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CLASS MEMORY: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO CLASS IDENTITY

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Images of society are not only a product of present milieux, but of present milieux interpreted in the light of past experience and expectations for the future, individual and collective. As Elizabeth Bott commented, '... when an individual talks about class he is trying to say something, in a symbolic form, about his experiences of power and prestige in his actual membership groups and social relationships, both past and present' ... Images of society are the product of individual experiences in specific historical circumstances, too complex to be encapsulated in anti-historical sociological constructs.¹

Surveys and Structured Questionnaires

Over the last decade a remarkable international project examining class consciousness has come to fruition. Survey results from the 'Comparative Project on Class Structure and Class Consciousness', instigated by Erik Wright in the early 1980s, have now been published in a number of countries.² The Australian findings have emphasised that a large majority of people do not base their sense of personal identity on social class:

When this dimension of class subjectivity is brought into focus, the picture which emerges is of a society whose inhabitants appear relatively indifferent to matters of class, and one in which objective class position, in turn, has little consequence. A majority of Australians quite simply do not think of themselves or their lives in class terms, and this indifference to class appears borne out of a perception not simply that the class structure is relatively fluid and open, but also that class has no great cultural significance as a basis for social division.³

The British findings pointed towards the opposite conclusion:

contemporary Britain is still widely perceived among its population as being class structured, and ... class is readily available as a source of social identity to most people. Indeed it is the most commonly cited such source and is more salient than other potential identities that have recently been suggested as transcending that of social class itself.⁴

Does this stark difference reflect a real difference between the two countries, or is it simply the result of different approaches to studying class identity?⁵ There is a lot at stake in the rival claims: the Australian findings appear to endorse views about the 'demise of class politics' and the emergence of new kinds of 'identity politics'; the British findings confound them.⁶ In this article I will explore the issue of class identity from the perspective of life-history methodology. While I do not enter the debate on the 'demise of class', I do suggest that social researchers are engaged in wishful thinking if they believe that the matter can be settled by asking people in a structured questionnaire if they see themselves in class terms.

One of the ironies of the Australian findings on class identity was that other findings emphasised the continuing saliency of class relations for many important aspects of life,

such as income distribution, voting, and social mobility. Aware of this incongruity, that class effects across a range of areas did not surface as 'class consciousness', the authors suggested a number of possible explanations. They conceded that other sources of collective identity (eg. nation, family group membership) may be "class identities' of a sort, in that they are partially class determined', and they speculated that class identity might become more important in 'certain specific contexts', such as during political mobilisations. They also suggested that the old formula of connecting people's class location with their political activity, with 'class consciousness' serving as the middle link, was inherently flawed. For these authors, the extent to which people exhibit consciousness of class was the result of the 'collective practices of trade unions, business groups, political parties and other class related organisations, and the discursive categories which animate or inform these practices', rather than simply their location within a social structure.⁷ On this point, the two research teams were moving in a similar direction. As the British researchers argued:

Class consciousness ... is not mass consciousness. A class conscious movement is not the spontaneous product of a populace having progressed in linear fashion through feelings of class identity and opposition to those of class totality and the conception of an alternative society ... class consciousness is an attribute of organisations rather than individuals: it is the capacity of a class to behave as a collective actor.⁸

For the Australian researchers, the logical outcome of these kinds of arguments was a recognition that 'class consciousness' could not be investigated using survey questionnaires.⁹ As Michael Emmison explained, this methodology was 'clearly unsuited for investigating this particular collective and action-oriented conception of consciousness' and researchers should 'return to the more qualitative, descriptive or case study methods which have traditionally been favoured by political economy and history'. However, lest this conclusion render quantitative endeavours like his own redundant, Emmison reconceptualised the appropriate research object for survey questionnaires as 'those aspects of class subjectivity which are more amenable to individual and cross-sectional level measurement': things like 'class awareness, class self-placement, and perceptions of class process'. For Emmison these constituted inquiries into 'consciousness of class' rather than 'class consciousness'.¹⁰ This concession represents an important recognition of the importance of qualitative and historical materials for understanding class consciousness. But I would argue that it does not go far enough. To my mind, even Emmison's revised agenda, comprising class imagery and class identity, is not suited to investigation by survey questionnaires. I base this view on two important issues: the problem of ambivalence and the problem of context.

Ambivalence

One of the most significant British findings was that class identity and class imagery were ambivalent and contradictory amongst large numbers of their respondents. In one instance, as many as forty per cent of the sample gave inconsistent responses across different, but related, questions about class issues.¹¹ This discovery of ambivalence was nothing new: it was one of the main conclusions to emerge during two decades of research into class imagery in Britain.¹² Summarising this earlier literature, Goldthorpe and Bevan suggested that contradictions at the level of consciousness could be explained by the contradictory social world in which the respondents lived: 'For the social reality which these workers experience, and especially their work lives, is itself shot through with contradictions - for example, affluence succeeded by redundancy, co-operation by conflict. It is thus legitimately open to

contradictory interpretations and is constantly provided with them, by the media, politicians, intellectuals and other opinion leaders, no less than by the workers themselves.¹³

To some extent the Australian researchers did not have to deal with ambivalence because their methodology helped screen it out. Their question on class self-placement was placed in isolation, in the middle of a long list of questions posing other sources of identity (nationalism, locality, ethnicity, gender, etc). By contrast, the British questionnaire explored a range of class issues in a block and posed the question of class self-placement after considerable discussion around the issue of class. For this reason the Australian researchers regarded the British questionnaire as 'loaded' in favour of class, but there is another way of interpreting this. The British questionnaire explored class in more depth, and gave their respondents time to 'talk through' their position on class identity and other class issues. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find in the British study, not only more developed views on class identity and imagery, but also more ambivalent ones.¹⁴

What does ambivalence, and indeed silence, around class identity and imagery mean? For survey researchers, they are an embarrassment. Sometimes ambivalence is viewed as the product of poor survey design or interpretation, sometimes the result of 'confused' thinking on the part of respondents; and sometimes as evidence for the passage of real contradictions into consciousness. When respondents are silent on class, or deny its existence, they are often simply left out of the analysis, consigned to the 'don't know' category.¹⁵ By contrast, for historians both silences and ambivalence's are fertile fields to plough. In Italy, Luisa Passerini has used both oral history and archival materials to perceptively explore the silence around Italian memories of the Fascist period, analysing this phenomenon as a kind of 'collective amnesia'. In Australia, Jenny Gregory studied the absence of childhood memories of class as a product of middle-class taboos against drawing attention to social divisions.¹⁶ In my own research, silences and ambivalence's have been critically important for understanding how class identity is formed.

Context

Social scientists have traditionally drawn a distinction between reliability and validity. Surveys which use structured questionnaires tend to be high in reliability: they can be replicated by other researchers and return comparable results. However, in terms of their validity, that is, whether such questionnaires really measure the thing they are trying to investigate, the situation is far more problematic. When the thing being measured is observational in nature, such as occupation, number of children, or suburb of residence, the validity of the results can be quite high; but when it is attitudes which are being measured, validity can be quite low. As for 'consciousness' itself, a concept of much greater complexity than 'attitudes', it is almost impossible to operationalise it in a meaningful fashion for use in questionnaires. We saw above that both the British and Australian researchers conceded that 'class consciousness' is an action-oriented phenomenon, in which the institutional setting and the collective expression are integral to its definition, and they concluded that attempts to map it through individual attitude measures are largely futile. I agree with this view on class consciousness, but as outlined earlier, I think it should be extended to other aspects of consciousness as well, particularly class identity and class imagery.¹⁷

I would argue that efforts to use survey-based attitude research as a device for understanding consciousness run aground on the paradox of context. In order to apply the same questions, in the same manner, to everyone surveyed, the researchers have to pose their questions in general terms and apply rigid interview protocols. As part of this

procedure, they must decontextualise their questions so that the replies are not seen to be an artefact of the interview process itself. The result is a preference for questions which are universalistic and abstract, rather than specific or concrete. For example, in his attempt to gauge class consciousness Erik Wright asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with a set of attitudes, such as 'Corporations benefit owners at the expense of workers and consumers' and 'It is possible for a modern society to run effectively without the profit motive.' To explore class identity, the Australian researchers asked: 'Many people feel that Australian society is composed of different social classes. What about your own position? Do you think of yourself as belonging to a particular social class?'¹⁸ The paradox lies in the fact that consciousness is heavily context dependent for its meaning. A moment's reflection about the real world confirms this insight. It is relatively easy to be consistent about attitudes when they are platitudes. But when we explore consciousness itself, the meanings people give to their personal experiences and the processes of reflection they engage in, we find consciousness is always context specific and often contradictory. To tap into this level of meaning, interview questions need to be tailored to the specifics of the interview situation; they need to be flexibly structured around the narrative which the interviewee offers up, an unattainable strategy if one is using survey questionnaires.¹⁹

Unravelling context specific consciousness requires historical and qualitative methods of investigation. The life-history method is ideally suited to this task. A particular sentiment or anecdote which arises in a life-history interview can be analysed by a series of 'contextual circuits'. The first circuit in this contextualising is composed of the various narrative elements in the person's account, particularly the 'narrative identities' which the interviewee assumes at different stages. As well, the aspects of a person's life-history - their actual biography - interpenetrate this narrative. It is almost a truism that comments and observations in an interview never stand alone, but derive part of their meaning from referencing other aspects of the life-history context. The next circuit in contextualising an oral history interview involves theorising memory, analysing how identity and consciousness are structured by the operations of memory. The final circuit is the historical and spatial setting, the social structures in which these individual biographies are embedded.²⁰

Life-History and Class Memory

Both oral history and the life-history method underwent major revivals during the 1960s and 1970s.²¹ While historians have always used oral history materials to supplement written sources in their study of public figures or 'important events', the revival of interest in oral history in more recent years has seen the method extended into new settings. During the 1970s, historians increasingly employed oral history sources in the study of social history, particularly 'history from below' and history which gave a voice to marginalised groups such as workers, women and blacks.²² At the same time sociologists were busy with their tape recorders, collecting detailed autobiographies of 'ordinary people', and exploring the personal lives of marginalised groups. Unlike survey approaches, the life-history method used open-ended techniques of questioning, with minimal direction from the interviewer, and with a preference for long, self-reflective accounts from the interviewee. The kind of 'data' which emerged from such interviews was sometimes termed 'thick description', meaning that it was rich in detail about the concrete experiences of everyday life.²³ The defining element of the life-history method was its concern with understanding an individual's life-history as an entry point into understanding society as a whole. Recently the term 'theorised life-history' has also been used²⁴ in order to emphasise more explicitly the importance of forging this link between an individual life and the social and economic

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structures which shape that life. Sociologists have been particularly impressed with the 'ethnographic richness' of life-history materials, and the access which such methods provide to the subjective reality of people's lives, and to domains of social life not readily available with other methods.²⁵

In my own use of the life-history method, I draw on both the oral history and sociological traditions. The transcripts I use below are oral history interviews and have been gathered as part of a systematic study of working-class communities which also involves documentary and archival research.²⁶ The sociology enters in the way in which I choose to read them. This involves using a critical realist method of abstraction to 'unpack' the many 'determinations' which converge in a concrete outcome.²⁷ My aim is to expose the 'generative mechanisms' which lie within social processes, such as those of class and gender. As I hope to show below, focussing on memory is particularly helpful for exploring those mechanisms which connect class and gender experiences with identity formation. From this perspective, each life-history is a self-contained case study and my analysis does not depend on establishing whether the person is 'representative' or not, or whether she is 'typical' or not. I do not attempt to generalise in any kind of quantifiable fashion, but rather, I explore the case studies in terms of 'patterns of sociostructural relations'²⁸ In this light, these life histories represent 'instances' of social processes and thereby illuminate the way such processes emerge from particular structural relations. Each case study stands on its own; an additional case study or two cannot confirm the 'validity' of patterns which emerge in the first case study. Instead, the value of additional case studies is their potential to reveal more of the complexity of social processes, to illustrate how those 'sociostructural relations' emerge under a different set of conditions.

Instead of class imagery, I focus below on *class memory*, a term which encompasses two aspects of class identity. Like class imagery and class self-placement, class memory can refer to that conscious positioning, in memory, of the self within a network of class relations. Whether these relations are conceived in terms of power, status or income is not critical. Class memory, in this first sense, is a phenomenological concept which is grounded in the 'world view' of the people interviewed. In addition, I also use class memory in another sense, one which captures an important part of a person's relationship to the means of production and reproduction. Class memory, in this second sense, refers to an individual's memories of their *labour power*, of its nurturing, expenditure and withering. Sometimes, these memories attach to the commodified form of labour power, that is, its sale in the capitalist labour market; sometimes they attach to its non-commodified form, such as domestic labour. Whatever the case, and whether or not the person sees their labour power in class terms, my analysis relates these memories to that person's class identity.

Within oral history forums, the discussion around memory has mostly focussed on its reliability. Patrick O'Farrell, in the opening salvo of what became the 'great oral history debate', warned of the central danger in oral history: 'The memory plays tricks on us all, and to enshrine its trickery in 'historical' print is to maximise ... error'.²⁹ In reply to sceptics such as these, Paul Thompson argued that memory could serve as a reliable guide within oral history, pointing out that the most severe memory losses occurred relatively soon after the events in question and that from then onwards, memory remained remarkably stable.³⁰ However, the more serious problems with regard to memory relate to its selectivity and reconstruction, issues which Thompson quickly skated over. The cognitive psychology literature on memory, particularly the tradition termed 'autobiographical memory', has been particularly sensitive to these issues.³¹ Despite differences in emphasis and in terminology, psychologists working in this area have all advanced a number of similar

propositions. They argue for viewing memory as a process of *reconstruction*, rather than the *retrieval* of stored information. They argue that both the encoding of original experiences, and their subsequent recall, pass through cognitive categories which are crucially formative in this reconstruction. Finally, they also suggest that self identity is implicated in this process: that the cognitive categories are tied into the definition of the self, and in turn, the memories retained and recalled are partly constitutive of the identity of that self.

Accepting a 'reconstructionist' view of memory, as opposed to a 'retrieval' view, does not imply that we cannot distinguish different levels of veridical accuracy in oral history accounts, nor does it imply that memory and fantasy cannot be distinguished. The work of organisations like Amnesty International, which rely on corroboration from independent eye witnesses, illustrates that protocols for discerning fact from fiction can be developed. The traditional enterprise of oral history is not called into question by adopting a 'reconstructionist' view of memory. If anything, it is enriched by the new possibilities for analysis which this perspective introduces, particularly possibilities for exploring the issue of self-identity. In an oral history interview we do not gaze directly into the past through the eyes of our informant. Rather, we meet a person engaged in a 'highly constructed ... performance' which is the product of 'thought, artifice, verbal and literary skills'.³² Personal identity thus emerges as the author behind the script. Agnes Hankiss suggests that a person's present imagery of the self is related to the image of childhood which he or she constructs. Furthermore,

Everyone builds his or her own theory about the history and the course of his or her life by attempting to classify his or her particular successes and fortunes ... according to a coherent, explanatory principle and to incorporate them within a historical unit. In other words, everybody tries, in one way or another, to build up his or her own ontology.³³

In this respect, we can read memories for the conscious self-identity which they embody. This explains why we often find a strong *teleological* element within autobiography,³⁴ which works by recreating key past events or feelings as the progenitors of the kind of person we now understand ourselves to be. This is part of the process by which the unified presence of the self is constructed, a process which post-structuralists have explored at length.³⁵ What Hankiss overlooks, however, and what the teleology disguises, are the contradictions, silences and ambiguities which emerge in most life-history interviews. These may suggest different possibilities around identity within memory, possibilities which may run counter to the 'official' ontology being developed. In the life-histories which follow, I focus on the fruitful analytical possibilities of reading class memory for their contradictions.

Oral history interviews can be read as a double transaction: a simultaneous juggling of performance and reverie. In the course of any interview, there is constant movement between performance and reverie, with different narratives settling in at different points. For example, anecdotes, jokes, explanations and 'theories' usually veer towards performance; surprises, uncertainties and emotional imagery often veer towards reverie. Whatever the case, two transactions are always taking place. Even when the interviewee is repeating a family anecdote for the umpteenth time, memory is still being mobilised to clothe the ribs of the story. Similarly, even when the interviewee seems totally absorbed in reverie, an audience is always being addressed - though sometimes as an absent other. A cultural reading of memory recognises these two dimensions of the interview. On the one hand, focusing on the performance dimension alerts us to the presence of a range of narrative devices, such as metaphors and symbolic expressions. On the other hand, focusing on reverie alerts us to

the importance of teleology as an important link between memory and self-identity, and to the role of mnemonic associations as one entry point into a person's emotional life.

Reading Class Memory: Betty Seeton

Betty Seeton (the name is fictional) was a child of the Great Depression. Her mother was a clerical worker and her father a coalminer at Lithgow, a small town in the New South Wales central west. For the last twenty years of his life, Betty's father suffered from 'black lung' and the family depended for their livelihood on the family savings and her mother's domestic production of vegetables and fowls. Betty's father was an autodidact, enthusiastic in his thirst for self-education. As for Betty herself, an early love of music led her into a career as a music teacher. Her teacher's scholarship, and her studies at the Conservatorium of Music, provided an avenue out of the small mining town, and out of the manual working-class as well. After teaching in Sydney for several years, Betty found herself back in Lithgow, where she married and settled down. Her husband, whom she met through a Church choir, had worked in a series of manual jobs, mostly in mines and factories, before gaining his boiler ticket and securing a permanent job at the local hospital.

Betty's account of her childhood revealed a sympathy for the hardships her parents faced, and a gratitude for their sacrifices, particularly the opportunity they gave her to learn music. But, at the same time, there was a strong sense of the stifling restrictiveness of their paternalism: the constant monitoring of everything she did. The sense of suffocation induced at home was reinforced in the parochialism of the surrounding community: 'I always thought that Lithgow was a very narrow, restrictive place, and I lived amongst ordinary people whose outlooks in some cases was terribly narrow.' The answer, for Betty, was to escape through learning, an experience which gave her 'enormous' pleasure and opened new horizons: 'even doing French and Latin transported you to another time and another place'. By leaving to study in Sydney, Betty found the means by which to break through the boundaries imposed on her as a daughter. For Betty the narrow parochialism of the mining town had a particularly strong gender dimension, something which linked the world of the 1940s with that of the 1990s:

there's a good deal of male chauvinism around here. Now whether it is because it is a working-class community I don't know. But far be it from me to denigrate the working-class - as you see I come from that background myself - but, a music teacher I once had, when I was doing some violin studies, she said, 'Oh, the working-class people are lovely, poor dears, but,' she said, 'women, children and dogs are down there.'

Did you agree with that?

And I think that that's fairly true, I think it's probably getting better, but not amongst a lot of people, because a lot of working people, what thought would they ever give to these things? You know, they go on through their lives, and they wouldn't ever think about it. They'd just go on as their fathers did before them, and they wouldn't see any reason to change, or even think about changing. And I think that male hierarchical thing was very definitely entrenched here.

In this memory, the working out of these connections between class, gender and small town parochialism came through the episode focussed on music. The violin teacher's role, as a narrative device, was to solidify these connections and allow Betty herself to stand

back from too strongly endorsing them. Betty's narrative identity here, as the daughter of working-class parents, was emphasised in the interpolation ('far be it from me ...') and it served to tone down her agreement with her teacher. While the conclusion had an authoritative ring ('very definitely'), the language used along the way had a more ambivalent tone ('fairly true', 'getting better').

Where did this ambivalence come from? Why did not Betty, in the light of her other memories of oppressive working-class restrictions, move more decisively away from identifying with the manual working-class? The answer partly lay in Betty's marriage (to a manual worker), but it also lay in the other elements which made up Betty's class memory: particularly her account of her father's working life. Here the imagery was symbolic and emotionally powerful, and the narrative identity was far more sympathetic than that assumed in recounting other depictions of her family life:

I remember him coming home from work. He never used to shower at work. Because he preferred to just come home rather than take all his clothes to work and shower. He would just come home in his pit clothes. And I remember him being black, perfectly black. And you know, he had his miner's lamp. And when I was a little kid, it was a carbide lamp, you know, that he had and this cap and what not. And he was as black as could be. He used to sit down at the laundry step at the back and take his boots off, which would be filled with little bits of coal, and he'd take those out into the yard and get the coal out of those, you know. And then mum would take his clothes and soak those, ready to wash. He must have had a couple. He used to wear a grey pit flannel, and you know, moleskin type trousers and what not, you know.

And he didn't talk much about it except that, you could see he hated it, you could see that he really and truly hated it. He used to tell us stories about the horses, they had the horses down in the mine, pulling the skips out. And he used to talk about how intelligent they were. And although he appeared to be hard, he never let us keep a pet, he wouldn't appear to like animals, I think he might have, deep down. Because I think he'd take an apple for the horse. And he'd talk about how the horse learned to open his lunch tin and get the apple out [laughter] so he had to make sure it didn't get the sandwich too. He used to talk about some things like. But he didn't discuss his work much. He'd be so tired, because they didn't have the machinery then, to do the work.

And I suppose he wasn't even well, even in those days, the dust must have been starting to settle in his lungs and cause ill-health. But he used to go and have a big hot bath, and then he would have a meal, and then he would lie down on the couch that we had in the living room and he would just go to sleep and he'd wake up sometime in the evening and he'd read and he'd listen to the radio, or whatever. And then he'd go off to bed early, because he was really, really exhausted, physically exhausted.

Transactions with memory often employ mnemonic associations, where one image induces a flow of other images. At the same time, transactions with the audience may set up a narrative structure which follows a story-telling logic. The anecdote which eventually surfaces is the product of this double logic. Both of these elements are social, rather than psychological, processes. The story-telling is part of a social performance, the transaction with memory an interaction with social memories as well as personal reminiscences.³⁶ We can see this with Betty Seeton's anecdote. In its repetition of 'blackness' and 'exhaustion',

and in its story about the horse, Betty's narrative drew upon a cultural repertoire wider than her own personal recollections. At the same time, a daughter's empathy for her father emerged in the affectionate tone given to the horse story, in the overall choice of words, and in the syntax: 'you could see that he hated it, you could see that he really and truly hated it'. The details in this anecdote, from taking off the boots through to lying on the couch, are more than just the embellishment of the story-teller's art. They suggest that self-identity is present in more ways than just the narrative viewpoint, but actually enters into the kinds of details which fill out the description. To appreciate this point, we need to briefly overview some key findings in the psychology of memory.

In the 1970s the Canadian psychologist, Endel Tulving, developed a distinction between episodic and semantic memory, that is, between memories for 'perceptual events' and memories for words and concepts.³⁷ Marigold Linton employed this distinction in a self-experiment on memory which spanned six years and which showed that repeated experiences with particular kinds of individual events increased her semantic memory about those events. If the events were similar, then they were eventually no longer distinguished as separate events.³⁸ In other words, semantic memory increasingly organised her episodic memory over time. This finding is consistent with other studies which show that the reconstruction process which takes place in memory involves the merging of episodic memories into more generic 'event' categories which are organised semantically.³⁹

In a transaction with memory in which a routine event is recounted, we may be inclined to think that we are recalling a single memory; for example, a typical 'day in the life...'. But in the light of this memory research, it seems more likely that we are reconstructing the event from our semantic memory and the abundance of vivid detail, far from indicating accuracy in recall, is actually evidence of the fertility of this semantic memory. This is not to say that the details are the product of fantasy. Rather, they act as mnemonic devices: elements from the episodic memories which have passed into semantic memory because of their symbolic or emotional meaning. Betty's father's blackness and exhaustion, as well as the small lumps of coal in his boots, are almost metaphorical, operating in this narrative as a form of synecdoche (where the part stands in for the whole). This is partly a narrative device, part of the art of story-telling which Betty has mastered so well, but it is also an aspect of her memory transactions. The merger between episodic and semantic memories is not always transparent. A person may not be aware, for example, that an image they hold in their mind is not the single, solitary episode it appears to be. That image has not been extracted from a repository where all one's days are catalogued; rather it has been re-fashioned from a blurred amalgam of some of those days. The work of two important memory researchers shows how this process of re-fashioning works, and how its transparency arises.

Over many years Elizabeth Loftus conducted experiments on eyewitness testimony, in which she deliberately induced distortions into her subjects' memories. In one of these experiments Loftus showed her subjects photographic slides of a motor vehicle accident scene, and then managed through the wording of her questions, to convince nearly a fifth of her subjects that they remembered seeing a barn, something which did not in fact exist in the original scene.⁴⁰ Over time, this process of constructing memories becomes invisible: one cannot unpack some original or pristine image that is separate from its temporal context.

In his pioneering work in the 1930s Frederic Bartlett established one of the key insights of memory research: that memory conforms to interpretation. When Bartlett gave an unintelligible story to a group of subjects to remember, he found that their recalled stories imposed coherence on the story: 'In their 'effort after meaning', they were forced to map

out the story, prior to remembering it, through providing some interpretation that would render it intelligible.⁴¹ When their memory was still fresh, Bartlett's subjects often realised the discrepancies between the original story and their own accounts, but over time those parts of the story which did not fit the interpretation faded. Eventually they were left with only a single memory, and no recollection of its disparate origins.

Returning to Betty, these insights suggest that her identity, as a working-class daughter who felt pride and compassion for her father's working life, shaped her semantic memory. In turn, this semantic memory, in conjunction with her story-telling skills, recreated for her audience 'a day in the life' of her father. This was an apparently typical day which, nevertheless, managed to symbolically capture just those features of his working life which impacted so profoundly on Betty's own identity. The whole story was, in a sense, a metaphor for Betty's expression of class loyalty.

At the same time, however, Betty's class identity remained contradictory. It was evident in an earlier passage that both music and gender undercut the unity of class memory, rendering its associations ambivalent. The critical divisions within Betty's contemporary working life centred around gender and music. The most difficult period in recent years was a struggle to come to terms with working alongside a young man who was 'very ambitious' and who 'used to do different types of music ... a lot of sort of rock music and what not'. Eventually, he moved on and Betty found herself working with a younger woman. Although the newcomer also played a 'more modern type of music', Betty found that she had the 'same sort of aims and works in with us and is really great ...'. It was predominantly within these kinds of relationships with other women teachers that Betty found a milieu favourable to feminism. During the long discussion of her working life, her approach to music, her return to the Conservatorium for further studies, and her relations with her husband, Betty's perspective was overwhelmingly that of the musician and the feminist. As such, class identity stood in an uneasy tension with this perspective. On the one hand, there was the imagery of the parochial and patriarchal working-class community. On the other hand, there was the sympathetic portrait of working-class struggle and hardship, epitomised in her father's working life.

The ambivalence dissolved when her own working life moved into alignment with that of her father's. Betty's identification as a working-class daughter finally emerged most sharply in the account of the industrial conditions of her current working life and the contemporary changes in the mines around Lithgow. For Betty, the erosion of working conditions in the mining industry, and the threat posed to her own industrial conditions by the New South Wales government's 1991 industrial relations legislation, revitalised memories of her father's working life. The memory of his swollen, poisoned hand - which went unreported at work and thus without compensation - and of their family taking unpaid holidays, gave to the word 'conditions' a particular emotional resonance, an association which was mobilised in contemporary struggles:

So I suppose I'm a bit militant. People think I'm funny at school, because I get upset about people's working conditions being lost. But I just really honestly believe that most bosses aren't going to give you good conditions out of the goodness of their heart. That the unions have got to try and maintain what they've got, you know, not just let it all slip through their fingers and have to fight the same battles over again.

To move beyond a cultural reading and locate Betty's contradictory class identity within a structural setting, involves recasting this ambivalence within class memory as the product

of a contradictory class location. Making this observation is not equivalent to 'reading off' ideology from class location, because the analysis throughout has incorporated mediations based on other sources of identity, as well as the contingency which arises from the 'complex synthesis of many determinations'. Material conditions of existence, social relations of production and reproduction, cultural and symbolic resources and the psychological operations of memory have all collaborated to fashion Betty's class identity.⁴²

Since the 1970s a debate has raged within class analysis around the issue of the 'new middle class', people who work as managers, professionals, intellectuals and technicians.⁴³ Without revisiting this debate in any detail, it is worth noting that many of the theorists who refuse to include the new middle class within a broad definition of the working class emphasise the cultural differences at stake. As Barbara and John Ehrenreich summarised it: 'The subjective dimension of these contacts [between the two groups] is a complex mixture of hostility and deference on the part of working-class people, contempt and paternalism on the part of the PMC [the professional-managerial class].'⁴⁴ Similarly, Sandy Carter used detailed ethnographic material to conclude that: 'Around income, jobs, community, family and sexual relations, working class life is so enormously different from that of the 'middle strata' [the new middle class] that to disregard the difference can only smack of blindness, condescension and arrogance.'⁴⁵ Whether these cultural differences provide sufficient grounds for arguing that the new middle class stands in an 'objectively antagonistic' relationship to the traditional working-class is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is worth noting that, in terms of individual self-identity, such cultural differences are strong enough to saturate lived experience with contradictory tensions. For Betty Seeton, as for a generation of scholarship children before her, education took her only part of the way out of the working class. Like Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams⁴⁶ she took up a new middle-class occupation, but retained strong emotional links with the working-class culture of her parents. The feeling of being 'caught between two worlds', common for people in these circumstances, was heightened for Betty because she was a woman. As other accounts of working-class communities highlight,⁴⁷ sexism in traditional working-class communities operates in both a claustrophobic and authoritarian fashion. Consequently, the ambivalence in Betty's memories of her working-class childhood reflect the contradictory social relations set up by this tension between working class and new middle class, overlaid by differing definitions of femininity and masculinity which polarise around this tension, and differing definitions of cultural activity which often emerge as a contrast between 'high culture' and local working-class culture.

Reading Class Memory: Mary Wallace

In 1960 Mary Wallace (the name is fictional) moved to Mount Druitt in Western Sydney to raise her four children. She had just divorced her husband and, with the money left over from paying his drinking debts, paid a deposit on a small fibro cottage in the Old Village. Mary stayed there for the next 13 years, watching the changes with growing dread. The Housing Commission developments brought a new, 'undesirable element' into the area and, once her children had all left school and found work, 'I couldn't get out of it fast enough'. For much of the interview, Mary regularly began her harsher comments with the phrase, 'not that I'm a snob or anything, but ...'. At first glance, one might be tempted to conclude that she was simply a fish out of water, a middle-class woman forced by poverty into a cheap housing area. In terms of class memory, however, the situation was much more complex and contradictory.

Mary's mother and father had lived in western New South Wales. His job as a builder

took him around all the large country towns west of the Divide. Her mother was not in paid work but concentrated her energy on educating her children and writing books and poetry. The Great Depression hit the family hard and they lost everything. The family moved to Sydney and settled in the semi-rural suburb of Beecroft. The marriage, scarred by the husband's 'womanising' and violence, deteriorated further under the harsh conditions of unemployment.

When it came time to leave school, her father suggested that Mary should enter 'service' but her mother insisted on a professional career for her daughter, hoping that she might become a doctor. Mary herself had other plans: a strong desire to be an artist. The teleology of memory, in which the trajectory towards the present can be found layered across the past, is revealed in Mary's 'destiny' to be an artist: 'I can remember being in my cot and picking up a pencil and drawing stick men all along the wall' and 'I can remember when I was ten the school inspector came around ... and he was going through all the art books ... and he came down, and he put his hand on my head and he said 'When you grow up you are going to be an artist'. In her art exams for the Intermediate Certificate Mary gained the highest mark in the state and won a scholarship to East Sydney Tech, but her mother refused to allow Mary to accept it: 'she said 'Oh no, you can't be an artist you will always be poor' ... She had read all these novels where artists are always living up in attics and couldn't get enough to eat, and they would be scrounging around, and they would be living this dreadful bohemian sort of a life.'

Mary had no intention of becoming a doctor and so, in a pragmatic compromise, enrolled in a business college. At 17 she began her working life with a bicycle firm, working in the office as a cashier. With the war now underway, labour shortages meant 'you could walk in anywhere and get a job' and Mary eventually landed a secretarial job in an architect's office. At 21, she married a farmer, Mike Wallace, and went to live on his farm on the outskirts of Sydney. But after several years the marriage began to fall apart because of Mike's drinking and the family returned to Beecroft, building a home on part of her father's large block. It was only a temporary solution: Mike had become a 'part-time husband', and Mary faced returning to work or watching her family go under.

While Mary had valuable office skills to offer in the labour market, she also had four children: 'I could not get a job, I walked Sydney. And especially if you said you had four children, that was the end. So I woke up to that, I'd go in and say I had one.' Without a husband, the banks 'wouldn't even touch you', so Mary sold the Beecroft home and with the money left over from paying all the drinking debts, moved to Mount Druitt, the 'cheapest place I could buy a house'. She was then working in a factory office in the inner city, but with the move west, she looked around for work closer to home and found another office job in the American-owned 3M factory at St Marys. She stayed there until she retired from the workforce, when she finally moved from Mount Druitt.

The commodified part of Mary's labour power was expended in factory offices where both class and gender relations of power were ever present. At 3M, she worked alongside men who did exactly the same amount of work, but were paid twice her wage ('that used to make me mad'). When the company conducted a series of IQ tests amongst the staff, Mary scored higher than her male boss, much to his cost: 'he was furious ... he threw the pencil on the desk ... do you know what, they demoted that man'. Working for a firm with a deep hostility to unions, and a fetish for time and motion studies, Mary found her job at the cutting edge of class struggle: '... the Americans treated you liked a slave. You worked and you got your pay and there was no respect for you as a person. Somehow you were a bit of machinery, there to do a good job.' However, Mary's response to this regime, based

on her situation as a single parent, isolated her from her fellow workers:

I used to work hard to make an impression, and they, all the girls, used to say to me, 'What are you doing that for? You know, you're making it bad for us.' But ... they didn't realise how important that job was to me. I mean, if I lost that job I would have been down the gurgle.

At a cultural level, Mary had already isolated herself. Her mother's efforts at developing cultural capital⁴⁸ in her children, in the form of music and dancing lessons and literature, had gelled with Mary's own artistic sensibility to produce an intellectual thirst which the mundane world of the office workplace could rarely quench: 'you couldn't sit down and discuss a book with them or anything. I mean all they were interested in was the price of butter, bread and what their children were doing'. The women were also preoccupied with trivial forms of status distinction: their clothing, the cars they drove, their husband's jobs, and the street and suburb in which they lived. For Mary, on the other hand, the distinctions which really mattered, things like stimulating conversation or sensitivity to nature, were missing: 'we would walk from the office over to the canteen and I might say to a couple of the girls, 'Oh look at those beautiful trees over there.' And they would say, 'What trees?' You know, and I would think, 'Oh forget it'.

For Mary, this lack of sensitivity was not something unique to the western suburbs, or to the working-class women with whom she shared her lunch. Her own sister, who became a journalist, was also deficient: 'I'll say to her something, I would be driving along ... 'Isn't that beautiful?' And she says, 'Oh, it's all right', and I know she hasn't seen it, and I think 'Oh dear, you are missing'. Nor was Mary's contempt for the status games of the office world unique to that setting. Her upbringing in Beecroft during the 1930s, then an 'upwardly mobile' suburb, had left her with a lasting contempt for middle-class snobbery:

When I was about ten, I suddenly woke up to this teacher. [She] was putting us all into little pigeon holes. And she would say, 'Now hand up the children who've got an electric jug at home.' And we didn't have an electric jug, we had an old fuel stove with an old black kettle on it. And up would go my arm. 'And who've got an electric iron?' We had the old irons and things, up would go my arm. And my sister was younger than me, and she would look and if I put my hand up, she would put hers up [laughter]. And we had everything in that house. We had everything, like hell we did. We had nothing, but I wasn't going to [let on] ...

These childhood memories also found in Mary's own creativity a powerful ally for shaping her class memory. Her contempt for the limited horizons of the middle-class women in Beecroft - 'they had nothing to think about except what you wore, what you owned' - was sharpened by her pride in her father's trade skills:

I always felt that the workers never got a fair go and a worker is the salt of the earth. I mean the houses my father used to build were magnificent and he was well trained ... when he built a house he could build it from whoa to go, not have to call anybody in. And during the depression, he built a house for two pounds a week. And that house is in Beecroft, I see it when I go past, a beautiful home. He was glad to get the job. And I think to build something is absolutely fantastic, to be creative, and I cannot see why people have to look down on a person being a tradesman.

In retrospect, the divisions in Mary's class memory seem clear: an unmistakable pride in being a tradesman's daughter, and a contempt for the pretentiousness and snobbery of her childhood suburb. Yet other memories, and the admissions that come with them, signal just how complex class memory is at an emotional level:

When I was young, I mean you went to a dance and a fellow came up and asked you to dance, and you looked at his hands and saw that he had grime and everything under his nails, you would turn your nose up at him. I mean, he was a manual worker, and yet my father was a manual worker. But you get, I mean, it rubs off, environment rubs off.

In his discussion of the 'scholarship boys', and other working-class people who take up 'self-improvement', Richard Hoggart noted the emotional tension which such people experience when confronted by middle-class snobbery: 'He wavers between scorn and longing'.⁴⁹ In dismissing the status games of the office women, and in deriding the petty snobbery of the Beecroft women, Mary's sails were filled with the winds of scorn. But her mother's efforts, with the music, dancing and literature, also stirred the breeze of longing, and Mary loaded on board her cultural capital. In the memory of her music teacher's snobbery, we glimpse this ambivalence, with the scorn and longing condensed into the image of the silk petticoat:

this [other] girl was always beautifully dressed and I can remember this music teacher ... saying ... to this girl 'Oh, look at your beautiful silk petticoat.' And I used to be hanging on, 'Oh God', you know, and I wouldn't even have a petticoat on. And that's what they were like, so small minded, that's what made me go Labor ...

We find in Mary's class memory a set of emotional divisions which pride in her father's labour power could not undo. A distinction between roughness and refinement, and between an inner world and an outer environment, were central in Mary's recollections of Mount Druitt. The adjective 'rough' was used to describe the change in Mount Druitt's population: the 'uneducated country bumpkins' who lived there in the early 1960s were increasingly replaced by the 'undesirable element' that came with the Housing Commission. The key definer of roughness was swearing, 'the 'f' words you had never heard before'. At work, the main distinction between office women and factory women was also 'roughness' ('they were rougher than the men ... you wouldn't dare look at them sideways, they would really tell you off'). Finally, at school 'roughness' also emerged in the swearing and the answering back of the students. 'Foul language' grated sharply for someone brought up on poetry and music, and it also evoked the painful world of masculine violence and drunkenness (embodied in her father and husband respectively).

At the same time, Mary's identity as a mother merged with this sensibility. The corrupting power of the 'roughness' posed a threat to her children's futures. Here the distinction between the inside and the outside, the inner haven and dangerous environment, was employed to map out a strategy of family survival. Her eldest daughter was enrolled at the local high school ('I knew she would survive ... she wouldn't mix with anybody that was rough'), but the younger one was sent to a Catholic school ('she couldn't take this rough element'). Both of her boys were also sent to Catholic schools, with the desperate hope that the younger one might be rescued from the 'influence' of the area, already evident in his truancy and 'rough' friends. When Mary's sister visited her in Mount Druitt and declared 'I would rather jump off the harbour bridge than live here', Mary's response highlighted

this strategy:

I thought, 'Okay, I have got a house here, I have got a roof over my head, I have got my children', and that's all that mattered. Look ... you can't change your environment, but if you don't get mixed up in the environment, it's not going to affect you ... and I had all my interests in the house.

The other inner world, the one that sheltered Mary from this 'depressing' place, with its 'degrading poorness', was her painting. It had by that stage also become a source of income, and Mary would use paintings for deposits on various household purchases. One time, finding herself desperate to pay the rates, Mary used a postage stamp of Albert Namatjira to paint his portrait, and then offered it to the publican at the local Namatjira Hotel. However, it was overwhelmingly the non-commodified domain of her labour power that mattered most. After a whole day spent painting in the bush, Mary would return home 'exhausted but saturated with nature'; as she explained to the local priest, her painting had become the spiritual equivalent of going to church.

Class memory is also about place, and for Mary that involved another set of contradictions. Beecroft, a suburb dark with memories of family misery and hurtful exclusion, was also a place rich in beauty: 'that's where I learned to love nature, because we had this acre and a half of orchard, and all these daffodils growing, I can still see it'. Mount Druitt, that sanctuary for a young mother and her four kids, in time became an albatross weighing down their futures:

When Paul left school, he tried to get a job in an office, he wanted to do accounts ... and he went from job to job. And he could not, because as soon as he said, 'Mount Druitt', cut off! So he gave my sister's address in the city and he got a job like that.

For Mary, grappling with the stigma of the Mount Druitt was also overlaid by the tension around 'scorn and longing'. When she returned to painting, in the late 1960s, she took up lessons at the Royal Art Society in Sydney. Her tutor was impressed with her talent and urged her to join the women's social group. When Mary gave her address as Mount Druitt, the secretary, who at first had been 'all over me', turned up her nose, and the social group black-balled Mary. In grappling with the hurt, Mary's sentences contain, side by side, the scorn of defiance and the longing for acceptance:

It didn't make any difference to me, I would tell anybody that asked me [where I came from]. But I still get a little bit squirmish, I used to get a bit squirmish, I will admit. And even now, when people say to me, 'Where did you live before you came here?' and I hate to say 'Mount Druitt', I hate to say it.

Conclusion

I have suggested in this article that memory operates in a teleological fashion. Quite often, our lives, in retrospect, appear as the seamless unfolding of a destiny, not the uneven resolution of a hundred tiny struggles or a thousand partial choices. Frigga Haug has suggested that biographies are particularly prone to teleology, and that a certain view of self-identity can emerge from this:

To view childhood and adolescence simply as causal phases of today's person is to assume

that actions follow one another logically, that adult human beings are more or less contained within children, that external events produce little more than minor modifications.⁵⁰

Contradictions, however, threaten to overturn this neat simplicity. Most of the time they are hidden by 'rapid repression, obliteration and forgetting', devices by which the self attempts to maintain the kind of emotional equilibrium which provides us with our stability as people. Using the approach of memory-work, pioneered by Haug and her colleagues, this stability can be deliberately challenged. There are two stages to memory-work. First, the memories which the participants produce are scrutinised for their contradictions, which at first glance, may appear as 'no more than hairline cracks' within a 'harmonious whole'. However, 'under the surface, confusion reign[s]'. Secondly, the ideological history of the participants is explored, an exercise which can reveal how 'social judgments and prejudices, semi-scientific theories, everyday opinions ... serve most often as solid buttresses to shore up the ruptures in our own construction of ourselves'.⁵¹

Frigga Haug's work provides valuable insights for thinking about how contradictory social relations inscribe their presence on self-identity. The self's emotional need for stability finds in various ideologies, devices for smoothing over contradictions which are located in social relations of production and reproduction. At the same time, the teleological character of memory cements in place a history of the self which presents a 'harmonious whole'. However, the fragility of this edifice is exposed systematically in exercises such as memory-work, and more informally, in episodes like oral history interviews when contradictory social relations are exposed and their emotional consequences are given the time and the space to emerge.

I noted earlier that those surveys which delve into class identity with a little more depth than self-descriptive labelling often find ambivalence. These kinds of surveys have flickered past this fragility of the self, and brushed lightly against its contradictory tensions, but have found no place to land and explore its full potential. At one point in their reflections, the British research team speculated that class identity may exist as a latent feeling, which effective political mobilisation may transform into class conscious activity.⁵² Their method, however, precluded them from taking this insight any further. From a life-history perspective we can take this issue further by regarding class memories as the raw materials upon which class ideologies go to work. In this sense class memories point toward latent class identities; they constitute that cultural terrain upon which ideological messages go to work. As Richard Johnson argued, ideologies do not address 'naked subjects',⁵³ they find an acculturated individual already in place, whose responsiveness to such ideologies is conditional upon their prior lived experiences. In order to comprehend how ideologies are effective in forming particular identities, we need a detailed understanding of that prior lived experience, something which only life-histories, autobiographies or participant observation studies can offer.

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Endnotes

1. R. Martin and R.H. Fryer, 'The Deferential Worker?' in M. Bulmer (ed) *Working Class Images of Society*, London, 1975, 113-114. The literature on 'images of class' is extensive. The seminal studies in Britain included D. Lockwood, 'Sources of Variation in Working Class Images of Society', *Sociological Review*, 14, 1966, 249-67, and J. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, F. Bechhofer, & J. Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge, 1969. Important studies in Australia included: O.A. Oeser and S.B. Hammond, *Social Structure and Personality in a City*, London, 1954; A.F. Davies, *Images of Class: an Australian Study*, Sydney, 1967; C. Chamberlain, *Class Consciousness in Australia*, Sydney, 1983.
2. Countries in which the project was carried out included: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, West Germany, and the United States. The findings for Australia, the United States and Britain were published as follows: J. Baxter, M. Emmison, J. Western, & M. Western (eds) *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, South Melbourne, 1991; E. Wright, *Classes*, London, 1985; G. Marshall, H. Newby, D. Rose & C. Vogler, *Social Class in Modern Britain*, London, 1988.
3. Baxter et. al., *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, 274. There was nothing novel in this claim. In the late 1960s Don Aitkin's surveys reached the same conclusion: 'these data confirm that class is of little importance to most Australians: one's town, one's state and even one's status as a British subject appear to loom larger.' D. Aitkin, *Stability and Change in Australian Politics*, Canberra, 1977, 130. Other Australian survey research, in the early 1950s, reached different conclusions: 'most cases appeared to consider their class membership as their major grouping or position in the community', Oeser and Hammond, *Social Structure and Personality in a City*, 265-6
4. Marshall et. al., *Social Class in Modern Britain*, 155.
5. The Australian researchers argued that the British findings were 'an artefact of the design of their survey', but never considered whether the same criticism might apply to their own findings. Baxter et. al., *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, 284
6. The 'end of class' thesis first appeared in the 1950s, mainly in debates around the affluence of the post-war working class. Whereas in the 1960s the critics of this thesis were to be found on the left, during its revival in the 1980s, many of its advocates were now on the left. For the British debates of the 1980s around the continuing relevance of class see the journal *Marxism Today*; M. Jacques and F. Mulhern, *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* London, 1981; B. Fine, L. Harris, M. Mayo, A. Weir, E. Wilson, *Class Politics - An Answer to its Critics*, London, 1985; E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, 1985. For the Australian debates, see the journal *Arena*; R.W. Connell and M. Goot, 'The End of Class, Re-run', *Meanjin*, 38, 1979, 13-15; B. Frankel, 'In Defence of Class Analysis', *Arena*, 66, 1984, 125-137; D. McKnight (ed) *Moving Left: The Future of Socialism in Australia*, Sydney, 1986.
7. Baxter et. al., *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, 302, 341.
8. Marshall et. al., *Social Class in Modern Britain*, 220.
9. In this regard they were belatedly recognising what critics like Connell and Goot had argued in the late 1970s: 'to think that an abstract, forced-choice question, asked by a stranger with her foot in the door, could represent the emotions, perceptions, subtleties, difficulties and contradictions that go to make up class consciousness - let alone that it could fix a person's class - is frankly absurd.' Connell and Goot, 'The End of Class' 13.
10. Baxter et. al., *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, 260-61.
11. Marshall et. al., *Social Class in Modern Britain*, 177, 187.
12. See the various contributors to Bulmer, *Working Class Images of Society* and G. Marshall, 'Some Remarks on the Study of Working-Class Consciousness', *Politics and Society*, 12, 1983, 263-301. In the Australian surveys of the late 1960s Aitkin found 'of those who had described themselves in 1967 as middle-class or working-class, 32 per cent two years later had either abandoned one class label for another or denied the existence of class altogether.' *Stability and Change*, 128.
13. J. Goldthorpe and P. Bevan, 'The Study of Social Stratification in Great Britain: 1946-1976', *Social Science Information*, 16, 3/4, 1977, 309.
14. Baxter et. al., *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, 365; Marshall et. al., *Social Class in Modern Britain*, 294.
15. See, for example, N. Britten, 'Class Imagery in a national sample of women and men', *British Journal of Sociology*, 25, 3, 1984, 411.
16. L. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. by Lunley and Bloomfield, Cambridge, 1987; L. Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, 1979, 84-108; J. Gregory, 'The Deconstruction of Memory: Exploring Childhood Memories of Class', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, 11, 1989, 75.
17. See K. Plummer, *Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method*, London, 1983 for the distinction between reliability and validity; see Connell and Goot for a critique of attitudinal research.
18. Wright, *Classes*, 146; Baxter et. al., *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia*, 365-6.
19. De-contextualised abstract questions are more likely to elicit answers which reflect dominant ideologies, rather than personal meanings. See Bulmer, *Working Class Images of Society*, 74, 109. Wright conceded the problem of context, but then ignored it for his analysis, *Classes*, 143. Marshall et. al., *Social Class in Modern Britain*, were also acutely aware of the problem: 'context and meaning are precisely what must be sacrificed by survey researchers attempting to work towards more general and reliable conclusions.' 189.
20. For a sustained argument about the importance of spatial contextualising, and a critique of the dominance of historicism within the Western intellectual tradition, see E. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*:

- The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London, 1989.
21. Useful overviews of the life-history revival can be found in Plummer, *Documents of Life*, and in the pages of the bilingual journal *Life Stories / Recits de vie*. For the oral history revival see P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford, 1978. For some of the debates around oral history see A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12, 1981, 96-107; 'Editorial: Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, 1979, i-iii; the 'Great Oral History Debate' in *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, 5, 1982-83 and 9, 1987.
 22. See Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, for this perspective. For a critique of this notion of 'giving a voice', see P. Hamilton, 'Inventing the Self': Oral history as Autobiography', *Hecate*, 16, 1/2, 1990, 128-133.
 23. A term originally coined by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. See B. Shaw 'Life History Writing in Anthropology: a Methodological Review', *Mankind*, 12, 3, 1980, 226-233.
 24. R.W. Connell, 'Live Fast and Die Young: The Construction of Masculinity among Young Working-class Men on the Margin of the Labour Market', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 27, 2, 1991, 143
 25. For advocacy of these themes see: A. Camargo 'The Life-History Approach in Latin America', *Life stories/ Recits de vie*, 1, 1985, 41-54; A. Faraday and K. Plummer 'Doing Life Histories', *Sociological Review*, 27, 4, 1979, 773-798; G. McCracken, *The Long Interview*, Newbury Park, 1988. Sexuality is one domain to which life-history research is ideally suited. See Bob Connell's work on masculinity and the AIDs related life history research on sexual practices (G. Dowsett, 'Investigating Gay Sexuality and Gay Lives - the Theorised Life History Method', paper to Second European Conference on HIV and Homosexuality, February, 1991).
 26. The two case studies used in this article are taken from a larger project examining class formation in post-war Australia. It involved oral history interviews with people in three post-war working class communities: Lithgow (1940s), Marrickville (1950s), and Mount Druitt (1960s). The people interviewed were not selected on an equal probability basis but according to what Glaser and Strauss have termed 'theoretical sampling'. The original sample frame was based on the person's year of leaving school (for Lithgow and Marrickville) and year of moving to Mount Druitt, and on their occupation. Because of the focus of the project on people's working lives, the intention of the sampling was to achieve a good diversity of occupations, whilst also ensuring an equal gender balance. (B. Glaser and A. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, New York, 1967.) The topic questions focussed on parents' lives, childhood, schooldays, working life and family life. While oral history and life-history overlap in this project, this is not always the case. Oral histories can focus on historical themes which are not life-histories; and not all life-histories are oral accounts. One of the most celebrated life-history classics used letters and written autobiographies (W. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 2 Volumes, New York, 1958).
 27. For a fuller account of critical realism, see R. Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, Second Edition, Sussex, 1978; R. Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, London, 1986; A. Sayer, 'Abstraction: A Realist Interpretation', *Radical Philosophy*, 28, 1981, 6-15
 28. D. Bertaux uses this phrase to explain how his method of generalising differs from that used in quantitative research. See 'From Life-History Approach to the Transformation of Sociological Practice' in D. Bertaux (ed) *Biography and Society, The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, Beverly Hills, 1981, 37.
 29. P. O'Farrell, 'Oral History: Facts and Fiction', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, 5, 1982-3, 9
 30. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 101-102, 113
 31. M. Conway, *Autobiographical Memory: An Introduction*, Milton Keynes, 1990; U. Neisser (ed) *Memory Observed, Remembering in Natural Contexts*, San Francisco, 1982; B. Ross, *Remembering the Personal Past: Descriptions of Autobiographical Memory*, New York, 1991; D.C. Rubin, (ed) *Autobiographical Memory*, Cambridge, 1986
 32. R. Johnson, with G. Dawson, 'Popular memory: theory, politics, method' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Making Histories, Studies in history-writing and politics*, London, 1982
 33. A. Hankiss, 'Ontologies of the Self: On the Mythological Rearranging of One's Life History', in D. Bertaux, *Biography and Society*, 203.
 34. See J. Murphy, 'The Voice of Memory: History, Autobiography and Oral History', *Historical Studies*, 22, 87, October 1986, 169
 35. See, for example, A. Game, *Undoing the Social: Towards a Deconstructive Sociology*, Milton Keynes, 1991 and C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Post Structuralist Theory*, Oxford, 1987.
 36. For the concept of social memory see J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory*, Oxford, 1992 and P. Burke, 'History as Social Memory' in T. Butler (ed) *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, Oxford, 1989
 37. E. Tulving, 'Episodic and Semantic Memory' in E. Tulving and W. Donaldson (eds), *Organization of Memory*, New York, 1972.
 38. M. Linton, 'Ways of searching and the contents of memory' in Rubin, (ed), *Autobiographical Memory*, 79
 39. Barclay cited in Conway, *Autobiographical Memory*, 100
 40. E. Loftus, *EyeWitness Testimony*, Cambridge, 1979, 60-62
 41. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 35
 42. For the distinction between cultural readings and structural readings see R. Johnson, 'Popular Memory', 226-229. For the notion of the complex synthesis of many determinations, see A. Sayer, 'Abstraction ...'.
 43. Some of the key texts in this debate around the 'new middle class' include: A. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, London, 1979; N. Poulantzas, 'The New Petty Bourgeoisie', in A. Hunt (ed) *Class and Class Structure*, London, 1977; N. Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London, 1978; P. Walker (ed), *Between Labor and Capital*, Boston, 1979; E. Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, London, 1979; E. Wright, *Classes*, London, 1985; E. Wright, *The Debate on Classes*, London, 1989.
 44. B. & J. Ehrenreich (1979), 'The Professional-Managerial Class' in Walker(ed), *Between Labor and Capital*, 17

45. S. Carter, 'Class Conflict: The Human Dimension', in Walker (ed), *Between Labor and Capital*, 109
46. Both Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, the children of working class parents, became university academics through adult education tutoring.
47. See, for example, B. Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the Eighties*, London, 1984 and C. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, London, 1986
48. The concept of cultural capital has been most fully developed by Pierre Bourdieu. See P. Bourdieu and J. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Trans. R. Nice, London, 1977 and P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Trans. R. Nice, Cambridge, Mass., 1984.
49. R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, 1971, 302
50. F. Haug, 'Memory-Work', in F. Haug et. al., *Female Sexualization, A Collective Work of Memory*, London, 1967, 46
51. Haug, 'Memory-Work', 48, 68. The method of memory-work has been taken up enthusiastically in other settings since Haug's group began their enterprise. For a recent Australian version, see J. Crawford, S. Kippax, J. Onyx, U. Gault, and P. Benton, *Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory*, London, 1992. In its original formulation, memory-work followed a number of procedures. A memory-work group would take a particular theme as a trigger (such as 'hair'), and using a technique of third person narration, write out the memories associated with that trigger. The stories that emerged were then discussed by the group and analysed in such a way as to highlight the discrepancies between 'what we normally take to be our theoretically well-founded, enlightened and radical way of thinking, and our spontaneous judgements and feelings on the events of our childhood'. Such a process helped reveal the way in which 'our consciousness becomes ideologized', the way in which 'interpretive models, feelings, thoughts, snippets of popular wisdom, judgements' were brought to each story. The discussion phase was followed by project work, examining historical documents, fairytales, newspaper articles, and so forth, in order to 'forge collectively new connections' between different elements within the stories.
52. Marshall et. al., *Social Class in Modern Britain*, 193.
53. R. Johnson, 'Three Problematics: elements of a theory of working class culture', in J. Clarke, C. Critcher & R. Johnson (eds), *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, London, 1979, 234