

The Un/methodology of 'Theoretical Intuitions': Resources of Generations Gone Before, Thinking and Feeling Class.

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## **The Un/methodology of ‘Theoretical Intuitions’: Resources of Generations Gone Before, Thinking and Feeling Class.**

### **Abstract**

*Class Matters* (Mahony and Zmroczek, 1997) was an important collection marking working-class women’s contribution to the academy and society. In taking up the question of class, this paper considers the ways in which a partial and particular discourse (Hey, 1997) reflected its author’s material circumstances, including her preferred conceptual interests as well as her un(self)conscious knowledge. In revisiting the way class ‘mattered’, and continues to matter - we devised and enacted an exploratory dialogical methodology to open up the original text to new meanings and interpretations influenced by generationally and geographically specific intellectual/theoretical vocabularies. The paper enacts this multivocality with reflections from each author, connected by a co-authored exploration of affect and the power and problematic of the ‘autobiography of the question’.

Keywords: class; affect; multivocality; generation; identification

### **Introduction**

The following paper is about the question of class identity and its production. Class is a definitive topic of sociology, one that we work with as well as question. Through a practice of thinking with and against dominant theorisations of class we aim to draw out some unresolved tensions within the logic of reproduction (Bourdieu, 1994). We recognise the practices through which the elite recursively fortify their illusion of possessing *inherent* and thus natural talent, disguising how privilege works as a multiplier of unevenly distributed opportunities and power (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). However, we question the ways a logic of reproduction can reify classed cultural practices, obscuring relationality and struggle as the site of class formation.

Analytics of class are returning in higher education research, showing ongoing class inequalities despite widening participation practices (Leyton et al, 2012; Lehmann, 2014; Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2010; Robinson and Walker, 2011; Mallman, 2017). In a context of the increased global tendency to precarious employment and the intensification of academic work related to pronounced surveillance and managerial techniques of performativity (Fardella, Sisto, and Jiménez, 2015; Gill, 2014), the figure of the ‘working-class academic’ has emerged as a site of class politics and critical analysis. Recent research has indicated that working-class academics are less likely to get a PhD from prestigious universities and earn less than their upper-classed counterparts (Chiappa & Perez Mejias, 2019). Their experiences in higher education are also marked by acute feelings of needing to work harder to get recognition from peers and universities; a lack of institutional support and networks, and the invisibilization and downplaying of class as a matter to address, leading to misrecognition and experiences of disrespect (Haney, 2015; Kastberg, 2014; Waterfield, Beagan and Mohamed, 2019). We argue that despite the formidable and entrenching forces of class interest at work, resistance is intrinsic to class formation. In order to show this, we take a microscopic optic on class, seeking to extend knowledge about class as a structuring relation by scrutinising working-class agency as it emerges within and against ascendancy. This mode of class analysis shows dominant class interests as incessant and pernicious but as forever encountering and sometimes fraying in the face of dissent and difference.

In the Academy, there had always persisted a vigilant and vital strand of feminist class theorising (Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 1979, Adkins and Skeggs, 2004). One

collection in particular, brought together in the monograph *Class Matters* (1997), provided feminists from working-class backgrounds with a crucial political and intellectual platform. This work provides a foundation for intellectual critique of the way the culture of higher education has further bent to the will of the middle-class *habitus* and to the profit motive (Reay, 2000; 2018). Whilst acknowledging the distinguished work of our colleagues, our agenda is slightly askew from customary critical class analysis. We see that it sometimes flattens out and over-generalises working-class experience especially as this applies to the space of higher education. If subjects are deemed of more or less value through their access to, or ability to accrue, symbolic value from value-awarding institutions such as higher education, working-class subjects are forever forestalled in their praxis by the symbolic violence of being deemed bereft of a suitable *habitus* and thus they have no possibility of generating the *right* kind of value. And whilst the discourse of lack invariably dominates accounts of the injustices inflicted by the rich on the least advantaged (Kenway et al, 2017), we have come to understand a way of theorising class as a complex relational, resistant, reconstitutive resource and assemblage (Skeggs, 2004; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012), an understanding that has materialised out of our own writing and biographies, for example (Hey, 1997) (Leaney, 2019) and (Leyton, 2019).

Our paper reworks these ideas together showing imaginaries deriving from both theory and experience and holding our differences in tension. By differences, we mean those of class, age, gender, geography, theory and political, temporal and historical contexts. It is the differences between us and our commitment to representing difference as a site of

dis/identification that informs the multivocality of the paper. We offer a co-authored narrative alongside interruptions from our different perspectives.

The paper is in 5 parts: part 1 offers an initial commentary on the temporality and poetics of writing; part 2, ‘retro/flections’ provides a brief summary of the original text; part 3 entitled ‘the un/methodology of theoretical intuitions’ describes the conceptual frame we used to access and understand the text. This is followed by a substantive discussion using this frame to identify two ‘theoretical intuitions’ firstly; part 4 ‘embodiment and affect’, secondly; part 5 ‘refuting class as reification’. The paper closes with a suggestion for revitalising class analysis by attending to its fissures, plurality and vitality.

### **Opening Commentary: Class Trespasses**

All books reveal their historical, social and political context – feminism’s entry into the university was one such moment but how much of what was said by feminists about ‘class’, its forms and modes of power, is germane given the increasingly precarious position of women, working-class, black, latinx and queer academics? The paper is necessarily burdened to some extent, by dealing with the political and theoretical history carried in the stimulus text. However, in taking the text as a situated document, the critical re/readings we conducted draw on newer/different theoretical ideas as well as new empirical locations. When we met to discuss and prepare our contribution to the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) symposium at the University of Sussex in November 2017, we spoke ‘class’ for 3 hours over food and beer on a (for once) balmy English summer day in Valerie’s garden.

We have struggled to maintain the multivocality of our thinking aloud together. Papers entice more univocality, certainty and linearity than our initial meandering explorations. At times in this paper we have assumed the overly generalising conflating ‘we’ of collective authorship but we did not want this to either elide or over-privilege its ‘other’, the egotistical ‘I’ of separate singular contributions. Our voices exist in this writing in both senses, beyond or behind some of the words. More specifically, our revisiting the subject of class expressed through some anecdotal elements of an individual auto/biography (Valerie’s) holds that ‘singular I’ to account in an entirely new critical historical understanding, a process elaborating the rich re-imagined locatedness for each of us, and of theory itself.

## Retro/flections

### ***Valerie***

My writing being made the object of my then students<sup>1</sup> was and remains disconcerting, a bit like a ‘reverse supervision’ – moreover, it was writing that was twenty years old and in large part, personal. If I was flattered to be taken this seriously, I was also unsettled, by being read out loud. This ambivalence persists - the writer may have intentions but her ways with words can never guarantee her meaning even if one accepts the author/ity of the producer. Once you publish you can certainly be damned/misunderstood/read against.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah graduated with a doctorate in 2016 and Daniel in 2019. Sarah was co-supervised with Mairead Dunne and Daniel with Louise Morley.

Each reaction is possible and rereading something I thought ‘not half bad’ in my previous smug innocence is distinctly uncomfortable. It was a shock to realize how seemingly autobiographical it was - as the ‘subject’ or ‘the fictive persona of me’ emerges in a particular aesthetic, indebted to the genres of cultural studies criticism and feminist expressions of the politics of the personal. I think that this was all intentional. Why? In part, because the editors had encouraged the use of the personal voice (though see Skeggs’ 1997a interesting ‘refusal’), and the discipline of sociology at the time was frequently hyper-abstract and routinely gender-insensitive. If I analyse ‘the text’ as a piece of discursive writing I can barely see any structure or prefiguring of its argument. In other words, I assume a great deal about my readers’ ability to come with me to the ‘North of England’ – I took for granted *for once*, that I was *sharing* a common experience of class dislocation. My method, such as it was, seemed to consist of folding ideas about place, voice, identity, power, and difference into a layered piece of ‘thinking out loud’ because I was trying, in a safe psychic space to resolve a dilemma - what Miller (1995) calls ‘the autobiography of the question’ - that is ‘how can you be working-class in the Academy?’ My solution appears now to render an account of class as a highly self-conscious, if ambivalent, unavoidably quasi-heroic cultural performance. There is something in this ‘heroic’ pose, pointed out to me by Daniel and Sarah. My writing *is* resistant, expressing a stubborn refusal – a *refusal* to endorse working-class subjectivity as lack – deficit or inferiority. In the struggle to emerge from a semiotics of deficit in which the working-class is always or predominantly characterized as ‘less than’ I went to some lengths to display myself as identifying *as* and *with* the working-class subject who

was ‘more than’ - more than sociology’s imaginary of lack and *definitely* more than the abject other of the bourgeoisie’s fantasy.

### ***Brief Synopsis of ‘Northern Accents: Southern Comforts’***

My writing had two pieces of data: my self and a critical commentary on a Boddington’s Beer advertisement in the UK – the one I used was called ‘Sun Cream’ (Bartle Bogle Hegarty, 1992). This was a very successful advertisement series, positioning the beer as a no-nonsense brand through playing on its image as ‘the cream of Manchester’. I sensed that the ‘writing of class’ needed to convey something of its subjective visceral nature – class is felt as Kuhn says ‘under the skin, at the core of your being’ (1995, p.117) not ‘out there’ as a dead category. It works as a system and structure affecting persons and sticking them into spaces and places – so finding *any* visual representation of those embodied moments of ‘classifying’ was important - Boddington’s Sun Cream provided a lot of analytic yield<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The advertisement is available on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/25134969>) and youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjuZc-qKAfQ>)



‘Sun cream’ advertisement by Bartle Bogle Hegarty (1992)

The advertisement dramatises difference – in representing an apparently glamorous woman – the object of the male gaze and our gaze – we assume she is on an exotic holiday, appropriate for the ‘high-fashion’ *femme fatale* she poses as. But when the actor speaks, she responds to the archetypal northern working-class name ‘Vera’. She is shown in fact sunning herself on Blackpool’s North Shore, the background which for me instantly reveals the setting and participants as a historic northern working-class landscape with figures. The advertisement cleverly plays with this cultural history in site/sight and sound. It is not just any location or any accent – the voices are Mancunian ones – Manchester being at one time the home of Boddington’s brewery in the UK, and the iconic ‘Vera’, who asks...not for sun-cream but ‘For another rubdown with chip fat’. At this utterance, the out-of-reach world of the jet-set liquefies into a proximate ordinariness – the advertisement invites us to laugh at the pose, and to laugh at the pretence and fakery of advertising itself with its manufactured aspirational world of impossible perfection. It trades in artifice versus authenticity and amounts to what Skeggs (1997b) calls an ‘anti-pretentiousness critique’. This practice arises as a class weapon in

cultural warfare often taking the form of a spoof or parody, that working-class people use to position those positioning them. It appropriates the appropriators. The advertisement draws on and distributes this inside knowledge but does so with no disrespect. For once the ‘down’ class is not condemned or condescended to. Importantly, it is not laughing *at* ‘Vera’ - in fact she has the last word. Such affect-laden cultural messages told in popular forms condense complex meanings about the divisions of the social – it seems to me that the advertisement assumes that the ‘common people’ are all sociologists manqué. And that an ability to laugh at class snobbery, disdain and contest its incipient antagonism, is incredibly important to working-class people – a vital survival tactic as well as comprising a necessary critical defence. We next explain our approach to interpretation and writing, what we came to call the ‘un/methodology of theoretical intuitions’. This term aims to recognise the sense of us knowing something beyond reason, ‘under the skin’, seeing class at work in the intellectual, embodied and affective tensions transmitted within talk and texts.

### **The Un/Methodology of Theoretical Intuitions**

Daniel coined the term ‘theoretical intuitions’ in response to the chapter – he was saying that it was as if Valerie was not entirely ‘outside’ it – the writing - literally ‘bringing up’ emergent embodied knowledge. The chapter is a form of amalgam discourse. It offers more than retelling the ‘self’ because it cites and expresses ‘theory’ (hybridity, subjectivity, post-structuralism to name but a few!) but it is not entirely consumed by ‘sociology’ and the politics of ‘feminism’. It is written in the spirit of a not entirely conscious, immanent intersectional analysis. When one has pushed things to the edge of

one's thinking – for example, you put class into feminism and historicise subjectivity – in this case to make sense of the self. 'Theoretical intuitions' refers to the ways in which 'theory' is always a work in process and progress, requiring creativity in its devising and use. Here is what Daniel specifically remarked:

*When the idea of 'theoretical intuitions' came up it was amid an affective atmosphere of critical respect, playfulness and tenderness. In this 'setting' I wanted to say that what I found in Valerie's chapter were advanced theoretical 'elaborations', 'innovations', 'frameworks' or 'tools'. But, I believe in a more unconscious mode that day, I found that my own metaphors were revealed as being strongly embedded in disembodied, technological, male theoretical discourse – metaphors that vex me and yet capture me in a male infatuation with some strand of poststructural thinking on power, so words such as technologies, dispositif, apparatuses and devices were and are all over my theoretical thinking.*

*'Theoretical intuitions' recognises the micro-politics of making her experience of being classed and living a class as central to her theorising. For Valerie class is not just something 'beneath your skin', but also a strategic point of confrontation, instability and inversion of power relations (Foucault, 2001a). Class, in this view, is made out of a chewing [over] the ideas; thinking in complexities, openness, ambivalences, passions, and respect. It could be seen as resistant mode of thinking against 'high-speed higher education' (Hey, 2006, p.442). Theoretical intuition is a mode of thinking that recognises the 'real' and yet fictive dimension of class domination. Class here, is a pervasive, totalising, unavoidable experience*

*of power and devaluation, as well as a strategic, subversive and satirical weapon of disarticulation of class fabrications and superiorities. Class, in this gaze, vibrates for me as a sticky and infiltrating force that modulates our subjectivities, a vital weapon carrying the possibility of pleasures and reversals.*

So, it seems Daniel has identified a power and resistance tactic of thinking back against class. This is followed by Sarah's critical response to the writing:

*There remains an uneasy tension between theorization and feeling which I think the notion of an 'un/methodology of theoretical intuitions' begins to capture. Valerie introduces this discomfort in her account of a fascination with post-structural theory that nevertheless fails to disrupt her felt sense of being classed. Of course these questions of thought and feeling are inherent to the project of working-class women's perspectives on social class (Walkerdine, 2010). But, the tension between thinking and feeling is productive, reflecting as Valerie suggests the 'autobiography of the question'. Reading the reflections in Class Matters on how experiences of being classed inform theorizations of social class, captures the live quality of classification (Hollingworth, 2015). Rather than ontology forming the grounds of epistemology, that 'what I am determines what and how I know', the two are co-constitutive (Skeggs, 1997a, p.131). To be named working-class opens (or closes) possibilities to know and thus to name – I, like Valerie, can't help but to fix everyone I meet into a classed box – a (re)production of ways of knowing that fundamentally shapes my being in the world. As such, theoretical*

*intuitions are the embodied affects of approaching the edges of experience and understanding. Feeling there is something to say but being unable to articulate it, experiencing something as profound yet finding it becomes unremarkable when read through dominant ways of knowing, being drawn into ways of seeing and thinking that challenge and unsettle what had been a place of comfort.*

In what follows, we further address some substantive ‘theoretical intuitions’ shaping our argument to look at the themes of ‘embodiment and affect’ and ‘refuting class as reification’.

### **Embodiment and Affect: Feeling Class/ed**

#### ***Valerie: ‘Being mithered’:***

*My negotiation of these class relations is literally carried, condensed and expressed most acutely in my voice... (Hey, 1997, p.142)*

I have always understood that the disconcerting of the social presents initially in the affective register – you *feel* something wrong or you *feel* yourself as ‘*the something wrong*’. In a class society, you can ‘feel in the wrong’ or be put there when you literally open your mouth. Within the context of UK higher education having the right ‘accent’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Accents bridge the symbolic and the material. Marking distinctions of geography (Cavanaugh, 2005), class (Addison and Mountford, 2015) and race (Errihani, 2015). As such, accents are a practice of inclusion and exclusion.

continues to mark distinction, ‘placing’ you in the educated/uneducated classes. When I crossed class or when class crossed me, I have always felt it at work on me before realizing quite what was going on. This was most notable when I went to teach at an elite Russell Group University, here I began to be or to feel ‘mithered’<sup>4</sup> by something, a discomfort prompted by people mimicking my Northern accent.

So, way before the fashionable ‘turn to the affective’, I (and I suspect many others) encountered their difference as an affect on the skin – in a heartbeat, in a look, when we became remarked upon as ‘the other’ - as a negative difference. There is after all an enormous effort expended by working-class women to be recognised in the Academy because if your route into it has been lived as ostensible social mobility – this has meant a comprehensive self-conscious editing and self-censoring of one’s ‘difference’. However, the porous quality of the subject means that the ‘wrong class’ can leak out – as many working-class scholars note, this continues to create ‘private trouble’ but it signals important ‘public issues’ (Mills, 1959) such as the profoundly alienating *habitus* of higher education (Bourdieu, 1988; Loveday, 2016; Johansson and Jones, 2019).

Research and writing for me then, has always been about taking notice and tracing the source of disruptive affects – because here you discover power’s forceful norms at work within the banal, as well as the more lethal structural degrading of working-class

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<sup>4</sup> Mithering is a Northern dialect word for pestering – usually used by the mother of a nagging child or as the affect of unease in the mind of the person – a sort of irritating bother.

difference. Many daughters of the working-class within higher education occupy a social and professional position awry from the disembodied bourgeois masculine universal as the ‘scholar’. Yet our insistent claim on knowledge is a passionate preoccupation as we challenge our own and our class’s mis/recognition.

### ***Sarah: Mimicry and Mis/recognition***

I guess the simple question is whether the academy remains a space of discomfort for the working-class? And I think the easy answer is yes. If we understand class as classificatory struggles (Tyler, 2015) then our identifications with being working-class tell us something about the ‘normative’ academic – there must be something against which we struggle? Like Valerie, I have been mimicked (my habitual use of the idiom ‘well good’ is particularly popular<sup>5</sup>), a mark which renders me outside of the ‘class that is invisible to itself’. This is the making of class, the process by which embodied difference signifies distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). As such, for me, the making of the figure of the ‘working-class academic’ occurs in moments of disruption where others’ classed privileges are rendered visible (Rancière, 1998). The moment of incomprehension when ‘analytical elaborated code’ (Bernstein, 1972) is uttered in a working-class accent disrupts the embodied ease of the privileged classes, making sensible their ‘ability’ as a repetitive attempt at being (see Hey, 2013). Now this is the uncomfortable space that

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<sup>5</sup> The expression ‘well good’ became the focus of class mockery in the comedy sketch series ‘Lee Nelson’s well good show’ which ran for two series in 2010-2011 and ‘Lee Nelson’s well funny people’, which aired for one series in 2013 on BBC Three.

Reay (1997) captures as the ‘double bind’ of the working-class academic. Yet we are not the *only* uncomfortable members of this exchange. By making explicit the process by which ‘academic jargon is *another* language acquired by practice’ (Hey, 1997, p.143) we begin to detangle this privilege of access, from the assumption that the speaker possesses innate ability and flair. In this way, Valerie’s ‘cultural language games’ offer a radical critique of the reproduction of classed privilege within the academy that destabilises classed cultural hierarchies. By making explicit the formation of language and re-valuing de-valued speech in its articulation with/against academic discourse, Valerie challenges the normative academic form.

Her account of the games she plays with her accent reflects the nuances of class formation, where transgression, parody and mimicry are part of the making of what appears to be coherent classed culture (Butler, 1988). What this peculiar classed position makes so clear is the role that access to resources has, in the production of knowledge. As a working-class woman writing/speaking/thinking class, Valerie captures the co-constitution of ontology and epistemology. It is not simply that she is working-class and thus can produce knowledge of being working-class rather; the felt being of class is mediated and transformed in its conceptualisation within modes of thinking/speaking. As such, the formation of the ‘working-class academic’ is a productive site for class theorization, precisely because it is such an uncomfortable place to be. My own interest in class has always been the process of classification. I am not sure I entered the academy *feeling working-class*, rather *I felt classified* and it was against this naming that I struggled. Yet, entering the academy has privileged me with the resources to speak class;

my feeling classed is made ‘sensible’ in its articulation within dominant sociological discourse (Rancière, 2004).

The academy is a paradoxical space for me, embodying aspects of a devalued classed position. Of course, there are entrenched cultural norms within higher education, which often explicitly exclude those differentially classed (Reay, 2000). However, I found there are also spaces within which a particular enactment of working-classness is valued as a form of ‘authenticity’. It is within this space of critical working-class scholarship that my sense of being working-class was valorised. I felt a sense of shared history, culture, and humour in particular sociological accounts. Yet this coherence was unstable and subsequently ruptured during my ethnographic research on a council estate. Despite my own background living on a similar council estate to my participants, they did not share the working-class identity that I had invested in since entering the academy. Although I anticipated having to negotiate power dynamics with the participants on the axis of researcher/researched, participants narrated disparate aspects of my trajectory together to classify my position as abject, beyond the respectability of the working-class (Skeggs, 1997b). This re/positioning destabilised the identity I had enacted with other ‘working-class academics’. Though this classification was often informed by dominant classed discourses of deserving/undeserving and respectable/unrespectable (Jensen, 2014), these ideas were always troubled and mediated through affective relationships. It was this unexpected classification as ‘other’ but also the kindness with which I was treated, that has shaped my research focus on the process of classification that occurs within the

council estate and specifically, the entanglement of dominant discourses with everyday enactments of a ‘liveable life’ (Butler, 2004).

To be working-class, like any identity claim, is a claim to power. The power to claim a working-class identity may be in relation to the non-working ‘other’, as it was for many of my participants, or for us as academics, it is a claim enabled by an accumulation of resources (social, cultural and material). Classification draws our attention to the consequences of such claims. It is this making of class in moments of classification that we feel, moments which position us as beyond the ‘class which is invisible to itself’.

## **Refuting Class as Reification**

### ***Valerie: Disavowing Deficit***

I think for all of us, ex-working-class women who became academics, the fury we felt at the elision of working-classness with intellectual ‘lack’ kept us busy in our own productivity. But additionally and this is a big ‘but’ we did not or do not *ever* want to ‘let go’ or ‘get over’ our roots. Part of the reason for this, relates to a shared concern with the failure to think being working-class as critically capable. One of the key points of our formative discussion was recognising the complexities of working-class experiences that can be both joyful and painful. We discussed how the cultural resources of the academy are not inherently classed, rather the *access to them is*. This optic of the micro-level shows something of the messy living of being classified that takes us into domains of action not entirely captured by the logic of reproduction and its thinking.

Rancière, has identified theories of reproduction as complicit in writing the working-class as ‘being incapable of having any other thought than that which their mode of life imposed’ (Pelletier, 2009, p.138). Thus ‘emancipation’ requires an educated vanguard and tends to construe the working-class locked in an organic fomentation of class-consciousness incapable of being present ‘at its own making’ (Thompson, 1963). As the paper tries to show the forces of class antagonism are pushed back against incessantly.

#### ***Daniel: Recalcitrant Desire***

In this thinking on class and reification, I trace a recalcitrant desire to acknowledge pleasure. Pleasure here is not just a perverse force propagated through the circulation of visibilities and affectivities that resonate with popular economies of fantasies, but also it is a potential for occasions of emancipation. Pleasure can be an effective/affective strategy against attempts of defining working-class and non-masculine subjects as lack or abject. In this sense, to me, an actual title of Valerie’s chapter would be reversed and actualised to something like ‘*Working-class Comforts, Insurgent Northern Accents*’. There is a pleasure when resisting being co-opted by middle-class hierarchies. Even if navigating between two languages of class is exhausting as Valerie recognised, there is nonetheless an emancipatory pleasure when switching from middle-class vocabulary to working-class accent and parody.

In this writing, ‘holding our differences in tension’ has not been an easy task. My foreignness is made visible as a dis/advantage; an ambivalent onto-epistemic location, whereby asserting an identity position reveals assumed knowledge. While this risks to reify Global North/South hierarchies and blurs the complexities of lived multilocal classed subject positionings (Anzaldúa, 1987), it also gives me space to inhabit a local working-class geography of personal experiences that have reshaped surfaces of my subjectivity. Friendship and shared wounds with refugees, English, diverse European and non-European precarious housemates, have composed a rich archive to speak back to and understand the contemporary institutional distance between higher education, academic culture and day-to-day knowledge. Knowledge about how to live, deal with and yet laugh against rising institutional racism and nostalgic nationalism.

Theorising class can be seen as a *parrhesiastic* work of critique; that is, as a fearless speech on class through the encounter and insurrection of subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 2001b; 2008). These subjugated knowledges have the power to expose disagreements often made ‘marginal’ or co-opted by civilising and commodifying ordering of knowledge circulation (Foucault, 2003; Rancière, 1999). Valerie cracks open the assumed orderings and hierarchies of class. In Valerie’s thinking, this is made in a carnivalesque spirit, embodying a *trickster*’s subjectivity emerging from subalternity. When reading the edited collection *Class Matters* and Valerie’s chapter, one of the challenges I encountered is related to the actual possibilities within and beyond the academy to use a clear working-class location and attachment as a politics of theorising and struggle. Valerie locates herself in a clear, not fixed, and proud working-class

belonging. Today, even a dominant middle-class progressive discourse portrays the working-class as a threat to democracy and cultural modernisation through the production and use of ‘enlightenment technologies’ (Skeggs, 2002). In these turbulent times, this ‘public’ classing gaze (Skeggs, 2002) sticks to certain deficit working-class subjects responsibilised not just for their own educational and economic underachievement, but also for the democratic and cultural crisis of British society. Amid this intensification of the demonization of working-class lives, it becomes even more difficult to identify with/within working-class culture and claims to value and knowledge. In this context, destabilizing theorizations of class, are even more necessary to identify points of discontinuity within the attempts to reinstate what Rancière calls the ‘police order’ (Rancière, 1999).

Finally, to me, both Valerie and Sarah’s reflections remind us that we can and should go beyond Lorde’s powerful assertion: ‘The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (1984:110-114). Rather, we can dismantle the deeper assumption that the tools; ‘ontological, epistemological, and material power’ are never intrinsically properties of the master in the first place, just like working-class lives are never the master’s ‘other’ (like the slave or the apprentice). Refusing to be the other, claiming clearly ‘I am not your other’, can be a pleasurable and vital game against reification.

### Closing points

In this paper, we have identified the salience of ‘affect’ and ‘embodiment’ and the tendency to reify working-class culture as lack, in our counter-formulation of resistant

theoretical intuitions. Our intention behind this exchange is to accord agency, complexity and respect to the working-class ‘other’ - to refuse the shame of being seen as the only one having an ‘accent’ or indeed ‘a body’ (!) even as we know we are indeed privileged because of the ‘luxury’ of academic distance and associated conceptual capital, publishing, audience and voice. But as others in this special issue affirm even this hard-won space is now under erosion. The fate of the dominated in their quest for higher education in countries such as Brazil, Chile, The United States, Hungary, Turkey and many others is threatened by the restoration of right-wing hyper-nationalist regimes with their inevitable closing down of critical studies. The situation in these countries is especially dire.

Our aim has been to imagine some new vocabulary for understanding the ‘doing’ of higher education and the doing of working-class people in higher education. This work remains unfinished, but through the introduction of ‘theoretical intuitions’ as an un/methodology, we offer a practice for exploring class, sharing new and contrasting theoretical vocabularies, to trace the emergence of classed thought, feeling and formation. As Picasso observed: ‘All finished paintings are dead paintings’! Maybe all tidy ideas are dead ideas by analogy.

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