

Of dinosaurs and divas: is class still relevant to feminist research?

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Valerie Walkerdine¹

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‘Well, I was a bit fed up—there didn’t seem to be much there for me —you know how these little towns are. One coffee bar—it was closed on a Sunday. Didn’t even tell them I was going. I sent ‘em a card when I got down there’.

So opens Ken Loach’s famous 1966 docudrama, ‘Cathy Come Home’, about a working-class young woman who leaves the provinces to go to London. As the story-line reveals, Cathy meets a man, they get married and rent a flat, but he has an accident while driving a work van and is off work, with no money paid by his employer. This means that they cannot pay their rent. The couple have children and, as the film develops, their housing situation gets worse and worse, through terrible accommodation to the family finally being split up, time in a hostel and losing the children. The issues raised in the film—homelessness and insecurity—are just as terrifyingly familiar today.

I am starting here because I want to think about the significance of class from this period onwards. Cathy’s desire to move away from small-town life to the excitement and freedom of the metropolis is very familiar to me and, I expect, at differing historical periods, and for different reasons, also to many here today. While not presenting a historical analysis, I want to set out in this lecture a possible way of understanding how Cathy could be seen as part of a movement to leave the ‘boring’ small towns and suburbs and move onto a personally more exciting trajectory. That this fails spectacularly for Cathy can be set against the emergence of a cultural politics that separated those who left from those left behind. And in doing

✉ Valerie Walkerdine
walkerdinev@cardiff.ac.uk

¹ School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Ave, Cardiff CF10 3WT, UK



so, in many ways, separated working from middle class, with consequences today for how those ‘left behind’ are viewed.

In the period after the Second World War, huge changes took place in a country still ravaged by shortages, bomb damage and the return of troops, together with the effect of so much death and war on people. Indeed, it wasn’t until relatively recently that I began to recognise the effects of death and loss in two world wars on my mother and grandmother.¹ In particular, my mother’s phrase ‘soldiering on’ was a common way of describing a hard life in which it felt impossible to imagine not coping, or even feeling, despite experiencing what would nowadays routinely be described as trauma and hardship. This created a fertile ground for my desire, as shown by Cathy, namely to run away to a life with the promise of more excitement and less drudgery. A promise I personally recognised in my desire to attend a college in London. Nowhere else. And certainly not the provinces.

If economic life was hard in the 50s, nevertheless, factory life for working-class women would feel like a relief after a life of service. But now, women who had got used to wartime work in factories went home to look after the children with men in receipt of a ‘family wage’.² For working-class women stuck managing at home, not going to work must have felt both a freedom and a disappointment.

Nell Dunn’s novel, ‘Poor Cow’, made into a film by Ken Loach in 1967 starred Carol White, who had played Cathy a few years earlier. Nell Dunn was an upper-class woman who slumped it in Battersea to reveal the lives of the urban poor women in this period, which she presented as poverty, shockingly poor housing and a feisty, active sexuality, supported by some prostitution to supplement meagre wages and financial dependence on men. Dunn sets all this out, though it is difficult to know how much is romanticised by the author.³

In *Poor Cow*, we are presented with one character, who wants to ‘have something, to be something’. She lists an array of desires—to own a car, to have a cottage in the country, ‘a proper little home with fitted wardrobes and pale colours’. She goes on to furnish the home in fantasy. Wanting and such possibilities were not on my mother’s agenda in the same way at all. The feeling that presented itself to me was more along the lines of a need to put up with life and to soldier on through whatever presented itself. Given the possibilities opened to me by education and the fantasies presented by film and television, I wanted the possibility of something else, however vaguely defined. My mother found this hard to take and often used the phrase ‘much wants more’ to describe me. For her, I had so much more than perhaps she could even have dreamed of, and yet this did

¹ The Maternal Line, video installation, performance and artist’s book, see www.valeriewalkerdine.com.

² See for example, W Beveridge (1942), *Social insurance and allied services*, Cmd. 6404, London: HMSO and K Laybourn (1995), *The evolution of British social policy and the welfare state*, Keele University Press.

³ The principle of the family wage meant that men were taken to earn enough to support women and children, which produced the difficulty of financial dependence on men, shown clearly in both films. Women thus were made to hold the responsibility for the home and children, which women rebelled against only a few years later, with the Women’s Liberation Movement often highlighting the plight of the stay-at-home wife and mother.



not appear to satisfy me.⁴ For her life was to be endured, for me, it offered the promise of an adventure.

Looking at another fictional depiction of the era, in Sheila Delaney's 1961 'A taste of honey', relations between a mother and a daughter are played out. The mother is portrayed as unsympathetic, always let down by men, fighting with a daughter who gets pregnant by a black seaman and is helped through her pregnancy by a gay man. The themes of this confusing era are set out in all these fictional portraits of working-class women.

In my own case, although born later than the women portrayed in these films (who all would have been born during the Second World War), I remember, and later wrote about, the feelings of longing and wanting made possible by the expansion of state education, consumption (especially the burgeoning boutique scene, typified by the likes of Mary Quant and Biba) and the counter-culture. My mother, I remember, had very few clothes. What I wrote about in the 1980s in the book 'Truth, Dare or Promise' (Heron, ed, 1985) was the feeling of meeting middle-class women who assumed the possibility of an expansive life that was way beyond any dreams expressed by the women in *Poor Cow* or my own dream of looking like Jean Shrimpton or Audrey Hepburn. As I wrote then, in the face of other people's confident sophistication, I felt trapped inside a wall of silence about my own ordinariness, the feeling that there was nothing to say. 'I didn't have an affair at fourteen, join the Communist Party at sixteen, go off to paint in Paris or live in an ashram in India'. As I pointed out, there were only two ways to get out—to marry out or to work my way out and so I appeared the epitome of the hard-working, conservative and respectable working-class girl (p. 64).

My own history seemed like nothing. I described it as 'ordinary', a phrase favoured by my mother as in 'ordinary working people'. For her it was a source of pride. But for me it signified 'conventional', set against this parade of extravagant acting-out and well-travelled cultural consumption. Even my own 'ordinary' dreams were made possible by the expansion of state education—a possibility not open to my mother a generation earlier. So, while I am stressing the possibility of having dreams for this generation of working-class women, I am saying that the stories of successful non-conformist adventures largely belong to the middle classes.

So it is this trajectory, this differentiation in possibilities presented through different life chances and opportunities in this period that I want to think about as a prelude to engaging with the trajectory to the present.

To set this up, I am thinking here about the possibility for self-development and expansion presented by this 1960s opening up of education and markets. It is this creation of demand and desire, deliberately set up by mass production and advertising⁵ before the war, but not able to be fully developed until after the war, which created the possibility of a longing for something else, some other life and the

⁴ It is ironic in this context that working-class children are so often said by governments and policy makers to lack aspiration, whereas my mother was of a generation that could not believe that her children could have and want so much, never being satisfied with a life that she had little choice but to soldier on through.

⁵ See, for example, Adam Curtis, *Century of the Self*, 2002, BBC2, which may be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJ3RzGoQC4s> (accessed 6/12/16).



possibility of imagining this for a small percentage of children and young people (only 13% of 18-year-olds went on to higher education in the 1960s ‘expansion’). What we begin to see for Cathy, for Poor Cow, is the possibility of wanting something for oneself. We see that in these films, it is shown as unattainable and disastrous, with disaster piling upon disaster, but for a few and for the middle and upper classes, a whole set of individual possibilities seemed to open up in a variety of ways. What I am stressing here is the sense that the possibilities are individual—to find oneself, one’s path, one’s possibilities. I am suggesting that this was not possible for my mother or indeed for the majority of the population of my own generation. We can understand this as a failure to open up such individualisation to them or we can see it as their own failure to expand. I am not following either of those trajectories. Rather, I am suggesting that by pursuing an agenda of personal transformation as a radical agenda, something serious was lost.

The anti-war movement, expansion, revolt and counter-culture

I want to turn to this moment—a moment of revolt that spread across North America and Europe. Civil Rights, Black Power, Gay Liberation, Anti-Vietnam war protest, music festivals, the Hippy Trail, May 68.

I want to think how this moment is usually glossed—as a revolt against the closed-up stultifying world of normality and presented as mind-altering expansion. That moment happens when, especially in Europe, rebuilding after a terrible time, is happening and when consumer goods, cheap package holidays and other possibilities begin, slowly, to appear. Fridges, washing machines—transforming the labour of women.

But it is the sense that life is elsewhere and that working- and middle-class lives are restrictive that interest me here. I felt it like that, but looking back on it, as I have tried to point out, my rejection of this life seems much more like the desired rejection of a hard life in favour of a promise of glamour and excitement.

The middle- and upper-class young people who rejected this tended to have been born in the 40s, during the war. Indeed, at that time, rebellion was rewritten as a developmental stage, as portrayed in the 1950s film ‘Rebel without a cause’. An adolescent becomes a rebel—and the teenage years to stand for a developmental revolt and breaking away. So a historical and cultural phenomenon is recast as a universal developmental accomplishment. If rebellion is normalised, it follows that its absence is pathologised. In the USA, rebellion shows its face in civil rights and anti-war protests—a demand for peace culminating symbolically in Woodstock.

‘By the time we got to Woodstock’, sang Joni Mitchell, who in fact never got there herself, ‘we were half a million strong’
And everywhere was a song and a celebration
And I dreamed I saw the bomber death planes
Riding shotgun in the sky,
Turning into butterflies
Above our nation



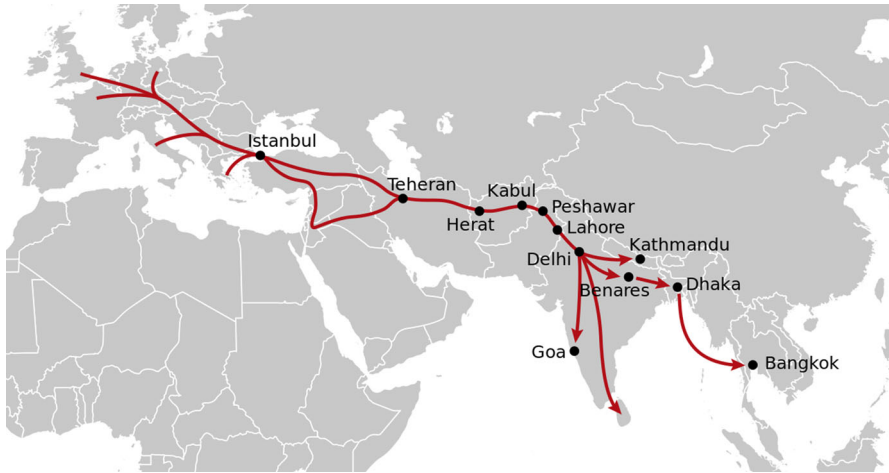


Fig. 1 Map showing the Hippy Trail

*We are stardust, we are golden
We are caught in the devils bargain
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden*

Innocence, love, peace, the Garden of Eden. Expand, let go, light up, chill out....

The inauguration of a counter-cultural movement certainly swept up some working-class young people and there was enough expansion to fuel the romanticisation of Otherness. We can see this throughout the arts and popular culture. However, in the context of this lecture, I concentrate on the phenomenon of the Hippy Trail.

As the map shows, the trail provided routes through and to a variety of middle eastern countries and parts of Asia (Fig. 1). Travelling in buses and trains, many young people fled 'bourgeois life' to experience Otherness. My argument here is that although doubtless some working-class young people joined the trail, it was largely a middle-class movement. But as important as its class composition was, the rejection of struggling ordinary lives as well as the provinces in favour of an exoticised Otherness and an individual trajectory of change and discovery meant the rejection of the difficulties of struggling and ordinary lives, of social conditions, as if solved by moving to become Other. This served to reject the provincial working class and to brand them as restrictive, backward and anti-expansion.⁶

So, my case so far is that the post-war conditions in the 1950s and 60s created a depressed working class struggling and that these conditions, plus the expansion of state education, in the context of the development of a mass market, made possible a

⁶ This is a position also highlighted in the USA by historian Nancy Isenberg in her book, *White Trash* (Isenberg 2016); see Francesca Ashurst's review this issue, which documents the centrality of the British transported poor to the American colonies and their history to the present. Although I noted this book before the 2016 presidential elections, the result has demonstrated the signal importance of the case made by Isenberg).



series of longings in which the provincial working class came to be seen as restrictive and lacking the individual psychology and imagination to make an individual leap out of conformity. Thus, the preponderance of individual self-expression as a radical statement and life pathway created Others as more exotic and enticing than home-grown small-town and industrial life. This paved the way for the continued pathologisation of the working class. In addition, the normalisation of teenage rebellion as a stage of development further cements the idea that breaking free of parental views and lifestyles is a normal part of growing up, leading thus to the view that not breaking free is pathological.⁷

Detour: May 68 and the French left

It is here that I need to make a brief detour to show how the intellectual currents emerging out of the French Left in May 68 were caught up with the idea of individual expansion and becoming Other. Although it is a complex moment that I certainly am not able to pursue in detail in this context, the spirit of revolt as a rejection of the ‘old ways’, in this case, for example, a classical curriculum in the university, in favour of a philosophy of expansion, is central to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Although we can understand their argument through a history of Marxism and a reaction to Stalinism, we can also see how it fits into and comes out of an expansionist 1960s movement—the counter-culture. Thus, their well-known critique of (Lacanian) psychoanalysis, especially in terms of the queering and multiplication of desire (as opposed to Lacan’s idea of desire as unitary, etc.), is to expand desire rather than contain it, freeing pleasure and desire in whatever form it may take. This expansion of expression is ubiquitous and politically signalled a state response understood by the Trilateral Commission in 1973 as ‘too much democracy’.⁸

Deleuze and Guattari noted that desire was the motor of capitalism. Thus, we see the progress of desire into the neoliberal project of the apparent possibility of endless choice and consumption, the possibility to apparently fashion oneself into what one wants to be. But Deleuze and Guattari based their approach on Sartre’s (1960/1984) theory of groups, developed in the wake of the Algerian War, in which he argued for a relationship between group struggle and personal responsibility.

A strongly psychosocial analysis, the group forms a central component that is, I think, often overlooked when stressing the possibilities of ‘becoming Other’. It is easy to understand the current situation without engaging with this. Just as the Trilateral Commission in 1973 were afraid of too much democracy, so the unruly desires that produced Brexit are being labelled as too much democracy.⁹ But what

⁷ The concept of adolescence was first proposed by the psychologist G Stanley Hall in 1904 in the wake of huge social changes following industrialization and loss of agriculture passed down families and the development of compulsory schooling.

⁸ <http://trilateral.org/page/3/about-trilateral> repeated in 2016 in the following: <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/brexit-direct-democracy-referendums-000000954.html> (both Accessed October, 2016).

⁹ For example, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/28/regarding-brexit-democracy-and-elitism/?utm_term=.ed30590766ca, Accessed October, 2016.



we are left with if we take this path is that there is something wrong with working-class desires that cannot be expressed but must either be contained or transformed. That indeed, too much democracy has so freed desires, as to have unleashed reactionary ones. It is this and how we came to this situation that I am wanting to investigate.

If pleasure and desire are to be expanded, norms torn down, leading to the creation of a self presented in Capitalism via the move from production to consumption, there are certain assumptions about what that self is—individualised, self-aware, capable of expansion.

How then do we understand a post-war history of poverty, pain, trauma, the breakdown of traditional forms of sociality and solidarity, the destruction of production in a people who had another history than those like me who were educated out?

Queering desire

So again we are left with the possibilities for expansion versus a proletariat now seen as closed, proto-fascist and anti-expansion. We also have a situation in which a central tenet of Left analysis of social change is personal and ideological transformation, which effectively brands the so-called ‘untransformed’ as reactionary.

This situation also provides a path to neoliberalism in which an expanded cosmopolitan consumption sits against an austere ex-industrial wasteland in which there are virtually not even any shops.¹⁰

I realise that I am simplifying a complex historical argument but I want to think about the ways in which the present of Brexit can be understood through this kind of analysis.

So I want to go on to think about the ways in which a certain romanticism of the working-class Other (‘a working class hero is something to be’) maybe this was true once but even then it was male manual workers who were so romanticised not working-class women) becomes the notion that this stultifying space is only worth leaving and that those who remain can only be understood through the need to transform them, a pathologised poor working class, who are a burden, a drain, the object of scorn and ridicule, as portrayed in Britain in television series like *Little Britain* (Owen Jones 2012).

This ignores the fact that a great divide was created in which the history of what happens in the working class cannot be understood on its own terms but is continually read and judged using expansionist terms.

I am arguing instead that the great class divide opens up the possibility of a longing for expansion that not only has no economic possibility for expression but also equally has to be understood in terms of the psychosocial affective history of its production. Scholarship on this has been singularly lacking. What we have

¹⁰ This is literally the case. In poor communities, many shops and supermarkets have disappeared or are simply absent.



witnessed is the progressive exclusion and pathologisation of individuals and communities without understanding their histories—histories in which gender and sexuality play a central role. We cannot apply an analysis of the expansion, freeing and queering of desire without equally understanding the historical constitution of working-class groups and communities as Deleuze and Guattari, following Sartre, imply.¹¹ I believe that this is a task that we urgently need to do and so simply to start us off, I will refer to some of my own and others' work, mostly situated in poor, de-industrialised communities in south Wales.

I am well aware that what I present is at best a tiny fraction of what is possible and also largely about a white provincial working class, but I offer this as a beginning to thinking about potential ways of working. I will begin with a brief mention of research I did in an ex-steel community (see Walkerdine 2010; Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012).

In trying to understand sexuality and gender relations in this community, it became impossible to think about it without engaging with the production of masculinities in the period of industrial production, in which hard manual labour in dangerous conditions was demanded. Dangerous conditions not just physically but also constantly insecure over a period of two hundred years of iron and steel work. Thus, I argued, affective modes of organisation aimed to keep the community intact and safe in the face of lay-offs, the workhouse, shifts in the global demand for iron and steel. In this way, men became 'labour' and as labour inhabited a fantasy, trope or persona, a hardness, a strong distance from femininity. This appears in the present when young men attempt to undertake employment previously designated as 'feminine'—service work, cleaning, shelf-stacking, pizza delivery, creating group modes of rejection and exclusion. In the face of the loss of steel-working masculinity as a central trope and fantasy holding everything together, there are attempts at exclusion of clinging together and breaking apart (what we might term ontological insecurity). This manifests also as a refusal to try to work in other nearby communities because it is understood that they, like the steel community, will look after their own. It also appears in attempts to shore up masculinity, for example by women's designation of their men as breadwinners when no longer actually winning any bread, given that this is mainly won by the women. Thus, everything is in flux—wealth, the gendered division of labour, but it is certainly not an expansionist moment in the sense of individual possibility unless you count leaving, which is sometimes presented as part of aspiration, or indeed as a necessary step to growing up, or, even presented as a 'line of flight' in a Deleuze/Guattarian sense (Iverson and Renold 2013).

This does nothing to address the possibility of working-class self-determination and it is therefore hardly surprising that when a mechanism opens itself up for the expression of desire, it is tumultuous. This then further opens up the possibility that it is indeed read as 'too much democracy' or a moral failing in the sense of the action of degenerates who were left behind.

¹¹ Donzelot (n.d.) argues that Deleuze and Guattari relied heavily upon Sartre's theory of groups developed in relation to the Algerian War, in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol 1 (1960). This whole approach needs much more analysis and exploration.



Scott Kerpen, a research student in Cardiff, has been undertaking an interesting analysis of the means by which non-heterosexual men living in a capital city but from working class communities, maintain a persona on-line. One young man went to the lengths of keeping two Facebook pages—one for his friends and the other for his family. But this splitting of desire should also lead us to investigate how it comes about in terms other than a simple sense of opening up in one context and repression in another. I am suggesting that this socially, historically and affectively simplistic. Unless we understand the cartographic psychosocial production of affect and its place in territories, we are stuck in this repression/expansion explanation.

In a second example, I want to mention a paper by Emma Renold and Gabrielle Ivinson (2013) in which they work with girls in another ex-industrial extremely poor Valleys community. In this paper, *Valleys Girls*, they provide short case studies of several girls, arguing that several are able to, in their words, ‘imagine themselves forward’ to other possibilities, to become other than the re-creation of traditional gendered positions.

Some however, they say, appear to ‘get stuck’ and cannot even imagine themselves otherwise but for reasons that the authors are unable to understand. But while this attempt to understand differently is important, I argue that because it treats each girl as her own potential ‘becoming’, there is no understanding of the complex affective history through which what they experience as stuckness is manifest in the gendered and sexual histories of the possibilities afforded to communities such as this. To simply brand complex attempts to keep things going in communities such as Steeltown as ‘reterritorialisation’ seems to imply a negative moral judgement. As I have set out, and is inherent in the need to understand group and community formations in Sartre’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to the psychosocial, this issue has to be tackled in another way and that some of us have benefited from individual possibilities for becoming other should not blind us to the history of divisions that I am trying to explore.

While the Welsh Government has far more programmes targeting poor communities than England, nevertheless, the idea that such communities might express their own desires to become other in whatever form that may take, is not, in my view, taken seriously. Rather, desire is continually policed in such a way that it cannot be heard or indeed there is no sense amongst people that they will be heard, so why bother, unless it comes out as a massive, angry scream.

As David Studdert and I have argued (Studdert and Walkerdine 2016), certain desires and demands are simply not addressed. To explore the possibilities for ‘becoming other’ outside of a complex history of struggle makes no sense. As Donzelot (n.d.) says, struggles have a definite space and direction which forms their nature. By failing to understand the possibilities of individual becomings within that, we are reverting to a pathologising logic. What are the productive forces that make certain things imaginable, possible, actionable? What stops and prohibits this possibility?

If we fail to understand the historicity of framing bodies, discourses, affects, subjectivities, we cannot support or understand change. Thus, the expansion and queering of desire and the possibilities for working-class transformation must be understood in this way.



Classed girlhoods

In the final part of this lecture, I want to refer to how we might think about stories of girl- and woman-hood within a classed context of the recent history of the UK. One of the most striking aspects of the work I am going to mention is the sharp division in classed histories. I received funding¹² to do a secondary analysis of data that I and others had collected of 15 working-class and 15 middle-class girls and their families, girls born in the mid-1970s, up to the age of 21, in the 90s. There were observations, interviews, video diaries.

Looking back at this extraordinary dataset, where the comments of parents do cover the 1960s, some of the issues I am raising are starkly visible. While working-class parents generally find work easy to get in the 1960s, and can change jobs frequently, by the 1980s, all this changes. The introduction of monetarism and neoliberalism decimates steady working-class work. Many working class fathers become self-employed at this point, spurred on by the outsourcing of work. Every single father who does this has a business that eventually fails. Parents struggle and by the 1990s they are often reduced to scrabbling around for work that is far worse and pays far less than before, with no security. This strongly affects the daughters, though in a number of different ways. The desire to avoid the fate of their parents is very strong, and it does present possibilities for movement through education.

Meanwhile, at least in the interview material of the middle-class families, excluding the upwardly mobile,¹³ there is barely a mention of economic circumstances at all, AT ALL.

The Great Divide

The way that the sample was constructed by the original researchers in the 1970s was based on level of education and type of employment of parents. These divisions have largely got greater over the years, though the children of upwardly mobile working-class parents do not appear the same as other middle-class families. It is a complex picture that I don't want to over-simplify, but even this stark fact is of enormous significance. And the traditionally middle class, some of whom approach the upper class and aristocracy, do present a narrative of expansion.

This does not mean that there are not working-class girls, who, for example, go on to higher education, but the trajectory to it, while made possible by the economic and sociopolitical conditions of the moment, is quite different. I came to call it The Great Divide.

But this diminishes the complexity of the stories within the data. If we are to understand this divide, we must explore its specificity. We must understand the complex affective histories and entanglements as they relate to lives across the class

¹² With grateful thanks to the Leverhulme Trust for awarding me a Major Research Fellowship.

¹³ I excluded the upwardly mobile parents because their own working-class insecurities were revealed and they did not talk or act in the same way as other middle-class families.



divide—urban, rural, middle and working class, black and white, gay and straight, other possibilities and sexualities.

To briefly exemplify the complexities of becoming woman, I will mention Catherine, a working-class girl who does very poorly at school and is badly bullied. To understand what happens to her, I worked with line-by-line readings of interviews that show how family is intimately connected to and inseparable from the wider polity.¹⁴ When I put these together line by line in a very close reading, we get a complex composite picture of the emergence of affect and entanglement (Barad 2007) across generations and across the family.¹⁵ The father's difficulty with his distant father, a former Japanese prisoner of war, not being able to get enough distance from mother and sister, staying at work to get away from a household of women, Catherine's mother's own father nearly killed in an accident, an older sister who refuses to dress as a girl, a younger sister who cannot get close enough to her father, who has passionate friendships that always fail her and for which she is bullied and so on. A girl who, as a 21-year-old young woman, places a video recorder in her car in the 1990s to sing along to the Portishead Song, Glory Box, with its deeply longing refrain 'I just wanna be—a woman'.

*I'm so tired, of playing
 Playing with this bow and arrow
 Gonna give my heart away
 Leave it to the other girls to play
 For I've been a temptress too long
 Just
 Give me a reason to love you
 Give me a reason to be, a woman
 I just want to be a woman
 From this time, unchained
 We're all looking at a different picture
 Through this new frame of mind
 A thousand flowers could bloom
 Move over, and give us some room
 So don't you stop, being a man
 Just take*

No wonder! To be a woman for her is no easy endeavour. So, by analysing it this way, I reveal the complex affective relationalities that cross generations—that are barely visible but which can be detected if one reads closely enough. And yet this family, with its complex territorial movements across the geography of Britain, through council to private housing, through a variety of jobs, etc., also has to be connected to the wider modes of analysing groups and communities in the same kind of way. I argue that, only then, is it possible to get anywhere near an affective

¹⁴ There are two observations at age 4 at home with their mothers, interviews with girls and teachers at 10 and interviews with young women and their parents at 21. There are also video diaries made by the young women at 21.

¹⁵ See Walkerdine (2015).



analysis of classed experience as it emerges in the present and therefore is set to foreshadow the move into the future.

So, I conclude. In calling the lecture ‘of dinosaurs and divas’, I was thinking ‘am the dinosaur?’ Is my approach outdated? Are the working-class ex-industrial communities the dinosaurs? Are white working-class men dinosaurs? Is it prehistoric to argue that class needs to be central to feminist analysis?

When I first started writing about class, even ‘coming out’ as working class required some courage on my part. But, still now, class divides are well in evidence. Although there are few portrayals of working-class heroines, for me, feminism needs to engage with the complex affective histories and territories of classed Britain. It needs to find ways to approach the feminist study of class using a wide variety of approaches and disciplines, from arts and humanities to social sciences. We must address complex social, material and affective questions. We can perform class, we can tell its stories, explore its intimacies and its great sweeps. We can work with communities to support them in voicing their demands through a wide variety of methods and media. All of this is possible. All of this is urgently needed and there is no better place to do it than here in Goldsmiths.

I have been deeply honoured to give this lecture. I commend this feminist work, this political future, to you all.

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