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The Space of Appearances

The Constitution of the Public Realm

Simon J. Charlesworth

This article examines processes taking place within public institutions and political and public life that produce social exclusion and examines the human costs of such processes that render people “invisible.”

Keywords: Chav; comportment; economic; education; physiology; public; surveillance; value; visibility

Arendt spoke of public space as a “space of appearances,” made “between” people, through instantiations of sense that mediate presence (Arendt, 1968). Presence is mediated by value. To exist is to be perceived, positively. To be present is to be capable of soliciting forms of engagement that mediate forms of self-relation that are consequential to our capacity to contest space. When this takes place, our form of being is congruent, recognizable, in terms of the sense, embodied as that of someone whose physiognomy arises from shared conditions of acquisition. This means that the valued forms must be interpersonally constituted within the space through uncodified exchanges that establish the sense of how aspects of differentiated being will be perceived, in their terms, as “attractive” or “ugly,” “interesting” or “boring,” “bright” or “dull.”

The real issue about social valuelessness is the way in which individuals appear in the light of the interests through which individuals perceive others as significant. When deemed significant, they become an object of interest, soliciting forms of engagement based in solicitude rather than existing invisibly or conspicuously. Personhood involves positive valuation: recognition which involves solicitation born of engagement in human terms rather than the conspicuousness of those whose forms of appearance are
negatively constituted in the public realm. The sense of forms of being, that is, public life, is instantiated by those whose social power (often related to income). Those able to instantiate the public realm can constitute space in relation to their own interests by establishing, through display, an immanent sense constitutive of relations that instantiate value in spatial terms. The signifying atmosphere constituted via uncodified exchanges that “cue,” or instantiate, the forms necessary for contact to take place is a prerequisite to the practical alliances formed in the public domain by those with the economic power to enable mediated identities. Manipulation of others, through presentation of self, is a careful part of the “natural,” or interpersonal, realization of the forms of their relation, as “personal” forms, through situated projections of configurations of sense that realize differentiation so as to realize selective association.

Discomforting those degraded by their lack of possession of the embodied forms required to be positively visible, whose bodies are sensitized by glances, “treatments,” that make the space injurious, is the strategy used by those who cannot allow themselves to experience discriminatory intentions: “You’ve got to be able to cope. . . . They are . . . aggressive. . . . Yer’ve got to learn to be insensitive. . . . It’s physical wi’em.”

People have to realize themselves insensitively to cope with how they are rendered sensitive: made subject, attuned to being by disclosures constitutive of a kind of affectedness. The qualitative, the discernable, arises from processes that relate to value, position, and income.

Symbolic Capital: The Space of Appearance as a Sense Relation Constituting Visibilities

Symbolic capital . . . is . . . what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognized as capital, that is, to know . . . it on the basis of cognitive structures . . . able . . . to grant it recognition because they are attuned to what it is. Produced by the transfiguration of a power relation into a sense relation. (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 242)

The problem is the relation between public value and the instantiated forms of those who personnel the institutions through which one accesses the means to access the formal (“national”) economy: credentials that are dependent for their value on the personal forms that can be exploited to accredit the credential with its “real” value:

Today’s most prestigious market-places . . . receptions, conferences, interviews, debates, seminars, committees, commissions . . . [presume a] set of distinctive features, bearing, posture, presence, diction, and pronunciation, manners and usages, without which . . . all scholastic knowledge is worth little . . . and which, partly because schools never . . . teach them, define the essence of bourgeois distinction. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 91)

In contemporary society, public space emerges from interpersonal processes, constituting institutional spaces, which mediate access to the tokens necessary, to accede to public existence through forms of recognition that are a central aspect of the constitution of the forms of value through which the space is realized. The traces of the personal nature of these processes are obscured from the dominant by the way they realize distances as personal distances. This is what one male working-class student mentioned to me during my fieldwork, when I asked him about his experience at university:
When yer go to the geography department it's all upper-middle-class toffs, blonde hair blue eyes, the typical stereotype, yer feel they look down on you . . . yer feel really out of place, yer hurry through . . . those are the places I hate going . . . you have to focus yer energies to not givin' [in], when yer get aht, yer feel exhausted, an' yer sweatin'.

It is the interpersonal grounds of the constitution of these mutilated forms of visibility that I want to consider and the institutions of the contemporary university field are at the heart of this process. They are part of the institutions that produce the legitimacy of those who enjoy positive visibility within the public realm. They are part of the social institutions that consecrate the visibility of the middle classes and authorize them with a value that places them beyond the pain of the “curse of a negative symbolic capital” and the “questioning of the sense of their existence” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 240) that this involves. They don’t live in question, but the legitimacy of their presence is constantly put into question, as the same student experienced:

Ah wo' security an' ye'd gu in . . . “Who are you?” . . . thi'd se’ “We’re payin’ to be ‘ere.” . . . Ah’d bi . . . “Y er mean yer parents are.” . . . Y er walk in the’ like “Who the fuck are you?”

The nature of this questioning arises as part of the sense instantiated in immediate responses that “look” to realize the world those of the modal trajectory are disposed for, such that they immediately establish the continuities of a personal world issuing from segregated educational spaces. Although some are “at home,” others encounter the silent injunctions, the “power of suggestion . . . exerted through things and persons . . . which, instead of telling the child what he must do, tells him what he is, and thus leads him to become durably what he has to be” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 52). This is part of the constitution of a form of practical sensitivity necessary for “the effectiveness of all kinds of symbolic power that will subsequently be able to operate on a habitus predisposed to respond to them” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 52). That is, these aspects of the everyday world of class relations are part of the fundamental way that working-class people acquire their sensitivities and learn to respond to these irreproachable aspects of the symbolic violence they live with because it is a deep aspect of the constitution of the spaces and identities that the middle classes realize, as the terms of their existence, through selectively constituting their domains to service their needs.

However, this constitution of a space of intelligibility, publicly, is not something that escapes those who experience their negation, as the following student made clear:

People here [university], walk round and they’re just looking, scanning all the time, yer can tell they’re scopin’ for something . . . When they walk in a room, it’s like the gays have a saying, they call it “gay-dar,” they have “class-dar.”

What are being recognized are the behavioral routines of a conditional being-with, based in segregation, that reveals its intentionality in its mode of realization, in comportment: in its constituting others through a revelatory scanning, in which the being of individuals becomes “discriminated beforehand and then apprehended” (Heidegger, 1962a, p. 155). Bourdieu has emphasized the prevalence in these spaces of what he calls a realm of “sub-linguistic communication” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 101). It is impossible to state the ramifications of face-to-face processes that position some beyond the networks constitutive of the interpersonal processes whereby the dominant produce the tokens they need to accede to their positions: the tokens of value through which the instituting group controls access to the space of positions via processes rooted in recognition.
It is this constitution of a sense of value that is at the heart of people's experience because the closer the forms of humanity that they embody are to the required forms of those who are dominant, the more “human” the milieu will seem because they will encounter a space in which their recognition is immanent because they embody the schemas of instantiation of the forms recognized as “significant,” which leads them to be positively perceived. Their presence is constituted as an experience of a richer humanity, of a “social being that is known, ‘visible,’ famous, admired, invited, loved . . . which saves those it touches from the distress of an existence without justification” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 241). Conversely, those from communities whose forms issue from an absence of capital, who embody marks experienced as the absence of charismatic traits, will find that they manifest an absence of humanity. As subordinates respond to space disclosed via uncodified exchanges of sense, as they “cope” with a mutilated form of being perceived, they “appear” sullen, dour, and unfriendly, as they spontaneously cope with a space articulated in relation to their own embodied marks.

The sociability constitutive of alliances within public institutions are immediately perceivable. The following testimony of a working-class student reveals this awareness:

Even if you’re on same degree as them, the’ll socialise wi’ them doin’ someaht different from same . . . background, it’s backgrahnd is deeper than owt yer try an study t’ know, so the’r in’t a lot yer can du, really to fit in wi’y ‘em.

It . . . doesn’t matter how you are with ‘em, if yer rait-as-rain . . . thi’ . . . allous same . . .

Ah just go . . . keep miseln’ to miseln’ . . . come back . . . ohnny thing Ah gu fo’ is . . . course.

The minimal engagement emergent from inability to solicit contact produces the “psychological” phenomena of a lack of initiative or “will” to be involved in university. Hence, such students appear to lack charismatic traits.

Visibility and Stylization

Consumption is an aspect of the way in which the state nobility marks its essential difference from other dispositions. The disposition toward this stylization of the minutest aspects of one’s being-for-others as an emanation from and evocation of a lifestyle that is not determined by necessity is part of a display of “facility and freedom” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 55). An objective “distance from necessity and from those trapped within it” which “combines with a conscious distance which doubles freedom by exhibiting it” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56) explains why people from protected spaces have such an essential proclivity for manifesting their distinction in every moment of their self-realization, such that manner becomes a terrain of instantiated rank. Again, this is often well perceived by those who remain excluded from such modes of valuation:

Ah can tell Ah’m at . . . uni’ . . . manners gu aht’r winder, thi’ walkin’ in yer way . . . What it is wi’y ‘em is “Look at me: Ah’m better than you,” it’s an attention thing . . . Thi’ve got the heads held higher than what the station in life is, so thi’ are doin’ things to mek ‘em noticed.

Embodiment radiates significance and instantiates differences of worth. A form of being realized constitutive of its own grounds of validation comes into being
interpersonally, through the *selective* guaranteeing of personhood and the experience of subjection. A form of being, realizing the condition of its own recognition, is intentionality manifest in its orientation to others and immanent to the elaboration of *appearance* as an illicit political form. Moreover, the link among lifestyle, the biologization of class, and appearance as a naturalized form that becomes a medium for the instantiation of difference is well described in the following:

Yer can tell by the skin, yer can tell as soon as yer walk in. Yer know I was working at *Arena* [music venue] an’ Ah could tell, straightaway… It’s not one thing, it’s everything, it’s how they hold themselves, yer can see the confidence, the value shining through, male–female don’t matter, thi’ ave a certain posture, thi’ stand up straight, thi’ ‘ave a certain gait, thi’ stand out from the other working class cunts around me, thi’ stood away from them, they were… slim, they weren’t fat, the’re skin was healthy, not spotty or oily, the hair was shiny, the clothing marked them, they tell yer straight away the kind of person they are. I knew straight away that they were going to the universities and were from the better schools, and they were. Once I got talking to them, the guy played cricket for a minor county, and she was talkin’ about a friend who went to Croatia to play clarinet in an Orchestra. An’ Ah knew thi’d fit in ‘cos’r ahr thi’ wo’, thi’ weren’t mixin’ wi’ others an’ thi looked the’r part.

What strikes people is the difference in sense manifest in differences of attunement to disclosures of presence within the world so that people become alien to us by way of what they manifest, in immediate responses, about the way they exist in the world. The way resources affect appearance and the way vulnerability begins to be felt as an aspect of sensitivity to disclosures that affect relation to being are clearly articulated in the following:

Simon, everythin’ is different wi’y us; everythin’ the’r is, is different, it’s like dentists is fo’ty quid fo’ a clean Shie ses “it does not look so nice when yer smile if yer don’t ‘ave a clean”: Ah thought, “Who do Ah smile at?” Ah dun’t open mi mouth when Ah smile any- way… yer learn. . . . Thi’ ‘ave different kind ‘r dentists; different hair dressers, ‘air styles different, teeth are different, every fuckin’ thing shows yer a joey.

We see the natural efficacy of the skin, as parchment, immediately understood as a medium of hierarchy: biologized effects “communicating.” Skin is a surface of exposure, a zone of susceptibility. We come to carry the marks of the people among whom we acquire the means to be persons. Our dialect, our range of expression, our comportment bear the traces of our condition by virtue of our vulnerability to all that constitutes the human world. Comportment touches the eye with an “inner” sense of the susceptibilities that shape it: We understand *immediately* the primal significances made body by comportment. Comportment, presence, is born of sense, it relates to what is disclosed in being by being born of mimetically acquired aspects of sense that relate to the position imbibed and incorporated by the flesh as its sense of the world. Comportment produces aspects of significance that we grasp intuitively: Embodiment always produces, “in” us, a visceral response that relates to our structural relation to the aspects of sense embodied in others. The instantiation of appearance constitutes an order that is the basis of organization, a prelude to communications that facilitate organization, a realm that is finally constitutive of the national economy as an institutionally mediated form.

How one is perceived has consequence for how one can be realized. It has consequence for how one experiences being and for the forms of self-hood that are realized in relation to one’s personhood, as that is publicly constituted in these processes. These
forms are at the heart of the forms of being that are “available” for people situated in this flux of determination. Self-referential mental content, an identity constituted from stylized projection, is a way of being that has interpersonal conditions. Ability to be relies on ability to be perceived as, ability to be perceived under particularizing aspects, such that one can solicit the forms of engagement that realize such possibilities: make them real possibilities. When the forms of particular aspects have been constituted by specific groups who signify those possibilities in their own terms, rendering impossible the full acquisition of the perceivable, public, form of those forms, then those instantiating their possibility by constituting a rarity born of protecting access to what can only be mimetically acquired effectively control the conditions of accreditation of the value necessary to accede to positions and effectively control access to forms of professionalism by fusing competence with aspects of manner, or form, that are selectively disclosed.

Presence, for example, within a university, is mediated by capital: Accommodation is stratified by income. Mixing doesn’t occur in spaces constituted from difference: “Thi’s no mixin’, Ah din’t see any, it’s like zebras in it, one zebra can tell another one. They all look same to us, thi might do, but thi’ can tell”:

They make out . . . university’s open . . . the only ones they talk to are the trendy studenty . . . ones, me and Y [friend] we just used to gu in. . . . She used to hate meeting with the lecturers and then we used to get away . . . as soon as we could. . . . It is . . . divided, it’s all . . . money . . . the different halls . . . the rich kids all knew each other from the’ halls. . . . It was the way they . . . interact wi’ each other.

Other students experience this reality:

When I entered the classroom and greeted my classmates, they didn’t answer and totally ignored me. But African students did return my greetings as it is part of our education. The class was always divided in two groups: The Whites who were always together, discussing and going out and the Blacks also always together as we found it difficult to be part of the former group. . . . It was difficult to get an English person as friend. I don’t have any English friends. . . . In the hall of residence for overseas students, there was no single English student. . . . We were living in communities. . . . There were people from same countries or same continents. Life was not easy at all as again, we, Black people, were victims of our color and . . . other students thought that we were the one who should clean the kitchen, bathroom, etc. The argument was that they were not used to working when staying with their parents.

The stylized projection of distinguished forms “meant” to solicit the contact of significant others relies on others’ accepting one’s form of identity and thereby realizing its possibility by “seeing” others in a way that is congruent with their instantiation: It requires affirmation, that is, recognition. The problem is that the space of appearance is constituted to value differentially in relation to income. In a space in which contact is mediated by capital, “the rich kids all knew each other . . . they dressed different . . . just med yer feel like yer shun’t bi there.” The forms of these sources of positive visibility are well articulated in the following:

You’re talking about the main body of social excluders . . . they are elitist. . . . I went to see a friend at the LSE and I was sat waiting and there were all these students walking by and I just thought, “What the fuck!,” it was like a . . . parade of something from a cat walk, I thought there had been some special event on in the university, it was like a presentation.
from *Harpers and Queen*. . . And you do feel your class intensely, it’s worse in them places. . . . You do realise, you have to be able to present very carefully. . . . It’s a main aspect of the battle for them, they’ve the style shit sewn up.

As another put it,

There’s a whole sartorial discourse at work, they’re speaking to each other without ever a word being spoken, so when they come together to speak, they are assured that they’re interested, of their interests, in talking to this person. . . . We go in and they think, “Gee what an arsehole.”

Universities are essentially private, public, institutions because the forms of comportment that one must instantiate rely on domestic access to the culture of the middle classes. One needs a whole life trajectory, manifest in accent and bearing, to appear “interesting” to those who constitute the professions in terms of their own culture. Presence is constituted differentially, and this is because the space of appearances is constituted by uncodified exchanges realized in immediate responses; constituted from senses arising from the instantiated relations realized between people who occupy different economic positions. This constitution of a clearing that discloses aspects instantiating the significance, the value, of the presence of those who enter, is well expressed by Heidegger: “The opening up of the Open, and the clearing of beings, happens only as the openness is projected” (Heidegger, 1962b, p. 71); it “is the racist who creates the inferiorized” (Fanon, 1967, p. 93). The comportment of the dominant aims at inscribing within space the system of differences through which they create their own distinction. In making themselves visible they efface those whose degradation is constitutive of the meaning of their distinction: “They create these climates . . . through their own conduct” (Jeanson, quoted in Fanon, 1967, p. 91). They instantiate, in a cultivated immediacy that rests in a biologization of their lifestyle, that they are innately different and “separated by a difference in kind from the commoners of culture” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 24); it is a strategy that is felt: “The fuckers ‘ave allous got to be different.” Comportment is a quasi-code; realizations of significance involve an allusion to others’ unworthiness, such that patterns are experienced as potential evaluations because of the system of differences they practically allude to: the background of intelligibility that is the condition of their being sensible. Hence, these forms are power invested, fulfilling quasi-political functions: They are “symbolically violent.”

There is an imminent conflict occurring within public space that emerges from the embodied patterns that arise from economically disparate conditions of existence. It is the culture-implicated elements, constitutive of human reality as a reality dense with significance, that have carried health research to discussions about the psychosocial (Wilkinson, 1996, 2000). These are an attempt to grasp this realm of process damaging human beings by affecting them on a terrain that cannot be resisted: their sensitivity to others and the social meanings they constitute. Bourdieu refers to the “insidious injunctions and ‘inert violence’ of economic and social structures” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 141), nonverbal, silent, injunctions that are ways of establishing claims to legitimate hierarchy, that are part of the everyday class struggle as it is realized interpersonally, realizing particular social fields as markets. The relation between subtleties of style and their relation to income emerges in the following testimony of another working-class student:

Ah’m not sayin’ Ah’m bright but Ah ’elped these lads out . . . an’ all of a sudden thi’ fall into right . . . student crowd. . . . All of a sudden they decide to out me. . . . Ah’m gunna
Comportment reveals forms of concern: what matters to distinct people. It manifests a way of perceiving, “the way and manner of its being-perceived” (Heidegger, 1988, p. 40); the entity or person, the being, “in the manner of its being intended” (Heidegger, 1988, p. 40); “the how of its being-perceived” (Heidegger, 1988, p. 45). How these people understand how they appeared at university arises from the instantiated forms they encountered that revealed forms whose sense arose from the grounds of the forms of intentionality realized through constituting a signifying atmosphere in which certain forms would elicit the contact necessary for social valuation and solicited contact to be realized, thus positioning those present differentially. One student describes the practical forms through which people recognize the uncodified exchanges constitutive of a signifying atmosphere that uglifies via differential instantiations of a sense that organizes perception to such a degree that the perceptions themselves involve a description of the use of nonverbal cues constitutive of the process:

We used to go to this club... studenty, if anybody else came in, they stuck out, you can’t help but notice and in noticing, they feel it, it’s hitting them like laser beams, you can see they’re totally isolated, they’re just looking for a good time. They stand out like a sore thumb, if we used to get outsiders... coming onto campus you can see them [the students on campus] looking, it’s like... they’re niggers.

Self-Presentation and Self-Exclusion

The universities are a crucial medium for the constitution of a national economy that can be accessed only through selectively disclosed modes of engagement. Those constituting university space produce an experience that affects life chances by affecting access to what can be exhibited on a CV because the signifying atmosphere produces the possibility of every detail of a person’s “experience” being signified, “read,” in relation to this cultural field. Capacity to solicit contact is affected by these processes because it constitutes available self-descriptions and thereby the means of self-representation in an economy in which the social capital evidenced on CVs is necessary for credentials to be accredited with value. In conditions in which degrees have become ubiquitous, it is only what is not universally available to degree holders that can become a criterion of merit. The extension of education inaugurates conditions favorable to those instantiating the interpersonal basis of distinctions that can be used to fail the newly “educationally enfranchised.”

What has to be faced is that the university, the crucial mediating institution of the public realm, is a circumscribed realm of legitimate encounter, constituted by those with money. The first thing that any working-class person who goes on to a higher degree realizes is the naked cash basis of education. So real is the issue of money, that one professor explained, “We are told three overseas students and that’s a lecturer’s salary... to respond immediately to any e-mails from overseas.” Clearly, the mode of engagement that students encounter is differentiated in relation to the forms of capital they bring into the institution:
The head of a school in India which educates British children alongside pupils from India has said that applicants to universities in the UK from Indian pupils stand a higher chance of being accepted than similar applications from their British counterparts. Alastair Reid, who is the principal of the Hebron School in Tamil Nadu, said that the offers to foreign students were lower because universities could charge them more for their places. (O’Reilly & Robertson, 2004, p. 9)

For those with money or institutional support, those with the security to know that it is an instituted game in which they simply have to be themselves and live their lifestyle in order for, as one academic put it, the departments to be “glad to have them,” familiarity breeds contempt because they know they have the determinative capacity to ensure that even a qualified working-class candidate will not be able to operate the contacts through which the real criteria of selection are operationalized. Income ensures seamless early arrival that is then used as proof of superior ability, in a misperception that goes to the heart of the institutions: the perception of charismatic traits, where what is actually being perceived are characteristics of manner that arise from similarity of background. But innate ability is a legitimate reason to select a candidate, whereas reference to background is not:

Judgements which claim to apply to the whole person take into account not only physical appearance as such, which is always socially marked . . . but also the socially processed body (with clothes, jewellery, make-up and above all manners and behaviour) which is perceived through socially constituted taxonomies, and thus read as the sign of the quality and value of the person. . . . The . . . [body] . . . is the principal prop of a class judgement which fails to recognize itself as such: it is as if a concrete intuition of the properties of the body, grasped and designated as properties of the person, motivated the global perception and appreciation of the intellectual and moral qualities. (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 201)

This is practically experienced as the following testimony of a student illustrates:

I read [privately educated student’s] work and my content is . . . the same but the format or something makes his get a better mark, but it seems simple when I read it, but I try and do more detailed work, but then I get the lesser mark, it doesn’t make any sense.

What this student experiences is rather common: the unusual one of working harder at something that one can never improve at because one’s efforts to do “more detailed work” are likely to be perceived as the cumbersome efforts of someone who does not have the easy relation to academic culture of those who have direct personal access to the spoken form of it as a real culture, as opposed to something one can only access in isolation, in a text, without guidance. Because everything is experienced in the terms through which it is constituted, working-class students often experience their isolation and lack of help, for what it is, an inability to solicit contact, but they understand this in its naturalized terms, as being because of their inability and lack of personal qualities. Finally, they are not good enough to show up as bright and interesting.

Visibility, Income, Legitimacy, Pedagogy, and Constrained Communication

What occurs in these spaces arises from the fundamental dispositions of those with the social power to realize the illusion of their own legitimacy. The space of appearance
is constituted from the dispositions of those who have the economic power to be dominant, such that they can make their money register an endless array of differences that instantiate position and begin to make realizable the interpersonal grounds of the social function that the institutions serve. There are categories of overseas students who are valued, who can solicit attention: upper-middle-class Europeans, Americans, Japanese, and now Chinese, those from the financial power blocks whose economic power rests in their command of the credentials now necessary for their accession to the positions reserved for them through the preferential return on their educational capital constituted through networks made in the segregated educational spaces constructed for them, throughout their world:

Within the City the barrow boys are hardly to be found in the upper reaches of banks and consultancies, let alone in the City solicitors’ or accountancy firms, where the university—particularly private school and Oxbridge—educated reign supreme. . . . The old boys’ network still counts for much in the professions, but most of its members are now there by meritocratic achievement at the old schools and universities. . . . It is a marriage of money and meritocracy. (Adonis & Pollard, 1998, p. 76)

Once working-class people enter the system, it allows selection criteria to move onto other social criteria. There are the reason and the capacity to recruit the middle classes. Their culture, that they have travelled and not merely been unemployed in localities, that they are citizens of the world and not merely of a few streets, that they can talk about culture and art and literature and not merely about what they study, all make them ideal for universities who prize themselves on the breadth of the “culture” of their members.

There is no other proof of the value of economic capital and of the groups possessing it, to command cultural value, than the culture of the contemporary university, which is set up to hide the economic transactions through which a transnational elite exchange cash for the credentials they need to access the occupational, and thus economic, spaces that are central to their economic power. What is of concern is that it is through these means that they access the institutional spaces that are central to their constitution of the public realm so that dominating the institutions of representation, as well as the media, politics, and senior echelons of the economy, they are able to dictate the terms of public discussion. With Thatcher and Reagan producing more millionaires needing to find a legitimate means of transfer of wealth and position, an international university field serving their interests has been an ideal mechanism. That educating students who originate in “the field of power” (Bourdieu, 1996 pg. 120) serves a transnational agenda is clear from the words of one academic:

I was thinking the other day that of the students that I have taught, one is the president of a country, four are ministers of science and four are vice-chancellors, they speak English, when they want something they turn to England, if there are important meetings, they are on my side, and these are all networks made possible by this international exchange of students and scholars.

These educational institutions are a crucial mediator of “a new type of imperialism” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 2). Just as the constitutive moments of English culture are realized in relation to institutions that are a central aspect of how the dominant command their economic positions, so we might expect such a transnational class to reproduce other relations of subordination, as one Chinese Academic expressed it: “I myself
belong to second-rate people here [university]. . . . I have to face this reality so I do not complain this too much.” Bourdieu suggests that “cultural imperialism is a form of \textit{symbolic violence} that relies on a relationship of constrained communication to extort submission” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 2); not complaining manifests such submission. A further manifestation is refusal to communicate: “Yer lucky if yer find one or two people who’ll speak to you, the others just . . . blank yer”:

The ruling class no doubt owes its extraordinary \textit{arrogance} to the fact that, being endowed with very high cultural capital . . . it feels perfectly justified in existing as it currently exists. . . . The “new economy” . . . is global and those who dominate it are . . . international, polyglot and polycultural (by opposition to the locals, the “national” or “parochial”). (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 33)

\textbf{Cultural Imperialism, Institutionally Realized Mobility, Locality: Euphemized Class Apartheid}

Perhaps the only difference in this international trade of qualifications is that the overseas students have sympathizers because they are recognized by the institutors \textit{because of} their possession of capital. They are recognizable within the circumscribed realm of legitimate encounter established in the apperception of those whose ability to recognize human persons is as circumscribed as their realm of encounter. The relation among income, appearance, and the solicitation of contacts that open up a realm of possibility is manifest in the following:

I was coming back from London late last night and this . . . attractive and . . . well-dressed . . . Singaporean woman sat next to me, she’d been shopping . . . she had . . . a Julio’s bag with her. [S: . . . What’s that?] Oh, Julio’s is on the King’s Road, and she slipped out a leather wallet and got a prospectus out and I was looking over her shoulder and she was flicking through all the awards and scholarships that are available . . . and you realize that it is these kinds of people, who are absolutely loaded who are able to get these kinds of money. They . . . come over . . . make contacts, fund themselves . . . make the system work for them . . . networking.

We should not be surprised that in the institutions that the dominant use to constitute the realm of international freedom in which they move that issues to do with locality become degraded as a transnational class constituting itself internationally in relation to symbolically constituted significations of the world reduced to the topics of their constituted optics, frame interests in relation to their own lifestyles. What this means is that academic knowledge is constituted in distinction to locality, and working-class people’s experience is constituted as parochial: \textsuperscript{4} It cannot function as a capital, leading to anxiety:

I don’t know what to do. . . . I feel like I’m on the edge, like I don’t care anymore, I am totally . . . dejected, I wouldn’t even dream of them recognizing, me. . . . They can’t read what I write, the . . . level of it, “Why can’t you flag this up” what do you say to that? It is “flagged up.” . . . That’s why it’s in my thesis, it’s like there’s no marks on the page . . . it’s like she hasn’t registered any of it, she hasn’t taken care over it, you feel like saying; “What kind of crap are you trying to pull, it’s in black and white.” . . . It distances you from everything, you just exist in your own skin; she [supervisor] wants me to genuflect to all these authorities, I feel like saying, “Why do I have to touch base with these?” . . . I hate
it . . . I realize, our relationship is totally contractual, there isn’t any contact. . . . I find myself feelin’ “Why is she sitting there,” because she has to be, because it’s money, it’s contractual, they only want us for the money we bring in, there is no support, no contact, no intellectual engagement, I was dropped by my supervisor cos he couldn’t contact me or the subject, he’d . . . nothing to say . . . I’m in a . . . uni’, and there’s no one whose studied the . . . workin’ class, and I’m in this wank subject and they’ve never done an ethnography of any of this, I’m totally stuck about who to speak to.

Clearly, therefore, there is a relation among the clientele, the personnel recruited, and the syllabus, as one academic put it:

Anything to do with locality is sullied, polluted, the institution won’t go near it. There are two posts in the pipeline here, and the emphasis is on international things. . . . It’s . . . about the international focus of the department.

The department must have an international focus because they want to focus on topics that are of interest to the group that it wants to court: students of private means who bring capital into the department in return for the department turning over its resource base to them in an effort to constitute symbolic products, of use to these particular students:

We’re under a lot of pressure on the MBA to get the students people who are, suitable . . . so most students are American. . . . They are the largest . . . group, so people have to be carefully selected to do supervisions . . . and it is the same with the materials . . . we have to find stuff that is . . . suitable, for them.

There is thus an inherent bias in recruitment that affects every aspect of academic culture, especially its textual forms. What gets published is what flows through these networks. Submitted work to journals and publishers is routinely rejected without being sent to readers: The readers are used to legitimate processes of consecration that produce a public domain by excluding those whose difference is manifest in topic, content, approach, and categories. There can be little wonder, therefore, that working-class people find what is published, and taught, irrelevant. Its sense does not arise from their relationship to the world because the sense inscribed in texts arises in relation to a different relation to phenomena. Moreover, given that what discussion is able to take place takes place within a conceptual and discursive space dictated by the syllabus and by its producers, how can this not affect the educational experience, the possibility for growth, affirmation, and intellectual development, of working-class people? Little wonder that their experience of higher education is of its inherently vacuous nature, a self-referential vacuity that has to emerge from discourses constituted out of the vanity of those colonizing higher education: “All we get taught is jargon; all latest theories an’ if yer dun’t put it in yer assignment yer get marked dahn”:

Ah did . . . work wi’ police, an’ druggies . . . wrote this piece’r work . . . ‘anded it in, they said it wo’ wrong ‘cos Ah’d not quoted all these people who they’ve read . . . thi’ just mark yer dahn if yer dun’t put in all their references on the’r readin’ lists.

Working-class people, whose grandfathers were miners, whose parents struggle in a low-wage economy in which their children need credentials to avoid the same fate, are taught by international middle-class people about (e.g.) Hardt and Negri’s theory of empire. Rather than working with them in relation to the primal experiences of their
own lives, teaching them categories in relation to the details of the lives they lead, they
get taught classificatory systems that are of relevance only to the small group of inter-
national intellectuals constituting these problems of classification for their own agen-
das. Indeed, working-class students, armed with the latest theories, will find their
entrance to the labor market mediated by their debt:

Students are seduced into organizations like Next by the promise of freedom from debt
and a load of bollocks about personal and career development which amounts to fuck all.
One trainer . . . called what we do FIFO, fit in or fuck off."

Those using the institutional networks that emerge from their educational spaces
avoid destinies forced on working people. By finding work in the institutions of cul-
ture, they are uniquely able to constitute symbolic products of the right type as the
means to create such products are selectively disclosed. This selective disclosure takes
place through a pedagogy that is skewed by the inherent affinities of a transnational
group that is linked by its experience of travel and its fixation on the classificatory
optics of its own vision. Hence, we should not be surprised the personal reality of a
pedagogic relation constituted amid structural inequalities it reproduces at its heart is
experienced by working-class students in the personal moment made invisible by the
failure of those whose failure is constituted in its moment: “Even if yer gu to ‘em, thi’
basically dunt wanna listen to it.” The economic and class basis of the forms of asso-
ciation constitutive of departmental relations between staff selected from such pro-
cesses and the students who share their background is only too clearly manifest to
working-class students:

Ah din’t turn up fo’ meetin’s ‘cos it just rait pisses me off. Wi went on this like meal . . . it
wo’ shit, thi’ wo’ all on wi’ “Oh my father does this, this, this,” Ah sat the’er fo’ an’ ‘our not
sayin’ a word. Ah’ve got two exams an Ah can’t wait till Ah finish, an’ Ah shall never gu
back again, Ah hope.

The reality that has to be personally negotiated by those who are ill equipped for
their economic function by an educational process meant to consign them to their
position is only too clearly manifest:

I was not given a lecturer to help me with my dissertation, think there was another eight
in the same boat as me. I told who needed to be told, and they said they would deal with
it. As usual nothing happened so i thought fuck it i will do it on me own. Handed my
proposal and then at the end of year i handed my dissertation in. I got a 1% for it with no
reasoning as to why. Then in the first week into sept as i had finished in the may, they sent
me a letter saying that i could either take the normal degree or go back pay tuition fees
again and I would be able to do my dissertation again.

Those who bemoan the lack of interest of contemporary students should look at their
experience of education as isolated production and judgment. Many who are “included”
are not really involved in any engaged way, they are just used as part of the economies
constitutive of institutions that mediate economic access by selling cultural products
whose significance is constituted from mediated interpersonal processes “read” from
CVs and trajectories:

Thing is, Ah shun’t a bin there, thi’s ohny one reason Ah wo’ the’er, fo’ money, Ah got shit
GCSE’s, shit A levels, ohnny got onto lowest HNC co’orse, then, once Ah wo’ on that thi’
let mi do conversion to degree. Ah’ve never met so’ many tossers. . . . Ah’ve never met one
who wo’ either decent or good at the job, thi’ cu’n’t teach fo’ toffee, it’s learn yerself, yer self
taught . . . Ah wo’ comin’ back on train wi’ Y . . . wi wo’ both sayin’ ahr much wi’ ‘ate uni . . . the’re not accountable to nob’d’y, thi’ produce fuck all, thi’ . . . allus disaparin’
on business trips . . . yer just . . . guide yerself . . . Ah keep askin’ miseln’, “Why did a do
bullshit?” . . . thi’ like get yer when tha’s no clue abaht what to do in life an’ ‘ave yer at
college, thi’ get yer on co’urses, then yer . . . get fed along, . . . “Yer can gu straight onto
‘Allam [university]” . . . befo’ore yer know it, yer five years dahm line comin’ aht wi’ a
degree in bollocks.

Having had no opportunities, apart from being exploited, people understand the
nature of their presence via the terms constitutive of their experience of presence, “Ah
wo’ the’er, fo’ money.” A new mode of exploitation: buy a job via an educational and
institutional process that consigns individuals to the utterly meaningless experience of
struggling for credentials through a routinized pedagogy that delivers a futile experi-
ence of education. However, if the institutions exist to place middle-class people by
treating them differently, by allowing them forms of contact constitutive of the
resources and experiences they require, then we would expect working-class people to
be treated anonymously, impersonally. At the heart of the new higher education is the
old system reinventing itself through new courses that serve the needs of the middle
classes, and it is being paid for by the new entrants, the devaluation of whose creden-
tials secures the positions of the traditional middle classes. The condition of “inclusion”
has been the rationalized bureaucratization of higher education that has served
only to hide the processes occurring while allowing those perpetrating this charade a
professional rationale that excusses their complicity as overwork, lack of time and
resources, whereas the departments themselves take on students, especially at the lowest
levels, to garner the resources that secure their positions.

Surveillance, Social Markets, and an Economy
Producing a Socially Ranked Geographic Space

The pedagogic relation is constituted via a form of intentionality suffuse with the
interests of powerful groups looking to establish alliance. This constitutive relation will
influence how people are perceived. The aspects that disclose their value arise from the
situated immediacy of their interests. Clearly, this form of disclosure will be perceived
by those who lack the embodied forms necessary to solicit engagement, and such
“scoping” or “class-dar” will be manifest in its form and the set of distinctive features,
bearing, and posture that solicit engaged forms of membership, that instantiate, the
boundary between the “hidden set of individuals in relation to which the instituted
group is defined” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 118) will be perceived by those whose form of
appearing is constituted as discrepant, or abject, because “uglification” (Young, 1990)
is a central process in the production of hierarchies. One father of a female working-
class student summarized her experience of being valued as follows:

Ahr lass went to uni’ . . . did law. . . . She’s gev up lookin’ fo’ owt in law, she ses yer gu in
interviews an’ it’s like this [imitates looking up and down with look of disgust].

This captures the sign-reading operations that are significant in personal encounters
in which middle-class people discern the relative significance, position, value of indi-
viduals. This shows the uniformity of criteria of value operating on “today’s most
prestigious markets” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 91), processes that are meant to ensure the conditional value of the tokens constitutive of access to the economy.

Given that where people can afford to live relies on income, which relates to occupation, if access to the labor market is now mediated by “reading” operations that decode significances constituted within institutions, then we can see why groups within the university become as stigmatized by their membership of groups confined to regional spaces by such processes. Position in the national economy mediates the national culture, which is why southerners educated at Edinburgh University can reproduce the prejudices arising from positonalities immanent to the nation as a socially ranked geographic space:

I was sat talking to this guy who’s something to do with Cambridge University Press and I was trying to discuss regions and dialects, I was trying to say that in England you get changes in dialect across even when you don’t move very far and I said, It’s like I’ve got cousins in St Helens who speak differently to me, anyway, when I got up to go this guy said to me, “Oh, it’s very brave of you to admit that you have relatives in St Helens.”

This was said to a privately educated student: the commonality of interest was meant to establish a kinship of superiority in regard of those whose first language is some pigeon form of English spoken by groups whose form of appearing in the light of the national culture is that of an uglified group. That it is enshrined in the public culture is manifest by remarks such as that of a minister for the Scottish Parliament, who used the expression a “plague of Neds” to refer to the poorest sections of the White working class as well as by the current obsession with Chavs and “hoodies.” Such negation emerges from the culture of the university in which physical distinctions are central to co-option, making uglification an inherent aspect of the constitution of the bourgeois form as value incarnate. It is because these processes are how academic spaces emerge that the space of the university is as it is: a space in which the glance is used to scan for the cues of lifestyle and shared interest such that working people must confront the interpersonally mediated objectivity of their public significance as that is itself constituted in the public domain by the machinery of representation the middle classes have at their disposal: “I have people looking me up and down all day. Think its cos they think I’m a Chav with the clothes I have on.” Moreover, the less absolute spatial divides become, the more imperative it becomes that one physically inscribe the barrier as a form of comportmental self-instantiation, signaling that one is not to be confused with the newly “included.” These processes of uglification are evidence of a transformation in the social relations, mediated as relations of sense, constitutive of public space. The newly trenchant, interpersonal forms immanent to institutional spaces are indicative of an older historical order reproducing itself through new conditions in which rank and distinction must be carefully realized.

Constrained Communication Lived

What is a relation of dependence for those who require mediums of expression to constitute their social experience but who cannot be constituted in recognizable terms in that space and who are therefore dependent on those (occupying institutional positions) who are implicated in the production of their dispossession? The paradox is that exclusion from institutional positions leads to invisibility. Those who are truly discriminated against are not privileged in the hierarchy of those privileged with being represented as underprivileged (the famous categories of sociological critique) because members of the...
group being represented are privileged enough to belong to the cultural institutions that produce representations of their own exclusion to privilege themselves with jobs. It is the interpersonal constitution of these institutional means of production that are easy to evidence but difficult to counter: “How do you go up to someone and say, ‘What’s your problem?’ You’re caught up in trying to defend yerself.” What emerges is a public space that is based on distorted relations that distort communicative relations:

We had to discuss our dissertation projects. . . . Of three proposals, they rejected two. . . . Every time I talked . . . there was like these looks . . . glances . . . it was like, “Here he goes . . . again” . . . and I could see them looking at each other like, “Here he goes again, on about class.”

Such disclosures have consequences:

It slowly grinds yer dahn mate, day in day aht, guin’ in . . . I drive in, thi’s a certain point, a tree or a sign-post an’ Ah’m, “Right, this is where uni’ starts.” Ah feel mi stomach tighten, an’ yer know . . . “It’s all dahn hill from ‘ere.”

Spatialisation is linked to psychophysiological experience. The link between “outer” and “inner” is necessary: Space and being are experienced in terms of the sense from which they issue. The feelings of dread and anxiety relate to the disclosures of significance in terms of which this person encounters being. Affecting the significances realized as exchanges of uncoded sense is a way of affecting behavior by forcing people rendered subject by their disclosed significance to face the strain of subordination: “Ah feel mi stomach tighten”; the response is narrated in terms of a downward spatialization that takes place “inside” such that the link among the spatiality of the soul, sensitivity, and the physiognomic is made explicit: “An’ yer know inside ‘it’s all dahn hill from ‘ere.” Social exclusion is realized through the way in which people are rendered subject, attuned to forms of sensitivity that have direct physiological effects through the hyperthalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis on both the cardiovascular and immune systems (Wilkinson, 2000), leading those negatively positioned to get out:

It’s an effect of goin through uni’. . . I’m . . . so alienated from them, it’s a period of insanity . . . the longer it’s gone . . . the worse it’s got, ma mates can’t understand what Ah’m doin’, Ah find it harder . . . to get along with them, if I lose them I’ll be in the . . . wilderness. . . . I feel, intellectually impoverished, I feel there’s somethin’ up wi’ ma mind. Right now, I just want to get it out of the way, I got my kids to think abaht, this is where ma life is . . . Ah can’t wait till all that crap’s finished. . . . Ah’m not even lookin’ at an academic job . . . Ah just wanna get out of it.

Or, as someone else described it,

She asked me what my plans are when I finish, fuck me! I can’t even constitute the project of a future, ma plans are to get a job . . . and hide, the idea of constituting myself in their educational system . . . it’s just bruising, damagin’, it’s sacrilizing, its despiritualizing, I’m fuckin’ tired of getting up every day and having to argue that the sky’s blue and waters wet, I’m so bitter, my mind just went numb.

This resonates with Fanon:

Intellectual alienation is a creation of bourgeois society. And I call bourgeois . . . any society that ossifies itself in determined form, forbidding any evolution, any advance, progress,
any discovery. I call bourgeois a closed society where it is not good to be alive, where the air is rotten, where ideas and people are corrupt. (Fanon, 1967, p. 224)

Notes

1. This article is dedicated to all of the personnel involved at Job Centre Plus and associated Benefits Agencies in South Yorkshire who have treated me with charity.

2. Data are taken from interviews and conversations as part of ongoing fieldwork in a deprived area of South Yorkshire in the United Kingdom. The statements are not organized via sociological categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, and occupation because it is not felt these categories add anything at all to the insights derived from the people cited. My focus is on what people find existing and how they experience that existing, via what media, and to what consequences.

3. We see that the space of the university is organized both departmentally and in terms of residences to aid “the creation of a social group united by bonds of alliance and kinship, reinforced by the ties of cohabitation” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 20). These groups also have the economic means to access higher degrees, and so the universities have an economic reason to serve them. Equally, working-class students are not given access to the mimetic conditions of acquisition of the means to socialize with people for whom clothing and vestimentary aspects are “exposed to the general gaze. . . . This form of property expresses or betrays . . . the social being of its owners, the extent of their means” (Bourdieu, 2005, p., 19). Within universities, the space of appearances enables those from elite segregated space “to situate the owners in social space by situating them within the space of tastes” (Bourdieu, 2005, p., 19).

4. It is therefore natural that regionalized localities become constituted in relation to taxonomies that delineate the intellectual status of their forms of existence: “This Wakefield nowhereville doesn’t have an existence to speak of” (Blackshaw & Crabbe, 2004, p. 135). There is no other way to make sense of the constitution of regions and localities that issue from the class processes constitutive of the national economy other than as spaces as invisible as the processes constitutive of them.

5. The absurdity of the contemporary experience of being a student for working-class people is well captured in the following:

I’m exhausted, i’m so behind now my times running out to finish the assignment, i’ve had virtually no sleep and i have to work tomorrow again and i just think i want to cry. i can’t get my head around infrastructures of transnational civil society etc all a load of old toss—i can see every part of the argument, it’s basically common sense, and there’s never a real conclusion to draw! just more questions!

And as someone else put it,

When people ask “where did you go to university?” I will answer—my bedroom! That doesn’t sound good does it? I have been to three tutorials in five years—a complete waste of time—the last one was last year and it was like watching paint dry!

6. We see why learning to “think critically” doesn’t help graduates to cope with the reality of their working environments. Indeed, the restructuring of further education is ensuring the same is true of one of the few areas open to working-class graduates: “The trouble wi’ education is yer’ve got to be able to close yer eyes to what’s goin’ on: the only way yer can accept what’s goin’ on is to ignore it.”

7. What is clear in this testimony is that the form of unengaged noninvolvement that is characteristic of their experience of a higher education that is higher in name only, or as one newly graduated colleague in my village put it, “Thi’ call it higher education, thi’s nowt higher abaht it, tha’ might as well get higher on drugs,” leads them to have absolutely no illusion about
the educational process they have endured. These people are ruthlessly incredulous to a previous
generation of working-class intellectuals' credulity vis-à-vis education. The problem is, how can
people who have been so clearly exploited by institutions not be cynical about institutions that
cannot even liberate individuals into jobs?

8. This is why the question “Where are you from?” is so loaded. Calling up about a post,
I was asked, “Where are you from?” The interpersonal is a politically coded field of intelligibility.
This is why it is “brave of you to admit that you have relatives in St Helens” because such distinc-
tions have real consequences, and it is perhaps not accidental that the first wave of terrorists who
bombed London came from communities in Yorkshire whose disaffection had a political focus
that the conditions obliterate in the surrounding communities. The conditions are well articu-
lated by one Yorkshire Muslim:

The areas we live in: so hostile, it’s a war zone, bad enough discrimination in work and
what not, but going to corner shop’s fuckin’ aggro. Ah just live ‘ere, gi’ mi a million pound,
it’s that desperate, Ah live in this fucking society what more can a person do? Yer know.
It’s so hard, yer deserve payin’ just to live ‘ere. It’s vicious time, yer . . . yer too preoccupied
to fight fo’ any rights. I an’t got a prayer, what I can earn, earn nahr, in a legit job is,
200 quid, famly ‘r four! Alrait we’re sufferin’ what chance ‘ave our bastard kids got, not
a bastard chance. Fuckin’ money’s gettin’ scarcer at our level, fuckin’ ‘arder an’ ‘arder to get
buy, money’s more an’ more scarce, you earn’ fo’ the basic essentials, to get the fuckin’
basic shittest life.

9. We see why

one of the defining features of the British class structure is that, to a large extent, where
you are born, metaphorically, determines where you end up. Such is the importance of
housing in this process that one can leave out the metaphor. Quite literally, where you are
born determines to a large extent where you die, both geographically and as a member of

10. See http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/. Being invested in the differences they constitute as
a significant strategy of alliance, this intentionality has, logically, to constitute the would-be
imitators as low and vulgar, uglification, racialization, again, emerge from this instantiated logic
and hence we get the phenomena of Chavs, Neds, Kevs, Schemies, Scallies, Ferrels, Casuals,
Townies.

References


Simon J. Charlesworth was educated at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology.