The Cultural Common Sense of East End London, Poverty, and the Social

Representations of poverty in late 1880s and 1890s London

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Major Research Paper
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September 19, 2004
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Chapter One

Introduction:
The East End of London and the Public Making of Meaning

The East End of London exists beyond its own historical reality as a signifier of nineteenth-century poverty, degradation, misery, violence and suffering. During the Victorian period, the meaning that the East End came to embody contributed to the more general understanding of community or the social order. However, this meaning was not reflective of the objective economic causes of unemployment and underemployment during the second half of the nineteenth century in London. The middle classes continually misinterpreted the problem of poverty because they could only understand it through the lens of the dominant social discourse. In the late nineteenth century, some people became increasingly uncomfortable with an understanding of social existence disseminated by the dominant pubic discourse on poverty, which excused the existence of East End misery, and as a result a multifaceted critique of the

existing social arrangements developed. This critique formed a counter or alternative discourse that could give meaning to the problems of poverty and its relationship to the functioning of the social order.

The East End, as a social metaphor, became a "contested terrain" for various social reformers seeking to influence the cultural meaning of 'the social'.[1] In an effort to investigate the making of the meaning of 'the social' through a discussion of the various representations of East End poverty, this paper will situate itself within the historiographical context of the linguistic turn as it has been developed by Patrick Joyce and others. However, it will rely more on the social contextualism or practice theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams than the post-structuralism used by Joyce. This paper will show how multiple discourses on, and meanings of, East End poverty were made, through a complex struggle for symbolic power in publicly contested discursive spaces and events. These new discourses on East End poverty expanded the spectrum of understandings for 'the social' in late nineteenth century London.

The multiple current understandings of 'the social' are the outcome of countless books, essays, studies, and discussions about the nature of human social existence. The meaning of 'the social' is unstable as it changes over time, and as it is held subjectively within a wide domain at any given time. It is for this reason that this paper will, following Patrick Joyce's lead, use quotation marks to denote that the term only has "significance in so far as" its meaning is "made by us, and not found by us in a world beyond this assignation of meaning".[2] From the Enlightenment onward we have increasingly constructed the role of human agency in the making of the world that we live in. Furthermore, we have also come to understand that societies in the past were also made by historical agents. Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach makes this point

clearly: "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated."[3] We have also become increasingly aware that human social interaction is infinitely complex, as there is no essential or transcendental logic on which it is founded, and as a result no general theory of 'the social' is possible or desirable.[4]

Twentieth-century philosophy has shown that the world as we know it exists in our language, as we cannot think beyond the bounds of our language. However, our language does not reflect the 'real' and the understanding of the world that it allows for is susceptible to change over time. By seeing language in this way, we come to understand that our knowledge and our meaning exist in our language. Language is a social process as it can only be intelligible if meaning is shared publicly. To understand the knowledge and meaning held by past cultures, we should examine and describe the texts that record their uses of language. By doing this we can show how the continuing development of meaning in language is central in the making of a social world.[5] Moreover, we need to recognize that the making of 'the social' in our language is not a harmonious process. Power plays a role and as a result the making of the meaning of 'the social' is a process of continual conflict. Leaving aside dated theories of historical materialism, and its obstructive goal to explain the interaction between the essential "means of production" and the resulting "superstructure", we will show that the description of the functioning of power is more interesting than the building of endlessly revised theories of cause and effect. The subject of our linguistic investigation will be the representations of poverty and the East London residuum or casual poor from the unemployment unrest of the mid-1880s through to the end of the century.

The East End of London during the reign of Queen Victoria has never really been intelligible for outsiders.[6] For those separated by social fortune, geography, or time from the famous slums, the only means of understanding its existence are through the discourses created by literary representations, social theories, and statistical data. Beginning with Friedrich Engels' descriptions in *The Condition of the Working* Class (1844), and continued by a range of social investigators including Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth, the illegible modern city was given form and made intelligible.[7] These authors made the "apparently unsystematic and possibly incoherent" realities of the nineteenth-century city into a form that could be "perceived as a total intellectual and imaginative structure".[8] Asa Briggs suggests that London was of increasing interest due to its particularly complex circumstances: "The rapid growth of London both in area and in population was fascination in itself because it seemed to obey no known laws."[9] The East End was fertile soil for literary forms of representation; however, these were not often produced by the inhabitants of East London. As a result, the cultural and historical divide between those of us living in the twenty-first century and the 'real' East End experience from more than a century ago is beyond any method of restoration. William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock show how urban studies have become aware of the importance of language in constructing understandings of the city:

> When studying the modern city, we confront problems of language as well as of methodology, for language inevitably conditions our responses to the city. Our perceptions of the urban landscape are inseparable from the words we use to describe them and from the activities of reading, naming, and metaphorizing that make all our formulations possible.[10]

For these reasons we must limit ourselves to showing how the East End was understood by those who did write about it and how these constructed meanings shaped the common sense beliefs that contribute to a cultural understanding of 'the social'.[11]

Some basic empirical information should help to show the context within which modern London developed. Britain, during the nineteenth century, experienced a process of rapid urbanization. During the first half of the century the urban population expanded at two and a half times the rate of population growth. The growth began to slow during the second half of the nineteenth century, but as the cities were already very large, the combination of urbanization and population growth "saw by far the greatest addition to the absolute numbers of towndwellers ever experienced".[12] By the year 1901 the urban population had reached a saturation level with "between three-quarters and four-fifths" of the total population living in urban areas.[13] So, by the late nineteenth century, England was faced with the new realities of a culture and society overwhelmingly dominated by the urban population. In the span of a hundred and fifty years, starting in 1750, the urban experience transformed from the subordinate or secondary national social experience to the dominant culture of England. F. M. L. Thompson understands this development to be very significant in the history of England: "Urbanisation has been so thoroughgoing… that it has in effect liquidated what was a social region, by turning in into a nation".[14] Asa Briggs also recognizes the significance of London during the final two decades of the nineteenth century: "London captured as much of attention of thinkers and writers, social critics and prophets, as the provincial cities had done in early-Victorian England."[15] This new implication of urban life might help to explain why the problem of poverty in the biggest urban centre in the world, London, was a major concern during the late nineteenth century.

Gareth Stedman Jones' *Outcast London* (1973) is the definitive historical work about East End poverty and the middle-class social reformers who attempted to make sense out of the problem. His book describes both the objective economic structures of poverty through an in depth investigation of the 'real' socio-economic conditions and the middle-class representations

of the same poverty that was reflected in the extensive social reportage and social reform literature. Stedman Jones' findings on the objective causes of poverty will provide further context of the conditions of the London economy.

Stedman Jones describes London's unstable economic conditions during the second half of the nineteenth century in the first chapter of the book. He shows that the London economy relied on three major factors, which included (1) the major port and the resulting commercial traffic, (2) the consumer market driven both by wealth of some inhabitants and by the sheer number of people in London, and (3) the government, which by the late nineteenth century was governing both the United Kingdom and the worldwide imperial empire.[16] The economy, however, was not driven by the development of large industry and factory production. The cost of land in London and the distance from the coal fields increased the cost of industrial production beyond competitive levels when compared to the industrial centres in the Midlands and the North of England.[17] Even long-time London industries, such as silk weaving, shipbuilding and engineering, were on the decline during the second half of the nineteenth century. By the 1880s, the engineering trade was primarily geared towards repair instead of new production. [18]

The majority of London's industry was focused on the production of finished goods for the large consumer market. The West End provided a demand for high quality finished goods that were still produced in small shops reminiscent of a bygone era.[19] The masses provided the demand for cheap finished goods that were generally produced by the sweating system. As mentioned before, the cost of land prevented the development of factories. To overcome this difficulty, a system of outwork, called "sweating", was developed where people did the work in their own homes. This was generally piecework and the pay was very low. The abundance of unskilled women and labourers "who were prepared to work at sub-subsistence wages" enabled

manufactures to overcome the impossibly high overhead in London and produce cheap low quality finished goods for the mass market.[20]

The East End experienced the worst of the economic decline in London. Stedman Jones explains that from "the end of the 1860s to the First World War, the East End was a by-word for chronic and hopeless poverty, and endemic economic malaise".[21] Stedman Jones quotes Paul de Rousier's observation from 1894 to show that employment at the docks, which came to symbolize the problems of casual labour, was only the most apparent of the deep-seated economic problems:

> …the existence of a surplus is not really due to the docks but to the abnormal state of the trades of the East End… trades organised on antiquated lines which retain the small shop and the skilled workman and give rise to the sweating system, are suffering from an endemic malady, and the suffering falls on the class least able to bear it… the unemployed belonging to the vanquished trades, who are always in hope of finding work in their own line, temporarily quit the workshop for the docks, in the hope of providing for their immediate wants by earning a day's wages. The disorganisation of the workshops of London reacts upon labour at the docks.[22]

Stedman Jones goes on to show that the poor economic conditions in the East End were caused primarily by the decline of old staple industries such as ship building that resulted in a surplus of casual labour. He shows that objective economic factors, not immigration or the degeneration of urban health, were the cause of the endemic poverty.[23]

The result of the unique economic development in London was that the control of the means of production remained relatively dispersed. There was no dominant capitalist class of large factory owners. Instead there was an odd mix of aristocrats, gentry, and politicians who stayed in London for only part of the year, commercial capitalists such as bankers who had no connection with the local working class, professionals such as lawyers and doctors and then a large group of small owners. Stedman Jones argues that the "extensive survival of small-scale production in Victorian London determined that its economic structure, its social and political

character, and its patterns of poverty remained largely distinct from those of other nineteenth-century industrial regions".[24] While the idea that these class structures "determined" the social, economic and political nature of London is too strong a statement, it is important to recognize that these objective factors did have a role forming both the real conditions and the subjective representations of them. We will see that the problem of poverty was not perceived by the middle classes in terms of this wide-scale economic decline.

The second part of Stedman Jones' book deals with the impact of urban development on the poor living conditions of the residuum in London. The population of London was continually growing throughout the nineteenth century. The majority of employment opportunities for the labouring population remained in the centre of London. Until the end of the nineteenth century there was no adequate transportation system for workers to travel to and from the suburbs. As a result, the labouring population lived, by necessity, in or close to central London. While the demand for housing in central London was steadily increasing, the supply of affordable housing was constantly decreasing. London was a booming economic centre and the demand for land for railroads, docks, warehouses and office spaces continually displaced residential areas. Stedman Jones explains: "Until the advent of cheap mass travel to and from the suburbs in the late 1880s and 1890s London suffered from a sharp contradiction between its commercial growth and the need to house its necessary work-force."[25] Stedman Jones shows the paradox where "the commercial and industrial development of London, which was so largely responsible for this increase in population, was the main agent in the displacement of the working class from the central area".[26] The increasing demand for lower class housing was not lucrative when compared with the increasing demand from commercial and transportation development (most notably the railroads).[27] The consequence of these economic and geographical conditions was a scarcity of

housing and the resulting overcrowding and poor conditions of lower-class living quarters. These objective market forces, along with the general economic decline led to the miserable conditions of East London during the 1880s.[28]

Judith Walkowitz, in her book *City of Dreadful Delight* about the "narratives of sexual danger" that were, among other things, employed to understand Jack the Ripper's 1888 murder spree in East London, develops the idea that the East End was a disputed space in the making of meaning.[29] In the first two chapters she develops interpretations which are of interest to us in this paper. The first chapter deals with "urban spectatorship" and the second with the "contested terrain" and the challenge from new agents in 'the social'.

Walkowitz argues that during the 1880s London became increasingly unintelligible to the male middle-class observers. Their dominant position in the making of meaning was increasingly challenged by the discourses of other social groups: "Social investigation, serious fiction, and 'shilling shockers' of the 1880s all bear witness to the growing scepticism among men of letters about their capacity to read the city and to sustain a coherent vision of the structured public landscape."[30] The detailed study of London's social order by Charles Booth and his assistants, which began in 1888 and continued through the 1890s, revealed an "incomprehensible region" of gender relations in the slums. The women did not fit into the appropriate categories of female inferiority or domesticity and the men, as a result, failed to maintain their role as the dominant agent in the family unit. Walkowitz argues that to

> …render the 'incomprehensible' comprehensible, Booth and his investigators applied Lamarckian and Spencerian evolutionary theory to the social world of the slums. They interpreted signs of gender and sexual transgression as symptoms of biological degeneracy. Over a number of generations, they explained, slum-dwellers had acquired pathological characteristics that rendered them impoverished and incapable of better work.

Even Booth, who sought to develop an objective scientific knowledge of the London social order

in the late 1880s and 1890s was troubled by the complex and heterogamous nature of his representation. He showed the standard representation of London being divided into two social territories between East and West was incorrect. Instead of this geographical division that had made London legible to the middle-class observer, he developed the biological evolutionary or racial difference between the respectable and the transgressive elements of society. Furthermore, Booth's personal affinity to the simple lives of East Enders was "one reason that his system of difference kept unravelling: as a scientific male observer, he set out to produce objective, totalizing knowledge, only to find himself at the site of internal conflict and multiple selves".[31] The dominant public discourse, reflected in Booth's representations of poverty, was becoming increasingly unstable as the meaning of London's social order became an increasingly contested terrain in the 1880s.

Walkowitz's second chapter examines the "new social actors" who began to make a place for themselves in public spaces and in the public discourse that provided meaning for 'the social'. Walkowitz argues that in "fact and fantasy, these developments rendered the streets of London an enigmatic and contested site for class and gender encounters".[32] Among the new social groups that fought their way into the public space were the unemployed workers that rallied and rioted in and around Trafalgar Square in 1886 and 1887.[33] Walkowitz further examines the building of a new public identity for the workers as their leadership challenged the discursive meaning of 'the social' by representing,

> …themselves within a civic discourse, as part of a national, sometimes international, community. They struggled against the limitations of localized or parochial identity, recognizing that 'an attack on the localization of the working man's outlook was a prerequisite of any sort of class action.'[34]

Walkowitz goes on to identify other transgressive public actors such as "gents", female entertainers, and female charity workers. Each of these groups challenged the dominant

understanding of the social established in the mid-Victorian period. Walkowitz's book is focused primarily on the public discourse on gender and the contending efforts to increase or decrease the public space for women. This paper will focus its attention, instead, on the challenge that emerged from, and on behalf of, the bottom of the social order in an effort to further develop an understanding of this phenomenon that Walkowitz briefly identifies.

Many of the most active social reformers in East London during the late nineteenth century combined their practical efforts on the ground with the practice of writing in major periodicals to inform the middle-class public of their success and challenges in social reform. These writings contributed to the complex process of the making of meaning through the establishment of a public discourse on poverty. In their use of language, these reformers constructed the object of poverty so that it was intelligible to the middle-class outsiders and therefore structured the general middle-class understanding of the social problem from the 1860s through to the late 1880s. Samuel Barnett, the churchman who founded Toynbee Hall, Beatrice Potter (later Beatrice Webb), who began her work in the East End as a rent collector and who became an important Fabian, Octavia Hill, a founding member of the Charity Organisation Society [C.O.S.], and Cardinal Manning, the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, each contributed essays to *The Nineteenth Century*, an important liberal review of the time. *The Nineteenth Century*, whose editor, James Knowles, founded in 1877 as a forum for debating important ideas, contains interesting articles on a number of topics relating to the social condition of the East End. In these articles we will see that the mid-Victorian moral representations of poverty were complemented by the biological evolutionary theories of urban degeneration and Malthusian theories of overpopulation during the late 1880s, as the middle classes came to terms with the invasion of their public space by the unemployed protesters. The second chapter of this paper will examine

the representation of East End poverty in the pages of *The Nineteenth Century* from the unemployment unrest of 1886 through to the early 1890s as a sample of the dominant public discourse on poverty by the literary and social elite and its relation to the meaning of the social order.

The Nineteenth Century provides a good sample of the dominant understandings of 'the social' that are reflected in representations of East London poverty, but to understand the conflicting view we will have to broaden our perspective. The challenge to the dominant discourse was not homogenous and it sprang up from multiple and distinct discursive locations. The public spectacle of the Dockers' Strike gave a voice in the newspapers for leaders of unskilled labourers of the London docks to develop and spread a new meaning of 'the social'. Charles Blatchford, an important socialist writer, used the literary form of middle-class social reporters to parody the standard representations of East End poverty. Tom Mann, an active socialist and new union leader, contributed to the development of British socialistic discourse through the publication of propaganda pamphlets and articles. Furthermore, he was one of the co-authors of the *Minority Report of the Royal Commission on Labour* (1894). The counter discourse did not develop through a unified process and along with the leaders of the lower classes, it was contributed to by members of the literary elite in the Church of England and the intellectual developers of liberal theory. A new periodical, *The Commonwealth*, provided a forum for the development of a middle-class variety of Christian socialism in 1896. Under the influence of J.A. Hobson in the 1890s, the political and economic ideology of liberalism underwent a significant transformation. Through an examination of this hodgepodge of texts we will see the emergence of a very different meaning of 'the social', through the development of a new meaning of community, which made its way into the public discourse in the late 1880s and the 1890s.

The remainder of this introduction will discuss the impact of the linguistic turn on the study of nineteenth century social and cultural history and the philosophical framework that will influence this paper's examination of the making of meaning. Patrick Joyce, who has led the post-modern challenge to the traditional social history of nineteenth-century England, will be studied to understand the historiographical context in which this paper is situated. However, as an alternative to Joyce's heavy reliance on post-structuralism, we will show the usefulness of the practice theories or social contextualism of Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, and to a lesser extent Williams. Wittgenstein's "bedrocks" and Bourdieu's "habitus", or in more straightforward jargon "cultural common sense", provide a way forward into linguistic analysis without the problems of linguistic determinism.

Many of the concepts that were assumed by earlier generations of social historians have come under scrutiny in the past two decades. The criticisms originated with new understandings about the nature of language and its impact on our knowledge and understanding. It has been shown that social concepts such as class division and even 'the social' itself have been constructed by the very academic disciplines whose purpose is to study them. As a result, there has been a "fall of class", a subsiding in the once strong faith in the grand narratives of liberalism or Marxism, and even a weakening in the commitment to the study of objective causes and effects.[35] The crumbling of the social history project, however, has not been catastrophic and though the spectre of Marx now shares the ground with the much younger ghost of Foucault, the industrialized machinery of the modern university continues its mass production of students and social history research. The social and cultural approaches to nineteenth-century English history continue to co-exist and historians are left to pick and choose between the multitudes of arguments supporting each side.[36]

The grandfather of the cultural approach to British social history is E. P. Thompson. His seminal work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, had a major impact on the methodological approach to social history. Thompson emphasized the study of the real social experience, as opposed to the earlier focus on the objective structures of society. The famous and often quoted definition of class from the preface of *The Making* needs repeating once again:

> …class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms.[37]

This statement signified Thompson's break with the vulgar Marxist faith in economic determinism and the resulting rigid understanding of the base and superstructure relationship. This break, however, did not reject the basic tenets of Marxism and for Thompson "experience" is still "largely determined by the productive relations". The first development of cultural social history, led by Thompson, still placed socio-economic relations as the determining force in the making of social consciousness.

Stedman Jones was the first historian of nineteenth-century Britain to challenge the Thompson paradigm by questioning the link between social experience and social meaning.[38] In the essay entitled "Rethinking Chartism" (1982), and in his collection of essays *Languages of Class* (1983), which included an extended version of the former, Stedman Jones argued that historians had been overly influenced by the writings of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and Thomas Carlyle when they examined Chartism.[39] These writers had understood Chartism as a symptom of class consciousness and historians had naively continued to accept that interpretation. Instead, Stedman Jones argues that Chartism was a continuation of older forms of radicalism and that it

could only be understood in the context of the language used by the Chartists to give meaning to their movement. Stedman Jones summarizes his changed approach by explaining that: "if the interpretation of the language and politics is freed from *a priori* social inferences, it then becomes possible to establish a far closer and more precise relationship between ideology and activity than is conveyed in the standard picture of the movement".[40] This "Rethinking" of Chartism brought into question the causal theory provided by Marxism. According to Stedman Jones, it was not the social experience of increased industrialization and exploitation that caused Chartism, as the individuals from the time did not have access to language that would make these new forms of social existence, or the resulting grievances, intelligible. As the old grievances of radicalism diminished during the 1840s with increased political freedoms, the Chartist movement declined as the unity created by those grievances collapsed. The experience of the new social and political context could not be expressed in the old language. Stedman Jones concludes that if "Chartist rhetoric was ideally suited to concert the opposition to the Whig measures of the 1830s, by the same token it was ill-equipped to modify its position in response to the changed character of state activity in the 1840s".[41] The Chartists were trapped within the understanding of the social and political world provided by the language of radicalism which emphasized political exclusion instead of social and economic alienation.

Stedman Jones' analysis challenged the historical community to rethink the causal forces of history and to recognize the importance of language and the meaning that it makes possible. The incredible industrial development of the nineteenth century and the resulting transformation of the social experience needed a rethinking as the historians now had to examine how the subjects in the past were able to make sense out of the changes within the meaning and language available for them. Stedman Jones' contribution to this debate predates the more dramatic

"linguistic turn" in history that came in the late 1980s. Patrick Joyce took it upon himself to lobby for a more dramatic rethinking of social history, influenced by feminist critics and French post-structuralist philosophy.

Joyce uses the introduction of his book, *Democratic Subjects*, to outline his agenda for a post-modern social history of nineteenth-century England. He argues that his approach, in contrast to the beliefs of his critics, might help "revitalize 'social history'".[42] He suggests that a new foundationalism, based not on a search for the real condition of society, but on the acceptance that "the only true foundation is that there is no true foundation, only the making of meaning" should guide social history in the future.[43] Joyce acknowledges his theoretical debts to feminism and post-structuralism for the understanding of "identity as radically de-centred and unstable" that resulted in making 'gender' the new object of theoretical analysis.[44] He argues that if Denise Riley, a renowned feminist historian, questions fundamental concepts such as 'woman' and 'man' then the idea of class identity is now open to scepticism.[45] Joyce uses Jean Baudrillard, the French theoretical sociologist, to deconstruct the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' knowledge:

> The notion that some knowledge is 'hard is inseparable from the idea that there is somewhere a basis or origin for it which sanctions this hardness, this certitude. Such modes of thought have been called 'essentialist' or 'foundationalist'. It is the immensely liberating, but immensely troubling, message of post-modernist thought that this is not so, that there is no 'centre' which will serve as a fixed point for knowledge and action.[46]

The most important result of this line of thinking is that "meaning make subjects and not subjects meaning".[47] The individual from the past is not a freewheeling agent as her/his identity or subjectivity "is 'positioned' by the play of the symbolic order".[48] The result of this new understanding of identity is the shifting of focus from the socio-economic conditions of life to the narratives that provided meaning in life.[49] Joyce makes the emerging democratic narrative of

the nineteenth century the object of his study and he attempts to show how the development of

this narrative contributed to the making of 'the self' and 'the social' in the Victorian period.

Joyce's book raises some very interesting questions and shows the importance of the new

focus on the making of meaning. However, his attack on the concept of class leaves room for a

reworking of some of his central ideas. The old concept of class, which see the objective

economic forces (relationships to the means of production) as the structuring force has

experienced a collapse in recent decades. This does not, however, discredit the concept of class,

but only the causal theory provided by Marxism.

Nineteenth-century England still seems to have the distinction of an upper, middle and

lower classes. This class hierarchy understanding of 'the social' was constructed both from

above and from below during the early nineteenth century.[50] The old elite, with their continued

hold on traditional powers such as the House of Lords, the military leadership and their

ownership of most of the land; the vast and heterogonous middle classes who prided themselves

on their comfort and their respectable culture which distinguished them from the masses below;

and the lower classes whose political and economic power remained nominal and whose

aspirations in life were limited by their lack of education and capital.[51] These three levels of

society were never clear cut divisions and the social hierarchy was more of a sliding scale than

three definitive categories.

The class hierarchy was a part of the public discourse that provided an understanding of

the social order. This making of meaning in language was the result of an ongoing struggle for

power.[52] This is not to say that it was always a strategic battle (though it sometimes might have

been), as it was also the result of the workings of the political unconscious.[53] Those who hold

power and benefit from the existing power arrangements in a 'society' legitimize their positions

in their understanding of 'the social'. Those who are subordinate in the power relations, though they may not have a class consciousness based on their relations to the means of production, will attempt to subvert the dominant discourse.[54] This should be understood in terms of a circular process, where cultural meaning makes the subject, but where the same cultural meaning is a contested terrain, and where subject's position in the struggle over meaning is structured by their socially relative habitus or bedrock beliefs. In simpler terms, the cultural worldview for a son of a lawyer in West London is generally very different from that of the son of a dock worker. When these two individuals hypothetically interact with each other their divergent views on the meaning of 'the social' might lead to conflicts as their fundamental understanding of the functioning of the social world might conflict. The wider public process of the making of meaning is a struggle for symbolic power. It is both a conscious and an unconscious struggle, as the agents/subjects are sometimes aware of what is at stake. They might know that the dominant cultural meaning of 'the social' contributed to the making of 'the social'.

To understand this argument we need to understand the practice theory or social contextualism of Wittgenstein, Bourdieu and Williams. Wittgenstein is an Austrian philosopher who studied at Cambridge during the first half of the twentieth century. Bourdieu is a French sociologist who has contributed a great deal to the study of symbolic power and language. Williams is a Marxist literary critic who follows the insights of Mikhail Bakhtin's circle, a group of Russian Marxist intellectuals from the early twentieth century, and their revisionist method of literary analysis.[55] The ideas of Wittgenstein and Bourdieu are linked, in that Bourdieu uses some of Wittgenstein's ideas about language to explain the functioning of power in social interactions. Williams, on the other hand, comes out of a more overtly Marxist position, but ends up at a very similar understanding of the functioning of language. It should be made clear that, while each of these

thinkers are useful in helping to develop the philosophical framework for this paper, the purpose

is not to use them to build a general theory. Their ideas can give us insights into the workings of

symbolic power in practice, but we will only find partial answers in the end, as there is no

transcendental logical system behind the chaos of the social world.

If the meaning held by language is not a direct reflection of the real then where does it

come from? Each of these thinkers argues that meaning is developed socially and historically.

Williams, following V. N. Volosinov of the Bakhtin school (there is some evidence that Bakhtin

was the true author of these ideas), argues that while signs are not reflections of the object they

signify, the "fusion of formal element and meaning is the result of a real process of social

development, in the actual activities of speech and in the continuing development of a

language".[56] Meaning is made in practice between "real individuals who are in some continuing

social relationship".[57] Williams' approach focuses the attention on the active nature of language:

> The real communicative products, which are usable signs are… living evidence of a
> continuing social process, into which individuals are born and within which they are
> shaped, but to which they then also actively contribute, in a continuing process. This is at
> once their socialization and their individuation: the connected aspects of a single
> process…[58]

Williams' theory of meaning in language is very useful as it emphasizes the social nature of the

making of meaning. It is also useful, as he understands discourse as the product of an active

social process. However, there are problems with this theory as well. It remains very committed

to the concept of experience and it claims that "language is the articulation of this active and

changing experience; a dynamic and articulated social presence in the world".[59] This approach

places the conscious agent as the maker of a social meaning that reflects the 'real' social

experience. This approach to language contradicts the post-modern challenge and supports the

cultural approach of E. P. Thompson with his commitment to the concept of experience.[60] As a

result, it is also open to the same criticism directed against Thompson, that "'experience' and 'productive relations' cannot be understood outside discourse and the 'imaginary' to which it gives rise".[61] Experience cannot be reflected in language, as the available language will shape how the experience is interpreted.[62]

Wittgenstein and Bourdieu do not accept this direct link between experience and language. They instead argue that meaning in language is structured by socially and historically constructed structures that are learned through practice and which function unconsciously. These unconscious structures are the perceived foundation of our knowledge, which is why Wittgenstein calls them bedrocks. They are often reflected in common sense beliefs which cannot be explained except that they are fundamental to our understanding of the world. A Wittgenstein example is that our common sense tells us that the world has existed for millions of years before we were born. How could we communicate with a man who insisted that the history of the world, for an example, only goes back 237 years? Our common sense would lead us to conclude that this man was crazy or joking, because we know that this is not possible. However, in the words of Wittgenstein "… I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false." He goes on in the next statement to say: "The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules."[63] This idea further developed by Meredith Williams:

> Because we do history, because we hold grudges, because we give birthday parties, because we are sad when an anniversary is forgotten – because of all these particular activities and many others, it is certain that the world has existed since long before my birth.[64]

The result of our cultural common-sense faith in the existence of history is a form of solid

knowledge that is one of the many foundations on which our worldview is constructed. So we can see that our essential cultural knowledge, though it is only "webs of significance" spun through time by humans, forms into solid (but not 'real') bedrock beliefs on which all kinds of other meanings can be built.[65] A simple example being the common sense or bedrock belief in two distinctly separate gender roles, upon which labour and power has been divided (and continues to be divided) throughout history. The bedrock belief represented by the symbols 'woman' and 'man' may be cultural constructs, but they are constructs that were once accepted as solid truths and which led both men and women to argue against the expansion of the franchise or the opening of medical schools to women. Bedrocks are perceived as realities by the subjects who learn them subconsciously through practice.

The key element to the theory of practice is the unconscious nature of the rule following. The "bedrocks" beliefs, or in Bourdieu's jargon the "habitus", are not direct reflections of experience. Instead they are the "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history" and they are "the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product".[66] So the foundation of meaning is historical and social, as with Williams, but the production of new meaning is constrained by the unconscious structures of our knowledge and by the limits of our language. These bedrocks or habitus are not linked to a transcendental understanding of logic and as a result the structures or constraints on our thinking are not fixed. As Jose Medina shows, in Wittgenstein and Bourdieu's view "there are no fixed boundaries around what is thinkable and intelligible, but neither is it the case that in human thought and action anything goes, that anything we say or do constitutes an intelligible utterance or action".[67] The knowledge and meaning that is held in the language of our culture is "normatively structured through our orchestrated agency, that is, through the practical agreement of participants in social practices".[68]

Median goes on to explain:

> For Wittgenstein and Bourdieu, this normative structuration through practice creates background certainties ('bedrock' assumptions or tact judgments) shared by practitioners, which constitute a shared sense of what is obvious, familiar, and natural. What is thinkable and unthinkable for us is not fixed once and for all; it is situationally delimited by our bedrock beliefs and judgments, which do not function as fixed determinations, but as *contextual constraints*.[69]

Combining the ideas of Williams, Bourdieu and Wittgenstein we come to understand discourse as a product of an active social process, where meaning is made within the constraints of the cultural context. We are also made aware that the cultural contexts are susceptible to change and as a result meaning and knowledge are historically relative. However, because the concepts or meanings in discourses are public or shared products, we should through comparison be able to develop some partial understanding of the meaning reflected in past discourse.[70] This understanding of the making of meaning as a social product, constrained by the residue of past social processes, will provide the philosophical framework for this paper.

Finally, we must return to our example of the lawyer's son and the dock worker's son. Without developing a complex theory about each of their relationships to the means of production, we still might presume that the cultural environment of their lives would lead to the development of different habitus or bedrock beliefs. Bourdieu expands the concept of capital beyond pure materialist understanding. He shows that the various fields that make up the multi-dimensional social space each have their own form of capital. Academics, through their mastery of certain ways of thinking, have a large amount of knowledge capital, artist's hold cultural capital, people who were taught to speak 'correctly' have linguistic capital, and of course people who own land and stocks have economic capital.[71] We accumulate these various forms of capital and they influence our power position in the different fields of a decentred society. These multiple forms of capital are reflected in our use of language. Bourdieu shows:

> All the agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice. The network of oppositions between high (sublime, elevated, pure) and low (vulgar, low, modest), spiritual and material, fine (refined, elegant) and coarse (heavy, fat, crude, brutal), light (subtle, lively, sharp, adroit) and heavy (slow, thick, blunt, laborious, clumsy) and free and forced, broad and narrow… is the matrix of all the commonplaces which find such ready acceptance because behind them lies the whole social order.[72]

The upper and middle classes, generally identified with the positive descriptive language (high, fine, refined, free, etc.) and with their larger accumulation of capital in the various fields have a higher status in the social order than the lower classes who have very little of any kind of capital.

The result is the formation of loose classes or social categories. The members of the loose classes tend to interact with each other more than they do with members of other classes and as a result they are more likely to develop a shared social common sense or habitus that is different from the habitus of other loose classes. The lawyer's son and the dock worker's son would have different common-sense beliefs due to their social formation in different habitus. However, we must be careful not to assume that these class categories on paper are reflections of the 'real' social conditions as the categories themselves are the result of struggles over symbolic group identities. Bourdieu describes this struggle in the making of meaning:

> What is at stake here is the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of di-vision which, when they are imposed on a whole group, establish meaning and a consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and unity of the group, which creates the reality of the unity and the identity of the group.[73]

We will see an example of this struggle between the middle-class social reformers who divide the social order between the included respectable workers and the excluded residuum at the bottom, and the heterogeneous counter discourses that demand the inclusion of the lower stratum of society at the expense of the freeloading landlords and capitalist at the top.

In the second chapter of this paper we will see how the dominant representations of poverty in

East London were shaped by the nature of the cultural common sense (habitus or bedrock) beliefs of the middle-class social reformers. Keeping in mind the complex circular process of the making of meaning, we will attempt to see how these representations of poverty were related to and contributed to the making of the meaning of 'the social' during the late 1880s and the early 1890s. Through a close reading of the essays in *The Nineteenth Century* we will come to see that the defining common-sense belief that shaped the middle-class response to the problem of poverty was an understanding that social hierarchy was reflective of in the natural order. With this partial answer established in the second chapter, the third chapter will examine the construction of a multifaceted counter discourse, or a complex new common-sense understanding of social interaction. We will find that the new common-sense beliefs infused into the public understanding of 'the social' by the various opposing discourses included an ethical Christian belief that humans were essentially equal, along with new socialist understanding of economic exploitation, and a belief that 'the social' need to be reorganized so that all the individuals in society had a decent quality of life. This paper will try to develop an understanding of the public process where social meaning changes over time, but not as historians of ideas once might have directed their inquiry, for the genesis of the meaning, but instead the process whereby it gained cultural significance on a wide scale.

Chapter Two

The East End and Poverty:
As Represented in *The Nineteenth Century*

The East End of London gained an increasing cultural significance during the second half of the nineteenth century. The discourse that developed to make the enduring poverty of East London intelligible to the outsider was a construction, made by the social investigators and social reformers who wrote about the problems of poverty in London. The East End, and the condition of 'the social' that it came to represent, resulted in a great deal of discussion in the pages of James Knowles' *The Nineteenth Century*. A selection of essays from this journal will serve as a sample of the literature that reflects the dominant public discourse on poverty and 'the social' during the late 1880s.

The middle classes were first made aware of this new social problem in late the 1830s and the 1840s through the writings of Charles Dickens and Henry Mayhew. In the extensive literature that followed this early exposure, the East Enders were constructed as a nation apart from respectable London. These representations of the East Enders, which presented the residuum poor as a photographic negative of respectable society, contributed to the making of the middle-class meaning of 'the social'. Stedman Jones has done a great deal to develop an understanding of how the middle class perceived the problem of poverty and casual labour in London from the 1860s to the 1880s. He traces the origins of the middle-class understanding of poverty to the period of social instability in the 1860s.[74] Both Stedman Jones and Walkowitz show that the dominant public meaning of poverty and 'the social' were increasingly contested from the mid-1880s onward. However, this chapter will show that the dominant discourse on poverty, which developed from the 1860s onward, continued to provide the means for the middle classes to understand the social condition into the late 1880s. Even though the 'real' experience

of the 1880s social and economic conditions seemed to contradict the constructed meaning of 'the social', the middle class social reformers were unable to understand the new conditions beyond the bounds of their discourse. The upper and middle classes' understandings of poverty were structured by their cultural common-sense belief in the natural hierarchical nature of 'the social'. The chapter begins with an examination of the dominant representations of the East End in the mid-nineteenth century, before focusing on the meaning conveyed in essays concerning social reform in *The Nineteenth Century.*

The East End of London was the epitome of contrast during the late Victorian period. London was the largest and wealthiest city in the world and it was the capital of the largest Empire the world had ever seen. The West End represented the hub of culture and government in Great Britain, with the theatre district, the law courts, Whitehall, and the Parliament. The City of London was both at the geographical core of the metropolis and the centre of the world's financial markets. However, within a mile's walk to the east of the City, a staggering contrast emerged. The London Docks lined the river east of the Tower of London, and the land north of this section of the Thames was covered by a slum of staggering proportions (for a visual representation, see Charles Booth's map in appendix one). Instead of theatres and government buildings, the East End had gas works and workhouses. While the inhabitants of the West End enjoyed the spoils of Empire, the people of the East struggled to feed and house themselves.

The paradox was not missed by the Victorians. It led to the development of a unique genre of literature. Social reportage, which borrowed the template of exotic travel writing, attempted to show its readership the social horrors which existed within their city.[75] In Peter Keating's introduction to a collection of social reportage literature he explains that a "distinctive branch of modern literature in which a representative of one class consciously sets out to explore,

analyse, and report upon, the life of another class lower on the social scale than his own" developed from the 1840s onward.[76] As mentioned above, Mayhew was amongst the first to 'expose' the conditions of poverty in London. According to Keating, Mayhew's series of articles published in the *Morning Chronicle* were intended to:

> …draw attention to inequalities in English society and to force upon the reader an awareness of his social blindness. The poor inhabit a separate 'country' which remains to be discovered by the wealthy, and the way of life in that country is so strange that a leap of imagination is required to believe that it even exists. But these are far from the only connotations to be drawn from the language of exploration: it was its almost inexhaustible adaptability that made it so attractive to writers like Mayhew.[77]

The urban poor were represented as a different nation from a different land and the "otherness of this alien underworld" was emphasised by the content and the form of social reportage literature.[78] However, the irony was always obvious to the reader, as the alien nation lived amongst them. Keating explains that the "distant tribes live not in Africa or India, but in Soho, East London, Manchester, or Birmingham".[79] This literary form, which constructed residuum as 'the other', and highlighted the paradox of the social condition, allowed the middle-class writers to imply a meaning of 'respectable' social existence.[80]

Members of the educated middle classes of London constructed the literary representations of the East End and these were shaped by their common-sense beliefs about 'the social'. The East End residuum was represented as a mass of demoralized humans, prone to sexually immorality, dirtiness, lack of thrift, excessive drinking, and laziness.[81] They were a symbol of the antithesis of essential middle-class understanding of 'the social' and of gender roles. Gill Davies develops this idea in her close readings of middle-class representation of the East End. She finds that in fictional constructions of the East End "women are used as powerful signifiers of the 'otherness' of their class".[82] Strong images of bodily functions and the lack of moral restraint were used to emphasise middle-class values of chastity and restraint. Gill Davies

argues that these

> …female types can be read as embodying (literally as well as metaphorically) middle-class anxieties about the working class and male fear of women's demands. The subhuman and the monstrously physical are located in the people (working class and female) who depart furthest from the (middle-class and male) 'norm'.[83]

One of the results of the extensive literary representations of poverty in London was that the East End became more than a "merely geographical" location of poverty, "but a signifier of the 'condition of England' problem" that the whole of Britain was facing at this time.[84]

In the third section of *Outcast London* Stedman Jones shifts his focus from the objective causes of casual employment and the housing problem to the middle-class and upper-class perceptions of these problems. He argues that in the 1860s "the fears of the governing classes focused primarily upon the condition of London and the condition of East London in particular".[85] The riots in East London during the early 1860s and the collapse of the poor relief system focused public attention on the social instability caused by the problem of poverty.[86] Stedman Jones contends that the Reform Bill of 1867 was a strategy to ally the more prosperous elements of the lower classes with the establishment and in doing so "forestall the dangers of an incipient alliance between the casual 'residuum' and the 'respectable working class'".[87] The object of middle-class fears was this 'residuum' or pauper class and the causes of this problem were irresponsible public and private charity efforts.[88] The middle-class social reformers developed a number of solutions to counter the further demoralization and pauperization of the poor. In response to the problem, the administration of the Poor Law was changed, so that outdoor relief was no longer given, the Charity Organisation Society was developed to control private charity, Octavia Hill developed model housing schemes for respectable workers and their families, and Samuel Barnett founded Toynbee Hall, the first university settlement that was intended to bring the working class in contact with the 'natural' leaders of society. Stedman

Jones argues that all of these developments, even those inaugurated in the early 1880s, were in reaction to the social instability and fear of the residuum that originated in the 1860s.

The Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity (the Charity Organisation Society [C.O.S.]) was formed in 1869. This organization was intended to prevent further demoralization by restricting the abuse of charity by the "clever pauper". Stedman Jones explains:

> The C.O.S. repeatedly stressed that its function was not primarily to give relief but to organise charitable activity. Ideally, all local relief was to be channelled through the charity office and the local committee would decide whether the applicant was deserving before passing him on to the relevant specialized charitable agency or to the Poor Law. […] Deprived of the opportunity to exploit the lack of co-ordination between competing charities, and offered only the workhouse by the (Poor Law) guardians, the 'clever pauper' would be forced to turn back from mendicancy to labour, and the demoralized poor would relearn the virtues of thrift and self-help.[89]

The C.O.S. developed systematic procedures to investigate the conditions of the poor, so they could differentiate between the deserving poor and the unworthy poor. This was intended to rebuild links between the rich givers of charity and the poor receivers by presenting a unified front of charitable giving. Stedman Jones explains that concerns over the "separation of classes and the deformation of the gift" led the C.O.S. to develop "elaborate methods of investigation and classification" that "were an attempt to reintroduce the element of obligation into the gift in districts where a small number of mainly non-resident rich were confronted with a vast and anonymous mass of poor applicants".[90] The philosophy and the corresponding methods of charity propagated by C.O.S. both reflected and constructed the dominant common-sense understanding of poverty, seen as the product of individual demoralization caused by middle-class absenteeism, from the C.O.S.'s inception in 1869 through to its decline in the late 1880s.

Stedman Jones follows the development of this middle-class understanding of poverty through to the end of the 1880s. The economic crisis of the mid-1880s that resulted in the

unemployment riots shook the public's faith in the C.O.S.'s ability to deal with the problems of poverty and the threat to respectable society it presented. The leaders of the C.O.S. managed to hold off calls for winter relief during the first few years of the decade, but in the winter of 1885-1886 the conditions deteriorated to a point that the 'rational' arguments against widespread charity relief made by this organization were finally rejected. The Mansion House appeal, begun before the Trafalgar Square riot in 1886, grew slowly at first, but then received substantial support after public order was threatened by the riot in the West End.[91] Stedman Jones explains that the public fear that resulted from the unemployment unrest led to major changes in the dealings of the wealthy with the poor.[92]

The established social reformers, however, did not lose faith in their reading of the problem of poverty in London and they continued to fight against any policies that would encourage dependence and therefore demoralization. The discourse employed by these social reformers from the 1860s onward was deeply entrenched before the economic crisis of the 1880s. Furthermore, the middle classes' understanding of poverty was structured by their socially specific cultural common sense (habitus or bedrock beliefs) about the working of the social. The discourse provided the lens through which they read 'the social'. This discourse was subconsciously learned by the middle classes, through a process of education where the cultural common sense was absorbed through the active practice of social communication and interaction. They in turn, remade the discourse through their social reforming efforts and their literary outputs.

The middle-class social reformers could not read the problem as one of economic conditions preventing willing and able labourers from finding adequate employment, nor could they see the housing problem as being caused by objective market forces. Their common sense

belief that poverty was the result of individual moral failings prevented them from seeing the wider causes of poverty. Instead, as we will see in the pages of *The Nineteenth Century*, public discourse was further developed with urban racial degeneration theories, and the Malthusian discourse of overpopulation along with the continued essential belief in a hierarchal social order. Doug Lorimer has shown how the common-sense belief in hierarchy structured the Victorian understanding of race during the mid-Victorian period: "The nineteenth-century discussion of the racial question rested upon values and assumptions moulded by this hierarchical, class-conscious, social order. The question 'does a black man equal a white man?' had little meaning in an age when few thought all white men deserved equality."[93] The common sense understanding of 'the social' observed by Lorimer in the context of racism remained one of the dominant foundations (or bedrocks) of the middle-class understanding of the social order throughout the nineteenth century. The belief in a natural or organic hierarchy shaped the way that community was imagined and allowed the misery of poverty to be dismissed as an undesirable but inevitable evil.[94]

In 1877 James Knowles, having severed his ties with the *Contemporary Review*, decided to start his own monthly journal: *The Nineteenth Century*. Helen Small argues that his "decision to go it alone was in part financial, but it was also one of journalistic principle".[95] Knowles wrote to William Gladstone: "I should have no care to edit any Review which was not *utterly impartial* – believing as I do, that full and fair and free discussion is the best way for arriving at and disseminating Truth."[96] In practice, Knowles "relished diversity and dispute in his pages" and he actively sought out conflict in his journal by enlisting people with strong opposing opinions to write in the review.[97] Because Knowles was both the editor and owner of the review, he did not have to contend with other power holders when deciding what content and opinions would be

published. His financial control also allowed him to publish a very high-quality review, as he was not limited by the desire to make a quick profit. He convinced some of the most significant literary men of the time, including Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Cardinal Manning, W. E. Gladstone and T. H. Huxley, to contribute to the review. The result of this approach, according to Small, was success both from the journalistic point of view and from the financial perspective as the "journal sold brilliantly from the start; before long over 10,000 copies per issue had to be printed".[98]

Knowles changed the format of the review in one fundamental respect. He broke with the convention of anonymity adhered to by other reviews and included the names of the authors of the articles in *The Nineteenth Century*.[99] Knowles' *The Nineteenth Century* is a particularly useful source for historians as each lengthy issue holds a wide spectrum of views on topics that were perceived as important at the time. Because the authors were identified, it is useful both for discerning the opinion of individual authors on various topics and for investigating prevailing discourses that made the world intelligible for the elite literary women and men of that time.

As a symposium for the discussion of relevant issues, it should come as no surprise that the problem of poverty in East End London, and in cities in general, was constantly discussed in *The Nineteenth Century*, particularly after the unemployment unrest of 1886 and 1887. Through close readings of a selection of essays that were published in this review we will see how the middle class continued to construct their understanding of poverty. The middle-class social reformers who contributed to *The Nineteenth Century* all generally had a great deal of practical experience working in the East End. Reverend Samuel Barnett (1844-1913), Vicar of St. Jude's in Whitechapel, spent much of his career working on behalf of the poor in Whitechapel and in the whole of the East End. Even after he was promoted to be the Canon of Bristol Cathedral, a

position he held from 1893-1906, he and his wife choose to remain residents of Whitechapel.

He was the founder of Toynbee Hall, the first university settlement in the London slums.

Beatrice Potter (1858-1943), the daughter of a wealthy railroad entrepreneur, first gained

experience in the East End as a rent collector. Octavia Hill (1838-1912), a founding member of

the C.O.S., was a committed social reformer who focused on improving the housing conditions

of the poor in London. Cardinal Manning (1808-1892), the Roman Catholic Archbishop of

Westminster, was known for his commitment to the poor. For example, he was involved in the

negotiations during the 1889 Dockers' Strike on the behalf of the labourers. Another contributor

to *The Nineteenth Century*, who was not active social reformers but who still contributed to the

representation of the problem of poverty, will also be discussed in this chapter. Frederick

Greenwood (1830-1909) was an important reporter and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who held

significant political influence from the mid-1860s through the end of the century.

This collection of essays, published in *The Nineteenth Century*, provides a sample of the

public discourse which constructed the middle-class meaning of the East End and the problem of

poverty it signified in the late 1880s. However, this meaning was being increasingly contested

and the new social actors described by Walkowitz increasingly fractured the discourse's ability

to offer a totalizing explanation. However, even while the discourse was in decline the social

reformers who wrote for *The Nineteenth Century* remained under its influence at least through to

the late 1880s. Even while experience was providing evidence that the dominant discourse was

inadequate, the middle classes could not understand the problems of poverty without it. It was

only after an expended process where new public meaning was created (which will be partially

discussed in chapter three) that the old dominant discourse could truly decline. While this

chapter seeks to show the continued presence of the standard middle-class construction of

meaning in *The Nineteenth Century* during the late 1880s, the reader should remain aware of the instability of the discourse described. The remainder of the chapter seeks to present the making of social meaning and in doing so it will surely oversimplify a very complex process and collapse the texts from the past into an interpretation shaped by the form of this paper. This is only one of many possible readings of the texts, but it is one that might help us to better understand how the East End and 'the social' was rendered intelligible to the outsider in the late 1880s.

It is clear that these writers seem to have a genuine concern and a real desire to improve the conditions of poverty in London. The social reformers' representations of the lives of the poor often have a sentimental tone that seeks to build an emotional link between the readers and the impoverished. Barnett described the living conditions in such a way:

> …the street in which every room is a home, the homes in which there is no comfort for the sick, no easy chair for the weary, no bath for the tired, no fresh air, no means of keeping food, no space for play, no possibility of quiet, and to them the news of the national wealth and the sight of fashionable luxury seem but cruel satire. [101]

Hill wanted to ensure that the impoverished were seen as real families instead of an abstract mass of poverty. She concluded her article with the hope that "dark places shall surely grow lighter when spirit meets spirit in natural human intercourse, and men, women, and children are met and known as members of families". [102] While this paper presents the essay of the social reformers as a sample of the dominant public discourse on poverty, it does not seek to devalue or pass negative judgements on their efforts to improve the conditions of the poor. However, their wide practical experience in the East End and their altruistic dedication to improving the conditions of the poor, did not lead them to develop an understanding of poverty beyond the bounds of the dominant public discourse. The social reformers' common sense structured their understanding and caused them to construct an object that made poverty intelligible.

As we have seen, the East End of London, and the social problems that existed there, were not readily legible to the outsider. Essentially, the infinitely complex problem needed to be simplified and symbolized so that the outsider could understand it. The casual residuum was created in the discourse, as an intelligible object, around which the social reformers created a meaning for the social problem and an understanding of its relations to the social order. The object was made through the process of categorization. The poor were discussed as being part of two distinct and dramatically different clear-cut groups: the respectable workers and their families, as opposed to the casual and the unemployed who made up the residuum of society. Jennifer Davis shows that "the 'residuum' was as much a consequence of its identification as it was a necessary pre-condition for it".[103] The middle class social reformers created a symbolic division between the legitimate members of 'the social' or community and the socially dangerous outsiders.

The divisions between the respectable workers and the residuum were clearly differentiated in both of the essays contributed by Barnett. In "Distress in East London", he recognized that there was not a clear understanding of who the 'poor' were and he set out to clarify which people were the object of his concern. He suggested that the middle classes have been presented with confusing and conflicting representations of the poor. Sometimes they heard of improving conditions, and they saw working men "well dressed in black cloth" and they were informed that the "trades-unions, friendly, co-operative, and building societies" were constantly expanding. [104] In contrast to this positive news the middle classes also heard "the clergy or missionaries echo some 'bitter cry,'" on behalf of the impoverished and "how there were thousands of working folk in danger of starvation, thousands without warmth or clothing".[105] Barnett explained that 'labourers' and the 'poor' were not synonymous. The poor, however, were

not simply a small minority either and the conditions of the winter of 1885 showed that "there is a vast mass of people in London who have neither black coats nor savings, and whose life is dwarfed and shortened by want of food and clothing".[106] Barnett showed the readers that the problem was not so great that all of London's labouring population was living in poverty, but at the same time that twenty to thirty percent of Londoners were ranked among the poor.[107]

In a second article by Barnett, "A Solution for the Unemployed", the divisive categorisation of the lower classes was even more fully developed with the help of the new empirical evidence provided by Charles Booth. Barnett used the evidence to show that his earlier understanding of poverty was correct:

> Three years ago London was startled by the evidence of its great 'fluid population.' The unemployed, by crowds and riots, forced themselves into notice, and ever since there have been inquiries, investigations, and commissions. Of these inquiries Mr. Booth's has been most to the purpose, and he, having analysed the occupations of the inhabitants of East London, estimates that out of a total of 908,000, about 314,000—men, women and children—are dependent on casual labour. For the workers of this number work is so irregular that a great part could easily be performed by those in the class of regular workers, and the majority of them may fairly, if not technically, be numbered among the unemployed.[108]

From the evidence collected by Booth, Barnett was able to support his construction of the residuum with empirical evidence. The residuum, which was constructed as a unified object, made poverty understandable as the reforming efforts could be focused on this category of social failures.

Barnett's use of the evidence collected by Charles Booth in the late 1880s is an interesting example of the circular creation of meaning. Booth undertook his massive investigation of the social conditions in London from within the meaning of poverty provided by the dominant public discourse. Walkowitz argues that Booth "by no means represented an imaginative break with the tradition of urban exploration pioneered forty years earlier by Engels

and Mayhew."[109] Social reformers such as Barnett had already divided the poor between the

regular and the casual. Walkowitz shows that despite Booth's "scientific pretensions, his study

relied heavily on moralized impressions of social customs and conditions that reproduced

familiar tropes of degeneration, contagion, and gender disorder, in order to mark off the

dangerous from the respectable working class".[110] When Booth then set out to find 'objective'

data to better understand the object, his common sense understandings of 'the social' structured

the questions that he asked, and as a result he contributed to the reinforcement of notions of

division between the labourers backed by statistical evidence.

Beatrice Potter also made a clear distinction between the respectable regular workmen and the

casual and criminal class below them. In the article "The Dock Life of East London," she divided

the dock workers between the "'permanent' man of the docks" who "ranks in the social scale

below the skilled mechanic or artisan" who were the minority and the casual class that she

describes as "victims of irregular trade" who "are slowly but surely transformed into the sinners

of East-end society" that made up the majority.[111] From the start of Greenwood's article, "Misery

in Great Cities," the distinction was made between the respectable workman deserving of support

in time of need and the East Enders who were suffering the results of low moral lives. He

constructed a hypothetical regular working man who falls ill and represented him as a full

member of respectable (middle class) society:

> When his illness overtakes him he is living in no foul East-end quarter, in none of the
> gutter-byways into which not only the more hopeless poverty but the most inveterate
> idleness and most defiant vice naturally drain, but in some quiet little street where no sign
> of distress is visible, though a desperate struggle for the common decencies of life may be
> going on in every other house. [112]

Greenwood made the distinction again when discussing the housing problem for working class

families. He suggested that the social reformers should concentrate on improving the "housing of

the poor in London—not in its slums, but where the better sort of working people dwell".[113] In the title of Cardinal Manning's article, "A Pleading for the Worthless," the object of his focus was already constructed. His description of this social category distinguished them as a world apart from the rest of 'the social':

> …the social outcasts that form our criminal or dangerous class. And so long as they are born in dens, and live in drunkenness, and die without the light of God's law, they will multiply and perpetuate their own kind. Multitudes are at this day in London in the abject poverty of moral degradation, and of reckless despair of rising from their fallen state. [114]

The construction of the residuum as a category separated, not only from the middle and upper classes, but from the respectable and independent lower classes, created clear symbolic boundaries between the respectable community and the outsiders. Furthermore, this image of a degenerated underworld of urban dwellers reproducing themselves represented a threat to respectable society and its civilization.[115]

With the object established in the form of a degenerated residuum class of casual and unemployed "parasites", the construction of the problem facing 'the social' was relatively straight-forward.[116] Barnett, in his discussion of the failed efforts to deal with the problem through the Mansion House Relief Fund, stated his understanding of the facts clearly: "…the poor are very poor, and that the Fund failed as a means of relief."[117] Building on this statement, he warned the readers that the conditions of poverty were escalating into a crisis and that the middle class would be forced to deal with the problem one way or the other:

> The policies which occupy the leaders' minds, the interests of business, the theologies, the fashions, are but webs woven in the trees, while the storm is rising in the distance. Sounds of the storm are already in the air, a murmuring among those who have not enough, puffs of boasting from those who have too much, and a muttering from those who are angry because while some are drunken, others are starving. The social question is rising for solution, and, though for a moment it is forgotten, it will sweep to the front and put aside as cobwebs the 'deep' concerns of leaders and teachers. The dander is lest it be settled by passion and not by reason, lest, that is, reforms be hurriedly undertaken in answer to some cry, and without consideration of facts, their weight, their causes, and

their relation.[118]

Barnett went on to describe the conditions of life for the poor in East London. He was very sympathetic to their plight and while he acknowledges that some of them had brought on their own downfall, due to moral weakness, he spread the blame further to the impossibly low wages earned in East London. He explained that a " wage of 20*s*. or 25*s*. a week is called good wages, yet it leaves the earners unable to buy sufficient food or to procure any means of recreation".[119] He attempted to show his reader that they were linked to East End poverty through their consumer practices:

> … dwellers in pleasant places, without experience of the homes of the poor, who will resolutely set themselves to think about what they do know, must realise that those who make cheap goods are too poor to do their duty to themselves, their neighbours, and their county.[120]

In the later article, Barnett constructed the social problem in London more directly in relation to the casual underclass. He argued that the very existence of this class of people was the problem:

> Masses of the unemployed, who are ill-clad, ill-fed, and ill-taught, frequently congregate; they may be seen at meetings, they gather at street-corners, and seem almost to rise from the earth if a street accident happens. Their faces tell the tale of their poverty, and if some of their faces tell also of ill-will and idle habits, the necessity that something should be done is not less, but greater. The existence of such a class numbering in London its tens of thousands is a national disgrace and a national danger.[121]

The existence of an object, the casual and criminal underclass, which middle-class social reformers constructed in their discourse, was then made into the most significant threat to respectable society.

This construction of the problem was not unique to Barnett, as the existence and threat of the underclass was one of the common sense assumptions in the middle-class discourses. Potter discussed the casual dockers in very similar terms to Barnett's description of the unemployed:

> …the staple of the dock and waterside population subsisting by means of the extreme fluctuation and irregularity of employment is made up of those who are either mentally or

physically unfit for worthful and persistent work. […] Socially they have their own peculiar attractiveness; economically they are worthless, and morally worse than worthless, for they drag others who live among them down to their own level. They are parasites eating the life out of the working class, demoralizing and discrediting it.[122]

Greenwood also exhibited his commitment to the dominant middle-class understanding of the problem and its link with East London. He argued that attention should be focused on supporting the workers outside the East End. This is because Greenwood made a clear link between the underclass and that geographic entity:

> Outcast London, as it has been called, does indeed include upon its outskirts many sober, striving, capable, good men and women; though if these were all got together (as I wish they could be) it would be seen how many of them are irretrievably spoiled for the uses of this world by feeble health or broken spirit. Put all these aside, however, as folk to work upon hopefully, and outcast London will be found a mere multiplication of the 'bad lots' that are bred in every family, gentle and simple, rich and poor, educated or ignorant. In London we are a family of five millions, crowded together in the space of a few square miles. Being what we are in every grade, in spite of all opportunity and all incitement to do well, the proportion of those who are vicious, heedless, idle, predatory, foul in mind and habit, or hopelessly incapable, must make up an enormous aggregate.[123]

Greenwood simplified the complex social structures in London by linking a particular geographic region, the East End, with an unsophisticated idea that there are naturally "bad lots" within 'the social'.

G. Osborne Morgan, in his article "On Well-Meant Nonsense About Emigration", contributed to the construction of the problem by adding the Malthusian discourse on scarcity.[124] He explained to the readers that every day one thousand more persons arrive in London, where the market was already saturated with labour. He focused on the problem of over-population and crowding, where "50,000 persons are huddled together in a locality where there is not work or room for half of that number".[125] The Malthusian discourse employed by Morgan however did not lead to a fundamental rethinking of the social problem. He integrated the Malthusian idea of scarcity with the concept of urban degeneration. When Morgan explained which people should

be considered for emigration schemes, he was adamant in his belief that: "Nothing can be more unjust to the Colonies, nor more cruel to the subjects of the experiment, than the proposal to pack off promiscuous shiploads of half-starved 'East Enders' to the wilds of Canada or Australia."[126] Instead Morgan suggested that they "should arrest and divert the present flow of population from the agricultural districts to the large town rather than to transplant to the Colonies men and women enervated and demoralized by years of city life".[127] Morgan's continued adherence to the cultural common sense understanding of urban poverty determined his understanding of the Malthusian concept of scarcity. He only partially rethought the problem of urban over-crowding within the objective framework of scarcity as he still perceived the 'otherness' of the urban dwellers as an impossible boundary when developing his ideas on how to improve the social conditions.

The third important aspect of the discourse that needs to be discussed is how the middle-class reformers understood the causes of the problem. This is of particular interest as it brings out many of the underlying assumptions about the functioning of 'the social.' The various writers in *The Nineteenth Century* identify a range of causes from the immorality of the poor to the mass exodus of respectable society from the poorer districts of the city.

Stedman Jones argues that some basic and crude assumptions about economic laws caused the middle-class reformers to misunderstand the causes of poverty. He identifies three economic concepts and that were understood to function in a very mechanical fashion as the beliefs that structured middle-class discourse. The first economic concept was a firm belief that any tampering in the market, by means of charity, would have an automatic impact on supply and demand and would lead to subsequent increases in the cost of living. Essentially, the belief was that any money given to the poor through the Poor Law's outdoor relief, subsidised rent, or

other charity would only benefit the landlords or the employers. The second was a belief that the working class would do anything to avoid work and therefore charity and Poor Law relief caused more poverty than it solved by causing workers to be come dependent on charity instead of self-help and thrift. The third assumption was that casual labour was "inherently mobile in pursuit of its self-interest" and that the residuum would flow to districts where charity levels were high.[128] These essential economic beliefs, however, are only part of the common-sense system that structured the middle-class understanding of the problem. As we will see, the understanding of 'the social,' as a naturally hierarchical order, also structured their approach.

Greenwood was the most outspoken about the moral failing of the underclass. As we saw above, he compared London to an average family, arguing that every family has a black sheep and that the underclass was just the delinquents from a family of five million.[129] Cardinal Manning had a similar, but different approach to identifying the causes. He agreed that the "worthless" were the product of immorality, but he found wider social forces causing the moral decline, instead of widespread personal weakness. Manning identified three primary causes that made the "worthless". He first blamed the miserable housing conditions as they diminished the good done in family life. He explained that a "good home is the highest and best school: it forms and perpetuates the character of a nation. What moral influence or formation of the life and character of children is possible in overcrowded dens where all is misery and confusion?"[130] The second cause he identified was the drink trade and he blames the producers and sellers of alcohol for putting profit before concerns for the well-being of their countrymen. Manning represented the problem of drinking as a paradox because the "foul and fetid housing drives men and women to drink, and that drink renders their dens sevenfold more foul and fetid".[131] The final cause of East End poverty was the "absence of a moral law" in London. He was concerned that it was

impossible for even "one half of the population of London to set foot on a Sunday in any place of moral teaching or of Divine worship".[132] Between Manning and Greenwood we can see how a lack of morality was attributed as one of the major causes of poverty in East London. Potter, Barnett and Hill each developed a further explanation for why the poor were suffering from immorality. They identified the decreased interaction between the 'natural' leaders of the community and the labouring population below them. In the lengthy quote below, Barnett presented his belief that the absence of the respectable middle class from the East End was the major cause of its degradation:

> It is this habit of living in pleasant places which impoverishes the poor. It authorises, as it were, a lower standard of life for the neighbourhoods in which the poor are left; it encourages a contempt for a home which is narrow; it leaves large quarters of the town without the light which comes from knowledge, and large masses of the people without the friendship of those better taught than themselves. […] Absenteeism is an acknowledged cause of Irish troubles, and Mr. Goldwin Smith has pointed out that 'the greatest evils of absenteeism are – first, that it withdraws from the community the upper class, who are the natural channels of civilising influences to the classes below them, and, secondly, that it cuts off all personal relations between the individual landlord and his tenant.' […] The result in Ireland was heartbreaking poverty which relief funds did not relieve, and there is no reason why in East London absenteeism should have other results.[133]

This view was echoed in Potter's article when she argued that the lowest levels of the community had taken over the leadership role vacated by the middle class: "Respectability and culture have fled, the natural leaders of the working class have deserted their post; the lowest elements set the tone of East-end existence." [134]

The construction of middle-class absenteeism as the cause of the problem underlines the hierarchical conception of the social order. The cultural common sense belief that there was naturally a top and bottom of society and that this was a reflection of the quality of the persons, not the result of power or hereditary control of the means of production, structured the construction of the middle-class understanding of the problem of poverty. The middle-class

reformers were not seeking to understand why there was inequality in 'the social,' as this was only natural, but instead why the bottom sections of society in London were so far below the rest.

A final cause of the poverty apparent in the essays of Barnett and Potter was that the very existence of the underclass of casual and unemployed workers in turn caused the problem of poverty. The mass of unemployable were understood to be a burden to the steady respectable workers:

> It is a disgrace to statesmanship that the earnings of workers should be consumed in the support of unwilling idlers, and this happens as long as the unemployed are kept alive, for it must be remembered that the bread which they eat, insufficient though it be for themselves, is taken out of the mouths of others. All who are idle hang like a dead weight round the necks of the busy, and the workers have a right to complain of a system which makes them poor to keep others poorer. It is a shocking thing to say of men created in God's image, but it is true, that the extinction of the unemployed would add to the wealth of the county.[135]

Barnett built up the unemployed as more than just a burden to the community. In his writings they were a threat to the values that made Britain great:

> They—manifest, that is, in their misery and bitterness—may at some moment be the extra weight to turn the scale against free trade, indoor relief, or religion. The existence of the unemployed is a fact, and this fact constitutes a danger to the wealth and well-being of the community.[136]

Potter also represented the casual and unemployed class as a cause of the problem. They were described almost as if they have a contagious and hereditary disease:

> And decay breeds parasites. The casual by misfortune tends to become the casual by inclination. The victims of irregular trade, and of employment given without reference to character, are slowly but surely transformed into the sinners of East-end society. Like attracts like. The ne'er-do-well of all trades and professions, the haters of the dull monotony of country labour, drift up to East London, the centre of odd jobs and charitable assistance.[137]

Potter's quote exemplified the second two bedrock assumptions about political economy that Stedman Jones identifies. The casual labourers were represented as mobile, coming to London in

pursuit of the easy life and that the experience of irregular trade "slowly but *surely*" teaches the individual that work could be avoided. This understanding was another example of the circular making of meaning, as the middle-class social reformers first constructed the residuum as an object that made the social problems legible and then, confident of their social reading, developed a theory that blamed the object they themselves had constructed in their discourse.

Perhaps the cultural common-sense belief at the heart of the middle-class understanding of the cause of poverty was their limitless confidence that they understood the problem. Something that was absent from any of the writers in *The Nineteenth Century* was any kind of critical self-reflection. Barnett, Potter, Hill, Greenwood and Manning all represented their knowledge and understanding of the problem as being unquestionably true. Most of these authors were able to claim the definitive authority from having worked with the poor and experienced the problems first-hand. Barnett and Hill were well known public figures as a result of their long-term efforts in the East End. Hill stated that she has not learned lessons about the needs of the poor "from theorizing, but from watching with the eyes of real affection the actual homes".[138] Potter explicitly made a reference to her experience as a rent collector. [139] This claim of authority derived from experience was perhaps further bolstered by the literary tradition of making the chaotic, modern, urban space knowable and a cultural faith in the power of knowledge that came from the continuing progress of scientific discoveries. [140]

The solutions developed by the middle-class reformers were structured by their understanding of the problem. They felt they needed to promote a higher moral standard among the poor and they needed also to deal with the structural problem of over population and over crowding in the East End. To address the first problem the solutions ranged from restricting the drink trade to increasing the presence of the educated elite in the slums with the settlement movement and

Hill's "visitors". To deal with the overcrowding, different emigration schemes to send the surplus labourer overseas and plans for work farm colonies as a clearing house for the useless residuum were developed. All of the solutions reflect the idea that the middle classes would need to take a leadership role in finding a solution, as the possibility of a democratic social renewal from below does not seem to have been an option in this dominant social reform discourse, again showing the innate hierarchical assumptions in their system of beliefs.

The public discourse, as it was reflected in *The Nineteenth Century*, which has been examined in this chapter, determined the public understanding of 'the social' during the late 1880s. The middle-class social investigators and reformers constructed an understanding of society that was built on a common-sense belief that middle class values were respectable and good and that the residuum were the dangerous outsiders that threatened the continued existence of this good society. Their hierarchical outlook and the general confidence in their ability to diagnose London's social illness determined the conclusions the developed. Furthermore, these conclusions then structured future conclusions until a complex set of common sense beliefs about the nature of poverty were accepted as second nature truths. In this chapter, we have seen that these common sense values remained prominent in the public discussion through to the end of the 1880s, long after the economic structures of London had changed to make poverty and poor housing a reality that was beyond the control of the individuals who were forced to experience it. However, as we saw in the introduction, the middle-class discourse was increasingly challenged from the 1880s onward as new social groups demanding a louder public voice contested the meaning of 'the social'. As the new counter discourse gained increasing acceptance, the public understanding of 'the social' became more complex. It is important to recognize that not all of the individuals examined in this chapter remained firmly committed to

maintaining the mid-Victorian understanding of 'the social' and some of them were influenced

by the new understanding developed in the contested public discourse during the 1890s. Both

Barnett and Potter changed their position during the 1890s. Barnett began to support some

collectivist policies such as old age pensions and Beatrice along with her husband Sidney Webb,

became an important leader of the Fabians' campaign for a form of state socialism. The

following chapter will examine the development of a counter discourse that provided an

alternative meaning for poverty and 'the social'. The third chapter is intended to give a partial

understanding of how public meaning changed during the 1880s and 1890s. While it focuses on a

different selection of subject/agents who contributed to the making of the new meaning, it should

be reinforced that some individuals discussed in the present chapter also contributed to the

making of the new meaning. There was no clear-cut division between the old dominant discourse

and the new counter discourses.

Chapter Three

The Making of a New Meaning of Community:
The Development of a Multifaceted Counter Discourse

The continuing presence of abject poverty in the late nineteenth century provided the

context for a major rethinking of the standard understandings of society. The dominant public

understanding of poverty and 'the social' no longer satisfied many of the social actors and

groups. Subjects were alienated from the discourse by the experience of poverty. An alternative

meaning, however, was not readily available, as the new social actors could not directly translate

experience into language. A narrative of Tom Mann's intellectual development during the early

years of his life will provide an example of the alienation and the search for new meaning. The

chapter will then focus on the counter discourse on poverty and 'the social' that developed from

the 1880s onward. Out of the dominant discourse an alternative understanding emerged. The

counter discourse on 'the social' was infused with meaning from sources old and new. Old

radicalism, new socialism, new liberalism and ethical egalitarian Christian values were combined

to develop an understanding of 'the social' with a new emphasis on the language of community.

The counter discourse was developed in many different discursive locations. It was not unified or

homogeneous in any way. Its categorization into two opposing discourses is a construction of

this paper. It is a necessary simplification which will provide some insight into the process of the

making of new public meaning. However, it is important to recognize that the process was

infinitely complex and we are not seeking unified theories or laws of cause and effect; instead we

are seeking to show that meaning does change over time and that the social context has some

impact on this process.

This chapter, after the opening narrative on Mann, will examine the development of the

alternative discourse from five different locations. First, the Dockers' Strike will be read as a

discursive event, where the alternative understandings of poverty and 'the social' held by the

strikes' leaders were presented to the wider public through the filter of *The Times* reporters and

editors. After the examination of this historical event, the paper will shift its focus to four

different authors who each contributed to the development of the counter discourse through their

various publications. The editor of the socialist newspaper *The Clarion*, Robert Blatchford

(1851-1943) used the literary form of social reportage to parody the standard description of poverty in East End. The various literary efforts of the socialist agitator and union leader Tom Mann (1856-1941) expanded the domain of the counter discourse. Thirdly, the middle-class version of the challenge will be examined as it was represented in the pages of *The Commonwealth*, a Christian Socialist review founded by Henry S. Holland (1847-1918). Another middle-class source is J.A. Hobson's (1858-1940) contribution to the development of liberal ideology. This survey of discursive events is in no way conclusive and it is only intended to provide a sample of the process where new meaning was publicly created by new social actors. Furthermore, the five samples are not examined chronologically and we are not seeking a narrative that would attempt to explain cause and effect. Instead we are attempting to show that new systems of cultural common sense were formed during the construction of new public meaning. This process was important as it provided a newly constructed public understanding of 'the social' that was more reflective of the meaning made by the lower classes in the late 1880s and the 1890s, and as a result more complex and diverse than the public understanding of 'the social' that was dominant from the 1860s to the 1890s.

It was not only the middle classes who were influenced and educated by the dominant discourse on poverty, as a wide range of subjects found their understanding of social problems and the social order in the public discourse of the 1860s and the 1870s. Self-help enthusiasts amongst the labouring classes were equally susceptible to its totalizing knowledge and its ability to explain the poverty they knew so well.[141] A brief narrative of Tom Mann's intellectual development will show how he came to understand poverty through the dominant public discourse of the 1870s, but then was alienated from the middle-class understanding of 'the social' as a result of his own experience in the labour market. Mann, born in 1856, the son of a colliery clerk, had little formal

education in his childhood. At the age of nine, Mann began working at the coal mine Victoria Colliery in Foleshill, near Coventry, until four years later, when the mine caught fire and was permanently closed. His family moved to Birmingham and Mann became an engineering apprentice.[142]

During the first years of Mann's apprenticeship, engineers worked sixty hours a week with forced overtime. After this, the union was able to negotiate a nine-hour day with half days on Saturday, giving the workers, Mann included, leisure time in the evenings and on the weekends.[143] This allowed Mann to begin his education by attending evening classes six nights a week. He became involved with the respectable self-help culture of Birmingham. He was devoted to religion, temperance, education and moral reform. He explained in his memoirs that in his early twenties he was very committed to the idea that immorality was the cause of poverty:

> By the time I was twenty-one, in April 1877, the knowledge I had of trade unionism, co-operation, politics, or other forms of activity, sank into nothingness in comparison with my then dominant conviction that everything was subservient to the 'one thing needful', the 'salvation of the soul'. All social distress, according to this view, is the direct outcome of neglecting the soul's salvation. With missionary zeal I worked in the temperance movement, as an adjunct to church work, believing in the orthodox way that a vicious environment was mainly responsible for keeping human beings in the 'wide road that leads to destruction'. I realized, however, that I ought to try and change that environment by social activities.[144]

Mann was involved with groups promoting vegetarianism and temperance as solutions to the scarcity of food stuffs. However, as time when on, Mann became increasingly aware of the weaknesses in the explanations for the causes of poverty offered by the middle-class social reform associations that he was involved with. He explained that:

> It was clear that there was a mighty force of some kind counteracting and nullifying the efforts of well-disposed reformers. With altruistic enthusiasm, such persons worked in and through religious institutions, temperance and food-reform agencies, people's concerts, organ recitals, penny readings, Christian Endeavour societies, and Young Men and Young Women's Christian Associations. These, and all the other benevolent and kindly efforts made by the comfortably placed on behalf of the miserable, failed to reduce

the totality of misery, or to minimize the sum of human suffering.[145]

Furthermore, Mann's experience as a worker forced him to recognize that immorality was not the only cause of poverty:

> I was myself one of those liable to summary discharge, and to considerable spells of unemployment, quite irrespective of personal habits. Since the most intelligent and virtuous were affected equally with the others, it became nauseous to listen to statements from the temperance platform as to how careless individuals who had neglected their homes, etc., had become total abstainers, had regained regular employment, were able to keep at work in consequence of their reliability, and so on. [146]

This experience left him without any understanding of the social problem as he had not yet been exposed to alternative explanations or discourses about the causes of poverty.

The first book that helped him see past the moral explanations of poverty was Thomas Malthus' *Essay on Population* (1798). Malthus focused on the problem of scarcity and allowed Mann to see the problem as one of economic structures instead of morality. Mann did not have the education to understand "many arguments advanced by the Malthusians" and he was not convinced that this gloomy theory was correct.[147] The second book, which helped him to further develop his understanding of the problem, was Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879). Mann explains that "this was a big event for me; it impressed me as by far the most valuable book I had so far read, and, to my agreeable surprise at the time, it seemed to give an effective answer to Malthus."[148] The American, Henry George, had a significant impact, not only on Mann's understanding of the social problem, but also on the wider development of British Socialism.[149] His book, *Progress and Poverty*, examined the paradox of industrial progress where large amounts of wealth were created, but only a small class really gained from the advancements. George explained that the original hope that industrial progress might solve the problem of poverty and want was not actually achieved: "It is true that disappointment has followed disappointment, and that discovery upon discovery, and invention after invention, have

neither lessened the toil of those who need respite, nor brought plenty to the poor."[150] In

Progress and Poverty, George developed the concept of unearned increments. He showed that

the wealth accumulated by owning land was earned even if the owner did nothing to improve the

value of his land. Land speculation drove the demand for land to grow beyond the pace of

economic growth.

George's understanding of the causes of poverty inverted the blame from the residuum at

the bottom of the social scale to those who lived off unearned and often inherited wealth at the

top. Furthermore, he helped to develop an economic doctrine that demanded basic equality for

everyone in the community. George argued that a man's equal right to "use the land" was

comparable to his "right to breathe the air".[151] He contended that humanity's path towards

civilization and progress, was tied to the growth of equality and he suggested that land

monopolies were the "main obstacle to the realization of this equality".[152] The basic solution

proposed by George was to tax the rent value of the land, which would requisition the unearned

wealth for the use of the whole community.[153] George's contributions to political economy

provided British socialists like Mann with an understanding of poverty as a problem caused by

the unfair structures of the political and economic system instead of the moral and economic

failure of individuals. Mann explained in his memoir that George's book enabled him to "see

more clearly the vastness of the social problem".[154] Mann's first contact with George's book was

in 1881 before Socialism had become widely known and even before the early socialist

organizations had been organized. George's book opened up a new range of understanding in the

public discussions on poverty and political economy.

The narrative of Mann's intellectual development, from a general lack of education at the

age of 14, though his experience with self-help and middle-class values of respectability, to the

beginnings of his socialist thinking shows us how one individual navigated his way through the meaning of 'the social' during the mid-Victorian period. We saw that his experience with the real social conditions did affect his progress, but that he was unable to make this experience intelligible until he came in contact with an adequate alternative discourse which structured his construction of a new understanding of 'the social'.

In the two decades that followed Mann's first contact with Henry George, a multifaceted counter discourse developed to provide an alternative meaning to 'the social'. H. M. Hyndman founded the first socialist political movement, the Social Democratic Federation [SDF], in 1881. William Morris and Eleanor Marx (Karl's youngest daughter) were also members of the SDF until a disagreement with Hyndman in 1884 led them to form their own socialist movement, the Socialist League. These socialist movements, whose leadership was dominated by the middle classes, provided a political training ground for a new group of lower class of socialist labour leaders. Tom Mann, John Burns, Will Thorne, and Ben Tillett were all educated in socialism through their involvement with the SDF during the 1880s.

The unemployment riots and protests in 1886 and 1887 not only brought increased public attention to the problem and proximity of poverty as represented by the dominant public discourse of middle-class social reformers, it was also one of the early events where the counter discourse gained a public voice. Hyndman, Burns, and Champion were among the speakers in Trafalgar Square who agitated the crowd of unemployed protesters into a frenzy during the first major protest in 1886. Bloody Sunday, in November of 1887, was also organized by the SDF in conjunction with more traditional Radical democratic organizations. These protests were loud symbolic statements that not everyone accepted the standard explanations of poverty.

From the beginning, the counter discourse developed in a very heterogeneous fashion.

The SDF continued their propaganda work, while the lower class members of the organization formed the leadership of the new unionism movement in 1889. Spurred by the success of the unskilled and female Match Makers' Strike, Will Thorne, with the support of others, organized the gasworkers of London into a union and negotiated an eight-hour day for the employers. The third, and most famous event of 1889 was the Dockers' Strike beginning on 15 August. The leadership of this strike included Ben Tillett, the leader of the small dockers union of tea operatives which had existed before the strike, and Tom Mann, John Burns, Will Thorne and other members of the SDF and the wider labour movement.

On 16 August 1889, *The Times* in a brief article announced the beginning of the dockers' strike in East London:

> Strike of Dock Labourers. – About 2,500 dock labourers employed at the East and West India and South London Docks are at present on strike. They demand that instead of being engaged as they have formerly been, they shall not be hired for less than four hours at a time, and that the uniform rate of pay shall be 6d. per hour. The strike is considered to be spreading, and yesterday large crowds congregated in the neighbourhood of the docks, but their demonstrations were orderly.[155]

From this first report of the strike through to its conclusion in September, *The Times* focused increasing amounts of attention on this event. In all likelihood the newspaper reports of the speeches made by John Burns, Ben Tillett, Tom Mann, and H. H. Champion reached a larger audience than most of the essays, articles, pamphlets and books they collectively wrote. The public spectacle of the large and orderly protest marches through the streets of the city gave the socialist leadership of the strike an extended access to media attention. The leadership were also aware that the public spectacle itself, due to its respectable, orderly nature, was a direct challenge to the dominant representations of dockers who were symbols of the dangerous residuum in public discourse on poverty.

The strikers were amongst the poorest individuals in the great metropolis. The condition of their employment invoked powerful descriptive language from Ben Tillett:

> …the men, old and young, fought for those few shillings as men fight for life. Coats, flesh, even ears, were torn off. Men were crushed to death in the struggle. The strong literally threw themselves over the heads of their fellows, and battled with the milling crowds to get near to the rails of the 'cage' which held them like rats – human rats, who saw food in the ticket.[156]

From the beginning of the strike the dockers made their proximity to the heart of the city felt, with increasingly large processions that marched from the docks to the City and back again:

> The whole of the proceedings yesterday by the men were very enthusiastic, and began early in the morning by the formation of a procession, which was a mile-and-three-quarters long, and a number of men in it carried poles with crusts, penny loaves, bones, vegetable tops, and other refuse fixed to them, to show the fare they lived on. The procession, after passing through the City and groaning at the companies' offices, returned to the vicinity of the docks… A number of police accompanied the procession from the docks to the City, but there was no disorder to call for their interference.[157]

A little over a week after the strike began, these marches had grown powerful in their symbolic weight. On 24 August, *The Times* reported the speech made by Ben Tillett after another successful parade through the City:

> Mr. Benjamin Tillett, the secretary of the Dock Labourers' Union, presided, and, addressing those within sound of his voice, said that the procession that morning had been truly a magnificent one, and though they took 50,000 to the City yesterday, they had taken nearly 80,000 that day. Many men who had now come out and who had marched with them had done so simply in the interest of their fellow-men. That fact showed how much working men feel for each other when they were put to the test.[158]

Later in this same mass meeting, John Burns announced to the cheers of the crowed that "[t]hey had begun a revolution now in the cause of labour – a peaceful one, which would not cease".[159] The docker strike was a real and tangible historical event, a peaceful revolution, that took place during August and September 1889. However, even real historical happenings are only accessible to us through their representations in language. The different perspectives created different depictions of the event. Most obviously, the employers represented the strike differently

from the leaders of the strikers. They responded to the early public support for the strike by presenting their perspective to the public:

To The Editor of the Times.

> Sir, -- As the strike of dock labourers is engaging some attention, I beg to be permitted to say a few words.
> Dock labourers are of two classes – the one, the casual labourer, recruited from all classes of society, consists largely of men who from misfortune, from want of physical power, or from some other cause have failed in their own walk of life; the other of men who possess much skill and great bodily strength.
> The strike was of men belonging to the first class, who were working in a neighbouring dock, the demand, I am informed, was for a minimum number of hours per day, and for an increase to 6d. per hour in the rate of pay of men employed in discharging ships.
> … no men employed in discharging ships in the Millwall Docks earned less than 6d, per hour, and many considerable more.
> G. R. Birt[160]

Birt, the Manager of Millwall Docks, relied on the dominant discourse on 'the social' to remind the public that the strikers were members of the residuum who deserved their low station in life as they were failures in the struggle of life. He attempted to reinforce the division between the degenerated casual labour, and the respectable workers employed by him who earn 6d. or more per hour. The conflicting representation between that of Birt and those of Burns or Tillett, one committed to natural hierarchies and the other to working-class unity, were reflections of the two discourses which this paper has discussed.

The dock strike was the historical event where a large component of East London's casual class were united, albeit briefly and where they found a voice in the national media to stake their claim to an increased position of power in the labour market and a more just distribution of wealth. Furthermore, it was a multiple victory for the proponents of the socialism who led this strike. Firstly, with the financial support of other unions and the public of Britain and Australia the strike was able to hold out long enough to force some major concessions from the employers (most importantly a recognition of the union's legitimacy). Secondly, it led to the

rapid development of new unionism during the early 1890s (though this early success was followed by a decade of defeats as the poor economic conditions made solidarity amongst the unskilled difficult). Thirdly, the strike provided a great deal of publicity for the counter discourse held by the socialist movement. Day after day *The Times* and other newspapers dedicated extensive coverage to the speeches made by Burns, Tillett and Tom Mann. This coverage provided a new legitimacy for the ethical Socialist discourse they relied upon to present the grievances of the dock labourers to the public. In this way we can see how the history of events intersects with the history the making of meaning. The Dockers' Strike of 1889 contributed to the ongoing conflict over the representation of the East End and the resulting meaning of 'the social'. During the decade that followed, the counter discourse was expanded into the public domain through the literary efforts of a wide selection of individuals. The remainder of the chapter will examine a sample of the alternative representations of poverty and 'the social' from the 1890s.

Robert Blatchford, the editor of the *Clarion* and author of *Merrie England*, published a book of social reportage articles, entitled *Dismal England* (1899). Blatchford was one of the leading socialist literary figures to emerge from the ranks of the lower classes in the late nineteenth century. His first book, *Merrie England* (1893), sold over a million copies and is considered one of the most important pieces of socialist literature to have ever been published in England.[161] *Dismal England* was a collection of articles that focused on the miserable conditions of the lower classes throughout the United Kingdom. The first article, "The Children of the Ghetto", was concerned with the living conditions in East London.

Blatchford used the same literary form as the middle-class social investigators, portraying himself as an outsider on an adventure in a foreign land: "It was a strange experience: within half

an hour's walk of the City boundaries we were in a foreign country."[162] He explained in the

introduction of this book that he was prompted to publish his collection of articles after reading

an American example of middle-class social reportage by Walter Augustus Wychoff. Blatchford

explained that Wychoff's book, *The Workers*, was not a revelation for anyone who had really

worked for a living and that Wychoff could not really understand the conditions of the workers

because, while he experienced the toil of a hard days labour, he still had "no fear of starvation,

no need to dread the future".[163] Blatchford explained that he was better equipped to represent the

conditions of the poor because he had real personal experience: "Starting thus equipped, and

bearing in my mind the memories and in my soul the scars of poverty and labour… I went out

upon the varied quests recorded in these articles."[164] Blatchford's barrowing of the literary form

of social reportage allowed him to parody the middle-class understanding of poverty in East

London.

The most interesting parody in "The Children of the Ghetto" was the direct challenge to

the moralizing representations of drink in East London that were prevalent in the dominant

Victorian understanding of the social order. Blatchford suggested that the conditions of life in the

East End resulted in the high levels of drinking, instead of the high levels of drinking leading to

the low levels of living:

> The gin—that hellish liquor which blurs the hideous picture of life, which stills the
> gnawing pain, which stays the crushing hand of despair, and blunts the grinding teeth of
> anguish when the child lies dead of the rickets, or the 'sticks' are sold for the rent, or the
> sweater has no more work to give, or the husband has beaten and kicked the weary flesh
> black and blue! What would they do, these women, were it not for the Devil's usury of
> peace—the gin?[165]

Blatchford followed this section with an exposé of "The Bridge of Sighs" that had a police

officer on duty to prevent the constant problem of suicide. He confronted the reader with the

'realities' of East End life that led women to take their own life:

Do you understand it? The woman has been wronged until she can bear no more; she has sunk till she can struggle no longer; she has been beaten and degraded until she loathes her life—even gin has ceased to buy a respite; or she is too poor to pay for gin, and she drags her broken soul and worn-out body to the Bridge of sighs, and her friends come down to help her to escape from the misery which is too great for flesh and blood to bear. It is a pretty picture, is it not? While our sweet ladies are sighing in the West End theatre… or repeating at church with genteel reserve, the prayer for "all weak women and young children"—here to the Bridge of Sighs comes the battered drudge, to seek for death as for a hidden treasure, and rejoice exceedingly because she has found a grave.[166]

These two examples show how Blatchford represented the disparity between the middle and lower classes in London.

In Blatchford's social reportage, he exposed the miserable conditions of the slums, but he did not seek to create a 'low other' out of those living in poverty. Instead he emphasized the humanity of the people while criticizing the wealthy parasites that live off the suffering of others. Dismissing the individualist ideology, he complained that "now there are many too rich to need a task, and very many more who starve because they cannot find one".[167] In the final page of "The Children of the Ghetto," he observed: "I saw more children than even Christ could comfort, and many women whom only Christ could bless, and I saw a vast hive of poor fellow-creatures whom to all appearance neither God nor the Radical party cares to save".[168] An egalitarian version of Christian ethics provided the bedrock common-sense foundations for Blatchford's sympathetic understanding of poverty. The focus was shifted from immorality of the individuals to the ethical failings of the whole community.

Blatchford began the third article, "The Poor in Ireland", by recounting a conversation he had with a priest during his travels to the emerald isle. The priest was full of praise for the majesty of London. This disturbed Blatchford, who had spent his time in London looking at the human suffering instead of the architecture:

To him (the priest) the significance of a city seemed to lie in its buildings; to me it lies in its people. So, when he spoke with such satisfaction of bridges and edifices, with, so far

as I could judge, no lurking thought behind, of the awful volume of human misery weltering around the vainglorious piles, I felt all the old revulsion against the affectation and selfishness of modern culture and religion burning in me and clamouring for expression.[169]

Blatchford used the literary tools of the middle classes to present an alternative discursive understanding of poverty that sought to include the underclass in the community by emphasising their humanity.

During the 1880s Tom Mann increasingly became a full time socialist activist and a labour leader as his reputation as an agitator made it impossible for him to find employment. He had moved to London during the early 1880s to find work as an engineer and had subsequently built ties with the socialist movement in the city. In the late 1880s Mann travelled throughout England, supporting the development of SDF chapters and the growth of unionism. In 1886 he published his first important essay calling for a mandatory eight-hour day. In the years that followed he became an important contributor to the development of the complexity and diversity of the counter discourse or the alternative meaning of 'the social'. John Laurent argues that "while labour historians are generally agreed over Mann's importance as an inspiring leader and tireless organiser, too little attention… has been devoted to his importance as an *intellectual* leader".[170] As an important member of the labour movement, Mann's literary efforts contributed to the public process where meaning was made.

Much of Mann's writings dealt extensively with the problems of unemployment and poverty. His first important pamphlet, "What a Compulsory 8-Hour Working Day Means to the Workers" (1886), challenged the interpretations of middle-class social reformers and attempted to provide a new understanding of the causes of poverty. An article published in *Vox Clamantium*, entitled "Preachers and Churches" (1894), called on established religions to actively work to improve social conditions. As a leading member of the Independent Labour

Party, Mann published the pamphlet "The Programme of the ILP and the Unemployment"
(1895), which developed a socialist political discourse concerning poverty. Finally, Mann was
the socialist labour leader invited to take part in the Royal Commission on Labour from 1891 to
1894 and he was one of four authors for the *Minority Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*
(1894)*.* These sample writings will provide us with an example of Mann's contributions to the
development of a counter discourse on poverty.

Mann contributed to the development of the eight-hour-day movement in England both as
an activist helping to create the "nucleus of the Eight Hours League" and more importantly with
the "publication of his famous pamphlet on the subject".[171] The pamphlet, entitled "What a
Compulsory 8-Hour Working Day Means to the Workers", that was published in numerous
editions from 1886 onward, presented the issues in a way that they were accessible to the wider
public.[172] Mann began the pamphlet with a statement that identified the object of his concern and
its causes:

> The appalling amount of distress that exists in every town in Britain must arrest the
> attention of all duty loving men and women. No one who sees the effects of want and the
> fear of want can passively behold the dire poverty of a large section of the workers.
> Rather will he probe and probe until he finds the cause of the disease. Socialists have
> probed and they find the disease of want to be spread by the profit-making system upon
> which all industry and society itself is based.[173]

Poverty was caused by the profit-making system, not immorality, drink or urban degeneration.
Mann reminded the reader that the "machine has increased the ease and rapidity of wealth-
production" but that the wealth was not being spread equally among those who contributed to its
making. He went on to identify who was benefiting: "This increase of wealth is of course
enriching someone – a class of which may perform but little really useful work while the bulk of
them serve no function useful in any way to the community."[174] This was a common thread
through much of the counter discourse, where the constructed meaning was inverted and the

wealthy, instead of the residuum poor, become the "useless" dragging down the community. In this pamphlet, Mann directly challenged the discourse of the middle-class social reformers by showing the contractions of some of their leading ideologies. He characterized these ideologies as the "blind leaders of the blind" among which he included the "Malthusians, the Teetotallers, the Financial Reformers, and well-intentioned Radicals".[175] Mann began with the Malthusians, who argued that there were "too many people in the country, and that the only way of bettering our condition is by curtailing the population".[176] He dismissed this argument by reminding the reader that "every year the wealth in this country is increasing much faster than population".[177] He had equal contempt for Temperance advocates who "hammer away at the blessings of sobriety as though drunkenness was the cause of poverty, when the fact is the other way about". [178] Mann rejected the middle-class understanding of poverty and identified both the 'real' causes of, and the solution for, suffering and want:

> It is a useless expenditure of energy to be continually preaching temperance and thrift. Let all the blest with leisure, food and health enjoyments, as they might be if the economic basis of society was as it should be, and then these matters will all right themselves. The only reason people understand the law of wages, which is that all above a bare subsistence wage shall go to profit-mongers as profit. The only way out is to destroy the profit-mongers.[179]

This pamphlet, while primarily concerned with promoting a legislated eight-hour day as a pragmatic solution to unemployment, also helped bring the socialist understanding of poverty into the public discourse.

Tom Mann remained a devout Christian even after he broke with the middle-class moral reformers during the late 1870s. He even considered becoming ordained by the Church of England and rumours spread that he had already done so, but in the end he decided he could do more to change social conditions if he remained independent from the religious institution.[180] "Preachers and the Churches" was very critical of middle and upper class Sunday Christians and

of the churches that condoned and blessed their lives. He did not accept that an individual's daily life could be separated from their religious life, where capitalists caused suffering and poverty throughout the week and then sought salvation on Sundays. Mann described the typical middle-class Christian in less than friendly terms:

> He will attend a prayer-meeting and bless God for the good things of life, and pray for the salvation of the poor sinners in the slums, and will take, as evidences of God's blessing in return, the possession of a few more shares that will pay ten per cent; and if fifteen per cent – why, the more cause for thankfulness, of course! Let none tell me I am concocting a case; such men can be counted by thousands. And why? Because that upon which they have been fed is devoid of real vitalizing force.[181]

There was an interesting parallel between Mann's understanding of the middle classes and Cardinal Manning's representation of the worthless. Again, Mann inverted the meaning, blaming the demoralization of the middle and upper classes for the social evils facing the community. Mann did not blame the individual so much as he censured the religious institutions for their failure to provide better religious guidance:

> The Church is in a helpless backwash, having lost the true courage, mental and moral vigour, power of discernment, and hence capacity, to apply what humanity now demands. The parsons, clergymen, and ministers are, for the most part, a feeble folk, who, daring not to lead, are therefore bound to follow.[182]

Mann explained his understanding of the role for Christianity in providing an ethical foundation upon which society could be constructed:

> Salvation surely consists in living in accordance with Divine harmony – in loving order and living it – hating disorder here on earth, and striving might and main to remove it so that earth may be more like heaven. Oh, the unworthiness of followers of Jesus being primarily concerned about their poor little souls! He that seeks to save his soul on these lines will lose it; but he that will lose his own life by working for the salvation of the community – all such must be saved.[183]

For Mann, Christian religion needed to play an active part in the making of a social order. He, like Blatchford, was trying to infuse the already existing common-sense beliefs found in Christianity into the discourse that provides the meaning of 'the social'.

The standard middle-class Christian solution for poverty and suffering in the community was totally inadequate according to Mann:

> A little less time spent at orthodox mission meetings, and more time spent in helping on effective industrial organisation, to ensure right-doing in the business of life, is sadly needed just now. This orthodox mission work is exactly what our exploiting plutocrats rejoice in. It is so gracious of them to give an occasional ten pounds to keep a mission going, that they may with reasonable safety exploit an additional twenty from their employees, and still receive the praise and blessings of the faithful.[184]

Mann proclaimed that currently the "Socialist agitator and the Trade Union organiser is doing far more than the preachers" to address the ethical failings of the community.[185] He concluded the article with a direct challenge to his middle-class readership to play a more active role in reforming social conditions:

> The social salvation of the entire community is the religious duty in which you preachers and people are called upon to engage. Oh! rich women of the Churches, have you no social and political duty? You, who spend so much on your own persons, have you no care for the body of society? Yea, I tremble for your future, women of the middle classes, who have a great power; will you not use that power to wipe out these stains on our national and Christian character? If you take up a determined stand in connection with the Churches, they will be compelled to become active. The work will be done with or without you, but quicker with you than without you.[186]

Mann's article turned the dominant discourse on its head, placing the fault for the moral and ethical failing of the community on the top of the social order instead of the bottom.

Tom Mann became the secretary of the Independent Labour Party in 1894. The party, led by James Keir Hardie, was founded in 1893 as an alternative to the Lib-Lab arrangement where unionists were elected in coalition with the Liberal party. Mann worked with Hardie during the middle of the 1890s to expand the influence of the party. Again, Mann's organizational efforts and active propaganda works were complemented by his literary outputs. He published a number of pamphlets that were intended to represent the policy of the ILP, including "The Programme of the ILP and the Unemployed". This pamphlet was a direct challenge to the middle-class

discourse on the East End and poverty. Mann was pleased with the progress socialism had made,

with tens of thousands of converts in recent years, but he recognized that there were still "men

bowing down to,

THE GOD OF COMMERCIALISM,

worrying, groaning, sweating, scheming, tricking, lying, fighting to get life's necessaries, as though Nature was so unkind or incapable as not to have supplied us with a sufficiency. Children still pine and die for lack of food and other health-giving conditions. Mothers still moan and sigh because they know not how to provide for the children's requirements. Workless husbands and fathers still tramp sullenly and curse silently, seeking work as the means to life for themselves and dependents, but finding none.[187]

Mann recognized that these social conditions could only be changed when the population

became aware and convinced that an alternative working of 'the social' was possible. He argued

that education was amongst the most important functions of a socialist at this time:

While these conditions remain the order is and must be,
AGITATE! AGITATE! AGITATE!
otherwise despair will overtake the community… Upon the agitators rests the stupendous task of awaking the nation to a sense of our present-day degradation and to inspire with yearnings for a worthier life… It is only after the agitatory and some of the educational work is done that properly constructive work can be engaged in. The ploughing must be done before the sowing, the foundation must be laid before the superstructure can be built; and so with our social conditions—the desire for a change must be felt, and the possibility of the change made clear before much can be done to actually bring about the changed conditions.[188]

In this statement we can see that Mann was conscious of the struggle over the making of

meaning. He knew that the public understanding of the social needed to be changed before real

social progress could be made.

Mann expressed a clear understanding of community that was based on a belief in equality. He

rejected private property and argued that the wealth made within the community should benefit

the whole, instead of just the upper classes:

The true object of industry being the production of the requirements of life, the responsibility for this production should rest with the community collectively; work and

the wealth resulting therefrom should be equitable distributed over the population, and as a means to this end, we demand the immediate enactment of the following programme.[189]

The problem of unemployment represented the total failure of the current economic structures to distributed wealth effectively. Mann argued that unemployment needed to be solved:

> …the very existence of the unemployed is proof positive of the helplessness of the democracy of any and every nation where the unemployed exist. It is difficult to conceive of any limit to the mental and social progress of a people whose industrial system affords opportunities of development for all alike; and it is difficult to see what real progress can be made by the workers of any nation whose industrial system is dependent entirely upon the awful fact that a percentage of its citizens must be in enforced idleness and therefore competing for work.[190]

Mann went on to argue for the nationalization of all unproductive land and increased government involvement in industry to provide "work for all who want it".[191] He suggested that nationalization would lead to the gradual replacement of the profit-making economic system to one functioning with the needs of the community as a whole in mind.

From 1891 to 1894 Mann was a member of the Royal Commission on Labour and he was the joint author, along with William Abraham M.P., Michael Austin M.P. and James Mawdsley J. P., of the minority report that was then published in pamphlet form for public consumption. This report would have been read both by the politically powerful individuals and by the general public in its pamphlet form. It was clearly intended to challenge the dominant understanding of the labour problem in Britain. The conclusion of the minority report provided a good overview of the major tenets of the counter discourse propagated by Mann and his fellow authors. For this reason, the conclusion is reproduced in whole in appendix two. The authors of this report sought to extend the range of their focus beyond the disputes between owners and workers to a discussion of the problems of social organization. They represent 'the social' as a community instead of a collective of individuals.

The miserable living conditions and the problem of sweated trades were symptoms of the

failings of the system to support the needs of the community. The authors of the report

proclaimed that the only viable solution for these problems was "to be found in the progress of

the industrial evolution, which will assign to the 'captains of industry,' as well as to the manual

workers, their proper position as servants of the community."[192] They felt that the social

condition of the 1890s "demand the serious attention of the Government, and constitute, in our

opinion, the most pressing of all the problems of statesmanship".[193] They suggested that the

community was justified to take increasing control over the means of production as it was clear

that private ownership benefited some members of the community more than others. The

language of democracy was spread beyond politics to the realm of economics and social

organization and used to give new meaning to community and 'the social'. The authors made it

clear that they saw a new role for government to improve social conditions:

> We think it high time that the whole strength and influence of the collective organisation
> of the community should be deliberately, patiently, and persistently used to raise the
> standard of life of its weaker and most oppressed members. We regard this as one of the
> primary functions of democratic Government, whether national or local…[194]

The final statement of the report proclaimed a new meaning for politics that recognized the

interconnectedness of life in a community.

> …the whole force of democratic statesmanship must, in our opinion, henceforth be
> directed to the substitution, as fast as possible, of public for capitalist enterprise, and
> where this substitution is not yet practicable, to the strict and detailed regulation of all
> industrial operations, so as to secure to every worker the conditions of efficient
> citizenship.[195]

The new discursive meaning of 'the social', infused with the language of community and

democracy, constructed a new understanding of the social condition where those at the bottom of

the social order were the victims of an unjust system. However, it also makes it clear that the

lower classes have the power to force change and that through democratic action the community

would overcome this system and prevail over the class who amassed wealth at the expenses of

the suffering of the community.

Reverend Henry S. Holland began a new journal entitled *The Commonwealth* in January 1896. His first editorial that led off the first issue of this journal set a clear agenda for the publication. A new understanding of 'the social' was needed:

> Old Watchwords are passing away; old war-cries are failing. Historical parties, political divisions are shifting and breaking. The ancient landmarks, the habitual presumptions are 'suffering a seachange.' Yet, amid the hubbub of a vast confusion, one steady and enduring fact ever makes its presence more acutely felt: one ideal stands where all else breaks. Deeper than the dividing of party, supreme over all the accidents of class, is the Common wealth—the Common Life, in the name of the community, for the common good.[196]

It is interesting to see that Holland employed language similar to that of the practice theories from chapter one when he described the context of his time. He seemed to have been conscious of changing common sense or bedrock beliefs when he talked of "ancient landmarks" and "habitual presumptions". Like Mann, Holland used the language of "community" to give meaning to 'the social'. Building on the egalitarian strain of Christianity, Holland argued that the policies and practices that promoted the good of the whole community should be the new foundation for a revised understanding of the social order. Holland proclaimed that the "general Life is the one social Reality. In it and for it we all live, citizens of one Society".[197] He rejected private property in favour of an understanding of wealth owned by the whole community:

> What wealth has the community at large as a corporate whole? That is the final question which has to be asked, and is worth the answering. That is the ultimate test applied to laws, to politics, to property, to rights, and claims and possessions and interests.
> Is the general Wealth by these increased? Is the general Health bettered? If it is, let them stand. If it is not, let them go.[198]

Holland underlined the interconnectedness of modern society by reminding his readers that the comforts they enjoyed in life were partially responsible for the suffering of others:

> The happy should be aware of sobs in their laughter, of shadows thrown over their sunlight, while the poor and the forlorn weep in dark places. Everyone's sorrow is our

sorrow, and all have a claim on our gladness. "If a little thorn be in the foot," says St. Austin, "the whole body must stoop down to remove it." This is the way the City is built: and it is time to set about building it in real earnest. That City rests on the fundamental conviction that no one of us can possibly live to himself alone, even if he wished it. Every act that we do, every movement that we make, every plan that we propose, every word that we speak, presupposes an innumerable multitude of other men, without whose co-operation it would have been inconceivable and sterile.[199]

This interconnected understanding of 'the social' that was represented in Holland's editorial provided a revised common-sense foundation upon which to build a wider meaning for community life. It also countered the individualist social vision by rejecting the idea that the individual could even exist unless the community supported him:

We mean that there is no private action that has not a social value, a social significance. Our private affairs are necessarily of public concern. Individualism is not a matter for discussion: it is a practical impossibility. No one who has any active interest in life can say, "I choose to do it: what does it matter to you? It is my own look-out." […] Your very freedom to go your own way assumes and utilises the labours of thousands, who minister on you behalf. Butcher, baker, candle-stick maker, tailor, trams, railways, post-offices, all are toiling night and day, that you may have leisure to do what you please. They all have a claim upon you: they all have a voice in your affairs.[200]

Holland's editorial reflected the discourse of Christian Socialism that re-emerged in the late nineteenth century. Its predecessor, led by Frederick Denison Maurice, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, developed during the unrest of Chartism during the 1840s. Disagreements between the leaders caused the original movement to collapse in 1854, but from the 1880s onward a new generation of Christian Socialists, including Holland and Rev. Percy Dearmer (1867-1936), began to rebuild the movement.[201] We have already seen that Christian ethics were the foundation of the socialist labour leaders, such as Kier Hardie, Blatchford and Mann, in their challenge to the dominant understanding of the social order. Members of the educated elite such as H. S. Holland also contributed to the infusion of an egalitarian ethical Christian discourse into the public understanding of the problems facing the social order.

The counter discourse was also developed by middle-class intellectuals outside the Christian

Church. The new liberals, led by J. A. Hobson were working within the intellectual tradition of liberal political economy, building on the accomplishments of J. S. Mill and other great nineteenth-century political philosophers. Along with L. T. Hobhouse, Hobson developed new liberalism, which "reformulated in a crucial and decisive manner" the "basic tenets of liberalism".[202] Michael Freeden shows that a "new fundamental ethical principle or viewpoint" was developed within liberal ideology.[203] Hobson developed a new understanding of community and 'the social' that shifted the bedrock beliefs of traditional liberalism. Freedman suggests that Hobson was in

> …direct contrast to the old liberal attitude which was unwilling to regard human welfare as a legitimate field of concern for the community, precisely for lack of a concept of society which could link the various aspects of human existence and underscore the idea of mutual responsibility for the 'condition of the people'.[204]

This new understanding of 'the social' contributed to an essential shift in the economic understanding of private wealth. Hobson conveyed an expanded comprehension where the creation of wealth was a collective or social activity.[205] Hobson argued that 'the social' was very interconnected even in the creation of wealth:

> …it signifies that the community refuses to sanction any absolute property on the part of any of its members, recognizing that a large portion of the value of each individual's work is due, not to his solitary efforts, but to the assistance lent by the community, which has educated and secured for the individual the skill which he puts in this work; has allowed him to make use of certain pieces of the material universe which belongs to society; has protected him in the performance of his work; and lastly, by providing him a market of exchange, has given the social value to his product which cannot be attributed to his individual efforts. [206]

Hobson argued that because wealth was not created by an individual alone, then the community as a whole has the right to claim some of this wealth:

> In recognition of the co-operation of society in all production of wealth, the community claims the right to impose such conditions upon the individual as may secure for it a share in that social value it has by its presence and activity assisted to create.[207]

Hobson's contributions to the development of new liberalism added to the formation of the counter discourse. He developed the new meaning of community within the liberal ideology that had provided the dominant understanding of the economy, politics and 'the social' throughout the nineteenth century.

Holland's editorial and J. A. Hobson's political economy exemplified the complexity of the process where meaning was publicly made. There was no one 'original' location where an individual made the new meaning. Instead it was an ongoing process were a discourse gained public attention and further propagation from many different locations. Blatchford, Mann, and Holland each spread the uses of a diverse counter discourses that downplayed or rejected hierarchy in favour of forms of unity and equality. As these discourses gained increased public space and it was practised by more and more individuals it became more powerful and then acquired further authority to represent the 'real' social order. The solid public cultural understanding of 'natural' inequality was splintered by the presence of a solid public cultural understanding of 'natural' unity and equality. Both of these discourses reflected constructed understandings of 'the social', but those who learned and made them through practice perceived them both as being the 'real' common-sense functioning of the social world. From the late 1880s onward these two meanings, increasingly co-existed in the same public space, augmenting the complexity of the cultural understanding of 'the social'.

The five different discursive locations examined in this chapter each contributed to the development of a new understanding of 'the social' in the public discourse. When these multiple sources are read together a new common sense understanding of poverty at the end of the nineteenth century is apparent. The East End was represented as the symptom of an ethical failing of the whole community as a whole instead of the result of individual failures in the

natural struggle of life. In the discourses, a new understanding of society, which was represented as an interconnected community, was constructed. This developed the understanding that the health of the community should be judged by the living conditions of its lowest members. In most of the counter discourses there was a tendency to invert the dominant discourse by constructing the middle and upper class as the moral failures in the community and by singling out the individualist ideology as the problem that caused undue poverty. This chapter has shown only a small sample of the multifaceted counter discourse on 'the social' which gained new ground in the contested urban terrain of meaning in the late nineteenth century.

Conclusion

The meaning of 'the social' was constructed and changed through an active public process throughout the late nineteenth century. This construction was reflected in the multiple texts where subjects/agents presented their understandings of the East End, of poverty, and of the social order. The subjects/agents were structured by their cultural common sense that provided the lens through which they interpreted the complexities of the urban social landscape.

The dominant middle-class understanding of the social order, described by Stedman Jones, and reflected in the social reform essays of *The Nineteenth Century*, was structured by the social position and its relative cultural common-sense outlook of the literary men and women

who made London legible from the 1840s onward. The middle-class discourse constructed a category, the residuum, made up of individual social failures, which made the ongoing problem of poverty intelligible within the public understanding of 'the social'. This discourse also contributed to a particular understanding of the social order as a natural hierarchy. The articles in *The Nineteenth Century* show that this discourse continued to determine the public understanding of poverty into the late 1880s. However, the unity of the dominant discourse was increasingly challenged from the mid-1880s onward by new social actors. This paper has focused on the contribution to this challenge from and on behalf of the lower classes of London.

Through a process of inversion and infusion a counter discursive understanding of poverty and 'the social' was formed from multiple discursive locations. Parody and satire were used to stand some of the common sense beliefs, reflected in the dominant discourse, on their heads. Egalitarian Christianity, socialism, democracy, and new economic theories were infused into the standard discourse on 'the social' making new public meaning. The interconnectedness of 'the social' was underlined by the inclusion of the language of community. Tom Mann, H. S. Holland and J.A. Hobson each showed their respective readership that the common sense beliefs that supported individualism were no longer valid in the social and economic context of the late nineteenth century.

The changing meaning of 'the social' that was discussed in the third chapter, however, was not a complete rejection and replacement of the old discourse. In the process of public making of new meaning, the subjects/agents always begin from within the old discourse. There was no black and while divisions between the old dominant discourse of chapter two and the new counter discourses of chapter three. Further research into the process of transformation would likely highlight the importance of the old discourse in the making of the new public meaning

even more than this paper has been able to do. Furthermore, it would show the important role played by individuals such as Barnett and Beatrice (Potter) Webb in the making of the new meaning during the 1890s. Moreover, the counter discourse was far more complex than this paper was able to show and the contrasts and divisions between the multiple subjects/agents who collectively made the new public meaning would be as interesting as the similarities which chapter three highlighted. Between the new union leadership, the ILP, the Christian Socialist, the Fabians, the new liberals and others, a new meaning was created during the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. However, this new meaning was not fundamentally linked or unified and the practical solutions to the problems facing 'the social' proposed by the various groups differed widely.

The representations of the East End and its poverty which have been examined in this paper have allowed us to examine the wider meaning constructed to make the modern urban social landscape intelligible. The 'real' social experience of poverty in London would have been different for each and every individual. Writers and thinkers of the time, like historians today, sought to make the social world into a unified and universal representation that could be analyzed and understood. Through this active social process meaning was made and some of the meaning formed into solid common sense or bedrock beliefs. Because these solid beliefs were founded on social understandings made by humans, instead of on transcendental laws of human existence, they were amendable to change over time. This paper has attempted to show this process of change, through the close reading of a limited sample of texts, during a short historical period.

The philosophy of Wittgenstein and the sociological theory of Bourdieu provide a useful contrast to the more standard use of Michel Foucault in the 'post-modern' approach to history.

Wittgenstein and Bourdieu provide us with the idea that we are both subjects determined by the webs of cultural meaning which make the world intelligible and at the same time agents capable of contributing to a changing public meaning, founded on redeveloped common sense beliefs, bedrocks or habitus. The social contextualism of the practice theories provides better framework for an understanding of the process of change over time. Furthermore, it retains a limited sense of agency which is comforting for those of us who remain partially committed to the basic tenets of humanism.

While the cultural Marxist belief of E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams that social experience was reflected directly in culture and language seems to be too simple an understanding of the public making of meaning, we have seen that objective social and economic forces still structured how individuals from different positions in the class hierarchy perceived the world. The development of the counter discourse in the late nineteenth century shaped the development of the struggle of the lower classes to gain more influence in the making of the political, social and economic world of the early twentieth century. It provided a new basic understanding of 'the social' and new common sense outlooks to build a different vision of community. Too many histories have been written to try and explain why the prophecies of Karl Marx never came true in England, the first industrial country.[208] The study of history will benefit when we finally leave that question behind. If we accept that there is no essential law of social or cultural development and that no theory can completely answer the mysteries of history or predict the future, then we can study history in an attempt to understand how meaning changed within a limited historical context. This paper has attempted to build a framework for this type of investigation and to provide some partial answer within the historical context of London during the late 1880s and the 1890s. However, it is only a beginning and it leaves more questions than

answers.

Appendices

Appendix One

Charles Booth's Poverty Map of London 1898-1899

Appendix is too big a file to send by e-mail.

I will include it in the final copy.

See http://booth.lse.ac.uk/cgi-bin/do.pl?sub=view_booth_and_barth&args=531000,180400,6,large,5
Appendix Two

William Abraham, Michael Austin, James Mawdsley, and Tom Mann, *The Minority Report of the Royal Commission on Labour*, (Manchester: Labour Press Society Limited, 1894), collected in *British Labour Ephemera*, p. 29.

Conclusion.

To sum up; we regard the unsatisfactory relations between employers and employed as but one inevitable incident of the present industrial anarchy. The only complete solution of the problem is, in-our opinion, to be found in the progress of the industrial evolution, which will assign to the "captains of industry," as well as to the manual workers, their proper position as servants of the community.

Meanwhile, the relations between capitalists and manual workers are enormously embittered by the demoralizing conditions in which great masses of the population are compelled to live. Under any conceivable view of social development, these conditions demand the serious attention of the

Government, and constitute, in our opinion, the most pressing of all the problems of statesmanship.

The evil influences of the "sweated trades," the demoralizing irregularity of employment, the unsanitary condition, both of the workplaces and the homes, of large sections of the community, the inadequate wages obtained in all the less skilled grades of workers, the excessive hours of labour which prevail less skilled grades of workers, the excessive hours of labour which prevail throughout so large a part of the industrial field, all call for immediate action.

We think it high time that the whole strength and influence of the collective organisation of the community should be deliberately, patiently, and persistently used to raise the standard of life of its weaker and most oppressed members. We regard this as one of the primary functions of democratic Government, whether national or local, and whilst leaving on one side as beyond our scope such fundamental matters as the nationalisation of the land, and the taxation of unearned incomes, we have suggested, in some detail, various immediately practicable reforms in this direction. These reforms include:—

1. The explicit and widely advertised adoption by the Government and all local authorities, of direct public employment whenever this is advantageous, the Eight Hours' Day
2. The extension of the factory and similar Acts to all manual workers in all trades, and their drastic enforcement in such a way as to discourage home-work, and absolutely prevent industrial oppression.
3. The securing by appropriate law of an Eight Hours' Day for every manual worker.
4. The thorough investigation and bold experimental treatment of the problem of the unemployed.
5. The provision of adequate sanitary housing accommodation for the whole nation; as well as honourable maintenance for all its workers in their old age.

In short, the whole force of democratic statesmanship must, in our opinion, henceforth be directed to the substitution, as fast as possible, of public for capitalist enterprise, and where this substitution is not yet practicable, to the strict and detailed regulation of all industrial operations, so as to secure to every worker the conditions of efficient citizenship.

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