

**Seeing Through Happiness. Class, Gender and
Popular Film: Liverpool Women Remember the
50's Film Musical.**

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Abstract

My research, drawing on interviews with seventeen white working class women in Liverpool, explores the meanings that the women made around Hollywood film musicals in Liverpool in the 1950's, and the significance of those memories in their lives today. The central aim of the thesis is to challenge and expand existing theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship between class, gender and the consumption of popular culture.

The thesis stages a series of questions around the function of qualitative empirical research on audiences for film, specifically the function of empirical research on working class female audiences for popular film, in terms of understanding the breadth of meaning made around cinema in working class women's lives. What the interviews present are a complex array of readings of the musical texts, readings that are located within specific personal, social, cultural and geographical histories.

The research contributes to current debates in film and cultural studies. The thesis intervenes in current debates within cultural studies, placing centre stage fundamental concerns around the relative absence of class within contemporary research on popular culture. It contributes to methodological debates within cultural studies through an analysis of the possible methods for researching the lived experience of media audiences. It enters film studies at the site of recent methodological debates around the possibilities and limitations of textual and empirical analysis as a means of accounting for the ways in which audiences make meanings around film texts. It also enters in the midst of the fascinating and important emergence of empirical research that produces ethno- histories of popular cultural practice by investigating the ways in which cinema and film going figure in the daily lives of people. In demonstrating the breadth of meaning of the cinema in working class lives, the thesis also shows the limits of an exclusive focus on film texts. The presentation of situated readings of the musicals within a grounded theorisation of memories of the time and place of their consumption is generative of some new ways of reading specific film texts, the genre in general, and indeed the institution of Hollywood cinema as a whole.

Introduction - The Search for Theory

“I think it was make believe really. I don't mean people really believed. They knew what was reality and what wasn't. They would come back to their own lives again. But for that time they were in there watching that musical it was just incredible, it was just incredible. It just totally took people out of themselves. You know youngsters now are probably taking acid and all that to give them the same lift. I know this sounds silly but people were just totally uplifted by them.” (Ellen)

“The musicals were just absolutely magical. You should have seen the house where we lived in Cunningham Street. The worst slum I have ever seen in my life. This is a palace compared to it. To live like that, and then to go to that magical world. How can they despise it? Only them that's got a lot more can despise it.” (Barbara)

“I feel that Liverpool was . . . not exactly deprived, but grim, and if your father was a docker and unemployed, with a big family, you could go the pictures and forget everything. And that's my, that's my theory.” (Marie)

The three extracts that open this thesis are taken from empirical research, conducted as part of this project. The empirical research explores, using interviews with 17 white working class women (see Appendix 1 for brief biographies) in Liverpool, the meanings that they made around Hollywood film musicals in Liverpool in the 1950's¹, and the significance of those memories in their lives today. I am positioning the empirical project as a case study² within and out of which certain questions around class, the cinema, the musical, the passage of working class femininity and history might be posed. What the interviews present are a complex array of readings of the musical texts, readings that are located within specific personal, social, cultural and geographical histories. The thesis will not use the interview data to produce or endorse working class readings of Hollywood musicals, but will rather use the data, and the complex articulations of class identity and the need for the popular in the women's lives in it, to question the adequacy of some of the existing theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship between class, gender and the consumption of popular culture.³

The research contributes to current debates in both film and cultural studies. It enters film studies at the site of recent methodological debates around the possibilities and limitations of textual and empirical analysis as a means of accounting for the ways in which audiences make meanings around film texts.⁴ It also enters in the midst of the fascinating and important emergence of empirical research that produces ethnohistories of popular cultural practice by investigating the ways in which cinema and filmgoing figure in the daily lives of people.⁵

Thinking Critically About the Musical

This thesis, whilst primarily addressing the question of the theorisation of the relationship between class and the popular, also makes a significant contribution, through its empirical work, to the expansion of available research on the film musical, with its entrenched mode of textual analysis.

There has existed something of a dearth of work on the Hollywood musical since the burst of structuralist critical activity from the late 70's to the mid 80's. The critical study of the musical seems to have waned with the passing of the structuralist moment. Jane Feuer wrote the second edition to the now seminal *Hollywood Musical* in 1993, adding a final chapter, "A postscript for the nineties" which seemed to direct a post-structuralist interpretation of the musical towards audience research, arguing that now that the mass audience for the musical has shifted to more specialised 'cult' audiences, the study of the musical must take account of the "subcultural structures of feeling around, for example, gay male, urban audiences. I agree with Feuer that this kind of work needs to be done, and is being done on gay and lesbian audiences, (Dyer 1987, Wilton 1995, Burston & Richardson, 1995), although with the exception of Dyer this work is not empirically based. However, I still retain two problems with Feuer's directive. Firstly, Feuer typically provides no kind of methodology for how this work might proceed. It's a kind of impressionistic take on audience research that works with both feet in the camp of the spectator, whilst leaning tentatively out towards some other method. What I also find problematic in Feuer's postscript is the shift in critical emphasis from the mass to the specialised, when in fact no specialised empirical research yet exists on the mass audience for the Hollywood film musical.

Thus, I would argue that work that *urgently* needs to be done is historical post-structuralist research on the mass audience for the musical, work that deconstructs the masses from within the mass by looking at the meaning making practices of specific social groups. From this space my research steps out, looking at the effects of the investment of a group of working class women in Liverpool, in 1950's Hollywood film musicals. I am placing the filmic texts within a specific historical, social, empirical and theoretical context in order to ask questions not only about the meanings made around the film texts, but also to use the consumption of popular film by a particular audience to question the discursive parameters of the theoretical discourses around class and the consumption of popular culture. In demonstrating the breadth of meaning of the cinema in working class lives, this thesis also shows the limits of an exclusive focus on film texts. It thus makes an important contribution to debates in film studies by expanding the limits of what films can be used to talk about. The presentation of situated readings of the musicals within a very grounded

theorisation of memories of the time and place of their consumption is generative of some new ways of reading specific film texts, the genre in general and indeed, the Institution of Hollywood cinema as a whole.

It intervenes in current debates within cultural studies, placing centre stage fundamental concerns around the relative absence of class within contemporary research on popular culture. In an interview with Kuan- Hsing Chen, Stuart Hall (1996) was asked, "Maybe you have something to say in terms of the relative absence of class analysis in recent cultural studies." (400). In a lengthy response, Hall moves to talk about how cultural studies has been transformed by the whole question of the subjective, symbolic domain, by sexual politics, feminism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis. He also links the erasure of class to post-structuralism, linking this in turn to the difficulty of dealing with monolithic centred social structures like the working class. "It is as if the question of class can only be addressed seriously if it is occupying a privileged theoretical position As if there is no way of thinking about it in a more decentred way. I do think it's work that urgently needs to be done." (400).

Richard Johnson (1979), identifying the inadequacies in the three main approaches to the study of working class culture (Marxism, culturalism and structuralism) asked, "do we need new ways of thinking about working class culture, and what should these be?" (201). What makes Johnson's question significant is its historically contingent location, posed at a moment of crisis for the study of the working class, a moment complexly related theoretically to the height of the uptake of structuralism in cultural studies, and historically to the legacy of post war anxieties around the restructuring and recomposition of the working class, anxieties circulating within the discourses of affluence and consumption. What is so pertinent about Johnson's question in relation to contemporary debates in cultural studies, is how little British cultural studies⁶ has gone any way towards answering it. Johnson's question, as the figuration of a moment of crisis, met and continues to meet with a relative silence. A silence that links complexly to theoretical developments within post-structuralism , and a silence that now spans over 40 years of cultural studies' expansion and explosion as a discipline. It is a silence that is so incongruous to a field of inquiry founded (in part) on the study of working class culture. It is a silence according to Valerie Walkerdine (1996) which also speaks volumes:

What I want to argue is that while in one way the left appeared to have abandoned the white working class, class having seemed to disappear from the agenda, the proletariat, the mass has been an obsession, a central, if sometimes silent figure during all the debates from modernity to postmodernity. Indeed we might say, following Foucault that stories about the masses circulate endlessly. The issue

is not the, so much that they have disappeared, but a question of where and how they are talked about, what kind of object they become.(102).

Why and how through cultural studies' shifts and retreats through Marxism/Post Marxism, culturalism, structuralism/post-structuralism and postmodernism did class slide from the agenda? The answers to this question are multifold and expansive, covering years of political, economic, historical and theoretical changes. Indeed what makes an analysis and critique of the issue of class in cultural studies so difficult is the size and weight of the theoretical, political and historical material that must necessarily be encountered and examined. In a project this size it would be impossible to tackle all of this. Still there remains the pressing and under theorised question relating to the relative absence of class from the contemporary study of popular culture. In the light of this, what the thesis offers is a contribution the self reflexive nature of cultural studies as a field of inquiry. I am asking , how can we 'do' class in cultural studies now? Through which theoretical and critical frameworks can the working class be known, not as a monolithic social category, but here as women who identify themselves with working class, not so much as an identity, but as a form of identification (in which their sense of self is developed in relation to the experiencing of hardship, poverty, loss and happiness which the women position in the interviews as classed) which shifts and changes over time? Through this analysis, I am also asking how the working class is already known, how it has already been made? In relation to the constitution of the working class as an object of study this thesis will be exploring the following questions:

1. What theoretical developments have helped to shape the working class as an object of study in British cultural studies? Here I will be looking specifically at:
 - The centrality and significance of culturalism in the formation of working class culture as an object of analysis.
 - How developments in structuralist and post- structuralist theory have affected the working class as an object of study.
2. What historical and theoretical conditions have been involved in my being able to speak (and not to speak) the articulated experiences of working class women in Liverpool (including my own) through cultural studies? How might this analysis re-generate the terms of the theoretical debates on the classed consumption of popular culture?

“A Method for Doing Things Differently.”

Ellen Seiter (1995) writes, “everyone complains about class definition, but a method for doing things differently has remained elusive.”(141)..Critically this thesis, in attempting to develop a framework for bringing class back into question, is also

attempting in Seiter's terms to stop complaining and "to build a method for doing things differently." I would be wary of the existence of any one method for 'doing' class, and make no claim that this thesis provides such a thing. What the thesis will do is question the limitations of the available means for studying the working class, and work towards the construction of a different methodological framework for understanding working class lives and the place of popular culture in them. This framework will be built out of a critical overview and assessment of some of the available empirical methods for understanding how audiences consume popular culture/film, together with a critical reflection on the construction of ideology and consciousness in the theoretical and historical constitution of the working class, and their use of popular culture.

Following Beverly Skeggs (1995) I would position my research as corrective, a correctiveness that I want to stress is not trying to claim any kind of moral or epistemological high ground. Skeggs' construction of corrective is contingent on the analysis of the potential and limitation of any method, and a rigorous critique of the function of empirical data. Skeggs describes her ethnographic research⁷ as "corrective" in that:

I did not consider many of the available representations of the working class to be plausible. There were classic studies of heroic male labourers and skilled workers who struggled with dignity, of sensitive working class boys who became academics, and of oppressed working class women. I could not find any contemporary sociological accounts of working class women who were not ground down, and who did not take ideology on intact. (195)

Skeggs wanted to do research which "both filled the gap in existing knowledge about working class women, and which challenged many of the dominant ideas at the time." (ibid.) In order to do this Skeggs felt that she "had to speak to real working class women rather than relying on the representations available."(ibid.) She has since gone on (Skeggs,1994, 1995,1997,1997a) to problematise her epistemological certainty in the concept of experience - that working class women had a greater knowledge of the workings of oppression because they had experienced it. What Skeggs has examined are issues around the theoretical decisions which inform how the empirical data is used - its function. It can be used as grounded theory by developing theories from experience. It can be used with the specific intention to improve pre-existent theories, or for theoretical modification, so that existing theories can account for the specificities and the context of the social group being studied. It can also be used to challenge the concept of reality , showing that all knowledge is textually produced and cannot exist outside of social constructions. (Clifford, 1986)

Contingent to the functioning of data in these areas is its status. Considering status means in Skeggs terms, negotiating the status of experience. This has important implications for the framing of an empirical method in my own work. If I define the function of the interviews as the articulation of personal experiences being theoretically a means to disrupt the grounding of certain theories about the working class, and to extend the terms through which they can be known theoretically, then it is *both* the function and status of these personal experiences that must be rigorously thought through. Any difficulties around the positioning and defence of method in this thesis does not detract from my conviction that qualitative empirical audience research can provide the most effective means for coming to terms with the complexities of a classed investment in popular cultural forms. Indeed such difficulties become a crucial aspect of the epistemological project of this research, and its politicisation of the production of theory. In the end I support and am supported by Ann Gray's (1995) argument that, "quite simply there are things to be known about an audience that we cannot know by sitting at our desks or in our libraries." (195), and by David Morley's (1992)⁸ argument that:

The interview (not to mention other techniques such as participant observation) remains a fundamentally more appropriate way to attempt to understand what audiences do when they watch television than for the analyst simply to stay at home and imagine the possible implications of how other people might watch television." (180)

Morley's argument emerges from his engagement with a series of theoretical positions around the status of knowledge produced from a reading (the researchers) of interviewees readings of a visual text. It is an argument pitched in the epistemological debates that rage on between the various merits and limitations of textual analysis and empirical research, particularly in film and media studies. In this thesis I will be following Jackie Stacey (1994), who argues that the most effective method for thinking about a particular audience's investment in cinema should take account of both methods - the empirical and the textual. In positioning qualitative empirical audience research as the most "appropriate" means for studying the audience for popular film in this research, I recognise that this is a position that must be both explained and defended.⁹

This thesis offers up a possible method "for doing things differently" in terms of an analysis and understanding of the classification of class through an empirical analysis of a particular audiences investment in a particular genre of popular culture. In its offering of a *possible* method the thesis is *both epistemological* in the sense in which it is concerned with explaining the assumptions (both explicit and implicit) upon which we have gone about constructing our theories of the working class and of

the popular, and **interventionist**, in as much as the epistemological project is directed towards what Elspeth Probyn (1993) refers to as “the figuration of something better.” (3) This figuration of something better does not work to transform the social position of the working class, but rather works along the lines of Lawrence Grossberg’s (1997) definition of cultural studies as a project. “I would argue that cultural studies can only be defined as an intellectual practice, as a way of politicising theory and theorising politics.” (7). I want to re generate the terms of the debates through which we have come and might come to ‘know’ the working class theoretically. The thesis is neither an exploration of identity, nor a search for a lost working class identity , but rather as Pat Mahony and Christine Zmroczek (1997)insist in relation to their own work, “it is more than that. It is a search for theory.” (2) It is a search for theory that is rooted in a conviction (and analysis) of the appropriateness (to coin Morley’s phrase) of empirical research on real people. Out of this, it is hoped will emerge a different lexicon for thinking the relationships between class and the popular. In this way the research moves with and beyond Seiter’s call for a new way to *define* class. I would agree with Beverly Skeggs (1997a) who argues that, “we operate with a constant defining descriptor, and all that changes are the descriptions which are somehow squeezed to fit. *We need to know how differences are re-produced, and how they are lived.*” (126) (my italics)

Skeggs’s important directive towards *what we need to know* emerges directly out of her difficulties with the deployment of class as a social classification in her own research. It relates in significant ways to Angela McRobbie’s (1992, 1997a) call for the study of “real existing identities in the ethnographic sense,” (1992: 730) as a means of coming to understand the actual process of identity acquisition as a process of everyday life, one that is projected onto and expressed in an expansive range of cultural practices, including texts, images and commodities. Referring specifically to the contemporary terrain of cultural studies in which identity politics play such an important role, McRobbie cautions us against an over reliance on textual or discursive identities. In this caution, McRobbie is echoing Hall (1992) who says, “I’m trying to return the project of cultural studies from the clean air of meaning and textuality and theory to the something nasty down below.” (278). McRobbie urges us to consider the site of identity formation in and through the cultural practices of everyday life:

I want to end with a plea for identity ethnography in cultural studies, with a plea for carrying out interactive research on groups and individuals who are more than just audiences for texts . . . What is now required is a methodology, a new paradigm for conceptualising identity-in-culture, an ethnographic approach which takes as its starting point the relational interactive quality of everyday life and

which brings a renewed rigour to this kind of work by integrating into it a keen sense of history and contingency. (730)

Although McRobbie does not deal specifically with the question of working class identity, locating it as an interesting site alongside questions of race or sexuality as “combative senses of self,” (729) in current debates, her plea can be put to work to raise fundamentally important questions in cultural studies (both theoretical and methodological) around the construction of a new paradigm for conceptualising the *living out* of working class identity.

Locating History

Contingent to the epistemological project of this thesis is the place of history. It is history which enables the thesis to work towards a corrective and transformative theoretical framework. It is history which enables in Probyn’s terms “the figuration of something better.” History is worked through experience, the personal, memory. It is also the site of the location of the working class as an object of study. History works in the thesis through the following questions:

- What is the relationship of history to the practice of audience research?
- What does it mean to work historically in cultural studies?¹⁰

There is a big difference between the history of cultural studies, a history which has already been the focus of much research and assessment, (see for example, Punter, 1986, Clarke, 1991, During, 1993,) and the use of historical research as part of a method in cultural studies. Both Carolyn Steedman (1992) and Christine Geraghty (1996) have asked what it means to work historically in cultural studies. Steedman maintains that this has been interpreted as writing the history of the emergence and development of cultural studies as a discipline, rather than taking on board the historiographic implications of an historical focus. What Steedman does is to formulate a series of questions to enable us to think beyond narratives of origination:

Why does cultural studies want history? What does wanting it mean? What new acts of transference will items from the past help cultural studies to perform? How will it be done? How will it be taught? Will there be any room for detailed historical work; or are students of cultural studies bound to rely on great schematic and secondary sweeps through time? Will there be any room for the historical case study in its pedagogy? What good is it all to you anyway? Perhaps no good at all. (621).

Steedman’s agenda of questions are extremely difficult ones to answer, yet vitally important. Indeed what does wanting history mean? What new acts of transference *will* items from the past help, or make cultural studies perform?

This thesis wants history in a number of different ways :

- The use of the interviews as personal history, through a focus on memory and experience.
- The place of my own working class history.
- The history of the location of the working class in British cultural studies.
- The specific location of the working class at the intersection of post-war discourses around Americanisation and consensus.

Overwhelmingly, I want history because it is the space in which we have been defined, and in which we might (have) come to understand who we are. It is the space in which we can define what matters. In terms of those acts that items from the past might help cultural studies to perform, In this thesis, historical analysis helps us to explore how the working class have come to be known via classifying practices that have been complexly articulated. It also provides memories of the time and place of the context of consuming the film musical. The exploration of nostalgic remembering as class specific is an important intervention.

Personal history is presented in the thesis as the site out of which some of the assumptions that ground the classification of the working class might be complicated. Carolyn Steedman (1992) has said that she is “more interested in looking at what history doesn’t perform for people.”(622). This issue of history and performance names, in part, the push and pull of the historical practice of this thesis. It examines and explores the tensions between the women’s performance of themselves within the space of history in the interviews, and the non - performance of that subjectivity within some of the other spaces of history and theory. The deployment of the verb performance as process in Steedman’s account moves her analysis somewhere beyond the examination of historical inaccuracy. The non performance of history speaks of more than the historical inaccuracy of history - and thus the assumption that history is truth (accuracy) or falsehood (inaccuracy). Rather, Steedman argues that history is discursively produced, and constitutes identities as effects of discourse, as processes which are regulated and controlled by a complex array of determinations - that is identity is performatively produced. This issue of history and performance names, in part, the push and pull of the historical practice of this thesis. It examines and explores the tensions between the women’s performance of themselves within the space of history in the interviews, and the non - performance of that subjectivity within some of the other spaces of history and theory.

Producing a piece of research which deals with the history of Liverpool in the 1950’s also offers a corrective to the paucity of historical archival material available on

Liverpool in the 50's. The local history collections in Liverpool have an abundance of material on Liverpool during the war, and in the 60's, but the 50's remains something of a forgotten decade sandwiched between the drama of the war years, and the heady decade of the 60's. It would seem from my difficulty in finding histories of the 50's in Liverpool that as a decade it was deemed too ordinary and uneventful to talk about - a period of reconstruction, affluence and consensus. Hopefully this thesis will complicate that picture.

Structuring the Thesis

Following Richard Johnson (1979), I will be locating both the film audience and the working class as "problematics." Johnson argues, "a problematic may itself be defined as a 'definite theoretical structure,' which organises knowledge by making it possible to ask some kinds of questions, and by suppressing others." (14) The analysis of a problematic involves an interrogation (in terms of a symptomatic reading) of the problematic(s) of particular texts. Thus this chapter will explore the discursive production of the audience and of the working class (in cultural studies) across a range of texts. I will concentrate my exploration of the film audience to the debates within feminist film theory around the positioning of the spectator and the real woman who watches film.¹¹ In the execution of this analysis of problematics, I wish to establish the need for my research, through an analysis of the silences and absences in some of the available theoretical models in coming to understand the relationship between class, film and the audience..

The thesis will be broken down into five chapters. **Chapter One. Positioning Problematics, Class and Cultural Studies** will reflect on the theoretical frameworks in place in cultural studies for coming to terms with the British working class. This chapter will take seriously Chas Critcher's (1979) assertion that, "the examination of the lives of the working class depends for its impetus on defining them as a problem." (4) What I will argue is that the positioning of the working class as a problem (problematic consciousness) in British cultural studies is complexly linked to the historical project of the working class (in Marxist terms) and the relationship of the function of the Left intellectual to that. Thus, questions around the positioning of the working class as a problem usher in a great number of crucial issues relating not only to cultural studies' history, but also to the location of the function of the role of the intellectual in relation to class within what Laurie Anne Whitt and Jennifer Daryl Slack have defined as cultural studies' "interventionist commitment." (1992:572) Slack and Whitt build on Lawrence Grossberg's (1988) account of the project of cultural studies:

Cultural studies is concerned with describing and intervening in the ways discourses are produced within, inserted into and operate in the

relations between people's everyday lives and the structures of the social formation so as to reproduce, resist and transform the existing structures of power. (22)

They go on to argue, "Cultural theorists, consciously and emphatically, aim not merely to describe or explain contemporary cultural and social practices, but to change them, and more importantly to transform existing structures of power." (572) The interventionist commitment is thus built on the premise of *description and intervention*.¹² what I am interested in exploring is the destination of this interventionist commitment when that destination is the site of working class culture and consciousness. What lies at the end of such an intervention? What motivates such an intervention? Slack and Whitt remind us that, "While the exact nature of the description is elusive, it is much easier to be confident about what is being moved away from. The project of cultural studies is grounded on a moral and political critique of late capitalism, and more generally of oppressive cultural and social formations." (ibid.) Slack and Whitt go on to trace the relationship between description and intervention and the positioning of "sites of resistance," in cultural studies. "Cultural Studies has assured that studies have described cultural sites where intervention is deemed to be either needed or actively taking place - for example in the identification of sites of resistance." (573) They further argue that:

Cultural studies advocates for the disenfranchised and has served as a voice for those individuals and groups who are variously seen as subjugated, silenced, repressed, oppressed and discriminated against. It speaks not just for those 'here', but for those 'there', that is for those anywhere without a voice in the dominant discourse and without a place in the dominant political and economic hierarchy. (ibid.)

Despite locating the project of cultural studies firmly within a Marxist discourse, Slack and Whitt do not position that project in relation to the history of cultural studies involvement with the working class by proxy, nor, in the setting of the limits of their project do they take account of the problematic and contradictory relationship between cultural studies and Marxism.

Colin Sparks (1996) argues "there need be no apology for selecting the relation between Marxism and cultural studies for special attention: for many years it was generally believed that Marxism and cultural studies were, if not identical, at least locked into an extremely close relationship." (71) Although as Hall (1992) argues we must consider that:

There never was a prior moment when cultural studies and Marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit. From the beginning (to use this way of speaking for a moment) there was always/already the question of the great inadequacies theoretically and politically, the resounding silences, the great evasions of Marxism, the things that

Marx did not talk about or seem to understand which were our privileged object of study; culture, ideology, language, the symbolic. (279).

Hall also maintains that the problem which governed the encounter between cultural studies and Marxism was “located and cited in a necessary, prolonged, *and as yet unending* contestation with the question of false consciousness” (279) (my italics) What this chapter will examine is the nature of the relationship between description, intervention, resistance and consciousness in the articulation of the project of cultural studies, and the delimiting of the role of the intellectual in the transformation of working class consciousness. What this comes up against historically is the reality of the non-performance of the working class as revolutionary agents of change. As Hall passionately and critically reminds us:

Anybody who is into cultural studies seriously as an intellectual practice, must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we've been able to change anything, or get anybody to do anything. If you don't feel that as one tension in the work that you are doing then theory has let you off the hook. (284)¹³

In order to understand what cultural studies does, and negotiate what it might be possible for cultural studies to do, its interventionist commitment must be rigorously thought through. In order for us to understand what cultural studies has done to/for the working class, and what it might be able to do to/for the working class it is critical that we negotiate the positions that we have come to occupy as theorists in relation to the working class - and consider, really consider what it is possible or indeed proper for us to do 'for them.' .

It seems to me that we must also take into account an emotional register of our position as theorists in relation to the working class (a register that is much more difficult to sustain through the analysis of texts, and might only be levelled as assertion); our various senses of disappointment and loss in the perceived failure of the working class “to do anything,” or in ourselves for not being able to get them “to do anything.” Perhaps the most we can assert as Holton and Turner (1994) say is that, “It may well be true that many critics . . . have given up on class analysis due to the non appearance of a revolutionary agency of working class action.” (800) However, in the light of the problems around ascribing personal and emotional motivation to authors, we have something more concrete to work with. That is, as I have been arguing a real difficulty around finding the theory to describe the working class. It strikes me as significant that if we don't do class in cultural studies now because of the difficulties in finding theory that can handle the complexities and contradictions of those identities, then cultural studies should as I am attempting to

do, be asking itself why the terms no longer fit, and how we might develop other terms.¹⁴ What we need are different theories and methods.

It is as a function of the search for this that I execute an analysis in **Chapter Two** of the possibilities for talking about working class women's relationships to film. This chapter, "**Positioning Problematics, the Female Audiences for Film**", will reflect critically on the positioning of the film audience in feminist film theory, exploring the tensions between the location of empirical research and feminist film studies preference for textual analysis. It will pursue the following questions:

- How has the relationship between the female spectator and the real woman who watches film been theorised?
- How exactly has the empirical been positioned in these debates?
- What place is there in the theorisation of the female spectator for the experience of individual and socially differentiated women?

What I will work through is not only, "what the accounts of film viewing by real women can do to our understanding of how women watch films." (Stacey, 1994:77), but specifically what the accounts of film viewing by real working class women can offer to the existing debates that seek to explain how and why women watch films? I will do this through a closer examination of the available theoretical models for thinking the relationship between women and film viewing. I shall be interrogating the limitations of feminist film theories reliance on the textually determined hypothetical subject position for the female spectator. What I will look at is the tension that exists between the hypothetical textual subject, and the empirical socially located viewer. I want to explore what new theoretical paradigms an analysis of this tension might enable, and how these paradigms might be put to work to understand how cinema might be placed in peoples day to day lives, "how cinema figured in the ordinary cinema goers fantasies, aspirations and constructions of self." (Kuhn, 1997:1) This chapter is also corrective in as much as it is making class matter, bringing class into question in a field of study in which the experiences of working class women have been given little attention.¹⁵

Chapter Three, Theorising the Function and Status of the Interviews, will detail my method, and discuss exactly how it might be put to work to develop new ways of talking about working class experiences. It will also explore what is at stake in asking methodological questions in the first place? What is at stake are the relationships between power, politics and the production of knowledge as the foundations of epistemology, which in turn is the foundation for both method and methodology. Liz Stanley (1990) focuses on these founding relationships, defining epistemology as a

theory of knowledge which addresses central questions such as, who can be a knower, what can be known, what or who constituted and validates knowledge, and what the relationship might be between epistemology and ontology? (26) To ask methodological questions, therefore, is to address the central questions, how do we know what we know? By which interpretative and theoretical frameworks do we “know”? Jackie Stacey (1993) reiterates this, arguing that without methodological questions “the politics of knowledge production remain hidden and mystified.” (261) What grounds my method is the offering up of experience, memory and the personal as epistemological possibilities.¹⁶ Thus, the discussion of what my method enables must be worked through an analysis of these categories. Referring to the crisis around the political positionality of the intellectual in cultural studies, Elspeth Probyn (1993) writes, “As theorists we don’t know what to do with ourselves . . . underlying this crisis is a deeper evaluation of what ‘experience’ can be made to mean, and how it may be put to work.” (4) This chapter will draw heavily on Probyn’s retrieval of the ways in which experience has been made to function, focusing in particular on the location of experience in Raymond Williams’s work. I will also analyse the place of the eclipse of the category of experience in structuralism and post-structuralism, and the effect of that on the formation of the working class as an object of study in cultural studies. Raymond Williams (1979) maintains that, “the lived is only another word, if you like, for experience: but we have to find a word for that level.” (168) Working on from this Probyn argues, “It is precisely this level of the lived that we need to explore if we are to rethink and elaborate alternative enunciative positions in cultural theory. Without those words, those riffs along the register of the experiential, we remain in our awkward positions as clumsy subjects in front of the text.” (16) My empirical method works at the level of the lived to move towards alternative enunciative positions for coming to terms with the articulation of working class experiences around a group of texts. Following Probyn’s structuring of experience as working on two fronts at once - the ontological and the epistemological - the analysis of my empirical experiential method will also deploy the ontological and the epistemological as conditions of possibility for alternative speaking positions within cultural theory. In order to do this I must position both the status and function of the interviews in relation to empirical claims for the ability of data to challenge existing accounts, and related to that, empiricist positions on the status of data as evidence. The chapter will thus examine what kinds of truth claims (if at all) I am using the interview data for. What status do I confer on the interviews as being able to offer up another way of telling it, where ‘it’ is working class experience? If that status is not the truth, then what is it? The chapter will also explore how I will be analysing the interviews as the articulation of lived experience that gets mediated/produced as memory. Thus an exploration of memory, textuality, narration and their relationship to the articulation of lived experience in the interviews will be

an important part of the methodology. Lived experience is understood in this research as Angela Mc Robbie (1997) has recently framed it: “a form of investigation where the impact and significance of empirical changes in culture and in society on living human subjects can be observed and analysed and where these same human subjects are invited to reflect on how they live through and make sense of such changes.” (170)

This chapter will position experience, not only as the lived of the interviewees, but also the lived of my own experiences growing up in Liverpool as working class, loving musicals, leaving that to enter the realm of academia, and ‘going home’ to build a Ph.D. on experiences that I maintain a complex residual relationship to, but in material terms am no longer part of. Phil Cohen (1992) writes that, “most theories have a strong, if disavowed, autobiographical element in them.” James Lull (1990) makes an even stronger case when he claims that “all research is autobiographical.” (12) Valerie Walkerdine (1996) suggests, “that it is an impossible task to avoid the place of the subjective in research , and that, instead of making futile attempts to avoid something which cannot be avoided, we should think more carefully about how to utilise our subjectivity as a feature of the research process itself.” (1) Thus this chapter also questions what it is that the use of ourselves can add to the interpretation of data? As a conscious strategy how can the autobiography of the researcher be theorised, and what can it do?

Chapter Four, Analysing the Interview data will examine the structure and form of the recording of the interviews, and the techniques used to analyse the data. This chapter will identify key themes that emerged throughout the interviews: these are escape, glamour, loss and America. What I will look at are the various ways in which escapism, loss, glamour and America are narrated across the interviews, and in what ways the women’s pleasures in the film musical can be located within each of these categories. The analysis of the interviews will not be limited to this chapter. The chapter will introduce some of the ways in which loss, escapism, glamour and America were talked about, and what their significance might be. I am not, as I have already mentioned, attempting to use the data to provide working class readings of Hollywood film musicals. Rather, I want to explore the ways in which individual women have orchestrated the meaning of the musical in their lives around these four categories, and in turn, how this might be used to develop an understanding of the musical, the place of the cinema in Liverpool, and aspects of the historical and economic climate of England in the 50’s.

This chapter will also locate the status and function of textual analysis in my thesis in relation to some of the existing textual work on the film musical. It will provide readings of three musicals, *South Pacific* (1958, USA) Dir. Charles Fox, *Calamity*

Jane (1953, USA) Dir. David Butler and *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950, USA) Dir. Georges Sidney, and examine the implications of the women's location of the analysis of film texts in the interviews for the understanding of the processes involved in making meanings around films, and for what films can be used to talk about. This section of the chapter will discuss methodological difficulties around the place of textual analysis in empirical research, when the interviewees do not talk in any detail about actual film texts. This analysis will be used to address the questions: What counts as talking about a film? What else can the film Musical be used to talk about apart from (or in addition to) formal textual qualities?

Chapter Five, Seeing Through Happiness: The Americanisation of Liverpool, will explore the particular construction of the American Dream in Liverpool in the 1950's. Making detailed use of data from the interviews, I will examine the construction of a geographically and historically specific fantasy of "America." My analysis will work out of detailed readings of the location of loss, glamour and escapism, as well as their memories around specific film texts. (*South Pacific*, and *Calamity Jane*.) I shall trace the ways in which these key themes, and the analysis of the film texts can be seen, in turn, to feed into their construction of and need for an American Dream.

It was directly out of the interviews that the significance, proliferation and importance of the sustaining fantasy of "America" across the interviews became apparent. In the classification of the interview texts into emerging themes, by far the most talked about, and in the most interesting ways was the idea of America. To such an extent, that the women's pleasure in the musical could be read as an investment in the fantasy of "America." This fantasy was played out in a specific geographical and cultural space in which the connection to America was also established through the status of Liverpool as a port and the movement of working class merchant seamen (and crucially American goods) to and from America. The physical manifestation of the American Dream on the Liverpool landscape had also been executed in the form of the GI's during and after the war.

What I want to examine, using the interviews, are the ways in which the discourses articulated around America in the interviews can be used to expand the terms of the available critical debates around:

- Americanisation in Britain in the 50's
- An understanding of the meanings of the film musical
- The theorisation of the relationships between class, gender, memory and film

I shall be keeping central the argument that post-war debates around Americanisation were also debates about the proper role of popular culture (especially) Hollywood Cinema in the lives of the working class, and were, therefore, also debates in which the questions (and anxieties) of the masses and their pleasures were a pre-occupation. Within the Americanisation debate, larger political issues attached to the function and status of the post-war working class, issues relating to newly acquired consumer power, affluence, consensus and embourgeoisment, are also contingent. Using the interviews, and the women's positioning of themselves within post-war mythologies of consensus, affluence and consumer power, I want to question the partiality of these issues, relating them back then to the premises/assumptions upon which fears of undue American influence, and its relationship to the masses were grounded, and thus to a re-evaluation of the analysis of the need for, and investment in Hollywood cinema and the American Dream in lives that are hard.

The analysis of the construction of the American Dream within the specific context of Liverpool and its conjunctural relationship to Britain in the 1950's will be placed within Raymond Williams' exploration of the operation of a structure of feeling as "the culture of a period." The structure of feeling in Williams' terms designates the relations that articulate at any moment - the material life, the social organisation, and the dominant ideas- in other words the determination of the structure. It also critically acts to articulate 'something else', *how the structure feels*. Thus experience (a critically loaded term and one whose definition and function within my analysis must be carefully mapped out) becomes central to the tracing of the determination and operation of a structure of feeling. Experience, around lives and texts (here in the form of the interviews) at both an ontological and epistemological level impels an analysis of the conditions of possibility of a particular form (here, both the Musical and the American Dream), and critically the *local need for that form*. This chapter will map out a detailed case for understanding Americanisation as a structure of feeling. It will make its case through the location of a structure of feeling in a localised setting - Liverpool.

One of the chapters most important and difficult contributions is to the understanding of the relationships between class, locality Americanisation and cinema. The positioning of the local in this piece will also be carefully mapped, not as the reification of the concrete, the lived (the other extreme of a vertical relation of difference extending all the way to the abstract or the general), but in Lawrence Grossbergs (1997) terms as an articulation of the local and the specific, in which the local is always a comparative term, describing the different articulations at different places within a structuring of space. Thus the local and the global (here specifically

Americanisation) are mutually constitutive. If the local is understood as an articulation (in Stuart Halls terms) then the local becomes the site in which and out of which to explore the historical conditions in which the operation of Americanisation as a structure of feeling in Liverpool were forged. Within this, the interview texts as texts of experience articulate the making of the local in historically and culturally specific conditions.

In making a case for Americanisation as a structure of feeling in Liverpool, I will not be arguing that the case is unique to Liverpool. However, there are specific historical determinations that effect Liverpool's relationship with America: Liverpool's trading relationship with America, the passage of large numbers of working class merchant seamen to and from America, Liverpool's status as a stop off point for immigration to America, it's history in the slave trade to America, and the presence of the GI's during and after the war. I will explore the particularity that these determinations give to the structure of feeling in Liverpool. What I shall be exploring are the ways in which a focus on the empirical analysis of the specific historical conditions of possibility for Americanisation as a structure of feeling at the level of the local can develop our positioning of the relationships between class, ideology and the popular, and thus expand our understanding of what films (film musicals) can be used to talk about? What kind of American Dream did the film musical manifest for each of the women. How and why was it used as a point of escape?

To re-state. The thesis will be exploring the following agenda:

- The ways in which seventeen white working class women negotiated a class identity as a form of identification around the meanings made of the film musical.
- How this data might be put to work to regenerate the terms of the debates on class and the popular, the film musical, Americanisation, and empirical audience research.
- I shall also be making links between my analysis and some of the reasons why class has slipped from the cultural studies agenda (located in historical, political and economic anxieties about the function and status of the working class), and the interviewees positioning of themselves as working class over time.

¹ The absence of black women from this study throws out some interesting questions about the absence of empirical work generally on black audiences for film and television. There are very few studies. Indeed Gillespie's (1989, 1993, 1994) work on visual culture among south Asian families in west London, and their interpretations of the televised Mahabharata is one of the only empirical studies that exists on British black or Asian audiences. Jacqueline Bobo's (1995) empirical work on black American women as cultural readers is an important exception, though in an American context. There are the inherent difficulties with white researchers researching black or Asian peoples lives, and perhaps the difficulties

involved in black people responding to calls by academics, when they imagine that academic to be white. Means must be developed to find 'communities' for this kind of research that can overcome these attendant difficulties.

In the case of my research, the reasons why black women didn't respond are possibly more historically determined than the above. Large scale immigration of black people into Liverpool did not happen until the late 50's. I do not know, although it would be interesting to know, what the relationship was between the cinema and black audiences in Liverpool at that time, although I imagine that they would not be welcome or frequent attendees. Therefore, there would not be an established black audience for the Hollywood film Musical in Liverpool at that time. Certainly an interesting project would be to look at the relationship of new immigrants and the British cinema experience.

The motivations for looking at working class women, Hollywood film musicals and Liverpool in this thesis are complexly determined, and will be explored throughout the course of the work. For the moment let me mark (without at this stage entering into the complex debates around the use of personal experience and memory) that I grew up working class in Liverpool. I hold enduring and special memories around watching Hollywood film musicals with my mother, my aunts and my grandparents. What has always interested me are the ways in which the films were consciously chosen as a vehicle by the older family members to teach the younger generation about their experiences in Liverpool in the 50's. It was through watching these films with my family that I learnt how women lived at the time, what they desired, what America meant to them, how they endured poverty. I heard narratives and fantasies around the GI's stationed just outside Liverpool during and after the war. I was a bystander to fierce debates about who was the better dancer Astaire or Kelly. There was an important narrativity of their histories threaded through the narratives of the films. I knew that Musicals were special. This research is an attempt to explore the meanings invested in that 'specialness' I came to feel increasingly that there was something important in trying to figure out why this genre of film, not manifestly working class, became so in Liverpool for some women, and how all of this might be used to come to a different understanding of the relationship between gender, ideology and the popular; and of some of the ways in which working class women live.

It has been suggested that a comparative gender study would have been a more effective method in this project. Whilst I take seriously the critique that women cannot be taken for granted as an object of study, by no means have we exhausted everything that it is possible to say about women's (particularly working class women's lives), and that is perhaps enough to justify women as a focus by saying that these are the lives that I am most interested in.

² In the framing of this project as a case study, I mean that it is the analysis of one case in the sense of looking at the meaning making practices of a specific group of women in a specific place around a specific group of texts. The significance (and potential limitations) epistemologically of this specificity will be drawn out as the thesis progresses. I also have in mind a Freudian construction of the case history as producing a narrative out of a process of analysis and translation. This refers both to the activity of the historian - the presentation of the history - and to the objects of her undertaking, what and who the history is about. (cf. Marcus, 1985) Consideration of the processes (both conscious and unconscious) at work in the production of a case history pose important methodological questions about the power relations involved in the production of knowledges from empirical research. Again these will be developed.

³ I gathered my interviewees from a variety of sources. Firstly, I decided to write a letter to the Liverpool daily newspaper, *The Liverpool Echo*, asking for replies from women who loved 1950's Hollywood film musicals. In this letter, I asked if the women would tell me if they were prepared to be interviewed. I got fifteen replies from this, seven of whom did not

want to be interviewed, but wrote down some of the reasons why they loved the films so much. I also visited a community education project; a women's local history group. My auntie, who went to the group put me in touch with the course leader, who invited me to come and do a group interview with the class. I then followed up with individual interviews with four out of the ten women. My auntie was also active in putting me in contact with other local women who she thought might be of interest. I ended up interviewing three women through this route

In the end I interviewed 17 women, excluding a large group interview which I decided not to use because of the difficulty in transcribing the material. Ten of the interviews were individual. Annie and Barbara were interviewed together, as were Kay, Emily and Pat, and Vera and Joan. Mary was interviewed with her husband Albert in the room at her request. The interviewees were chosen, not on the basis of the formation of any kind of sample but, rather that they were prepared to be interviewed, or that they seemed like interesting women. All of the women are white, again, not through selection, but because no black women came forward to be interviewed. The women range in age from 57 - 78. All except one, Pauline, who was born in New Brighton, (the other side of the River Mersey from Liverpool), were born in Liverpool and most have lived there all their lives. The exceptions to that being Barbara and Annie, who moved from Liverpool to the other side of the River 10 years ago, and Pauline who remained in New Brighton.

⁴ Jackie Stacey's (1993, 1994, 1994a) work provides the most insightful account of the historical nature of these debates, and their implication for the study of film audiences. The debate presented in the (1989) special issue of *Camera Obscura*, also provides an important reference to the nature of the points of tension between the textual and the empirical in feminist film theory. Jacqueline Bobo's (1997) research on black women as cultural readers also gives access to important aspects of the debate in relation to the study of specific social groups.

⁵ Annette Kuhn's current research on cinema audiences in Britain in the 1930's provides an excellent example of the potential of this kind of research, both to contribute to debates on method in film studies, and to expand our understanding of what individual films and cinema going can mean.

⁶ The reasons for my focus on British cultural studies need to be specified. The nationalisation of cultural studies in recent years e.g.: Latin American cultural studies, Australian cultural studies, German cultural studies sits in an interesting tension with debates around the globalisation (Americanisation) of contemporary cultural studies. Thus national cultural studies, and the questions of historical and national specificity that they might address have an important role to play. I focus on aspects of the emergence and development of British cultural studies, because its historical and theoretical constitution of the working class relates specifically to the interviewees location of themselves in the 50's and beyond. The (historical) context out of which British cultural studies was also the context of their lives.

⁷ Skeggs is talking about her project begun as a Ph.D. student with eleven young white working class women she was teaching on a Community Care course at a local Further Education College. As she was given more access to students, the number rose to eighty three young women. Skeggs was exploring how the young women converted their already acquired feminine cultural capital into an educational resource, whilst their behaviour was far from the ideals of femininity. I would also like to mark at this stage, (although this will not be an area that I go into in any detail) that the problems around the particular form of ethnography deployed in cultural studies are too narrowly circumscribed, and the differences between traditional anthropological ethnographies and those customarily conducted in this field relatively undertheorised. For productive discussions of this see Radway (1988), Evans (1990) and Nightingale (1986).

⁸ Morley is dealing specifically with an ethnography of the television audience, rather than the audience for film. Nevertheless there are important crossovers (as well as distinctions) in terms of the methodological debates around the positioning of the audiences for both mediums.

⁹ It is important to keep in mind that Morley's construction of empirical research as more 'appropriate' is coupled with a rigorous and reflexive critique of the practices of audience research in cultural studies, and a conviction that 'good' audience research should be a combination of sociological materialism, epistemological realism and methodological pragmatism. See Morley (1997) for a thorough overview of some recent debates concerning ethnographic audience research in cultural studies. I shall be working with a rigorous and reflexive critique in the construction of the 'appropriateness' of my own method.

¹⁰ This question comes directly out of Christine Geraghty's recent piece for *Cultural Studies* (1996) in which Geraghty reflects on a quotation by Alison Light:

It seems to me that given the formative role of novels as a place where our subjectivities, our very ideas of ourselves, are fashioned, any critical practice which does not find fellow feeling with past readers and writers, however distant they may seem from our own conscious projects and beliefs, is . . . unable to understand the historical meaning of such writing.
(Light, 1991: x)

Geraghty writes, "Her words set me thinking about what it means to work historically in cultural studies, and what the implications are of such a practice in teaching the complex range of courses which might be in any communications/cultural studies/media programme." (345)

¹¹ This analysis will work primarily out of the exchanges and debates in the *Camera Obscura* (1989) 20-21 on "The Spectatorix". In this double issue prominent feminist film and television theorists were asked to give their responses to a set of questions relating to the definition and operation of the female spectator as a figure for understanding the meanings made around film.

¹² This is well documented in cultural studies literature now, see for example, Grossberg (1987), Johnson (1986-7), Radway (1984), Schudson (1994), Storey (1996), Webster (1994), Williamson (1986).

¹³ This is not then to be drawn into a position that Meaghan Morris (1988) describes as the choice in cultural theory between 'cheerleaders and prophets of doom,'. Morris describes her unease about 'fatalistic theory' on the one hand and 'cheerily making the best of things' and calling it cultural studies on the other. Duncan Webster (1994) argues that, "the problems of recent cultural studies are set out quite brilliantly here, but if that concluding stand off between fatalists and cheerleaders captures elements of the present impasse, the piece avoids a sense of how this came about." (538) what Webster argues is that the stand off needs the introduction of history. I would argue that the working class as an object of study are interestingly and centrally positioned (if not spoken about) in this stand off. To this end I would agree with Webster that what is needed is history, a history of theoretical positions and how (through what historical, political, economic) turns they might have come about. I agree with Hall that we should feel the ephemerality of cultural studies as a transformative project. We should position ourselves in relation to the production of theory, not as a choice between fatalism and celebration, but with a healthy dose of cynicism. When I talk about cynicism, I am referring loosely to Peter Sloterdijk's (1983) construction of cynical reason as something that we work with when we know the falsehood of a practice, but still continue with that practice in a kind of ironic detachment. When we produce theory, therefore, we must know

that it won't change anything in terms of peoples material social realities, but still work in the hope that it just might, or at least change some peoples understandings of what (when we are talking about social experiences so very different from their own) living in that material social reality might mean..

¹⁴ What I am marking as significant and complexly linked to the particular and historical location of the working class within the interventionist commitment, is that these kinds of debates have not yet taken place in cultural studies. Sociology has been engaged with lengthy debates about the practices of social classification, and the point of doing research on class. Holton and Turner (1994), Goldthorpe & Marshall (1992). There have also been particular discussions about the stratification of the relationship between women and class, Goldthorpe (1983), Charles (1990), Wright (1989). I am aware of the crossovers between the two disciplines, and the ways in which this debate could be usefully imported into cultural studies. Yet in the marking out of the distinctness of cultural studies as I do in this thesis, this level of analysis has not taken place.

¹⁵ The exceptions to this are Press (1991, 1989), hooks (1996), although talking about both black and white American women, and in a British context, Partington (1990, 1991) Gray (1992, 1995), Walkerdine (1986) and most recently (Kuhn, 1997).

¹⁶ Experience is a thorny and difficult issue. As the thesis progresses the relationship between experience and the production of knowledge will be challenged and analysed. Chapter Three will be particularly important in locating the function and status of the interviews as data/experience/evidence. I am not claiming that the interviewees have experience which can then be used as the foundation for the production of epistemically privileged knowledges on class and gender (see Harstock, 1987, Stanley, 1990, Nelson, 1990 for an analysis of feminist standpoint theory in relation to this issue) but, rather, that they are constituted through experience as gendered and classed - experience in this research, therefore, is central to the construction of subjectivity and history.

Chapter One

Positioning Problematics Part One: Class and Cultural Studies

This chapter, together with Chapter Two, **Positioning Problematics, Part Two: The Female Audience for Film**, will establish the need for my research, through an analysis of aspects of the theoretical, methodological and historical context in which both the working class and the female audience have circulated as objects of study. It will examine the limitations (absences and silences) and possibilities (pragmatic) of some of the existing theoretical frameworks for taking account of the significance of the meanings made by the interviewees around the film musical in their daily lives. This analysis will work to support my construction of a qualitative, historical empirical method that is locally grounded as the most 'appropriate' means of coming to terms in turn with the need for popular culture in lives that are hard.

This chapter in exploring the potential and limitations of the theorisation of the relationship between class and popular culture will address itself to the following agenda of questions:

1. What theoretical developments have helped to shape the working class as an object of study in British cultural studies? Here I will be looking specifically at:
 - The centrality and significance of culturalism in the formation of working class culture as an object of analysis.
 - How developments in structuralist and post-structuralist theory have affected the ways in which the working class has been established and questioned as an object of study.
2. What historical and theoretical conditions have been involved in my being able to speak (and not to speak) the articulated experiences of working class women in Liverpool (including my own) through cultural studies? How might this analysis re-generate the terms of the theoretical debates on the classed consumption of popular culture?

In examining the historical and theoretical discourses through which working class culture has been established as an object in British cultural studies, as a means both of making sense of my own data, and of bringing class out of retreat, this section is also making a case for the importance of a focus on class. Despite the very real problems that (ought to) exist to describe and understand class historically and theoretically, working class women's negotiation of the material difficulties that shape their lives, the location of popular culture within this as a means of escape, and more than this as a strategy of survival, can draw out some crucial questions, relating to :

- The analysis of the structures of power through which working class women are forced to live out their material difficulties

- The structures of power and industry through which popular cultural forms are produced and distributed
- The development of understanding of the meanings made around particular popular texts
- The place of personal history in the analysis of popular culture - what the story of a life (complexly determined by the experiencing of gender, race, class, age and sexuality) can do for our understanding of what it might mean to live with and through the conditions of that life
- The place of these conditions as the material context out of which the popular is positioned as escapism.

This section presents itself, not as a search for a lost working class identity in British cultural studies, but as a search for theory, that follows on from the directive that I referenced in the introduction, “do we need new ways of thinking about working class culture, and what should these be,” (Johnson:1979) to re-construct that directive as *we do* need new ways of thinking about working class culture, what should these be? I shall take seriously the proposition put forward by Beverly Skeggs (1997a) that the term class is no longer an appropriate one to use, and that we should find other terms.

Like the interviewees who made up the empirical body of Skeggs’s research, the women in my study were “born into structures of inequality which have provided differential amounts of capital which have circumscribed their movements through social space.” (161) Cultural studies must have a framework for coming to understand these structures of inequality. The retreat from the question of class according to Skeggs begs serious questions about responsibility and the production of knowledge, “when a retreat is mounted we need to ask whose experiences are being silenced, whose lives are being ignored, and whose are worth serious study.” (7) She goes on to argue, “to ignore or make class invisible is to abdicate responsibility (through privilege) of the effects it produces.” (ibid.) For Skeggs, therefore, developing a model for understanding class, and the ways in which classifications are lived (in all their contradictory and fragmentary [post-structuralist] states) is critical in order “to show how [class] is a major feature of subjectivity, a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being.” (ibid.) Skeggs’ re-nuancing of the figuration of class in theory relates to other feminist post-structuralist accounts of working class women such as Carolyn Steedman (1986) and Valerie Walkerdine (1990, 1996, 1997) whereby what counts are the ways in which class is lived as difference.

It is this work, together with aspects of the culturalist humanist impulses in British cultural studies, that provide, in the end, the most effective framework for the deployment of class in this research, where class is a form of identification with the effects and experiences of structural inequalities. This is then explored as it is articulated in and through the consumption of a range of cultural forms, particularly the film musical. To analyse class as a

form of identification with the experiences of inequality, is not to return to an inevitable class consciousness arising out of shared oppression, but rather, as McRobbie (1997) advocates, to look to the lived *experiences* of class, and the ways in which those experiences have constituted forms of subjectivity which are complexly determined, but where one of those determinants is class. I am also working with an awareness of Skeggs's important reminder, that "class inequality exists beyond its theoretical representation." (6)

I shall be following Skeggs (who does not in the end use another term), in arguing that we do need to set the term 'working class' in motion, as a signifier for a search for new modes of classification that are set up to be contradicted and complicated by the practices and processes through which the classification is lived. Thus, my data, as the articulation of the complex and contradictory processes through which the classification working class is lived, is central in this analysis to the practice of producing a theoretical framework in which working class culture might be understood.

Reflecting Within a Discipline

Historically and theoretically, my motivations for a revision and reflection on the constitution of working class culture in British cultural studies at this moment are significant.

Cultural studies as Golding and Ferguson (1997) note, "is not infrequently caught in the act of reinventing itself." (xi) They go on to observe:

There is a certain critical groundswell that suggests this process might be underway again. The spectacle of epistemological tails being swallowed and methodological skins being shed, while a matter of interest to others, appears to be neither novel nor noteworthy for an 'intellectual project' that extols the virtues of eclecticism, relativism and the moving target as a research agenda. (ibid.)

There is, as Ferguson and Golding argue a re-invention/reflection of cultural studies taking place at the moment. My project is positioned in the thick of this reflection/ re-invention, which is also an opportunity to regenerate the terms of the debates within cultural studies. This is precisely the time when "the figuration of something better" is opportune - at the juncture of what has passed, and what it might (must) be possible to do. The particular crisis' (both internal and external) which are forcing cultural studies revision at this point make the re-invention of the position of social class within cultural studies particularly pertinent.

Ferguson and Golding identify three lines that are forcing cultural studies' hand. The first is cultural studies' high visibility, the consequence of its international advance, academic institutionalization and disciplinary colonization through celebrity scholars, conferences, journals and texts. The second line is cultural studies' "penchant for a pedagogy of infinite plasticity," (ibid.) with interests spanning its own history, gender and sexuality, nationhood and national identity, colonialism and postcolonialism, race and ethnicity, popular culture and

audiences, science and ecology, identity politics, pedagogy, the politics of aesthetics and disciplinarity, cultural institutions, discourse and textuality, as well as 'history and global culture in a postmodern age' (Grossberg et al., 1992: 18-22) The third force pushing cultural studies along the path of revisionism, according to Ferguson and Golding stems directly from external critique. "The substantive issue was and is, cultural studies' failure to deal empirically with the deep structural changes in national and global political, economic and media systems through its eschewing of economic, social or policy analysis," (ibid.) in favour of the continued embrace of textualism, discursive strategies, representation and the practices of consumption. All of this has prompted cultural studies to re-examine and (perhaps) to re-invent 'what kind of explanation of cultural and social processes cultural studies is able to offer.' (ibid:xxiii) As Richard Johnson (1986/87) asks, "what is cultural studies about?" (43).

The answers to this question are many and varied. Johnson goes on to offer his "preferred definitional strategy." He writes, "for me cultural studies is about the historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity, or the subjective forms we live by, or, in rather perilous compression, perhaps a reduction, the subjective side of social relations." (ibid.) "Our project," he maintains, "is to abstract, describe and reconstitute in concrete studies the social forms through which we 'live' become conscious, sustain ourselves subjectively." (44) Stuart Hall argues that cultural studies lives and has always lived with a tension around providing an adequate account of culture.(1992:283) Johnson argues that the term culture in cultural studies exists as "a reminder, rather than a precise category." (1986/7:42) For Hall, the tension exists between what can be called textuality, and the historical formations in which cultural practices are lodged:

Assume that culture will always work through its textualities, and at the same time that textuality is never enough. But never enough of what? That is an extremely difficult question to answer because, philosophically, it has always been impossible in the theoretical field of cultural studies, whether it is conceived in terms of texts and contexts, of intertextuality, or of the historical formations in which cultural practices are lodged, to get anything like an adequate theoretical account of cultures relations and its effects. Nevertheless, I want to insist that until and unless cultural studies learns to live with that tension . . . it will have renounced its 'worldly' vocation. (1992: 284)

Hall goes on to argue that the explanation of cultural and social processes that cultural studies is able to offer should rest on its ability "to analyse certain things about the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities," cultural studies should think "about textuality as a site of life and death." (ibid.) Lawrence Grossberg insists that cultural studies must offer theoretical frameworks derived "not from its own intellectual practice, but from its encounters with the real organisations of power." (1997: 7) He goes on to argue, "Context is everything and everything is context for cultural studies;

cultural studies is perhaps best seen as a contextual theory of contexts as the lived milieu of power." (ibid.) What cultural studies should offer, therefore, is a way of explaining the relations between people, culture and power. Peter Dahlgren opens his analysis of cultural studies as a research perspective for media researchers with excerpts from a recent polemical exchange (Grossberg: 1995) within cultural studies, cited in the tensions between cultural studies and political economy. (1997: 48) The relationship between cultural studies and the analysis of the structures of political and economic power in which cultural practices (textualities) are cited is an ongoing one (Garnham, 1997, Kellner, 1997). However, as Ferguson and Golding argue the division of the problems within cultural studies to a battle line between something called political economy and something called cultural studies is too crude. Nevertheless, as they argue, what cultural studies must address with some urgency is its seeming retreat away from the concrete study of politics, economics and cultural policy in the face of the overwhelming analysis of consumption practices. "In retreat from the crudities of economic reductionism and the base -superstructure model, cultural studies' construction of culture has become entirely detached from economics and largely from politics too." (1997: xxv)

It is critical to think about the implications of these tensions for the study of class. What British cultural studies is no longer about are fundamental questions arising from the structural inequalities of class. In cultural studies' turn away from the study of the political and the economic what happened to class? Did cultural studies lose its purchase on the institutional and structural context of cultural practice because of the loss of the political dynamic of class as the axial principle of the locus of social difference? To what extent can the loss of this political dynamic be cited as the major loss for contemporary cultural studies - or even less dramatically as a source of intense irritation. Ferguson and Golding cite Sivanandan, reflecting on recent work on race, pouring scorn on 'theoretical practitioners', working simply on textuality, who have lowered their sights "from changing the world to changing the word." (1990:49)

I agree with Stuart Hall (1996) when he argues that "we did talk too much about class in the beginning, about class as a monolithic category," (400) nevertheless (and indeed in the light of this), it is puzzling how little attention the turn away from class has received in cultural studies revisions and reflections. Peter Dahlgren (1997) argues that:

Few cultural theorists would deny that the logic of capital and its institutional manifestations contribute to shaping social power. It is between these extremes that many positions have been articulated, with differing conceptions of how much independence can be accorded to cultural phenomena in explaining the reproduction of, and levels of resistance to dominant power. (55)

Within the logic of capitalism, institutional manifestations and social power, Dahlgren asks, "is social class to be seen as the fundamental variable of domination, shaping social location, subjectivity and identity, or is it merely one of several factors to be weighed, along with gender, ethnicity and other categories?" (ibid.). He summarises that, "while class is a central and indispensable category, there can be no fixed gauge as to its relative weight in all situations; context and articulation become paramount." (ibid.) Dahlgren's is an important argument, however, it is an argument often made at cultural studies from 'outside', (in Dahlgren's case media studies) rather than an issue that is generated from within cultural studies.

Janet Wolff (from a sociological perspective) argues that cultural studies should return to the originary project of cultural studies that has since been de-politicized. (Wolff, 1993) There are dangers, both with the concept of an originary project, and with the notion that one can return to this. The myths of origin that surround cultural studies, in the form of the trinity of 'founding fathers'- Hoggart, Williams, Thompson, and its location at BCCCS have been problematised and challenged (Schwarz, 1987, Hall, 1996). Such a return is not something that this thesis is engaged in. However, a critical re-evaluation of the place of class as an axial focus in cultural studies necessitates a reflection on the constitution of cultural studies and the working class (albeit in different forms) as objects of study. This can involve, not a return to an originary position, but rather, as Hall (1992) says going back "to that moment of 'staking a wager' in cultural studies, to those moments in which the positions began to matter." (278). In this way we might move forward to develop explanatory frameworks (theoretical and methodological) for the cultural and social processes that cut through really existing working class identities in concrete contexts.

Discourses of Affluence and Embourgeoisment

What I want to explore in this section is the relationship between the emergence of cultural studies to a wider sociological and historical crisis around the social classification of the working class in post-war Britain - a crisis tied into discourses of affluence, embourgeoisment and the perceived erosion of the traditional working class culture. What I am searching for is a historical and theoretical framework through which my interview data can be read, a framework in which the interviewees contradictory and complex location of themselves within discourses of affluence/poverty, class identity and the spectre of Americanisation in the 50's can be read. I am searching for the spaces of the non performativity (in Steedman's terms) of the 'official' historical discourses in which these women were positioned in relation to the particularities of their lives in concrete local contexts. In searching for the tensions between the spaces of historical performativity and non performativity, I am also searching for theory to come to terms with the place of popular culture as escapism within the context of their lives.

Carolyn Steedman(1986) argues:

Post War materialism has become the metaphor for all that has gone wrong with the old politics of class and the stance of the labour movement towards the desires that capitalism has inculcated in the passive poor. An analysis like this denies its subjects a particular story, a personal history, except when that story illustrates a general thesis. (10).

Constructions of affluence in Liverpool

The question of increased affluence following the war, was a question that I pursued in my interviews. Critically, none of the women remembers a climate of affluence or the increased availability of goods. "Some people might have been better off, in London or in the South maybe, but not up here." (May) Liverpool as a port had always had a circulation of consumer goods, especially American goods, brought back by merchant seaman, so perhaps there would not have been that obvious change, but the women remember times as being very hard in the 50's. "The 50's was different. There wasn't any money in the 50's." (Emily) "Although the war finished in 1945, to us it still could have been on Joanne, because I was allowed one loaf a day for five of us." (Kay) "There were no washing machines then, no luxuries. I know I didn't have a washing machine." (Pat) "we were on very low wages in the 50's. I was on £3.10 in the old money in the early 50's, and we still lived in real squalor." (Annie).

Pat: "The wages weren't high were they?"

Emily: "The wages were very low. £4.50 we got. [A week]."

Pat: "£5.00 a week John was earning. When he was working, that's what he was getting. I was working, before I had the kids like, and I was on £2.50"

Kay: "That's why we are good managers now. We waste nothing."

May maintains that, "There were no washing machines then, no luxuries. I know I didn't have a washing machine. Everyone had a big fire guard as well. You dried your washing in front of the fire." Pat compares the 50's domestic labour to now, "they don't know they're born, now, walking around with a Hoover. You used to be down on your knees scrubbing at the floor. They were floorboards most of the time, you couldn't afford lino, but everything was so nice and clean." *The Liverpool Echo* from the mid 50's was full of adverts for labour saving domestic appliances, with information on how to buy them on hire purchase agreement. The interviewees did not, it would seem, get involved in Hire Purchase agreements in the 50's. Ellen talks about The Merchant Navy, and the employment and absence of working class men in Liverpool in it. The Merchant Navy was a large and precarious employer. This certainly did not change in the 50's:

Ellen: They never used to say he's in The Merchant Navy. They used to say he went away to sea. When they used to have these problems with their money and all that, and they caught up in these strikes, their wives would be left without money. The shipping companies used to maintain that while they were stuck in these strikes, which weren't their strikes, it could be a dock strike or somewhere, so the ships couldn't move. But they used to say, well they weren't working so they didn't get paid. They didn't get paid, so their families didn't get paid... They had very few rights you know, and they worked long hours. That's what caused all the problems with my dad's lungs you know, with his chest. He used to be a fireman, a donkeyman they used to call them. That was something else that used to fascinate me too, when they used to say he was a donkeyman. I used to think, how can he be a donkey and a man, but it was something to do with the coal, you know, the boilers. It was all the coal dust you see. He used to fill the boilers.

This is certainly a far cry from the mythology around the working class in the 50's as being made soft from the lures and availability of consumer goods, better working conditions and more money. Ellen remembers her father as a donkey and a man. It is a brutal image of a man at work in a job which killed him in the end. He died of emphysema.

Throughout the 1950's Liverpool did enjoy high rates of employment. Liverpool's lowest unemployment rate during the 50's was in 1955, at 2.6%. The highest was in 1959, at 5.9%. (Merseyside County Planning department, 1986) The interviewees pointed to their memories of the job page in *The Liverpool Echo* which would have hundreds of jobs. You could always get work if you wanted it, and you could move from job to job. Barbara, Carol, Vera and Betty talk about their fluidity as workers at this time, moving from place to place depending on what suited.

Barbara: I had 22 jobs in 22 years. I just couldn't stick. I don't know why I just couldn't fit in. I went from one to the other. If I found one that wasn't too bad, I'd stay for a few years. I just couldn't stick factories . . . but I couldn't see any way, any future anywhere else. No one ever took hold of me and said, look, you can do this, you can do that. Not till after I left work.

Betty: I was 14 when I started working, my first wages was 12/4d a week. I went with my cousin Bertha to work there cos I didn't want to go and start a job on my own. I didn't like it. I didn't stay there long. And from there I went to work in the shop. I got 12/4d a week and me mam used to give me half a crown. From the shop I went to work as a waitress then, in the Harlow Cafe. It was a

little bit more wages. I think I got 17/6d there a week. But you got tips and my mam went to work there as a cleaner. I was there for quite a while actually. I went to work at Bibby's then, where I got 32/- a week. I was there for a few years, and then I went to work in Tate & Lyles's on shift work because I wanted more money. Cos by then I was 18 or 19. I used to do six to two and two to ten. I used to have to stay at my Auntie Annie's on a six to two shift. I was there for quite a while. I went to work in Broad & Rodgers after that. I didn't get much money there really.

Quoting statistics is problematic. Citing employment figures for the 1950's misses the point of what is being talked about in the interviews. These women wanted more than just a job, although having a job was vitally important. What they wanted, what they dreamed of was a glamorous job, an exciting job. They could go out and get endless factory jobs, but what about something beyond this?

Maria: Here it was work hard, work hard and small money, give them little wages and that, continually struggling in this country. The Americans gave the impression that if they struggled there was something at the end of it. That's the feeling I got - I got the feeling off Americans that if you did work hard, there was something at the end of it. But here you could work hard and struggle and everything, but then they never wanted you to be happy, or to dance.

Despite the women's debunking of a myth of affluence in relation to their own lives, what was resisted so often in the interviews was what they perceived as a stereotypical representation of working class lives as emiserated and hopeless. Barbara says in relation to the myth of affluence, that it was universally applied because, "All that, you've never had it so good, they don't know how we live." Similarly the women's descriptions of their social situations in the 50's were executed with a conception of an imagined audience "them" in mind, and for the purpose of making them understand "the way things really were." In the deconstruction/destruction of images of misery this takes on a significant resonance. "A lot of people when they talk about working class peoples lives, always talk about them as being miserable don't they? You know really poverty stricken lives and having miserable hard lives. I don't think I did. I think I had a good life." (Betty)

Singing fits into this in important ways. In the 50's singing was a significant aspect of working class leisure. People who could sing well were admired very much, but from what I can gather from the interviews ability was no measure for participation. If you felt like it, you sang. Some pubs were known as singing houses. Singing was also accessible, you didn't need lessons to do it. I wonder how far the women hold different relationships to the singing

and dancing in the film *Musicals* on the basis of accessibility. Certainly they talk about singing the songs from the musicals on the streets going home. Many still sing them now. They remember their mothers and other women singing. Many of them sing in the interviews. I think that singing also operates as a signifier of resilience, happiness, community, solidity. It's a resistance to misery, or to the notion that the working class are miserable. Ellen recounts a fascinating series of memories around women singing:

People weren't bothered then. If they had a party and that. I mean I don't know about you, but there's no way I'm going to sing. People weren't bothered. They just used to sing. When I was kid, a group of young women going out used to walk along the street with their arms around each other singing their heads off, just singing. They wouldn't have had to have been drinking, just singing the popular songs. Nobody thought anything of it. That's just what they did. That's why. Someone was talking to my sister the other day about that Terence Davies film *Distant Voices Still Lives*, and they said, "It's stupid, why are people singing all the time," Margaret said, "because people did sing." My Auntie Annie used to sing all the way back from the pub on a Saturday night, and when she'd go to Mass on Sunday morning Father Farrell used to say to her, "I heard you coming back last night Mrs Mack," She wasn't drunk, she just used to sing coming back. When they'd go to a pub, they'd say, it's a singing house, and people just used to sit a around singing. You know that film *Educating Rita*, when she goes to the pub with her family, and they're all sitting round singing . . . and then they'd come back and have whatever they were having for their supper and that, and you'd perhaps have someone who could play the accordion, and they just used to sing (silence) They weren't simple, they just used to sing.

Joanne: What's being simple got to do with singing?

Ellen: Yes, but that was the impression of, I can't remember what his name was, who said it's stupid, why do they have people singing all the time. It's probably just imbued into Terence Davies's subconscious as a child. Obviously people didn't sing all the time. But I think when you get people's lives portrayed by other people, they only ever deal with the down side don't they? *They don't deal with the fact that people were tenacious and hung on against, you know, in terrible poverty and all that. There were times (laughs) when they were really quite happy.* (my italics)

What is so central to my analysis is finding the theory to come to terms with the location of the film musical as escapism within a local context in which people were not visibly better off

in the 50's, and whose class consciousness operated at the level of the local as a pragmatism - a strategy of survival. Richard Hoggart has identified a cynical consciousness as a strategy of survival, "a saving inhibition, a defence against constant assault." (1990: 273). It also greatly complicates the at times simplistic ascription of the erosion of class consciousness in the 50's in the face of increased consumer power, both by complicating the myth of increased consumer power in itself, and the understanding of working class consciousness. Richard Hoggart argues that the questions of class consciousness should not be addressed to its erosion, but rather to *what forms* the working classes consciousness of themselves as a class came to inhabit:

Are the working class becoming middle class? Not in any useful sense of the word. The essence of belonging to the middle class was to hold a certain range of attitudes, attitudes chiefly decided by that class's sense of its own position within society and its relation to the other classes within it. From this, its characteristics, its snobbiness as much as its sense of responsibilities flowed. These attitudes are not brought into play merely by possessing certain objects or adopting some practical notions from the middle class (1970:58).

Hoggart complicates consciousness, in as much as working class consciousness does not disappear with social changes, but itself changes. "This consciousness changes with the increase in prosperity in the sense that it removes old fears and increases confidence." (45). It is the job of theory to come to terms with the changes.

Angela Partington (1991) in exploring the relationship between class and consumption as a perceived consent to subordination argues that, "the association of consumption and consensus has meant that the 1950's has often been dismissed as a hiatus in the history of class and gender struggle." (15). Partington's research sets out to contest this myth:

The periodization of the years 1947-55 rests on a perceived lack of contradiction, a national consensus culture, a homogenised social reality brought about by affluence, which was only interrupted by the emergence/identification of marginal groups in the sixties despite the fact that the sixties were considerably more affluent/consumerist than the 50's). It is this evocation of the 50's against which I want to reconsider post-war femininity as a source of contradiction. (27).

Partington's construction of a contradictory (feminine) class consciousness is important, in as much as it expands the theoretical frameworks through which class consciousness in relation to increased prosperity might be understood.

Carolyn Steedman (1986) writes of the notion of 'getting by', and its place within working class consciousness. She constructs this powerful pragmatism out of her own working class life history, and a particular memory of her mothers encounter with a health visitor:

Upstairs a long time ago she had cried, standing on the bare floorboards in the front bedroom just after we moved to this house in Sreatham Hill in 1951, my baby sister in her carry-cot. We both watched the dumpy retreating figure of the health visitor through the curtainless windows. The woman had said: 'this house isn't fit for a baby.' And then she stopped crying, my mother, got by, the phrase that picks up after all difficulty (it says: it's like this; it shouldn't be like this, its unfair, I'll manage) (2)

Steedman goes on, "What was given to her, passed on to all of us, was a powerful and terrible endurance, the self destructive defiance of those doing the best they can with what life hands out to them." (31) ..the emotional politics of "getting by" are so strong in the case of Steedman's mother - ' a powerful and terrible endurance", " a self destructive defiance." For my research I can only work with the women's lives as they are presented to me in the interviews. In these forms, the emotional politics of getting by do not translate into something dangerous and self destructive. Rather , "getting by" as a survivalist model of class consciousness can be seen to articulate the complex negotiation of a range of cultural and social processes as they cut through and across the context of the communities in which these women live(d) and/or remember.

In *Landscape For A Good Woman*, Steedman uses the stories of her mothers life, and her own childhood in the 50's as personal interpretations of past time. "The stories that people tell themselves in order to explain how they got to the place that they currently inhabit, are often in deep and ambiguous conflict with the official interpretative devices of a culture." (6) The official interpretative devices that Steedman is most interested in here are the discourses of Marxism, Psychoanalysis and other histories in which working class women and children have been positioned. Steedman says of the book, "above all, it is about people wanting things, and the structures of political thought that have labelled this wanting as wrong." (31).

Steedman speaks of the psychological simplicity attributed to working class people, and positions Hoggart and Jeremy Seabrook in relation to this:

When the sons of the working class, who have made their earlier escape from this landscape of psychological simplicity, put so much effort into accepting and celebrating it, into delineating a background of uniformity and passivity, in which pain, loss, love, anxiety and desire are washed over with a patina of stolid emotional sameness, then something important, and odd, and possibly promising of startling revelation, is actually going on. (12).

Steedman goes on to talk about the location of the working class consciousness within the realm of the mode of production that draws on the reality of that world. She also argues that , "working class people have come to be seen within the field of cultural criticism as bearing the elemental simplicity of class-consciousness and little more." (13) Technically, Steedman argues, class consciousness has not been conceived of as psychological

consciousness. It has been seen rather as a possible set of reactions people might have to discovering the implications of the position they occupy within the realm of production. She draws a distinction between theoretical propositions and the use of consciousness in the everyday world. "theoretical propositions apart though, in the everyday world, the term is used in it's psychological sense, is generally and casually used to describe what people have 'thought, felt and wanted at any moment in history and from any point in the class structure.'¹" (ibid.).

Steedman arrives at a definition of class consciousness that radically departs from the locations of class consciousness as an expression of the mode of production. She argues for an understanding of class consciousness not only as a structure of feeling that arises from the relationship of people to other people within particular modes of production, but as:

a proper envy of those who posses what one has been denied. And by allowing this envy entry into political understanding, the proper struggles of people in a state of dispossession to gain their inheritance might be seen not as sordid and mindless greed for the things of the market place, but attempts to alter a world that has produced in them states of unfulfilled desire.(123).

Carolyn Steedman's re-assessment of the historical, emotional and structural politics of class consciousness is indispensable to this research. Steedman positions her research in relation to working class autobiography and peoples history, forms which have been developed to allow the individual and collective expression of thoughts, feelings and desires about class societies and the effect of class structures on individuals and communities:

But as forms of writing and analysis , people's history and working class autobiography are relatively innocent of psychological theory, and there has been little space within them to discuss the *development* of class-consciousness (as opposed to its expression), nor for understanding of it as a *learned* position, learned in childhood, and often through the exigencies of difficult and lonely lives. (13)

Whilst my project does not examine class consciousness as learned, it is searching for a means to theorise the women's development of a class consciousness over time since the 50's in relation to wanting, specifically to wanting constructed around images and fantasies of America. The American Dream was the most significant determining factor in the interviewees pleasure in the musicals. As Pat Kirkham (1995) has argued, the American dream in post-war Britain was "a dream of having in a world of lack." (198). Thus, through the interviews the debates around affluence and class are complicated by the determination of gender, and of the development of class consciousness through the inter - relationships between the women's present social situations and their memories of the 50's. Thus the development of class consciousness must be worked through (in part) an analysis of classed nostalgia and of loss in a "a world which had produced in them states of unfulfilled desire." (Steedman 1986:14).

Myths of Affluence and Consensus

"Each year which takes us further, not only from the hungry Thirties but from the austere Forties weakens class consciousness." Richard Crossman (Laing 1986:32)

In this section I want to examine the ways in which aspects of the post-war mythologies around affluence and consensus worked their way through the construction of the working class (and their consciousness) as a problematic. A series of social and economic changes have now become part of the mythology of the 1950's. Economic propositions emphasised the convergence of incomes and the spread of ownership of consumer durables.

Technological and managerial changes are alleged to have inverted the traditional working class situation of heavy manual work and low wages. Changes in the structure of the urban ecology lead to the decline of the urban village with its restricted geographical mobility and limited cultural horizons. These can be summarised in Mr Gaitskill's infamous list - "the changing character of labour, full employment, new housing, the way of life based on the telly, the fridge and the motor car, and the glossy magazines have all affected our political strength strength." (In Dutton 1991:54) Rita Hinden, then editor of the journal *Socialist Commentary*, in arguing for a change in the Labour Party's image to accommodate the increasing number of working class "who feel rightly or wrongly that they have outgrown that label," (Laing: 22) ² conjured up in a classic form, the image of an affluent working class, in the throes of embourgeoisment, shedding the social and political characteristics of pre-1939 Britian:

One has only to cast the imagination back to those days to appreciate the extent to which things have changed . . . large groups of manual workers have higher earnings than white collar workers or than sections of the middle class. They are cushioned by the provisions of the Welfare State; their children have educational opportunities beyond the dreams of their parents. They now have opportunities for leisure, for the enjoyment of most of the good things of life. But this is not all. The manual workers have not only vastly improved their position as manual workers, they have also *changed* their position; some are no longer manual workers at all. As a result of technological changes some blue-collar workers have become white-collar workers . . . more cross over the line each day. There is an increasing fluidity in our society . . . The day is gone when workers must regard their station in life as fixed - for themselves as well as their children.(26)

What cultural critics in the 50's were being forced to respond to, were perceived, and actual changes in the nature of working class life, as well as, and this is centrally important, the importation of mass American culture onto British shores. Hollywood cinema was centrally involved in the dissemination of American culture amongst the working class. What cultural studies had to wrestle with was the location of the relationship between the popular and the people in all of this, existing between manipulation and an expression of identity. What had

to be negotiated was the operation of popular culture as either produced for ordinary people as a means of keeping them happy and passive, or as actively produced as popular by the people as an expression of an oppositional identity.

According to Laing (1986), Labour's persistent and accelerating electoral decline throughout the 1950's was then attributable to the emergence of a new social group, secure, prosperous and satisfied: a group who, increasingly, saw themselves neither as working class, nor indeed part of traditional Labour politics. Thus, there existed a crisis of consciousness and classification around the working class in Britain in the late 50's. It is a crisis that is echoed, although in a different historical and political context in Skeggs' work. Skeggs talks about her assumption that she could deploy the term working class to her interviewees unproblematically. What she discovered in the course of the research was many of the women actively resisted the label working class, perceiving it as demeaning:

This made me re-assess the problems of using the term class if it is resisted by those to whom it is meant to apply, and it made me ask what is the purpose of classification if it fails to offer any value to those whose lives are meant to improve as a result of acknowledgement of classification (that, of course, is the traditional position taken by Marxists who believe that class consciousness leads to class action and hence change). (1997:123)

What was operating in the 50's was a crisis of classification, one that worked in and through the myth of affluence - in the newly affluent Britain class was 'out of date'.

It was in the 50's that social theorists began to assert that the working class had lost its way. Some even went as far as asserting that the working class was disappearing altogether. The working class was moving further and further away from its historical mission, lured by the glamour of consumer goods, and the good life beyond. Chas Critcher (Clarke *et al*, 1979), throws up an interesting set of questions relating to the location of the upsurge in the study of the working class within a crisis of intellectual consciousness. Critcher, dealing specifically with a group of sociological research, *The Affluent Worker (1960)*, *Coal is our Life (1956)* and *Towards Socialism (1965)* - into this he also brings Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy (1957)* - argues that, "the crisis to which these texts belong is essentially that of a group of social-democratic intellectuals faced with the contention that capitalism works." (15). This statement is interesting in relation to Laclau's (1985) later assertion that the disappearance of the study of the working class in the eighties can be located in the political imaginary of the Left.

What is now in crisis is a whole conception of socialism which rests on the ontological centrality of the working class, upon the role of Revolution with a capital 'R', as the founding moment in the transition from one type of society to another, and upon the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and homogeneous collective that will render pointless the moment of politics.(2).

What Laclau and Critcher are arguing is that a crisis of classification that is rooted in real material changes in working class life, and the identification and activity of the working class, necessarily also becomes a crisis for the intellectual Left. It presents a crisis for their activity as intellectuals, versus the perceived inactivity of the working class, not only in terms of political activity, but also in terms of theoretical work, when the existing theoretical frameworks for classifying social groups do not seem to fit with the nature of contemporary social experience. This ties into Critcher's identification of the major problems circulating in the discourses around the post-war working class; its vulnerability to cultural penetration, the failure of the welfare state to alter its position of economic and educational disadvantage; its apparent political and cultural identification with the status quo. "Most of the sociological studies have in common a concern with the effects of social change on the working class. The passivity of the class is a key feature; the sociology's present people to whom things happen." (14).

Class and Consensus

Here, I want to take up the question of perceived passivity and consensus, and its relationship to the working class and to the myth of affluence, in order to understand more fully the political and historical spaces in which the British working class were constructed. I also want to understand more fully the political climate in which cultural studies emerged. The question of a post-war consensus has a mythological status. Did it really exist or not? Consensus is not meant to imply total agreement, nor an unspoken coalition of policy and intention. In Britain, it was the left wing of the Conservatives, and the right wing of Labour which dominated their respective parties. The practical effect of which was a general convergence towards the centre ground of British politics, in the supposed spirit of running the country in the best interests of everyone. The Conservatives wanted "fair shares for everyone."

In reality, any consensus that did exist came as a pragmatic response to changes that had been initiated by the coalition government during the war that Labour (1945-51) had to continue, and that the Conservatives (1951-64) felt duty bound to maintain. Thus there emerged in 1945 a strange consensus, one that Tony Benn has called "a welfare capitalist consensus." (Dutton: 23)

The perceived destruction of the working class is central to the arguments around consensus. The Conservatives argued that the working class were enjoying a standard of living such as they had never known, and thus enjoying the trappings of a middle class lifestyle. Marxists argued that consensus was wiping out the working class, that Labour were selling out the working class to the ideals of capitalism. Marxist commentators maintained that consensus existed, but as little more than a particular form of ideas of the ruling class, which

represented the interests of capital. The dominant value system and its version of national interest reconciled the masses to the inequalities, and to established political and economic order. The system was able to do this because of the corrupting effects of parliamentary politics on the political leadership of the working class. A Labour government, by accepting the political consensus which is advantageous to Capitalism, denied its own values and the interests of the working class.

On both sides of the coin there was an image of a working class being co-opted and coerced by the lures of Capitalism. In Marxist terms, so coerced were the masses by the trappings of a good life that they voted the Conservatives back into power in 1951, and every General Election until 1964.³ It was this desperation on the Left, and the lack of a revolutionary alternative in British politics that helped to create the climate of crisis to which cultural studies was in part a response. Despite my great problems with the location of the working class as somehow duped in the Marxist lexicon, I would have to agree with their critique of the myth of a modern, affluent Britain in which poverty and employment had been drastically reduced, and class divisions were disappearing.

More Money than Sense

What is interesting about the discourses around consensus for me is the way in which the myth of working class affluence can be located within them. If consensus has come to name a myth of fair government for all by whatever means necessary, plastering over a range of disparate political positions, beliefs and expectations, then the myth of affluence is particularly well placed as the success story of consensus. Living standards rose, rationing ended, controls were lifted, and open encouragement was given to private enterprise. The Welfare State was established, nationally there was full employment. This was running the country in the best interests of everyone, and it was believed to be working in some quarters at least. Yet, as David Dutton argues, the changes which were introduced fell far short of social or economic revolution. The class structure of the country was hardly affected, and there was no significant redistribution of the nation's wealth (28).

Whilst 'evidence' of the construction of a more affluent Britain in the 50's is expansive as Critcher (1979) indicates, there is also a case to be made that although this sense of change did have a material basis, elements of improvement were partial and uneven, and always affected sections of the class (split by age and sex as well as region) somewhat differently. It has always struck me as significant how often Harold Macmillan's speech in Bedford in 1957 should be misquoted. What he said was ".most of our people have never had it so good. Go round the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime." This speech has entered the common-sense rhetoric around the 50's as :you've never had it so good." There is a lack written in-

between the most and the you. How many, who, where and why were not incorporated into the most?

David Laing quotes Stuart Hall as a voice of the New Left, (at the same time positioning the New Left as “virtually the only political grouping attempting to challenge the basic tenets of the myth of affluence,” having to admit that something had changed:

even if working class prosperity is a mixed affair, often vastly magnified by the advertising copy writers., it is *there*: the fact has bitten deep into the experience of working people. The experience of the post-war years is no longer that of short time and chronic unemployment . . . there has been an absolute rise in living standards for the majority of workers, fuller wage packets, more overtime, a gradual filling out of the home with some of the domestic consumer goods which transform it from a place of absolute drudgery. For some, the important move out of the constricting environment of the working class slum into the more open and convenient housing estate or even the new industrial town . . . above all, the sense of security - a little space at last to turn around in.[29]

Laing goes on to argue:

Some things *had* changed but for there to be a judgement as to whether these changes were transformations at the level of class two further kinds of investigation were necessary. There had, firstly, to be a clear sense of what kind of category social class was taken to be; generally it is possible to say this clarification did not happen. It implied a style of systematic theoretical reflection inimical to virtually every political complexion of British social and political analysis in the 1950's. The second requirement was for empirically specific accounts of the life-conditions and experience of working - class people in Britain, not simply the *assumed* state of working-class, 'New Estate' or affluent-worker life read off from either statistics (whether electoral, questionnaire or market research) or journalistic observations based on whatever was the most manifestly visible. (Laing: 30)

Laing goes on to argue that whilst weak on theory, British social analysts retained a strong commitment to the empirical, and a body of research into the condition of the post-war working class was established. The sociological texts that Laing is referencing is that “genre’ of working class studies that Critcher analyses in his review of a post-war sociology of the working class. .(*The Affluent Worker, 1960, Coal is our Life, 1956 and Towards Socialism 1965* - into this he also brings Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy, 1957*) - As Critcher argues, and Laing supports, the general thesis⁴ of these texts could be seen to be the passivity of the working class.

I support in theory the use of detailed empirical research as a means of coming to understand the variations in the social experience of the post-war working class. This is not to say that I would agree with their ‘findings’. However, one of the biggest problems with the construction of the myths of affluence and consensus was the universality of their claims. It would seem logical, therefore, that the way to deconstruct the assumptions upon which these

myths were built would be through concrete local studies of peoples social experiences. As Joanne Bourke (1994) argues, "People's experiences locally were essentially their experiences of national politics, institutions and structures. People did not experience the "Education System", they experienced neighbourhood primary schools: they did not experience the 'Health Service', but local clinics." (166) Thus, as Bourke further argues, "The individual's concentration on the home and local territories provided a conceptual basis with what was national." (ibid.: 211) Thus, the study of working class culture involves the concrete local studies of working class cultures - specific communities.⁵

Reading the Interview data - " the most difficult bit of theory."

Richard Johnson (1986/87) argues that , "any analysis of 'working class culture' must be able to grasp the relation between economic classes and the forms in which they do (or do not) become active in conscious politics." (223) Indeed it could be argued that this is the tension which cultural studies has wrestled with since its inception, in terms of its constructions of theoretical frameworks for understanding working class culture. It is a tension with complex links to the (even more) complex relationship of cultural studies to Marxism. Andre Gorz (1982) has addressed the crisis of consciousness for the working class that has not been revolutionary. He calls this class "a non class," which, according to Gorz, "is not a social subject, it has no transcendent unity or mission, and hence no overall conception of history and society." (10). Gorz situates this "non class" against the historical role of the proletariat in Marxism. "It is of little importance to know what proletarians themselves think they are, and it matters little what they believe they are doing or expecting, all that matters is what they are." (16). What they are is revolutionary by destination - the working class must become what it is. What the Left has had to come to terms with is a proletariat that is not revolutionary. It has faced a crisis of consciousness. "This crisis, however, is much more a crisis of myth and an ideology than a really existing working class." (67). Gorz makes some important arguments here around the conceptualisation of the post-Marxist subject. The difficulty with his argument is that it maintains that, "class membership has come to be lived as a contingent and meaningless fact." (ibid.). Once again, this harks back to the difficulties around the categorisation of class. Just because the working class are not revolutionary or politically militant does this necessarily mean being working class means nothing to them? My interviewees lived out their class membership at the level of family, community, neighbourhood. It meant, and means a great deal to them. Stuart Hall (1981) has talked about the categorisation of class in post-class politics. "There are a range of political questions relating to class which touch us as social consumers rather than as producers, more pertinent to domestic life, the neighbourhood or locality than the point of production." (28).

Colin Sparks (1996) argues "there need be no apology for selecting the relation between Marxism and cultural studies for special attention: for many years it was generally believed

that Marxism and cultural studies were, if not identical, at least locked into an extremely close relationship." (71) Although as Hall (1992) argues we must consider that:

There never was a prior moment when cultural studies and Marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit. From the beginning (to use this way of speaking for a moment) there was always/already the question of the great inadequacies theoretically and politically, the resounding silences, the great evasions of Marxism, the things that Marx did not talk about or seem to understand which were our privileged object of study; culture, ideology, language, the symbolic. (279).

The foundation of cultural studies lay in a move away from, and critique of, the established Marxist tradition of cultural theory embodied in the writing of authors who were members of the British Communist Party and its international affiliates. "All of the multitude of introductions to cultural studies seem to be in agreement that the founding fathers of cultural studies were Williams, Hoggart and Thompson, ably assisted by the young Stuart Hall. Each of these writers had critical positions towards Marxism." (72)⁶ It must also be acknowledged that each of these writers was also trying to negotiate a critical position through Marxism in relation to the real and perceived social changes affecting the working class in Britain in the 50's. The central thrust of my argument is that cultural studies must itself be seen as a search for theory for coming to understand the changes in the constitution of the working class, and the role of the Left intellectual in relation to that.

One of the most significant legacies of Raymond Williams to cultural studies, and to my research, is his identification of the unresolved tension between actual working class communities and what Williams (Hoggart and Williams, 1960) calls, the high working class tradition. He goes as far as to call it, "the most difficult bit of theory."

The most difficult bit of theory that I think both of us have been trying to get at, is what relation there is between kinds of community, that we call working class and the high working class tradition, leading to democracy, solidarity in the unions and Socialism. To what extent can we establish a relation between given kinds of working class community, and what we call working class consciousness in the sense of the labour movement. (Williams to Hoggart: 28).

What Williams effectively identifies as "the most difficult bit of theory" is the site of class consciousness, and the difficulty of fitting real life into established and assumed categories and processes. In this conversation with Richard Hoggart (the first they had ever had in person) it is interesting that Williams (and Hoggart) should turn to personal experience as the site out of which the difficulty is manifested and might be re worked. This conversation was reprinted in the first edition of *New Left Review*, a document which Hall (1992) cites as being extremely influential to the founding philosophies and politics of cultural studies. Hoggart and Williams open by talking about their respective books, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and *Culture and Society* (1958). Williams says:

It's interesting, the way the books were built. I can remember my own first impulse, back at the end of the forties. I felt very isolated, except for my family and my immediate work. The Labour Government had gone deeply wrong, and the other tradition that mattered, the cultural criticism of our kind of society, had moved, with Eliot, right away from anything I could feel. It seemed to me that I had to try to go back over the tradition, to look at it again, and get it into relation with my own experience, to see the way the intellectual tradition stood in the pattern of my growing up. (26).

Hoggart responds:

I felt from your book that you were surer than I was of your relationship with your working class background. With me, I remember, it was a long and troublesome effort. It was difficult to escape a kind of patronage, even when one felt one was understanding the virtues of working class life one had been brought up in - one seemed to be insisting on these strengths in spite of all sorts of doubts in one's attitudes. One tried consciously in the light of day, to make genuine connections, to see deeply and not just feel sentimentality... but it was a running argument. (26).

The above statements are extremely significant if they are read, as Hall (1992) would have it, as founding positions for cultural studies. What is significant is, firstly, the extent to which working class culture is located in personal narratives and experiences. Secondly, the extent to which the relationship between the theorist of working class culture and the culture they are studying is problematised even, and especially when, the theorist comes from that culture, and thirdly the way in which, both men, retreat back into their personal experiences when they encounter problems with Left theory and politics, in order, as Williams states, "to get it into relation with my own experience." From the outset, therefore, both Williams and Hoggart advocate the use of the personal as a necessary strategy for the negotiation and survival of their own status as scholarship boys *and* as a means to interrogate the limitations and parameters of Left theoretical discourse, and the social positionality of the working class in theory. Lawrence Grossberg (1988a) has argued that "the specific shape of cultural studies can be seen in the extremely personal form." (14) Hoggart talks about "the need to make genuine connections, to see deeply, and not just to feel sentimentally...but it was a running argument." It was and *continues to be* a running argument

David Morley (1992) has addressed (although not in these terms) "the most difficult bit of theory," in his discussion of the politics of the production of theories of ethnographic practice:

At a more technical (or operational) level, of course, that doubt - concerning our ability even to know the 'other' - is often expressed in the critique of any research procedures in which members of category A observe/research members of category B. If that makes the research ipso facto invalid, that can only be on the premise of an ultimately solipsistic theory of knowledge, which logically entails an infinite regress - so that one would have to argue that, finally, only a person of exactly the same category (of which there is logically only one) could do research on themselves. (189)

This is a difficult statement. I would suggest that Morley, in his sophisticated construction of the circularity of solipsism, manages to simplify the issue. For the issue in cultural studies is surely not one of attributing validity/invalidity to bodies of research, but rather of drawing different methods of empirical research into debate with the questions we might want ask. Morley goes to the extent of calling it "moral hypochondria", an excessive nervousness about what can be known and by whom. He goes on to make a curious distinction between the political objections of members of one social category researching members of another as a problem (which is constructive) to the argument that it is an epistemological problem (which in his terms is not constructive). I do not understand this distinction. I would suggest that the problem is *both* a political and an epistemological one. What fascinates me is that Morley concludes his argument with a political (not in his terms an epistemological point) that if the criteria of moral hypochondria were to stand, then, "Marx's research into the position of the working class would be invalidated on both epistemological and political grounds, on the simple basis that Marx himself was not a member of the working class." (ibid.) Why should it be so horrific to entertain the possibility that Marx got it wrong? I fail to see how (or indeed where) Marx's work being invalidated would serve any theoretical purpose. I am certainly not arguing that Marx's work is invalid. That would be absurd. Rather, I am interested in the relationships between Marxist assumptions about the radical consciousness of the working class, social and economic changes to the structure of the working class in the 50's, and the production of theories of class in cultural studies.

What is so interesting about the work of Williams and Hoggart is the use of experience as a means through which to come to terms (theoretically) with the understanding of the changes in working class life. What I want to think about here in more detail is what their humanistic culturalist approach can offer to the analysis of the interviews. What then is the potential and limitation of culturalism for my research? What is the relationship of structuralist developments to the construction of a theoretical framework for analysing the interviews? (This analysis is especially important given its place in the ethnographic studies of working class culture in cultural studies in the 70's and early 80's) What happened to the study of the working class in post-structuralism? The key term that I shall be pursuing for its usefulness is experience. According to Elspeth Probyn, "the enormous influence of structuralism and post-structuralism in cultural studies can be measured by the eclipse of experience." (1992:14) In this she quotes Hall:

Whereas in culturalism experience was the ground, the terrain of the lived, where consciousness and conditions intersected, structuralism insisted that 'experience' could not, by definition be the ground of anything, since one could only 'live' and experience one's conditions in and through the categories, classifications and frameworks of the culture. These categories, however, did not arise from or in experience, rather experience was their effect (1981: 28)

Marxism, Culturalism and the Category of Experience

In the 1950's what has been termed culturalism emerged as a commitment to the study of culture as a whole way of life, and popular culture in the work of Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart was working class culture, "ordinary culture," in Williams case expressed through a range of forms and practices of competing definitions of social reality. The versions of Humanist Marxism (differently) deployed by Williams, Hoggart and E.P Thompson, was committed to the analysis of social historical recreations of cultures or cultural movements, or for ethnographic description. This has been set against, in the histories of cultural studies, the practical structuralist impulse as a theoretical form which privileges the discursive construction of situations and subjects. The preferred method being to treat cultural forms abstractly, uncovering the mechanisms by which meaning is produced in language, narrative or other kinds of sign systems.

For Raymond Williams, Marxism was a formative influence on his intellectual development. He had he briefly been an active member of the Communist Party. That encounter with this version of Marxism continued to mark his thought (Williams, 1958, 1979, O'Connor, 1989) This influence survived the Cold War. In 1956, he explicitly acknowledged it's continuing influence even during the period when he was critical of Marxism. Williams (1958) writes. "When I got to Cambridge I encountered two serious influences which have left very deep impressions on my mind. The first was Marxism, the second the teaching of Leavis. Through all subsequent disagreements I retain my respect for both." (7).

Indeed the intellectual framework within which *Culture and Society* (1958) was conceived and written was one in which Marxism was a central point of reference. Here, Williams made two major criticisms of Marx and of his British adherents. In the case of Marx's own writings, Williams detected a confusion on the question of 'structure and superstructure.' He argued that Marx and his followers had not been able to provide a substantial theory of the importance of the economic structure in understanding culture. Marxists had not been able to resolve the problems involved in the relationship between economic, social relations and cultural relations. What had developed was a restrictive interpretation of materialism, and of culture:

There would seem to be a general inadequacy among Marxists, in the use of 'culture' as a term. It normally indicates, in their writings, the intellectual and imaginative products of a society; this corresponds with the weak use of 'superstructure'. But it would seem that from their emphasis on the interdependence of all elements of social reality, and from their analytic emphasis on movement and change, Marxists should logically use 'culture' in the sense of a whole way of life, a general social process (273)

The latter of these formulations is the one for which the book became famous. Taken together, these two criticisms seem to relate to some of the fundamental concerns which

were later to become 'cultural studies.' For Williams, culture was not simply a superstructure, entertainment or art; it was the material of everyday living - Williams named it 'cultural materialism,' which rejected a fixed and determining notion of the economic base.

For Williams the threads holding together the material of everyday living were experience. For the purposes of my research it is the retrieval of the ways in which experience has been made to function in relation to the theorising of the working class in cultural studies that can pave the way for the interpretation of the experiences of the interviewees as the means to elaborate a politics of experience, as *simultaneously* a politics of theory and a search for theory. In placing experience within the arena of the politics of the production of theory, I am drawing on Elspeth Probyn's insistence that experience be made to operate on two levels. At an ontological level, the concept of experience posits a separate realm of existence - "it testifies to the gendered, sexual and racial facticity of being on the social; it can be called an immediate experiential self." (16) At an epistemological level, the self is revealed in its conditions of possibility; "here experience is recognised as more obviously discursive and can be used to overtly politicize the ontological." (ibid.) Probyn goes on to argue that, "both of these levels - the experiential self and the politicization of experience are necessary as the conditions of possibility for alternative speaking positions in cultural studies." (ibid.) Probyn's project is close to my own⁷, in as much as she is searching for new classifying practices (alternative enunciative positions - the epistemological level) in cultural studies out of an understanding of how differences are lived (the ontological level). Central to this project is a critical working of experience. Central to this, in Probyn's work is an exploration of Williams' deployment of experience.

Martin Allor (1984) discusses Williams' epistemological and ontological use of the word culture, arguing that it works epistemologically because it designates the relations between individuals and social formations, and ontologically because 'culture' also refers to the lived experience of the social formation over and above the structural elements of the social. Allor critiques Williams for this ambiguity and argues that Williams' 'cultural materialism . . . covers and collapses much of the theoretical and critical space that it opens." (19) Allor argues that in using 'culture' epistemologically and ontologically, Williams collapses the distinctions in analysis suggested by these critiques.

It is in contrast to these critiques that Probyn decides to focus on experience as a key word, mapping "the productive tension that Williams constructs between the ontological and the epistemological." (18) She argues, "While experience describes the everyday or 'way of life', it is also the key to analysing the relations that construct that reality." (ibid.) Probyn acknowledges that Williams admitted his use of experience was problematic, but takes her motivation from his continued maintenance that there was a connection between the organisation of the social formation and the lived experience of it. "Used epistemologically,

experience provides evidence of the interrelation of structural determination and individual relationships which compose the social formation.” (20) The most important aspect of Williams’ deployment of experience is its place in the production of theory - its role in the negotiation of “the most difficult bit of theory” in terms of making connections between lived experience , the structural determinations of that experience and peoples responses to that.

Probyn interprets this as : “at an ontological level, experience speaks of a disjuncture between the articulated and the lived aspects of the social and, at an epistemological level, experience impels an analysis of the relations formulated between the articulated and the lived.” (21) She goes on to say, “these two levels are then necessary for a project analysing people’s contradictory involvement in practices that go against their own (class, gender, racial) interests.” (ibid.) Probyn makes an interesting observation that cultural studies later used Gramsci’s understanding of ‘hegemony’ to describe the process through which such consent is won,⁸ but maintains that in Williams’s work “it is experience which first articulated the ontological and epistemological conditions of the actual involvement in contradiction.” (ibid.)

Joan Scott (1992) executes an important epistemological critique of experience, cautioning us as researchers against using experience as a foundational concept - as evidence in documenting the experience of others:

The status of evidence, is, of course ambiguous for historians. On the one hand they acknowledge that ‘evidence only counts as evidence and is only recognised as such in relation to a potential narrative, so that the narrative can be said to determine the evidence as much as the evidence determines the narrative. On the other hand, their rhetorical treatment of evidence, and their use of it to falsify prevailing interpretations, depends on a referential notion of evidence which denies that it is anything but a reflection of the real. (24)

Scott goes on to argue that when the evidence offered is the evidence of experience, the claim for referentiality is further buttressed. What could be truer, after all, than a subjects own account of what he or she has lived through? “It is precisely this kind of appeal to experience as incontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation, as a foundation upon which analysis is based, that weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference.” (ibid.) She maintains that the evidence of experience becomes evidence for the fact of difference, “rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world.” (25) In the end, “the evidence of experience reproduces, rather than contests given ideological systems, those that assume that the facts of history speak for themselves.” (ibid.). Probyn’s negotiation of Williams’s category of experience does not equate experience unproblematically with evidentiary truth. Williams (1976) describes experience as a particular kind of consciousness. He argues that it is “the fullest, most open, most active

kind of consciousness, it includes feeling as well as thought." (126). According to Scott, the limitation of Williams's experience = consciousness equation is that the experience of being working class (the felt facticity of material being in Probyn's terms) leads automatically to the embodiment of working class consciousness. What Williams does not explore in any detail are how conceptions of selves, of subjects and their identities are constituted. What is lacking in Williams' conception of culture and experience is a conception of subjectivity, one that connects as Richard Johnson (1986/7) argues "with the most important structuralist insight: that subjectivities are produced, not given, and are, therefore, the objects of inquiry, not the premises or starting points." (44)

Structuralism and the Eclipse of Experience

Richard Johnson (1979) argues that, "in any very direct sense, structuralism has little to contribute to an account of working class culture." (224):

This is not an object recognisable within this problematic. Structuralist theories pushed into the background the association between culture (or particular ideologies) and class and focus instead on the relation between ideology, as a general feature of historical societies, and mode of production as their determining base. In general this tendency opposes what is termed a 'class reductionist' view of culture/ideology. (ibid.)

structuralism stress was on the determinate conditions that effect people, and as such it could be seen to be upholding the dialectic that "men make their own history, but not in conditions of their choosing." Structuralism represented a return to Marx, with the insistence on thinking the relations of a structure on the basis of something other than the relations between people.

Studies of 'youth' are central to the development of British cultural studies. The studies most often cited in the history of the discipline are Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour*, Dick Hebdige *Subculture, The Meaning of Style* (1979), Angela McRobbie's (1991), *Feminism and Youth Culture*, and the edited collection by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1976), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Sub-Cultures in Post War Britain*. The studies of post-war male youth sub-cultures sit at an interesting juncture between methodological and theoretical changes in cultural studies (ethnography and structuralism) as well as with conceptions of working class culture, consciousness and political activity. Angela Mc Robbie (1991) has criticised post-war sub-cultural theorists for their exclusive focus on working class boys, and the equation of youth with male. Mc Robbie wanted to pose questions relating to "the contradictions that patterns of resistance pose in relation to girls . . . in and through various institutions and cultural forms." (16). I do not want to deal with McRobbie's important re-assessment of what she terms "the sub cultural classics" here, and the profound influence that it has had on the development of research on femininity and youth culture in cultural studies, but will look in more detail at Willis' *Learning to Labour (LTL)* as a seminal text within the canon of cultural

studies for the analysis of working class (albeit) male culture. I will not go into a detailed analysis of the text, but rather, will focus in particular, as part of an exploration of the impact of structuralism on the constitution of the working class as an object of study in cultural studies, on the text's negotiation of structuralist tendencies in its presentation of the strength, defiance, belligerence and humour of the twelve boys - 'the lads' who make up its empirical focus. According to Beverly Skeggs (1992) *LTL*:

Showed how young working class men wield power. It also showed how they contributed to their own subordination. It pointed out that there were few dignified alternatives to their action. It didn't blame them, or the working class in general. It demonstrated that young white working class men made history, but not in the conditions of their own choosing, and in so doing their oppression and the oppression of others was ensured. (181)

Willis' study develops from the anthropological ethnographic tradition in youth cultural studies in which observers enter into the culture of a specific group to understand and expose its workings. Willis adds a Marxist theoretical analysis to such methods, one in which labour power (here the transition of 'the lads' from school to the workplace) is positioned as integral to the reproduction of class identity:

The point at which people live, not borrow their class identity is when what is given is re-formed, strengthened and applied to new purposes. Labour power is an important pivot in all of this, because it is the main mode of active connection with the world: the way par excellence of articulating the innermost self with external reality. (Willis: 2)

In this sense then, it is culture, the culture of 'the lads' at the intersection of school, home and work that is the determining factor - the site in which and out of which youth groups handle the raw material of their social and material existence. Unlike Hebdige (1979), Willis was less concerned with the flamboyant styles of sub cultures, and more in the class base from which subcultures emerged, and the potential of individual action to change structural relations. If we (practitioners in Willis' terms who are unspecified but presumably teachers, educationalists) might come to understand the processes, both structural and subjective through which, "working class kids get working class jobs," (9) over and over again, then it may become possible to work to undo the processes.

Skeggs (1992) maintains that we should not underestimate the originality of Willis' attempts to understand classed and gendered subjectivity in relation to structure, despite the fact that it may now read as naive in relation to theories on the multiplicitousness of subjectivity. Whilst Willis does not demonstrate the profundity of 'the lads' experiences, his attempts to show how the structure was lived were important and relatively new at the time. Skeggs also praises Willis for giving dignity to 'the lads', and argues that he challenges the deficiency views of working class culture, as well as the vulgar reductionism of Althusserianism.

In Althusser's terms ideologies are not produced by individual consciousness, but rather individuals formulate their beliefs within positions already fixed by ideology as if they were their true producers. In other words ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. Ideological mediations produce forms of consciousness for individuals and groups, that is modes of being in the world, and subjective identities. These modes of being are already knit together with non representative elements, such as hopes, fears, beliefs. Ideological mediations must depend, therefore, on conditions that no subject can ever create or master themselves, material constraints from the division of labour, forms of property etc.; and the no less material constraints of language, desire, sexuality, etc. Ideologies are, therefore, the various historical forms in which unconscious conditions can be elaborated to allow individuals or groups to imagine their own practices. As an ensemble of representations, ideology is present to such an extent in all the activities of individuals that it is indistinguishable from their "lived experience." It was this form of ideological critique which came to dominate cultural studies from the late 70's.

In terms of my research, one of the most important contributions of *LTL* to the analysis of working class culture is its refusal to position 'the lads' within an imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence - as interrelated subjects. Willis' subjects were acutely aware of and able to articulate and distinguish their real material conditions within their lived experience. Thus Willis rejects the simplistic ascription of 'false consciousness'. "Consciousness is in any conceivable sense false only when it is detached from its variable context and made to answer questions." (122) It is the real conditions of existence and 'the lads' acutely painful knowledge of them that penetrate culturally to determine 'the lads' indifference to work and to educational qualifications.

LTL, therefore, does make a significant contribution to the study of the working class within a negotiation of structuralism. In relation to the prevalence and pessimism of Althusserianism within cultural studies at the time, it carves out an important space for the working class that never, not for once loses sight of the materiality of those lives, and the effects of the negotiations of structural inequalities at the level of subjectivity and of structural relations. There are significant limitations to Willis's study, not the least of which being his omission in equating masculinity (in relation to femininity) with power and domination. When for example 'the lads' speak of rape, "you know, you're struggling with her, fighting, to do it, and you've got her knickers down." (43) 'The lads' frequent references to menstruation also articulate a fear and a degradation of women that Willis articulates as part of their resistance. These limitations have since (in part) been surpassed by McRobbie and by Walkerdine (1990). What Willis was afraid of doing, in his attempt to attribute dignity, was condemning 'the lads' behaviour and attitudes. In trying to understand where these attitudes come from, and what might determine them in terms of class deprivations, Willis loses sight of the power attached to 'the lads' whiteness, defiant heterosexism and masculinity. Thus 'the lads' come

to re-present the working class as it were, and class is not considered as a subjectivity in relation to the structure that is also determined complexly by race, sexuality and femininity.

Nevertheless, if structuralism represented a particular return to Marx in the form of the Althusserian Marxism, then *LTL* offers up an important intervention. The shift to Althusser had an important and lasting effect on the constitution of the working class as an object of study. Valerie Walkerdine (1996) identifies the "moment of Althusser" as part of the continuing effort to explain the problem of class consciousness - its failure:

For Althusser, the working class was constructed not in the real relations of production, but in a set of imaginary relations in which bourgeois fantasies, especially those in the mass media, had produced the very mirrors in which the workers identity was formed. By referring to Lacan's psychoanalysis, the way this work was taken up clearly implied an account in which working-class identity was an ideological product down to the very unconscious meanings of the original fantasies. (103).

Walkerdine goes on to argue that this location of the working class as being totally formed in ideologies, in mass media, this infantilizing of the working class "paved the way, for not only the dropping of class from cultural analysis but also the idea that by the 1980's the working class no longer existed as a viable entity." (ibid.). This is a large and difficult leap to make, and one that Walkerdine partially attempts to explain through a tracing of discourses on the state of the working class mind. Although I am not convinced that these do in fact explain the link between the take up of Althusser and the dismissal of class from the critical agenda in cultural studies, it is nevertheless a fascinating and important question to consider. Why, with the uptake of a model for the subject of ideology, as both a conscious *and* unconscious process, did that subject become less and less a classed social subject in terms of the analysis of popular culture? Walkerdine is suggesting that this relates to difficulties in handling the working class unconscious. This suggestion relates in important ways to Steedman's (1986) assertion that a key to the analysis of the working class is the attribution of psychological simplicity. Walkerdine argues that if the working class were hard to handle at the level of consciousness, then how much more so at the level of the unconscious.

However, in the historical analysis of the theorisation of the working class as a problematic in cultural studies, the retreat (in terms of silence/absence) from the question of class in structuralist project might, as Walkerdine suggests, also relate in important ways to the discomfort with the question of a perceived (failed) working class consciousness, and the prospect of the analysis of a pathologised unconscious, given the historical location of the emergence of structuralism after 1968.

Experience in the structuralist project became eclipsed as an authenticating experience. This marked it out from culturalism. The structuralist subject was spoken by the unconscious structures in which it thought. It lived in an "ideological unconsciousness" in Althusser's

terms, and it is within this that subjects succeed in altering the lived relation between them and the world., “acquiring a new form of specific unconsciousness called consciousness.” (1971: 72) Experience, therefore, is an *imaginary*, not authenticating relation.

Richard Johnson (1979) argues that structuralism's major absence was a developed epistemology of historical research (27). In his opinion, this inhibited concrete analysis, leading into overly functionalist accounts of the operation of ideology that retreated into the reading of texts with a psycho-analytical reading of the subject. He further argues:

One consequence of the particular form of abstractness which is a feature of Althusserian philosophy is the failure to realise the theoretical promise in the production of specific histories . . . we cannot hope to grasp actual societies only in terms of the dominant mode of production and its ideological and political conditions. We encounter immediately the problem of 'survivals', of unthought relations that can only be grasped by historical research.(22)

Johnson's directive relates in important ways to my research project - developing a theoretical framework for understanding the operation of the interviewees' class consciousness around their consumption of the film musical as a strategy of survival. In support of this, I found culturalist interpretations of experience, consciousness, class and history to be more immediately (although not unproblematically) useful. Onto these can be grafted the potential (again not unproblematically) of structuralist projects - the place of detailed textual analysis, subjectivity (both conscious and unconscious) as produced, the role of the mode of production in the constitution of subjectivity. As a way into this negotiated relationship I would like to discuss the construction of history, class consciousness and experience in the work of E.P Thompson.

Edward Thompson and the Making of the English Working Class

Edward Thompson was the most explicitly Marxist of cultural studies three “founding fathers”. Not only had he been a long term member of The Communist Party, and an active participant in its History Group, but his break with the party was first articulated in terms of a rediscovery and reaffirmation of what he saw as central aspects of Marxism. Thompson, in his work for *The reasoner* and for *New Left Review* tried explicitly to develop a new form of Marxism which went under the general label 'socialist humanism.' The major shift in Thompson's thinking was his developing critique of the limits and positions of Stalinism, which he saw as a distortion of the real tradition of Marxism, which he wished to defend. In its place he developed 'socialist humanism,' which had a stress on the question of agency at the core. One direct consequence of the stress upon human activity as the engine of social change was that the ideas and beliefs which human beings hold about the world became much more central to socialist politics. The stress upon culture and the mass media was not in itself a radically new departure, either for Marxism generally, or for its Stalinist deformation, but in most versions of the tradition, the emphasis of the political programme

lay in class struggle understood as centrally located in workplaces. Thompson theorised a position, which was to become central to cultural studies, in which cultural questions were regarded as at least as important, if not more central than, the subjects of orthodox concerns like strikes.

At least this is one popular version of Thompson's contribution to the philosophies and practices of cultural studies. Thompson's own position in relation to the later work out of CCCS, however is antagonistic. He fiercely objects (1978) to the identification of his work as 'Culturalist', arguing that "this category of culturalism is constructed from some sloppy and impressionistic history." (398) Thompson objected to the "mish-mash "coming out of Birmingham, and declared himself (1981) to be against Williams' "whole way of life", in favour of "a whole way of struggle." (113) It is Thompson's allegiance to the traditions of Marxism, like the notion of struggle, that contribute to his resentment of the watering down of Marxism in culturalist interpretations.. Thompson's starting point is "experience", as the raw material of life. This is at one pole, at the other are all of the infinitely complex human disciplines and systems, articulate and inarticulate, formalised in institutions and dispersed in the least formal ways, which handle or distort this raw material. For Thompson there is always something which is culture and something which is not culture, and between them is experience, itself lying half within social being (Experience I) and social consciousness (Experience II).

Thompson argues that 'culturalist' interpretations rely too much on Experience II, on social consciousness, showing how it is an imperfect and falsifying medium, corrupted by ideological intrusions. Thompson argues that this is "not culture". It is "not culture" because the study of culture must involve the study of something which is not culture. Not culture is the active process of institutions which handle, transmit or distort culture as social consciousness. Thompson argues that only by taking into account social being as an historical phenomenon can the study of culture as a way of struggle be executed. To study working class culture should be to study those historical moments in which experience is in friction with the imposed consciousness of Experience II. For Thompson working class culture is historical, and it's study should be engaged with the intricate workings of the thoroughly historical active process between social being and social consciousness. In this way, and only in this way can you hope to get to the raw material of lived experience - material reality.

For Thompson working class consciousness does not simply arise from the experience or knowledge of living a working class life. *The Making of The English Working Class* (1963) is a polemic against abbreviated economistic notations of Marxism which had become very clearly disclosed in the arguments around, inside and outside of the Communist Movement from 1956 onwards to the creation of The New Left. In this tradition the very simplified

notion of the creation of the working class was that of a determined process. "Steam power plus the factory system equals the working class. Some kind of raw material like peasants 'flocking to factories' was then processed into so many yards of class conscious proletarians." (32). For Thompson an analysis of the historical process was an analysis of the way in which people handled experience. Class is a historical phenomenon, not a structure. It is something which happens in human relationships. Class consciousness is also thoroughly historical, as it is the way in which lived experience is handled in cultural terms.

Thompson has been criticised for using consciousness as "a turning stone of analysis [that] defines class in an excessively voluntarist and subjectivist manner." (Palmer, 1981:12). As an accusation, Palmer argues that, "Thompson reduces class to its subjective component." (ibid.) .In terms of my analysis this has been Thompson's greatest strength. Class consciousness is historical, and working class experience is given a status outside of the academy which calls it forth for validation as struggling because it exists. For Thompson, classes do not struggle because they exist, but rather they come into existence out of that struggle.

Thompson's work has been important in as much as it removes class and consciousness from the ossified categories of Marxist structuralism, with its narrow definitions and determinations. It has also been important in as much as history is so critical to the interpretation of working class culture. The limitation of Thompson's work is that working class experience (the experience of struggle), because it *is* ultimately shaped by relations of production is a unifying phenomenon. Joan Scott (1992) argues that "in Thompson's use of the term, experience is the start of a process that culminates in the realisation and articulation of social consciousness, in this case a common identity of class. Thompson sets out to historicize the category of class, but ends up essentializing it." (29) Scott further argues, "the ground may seem to be displaced from structure to agency by insisting on the subjectively felt nature of experience, but the problem Thompson sought to address isn't really solved. Working class "experience" is now the ontological foundation of working class identity, politics and history. " (30). Thompson historicized experience in order to come to a better understanding of the nature of class struggle and political resistance. Thompson's work holds no space for a subjective, historical classed experience such as that of the interviewees that is not then the basis for some sort of political struggle. What is difficult to do historically in Thompson's account is to theorise a survivalist mode of class consciousness that operates, not at the level of organised political struggle, but rather at a pragmatic level. Richard Johnson (1986/7) identifies 'survivals' as the means by which subjects sustain themselves subjectively in the social formation (44). His location of sustaining as a process of survival opens up the possibility for studies of working class culture and consciousness that reached beyond the need to frame the working class within a

paradigm of political activity. It is possible to find this kind of framework in Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*.

Hoggart's Working Class Landscape

Richard Hoggart spoke of his deep need to make connections between his working class background in Leeds, and his intellectual practice, as being intensely difficult, but politically necessary. Hoggart's relationship to Marxism was one of suspicion and hostility. Colin Sparks (1996) writes, "In *The Uses of Literacy* the middle class Marxist is dismissed out of hand, and the working class Marxist, then by far the majority of those claiming such an intellectual allegiance is not even mentioned." (73) Sparks' interpretation ignores the very poignant commentary that *Uses of Literacy* can be seen to be making about "that most difficult bit of theory," and in turn its relationship to the function of the intellectual Left and the working class:

One has sometimes to be cautious of the interpretations given by historians of the working class movement. The subject is fascinating and moving; there is a vast amount of important and inspiring material about working class social and political aspirations. But it is easy for a reader to be led into at least a half-assumption that these are histories of the working classes, rather than, primarily, histories of the activities and the valuable consequences for almost every member of the working classes of a minority.. But from such books I do sometimes bring away an impression that their authors overrate the place of political activity in working class life, that they do not always have an adequate sense of the grassroots of that life. (15).

Hoggart's focus is very different "I am writing particularly of the majority who take their lives much as they find them - 'the vast apathetic mass' - 'just plain folk' - 'the general run of the people.'" (23) It is the way in which Hoggart analyses this landscape without the context of political transformation that makes his work so important. It is evident that in the 50's the majority of working class people did not live their lives through organised struggle. Hoggart's construction of a class consciousness that works through a pragmatism - a survivalist instinct is critically important to my work.

In the early part of *The Uses of Literacy* Hoggart talks about consciousness as a form of self defence or self protection, that takes the form of stoicism or cynicism. "Working class stoicism is rather a self defence, against being altogether humbled before men. There may be little you can do about life; there is at any rate, something you can be." (98). Of cynicism; "cynicism is a saving inhibition, a defence against constant assault." (273). I do not think that Marxist theory can achieve this depth of insight into the consciousness that governs the lives of real people. Gareth Steadman Jones (1973), writing about the making of working class politics in London between 1870 and 1900, argues that this was a type of culture which literary critics, like Hoggart were to label 'traditional' in the 1950's. Steadman-Jones argues that in this period artisan radicalism and the impact of socialism were usurped by a way of

life centred around the pub, the race course and the music hall. "There was no political solution to the class system, it was simply a way of life." (111).⁹ Hoggart argues:

When people feel that they cannot do much about the main elements in their situation, feel it not necessarily with despair or resentment, but simply as a fact of life, they adopt attitudes towards that situation which enable them to live a liveable life under its shadow, a life without the constant and pressing sense of the larger situation. The attitudes remove the main elements of the situation to the realm of natural laws, the given and raw, the almost implacable material from which a living has to be carved. Such attitudes, at the very least adopt a fatalism or plain accepting, and are generally below the tragic level, they have to much of the conscripts lack of choice about them. But in some of their forms they have dignity. (92).

Beverly Skeggs (1997, 1997a) locates the motivation for her research in giving dignity and intelligence to available representations of white working class women:

I began my research as a Ph.D. to show, somehow (I did not know how at the time) that white working class women were neither stupid, desperate, hyper-sexual, enduring drudges, naive or passive - all prevalent academic and popular representations. Inspired by studies of working class boys (e.g. *Learning to labour*) I wanted to show that working class women too have intelligence and dignity. (1997a:125)

What is so important about Hoggart's work is his analysis of dignified and important lives being lived out within the ordinariness of a difficult existence (not politically resisted) of a capitalist social formation. What is so problematic about Hoggart's work for the purposes of my research, and for Steedman (1986) is his analysis of the inter relationship between gender and class, and his trafficking in the stereotypes of working class women. "It is evident that a working class mother will age early, that at 30, after having two or three children, she will have lost most of her sexual attraction, that between 35 and 40 she rapidly becomes known as the shapeless figure known as 'our mam.'" (46). Hoggart is extremely patronising in his limiting of the horizons of working class women's lives. "A wife is happy if she can 'mange' or 'get along', if she can find something left over for extras at the end of the week she is very content." (41). And, "the wife's social life outside of her immediate family is found over the washing line, at the corner shop, visiting relatives at a moderate distance occasionally, and perhaps now and again going with her husband to his pub and club." (35).

Steedman argues that in Jeremy Seabrook's and Hoggart's landscape of transition women are without class because women are not the heroines of the conventional narratives of escape through education and work. Annette Kuhn (1995) argues, "There is too often a failure to imagine how social class is actually lived on the pulse, how it informs our inner worlds as it conditions our life chances in the outer world." (101) Steedman further argues that this framework is ignorant of the material stepping stones of her (and other women of her generation and her mother's generation) stepping-stones of escape: clothes, shoes, make-up.

(15) "Women are . . . without class because the cut and fall of a skirt and good leather shoes can take you across the river and to the other side: the fairy tales tell you that goose girls marry kings." (16) Steedman makes a case for the profoundly a-historical landscape in which women are figured in Hoggart's account (as not working, as patriarchally dominated, limited, lacking in ambition) to be detailed and historicised. "In this way, the urgent need becomes to find a way of theorising the result of such difference and particularity." (16)

This urgency (relating to the specificities of the experience of class, gender and locality) is magnified if my data is put into contact with Hoggart's analysis of Americanisation. Hoggart's research is limited by his yearning for an authentic folk culture for the working class, and his distrust of "the shiny barbarism" of mass commercial culture. Hoggart's distrust of Americanisation as eroding traditional working class culture, together with his dismissal of the rich and detailed cultural landscapes which working class women inhabit, is problematic in terms of my analysis of the complexly located place of the American Dream in working class women's lives - the role of this sustaining fantasy in the lived experiences of the interviewees, and their modes of identification with class. Nevertheless, it is possible to use the early part of Hoggart's analysis, in which he maps out a fascinating and detailed picture of working class life and consciousness, and apply it to another locale and a specific group of subjects, in this case women. In this way, both the terms of Hoggart's analysis of gender, and of the forces of Americanisation can be troubled and complicated using (in part) the terms of his own analysis.

Feminism, Class and Cultural Studies

In their introduction to the anthology, *Off Centre, Feminism and Cultural Studies*, (1991) Franklin et al examine the pasts, presents and futures of the relationship between feminism and cultural studies, looking at the encounter between feminism and women's studies, and between feminism and Marxism, post-structuralism and postmodernism. In this important anthology it is significant how little of the space is given over to the specific question of class. Franklin *et al.* Address the question of the relationship between women and class through an analysis of feminism's extension of Marxist theories of the exploitation of labour within Capitalism to look at women's position in paid employment, and at the sexual division of labour inside the household. They also talk about the efforts made by cultural studies to leave behind the limits of economic determinism, and an over emphasis on the mode of production as the key contradiction with society. From there the authors move into the realm of discourse theory, of psychoanalysis and of post-modernism to assess the great strides made there by feminist theorists in the arena of the analysis of female subjectivity, and a deconstruction of the monolithic social categories of patriarchy as the dominant form of female oppression. The 1978 collection *Women Take Issue* was concerned with extending the limits of Marxist theory to take account of aspects of patriarchal domination. What

feminism within cultural studies should be looking at according to Franklin et al is the relationship between forms of knowledge production, power and politics.

It is curious how little class should figure in this history, except as labour (including reproductive and domestic), and then only minimally. It is also curious that the question of the deconstruction, not only of the monolithic category of patriarchy, but also of class, is not addressed. In the rooting of the history of cultural studies and feminism within Marxist analysis of labour relations and the mode of production, the effect of post-structuralism and post Marxism on this ought to have been addressed with relation to class. But perhaps the level of this analysis accurately reflects the lack of real impact that feminism has had on the question of class in cultural studies. The question has been largely locked into the equation of capitalism and patriarchy, with little account being taken of working class women's relationships to popular culture. There are exceptions to this. Angela McRobbie's *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991), made a significant attempt to redress the exclusively male focus on sub cultural activity, and in the process explored the complex cultures built up around the consumption of popular cultural forms by working class teenage girls. However, as McRobbie (1991b,1997) has since gone on to argue, her definition and deployment of the terms working class and girl in this research were limited. She maintains (1991 b) that class was simply "wheeled on" by her as a pre given classification into which the girls were positioned. Mc Robbie further argues (1997) that "what remained unexamined was the category "girl" itself, " and the way in which this implied a regularity of subjectivities and experiences." (181) In this article, McRobbie also makes a case for feminist cultural studies as a polymorphous discipline that cuts across film and media studies, sociology, history, literature, and with debates in Marxist, feminist and postmodern theory. Its interests also frequently overlap with those found in women's studies, feminist psychology and feminist anthropology. Thus, it would seem that to examine the relationship between feminist cultural studies and class would then mean examining the relationship between all of these other disciplines and the question of class. This is obviously beyond the reach of this thesis. I think it is still possible to argue from the *Off Centre* anthology, which does cover work from a range of disciplines that feminism within cultural studies has retreated from the question of class. It is a significant omission that Franklin et al fail to mention the contributions made to the study of working class subjectivity by Carolyn Steedman and Valerie Walkerdine, both of whom are centrally engaged in interrogating the parameters of knowledge, power and politics in the constitution of the working class as an object of study.

From Post-Structuralism to Post- Post-Structuralism. Studying the Masses After the Masses

What I want to attempt to work through in this section is an analysis of the implications of postmodernism and post-structuralism on the analysis of class and popular culture. Obviously this could amount to a thesis in and of itself. Therefore, the analysis presented

here seeks to highlight some significant issues, rather than attempt to put forward any (however tentative) conclusions. I am trying to understand the direction that the study of class and popular culture took in cultural studies, as well as to think about the direction that it may take from here. I shall, therefore, touch on the question of cultural studies populist celebration of popular culture, the role of the intellectual within this, as well as drawing together aspects of the analysis of post structuralism (its potential and limitations) to address the question of working class subjectivity and its constitution in relation to the consumption of popular cultural forms.

Peter Dahlgren maintains that, "a good deal of cultural studies research in the 1980's centred upon the notion of resistance." (58) Beginning in the early eighties cultural studies took on board the "reader's rights" brand of the study of popular culture. At the head of this, it could be argued is John Fiske. For Fiske (1989) popular culture is the culture of the oppressed, it is the culture of conflict and "always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate, and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology" (2) To study popular culture in Fiske's terms is to study the meaning making process of subordinated people's relationship to structures of dominance. If the subordinate can't be seen to make resistant meanings out of it, then a cultural form isn't popular culture, it's part of dominant, hegemonic culture.

Martin Barker has issued a polemic against Fiske, arguing that his work represents "a real threat to cultural studies." (In Storey 1994: 531) He bases his argument on the problems found in the books: "their profound lack of any interest in history; their transmorgification of theory into hollow and mechanical epithets; their congratulatory domestication of culture, and their dulling of all politics of culture under the guise of advocating semiotic resistance." (ibid.) Fiske's work, Barker argues, "represents all that is going bad in the work of popular culture. It is the equivalent of cheering in the face of defeats of warming one's hands in the cold fog of the new conservatism." (ibid.). In short it doesn't analyse or challenge the dominant right wing culture and politics: "People negotiate their readings - wow." (532) the tone of Barker's review is perhaps unduly harsh, but it speaks to a problem in cultural studies that is being re addressed in the (to oversimplify the terms) political economy versus textualism crisis that I discussed earlier in this chapter.¹⁰ The crisis is around the critique versus (populist) celebration of popular culture¹¹, where, as Webster (1994) argues, the popular is not a problem, but 'the problem of the popular is.(532) Here Webster is referencing Judith Williamson's (1986) article in which Williamson argues that, "Left wing academics are busy picking out strands of subversion in every piece of pop culture from street style to soap opera." (14) Williamson asks, "What are the shifts in society at large that have pushed the left to grovel before a popular culture we would once have tried to create some alternative to? And isn't there some middle ground between condemning and emulating it?" (14) Williamson's critique of the readers rights school of criticism is pertinent:

All these people on the left with not only degrees, but often doctorates, are in fact rediscovering popular culture as really quite good fun. However, the vast majority of people knew it was quite good fun all along. There is something of the mass observation project of the 30's where middle class researchers set out to observe popular habits in all this discovery of something that most people already know. (14).

There must be an alternative to the post-structuralist textualist excesses and the reading off of resistance from them. Williamson's criticisms of cultural studies at least places a stress on history. She sees the Left as becoming less and less critical stemming from the Left's "post 79 awareness of the Right's successful populism known to many as Thatchersism." (14) Williamson offers two readings of this awareness: a 'charitable' one which sees the Left trying to re-appropriate 'popular pleasures' from the Right, and a more critical view where politically demoralised socialist academics sink into popular culture out of a mixture of boredom and pessimism. She argues, instead that they should be offering radical new ways of meeting popular demands and desires instead. Webster supports Williamson's historical argument, connecting changes within cultural criticism to the diverse process of rethinking on the Left in the 1980's. "So both Labour and the Communist Party have been accused of a pessimistic capitulation to Thatchersism, taking over the Right's agenda rather than transforming it . . . ; just as, so the argument goes, cultural studies has recapitulated to the existing cultural industries, in order to celebrate the couch potato, rather than to propose an alternative." (534) Williamson is arguing that the Left cultural critics' vocabulary should include words like "revolutionary' and 'reactionary'. She defends this political position against a stereotypical representation of Left political radicalism.

I switched on Woman's Hour the other day to hear Kathy Myers telling a vast audience that the Left used to think the working class was a man in a cloth cap who kept ferrets. This caricature has become rampant all over the modern Left. It is, of course intended to show how out of touch the Left had been until it discovered marketing and consumerism.. but in seventeen years on the British Left I have never actually encountered a view quite this crude. Instead like many other people, I encountered the exciting ideas of Marx, Lenin, Rosa Luxembourg, Trotsky, De Beauvoir, Franz Fanon, Angela Davies and hundreds more. This does not mean that I wear a donkey jacket or a Che Guevara beret. (15).

The difficulty that I have with Williamson's piece lies in the contradiction that it embodies between materiality (a notion of the felt facticity of working class life) and ideas. Williamson positions her relationship to the Left with ideas, and the transformative potential of ideas. It is a problematic position that has too much of the "what can we should we do for them? (the working class) about it. How can we make them see differently. What is so problematic here ultimately, (and this is the position that cultural studies has continually found so hard to negotiate in relation to the working class) is the position of the Left intellectual within constructions of 'pleasure' as post-structuralist jouissance, or as populist fun . The problematic through which the working class figure is once again "that most difficult bit of

theory,” made more urgent by the historical and political location of class within Thatchers populist ideologies. However, “The problems of being popular” is also very important for my research. In making a case for the working class as properly revolutionary, and the function of the Left intellectual as imagining different forms in which the working class might be transformed by radical ideas, Williamson also makes a very good case against the wholesale (and arguably) condescending celebration of popular culture as good, and the masses as really quite clever for making their own uses of it. What Williamson argues is that to study popular culture should be to take into account the complex materiality of peoples lives, not the least of which being the taken for granted assumption amongst the working class (and not one that intellectuals have discovered) that, “in many ways, popular culture is what a makes a difficult life more bearable.” (14).

Kay: Do you know what? We all hard jobs, dirty jobs, factory jobs, worked blinkin hard, and what helped us through the day was if we were going to the pictures that night. It would give you pulse, energy!

Maria: You couldn't get a better tonic you see. You could go to one of those cinemas and you could come out Doris Day - it was so, it was so good.

Ellen: They were cheerful. They relieved a lot of the stresses people were under, and they were quite awe inspiring. People are too dismissive about them.

It is the differential location of the popular within material contexts in which hardships of varying kinds and to varying degrees are part of everyday life that separates out the position of the intellectual from the working class - and the function of popular culture as escapism there. The lived differences of social positionality and access to cultural capital between the intellectual and the working class (which can only be explored through concrete historical study) must be taken into account in the textual play of the analysis of semiotic resistance, for these are the (differential) contexts in which meanings are made and circulated. As Williams (1979) argues, “the material world exists whether anyone signifies it or not.” (167) Meaghan Morris (1988) has also talked about the “discovery” of popular culture by Left intellectuals. She links it in part to questions of pleasure and denial, and “the specialised activity of renouncing the forms, if not the privileges, of an elite academic training for a born again ‘popular consciousness.’” (243). Morris links this too, to the insecurity that Left intellectuals now feel in relation to their position vis a vis “the people” arguing that the confession of an identification with the popular gives them a link to the Other that historical, material and critical processes have made so problematic. Morris criticises, *not* the enabling basis of theories of consumption, that consumers are not cultural dupes, but active, critical users of mass culture - but the inscription of intellectuals' relation to popular culture - (as a

substitute in the face of these historical, material and critical processes) as identification/connection with the people. To use a very crude analogy if the Left intellectual looks out of his/her window, scans the horizon and does not see revolution/resistance on the ground, they can put their head back in their books "and confidently pronounce on progressive texts and forces." (Webster 1994:540) This is the perspective, according to Webster that Morris uncovered, gazing at the popular in order to celebrate cultural studies' own reflection, and the position of the intellectual within that reflection. . . .

Dick Hebdige (1989) questions what a theory of postmodernism can offer to a radical Left:

If the engagement with theories of postmodernity and postmodernism is to be a fruitful - dialectical rather than defensive - then it has to be acknowledged from the start that such theories pose a challenge to the Left's ambition to change the world because they question the belief in rationality and progress which direct and underpin the Left's project(s). Those challenges have to be squarely faced if we are to move beyond them to understand the dynamics of new times. (49)

What Hebdige addresses in this very interesting piece is the political crisis left standing in the face of postmodernism's destruction of the masses as a motor of history and historical change. He quotes Baudrillard (1983) to highlight the postmodern conviction that we live today, "in the shadow of the silent majorities," - the masses are a myth of an active (now outmoded force). Hebdige argues that "there is a tradition of cultural socialism closer to home that is rooted in a similar scepticism towards the notion of the masses." (52) He cites Raymond Williams, who always insisted that that the 'mass' was a category intellectuals tended to reserve contemptuously for other people, and never for themselves. Rather than "giving up the ghost" of radical socialist politics as postmodernism may prompt, Hebdige maintains that aspects of postmodernist theory could be brought to bear on a socialism without the masses - one that complexifies social classifications, and takes account of a sociology of aspiration, a map of consumerist desire and weds it (without celebrating it) to a sense of radical possibility. He argues that popular culture is worth studying as culture, without celebrating or reifying it as an (intellectual) merging with the imaginary masses.

O'Shea and Schwarz (1987) explore the implications of the deconstruction of a model of popular culture as the subordinate moment in a social totality defined by class relations. "In deconstructing the popular it loses its fixed subject: the idea of unitary people - hero or villain disappears forever." (104) O'Shea and Schwarz, whilst recognising the importance of this deconstruction of the social totality, in terms of the analysis of the subjective interaction with popular forms, also mark a caution in terms of some of the poststructuralisms that have come to stand in as the study of popular culture. "Social totality, unitary subjects are out, but it is not entirely clear what composes the alternative." (108) The will to deconstruct they argue, can re-arrange some of the questions, can limit imperiousness, but does precious little

to resolve the basic issue - that being to think of popular cultural relations as the connection of different popular identities with the organisation of popular cultural forms from above. Richard Johnson (1986/7) speaks of the need to develop a "post-post structuralist" account of subjectivity, which involves returning to some older, but reformulated questions - about struggle, "unity" and the production of a political will. This involves accepting structuralist and post structuralist insights into the discursive and fragmentary nature of subjectivity as a statement of the problem (whether we are speaking of our own fragmented selves or the objective and subjective fragmentation of possible political constituencies). "But it also involves taking seriously what seems to me the most interesting theoretical lead: the notion of the discursive self-production of subjects, especially in the form of histories and memories." (69) Quite how this account of "post-post structuralist" subjectivity might be written remains something of a mystery. Nevertheless in terms of thinking about or through a model for the analysis or classification of a working class subject, Johnson's arguments around the discursive self production of subjects are strong. His directive can work well with Hall's (1996) call for bringing the working class subject back onto the cultural studies agenda as de-centred, yet attached somehow to a notion of the materiality of the social totality.

The function of this chapter is, in part practical, in terms of searching for a theoretical framework to make sense of the interview data. The point of the chapter is not to seek out a lost working class identity in cultural studies, but, as I have indicated, to set the term working class in motion through some of the discourses in which it has been positioned, in order to search for new modes of classification that may be contradicted and complicated by the practices and processes through which the classification is lived in and as difference. This analysis will be drawn into the following chapter which questions what place has been made for working class women's pleasures in feminist film theory, and what it might take theoretically and methodologically for questions of class, gender and identification to be brought into sharper focus.

¹ Steedman is quoting Lukas (1968), *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin Press (51).

² Hinden was following the lead of Mark Abrams, who had been commissioned by the journal to discover what image of Labour was held by different groups of voters. Abrams findings (published in the summer of 1960) suggested significant discrepancies between the class identification of Labour and non Labour voters. The image of the Labour party, concluded Abrams, was "one which is increasingly obsolete in terms of contemporary Britain." Abrams' research is included in Laing's very useful analysis of the construction and marketing of political party imagery as one way of understanding the nature of the social and political changes in post-war Britain, and the identification of the class of the voter.

³ This echoes the discussions of the embarrassing voting behaviours of the British working class in the 80's, seen to continually vote Thatcher back into office.

⁴ I am not attempting to argue that these very different texts produce the same arguments, but rather, using Critcher and Laings's useful analysis, try to illustrate a general thesis. For a detailed analysis of the individual texts see Critcher (1979).

⁵ I am aware that to talk in any simplistic way of the working class community as some sort of homogeneous unit is extremely problematic. It runs the danger of constructing a complicated agenda of questions around locality as an element of working class culture, drawing in a variety of uneven and contradictory experiences of race, age, gender as a different repertoire of resistances, strategies, subordinations and solutions (253). Kathryn Dodd and Philip Dodd (1992) also question the assumptions that lie behind the constructions of authentic working class communities in the media. Joanna Bourke questions the assumptions central to the defence of a concept of the 'working-class community', asking for clearer analysis 'of what could possibly constitute a working class community?' (1994: 136-169). In deploying the term 'working class community' in this research the definitions of both working class and community are complex and contradictory. However, the exploration of the meanings of both of these terms shall be worked through the analysis of the articulation of personal experiences of class and of community.

⁶ Bill Schwarz (1994) has argued that this notion of the founding fathers has become something of a myth that can be wheeled out to avoid the difficult job of researching the Nationalism, the crisis in British national identity in the 50's, which can also be said to have given rise to cultural studies. I will discuss Schwarz's arguments in more detail in the next chapter, when I look at post war British history, consensus and Americanisation.

⁷ As crucial as Probyn's work is to this research, it must be noted that she does not deal with class as a specific question in her research. Rather she attempts to build a model for the operation of the experiential self that might be put to work to understand the lived difference of different social positionalities.

⁸ Cultural studies' relationship to Gramsci has been criticised, interestingly, as an over reliance. O'Shea and Schwarz (1987) and Bennett (1994) both make interesting arguments in relation to this.

⁹ This relates to difficulties I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, that empirical researchers like McRobbie(1982) and Skeggs (1995) encountered with their interviewees, for whom class was so much a factor of life that they could not/did not separate it out for discussion.

¹⁰ This is a debate that Fiske himself has entered into in a critique of his own earlier theoretical positions. See Fiske (1996).

¹¹ I do not have the space here to assess the nature of this debate in any detail. What I am trying to do is to figure out the positionality of class within these debates, and aspects of the relationship of them to the historical trajectory of cultural studies as a response to a crisis around the social positionality of the working class in Britain in the 50's. For critical examinations of the issues around populism see McGuigan (1992, 1997), Schudson (1994), Gitlin (1997)

Chapter Two

Positioning Problematics Part Two: The Female Audience for Film

This chapter, which further establishes the need for my research through an exploration of the possibility for examining working class women as audiences for popular film in existing feminist film theory, will pursue the following agenda of questions:

- How has the relationship between the female spectator and the real woman who watches film been theorised?
- How exactly empirical research been positioned in these debates?
- What place is there in the theorisation of the female spectator for the experiences of individual and socially differentiated women, particularly, here, working class women?

Theories of female spectatorship in feminist film studies rarely address the question of working class women's points of identification directly. At a recent conference¹ I overheard two women talking about locating a female spectatorial position for *Forrest Gump*. They were talking about colleagues - feminists and academics - who found Gump an attractive and appealing image of masculinity. Not only did the women find this incredible, but more than this, that such readings should come from educated middle class females. One of the women said, "these were educated women. These were not, well, you know" What struck me at the time was this woman's seeming inability to speak the inverse of the educated spectator. I do not recount this anecdote to attribute blame to the female academics for their apparent prejudice, but rather, make use of it to enter into a set of theoretical issues relating to the difficulties in finding a means (theoretically) for us to articulate the experiences of working class women in relation to film. Perhaps this woman's inability to speak the Other of the educated middle class woman relates more to the absences and silences around this figure as a problematic in theory, than it does to her own social attitudes. The issue relates to the search for theory, just how do we speak working class women's experiences in film theory? What language do we have?²

What motivates this chapter is a need to examine what we have to do methodologically in feminist film studies in order to make it possible to talk about working class women's relationships to film. I will do this through an analysis of the methodological debate between the textual and the empirical in feminist film studies, together with an exploration of some of

the work that already exists to attempt to account for working class women's relationship to popular film.

The chapter will be structured by an analysis of the debate between the textual and the empirical in one influential text, the *Camera Obscura* (1989) special edition on *The Spectatrix*, marketed as a watershed collection of essays and comments, which re-evaluated and re-directed the study of the female spectator. In focusing my analysis on questions of method, I do not want to give the mistaken impression that *The Spectatrix* was a collection about method. It was not. It was an historical assessment of the discursive production of the female spectator, in which the question of method (to varying degrees in different responses) played a part. I am picking out those issues which relate directly to questions of method. I am looking at the female spectator as a discursive construction, and am examining the place made within its construction for socially differentiated female subject positions. I will go on to look at feminist film theory's reliance on textual mechanisms³ as a means to locate the spectator, and at its (at times suspicious) avoidance of empirical methods. My analysis will link back time and again to Stacey's (1994) agenda. "How might our understanding of female spectatorship be transformed by accounts of its processes offered by women in the cinema audience? Why have feminist film critics shown so little interest in such accounts"? (9)

This chapter will also look at the place of history in the existing research of women's relationship to film. To this end I will look at Janet Staiger's (1992, 1986) work on methods and problems in studying the historical reception of film, in order to examine what role history plays in feminist film studies accounts of the spectator, and in relation to this what role an *empirical historical method* might play in building on and expanding the (already existing historical) analysis of the meanings circulated around film texts in women's lives. Thus Jackie Stacey's (1993, 1994, 1994a) work on British women's identification with Hollywood female film stars in the 1940's and 50's, as *both* historical and empirical will play a large part in the exploration of the possibilities and limitations of existing methods in this thesis.

The Spectatrix, the Spectator and the Social.

Perhaps even more interesting than the plenary essays in *The Spectatrix* (1989) were the questions drawn up by the editors Janet Bergstrom and Mary Anne Doane for the critics invited to respond. These read:

1. Please outline the history of your own critical engagement with the issue of the female spectatorship. How did you become interested in the female spectator per se? How did you incorporate this into your own work? Has it been a central issue in your work? Why or why not? What was your view originally? How has your view changed? If so, what is your view today, and why did your opinion or approach change?

2. The very term female spectator has been subject to some dispute insofar as it seems to suggest a monolithic position ascribed to the women. In your opinion, is the term most productive as a reference to empirical spectators (individual women who enter the movie theatre), the female spectator as the hypothetical point of address of the film as a discourse, or as a form of mediation between the two concepts? Or as something else entirely?
3. Has the notion of the female spectator outlived its usefulness? Is it important now to shift the terms of the problematic addressed by feminist film/TV criticism? If so, in what direction?
4. An extremely important aspect of feminist film criticism has been the notion of 'reading against the grain'. Consistent with this approach is the idea of creating a reading space for women in which they can forge their own meanings. Are there limits to this form of criticism? What kinds of meanings are produced through this process, and is there any way of choosing among them? How can numerous 'readings against the grain' be accounted for? Under one or another name, 'reading against the grain' has been central to virtually all of contemporary film criticism, especially essays aimed at demonstrating the complexity of film text or contradictions among discursive levels and their relationship to social and cultural forces. Are there instances where specific alternative readings are available to women that are not available to men?

What seems to have governed Bergstrom and Doane's choice of questions was their belief that, "in 1989, the female spectator has become a fractured concept, activating a host of conflicting and incompatible epistemological frameworks, circulating around what could be seen as entirely different objects of study (e.g. the spectator versus the audience)." (12) Their questions were significant in that they had the potential to push feminist film criticism towards a level of methodological debate that it had not engaged in. Meaghan Morris has argued that "the spectator has prevented methodological debate within film studies," (241) that "she" belongs to a particular theoretical moment, and that the theoretical figure needed to understand why and how women watch films needs to be reconstructed. The great difficulty is finding the method to do this. As Doane writes, "it is easier to point to the need to take other differences into account than it is to arrive at satisfactory methods for doing so, or even, more simply to understand what it is that we want to know and why." (9)

Within the struggle to find the terms, both theoretical and methodological, what I found interesting was the ways in which the respondents in *The Spectatrix* struggled with question 2, and the following locational terms for the female spectator:

- "as a reference to empirical spectators."

- “a hypothetical point of address”.
- “something else entirely.”

I want to think about the implications of the struggles around these terms for the development of my own method.

In their introduction to *The Spectatrix*, Bergstrom and Doane write, "for a while it seemed (and often it still seems) that every feminist writing on film felt compelled to situate itself in relation to Mulvey's essay." (7) Of course the essay that they are referring to is the now im/famous "Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema." (1975). Perhaps Bergstrom and Doane are right, perhaps we do feel compelled to start there. Certainly nearly every survey of feminist film theories history begins at Mulvey. Many of the limitations of her now canonical essay have already been exposed (Doane, 1991, Kuhn, 1982, Mayne 1993, Stacey 1994, Geraghty, 1996a and indeed Mulvey herself, 1981). It is true it was an important piece of work, groundbreaking in its production of a stunning recognition effect about the construction of images of women within the cinematic apparatus. It is also true that it has limitations. Amongst these can be counted the limitations of the exclusive focus on sexual difference to the exclusion of other social differences between and within women, meaning as production led, pessimism, textual positioning, masochism, female passivity, the stranglehold of the unconscious, the originary psychic trauma of castration, and the inevitability of Oedipal desire.

What concerns me is that it has become fashionable to decry Mulvey's early work (and I have been as guilty of this). Often its importance is acknowledged, its limitations pointed out with the assumption that what you are about to read will fill in the blanks. Feminist film theory has moved some way out of the theoretical box that Mulvey built, but are not its "accepted" paradigms still spectator positioning, textual analysis, meaning as production led and the unconscious?

When I read *The Spectatrix* for the first time I was overwhelmed by how little distance much of the work had travelled since the seventies. What struck me as I waded through the 50 or so responses was the reluctance on the part of many of the respondents to really tackle the poignant and far reaching questions put forward by Bergstrom and Doane. I was particularly interested in the defensiveness against those questions, such as has the female spectator outlived its usefulness? Is it now important to shift the terms of the problematic addressed by feminist film/TV criticism? If so, in what direction?, questions which were pushing towards the consideration of a different way of doing things. There appeared to be a real reluctance in some replies to consider this, and anger in others that they should be being asked to. Many of the women argued that the notion of the female spectator was considered too monolithic, that there were so many different interpretations of what it meant, (and the

work that it could be made to do.) Barbara Creed (works through a four part construction of the female spectator - as combinatoire. Thus "she" is:

1. The diegetic (the 'woman'on the screen)
2. The imaginary (the construction of patriarchal ideology, the one to whom the film is addressed)
3. The theorized (the creation of feminist film criticism)
4. The real (the woman in the auditorium) (135)

For Jacqueline Bobo, the female spectator is an articulation (in Hall's terms), a flexible linkage, a connection that forms a unity between two different entities under conducive conditions. "The elements involved are a social group and a discourse, which is not always a cultural form." (102) Guiliana Bruno positions the spectator " as a trajectory of reading and re-writing a text." (105) Carol Flinn makes a distinction between the "female spectator" and the "feminist spectator", where the female spectator is a textual interpretation, and the feminist spectator, "a critical or interpretative position potentially available to any woman who watches and listens to films in male dominated culture." (153) Meaghan Morris argues, " I think perhaps that an emphasis on 'the female spectator' has helped to retard consideration of feminist film theory of the problematic of popular culture and of film situations in which spectator might not be the best term for the role of the participant." (243)

I think that one of the most important and pragmatic responses comes from Annette Kuhn who argues:

Perhaps we should be asking ourselves what is all this for? (Not just in terms of epistemology and method, but strategically, politically) what do people - women especially - do with film and television? How do film and television form people? How can we arrive at answers to these two questions? Who in any case are 'we' and what are the uses of the knowledge we are seeking? (216)

What it seems to have been so difficult to work out (and this is hardly surprising) is a language (a method) for arriving at answers to the questions that Kuhn is posing. The real difficulty in *The Spectatrix*, and indeed in the current debates within feminist film theory is the conceptualisation of the social within the different processes of reading, both textual and empirical. The tension seems to exist between a conceptualisation of the spectator as always/already social, as a process that enables one to interrogate "cinemas binding of fantasy to images [that] institutes forms of subjectivity which are themselves unequivocally social." (De Lauretis, 1986). Carol Flinn maintains:

The spectator for me is largely a theoretical construct, different from an 'actual' audience member, yet not unrelated to her. Were there no correspondences between the two one would have to assume that theory transcended the banal facts of history or that its discourse was in fact socially

and politically disengaged - something I doubt many of us would want to do.
(152)

I am not attempting to argue that the female spectator as a method of textual analysis does not allow us access to the theorisation of the social. In this sense I retreat slightly from Charlotte Brunsdon's position:

I would argue that all that can be produced by textual exegesis are hypothesis about textual organisation and spectator address. Whether we refer to inscribed readers, spectators, etc. Does not seem to be the crucial issue. The problem is how this type of material - skilled, highly trained readings - relates to anything else, particularly, how it relates to the culture in which the work . . . is produced, and the meanings any particular audience member makes. (108)

Certainly, the particularity and specificity of the meaning making practices of an individual (or indeed specific social group of viewers) potentially gets lost. Nevertheless, the female spectator can, in terms of an analysis of structures of power, patriarchy, homophobia, racism, and the representation of those systems in visual culture, together with the re-working of dominant ideologies as they might be seen to figure in filmic texts, certainly relate to something else - to the culture in which the work is produced. Further, the analysis of hypothetical viewing positions, either as resisting, duped or ideal can provide access to a myriad of different ways of reading a film text.

I want to go on now to look at three pieces of writing; Teresa de Lauretis (1987) "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Re Thinking Women's Cinema," Michelle Wallace (1993), "Race, Gender and Psychoanalysis in the forties Film: Lost Boundaries, Home of the Brave and The Quiet One," and bell hooks (1993), "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." I will look at these texts as a study in the potential and limitation of the textual female spectator to address the social and questions of social positionality. The specific social difference that I will look at here is race.⁴ The analysis works to support the construction of my own method to think through the experiences of white working class women in relation to the film musical.

De Lauretis in "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory," sets out to explore the existence of a specifically female aesthetic (in terms of language and politics) to women's cinema⁵, and examines the place of the theorisation of this in feminist (film) theory. De Lauretis executes a significant analysis on how such an aesthetic should (should be seen to) operate - "as a means of effecting another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject." (163) It should not then work merely to secure discursive boundaries as gender specific. Rather, it should move beyond the notion of sexual difference in its most limiting form, " that is to say a difference of women from men, female from male, or Woman from man . . .to a delineation and a better

understanding of the differences of women from Woman.” (164). She does not get as far in her critique of sexual difference as Stacey (1994) who argues that:

Theories which emphasise sexual difference would mostly have us believe that subjectivity is formed through unconscious operations. But how, if we are talking about feminine/female subjectivity is it possible to deal with such representations as ‘lived experience’ and ‘memory’ . . . How might ‘social forces’ be negotiated be represented in lived experience, in memory, or indeed in unconscious processes. (32)

Nevertheless, at the time of writing De Lauretis makes an important and still under theorised contribution to feminist film theory in trying to link the mechanisms of the textual operation of a film to her sense of her own social self, and thus to larger questions of social and not just sexual difference. To this end de Lauretis executes a detailed analysis of Lizzie Borden’s *Born in Flames* (1983), as forcefully representing the invisibility of black women in white women’s films, or of lesbianism in mainstream feminist film criticism. What de Lauretis argues, through textual analysis is that *Born in Flames* :

Through its barely coherent narrative, its quick paced shots and sound montage, the counterpoint of image and word, the diversity of image and language, and the self conscious science-fictional frame of the story holds the spectator across a distance, projecting toward her its fiction like a bridge of difference. In short what *Born in Flames*:does for me, woman spectator is exactly to allow me to ‘see difference differently’, to look at women with eyes I’ve never had before and yet my own. (165)

She goes on to argue that what the film portrays for her, what elicits her identification with the film, and gives her, a spectator, a place in it “ is the construction of my own history and the personal/political difference within myself.” (ibid.) The film she argues, constructs a place for the spectator that is not a positionality in language or desire - a fixed point on a compass of sexual difference, but instead ‘makes a space for what I will call me, knowing I don’t know it, and give me space to try to see, to “know” to understand.”(173). I

De Lauretis’ analysis is important on many levels, not the least of which being, in terms of this research the space that she opens up within the model of the female spectator, as not a spectator (an abstract position), but “me” for the experiences of both the film critic and/as spectator and the other female viewer as spectator to come into play. She opens up the space of personal history as integral to the process of the production and understanding of social difference within and outside of visual culture. Her analysis put the personal on the table as a means of speaking and understanding difference.

Michelle Wallace (1993), has made a very interesting case for the historical black female spectator through a negotiated interpretation of psychoanalysis. Wallace maintains that if we argue that psychoanalysis aims at a reconstruction of the subjects construction in all of its

splits, then within that there is a place to explore fragmented black female subjectivity. She sets out to examine the constitution of black female subjectivity in relation to black women's consumption of mainstream Hollywood cinema in the forties. Wallace's choice of mainstream genre marks a significant and importance difference to De Lauretis' analysis of independent feminist cinema as having the potential to make us see difference differently. Wallace is situating a feminist politics/aesthetic firmly in the mainstream. The starting point for her analysis, is her own history and relationship to forties films. "My grandmother and mother taught me to know and to love Lana Turner. Rita Hayworth, Gloria Swanson, Joan Crawford, Ingrid Bergman, Gloria Grahame, Barbara Bel Geddes and Barbara Stanwyck, not because they were 'white' but because they were stars."(264).

Wallace makes an important raid on dominant psychoanalytical discourse. She argues that blacks were a huge audience for mainstream cinema in America in the 40's, spending about 150 million dollars annually on movies, and that there should be some way of accounting for their identification with white mainstream cinema beyond the prioritising of sexual difference as the formation of subjectivity. I think that the following quotation by Wallace in its challenge to the comfortable categorisation of psychoanalysis within the body of feminist film theory is very important:

It was always said among black women that Joan Crawford was part black, and as I watch these films again today, looking at Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* or Lana Turner in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, I keep thinking, "she's so beautiful she looks black." Such a statement makes no sense at all in current feminist film criticism. What I am trying to suggest is that there was a way in which these films were *possessed* by black female viewers. The process may have been about problematizing and expanding one's racial identity instead of abandoning it. It seems crucial here to view spectatorship not only as potentially bisexual, but also multi-racial and multi-ethnic. (264).

Wallace's use of the metaphor "possession" is wonderful, it offers fantastic possibility for the study of the relationship between race, gender and popular culture, but also for the study of the relationship between class, gender and popular culture. The metaphor of possession manages to move to an order of experience within which the popular is complexly located within the story of a life, and within the specifics of a social history. In Wallace's piece, therefore, the model of the black female spectator as a process of re-reading texts and the unconscious fantasies and desires of the black female viewer manages to relate *Lost Boundaries* (1949), *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *The Quiet One* (1949) to the culture in which they were both produced and consumed.

In "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," bell hooks executes an analysis of black female cinematic identification. hooks works with Anne Friedberg(?) who maintains: that, "identification is a process which commands the subject to be displaced by another; it is a procedure which refuses and recuperates the separation between self and other, and in this

way replicates the very structure of patriarchy. (297) Moving on from there hooks argues that we might then surmise that many feminist film critics over identified with the mainstream cinematic apparatus, to produce theories that replicate its totalizing agenda. She is partly criticising white feminist film critics who either ignore race altogether or else include analysis of race without showing an interest in black female spectatorship. In this she is right, but there is a curious subtext to hook's work that suggests that black women who identify with mainstream white cinema are trapped in the system of identification = denial of difference = denial of self, that black women who identify with mainstream white cinema hold "the masochistic look of victimisation." (289) It would seem that we are right back with Mulvey - trapped like a rat in a maze, even to the extent with which hooks identifies/agrees/celebrates Mulvey's declaration that ". . . watched through eyes that were affected by the changing climate of consciousness, the movies lost their magic." (290) hooks' is a rallying call for transformed consciousness to be brought about through the abandonment of the mainstream and the celebration of the avant-garde. It's a rallying call that does not, as Wallace's piece attempts to, come to terms with the complexities of the relationships black women might have with popular film.

Yet hook's article also moves a significant distance away from Mulvey, in that she is arguing that black female spectators are not able to identify with the phallogentric gaze, nor the construction of white womanhood as lack. Black female spectators, she argues are able to critically assess the cinema's construction of white womanhood as object of phallogentric gaze, and choose not to identify with either the victim or the perpetrator. Black female spectators who refuse to identify with white womanhood, who do not take on the phallogentric gaze of desire and possession create a critical space where the binary opposition Mulvey posits of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look' is continually deconstructed. "As critical spectators Black women looked from a position that disrupted." (295) hooks' article contains a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, she is transforming the terms of the debate by arguing that black female spectators can develop an oppositional gaze by not being duped by Hollywood Cinema, but on the other hand she is landing black female spectators right back where white female spectators were positioned in the 70's (and still are at times) Her "ideal" spectator is educated, resistant and resisting in her refusal of the regressive identification that hooks perceives that Hollywood demands. But where is pleasure? Where are black female spectators to find their pleasure? Surely not only in the acts of textual interrogation and deconstruction of avant garde film practices. What of Wallace, her mother and her grandmother and their love of Rita Hayworth? hooks would seem to pathologise that pleasure, and yet Wallace manages to make something much more complicated out of it, arguing that the possession of white womanhood by black women was itself a way of problematizing black identity, complicating it. It was not about abandoning it.

I include these analysis of de Lauretis, Wallace and hooks as examples of the ways in which the female spectator has been put to work to disrupt the notion of the monolithic female spectator, and to specifically question the construction of racial difference, patriarchy and the role of history in the positioning of female viewers for film. These articles stand as evidence that the female spectator, as a process can be used to interrogate the social, social classification and social positionality. However, what is lacking in all of them, but particularly Wallace and De Lauretis is a sustained level of empirical analysis. My point is not that we should condemn feminist film theory for its failure to engage with empirical research, but rather think about:

1. Firstly what empirical research might make possible - what it can do that the model of the spectator cannot do - in terms of thinking about what women do with film *in their daily lives?*, how their subjectivities are *formed* (as ongoing, in flux) in relation to film?
2. Why feminist film theory has been so reluctant to take it on board.

To continue for the moment with the construction of racial difference, and to think in this context about what empirical research might make possible, let me turn to Jacqueline Bobo's (1993,1995) work on black women as cultural readers. In particular her work around black women as audiences for *The Colour Purple*(1985, Dir: Steven Spielberg). Bobo's work is profoundly important on a number of levels: in making visible the complex range of experiences and relationships that black women (differentiated by age, class and sexuality) construct around visual culture, in engaging with a complex methodological debate around the use of empirical research to access these experiences, and in making history, including the social and cultural histories of her interviewees central to the analysis of texts. Bobo's work is vitally important too for its refusal to fall on either side of the celebration/condemnation of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Rather, Bobo conducts an analysis in between. "It would be a mistake to assume any film or mainstream cultural product is without harmful effects simply because of audiences' ability to read around the text." (91) At the same time, making detailed use of her empirical research, Bobo is able to understand and theorise a *use* and *investment* in popular cultural forms that works through personal history and its relationship in turn to larger historical issues. With specific reference to *The Colour Purple*, therefore, Bobo is able to argue, "as black women cultivated resistance strategies during enslavement and fought against all manner of inequities and injustices during the early parts of the century, so too did they use the moment of the entrance of the film *The Colour Purple* to advance a better understanding and knowledge of black women's historical and cultural legacy." (92)

What Bobo achieves in this work, through the use of an empirical method, is a way of understanding the complex ways in which texts intersect with and through our daily lives. Empirical research can open up an avenue - a different way of speaking - the meaning of a

text through personal experience. It can root the need for a text within a narrative of a life in a way that textual spectatorship cannot. One of Bobo's respondents speaks here of the function of *The Colour Purple* in her life:

Phylliss: I think it was a catharsis for me. Because it was some of those things I had actually lived, some of the things I had actually seen other people live. I liked being able to sit there and see it on the big screen. It was important for other people to view that, to make them aware that this is really happening, folks. For critics to say that this is a fantasy - I had a real problem with that, because it's just like saying that "The Cosby Show" is a fantasy. I know that just like the things that happened in "The Cosby Show". I know families like that - who kid around, joke around, have all that love . . . its almost as if people are negating some part of my existence when they say that this movie isn't real. It opened up a lot of wounds for me, it made me go inward, it made me do lot of thinking.

In my own research, despite coming to the project with some idea of the kinds of things the women might say, having grown up within a particular narrativisation of the film musical in Liverpool. The particularities of the women's lives, and the positioning of the films within them was incredible, and vitally important in terms of expanding my understanding of working class women's experiences in Liverpool in the 50's, the cinema and the Musical genre.

Maria: We had all our cousins living with us, and me mums brother and his family, they got bombed out and they were all over in North Wales you see, and um after the war they all came back, they had nowhere to stay so they stayed with us. And em grandmother lived in our house as well. I used to sleep at the back of her in a single bed till I was sixteen. My aunt and uncle had ten kids, and there was already eight of us, plus me parents, then our Eileen my mums younger sister, she came to live with us, and she had three kids, so were talking about twenty eight people you know, with one toilet. Um, it was you know - so it was an escapism, the Musical was a great escapism. Absolutely first class. You could dream about it.

Marie: The cinemas were within reason , they were within your price range, you know. I left school when I was 15, and there was myself, there was Mary Kelly, Maria MacDonald, Eileen Atkins, Margaret MacKay, there used to be a crowd of us, and of course we would be imitating them you know. I'd only left school a week and I'd bought red lipstick, and I used to jam it on, and I'd bought my Max Factor mascara. Things started to come in from America

that we didn't have here, and there was another thing Max Factor panstick. My dad used to bring home these magazines, and Mary Kelly's father, he was a Merchant Seaman, he used to bring home magazines from America. Their advertisements were always lavish. Well you'd save up to buy the Max Factor. The panstick was half a crown. Panstick was like foundation make up you know, and because it made those filmstars look more beautiful . . . you know we were impressed by this, and of course the advertisements of this, we'd go and save up to buy it, because we wanted to look like the girls in the Hollywood film musicals. They were so impressive and clean. That was another thing they were clean.

The different methods, empirical and textual, also work through different modes of speaking the meaning of a text. Whilst the responses drawn from empirical research become theory (in terms of their embodiment through translation and analysis into academic discourse/speak) they can also stand up as evidence in their own mode of speaking. I think that this is important. I am not positioning empirical data as access to the truth emerging from real women's mouths in an unproblematic way, nor, to reiterate, am I arguing that this data stand uncontested in the process of translation. However, if executed with care, empirical audience research can still give women, who only figure in the academy (if at all) as the *objects* of study a means to talk about what they find pleasurable *on their own terms*.

Peggy: You knew that it was all going to come out right in the end. But, therefore, what you were hit with was the actual vision. Because they were beautifully dressed. I mean over the top. There was no way that you in the 1950's could have gone out dressed like that. But it was something that was like a fairy on top of the Christmas tree, so that it was something that made you feel sparkly watching.

In *The Spectatrix* there was a common ground amongst some of the theorists on the separation out of the spectator and the empirical social subject of film. Mary Anne Doane, Barbara Creed and Guilaian Bruno all separate the spectator from the actual person who watches films. Creed argues:

Now reading through the minefield of critical literature on the female spectator one thing emerges clearly: a cinematic female spectator has certainly been constructed within feminist theory, but 'she' is very much a construction of that critical discourse based in psychoanalytical theory, and probably bears only a tenuous relation to the woman who sits silently in the darkened auditorium eating her peanuts. Too often the cinematic spectator of feminist theory is spoken about as if she were the female spectator in the theatre - the referent is collapsed into the real. (132).

Creed is referencing here a position taken up by Flinn quoted earlier, whereby there is an inevitable slippage between the spectator and the social with no account, either theoretically or methodologically of how this relationship might be thought through. The difficulty is that the spectator is seen ultimately to institute forms of subjectivity which are unequivocally (or not) social. There is a full stop placed after the revelation that spectatorship = subjectivity = social construct, where the social construct comes to stand for an imagined audience that is never theorised. Mary Anne Doane chooses to locate the spectator as "a function of a discursive strategy at a particular historical moment when reading and readability were centrally important issues in the theorisation of film." (142). She goes on to place it as "totally foreign to the epistemological framework of the new ethnographic analysis of audiences." The female spectator, Doane maintains, "is a concept, not a person." (ibid.). Maureen Turim (1989) argues that "there is no 'empirical spectator' only empirical methods for measuring and assessing the individual women who leave the movie theatre." (122). Meaghan Morris locates the spectator in a similar way. Morris argues, "the term female spectator has been most productive, not as a mediation between a concept of the empirical spectator and one of a hypothetical point of address, but rather as a metonym of a zone of analysis produced by contemporary theory." (242) Within this zone, Morris maintains, "the relations between empirical and rhetorical (or historical and theoretical) feminist research in cinema can be conceptualised - along with a politics of the purpose (and points of address) of such research in the present." (ibid.).

The separation of the spectator and the audience is one thing, but what is lacking in feminist film theory is a sustained level of debate around the reasons why the spectator is chosen (albeit as a process that can do different jobs) over and above empirical research. Jackie Stacey (1994) sites the possible reasons for feminist film theories reluctance to venture into the area of audience research in a largely pragmatic framework. This she articulates as:

- The ease of doing textual analysis compares favourably with the uncertainties and practical problems of audience research
- Ethical issues around the relationship between researcher and spectator. The attendant difficulties of putting a person, rather than a text under scrutiny. (12)

What can also be seen to exist is a suspicion of empirical methods as necessarily *empiricist* methods:

Addressing empirical spectatorship does not tempt me and I am not interested in an empirical analysis of the phenomenon of female spectatorship. I could discuss many of the reasons for this, but the most banal is probably the most appropriate. I cannot get over an old semiotic diffidence for any notion of empirical truth or reality which I find very problematic. (Guilaina Bruno:105)

Bruno is arguing that empirical audience research gets no closer to the truth about how or why women watch films than does the spectator as a trajectory of reading and rewriting a text, and that at least the spectator has no stake in truth claims. Doane comes at this point from the opposite direction, via the critique of the spectator as an abstraction in empirical audience research. "If you say, ah, that's the problem, abstraction, then that's assuming that there is a realm in the production of knowledge that's more real. (142). The real point, Doane argues, is to question, "what the abstraction allows or disallows." (ibid.).

Doane makes an important methodological point. She does caution us against putting empiricist faith in empirical methods to give us the truth. Christine Geraghty (1996a) too has cautioned against, empirical research's "apparent promise of truth emerging out of the mouths of real women." (320). I take these cautions very seriously, and as Charlotte Brunson (1989,1986), Ien Ang (1989), and others examine, there are indeed problems particular to empirical audience research with women. Jackie Stacey (1994) argues that the problems of empirical film audience research have a particular resonance:

How might audiences accounts be considered as texts, and yet maintain a different status from the texts of film theory? How might we move beyond the simplistic ascription of audiences responses as the authentic truth' about media meaning, whilst avoiding treating them as simply another kind of narrative fiction? How might some aspects of the psychoanalytic conception of the subject be retained if modified, within studies of 'real audiences' (74)

Ien Ang rightly insists that doing audience research is itself a discursive practice which can only ever hope to produce historically and culturally specific knowledge's which are the result of equally specific discursive encounters between researcher and informants. Research is thus, from her point of view, always a matter of interpreting (or indeed constructing) reality from a particular position, rather than the positivist approach of assuming that a correct scientific perspective will finally allow us to achieve the utopian dream of a world completely known in indisputable facts. John Fiske (1989) argues that there is no such thing as "the television audience" (56) defined as an empirically accessible object Fiske follows Hartley (1987)who pursues the constructivist argument further, arguing that there is no 'actual' audience that can be separated from its construction as a category. In no case is the audience 'real' or external to it's discursive construction. There is no 'actual' audience that lies beyond its production as a category . . . audiences are only ever encountered as representation. (125) David Morley (1992) maintains that none of the empiricist cautions around the practice of empirical research, "in principle vitiates the need for empirical work, and for argument founded on the assessment of empirical evidence." (17)

However, I would maintain that in order to get out of the arena of tail chasing that an entry into these kinds of methodological debates can at times lead us into, it is important to work in a practical and pragmatic way with Doane's directive, that we should consider practically how

theory allows us to understand what film means in women's daily lives. I would argue that the level of methodological debate within and between feminist film studies, and empirical audience research, is locked and debilitated by the question of truth. It seems redundant to get locked into a push and pull of which is more real, the spectator or the audience. Part of the practice of methodological debate is to take into account what status and function the information that we come to know (through our chosen method) has, and what questions we use it to address.

The Female Spectator as Combinatoire - Textual, Empirical, Historical.

Jackie Stacey's work on female spectators is so important on a number of levels, not the least of which being the degree to which her engagement with methodological debate operates at a pragmatic level. Stacey's model of the female spectator is groundbreaking in its rejection of the either/or textual/ empirical. In place of this limiting choice she constructs the spectator as a *combinatoire* of the textual, the empirical, and critically, the historical. Her methodology does not involve positioning empirical audience research as better than textually determined readings of film texts and imagined audiences, but as accessing an order of experience that the textual spectator on its own cannot. Stacey's method in combining the textual and the empirical spectator merges the most exciting and insightful possibilities of both. Stacey's method is used to explore *the use of the processes of spectatorship by real women*. Thus the traditions of the deployment and analysis of hypothetical subject positions, detailed textual analysis, questions of the passive viewer produced through the mechanisms of the text, and the operation of the unconscious are applied to the articulated experiences of real women. In this way questions of passivity and dominant ideology, the constitution of subjectivity, the analysis of film texts and the operation of memory, fantasy, loss and desire are worked out of women's experiences, and into an assessment and critique of the available theories (both empirical and textual) for coming to terms with these experiences in the narratives of real life. What makes this method even stronger is Stacey's conviction that these questions and issues must be played out within a concrete historical context. Thus, Stacey positions her work as developing a notion of the spectator as an historical subject. "I would argue for the need to understand popularity and pleasure as historically located in order to theorise the full complexity of female spectator's relationships to popular culture." (47) She further argues that "there is a history of female cinematic spectatorship which has yet to be written." (49). This can be taken even further. There are endless histories of female spectatorship yet to be written.

Stacey gives the audience accounts a textual status as stories of historical spectatorship. She makes a case for reading stories, not as the simplistic ascription of authentic truth, nor simply as another kind of narrative fiction, but as texts to be read in a critical theoretical framework. It is not the case, therefore, that these accounts are more truthful than existing textually determined accounts of the female spectator, that these are more real as against

those which are abstract, but rather, a dialectical relationship emerges between the material studied and the theories used to analyse it. "Female spectator's accounts of the cinema are used to criticise or confirm existing film theory, and indeed produce new or refined categories which could usefully add to our understanding of how audiences watch films." (72).

Stacey also does not write out of the historical method the messy bits of the history of her research. "I am aware of the temptation to represent the research project as a seamless narrative in which the next step seems inevitable." (ibid.). In place of this Stacey writes in "the dead ends, the U turns, the frustrations and the despair," (ibid.), as a means of bringing methodological focus to bear on the *process* of research.

The Operation of the Historical Female Spectator in *Stargazing*

Given the importance of history in my own work, I want to focus my analysis of Stacey's research on her construction of the historical spectator. Stacey is very clear about the work that history is doing in her research:

The investigation of the historical reception of film raises important questions about the relationship between the cinematic institution and the female spectator. What do spectators bring to films from their own specific historical and cultural locations which then determine their readings? How do the discourses of particular historical conjunctures limit the possible readings a spectator may make of a film? (49).

Jackie Stacey's research explores the relationship between women in Britain in the forties and 50's, and female Hollywood film stars. Her research never leaves the concrete historical context of Britain in the 40's and 50's. In order to find subjects for her work, Stacey wrote a letter to *Woman's Own* and *Woman's Realm* magazines asking for women who were keen cinema goers to write to her about their favourite 40's and 50's stars. She received 350 letters, and 238 responses to follow up questionnaires. Some women also sent their scrap books and old photographs. It was out of these texts that Stacey constructed her lost historical audience.

In Stacey's work, the social identities formed outside the cinema are assumed to shape the kinds of readings made by female spectators of Hollywood stars in Britain. "She" is a real woman with memories, and a story to tell. What makes Stacey's work such an important contribution to the development of feminist film theory is that she does not end with the call to historicise as is often the case, but begins there in an effort to construct a methodology for putting the historical spectator to work. Stacey argues that what sets her work apart is its attention to location and specificity - white British Women in the 40's and 50's.

Stacey chooses to focus her study on Britain in the 40's and 50's for a number of reasons. Firstly she has very strong memories of watching films from this period with her mother. Secondly, there exists a body of feminist film work on the film noir of this time that she can work out of (Kaplan, 1978, Haskell, 1973). Thirdly, it makes the field work more manageable in that she is dealing with the memories of women who are still living. Fourthly, she argues that the 40's and 50's were a time of immense change for numbers of women. Stacey focuses particularly on the consumer boom of the mid to late 50's, asserting that there was a general shift in the discourses of gender glamour and commodification which accompanied the expansion of consumer markets. She explores how these developments impacted upon spectator/star relations at this time. In relation to this, Stacey also looks at the phenomenon of Americanisation, exploring how the escapism (as a form of fantasy) offered by Hollywood and America was differently determined by the sense of distance between Britain and America. Stacey argues that the proliferation of American consumer goods available to women in the 50's somehow brought America closer. It was the tension between, on the one hand the lack of familiarity with American culture, and the tangibility of American culture through the purchase of goods and the impact of things American generally in Britain in the mid to late 50's that affected the women's relationships to Hollywood cinema and the imaginary identification with Hollywood stars. One of Stacey's central concerns in this work is to talk about how Hollywood stars are connected to the consumption practices of female spectators in the production and reproduction of particular formations of female subjectivity at this time.

In investigating female spectatorship in terms of its historical and national specificity, Stacey is drawing on the tentative work of some British film theorists who have emphasised the importance of extra cinematic factors. The British Film Institute's dossier on *Gainsborough Melodrama* is an example of this kind of approach. Stacey is also influenced by the approaches of other theorists of historically located spectatorship, particularly Patrice Petro (1989), Carol Flinn (1989) and Miriam Hansen (1989, 1991). Hansen (1989) argues:

Not only do we need to conceptualise spectatorship as a process that mediates between the two levels, as a historically constituted and variable matrix; we also need to complicate the issue with a third term - one that accounts for the social, collective, experiential dimension of collective cinematic reception. (169).

Stacey also references Angela Partington's (1990) research. Partington's work is centrally about the construction and perception of working class femininity in Britain in the 50's. What Partington does is to present an account of the struggles that took place over the meaning of goods in the 50's between those groups who aspired to deny consumers the capacity for meaning production (professionals and 'experts' working both for the state and for the marketing industries) and working class women themselves. This research attempts to

understand and explain the commodification of working class culture, and the consequences of working class women's consumption practices as the articulation of differences.

Partington examines how working class femininity was produced at an historically specific moment, at the intersection of competing discourses, in the relationships between women and a range of commodities, including both manufactured goods and cultural products. She works her analysis out through the construction of three case studies in consumption (homemaking, fashion and Hollywood Melodrama).

Partington's research makes a vital (and as yet underestimated) contribution to feminist film studies, in as much as it moves from talking around the struggles of identity politics as an antidote to the universalising tendencies of feminist film theory in the 70's, to looking at how these kinds of struggles with specific relation to the question of class might have been played out historically and socially. Partington's specific focus on working class femininity in relation to the consumption of Melodrama in and of itself makes a huge contribution to an area that has received no critical attention. Her construction of a mode of reading an historical working class female spectator is profoundly important. The meaning of a film, Partington argues, is dependent on a gendered viewer, but the particular reading of the film also requires membership of a group which is simultaneously being addressed as the consumers of other goods.

Melodrama as a styled product required the competencies of women who were also being targeted for the first time as consumers of domestic and fashion goods, producing new kinds of 'romance' and 'family drama' in which emotional investment in visual objects is necessary. (144).

My concerns with Partington's work lie in its construction of consumption only as a site of negotiated readings and resistance or exploitation. She is looking at the ways in which working class women mixed and sampled consumer goods, thereby relating to both functionalist and decorative objects in a way that was deemed improper and which the professional elite had attempted to monopolise. I am concerned that she locks the working class consumer into a choice between an either/or and only of resistant/conformist pleasures, thus remaining in the ideological arena of good or bad pleasures in relation to working class women's consumption practices that is limiting and to which there seems to be little alternative. As Stacey (1994) says of Partington's work, "there continues to be very little historical evidence of what sense consumers made of different commodities based on *their* accounts of their practices." (187)

In her effort to locate history as a context of reading and of the formation of subjectivity, Stacey references Janet Staiger (1986, 1992), who positions her own work on the historical reception of film methodologically in this way:

What we are interested in, then, is not the so called correct readings of a particular film, but the range of possible readings and reading processes as historical moments, and their relation or lack of relation to groups of historical spectators. (1986:.20).

Staiger's construction of a context for spectatorship moves away from what she terms "idealized speculation," (1992:80) towards comparative and historical study. Hers is "not an interpretation of texts, but an attempt at an historical explanation of the vent of interpreting a text." (81). Staiger's work is so important to Stacey's historical study because it complicates and challenges the status of audience's accounts of films: how are these to be found; which interpretative frameworks might be useful in analysing such accounts? (50). Stacey goes on to argue, "methodologically important questions about what should count as 'data', and how this material should be treated by the researcher are raised by the historical study of the female spectator." (ibid.). Staiger's work is important for my research, not only because of the level of its methodological debate, but also because of the specific place of class within her Neo-Marxist historical materialist approach. In her attempts at historical explanations of the event of interpreting a text, Staiger considers class to be determining the experience of individual's constructed self identities, and the relationship of that to textual address. She is interested in exploring what/how knowledges are produced around texts that are determined by the experiences of class. Staiger does not unproblematically adopt the use of class as an identity, and considers carefully the politics of adopting a term that many have abandoned because of its difficulties in accounting for a range of choices of self identity:

Marxism has traditionally emphasized class as the most pertinent aspect to self identity, but it seems harder and harder to maintain this self identity as one that individuals use often for interpreting. The preferred choices of self-identity (occupation, life-style, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preferences, nationality and so on) may, or may not be progressive or capable of being mobilized for progressive activities. Political and historical analysis need to consider this question as well. (1992:211)

Nevertheless, Staiger flags class as a significant part of the study of historical spectatorship, and positions a debate, and a particular set of methodological issues around the relationship between class and spectatorship, which whilst by no means easy, should nevertheless be thought through. As important as Staiger's work is in its construction of concrete historical contexts of the reception of films, through an analysis of popular press and other media reviews, the absence of qualitative research methods with real people is a significant lack for me. It is a lack that Staiger points out herself, one that has particular resonance for the question of class:

This study has not dealt directly with non tutored readings; it has unfortunately, in many cases, focused solely on popular press reviews. Only indirectly has this study asserted claims about people who have traditionally had no access to public and printed records of communication. Such an unspoken mass deserves as much attention as the popular press, if not more. How to do this for historical readers remains a problem.(119)

If it is difficult to research historical working class audiences who are alive, then how much more difficult might it be to research dead audiences? I must be careful in constructing qualitative empirical audience research as the most appropriate means of coming to understand the meanings that people make around the cinema. How do we then research working class audiences that are no longer there to be spoken to? What happens to those histories? Staiger's work is important because it provides a possible framework for doing this kind of work.

Building on the History of the Combinatoire

What I want to talk about in this section, making use of my interview data, and Stacey's analysis of her data, is to set the different histories constructed across the two pieces of research alongside each other. I will do this as a means of showing how history can be further complicated through a focus on the local - the analysis of identification with processes of spectatorship by a socially, culturally and geographically specific group of women.

The relationship to America expressed by the women in the interviews works, *in part*, against Stacey's arguments that the idea of America in Britain at the time was as a distant imaginary - another planet. One of the most fascinating aspects that has come out of my interviews is the articulation of a relationship to America that is also (and sometimes only) one of closeness and proximity. Barbara said:

I think Liverpool has always felt close to America. Funnily enough the Liverpool accent has similarities with the New York accent. When I went to New York I was standing on the street corner and I met one of the fellas that used to live over the road! There's always been that affinity. How you define it I don't know. If you go down Dale Street, and all those buildings you always felt that you had an opening on the world there, because there was nothing (apart from Ireland) there was nothing between you and America. Especially with all the seamen coming over. Our whole family were sailors.

This is tied, as Barbara indicates, to Liverpool's status as a port, and the availability of American goods in Liverpool at the time. It is also tied very much to the employment of so many working class men as merchant seamen. Men like my granddad sailed in and out of America on a regular basis, bringing back goods and stories. I can always remember my granddad saying, "it's a great country if they like you." And he always felt liked by America, and liked to like America. In my research there is a particular dialectic to the possibility/impossibility, nearness/proximity equation of Liverpool's imaginary America that needs to be worked out. I will go on in Chapter Five to think about the ways in which America = escape = fantasy operated in the women's lives. Stacey argues, "the lack of

familiarity with American culture clearly contributed to the pleasures Hollywood offered.”
(118) Although added to this, Stacey argues, is the process of retrospection:

For many respondents American culture will have become more familiar than it was in the 1940's. Television has increasingly brought representations of American culture into the domestic space of most British households; the expansion of tourism has transformed perceptions of distances and differences between continents; and the continuing expansion of American economic and cultural imperialism has contributed to the breakdown of such fixed national boundaries between Britain and America. Thus memories of times when America 'might have well have been another planet' contrast starkly with the everyday presence of American culture in Britain today in which MacDonaldis, baseball hats and 'Cagney and Lacey' are part of everyday life.(118)

This process of retrospection is indeed very important, and certainly applies to my data, and to the changing relationship of the women to America over time, as they have come to 'know' America differently. However, what is there in my interviewees' accounts of the 50's, that is not there in Stacey's is a sense of nearness, closeness.

May: When you went down to The Pier Head and you looked out across The Mersey, you felt that there was nothing there between you and America.⁶

Ellen: It [America] was just there, something you were always aware of.

If the 'other planet' argument cannot always be said to apply in Liverpool in the 50's, then in what ways did the specific construction of an imaginary America there contribute to the pleasures that the Hollywood film musicals offered?⁷

In my work, therefore, the historical focus produces different kinds of readings of Hollywood films in the contexts of the interviewees' lives. The contradictions between my historical "findings" and Stacey's only serve to give strength to her arguments about the importance of history to complicate the meanings made around a text. I would argue, however, that the smaller focus of my research, both geographically and historically, works more effectively than Stacey's national focus to draw out the implications of the meaning making practices of a specific audience, and a specific life story.

Both Meaghan Morris(1989) and Maureen Turim (1989) argue that future research on women and film must be conducted in a local context. Turim states, "if we are to study the sociology or history of the female spectator, historical and sociological studies of the females within the populations viewing the films are our best resource." (306) Morris argues, "I think it is a mistake to try to account for the plurality of possible readings and the criteria of choice between them on epistemological grounds. Answers to them must be produced in local contexts and with limited claims to efficacy." (245). What Turim and Morris are pushing

towards is a historical method of empirical research in specific geographical locations. The main limitation of Stacey's method is that its focus is too big. Whilst Stacey addresses important issues around national identity and the construction of a British femininity, something important around the specificity of a life, and of the local contexts in which national politics and ideas were negotiated is left out. This is revealed as a limitation when it comes to the analysis of specific social identities - here class.

Class and the Combinatoire

In this section I want to look at the place of class and gender within some existing studies of female spectators for film and television. I also want to mark in more detail the positioning of "working class women" as a classification in my empirical research.

Both Ann Gray (1992) and Ellen Seiter (1992) talk about going into women's homes to interview them, and feeling that "I know a working class house when I see one." (Seiter:141) Seiter argues that these categorisations rely upon recognising women's responsibility for consumption, choosing clothing and household decorations for example. Beverly Skeggs(1997a), as I have argued, complicates these categorisations when she talks about one of the most difficult and interesting dilemmas in her research being the question of how to define the women in her study.⁸

I chose a group of working class women and wanted to represent them as such. To me, a feminist sociologist, they were clearly working class. Practically everything about them signalled working class, from their education, housing, cultural practices, choices etc. They, however, with only a few exceptions, did not want to be defined as working class. It was something that ^{they spent} great amounts of energy and money trying not to be. (200)

Skeggs explains how the women in her study did not talk about class, although it was articulated through discourses of economic limitation and cultural choice. "If I had listened for directly articulated class comments I would not have heard them." (201) Skeggs goes on to talk about how she had to use her frameworks to understand their comments. She references Angela McRobbie (1991) in relation to this. McRobbie notes the disparity between her "wheeling in class" in her research, and it's almost complete absence from the girls talk and general discourse, leading her to suggest, that being working class meant little or nothing to the girls she researched. Skeggs argues, "this is problematic. If the researched do not speak the concepts does it mean that the researcher cannot use them?" (201) Skeggs asks an important question, but I think that the implications of McRobbie's suggestion are more far reaching, even than this. McRobbie suggests that because the girls did not talk about class per se, then class may have meant nothing to them. It was McRobbie's expectation that they should separate themselves from their integral class location to talk

about class in terms that she could recognise. When I was growing up, in my family and my neighbourhood, I don't remember talking about class "as such" (i.e. in terms of socio economic categories or party politics). Working class was what we were, operating as a form of identification in relation to the conditions that we lived in, and the prospects for our lives. That did not mean that it meant nothing to us. It was the measure of our distance and our closeness to others. Our various deprivations orchestrated our desires and fantasies, we just had a different language for it. This is the point at which Skeggs enters the debate, at the site of the methodological difficulties around the different languages that the researcher and the researched use. Skeggs argues that theory is a different language which draws on concepts not used on a daily basis. It automatically positions the theorist/writer differently to the speaker/researched, (ibid.) this need not undermine the research process, indeed it strengthens it, if those differences are made explicit.

In my research all but two of the women (who had been Communists and very active in unions) did not directly talk about class. And yet at the end of each interview I knew that I had been talking to a working class woman, and that issues around class had been integral without me asking directly about class. On what did I base this? I based it on the women's articulation of the negotiation of structures of inequality and deprivation. The women were working class through the ways in which they recounted their history in the 50's, and the transition of their lives to the places that they currently inhabit.

I did panic, however, towards the end of the research that the question of class had been my agenda from the start and not theirs. I worried, that like Skeggs's interviewees, mine would feel insulted that I had labelled them as something that they did not consider themselves to be. It was for this reason that I wrote and asked them if in fact they considered themselves to be working class now, or if they ever had. (Appendix II) Unlike Skeggs, all of interviewees do still think of themselves as working class, although (critically) they do not define what that is. What this research explores is the location of their working classness as a form of identification with poverty, hardship, loss, escapism, longing. In a sense it looks to what Skeggs calls "the emotional politics of class," (134) enacted on a daily basis as an ubiquitous part of the women's existence. As I argued in the introduction, despite the very real problems that exist in the classification of the working class now, it is critically important to remember that class exists beyond its theoretical classification, in the practices of everyday life through which people sustain themselves.

Class and Feminist Audience Research

In this section I want to look at the place of class within some existing studies of female spectators for film and television. I will enter into the analysis of the limitations of existing models of social classification for working class women in film audience research through of an exploration of the limitations of Stacey's deployment of a model of social classification.

These limitations relate, in part to the size of Stacey's study, and the necessary level of generalisability. She argues that "the questions put on the agenda by feminist theory seemed to bear no relation to the questions of *general* cinema going habits of women at different times." (51) (my italics) The generality can be a problem here, if we are seeking to understand, not so much the classification of differences, but the ways in which differences are lived. As much as Stacey's groundbreaking study opens up all sorts of avenues for the further investigation of specific social groups, within the study itself the position of class is problematic, certainly in terms of its applicability to the experiences of my interviewees.

Stacey defines her respondents' class status in terms of their job, income, husband's income and educational qualifications. She gains this information from her questionnaire, mapping it onto the registrar generals key to class categories.

A Upper middle class. Professional, managerial, higher administrative work.

B Middle class. Intermediate management and professional work.

C1 Lower middle class. Supervisory, clerical, junior professional, administrative work.

C2 Skilled working class manual work.

D Working Class semi - skilled manual work.

E Lowest State provision. Widows, casual workers, lowest grade work, subsistence existence.

(254).

Stacey includes a brief section on "class differences" in which she concurs with the findings of research on class differences and cinema audience composition in post war Britain. Referencing Mark Abrams⁹ who claimed, in an article written for the *Hollywood Reporter* that: "the Working Classes flock to the movies with such avidity that they account for more than 70% of the audience.' (Quoted in Swann, 1987:46.) Stacey herself references Swann, who has commented, "that there are many competing claims about the demographics of British cinema audiences in the post war period, but all suggest this kind of class difference in its composition." (87).

Questions of class are central, therefore, to the analysis of the post-war cinema audience. So much so, that Stacey treats class as a given to the analysis of the post-war cinema audience, without going into detail on debates around the analysis of class as a social category. Part of the difficulty that Stacey articulates is well founded, relating to problems around the use of working class as a category given the sociological work on class fragmentation since the war. This has a particular significance for the lives of working class women. Stacey argues, "class position is notoriously difficult to ascertain for women, since a woman's class position is frequently defined through her husband's paid employment, and the category 'housewife' that so many women use to describe themselves is one which does

not explicitly indicate class position." (87). Nicola Charles' (1990) work on women and class, and the difficulties around assigning individual women to classes solely on the basis of their husband's occupation is important in this context. Charles makes a case for considering the "subjective class" of a woman - the relationship between gender and consciousness - as a way into understanding the way women experience and understand class, as a possible means of overcoming the fact that, "the complexities of class as it is lived may be greater than the (admitted) complexities of occupation and may encompass spheres other than the purely occupational." (49). What Charles marks are the limits of occupational stratification for understanding how women perceive themselves as working class.¹⁰ Whilst I agree with Stacey's concerns, and take seriously the limitations and problems with the existing models for thinking women's social class, I would maintain that frameworks for thinking about this relationship should continue to be developed. An over reliance on existing models will not help us to deconstruct classifying practices and systems.

Stacey does not question these in any detail, and the result is a rigidly demarcated system of classification, which tells us very little in the end about how the women experience class in relation to their consumption of films and film stars. Based on her analysis of the occupational and home ownership status of the respondents in the 40's and 50's, together with the readers' profiles of the two magazines in which she advertised, which showed that over 50 per cent of their readership came from classes C1 and C2. Thus, Stacey locates most of her respondents as "coming from [these] similar backgrounds." (87)

Related to this, Stacey includes, almost as an afterthought, the fact that "though most of my respondents tended to come from similar backgrounds in the 1940's and 50's, many of them have since shifted class positions through marriage or changes in education, training and employment." (87). Surely this shifting of class positions has a great effect on the interpretation of the data. Stacey makes a great deal of the use of memory as a means of interpreting the data, but some of the women's memories are also of themselves as part of a class to which they are no longer (or are complexly and residually linked). How does this impact the women's stories of their consumption practices, when they are told in relation to conditions now left behind? How does class intersect with nostalgia in the meaning making practices around the cinema?

Ann Gray (1992) constructs a somewhat limited framework for the analysis of classification in her analysis of the ways in which factors such as class, age, employment position, number of children and age of children intersected in women's domestic spaces and how they affected their consumption of videos. Although Gray does argue that "it proved too rigid a classificatory system when it came to analysing the interviews." (35), she still deploys it as an initial summary. Gray overlooks an important methodological point, that it is only when it comes to analysing individual women's lives and experiences that the system proves

inadequate. What are the stories of these lives doing then to the assumptions upon which these models are constructed in the first place? The lived experience of class is much more complicated than these models can ever accommodate.

Despite the limitations of Stacey and Gray's research in terms of its location and definition of social class, it nevertheless entertains the possibility of taking working class women's pleasures seriously, and certainly in Gray's terms of complexly locating them within the context of an individual life. In her study working class women's pleasures in consuming videos at home are not being used to illustrate modes of resisting or negotiated readings, but are located at the intersection of a complex array of domestic practices.

Andrea Press (1991) bases the aims of her research on working and middle class American women's relationships to television in what she perceives as the achievements of CCCS, and their tradition of presenting the defiant spirit of working class culture. "In these studies investigation of cultural hegemony, the way in which the dominant culture orchestrates the consent of those who are dominated within it is well illustrated in studies that investigate the way working class subjectivity is colonised in hegemonic interests." (7) In the light of this belief Press makes an interesting and troublesome argument. "Although working class culture may illuminate resistance to domination in the British context, in the American context the lack of cultural resistance, rather than its incipient presence, and the lack of even the appearance of a rebellious working class subjectivity, become the important issues when one investigates working class cultural practices and creations." (17). Press' wholesale celebration of resistance is problematic, locking the working class into an automatic relationship with 'proper' political activity. I would suggest that it is not only in America that the perceived lack of the appearance of rebellion is a 'problem'. I would further suggest that Press' need to see a rebellious working class speaks to an inadequate understanding of how working class might actually live and negotiate structures of deprivation and inequality - and the place of the popular within these processes of negotiation.

In Press's study of working and middle class women as viewers of American television, her definition of working class viewers is based on what can be seen to be empirically verifiable as 'working class.'¹¹ She is working then, with an already established set of assumptions which carry over into her definition of them, and her desires for their modes of interpretation of the texts on offer. In the appendix she lists with almost salacious detail aspects of the working class women's lives in order to verify their class status. Much of this again is based on occupation (husband's occupation) and education, as if these come to signify an inevitable consciousness and mode of identification.

In looking at working class women's identifications with middle class images in *The Cosby Show* and *Dynasty*, what could potentially be an interesting study turns into a prescriptive, patronising and voyeuristic diagnosis of a pathologised consciousness. Press asks:

How can women develop a critical consciousness of their own experience, and put this consciousness to active political use when awash in a sea of middle class images? In these cases television's hegemonic function assumes a double edged character in this doubly oppressed group." (110).

This question could be put another way, without the attendant value judgement to form a very different kind of study. *What kinds* of consciousness of their own experience do working class women construct around the consumption of middle class images in the media? This sets a very different agenda, and avoids the rather limiting conclusion that Press comes to:

I conclude that working class women are more susceptible to what I term television's class specific hegemony; that is, working class women are particularly *vulnerable* to television's presentation of the material accoutrements of middle class life as the definition of what is normal in our society. Their television watching, therefore, may contribute to a degree of *alienation* from the reality of their own material experience and potential, or at least contribute to a sense of personal *failure* women experience for not achieving this media defined norm, and may thereby confound working class women's *oppression* in our society. (138) (my italics)

Vulnerable, alienated, oppressed, failing. Are these some of the assumptions that have grounded the classification of working class women, and an understanding of how they live their lives? Is this the way that we understand working class women's lives - the experiences through which their difference(s) are lived? If so, how (and why should we) bring other orders of experience into the frame? What effect might this have on our theorisation of their place of the popular in lives that may (or may not), used to be (but are not now) vulnerable, alienated, oppressed, failing.

Valerie Walkerdine (1986) works through the experience of going into the home of the Coles, a working class family in London, initially in order to make an audio recording of their six year old daughter, Joanne, as a part of a study of girls and their education. While she is there the family watch *Rocky II* on video. What Walkerdine deals with in this piece are the feelings around her position as a researcher watching them watching the video, and them watching her. It is a piece written around the fantasy and power knowledge implications of a complex network of gazes - her to them, them to her, them to the film, her to the film, and its implication on the process of empirical research. I think that Walkerdine's piece is a phenomenal achievement on lots of levels, not the least of which being that she blows apart that hallowed distanciation and objectivity of the social scientific researcher. She is uncomfortable in the room with the Coles. She feels voyeuristic. They are uncomfortable

with her. She talks about her desire to "know" the Coles, and her initial horror at their identification with the film and the father's continual replaying of the final fight scene:

I do not remember if I saw all of the film then. All I recall now is the gut-churning horror of the constant replay. Much later, when beginning to do the work for an analysis, I hired the video of *Rocky II* and watched it in the privacy of my office, where no one could see. And at that moment I recognised something that took me far beyond the pseudo-sophistication of condemning its macho sexism, its stereotyped portrayals. The film brought me up against such memories of pain and struggle and class that it made me cry. I cried with grief for what was lost and for the terrifying desire to be someone and somewhere else: the struggle to 'make it.' (169).

What Walkerdine does is to write her self centrally into the research and into the dynamics of ethnographic methodology. It is an approach that has met with criticism (Marcus 1987, Probyn, 1993,1992). Dismissed as self-centred, self indulgent, Walkerdine has been accused of "wiping the Coles out of her analysis in favour of her own story" (Lull ,1990:12). Many of the criticisms of Walkerdine's approach seem to be based on the idea that nobody wants to know about the psychological angst of academics, that it is pointless. But Walkerdine's use of the self here goes beyond the self indulgent, and beyond the implicit assumption that nobody wants to know about the psychological angst of academics because all academics are the same, and share the same angst.¹² What she brings to the fore in this analysis is the powerful force of class -here a researcher from a working class background - attempting to theorise the engagement with a film by working class viewers already inserted in a multiplicity of sites for identification.

What happens too often when researchers look at people's relationships to popular culture, is that the researcher sets up a false distance between themselves as researchers and themselves as consumers of popular culture. This is a limitation, for example, in Radway's (1984) work on the romance. Why has she chosen this genre? How does she feel about the romances? (A question which surely impacts on how she feels about the readers). What impact have romances had on her life? This kind of positioning of the self when we are researching working class women's massive investments in popular culture is important, not as self indulgence, but as a means of differently locating the popular within the context of individual experience. Our needs for and uses of popular culture are different, and these needs are complexly determined by class and by access to cultural capital. I agree with Ellen Seiter (1993) when she argues, "I believe cultural studies must focus on the differences in class and cultural capital which typify the relationship between the academic and the subject of audience studies." (61).Walkerdine's self reflexive stance then becomes a means for opening up these kinds of questions. It also becomes a means to question politically our 'will to know' the working class audience. What do we want our research to say about them?

Walkerdine's research also combines an analysis of the psychic and social determinations on the possible meanings made around the film text - the relationships between class, pleasure, desire and fantasy. As a strategy this moves the location of class consciousness out of the realms of proper/resisting, improper/duped, into the realm of the unconscious of a specific research encounter. Mr Cole is re-positioned after Walkerdine's initial horror at his pathologised pleasures into a much more complex space, which exists beyond the either/or of resistance and conformity, but operates at the intersection of a complex series of gazes and sites of identification. Walkerdine's ethnography is trying to get at a different register of experience, of actual social subjects with a text, where a range of social and psychic dynamics are inscribed in the act of "reading", and in the everyday life of practices which produce us all.

What Walkerdine tries to build is a theory of the relationship to a text that is built on the complex interplay of discourses:

In trying to understand the domestic and family practices in which adults and children are inscribed I examine the play of discourses and relations of signification which already exist. And I approach the viewing of a film in the same way, as a dynamic intersection of viewer and viewed, a chain of signification in which a new sign is produced, and thus a point of production and creation in its own right. (171).

Central to this pursuit is the work of psychoanalysis. Whilst it could be argued that Walkerdine, like Radway is not moving too far beyond the gates of the psychoanalytic family drama with her stress on the divided relations of domestic practices, she is in fact moving a great deal further beyond the gates with her central focus on working class identity and subjectivity. As against the assumption of bourgeois identity which often govern psychoanalytical investigation. Of course there is the question of how the topography of the bourgeois drama translates over to the working class family in London, and the politics of this, but this is not something that Walkerdine addresses here.¹³

Still, psychoanalysis is central to this work. Dave Morley (1992) has called it, "an ethnography of the unconscious," . He argues:

From my own point of view, Walkerdine's analysis is of interest not simply on account of the important 'break' which it makes by developing a mode of analysis derived from psychoanalytical theory which is for once historically and contextually specific, but also because it opens up the whole question of how we understand the specific conditions of the formation of pleasures for particular groups at any one historical moment. (64).

This is high praise indeed from a theorist so averse to psychoanalytical methodology. Indeed it is to Walkerdine's credit that she draws psychoanalysis into a dialogue with the text, the

social subject who watches, and the effectivity of identifications with the text as they are inserted into the lived materiality of subjectivity:

Identifications like those of Rocky and Mr Cole as fighters may be fictions inscribed in fantasy set and worked out in the film itself, but they are also lived out in the practices in which Mr Cole is inserted. There is no 'real' of these practices which stands outside fantasy as a psychic space and a reality which can be known. If such fictional identities become 'real' in practices, they must have a psychical reality which has a positive effectivity in the lived materiality of the practices themselves. (183).

The Unconscious of the Combinatoire

An important part of the development of a methodology for reading the audience accounts in Stacey's research is the negotiation of the place of psychoanalysis. Stacey does not avoid the extremely difficult methodological and theoretical issues around subjectivity and meaning in the production and translation of audiences responses. These involve taking on board the relationships between subjectivity, memory and the unconscious as integral to the production of any woman's story, and in Stacey's own interpretation of that story. In the process of empirical research, Stacey holds onto psychoanalysis as a method for locating the historical spectator in the social identities formed outside the cinema. Stacey writes, "what interested me when I first began this research was the extent to which the psychoanalytical and historical investigation of female spectatorship was necessarily incompatible." (75). She goes on to argue, "what the project aims to offer is an investigation of the ways in which psychic investments are grounded within specific sets of historical and cultural realisations which in turn shape the formation of identities on conscious and unconscious levels." (79). Stacey moves away from the domination of Lacanian psychoanalysis in film studies to utilise, like Radway (1984) object relations theory, which she argues, "is particularly illuminating for the cultural analysis of spectator - star relations." (228).

For the most part, empirical audience researchers in setting their work against textually determined readings, have dismissed psychoanalysis as incompatible with audience research. What I would suggest is that there is no fundamental incompatibility between audience research and the unconscious, but rather an incompatibility between audience research and *the* particular view of psychoanalysis that has characterised institutionalised theories of spectatorship, and the critiques of those theories from within cultural and media studies. Judith Mayne (1993) argues:

The problem may have less to do with psychoanalytic approaches to film study and spectatorship in general and more with the specific kind of psychoanalytic inquiry that has characterised contemporary film studies, where there is such a desire to understand the psychic foundation of culture that oftentimes the two are conflated. How many times does one need to be told that the individual film or film genre articulates the law of the father, assigns the spectator a position of male oedipal desire, marshals castration anxiety in the form of voyeurism and fetishism before psychoanalysis begins

to sound less like the exploration of the unconscious and more like a master plot? (72).

Stacey encountered problems with psychoanalysis in terms of its construction of a universal subject, and also through its institutionalisation within feminist film theory. (The institutionalisation of that feminist re-reading of a Lacanian re-reading of Freud, and the attendant limitations of the stranglehold on the construction of sexual difference, the inevitability of desire, and the re-enactment of the psychic trauma of castration). She found it difficult to carve a space within this discursive psychoanalytical framework for the social identity of the spectator, so monolithic was its inscription of the formation of female subjectivity in general as a universal set of psychic mechanisms. The assumptions grounding this construction needed to be questioned - not all discursive effects could be reduced to and explained by this functioning of a single universal set of psychic mechanisms. Stacey argues that, as well as analysing the unconscious processes of spectatorship, feminist film criticism needs to develop a theorisation of how identities are fixed through particular social and historical discourses and representational practices outside, as well as inside, the cinema. She argues that the exclusive focus on the unconscious processes of spectatorship has been unable to explain precisely how such meanings are fixed.

Supported by analysis of the dynamics of the analytical situation in Freudian psychoanalysis (Marcus, 1985, Moi, 1989) I would also suggest that it is surely not the case that psychoanalysis is inimical to audience research, especially given the fact that Freud's original work was based upon people's accounts of their own experiences. It could be argued that the fundamental premise of what has been called Screen theory is flawed with regard to its take up of psychoanalysis. There is something problematic methodologically in using psychoanalysis as a method of reading texts that positions subjects, when psychoanalysis is an empirical method in the sense that it was used clinically to read the unconscious of real people's experiences. (A method obviously not without its flaws as work on transference and countertransference indicates). Therefore, when Dave Morley (1992) argues that psychoanalytically based film work has ultimately mobilised what can be seen as another version of the hypodermic theory of effects, in so far as "in its initial and fundamental formulations it attempts to account for the way in which the subject is necessarily positioned by the text," (59) he is talking about a *particular mode* of psychoanalysis. In as much as it is directed at this specifically his argument can stand. What I am suggesting is that this should not be read as the basis for an argument that there is a fundamental incompatibility between audience research and the unconscious. Rather the project is to conceptualise cinematic identification not solely as analogous to early psychic developments, but as a cultural process with social meanings beyond the cinema.

The debates around psychoanalysis in film and cultural studies, largely revolve around one specific mode of theorising the unconscious and the subject. This cannot be the basis for

calling for it to be written off the empirical agenda, only to be replaced by the working assumption that the primary effects of the media *and* media research concern consciousness. I would argue that a thoroughly reflexive methodology for exploring the audience for film must take account of psychoanalysis at some level. To ignore it is to assume that there is no unconscious to the act of producing theory, and no psychic dimension to the practice of research.

Jennifer Hunt (1989) argues that our own conflicts and unconscious greatly affects the process of empirical research. "The psychoanalytic exploration of fieldwork pays particular attention to the psychodynamic dimension of the research encounter, and how unconscious processes structure relations between researcher, subject and the data gathered." (9) What Hunt is doing is exploring a domain of research relations that has been omitted from traditional discussions in order to provide a complementary framework which will add depth and richness to the complex analysis of people studying people in social context. She looks at case studies of fieldwork encounters in terms of the possible transference relations that might be going on. It is an important argument and an important piece of work in as much as it makes a case for psychoanalysis not as incompatible with empirical research, but as inimical to empirical research.¹⁴ Annette Kuhn (1989) cautions us, "In attempting to marry female audiences with feminine spectatorial positions we certainly should not be tempted to abandon the unconscious." (214). The real difficulty methodologically is to forge a relationship between subjectivity and the social formation - between femaleness/femininity within a subject/social formation nexus. Stacey asks:

Theories which emphasise sexual difference would merely have us believe that subjectivity is mostly formed through unconscious operations. But how, if we are talking about feminine/female subjectivity is it possible in these terms then to deal with such representations as 'lived experience' and 'memory' . . . How might 'social forces' be negotiated, be represented, in lived experience, in memory, or indeed in unconscious processes. (32)

Specifically, Stacey asks how the social of sexual difference might be fixed in the identification with the processes of spectatorship be real women? In my work it is the passage of an ageing working class femininity in relation to the processes of spectatorship around the film musical that must be negotiated. Within this the representations of 'lived experience' and 'memory' are central. In my methodology where and how does psychoanalysis figure?

Susannah Radstone¹⁵ articulates an "inside" and an "outside" to the processes of escapism, where the inside is the unconscious, and the outside, conscious responses to the question of popular pleasures. The negotiation of the inside and the outside in empirical qualitative research throws up a difficult set of methodological issues for any researcher. For me the

problem is (in part) an ethical one. In the theorising, in my research, identification as a cultural and a classed process that produces female desire as escapism, rather than confirming/recognising (in the Lacanian model) existing forms of desire, and working with a register of fantasy, as well as having to come to terms with the processes of memory and loss which are so important in the constitution of the women's subjectivity in relation to the musical, my work does take account of the "inside" of escapism. However, I never wanted to execute psychoanalytical readings of the interviewees responses. I felt uncomfortable doing this, and politically felt that the women would have been offended at their responses being translated in such a way. I could not and did not want to read off the unconscious from the interviews. Therefore, what I work with is the articulated "outside" of the interview texts, together with an implied "inside". There is an unconscious to the interview texts, and to the forms of identification that constitute the women as subjects in relation to the film musical, but I do not attempt to get to that in the analysis of the texts. There is also an unconscious of my encounter with the women in the space of the interview - a complex of desire, loss, transference, counter transference that effects the dynamics between me and them. I would argue that it can be enough to mark this, without analysing those dynamics in any detail. Marking it as a determining factor in the deconstruction of myths of distancing and objectivity in the research process makes an important intervention into the theorisation of our implication in the practice of research, and the data we produce.

Angela Mc Robbie (1997) argues that Walkerdine, "stands almost alone as a feminist writer influenced by psychoanalysis and post - structuralism, but anxious to show how, in empirical terms female subjectivities, particularly those of girls and young women, are constituted." (179) Sean Moores (1993) also praises Walkerdine's work for its intervention (through psychoanalysis and post - structuralism) into the practice of ethnographic research. Jackie Stacey (1994) cites Walkerdine's text as one of the few pieces which can be placed within the canon of film studies, that explores the interaction and interplay of social reader and social text. In this sense she celebrates it. But she argues, Walkerdine does not get the balance right in that she moves too far away from the text - the visual mechanisms of *Rocky II* she argues, are ignored. What remains somewhat under elaborated is the question of how textual, social and subjective formations interact. "Thus cultural consumption does to some extent remain a magic convergence." (42). Stacey argues that we need also to examine the visual mechanisms of the text, and that we need history, we need to understand how popularity and pleasure are historically located in order to theorise the full complexity of identification and the effectivity of fantasy in the practices of everyday life.

Sue Harper and Vincent Porter (1996) have criticised Stacey's work for the reversal of the critique that she makes of Walkerdine. Stacey argues that Walkerdine makes too little of the determining mechanisms of the visual text in favour of social and psychic determinations. Harper and Porter maintain that Stacey makes too much of it.

Harper and Porter's research into The Mass Observation Archive on what made people weep in the cinema in the post war years both endorses and fleshes out Stacey's conclusions. It also challenges them:

Stacey argues that films and stars are centrally instrumental in shaping the responses of audiences, and it is on this point that our interpretation of the Mass Observation material challenges her work. It seems to us that, in the period under consideration, gender, social class and to a lesser extent, age were paramount in determining the nature and intensity of film response. These constraints appear to have been more significant even than the nature of the filmic text in shaping responses to films. (172).

Annette Kuhn (1997) operates with a similar textual positioning to Harper and Porter. The film text is not incidental, but gender, social class and age appear to have been more significant (together with cinema going itself as an event) than the mechanisms of the film text itself. In the end, therefore, it could be argued that Stacey's fantastically enabling model lends too much weight to the text through its limiting analysis of social positionality - specifically in this instance class - as gendered subjectivity. My data, as I will go on to show works through (unlike Stacey) a historical context that is also *locally* contingent.

¹ The site of following anecdote, the conference, is significant in terms of the construction of my own subjectivity as an 'educated working class woman', and the sense of overwhelming dislocation and discomfort that I feel when I enter the conference community. They are the places in which that very real sense that Jo Stanley (1995) talks about - feeling like "a working class thicko" - (170) becomes so hard to negotiate. Stanley argues that this might be because the conference as "the temporarily relocated academy," (172) in its temporality and uprootedness also becomes an intensification of the academy. Stanley goes on to argue very powerfully that the sense of "feeling like a working class thicko" is not only the internalized oppression, the *feeling* like, but also the actual objectively existing practice - the being treated as a working class thicko, or *being made to feel* like a working class thicko within and through the positions taken up in the papers delivered, or in the exchanges in the social spaces of the conference.

² These questions do not obviously only relate to working class women. They apply to different kinds of marginalised subjects and their position in theory, and have particular resonance in empirical debates where real life is on the agenda.

³ I do not want to construct textual analysis within feminist film studies as a monolithic category. There is not one textual analysis. For the purposes of this project I am defining textual analysis as working with the mechanisms of the text either to 'read off' a viewer's conscious or unconscious reading, or to construct a hypothetical subject position (sometimes socially differentiated: black, gay, lesbian, female, male) for the viewer. I am aware that the political or theoretical motivations for textual analysis can be very different, so that whilst textual analysis might be a taken for granted method in film studies, its destinations are not always the same. There remains for analysis the relationship between film studies, textual analysis and methodological debate. As Jackie Stacey (1993) argues there has been very little critical analysis or awareness in film studies due to the paucity of methodological debate that textual analysis is a *choice* of method, and not an inevitable one.

⁴ I do not want to imply that race somehow exists on its own as a category that is not also cross hatched with the experiences of class, sexuality, age and gender. Both Henry Giroux (1996) and Paul Gilroy (1995) have spoken of the dangers of not perceiving race as also being lived out (perhaps in the first instance) as classed. bell hook's work (1996) continues to make class central to the analysis of Afro American women's experiences.

⁵ In this piece de Lauretis seems to be defining women's cinema as independently produced films made by women that can be seen to address women as an audience. She does go on to complicate women as a universal point of address.

⁶ This statement begs interesting questions about the place of Ireland in Liverpool women's constructions of fantasies of America. Of course geographically what is there between Liverpool and America is Ireland. The place of Ireland within the women's immigrant family narratives is significant in their construction of America as escape, when their histories involve an escape from Ireland where America was a promised land, a possibility. In the history of emigration from Ireland in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was the poorest of the poor who came to Liverpool. America was more desired, but it took more money to get there. Liverpool was, in a way, second best, and once there you had to make the most of it. It was interesting how many of the women told success stories of family members who made it to America.

⁷ To reiterate, I am making Liverpool a special, not unique case in this research. I am not arguing that this analysis could not apply to other places. However, I cannot and do not want to speculate about this. As Janet Staiger (1992) writes, "context cannot be understood from idealized speculation. History is necessary." (80). Certainly the benefits of comparative local histories are many in the construction of histories around the cinema as Kuhn's (1997) research is revealing.

⁸ Diane Reay (1996) talks about a similar dynamic in her fieldwork. "Oya and Bo entered into a discourse of middle class, but the other five women resisted class labels because they recognized the uncertain, shifting territory they inhabited, a class landscape of maybe and perhaps. Where personal history shaped current consciousness, and where there were none of the certainties of conventional middle class horizons." (60)

⁹ "The research of Mark Abrams Research Services Company was produced for the Rank Organization with a view to using films to market other consumer goods. Drawing heavily on the results of the Hulton Surveys, Abrams highlighted the extent to which the cinema audience was drawn from working class people and from younger sections of the population." (87)

¹⁰ This limitation is also marked in Goldthorpe (1983) and Wright (1989)

¹¹ It is important that I mark a distance between Press's approach and my own here. What I am arguing is that Press works within a framework of empirical viability that is rooted in assumptions about what counts as working class - oppression, hardship, alienation, vulnerability. These are then pinned onto occupational stratification models to lock the women into place. In my research there are no inevitable working class experiences, and the women's occupations are not used as the means (solely) of defining their class. Class is defined through the women's positioning of themselves as working class. This, as I will go on to show, incorporates a complex range of experiences. Class is, therefore, a subjective class.

¹² An interesting body of work is now emerging on working class female academics, their experiences within the academy, the place of their class in the formation of teaching strategies, and in research. See for example, Mahony & Zmroczek (1997), Tokarczyk, M & Fay, E. (eds) (1993)

¹³ Carolyn Steedman's (1986) *Landscape For a Good Woman* is an indispensable analysis of the difficulties in mapping the Freudian case history onto working class lives.

¹⁴Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody (forthcoming) make a very strong case for this in their analysis of the interviews and video diaries which make up the data in their project “Transition to Womanhood,” a longitudinal study which traces the lives of both working and middle class girls.

¹⁵ Susannah Radstone’s book on memory and method, in which the separation of the inside and the outside is worked through is forthcoming.

Chapter Three.

Theorising the Function and Status of the Interviews

Through chapters One and Two, I have attempted to establish the need for my research through an analysis of the shortcomings and possibilities of some of the available theoretical frameworks for thinking about female audiences for film, and working class culture in cultural studies. In so doing, I was also searching for a theoretical framework through which the class of the interviewees might be understood as an historically and locally contingent form of identification through which (and in relation to other cultural forms - here the film musical) the women's subjectivities are constituted.

In the introduction I referenced Beverly Skeggs' motivation to do research which filled the gap in existing knowledge about working class women, and her commitment to speaking to "real working class women". Skeggs speaks of her earlier problematic epistemological certainty in the concept of experience - that working class women had a greater knowledge of the workings of oppression because they had experienced it. What she examines in its place are a complex range of issues around the determinations affecting and informing how our empirical data is used - its function - what questions we use it to ask. Contingent to the functioning of data is its status. Considering status means, in Skeggs terms, negotiating the status of experience.

In this chapter I want to move on to think, in terms of function and status, of the work that the interviews are doing in this research. I will go on in chapter Four to look in detail at the content of the interviews. In this section, I want to explore, in more abstract terms the questions and issues that the interviews pose methodologically and epistemologically. Specifically, I want to work out- as a search for theory- the function of the interviews in relation to questions of memory and textuality, and in turn their relationship to the theorisation and articulation of lived experience, remembering that lived experience is conceived of empirically as a form of investigation which observes and analyses how human subjects reflect on their place within and negotiation of the social and social changes. I want to think about the ways in which memory work can be positioned as part of the experiential (as an epistemological and ontological concept), and to theorise the complex forms of the women's historical identification with class. I also want to position my research in relation to some of the debates around empirical audience research and empiricism, in an attempt to establish the status of the data, not as truth, but as lived experiential 'evidence.' as social description that can be used to articulate alternative enunciative positions.

When Angela Mc Robbie (1997) succinctly framed an understanding of lived experience, she was working towards the development of a more applied feminist cultural studies - "to a reconciliation of sorts between the post-structuralists and those who consider themselves on the side of studying material reality." (170). What McRobbie envisages is a return to 'the three E's'; the empirical, the ethnographic and the experiential, not so much *against* as *with* the insight of what she terms, "the anti E's", that is anti-essentialism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis. McRobbie refers to "the spectre of humanism" haunting feminist post-structuralist writing, and suggests its suspicion of empirical truth claims. According to Mc Robbie , the empiricist 'representation' of results and the authenticity claims of experience has inhibited post-structuralists attempts "to look outside theory to the world we live in." (ibid.) McRobbie's exploration of these issues makes a significant contribution to my research, and its attempts to locate the interviewees lived experience of class, both within the category of experience, post-structuralist critiques of that category, the practice of empirical research, and important poststructuralist developments in the theorising of identity.

Performing Empiricism

Doing empirical work may not mean becoming an out and out empiricist. And given the low profile that empirical research has had in cultural studies over the last 20 years, what this might mean now, in the late 1990's, is not just beginning to do empirical work informed by questions which emerge from a poststructuralist paradigm . . . it might also mean quite simply strategically (or opportunistically) speaking the language of empiricism as and when required. (McRobbie, 1997: 183)

McRobbie makes a strong argument in relation to the deployment of the conventions of empiricism in empirical research. She suggests that it is possible to opportunistically deploying empiricism as a means of countering the charges of empiricism, or "empiricist epistemological assumptions" (Harding, 1987: 184)¹ as negation. McRobbie argues that "the particular authority of the empirical mode can now be occupied with greater complexity." (183). She goes on to state, "that it can be used where appropriate and deconstructed elsewhere for its narratives of truth, its representation of results." In this way, she maintains, "research can be re-written and re-scripted according to its politics of location." (ibid.) thus empirical work can still be carried out even if the feminist researcher no longer believes it to be a truth seeking activity. "Indeed awareness of this and of the structures and conventions which provide a regulative framework for doing cultural studies' research brings not just greater reflexivity to the field, it also demonstrates cultural studies to be a field of inquiry that is aware of the power which its competing discourses wield in its self constitution." (ibid.)

In earlier drafts of this research, the circularity of the methodological arguments that I structured around my interview data related to my own difficulties with the occupation (and indeed definition of) the particular authority of the empirical mode that I was working with,

where the narratives of lived experience were to stand *not* as truth, or the articulation of authentic working class experience, but nonetheless as evidence of a sort. The difficulty lay in negotiating questions of evidential authority within a poststructuralist paradigm, where that same evidential authority provided the textuality and materiality of the diverse and fluid subjectivities of 'working class women', (together with my own as an 'educated working class' researcher.)

I spent a great deal of time negotiating and defending the status of my interviews not as truth "in the empiricist sense", but as fictional., where fiction shied away from, "the banal claim that all truths are constructed." (Clifford 1986:6) In this theoretical schema the interviews could not be called real because they were themselves discursively produced. By this I meant that the women's stories were a product of their subjective told through the complexities of conscious and unconscious memory processes (as a combination of remembrance, imagination and invention) which interpret experience. The language and modes of expression used to select and recount history when being told in an interview was another factor to consider. The place of my subjectivity as the researcher/ interpreter who translated what they said also had to be considered. In the light of all of this, I could not use the interviews to attest to a truthful account of how working class women live and use popular culture. The question that then remained was, If my data was not giving me the facts of working class women's experience, then what was it giving me, and what the status of the evidence produced?

In attempting to locate the function and status of the interviews, I had become over invested in the question of truth. In searching for the status of the empirical data, I had constructed my own set of (inadequate) assumptions about empiricism, throwing up some notion of fictional (as discursively produced) as the antithesis to the (empiricist) truth. I had narrowed complex debates around empiricism to undertheorised questions of truth, when in fact the debates around empiricism intervene more complexly in the production of theories of *evidence*.² Whilst a discussion of the differences between truth and evidence is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important, nevertheless to mark the different location of each -truth and evidence- within the production of a narrative. Evidence is what makes (or does not make) the truth evident. Thus, whilst complexly tied to questions of truth, evidence is not truth, but is what can be used to construct the truth. It becomes possible, therefore, to use evidence in McRobbie's terms, both to intervene and deconstruct empirical truth making claims, but nevertheless to let the narratives of lived experience count as evidence in the sense of being important in *making*, but not *proving* a case. It becomes possible to perform the language of empiricism (e.g. statistics, results, data) without necessarily endorsing this as the only way to explore the relations between texts and readers, nor endorsing the particular data produced as the only available set of results. In other words empirical evidence is used opportunistically to make a *particular case*, to address a *particular set of questions*, and not to

represent the truth of that case. Rather than becoming trapped in the circularity of arguments about the truth (or not) of our data we should consider data as evidence with a function. In my research this involves thinking about what work the interviews are doing as part of a larger theoretical project. This project works to negotiate the construction of the relationship between class and the popular in cultural studies. It also works to regenerate the terms of the debates on class and the popular, the film musical, Americanisation and empirical audience research. It locates the meanings made around the musical by the interviewees within wider experiences of and processes of identification with class. The interviews are not wheeled on to supply the experiential truth to falsify the premises of the existing theories, but rather to address the gaps, absences, silences, possibilities, limitations of an existing body of work, and to offer suggestions for the future direction of the theorisation of class. I hold onto experience, not as the foundation of knowledge, but as central to the construction of subjectivity and theory. It is evidence (recognised in relation to a potential narrative or theoretical construction - a narrative/construction which determines evidence as much as evidence determines narrative/construction) with a function.

The Performative Empiricist Self

There is now a significant body of work in cultural studies (Steedman 1986, Couldry, 1996, Bristow, 1991, Marcus, 1987, McRobbie, 1991b, Walkerdine 1990, Elspeth Probyn 1992, 1993, 1993a) that debates the use of the autobiographical in the production of theory. Lynne Nelson (1990) makes an important suggestion that in our research practices the self (our own experiences) are always deployed in an empiricist way. "In an important way just about everyone is an empiricist. We believe that our theories confront the world, and are developed and modified in accordance with our experiences of it. Most of the time for most of us this thesis of empiricism, though perhaps a 'milk toast' version of empiricism, is uncontroversial." (6) In considering the location of empiricism in relation to the framing of the function and status of the empirical data in my research, it is also important to consider the place of my own (classed) experiences of the world (specifically a working class childhood in Liverpool, a shift out into higher education - with its attendant class dislocations, a 'return' to that place as the site for the research), and the positioning of those experiences in the search for theories to take account of the lived experience of the interviewees. In what way can the strategic use of the experiential self be used to question the epistemological perimeters of the theorisation of social difference - here class and gender?

My research was motivated by my failure in higher education to encounter theory that could adequately take account of my own shifting experience of class, and an understanding of the location of popular culture in my own life, and the working class lives that were part of my own. Beverly Skeggs (1997a) describes her access to Marxism via university in powerfully enabling terms, "It enabled me to (metaphorically) turn the class system on its head and pointed to the privilege, normalisation and lack of 'real' experience of those who tried to

patronize me," (131) Skeggs points to the limitations of the constant reading/viewing of working class women from the position of the knowledges of the middle class. In so doing she implies a performative empiricism in the sense in which she makes possible the production of more adequate conceptualisations and theorisation of working class women if/when these are written out of those women's experiences. This is not then to argue that the experiences out of which these are produced are 'real'/authentic/true. It is to argue that we are produced as subjects through our experiences, that those experiences always involve interpretation.³ Out of the interpretation of those experiences it may well be possible to develop alternative discursive frameworks for understanding class as complex from of identification.

My own encounter with left intellectualism in higher education sat in tension with my lived experiences of class, and motivated my need to refigure some of the assumptions and terms of the debates. Gayatri Spivak (1988) talks about "stallings", as moments that throw a monkey wrench in our thinking (62). Room 404, as I have come to refer to the following experience was one such stalling. It was the moment at which I decided that I had to find a way of making use of my knowledge of working class life as a means of theorising what was wrong with some of the existing theoretical models, and as a means to argue that middle class researchers interest in the working class as an object of study may (although by no means always) in the end produce the working class as an object of study that says more about their own fantasies, desires and assumptions about the working class than it does about anything else.

Room 404

It was Tuesday afternoon. I was attending a lecture The subject of the lecture was sexuality and surveillance. The lecture looked at the work of 19th century photographer Arthur Mumby, and his obsessive reconstruction, through photographs, of images of Wigan Pit Brow women. The lecture's specific concern was with the making of the bourgeoisie as its own object, or, more particularly with the making of bourgeois masculinity - the specific conditions under which working class women entered bourgeois sexuality in the nineteenth century, and the enactment of those conditions in visual representation. It went on to question the attestation of Mumby's photographs to the reality of working class life, arguing that they were more related to bourgeois male fantasies incorporated into truths through which the working class woman was created as an object of knowledge to be governed and regulated. The lecture also looked at the question of resistance, exploring the ways in which the women in the photographs could be seen to be resisting the gaze of the bourgeois male through the direction of their own gaze back at the camera, their body language, or their choice of clothes.

I remember this experience so clearly, because it was the moment that changed the direction of my work completely. Up until this point I had never considered class as something that I had any stake in, in theory. I thought about the theoretical analysis of class as belonging to academics, like this one, middle class and very well versed in Marxism.⁴ I remember sitting in this room feeling so uncomfortable. It hurt to see those images up there. It hurt even more to hear the academic analyse them, and read from Mumby's diaries in a "Wigan accent." And I thought, "Indeed, we are different, we are miles apart, you have no part in a working class history, aside from academic pursuit, but its an integral part of who I am. I grew up in it." I saw images from my own past, images of my great grandmothers, and my grandmothers , a matchstickmaker, and a ship's cleaner in Liverpool. I was so angry with the academic, her, not Mumby, who none of us were supposed to like. I saw her and Mumby as having a similar pursuit. I was uncomfortable with her fascination and curiosity about these women. I hated her fake northern accent. I disliked her implicit self congratulatory stance for "doing poverty when nobody else was," when she had no idea what it might have felt like to live in poverty or hardship. I thought about the phrase "they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented." I knew that this was the role that she had given herself, inspired by "what can I do for them," located within the salvage paradigm. I disliked the ease with which she spoke about the working class, when I, the working class girl made good, had no way of speaking my experience of class inside the academy ..

However, the site of my own desire as an "educated working class woman" to go back to the place of my working class history, Liverpool, to study working class women's lives should also be analysed. As I said in the introduction, the motivation for this work is personal. I cannot write this thesis as if my connection to the interviewees in terms of history, geography and class is simply a bonus. At times it was, but it is also extremely problematic, in terms of the perceived assumption that I might be looking at these women's lives simply because I feel that I know them, whereas the middle class observer does not. The structuring of knowing, in this thesis, is never that simple. The point is that the middle class observer does know 'them' through all of the discourses in which the working class are already inscribed. The middle class researcher might also know the working class through his/her encounters with 'them' outside of the academy, as bus drivers, waitresses, shop assistants, cleaners etc. The difference between me, us and them is that I and they are (have been) inscribed in these textual and extra textual encounters as the Other. There are different levels of 'knowing' the working class. It is at the disjunctures within and between these different levels of knowing that this thesis is in part looking

Related to this, I would like to discuss a criticism that has been levelled at my work. Firstly, that I am using my working class history as a claim to be one of them, and thus a convenient means to bypass the difficulties involved in theorising the power/knowledge relations between a middle class academic and her working class interviewees. That I am

reconstructing the location of Gramsci's organic intellectual location, through my use of the self. Secondly, there is the argument that I am confessing to a working class past in order to stake a claim in a marginalised identity because everyone who seemingly isn't, wants to be an Other.

The criticism that I am using my history as a claim to be one of them, is, methodologically a very interesting and very difficult issue, in as much as I am claiming *to be and not to be* one of them. I was advised to read discursive anthropology's debates around ethnographic research and the position of the researcher. I had already done this. The most striking factor in my research is that I both am and am not the somebody from somewhere else who comes to observe a culture. It is interesting and troubling, this need for others to deny that I have a connection to the working class culture that I am studying, rather than tackling the much more difficult and interesting set of methodological issues around what that connection can make possible (and impossible). Carolyn Steedman is right when she suggests (without taking up an unsophisticated epistemic position that being = knowing) that there are simply things that we can know or understand about working class life that the middle class researcher cannot. Her suggestion links in important ways to Lynne Nelson's position in relation to empiricism, and to my own construction of a performative empiricism as a mode for speaking the self as a means of intervening in the different ways of knowing the self and the Other.

In saying that there are aspects of interviewees experiences that I understand, I am not claiming to know them. As Anne Gray (1995) writes of her own connection to her interviewees in the *Video Playtime* study:

I am not presenting a set of credentials for being the same as the women in my study. On the contrary, I cannot now claim that shared identity, and whilst I recognise it, and during the interviews was able to understand and talk about aspects of their experience, their investments, I now know what it is to be positioned very differently. (159).

I would suggest that my position as a researcher with a residual relationship to aspects of working class experience (although differentially located historically) in Liverpool can open up interesting and important, *not unproblematic*, epistemological spaces in the empirical research process.

My own classed experiences are integral to this search. The difficulty comes in formulating a theoretical model and mode of narrativity for that self to be put to work. The narrative mode through which the self is enunciated in the practice of research does not have to be confessional. The intricacies of our lives and experiences do not have to be revealed in order for the self to be put to work. Elspeth Probyn (1993) in her 'manifesto' for the use of

the self as an enunciative practice, maintains, that there must be more to the use of the self than “shooting from the heart” (4) - and that the self can be put to work without revealing the details of “me.” Probyn is concerned, like Marcus (1987) that the use of the self in theory often amounts to no more than an excuse to talk about “me.” She argues that the self is not used strategically or politically as a means to talk about different processes of subjectification, but rather in much “new ethnography” has come to signify “the ways in which the experiential is bent in on itself.” (5). What Probyn wants to bring out, “are the ways in which the sometimes real implications of the insertion of an experiential self can be checked by using experience epistemologically to locate and problematise the conditions of individuated experiences.” (16). Thus, the mode (both in terms of theory and narrativity) of myself that is deployed in this thesis is one that opportunistically performs empiricism in order to address the different constructions of knowledge around the working class. I acknowledge that my difficulties in encountering academic discourses around the working class in the academy⁵ arise out of ‘knowing’ the working class (in a specific context). Using Skeggs and Probyn, I support a narrative mode for myself that does not speak the details of my life, but sits them (productively) in tension with aspects of the production of theories of the working class as part of an epistemological project.

In choosing (and these choices are strategies) not to talk about my life, I am not (unlike Probyn) taking a stance against an emotional exposure of aspects of our lives as an integral part of a research practice. The place of emotion as an important part of the research process is undertheorised. Often it is read as an unnecessary indulgence. (Morley 1992:173-197). I acknowledge the cautions in relation to this that Probyn and Morley set up, and the need to keep the autobiographical in epistemological check. However, I can also see a point and a place for emotionally charged writing that Probyn, fearful of theorists, “embroiled in the exigencies of their own locales,” (10) remains suspicious of. What Probyn does not question are the politics of the difficulty, and inaccessibility of academic language as an (at times) alienating discourse.

Valerie Walkerdine's work in *Schoolgirl Fictions*(1990) (coming under the rubric of work that Probyn is suspicious of) is an emotionally charged piece of research. I can remember clearly my first encounter with this work. It was at a time when I felt very alienated from the academy, lost and displaced. I had no idea that it was possible to write in the way that she does in *Schoolgirl Fictions*, where the emotional content of Walkerdine's deployment of the self as “an educated working class women” trying to negotiate the academy and all of the other fictions in which she has been formed as female and as working class is overwhelming, theoretically challenging and politically important:

Or what about that moment in history, the dream held out in the palm of an outstretched hand? They held out the knowledge, the position to me, and told me that I could claim it as mine, if I worked for it, and had the ability. So what of that dream? Should I have adapted to reality? If so, which of the

realities would you have me adapt to? The dream of difference, of the exotic, out of my class, out of my gender? The reality of the factory, the office, the kitchen, the cradle, workers and women, ordinary people? Did anyone really expect me to adapt to those realities, too swap poverty for wealth, when they faced you with a dream? Who in their valium induced haze would want to swap that version of reality for the glittering landscape of the dream? (170).

There are places in Walkerdine's work, in which I found such emotional refuge at that time, and still do. There are feelings that she expresses that I know I will negotiate all my life. "I cannot explain what it feels like to be in another place because of that work, for embedded in it is the necessary fear of giving up, the terrifying doubts that very soon they will find out that you have no talent." (163). This book was a cathartic experience for Walkerdine, an experience that Gray (1992) dismisses as Walkerdine's "joining the current trend for self exploration through research." (34). Rather than rejecting the emotional, a much more difficult pursuit might have been to look at what methodological purpose it serves.

Over time, I have come to read *Schoolgirl Fictions* with some discomfort. This is because over time, I have come to find other means through which to express my sense of dislocation in it. I do not need to write or think about my place in it anymore with the same level of emotionality. This is not to detract from the importance or necessity of emotional writing as a means of getting by in the academy for women whose position there is ambiguous. Walkerdine's work was produced by her, and consumed by me at a particular moment, and it opens up a space which very well might not need to be re-worked again. However, it did open up a space for her to speak something that she thought never could, and it gave me a language (a different language) to talk about class. It gave me a beginning, that enabled me to keep going.

Probyn's self is supposed to open up alternative speaking positions, but what if those positions can *only, at that moment* be spoken through feeling and emotion. This is not to say that it always will be, but what if at that moment emotionality is the only language through which something can be spoken. Methodologically then, the emotional self, can become the starting point from which to approach or re-approach theory. It therefore, has the potential to open up new speaking positions within existing theoretical discourses.⁶

Locating memory

I have argued, following Scott(1992) and Skeggs (1995) that experience cannot be taken as the foundational ground of historical truth, but is itself discursively produced, thus it is necessary to come to an understanding of the role of memory work in the articulation of experience as narrative in the interviewees accounts. As Carolyn Steedman (1986) argues, "memory alone cannot resurrect past time, because it is memory itself that shapes it, long after historical time has passed." (62). Jackie Stacey (1994a) has argued that historical

audience research cannot constitute a historical methodology without a formulation of the significance of memory. "Audience research can never capture that 'pure' moment of reception . . . in historical research, the length of the gap between the events and their recollection . . . highlights especially sharply the question of processes of memory formation." (318) It is vital to take account of memory formations in the construction of the women's personal narratives, in as much as this is the filter through which their experiences around watching the Musicals in the 50's is passed. The methodological question at issue is : What work is memory doing in the interviews, and what is its place in their analysis and status as evidence?

The status of memory, and its relationship to narrativity and textuality must be thought through in the positioning of the interviews within this project. In the introduction, I located the research in relation to Annette Kuhn's (1997) definition of memory work as a conscious staging of memory, and as:

an active practice of remembering which takes a questioning and critical attitude towards the past and the activity of its reconstruction through memory. Memory work undercuts the authenticity of what is remembered , treating it not as 'truth' but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined for its meanings and its possibilities.
(2)

What Kuhn does (following Frigga Haug, 1992 and Jo Spence, 1986) is to trace the activity of remembering, and the location of the relationship between actual events and our memories of them, as a mediated not mimetic practice that never provides access to, or represents the past 'as it was', but as itself re-written through the working of memory (as remembrance, imagination and invention). What is so interesting about Kuhn's analysis in relation to my own work, is the way in which she traces the workings of memory as it passes through (and is translated onto) visual texts. This involves looking at both the textual construction of the past in visual texts, and the subjectivities that memory texts produce for recipients, as well as at the constitution of subjectivity in relation to the consumption of the texts. Critically memory work involves an analysis of the stories produced through memory work as texts - as signifying systems. "For while it might refer to past events and experiences, memory itself is neither pure experience, nor pure event. Memory is an account, always discursive, always already textual." (6)

My research, unlike the work of Kuhn, Spence and Haug, is not concerned with the therapeutic side of memory work as a process of coming to terms with our own pasts, and the practices through which we have been constituted. Nor is it actively involved in the analysis of the "inside" - the unconscious of the interviewees' memories (this is integral to memory work as Kuhn defines it), but rather concerns itself with the analysis of the articulated "outside" of memory in the form of the stories that the women tell. Critically and ethically, the

interviewees are not engaged in memory work as therapeutic. (This is not to say that their recounting of memories does not have a cathartic - and perhaps at times painful - effect). They are remembering because I have asked them too, in a specific context.

James Fentress and Chris Wickham(1992) argue that memory is always an active search for meaning. Luisa Passerini (1982) maintains that, "memory influences the present, that's one of its capabilities." Memory is never just about the past, but is a past/present relationship. In the interviews memory is positioned as an active search for meaning at the transition of the past and the present. It negotiates a difficult border between history and fantasy. The women are coming to terms with the loss of the past (as a fantasy of possibility for the future) Remembering the 50's for the interviewees is thus positioned in the research as a practice that produces narratives - strategic texts of the self - that are read not as true accounts of their lives in the 50's, but as stories through which the women are coming to make sense of the past and their lives now, in other words with the pleasures and losses of the past/present relationship. The memories produced in the process of the research encounter actively *create* rather than simply recall the women's place in the world. Memory can be read as further undermining (and thus invalidating) the truth of experience, or it can be placed as an active part of the narrative production, the textuality of lived experience of class, through which the fluidity and complexity of class as a form of identification that is played out in relation to cultural (visual) products, here the film musical, can be explored. Central to this is the analysis of *the material conditions of remembering*, then and now, taking seriously the ways in which the interviewees articulate the material conditions of their lives. Memory and the material conditions of remembrance are indissolubly linked in the placing of the need for popular culture in the story of a life. This exploration can then be put to work as part of an epistemological project that seeks to expand the terms of the the available theoretical debates for coming to understanding the relationships between class, gender and popular culture.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the interviewees' memories of the 50's is the way in which the 50's are located nostalgically as safer, nicer, better. I do not want to get into the business of arguing that the women remember it like this, but was this really how it was? Rather I want to say, they remember it like this. What does it mean to remember it like this? The issue of the sentimentalising of the past is one that Lynne Spiegel (1995) takes up in relation to the practices of remembering the past through the eyes of T.V re-runs. She defines this mode of presenting the past as popular memory - as "history for the present," (21). Spiegel argues, "it is a mode of historical consciousness that speaks to the needs and concerns of contemporary life. Popular memory is a form of story telling through which people make sense of their own lives and culture."(ibid.). Spiegel sets popular memory up against what she calls "official professional history" (27), which tries to mask its own story telling mechanisms behind the science of the quest for historical accuracy.

Popular memory, according to Spiegel does not set out to find 'objective', accurate pictures of the past. Instead it aims to discover a past that makes the present more tolerable. Its function is very much developed in relation to the conditions of remembering in the present - to the concerns and needs of the present. So then memory is used as way of making sense of the here and now. "It provides people with a way of making sense of an alienating and imperfect world." (30)

Of course, as Spiegel argues, the opposition between popular and official pasts is not absolute, and popular memory is intimately connected to the more dominant 'official' perceptions of history. "To think otherwise is to risk treating the 'popular' as if it were wholly unified, fully achieved and therefore capable of sustaining a memory wholly apart from the dominant constructions of the past." (22) It is important to work through the places where Spiegel's definition of popular memory is most useful to my own work, and the places where it is not.

Spiegel is dealing largely with the representation of the past on television, and of the consumption of those representations. Popular memories then are images, representations, constructed and disseminated, and the point of analysis to look at the kinds of effects they aim to have - why is it popular to remember the past in this way in the first place?. Spiegel's analysis focuses both on the production and consumption of popular memories. She looks at the ways in which spectators use their own regional and personal memories to contest the dominant social memory that television constructs. In this she is keen to differentiate popular memory from the notion of resistant readings. Popular memory has ideological effects - all history does- but the real point, according to Spiegel, is to think about why it is popular to remember the past in this way in the first place. Popular memory speaks to the concerns of the present in a way that professional histories often do not. It gives people ways to use the past in the context of everyday life.

I find the argument that the purpose of popular memory is its use value in the present - as a way of coping with everyday life, an important one. I also appreciate Spiegel's move away from the necessity of producing resistant readings. It seems to me that she moves into a much more complex space, in which the specificities of the social context of the viewing subject (which includes regionality), and the relationships of personal narratives of the past to other official interpretations of the past are all important.

Where my research diverges from Spiegel's Foucauldian interpretation of popular memory is in the status of the media text in the formulation of memory. For Spiegel it is the representation of the past on T.V, together with the remembrance of that past in the personal, and the discourses around that past in history that converge to form the analysis of

popular memory. In my work I am not dealing with the representation of Liverpool's history in film. I am dealing with the memories of the representation of an American past and present, and the investment in those images by the women in Liverpool. What differs is the status of the text. However, I find Spiegel's work enabling in as much as it gives me a way to theorise my concern with the use value of memory in the present, rather than its' status as 'true' or 'false'. I am also setting personal remembrances of past time in opposition to the historical and theoretical discourses in which working class women have been positioned, in an attempt to regenerate the terms of the academic debates on class and the popular.

Fentress and Wickham (1992) address the question of the tracing of historical consciousness in relation to memory. It seems to me that they employ the term "social memory" partly to distinguish what they are looking at from a Foucauldian conception of popular memory. They also want to mark their territory as the concern for the relationship between the individual to the individual's social group. Fentress and Wickham are looking at how individual consciousness might relate to those of the collectivities that individuals make up.

Their work is not about collective memory, but rather how individual memories become social. Fentress and Wickham define social memory as existing because it has meaning for the group that remembers it - and that individual memory becomes social through a conversational process - simply by talking about it. They argue that, in order to analyse social memory, we must look at and unpick the narrative structures that are formed around certain memories in social groups. How do certain social groups remember the past?

The way memories of the past are generated and understood by given social groups is a direct guide to how they understand their position in the present; that one can, in fact, barely separate social memory from an analysis of the social at all, and that, conversely, any analysis of social identity and consciousness could become, if the researcher wished an analysis of perceptions of the past. (126).

I would argue that care must be taken not to conceive of any social group, but particularly the working class, as a cohesive identity. We should not presume that we will be able to unearth such a thing as working class memory based on community identity. In my research I cannot presume that the women's belonging to the same social group, in the same city, at the same point in time, gives me unproblematic access as a researcher to the cohesive class consciousness of a community. I am not making individual women's memories working class memories. They do not become social in that collective sense. I am making individual memories social in the sense that they are worked through experiences which are determined (and individuated) by class, age gender and geography.

I will go in the next chapter to explore in more detail the specific memories produced around the film texts, and their impact, both on the reading of film texts, an understanding of working class women's location within Post War discourses of affluence and consumption, the construction of glamour and the construction and investment in a fantasy of America. I will also examine nostalgia for the past as articulated in the interview texts, as being particularly classed. This is an aspect of the existing research on memory that is under theorised. The insertion of the question of class into the operation of nostalgia, itself has the potential to bring into question the material conditions of remembering, and the negotiation of material difficulties in the formation of a classed identity, and points of identification determined by the experience of class in relation to the reading of film texts.

¹ Harding frames these assumptions in the following way, whereby the scientific method itself eliminates social bias, or questions of truth and power, as a hypothesis goes through its rigorous tests. The more that I read, the more I came to realise that these assumptions were absurd, and conceived of empirical research as far too hygienic. The assumptions of traditional empiricism, Harding argues, insist that, "the social identity of the observer is irrelevant to the 'goodness' of the results of the research." (183). Harding further argues that, "it is not supposed to make a difference to the explanatory power, objectivity and so on of the researchers results if the researcher of the community of scientists are white or black, Chinese or British, rich or poor in social origin." (ibid.) What empiricist epistemological assumptions are founded on is the conviction that reality exists independently of the mind which perceives or interprets it. The immediate facts of real life experience are appealed to as a bedrock guarantee that we can tell the truth of that experience by sticking to straightforward description and not letting words or ideologies get in the way.

² Lynn Nelson (1990) and Sandra Harding (1987) have both produced complex and detailed accounts of the relationship between feminism, epistemology and empiricism. Nelson in particular talks at length about empiricism as a theory of evidence.

³ The production of knowledge out of personal experiences of oppression is one of the founding premises of feminist standpoint theory - that all knowledge springs from experience (Harstock, 1987). For some standpoint theorists, positions of oppression generate epistemic privilege, only those who have the appropriate experience of oppression are able to talk about it. This reduces knowledge to the formula that Probyn (1990) so forcefully critiques - that being equals knowing (ontology = epistemology). In this case experience becomes part of the empiricist tradition in which experience is the source of knowledge. I am arguing a case for a special knowledge arising from the experiences of living in and with structures of inequality. I am not, however, using experience as evidence to substantiate knowledge claims determined by the structural positioning of class. Class, in this research, is positioned as a multiple position which can be occupied in contradiction and ambivalence.

⁴ The ethics around including anecdotal information where the person criticised is offered no opportunity to answer back are important ones. In this case, however, a productive dialogue did ensue between myself and the academic in question (Griselda Pollock). My Ma thesis (1991) was produced as a response to this difficult encounter, and included a conversation between Griselda and myself that attempted, using hooks and Childers (1990) dialogical model to work productively through some of the tensions.

⁵ It is important to continually acknowledge the specificity of my encounters. I do not speak of and for the academy per se, but draw a set of questions relating to potential theoretical inadequacies out of a specific encounter, my own, within specific institutions. My case is strengthened through the use of other educated working class academics accounts of their difficult encounters with the academy and

with theories of the working class circulated there (Skeggs,1997, Walkerdine, 1991,1996, Steedman,1984, Stanley, 1997, Morley,1997,).

⁶ As a strategy, this also has pedagogic implications. How often have we encountered students who, for a variety of reasons find it so difficult to find a way into theory, or a way of making it make sense for them. Working class students in particular can feel shut out and uncomfortable. One place for them to find the tools to theorise their difficulties may well lie on an emotional level.

Chapter Four

Analysing the Interview Data

This chapter develops on from the methodological arguments discussed in Chapters One and Two, into an analysis of the data itself. What I will do here, is to execute a thematic reading of the interview texts, separating them into four areas of investigation. These are:

- Loss
- Escapism
- Glamour
- America

What I am exploring are the various ways in which escapism, glamour and America are narrated across the interviews, and in what ways the appeal and pleasure in the film musical can be located within each of these categories. The analysis of the interviews will not be limited to this chapter. The chapter will introduce some of the ways in which loss, escapism, glamour and America have been talked about, and what their significance might be. These categories will then be carried through the rest of the thesis. I am not, as I have already mentioned, attempting to use the data to provide working class readings of Hollywood film musicals. Rather, I want to explore the ways in which individual women have orchestrated the meaning of the musical in their lives around these four categories, and in turn, how this might be used to re-organise our understanding of why and how working class women use popular culture.

Mode of Analysis

I decided on a method of cutting and pasting the interviews onto index cards. I went through all of the interviews in detail highlighting and placing into themes those points that kept recurring. I then cut these out and organised them onto the cards. I took the largest groupings of cards which were loss, escapism, America and glamour. (The other smaller categories were British films, dancing, age, wealth, war, community, marriage and specifics of Liverpool cinemas. I will incorporate these into the wider analysis of the data) At the end of this process I had a means of seeing, not only the issues most talked about (America was the most talked about), but also the different ways in which these areas were talked about and defined. It then became possible to break each area down into a series of issues and questions.

The Structure of the Interview.

I travelled to the women's homes to conduct unstructured interviews that lasted from an hour to two hours. Anne Gray (1995) talks about the ceremony attached to being welcomed as a researcher into the women's houses. "There was a distinct sense of 'occasion' attached to many of my visits. I was invited in as a guest, and usually offered cups of tea or coffee before settling down to the business in hand." (163). This is a feeling that I certainly share. To the letter I was made to feel very welcome, and was plied with tea, coffee and cakes. In several instances I was aware that the best china was being brought out for me. In one case Mary's husband brought my tea in a mug. He was sent back to the kitchen with the reprimand, "she's from London, she won't have her tea in a mug she'll have it in cup." Most of the time family had been sent out of the house, so that we had peace and quiet to talk. I was seven months pregnant when I did my first batch of interviews which really helped to break the ice in a lot of cases, and gave the women who had had children a point of identification, and a space in which to give out advice on labour, childcare etc. Some of the women also knew my grandparents when they were alive and my mother and her sisters, again this transformed the interview space into an exchange of shared knowledge.

Most of the women were very willing to talk. The difficulties in the interviews were not related to getting the women to talk. Rather, difficulties arose initially out of the use of the unstructured interview. Some of the women would have much preferred a set agenda of questions. It was frightening for them to just be expected to talk, as they were worried that they were not saying the right things, or in the right way. I was often told in the interviews, "I don't know what use all of this babble is going to be to you." Or "I'm not sure what you want to know." The unstructured interview can also elicit suspicion about what exactly it is that we want to know as researchers, what we are looking for.

I had chosen the unstructured interview because I wanted to know how the women themselves placed the musicals within the context of their lives, rather than me prompting them to think about its location in certain places. I suppose that also, at the back of my mind was a loosely formed psychoanalytic model in which I would "follow digressions, be receptive to unanticipated areas of discussion." Ellen Seiter (1993) discusses issues round the unstructured interview when she constructs a case study around one particularly troubling interview in which she and her research partner worked with an unstructured interview. The two men they were interviewing made some troubling and offensive comments, and were, Seiter thought, speaking to them in a way that they thought would be impressive, rather than saying what they actually felt. Seiter felt trapped in her method of interviewing. She was *supposed* to be receptive to digressions and unanticipated areas of discussion, but felt irritated and impatient, did not want to nod encouragingly, but to challenge and argue back. Seiter draws some interesting methodological issues out of this encounter about where we put ourselves and our feelings as researchers in the interview process.

I do not think that I adopted this unstructured interview method as literally as Seiter; nevertheless, it was a problem, to draw someone away from a ramble that seemed to be irrelevant. There are always things that we want to know, and things that we want our interviewees to say. In an unstructured interview these are not always easy to tease out. I know at times in the early stages of interviewing that I resorted to manoeuvres to get the women to say something, when it might have been more honest to just ask them. Still I did not feel that I wanted to go into the interviews with a rigid agenda of questions. It would have been too prescriptive. What I developed in the end was a mode of interviewing that combined aspects of just letting the women talk, and a series of questions that I directed. (These were not uniform, but loosely structured around similar themes.) It seemed like a workable compromise.

Locating the Text of the Film

What I want to look at next is a particular problem that I faced in the course of interviewing that relates to the function and status of textual analysis in my thesis. The problem relates to the question, What counts as talking about a film musical?

There is a staggering amount of material written on the musical, much of it historical, biographical or anecdotal writing on the studio system, the stars, the directors, the personalities. There are also a number of useful reference texts (Taylor & Jackson, 1971, Vallance 1970). Most of this literature, however, whilst fascinating at times, is not relevant to my research project, it being neither about studios, stars or directors.

To my knowledge there are no specific empirical studies of the audience for the film musical. The study of the film musical is dominated by textual analysis. What I want to differentiate at this point is work on the musical that can be constituted as a critical analysis of the genre. I will examine the specific use of some of this work to my research.

Michael Wood's *America In The Movies* (1975) has an interesting chapter, 'Darkness and Dance', which whilst underdeveloped in places, has thrown up some interesting points that have influenced my argument that what the women were consuming when they watched the musicals was a particular fantasy about America. Wood makes some rather heavy handed connections between 50's musicals and 50's America. Peter Biskind (1983) follows a similar line of investigation, when he looks at the ideological messages of 50's American films in terms of the image of America they were putting across. Despite its promising title, Biskind's book is disappointing, being both predictable and prescriptive in its analysis of the ideological project of American films as being about the translation of social values into felt needs.. It relies on textual analysis to examine the values that films carry (and implicitly produce for the spectator), and does not talk specifically about musicals. Wood's ideas are more relevant in that he does deal directly with the musical. He executes an interesting

analysis of the different styles of Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly as signifying different aspects of 50's American ideology, with Kelly literally embodying the appeal of American democracy with his boundless energy, vitality, extraordinary talent, and seeming ease of execution in dance. Only in America is it possible to be this vital, this extraordinary. Only in America is it possible to dance and sing in the streets because life is so good. As over generalised as Woods analysis is in places, it nevertheless provides an important entry into the analysis of the interviewees constructions of fantasies of America, and the relationship of those fantasies to the ideological construction (and criticism) of America in the film texts themselves, and in post-war Britain.

Jane Feur's *The Hollywood Musical*(1993), and the collection, *Genre The Musical* (1981) edited by Rick Altman, together with Altman's own *The American Film Musical* (1989), make up the main critical academic references for the study of the musical. The first edition of Feur's book, published in 1982, was one of a handful of academic studies of film musicals. Its mission was to have musicals taken seriously as an object of study in as much as they epitomised the golden age of Hollywood's studio era in the popular imagination. They also seemed resistant to academic analysis were executing their own ideological project in the fulfilment of human needs. "We need a key to open the shimmering glass door musicals place between themselves and any form of intellectual inquiry. Musicals seem particularly resistant to analysis; peel away the tinsel and you find the real tinsel underneath." (1) Feur's work was important and groundbreaking in its unravelling of the narrative devices that enabled the musical to complete its ideological project.

There is no specific work on the relationship between women and Hollywood film musicals. Jackie Stacey (1994) does make reference to musicals in her analysis. Feur does work on gender and sexual politics in the second edition. Work on the ideological criticism of the sexual politics of the musical has been less than sophisticated, being overly concerned with a simplistic content analysis informed by a notion of positive or negative images of woman. For example a feminist attack on *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Turim,1976) which pays little attention to issues of genre, industry or the subtler questions of textual pleasure. Lucy Fischer's(1989) "Shall we dance? Woman and the Musical," is a prescriptive piece that looks at the construction and deconstruction of images of woman in the ideological elements of visual signifiers in the musical genre. Fisher looks at Berkeley's "Dames", then at it's deconstruction in Arzner's *Dance Girl Dance*. Basically, it is a destruction of visual pleasure argument, locked into the resistance paradigm that is out to reveal how ridiculous the musical is. Fischer wants to leave us with no illusions.

When I first developed this research project I did not conceive of the analysis of the film texts as being the dominant method for positioning the interviewees. The research was to be about the theories in which the women might be positioned as consumers of the film texts.

However, I could not have conceived of just how difficult it would become theoretically and methodologically to position the analysis of the texts. This difficulty arose as a result of the women's location of details of the film narratives in their interviews.

One of the most difficult things that I had to face in the analysis of the interviews was the fact that most of the women (the exceptions being Maria and May) did not talk in detail about the film texts.¹ When I began interviewing, I more or less wrote the first interviews off as interesting but not relevant because the women did not talk about any films in detail. Even when pushed they refused to go into detail about why a particular film was their favourite or least favourite. I carried on interviewing, and the same thing tended to happen. They did not talk about films, or even about film stars to any great extent.

Film titles were mentioned, but this varied from interview to interview. Some mentioned sixteen film titles in passing (Pauline), some mentioned none (Kay, Emily, Pat). It was very difficult methodologically to find a point of analysis for this. The location of the film texts in the interviews could have something to do with the structure of the interviews. I asked them initially very loosely how they remembered Liverpool in the 50's. I pushed them in the direction of a more general historical and social context. Perhaps if I had opened with, "what is your favourite musical of all time?" it would have set a different precedent for the location of the films. It is difficult to say. Films were referenced. There were over forty musicals listed throughout the interviews, but the pleasure in these tended to be located in one sentence; "Oh I liked Gene Kelly in *Singin in the Rain*, and I liked *South Pacific*, that was lovely, ooh and Rita Hayworth, she was gorgeous." (Vera)

It occurred to me that my conception of what counted as talking about a film was very limited. I was thinking about film texts, about narrative analysis, about remembering particular and fantastic moments from a film. When the women talked about film musicals they were referencing a different order of experience. The women were using the musical to work through a range of memories and emotions around glamour, femininity, death, loss, dreaming of America, a vibrant and exciting Liverpool, escape, never wanting to leave.

The women's failure to perform in the way that I wanted expanded the limits of this project, turning it into a far more interesting and challenging study. The project opened out into something with a different agenda of questions: What counts as talking about a film? How else can film be defined (beyond textual analysis) in the study of audiences, and in relation to what else? Specifically, what else can the film musical be used to talk about? The difficulty that I had was in my role as a researcher and an interpreter, and theorising a place for the film text. It was a crisis that initiated for me an epistemological dilemma. If the women did not talk about the films in any detail (but were still talking through the films) then drawing out a detailed reading of the titles that they mentioned on the basis of what I thought

they would have read into it (or were not saying) seemed inconsistent with my methodology. Other researchers have experienced similar difficulties around the positioning of the film text. I referenced Harper and Porter (1996) earlier, who said that the respondents in the Mass Observation archive did not talk about specific films in detail, but rather the whole social experience of going to the cinema was the significant factor. Ellen Seiter (1993) talks about her respondents as having, "no interest whatsoever in offering us interpretative textual readings of television programmes as we wanted them to do." (62). It is interesting to think about the reasons why interviewees might not reference the visual texts in detail. Perhaps they feel that we are looking for a correct reading, or that we know a lot more than they do, and that they might appear ignorant.

Lily: Of course you know all about these films, we only watched them for the pleasure sort of thing.

Barbara: I'm not sure what you want to know, what I'll be able to tell you.

Pauline: I don't think that I've got anything interesting to say really. I think you'll be bored.

The interviewees did mention film titles, and would say (if pushed in some cases) what their favourite musical was, but if I asked them why, or which part of the film they liked the most, they were reluctant to say, and would reply with, "it was just escapist.", or "all of it, it was just the glamour," "it was just entertainment." What was being put forward was a kind of 'common sense' interpretation of the meaning of the texts. Richard Dyer (1992) has urged us in relation to the notion of entertainment as common sense to move beyond the assumptions of this to really think about what it means and for which audiences:

Entertainment is difficult to define because everyone knows what it is, because it is a common sense idea. Common sense is the cornerstone of day to day thought and talk, and for that reason it is resistant to the probings of those who want to ask what such and such means. Questioning common sense, however sympathetically, stops the flow, unsettles the comfortable taken-for-grantedness of the ways in which we habitually make sense of our lives, thoughts and feelings, to ourselves and with others. (1).

I wonder how far this was what was going on in the interviews - the assumption that everyone knows why musicals give pleasure, and are entertaining. Entertainment, then, as Dyer argues does become the end point in discourse, rather than the beginning of an analysis of people's pleasures, desires and investments in specific popular cultural forms. It was for this reason that I decided to break the interviews down into the four areas of analysis, to try to figure out exactly what the women meant when they talked about glamour and escapism in relation to the musical. However, this did not resolve how I should interpret the film texts using the interviews.

What I did in the end was to make a list of the films referenced most often in the interviews , in descending order, also keeping note of a film if it was not often mentioned, but spoken about in a particularly interesting way. I figured that there must be something there in the women's accounts around these films that made them keep coming up time and again across the interviews, even if they did not talk about them in any detail. What I was looking for were the determinants behind the "common sense" reading, and the dynamics between these specific texts, and what was going on in their lives, in Liverpool, or in Britain at the time. I am also looking to execute a reading of these texts that does not necessarily locate the women as resisting readers of the perceived dominant ideological messages present in them, especially in relation to their construction of a mythology of America. What I will do, is to use the categories of loss, escapism, glamour and America as focal points through which to read the texts.

Out of this list, I have taken the top three films to analyse. The number in brackets next to the film indicates the number of times it was mentioned across the interviews:

South Pacific (1958, Twentieth Century Fox). Dir. Charles Walters. [10]

Annie Get Your Gun (1950, MGM). Dir. Georges Sidney.[6]

Calamity Jane (1953, Warner Brothers). Dir. David Butler [6]

Oklahoma! (1955,.Rodgers and Hammerstein). Dir. Fred Zinnemann.[5]

Carousel (1956, Twentieth Century Fox) Dir. Henry King [5]

Gigi (1958,.MGM). Dir. Vincente Minnelli [4]

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (1954.,MGM). Dir.Stanley Donen. [4]

Singin' in the Rain (1952, MGM). Dir.Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen [4]

High Society (1956,.MGM). Dir.Charles Walters [2]

Some interesting observations arose from this exercise. Firstly, that *South Pacific* should have come out as the film mentioned most often. Secondly that half of the ten films mentioned most often, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Oklahoma*, *Calamity Jane*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and *Carousel* should all belong in a mythical mid west, and to the sub genre that Feur (1993) and Altman (1989) have identified as the folk musical.

I would argue that the appeal of films like *Annie Get your Gun* and *Calamity Jane* lay in (at least) four different places. Firstly, in the text itself, with the costumes, the music or the particular star. Secondly, this appeal was complexly tied to the sense and experience of community that these women lived with. Thirdly, the construction of America in the film, and (within and) outside the film in Liverpool, and in Britain at the time. All of this, in turn can be related to, fourthly, the place of dancing, and especially singing in working class communities in Liverpool in the 50's. Feur's location of the spectator for the film musicals ideological point of address provides a useful starting point, but my analysis moves this forward in locating a

historically and socially specific viewer for whom the folk musical appealed on a complex and interrelated number of levels.

What I want to do now is to look in more detail at the ways in which Feur positions the spectator as the ideological point of address for the film musical. I then want to go on and look specifically at her analysis of the ideological project of the folk musical, and within this, where she places the spectator as its ideological point of address. Following all of this I want to explore the relevance of her analysis to the interviewees' narratives around *Annie get Your Gun* and *Calamity Jane*.

Feur argues that the musical of the 40's and early 50's provides the promise of entertainment itself as a dream resolution. The experience of the film may provide an emotional catharsis or an escape for the viewer. Musicals project the dream into the narrative, thereby implying a similar relationship between film and viewer. "The dream resolution, the resolution of the film and leaving the theatre tend to occur within a very short time span. For a little while after seeing a musical, the world outside may appear more vivid; one may experience a sudden urge to dance down the street." (77). Feur argues that for a time the spectator might not know which world they are occupying. The musical positions the spectator as a dreamer whose dreams are being externalised by the narrative.

Feur draws a distinction between the internal audience (the theatrical audience) and the spectator for the film musical. The internal audience is the audience within the film whose purpose she argues is to shape the responses of the movie audience to the film:

The subjectivity of the spectator stands in for that of the spectral audience, rendering the performance utterly theatrical. We are, as it were lifted out of the audience, we actually belong to (the cinema audience) and are transported into another audience, one at once more alive and more ghostly. And in the cut to a closer shot, since the internal audience retreats into off screen space, the performance can be truly 'all for us.' (30).

This is a narrative device that can be seen at work so often in the musical. In *The Bandwagon* (1953, MGM. Dir. Vincente Minnelli).. it is the theatrical or the internal audience that is judging whether or not Geoffrey Cordova's rendition of Oedipus Rex counts as entertainment or not. When the performance fails, the subsequent show is performed in front of a live audience, whose thunderous applause lets the cast and producers know that the formula is right. As the closing number of the film, "that's entertainment," says, "a show that is really a show sends you out with a kind of a glow, and you say to yourself as you go, that's entertainment." What the film narrative does is to organise the spectator as a hypothetical point of address through the structuring device of the internal audience. The internal audience is what pulls you into the narrative, makes you feel part of it.

Feur argues that the musical can be seen to operating a technique of direct address not unrelated to Godard:

The spectator is lifted out of her transparent identification with the story, and forced to concentrate on the artifice through which the play or film has been made. Whilst the goals of the musicals and those of Godard must surely be opposed, their methods of direct address are identical. When performers in musicals turn to face us directly, and burst into song, we do enter another register, but the potentially disorientating effects of the break in narrative are minimised by the presence of the audience in the film and by mechanisms of identification. It's as if we've been given a complete confession in order to conceal the real crime. For what's mystified in the end is the origin of the musical film itself. The musical denies that technological calculation, and big business lies behind its most endearing charms. This is especially the case in the backstage musical. (35).

Feur argues that the structuring narrative devices of the folk musical are to encourage audience participation. The musical sees itself, Feur argues, in a direct line of descent from folk art, "perceiving the very distinction between performer and audience as a form of cinematic original sin." (3). According to Feur, the musical seeks to bridge this gap by putting up community as an ideal concept. In basing its value system on community, the producing and consuming functions severed by the passage of musical entertainment from folk to popular to mass status are rejoined through the genre's rhetoric. "The musical always reflecting back on itself, tries to compensate for its double whammy of alienation by creating humanistic 'folk' relations in the films; these folk relations in turn act to cancel out the economic values and relations associated with mass produced art." (ibid.). Through such a rhetorical exchange, Feur argues, the creation of folk relations in the films cancels out the mass entertainment substance of the films. "The Hollywood musical becomes a mass art which aspires to the condition of a folk art, produced and consumed by the same integrated community." (ibid.).

What Feur calls the folk musical then, posits the spectator as part of an integrated community through its use of seemingly non choreographed numbers, and its preferred setting in small town America, or the mythical west.. The singers and dancers perform for the love of it, or the need to do it, not for profit. In a way Feur argues, "these amateur entertainers are us." (13). Certainly Maria's exuberant statement that makes reference to *Calamity Jane* and *The Sound of Music* (1965, Twentieth Century Fox. Dir. Robert Wise) would echo this:

You see that's the difference. You wanted to sing with them people. They did lighten your life. They put you in a nice frame of mind. They did make you see love for what love is. I mean for me love is the greatest thing that this planet has got. It doesn't matter whether you love your parents, your grandparents, children, your husband, plants, trees, if you love it just beats everything. It

gives you a nice feeling inside. The Hollywood films gave me that. They gave me a feeling of love. And I came out of the cinema feeling, well I could drive over The Black Hills of Dakota, you know I could sing on a hill.

In the folk musical, singing and dancing may emerge from the joys of ordinary life. Feur goes on to argue that if you execute a detailed textual analysis of a musical such as *Summer Stock*(1950. MGM. Dir: Charles Walters) or *Easter Parade*(1948. MGM. Dir: Charles Walters), you would see that "the conventions for staging and filming numbers in musicals position the spectator as an uncritical consumer of entertainment as folk rather than as mass art." (22).

What Feur is stressing is the place elevated for community in these films, and the way in which this lures the spectator into identifying with the sense of freedom, spontaneity and closeness that the films embody. In the interviews the relationship between cinema and community was extremely important, and the loss of a sense of community was one of the most difficult things that the women had had to come to terms with in their lives.

Betty: I think we had better times then, than what we have now, cos you was more - your friends stuck together more, and you were in a close knit community sort of thing.

Maria: I remember the quotation Bob Hope once said about colour television. When it came out he said you're paying £360 to sit in by yourself to see something that you once paid ninepence to see with a crowd of other people, social, isn't that the whole thing about the pictures, it was social wasn't it.

Carol: I think the spirit, the community, people being friendly. It was exciting. It was exciting you know. I mean when the kids go to the pictures today they don't get excited. They think Oh Yeah, I want to go and see the Flintstones. I used to be able to feel my insides going before I went because I knew that I'd be seeing everyone in the street, we'd have a laugh. It was just really enjoyable. I miss all the hype. I suppose that's the word for it. You wouldn't have used that word years ago, but that's what I mean. There's no spirit, no community.

Pauline: I used to go to the cinema in those days because it was like a little community. It was full every night. Everybody around was from your little plot. That was your local cinema. You rarely went outside your local area.

Ellen: It was actually, when you think about it now, like a tactile thing. It's like something you can almost touch because there was the atmosphere of it, the excitement.

For my research, Altman's positioning of the folk musical as projecting the audience into a mythological version of the cultural past, a past in which there is an emphasis on family groupings and the home, community, small town is highly significant. "The sets never aspire to the status of reality, but rather to that of remembered reality. People in folk musicals don't perform, they just sing. Music is not something to be saved for unusual moments; it is as much a part of the life cycle as eating and sleeping" (287). According to Altman, "the genius of the folk musical is that it manages both to mythify the American past and yet, by making the process of mythification visible, to retain before our eyes the very dangers which necessitated that process to begin with."(290). All of this has a fascinating relationship with the issues and questions raised in the interviews, especially in relation to the imagining and dreaming about America.

These films at the time opened up all sorts of possibilities for dreaming because they did / and did not require a suspension of disbelief. They were fantastic and they made room for fantasies of being extraordinary and glamorous, but they also had a root in their real lives. These women lived in tight communities, where singing, too was not just saved for special occasions, but was a part of their everyday lives. I have often heard film theorists wrap themselves in knots over the "realities" constructed in the musicals, where characters burst into song in the middle of the street, in a museum, in cab to full orchestra. This did not happen on the streets of Liverpool in the 50's to full orchestra, but women did sing on the streets. "When I was a kid, a group of young women going out used to walk along the street with their arms around each other, singing their heads off, just singing." (Ellen) They sang in the house, and they sang in pubs. It was not always for performance, they just sang. Perhaps it was easier, therefore, to place yourself in that community in the Black Hills of Dakota, where you could also sing at the drop of a hat. Kay recounted a lovely image of Sunday mornings after Mass when all the back doors would be open on the houses, and the women would be cooking the dinner. She said that someone would start singing and the other women would join in, and the song would carry along the back yards. Betty remembers singing as an integral part of working class social life. She also uses singing as a way of specifically remembering her mother:

When people used to have a party, you know people would just strike up singing. They didn't have to be coaxed into singing. It was just, well our such and such a body can sing. Quite often they had their set songs that they sang. My mother never smiled when she sang, and I mean she was quite a happy go

lucky woman really. But when she sang she was very serious. She just sat and sang with this serious face, not a smile on her face. That's the way (laughs) she used to sing.

The films are remembered now in part through the loss of this community. Remembering how it felt to watch those films, living as part of a community that cared for each other places the memory of the folk musical in a nostalgia for the past. Perhaps in as much as the folk musical traffics in a mythologising of the American past, so too does remembering them traffic in a mythologising of Liverpool's past. In the interviews the women express a loss and a longing for a working class community that is no more. The narrative from through which this loss is articulated is extremely visual. These are often first person narratives that place the women within a particular scene:

Kay: Oh the little shop. You could always run out . . .

Emily: get a penny cigarette and a match.

Pat: You used to knock at the side door if the shop was shut. Knock at the side door and say, "Have you got a loaf?"

Emily: Everyone was hard up weren't they? You didn't have nothing.

Kay: Yes, but you didn't moan about it did you?

Pat: I used to put our two kids in the pram, you know on the light nights and push them into town. All the shop windows were lit up, and the shops full of beautiful things. You could window shop, you could go out at night, not like now.

Another theme in the interviews was the loss of a sense of personal safety since the 50's. What this leads to is a mythologising of Liverpool in the 50's as nicer and safer than Liverpool now. "Everything was nicer then."(Emily) "There was nobody got killed, murdered or assaulted or anything."(Maria) "It was a better way of life."(Kay) The women have memories of being able to walk the streets, of not feeling threatened . I do not want to get into proving the women wrong in relation to the safety of Liverpool, although obviously people did get killed, assaulted, murdered, raped etc. What has to be taken into account is the function of these memories of safety and niceness within a wider sense of loss.

I think that what is being mourned is the loss of community. It is a fact to them that the sense of community that they valued so much has been eroded. It is the security and

comfort of that that they have lost. Women remember front doors being open all the time, women and children sitting out on the steps. These memories are so passionately recalled, they are sensual, tactile. It's like the women can taste and smell the atmosphere of Monday night at the pictures, and coming home singing on the streets arm in arm with your friends, the smell of dinners cooking on a Sunday morning.

Emily: You just had to live that era. Sundays were Sunday's - Put your best on! You had to save those clothes to go to Mass, and you could smell all the dinners, I used to love that, and you could hear the church bells. There was something .

Lily's nostalgia for the past operates through that key signifier of safety - leaving the front door open- "You could go out and leave the front door open." Mary too talks about "going out and not worrying if the door was locked." All of this they say is gone. Neighbourhoods are now rough and dangerous, kids out of control, drugs, joy riders, theft.

Some of the women are now widowed, their children left home, they are living alone in houses that once burst at the seams with people. They feel unsafe living alone and have alarms and window locks. They would not go out to the pictures anymore because they no longer go out at night. This contrast sharply with the positioning of a sense of safety and comfort in the community.

Annie: The streets were teeming with people for a start. They were safe. I mean the only street crime that went on was robbery of people going home with their wages. But you were perfectly safe on account of it being a Catholic area.

Kay: There was something about it. I don't know what it was.

Pat: Everybody helped one another . . .

Emily: You never heard of anybody. . .

Kay: And you could always share a trouble.

Joanna Bourke (1994) discusses the concept of the working class community through a range of texts, focusing on the construction of community amongst modern socialist historians (Seabrook, 1984 Bulmer& Abrams, 1986) as the neighbourhood which was in turn the class, which in turn represented resistance to capitalism. She also looks to the work of recent historians (eg. Benson, 1989) which discusses the continued existence or

disintegration of 'working class communities.' In all of this, Bourke argues, "never is there any clear analysis of what could possibly constitute a working class community." (138) Bourke then goes on to attempt to offer up a discussion of what might constitute this space. Her analysis is insightful and useful, in its exploration of the fact of spatial immobility versus the articulated desire of the working class to stay in one place² Her exploration of the different senses of belonging and not belonging is also significant - drawing in questions of race and sexuality, as well as other issues of 'outsiderness'- "who at any one time belongs or does not belong to the designated group?" (151)³

I cannot enter into a lengthy discussion about the construction of community in general terms. What I am marking as significant is the place of the nostalgia for a retrospective community in relation to the popularity of the folk musical, particularly *Calamity Jane and Annie Get Your Gun*. I am trying to make some links between this nostalgic reconstruction of a working class community to the construction of pleasure around the images of community offered in the narratives of the films. It is interesting that the women should remember films that are both about what they claim to have had in Liverpool, home, community, togetherness, but in a mythical and idealised American setting.⁴

It is significant that these films should be set in a mythical mid west, for here so much of the frontier ideology, the search for a better life, the staking of your claim, and the building of a homestead should be played out. I also want think about questions of glamour, femininity and community.

From "Calam" to Calamity Jane to Doris Day: Femininity in Transition.

The success of MGM's *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950) was apparently the chief inspiration for Warner's *Calamity Jane*. In *Annie Get Your Gun*, Betty Hutton plays the sharp shooting tomboyish hillbilly who joins Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and promptly falls in love with star attraction, Frank Butler. Love turns into bickering rivalry, however, which is only resolved when, despite the contentious duet, "Anything you can do I can do better," - Annie let's Frank beat her in a shooting contest. In *Calamity Jane* buckskin wearing trigger happy "Calam" is played by Doris Day, who has a feuding romance with Wild Bill Hickock (played by Howard Keel).

Calamity Jane is interesting for my analysis in its setting in a mythical mid west, and the attendant construction of the American Dream that gets played out there - the frontier ideology, the search for a better life, the right to stake your claim on land and the promise of a good future, the building of a homestead. It is significant, too, because Doris Day plays a character, "Calam" whose femininity is in question from the start. Although we sense that she will eventually be transformed into "Doris Day," as a signifier of fresh, clean, pretty, vibrant femininity. "Calam" is undeveloped, rough, she does not talk or dress properly. She

does not know how to act like a lady. She is a woman, who is strong and independent, yet something of an aberration because of her unfamiliarity with glamour. In contrast to her we have the big star who has come into town, Adelaide Adams, who is both sexy and glamorous, and her maid (the narrative's ideal feminine image, pretty, kind and domesticated) Kate.

I wonder how far the interviewees identified with "Calam's" rough femininity. The Liverpool accent, for example, has connotations with roughness, and with not talking properly. Calamity's cabin is said to be "not fit for a dog". Calamity herself says, "what do I know about nice things. I aint never had any." It is possible, therefore, to locate a classed narrative in this film. The interviewees often talk about the state of their own homes, and compare them to the kinds of interiors shown in the musicals. "We had an outside toilet and a steel bath in front of the fire, and we had to share the water." (Marie) "Our house was clean, but we had nothing." (Maria) "I remember a girl down the road, and they had a parlour with lots of lovely frilly cushions. We had nothing like that. We thought her parlour was like a film star's house." (Betty). A huge part of the pleasure in the musicals lay in the space that they opened up to dream about the possibility of having nice things like the Americans had. "

Betty: I think the first thing I learned about America was that they had these lovely things in America, and you thought, God, we don't have anything like that here.

Anne: I remember my father and sister brought me a dress one time, Oh I'd never had such a beautiful dress. She brought it from America, and to me it was a gorgeous dress. She used to bring shoes when she came over, you know bring things over, and they did seem much better than ours.

Ellen: They all had lovely clothes in the musicals, lovely clothes, fridges and nice teeth!

Barbara: The seamen brought us a lot of things. I told you about my green sandals. My other sister, the one who was out with everybody, they used to bring her things home. Even the jars were different, a different shape. It was different, it was modern, it was great.

The belief was that in America it was possible to have nice things. The narrative of this film does not despise Calamity. It makes her different, exciting, extraordinary. In the short term she is extraordinary because she is so rough, ready and tom-boyish. In the long term she becomes extraordinary through her transformation into an elegant femininity. The cabin "not fit for a dog" is given a "woman's touch" with Kate's help. It gets pretty, folksy curtains, painted furniture, edgings on the shelves, fresh flowers, yet it still remains a cabin.

The transformation of her cabin reflects some of the "make your home more beautiful " articles that appeared in *The Liverpool Echo's* women's pages. These were full of practical and cheap ways of "transforming" your home with the addition of decorative elements. Many of the women it must be remembered were living with parents before and after they were married. There was a severe housing shortage in Liverpool after the war because of the bombing, and it carried on throughout the 50's. It was very rare to get married and to move into your own home. The appeal, therefore, of a place of your own to transform was enormous. The simple acts of transformation on Calamity's dirty cabin, executed with a bit of know how and hard work were even more appealing.

Calamity herself, in an effort to win over Wild Bill becomes Doris Day. Off go the buckskin clothes, on goes the corset, the flowing skirt and the pretty blouse. Wild Bill says of the new Calamity, "it looks like Calamity's been holding hidden armoury on us." Where in post war discourses on fashion and glamour, or indeed in British cinema would it have been possible for working class women to see themselves undergo such a transformation, and to see a character, who whilst being chastised for her lack of glamour and refinement was not pathologised or punished for it. *Calamity Jane* also makes a place for working class women to dream of having nice things, for themselves and their home. Carolyn Steedman (1986) talks about her working class mother in the 50's. And her "rejection of the politics of solidarity and communality," which according to Steedman had everything to do "with its failure to embody her desire for nice things." (13).

It is possible to see how real life in Liverpool in the 50's with its feeling of community, the place of singing in working class women's lives, and their desires for material things could have been transposed onto this mythical image of the wild west, with its transformed femininity, and interiors. What I am trying to show in this reading is that the location of viewing positions for working class women were complex. Their points of identification were multiple, and also geographically historically and socially specific. On one level they can indeed be read as buying into the narratives need to tame and domesticate an aberrant femininity. This would ignore the dimension of class which can be read into Calamity's character, and the absence in British cinema of images of working class women who were glamorous, beautiful, domesticated and desiring of material things.

Nelly Forbush and the Negotiation of Responsibility

I want to look now at *South Pacific*(1958) which is an interesting and difficult film to analyse in the context of the interviews. It was first shown in Liverpool on Boxing Day, 1958. What puzzled and fascinated me about why this film should be mentioned so often is that by 1958, all of the women who got married (apart from Ellen and Carol) were married, and had told me that their trips to the cinema had virtually diminished, because of home and family commitments.

May: Well I got married very young and had two children by the time I was 22 .
. so erm, I didn't get out much in the 50's.

Betty: Once I reached twenty, and was having children, married and having children. You just didn't go then, but all the musicals had finished then.

Pauline: From 1956 I didn't go to the pictures really. Keith was born in 1956. After that I didn't go to the pictures.

Vera: When I had the children I never, my husband didn't go. I don't go to the pictures much now. I watch videos.

Joanne: Did your relationship to the pictures change when you got married?

Kay: Ah, we couldn't go Joanne

Pat: We couldn't go as much could we? Someone would come in and say, there's a marvellous picture on at The Savoy or The Hippodrome, go and see it, but you had to have someone to mind the kids.

There are some interesting issues to be addressed around how and why they remember this musical if, by the time it was shown they had stopped going to the pictures. Either they made a special effort to see this, which I know that some of them did, because it was the first time that a Todd A-O picture had been shown, or it is a film that they have seen much later than the 50's on television. If this is the case, then the relationship of the narrative of *South Pacific* to the direction that their lives took after the 50's in terms of marriage and children, and the relationship of this to their dreams about the direction in which their lives would go before marriage and children is very interesting.

Only two of the interviewees (May and Maria) identify in any kind of detail why they enjoyed *South Pacific*:

May: It's my fave rave of all time, *South Pacific* because I love Mitzi Gaynor. Poor old Mitzi never did anything after that. She was Nellie Forbush in that. I thought it was one of the most romantic pictures I've ever seen, I really did. I loved the feel of it, I really did. I can't see enough of it. I thought *South Pacific* was really sentimental, and it had a very tender feel about it because he couldn't tell her about his children. When he tells her about the two of them, and she leaves him, and they come back together again, it still gets me. I love that film.

Maria: Now I could identify with an army situation on a tropical island, where they were in the South Pacific, having you know been fighting the Japanese, but that came over you know as an exciting thing. I mean when they showed a film here, it was, you, know. I mean our soldiers were better as fighters than the Americans, but when they came over I'd rather watch the people in the South Pacific, and their kind of war than the kind of war that the British were telling me to watch - you know - a film like *Ice Cold in Alex*, right, that was John Mills, but if I had the chance too go and see *South Pacific*, it would be the winner. If I was going to spend my money. I'd go and see *South Pacific*.

South Pacific constructs the South Pacific as a lush, dreamlike fantasy space. Along with this it removes American soldiers from their 'natural' habitat, transplanting an imaginary America on the shores of this not quite real island. Whilst there are fascinating and important readings to be made of this film in terms of its construction of American imperialism, and the location of the native Other, in this context I am more interested in the significance of Nelly Forbush's (Mitzi Gaynor's) dilemmas over choosing between an exciting life of travel in the army or settling down with the French plantation owner, Emile de Becque (Rossano Brazzi) to bring up his children, born to a native woman, now dead. I want to think about the ways in which Forbush's dilemma might have played itself out in the interviewees' lives, and how far her choice of marriage and domesticity, instead of a life travelling the world, fits with their choices and/or domestic situations. *South Pacific* endorses marriage and responsibility as the right choice, made more emphatic by its location in preference to a life of travel and little responsibility.

Nellie Forbush is a nurse on the American naval base in the South Pacific, who also provides entertainment, by singing and dancing, for the troops. She is blonde, bright and bubbly - a darling. She meets the brooding Frenchman de Becque, and falls in love with him. Forbush does not know that De Becque has two children by a native woman. De Becque does not tell Forbush about his children for a long time because he is not sure how she will react to their ethnicity. Eventually he has to, when he asks her to marry him. Forbush is shocked at the news and runs from him. She is thrown into crisis not just because of the children's ethnicity, but also because getting married will necessarily (in this narrative) mean leaving the army behind to live on the island and become a wife and mother. It is interesting to see a female character in the musical have to wrestle with this kind of choice. In the song, "A cock eyed optimist," Forbush refers to herself as being, "stuck like a dope with a thing called hope." She looks for the best in situations, always hoping that they will turn out better.

I think that the narrative of this film is hard on women who hope and dream for something different, as referenced in her being stuck like a dope with a thing called hope. The proper

passage of Forbush's life must be to marry and become a mother. We are invited to praise her for taking on black children, and to adopt her patronising attitudes towards them. *South Pacific* possibly provided such a strong point of identification for the interviewees because it turns its attention to the dilemmas of an ageing femininity that has to face limited choices and responsibility (not just those relating to marriage and children.). Forbush has reached a point in her life, a life with choices, where she is compelled to make the right decision. The women in my study too, by 1958 had passed the point of the abandon of young womanhood to meet with the responsibilities of marriage and children. Forbush has to sacrifice, and so did they. What Forbush has to come to terms with is the loss of a certain aspect of herself and her life. The interviewees have had to negotiate this difficult terrain too. Of course Forbush's situation is more glamorous than theirs. She must live on a beautiful island in the South Pacific with a wealthy and dashing Frenchman who has plenty of money. My interviewees were in Liverpool (a place where they say they wanted to be), but with very little money.

I would argue that *South Pacific* is referenced so much because it sits at a transitional point in the women's lives, when questions of age, loss and responsibility were prominent. In terms of the musical *South Pacific* also sits at the close of the mass popularity of the genre. It was also shown at a time when in Liverpool, and nation-wide cinema going was becoming less popular. Cinemas were closing down all over Liverpool by the late 50's, turning into Bingo Halls. It sits, historically, therefore, at the intersection of a complex interplay of losses. Too many changes came together in 1958, that marked the passing of an era of their lives, an era so tied to the cinema, to youth, to the dreams for things and for the future. These are all placed onto the film text in as much as it negotiates loss.

Reading the interview texts.

I now want to go on and look at the interview texts themselves in more detail, to see how the themes of loss, escapism, glamour and America were articulated and defined.

Loss

The focus on loss and its relationship to the analysis of class and gender in this work is what sets it apart from any existing empirical audience research which takes account of questions of class.⁵ Class, loss and the passage through history of an ageing working class femininity become the turning points of every other piece of analysis.

By far the strongest emotional issue that comes out in all of the interviews, in different forms is loss . Loss is there in many of the discussions about America, glamour and escapism. I would go as far as to argue that loss is the primary thread that links all of the stories told. What is being articulated is a loss of youth, of energy, community, an alive and safe Liverpool, the inner city, parents, friends, family, hope, dreams, glamour. What also gets

articulated is some kind of a loss of innocence, something that the development of knowledge and cynicism over time (especially about America) has taken away. I will talk more about the specific relation of loss to America later in the chapter, and in Chapter six, when I deal specifically with the post war discourses around Americanisation.

What I want to avoid is placing these working class women, through a focus on loss, within an existing stereotype that older working class women live emiserated, hopeless, broken lives. This is certainly not the sense that I got in the interviews from most of the women. Rather I want to look at the location of loss as part of the passage of the women's histories. Remembering always involves some kind of loss. What I want to look at in the research are the specific losses attached to remembering Hollywood musicals. This is very different to working towards an interpretation of the whole of their lives as lost or finished. Indeed I got the impression from many of the interviews that the women were very much trying to get the best out of their lives. 7 out of the 17 women were involved in adult education, ranging from GCSE and A level courses to community education projects, and in 2 cases University. (Barbara went to Liverpool University, Ellen began an Open University degree). 4 of the older women were very involved with a pensioner's group, organising outings and performances. 2 of the women were involved in amateur dramatics. 1 woman was a writer, who had had some of her work published in anthologies of Liverpool women poets.

Here is an extract from the group interview with Kay , Emily and Pat:

Kay: There's a poem you know about this old woman in hospital, and the nurse is looking at her and talking to her. This poem is written by the old woman, and she's saying you're looking at me and seeing this little frail old woman, but I can remember . . . and she starts talking about being a girl and a teenager, and getting married and having children and my mind is just the same as it was then, but you're looking at me and thinking you're just an old . . .

Emily: I used to go to a lady in Aiden Road. She was very frail. She had a photo on the wall, and I asked her who it was and she said it was her. Do you know she was gorgeous and I couldn't stop staring at her. She was lovely, honest to God she was.

Kay: I seen in the paper last month that there was a talent competition for pensioners. Oh Joanne! They were pensioners. It's just come to me as you said there were parties and anyone could get up and entertain. What was that man like from Scottie Road who got up and sang? He was an ex docker. Oh God he didn't want the mike. You could just see him in working clothes. They were in their seventies some of them. Joanne all the audience were pensioners,

but not old pensioners. They were full of life! Oh Em you wouldn't know who to pick. The songs they were lovely, took us back years, took us back years!

Both of these women are in their early 70's, and this exchange took place towards the end of the interview. After this they started singing themselves. I include this extract because it highlights both a sense of the loss of youth that comes out in the interviews, and a defiance and tenacity in the face of this. This is not the case in all of the interviews. In the interview with Mary, for example, I experienced a very different relationship to the process of ageing, one tied into the pain and sadness of ill health. Mary could no longer walk, and had had over ten major operations. There was a stoicism so pronounced running through this interview that it was comical at times. Yet this stoicism was deadly serious to Mary and her husband, as it became the means to express their survival of very difficult circumstances.

Mary: We lived in one room didn't we in Black Road. We only had one room. How many kids did we have?

Albert: We had three

Mary: And do you know what, we didn't have a proper sink to get washed in. I used to do the sheets and everything in the floor in the one room. Have a bowl, put the sheets in and then wash them and then put them out on the line. There was no washing machines, we didn't even have a gas ring, we had to cook everything on the fire. I had the three little ones there, and then he took that illness. He used to sit by the side of the fire there, and all his legs would get burnt and he couldn't stand up, I'd have to lift him from there and turn him around. We've come through a lot, but we're no worse off. We're still here. I've had 10 major operations and I'm still here.

Albert: None of them has gone right. She's had her knee done, her bones taken out of her foot. One of her feet is size five, and the other is size seven, but as I say she plods on.

Mary and Albert are not thriving in their old age they are holding on, "plodding on" with their memories of their youth to keep them going, and the love and support of their children. It is interesting to think about the function of the memories around the musicals in relation the women's location of their own ageing, when that location takes the different forms of plodding on, or like Kay and her friends, getting a second wind.

Mary and Albert were both cinema projectionists. Mary, in fact took Albert's job on during the war. There was an underlying resentment that she had to give it back when he came home, although they met on the job.. Mary had some fascinating information on the access of

young women into the cinema industry. She spoke with great pride about mastering the difficult projection machinery. "I saw this little advert in the paper, 'Young Ladies needed to train as cinema projectionists to allow our men to join up.' So I went along to the Rialto for an interview, and he showed us, each one of us, when we went in, how to lace a machine up, and asked us to do it, and he said to me "Oh you're a natural we'll have you." She enjoyed her job very much, and got a great sense of achievement from it.

Mary used the space of the interview ostensibly to talk more about her job than she did about musicals. She did not mention specific films very much, or if she did she used them as a historical marker for other things that were happening in her life, particularly in charting the course of her career in the industry. Every film that she mentions is talked about in terms of what "we" or "they" showed, meaning the cinema. Her particular pleasure in the musicals lies in her achievements within the industry. What is significant is that this was such a short term occupation for her, yet so central to her sense of self. She started work as a projectionist when she was sixteen and a half, and finished when she was nineteen, when she got married.

Mary: I finished at 19 didn't I? I got married at 19 didn't I?

Albert: I think so.

What was never made quite clear in the interview was whether it was marriage that stopped her working or an accident that she had. One of the cruellest ironies in Mary's life is that she was injured very badly whilst carrying a sack of films from the studio offices in the centre of Liverpool to the cinema.

Mary: He was in the army. What happened just before then, he was away overseas and I went down to get the films from Warner Brothers. That was down the back in Camden Street. You'd have to carry this big sack of films on the bus, you'd have to carry them on your back.

Albert: It was a big bag you know, and you'd have to carry the on your shoulder.

Mary: So I just walked in this day and I went right through the floor in Warner Brothers. My leg just went stiff.

Albert: She fell through the floorboard.

Mary: And I went to the hospital. The doctor said he couldn't find anything wrong. I was limping. I couldn't walk. I couldn't bend it anyway. One day I was back up to work back up at the Palladium and I got a tap on the shoulder, and it

was him the doctor from the hospital. He said, 'I've been following you all week.' He said, 'you definitely can't work on that leg'. He said, 'I've been watching you.' He said, 'I don't think that job's any good now.' He said, 'you're a danger to everyone as well as yourself.' So that ended my career, I was 19.

It is a very sad story of the loss of a job, and a sense of achievement. It is a story that also points out the other side of the glamour shown on screen. In order for that to get there it was being carted across Liverpool on the backs of young working class women and men. Mary's whole interview was told through a series of tales of ill health and medical interventions. Hers is a narrative of the loss of good health. I wonder how much this is tied to that initial loss that she talks about. The loss of that wonderful job that she loved.

Mary then, used Musicals as a means to articulate the relationship between youth, good health and achievement, and also to capitulate her into the realm of ill health and nostalgia. She says that she would love to go back into a projection room, "for old times sake. I'd love to go back, but I can't walk up the stairs now. I can't do it now." She goes on to say:

This is all I live for now, the television, because I can't get out like I used to, unless he takes me out. We used to look after the house lights, do everything didn't we. It would be lowered from the ceiling, massive big lights, and we would have to clean them.

Youth in all of the interviews operates as a signifier for energy, possibility, glamour, beauty. All of the women that I have interviewed have lived hard lives, some desperately hard lives. As they look back on their cinema going days they see themselves as young women, often before marriage and children. What is interesting, and this is talked about a lot by the older women is that no matter how they see themselves now, they still feel so close to the memory of themselves as a young carefree woman. In all of the interviews the women remember themselves in this way, despite the fact that they were nearly all doing jobs that were either extremely hard and dirty in factories, or that they didn't enjoy.

There is a complicated process at work between the women's memories of themselves then, and their sense of themselves now, that operates through loss. It is a process that results in the construction of complex subjectivities over time. Emily's reference to the old woman in *Aiden Road* is interesting in this respect, as the woman's beauty, her glamour is immortalised in the photographic image. No matter what she looks like now, it is still there to be seen. I wonder if they remember themselves in this way, through or as frozen images of beauty and glamour. They often talk about themselves in a certain outfit at a dance, or about constructing elaborate hairstyles, copied from the films in the mirror at home. Jackie Stacey (1994) calls this "iconic memory," which is a frozen moment, a pure image. "Iconic

memories are not only produced as memories of the stars, they can also be spectators memories of themselves in such frozen moments." (318):

Kay: I remember Joanne the very first time I wore a scarf. I was with my friend Rose Marr, I was about fifteen or sixteen, we were going to New Brighton, and at that time you are just trying to be fashionable, not much money in your pocket. Anyway she came down to call for me, and I had this piece of material and I said, Rose you can have one as well, and we both put them on, and she had a lot of hair, and she used to have curls like a halo, and it stuck right up like that! But we thought we were marvellous.

Betty: I used to have a big long page boy. It used to be destroyed putting curlers in, they used to be Dinky curlers, made of tin. And you had to get them in (untrans) all the way down. And I used to set the front of my hair with tea, so that I had these two little ducks you know, in front of my hair. Me mam used to go mad, she used to say it was bad for me, you know wetting my hair with tea, and then putting the Dinky curlers in. And you couldn't sleep very well in them. But we put up with anything.

Maria: Another thing we'd do was sort of like copy a beauty spot. I've got a photograph of myself right when I was seventeen, and you used a little pencil to make a little mark on your face like a beauty spot, once again copying film stars you know, and er they did, they made an impression on us, you know.

What is operating is a particular discourse of femininity, a discourse of ageing femininity that weaves itself around the memories of the cinema. To remember the pictures is to remember what it felt like to be young, and to feel the loss of no longer being young. Remembering the pictures becomes another space in which the women have to come to terms with getting older. Obviously this means different things for all of them.

Emily, at 71 had been given the opportunity to live her life to the full after her husband had become too ill to be cared for at home by her, and had been taken into residential care. Interestingly, I found out later, her husband was a musician, and was very involved in the dance hall scene in Liverpool. Even though we were talking about Dance Halls in the interview, Emily never mentioned this. What she did mention, and often, was sex. She talked at length about her contact with the GI's and her negotiation of their sexual advances, about sex (or the lack of it) in the films, and about the advent of the pill. She talked about meeting GI's at dances, but not about her husband who she also met at a dance hall. Again this relates to using the musicals to remember a self before marriage and children.

Emily: I remember a sailor bringing me home from the Rialto once, he had such a baby face, you know so innocent looking. They were worse than our lads for sex weren't they? I lived in Granby Street then, and he come right out with it, Ahhh! (Speaks in an American accent) "Goddam he said, I've got these nylons, and I've got that . . . it was all down , you know, his tunic! He never spoke a word in the dance. I always remember his face. This was in The Rialto. It was a beautiful ballroom that, it's all gone now. Of course it was the Blackout, so when we got outside he began to talk a bit. We lived in Granby Street then and they were very nice houses then, and when he asked me right out! And not in a very nice way either. I went, "Ooer, ay, we're not like that." Goddam he said, I've got nylons, I've got this, I've got that. I never knew he had anything there. Oh ay.

Another loss that gets articulated in the interviews by many of the women is the loss of the inner City. A lot of people in Liverpool moved out of the inner cities after the war ,partly because of the damage caused during the Blitz, and because of the building of new council estates further out. This move is remembered as a terrible loss for a lot of the women - it is the loss of the town. "I cried when we came to live up here, I missed the town so much." (Pat) .Some of them talk about how they still went into town to do all of their socialising, refusing in a way to get involved with their new communities. "Once we moved up here we still went back into Liverpool centre. People found it very difficult actually to make that break. They still returned home to where they had been. They still returned to the inner city part of Liverpool. That was like home to them. It was still home." (Ellen) "I was living up here then, but don't ask me about here, because I don't know nothing about up here because I was always down the other end. I still used to go down the other end of the city, cos I used to go to the dances down there you know, both The Grafton and The Locarno." (Betty) It was seen to be more glamorous to go to the cinemas in town rather than the local ones. They got the big features first, the seats were more expensive, the picture houses posher. Town is remembered as vibrant, exciting. In relation to this, therefore, the deterioration of the inner city is also experienced a painful loss..

In entering into this particular discourse on loss, the interviewees are talking about the deterioration of Liverpool City Centre from the late 60's onwards. So often in the tapes the women talk about how nothing is the same anymore, "there's nothing in town now" seems to sum up a lot of the feelings of the women. What they are saying is that there is nothing in town for them anymore. It must be hard to shop on streets that you remember so differently, which were once an integral part of your social life as a glamorous young women. The deterioration of the city centre often gets articulated through the loss of shops. The women talk about different shops that they used to go to, to get clothes made, shops that sold all the

latest styles, fantastic shoe shops, and the Hollywood hat shop that had a constantly changing window display depending upon the film that was doing the rounds.

The loss of the inner city is a particularly poignant and painful part of Barbara and Annie's life. Barbara says, "it was a richer life then, for all its hardness and difficulties it was a richer life." Of all the women that I interviewed Barbara and her sister Annie were the only two that had been active politically on the Left. What is significant in relation to the political consciousness that Barbara had once embodied was how much more keenly in relation to the failure of this she felt her age, the loss of her dreams and of possibility:

We are only now seeing what it was really like. There's a series on telly at the moment called "The Depression." I say to Annie, I didn't know that. The communes in San Francisco, the sophistication of their organisation. If I had known that I wouldn't have carried on in the 60's and 70's in the way that I did because I would have been too cynical, but we didn't know that, and we started it all up again and where did it get us? Did it get us anywhere?

Barbara at 78 was also the oldest woman that I interviewed. She was remarkable. She had been a teacher, a social worker, and she had attended Liverpool University when she was 65 and gained a degree when she was 68. Barbara felt so much the pain of a separation from what she had been, and the spaces in which she had lived. She did not romanticise the past "it was too bloody hard for that," but she missed the sense of belonging to something. This something was not a political party but a community of people, family. "It was a better way of life... people were more sort of close... you were in touch with people and now that's gone, and I think that's one of the worst things they've ever done." The "they" that Barbara is talking about are the Tories, and the damage that the Conservative government has done to the manufacturing base in the city. She talks about the factory in which Annie had worked for years, closing down in 1984.

When that factory closed down ten years ago, Annie was on the executive of that union, the shop stewards and all the rest of it, the mother of the chapel, and it stopped dead. You got paid off. All our family were scattering, and we bought this house over here. In retrospect it wasn't such a good idea. We suffered a series of really terrible losses. It was very difficult to come to terms with that, very difficult. And then you've got the ageing process which you're not supposed to talk about at all. You've got that to contend with you know. Its very difficult.

What Barbara uses her memories of the musical for is to articulate a sense of belonging and richness against a sense of alienation and the difficult process of ageing. Her sense of

alienation came through education, both in terms of the University's attitude towards this "old" woman with her bags of shopping in lectures, and in the changes in her own language and attitudes that it wrought. As much as she appreciates having gone there, I sensed that in the damage it did her it was not worth the effort.:

Barbara: . . . When you go to the university you are separated out , and that's when you start losing. That's when you start demanding things for yourself. It is different. You do start to get distanced from people. The way we are now it's terrible.

Annie: Us here isolated?

Barbara: No! No! I mean the way we are isolated from people. We are living in a working class ambience, and yet in one sense we are not even part of it. That's what makes it so difficult for us doesn't it really. We have taken our soft middle class attitudes, and yet we are still totally based in our working class thing. It's a funny situation. . . You get them like Eileen Atkins. I could have killed her, they go back and they can't relate to their parents. Oh they were good to me and all that, but they were only little people, and all that sort of thing. I hate that, that's the one thing I hate. Because the one thing you do is you respect your family, because you know what a bloody hard struggle they have had. You don't patronise them because you have got brains or society says that you have got a few more brains. Their skills are tremendous.

Against these feelings of guilt, responsibility and loss, Barbara sets up the idea of a structured community to describe the sense of belonging that she so ties the cinema into. She describes it in this way, "You didn't have to dress up. You could go as you were. You didn't feel like an interloper. It was yours, it was local. You could go there when you liked. The mothers could take the kids." The specific function of the musicals in this inner city community in which life was hard was to offer a particular kind of escape:

Barbara: They were just absolutely magical. You should have seen the house where we lived in Cunningham Street. The worst slum I have ever seen in my life. This is a palace compared to it. To live like that, and then to go into that magical world. How can they despise it? Only them that's got a lot more can despise it.

Do you know what I like? Those Indian films. They are always full of exuberance . I think of those people in India going to the pictures and watching

those beautiful women, and I sometimes relate back to that and think that's what we must have been like watching those beautiful goddesses up on screen.

A lot of the memories around the cinema are attached to parents, to spouses and to friends. Everyone of the women had lost their mothers, most of them their fathers too, husbands, friends also dead. One of the most difficult interviews that I did was with Pauline. The events leading up to it did not help my mood. It was winter, it was dark. I felt very pregnant that day, very tired. I had to get right across the River Mersey from Liverpool, onto the Wirral. It had been a long journey. I got to her house, and she was lovely, offering me all sorts of Christmas goodies and drinks of orange juice. The interview itself, however, at the time felt like a waste of energy. It was quite difficult to get her to speak, and everytime that I pushed her on an issue she asked me if I wanted more food.

Joanne: Do you remember why you like the musicals so much?

Pauline: I don't know. I can't remember. It's just because of the songs and that from it. Perhaps, I don't know, that's mainly what I remember really. Would you like another tea or a coffee?

At another point in the interview:

Joanne: How come they have stayed in your memory?

Pauline: . . . Clifford, there's some mince pies there, maybe she'd like . .

Joanne: I'm all right thanks

Pauline: I'll show him where they are (exits)

What I experienced in the transcribing of this tape was something very different. Overwhelmingly, what Pauline was talking about was loss, and of the few references that she made to films or the cinema generally two of them were to talk about friends who are now dead one from cancer, one from a heart attack:

Pauline: I used to have a close friendship with my cousin Reg, who has since died. On Thursday evening when the others were all working in the shops and that - we had more than one business - I would go to his house, and we used to go - he used to take me to see - I went with him, we walked to Liscard and went to see *Easter Parade*, I always remember that. And we'd walk to the Gaumont to see different films. But, as I say, sadly he died. And that was the Danny

Kaye era, and he was coming to the Empire. We queued up all night to get two tickets, and his sister was very annoyed because it was so good. Shame he died, but we can't go on forever can we?

Where I had felt that she had not talked about anything useful at the time of the interview, turned into an important narrative of loss and death that was very sad. It was as if she was using the pictures as a way of coming to terms with death.

At the time this interview was one of those that I thought was a waste of time. Pauline seemed to be telling me that she didn't really go to the cinema, and that she didn't really like Hollywood musicals. I remember thinking, well why did you answer the ad then? Now, this interview is fascinating, for precisely those reasons. It's a very rich text. Even in this short extract there are some fascinating dynamics. Once again there is the location of pleasure in the musicals outside of marriage, here with her cousin, who she relishes being alone with. Pauline locates her pleasure in music throughout this interview as something that marriage and children made more difficult to sustain.

Pauline: I used to like to sing when I was younger. I can't now of course. But when the boys were little, when we were at the shop, if I ever put a record on, or a tape or anything it'd be really quiet. They didn't like it, so of course I stopped. I'd wait for them to go out and then maybe - I liked to put the music on really loud. I still do. But if my husband - if I'm in by myself, I like Johnny Mathis, I'll put it on really loud and he'll come in and turn it lower and say, "think of the neighbours", which I suppose is right, because the young chap next door has two dogs and we've had rows, a lot of hassle with them barking. He's out all day you see. So . . . would you like a mince pie, or another cup of tea?

Also present in Pauline's interview is the philosophy that you don't let the hard times, or the painful memories get you down. There is an emotional pragmatism present in a lot of the texts, a pragmatism that the memories of the musicals are tied into, and one that is classed. It is the expression of Steedman's notion of "getting by" You get on with it no matter what, you have to. In the 50's the musicals helped the women to get on with their lives, gave them a space to dream and a point of identification for glamour. The memories of their investments and pleasure in the musicals then, becomes for them now a means of negotiating those dreams which never came true (and the dreams that did). They become a space for feeling again the safety and pleasure of a close community, and a place in which to think happy thoughts about people who are now dead

Memories of the musicals as a means of coming to terms with painful memories of death appear quite a few times in the interviews. Ellen talks about sitting by her father's bed as he

was dying, singing him a song from a musical. Barbara talks about the pictures being a final pleasure for her mother as she was dying. Both May and Anne talk about the female movie stars functioning as kind of substitute mothers for them as their own mother's were dead. The movie stars and the discourses around them in the film newspapers educated them into femininity in a way - taught them about fashion and make up when there was no mother or older sister there to do it for them:

May: I used to really like Debbie Reynolds. I thought Debbie was great. I was growing up without a mother reaching puberty, and I remember opening up *The Picturegoer*, and it was Debbie Reynolds telling you how to put a bra on. I'll never forget that, because I was a well endowed kid, and I was the eldest, and I had no female cousins or anyone, because, well that's another story. I remember reading, and I went and bought this same bra. It went right around your back, crossed your back and fastened on the rear with two buttons. When Elizabeth Taylor pinched Debbie's husband I was mortified, I really was, but Debbie was always perfect, without being over glamorous..

Glamour

Another theme that has come out of the interviews is that the films offered glamour where glamour would otherwise not be found. Rather, the films offered a particular version of glamour that was so appealing because it was so un-British. Jackie Stacey (1994) argues that, "American glamour played a particularly significant role in the changing constructions of British femininity." (112). Stacey references Hebdige (1988) who argues that the appeal of certain imported American goods can be read as an expression of the working classes discontent with 'traditional British values.' Certain American goods were desired because of their streamlined and glamorous image. Working class consumers were expressing a taste for things American, and in the process of embracing 'Americanness', rejecting dominant British values of what accounted for good taste. I will talk about the specific relation of glamour (and of escapism) to Americanisation in the particular context of the women's lives in Liverpool in Chapter Five. For the moment I want to mark some of the different ways in which the function of glamour is defined in the interviews. .

Glamour is talked about by Barbara as "a life saver." She says, "all that glamour up there. The pressures of life would have been too much without that escape. People laugh at the dream factory now, but it was an out." I want to say two things about Barbara's definition of the function of glamour as a lifesaver. Firstly glamour is intimately linked, as it is in many of the interviews to escapism, but I do not want to talk about that relationship in detail here. I will talk about it in the next section. What I do want to discuss is the expectation to find these kinds of statements in research of this nature. It should come as no surprise that glamour played such a key role in the pleasure around the musical. Jackie Stacey talks in some

detail about glamour as an important part of the analysis of women's relationships to female stars generally. (See Gledhill, 1991) Where my work differs from this is in its specific focus on the question of class and the appeal of glamorous images amongst one group of women. I think that the women's choice of American glamour exceeds the analysis that Hebdige is able to offer, as "an expression of discontent," and moves into a realm that has to be more historically, culturally and socially specific. What was the location of the working class in post-war discourses around fashion and glamour? How does this tie into wider political discourses about the proper place of the working class consumer.?

Glamour in the interviews is positioned as the opposition to what is ordinary, and ordinary was what these women were trying not to be. What space was there in post war political and social discourses for working class women to be extraordinary? In the musicals it was so easy to imagine something (somewhere else) out of the ordinary. This becomes extremely poignant when the women are talking about work.

Maria: They worked in you know a record shop or something. They didn't do the kinds of jobs we had to do in factories. I worked in most factories in Liverpool. The jobs that the films stars had in the films was nothing to do with the way that I had to or your parents had to earn their living. These were glamorous people living in a glamorous world, you see. If they went out for a job, like Debbie Reynolds, she'd go after a shopgirls job, but she got to wear about 30 different outfits in that film, that was the difference between Britain and America. Those girls had 30 different outfits in one film. In Britain you know you used the same skirt only added something to it, such as a blouse, or you wore a different coloured top with that skirt that you had on last week. You know here it was always a tighten your belt syndrome. It's always been the same - tighten your belt, never give happiness - so to see big movie stars.

The women talk about how they wanted to look and feel special, and the musicals gave them a means to feel this. Peggy says, "it was something that made you feel sparkly watching." Through the copying and negotiation of clothes and hairstyles it was possible to achieve the look - a special look:

Carol: I think it's the glamour really. I think that's what's gone out of the films today. They are trying to be ordinary. They were different for us. They were really special. Everyone was pretty and everyone had lovely clothes. The houses were always lovely. These days when they make a musical they are always swearing, and they wear ordinary clothes. There's nothing fantastic really. I mean now and again I look at Come Dancing because they have stuck

to the glamour, they've kept the glamour. These days I don't think that the films have got any glamour in them. That's what I want, the untouchable type of thing, what you couldn't get. These days I think everything is too easy. They don't play to glamour now, everything is just sensationalism. They can't just make a film now. As I say (quietly to herself) it's gone.

What glamour is also being linked to in what Carol is saying, is to loss. Glamour was their pursuit when they were young. It signified possibility, being extra-ordinary. What is interesting about the function of glamour in the interviews is its location on two different levels. There is the other worldliness of the glamour on screen, and its negotiation and reconstruction on the ground. Many of the women talk about what they had to do in order to achieve glamour. Knowing a good seamstress seems to have been the key:

Maria: I was fortunate enough to have an auntie, my auntie Vera, and she was great with a needle and thread, she could make anything. And um she could make a straight skirt for you, with a split up the back you know. I mean we're talking class here.

Carol: My mum had some beautiful clothes she really did. She used to make me nice clothes, and they wouldn't ever look made. Everyone would go where did you get that from? Because it would look a little bit exclusive you know. But the ordinary public, those clothes weren't available for them. You couldn't go to the shop and buy any. You probably could in London or somewhere like that, but not in Liverpool.

Betty: You always wanted to go that one better than someone else. Billy Fletcher used to bring shoes home from sea for me, because you couldn't get them here. And he'd bring wedged heels home for me. We'd get our Tommy to bring material home, and me dad would get material, and me dad's friend's wife was a dressmaker, and she used to make clothes for me.

A lot of fabric from America was brought into Liverpool by the merchant seamen. "We'd always hear of someone who had material that had been brought home and they were selling it." The women copied the styles that they saw on the screen, getting dressmakers to copy designs or alter patterns. Nylons, which were incredibly expensive and hard to get hold of, were invisibly mended in little shops in town.

Fashion was pursued by young women with extravagance and energy. Angela Partington (1990) elaborates how the tastes and preferences of working class women in the 50's neither coincided nor came into 'symmetrical conflict with those of the professionals who aspired to socialise them, they were just different. Working class women were targeted to look in

particular ways, and to take particular pleasures. Partington argues, "the promotions of the latest fashions were accompanied by advice and instruction which stressed the rules and regulation of 'good taste'. Glamour was acceptable in its place, as a pleasing contrast to the rule of restraint." (106). As consumers of fashion goods working class women were being educated in the skills of 'good taste', restraint, practicality etc. In much the same way as they were being trained as home managers in order to consume domestic goods properly. Partington talks about working class women's rejection of this advice (at least before marriage) as the "improper" appropriation of fashion goods. Certainly the *Liverpool Echo* was full of fashion articles which tell women basically how to make thrifty versions of top fashions - reversible skirts, removable sleeves, accessories to make an outfit work in different ways. .

What fascinated and puzzled me in relation to glamour and Britain was that in all of the interviews not one woman mentioned the Coronation. It seems strange that in talking about Britain's lack of and need for glamour, the Coronation is not remembered by any of the women as being an injection of glamour and extravagance. It is just not mentioned at all. I went back through *The Liverpool Echo* in the Coronation Year to look at the nature of the coverage. It was huge, with special supplements running for weeks. There was reporting of the street parties, and photographs of the city centre decked out. There was fashion and beauty Coronation advice along the lines of "be a Queen for a day." The cinemas in town also ran the Coronation ceremony for many weeks afterwards.

I think that the reason the Coronation is not mentioned is because it was so British, and was a display of glamour in a social system in which the women knew their place as ordinary. America is often talked about as something untouchable. For my interviewees this kind of "Britishness" was far more untouchable, and unappealing. I will talk later about part of the appeal of the American Dream lying in the fact that the women did not know much about America socially, nor, therefore, about their place in it. The same could not be said for Britain. Seeing the Coronation could only have only sought to highlight their extreme ordinariness in the social system of which the Coronation was such a part.

The question of talent in the musicals also relates to the desire to be extraordinary . It is the admiration of the talent of people who can sing and dance so well that gets articulated. I wonder how far the admiration of talent comes to signify something else, something larger to do with questions of achievement, opportunity and success? Marie says, "it was what you couldn't achieve yourself." In a number of interviews the question of dancing lessons has come up. A number of the women longed for dancing lessons but could not afford to be sent. This lack of access to a middle class girl's right of passage speaks of a working class girls envy and desire. Lily and Anne talk with longing about their desperate desire to go to dancing lessons, and about how there was one girl in the street who could afford to be sent

on a Saturday morning. She used to come back and teach the rest of the street the moves she had learned. The admiration of talent is also an envy for the opportunity to show that you could be extraordinary. This is measured against the women's perceived ordinariness of their lives then and now. Often this is tied into discourses of dreaming about America. Marie and May in particular talk about the amount of talent in America, and the fact that in America it was possible to be extraordinary. "I was never theatrical at all. I could never dance or anything like that, but while I was looking at movies, of course you did a swap sort of thing, and thought, God I'd love to be doing that you know." (May) "When you looked at that amazing talent on the screen, and we couldn't make a musical like that in this country, it was like looking at what you couldn't achieve yourself." (Marie)

Escapism

Another major theme in relation to the Musicals is that of escapism. I came to realise as the work progressed that this is one of the most taken for granted and under theorised aspects of popular culture. Jackie Stacey (1994) has written. "It is a truism to assert that escapism is one of the most important pleasures of Hollywood cinema. But what exactly is meant by escapism?" (90). She argues that most studies fail to move beyond the level of generalisation in their analysis of the consumption of popular cultural forms. Stacey's work then, is an intervention into generalisation, through an analysis of what is at stake in her respondent's consumption of female film stars in Britain in the 40's and 50's. Stacey also considers the material importance of what the women are escaping from, in terms of the drabness of post-war Britain, and into, in terms of the material surroundings of the cinema.

Everything written in this thesis in terms of the materiality of the women's lives, provides an answer to the question what was at stake in their consumption of Hollywood musicals. Within the canon of cultural studies, and the relationship of working class women to popular culture, the interviews at times provide the kinds of answers to the question of why the musicals were popular that would be expected in a study of women and the film musical. It is therefore no surprise that the women say things like "I know lots of things were glossed over, but at least you came out feeling better." (May) "They were pure escapism in hard but happy lives." (Maria) "They just completely took you out of yourself." (Ellen) "They took you over." (Barbara) Time and time again it is said in the tapes that they were "just pure escapism." The notion of escapism is such a given in any study of women and the popular, it has achieved such a currency in cultural studies discourses that it has lost its specificity.

On the one hand these readings are what's expected, they are to use Janet Thumin's (1995) term, "common knowledge" - so too is the equation of film musicals with escapism. But, as Thumin goes on to argue, "the term common knowledge implies things so well known that they don't have to be spoken, or written about, yet the assertion that knowledge is common frequently conceals a claim for the dominance of one set of interests over another." (62).

For a time I was trying to establish an ideological relationship between the interviewees and escapism that functioned within the resistance paradigm. I was looking through the interviews for those points at which the women said yes it was escapism, but we did not really believe what we were seeing. At that time I was not able to move beyond the resistance paradigm. I wanted a basis for arguing that the ideologies in which these women might be positioned as duped were limiting because these women obviously were not duped.

I have since come to realise that this approach was not going far enough. There is a different way to read the "what's expected," in the interviews in terms of escapism. There are statements, which, on the one hand, could be read as entirely duped. "I thought everyone in America was beautiful."(May) "I thought they all lived in white houses with little picket fences."(Marie) "They all had their own bedrooms with big satin bedspreads."(Maria) There are statements like the following which can be read as entirely duped:

Maria: I mean you did actually think deep down that if you met a handsome boy you'd live in a house, I mean the houses were always gorgeous, I must say, you know with the front door and there was always a maid in the kitchen, wasn't there and clothes were laid on the bed, do you know what I mean? Yet I mean you never sort of thought, well where did they get the money to live like that? (Laughs) did you? You know I mean we had an outside loo, and no bathroom, but we just thought Hollywood and America, I mean I know I believe there's a sort of a stereotype person who thinks well everybody lives like that in America, which of course they didn't, but everyone thought America you know they all live like with these big detached houses where you go in the front door and there's this smacking big staircase that Doris Day would come down in a marvellous ballgown, and a man in a tuxedo waiting for her with a rose, oh it was lovely.

What I am saying is that these readings can also point the way to an articulation of a more complex definition of escapism, one that operates on the specificity's of a register of individual need, and also on the development of the women's consciousness of themselves, their own situation and their relationship to popular culture and ideology over time. How has knowledge acquired since the 50's affected their interpretation of the function of the musicals as escape?

The development of knowledge over time has greatly affected the interviewees relationships to the musicals, and so has affected the women's location of themselves historically as viewers. Overwhelmingly what comes across is that they believed in the fantasy of America articulated in the musicals then, but they do not believe it now. If what is being analysed in

my work cannot be the subjectivity's of working class women in the 50's, but by the very nature of historical research, the women's memories of themselves and their relationship to film musicals in the 50's, then this complicates the notion of escape as it becomes thoroughly historicised, completely bound up in memory, subjectivity, and different registers of knowing. Therefore, I have to look historically at the construction and definition of escape. What escape meant in the 50's is perhaps already lost to me and to them, as it has been changed by the acquisition of new knowledge's and new experiences. I have come to realise that escape in the interviews is already historicised, "I saw" rather than "I see" "I believed" rather than "I believe". For the women who still watch musicals now and lose themselves in them, they are losing themselves in the memory of what it felt like to lose themselves then. "I saw Americans, once again through the eyes of somebody young looking at film stars."(Maria) "Life isn't like that, but you don't know that when you've young."(Marie) Historical escapism has a complex relationship to loss. It also relates very much to the women's gaining of a much wider knowledge of American life and culture through the expansion of television. The knowledge that America is not the land of opportunity, nor the land of dreams has greatly affected their relationship to the films. America has poverty, violence, corruption. This is known now. By and large it was not known then. A lot of the women reference that moment or moments when they discovered that America was not how they had thought. For example, Marie's brother emigrated to America. Her mother went out to visit him there. When she got back the other children were firing questions at her, how did he live, what was his life like? "I always remember, she was very droll and she said, I'll tell you how he lives. He gets up at a quarter past seven every morning, gets in his car and drives to work, comes home at half past five to 6 o'clock eats his tea, sits and watches television, or listens to the radio. That's his exciting life in America."

Something else that comes up specifically in relation to escape which is interesting is that Barbara, May, Peggy and Anne say that is too easy to dismiss the musicals as escape. Rather they argue, they were educational. There seems to be a level at which the musicals widened the horizons of the women, taught them things that they otherwise might not have come to know. For example, May, whose mother was dead learned how to put a bra on from an article on Debbie Reynolds in *The Picturegoer*, Barbara learned about mortgages from *Summer Stock*. All of the women remember the musicals as educating them in fashion and make up. The interviews with Carol and Betty particularly emphasise this.

Related to escapism, there is a degree of debate on realism in the interviews. Marie discusses realism and her dislike of it as depressing, almost as a justification for liking to be entertained with fantasy. She quotes her husband on realistic film and T.V, "no they've got no right to depress me." This is one thread of the debate. The other relates specifically to developments in the genre. May, Lily, Barbara and Vera all talk about the shift in the musicals in the mid 50's, they became more complex and ambitious, "too much into realism."

Related to this is the general dislike that gets expressed in the interviews for British Films at the time. They lacked glamour, they were too classed, too realistic, too drab, they had no star quality, no extravagance, no notion of entertainment, "a Charles Dickens atmosphere.". Not all of the women dismiss the British film industry, and some went to see a mixture of films, but many of them do. Maria says:

I'm not putting England down, but I'm just trying to give the impression of what it was like in the 50's. Everything in the UK was dull. Every, even summer days in the UK we were still expected to have dripping butties and tighten your belts. You were never ever shown in the cinema, you were never shown happiness films. . . for my generation, as far as happiness goes, our happiness definitely came via the USA.

Pam Cook (1985) argues that the unstated inverse of the musicals/Hollywood couplet is realism/British cinema. In my work I have had to deal with both sides of this couplet. It would be impossible for me to deal with the consumption of Hollywood musicals in the 50's without referencing the interviewees' relationship to British Cinema. Most of the women in the interviews rejected British films for a variety of reasons; they weren't glamorous enough, they didn't have stars like the Americans had stars, they were full of middle class people with middle class accents, they were grim, depressing, "not about us." What is being articulated in the rejection of British films is a rejection of something that they see as Britain, and their place in Britain. It fascinates me that they see the musicals as being more about them, when they are so blatantly not about them. Rather the issue is that they can find points of identification for themselves in musicals in a way that they cannot in British films.

What I want to think about here are ways of approaching this relationship of British Cinema to Hollywood musicals in my research. I do not have the time or the space to negotiate in great detail the histories of the importation of American films into Britain. There are many interesting histories of the respective film industries, and these are included in Swann (1987), Docherty. *et al* (1987) and Thumin (1991) This is not, however, the aspect of the relationship that I need to look at. Paul Swann argues, "It is easy to cite figures for cinema audience size and composition, but it is much more difficult to asses the effect of the imaginary world into which people stepped after they passed through the cinema lobby." (36). It is the immersion in this imaginary America that I am interested in, and it' relation to the escape from a not so imaginary Britain. For this I need to look at Britain's construction of itself in the 50's , at the dreams and aspirations of a nation trying to regenerate itself. I need to look at how the working class figured in these dreams , and how they were negotiated on the ground by working class women. Why did Britain disappoint them? Why wasn't it possible for them to have aspirational fantasies in the same way when they located them in Britain? When the

women say that Britain was not capable of making a musical, what is that saying about the musical, Britain, and inevitably about America?⁶

America

I have already gone some way towards explaining the function of the particular narrative of the American dream in the women's lives in talking about glamour and escape, and also loss to a degree. I will talk in more detail about the relationship between their narratives around the image and appeal of America and post-war discourses around Americanisation in Chapter Five. What I want to talk about here is the women's actual contact with G.I's or their knowledge of the myth of the G.I's as the physical manifestation of the American Dream on the streets of Liverpool.

The G.I's were stationed at Burtonwood, a large base in Warrington which was 17 miles from Liverpool. They arrived around 1942. Most of the troops had withdrawn by 1946. The base itself operated as an American supply depot until 1992, when a ceremony in Warrington on May 14th marked its closure. The American's did much of their socialising in Liverpool. In the interviews the G.I's function as carriers of the women's memories of desire, sexuality and dreaming. Three of the women are too young to really remember the G.I's, four of them say that they never found the G.I's appealing, that they were brash and vulgar (which in itself is interesting). For the rest, the G.I's were glorious figures in gorgeous uniforms. If the women seem to be defining glamour as extravagance and something extraordinary then the G.I's were glamour personified.

May: All I wanted Joanne was for the war not too be over so that I could get to America and marry a Yank. That was all I wanted! But I was too young. I thought everybody, every American was like on the movies, you know really glamorous and wore the same styles that they wore on the pictures. Of course they didn't really . . ."

Joanne: Were they nice dreams?

May: Oh yes! I still have a great affection for America. I don't know why but I do?

Interestingly, I asked Peggy if the G.I's were seen as glamorous she had this to say:

Rich, Rich I think that's the word. And full of confidence to a degree which no English boy of their age would have adopted at all. Really not. Which quite got up my nose to be honest. There was no diffidence about them. On masse they

were very brash and in a way treated - perhaps it was just because they were over here, doing things they wouldn't do over there, I don't know. But they were very, it was, what they said went. And they could be very courteous but it was in a sort of condescending manner if you know what I mean.

At either end of the take on the Yanks, glamorous or crude, there is still a degree of trepidation around them. They were different and somehow it seemed a bit frightening. Emily and Pat talk about the sexual threat that the Yanks posed. Their memories, however are also filled with an excitement around the sexual adventure that the Yanks promised, even if you never took them up on it. It wasn't only sexual adventure that they promised, of course. The Yanks offered the dream of something different, a big house, and a fabulous life in America. "I met one once, he was an American sailor, and what he would have done for me. He was married! I said, there's nothing down for you love. He was going to do all kinds. He had a beautiful home in the states." (Pat)

There was a kind of sexual excitement around the Americans. There was also the belief at the time amongst a lot of the women that the Americans did indeed all have beautiful homes in the States and lots of money. There was no reference point for the women to measure the American's tales against in terms of authenticity. Again, this relates to the development of knowledge about America. The women now know that most of these tales were bogus, and that a lot of the soldiers were from very poor families. When they look back, they see themselves as falling for the stories that the GI's told them, but they recognise the context in which they believed them to be true - youth, and a need to believe, and not knowing any different. What struck me throughout all of the interviews, and I found this to be very powerful, was the lack of apology or self deprecation for their immersion in these myths. There is no sense of them seeing themselves as stupid, more that they simply could not have known then what they know now. I also think that the level of the women's investments in the fantasy of America, that came from the musical and from other aspects of their lives meant (and still means) far too much to them for it to be dismissed. This adds power to my argument that they used popular culture as a means of survival. Kay says, "they helped us", Barbara says, "they were a lifesaver," Maria, "they meant so much, they kept you going." It also helps to make a case that they use their memories of their investments in the film musical now as a way of negotiating age, responsibility and the fate of dreams. As Vera says, "It keeps with you you know (laughs) all your life."

In the next chapter I will go on to explore in more detail the particular construction of and interpretation of the American Dream, as it is narrated in the interviews. I will relate this to wider historical debates around Americanisation in Post War Britain, and to contemporary theoretical debates around globalisation and the local. What I am trying to do is to find a theoretical framework in which the women's need for and construction of the American

dream as sustaining might be taken seriously and understood as a strategy of survival, as itself a means of 'getting by.'"

¹ This situation would not have arisen had I sat with the women and watched films with them. However, after the first few interviews, I realised that I wanted to use the interviewees narratives to figure out the ways in which they positioned particular films within their lives. I did not want to pre select certain film texts. In the subsequent research that I may do with this group of women (discussed in the conclusion) where the interpretation of particular texts, as they were positioned in the original interviews would be pursued, watching films with the women would certainly be considered.

² This will have important implications for my work later on when I discuss in more detail the interviewees relationship to a fantasy of America, and the geographic and spatial relationships built up around that fantasy.

³ The interviewees construction of a sensual, safe, tactile community in Liverpool in the 50's conjures up similar images to Terence Davies' *The Long Day Closes* (GB, 1984) in which images of a micro community in Liverpool in the 50's are weaved through a sensual visual tapestry of remembrance and imagination. The 'whiteness' of this narrative weaving is interrupted in the film when a black man, who is lost, calls at the front door of Bud, the central character. The black man is a foreign Other, feared and unknown. The family ('the community') come to the door and say - "ay you, frig off." I am not attributing racism to the interviewees. I am marking the whiteness of the community that they build, in which blackness only ever enters via the older women's discussion of black G.I's. I am also marking the specificity of their experiences of a particular community.

⁴ Certainly in *Calamity Jane*, questions of the place of the native American in the mid west communities gets an airing, but is not dealt with in a critical way. The native American would be the outsider that did not belong in the all singing and dancing romantic exuberance of a transformed femininity within a close knit community that is played out in this film..

⁵ There is a fascinating piece of work by Sandy Brewer (1997), a research student at Goldsmiths College, which, whilst not empirical, has profoundly important implications for the articulation of the relationship between working class women and popular culture in empirical research. Brewer looks at the investments of working class girls in Protestant images of Jesus produced for children. She makes important links between their identification with images of a man suffering, and their experiences of growing up around men who suffered physically through work.. Brewer talks a lot about loss and working class girlhood in her effort to understand the girls possible identification with these images.

⁶ Britain has made film musicals, over 30 of them. What the women seem to be articulating is that British film musicals could not operate as escapism in the same way that the American films could. They did not have the same qualities. This argument also ties into the critically important function of the dream of America, and the knowledge of the reality of Britain as greatly effecting the operation of the popular as escape.

Chapter Five

Seeing Through Happiness: The Americanisation of Liverpool

“We saw Americans through happiness, that’s how we saw Americans. All these Americans were very happy people.” (Maria)

“There exists a reasonable amount of argument and evidence about Americanisation sufficient to generate ideas and interpretations; but the point is how to use it.” (Dominic Strinati, 1992:65)

Dominic Strinati (1992) in his assessment of the literature on that shorthand for a collection of economic, political and social changes, national fears and anxieties that came together as Americanisation, executes an important strategy in attaching a practice to the examination of the historical and theoretical discourses around Americanisation - what questions can they be used to ask? This chapter engages with that practice, seeking to contribute to the understanding of the relationships between class, locality Americanisation and cinema. It will explore aspects of the particular construction of the American Dream in Liverpool in the 50's. Making detailed use of data from the interviews, I will examine the construction of a geographically and historically specific fantasy of “America.” What I want to explore are the ways in which the discourses articulated around America in the interviews can be used to (re) present the relationship between the working class, pleasure and American popular culture in Post-war Britain, and thus potentially expand the terms of the available critical debates around:

- The relationship between the masses, pleasure and fears of undue American influence in Britain in the 50's
- An understanding of the meanings of the film musical
- The theorisation of the relationships between class, locality, gender, memory and film

Liverpool - a Special Case?

In using the interviews to investigate the particularities of the construction of an American dream in Liverpool and the ways in which Americanisation (as a process which happens to people) was (and continues to be) lived on the ground, it is important to specify the ‘specialness’ of Liverpool as a case. There are a number of factors - geographical, historical and political which I would argue mark Liverpool out as having a significantly important relationship to the debates around Americanisation in the 50's.

Liverpool's position as a port with an important trading relationship with America in the post-war years opened the city up to a trafficking in imported American goods. Large numbers of working class men were merchant seamen, who travelled frequently to America. The interviewees talk in particular about requesting magazines, fabric, shoes and nylons from relatives who went away to sea. Somehow the trading relationship and the passage of men and goods brought America closer to Liverpool. The location of the port historically as a stopping off point for immigration to America also forges a special relationship between Liverpool and the imagining of America as the land of plenty. It is significant in the interviews how often the language of this mythology of America gets re-articulated in statements like "Oh the streets were paved with gold over there." (Annie) "America was the promised land." (Anne).

The ethnicity of most of the interviewees as second or third generation Irish immigrants is also significant. In the waves of mass emigration from Ireland it was America that was imagined as the land of hope - as the place of escape. In the history of that emigration, Liverpool was second best. It was the place where the Irish came to either on their way to America (and never managed to leave), or it was the place that they came to if they could not afford to make it to America. It is possible to tentatively argue that the women were already positioned within a narrative of longing and loss in relation to America, one that got retold in their own immigrant histories. So many of the interviewees had stories of family members who had 'made it' to America and who had a great life. Considering Liverpool as an Irish Diaspora brings to bear important questions about the place of the City in the passage to America as escape. Liverpool's role in the 18th and 19th century? In the passage of slaves to America is also stamped on to the city's history. An account of this complex and detailed history is beyond the scope of this thesis¹, nevertheless it is important to mark the role of this history, and Liverpool's implication in it as further forging a connection to America as an imagined New World.

The particularities of Liverpool's history with America make the analysis of the negotiation of Americanisation there so interesting, as a connectedness was already established historically through the history of trading (both in people and goods), immigration and the impact of the GI's. Thus, the analysis of the impact of Americanisation is being analysed at a local level, where the local is positioned, not as the *reification* of the concrete, the lived (the other extreme of a vertical relation of difference extending all the way to the abstract or the general), but in Lawrence Grossberg's (1997) terms as an *articulation* of the local and the specific, in which the local is always a comparative term, describing the different articulations at different places within a structuring of space. Thus the local and the global (here specifically Americanisation) are mutually constitutive. Grossberg is referencing Stuart Hall's (1986) definition of the work involved in constructing an articulation:

An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what conditions can a connection be forged or made? So the so called unity of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be re-articulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The unity which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social force which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily be connected. (53)

In this research, to position the local as an articulation is to attempt to move some distance from the reification of the local as the representation of real life, of authenticity, and to attempt to shift into a terrain in which, as Grossberg argues, the relationship of people to the places they belong to (and here the places they imagine their way to) are thought of as part of a larger spatial economy within which the local is made and experienced.

Americanisation as a Structure of Feeling

I am analysing the construction of the American Dream within the specific context of Liverpool² and its conjunctural relationship to Britain in the 1950's within Raymond Williams' exploration of the operation of a structure of feeling as "the culture of a period." The structure of feeling in Williams' terms designates the relations that articulate at any moment in history - the material life, the social organisation, and the dominant ideas- in other words the determination of the structure. It also, critically, acts to articulate 'something else', *how the structure feels*. Thus experience (and in the terms of this research, lived experience) becomes central to the tracing of the determination and operation of a structure of feeling. The movement of experience between lives and texts (here the film musicals in the interviews) at both an ontological and epistemological level impels an analysis of the conditions of possibility of a particular form of fantasy (here, both the Musical and the American Dream), and critically the *local need for that form*, within the determination and operation of a structure of feeling. To analyse Americanisation in post-war Britain as the local articulation of a structure of feeling, is to position Americanisation as a process that is complexly determined by material, social and ideological relations, and experienced, needed (felt) by actual social subjects. What I am adding to this is Skeggs' (1997) argument (discussed in Chapter One) that class as a question must not be retreated from because to do so is to ignore the negotiation of structures of inequality and deprivation by those who live with/in them. Thus, the location of Americanisation as a structure of feeling in this research, will be contingent, not only on a consideration of the larger social, political and ideological Post-war context in which fears, anxieties and fantasies of America functioned, but also on the articulation of the negotiation of structures of deprivation and inequality in the interviews. Together these can form the basis for the analysis of Americanisation as structure of feeling.³ What I shall be exploring are the ways in which a focus on the empirical analysis of the specific historical conditions of possibility for Americanisation as a structure of feeling at the level of the local (as an articulation) can develop our positioning of the relationships between

class, ideology and the popular, and thus expand our understanding of what films (film musicals) can be used to talk about? "What kind of American Dream did the film musical manifest for each of the women. How and why was it used as a point of escape?" The specificity of the women's lives - their emotional needs - needs which complexly link to the articulated historical, economic, political determinations of the structure are central to the analysis.

If Americanisation (as a process) is something which happens to people and to places, and the structure of feeling is the structure (at any given time) in which we live, which gives rise to 'us', then the analysis of Americanisation as the articulation of a structure of feeling must centrally involve thinking about lived experience as itself an articulation within a structure of feeling. Elspeth Probyn (1993) argues that "Williams' concept of the structure of feeling expresses the richness of what it means to work from within the felt facticity of material social being." (5). A tangible 'beingness', an ontological register is thus essential to the project. However, she later goes on to argue, "theorised within a theory of articulation, the experiential may be prised from its commonsensical location in 'belongingness'." (29) A critical use of the term, as both an ontological and epistemological category may come to emphasise the historical conditions involved in the speaking of experience.

I shall be keeping central the argument that post-war debates around Americanisation were also debates about the proper role of popular culture (especially) Hollywood Cinema in the lives of the working class, and were, therefore, also debates in which the questions (and anxieties) of the masses and their pleasures were a pre-occupation. Within the Americanisation debate, larger political issues attached to the function and status of the post-war working class, issues relating to newly acquired consumer power, affluence, consensus and embourgeoisment, are also contingent. Using the interviews, and the women's positioning of themselves within post-war mythologies of consensus, affluence and consumer power, I want to question the partiality of these issues, relating them back then to the premises/assumptions upon which fears of undue American influence, and its relationship to the masses were grounded, and thus to a re-evaluation of the analysis of the need for, and investment in Hollywood cinema and the American Dream in lives that are hard.

Americanisation and the Masses.

Bigsby (1975), Strinati (1992) and Chambers (1986) argue that British fears of the undue influence of American Popular culture on the vulnerable sections of British society were not just a post-war phenomenon, but can be traced back through advertising, cinema, popular music, and dance entertainment to the late 19th century, and the London Music Hall. However, it was the particular convergence of social, political and economic changes in the post-war period, together with a crisis around the perception of a proper working class consciousness, and British identity that brought Americanisation into the post-war lexicon.

Ian Chambers argues, it is important to remember that:

For all the resentment that surrounded the trans global spread of Coca-Cola, chewing gum and Hollywood, British reactions were often steeped in a far older bile than simply Anti-Americanism. It was the novel and unsolicited ingression of new tastes coming from below, and their evident powers to challenge and redraw some of the traditional maps of cultural habits that generated many an acid and apprehensive rebuttal. (4).

The debates around Americanisation were debates around mass culture and perceived changes in patterns of domestic consumption. They were also debates lodged in that point of tension between tradition and democracy, governed by the negative consensus of cultural conservatism, with its fear and deep suspicion of working class popular pleasures. In as much as Americanisation concerned a cultural process relating to the dissipation of mass culture, it was a debate which was centrally about the masses, and their relationship to ideology. As Strinati (1992) argues, "at stake was a long standing set of concerns about art and the proper role of culture in the lives of the masses, the people, the working class." (47).

Paul Swann (1987) has argued that, "the post-war discussion of Americanisation often centred on the American motion picture. The years after the war were the last decade when film was the dominant mass medium and entertainment form in Britain and the US." (1). Swann goes on to argue that it is hard to exaggerate the importance of Britain as a market for Hollywood. For nearly 40 years Britain was Hollywood's biggest export market. Indeed it would be impossible to separate Hollywood cinema from the discussion of Americanisation. Hollywood was blamed as the major carrier of American ideology and values. It was seen to be eroding traditional British working class culture. Ironically, in the 50's, it was cinema going (whether to Hollywood movies or not) that became such an integral part of Britain's organically based popular culture, binding communities together.

In the exploration of American films, guardians of Britain's moral worth argued that the most base elements of Americanisation: commercial nexus and profit motive, efficiency and standardisation, and immaturity were also being brought ashore. This was mass culture at its worst, and it was attacking British native folk culture, inserting what Leavis (1969) called "a form of substitute living." (21). In as much as American cinema cannot be separated from the debates on Americanisation, neither (and relatedly) can the question of class. In Post-war Britain, cinema was a medium for predominantly working class audiences. Part of the anxiety around Americanisation was rooted in fears around the masses and their vulnerability to the messages of mass American culture through Hollywood Cinema. Karl Meyer, in 1968, wrote that "the British lower classes were the first to be openly Americanised." (Swann, 1987:21). Indeed it has often been argued that Americanisation was progressive in the sense that it began with the working classes and percolated up through the social hierarchy. But what did it mean to become Americanised? For some it meant the adoption of American

dress, habits, modes of speech and behaviour - a general preference for things American. More threatening than this perhaps, was the perceived belief that to become Americanised was to abandon allegiance to Britain.

Herbert Gans (1959) in a study focusing upon British consumption of American film and television programmes in the 1950's argued that many working class people had become alienated from traditional British values partially as a consequence of the example of American popular culture which they saw in American feature films. According to Gans' research, the state of Britain in the post-war years made the working class very susceptible to the aspiration fantasies of the classless, regionless society they saw at the cinema. For Gans, American films presented a model for upward social mobility which was very powerful and seductive.

This is an argument that I discussed in Chapter Four in relation to the women's identification with the folk musical. What is interesting and typical about Gans' "findings" is the location of the working class as vulnerable and susceptible. Americanisation is something that is done to the working class. It takes them over. It is a limiting argument that ends, rather than begins at the point of consumption. A more interesting set of questions would involve thinking about what people did with the messages they received from American popular culture, and why they might need them. On this agenda the questions of subjectivity and pleasure are central. Valerie Walkerdine (1990, 1992, 1996) has spoken of the relationship between the fantasies and fears of the masses on the Left, and their constitution as interpellated subjects for ideology, "There has long been, and I want so much to talk about it, a sense of the relation between the masses, the working class, the popular, mass consumption, communication, media as bad, bad, bad. The masses are seen as bad, and the markets and the media make them even worse."(1992: 4).

What makes this relationship so interesting in the 50's is the circulation of the myth of affluence and consensus, and the embourgeoisment thesis. The fantasy of the working class, according to Walkerdine, was in a particular state of crisis in the 50's:

The working class increasingly came to be identified as being totally formed in ideologies, in mass media, trapped in a Hollywood which played upon their most infantile fantasies, constructing a patriarchal fetishisation of women: a sexist and infantilised working class, the very working class constructed in the fantasy of the New Left. (ibid.).

Access to American culture through advertising, cinema and music was seen to be orchestrating for the working class a spectacle of consumerism. As I argued in Chapter One, the post-war British working class was perceived as a class "with more money than sense." "More money than is good for it" on the one hand, and on the other, a working class made more equal in the promises and prospects of post-war Britain. At the root of either side

of this equation is a vision of a working class that is vulnerable, easily manipulated and easily pleased. The working class swallowed the American Dream whole and regurgitated it in its consumption, its pleasures and its dreams. It was unpatriotic, it was irresponsible. What the issue seems to have come down to on both the Left and the Right was the fact that the working class could not see, or did not care that they were being sold an empty promise in the image of American democracy, abundance and freedom.

I have already argued around the mythological status of the myth of affluence in terms of its application to my interviewees. Using my arguments, therefore, we can say that the parallel between affluence and Americanisation used so often in the 50's to explain the link between Americanisation and changing patterns in working class consumption does not hold in specific contexts. At the very least it is made much more complicated by the complexities of the relationships of my interviewees to affluence in Britain.

Americanisation amongst all persuasions of cultural critics was seen to be eroding the traditional British working class. The working class were becoming one great American styled homogeneous mass. This view has been counterposed. Dick Hebdige (1979) argues that early fears about the homogenising influence of American popular culture were unfounded. Hebdige, with his focus on white working class youth goes on to look at the ways in which working class youth negotiated and reassembled American style and culture Chambers (1986) argues that Americanisation did not cancel out the traditional urban working class culture, rather, together with the massive expansion of internal markets and the accompanied growth in the production of consumer goods, created a sharply altered economic and social climate at home in which imitations of American postures took place. In other words the working class was not eroded, but its insularity prised open. It was re-formed as a different kind of urban culture. "A less precise, more amorphous popular urban culture was relentlessly taking root. Or, as the teenage male hero of Colin MacInnes's *Absolute Beginners* put it: it was uncool to be anti-American." (7).

Jerry White (1986) argues that working class youths' identification with Hollywood masculinity functioned as a means of consolidating working class youth. It helped them come together as heroes rather than bystanders, gave them a means to come together as teenagers, rather than as young men. White also argues:

The adopted American accents, dress styles and mannerisms, which many observers bemoaned as slavish emulation of a new trash culture can be interpreted quite differently. This borrowed style was self conscious identification with a more democratic discourse than anything British society (including its Labour movement) had to offer them (166).

What all of these counterposing positions have in common is rooting the strength of the working class in their (male) gender, and in their negotiation of American ideologies as a

form of resistance. They are at pains to show that the male working class was not taken over by American images, that American images were somehow made British by the working class. As relevant and pertinent as some of these ideas may be, they throw us once again into that need to see the working class as not duped but resisting and resistant.

I would suggest that the best line of inquiry is not to measure the resistance of the working class to American ideology. What has to be reinserted into the equation is the question of pleasure. Why did the interviewees find the images of America constructed around the film musicals so pleasurable? In asking this question, the issue of whether or not the interviewees resisted the ideological manifestation of 'America' is not of paramount importance. What is important is the functioning of the fantasy as sustaining within a complexly determined structure of feeling. To work at this level of the structure - the empirical exploration of the lived experience of the structure - is one analytical option within a range of possibilities. I am interested in exploring 'the felt facticity of material social being' at the level of the structure, and what this might offer to our understanding of class and gender in relation to the figuration of cinema in the women's fantasies, aspirations and constructions of self.

Americanisation, Pleasure and the Masses.

The question of pleasure in cultural studies is now a deeply political one, in terms of thinking about the relationship between subjectivity and the popular. Duncan Webster (1988) has argued that "socialism, that speaks so often of needs, desires and aspirations must also come to terms with pleasures and desires." (174). Webster talks about the British Left's failure to treat pleasure as a political issue, or to take pleasure seriously. Instead it has seen its role as finding more radical ways to fulfil pleasure. Webster is drawing this argument from Judith Williamson (1986). I would argue that he over simplifies what Williamson is trying to say. Webster also fails to bring the question of class centrally to bear upon the debate, a debate which is after all about a profound distrust of working class pleasure. It is not so much that the Left have not come to terms with pleasure. The question of pleasure is very much there, but on the Left's terms. There are proper pleasures, and there are improper pleasures. The issue is that the working class are perceived as not being able to tell the difference.

Ien Ang (1989) in her research on audiences for *Dallas* makes an insightful argument about the relationship between audiences, pleasure and Americanisation. She maintains that :

. . . the somewhat rueful realisation that non-American peoples have a disturbing susceptibility to American media products. [As a] 'disturbance' probably looms only in the ivory towers of the policy makers and other guardians of the national culture. In the millions of living rooms where the TV set is switched on to *Dallas*, the issue is rather one of pleasure.(3).

Ang's observation is important in as much as it marks a potential difference between the distrust of the masses pleasures in the popular, and the location of popular pleasures in working class people's narration of their own use of the popular. However, her separation out of the question of pleasure from the policy makers and the guardians of the national cultures concerns is problematic. Surely it is their distrust of the pleasures of the masses that motivates their perception of Americanisation as a 'disturbance.'

Ang goes on to talk about the specific relationship between feminism and pleasure. "What is the relevance of pleasure for a political project such as feminism. What is the political and cultural meaning of the specific forms of pleasure which women find attractive?" (130). She argues that there is a danger of over politicising pleasure, and of losing sight of the real issue, which is the relationship between fantasy life, pleasure and socio-political practice and consciousness. What is at issue, according to Ang, are the implications of women's identification with certain popular forms on the ways in which they make sense of and evaluate their position in society.

Ang argues that one of the ways in which women negotiate their position in society is to negotiate the relationship between *a pleasurable absent future* and *an unpleasurable present*. In a discussion about the role of pleasure within the wider scope of feminist politics, Ang makes an interesting statement:

We cannot wait until the distant utopia is finally achieved: here and now we must be able to enjoy life - if only to survive. In other words, any uneasiness with the present, with the social situation in which we now find ourselves must be coupled with an (at least partial) positive acceptance and affirmation of the present. Life must be experienced as being worth the effort, not just because a prospect exists for a better future, but also because the present itself is a potential source of pleasure. (133).

Ang's insertion of the role of fantasy into the transition from present to future is applicable to my own research. It is interesting that she places escapism in a complex relation to a belief in the present as a potential source of pleasure, as well as in relation to the future as an imaginary ideal. Fantasy, in this model is a fictional arena which allows you to play with 'realities'. It does not function in place of, but beside other dimensions of life (social practice, moral or political consciousness). I would agree with Ang, then, that there is little to the point that imaginary identifications are politically 'bad' because they lead to pessimism and resignation in real social life.

Americanisation and Ideology

In the light of this it is necessary for me to consider the ideological relationship of the interviewees to their versions of the American Dream. I am not trying to argue that the women necessarily resisted dominant American ideologies, nor am I attempting to show that

they did not believe that everybody in America had lots of money and lived in fabulous houses. Most of the women, as I said in Chapter Three, did (at the time) believe this. Rather, I want to analyse the meanings that they made around the American Dream, not as good or bad, resistant/conformist, but as a means to extend existing debates around the operation and function of escapism in relation to the consumption of popular culture, and of the pleasure invested in images of America in post-war Britain..

What I want to think about in relation to the interviewees pleasurable identification with an imaginary America, (which I differentiate from a pleasurable imaginary identification with images of America in Althusserian terms) is how exactly the version of the American Dream orchestrated around the musicals functioned as escapism, and how the American Dream negotiated (then), and continues to negotiate (now) the difficulties around a pleasurable absent future and an unpleasurable present. I want to use the interviews as a means of exploring further the nature of the interviewees pleasure in "America", and how the articulation of that pleasure might build upon existing understandings of the need for and use of popular culture and/as escapism.

The Althusserian analysis of ideology as interpellation has held a firm grip on British cultural studies. In this model an ideological relationship is predicated on a fundamental misrecognition of material reality - an imaginary identification. What I want to explore in this section is the interviewees' articulation of *knowing all too well* their social reality, their place in British society as working class women, and the significance of this in the predication of their ideological relationship with America. This analysis echoes Paul Willis's' (1977) location of 'the lads' ideologically as operating within a profound state of awareness of the reality of their social situation. I will suggest that the interviewees' ideological relationship, is not based on interpellation as a fundamental misrecognition of material reality, but on a fundamental *recognition* of the ordinariness of material reality which translates into a longing for extraordinariness. This powerful longing for extraordinariness translates in the interviews as an envy of talent (as possibility):

May: I was never theatrical at all. I could never dance or anything like that, but while I was looking at the movies, of course you did a swap sort of thing, and thought, God I'd love to be doing that you know.

Marie: I loved watching the singing and the dancing, the talent . . . it was what you could, or couldn't achieve yourself.

Ellen: My dad admired the Americans. He lived in America for a few years with the merchant navy, so . . . I don't know if that had any bearing on it. But I think it was . . . it was just . . . he admired the talent.

Lilly: I don't remember having a desperately wretched life. I had quite a happy childhood. But it was just like these unattainable things you saw people doing . . . it was just a total contrast to the way peoples lives were. How many people can open their mouths and these wonderful singing voices come out, and break into these wonderful dances.

This longing/desire was not an interpellation, or an imaginary identification precisely because it was rooted in recognition, not misrecognition. This is not to say that the interviewees' relationship to the musicals was not an ideological one, but it is an ideological one in which the terms of recognition (knowing) and misrecognition (not knowing) are complicated. This shift in the conceptualisation of knowledge in relation to ideology has complex links to the post-war crisis around the state of working class consciousness. In *Capital Marx* based ideology in a fundamental misrecognition - "they do not know it, but they are doing it." Althusser located the interpellated subject of ideology as having "an imaginary relation to real conditions of existence." False consciousness, therefore, is a misrecognition of effective conditions - of the social reality. Slavoj Zizek (1989) has called this a "naive consciousness"(29). Zizek goes as far as to question whether "this concept of ideology as a naive consciousness still applies in today's world?"(ibid.).

Zizek references Peter Sloterdijk (1983) who argues that ideology's dominant mode of functioning is cynical, which renders impossible - or, more precisely vain, this classical - critical ideological procedure. "The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less insists upon the mask." (ibid.). The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk would then be: 'they know very well what they are doing, but still they are doing it.' Here cynical reason is no longer naive, but is a paradox of an enlightened 'false consciousness.' "One knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it." (ibid.). Angela Partington (1990) argues that what has grounded much of the resistant readings school of cultural studies is a notion of an enlightened false consciousness as a suspension of knowledge, "false consciousness by another name." (134) Hoggart (1990) identified a cynical consciousness as a strategy of survival, " a saving inhibition, a defence against constant assault." (273).

I am attempting to define the longing for extraordinariness of the interviewees as interpellation, or imaginary identification with ideologies of America that is complicated by the passage of knowledge over time, and the contingent relationship between knowing and not knowing the material social realities of Britain and America. Within this the notion (the paradox) of cynicism is a useful one. Sloterdijk and Zizek's continued framing of this within the terms of false consciousness, however enlightened, remains problematic, as the term

comes into currency always/already loaded with assumptions about the perceptive abilities of the working class. I also find their analysis is limited by its omission of specific questions of class. In their post-structuralist analysis of ideology, class (as a perceived monolithic social category) is eroded in favour of the discussion of the subject as the intersection of a set of philosophical and psychic processes. This retreat from the E's (in McRobbie's terms) in favour of the anti E's leaves little room for the exploration of the lived experience/interpretation of enlightened/cynical consciousness.

In my work the women's ideological relationship to the musicals can be read as both obviously cynical/enlightened, "we didn't think they were real, we watched them as if they were real." (Lily) and not, "I really believed America was the way they showed it on the films. I thought everyone had maids in the kitchen, satin bedspreads and white picket fences." (May). In both cases, however, what is important to consider are the motivations for the investment in the sustaining fantasy of America, and the relationship to that of the processes of recognition/misrecognition of the material social realities of America and Britain. Whilst the interviewees ideological relationship to the musicals as pleasure is rooted in a fundamental recognition of their material social realities in Liverpool and in Britain, the same cannot be said for their recognition of the material social realities of America. What my research negotiates then, is an extremely complex realm of knowing and not knowing, one that has changed over time.

On the one hand, it was the women's knowing their allocated and actual place in Britain that effectively cancelled out a British dream.. As Barbara says, "working class kids in this country are taught not to want." It was *not knowing* their place in America, not knowing about the social realities of America that enabled the Dream to operate so effectively. The interviewees knew America through stories of the fantastic achievements of immigrants into America, the transformative narratives in films like *Calamity Jane*, the tales of the GI's, and the stories brought home by their relatives who went to sea. This level of knowing made the musicals as entertainment effective in the imagining of something better. This ideological relationship was further complicated by the workings of memory, and the shift in recognition/mis recognition about America over time. In the 50's the women knew America as a fantasy space. They did not know (or want to know) about the materiality of American life, about poverty or racism.

With the expansion of the media the interviewees have come into contact with a whole different order of representation of American life, and with the knowledge that structures of inequality and deprivation exist there too. Anne says that she came to know America in the 50's:

Anne: My father's sister lived in America and she came over in the early 50's, and she was 'how about this one, what about that one' and you realise that New

York wasn't what it looked, you know. I haven't been to America but it looked totally different to what it must have been in real life because she said to me. 'There are slums in New York you know.' Well I thought it was you know, I thought that was America.

For the other women it happened much later:

Peggy: Its only really now, I would say, in the last decade again, that I can read these things without getting upset. Because its as if they were saying everything was no good about Hollywood. Well perhaps it wasn't.

May: We assumed America was like that (the musicals), and the horror in later years was to find out that many of these places, like Miami, were nothing like we thought they were.

Kay: It was a place that you wanted to go, and everything that you saw . . . it really took us over. I used to be disappointed when I read in a book that it was say just cardboard buildings. I used to think, Oh God no, couldn't be. Everything was so beautiful.

Carol: I suppose I really thought that if you go to America you see all these film stars walking around singing. I suppose you get disillusioned later on when you see all these films about America. You learn what its really like, you know New York, all the slums and everything. Unbelievable isn't it.

This process of *coming to know* (to recognise) America was profoundly important to the women in terms of the location of their pleasures in the musical in the present. Pleasure in the musical is articulated as a longing for the possibilities of the future, and a loss of youth in the past. The memory work that takes place in the interviews works to locate the pleasure in remembering the musical in a longing for the past - when the American Dream had the ability to sustain them and carry them through. Americanisation as a structure of feeling no longer works for them except when it is transported through memory to its articulation in the 50's. "Have you been there Joanne? I'd like to go, just for the sake of saying, I'm on American ground after all these years, the way it was presented to us years ago." (Kay)

Richard Dyer (1981), discusses "two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment," (18) -'escape' and 'wish fulfilment'. Specifically he is addressing the musical as 'pure entertainment', as pleasure, and therefore its central thrust as escape and wish fulfilment - utopianism. "Entertainment offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day to day lives don't provide . Alternatives, hopes,

wishes - these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and might be realised.” (ibid.) Certainly my interviewees position their pleasure in the musical as escapism, along these lines. Dyer goes on to argue that the utopianism constructed in the musicals “is contained in the feelings it embodies. It presents head on as it were what utopia would feel like.” (ibid.) utopianism works through the narratives of the musicals as an effective code that uses both representational (stars are nicer than we are, situations more soluble than those we encounter) and non representational signs (colour, texture, movement, rhythm).

What is significant about Dyer’s analysis in terms of the analysis of my data, and the framing of my theoretical arguments around Americanisation as a structure of feeling, is his stress on the emotional signification of entertainment forms: that is that the utopianism of musicals as Dyer defines it above, comes to acquire emotional signification in relation to the complex of meanings in the social, cultural situation in which they are produced. Thus, Dyer’s analysis opens up the possibility to explore the categories of the utopian sensibility (which he defines as energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and community) as “temporary answers to the specific inadequacies of the society which is being escaped from through entertainment.”

(23) Dyer illustrates these in the following table:

<i>Social tension/inadequacy/absence</i>	<i>Utopian solution</i>
Scarcity(actual poverty in the society, poverty observable in the surrounding societies) unequal distribution of wealth	Abundance (elimination of poverty for self and others; equal distribution of wealth)
Exhaustion (work as grind, alienated labour, pressures of urban life)	Energy (work and play synonymous), city dominated (<i>on the Town</i>) or pastoral return (<i>The Sound of Music</i>)
Dreariness (monotony, predictability, instrumentality of the daily round)	Intensity (excitement, drama, affectivity of living)
Manipulation (advertising, bourgeois democracy, sex roles)	Transparency (open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships)
Fragmentation (job mobility, rehousing and development, high rise flats, legislation against collective action)	Community (all together in one place, communal interests, collective activity)

Dyer argues that the advantage of this kind of analysis is that it does offer some explanation of why entertainment *works* - it responds to real needs created by society. The weakness of the analysis, according to Dyer, lies in the absences on the left column - “no mention of class, race, or patriarchy.” (25) That is, “while entertainment is responding to needs that are

real, at the same time it is also defining and delimiting what constitute the legitimate needs of people in this society.” (ibid.) I find Dyer’s argument curious in relation to the question of class, and its presentation as a valid problem by show business. Dyer maintains that entertainment orientates itself to the real needs (and he is very careful to distinguish this from a false needs argument) listed in his left hand column. In orientating itself to these needs, he maintains, the legitimacy of other needs - determined by class, race or gender is denied. He complicates this argument in relation to race, gender and sexuality somewhat through an acknowledgement that the actual role of women, gay men and blacks in showbusiness leaves its mark in central oppositional icons, for example the strong woman type, camp humour, dance and music. But Dyer argues, “Class, it will be noted is still nowhere.” (ibid.) What I find so curious is Dyer’s refusal to position the real needs of scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation and fragmentation within the question of class. Dyer later argues, “to be effective, the utopian sensibility has to take off from the real needs of the audience . . . to draw attention between what is and what could be,” (26) then entertainment must continually negotiate a fundamental contradiction. The job of entertainment, according to Dyer is to manage this contradiction, to make it disappear.

My interviewees’ experience of class and its limitations and difficulties could easily be mapped onto Dyer’s construction of social inadequacies. Certainly, my analysis of the women’s investments in *Calamity Jane*, and their relationship to complex issues around community, energy and intensity are supported by Dyer’s model. “The whole atmosphere and the appearance, and the music and the dancing and it was just the whole atmosphere. It was just sort of a different world, and you felt as though you were part of it, transported. And as you say it was America, and everybody had this idea that America was utopia.” (Anne) His difficulty in using it to ask questions relating to the movement between experiences of class and the production (and reading) of film texts, prompts me to question what model of class Dyer is working with. Certainly he never elaborates what this might be. I think that Dyer’s model is limited by the lack of discussion of a method to get to , or understand the real needs of an audience (beyond those that he prescribes - albeit tentatively). His discussion of the effectivity of musicals as entertainment also writes out class because of his perception of the failure of the film texts to address issues of the real needs arising from working class life. In the end this limits the use of his model for the analysis of my interviewees’ pleasures in the musical. A more interesting analysis can arise out of the exploration of how this form of entertainment - not manifestly working class - came to work so effectively for the women as escape and wish fulfilment - as the image of ‘something better’. The interviewees worked questions of class, arising from their real needs and lived experience of class, around the narratives of the films, thus making class matter in the interpretation of the film texts.

Femininity and Americanisation

The issues around class, femininity and Americanisation are not often dealt with in critical work. Pat Kirkham's article (1995) is an exception. In this piece which is a detailed reading of *Dance Hall* (1950, GB. Dir. Charles Chrichton), Kirkham uses her reading of the film to explore the dreams and disappointments of post-war working class women within the context of the continuing Americanisation of British Culture.

Dance Hall was made in 1950, and follows the lives of four working class young women in London. Ostensibly the film is looking at the nature of their investment in the dance hall, the Palais de Dance as their primary leisure pursuit, and at the nature of the relationships formed within and around that space. What the film does is to cast its eye over the state of British post-war womanhood, specifically working class womanhood, considered to be the most vulnerable to the temptations of American affluence.

Kirkham argues that "one of the strengths of *Dance Hall* is that , within a realist mode of expression, it addresses desires, dreams and fantasies which are, at times, symbolised by objects, particularly, but not exclusively dress, or by the dance Hall itself." (195). *Dance Hall* provides a space in which working class women's desires for things can be played out, both in terms of the film viewing experience, and in terms of the analysis of the characters desires. None of my interviewees mentioned *Dance Hall*, but it is an interesting film in the wider context of what they say, and in terms of Kirkham's reading of it, which makes some extremely important observations about working class women's lives in post-war Britain. What both Kirkham and the film are moving away from is a stereotypical image of working class women as dowdy and unglamorous. Kirkham also wants to rebut the idea that working class women only wore cheap clothes, as this was not the case. The end of clothes rationing in 1949, Kirkam argues, was an important symbolic moment for working class women. I have argued earlier that part of the appeal of America for working class women lay in the desire for nice things. America was seen to have nice things. Nice things were imported into Liverpool by fathers, uncles, brothers, friends who were merchant seamen.

Kirkham argues that *Dance Hall* had a contemporarity about it that was often lacking in post-war films about women in that it was a film "more about life with temptations than without them." (198) It also focuses, she maintains, "considerable attention on working class pleasure.": She goes on, "Couples, but particularly women are shown enjoying what are presented as the simple, straightforward pleasures of life. Most notably dancing, dressing up and having a night out with friends (pleasures too often ignored by the historians)" (198).

What *Dance Hall* also focuses on are the dreams of working class women. It's stance in relation to this is pessimistic and foreclosing. The lyrics from the title song of the film, "You're Only Dreaming" allude to this:

*You're only dreaming, what a fool you are
Just building castles on a distant star
From day to lonely day you sit and dream
and waste the hours away in make believe
You're only dreaming of an old refrain
Sweet haunting music that will fade again.
Why don't you understand, Fairyland won't do,
Wake up my dreamer to a dream come true.*

What the film is saying, according to Kirkham, is that the pleasures of the dance hall, dressing up and a night out with friends are fine, but that any dreams above and beyond this, dreams, for example that might be carried on a fantasy of America are unlikely to be fulfilled. One message of the film, therefore, is that working class women are foolish to imagine anything else beyond this. There is something condescending about the film's construction of a proper place for working class women's pleasure. It should be located with the community, and with the restraints of British post-war society. Kirkham ties this into the fears of Americanisation by the guardians of national and public morality. The fear was that working class desires liberated during the war might be refuelled and fanned in a period of relative affluence - that the working class eager to consume after a decade of deprivation would not be able to discern good from bad. In *Dance Hall* too, British womanhood is disrupted and disturbed by American pleasures, just as it had been, Kirkham argues, when the US GI's arrived during the war

Americanisation, the Masses and National Identity

A variety of changes ushered in fears and anxieties about undue American power and influence. America emerged from the war as a powerful political and economic force, Britain did not, and increasingly came to depend on American money with its war debts. Indeed, as has been argued, Britain could not have initiated or maintained The Welfare State without American money. Britain was failing to sustain the myth of itself and execute a post-war economic miracle. Britain was also in the process of losing its empire, and with this its status as a world power. This was in the face of America's increasingly dominant international role. Americanisation, then, in naming a process through which Britain was being saturated with American ideology, also named deep seated fears and insecurities about British national identity, both at home and abroad. Yes the debates were about America and American influence, but they were also very much about Britain and Britishness. Within these nationalistic arguments, the working class are interestingly located

Bill Schwarz (1994) talks about his feeling compelled to sketch some of the historical conditions of England from which cultural studies first emerged. His compulsion arises in the face of the plethora of works which think of history of the emergence of cultural studies in

terms of its trinity of founding fathers, Hoggart, Williams, Thompson. Schwarz argues, "the profane history of real ruptures, of excitement and despair, of furious polemics and bewildering uncertainties gets erased in these polite readings, replaced by a barely comprehensible myth of origins which eases the journey of cultural studies into the academy." (381).

What Schwarz does in this important piece of work is to trace some of the historical conditions in England at the time, conditions which became historical determinations for what he calls the 'Englishness' of early cultural studies. One such determination is marked as the collapse of the British Empire, which gathered pace, at least in the public mind after the war with Egypt in 1956. Along with this there was the impact of the capitalist organisation of cultural forms anticipated by Marx and Engels in the 1840's, and by Benjamin in the 30's. This accelerated fast from the 50's, re-organising dramatically the whole field of cultural relations and forcing into public debate new theoretical questions. All of this, as has been written countless times intensified the transformation of 'art' into lived or popular culture. Cultural studies so the history goes was an intellectual response to this crisis.

Schwarz goes on to argue that:

the complex and many layered effects of this protracted but profound cultural break were to unhinge simultaneously both the cultural forms of the old colonial elite - the cultures of what was now coming to be called old England - and the particular configuration of social and cultural forces which had cohered in the distinctively mass working class culture since the 1880's. (382).

He maintains that these twin developments broke across the social formation as a whole, reconstituting public and private cultures alike, "though nowhere was the impact more marked, I think, than in the language of the English themselves." Schwarz links this change in language to the white working class, specifically to Hebdige's (1979, 1988) description of white English working class youth in this period imagining themselves through an elaborate repertoire of narratives which could embrace 'Black' 'America' and 'Italy'.

This, together with the decline in British colonial power, and the related immigration of many colonised peoples to their imagined home of England, according to Schwarz, "imploded the British imaginary, slowly to be reactivated and re-racialized - most profoundly by the radical right." (383). What was going on throughout the 50's, then was a radical re-narrativisation of England, and of national identity.

It is interesting that Schwarz chooses as his example the case of white working class youths' identification with 'America' 'Black' and 'Italy'. Once again the crisis over national identity seems to have been placed in the laps of the working class. In the discourses around

Americanisation, there is the assumption that there is something profoundly unpatriotic about the identification of the masses with an imaginary America. Not that I am accusing Schwarz of replaying this myth, but his argument does throw up specific questions about the place of the working class in this re-narrativisation of England that he does not go on to pursue specifically.

In my interviews I was struck by how little the women identified themselves as British, or displayed any kind of pride in being British. An issue that is substantiated by their lack of reference to the Coronation and to The Festival of Britain, which was celebrated in Liverpool with fairs and exhibitions in local parks. First and foremost my interviewees located themselves as Liverpudlians.⁴ In the post-war reconstruction of Englishness these women can be identified on the one hand as a real problem, preferring the promises of the American Dream than any home grown offerings. They seem to have rejected or ejected the Coronation, and the promises of better life for all within post-war consensus politics.

What struck me about the interviewees' identification with Liverpool was that none of them said that they hated it, or wanted to be anywhere else. (Women, like Betty or Maria, for example, who live in particularly rough parts of Liverpool did talk about wanting to move to other parts of the City) The only woman that had left Liverpool, Barbara, came back. The relationship between the interviewees strong local identity, rather than a national identity, to Americanisation, to the perception of Liverpool nationally, and to an image and assumption about the working class attached to this perception is fascinating.

There exists the assumption that working class people are always trying and dying to get out of the places that they inhabit. They long to escape. For some, this is undoubtedly true, but certainly not for all.⁵ My interviewees on the whole did not want to leave Liverpool. The American Dream carried through the musical, was not, for them about becoming more American, or wanting to go and live in America, it was about having in a world of lack. It was about being offered the fantasy of being or becoming something extraordinary, when nothing else in Britain offered them that. It was a dream that was always played out in the context of Liverpool. They did not want to get out. They just wanted things to be better where they were. It could be argued that their construction of Liverpool as fantastic is acting as a kind of defence (as Bourke 1994 argues) against the disappointment that they never could or did leave, where leaving might signify the fulfilment of dreams. "My dad always said that Liverpool was the best place in the world to live." (Emily) "Everybody says Liverpool is the best place on the world to live." (Kay) This is something that I have given a lot of thought to. In some cases, perhaps this is true, but certainly not in all.

What might be important to take on board is that many people who were born in Liverpool, who have lived there all their lives really do believe that Liverpool is the best place in the

world to live. There is a perception, nationally, that Liverpool is rough, dangerous. Its accent signifies stupidity and criminality.⁶ There is a mythology that exists within Liverpool that it can be rough, but it is also special. It is a unique place, you are lucky to belong to it, to be a genuine part of it. This can get re-enacted in popular culture through the existence of “professional scousers” like Jimmy Tarbuck, Ken Dodd and, especially, Cilla Black, who has built her career on the masquerading of her special “rough diamond” Liverpool identity.

This belief in Liverpool comes through strongly in the interviews. “Everybody says Liverpool is the best place in the world to live.” (Anne) “My dad always used to say Liverpool is the best place on earth to live.” (Emily) “Why do people want to come back to Liverpool, that’s what gets me. There must be something in Liverpool because everybody wants to come back.” (Pat) Kay recounted this story to me:

Do you know what Joanne. I was speaking to a girl that emigrated and came back home after a few years. Sold up, sold everything, but they came back. I saw her when she got back. I said, ‘God, Et, couldn’t you have stuck it there’ She said, “Do you know what Kay, it’s a yearning, and it gets you here, and you want to get back, you want to get back. She said that’s why. Her and her husband felt the same. It can pass for a while, but it’s a yearning you get

The group interview with Kay, Pat and Emily was particularly strong on the articulation of the idea that there is nowhere on earth quite like Liverpool. Pat, who has visited Australia where her daughter lives, said that as nice as it was they were looking forward to getting home because nobody understood their sense of humour. Once again the association of Liverpudlians with wise cracking humour does have stereotypical associations, but people in Liverpool can be incredibly funny. Like the stoicism that I talked about in Chapter Three in relation to Mary and Albert, humour can also function as a means of “getting by” or getting through rough times.

The women’s strong local identity makes more acute the pain of the loss of the vibrant community and energetic Liverpool of the 50’s that they describe. It also counterposes the argument that Americanisation homogenised or destroyed ‘authentic’ grass roots working class communities. This was quite simply not the case in Liverpool in the 50’s. To reiterate, Americanisation for these women was not about becoming more American. It was a fantasy of having in a world of lack, a fantasy that retained a strong local materiality. The American Dream, as it operated in these women’s lives in Liverpool, was not something that was orchestrated by Hollywood cinema as a cipher of American imperialism. The dream was built out of Liverpool’s trading links with America, the passage of working class merchant seamen, goods and stories, the legacy of the GI’s, the orchestration of the dream in the film

texts, and, crucially the inability of British politics and cinema to provide a space in which these women could imagine something different.

The myth of affluence, the embourgeoisment thesis, consensus and Americanisation, I would suggest, were rooted in post-war anxieties around the state of working class consciousness. They were part of a political project of post-war Britainisation, in which a national identity in crisis attempted to foster a classed allegiance to the promises of British democracy. What is rarely there in the discourses around Americanisation in post-war Britain is an understanding of why and how images of America were so pleasurable, and so needed at that time. These are questions, which inverted, can also ask extremely important questions about British national identity. How come images of Britain were not pleasurable, were not needed?

It is possible to speak confidently about the American Dream. Why does it sound so clumsy and absurd to talk about the British Dream? What might a British Dream have looked like for my interviewees? Did they have one? What did their American Dream look like? How, where and why was it orchestrated? How did it sit in relation to the absence (or presence) of the British Dream? Simon Frith has argued that "America, as experienced in films and music, has itself become the object of consumption, a symbol of pleasure." (Quoted in Ang, 1989:55) Ang, following this, argues:

The hegemony of American television (and film) has habituated the world public to American production values and American mise-en-scene, such as the vast prairie or the big cities, the huge houses with expensive interiors, luxurious and fast cars and, last but not least, the healthy and good looking men and women, white, not too young, not too old. Such images have become signs which no longer merely indicate something like 'Americanness', but visual pleasure as such. (ibid.)

America, then, comes to signify the above, which in turn comes to signify visual pleasure. I do not dispute this, and it is an important observation. However, it does not go far enough. It passes over the concrete material realities of the viewing contexts in which these kinds of signifiers of America would constitute visual pleasure as such.? It also passes over the specific mechanisms of the visual texts to orchestrate visual pleasure. My interviewees found pleasure in a particular set of images of America in the musical. Crucially they found pleasure in these images, when they found little or no pleasure, as I discussed in the previous chapter, in images of Britain in the cinema.

The Making of the Dream.

In Vera's interview, she relates the complex passage of knowing and not knowing Britain and America, to the analysis of an image of supposed poverty in film, transposing it to the questioning and comparison of how "they" (the Americans) live and how "we" (the British) live:

As I say, you didn't really think socially, how do they live, how do we live. I can remember one thing, *Sunday Dinner For A Soldier*, (1944, USA, Dir. Lloyd Bacon), with Anne Baxter, they were supposed to be poor. I said, they're not poor, they've got loads of pots. We had one pan, and you did everything in it. They had rows and rows of pots and pans, that got me. I thought, fancy saying they're poor, when they're not, they're rich. Rows and rows of pots. That's about the only thing I remember socially.

In this memory Vera makes a strong comment on her identification (or lack of it) with the representation of working class life in films, and resents their pushing the audience to "think socially" about something that they do not even get right. In so doing she also marks out a complicated relationship to America, one that negotiates poverty, the social, knowledge and things. As I have argued, the interviewees investment in America as a fantasy space was partly predicated, not on a notion of America as free, but rather on America as modern, as a land in which you could have nice things, and amongst which you might be beautiful. This interpretation is in no way intended to be patronising or belittling. Rather, in "reducing" the analysis to the smallest of things, I am extending the territory of the debates around class and Americanisation, by attributing to the fetishisation of things a significance that goes beyond much of what has been written.

Vera's definition of America as not being thought of as a social place substantiates my argument that the construction of America as a fantasy space was predicated on a complex negotiation of knowing here and not knowing there. Britain was a social place. America was not. But the function of the fantasy of America as *not* a social place resounded in the interviewees material social reality. When I asked Vera what she meant by a social place, she talked directly about knowledge. She also made an interesting slippage in the equation of America with Hollywood, indicating perhaps, that the "America" of their imaginations was the Hollywood of their imagination:

It was just out of your depth, out of your realms, and you just didn't think about it. I don't think you ever thought about Holly . . . America in a social context at all. You didn't really know what was going on in the rest of the world. Also because television has brought everything closer. Unless you knew an American, you never knew what was going on.

JL: Did you believe that America was the way it was presented in the films?

Vera: . . . I can't think . . . I don't know.

Joan: You didn't think that way, you just accepted it.

This is an interesting exchange, in which Vera's sister Joan joins the discussion to object to my line of questioning. In asking Vera if she believed the images on film I was actually not judging her at all, but understandably, given my position as a researcher coming into the home, it was a question that was interpreted that way by Joan, who defends her sister against it. I think it is extremely interesting that Vera would say that she did not think about America as a social place. It is even more interesting that the one memory that she has of interpreting images of America in film socially should be attached to rows of pans, to the apparently smallest of details.

But surely this is what it would come down to? If your experience was cooking everything in one pan, then rows of gleaming copper pans would signify that what was being shown as poverty was not real. For Vera, it is only when *Sunday Dinner For a Soldier* attempts to represent the working class directly that question of reality enters, making her question the structure of the social. This is fascinating, as Vera does not question the issue of reality in relation to the fantasy scapes of the musicals. Work on the musical so often debates the issue of the suspension of disbelief needed to watch a musical, where people dance down the street with full orchestra playing. This seems to be much more of a dilemma for academia than it is for the women I interviewed, where it is not a problem. What is a problem is when films attempt to present what these women know in detail. Dancing down the street to full orchestras is not an issue because you could dance and sing down the street in Liverpool albeit without the orchestra, but working class people in post-war Britain simply did not own rows of gleaming copper pots. For Vera "remembering socially" means remembering with direct reference to the circumstances of her own life, to what she had or did not have. In a sense Vera was forced to remember socially because she was presented with an image of poverty. She did not want to think socially (i.e. in terms of material reality) in relation to the consumption of film, "you didn't try to analyse, you just enjoyed it, and that was that."

In this next extract, Betty talks about not knowing much about America. In the same story she articulates what she did know, even as a child, that in America they had nice things:

When you think about it, we didn't really know a lot about America did we? But when we saw these things coming up, when the war - it wasn't till after the war was on, and some of the things that used to come over from America for us. You know you were amazed because - I remember when the war was on, they used to give these presents out to children whose fathers weren't working. They came round the schools asking us all, you know, whose fathers weren't working. And they asked me, and I said oh no, my dad's working. I don't know why, I thought he was working. I think at the time I thought it was - if they weren't

working on the docks, that was in my mind. Cos a lot of the kids their dads worked on the docks. But I thought cos my dad went away to sea he wasn't entitled to it sort of thing. Any kids who was in the army, they got these presents. And I said, 'oh no my dad doesn't do anything.' Cos he went away to sea, they weren't classed as servicemen sort of thing. Any way a couple of weeks later they got all these presents off the Americans. And I always remember, it was a big long box they got, and inside was all these different colours of bows for hair, and I thought, 'I'd love one of those bows to put in my hair,' you know I never got one. And what else did they get? Sweets, they got chocolates and bags of sweets and all kinds they got.

This extract is fascinating on so many levels. It embodies the 'proper envy' that Carolyn Steedman talks about, towards the girls who got the nice things from America. Her experience, her first contact with America, also embedded in her memories the association of America with beautiful things. It is also a very sad extract in its undervaluing of the father's work, the perceived ordinariness of which does not let Betty count herself as worthy of receiving nice things. For Betty, this first encounter with America was crucial to her formation of a fantasy of America as a land of plenty, which functioned painfully in the material difficulties in her world.

At the other end of remembering socially is remembering visual pleasure, seeing nice things and imagining and enjoying them, not being forced to see that it wasn't real. Marie says, "you never sort of thought well where did they get the money to live like that? (Laugh) when you were watching these beautiful houses with maids, and fitted kitchens and walk in closets and clothes laid out on the beds." A huge appeal of the musical for most of these women was that it did not ask them to question the reality that it constructed.

The desire for visual pleasure is something that Marie talks about in relation to realist films. "they've got no right to depress me. People go on the toilet, but you don't want to see them going, yeah going on the toilet's realistic but do we want to see everybody going on the toilet?" (laughs) She goes on to say, "when you realise that life is grim, you do want to see more of the splendour of the glorious scenery and things don't you? That's what I feel."

Barbara says about America, "there was that feeling of the promised land, and yet we really didn't know all that much about it." I asked Maria if she believed that America was the way that she saw it in the films she says, "Oh definitely. Um nobody was poor in America. No nobody was poor in America. Of course everybody was um - you saw Americans through happiness. That's how you saw America. All these people were all very happy people." I think that Barbara's and Maria's comments are interesting, that America was about a *feeling*, (as part of a structure of feeling) more than actual knowledge.

The presence of the GI's in Liverpool played into the construction of this structure of feeling in interesting ways. In some senses they were the physical manifestation of the American dream in Liverpool, with their beautiful uniforms and their gifts. They were also something physical, something in actuality to pin your fantasies on. Knowledge is now more widespread about the plight of GI brides lured to America with stories of mansions and money, only to find themselves living in America in terrible poverty. These stories were beginning to circulate in Liverpool in the late 50's. The most significant factor about the functioning of the GI's as ciphers of American fantasies for British girls and women is that it was *assumed* that they came from big houses and money. It was the need to see them living in the landscapes of the women's imagination.

Once again the point of the analysis is not to prove that the women got it wrong, but to ask why they needed to believe it in the first place." We asked them all sorts of questions. If they lived in big houses with swimming pools." (Pat) "Of course they played up to it. They didn't have them, but we were brainwashed weren't we. But it did help us." (Kay) This is a phrase that Kay uses a lot to describe her relationship with the fantasy of America in its various forms, "it helped us." In as much as I may spend a lot of time analysing the nature of the women's relationships to fantasies of America, it is this little phrase that keeps coming back to me, "it helped us". This mythical, imaginary America somehow helped them to cope with their lives. What helped the women was to believe in a place where everything was better, where it was imagined that there was no poverty, or struggle.

The Romance of the American Dream

The fantasy of the GI's also functioned to manifest a structure of feeling around America that was also (in part) a romance. The presence of the GI's enabled the fantasy of America as a romance, and/as fantasies of romantic love to merge. A romance is a fictitious narrative that passes beyond the limits of ordinary life. Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce (1995), in exploring the undiminished popularity of, and desire for romance in contemporary culture point to its status as a narrative, defining it as "one of the most compelling discourses in which any one of us is inscribed," (12)⁷ as one reason why the desire for romance remains so strong for women. As a narrative (that passes beyond the limits of everyday life) romance has the ability to be re-written, re-worked. Its narrative works through the myriad of everyday experiences. Romance is a compelling narrative that can take you beyond the ordinary into the fantasy and the realm of the extraordinary. In this movement the (differential) location of class differences is significant. Stacey and Pearce argue that "since the fairy tale the sublimation of class differences has been a staple ingredient of romantic fiction for decades." (23) In the context of this Stacey and Pearce discuss the work of Alison Light (1984) and Judy Giles (1995). Giles, in her research on British working class women's attitude to romance between the wars, argues that they represented a significant challenge to the fictive

romance. Giles' interviewees, in her fascinating study, reveal a profound alienation from the narratives of romance. "A woman might resist, refuse or deny the pleasures of romance as not serving her best interests." (279) Giles explores an anti-romantic sentiment amongst the interviewees that functions as a pragmatism in the face of the perceived "silliness" and middle class indulgence of the hearts and flowers variety of romantic love. In this research I am not locating romance solely in the domain of romantic love (although the figure of the GI sits complexly within this particular narrativity), rather I am placing the figuration of America (as a fantasy that is formed in and through stories, and thus always/already an extraordinary narrative) as part a structure of feeling that is romantic.

It is important to think about the pleasure in the American Dream as a romance that has shifted over time, with a developing knowledge of what America is 'really like.' Pat says of the GI's. "I met one once, he was an American sailor, and what he would have done for me! He was married. I said, "there's nothing down for you love. He was going to do all kinds." Later she says, "The Yanks took over sort of thing, give you this, give you that. When you got over there they had nothing." Pat's use of "you " here is interesting. I could be reading too much into this, as the insertion of "you" for "I " is part of a pattern of Liverpool speech, but might not her use of "you" here also be read as part of the tension between the imaginary and the real America. Pat has never been to America. She was never a G.I bride. Perhaps she is imagining herself as part of this narrative - moving to America with an armload of promises and dreams- all of which amount to nothing. I am not trying to argue that Pat's life now is miserable. I do not know her well enough to say, but a huge part of working class women's experience is coming to terms with lost dreams. Wouldn't it make it easier to come to terms with the loss of an imaginary America if you believed that it was not what you thought anyway. Wouldn't it be easier to cope if like Betty, "you always thought of them as being rich and coming from big fancy homes and all that, but when you think back on it now, they were just like ourselves weren't they?"

Back then, it was the not knowing about America, or perhaps not wanting to know about the reality of aspects of American life, that formed the basis of the fantasies of America, and that enabled a structure of feeling around America, of glamour, abundance, possibility, excess to operate as romance. This process of fantasy formation is made even more interesting due to the fact that the merchant seaman, the working class men who regularly sailed in and out of America's east coast ports must have seen poverty and hardship - a harsh American reality What happened to these stories? Did they ever get brought home? If so, why were they not taken up?

The interviewees' holidays to America sit in tension with the subjective travelling to an imaginary America. Three of the women, Betty, Barbara, and Vera, had been to America. One, May, was planning to go the following Summer. For Vera, it was not a disappointment,

“the first holiday I ever had was Hollywood. I was happy then. When I got there I thought right I can die now.” For Betty, it was difficult to grasp that the imaginary had become her reality in the sense that she was actually there. This is a feeling that I understand. I can remember stepping out onto American soil for the first time, smelling and seeing America, and not being able to believe that I was actually there in the land of my imagination.

Betty: I just couldn't believe it. Going back when I was a teenager, I never would have dreamed, because that was just something that had never happened. You know, you'd never ever believe that you'd go to America.. And even when I went there - when I got over there, I was sitting there with our Anne, and I said, “I can't believe that I'm here, in America.” And I said, “if you'd said to me twenty years ago, we'll go to America,” I said, “I wouldn't have believed you.” I just couldn't grasp it at all that I was actually standing in America.

Barbara went to America in the early 1960's, and says that she was disappointed with it. She went there as a nanny for a few months, but “that didn't last long.” She went to Long Island, and found America very old fashioned. What Barbara was looking for was a sense of modernity, an avant garde. “I thought it was very old fashioned believe it or not, very couple orientated. When you used to go out dancing here, women used to dance together, and nobody thought anything about that. You even saw men dancing together. But when I went to America, you couldn't go anywhere as a single woman.” It has become part of the narrative of Barbara's life, often told I imagine, that she went to America, didn't like it and came home. Her sister Annie says, “you know those tales about people who go off with shilling and come back with a fortune, well she went off with a shilling and when she came back she didn't even have enough money to pay the porter.” (Laughs)

What is interesting is how this has affected their relationship to the films. I think that it has forced them to locate their pleasures in the musicals in their memories of the past, and in that historically determined structure of feeling, that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to maintain in a contemporary context. This is not to say that they do not find pleasure in the musicals when they watch them now on television, or on video, but that the pleasure is rooted in their memories of themselves and of Liverpool in the 40's and 50's, and also rooted in America's ability to signify visual pleasure as such.

There is a very interesting past/present relationship at work in their memories around the musical. Peggy talks about watching them then, “it was like sampling, a bit like going on a holiday into the future in a way. So that I still assumed up until the last decade that many of the places that we saw still were as they were then.” If watching them then was a bit like going on holiday into the future, then watching them now, or remembering watching them now involves a journey into the past. What is significant is the place of America, as a land of

the imagination at the cross-roads of the memory of a future (that has now passed) and of the past.

What is interesting is the location of the fantasy of America in the process of memory formation. The American Dream becomes in the interviews, the point at which so many of the difficulties around coming to terms with possibility and reality gets condensed. Stacey(1994a) calls this process, “ a contrast and mediation between past and present selves.” (326). Stacey goes on to talk about treasured memories. “Certain memories, it has been suggested have a particular function in processes of identity formation. Memories in which we have an enduring and recurring personal investment in terms of our identities have been called treasured memories.” (332) I would argue that the interviewees’ investment in the film musical as a means of escapism functions as such a treasured memory. I would further argue that it is the availability of the American Dream that is also being located as treasured, as special. Stacey argues that, “the notion of the treasured memory also suggests a place which can be regularly revisited.” (ibid.). Treasured memories represent investments in particular versions of the past, a past in which “the fantasy of possible futures could be played out.” (ibid.) Stacey maintains that “the pleasure of such memories derives from the ways they work as ‘personal utopias’, offering escape from the present.” (ibid.) They work to recapture a lost sense of possibility, they are nostalgic. “The invitation to produce a remembered past promises the pleasure of an imagined retrieval, but simultaneously reminds the respondents of the impossibility of retrieving that past.” (334). As acute as Stacey’s analysis is here, the pain and pleasure of nostalgic memories in my research is sharpened by the integral dimension of class. Stacey describes the operation of nostalgia as the expression of “ a yearning for a past in which the remembered self yearned for the future.” (335). Remembering then, Stacey argues “is an acknowledgement of the loss of that time, and also a way of guarding against complete loss by recreating the feeling of a past in which the future still held out some promise.”(ibid.) This process is made more acute in the lives of working class women, where the desire for something different can at times be so consuming.

¹ For an analysis of the history of Slavery in Liverpool see Costello (1988), Scouse Press (1984), Law and Henfrey (1981)

² In making a case for Americanisation as a structure of feeling in Liverpool, I will not be arguing that the case is unique to Liverpool. Within my model, it does not matter centrally whether or not what I argue, or what the informants say has an applicability in other local settings. What matters is its articulation in this local, and how that can be used to talk about class, gender and popular film. Other articulations will undoubtedly be made possible, but it will not be the job of this chapter, or indeed the thesis to debate or explore those.

³ Although this research will not address them, the political and economic developments in America in the 50’s, the political economy of the Hollywood studio system that exported the musicals, the

economy of the British Film industry that imported the films, as well as the economy of the local film industry in Liverpool, are also significant factors.

⁴ Lawrence Grossberg's (1997) caution in relation to questions of globalisation, identity, belonging and affiliation is important here. Grosberg says that we should never think "as if anyone belonged only in one place." (110) As I discussed earlier for most of the interviewees their ethnicity as Irish Catholics with an immigrant history is an important factor. Their ethnicity, it could be argued, further complicates their relationship to Britishness, locating them complexly and residually to Ireland, and through their immigrant histories to America.

⁵ This was certainly true for me, although it was not so much that I longed to leave Liverpool, as that I longed to be somewhere else. I recognise, however, that there is a danger, the premise of which was set up by Hoggart and Williams, of working class people who have got out, and who longed to get out, of going back and romanticising the site of their escape as fantastic.

⁶ There are numerous examples from the media which could be used to substantiate this claim. From the press coverage (and not just tabloid) of the terrible murder of Jamie Bulger it became 'evident' what a fertile ground Liverpool was to breed such 'monstrous' working class boys. I can remember clearly the depiction of Liverpool men and boys in the media as monstrous and dangerous in the reporting of the Heysel stadium disaster in 1986.

⁷ Stacey and Pearce, in this important collection of work on romance argue that if romance does have a common meaning across the multiple discourses and practices of contemporary culture - then it is its continued inscription as a narrative (romance is 'always already a story'). They go on to argue, "Our survey of the diverse narratives of romance represented by this book also revealed, however, that there is no longer a single (foundational) story to which they all refer." (37) Questions of the textuality and discursivity of romance must be related to race, sexuality, class and age, as well as nationality, ethnicity and history. In my research the narrativity of romance is complexly linked to questions of gender, class, nationality, locality and history..

Conclusion

This conclusion will be divided into 3 parts. Part I will summarise the thesis, re-visiting its main aims and objectives, and by working through a summary of each chapter, how the thesis attempted to address these. Part II will review the methodology. Part III will further draw out the implications of the thesis for future research and part IV will briefly explore the ways in which the work might be further developed.

Part I - Summarising the thesis.

The central aim of this thesis is to challenge and expand existing theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the relationships between class, gender and the consumption of popular culture. Through an analysis of the ways in which 17 white working class women negotiated a classed identity as a form of identification around the film musical, the thesis attempts to:

- Re-generate the terms of available critical debates around class and the popular, the film musical, Americanisation, and empirical audience research.
- Bring class back into question in cultural and film studies. In so doing, the thesis also explores some of the reasons why class has slipped from the theoretical agenda, and why it is critically important for it to remain in focus.
- Develop a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the consumption of popular culture as a strategy of survival- a form of escapism rooted in the materiality of a life, and the negotiation of structures of inequality and deprivation.

In the course of this investigation and analysis, the thesis also addresses specific questions relating to:

- The theoretical developments that have helped to shape the working class as an object of study in British cultural studies.
- The relationship of history to the practice of audience research.
- Methodological questions around the function and status of empirical data, including an analysis of the status of experience and the role of memory.
- The reading of specific film texts.

The thesis stages and pursues this series of questions around empirical, historical research on working class women as an audience for film in order to develop an understanding of the breadth of meaning made around popular cinema in working class women's lives. The research seeks to build a theoretical and methodological framework for analysing the importance of this genre of popular film in the interviewees lives. When I speak of

importance, I am thinking of the weight of the personal investments, fantasies, desires and pleasures inscribed by the women in the memories of consuming film musicals. Barbara talks about her house, in which food and money was in short supply, and her sister, who was given money by her mother to go out and get herself fish and chips. This was a special treat. Her sister took the money and went to the pictures to see a musical instead. Barbara says, "they meant that much, that my sister would rather go to the pictures than to eat." In searching for theory to understand the significance and operation of this level of investment, the thesis works to deconstruct dismissive or uncritically populist interpretations of the role of popular culture in working class women's lives more generally. In presenting situated readings of the musicals within a very grounded theorisation of memories of the time and place of their consumption, the thesis tries to provide a rich and detailed context for consumption, one which is complexly determined by history, geography, economics, class, gender, age and the negotiation of these determinations in and as lived experience.

The framing of lived experience is a critical part of this research, both in terms of the exploration of the discursive production of the working class as an object of study through cultural studies' culturalist, structuralist and post-structuralist moments, and in the framing of an empirical method for bringing class back into question through qualitative audience research. Lived experience is understood in this research, not as a reified working class authenticity - the expression of 'true' working class experience that can be called upon to falsify theories claims to representativeness. Rather, it is positioned as integral to the practice of the qualitative empirical research, in which the women position themselves in relation to structural inequalities and historical changes, and articulate their relationship to the film texts in the light of these. Lived experience is part of a process of investigation through which the interviewees articulate a sense, through the spaces in which they have lived, of who they are. Experience is the site in which the interviewees have been constituted as subjects, and out of which class, gender, age, geography is lived as difference. Thus, it is a complex space, which is accessed through the interaction of the historical, theoretical and empirical projects that make up this research. Articulations of lived experience fuel the aim of the thesis to challenge some of the existing theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship between class and the consumption of popular culture.

I want to go on to draw some further conclusions of the thesis through a summary of each of the chapters, addressing their individual aims and objectives. **Chapter One**, framed the working class as an object of study within Richard Johnson's (1979) definition of 'problematic' as a theoretical structure which organises knowledge in a particular way - making some questions possible, and suppressing others. A problematic is also discursively produced. Thus, this chapter explored aspects of the discursive production of the working class in British cultural from the 1950's. The chapter worked to establish the need for my research, both through its focus on the consumption of popular culture by working class women as a

strategy of survival, and crucially its focus on working class women *at all* in a critical climate in which the study of class has fallen from grace, a fall that has been curiously undertheorised. In this way, the chapter set the thesis up as corrective, in the sense of addressing an absence in contemporary cultural studies research. What I argued was that cultural studies has a continued responsibility to take account of the study of class. The issue of responsibility in relation to the production of knowledge is a very serious one. Its relationship to the question of class in British cultural studies has particular relevance. As a discipline, cultural studies was built on the study (not unproblematic) of working class cultures. The retreat from this in the face of very real theoretical difficulties around taking account of monolithic social categories, like class, does not detract from the question of responsibility. Beverly Skeggs (1997) inserts an itinerary of silencing onto the agenda. In this chapter I spoke of Skeggs' anger around the ignoring of the working class, and the silencing of their experiences.

The analysis in his chapter also had a practical purpose. I needed a theoretical framework to make sense of my interview data. The point of the chapter was not to seek out a lost working class identity in cultural studies, but to set the term 'working class' in motion through some of the discourses in which it has been positioned, in order to search for new modes of classification that may be contradicted and complicated by the practices and processes through which the classification is lived. Thus, what the chapter represented was a search for theory. In searching for theories around class and experience through which the data might be understood, the chapter made important contributions to the analysis of the structures of power through which working class women are forced to live out their lives, and the location of these conditions as the material context out of which the popular is positioned as escapism. Ferguson & Golding (1997) argue that cultural studies is now facing a crisis of political purpose around the kinds of explanation of cultural and social processes it is able to offer at an empirical, material level. That being the case, my research offers an important contribution to the direction forward, through its analysis at a personal level of the historical formation in which cultural practices are lodged.

Chapter Two explores the theorisation of the relationship between the female spectator and the real woman who watches film in feminist film studies, and the tensions between empirical and textual analysis. It examines what place there is in the theorisation of the female spectator for the experiences of individual and socially differentiated women. Specifically it explores the place made for working class women in feminist film theory, and what needs to be done theoretically and methodologically in order that the material determinations of working class women's pleasures in popular film might be understood as escapism.

Feminist film theory rarely addresses the question of working class women's pleasures. Thus, once again this chapter was corrective, in the sense of addressing an absence. What

motivated it was the need to examine methodologically what we have to do in feminist film studies to make it possible to talk about working class women's relationships to film. In answer to this the chapter advocated the use of qualitative empirical research as a means of coming to understand the specificity's of the contexts in which films are consumed. In order to understand the meanings that working class women make around popular films, one obvious (although not unproblematic) method is to ask them. The chapter explored the tensions that exist in film studies around empirical research methods, and the anxieties around promises of empiricist truth emerging from empirical research. This section negotiated these tensions through an analysis of the debate as it presented itself in the 1989 special issue of *Camera Obscura*. It then went on to look at the negotiation of these tensions through a range of texts, focusing in particular on Jackie Stacey's methodology in *Stargazing* (1994). Through a reading of Stacey's construction of a model for the female spectator that is a combination of the textual and the empirical, together with the historical and the psychoanalytical, the chapter argued for the importance of a combination of all of these factors in the analysis of working class women's pleasures, and the framing of the historical formation in which cultural practices are lodged. However, it limited history to the analysis of the local contexts in which cultural products are consumed. I do not advocate that is necessarily the best way to understand an audiences investment in film, but an analysis at the level of the local can potentially develop a more detailed focus on the meaning making practices of audiences in specific social and geographical contexts. In my case where the relationship between cinema and community was articulated so strongly in the interviews, it seemed like the most appropriate method.

To further support the development of my own method, the chapter also looked at existing empirical work (for film and television) on working class women. It pointed to a fundamental limitation in much of this research concerning the models of social classification used to define working class women on the basis of job, income, husband's income and educational qualifications. It seems to me that whilst these can provide important markers, they also ignore a subjective dimension of class identity. What this chapter marks as important is the consideration of women's understanding of themselves as working class. This ushers in the dimension of the lived complexities of class as complex forms of identification with structures of inequality, deprivation and loss. It argues for the importance of considering the lived experiences of interviewees around film texts, and the ways in which films are used to make sense of who we (think we) are.

Through chapters One and Two, therefore, I attempted to establish the need for my research through an analysis of the shortcomings and possibilities of some of the available theoretical frameworks for thinking about female audiences for film, and working class culture in cultural studies. In so doing, I was also searching for a theoretical framework through which the class of the interviewees might be understood as a historically and locally contingent

form of identification through which (and in relation to other cultural forms - here the film musical) the women's subjectivities are constituted.

In **Chapter Three**, I tried to work through the location of the interviews methodologically within the thesis as a whole, questioning what work they were doing, what status they had as evidence, and how my empirical method might stand in relation to charges of empiricism. The methodology of the thesis was not limited to this one chapter, but was integral to much of the analysis and exploration that pre and proceeded it. However, the thesis needed a section in which the questions and issues that the interviews posed methodologically and epistemologically might be thought through in more detail. This complex set of issues encompassed questions of memory and textuality, and their place in the interpretation of the data, and the framing of the status of the interviews as the articulation of the lived experience of class.

As I have already indicated, negotiating the concept of experience was central to the theorisation of the function and status of the empirical data in my method. In this chapter I explored the relationship between lived experience as I was framing it in the thesis to questions of empiricism. Supported by Angela McRobbie (1997), I argued that it was possible to perform empiricism as a means of occupying the empirical mode with greater complexity. In negotiating the status of our data we are grappling with questions of truth and evidence. For a long time I had been trying to frame my data's function (as texts through which the premises grounding much of the existing theory on class and the popular might be challenged) outside of the remits of a conventional empirical challenge. Because I did not envisage my data as offering me the truth, but rather, a series of interpretations passed through memory as a discourse of remembrance imagination and invention, I positioned the function of my data outside of an empiricist domain. What I had not taken into account was that empiricist debates were not so much debates around truth, but debates that intervene more complexly in the production of theories of evidence. Thus the perspective on the status of my data shifted to the evidential, where evidence was considered as being important in *making*, but not *proving* a case. The case that I was trying to make was twofold; Firstly, that some of the existing theories around class and popular culture did not take adequate account of the complexities of class identity, and the materiality of working class lives, and could not, therefore adequately theorise the location of popular culture as escapism within those lives. Secondly, that class had slipped from the cultural studies agenda, and needed to be brought back into question. Within this case, therefore, the data could be understood as the articulation of lived experience, and could be used, not as an antidote to falsify the premises of the existing theory, but as having the ability to address the absences, limitations and possibilities of an existing body of work in order to make and support a case.

This chapter also negotiates a similar function and status for my own closed narrative as a researcher. It was out of my own experiences and knowledge of working class life that my problems with particular bodies of theory first emerged. There was a fundamental tension between the world of theory and my world beyond theory. Again it is possible to locate that tension - to write it into theory as a performative empiricist self, as a motivation for the work, and as a critical position that potentially opens up new spaces in the theory. I use myself as a sub-text for the work. In this way it is possible to avoid the need for me to tell my story at length in the face of the richness of the interview data that I have to work with.

Chapter Four analyses the structure and form of the recording of the interviews, and the techniques used to analyse the data. It identifies the key themes that emerged throughout the interviews: loss, glamour, escapism and America. The purpose of this chapter was not only to collect a fascinating body of data around Liverpool and Britain in the 50s, the women's lives, their hopes and dreams, and readings of specific film texts, but also, in the process to expand an understanding of just what it is that films (here specifically the film musical) can be used to talk about.

What I found myself negotiating soon into the interview process was the fact that the women did not talk about specific film texts in very much detail. Having envisaged a chapter on film analysis, I was forced to re-think my own conceptions of what counted as talking about a film. The interviewees used the film musical (as a genre) as a kind of springboard into a different order of experience around the films, and their relationship to them over time. The film musicals were used to work through a range of difficult memories and emotions around ageing, death, the loss of a vibrant and exciting Liverpool in which they feel safe, as well as memories of good times - boyfriends, courting, going out dancing with friends.

I did feel, however, that certain film texts continued to be significantly placed within the expression of this range of memory and emotion. These were *Calamity Jane* and *South Pacific*. I analysed *Calamity Jane* as operating as a form of escapism through its transformative narrative, in which "Calam" is transformed from being a rough speaking unkempt 'not quite' woman who lives in a dirty cabin and knows nothing about nice things to a sparkling, clean, vibrant, glamorous figure of domesticity and 'proper' femininity. I located this reading within the articulation in the interviews of the women's sense of themselves as working class Liverpool women within the context of Britain as perceived to be unglamorous, unkempt, rough and unsophisticated. *Calamity Jane*, therefore offered them the space to imagine something different, a different context to play out a sense of their own identity.

One of the most moving aspects of the interviews was the women's coming to terms with getting older, and the complex set of losses around that; a loss of looks, waistlines, family, dreams, possibilities. *South Pacific* sits interestingly at a juncture of these losses, not only in

terms of the narrative of the film which deals with a woman having to juggle freedom versus responsibility and domesticity, but also in terms of the historical moment in which this film was shown in Liverpool in 1958. This was the point at which most of the women were themselves already married with children, and had stopped going to the cinema. The film, therefore sits poignantly within a complex interplay of losses, both material and imagined. To construct loss (in many forms) as a context through which to read this film, not only expands available interpretations of this film text, but also what the film musical, and indeed films in general might be used to talk about.

The discourses around glamour in the interviews were also significant in terms of setting up an opposition to the perceived ordinariness of Britain, and especially the women's perception of themselves as 'ordinary' working class within post-war British society. Glamour, thus links in important ways to fantasies of America and to escapism. In using the film musicals to escape, the interviewees were escaping into a fantasy of America as a space in which it might be possible for them to be extraordinary - extraordinarily glamorous, talented and wealthy. What was so interesting about the location of glamour was its un-Britishness. Glamour was both enacted and imagined by the women as a means of resisting the inscription of their place as working class in England, or at least the imagined perceptions of them as working class women i.e. dowdy, unsophisticated and ordinary.

The fantasy of America was extremely important in the interviews. Indeed in consuming the film musicals, the interviewees were also consuming a potent fantasy of America. What I have tried to do in this thesis is to provide a detailed context out of which and into which this fantasy played. Therefore, in **Chapter Five** I explore post-war discourses around Americanisation, and the particular location of the masses within anxieties of American ideological dominance. Using the interviews, I attempted to show the ways in which those discourses did not take adequate account of the complex local contexts in which a fantasy was needed and consumed. Locating Americanisation within a structure of feeling, my analysis took account of the local need for forms of American fantasy, and the other cultural and historical moments that interacted to give rise to America as a fantasy space in Liverpool in the 50s. It was not just the film musicals in isolation that enabled the American Dream to function, but their place alongside a range of other narratives and cultural forms. For example, the physical manifestation of the American Dream in the form of the GI's, the passage of working class merchant seamen to and from America, and with them the passage of American goods and stories of life in America, immigrant success stories of family in America. All of these, together with a larger conception of Hollywood glamour and the cinema industry gleaned from magazines like *The Picturegoer*, and other films apart from the musical worked to manifest the American Dream. What I wanted to do in this chapter was to frame an ideological relationship for the interviewees in relation to Americanisation as one in which the women need not necessarily be positioned as duped or resisting. I wanted to move

beyond the limitations that this choice imposes, to consider the complexities of the material context in which the American Dream operated in Liverpool in the post-war years, so that what matters is not whether the women resisted dominant ideological messages or not, but how the film musical as a manifestation of the American Dream was used by the women to negotiate the historical and material contexts in which they lived.

Part II - Reviewing Method

My local, historical, qualitative empirical method does offer the potential to consider in detail the meanings that an audience makes around a text within a specific context, and urges a consideration of the location of cinema within the practices of everyday life. In terms of the study of identity politics and identification in relation to film it certainly enables an analysis of forms of audience identification beyond the simple ascription of viewing positions related to categories of social classification, i.e. this is how working class women watch musicals. As a method it could certainly translate to the analysis of the forms of identification of other kinds of audiences.

I think that my method also goes some way towards moving us out of that stranglehold between empirical or textual analysis, and the attendant anxieties of making empiricist truth claims with our data. I certainly do not claim that it goes far enough, and very much feel that I have just about got my head above these choppy methodological waters myself. As much as Jackie Stacey argues there need not be an either or of textual versus empirical analysis, cannot the same be said of empirical or empiricist analysis. Angela McRobbie's notion of a performative empiricism is extremely productive, and will hopefully be generative of some new ways of approaching audience research.

I have considered at some length whether or not this research is limited by its exclusive focus on the question of class, and whether or not a comparative study with middle class women, and women who were not white might have been more productive. Whilst a comparative analysis would undoubtedly have produced some rich data, I feel that an exclusive focus on class that does not take account of other racial identifications apart from white at this moment in cultural studies is extremely valid. If cultural studies is about to re-invent itself, then I would argue that it is an opportune time for the terms with which we talk about and 'know' the white working class to be re-invented also. This will not be done without very detailed studies of working class identity, and deconstruction's of the theoretical modes of social classification that we have available.

The amount of textual analysis of the films in the thesis does give me some cause for concern. I feel that there should be more of this kind of analysis throughout the work. However, this was made extremely difficult methodologically due to the women's reluctance to discuss film texts in detail. Whilst this gave rise to an important observation and analysis

of what exactly counts as talking about a film (musical), and I would not want to undermine the strength of that argument, I would have liked to have followed up my original interviews with the women with a discussion based on the original interview text of where exactly particular films fitted into what they had to say. Unfortunately time and other circumstances did not make that possible.

Part III - Implications of my research for future work.

In the course of reviewing the thesis' main aims and objectives and how it set about meeting them, I have already indicated some of the contributions that the thesis might make to future research:

- Methodological debates in film and cultural studies around empirical research.
- Debates in cultural studies round the social classification of the working class.
- Bringing class back into question in cultural studies, and firmly onto the agenda in film studies.
- I have also suggested ways in which my method could be used in the analysis of the forms of identification with media texts of other social groups.
- Developing our understanding of what films can be used to talk about.
- Although not about Hollywood musicals *per se*, this research does greatly expand existing understandings about what a film musical can be used to talk about, apart from the history of the stars, the studios, the directors, and the mechanisms of the text. This thesis offers an alternative to text based analysis of the genre as a means of coming to understand what a musical can mean.
- The research can also provides an important point of reference for the understanding of middle aged and older working class women's lives in particular. Cultural Studies has rarely addressed specific questions around ageing working class femininity. The study of older women's relationships to popular culture is an undertheorised area in general. The particular focus on working class women is especially so. It is an area that would benefit from further study.
- The research also goes some way towards complicating the debates around Americanisation and class, with their attendant anxieties around the prevalence and influence of American popular culture on vulnerable audiences.

More than anything, I hope that this research might move some way forward, in conjunction with the important work on gender and class that has already emerged, particularly Beverly Skeggs' most recent work, to framing theoretical terms to understand the ways in which difference is lived out as classed. This does not mean that other factors that go to make up who we are like sexuality, race, age, gender are not also equally important, but that these experiences are also theorised as complexly determined by class, where class is understood,

not within the structures of models of social classification based on income and education, but on a subjective register that takes account of the myriad of complex forms of identification with the category working class. Certainly, this does make the study of class extremely complicated, but the study of class should be extremely complicated, and cultural studies does have a responsibility not to silence the material experiences that exist in the first and last instance beyond theory. It would not be possible or practical to claim that class can only be defined through the outside assessment of particular ways of articulating experience, that the use of indicators should be precluded per se. However the limitations and potential of each approach to the definition of working class should be addressed. We need to think of our methods of classification as choices that have consequences on the systems of classifications that we build. Within cultural studies, where the stress has been so much on the lived experience of class, and where the study of class has stagnated due in part to the limitations of existing models of social classification, the urgency to really think through the structures by which we come to 'know' and position social groups is magnified.

I hope that this thesis has also shown is that working class lives are not always emiserated and broken. Politically this is extremely important. The image of the working class as miserable and downtrodden is a familiar image, comfortable, knowable and controllable. The fact is that all working class people do not live their lives in this way. The interviewees talk about extremely happy times. At some points this was, perhaps, a romanticising of the past. But the past is also remembered in this way because at times it was happy and vibrant. In saying this I do not want to detract from the extremely difficult conditions that some of these women have and still live with. What I am arguing is that their declarations of happiness in the face of this serve an important purpose. They are part of a stoicism (with none of the derogatory connotations) that enable these women to keep going. What I am arguing is that the pleasure in the popular is complexly located in this process.

Part IV - Directions in which the work might develop.

Again, I have already indicated a possible direction that the work might take, in follow up interviews with the women that take a more detailed route through particular film texts. These would build on from the complex emotional, material and historical contexts in which the films have already been placed, but draw out particular implications for the reading of individual texts.

A further direction that this work could take, indeed I have begun to work collaboratively on this, is a detailed consideration of the question of ethnicity. In the thesis I talked about the interviewees defiant and unpatriotic construction of themselves as Liverpudlians, I addressed that to questions of locality and community. However, there is a strong case to be made in the consideration of Liverpool as an Irish diaspora, that the interviewees immigrant histories from Ireland, and the particularly poignant location of America as a promised land

within those histories also significantly fed into the effectivity of the American Dream as a longing and a fantasy. In constructing the interviewees as white working class women I did not take account of their ethnicity. Any suggestions that I put forward at this stage are tentative, but nonetheless important. I have just begun an empirical project with groups of women in Liverpool and London around the visual and material culture of First Holy Communion. In the pilot interviews for this work, the importance of the Liverpool women's links to Ireland, Catholicism and tradition is significant. The thesis, therefore, has already taken another direction, and some of the women from this research will form a part of the Communion study.

In Chapter One, I discussed Beverly Skeggs's (1997) argument that whilst class as a term of classification may well no longer be the most appropriate one to use, this does not abnegate the responsibility to try and understand how people (complexly constituted through experiences of race, sexuality, age, gender) live with and negotiate structures of inequality and material deprivation. What I have added to her argument is a particular responsibility for cultural studies to take account of these processes of negotiation, and the place of the popular within them. My analysis of the interviewees' construction and investment in a fantasy of "America" as a sustaining fantasy, a coping mechanism, operating within a pragmatic, survivalist class consciousness, provides one approach to an advance, not a retreat from the question of class. Within this advance class is understood as a form of identification with the history of experiencing structures of deprivation and loss, and finding ways to cope with them - to get by.

Appendix I

Betty

Betty works part time in a bar. She is 65. She married in 1954, when she was 23. She has four sons, aged 42, 41, 38 and 28.

Patricia

Her last job was a school cleaner (1985). She is 66. She married in 1952 at age 22. She has four children, age 40, 38, 33 and 32.

Kay.

She is a pensioner, aged 73. She married in 1945, aged 22. She has three children, age 49,46, and 40.

Vera.

Works in an office doing data entry. Vera married in 1957, aged 23. She has two children, age 36 and 32..Vera's sister **Joan** was present during the interview.

Peggy.

Retired deputy headmistress. Age 66. She married in 1950 when she was 19. She has two children, aged 44 and 41.

Carol.

Works as a telemarketing clerk. She is 54, got married in 1961 when she was 19. She has Six children, aged 33, 32, 31, 29, 26, 23.

Marie.

Married in 1957, aged 21. She has three children, aged 36, 34, 31. She is a retired part time clerk.

Lily.

Has three daughters, aged 36,34,24. She married in 1958, aged 23. She is 61 and works as a domestic.

Maria

Retired. Married in 1957, age 28. Has four children, aged 37, 35, 32, 29.

Ellen

Age 58. Works as a nursery nurse. Married in 1964 when she was 26. Two children, age 28 and 31.

Mary

Age 65. Married in 1950 when she was 19. She has three children, age 44, 39, 32.

Pauline

Age 68. Retired newsagent. Has two children, aged 44, 42. Married in 1948 when she was 20.

May

Retired cinema worker. Age 67. Married in 1948 when she was nineteen. Has three children, aged 46, 45 and 28.

Barbara

Age 78. Did not marry and has no children.

Annie

Age 74. Last worked in a factory. Never married, and has no children.

Emily Works as a machinist. She is 72. Emily married in 1944, when she was 20. She has 7 children, age 52, 50, 46, 45, 40, 41, 36.

Appendix 11

1. What is your age?
2. What is your current occupation. If you no longer work, what was your last job?
3. What year did you get married. How old were you?
4. Do you have any children. How old are they?
5. Do you consider yourself to be working class now. Have you ever?

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