A Lesson in Class: the working-class experience of Anthropology

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Abstract:
This paper focusses on socio-economic class structures, as they relate to the study and practice of anthropology. More specifically, it discusses the ways that working-class or financially precarious anthropologists (students, researchers and teachers) negotiate tensions found within the British university. It is concerned with the current climate of 'diversity' in education, and the role that socio-economic inequity plays in these discussions. This paper seeks to make room for class; it asks what we can learn from giving voice to the insidious silence that plagues it, in a context of neoliberal identity politics (Wrenn, 2014), ensuing ethnicist diversity practices (Brah, 1991), and what I would call 'cursory diversity' - what Sara Ahmed refers to as a 'hopeful performative' (2010, p.200). It is argued that anthropology as a discipline must start attending to the ways that financial precarity and social class impact the subjects that *study*, not just the subjects *of* study, by reflecting on the venacularity of the academy and the discipline itself. It achieves this through exploring the vernacularity of the working-class anthropologists' experiences in relation to the prism of 'diversity'; how class refracts to produce multiple forms of experience, of assimilation, and of exclusion - as well as resistance to such enclosure.

Keywords: Affect theory, social class, identity, pedagogy, micro-aggressions

Introducing social class

Social class has been a key historical marker through which anthropologists have conceptualised sociality (Evans, 2017). The stratification of societies along class has been configured under Cartestian lines (*see* Porter, 2004); it has been worked on through the lens of affect (*see* Loveday, 2016; Stewart, 2007), and through the work on the abject (*see* Lawler, 2005; Tyler 2008). The British working classes, in particular, have been a source of study – they have been demonised (*see* Hayward & Yar, 2006; Le Grand, 2013), romanticised (*see* Charlesworth, 1999; Hoggart, 2006 [1947]; Hudson, 1994), patronised (Bennett *et al.,* 2009), and memorialised (Hanley, 2012, 2017). The middle classes are arrogantly treated as the aspiration (*see* St Clair & Benjamin, 2011; Tyler & Bennett, 2015); the upper classes often with a lack of ethnographic interest (*see* Hay, 2013, Hay & Beaverstock, 2016; Spence, 2016), or as 'objects of class fantasies' (Binford, 2012, p.30).

Social class is a site of shame for some (*see* Loveday, 2016), and a site of guilt for others (*see* Steedman, 2013). It is both a vast and heterogeneous social configuration. It is considered the axis upon which every other intersection of experience rests (Cliff, 1984; Marx, 1970 [1850]) and by others, impossible to decouple from race and gender (Brah, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989; Limpangog, 2016). Social class has been the site of political struggle (*see* Day, 2007), and elsewhere, the site of muted silence (Fairclough, 2002; Steinberg & Johnson, 2004). Class exists in both etic and emic forms. It constructs the anthropologist's life, as the anthropologist simultaneously attempts to makes sense of others.

Class is the central focus of this paper, as it relates to the study and practice of Anthropology. More specifically, it discusses the ways that working-class or financially precarious anthropologists (students, researchers, and teachers) negotiate class tensions found within the British university. It is concerned with the current climate of 'diversity' in education, and the role that socio-economic inequity plays in these discussions. This paper seeks to make room for class, it asks what we can learn from giving voice to the insidious silence that plagues it, in a context of neoliberal identity politics (Wrenn, 2014), ensuing ethnicist diversity practices (Brah, 1991), and what I call 'cursory diversity' - what Sara Ahmed refers to as the 'hopeful performative' (2010, p.200). It is concerned with the movement from theories of diversity to diversity praxis[i], particularly in light of 'enduring "tokenism"' (Gould, 2020, p.15) experienced by people categorised as minority groups, of the ways that the talking *about* diversity becomes 'happy talk' (Bell & Hartmann 2007), pacifying the call for structural and institutional change. This paper is also concerned with the ways that exercising 'diversity' without critical reflection reinscribes the notion that those in power (who are so often those

that hire) need never be considered 'other', reinforcing the pre-existing unequal power relations between peers (*see* Gould, 2020).

My argument is this: if we are to make room for class in the discussion of diversity in Anthropology, we must call forth and chart those experiences, the ways that they shape the subject, and the ways the academy utilises such affective properties within its milieu to produce a particular kind of subject – a subject which for working-class anthropologists is positioned as unattainable. I take inspiration from Kathleen Stewart, whose work on affect theory illustrates how seemingly mundane events work to produce the subject. Stewart helps us to understand the importance of the brief, common and banal acts that saturate the day-to-day experience of working-class anthropologists. She writes of the 'little accident' that 'will compel a response': 'it will shift people's trajectories in some small way, change them by literally changing their course for a minute of a day' (Stewart, 2007, p.12). We must be attentive to 'class accidents' – that is, atmospheric subtleties – to the memories, gestures, events and body language, that all compound to produce an experienced *otherness*. Like a throwaway comment that chills as if it were ice thrown down the back of your shirt, like attempting to remove something sticky from your hands, these are the singularisations *felt*. These 'class accidents' – constructed as such to disavow the responsibility of those who enact such violences - are ignored, denied, and often feel impossible to articulate. They must be brought to light; within them one can begin to unravel the pernicious nature of the British class system, as it emerges within the academic house.

Normalities of said academic house become embodied in small moments; in the fusions, the fissures, disruptions and comforts. The format of this paper incorporates these small moments; I use my own experiences, as well as snippets of interviews I conducted with fellow anthropologists, represented as italicised vignettes. These vignettes work to articulate the banal, quotidian feeling of out-of-placeness of being a working-class academic. These italicised interruptions represent the crucial moments - the almost invisible subtleties - that cumulate to produce the ontology of the classed anthropologist. Additionally, the reader should note that I am not concerned with problematising the concept of class itself. Rather, my interest lies in exploring the vernacularity of the working-class anthropologists' experiences in relation to the prism of 'diversity'; how class refracts to produce multiple forms of experience, of assimilation, and of exclusion - as well as resistance to such enclosure.

I work from the position of reading the affective structures of class, through accounts of the 'moments' that stick to the subject (Ahmed 2010, 2013), of the memories which encapsulate broader social and material realities of being working-class in Anthropology. I am not arguing that these affects are inherently *bad*. Indeed, being a working-class anthropologist has many affective advantages, both in the field and in the institution. Yet as Ahmed discusses, some affects can float, and by extension surface the subject: 'Perhaps lightness and buoyancy are the affects of privilege – the affective worlds inhabited by those whose bodies don't weigh them down or hold them up' (2012, p.181). Others are given the quality of sedimentation, of weight, depending on the social categories the subject is rendered inescapable from. Affects are imbued with such qualities – such as heaviness, or hardiness; they can be erotic, or impressionable, or (in)appropriate – depending on the relation between who it is that is producing the affect, and who is its recipient[ii]. Likewise, the reception of affects is not a neutral process. The transmission of certain affects (Brennan, 2004) – who transfers them, which subjects are expected to carry them – exists within an intersectional framework of experience. Here, I focus on one specific dimension, which may not necessarily eclipse others. Instead, I hope that charting the continuing thread of class-centered microaggressions[iii], illustrates how they come into contact with, collide, mould and are diverted by specific subjects; mainly, the working-class academic.

The Collective Affect

The words of this paper are based on the author's first-hand experience of being a first-generation, working-class student navigating the middle-class terrain of academia in Britain, alongside interviews with working-class anthropologists ranging from undergraduate students to teaching fellows, regarding their relationship to social class and the forms it can take in Anthropology[iv].

My own voice, and the voices of those that I interviewed, can be identified in this work as italicised quotes, standing separate - but running throughout - the main body of text. Undoubtedly, the weight and forms that class has had for the voices within this paper will have differed from my own, according to other intersections of life experience - such as race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, migrant status - amongst other forms of experience. The choice to not distinguish or singularise our voices, however, is deliberate. We are not identifiable from one another in the text and as such, I position myself within a chorus of voices, a euphony of sound, a collaborative 'I', in a bid to bring to this paper an indication of the affective, not just material, effects of social class in Anthropology. Whilst the vignettes at

times guide and steer the analysis of this paper, at other times they disrupt, serving as forceful jolts (Strathern, 2014) to the paper, echoing the very manner in which micro-violences and epistemic anxieties infiltrate the everyday experiences of the working-class anthropologist. Thus, the reader should expect to experience an intentional de-structuring at times of the rhythm of this paper, bringing to light the affective, and seemingly invisible, hurdles that academia forces us to jump over.

The collective sentiment practiced throughout this paper is inspired by Saidiya Hartman's (2019) work, who writes: 'If you listen closely, you can hear the whole world in a bent note, a throwaway lyric, a singular thread of the collective utterance' (Hartman, 2019, p.345). Following the argument that visibility for those made-marginal is often a trap – that it '[…] summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/ imperialist appetite for possession' (Phelan, 1993, p.7), the collectivization of experiences into one indiscernible voice, is done so to protect my interviewees individually precarious positions within the academy. This method alludes to the oft-hidden nature of class – the ways the working-class academic attempts to blend into the academy by hiding, shifting, or unlearning that which may reveal themselves. Surrounding myself with the voices of others honours the fraught anxieties expressed by many of my interviewees (including my own); the reluctance to vocalise pain and dissatisfaction for fear of retribution – from implicit or explicit hostility from peers, to the stagnation of one's career, to job loss - in a landscape in which working-class individuals are made distinctly aware that they are not able to rely on the socio-economic safety nets that their middle-class peers possess. The choral formation of experience within this paper is also a political praxis, one that turns away from a neoliberalised production of the individual's story as a case of isolated malaise, and returns it to a social, collective charting of the need for change.

> I regularly come up against expectations that are implicit in the system - ones that I can only ascribe to classic classism. But I have never seen [the topic of social class] be an overt conversation.

I also write the experiences of mine and my working-class peers because the anthropological nature of *doing* anthropology needs to be taken seriously; as Stathern argues, Western anthropologists 'need to be conscious of the form that our own thoughts take, for we need to be conscious of our own interests in the matter' (Strathern, 1988, p.16). This, I contend, includes the institutional, not just the epistemic, milieu of anthropology; arguably, they are indistinguishable from one another.

> I was told to get over this anger, this chip on my shoulder. These are strategies to disarm you; they're trying to line you onto a trajectory, to convince you, 'you're in our gang now'. It's rude and unscientific.

Interviews were conducted as semi-structured conversations with peers that contacted me via a call for participation through emails circulated through my department, and through wider Anthropology networks. Some of those that took part in this process were already familiar to me, as acquaintances, friends and colleagues; others I had not met before. I spoke to eighteen people in total.

> You can't level accusations at them because you have to beg them for a job.

Although not all the anthropologists I spoke to were British, all (except one) were working in, or studying, Anthropology within a British university. The analysis in this paper will thus favour a particular type of class tension that exists in British institutions (and British Anthropology), which may not be fully suited to serve articulations of class in other contexts. This fact also speaks to the forms that the British class system takes, to the current climate of austerity. It speaks to the last decade and a half of shifts into an increasingly privatised education system (Anderson, 2016); it speaks to neoliberalised forms of state governance and institutional practices, and to the cultural shifts that have produced an intentional reliance on the market, rather than on a robust welfare system (Anderson, 2016; Nasser, 2003).

> I feel like I'm being silenced, or maybe pacified. Because of my middle-class colleagues' discomfort at their own privilege, I've become an inconvenience to them – like my very presence is unwanted. Is it because I reflect back to them their comfort, and the discrepancies between us? I don't know. There'll be silence when I walk into a meeting, or when I make a very legitimate, academic criticism, it's like a silent eye-roll in the room. There he goes again, they think, bringing class into it.

The social: subjectivities in flux

> Something I haven't quite overcome is the estrangement from where you come from. The alienation I feel in my new environment, I'm okay with […] but there's a sense of trauma when it comes to social mobility. This doesn't get discussed enough.

Social mobility is a process that remakes working-class individuals. All of my interviewees spoke to the experience of estrangement and social wrenching that occurs as the working-class individual moves through, and from - or typically conceptualised as 'up', in a subtle but enduring nod to the perceived subpar existence of the working classes - their class into the milieu of the middle-classes.

> At every junction, you're reminded of the middle-classes' right to be here.

Higher Education is often expressed as a 'necessary step' towards that which is considered a correct and productive (middle-class) subjectivity (*see* Lawler, 2005) but it frequently requires sacrificing aspects of the self – aspects which are consistently framed as unwanted, or inappropriate.

> Anyone who has experienced forms of social mobility – which is not a perfect term, but it's still useful – of occupying a different environment from the one where you grew up can relate, I think. It's not just a class issue, it's a migrant issue, for example. Those not from the UK who elect to study and work here are doing anthropological work every single day. They're figuring out how to occupy the world, how people work.

The same sentiments, found in Richard Hoggart's work on the 'scholarship boy' - a student who is only able to access elite educational spaces by way of financial scholarships in 1950s Britain, haunt the interviews I conducted with my peers. Hoggart details the losses, the self-consciousness, and the strategies employed by the scholarship boy in order to place himself in his new intellectual setting. For instance, 'he quickly learns to make use of a pair of different accents, perhaps even two different apparent characters and differing standards of value' (2006 [1957], p.228).

> My family don't know how to talk to me anymore.

These practices produce a straddled subjectivity, which can lead to self-consciousness and self-doubt – for the individual has not yet acquired 'the unconscious confidence of many a public-school-trained child of the middle classes' (Hoggart, 2006 [1957], p. 230). At the same time, the adopted strategies that facilitate one's transition to a middle-class cause an uncoupling with one's home and potential rejection by working-class peers.

> I was emphatically told by my friends [from home] that "you're not from around here anymore".

These learnt differences also produce what Abrahams and Ingram call a 'chameleon habitus' (2013); the ensuing misalignment between fields (in the Bourdieusian sense) and habitus produces a 'differently structured space that is neither one place nor the other' (2013, p.3).

> I feel too ignorant around my peers because of the implicit demands of this environment, and yet I feel awkward around my family and friends that I grew up with.

Accounts of working-class people often present them as deficient or lacking; Rose (1991, p.18), for example, discusses how the working-classes are often thought to be constituted by a cultural 'lag'. From other angles, they become shrouded in a type of romanticized bleakness, as in Charlesworth's account of communities in a town in Rotheram, (2000). But, as Skeggs puts it, working-class culture is not 'point zero' (2004, p.153), and it is not an inherently working-class quality to fail academically. I suggest instead that when working-class individuals enter the academic institution, they undergo a highly skilled 'editorial process' of the self (Loveday, 2016) which serves to ease the sting of difference they feel, and the processes by which they hide, mitigate, or defiantly wear these evaluations.

> Despite the experiences of the institution, I think it can be quite beneficial [to be working-class] in the field. Working-class people are always looking for cues on how to behave. It doesn't occur to those more privileged to modify their behaviour or pay attention to the cues around them – because they're so used to the ease in which they walk through the world.

Acknowledging this editorial process as an active strategy presents working-class individuals as navigators of the system, rather than as passive victims. This enacted reflexivity is what Bourdieu calls a 'cleft habitus' (Bourdieu, 1999), which occurs via the 'dialectical confrontation' (Bourdieu, 2002, p.31) that happens as one enters a new socio-material

landscape. This interstitial position between two positions – that which Bahbha terms a 'third space' (Rutherford 1990, p.211) – whilst being a highly skilled one, can be concurrently damaging, productive, and indeed – allow new forms of subjectivity to emerge.

> I've been listening to recordings of my family talking so I can refamiliarise myself with the accent that I lost. Because of the vocal drawl the accent has, people from where I'm from are so often mocked and seen as being stupid or lazy. I want to counter that. I want to hear a voice like mine in academia.

> I've always felt that I've used my class to my advantage – I've manipulated class boundaries as a tool. Around working-class people, I use the fact that I was born in a traditionally working-class area of London, to relate to them. With middle-class people who are highly educated, I use the fact that I'm PhD-educated as a way of relating.

The evaluation of accents is never neutral (Addison & Mountford, 2015, and accents, of course, are not a totalizing marker of social class. While it is out of the scope of this paper to explore the particular salience of accents as it relates to the British class system, I have included the quotes that I have regarding accents, however, is justified in that for myself and those that I interviewed, the negotiation of a new, learnt voice was produced along class lines, in a bid to be 'undiscoverable' as working-class. This 'undiscoverability' aligns with the ways that Goffman uses the term stigma, to refer 'to an attribute that is deeply discrediting' (1963, p.3). Possessing one (or several) attribute(s) produces fraught anxieties within the individual whereby the normative social demands cannot be met by the individual[v].

> You may be perfectly able to discuss a concept as well as the next anthropologist, but those that are able to pronounce the words correctly will always be better received than you in academic spaces.

Paying for Anthropology

> During my Master's degree, I worked sixty hours a week at a cinema, and studied part-time. I would walk two hours to get home from work at night, because I couldn't afford the bus…I was exhausted. My partner and I broke up, because I didn't have time for him in my life. As this went on, I remember thinking about the consequences of this degree, that it has cost me people.

Reaching the social demands that are expected of subjects rests upon the socialisation of an individual, which is actualised through embodying particular social norms and logics. Such social demands, and in our case the ability to achieve the implicit demands of British anthropology rest, I argue, upon two elements; the first is the financial and material security whereby one's energy and labour can be focused on academic pursuits.

> I receive funding for my PhD, which doesn't even cover my basic outgoings. Isn't that shocking? But it's so normalised, it's so expected – which means that the wealthy people in my cohort are able to publish more papers, attend more conferences, further their academic career, whilst I work exploitative hours for poor pay in order to be able to just turn up.

> My Master's degree was tough, awful in fact. I worked throughout, working nights in a supermarket almost every night. I'd finish a seven-hour shift at 5am, working for thirty minutes to get home, shower and then head into Uni. It was awful – I couldn't concentrate, I was so exhausted. I finally had a breakdown after one shift – it was 6am, and I just sat on this public bench, crying out of madness.

The second element to reaching the demands set by British Higher Education is an ontological suitability for such an environment. That is, learning the *ways-of-being* an anthropologist – beyond the learning of the anthropological canon – which includes ways of talking, delivering, and arguing in academic cadence. These are techniques that must be passed on, and learnt (Mauss, 1979).

> I remember a presentation I had to do in front of my seminar group on hermeneutics. I mispronounced that word for the entire presentation – I'd only ever seen it written down before! It's not a common word that people use at dinner parties when they're middle-class, sure, but I had never talked before of that concept. So you can be really smart and know what a word means, but you may have never said it out loud.

> I turned up to university without a laptop, and was very confused when I seemed to be the only one. But why would I? The first day on the job is always training, at the factory or the café or care home, or whatever job you're doing. The first two weeks are always training about the environment, health and safety - you are provided the equipment and tools you need to do the job. Why should I expect anything different from this landscape?

> These short-term contracts are nothing but abusive. You can't focus on the job because you have to apply for the next thing; advice that I've received by people in my department was just, you need to take a year or two off and write your book. Isn't that so helpful?! The assumed possibility that one could live for two years without an income. Who the fuck can do that?

The phenomenology of becoming-an-anthropologist, then, relies upon being able to access not only the means of production (which permit a material belonging and safety in such a space), but about being able to successfully engage with the instruments of the production of discourse (Bourdieu, 1991) and its ensuing comportment. In short, you need to know what's in the academic house, you need to be able to afford to enter the building, and when you show up – you need to look and act like it's always belonged to you, like you have always been there.

> I'm exhausted from the amount of side projects I'm doing to afford this PhD – but ultimately, it is a great problem that people are offering me work. Realistically I have no time to do projects, but I always say yes. Can I really say no to £400? In your hand that's quite nice. And it's always bitty money, but it's enough to convince me to do it all the time.

The enchanting nature of the academic milieu thus appears unreachable, yet simultaneously tantalisingly close in a meritocratic framework; oh if only! If only we worked harder, picked up an extra shift, got 'smarter' about our financial priorities, we'd be fine.

> Maybe this is the problem with the English class [system] as it sits within a larger Protestant work ethic, is that everything is fucking meritocratic – assuming you have access to the stuff showing merit. Which is useless, because it comes down to 'we need more money', which boils down to 'stop being poor'.

Hiding in plain sight

Returning now to Goffman's framework of stigma, he contends that by possessing an attribute[vi] that makes one unable to meet the imposed social demands, the stigmatised person becomes 'reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (1963, p.3). The 'deeply discrediting' attribute produces a stigma that Goffman 65conceptualises as being present in two states; it is either *discredited* (already known, or evident), or *discreditable* (not known, or not immediately perceivable).

> I refused to speak for the whole of my first term at university because of my accent.

Working-class students and academic often go to great lengths to ensure their potential site of stigma remains hidden; there is immense pressure to behave in certain 'respectable' ways that aren't evaluated by the middle classes as crude working-class characteristics – that show how eager you are to 'escape' your background, to witness a true lumpenproletariat native claw their way out of the mud – or indeed to demonstrate a caricatured version which prioritises the middle classes desire of uninvested proximity to otherness, akin to what Chouliaraki and Ogard call a 'self-indulgent connectivity to otherness' (2011, p.344).

Social class exists somewhere in between the lines that Goffman draws. Not being an immediately visible attribute, being working-class is nevertheless often searched for, 'found' and inscribed on the body, by others. Lawler demonstrates the way that white working-class communities are constituted as disgusting and abhorrent by the middle-classes (through their tastes), which in turn becomes the logic through which the middle-classes are constructed to be uniquely superior to the working-classes, silently marking the middle-classes as normal and desirable. This disgust at the working-classes is a kernel of their subjectivity; to be middle-class is to be *not* working-class (2005).

> I was a 'benefits baby', not even one of those respectable working-class types. We were hungry a lot as kids. I was the kind of poor that my middle-class peers would laugh at, swilling the word 'chav' around their mouths, spitting it out with no shame. Why would they? Shame was never theirs to carry, it was mine, and throughout my time in academia, I have been repeatedly reminded of that fact.

The classification of persons through a classed strata is not new. Brooke demonstrates the historical conditions in which sexuality and the body became the means of categorising and evaluating class differences in Britain. For example in the 1920s and 1930s, working-class women's sexuality and their failure to control their reproduction were taken to be bio-material indicators of their inherent deprivation (2006). This physicalisation of social class is used to justify exclusion: becoming a permanent physical and moral defect of the self. Skeggs further shows how

contemporary British culture itself takes on a classed form – and how its differences in value, according to class ranking, turn culture into a resource and a form of property (2004).

> I remember going to this posh dinner with this scholarship programme I was on. And there were four cutlery sets. Four! So obviously I ate with the wrong cutlery, and was so embarrassed when someone next to me gently pointed out that I was doing it 'wrong.

Skeggs also illuminates the particular neoliberalisation of social class in Britain; how class has not in fact 'disappeared', but rather is spoken and enacted through other emic forms of sociality – such as race, gender and sexuality; as well as through differently situated discursive forms – popular culture, academic theory, and political rhetoric (2004).

> The notion of 'being broke' was an interesting one, I thought I found solidarity with my cohort who spoke of 'being broke' – finally! I thought. People like me! But I learnt quickly that they didn't mean broke as in not having enough money to buy food and pay the bills. They meant that they had spent over their monthly budget, and gone into their savings. It was a very confusing time for me, working out what people actually meant when it came to their wealth.

> I found out that one of my colleagues – who I admire greatly, by the way – finished their book from their second home. They left their everyday life, to go to their second home for some 'peace and quiet'. And by everyone's standards, this was a normal thing to do.

The fact of being working-class can also be hidden through a number of ways, such as avoidance – which can lead to social isolation - or learning a 'chameleon habitus' (Abrahams & Ingram, 2013). As such, being discoverable[vii] as working-class can become the site for *potential* shame, a place of fear and acute self-consciousness (Goffman, 1963, p.14) when inhabiting the landscape of Higher Education. Thus it takes on a peculiar form of anxiety; a feeling of being on tender hooks, of relentless paranoid self-analysis.

> I don't remember specifically trying to get rid of my [regional accent], but I do remember being self-conscious about it. People would repeat things [that I'd said] back to me constantly […] I would feel so exposed, like I've just been seen for what I really am. I now feel almost ashamed that I lost my accent.

Beginning a trajectory into academia for many working-class people requires a conscious uncoupling from the self. One must begin to disentangle the self from the habituated social forms and behaviours that constitute one's most fundamental knowledge of how to perceive, and move through, the world. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as 'embodied history' (Bourdieu 1990) acquired through practice, and the social field, is useful here. Forms of educational socialisation are a key element of that which Bourdieu names 'cultured habitus' (1977, p.344).

> How do you tell your peers and teachers that you connect more with the people in the ethnographies than with the people in your seminar, or with the colleagues you share your lunch breaks with? I could never find the right words to say this.

While habitus is historical, it is also permeable, responsive (Reay, 2004) and adaptive. The infiltration of new knowledges, practices and discourses that recursively govern one another continually modify one's subjectivity. According to Bourdieu, this (subjective) habitus, through which all of us interact with our environment, therefore responds to an objective[viii] field in a myriad ways. While this is not a process that is singular to working-class anthropologist, in the case of our working-class scholar, grappling with the unfamiliar cultural territory of the Higher Education system, they must (quickly) learn strategies of permeation that buffer them from the forceful shock of middle-class education schemata.

> I was in my final year of my Undergraduate degree, when a professor leading one of the seminars I was in asked the group, by a show of hands, whose parents contributed to, or paid for, their rent. With non-committal shrugs and blasé head nods, everyone but myself raised their arm. Although I don't believe the intention of the Professor's question was to make someone uncomfortable, I think that was part of the problem. He wasn't expecting an answer other than what he assumed; that the entire cohort had both familial and financial security they were able to rely on. I left the seminar furious, which looking back at that incident I realised my self-righteous anger was a defensive mechanism to mask the overwhelming sense of inadequacy and embarrassment I felt. It was not the first time that I had been jarred by my working-class background, but it was for the first time that I had seen explicitly, by a show of hands, what I was: poor.

It is in the moments of relation to some(thing)(one) that class appears; the events in which you can be yanked back towards a concretised history of class, to one that you can anchor yourself to; or propelled forwards, or jutted sideways from it, loosening your grip on a key aspect of your social and internal world.

> It was only when I started Uni that I really became angry about my background, when I saw that no one around me had grown up the way that I had. And I wasn't angry at the right people, either. I was angry at my family, one whose lives had been plagued by clichés of British poverty. My family knew that they weren't the 'kind' of family that could have made my transition into this world easier: the pride they felt for me was deeply rooted in the shame they felt about themselves. To this day, I still feel heartbroken about this.

Conclusion: Doing Diversity Means Doing Better

The discussion of financial precarity and social class in Anthropology is a timely one. During the timeline in which this paper was produced, between 2019 – 2020, Universities across the UK have undergone two periods of industrial action, striking to push back the rising tide of exploitative work conditions, of pension cuts, of deeply classed and racialised outsourcing of maintenance staff, of precarious work contracts given to early career academics, of denials of abusive work conditions, and of a frightening acceptance of the privatisation of Higher Education in the UK, sitting amongst a wider landscape of austerity which has had fatal consequences (The Guardian, 2020).

Andrew Sayer argues that class remains a highly charged issue because of the associations of injustice and moral evaluation (2002). Discussing class throws into sharp relief the material realities of systemic inequity, of which we are all implicated, and which many of us benefit from. This makes us uncomfortable. This discomfort, however, is precisely why we need to centre these potentially sore, potentially prickly discussions, to hear the uncomfortable truths – amongst what it means and what it *does* to practice diversity in Anthropology.

Like other terms that move in and out of vogue in intellectual and political arenas, 'diversity' has come to stand for both nothing and anything: it is arguably a conceptual black box. Because of its malleable nature, and varying uses in many contexts, many environments, and amongst different labour forces, coupled with its seemingly celebratory nature of all difference[ix], 'diversity' has become symbolically vacuous enough to serve as an umbrella term for many different projects, intentions and political orientations – regardless or not if these are explicitly political. In many ways, diversity projects serve to obscure the nature of structural inequity (*see* Ahmed, 2012), depending on who has been granted access to the power to verify what is and is not diverse. Cursory diversity for many of us can feel like a plea bargain, a reminder of performative politics, a reinstatement of the *real* (but unwritten) rules: play the game, and smile through silenced lips, then get back to work, get back to surviving.

Anthropology as a discipline must start attending to the ways that financial precarity and social class impact the subjects that *study*, not just the subjects *of* study, by reflecting on the venacularity of the academy and the discipline itself. The task of Anthropology – as a discipline, a body of thought, an institution and a body of labourers – is to expand both its emic and etic space, to make room for not only a diversity of thought, but also of bodies, of voices, of accents, of economic possibilities and imaginations. We must acknowledge Western anthropologists' construction, as Bourdieu says, of a boundary 'between 'the world in which one thinks' and 'the world in which one lives'' (2000:52). This also has pedagogical implications, too – for what is taught, for how it is taught, for which research proposals receive funding, and for those who feel that studying and working in Anthropology is not worth the violences they experience. This means, *a priori,* making room for a diversity of experience; it means, *a priori*, to listening and sitting with the voices that are so often muted. The question, then, should not be 'why diversity', but rather, 'diversity *for whom?'*

Notes

[i] I follow Paulo Freire's definition of praxis here; which is 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' ([1970] 2000:51).

[ii] As well as how this relationality between subjects sits within a wider socio-material milieu.

[iii] Originally coined by psychiatrist Chester Pierce in the 1970s to depict the daily insults and discriminations experienced by African American individuals by non-black Americans, the term 'microaggressions' has been expanded to apply to any marginalised group experiencing banal and quotidian violences. Derald Sue defines microaggressions as 'brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership' (2010: xxvi).

[iv] Interviews were conducted in 2018 and 2019.

[v] According to Goffman, these social demands originate from the anticipation that a person will display attributes of her 'social identity'. The anticipation of receiving confirmation of such attributes facilitates a regulatory framework, by which normative social relations are governed and can be thus expected to emerge in particular ways. The expectations for normative social relations, predicated on individuals possessing assumed attributes, become in turn 'righteously presented demands' of an individual to conform to such normativity (Goffman, 1963:2).

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vi Stigmatising attributes are divided into three sub-categories by Goffman. They are: 'abominations of the body'; 'blemishes of individual character', and 'tribal; stigma or race, nation and religion' (1963:4).

vii See also Julia Sauma's work on being 'discoverable' as deaf in academia (2021, this issue).

viii *Objective* should to be taken to mean in the Bourdieusian sense of not having been enveloped, as yet, into one's subjective habitus.

ix An implication of such 'diversity celebration' is the flattening of power relations between subjects, and the institutions that afford certain subjects more socio-material power than others. Some bodies are valued more than others, which bears repeating until the phrase no longer holds such violent weight to it.

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