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Afterword

Affective histories and Class Transmission

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It is 2018 and I am sitting in a former Miners' Institute in a small community in the south Wales Valleys. I had been asked to be there by a projectⁱ working on social haunting in order to record the affect in the room and to use that to develop an artistic response. I am caught up in a potent atmosphere of anger, pride and pain that it helps not to have to name but rather to experience. When the aim is to produce an artwork, there is no particular focus on a faithful recording and more on what the febrile atmosphere stirs up in me to enable me to produce a response that attempts to capture what transmits itself to me and then passes through my own affective processes into a visual form. In a way, this is not unlike the process of evenly suspended attentionⁱⁱ that asks therapists, analysts and counsellors to pay careful attention to affective transmission to reflect it back again. I am describing this here because I want to convey something about the importance of what is gained from an understanding of personal, collective and political histories via an engagement with affect. What happened to the people in this particular community through its history of mining and deindustrialisation is well - enough known, but just as important is the well of affects generated and transmitted into the present in this meeting – potent, painful, angry, fierce, proud. In the meeting these are retold in personal stories and memories, in the manner of responses, in tears and anger, in laughter (cf Copestake, this volume) and silence, in bodily dispositions and imaginative choices. My feeling over many years has been that this ephemeral realm, conveyed through atmospheres and bodily dispositions, across historical periods, generations and geographical locations, is as potent for understanding class as any more obvious historical or social facts.

Perhaps this first began because my experience of being brought up in the post war working class in the industrial Midlands felt mostly about an ordinary everyday life that did not feel as though it was populated by the self-conscious radicality that epitomised, for me, the young middle class intellectual Lefties that I found in the 1970s intellectual scene in London. At first, everything seemed to suggest a paucity of the right kind of political experience that left me feeling inadequate to the historic mission that my class was supposed to embody. Here were young middle class leftists talking about joining the Young Communists at 16 or going off to paint in Paris. As I have written elsewhere (Walkerline in Heron (ed)1985), at a similar age, I was in the Girl Guides, widely regarded as a proto-fascist organisation in these circles. It is not as though my family had missed out on its fair share major events, from two world wars, a general strike, a depression, major illness and traumatic events, mixed with family political differences that ranged from a communist uncle to a Tory granny, but it was as though my own history and experience did not fit the model of what was expected of the working class at all. But as time went by, I came to understand such stories of heroes as, as much as anything, projections or fantasies of a class that could only long for change to be undertaken by others, who often seemed to fall short. My memory was filled with small, everyday events – sometimes domestic, sometimes work-related, but it was in those stories and tropes of the everyday, that the relational and intergenerational experience of class was constantly and minutely enacted. And in that everyday, class does not present itself with a capital C, but it is no less powerful as a testimony to help us understand the current politics of class. There were no major arguments, but many little stories, but affect was everywhere in the sense that I came to understand what was happening by the feel of what was going on.

In the 'Third Reich of Dreams' Charlotte Beradt (1985) recounts the collected dreams of people living in Germany before World War 2, whose dreams implicitly prefigure the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, when read from the perspective of what we know now. Similarly, Lotringer (2015) argued that what he called the 'mad literature' of Artaud, Weil, Celine and Bataille can also be understood as embodying the madness and cruelty of the war and Holocaust. Thus, I am trying to establish the central importance of understanding the feeling and affect of class.

Unlike those cultural and political movements that want to mine the everyday of workers' experience for a sign of opposition and resistance (pace work from the 1970s from Cultural Studies of resistance through rituals (Hall and Jefferson, 2006) to the resistance to work documented the Italian Autonomia movement (Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007)), my concern is much more about the small everydayness of affect and affective relations in which wave upon wave of affect becomes a way of engaging with the larger and more momentous issues of the times – an issue raised specifically in the Introduction to this volume. Not to find some revolutionary or indeed reactionary spirit, but to understand the bodies of feeling that connect the experiences of class to one another, that indeed can result in their manipulation through the pervasive use of market monitoring via Cookies and algorithms, but also find their expression where seemingly often least expected by those without an ear to the ground. As so many of the papers in this issue attest to, from a drug taker's embodiment of stigma (Addison), to a complex history of dispossession in the Fens (Jaines), or the creation of a feeling of being at home across complex cultural experiences (Rogaly and Bownik), the affective histories of class can be investigated and related in myriad ways.

Why the affective history of class transmission?

The felt, the unsaid, the unspeakable, the traces of class are passed down generations, although they can mutate in the process and no longer make rational sense yet make some sense in terms of ontological security and sense of belonging. I want to argue that, in the present, with the transformations in the labour market and the loss of most heavy industry at least in the UK, there is no absence of class but a complex situation in which class belonging becomes, in some cases, a memory of an industrial past, combined with experiences of low-waged work, exploitation, economic insecurity, pathologisation of all aspects of being and cultural disdain, as discussed in this volume by Clark as a half-life, Sampson as a haunting and Copestake as the work of laughter. In this context and given the enormous use of affect via algorithms within marketing, social media and politics (Veryard, 2022), the organisation of affect and affective transmission in relation to affect seems of vital importance.

There is a tradition of work within the social sciences stretching back to the 1960s, which does explore psychosocial aspects of classed experience using psychoanalysis (eg. Sennett and Cobb (1972), *Hidden Injuries of Class*; Lilian Rubin (1977), *Worlds of Pain*; Robert Coles (2003), *Children of Crisis*) and a longer clinical tradition of the exploration of intergenerational transmission of trauma (what Clark refers to as the toxic half-life of deindustrialisation) in families and communities (Yehuda and Lehrer, 2018, see also a summary in Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). However, I have not yet come across any work that refers to the affective transmission of class itself as an object of research but this volume itself acts as a way of beginning to think through what this might look like. However, as forerunners we might also point to the work of post-war working class academics, such as Raymond Williams and his *structures of feeling* (Williams, 1961) and

Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* (Hoggart, 1957). We can also cite here the tradition of the sociology of class begun by Bourdieu (1986).

The discursive turn

I mentioned the context of the 1970s Left in my introduction. This is the context in which I became an academic and was very influenced by what has become known as the turn to discourse, but we can also understand it as a move to take on board developments within continental Marxism, especially Althusser (and including his use of Lacan) and then moving from structuralism to post-structuralism via Foucault. Althusser (1975) placed almost all attention on ideology via his notion of ideological state apparatuses and their role in producing subjects interpellated into positions given by the state. He backed this with a use of Lacan and the importance of the Symbolic Order (Nobus, 2017) and the idea that the economy determined but only in the last instance – a critique of what was often termed 'economism' or 'economic determinism' at that point (Adlam et al, 1976; Henriques et al, 1984). A huge turn to cultural analysis, especially media systems of signification and using psychoanalysis, ensued, followed by a major interest in Foucault. As I understand it, the context for this was, on the one hand the wartime support of sections of the working class for fascism (Gramsci) but also, in France, the so-called failure of the workers to join the students in May 1968 (Reynolds, 2008) and also, further back opposition to the Communist Party in some Eastern European countries, such as Hungary in 1956, with the installation of oppressive regimes.

However, we might also note that the discursive turn, especially the work of Foucault, related to, and in some cases prefigured, the turn away from manufacturing capital and towards finance capital in countries like the UK and USA, via the elections of Reagan and Thatcher. Foucault minutely documented and analysed the discourses and practices of

liberal governance and the growing patterns of self-regulation that demonstrated the shift to the complex everyday organisation of power. At this very moment, the loss of heavy industry to the Pacific Rim, signalled moves which profoundly affected the lives of working class people, redefining work and livelihoods, for what has now been over 40 years (pace Clark, this volume). Indeed, the gradual privatisation (or quasi privatisation) of public assets and the introduction of neoliberalism in every area of life, did not remove class but profoundly altered it, as the Introduction to this volume makes clear. How many cultural analyses engaged with practices of consumption, how many began to ignore production? Sometimes from the perspective of today, it may feel like a sick joke, but some of this work did begin to understand the changing nature of work, for example in shops, selling lifestyles and identities. For what has been produced over the prolonged period of neo-liberal and globalist ascendancy is a situation where the standard of living, the lifestyle and social status of the western middle class, has been sustained by cheap consumer goods from China; cheap raw materials particularly oil, gas and food from Eastern Europe and the de-industrialisation and concurrent attempted destruction of working class communities in the West itself.

For this is a moment that has witnessed the neglect of class, the pathologisation and demonisation of the working class and the corresponding lack of empathy towards the fate of fellow citizens, a situation required for the working class to become utterly marginalised and dispossessed within Western national states.

But the hardships that surrounded me as a child, real as they were, are nothing in comparison to the state of the working class and poor generally that exists nowadays throughout western Europe. Where there were strong trade unions there are now few, where once they had a political party that at least tried to represent them they now have nothing of the sort, where they had an apprenticeship system and the prospect of jobs in

shipyards, mines and factories now they are reduced to zero hour contracts and the servitude and loneliness of the gig economy. The British working class are isolated geographically, excluded from participation in social activities and social life, are denied services ranging from doctors to simple things like shops (Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012, Studdert and Walkerdine, 2016), while all the time being bombarded with unaffordable possibilities for consumption and are mocked (Addison, Introduction, this volume) on television in so-called comedy shows like 'Little Britain' and are generally absent from cultural and public life.

In this context the need for an affective understanding of class becomes even more pressing because, in the absence of even many places to work together or to socialise together, the on-line production of 'feeling' has never been so minutely monitored. We ignore this aspect of our lives at our peril.

So, the affective approach to class must not simply produce a cultural approach to class but needs to take forward the ways in which the very experience of exploitation and classism or of class difference and markers of class erupts into the everyday of our lives but erupts into the everyday or is buried in silence unable to be spoken, but equally how that experience is felt across classes. (see Clark, Addison, Copestake, Watt this volume, for example). One example of this in terms of classism is Ronald Frazer's memoir, *In search of a past* (Frazer, 1984) in which he returns to the country house in which he grew up to interview the former servants, including his nanny. One of the marked issues that emerged for me as a reader was the difference between the quasi-familial feelings he had for the servants but their feelings for him were always cross-cut by their memory of the

difficult conditions of work that they endured and the huge gulf between them and their employers, his parents, who did not work, but whose leisure had to be serviced.

Discursive to affective practices

In the early work carried out by my colleagues and myself in the journal *Ideology and Consciousness* (Adlam et al, 1976) and in the joint volume, *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al, 1984) (themselves part of the discursive turn), we proposed that the discursive was organised into practices through which in the day to day world of governmentality, subjectification could be produced. Thus, within this context, practices were the place for the organisation of regulation through positioning in discourse. What struck me when conducting fieldwork for a project in a former steel community in South Wales in the in the first decade of the 21st century, was that there was the very clear formal and informal organisation of affect, in the ways that certain ways of being and doing things served to keep the community together. I began to call these affective practices. The role of these practices in keeping the community as 'one big family (according to inhabitants – not as a metaphor, but literally by always providing family-type support services for other families in the community) is not to be minimised. Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) contains many examples, but I cite a few examples here. On a day-to-day level, the rows of terraced houses facilitated talking over the garden fence across the row. Washing tended always to be done on the same day across households and many participants reported that this created a space for talking and sharing. During the Works era, there were numerous markers of collectivity, from times for work, sounds of feet on the pavements at this time, bells and hooters marking times of the day and the ever-present furnace-flame. People also explained that there were certain personal and family problems that were never aired outside the family on the

understanding that everyone faced problems and therefore the way to keep the community together was to not burden others in order to protect the shared communal space. People were also reluctant to work in other nearby communities as they said that each community looked after its own. At a more profound level, we posited the idea of a community skin, following the work of Didier Anzieu (1999, 2016) on the skin ego. This approach posits the idea of a second affective skin that protects communities already suffering by producing a sense of a community skin which protects the fragile community body . Some of these issues and approaches are taken up within this volume by, for example, Watt, Clark, Copestake, Sampson and the Introduction. While this is only one idea and one concept used as an explanation in this particular circumstance, I want to suggest that when we begin to explore the affective practices of class, we can begin to explore the central significance of affect in organised community responses, family practices and biographical and inherited ways of doing things that carry a strong affective charge and thus act as subtle means of class transmission, as many papers in this volume begin to do.

Why is this important?

In his foreword Satnam Virdee presents an important analysis of the intersection of class and race, understood historically. The history of capitalism has always been a history of conquest and colonisation, looting and enslavement, from the 16th century onwards. In this history, what becomes social class, does not enter the scene in the form articulated by Marx, until the industrial revolution in Britain. Thus, the intertwined history of class, race and capitalism is complex and cannot simply be equated with the recent period from the 19th century onward. However, understanding more of this history is essential if we are to engage with the complex affective relations which interweave with and cross class

ethnic and racial relations and practices are performed and the alliances and antagonisms produced across specific times and cultural locations. I suggest that we urgently need to understand this in order to grapple with the present political conjuncture without invoking over-simplistic characterisations.

In one town in the south Wales Valleys in the early noughties, it was reported that Polish migrants were taking the jobs of Welsh workers. The company employing the migrant workers, deliberately set up accommodation that involved hotbedding (ie people sleeping in shifts in the same bed) in order allow migrants to take the poorly paid work, thus undercutting then current wages. This produced considerable enmity, but I suggest that we understand nothing if we fail to explore the conditions producing the need of the Polish workers to move and their willingness to work in poor conditions for low pay and the Welsh workers' desire to defend their wages. Thus, we see that the animosity itself is directly produced by the company policy of low wages, itself made possible through European Union free movement of labour practices that themselves depend on a globalist neoliberalism. This issue is dealt with in the volume in Lulle's account of Latvian migrants in the UK. Thus, I argue that our work must operate on different registers at once – the economic and political but also the production via this of complex feelings and affective practices of togetherness and antagonism, discussed in different ways throughout the volume.

This is the organisation of affect as it crosses historical and biographical time. Although we are used to oral and working class and popular histories, these tend to use oral testimony, which has its important place, but leaves us short of the more subtle and complex aspects of being that can be transmitted in subtle and not so subtle ways.

I am reminded of research undertaken in Australia in the early 2000s (Walkerdine and Bansel, 2011) about workers in the new economy. I remember one interview of a man, now well-off, who had migrated with his family as a child from poverty in the UK on the £10 passage. He told of how he always now had to have a fridge full of fizzy drinks – as a child these were well beyond the means of his family, but the presence of the drinks acted as a way of making sure that this poverty would be kept at bay. In other words, I take this example as an indication that the fear and anxiety over the consequences of poverty was not removed by a good income in the new country but was a spectre that always haunted him. Such a haunting (see Simpson in this issue) does not simply disappear but needs to be understood as an affective process in the present, with its own subtle consequences. These are potent and I get a strong sense of them through many of the papers (Jaines, Lulle, Clark, Watt, Copestake, for example). These papers and my own work also demonstrate the specificity of affective practices of transmission relating to particular work practices in specific geographical areas. So, could we speak of an ecology of classed affect that leaves its traces across place and through generations?

This is why I want to demonstrate that such aspects of classed transmission may happen even despite an ignorance of their meaning and significance on the part of the actors. What I mean here is that affective practices and affective issues may continue to exist in a generation that does not know to what that affect refers (Simpson, Clark). The large number of studies on the third generation of holocaust survivors (Fossion et al, 2003) clearly demonstrates this. To take a much smaller example, what if the offspring of the £10 Pom who liked his fridge full of soft drinks, also took up his love of soft drinks, knowing that they carried something special without having a clear sense of what that specialness consisted in?

Developing a method of close reading

To explore this issue of complex transmission of what I called 'affective entanglement', further in my own work, I worked on a method for approaching transcript and observational data that I held on a number of families who participated in a study of girls from 4 to 21. This data included notes from observations at 4, interviews and observations at 10 with the young girl's family members and teacher, and interviews at 21 with family members and the 21 year old. In Walkerdine (2022) I worked on a method of close reading of all this material with one working class family. I did this by making a composite narrative from all interviews and observations regardless of who said what when. I was trying to understand something about the daughter, who was bullied badly at school and whose relationships with men from her father to boyfriends, was always very fraught. What emerged from this method of close reading, where I went over the transcripts again and again, was, to me, enlightening. It was possible to relate what different family members said at different times about different people including ancestors and relatives ranging from a grandfather who died in a motor accident to another grandfather who was interned in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, to what we could call turbulence or disturbances in generational affect. Just to give one small example, there was a great deal said by different people at different times about the father, who was described as difficult, remote, preferring to be away from the family and especially women and girls, who recounted the overbearing nature of the women in his family when growing up and the remoteness of his father, who had been interned in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. The daughter found her father very difficult and they fought a lot, but the bullying of the daughter at school could not be explained by the family nor effectively by the school, yet the complex dance of closeness and distance that emerged from the transcripts over many years made clear a kind of disturbance for the

daughter, who was often accused of trying to buy friendship and then being bullied. The transmission of this disturbance of across time and space, across generations and historical events, was not known by the daughter, only experienced. Yet was readily readable from interview material if analysed in this composite manner.

Thus, I am trying to extrapolate from this work to the understanding of the transmission of classed affect, to argue that, in principle, we can understand the affective transmission of classed relations across time and space, and that, understanding this, allows us to engage with issues of huge importance, such as the divides across the UK brought to light by Brexit (Cromby, 2019), the perpetuation of class pathologisation and stigma (Addison, Clark) (McKenzie, 2017, 2017a), the after-effects of empire and colonisation (Virdee). Clearly, this must be combined with economic and discursive analyses. When I was investigating the aftereffects of the closure of the steelworks in south Wales (Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012), I needed to understand something of the works since its founding and this led me also to begin to understand work practices, the role of the Workhouse in earlier generations, the workings of the global iron and steel trade, the importance of the political economy of Thomas Malthus, the history of closures and the politics of the post-World War 2 period. I feel that I could not have begun to understand the community affective practices in relation to the closures without understanding something of the political, economic and discursive history of the Works. Thus, as several of the papers in this volume suggest, the affective encounters must be understood within their historical and locational specificities as well as the wider political and economic issues of time and place.

Class, gender and sexuality

In the 1970s feminism in the UK, many women were already part of socialist groups, but as often remarked, many were fed up of their role as helpers ('making the tea, licking the stamps') and bed mates. It is at that moment that we might also think about the significance of the emergence of what we might also call a precursor to affective analyses. Angela McRobbie and Jane Garber (1976) wrote about the importance of girls' bedrooms as the site for the analysis of girls' classed cultures. In that sense, feminist writing on class from that period, while certainly documenting women's political struggles at work (Night cleaners, 1975), it also signalled the need to explore gendered experiences of class in a different way from that generally employed on the male-dominated Left. This moment inaugurated a tradition, in the UK at least, of women writing about class from a more cultural and what we may now term, a more affective angle (for a list of such work, see Walkerdine, 2022 but see also the Introduction to this volume).

This tradition of work was important for me in recognising the political significance of what was happening to the wives of the former Steelworkers, in the aftermath of the closure (Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). So much attention had been focussed on the workers – on getting them into other work or training with support from the trade union, but our research discovered, on talking to some wives, that they had never felt able to talk about their difficulty in bearing the distress of the men, of keeping things going amid despair and depression, of finding work and of negotiating the tricky path away from their husbands as the sole 'breadwinner', which sometimes involved operating as though the men still held that position in the family, even when not working. The affective work of the women, therefore, should not be underestimated, though it had never previously come to light to those outside the community, notwithstanding the hugely significant role of women within the 1984/5 miners' strike), nor had it been the object of any support for the women.

How to work on the entangled history and present of classed affects?

Throughout this afterword, I have attempted to signal a possible future approach to understanding classed affect. I have stressed the ways in which it is politically central, but equally relational, intersectional, entangled, minute and ephemeral. I have stressed that such work needs very careful attention to often-overlooked aspects of daily life, without prior judgement of what they might mean. I have suggested that this might include a political ecology of classed affect that could embrace the development of new approaches to fieldwork and analysis. This involves an engagement with the affective and political entanglement of intersecting histories of capitalism, class, gender, sexuality and colonisation, recognising that large political and historical changes can be played out in sometimes barely visible affective flows and practices. I have suggested that this political ecology could operate via a kind of temporal and spatial deep mapping (Bodenhamer, Corrigan and Harris, 2021, Guattari, 2012). I am also suggesting that we urgently need to address our tendency only to investigate working class, impoverished or otherwise disaffected groups, while ignoring the middle and upper class groupings (though see Sherman's (2017) important study of anxiety in wealthy Americans and its place in perpetuating inequality). The pathologisations about and fantasies of otherness on the part of the middle classes to the working class is poorly researched and often even understood as simply normal. From a professor impugning and pathologizing his elderly cleaners (Walkerdine, 2021) to middle class mothers teaching their young daughters that the window cleaner cleaning their windows needs to work to buy beer (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1985). Tyler (2013) writes of our current politics of pathologisation and abjection, but we have little in terms of any affective histories of the bourgeoisie and their role in the emergence of capitalism, their role in the professions and their changing status under

neo-liberalism, and thus the affective practices through which their communities of affect work in classed relations and amongst themselves, nor do we engage with geopolitics of the international wealthy elite and their role in international capitalism. There is so much yet to do, but I hope that this important special issue will act as a significant starting-point of the important work to come.

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Notes

ⁱ <https://www.socialhaunting.com/academic>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/evenly-suspended-attention>