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**What's Class Got to Do With It?<sup>i</sup>**  
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Drawing on my own experience as a working-class academic and my research in this area for over 40 years, as well as that of working-class students in the present, I discuss how the experience for working-class students in elite universities still includes many aspects of classism, such as shaming, leaving behind one's community, loyalty, lack of confidence and feelings of (un)belonging, even when those students can, and do, do very well indeed and even when policies are apparently in place to support them.

With class not being a protected characteristic in the 2010 UK Equality Act legislation(<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>) issues of classism tend to be ignored and relegated to the Widening Participation agenda, where the serious issues of classism, such as those set out above, tend not to be engaged with at all. We need to understand how this situation of the eliding and effacing of class has arisen and what needs to be done to confront it. My paper goes on to explore the possibility of the centrality of working-class academics in the critique of logocentrism within the academy and the possibility of exploring an ecology of classed relations. The paper asks how a different understanding of class as it is currently lived might help us in engaging with working-class students in higher education today and in the future.

You kill me with your gentle oppression

The subtle insinuation

Working itself inside my mind

Its lines flicker softly

You cannot know how I got here

and the incarcerating pain of survival.

Try harder

Keep going

You tell me that was quite good but we still need

more effort

(Didn't she do well, opening lyrics: Valerie Walkerdine)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHxwTYZX2P4>

Introduction

I have been aware for some time that working-class research students in my Russell Group university, were finding things tough. They often talked to me about this topic as they struggled to engage with issues of class in their own research. Although the university I work in is in a city, it is on the edge of areas of considerable poverty relating to the loss of work and heavy industry. On one level, I was thankful that these students were receiving PhD funding for work that I consider vital and are pursuing this and are thus able to be open about class. Although they are a tiny minority amongst a vast sea of middle class students, nevertheless they do exist. This is in sharp contrast to my own PhD 40 years ago when I knew no other working-class students. However, incidents have occurred and sentiments expressed that have shocked me and made me very angry about the classism experienced by these students.

The first incident I report concerns a student who wished to transfer from a post- 92 university<sup>ii</sup> to ours for their final undergraduate year, having been predicted a 1<sup>st</sup> in their degree. He had an interview but on arrival at the lecturer's door, received what he described as a shocked response to his appearance – rugby player, tattoos, strong local working- class accent. He was told 'we don't usually see people who look like you around here'. At this point, the student was understandably ready to go. On learning how well the student was doing on his course, the lecturer tried to backtrack but it was too late. The student left. It is to his enduring credit that the student tried again having obtained his first, to enquire about a PhD. I wouldn't have blamed him at all if he had never ever wanted to enter this university again. And I am humbled that he did.

I was so angry on hearing this story that such things were still happening. – they were part of my own experience when the numbers of working-class students in higher education were very small, but even with so many more students from the working class,

still micro-aggressions such as the response to class markers such as a particular combination of tattoos, the physique of a rugby player and a specific accent were enough to make a comment and mark negative difference. As one of the participants in previous research made clear, class is something that 'you can spot a mile off' (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001). Sadly, this incident was not the only one I heard about and I know from other research students, how much they struggled (some talented students walking out) with the inherent and thoughtless classism of the university, its culture, snobbery and the self-assurance of middle class students and academics, schooled in easy self-promotion. Of course definitions of class vary considerably, from Marx's notions of the proletariat and bourgeoisie (Bottomore, 1983) differentiated by the relation to the mode of production, through Weber's theories of stratification (Giddens, 1971) but also class as practised in technologies of population management. From, (in the UK), Charles Booth's cartographies of poverty with his classification systems (Booth, 1902/3), through to the Registrar General's System of Classification based on Father's Occupation (Carr-Hill and Pritchard, 1992) through to current techniques built on principles of market research. (e.g. Ipsos, 2009).

### Earlier trajectories

When I went on to higher education at the age of 18 in 1965, only 13% of UK 18 year olds made that journey, despite the fact that students like me profited from the Robbins Report (1963) in the UK which led to the expansion of higher education to cater for the post-war baby boom and the market need to supply professionals for the burgeoning welfare system with its particular gendered appeal to working-class young women. Indeed, it is this expansion, plus the provision of student grants for tuition and living costs that allowed people like me to go on to higher education at all. I was the daughter of a

Registrar General's Grade D semi-skilled manual worker father but who was offered a full grant because, by the time I went to higher education, my mother was a widow.

Without this financial provision, it would have been impossible for me to go.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the further I went in higher education the fewer working-class students I encountered. I think it is fair to say that in 1972 when I began my own PhD I knew no other working-class PhD students and certainly no working-class women students. I did not knowingly, in fact, meet any others until into my career as an academic and then few. The sense of fear, shame, imposterhood and feeling that at any moment I would be found out cannot be overstated. Indeed, when I made a documentary in 1989, called 'Didn't she do well? (Working Pictures, 1991), about a small group of working -class women who had gone on to higher education slightly later than me, the issues that emerged included all of those experiences plus a strong sense of not knowing what? or who one was after having experienced the limits of one's previous taken for granted world. As one participant tells us, 'I know who I am in that place, I know who I am in that [other] place, but I don't know who to be, just for me'. The sense of a 'just- for-me place', a place in which a secure identity is assumed, was not possible at that time for this woman. Indeed myself as director, as well as those in front of that camera, could identify with that experience. In my own case, I felt as though I had to be almost a different person in each classed place – dress differently, speak differently, behave differently – there simply was no stable place or easy way to cross the divide, producing the constant instability of an incessant backwards forwards movement. Education, it seemed, gave us so much but it also took so much away, and produced a horrible sense of alienation from the environment of our growing up. Neither any longer unproblematically belonging where we came from, we also did not feel a secure sense of belonging in the new place

where thoughtless assumptions about us were often the norm and pointed questions about our origins often asked.

### The current situation

The situation described above is not exactly the same as that in which my current working- class research students find themselves. They are the product of an expansion of higher education that was proposed in the UK 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/13/contents>). So, now that 50% of 18 year olds go on to higher education, of course there is still a strong class divide but it is structured and played out across institutional types and manifest in the respective differentiated associated value of their degrees. (Reay et al, 2010; Ball, et al, 2002, Friedman et al, 2015). However, if the sense of isolation is not quite as bad as it was for my generation, particularly for working- class young people attending less elite universities (usually described as post 1992 in The UK because that is the date when polytechnics and some colleges became universities), since working-class young people, especially in those institutions, are likely to find substantial numbers of similarly positioned young people. but even so, the possibility of entering post-graduate elite training or high status work, is remote (Friedman et al, 2015 op cit). In addition, the ending of grants and the introduction of tuition fees for undergraduate degrees in England (different in Wales and Scotland) complicated the push to open out higher education opportunities and placed further huge pressures on working -class students. Yet, hugely talented (and funded) working-class research students still, it seems, can experience all the same problems described above that plagued me 40 years before.

Has nothing been learned about classism, about exclusion, shaming and the easy assumptions of class privilege? Why has the larger number of academics from the

working-class not made some kind of significant difference? And why is so much important talent being wasted (Friedman and Laurison, 2019)? Despite my understanding of class in the academy, I am still shocked at how much the students suffered, how totally absent any formal recognition of this is and how little support is given to such students. For example, to whom could I even report a classist incident in the university? Equality and diversity provision does not recognise class as a salient form of disadvantage, meaning that there is no formal mechanism to even acknowledge it or interpret it.

### Class as a (non) Protected Characteristic

Ever since the 2010 Equality Act in the UK (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010>), which protects sex, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion/belief, disability, age, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership; and pregnancy and maternity,

making it an offence to discriminate on these grounds, I have seen calls for the recognition of class as a protected characteristic (e.g. Bell, 2019). As Chachamu (2017) demonstrates, concepts of equality and diversity as recognised in British universities after 2010, have a long history leading on from work in the post-2<sup>nd</sup> world war period on fascism and 1960s work arising from Black Power and Civil Rights protests. This early work aimed to understand the possibility of using education and training as methods for ending discrimination. While class discrimination has existed from the inception of class itself as a mode of classification and categorisation, it has never been legally recognised in the ways that racism and sexism have been in a different set of historical circumstances. Indeed, it could be argued that class discrimination is endemic because sanctioned and condoned through a system of liberal regulation that naturalised the bourgeois subject while pathologising and regulating other ways of being (Walkerdine, Henriques et al, 1984). I have argued that such pathologisation has

intensified under neoliberalism (Walkerdine, 2019a and b), so that bourgeois sentiments about the working class have moved from romantic idealisations of heroism and designations such as the ‘salt of the earth’, while always finding the working class politically lacking, to designations of a pathological individual who at worst is responsible for all the current social ills and divisions, such as poverty, Brexit for example (Walkerdine, 2019c). Thus, I doubt that the political will exists to recognise, much less tackle, the deep-seated, endemic class discrimination that exists within Britain.

Thus, while the numbers of working-class students have increased exponentially <sup>iii</sup> given the huge increase in the student population since my own time, class divisions now exist within a highly differentiated higher education sector between the parallel universes of elite and non-elite universities. While the marketisation of higher education in the UK offers a discourse of ‘choice’, thus apparently offering the possibility of attending any institution to any potential student, this itself occludes the complex architecture of exclusion, involving school facilities, catchment areas, poverty, employment patterns and many other issues, often presented via a discourse of merit, so that only those so-called outstanding students who merit university via high grades, are deemed worthy. We can also understand a call for the return of selection within secondary education within this framework, as well as the meritocratic vision of social mobility from the UK’s Sutton Trust (<https://www.suttontrust.com> )

In the 1980s, Walkerdine and Lucey (1985) argued there was a huge class divide in expectations of and the possibility for high working-class attainment within a primary and secondary education system deeply divided by money and class (Reay, 2018). We might also point to university policies in the present moment in the UK that are described as ‘Widening Participation’, usually glossed as attempts to bring about a positive relation between communities with a low percentage of young people and adults participating in



higher education. Until 2019, this was the remit of the Higher Education Funding Council as below:

“The Higher Education Funding Council for England has issued targeting guidelines; these stress that resources should be targeted at learners with the potential to benefit from higher education who come from under-represented communities:

... these learners are from lower socio-economic groups (groups 4-8 in the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, NS-SEC), and those from disadvantaged backgrounds who live in areas of relative deprivation where participation in HE is low... we expect that few will have parents or carers who have themselves had experience of HE...it is appropriate that we should prioritise learners whose parents/carers do not have that experience.” [Introduction to Widening Participation \(nd\)](#)

This agenda has been most recently implemented in England via the HEFCE Widening Participation Strategy (HEFCE, 2006) with the explicit aim of getting more such students into elite universities. However, since 2019 HEFCE and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) no longer exist and have been replaced by the Office for Students (OFS). In the new framework, universities are obliged to formulate a plan for widening participation and present this to the OFS. It can be noted that this latest iteration, presented below, follows the 2010 Act, thus, not including any aspect of class, but then adds, specifically (only?) for 2019/20 that this can include students of what is described as ‘low socioeconomic status’. Its inclusion only for one year is certainly a matter for considerable concern because there now appears to be competition for funding in relation to other aspects of discrimination, not present in the HEFCE approach.

## Underrepresented groups

Throughout this guidance we refer to ‘underrepresented groups’ as a general term. We use this term, which is identified as the focus of the access and participation plans within the governing regulations (section 32 of HERA and section 2 of the Higher Education (Access and Participation Plans) (England) Regulations 2018<sup>1</sup>) to include all groups of potential or current students where we can identify gaps in equality of opportunity in different parts of the student lifecycle. In determining the groups falling within definition, we have given due regard to students who share particular characteristics that are protected under the Equality Act 2010<sup>2</sup>.

For 2019-20 access and participation plans, we consider underrepresented groups of students to include students who share the following particular characteristics where data shows gaps in equality of opportunity in relation to access, success and/or progression:

- students from areas of low higher education participation, low household income and/or low socioeconomic status
- students of particular ethnicities
- mature students
- disabled students

[https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1093/ofs2018\\_03.pdf](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1093/ofs2018_03.pdf)

However, even such work with schools and in communities seems often to bear the mark of classism, with one university calling its programme ‘Step Up’. These programmes in the main do not appear to seriously address class discrimination nor the issues facing working-class young people and communities in relation to higher education (Evans, 2009). It is therefore difficult to understand this access agenda as little more than ‘window dressing’ that can be glowingly presented on university websites while failing to even engage with existing class discrimination within institutions. Not only do present working-class students speak of this, as in the example of the rugby player with which I began the paper, but even the thoughtless application of such policies can fail to engage with the situation on the ground for students and potential students from the working class, as for example in the offering of a ‘widening participation’ fees-only PhD scholarship, while refusing to address the fact that removing fees only reduces one barrier. Failing to offer subsistence produces a situation of desperation and financial

struggle for those who 'succeed' in obtaining a scholarship. It is this kind of thoughtlessness or deliberate occlusion that fails to properly address discrimination. Recently, Squire (2019) has discussed the introduction in some elite UK universities of working class student officers in student unions as part of the Widening Participation agenda. For example, St Hilda's College in Oxford established the position of a 'working class liberation officer' in 2016, though what or who was being liberated from what is unclear. Squire points out that different universities chose different titles, not all involving the term 'working class'. Her discussion of students who occupied these roles demonstrates their difficulties in some cases in taking on a working class identity and in establishing a constituency of students when these were largely hidden with class an unrecognised category.<sup>iv</sup>.

Thus, on one level, we have far more apparent access to higher education for working class students than in my day but yet many of the same issues arising in another form and context.

During my late 20s after the end of my PhD, I helped set up a journal, called *Ideology and Consciousness* to explore the work that was emerging on the Left and within feminism around subjectivity. That work was primarily influenced by developments in structuralism and later post-structuralism, as in the work of Althusser, Lacan and later Foucault. During this time, I became more aware of debates on the Left about ideology and about the discursive (Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess. Especially their journal, *Theoretical Practice*). Class was rarely discussed within these circles but if it was, it was through the lens of ideology (in this case mostly Althusser, 1976, but also, via Cultural Studies, Gramsci via Stuart Hall (1988) (see the work from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Turner, 2002). Marxist approaches, often very heavily sectarian at the

time, linked class to the ownership of the means of production, but the concept of ideology from a sense of 'ruling ideas' on the one hand to a 'camera obscura' which turns the image on reality on its head, producing a distorted and false image, (Marx, *The German Ideology*) or 'ideological state apparatuses' (Althusser, 1975) on the other, always presented both a possibility for a working class (usually portrayed as 'workers', often assumed implicitly to be male manual workers) to make a revolution, and yet at the same time there was always implied failure to be able to 'see' outside the confines of ideology. It did not escape me that it was the working class who were supposed to act but the middle class who were able, frustratingly to 'see' what was needed to be done, hence their endless agitation within the working class for them to act. I remember getting so angry with this middle class intellectual statement of frustrated superiority, in which the working class never seemed to act in the correct (i.e. radical) way and when I read Andre Gorz (1982, see also Walkerdine and Ringrose, 2006) berating working-class people for wanting consumer goods (rather than revolution) that I wrote angrily about whether he would rather my mother bent over a dolly tub to do her washing or at least hurt herself less with a washing machine. I felt confronted by what I experienced as a dangerous over-evaluation of working-class heroes – correctly as it turned out because I knew how easily such over-evaluation could turn into its opposite. Recent history has demonstrated exactly that. On the other hand, it was difficult to glean anything about working-class women and girls at all in the sense that the working class was often assumed to refer to male manual workers. Indeed, I was once berated at a conference by a very upper-class man for daring to imagine that I could work on class. To which he added as an afterthought oh yes – 'hidden injuries' – a reference to Sennett and Cobb's (1972) 'Hidden Injuries of class', which referred to the hidden pain of upward mobility.

My presentation of this is somewhat laboured because I wanted to demonstrate the ways in which class was thought about on the academic Left and to show that, in a sense working-class experience, was taken to be irrelevant in a context in which only getting beyond ideology (if that were possible pace Althusser, 1975) and into action was relevant and in which everyday life and femininity seemed never to get a look-in.<sup>v</sup> Indeed, within feminism, gender was seen as separate from, and pitted against, class (Phillips, 1987).

This led me to attempt to bring together my background of work on subjectivity with attention to the everyday life of class, paying attention to the lives of working-class girls and women. Much work has been undertaken by working-class women academics on the experience both of growing up working class at a particular historical period and the struggles to find a place within the academy without feeling shame and exclusion and without 'passing' as middle class (Kuhn, 1995; Ussher, 1996; Dews and Leste Law (1995), Zymroczek and Mahony (1997), Hey, 2003; Steedman, 1986). As one of the participants in my documentary, *Didn't she do well?* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQtVdu0\\_-vg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQtVdu0_-vg)) states, she finds straddling the divide between being working class and an academic almost impossible and so tries to bridge it by mostly socialising with other working-class academics who can also engage with the persona of the academic who neither fits any longer in the working class nor in the middle class.

Yet this experience, while still existing in some form, is not exactly the same as being a student in the present. For example Morgan (2015) reports that the working-class women students that she interviewed within post-92 universities in Wales felt relatively at home because there were so many others like them (even if they struggled financially and with family responsibilities), but students in elite Welsh universities had a much less comfortable time. They were constantly told that being in a Russell Group university was

best, yet often felt this very status rendered them particularly alone and always on the edge of uncertainty and of being shamed. The struggle to exist both in the academy and in a working-class community is still as painful for many of our working-class students as it ever was. And indeed, there will be as many strategies to cope with this as there are students: from forms of 'passing'; to keeping one's head down for fear of losing one's place; to vocal critique. So, I would like to address what we might think of as the abiding deeper and more persistent aspects of classism within the academy

### Elite knowledges and the Logos

Just as has been addressed in relation to colonial knowledges and patriarchal forms of knowing (in post-colonial critique and activism and the inception and struggle for women's, gender, queer and trans studies), the academy as it currently stands, is the bastion of classed knowledge. The forms of knowledge represented by the university tend to abstraction and universalisation, which itself can be related to the role of all forms of scientific knowledge in forms of population governance since the inception of liberalism, as Foucault has demonstrated (Henriques et al, 1984). Forms of academic writing are policed through peer review and publication gatekeeping, a situation which has only increased exponentially since the advent of competitive state funding regimes, such as the Research Excellence Framework (<https://www.ref.ac.uk>) in the UK, leading to daily policing of what and how much is published where, with university funding depending on the outcome. In my own field of social sciences, this involves a system of policing in which a paper is judged via notions of 'rigour' and a marked tendency towards positivism and empiricism elaborate?. A system of ranking by numbers of stars given by peers to peers tends to reward certain notions of what excellence is. Thus elite universities now

demand a high star ranking from academics together with publication in a highly ranked journal, sometimes at least synonymous with conservatism.

It can be argued of course that such a system of valuation simply builds on a certain economic context, upon the production of elite knowledges that have existed since the inception of the university. And indeed, the participation of non-elites in higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon, historically speaking. The production of knowledge has been by and large the province of the upper and then middle classes with money and time on their hands. Foucault (1979), among others, argued that such knowledges became enshrined in the move from sovereign to disciplinary power that is the rise of disciplines and disciplining and management of populations. It was the middle class who were marshalled into delivering this, through the rise of the professions and those same professionals who now mourn the precarisation of their position and the rise of an apparently Right-leaning working class (Walkerdine, 2019a).

Clearly, on one level, it is possible to produce a specific knowledge base that challenges dominant readings from the position of the working-class academic. While we could argue that such work already exists within universities (I cited the work of working-class women academics earlier in the paper), I think it is possible to argue that such a position is hardly promoted or understood as a specific type of work, as say, in the field of anti-colonial or Subaltern work, which is usually taken as focusing on accounts from below and as being anti-essentialist. My aim here then is to suggest that working-class academics<sup>vi</sup> and thus the working-class students they teach, have a vital role in developing what we might term a turn to working-class knowledges<sup>vii</sup>.

The specificity of Working- Class Other knowledges

I argue that working-class students and academics have a really important place in the academy precisely because we can potentially offer both an understanding of othering and discrimination but can also potentially use the duality of places we inhabit – both within and outside the academy to produce working-class knowledges. While there is no shortage of research ON the working class, the majority of it is not undertaken from someone with at least some aspect of insider-status. Just as one could argue that it would be difficult for a colonial elite to offer subaltern knowledge (instead of their own accounts of their experience of colonisation), so it must be equally the case in relation to class.

As Joanna Ryan (2017) argues, accounts by middle-class people of their own subjectivity and situation as classed are virtually non-existent, even though class is a relational concept that requires a binary to make it function. Yet working-class people are always asked to explain themselves to academics and their stories mapped if not pathologized as objects of inquiry, known rather than knowers. Within the social sciences at least, academics can appear to stand outside class by producing generalised descriptions of phenomena, such as working-class experiences of paid work or mothering practices, for example. Thus producing Other knowledges requires the production of counter-histories and narratives which usually demand specificity and historicity and not generalisation.

When I made my documentary so many years ago, my experience of presenting it at conferences and other meetings was that there was some attempt to deny the specificity of the working-class participants' experience by claiming that such experiences were common to all women who had gone through higher education. While clearly, if my analysis of the university production of the Logos has any validity, then of course it has been well-argued that it also excludes the feminine, but it also produced in this academic the experience of being invisibilised. What seemed glaringly obvious to the women who participated in the film, somehow was rendered invisible so that all women could be seen



to share the experience of growing up. Thus, I argue that what is needed is nothing less than a different form of working-class study that recognises and works with and counter to established elite classed knowledges.

What might this look like? The role of working-class academics in the production of working -class studies.

While my thoughts here are speculative, I want to attempt to sketch out some possible ways of moving forward that can then be addressed and discussed with and between working-class academics and students. The experience of class and being classed is my starting point for this exploration. This, of course, would apply equally to the middle and upper classes with respect to their relationship with other classes. I am wanting to challenge the Logos through the recognition of class as an ecological and specific concept that applies differently across different ecological, historical and cultural spaces. While there are shared experiences across locations and times which have to do with shared work, for example, the present context alone has taught us that de-industrialised working -class communities in England and Wales tended to vote to leave the European Union (e.g. Walkerdine, 2019; McKenzie, 2017) but voted remain in Scotland and Northern Ireland. In that sense then, my starting point is specificity, which may produce ways of bringing people together but only if we understand how classed experience differs where it differs. Thus, my starting point is not ideology or any sense of mystification of working-class people by 'the ruling class'. This accords no sense of ownership of experience if that experience is immediately removed via an appeal to a greater force. While I do support an understanding of the central importance of practices of regulation, management and normalisation within liberal governance, it is the possibility of both experiencing these and being able to imagine otherwise and to understand otherwise which I take to be the

central role of the working class academic. Thus, I suggest that it is possible to combine an understanding of historical and cultural specificity with an engagement with lives in the present.

For many years, given the academic concerns of the time, I used Althusserian, Lacanian and Foucauldian approaches to understand classed regulation and governance. However, after deploying these approaches for many years, my work attempted to understand subjectivity as 'more than the sum total of positions in discourse since birth' (Henriques et al, 1984). It was the multiplicity of positions and the complexities, conflicts and contradictions of experience, memory and daily life that I was trying to understand and engage with. I was confronted often in fieldwork and when understanding practices and discourses, with the complexities of my own response and my own history, so, not knowing what else to do, I began to incorporate this.

I became familiar with the romantic middle-class view of the heroic manual worker, but noted that if anything was said about working-class women, they were often taken to be a conservative force. When confronted with these views and trying desperately to fit in to the new middle-class academic world I was beginning to inhabit, I felt very put down by these designations, which appeared to suggest that I was not properly working-class. I remember middle-class academics proclaiming that they had been in the young Communists at 16 or had gone to an ashram at 18. All I could say was that I had been in the Girl Guides (Walkerdine, 1985)! Encountering similar sentiments within second wave feminism, I also saw that working-class women were often criticised for being too 'feminine'. I, for example, was once roundly criticised for wearing lipstick but I could never understand at that historical moment why it was acceptable to appropriate workmen's dungarees as was the fashion at the time.

It is out of those confusions, shame and anger that I began to try to work on working-class girls' and women's experiences, including my own, in order to explore the complexities of classed subjectivities and my own complex transitions into the academy. While this made me feel better, it also at times made me as frightened as it did angry. It is out of that trajectory that I am concerned with experience and specificity but also with the complexities of subjectivity. I have found the recent interest in affect within the humanities and social sciences (e.g. Blackman and Venn, 2010; Clough and Halley, 2007) very helpful in allowing the development of that work trajectory as it allows us to engage with sensation, feeling, perception as it circulates across spaces, links and divides people, crosses locations and includes non-human entities. More than anything it gives me permission to work with what I feel in a space, in an encounter, on reading. This is not because I feel that my feelings are any more valid than anyone else's on one level, but because it is the only way I know to hear and to honour my engagement with what I am being told, hearing, seeing, sensing. Of course, I would welcome the engagement of other classed researchers to work in a similar way, both with their own class and with their experience of other classes. I would like to hear what I hear in conversations at other times, which is the anger, disdain, pathologisation which litters conversations, but I have yet to find anyone brave enough to offer such an important service (Ryan 2017). Rather, this is much more likely to be translated into a generalised account or theory.

It is for this reason, that I argue that specificity is crucial. If universalisation and generalisation are the product of an attempt that comes from a particular social position, this can only be countered by specificity. I am therefore proposing a working-class mode of research from which to produce counter-narratives. It is this, which, for me, which is a specific task for working-class students and academics, whether it be in countering pathologising assumptions or reading research and policy in a different way (Medhurst,

2000). In that sense, this mode of working is also potentially profoundly ecological in that it posits this mode of working as the production of an ecology rather than a grand theory. In Bateson's (1972) classic *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, we find the crucial relatedness and embeddedness of ecological thinking.<sup>viii</sup> So, when Helen Lucey and I re-read transcripts taken from a study of 4-year old girls and their mothers by Barbara Tizard and Martin Hughes (1984), we had a different reading of classed relations (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1985). In the practice of reading, we circled through many emotions, but very often anger and sometimes envy of the taken-for-granted privilege of middle-class families. Where Tizard and Hughes had been keen to undertake a Labovian (Labov, 1973) reading of working-class children's linguistic competence to counter a reading of linguistic deprivation current at that time, we kept noticing class differences in practices and the current at that time normalisation of mothering as informal pedagogy, with the consequent pathologisation of its absence in working-class homes. Yet, we also noticed that different kinds of classed lessons were being learned in the middle-class and working-class homes. For example, a middle-class girl puzzles about why a window cleaner cleaning their windows, should be paid for his work. Her mother replies that he has to buy beer. Yet, by comparison, a working-class girl asks her mother for new slippers and is given a forceful lesson in the relation between work, money and goods. When she asks for the slippers for Xmas when her father has been paid, she is told in no uncertain terms that her father earns money for his labour and that the first priority is to keep the roof over their heads. Any idea that it is possible to just want something and thus to get it, is firmly squashed. So one girl is taught that workers only need to be paid to buy fripperies like beer, while the other is taught how unlikely it is to be able to buy what you want<sup>ix</sup> and how money is earned through hard labour.

As I reread the transcripts again for a fellowship (Leverhulme 2012-15), I recognised that this distinction occurs again and again in the data. The simple assumption that there is enough money to do what one wants is present in so many instances of middle-class life from age 4 to 21. This promotes a sense of the need to follow one's interests in an unproblematic move to higher education that is far less present for the working-class girls, most of whom do not go on to higher education. Thus, a widely differing understanding of personhood and possibility is routinely constituted.

We might consider also in this respect, the significance of the difference between researching on and researching with (Walkerdine, 2016). While much is made of participatory and co-produced research, there is a question of how one works with and on what basis. If we take to heart bell hooks' statement (hooks, 1990 cited in Walkerdine, 2016) that being invited in is absolutely central and always fraught and complex, then this might provide a starting point.

“Silenced. We fear those who speak about us and do not speak with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know that the forces that silence us because they never want us to speak, differ from the forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in the voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, and unfilled longing. Only speak your pain.

This is an intervention. A message from the space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators”.

(hooks, 1990, p.343, cited in Walkerdine, 2016).

## Finally

There are, of course many pitfalls for the working-class student and researcher and what is needed certainly requires courage. Yet, at the same time, this provides a space for working-class research which allows for the possibility of pride not shame and of being able uniquely to use one's experience to intervene in the academy. It is for this reason that I claim a particular role for the working-class researcher and for a renewed and long overdue address to an ecology of class. For this important work, many new working - class researchers are needed to join those who already manage to survive within the academy<sup>x</sup>.

No more

I will accept no more

Be sorry no more

Be quiet no more

They will have to hear my story

And they will not dare to say it made me mad

Of course it made me mad

After all

They pathologized my history

No more, no more

My shouts today will be

So loud

My tears drops of pure fire

You will no longer take away

My past

For today I take my life

Into these two hands

I am a time-bomb

And I have started ticking

(Didn't she do well, closing musical sequence, lyrics Valerie Walkerdine)

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<sup>ii</sup> A post 1992 university in the UK is an institution which was formerly a polytechnic or other college that became a university after legislation in 1992.

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<sup>iii</sup> The measurement of this increase has become impossible, because the UK Department of Education has chosen only to measure numbers of 18-19 year olds entering higher education from state versus private schools and between those who received free school meals at school (often used as a marker of poverty) and those without. This has completely occluded the understanding of class in higher education, since many middle class students attended state schools and free school meals mark poverty and not class.

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<sup>iv</sup> Interestingly, former working class student officers at LSE have established a campaigning group, Britain has Class <https://britainhasclass.org/about>

<sup>v</sup> I say this in the knowledge that Edward Thompson did understand the working class as emerging from the experience of certain craftsmen, in his 'The making of the English Working Class' (2013), but at the time I was on the 'discursive' wing of a debate in which it was impossible to talk about experience, a position discussed by Thompson in his polemic against Althusserians – 'The Poverty of Theory' (1978). Also, while the development of British Cultural Studies owed a great deal to the work of Thompson and to two working class male academics, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, this focus on everyday working class life was soon eclipsed by work on ideology in one form or another.

<sup>vi</sup> It could be argued that such a field of 'working class studies' already exists, by the USA based Working Class Studies Association. While this work is really important, it is not equivalent to the field I am proposing here, as it is not at all confined to work by working class academics or studies from below and thus can be understood as including work 'on' the working class as a research object.

<sup>vii</sup> It is important to note here the important role of oral historians and History Workshop in producing working class histories 'from below' though this does not necessarily exactly coincide with the form of work that I am proposing.

<sup>viii</sup> This was particularly important to Guattari (2013) in his *The Three Ecologies* (Walkerline, 2014) in which he argued for a profound relationality in the production of subjectivity, arising out of the affective relationalities of caregiver and infant. But it is the specificities arising as they do within the ecologies of classed relations that concerns me here.

<sup>ix</sup> Hence the popular working class British expressions, such as 'wants never gets' and 'much wants more'.

<sup>x</sup> Middle- class academics are also sorely needed to take part by helping us understand

the relational nature of classed experience from their perspective.