

## Radical Pedagogy, Prison, and Film

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### Abstract

*This article explores the work of The Inside Film project. Inside Film works with a specific group of people (prisoners and ex-prisoners) in a particular set of circumstances (in prison or on parole) exploring how film making can be used within prison education or with people who have been to prison as a means of fostering a critical engagement with issues around class from a perspective more traditional academic subjects are unable or unwilling to take. It aims to demonstrate the complexities inherent in the conception of film as a radical pedagogic tool. Analysing prisons and imprisonment it demonstrates that prison is the preferred solution to a whole plethora of social ills such as mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, illiteracy, homelessness and unemployment that capitalism itself creates.*

*The Inside Film project utilises a Marxist approach –insisting on the continuing exploitation of the working class. Considering popular culture within a particular strand of media (film) the project attempts to develop a language both analytical and adequate to understanding the social determinants that affect all our lives but whose impact and long term consequences are dependent upon the social class to which we belong. The short films made by those taking part in the project result in representations of working class life made by members of the working class who explore what it means to be working class in ways impossible for those from more privileged backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** Class, prison, crime, pedagogy, film.

If man (sic) is unfree in the materialistic sense- that is, free not through the negative capacity to avoid this or that but through the positive power to assert his true individuality-crime must not be punished in the individual but the anti-social sources of crime must be destroyed to give everyone social scope for the essential assertion of his (sic) vitality. If man (sic) is formed by circumstances then his (sic) circumstances must be made human. If man (sic) is by nature social, then he develops his true nature only in society and the power of his (sic) nature must be measured not by the power of the single individual but by the power of society. (Marx and Engels 1956: 176).

## The Project

The aim here is to establish the complexities inherent in the conception of film as a radical pedagogic tool at this particular historical conjuncture and to give some consideration to the social, political and moral imperatives that make such a conceptualisation of film and pedagogy necessary. At the same time it will attempt to consider what is involved in applying this theoretical conception in practice.

The 'Inside Film' project works both within prisons and 'on the out' enabling prisoners and those on parole to make their own films. This superficial description of the work of the project suggests a deceptively simple goal easily obtained through the transference of technical skills which makes it possible to situate the work of the project within the hegemonic framework of education programmes designed to improve the employment skills of the under privileged. Of course within the framework of accepted definitions of education provision this is precisely what it does, but the Inside Film project is concerned with the relationship between those accepted definitions and the type of subjectivity it produces.

Inside Film runs practical workshops where the students can learn to use a film camera and the basics of the editing software necessary to edit their films. Before they use the cameras or start shooting their films, the first six weeks or so of the course explores the theoretical and historical aspects of film and filmmaking. This theoretical underpinning is linked to the aim of the project to act as a counter hegemonic intervention challenging the essentialist, personalised and negative taxonomies of working class people and working class life. Not just by pointing out that they are, to put it very simply, 'wrong', in the representational sense of bearing very little resemblance to working class life, but also wrong in what can only be called the moral sense because of the role these representations play in normalising the misrepresentation of working class people in order to justify, legitimise and preserve the disadvantages and inequalities that characterise working class life.



Filming in HMP Rochester

These theoretical sessions are facilitated by academics who volunteer to talk to the students on such topics as class and ideology, documentary film practice, Third Cinema and genre. By definition, the people who run these sessions are committed to the attempt to expose the validation of a social order that is transmitted through the normalising strategies of a broad spectrum of institutions. The endeavour to achieve this aim involves utilising the material of the theoretical sessions as much as possible to contextualise the life experiences of those participating in the course. The academics running the sessions have found this approach to be liberating: not because they do not have to concern themselves with facts, on the contrary, the analysis and dissection of facts is an integral part of what they do; but because they are free to expose the links those facts have with oppression and bias and to educate in a way that offers recognition rather than imposition. In some cases the results are almost instantaneous. This approach to education has little to do with the gradual, unquestioned accumulation of facts transferred from those with 'knowledge' to those without it, and much to do with a politically strategic consideration of the contradictory nature of the totality of society. This consideration demands a dialectical approach to pedagogic practice, one that engages with the surface reality of society as means of exposing the underlying mechanisms that generate that surface reality, thus offering an explanatory potential to the often angry and frustrated students of Inside Film.

After the theoretical sessions and before the actual filming begins the students take part in ideas sessions where they discuss (and argue about) the kind of film they would like to make, what the subject matter will be, and what form the film will take. These sessions are generally speaking, lively and loud, as by this point the students have all begun to develop ideas about what they want their films to say and how they want them to look.

For some of the students their ideas will have been influenced by the preceding theoretical sessions where they were exposed to types of filmmaking they might not generally have the opportunity to view.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to witness during the discussions that take place as part of these sessions (which are only a few weeks into the course) a recognition that the mainstream dominant film product is not the only option available, this consideration of other possibilities takes place not only at the level of form but also in relation to representations of class, gender and race.

When a decision has been made about what kind of film they would like to make the students write the scripts, storyboard their films and cast them. If they are making a documentary they decide on a subject, do the necessary research and draw up a shooting schedule. After which they act in, film, direct, shoot and edit their films. The postproduction process allows for adding music, sound and special effects. For the duration of this process the students are engaged in a constant dialogue that references alternatives to the mainstream, dominant, filmmaking strategies, consequently there is a need to engage with these alternatives and to think about which ones serve best the film they wish to make. At the same time the dominant practices and conventions are interrogated and analysed.

The work the project does emphasises the relationship between the discourses used to fix the working classes in a position from which there is very little hope of escape, (Skeggs 2004: 80) and the neoliberal practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in this case the media. The establishment of this relationship enables a more generalised critique of the neoliberal system as a totality and demonstrates how the continuing suffering and exclusion of the working class is a necessary prerequisite of this system. We attempt to develop critical positions from which to engage with and process those practices creating the possibility of rejecting the ways in which existing processes and practices fix the working class. It is in challenging the forms of expression and the ways in which they are imbued with existing power relations that the potential to transform the way in which the world is viewed and by extension the way in which the world is inhabited becomes a possibility. This melding of theory and practice –this praxis- creates a vacuum between the established and the possible in which those taking part in the project can develop ways of thinking that are not possible for other groups. It is through praxis that we are able to combine the way we live our lives with the ability to reflect upon why we live them in the way that we do.

The method by which the Inside Film project attempts to achieve these aims is through the utilization of popular culture within a particular strand of the media (film) as a vehicle to develop a visual literacy and an analytical language, adequate to understanding the social determinants that affect all our lives considerably but whose impact and long term consequences are dependent upon the social class to which we belong (O'Neill and Wayne 2007). It is the possibility of putting this understanding and this language into practice that creates the potential to contribute to a transformation in the ways in which we understand our relationship to the world. The mode of consciousness fostered and conditioned by the class conditions into which we are born and which we have inherited produces alienated ways of perceiving and thinking. Generally speaking, the mainstream media deal only with end results and are not able (or willing) to trace the processes that produce those results (Channan 213: 1997). Knowledge of these processes has the potential to lead to a transformation in *personal* consciousness and create the possibility of a critical interaction with the *social* world, that is, an engagement with these processes and the structures that make them possible and the continuing role they play in the oppression of the working classes. In precisely the same way as knowledge of different film forms can lead to the adoption of alternative modes of film making so knowledge of the social structures that oppress and exploit the working class can lead to a seeking out of alternative methods of knowledge acquisition and self-recognition. What is at stake here for the people taking part in the project is the ability to recognise and acknowledge classed experience, knowledge and consciousness and the ways in which they relate to each other.

The Inside Film project concerns itself with a specific group of people (prisoners and ex-prisoners) in a particular set of circumstances (in prison or on parole), and explores the ways in which film can be used within prison education, or with people who have been to prison, as a means of fostering a critical engagement in ways that the more traditional academic subjects are unable to do.



Framing the Shot HMP Wandsworth

The United Kingdom imprisons more of its citizens than any other European country. In the last 10 years of the New Labour government the prison population rose year on year.<sup>ii</sup> The Conservative led Coalition government show no signs of reversing the trend, indeed since the riots that took place in London and other major cities in the United Kingdom in August of 2011 there has been a sharp spike in the number of people in prison.<sup>iii</sup> This confirms the intention of continuing the New Labour solution of warehousing the casualties of capitalism.<sup>iv</sup> The figure for those in custody in England and Wales on December 2011 was 88,179, a rise of nearly 3,000 from a year earlier.<sup>v</sup> The rates of incarceration in Great Britain are not only greater than any other western European country but also exceed those of Burma, Malaysia and Turkey. In 2008-2009 it cost on average almost £50,000 per year to incarcerate someone in a UK prison. Since the spending cuts implemented by the coalition government have been put into place that figure has fallen significantly and the figure for the cost of a prison place in 2012-13 has now fallen to £36,808. More than 50% of prisoners (both men and women) have been imprisoned because of economic crimes e.g. burglary, handling stolen goods, petty theft, etc.<sup>vi</sup>

The concentration on what might appear to be at first glance a rather narrow sector of society is not intended to detach this sector from the wider social world or the problems suffered by many subordinate groups under capitalism, but on the contrary to demonstrate the relationship between the demonisation of those who suffer most under neoliberalism and the prison system. The cost of the prison system to the taxpayer is large and growing. According to a report by the Howard League for Penal Reform in 2008 the criminal justice system as a whole -police, courts, probation services and the increasing role of the private sector in transporting prisoners and indeed in running prisons- in England and Wales received £22.7 billion (2009: 7). While the economic cost of criminalisation and imprisonment is borne by the taxpayer the ideological role of prisons in the formation of classed subjectivities and

individualised guilt contributes to the de-politicisation of a working class who in a post industrialised society have lost the sense of classed identity that prevailed after the Second World War. One of the major functions of prison is to deal with the people for whom capitalism has no use, but in defining the behaviours created by capitalism as criminal, the responsibility for people abandoned by the system becomes a question of personal and moral responsibility and not one of systemic failure. This is precisely why we should be attentive to the prison system; the micro focus on the particular can construct a model for addressing the general, or in Lukacsian terms, the totality. The totality refers to the different spheres of social life, culture, economics, education, law, politics, which under capitalism appear as autonomous but are in fact subordinated to systematic imperatives such as accumulation, commodification and competition (Jay 1984: 103-115). These imperatives indicate that it is less advantageous to be working class because the societal norms manifested in the above spheres are in harmony with these imperatives, which favour the desires and needs of the dominant classes. The increasing trend of prison building, privatisation and the imprisonment of those with no investment in the status quo, in this era of global neoliberal capitalism, suggests that the preferred solution to a whole plethora of social ills such as mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, illiteracy, homelessness, unemployment that capitalism itself creates, is a form of punishment that leads to an increase in these social ills. And it is as well to remember in our increasingly authoritarian surveillance society that protestors, political organisers and whistleblowers are increasingly being targeted by the state and imprisoned. At the same time people fleeing war torn countries are locked up in 'detention centers' for the 'crime' of being poor, afraid and from a different country.

An analysis of crime and imprisonment hoping to make some sense of the above incarceration statistics will find it necessary to acknowledge, that generally speaking, people who experience the prison system are some of the most marginalised and dispossessed members of the working class. As Bennett has pointed out, those in prison are not a "random" group nor are they "representative of the community" as a whole (Bennett 2008: 459). Rather those who find themselves in prison are people whose actions can indeed be defined as 'crimes', but should in actuality be defined as "manifestations of some social distress" (Stern 2006: 3). Inevitably, the people who are most affected by the criminalisation of social distress are those for whom capitalism has the most negative impact- the working class- who because of their lack of material resources are most likely to commit acts designated as criminal (Quinney 1980: 107).

The Inside Film project poses the question of how to challenge the values and ideological practices of a capitalist society and how to occupy already existing spaces in order to achieve this aim. This entails an attempt to construct a space within the confines of the prison, a space that differentiates itself from the usual education provision, a cognitive and practice based space in which it becomes possible to consider and to implement oppositional perspectives. Within this space the prisoners can create their own representations of their lives, provide evidence of their daily experiences both inside and outside of the prison and thereby challenge assumptions of working class people, working class life and of course, prisoners.

The right to self-representation that Inside Film attempts to provide is embedded within Article 19 of The Human Rights Act which enshrines the right to communicate and translates this right as “the right of every individual or community to have its stories and views heard” (X1X Article 19 Global campaign for free expression 2003: 13). This sounds deceptively simple and hard to disagree with, but it is important to consider the barriers involved in certain people telling their stories and how some communities are vilified and ignored to the point where they believe they have nothing to communicate. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) were drafted to ensure that the right to communicate would guarantee

- The unfettered right to hold opinions
- The right to express and disseminate “any information or ideas”
- A right to have access to media
- A right to receive information and ideas

Furthermore, international law requires states to take positive measures to ensure all citizens have access to the means to achieve the right to communicate and that no state interferes with these rights (Ibid 3). Therefore we could argue that Inside Film is providing a service the state has neglected to make provision for!

Antonio Gramsci theorised, that working class lives are marked by the contradictions and antagonisms inherent in capitalism, but that they are often unable to articulate their discontents in a constructive way. The inability to articulate obviously leads to a failure to communicate. The hostility and aggression this results in is channelled into (at best) reformism or more negative and individualised areas such as crime (Landy 1994: 14). The prisoners and ex-prisoners Inside Film works with, it is true, are aware of the injustices of everyday life for working class people, but awareness alone will not alter their position in the hierarchal structures of a class stratified society. What I lay claim to here is that the act of self-representation makes possible the consideration of their lives as part of a wider totality. The pedagogical practices of Inside Film emphasises the importance of placing dominant representations in the wider context of the economic system in which they exist, insisting on the relationship between economics and culture and class. This dialectical analysis allows for an exploration of popular culture as just one aspect of dominant political, economic and ideological hegemonic practices and refuses to countenance its detachment as ‘just entertainment’.

### **The Empirical, the Actual and the Real**

According to Marx “the visible, merely external movement” of capitalist social relations obscure its “actual intrinsic relations” (Marx Vol 3 Capital), therefore our sense of what is *real* is fractured by a supposed universality that functions to prevent us from developing a sense of the actual -that is, knowledge of the specific experiences of the working class as they operate within the social relations of capital. There can be no concept of the human being without a historical context –men and women are always products of the spatial, temporal,

social organisation of the circumstances into which they are born.<sup>vii</sup> Their position within the division of labour will influence, in determinant, although not unchanging ways, the process of their socialization and the construction of their subjectivity. Capitalist societies work in ways that detach this position within the division of labour from the structural determinants of class and therefore the market is perceived of as a place where labour can be traded freely. Marx exposes this as merely the phenomenal appearance-form, real in the sense that people do sell their labour in the market place, but merely external in the sense that it does not expose the underlying reality that people are forced by economic necessity to accept the terms of the capitalist class. This assumed universal neutrality acts as a cloak for how the 'actual relations of capitalism' proffer not freedom, but varying degrees of exploitation. As Lichtman puts it:

Capitalism requires individuals who are legally free and able to enter into and out of contractual relationships. Such individuals cannot be slaves or serfs nor can they possess the means of their own reproduction, or they would lack any incentive to exchange their labour power for wages. The capitalist takes all of this for granted, but he translates the fact of contractual exchange based on necessity into the ideology of *free* movement and *individual liberty* (Lichtman 1981: 108).

While Marx's original conception of the exploitative relationship was premised on the relationship between the factory workers and the factory owners of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the dialectical relationship of exploited /exploiter cannot be dismissed on the grounds that it is an outdated view. The continuing exploitation and oppression of the working class is apparent in the numbers imprisoned by those who hold wealth and power, lending as much credence to Marx's original conception as when these workers were involved in manual labour in the industries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While it is necessary to recognise the nature of labour has changed since Marx's time, it is equally important to consider that for Marx it was not the production of goods per se that defined the working class but the mode of that production, that is the *relationship* of the workers to the capitalist class. This was a relationship built on exploitation and there is no reason to suggest that this relationship has changed (Callinicos 2006: 144).

For those in employment the reality of the wage form is uncoupled from the actuality of the way in which work is separated into necessary labour and surplus labour. This separation results in the worker labouring for a certain amount of the day for no remuneration, but solely for the profit of the capitalist (Marx 1994: 226). For those out of work, conceptually their position remains the same within the economic dynamic of contemporary capitalism. Their relationship to the institutions of capitalism and the purpose that relationship serves for the capitalist system as a whole remains fundamentally the same as it did in Marx's time. The paradigmatic drives of the capitalist system are still in place; the pursuit of profit and competitiveness depend as they have always done upon the exploitation of the working class.

Under this system representations become mere appearances, appearances that contribute to the social construction of reality which is nothing more than a semblance of reality and which corresponds to the *appearance* of division of labour as one of equivalence. Representations



therefore contribute to the illusion of legitimacy upon which capitalism is built. This illusion of legitimacy with which we are presented is one that has to be confronted in order to create a picture of the totality. For those taking part in the Inside Film project the challenge is to understand how media images are constructed, how those constructions are linked to questions of power and legitimacy and how they can use the medium of film to document and articulate issues and concerns in their own lives. This challenge to the dominant ideological representations disseminated in the media depends upon a strong conceptual sense of the way in which the real is determined by the structures of capitalism and how that real can be actualised not in any arbitrary sense, but through a programme of theoretical and practical exploration, classed identification and political application.

To take one example of this practice, a film we have often watched with the students is *The Green Mile* (Frank Darabont: 1999), about the inhabitants of death row in a prison in the southern states of America in the 1930's. The film ostensibly portrays the wrongful conviction and execution of a black man with supernatural powers for the rape and murder of two small white girls. It is a sentimental film that a superficial reading suggests is sympathetic to the historical plight of racial minorities in the southern states of America. The majority of students, particularly the black students, respond to the film in a positive way. Generally speaking, when we have shown this film the black students' collective response is to view the passivity and sacrifice of the central black character as a 'true' representation of how black people have suffered as a result of poverty, racism and oppression. A deconstruction of the film reveals that the black character becomes secondary to the white characters, and that the film functions as a justification for the death penalty. Furthermore, it reinforces a discourse of black sacrifice to make possible a stable world order. The response to the offered critique of this film is revealing, the black students insist it is a true reflection of the lot of black people, and even when they accept the problems inherent within the film, they are still reluctant to view the film in a negative light. This example illustrates the cognitive work involved in identifying the distinction between the real, the experience of the working class and actuality. It also demonstrates how existing collective identification is conditioned by the frameworks dictated by dominant modes of understanding. The relationship between the real, the experience of working class life and the actual is crucial to an understanding of how we perceive the world in which we live and how we overcome the limitations of the merely empirical real. Perception in this sense is not immediate but is mediated through linking experience of the social world with the social and cultural practices we take part in and how they correlate to class position. The mechanisms involved in linking our subjective experience to conceptions of the real offer a route for us to change our understanding of the world. The subjective, perceptual quality of classed perspective results in, as Eagleton has pointed out, a "situation in which one class has power over the other (and) is either seen by most members of the society as 'natural' or not seen at all" (Eagleton 1989: 5).

The successful reproduction of class relations is not simply determined by the economic. In Western post industrialised democracies; the working class has lost much of its economic leverage over the last thirty years as industrial production has been moved to the 'developing

world' in search of larger profit streams. The non-unionised working class in the global south where wages are lower, employment rights and workplace regulations almost non-existent and commercial costs cheaper bear witness to the way in which the 'industrial prison complex' works to create

a symbiotic and profitable relationship between politicians, corporations, the media and state correctional institutions that generates the ... use of incarceration as a response to social problems rooted in the globalization of capital. (Sudbury 2002: 61)

The working class in the West is now often unemployed or underemployed (working on zero hour contracts), and therefore reliant on state benefits. With the destruction of working class industries during the Thatcher years, capital is no longer dependent on the physical presence of the working class. It has commandeered culture, particularly the media, as a means of justifying the exploitation and ongoing assault on the rights of the poor. According to Gitlin the media play a central role in the production and dissemination of ruling class ideology. By presenting the dominant ideology as universal the media becomes one of the "primary pipelines for capitalist values, primary weapons of social control" (Gitlin 1972: 363). In this contemporary historical moment one of "the primary weapons of social control" is the attack on members of the working class who depend on the welfare state as scroungers and skivers. The dominant media's concentration on *appearances* rather than *determinants* creates a politically calculated ideological separation between a specular reality and experienced actuality, the outcome of which is a constant and consistent misrecognition of the totality of social relations and the reality of working class lives.

The real and the actual should not be considered as opposing forces, rather they exist in a dialectical relationship where one implies the other and it is not possible to make sense of one without a critical engagement with the other. Challenging the *reality* of capitalism we can begin to develop knowledge of the structural *actualities* of capitalism. Without this knowledge any project, including the Inside Film project, offering the possibility of transformation, will be aiming to transform the external reality and not the intrinsic actuality of capitalism, and therefore will be doomed to failure. This is of course exactly what most educational projects taking place in prisons or that work with 'excluded' groups do, they attempt to deal with the end result, the 'criminal behaviour', while leaving in place the conditions that resulted in that behaviour in the first place. The ways in which Inside Film works, in contrast to these other projects, will, I hope, become clear, but the essential difference between Inside Film and more conventional approaches to teaching lies in its insistence on a bottom up involvement in deciding the route to a more critically engaged working class, as a means to overcoming the limits of the structures put in place by capitalism.

We never run workshops or make films that are predetermined. Our lack of what could be called course material is a direct result of a very loose set of specifications for the course. What we teach and the manner of that teaching is determined by the interests of the group: as topics arise during group discussions we will opportunistically encompass them within the theory we are discussing or arrange to bring in films that demonstrate a point, so, for

instance, a discussion about mixed race relationships initiated by one of the students led to an exploration of the Hollywood Production Code and the ban against miscegenation. This in turn led to a discussion of the way in which the representation of 'race' has changed, and not changed, in dominant films. This provided the opportunity, the following week, to screen a Third Cinema film dealing with the Civil Rights movement in the United States in the 1960's, *Now* (Santiago Alvarez 1965). This led to a discussion of the racism inherent in the present criminal justice system and of their own experience of that racism and how their lives and personalities had been affected by those experiences. This sequence of pedagogic events, initiated and led by the students, encompassed history, memory, contemporary attitudes to race and class, low budget film making and the political reasoning behind acts of censorship.

The important point here is that the students were engaging with events and concepts that have a direct relevance to their lives, some of which they had not been previously aware of. Crucially, the contribution of their own experiences and perspectives was essential to the work of building an alternative political schema. Marx's claim that the working class will be the agents of social change is dependent on the active involvement of the working class in relationships of change. While this might seem to be a self-explanatory formulation, it is of the utmost importance that we attempt to clarify how that involvement might come about and what form those relationships will take. The most crucial thing about this episode is the way in which it demonstrated the willingness and capacity of a group of imprisoned working class men to actively engage in creating their own narratives in direct opposition to the ones that the dominant society would impose upon them. These narratives meshed in a critical way historical, theoretical and personal knowledge, which through a process of debate, identification and recognition became collective knowledge. These oppositional narratives then became part of the films they went on to make.

One of the ways I wish to make our approach clearer is in the utilisation of Bhaskar's (1998: 33-47) threefold stratification model: the empirical, the actual and the real. The empirical refers to those experiences open to observation; Bhaskar stresses that the empirical is still mediated by concepts that make the empirically observable intelligible. The actual refers to those experiences that constitute the trends in empirically observable phenomena. In a context of natural science experiment, the actual is the regular pattern of events produced by the scientist in laboratory conditions. When the scientist does X to Y, Z tends to happen. But the actual is just the recurrent event. The real is the theoretical analysis of the generative mechanisms – the deep lying causal complexes that are at work so that when X is done to Y, Z tends to happen – at least in the laboratory, which is a closed system where interfering factors have been excluded (ibid: 3). When we apply this model to the prison system we can see the empirical is prison for people who have committed a crime. The empirical is shaped by the dominant conceptions of what constitutes a crime. The actual are the underlying trends, which mean that in general, prison is a place for working class people with few material resources who have committed a 'crime'. The real is the generative mechanisms of a class divided capitalist society, which produce both the dominant conceptions of crime and the people who tend to end up in prison.

The universalising impulse of the bourgeoisie is achieved by the separation of the economic and the social, that is, the ways in which the social relates to the forces of production but is manifested “outside of the sphere of production itself” (Meiksins -Wood 1995: 67). If we take a moment to think about this we will come to the conclusion that it is a quite extraordinary state of affairs, the social, or what we understand as the social, manifests itself *outside* the experiences of the working class. The education of the working class, their relationship to the institutions of society (whose function is to discipline them (Charlesworth 2000: 23), their inherited historical sense of their place in society all combine to situate the working class as external to the economic, educational, social and cultural knowledge of the whole.

According to Marx it is the social individual and the relations under which that person exists that is of the utmost importance. Consciousness of the whole is dependent on a perspective that is able to relate the complex interactions of the lived experience of class to the totality. This suggests that experience and cognition are irretrievably linked to reflection and practice. Experience links us to the world in practical ways, we *feel* our lives through our senses, experience is what we do (and what is done to us) and this is what shapes our consciousness, our way of being in the world; how we feel about the world, how we think of the world is directly related to our experience of the world. The denial and disavowal of working class experience, and by extension working class knowledge within the dominant culture, means that the necessary understanding that can lead to social and cultural transformation requires a process of disinterment of working class experience. Only then can it be re-evaluated, not under the terms of the universal values of the dominant culture, but in relation to the specific values of working class life.

How we conceive of the actual has direct implications for a conception of the real. Bhaskar's alignment with Marx on this point reinforces the disjuncture between the *real* and the *actual* (Bhaskar 1998: 41). But more than this, it allows for a formulation of the actual as an intelligible structure determined by its integration with, and contradiction to, the underlying reality on which it is dependent. This dialectical connection between the actual and the real allows for an interrogation of the concepts of crime and criminals that moves away from the universal application of predetermined dualistic concepts, such as good and bad, moral and immoral, right and wrong, and introduces a dialectical appraisal that uncouples the criminal act from the universalistic assumption of bourgeois discourses. It then becomes possible to view acts designated as crimes not as a single events, but as the interaction of a plurality of events with a strong tendency towards certain outcomes while at the same time considering justice not as a moral retribution for wrong doing but as strategy for the protection and maintenance of capitalism.

When the *actuality* of crime is discussed separately from economics and the *real* structural inequalities of economic distribution, or the *actuality* of media reports on crime are considered as functioning in a different sphere from elite attitudes to the poor, the result is a failure to comprehend the *real* interrelatedness of media reports of crime with elite attitudes to the poor. This results in a structured blindness to the ways in which crime operates as part

of the *totality* of a system dependent on the fracturing and obscuring of knowledge of the whole. As Callinicos (2006: 218) points out, Marx claimed generally accepted assumptions of morality and justice are no more than “historically specific expressions of class interest”. Considered in this light it becomes clear that the act of committing a crime goes far beyond the act itself and the individual who carries out the act. It is integrally linked to society as a whole and therefore comprehension of crime as a totality demands a radical alteration in comprehension and knowledge.

When students arrive for the first session of the course and there is, inevitably, some discussion around issues of crime and punishment, the overwhelming attitude of the prisoners and ex-prisoners themselves is that they deserve to be in prison because they have committed a crime. This attitude directly contradicts the awareness, alluded to above, of the unfairness of their lives. Inside Film attempts to provide an alternative model of crime that moves way from the hegemonic notion of the criminal and the neutrality of the justice system. We feel that many of the films made by the students are evidence that we are often successful in this attempt. We do not ask the students to fill in questionnaires or attempt to ‘measure their progress’ and there is no documented record of prisoners or ex-prisoners saying such things therefore the films are our only way of measuring if we have achieved what we have set out to achieve.

## **Representing Crime**

Attitudes to, and knowledge of, crime are based not on the experience of crime as part of the totality (although we might well have experienced *a* crime), but on a mediated conceptualisation of crime and the criminal act which demands that we distinguish between the official version and the reality of crime which exist in total opposition to each other. Generally speaking reactions to questions of crime and punishment are formulated not on the experience we have of them as part of the complex totality of lived social relations, but on hegemonic decontextualized assumptions of crime as an aberration from the norm of a healthy, functioning society, and punishment as a necessary response both of which function as independent of politics and economics. We are led to believe that prison is a necessary condition for a safe and secure society. Crime is coded as a question of moral choices and interpreted as a desocialised question of individual agency premised on individuals choosing to lead ‘honest, hardworking, *law abiding*’ lives. But if we consider for a moment what it means to abide by the laws of a profoundly unequal neo liberal society designed to exploit and oppress the working class and which in order to reproduce its own mode of being is dependent on that inequality remaining in place we can begin to understand why it is almost impossible for working class people to abide by the law. The law, and the legal system that enforces it, recognises no class structure –the law is indeed blind as it closes its eyes to the poverty, destitution and desperation that motivate most ‘crimes’ committed by the working class.

The most common characteristic of offenders (sic) are not professional villainy and self-interest but poverty, isolation, boredom, an inability to cope, drink problems and mental illness (Farrell: 154).

The strategic significance of Bhaskar's distinction is that it allows us to confront the ways in which the system of beliefs and rationalities that justify the mechanism of capitalism suppress the experience of the working class and contribute to the systemic subordination of those whose lives are blighted by the way in which the world is ordered. Viewed as a totality and contextualised in relation to lived experience, our knowledge of the institutional spheres of capitalism is exposed as partial and contradictory, providing the opportunity to cultivate a less alienated and more critically engaged relationship with the forces of production as they are manifested in social relations which in turn creates the potential for personal and social transformation.

Crime is generally considered to be the work of an *individual* who intentionally harms someone else either directly and physically through violence or indirectly and economically as in the case of burglary. What Reiman calls the "one-on-one" model of crime successfully constructs a visual signifier of the 'typical' criminal as someone who is generally young, male, working class, and usually black (Reiman 1995: 200-257). Indeed, this is an accurate description of the majority of people who are in prison, as Jewkes (2005: 45) has pointed out "prisoners are overwhelmingly young, male, unemployed and drawn from the lower working classes". The model used by Reiman serves a double purpose. It creates a profile of the criminal corresponding to the image of the working class currently in circulation, and the blurring of distinctions between the two images operates to effectively criminalise the working class or associate working class culture with criminality. At the same time this model directs the anger of those who are the victims of crimes or who are concerned about crime not upwards towards the rich and powerful but downwards to the poor and dispossessed (Reiman 2000: 144). The young mother who works while claiming benefits because she does not have enough money to buy food and pay the rent is labelled a criminal, while the perpetrators of the Iraq war which has been responsible for the deaths of over a million and which, it is generally acknowledged was, based on deceptions and lies, have never been held to account by those in authority or their actions considered as crimes by the legal system.

Or to take another example, the incidence of death and disease that occur as a direct consequence of management refusal to fund the necessary health and safety procedures that result in potentially fatal hazards in the workplace. The definition of the 'typical' crime means that the actual crimes committed by those in power result in a society where damaged children who commit acts of violence are labelled criminals while a mining disaster in which four men are killed,<sup>viii</sup> because the correct health and safety procedures were not in place, is not considered mass murder:

Is a person who kills another person in a bar brawl a greater threat to society than a business executive who refuses to cut into his profits in order to make his factory a safe place to work. By any measure of death and suffering the latter is by far a greater danger than the former. But because he wishes his workers no harm, because he is only indirectly responsible for death and disability while pursuing legitimate economic goals, his acts are not called *crimes*. Once we free our imagination from the irrational shackle of the one-on-one model of crime, can there be any doubt that the criminal justice system does *not* protect us from the gravest

threats to life and limb. It seeks to protect us when that threat comes from a young, lower class male in the inner city, when that threat comes from an upper class business executive in an office it looks the other way (Reiman 2000: 72).

Reiman's conclusion is that we need to consider the whole question of 'crime' and what is constituted as a crime combined with the inability of the state to address the problem of crime, not as a failure, but on the contrary, the construction of the typical crime is successful in fulfilling the ideological purpose that it is intended for: that of creating a fear of the working class and deflecting attention away from the *actual* crimes committed by the rich and powerful.<sup>ix</sup>

... the actions we label crime, the acts we think of as crime, the actors and actions we treat as criminal- is created. It is an image shaped by decisions as to *what* will be called crime and who will be treated as criminal (Reiman 2000: 293).

The actions of those with money and power are not classified as criminal and if they are, the perpetrators receive fairly lenient sentences, which, if those sentences are custodial they carry out in open prisons.

... politicians stay stoically silent with respect to crimes committed by middle class 'respectables'. The constant barrage of publicity around benefit fraud compared to the ongoing silence around middle class fraud and income tax evasion remains the classic example of how the crime problem is ideologically constructed by the majority of politicians, media commentators and state servants (Simm 2010).

## Education and Radical Pedagogy

The development of a theoretical and practical, politically committed, radical pedagogy of film, able to meet the challenge of exploring the questions raised by the attempt to conceptualise such a pedagogy in the service of the working classes, is dependent on a multi-disciplinary approach which endeavours to cross fertilize the rigid specialisms current within intellectual life (Boggs 2000: viii, Miller 2001). The isolationist impulse of these specialisms contribute to fostering a partial view of the totality of life under capitalism, each with its own conception of reality, and repertoire of meanings. This leads, inevitably, to the obfuscation of the connections that exist between different areas of knowing. Fixing on a particular object and objective, other factors in play are reduced in significance and prominence given to the specialism in focus. How then are we to grasp the actuality of the social if the other contributing factors are not present? Under a continuing developmental impetus considerable energy is expended on keeping the boundaries between specialisms firmly drawn, capitalism continues to evolve and class struggle is removed from the framework. This is not to say that the work carried out is not of use in the production of knowledge or that the knowledge it produces is without use. But to be truly effective in any project of transformation it must be connected relationally and complexly to other disciplines and to experience as it is lived in the production of historical knowledge. It is important to grasp that seemingly diverse areas of study within academia no matter how differentiated each is with its own language and its own 'schools of thought' actually function as sub-genres within the overarching genre of capitalist education.

The claims of different perspectives and new approaches fail to recognise that perspective is *always* classed, our view of the world is constructed by our place within it and the class position we occupy. The approach we follow is determined by our experience of life and education. Therefore our perspective is not neutral; it is embedded within the perceptual relations of class. Under the pressures of a commodified education system there is a narrowing of intellectual diversity, a levelling of differentials in order to guarantee a product that will retain its value in the market place. Commodification, focuses on the universal, and therefore fails to make the connections within and between existing social relations, which out of necessity creates a conception of knowledge that fails to recognise the particularities of class. It is important here to draw a distinction between the universal and the totality. The universal refers to the ways in which capitalist ideology functions to construct phenomena which are in reality dependent upon social and historical specificities such as class relations as independent of such specificities and in the process subsumes them into an essentialising category that fails to allow for the primacy of such particularities as well as their social interconnectedness. This process results in a standardised and homogenised understanding of social relations. The totality, on the other hand, recognises these particulars and places them within the network of social relations that coalesce into the whole. The existence of the working class is evidence of the impossibility of the universal, the relations of capitalism are intelligible only if viewed in relation to power, once we understand this it becomes clear that universalism is the ideology of power, indeed Balibar refers to ideology as the “dream of an impossible universality” (Balibar 2002).

The economic and social relations of capitalist education in most societies reproduce ways of (not) seeing and the hierarchal relations of existence that prepare children for their role in a workplace mirror the prevailing organisation of relationships in the school/college /university (Bowles and Gintis 2011: 12). These relations also act as filters to screen out information, the “pedagogical unsaid”, a two pronged process which leaves unchallenged the structures that perpetuate a system of class inequality while at the same time conveying through its own structures information on how to fit into the system it fails to acknowledge exists.

A market led approach to education results in an education system aligned to the imperatives of the state sanctioned goals of profit and commodification has resulted in a situation where schools “are organised and look and operate like businesses” (Ball 2008: 200). The embedding of the ‘logic of capitalism’ at every level of personal and public life informs and shapes the education system and, in the process, ensures education is not considered as a liberatory and democratic process aligned with the right of citizens to question the basic assumptions of the institutions that hold political power (Freire: 1978). According to Small (2005: 32) the alienation of the learner from educational achievement is not to be seen as existing in “the failure, the drop out, or the delinquent” but rather in the normal and even the successful student”. It is the successful students who internalise the demands of a class-differentiated labour market. The low educational achievement of those people who are incarcerated is testament to the impossibility of the imposition of a universal capitalist logic. Their low educational achievement is connected not to their status as prisoners, but to their experience of being working class.



A radical pedagogical methodology must start from a theory of the totality – the application of this paradigmatic conceptual tool makes it possible to begin to build connections between seemingly disparate areas of social relations and the ways in which their significance lies not in their material affect (important as this might be) but in the cognitive and perceptual blindness to the ways in which structures of power operate. Just as Reiman claims we need to view crime policy not as failing but as succeeding, so Mara Sapon-Shevin (talking about the American education system in ways that can be applied generally to institutions in the West) has challenged us to see the publicly funded education system not in terms of failure, but in terms of success. A system built on the reproduction of class difference is successful if it prepares the working class for a life of subservience, manual employment and/ or custody, that is “distributed negatively across the spectrum of market rewards”:

If we are concerned that we are failing to educate all children, or failing to prepare our future citizens, or failing some commitment to equity and social justice—then, yes, the system is failing. If we wish to see the reproduction of the current unjust system then the system under which we all live is actually succeeding perfectly. It does a superb job sorting out the winners from the losers, perpetuating a stringently classed society, and creating the work force that our stratified, capitalist society requires (Sapon-Shevin 2011: 22).

This crushing of the hopes and dreams of working class people, the reduction of their lives to a daily fight for nothing more than survival, their consignment to the stigmatized margins of a market based economy where (economic) activities necessary to exist are criminalised, are the central concerns for *Inside Film*. The overwhelming problem in dealing with these concerns is that while “the norms of capitalism appear as features of the natural world”, that is, as universal truths, we as human beings “need take no social and political responsibility for these norms” (Wendling 2009: 2). The enormity of attempting to address this problem has been raised by Alex Callinicos in relation to building new models of cognition and action: “how are we able to go beyond the limits set by existing practices and beliefs and produce something new something as yet unimagined?” (2006: 1).

To be human is to exist within the structures of the society in which we live: there can be no human development outside of those structures. It is not possible to stand outside of what we know and construct a position that will enable us to produce a theoretical standpoint to understand the society in which we live that will encompass the experience of all the people who live in that society (Castoriadis 2005: 3). The limits of what we know are dependent on how we relate to our class position. Knowledge of social relations relies on an application of a pedagogy prepared to engage with the myriad contradictions between the social, the economic and the cultural in the ways they are connected to lived experience. A ‘theoretical practice’ that does not engage with the experiences that exist outside of those acknowledged by the dominant ideology will limit its own ability to see beyond that ideology. Engaging with the cultural and experiential distance between the working class and other classes within the structures of capitalism provides a way of addressing the economic as it is manifested in the cultural and the social. A pedagogical practice seeking to ‘go beyond the limits set by existing practices’ must seek to occupy an autonomous space within already existing spaces.

Conceptually the notions of occupation and autonomy have been linked contemporaneously to the anti-capitalist movements taking place in various cities across the world and which involve inhabiting spaces in ways that construct them as 're-imagined' and liberated from the conditions of capitalism, rejecting the top down hierarchies of state imposed institutions. As Castoriadis notes "autonomy emerges when explicit and unlimited interrogation explodes on the scene –an interrogation that has a bearing not on 'facts' but on the social imaginary significations and their possible grounding" (1991: 163). Crucially this social imaginary must be a collective one. The specific shared experience of the prison and of parole produces knowledge of the world that is determined by that experience and which is in a direct contradiction to the prevailing ideology. It is within these contradictions that the intervention of a project like Inside Film can initiate a re-negotiating of the 'facts' and occupy an autonomous space within an already existing space that resists the accepted conceptualisations of the working class, film, education and culture and insists on the interrogation of each of these.

This then is an attempt to project ourselves into a future that does not exist, which is not known, one that will be produced in the very act of projecting ourselves into it. This is not an imagined utopianism into which our ideas of something different must fit. Rather, it is a struggle to wrench the future from those who are content to continue as we are or who truly believe there is no alternative (Eagleton 1981: 68) and begin to build radical "futures in the present" (Clever 1993).

The task is large and complex. In summary, film as a radical pedagogic tool:

- Connects the cultural consideration of film dialectically to the political project of praxis, linking the abstract category of theory with the empirical process of production as it applies to both filmmaking and to education.
- Integrates radicalism as a methodology into pedagogic practice and the process of filmmaking.
- Is concerned with education, not in the conventional model of knowledge transmission and acquisition but as a reaction to our environment (Biesta 2006: 27) and the ways in which our experience of that environment shapes how and what we learn and so consequently conditions our subjectivity (O'Neill and Wayne: 2009).
- Insists on (classed) experience as the conceptual and theoretical basis of political and cultural analysis. Following on from this it acknowledges that the working class has a culture both historical and contemporaneous that differentiates it from the dominant culture of the ruling elites.
- Strives through praxis to illuminate the dominant strategies of neo liberalism exposing the structural weight of the power concentrated in elites.
- Recognises the definitional power of the media and the unequally distributed cultural capital (Bourdieu 1996) involved in accessing that power.
- Argues for the production of film and the process of education to be viewed dialectically through the lens of the wider social and political spectrum of capitalist relations particularly as they relate to class.

As this list demonstrates, taken as a whole the Inside Film project is a political intervention in both filmmaking and education. Film as a radical pedagogic tool attempts to facilitate a critical engagement with the structural and ideological underpinnings of the dominant media whose representational processes produce negative images of the working classes constructing them as problematic and dangerous (Skeggs 2004). As a *tool*, a word consciously chosen for its connotations of manual labour, the project unambiguously aligns the work it carries out with the working classes, constructing itself as a class specific intervention. It is concerned with dismantling the ideological construction of dominant visual and discursive imagery. What is at stake here is the realisation that the powerful, institutionalised conduits of ideology, the media and the education system in particular, generally speaking, offers no other version of reality than one that chimes with the values of elite groups. Access to the resources essential to the task of communicating an organised opposition encompassing radical versions of social and political reality are extremely unequally distributed and dominated by an elite class (Benson 1978: 96). Essentially, working class meaning is considered to be, if it is considered at all, 'a subordinate one'. The stability of the present system is dependent on excluding and rejecting working class meaning.<sup>x</sup> The task we have set ourselves, to bring that subordinate meaning to the fore, can only be achieved through establishing ways of translating that subordinate meaning so it makes sense not only to those who never consider it, but to the people who that meaning belongs to.

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<sup>i</sup> To take just one example-one of the theory sessions is devoted to a film making practice known as Third Cinema- a low budget, politically committed cinema that grew out of the anti-colonial struggles taking place across South America and Africa in the 1960's and 70's (see Wayne 2001) One of the most interesting films to have been produced by the students is a film very heavily influenced by the filmmaking practices and strategies of Third Cinema WHO AM I? In this documentary the students make connections between personal identity, national identity and international violence in an unconventional and thought provoking way.

<sup>ii</sup> It is worth noting here that New Labour created an astonishing 3,600 new offences during their time in office, between the time they took office in 1997 and were voted out in 2010 the prison population rose by 41%.

<sup>iii</sup> Ministry of Justice Statistical Bulletin on the public disorder of 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011-September 2012 update: Published 13 September 2012

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/19/riots-violence-prison-population>

<sup>v</sup> These statistics are from The Howard League for Penal reform web site <http://www.howardleague.org/> accessed 10th November 2012

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/joepublic/2009/sep/17/erwin-james-education-prisoners-rehabilitation> accessed 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012

<sup>vii</sup> As Richard Lichtman has pointed out it is 'this contention that distinguishes the Marxist position from every religious or therapeutic movement that claims to transform the self without transforming the natural social world' (Lichtman 72: 1982)

<sup>viii</sup> For more details see <http://www.channel4.com/news/welsh-miners-rescue-inside-gleision-colliery> accessed 24th August 2013

<sup>ix</sup> When the rich and powerful are accused of crimes their punishment is considerably less than that of the working class person who has committed a crime and the consequences to their lives considerably less <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/nov/04/jailed-peers-expense-lords-return>

<sup>x</sup> Other strategies, as Dave Hill has pointed out after he had read this work, include incorporating, deriding, and devaluing.

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