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Class in disguise

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Abstract:

This paper asks how class can have importance in one of the worlds' most equal societies: Denmark. The answer is that class here appears in disguised forms. The field under study is a city, Aalborg, in the midst of transition from a stronghold of industrialism to a post industrial economy. The paper picks out two sets of discourses from this city: on the one hand newspaper discourses about the city's brand and on the other interviews with female inhabitants about experiences and visions of social differences and divides. The analysis reveals indirect and euphemized forms of class divisions. The paper also raises questions about how sociological discourses may contribute to the veiling of class.

Introduction[1]

Class seems to be out of fashion in Western societies. In the 1970'ies many scholars and political activists regarded class as the major social cleavage. "A working class hero is something to be", we sang, attributing a positive value to being working class. Through the 80'ies we were singing "Sisters are doing it for themselves" or "Sing if you're glad to be gay". In the 90'ies we could rap "Young, gifted & black".[2]

Today gender, sexuality and ethnicity are still overtly discussed – not only as part of song lyrics but also in broader societal debates - and the impact of these categories are continuously negotiated and worked against, like in programs for diversity management. In contrast, discrimination according to class seems to be acceptable, as it translates to education and thereby to merits. The post-industrial transfer of political focus from redistribution to recognition (Fraser 1995, 2004) has been coupled with an abandonment of concern for class politics (cf. Sayer 2005). In popular culture class is still present, but today almost exclusively as negative stereotypes, especially in reality TV (Skeggs 2005). As Munt (2000) states: "Whereas there has been public debate for the last twenty years on positive images of women, people of colour and gays and lesbians, there has been no such equivalent clamour for working class representation" (p. 8).

The muting of class runs into sociological discourses as well. What Westergaard (1996) stated already more than a decade ago still counts; all while inequality widens dramatically "fashionable theories and influential ideologies have appeared to say almost the opposite" (p. 141). About 20 years of deconstructivism in sociology has taught us that the meanings of "class", as all other categories, are shifting and impossible to keep stable. This paper is intended as a reflection on the deferred and shifting meanings of the class concept, all while we do not accept the difficulties involved in fixing what class "is" as an excuse for not analysing the still existing inequalities and social divisions– and it seems to us simpler to name these divisions class than to name them anything else.

When the (Western) working classes moved politically to the right, and thereby, according to a Marxist view, lost their class consciousness, many social scientists abandoned the

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[1] A shorter, French version of this article is published as "Parler des classes dans une société présumée égalitaire." *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* no. 191-192, pp. 123-133.

[2] The songs mentioned are "A Working Class Hero is something to be" by John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band 1970, "Sisters are doing it for themselves" by Annie Lennox & Aretha Franklin 1985, "Sing if you're happy to be Gay" by Tom Robinson Band 1978, and "Young, Gifted & Black" which is a classic song from Nina Simone that was reinterpreted by Big Daddy Kane in 1989.

class concept (Reay 2005). Other scholars responded instead by expanding the understanding of class identity to encompass less self-conscious manifestations. Many have analysed the current blurred or muted discourse on class in different, Western societies, and put the accent either on how class emanates from boundary drawing on cultural or moral grounds; on how classes are formed through negative rather than positive identifications, or on disidentification with class categories. Building on this body of research this paper will demonstrate the working of the same kinds of mechanisms in a Scandinavian context. The accent will be moved slightly, paying attention to how classes are disguised through translation into other categories. Two sets of discourses emanating from a study of a Danish city, Aalborg, are analysed: a series of interviews about social differences and a newspaper coverage and discussion of the city's brand and identity. Some findings from a survey will also be presented. To explore the ubiquitous but oblique ways that bring class to existence today is the primary objective of the paper. The secondary objective, treated in the concluding part, is a questioning of how sociological discourses on contemporary cleavages may contribute to the veiling of class.

Being one of the worlds' most equal societies, with the world's lowest score on the Gini-coefficient (OECD-data at http://fiordiliji.sourceoecd.org/pdf/fact2006pdf/10-03-02.pdf, cf. Jensen & Rathlev 2009), Denmark is a strong case for discussions about contemporary meanings of class. The score is due to rather low income differences together with the ample redistribution a Scandinavian welfare state provides - through taxes and welfare goods and benefits. The nation upholds an image of equality, and with some justification, when comparisons with other societies are made. But all traditional forms of inequality prevail also in Denmark – in wealth, longevity, access to higher education, etc. (for an overview see Jæger et al. 2003). While this makes Denmark an interesting case for studying the survival of objective inequalities and the discourses about them, within Denmark, Aalborg is a particularly interesting city, as it has a history of being a stronghold for industrialism and for the labour movement, and today is in the midst of a transition into a post-industrial economy.

Theoretical perspectives on class and identifications

It is, of course, the inequalities, injustices or objective effects that social origin has on differences in wealth, health, education etc. that makes class an important topic for sociology. Objectively speaking classes are, with Marx, different positions in relation to means of production, or, with Wright or Goldthorpe, differences in the distribution of wealth and other

resources, like influence over working conditions, or, with Bourdieu, in the distribution of economic and cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984, 1987) carefully stressed that classes do not exist as such. What exist are distributional differences, which the researcher may label class differences, thereby creating classes on paper. At rare moments such groups may become classes by regarding themselves as groups with common interests.

Following Bourdieu's understanding, the paper keeps an exclusive focus on the subjective or discursive aspects of class that both reflect and sustain the objective, distributional structures. In the section that follows our aim is not to give a full review of the literature about subjective classes, but to highlight some aspects (with key concepts in italics) that have oriented empirical analyses. We rely quite heavily on Bourdieu, but still find that later scholarships have brought important nuances, particularly regarding the complexity of identifications. This complexity is important, as it regards the disidentification with class categories and thereby the blurring of class discourse and the oblique workings of class structuring.

Subjective classes have been analysed sociologically in a series of different ways, with Marx as *class consciousness,* or in the tradition of British cultural studies as *structures of feelings* (Williams 1958) or in Hoggart's (1958) and Thomson's (1963) accounts of the working classes as lived *everyday experiences* and as *cultural practices*. These seminal works paved the road for a stream of research regarding class first and foremost as experiences and feelings: experiences of affinities or alienation, feelings of sympathy or antipathy, or bodily located feelings of being at one's right place like a fish in the water or being at the wrong place like a hair in the soup.

Such encompassing views on class proliferate today with works like Langston's (2004) and Charlesworth's (2000) ethnography or Monteiro's (2008) emphasis on class as *bodily inscriptions,* and understanding deeply rooted within Bourdieu's understanding of the *habitus* as permeated by class. Also Reay (2005) put words on feelings involved in class as "ambivalence, inferiority or superiority, visceral aversions, recognition and the markings of taste" (p. 911) stating that they all contribute to a whole "psychic economy of class" (p. 911) (also see Reay 2008). Likewise Sayer (2005) has drawn the attention towards how: "People experience class in relation to others partly via moral and immoral sentiments or emotions such as benevolence, respect, compassion, pride and envy, contempt and shame" (p. 3). Such feelings are probably only rarely experienced as having to do with class, but instead about some people being perceived as strange, snobbish, rude, narrow-minded, sympathetic, attractive etc. This implies

that class is experienced as a lot of other things than what in a strict sense is seen as class. Class is not only the social divisions, but also the effects these divisions have on other areas of life.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as an expression of class also encompasses practices, experiences and feelings, as well as distinctions and the drawing of boundaries. Specific forms of habitus fit to specific life conditions and trajectories and are expressed in material and cultural consumptions as well as in political and moral orientations and as much in condemnations as in preferences. As Bourdieu (1984) states: "In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick-making') of the taste of others" (p. 56). So class identity does not only concern who one is, but also who one is not. A Suzuki differs from a BMW not only in price and horsepower, but also in the signs that it gives about the drivers' social belonging.

Analysing men in elite positions in the United States and in France Lamont (1992), and later, in a study of working class men in the same countries (Lamont 2000), challenges Bourdieu claiming that moral boundaries are more important than cultural boundaries, especially in the American case. This point is carried further by Sayer (2005). This discussion seems to underestimate the importance Bourdieu actually attributed to ethical, moral and political class differences in *Distinction*, where they accompany the cultural and economic distinctions through the whole analysis. It still, however, seems justified to question whether the forms of high culture that played such an important role in class distinctions in Bourdieu's study of France, actually play such a strong role in other societies (cf. for instance Bennett et al. 2009, Prieur & Savage 2011 and 2013).

Bourdieu's shift of accent from affirmation and belonging to *negation and distances* has, however, been taken up in other studies (e.g. Savage 2000). As Devine and Savage (2005) read Bourdieu, to him identification implies differentiating oneself from others in a field, making class *identity* a relational claim to other players in the field. Thus, attention is drawn towards the interplay between position and *practices of positioning*, which of course demand a degree of reflexivity from the agents. The complexity of this interplay is not fully explored by Bourdieu, who concentrates on cases of fits between positions and dispositions in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1987). The rare misfits described are in cases of social mobility, when the *habitus* of a former or an imagined future position may be traced in current dispositions. Though his later work, *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al. 1999), contains numerous portrayals of

misfits, these are simply analysed as lack of adaptation of the habitus to new social conditions imposed by the decline of industrialism, with little attention to the issue of reflexivity.

In a study of a group of women who according to all sociological criteria would belong to the working class, but stubbornly resisted this label, Skeggs (1997) came to question Bourdieu's assumptions about fit between positions and dispositions. Skeggs concluded that such *disidentifications* or *misrecognitions* were to be understood as reflexive identity constructions, since to be working class offered the interviewed women no kind of positive identification. Skeggs further showed that boundary drawing is not reserved for the elites, but is practiced as well within lower layers, towards those who are even further down (or of another ethnic origin) or upwards against the "posh" or "hoity-toity". Studying working class men in United States and in France, Lamont (2000) shows a similar dissociation of socioeconomic status from moral worth at a subjective level, hereby revealing the reflexive reworking of the social hierarchy.

In the literature presented above, quite different concepts are employed and a question may be raised about how well they fit together. A habitus exists at a subjective level, while it reflects intersubjective entities such as cultural representations or shared schemes of perceptions, evaluations and categorizations. The pair formed by *habitus* and *representations* corresponds to the poststructuralist vocabulary's pair *subjectivities* and *discourses*, but the former conceptualization gives more impact to the unconscious and non-verbal than the latter does. In the following analysis we will use all these concepts as the possible differences between them are of minor importance for the purpose of this paper. In our analysis of class discourses, we will draw the attention towards the following aspects of subjective class, all present in the literature mentioned above:

- Class is seen as a lived, everyday experience, which translates to feelings and is expressed through the drawing of boundaries towards others, and more clearly so as negative rather than positive identifications.
- The subjective identifications related to class do not necessarily fit with objective positions. The social agents rework the categorizations reflexively.
- Class is expressed in indirect ways, through judgments and categories that are not explicitly about class.

The aspects are related, but within existing literature the emphasis alternates. Below we will look for all aspects stressing the last mentioned, as this is the least discussed, and its implications for sociology's own discursive practices remains to be analysed.

Two sources of empirical data

As mentioned the paper draws on two sources of data, with the main emphasis put on the latter: 1) Media representations of Aalborg and its inhabitants and 2) Interviews with female inhabitants of the city. In addition, some findings from a survey of class identifications and cultural practices among the inhabitants of Aalborg will be presented in a separate box (see box I later).

As regards the newspaper articles they have been selected through a systematic reading of newspapers with the purpose of finding references to the social composition of Aalborg. The reading does not aim at giving a representative picture of how Aalborg is portrayed, but only to highlight this specific topic. Only some of the relevant quotations will be used, but they are selected as some of the most explicit after a systematic search among all articles about the city of Aalborg in all Danish newspapers (accessible in the database www.infomedia.dk) in the period from 2004 to 2009. After eliminating the majority of the hits as irrelevant (treating sport events, accidents, crimes etc.) two key events stood out as the most telling for our purpose: the launching of a branding campaign for the city (468 hits) and the premiere of a movie shot in Aalborg (1389 hits).

The qualitative data presented in the paper originates from a study based on in depth interviews with 20 women living in Aalborg, strategically selected on account of their responses in a telephone survey conducted by the authors of this paper together with two colleagues (see BOX II and III later) (also see http://www.soc.aau.dk/forskning/compas/). The survey was used to construct a social space (Prieur et al 2008, Faber et al. 2012, cf. Bourdieu 1984), where after interview respondents were selected from different corners of this space.[3] The interviewed women were between 29 and 52 years old; all were mothers, and all were ethnically Danes. The reason only women were interviewed was a conviction that the ways of experiencing class would be quite specific depending on gender.

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[3] The women were picked out on the basis of different background information (age, marital position, economic situation, education, occupation, residence, etc.) and according to their answers on a number of questions about political stances, cultural preferences, etc.

The women were roughly split in two large groups primarily on the basis of their level of education, work situation and overall household income. They were, in other words, singled out due to a pragmatic assessment that resembles the one also being used by Lareau (2003). The group of women selected to represent the working class and the lower middle class all had little or no education and worked in jobs with low status and low income, all had husbands with similar or less privileged working situations and all were living in deprived areas of the city. The group of women selected to represent the middle class and the upper middle class all had a high level of education and worked in jobs with high status and high income, all had husbands with similar privileged working situations and all were living in privileged areas of the city. When asking for interviews, the topic was announced as lifestyle differences with questions about social background, upbringing, schooling, working life, leisure activities and opinions. Class was not mentioned explicitly.[4]

For this paper the interviews have been read with the purpose of examining the women's' experience of class difference and identity, highlighting the drawing of boundaries and examining the "commonsense" categories used to describe and explain class-based differences. In this paper, however, gender is not so much a question. Most of the indirect ways of wording class that we encountered in these interviews were also present in the interviews with men conducted by our colleague (Skjott-Larsen 2008). A difference, however, is the fact that motherhood and parenting was more outspoken in the interviews with the women. While the repertoire of topics that in our eyes relate to class still seems broad, the fact that we are analysing interview data with women only has evidently given more emphasis on certain topics and less on others than a differently composed sample would have. For instance, the fact that all are mothers is important, too. As Byrne (2006) puts it, much of the work involved in being mothers and bringing up children involves negotiating, repeating and reciting not only gendered, but also classed norms.

The following section of the paper contains an analysis of the media representations and the interviews. Despite their disparate nature both data sets tell a story about veiled discourses on class, and about how class is circumvented and addressed indirectly.

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[4] The interviews were conducted by Faber for her thesis on the meanings of class and intersections of class and gender (Faber 2008).

Class representations - underneath discourses about a city and its inhabitants

On the homepage of Aalborg City the following image of the city is announced: "Aalborg's time as an industrial city seems to be over. The concept 'knowledge city' has become more suitable" (www.aalborg.dk). Why is this said? Probably the idea is to counter the traditional image of Aalborg, as it is expressed by Carsten Jensen, a renowned Danish author who spent his teens in Aalborg and hates the city: "When the East-Germans become nostalgic, Aalborg will become a great tourist city", he declared to a national newspaper (*Information,* March 5-6 2005). The seemingly contradictory statements about the city share, however, an underlying disdain for industrial cities: They belong to the past. This judgment is, we will claim, indirectly a judgment of the kind of people who live in industrial cities.

In the first half of the 20th century, the economy of Aalborg was indeed based on traditional industry and on commerce. The industrial decline started in the middle of the century, all while administrative, service and liberal occupations kept growing (Christensen & Topholm 1990). The composition of Aalborg's industry was narrow, dominated by agro-alimentary industry (a tobacco factory was for many years the city's biggest workplace) and production of construction materials. Aalborg was an industrial locomotive and stood for progress, being Denmark's most modern city in the 1930'ies, thanks to investments in infrastructure and in housing. Until the end of the century Aalborg was also a stronghold for the labour movement (Bender et al.1998).

The decline of the agro-alimentary industry started in the 1960'ies, with tobacco production closing in 1970. The shipbuilding yard was then the second biggest workplace in the city, until it also went down in the 1980'ies (www.aalborgkommune.dk). The municipality of Aalborg then became the city's biggest workplace, and it still is. The University, which received its first students in 1974, has been a core actor in the development of the city, and through joint ventures with private companies led to growth especially within communication technology and medical technology.

While these changes are palpable for the inhabitants of the city, they may not have been noticed elsewhere. One of the national newspapers gave a rare presentation of Aalborg (*Information* 5-6/3-2005) as part of the coverage of a new movie, *Nordkraft*, about drug abusers and other marginalized people in Aalborg. The movie was based on a well-known book by the Danish author Jakob Ejersbo. We will not discuss neither the movie nor the book, but just highlight the image of the city in the comments provoked by the film version and the launching

of the movie. On the newspaper's front page the headline read: "Aalborg, you old port whore" (a quotation from a Danish rapper) and a picture of smoking factory chimneys seen through a wire fence. The articles inside the newspaper were mainly with authors and artists who had left Aalborg, but talked about the violence and heavy drinking they had seen when growing up in the city. The journalists presented the city as: "Denmark's Liverpool with heavy smoke, rain, drinking, drugs and work. Not knowledge based work, microbiology and medical firms." This presentation of Aalborg (which has neither more smoke nor more rain than the capital has, but a booming ICT sector) was only contested by a former inhabitant, Joakim Kjeldsen, who considered the city to be more middle than working class, as the citizens apparently should be characterized by "an introversion that threatens to suck the eyes right into the dark, Northjutlandish mind" (April 19, 2005). "Know a person from Aalborg on his stoop and hollow eyes", Kjeldsen states, claiming that the people of Aalborg pull their eyes together as a sign of self-control and suspicion. This frenologic nonsense was never even contested. Conversely, the image of the city retailed by the movie prompted a vivid discussion in the local newspaper. Aalborg University's director of communication, Allan Clausen, attacked the movie, stating that "it cements an already ruling perception, namely that Aalborg is only cement, drinking, and AaB [the local football team]" (Nordjyske Stiftstidende 21/1 2005). The cement refers to the cement plant Aalborg Portland. Clausen called for images of the city's cultural life, art expositions and coffee bars in order to attract students to the university. Just as the combination of cement, drinking and football connotes rather clearly, we will claim, to male, white, working class, the expositions and coffee bars connote just as clearly to the young and educated middle class of both genders.

A year before this discussion Aalborg municipality had launched a branding campaign. Also this event was extensively covered by the local newspaper, Nordjyske Stiftstidende. A headline of one of the articles in this covering was: "Aalborg chasing its new identity. Branding: the city wants to be rid of its reputation as a heavy worker city." (Aug. 4, 2004). So workers connote as heavy, and it would be desirable for the city not to connote to them anymore. A presentation of different scenarios for the city from this branding project (www.brandingaalborg.dk/fremtidsrapport.htm) names the kind of people the city should try to attract: the new economy's creative and innovative professionals – with reference to Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). Despite the reduction in number of their traditional supporters, *Socialdemokratiet* (Labour) has managed to stay in power in Aalborg, but

the effort requires tight-rope walking between respect for the past and embracement of the new: "Aalborg is a workers' city" declared the mayor, Henning G. Jensen, and continued, mockingly (according to the reporter): "But what is wrong with being a workers' city? With a bit of good will one could even name what academics do as work" (*Urban,* Aalborg Nov. 25 2004). Short time before this the mayor had declared his support to a new and glossy magazine about Aalborg with the remark: "This shows that Aalborg is not just another peasant town, but that there are enterprising people in the city, who try to make a difference" (*Appetize*, 2004 p. 52). When interviewing the mayor about the branding campaign – presented in an article titled "Negative image of Aalborg to be changed" - he stated: "We are tired of only hearing about Aalborg and Northern Jutland when a bus has an accident, somebody is killed in Jomfru Ane Gade [street with pubs and nightclubs], when a member of Bandidos [motorcycle club rivalling with Hells Angels] is buried, and when enterprises close down" (Nov. 24, 2004). This statement is interesting as the mayor had earlier described how he wanted the city to be presented, in a comment after a reputedly successful event with the Tall Ships' Race: "We have had a lot against us, and at the end of the day, we have only ourselves to pull us up by the hair, just as we did after the yard closed down in 1988 (…) The experiences with the tall ships may contribute to the creation of an atmosphere in the city, that in the next turn will attract people from the outside to settle here or to invest in the area" (Aug. 3, 2004). Jensen contrasts peasants to enterprising people, describing the latter as locally based people who will pull themselves by the hair, or as people coming from the outside to invest in the city. Both kinds contribute to the city's development. He employs an explicit, albeit fictive, "we", probably referring to "we, the people living in Aalborg". The question is whether the discourse is as inclusive as it seems. Because if some people are wanted, others must be if not unwanted then at least less wanted. Thereby the quotations fit only too well with the more general devaluation of all that connotes to the industrial world expressed by other sources. To be working class seems to be *out*.

The images of the city presented above are not the only ones. Images are contested, as showed in local discussions about what to do with the industrial buildings: rehabilitate them or tear them down? Should the waterfront remind about port activity or be transformed to a cultural centre? With today's global economy, the smoking chimneys have moved from the European cities' east side to the Far East. This leaves the choice between tearing down the old chimneys, converting them to picturesque souvenirs or just let them stand as they are. At the time being, all three solutions are applied in Aalborg.

Not much empirical work exists about representations of or discourses on class in the media. Bourdieu (1984) includes some data of this kind in his analysis. Also, Lawler (2004, 2005) builds on newspaper examples in her accounts of how the middle-class distinguishes itself through expressions of quite explicit disgust towards working-class existence, while Skeggs (2005) provides an empirical analysis of representations of class in reality TV, with working class culture and manners exposed in these contemporary "freak shows". Our analysis of the discursive treatment of the city of Aalborg fits with their analyses, even if the disregard of the working class in our example is stated in less explicit terms. This, we will claim, reflects well the particularity of the Danish class discourses, where class is only worded indirectly.

BOX I: How classes can emanate from a survey of cultural practices and preferences

A survey, designed with the purpose of assessing the relevance of Bourdieu's model of social differentiation and lifestyles, was conducted in the city of Aalborg in 2004, and from the city's 162,000 inhabitants a sample of 1600 persons between 18 and 75 years of age was drawn. 1174 persons (73.4%) were thereafter interviewed about their lifestyles, cultural practices, preferences and moral or political opinions. When asked about whether they agreed with a statement that there were no longer classes in Denmark, 75 % disagreed. The answer betrays clear *class awareness*. And when asked about within which class they would place themselves, obliging them to choose between the working, the middle and the upper class, almost all (96 %) accept to answer the question, which could be taken as an indication of a just as clear *class identification*. When, however, 76 % place themselves within the middle class, it seems evident that their class identification cannot be strong. The meaning in placing oneself within the middle class resides perhaps more in conveying a message about *who one is not* rather than who one is. In this survey, too, class appears indirectly. The data were subjected to several multiple correspondence analyses (MCAs). On the basis of the background data on different forms of capital, a construction of a social space was made wherein lifestyle choices were plotted (Skjott-Larsen 2008, Harrits et al. 2010, and Faber et al. 2012). The lifestyle variables were also used to construct a space of lifestyles, wherein the background variables were plotted (Prieur & Rosenlund 2010). These procedures revealed series of oppositions regarding cultural practices, which could be linked both to the volume and to the composition of capital. It was among those with the highest level of cultural capital that the readers of avant-garde literature and intellectual newspapers were found, and also the amateurs of abstract art. But even within this group most did not have a sophisticated or demanding taste, and they listened to much of the same music and watched many of the same TV programs as people with lower levels of cultural capital did. All in all, they appeared less clearly distinguished – less snobbish – than the people occupying the same social position did in *Distinction*. But even if their taste did not distinguish them clearly from other social groups, their distastes did: their distastes from some choices made only by people in low social positions, be it their music (for instance C & W), their favourite TV shows (for instance reality shows), their readings (for instance Danielle Steel), their culinary preferences (for instance traditional Danish food), and, not least, their moral and political opinions (for instance nationalist attitudes). People seek towards those who have the same preferences and opinions as themselves – they find together, in marriage, in friendships and in neighbourhoods. Thereby different social groups are created – groups that not are experienced as classes, groups that do not act politically as classes, but that still can be identified by the sociologist as classes.

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Wording class differences in interviews

Turning from the media representations of Aalborg and looking at the interviews with female inhabitants of the city it is striking how these, too, uncover veiled discourses on class. This phenomenon has also been addressed in earlier scholarship. Sayer (2005), for example, calls class "an embarrassing and unsettling subject" (p. 1); Savage et al. (2001) call it "a loaded moral signifier" (p. 889) while Bettie (2003) calls it "omnipresent even as it is discursively invisible" (p. 201). According to Ortner (2003), in American society class goes unspoken as such, often being displaced into culturally more salient discourses, like gender and sexuality.

While interviewing women living in Aalborg we found that they were reluctant to talk about class and their own position in the social structure, and yet, at the same time, they seemed to have a quite infallible sense of class. The elusiveness was at the same time a methodological problem and a central finding about how classes are constructed in contemporary society. Little by little stories about experiences and visions of differences surfaced in the interviews. These stories sometimes dealt with gender, in particular with motherhood and the upbringing of children, sometimes with neighbourhoods, consumptions and everyday life.

The analysis of the interviews presented is closely connected to a growing stream of research rethinking class through a concern with other intersecting identity issues that make up the complex social reality. In this body of work class studies have merged with the feminist tradition with explorations of how gender (and race/ethnicity) are lived through class at every moment; like in Bettie's (2003) compelling analysis of young women's complex identity work, showing that class and gender are simultaneously experienced and performed across spaces and intricately embedded in social structures and power relations (cf. Skeggs 1997, Reay 1998, Ortner 2003, Skilbrei 2005, Byrne 2006 and Gillies 2007).

In the interviews explicit class categories were almost never applied. The folk categories that the women applied for distinguishing groups of people did not bear any traces of references to relationship to means of production, neither to the labour unions' divides, or to the public-private divide, not even to occupational groups. A quite frequently drawn divide was, however, between those who worked and those who didn't. As the latter were often perceived as not wanting to work (preferring social benefits), this was to a certain degree a moral divide. Questions about labour unions invited to treat class at a more collective level, but did not get much resonance.

In the interviews there were only few traces of perceptions of social differences as related to hierarchy and dominance. Differences were matter-of-factly described with references to distribution of wealth: There are people who "have a lot of money", who "own manors", etc. Such differences were not commented as unfair. Only two women in marginalized labour market positions complained, as they had experienced disdain from people higher up.

Most of the interviewed women presented themselves as near the middle, as opposed to being at the top or bottom of society. All claimed to belong to a group of "ordinary", average types - both the economically and culturally privileged and the less so. The same is found in British studies, like in Uriocoli (1993), Savage (2000) or Devine (2005). But as Savage (2000) writes, the idea of ordinariness betrays class: "It is, after all, members of 'other' classes who might not be ordinary" (p. 117). People may maintain a dignity by not being the lowest, and convey that they are not pretentious: they do not think they are better than most other people. The latter message is of particular importance in a society like the Danish, where equality is strongly valued (Gullestad 2001, Vike et al. 2001).

An economically privileged woman disapproved of rich people for paying too much attention to appearance, and claimed her difference as she "wouldn't mind going to the local supermarket wearing garden clothes". As the particular supermarket she mentioned is situated close to a rather poor area of the city, she must appear quite posh when she walks around in garden clothes, as most of the other clients there don't even have gardens. However, for her it was a statement emphasising the ordinary aspects of her life; a proof she was not a snob. In this context it may be worth mentioning that there is a strong anti-snobbish current in the Nordic countries, and modesty is a particularly strong value.

One of our interviewees, a less privileged women with little education working in a low paid job, told about the unease she felt when working as a cleaner having experienced people ignoring her presence. This added to a lack of recognition of her effort: "I had to get away from there. I had to. Anything would be better than that. So, it does make a difference what one does for a living. You may well think 'I am not my work, I am me. Can't you see that?' That's what you may want to shout out loud!" This woman continues telling that she often got "a pain in the stomach" because she felt less and less capable of 'getting it right'.

As illustrated above people in both high and low positions conveyed unease with being categorized – reinterpreting and negotiating the positioning of themselves: "I may be classified as rich, but I am not like rich people/ I don't have much education or money, but I am

not like those who don't want to work." The examples indicate that it might not only be the subordinate character of the position that creates unease when being identified with it, as Skeggs (1997) suggests, but also the act of being classified in itself, as it implies loss of individuality and reduction to a stereotype.

The unease with categorizations concerns also applying them on other people. Often the women resorted to euphemisms: "It's like they are on another frequency than we are" (about rich people), or "It's a completely different world they live in" (about socially marginalized relatives). As Bourdieu (1998: 98, albeit clearer in the French original[5]) says about euphemisms: They make it possible to say something all while one does not say it, and they "permit the naming of the unnameable".

Among the most frequent circumventions of class was using geographical areas to explain social divides and to, metaphorically, portray other social groups, for instance "the posh families in Hasseris [a rich area in Aalborg], where people have a lot of money and big cars," in contrast to "the underprivileged in Aalborg East [a poor area in the city]". Thus, like Watt (2006) we find that class take on a spatial form, revealing itself in perceptions of different neighbourhoods and areas and of the people living there.

Quite similarly social differences were often phrased as questions of preference or presented as expressions of personalities, lifestyles and choices. People just have different priorities – like "the parents who don't have time for their kids, because they're out playing golf". There was, however, some conscience about the fact that not all have the same possibilities. Another stereotypical representation, related to boundaries drawn in relation to parenting, opens for this: "the single mothers who let their children run around without supervision". As the last two examples show, norms about good mothering practices marked distinctions both upwards and downwards. The ways in which the women continuously positioned themselves by reference to other mothers reveal how discourses of gender, child care and motherhood are inextricably bound up with more general cultural discourses of moral and class (for an extended discussion of class and motherhood see Byrne 2006 and Gillies 2007).

With the exception of one woman all the interviewed women were working (like the majority of Danish women). Depending on their social position the women expressed

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[5] The original quote in *Raison pratiques* p. 184: "L'euphémisme est ce qui permet de dire tout en disant qu'on ne dit pas, ce qui permet de nommer l'innommable, c'est-à-dire, dans une économie des bien symboliques, l'économique, au sens ordinaire du terme, le donnant-donnant.»

different perceptions of their work. While the middle class women seemed satisfied with their work situation, although mentioning the difficulties associated with having to balance work and family life in two-career families, the working class women and the women from the lower middle class talked about their work situation in a less positive way. Several of the these women refereed to the positions as mothers and dissociated themselves from middle class mothers whom they believed worked too much, not paying enough attention to the children and to the family's needs. As Skilbrei (2003, 2005) have also concluded before us, based on field work among cleaners and shop assistants in Norway, motherhood and family life has an important symbolic significance especially to working class women. Working in the family and caring for the children is experienced as more self-fulfilling than working in an underpaid job with low status – and it is seen as the ethically right choice. Women pursuing professional careers are frequently criticised for sacrificing their families (Skilbrei 2005, 2005).

The moral imperative is also present among the middle and upper class mothers themselves. As one university educated woman who lived in a rich neighbourhood said about the people living there (at the same time marking a distance to a group of people she in some respect belongs to herself): "People here may drive around in big cars, but their kids may perhaps be a bit neglected." They could need more "care, love and attention from their parents, and time".

Another university educated woman used motherhood not to criticize her own group but to mark a distance to parents with low income and low education. Throughout the interview she admitted having tried to influence her daughter's friendships, telling about a particular classmate: "She's very overweight and not so integrated socially, and she tumbles in here like an elephant in a china store, and she plays some strange games and says strange things. Well, I find it a bit ... it's like it all gets down at a lower level instead of being elevated." In the interview she also complains about the parents of the girl bringing home meals from McDonalds often, and the girl always asking for unhealthy food when playing with her daughter. Without mentioning class and social differences directly, she expressed a strongly classed discourse on good and bad eating habits and appropriate children play.

In the interviews experiences of upward social mobility or of having married a person with a different social background seemed help wording differences – providing a sharpened sensitivity for class. A woman told about her sister-in-law who was living from social benefits, and marked thereby a distance towards people considered having a lower work ethic than her: "My husband's sister is on social security and she wants nothing more. She has said

right out, that if she is assigned a job, she'll see to get sacked again. So she stays at home with their three kids. We are very different. We have a very different attitude toward things. If she can cheat, she will cheat. Sheand her boyfriend both have a completely different approach to society. She thinks it's alright just to do nothing and she won't make a contribution. Not because she is unable, in that case it was a completely different situation, but she is not willing to". Another woman who started to work as a canteen assistant, but chose to get more education, said about her former colleagues: "I think they were standing still, and I wanted something more." The "more" was a sense of meaning in her work, which she contrasted to those who work just the minimum necessary for qualifying for benefits when they quit. Yet, another woman who had also moved upwards and today has a high income, told about her preference for socialising with people of her own kind: "We can discuss today's situation at a difficult work place in this specific branch, or 'now the share prices are at that level' or 'oh God', and then have a beer on that. There are some common interests, which perhaps in the end also have had to do with the amount of money you dispose over." This woman explains that in becoming upwardly mobile she has replaced most of her old circle of friends now enjoying new consumer goods, practices and activities e.g. getting spa treatments and buying expensive wine although she "could buy the cheaper ones since it is just going to be poured down anyway", as she phrases it. The analysis of the interviews with women having experienced upward social mobility resound a related stream of Nordic works (e.g. Trondman 1994, Ambjörnson 1996, Wennerström 2003) which have all focused on working class people becoming middle class pointing to how this journey is paved with difficulties, often leaving the traveller confused about their own class positioning and marked by a continuing sense of dislocation and disloyalty.

Aalborg is not a very multicultural city, and ethnic divides were only accentuated by two of the interviewed women, one of them the previously quoted rich lawyer's wife. She said that she believed that many immigrants did not want to work and to adjust to Danish society, and she disapproved in particular of the Somalis, as she thought they "looked lazy". The other woman, on the contrary, was economically very unprivileged and with peripheral connection to the labour market. In the interview she stated that she felt that immigrants had easier access to some jobs than her because of the political focus on integration, and that they got social benefits more easily than she did. As in Denmark, everybody knows ethnic relations is a loaded topic, the women may have been reluctant to evoke it in front of the interviewer. In current media discourses the ethnic other – particularly the dangerous young Muslim man and

the oppressed Muslim woman – are discursive figures that frequently serve as abject categories. In the interview, it was actually more striking how the racist and/or the supporter of the populist Danish People's Party served as a discursive figure and abject category for the well-educated: The single kind of people they could legitimately distance themselves explicitly from, confident that the interviewer would agree. In only a couple of cases, these judgments were explicitly connected to lower classes, as when an upper secondary school teacher referred to people with little or no education, saying they had a completely different approach to life than her: "I look at things in a much more nuanced way than they do. Their world is very much black and white and they often generalise a lot".

Throughout the interviews, class appears indirectly through the utilisation of other categories, expressing valorisation for certain kinds of people and (more frequently) de-valorisation of other kinds of people. While those high up may word a criticism of some whom they perceive as narrow minded and intolerant (or more explicitly as racists and supporters of the Danish Popular Party), those in subordinate positions may word a criticism of pretentiousness and conspicuous consumption, with terms like "snobbish", "they think they are a bit more than others", "they feel better than others", "they show off" etc., or more positively with appreciations of people who are down to the ground, honest, and have a strong work ethic. Explicit class identities were almost never voiced, and the resemblances with most other people were more accentuated than the differences. Still, more or less subtle disidentifications were indeed voiced, often materialized in the ways in which the women talked about their families, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and other groups in society, and particularly by way of the lines of demarcation that the women used to present themselves in opposition to people they wished to be dissociated from. Above all, class was revealed through borders between 'them' and 'us' and through a declared affiliation to moral communities.

The moral distinctions were particularly pronounced by the women with working class backgrounds. In the interviews these women, deprived of privileged positions in society, often underplayed the significance of economic and cultural capital by explicitly dissociating money and status from personal worth and integrity. As Lamont (2000) puts it, such statements are marked by the core value that it is not social position but attitude that counts. In our interviews this is illustrated with statements like: "We don't need to go to Mallorca in order to be together and relax as a family", or, as another working class women phrased it: "Sure, I would like a new bathroom with spa and Jacuzzi, but when all is said and done I believe that the money

to pay for such a bathroom is costly earned". A similar tendency is also presented in Gullestads' (1984) now classic study on young working class women in Bergen (Norway) and their understanding of dignity and self-respect. These women were absorbed by the question "Who fits in with whom?" where "to fit in with" more or less meant "to be similar to". The women in Gullestads' study used different kinds of symbolic means to establish social boundaries and create a moral division between themselves (people of their kind) and "others". As shown our interviews were often marked by social distance. The women from the middleclass presented stereotypical ideas often related to the moral status of the working class. Likewise the women from the working class presented stereotypical ideas about the middle class who were perceived as selfish and characterised by a lack of ability to cultivate intimate personal relationships. In both cases neither the working class nor the middle class were defined purely in terms of economic and cultural criteria but as much on the basis of perceptions of disapproved behaviours and negative characteristics. Thus, more than anything else, the differences regarded moral matters, although the moral matters were to a certain degree seen as related to economic or educational differences. The women all tended to define their own identity negatively, against perceptions of who they were not and of what they did not represent, and in this process the norms and values of the middle class were almost always phrased in a hidden contradistinction towards the working class and vice versa.

BOX II: Euphemizing class – seeing class from above

Utterances about class come in many forms, always lurking beneath the surface and rarely full-blown. Throughout the two hour interview with a stay-at-home mother married to a successful lawyer and living in the most expensive neighbourhood in Aalborg she never referred directly to class utilising instead euphemisms. However, in the telephone-survey in which the woman had agreed to meet the interviewer, she had declared to belong to the upper class, but withdrew this assessment when interviewed face-to-face: "Of course we have more money than 'Jones, the painter', or his likes, not? But many people have a lot of money nowadays, don't they?" She said that her neighbourhood used to be upper class, but added: "But I don't feel it is like that today. It is quite ordinary people who buy houses here now. I don't think one can generalise about it. Of course there are still people who earn more than others, but I wouldn't walk about telling people that my husband is a lawyer, and he earns well and such things. I wouldn't dream about saying that. And in any case it doesn't regard anybody. We have what we need, and then it doesn't regard anybody how I spend my money, does it? They are not to pay for me. No, I don't think … I don't think there's anything upper class about us." Her unease when talking about this is unmistakable. Talking about money and income seems to induce an embarrassment, the interviewee, however, also seems reluctant to acknowledge that she has an advantaged life and more importantly, she appears anxious to get through that she is like everyone else, she is not a snob, and she does not regard herself as superior to others.

<div align="right">Faber (2008)</div>

How sociology may contribute to the veiling of class

The examples in this paper have shown how class is worded indirectly - through devaluation for everything that connotes working class in statements about the city from representatives of the local or national elite, or in the interviews when the women talks about other social groups than their own. The categories used by the interviewees for positioning themselves were not given, but invented for the occasion and handled in ways that during the interview gave the most positive presentations of themselves possible: They were ordinary and middle class, whatever their social position actually was, having a better work ethic, better mothering practice etc. than other social groups.

We sociologists are also good at inventing categories, and also good at choosing them so that our own group gets the positive characteristics. For instance, when analysing the survey we had made in Aalborg (about cultural consumptions and attitudes) (Prieur, Rosenlund & Skjott-Larsen 2008) we encountered an opposition between an international orientation (preferring exotic food over national dishes, watching international news, having more interest for the US presidential campaign than for the Danish royal family, disagreeing that Danes should be given priority to jobs before immigrants, favouring more aid to developing countries, not being proud to be from Aalborg or to be Danes) and a local orientation with all the opposite answers. How should we name this opposition? Sociology offers a wide range of categories. We might, with references to different scholars, label the first group (those with an international orientation) as tolerant (Bryson 1996), cosmopolitan (Castells 2000), globalized (Baumann

2001), creative (Florida 2002), reflexive winners (Lash 1994) etc. – and the other group (those with a local orientation) as xenophobic, narrow minded, traditionalists, losers etc. These taxonomies obviously give the educated elite, which happens to be our own social group, all the positive characteristics, while the lower classes get the negative. The very same oppositions could be seen as related to values such as loyalty, stability, authenticity, having roots, choosing family over career, etc. - not a more objective conceptual framework, but the underlying values would at least be explicit.

Such ruptures with the sociological doxa are possible. With a taxonomy from the food sociologist Holm (cf. Holm 1997) between a "conspicuous" food culture and an "inclusive" food culture we designed some survey questions on food consumptions that helped us to identify an opposition between people who wanted to serve guests new and exotic dishes, being indifferent with the price of the food, and people who found it more important to have plenty of food for the guests, and to know on beforehand it was the kind of food their guests would enjoy. Blushing over our own food habits, we found her vocabulary to be a rare example of a sociological taxonomy that does not give the most positive characteristics to our own social group.

The implicit male biasing of sociological theory has been analysed by Smith (1987), who criticized the taking of a "bird's perspective without a bird" (or "God's view"). The critique was coined at the tendency to forget that all points of view emanate from a viewpoint, and corresponds to Bourdieu's (2000) critique particularly of the "scholastic" view that biased by its distance to the urgencies of the world confounds theoretical and practical reason. In accordance with Bourdieu's call for reflexivity about sociological tools and approaches and drawing on the feminist vigilance for male biasing, Skeggs (2004: 45 ff.) has pointed to the implicit class biasing in sociology, with examples from the current sociology of mobility, which tends to disguise who can and who cannot move, and also in Giddens' sociology of the self with its silence on matters of class, gender and race. Sociology is full with such biases – like when talking about education, where already the use of "high" vs. "low" convey an evaluation , as Vogt (2007) has also pointed out in a critique of a research tradition where scholars may, un-reflexively, distinguish between "interesting" and "not interesting" jobs. These problems of inherent biases in sociological categorizations, conceptualisations, questioning etc. would indeed merit more thorough investigations. It also raises questions of the need to address the contours of the researcher's social identity and his/her social belonging or positionality (in terms of

gender, race, class, sexuality and other axes of social difference), and it raises questions of how we, as Nagar and Geiger write, can use research *"to produce knowledge across multiple divides (of power, geopolitical and institutional locations, axes of difference, etc.) in ways that do not reinscribe interests of the privileged?"* (Nagar & Geiger 2007).

The sociology of class analyses is full of classificatory systems in which intellectuals are either placed outside of the class structure, are given a positive role or, at least, accorded a euphemistic portrayal. To reinterpret and reword oppositions such as the above mentioned is a necessary reflexive defence against distortions of our analyses with narcissistic images of our own social group. Last but not least these issues are crucially important because our academic work can have 'real effects' in different ways and on different levels. On the one hand research can risk covering up or perpetuating structural inequalities as research can impact upon policy discourses, e.g. by *"effecting what/who are recognised (or not) as important, who are named as 'problems', who are constructed as deserving of resources, and so on"* (Archer, Hutchings & Leathwood 2001: 42). On the other hand research can disrupt the research participants if they feel misunderstood, misrepresented or even subjected to symbolic violence.

Concluding discussion

The primary objective of this paper has been to explore some representations of contemporary social divisions in a Danish city. The exploration has brought up more or less discreet applications of class divisions in media discourses and in interviews. As illustrated class divisions seem to be expressed through a multitude of other divisions, like the geographic and moral divisions demonstrated above, and are hidden in discourses that apparently treat other topics, like the city's progress or women's standards for motherhood. Explicit class categories are avoided, particularly for self-identification, where an unease connected to being "pinned down" appears quite clearly.

The argument about the hidden nature of class put across in this paper is an argument about class (still) having importance, also at the subjective level. Though, with data only from one point in time, the word "still" must be bracketed. If we are right, however, that class lives a hidden life in contemporary societies and appears in disguise, questions may be raised about the premises for the claim about the death of class. Regardless of whether class thrives better or worse than before, we can see that it thrives even in a prosperous welfare society - in one of the world's supposedly most equal societies. Using examples from media

representations of the city of Aalborg and from interviews with female inhabitants we have illustrated processes of disidentification with class categories and of moral judgments (or "othering"). As shown, class may be as efficient as ever as a producer of a series of more or less subtle social differences. Due to this we follow Savage, Silva and Warde (2008) who suggest that class identities have not been eradicated, but rather become less connected to collective and solidary sentiments and more to individualized emotional frames.

The access to higher education and thereby higher class positions is, formally, open to everybody in Denmark, with rather generous economic grants offered to all students. A certain social mobility indeed exists, and is well-known, so class is not (anymore) simply a fate. Beck (2002) is obviously right stating that the experience of class is more individualized today, but Bourdieu (1984) may also be right: class domination is first and foremost a question of symbolic violence. In a society like the Danish we believe the efficacy of class domination today resides precisely in its hidden nature, putting the responsibility for success or failure on the individuals. The prevailing idea seems to be that personal wealth is related to capabilities and diligence and marginalisation to bad luck or laziness.

The neoliberal winds that have been blowing over Europe in the last decades may have strengthened the experience of individual responsibility for one's fate. This is why it still should be a mission for sociology to unveil hidden structures of domination and the deceitfulness of the disguised discourses on class.

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