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**In Broken Images: A Marxist Approach To Working With Life Stories**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

### **In Broken Images: A Marxist Approach to Working with Life Stories**

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Working with an approach to the interpretation and analysis of life stories based in the Marxist tradition this study looks at the lives of six teachers of literacy to adults who live and work on The Isle of Thanet in Kent. The study reviews points of divergence between postmodern theories based within a narrative constructionist approach to the interpretation of life stories and a Marxist approach. A case is made for a Marxist approach to life story work being both valid and informative. The first part of the study looks at considerations of methodology as these affect life story work in general and Marxist life story work in particular. Some work from Goethe and Balzac is presented to show how Marx's own scientific worldview grew out of wider artistic and scientific traditions beyond those with which it is usually associated. Attention is drawn to the relationship between Marxism and humanism and how both can be brought together to provide a fertile and humane form of social science. The life stories of the six teachers are presented in a form agreed to by those whose stories are told. Three themes emerging from the stories are selected by the researcher for further investigation. These themes are class and identity, managerialism, and place. Each of these three themes is analysed to show the relationship of the six life stories to Marxism. On this basis the argument is then put forward that Marxism itself has an important contribution to make to the academic study of life stories. This final argument forms the substance of the concluding chapter.

Keywords: life stories, Marxism, postmodernism, class and identity, managerialism, place.

## In Broken Images: A Marxist Approach to Working with Life Stories

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## **In Broken Images**

He is quick, thinking in clear images;  
I am slow, thinking in broken images.

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;  
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;  
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;  
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;  
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;  
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;  
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

**Robert Graves**

## **Introduction: In Broken Images**

### **How can Marxism and life story work be brought together?**

It might be a surprise to discover that Karl Marx, a man possessed of tremendous self-belief, had as a personal motto 'De omnibus dubitandum' ('You must have doubts about everything'). It is only logical that doubt is almost necessarily a precondition of the development of understanding. This is the claim made by Robert Graves in the poem 'In Broken Images'. Whilst not making a claim to the apparent wisdom possessed by the 'I' in Graves' poem, the route by which that 'I' proceeds is, I hope, similar to my own. Such progress as I have made in my own thinking on the issues raised in this thesis have come about primarily because the 'research' process led me to 'doubt everything' in a way which I feel has been constructive.

At the centre of this thesis there are six life stories collected from literacy teachers who have spent a considerable part of their lives working in or near to the Isle of Thanet in Kent. Four of these teachers have lived and worked there all their lives. Two have only worked in Thanet for a few years, though in both of these cases the women involved have had significant contact with Thanet for all of their lives.

The people whose life stories follow are all aged between forty and sixty years old. The stories were collected and put together over a five year period between 2008 and 2013. These life stories were questioned, reflected on, and written about until the mode of understanding upon which this thesis is based emerged. This thesis is about how these life stories might be comprehended.

Sometimes it is argued that life story work is inevitably auto/biographical (Stanley, 1992). There are many reasons to agree with this proposition. One important reason in the case of this thesis is that in the process of its production I have had the opportunity, and need to reflect upon, and revise how I think about my own life and especially my relationship towards the body of thought and action which is inescapably and clumsily referred to as 'Marxism'. One way in which life story work, and indeed any really

transformational learning experience, is inevitably auto/biographical is that it obliges those who undertake it to reconsider their own life story.

There is absolutely no disrespect attached to saying that life stories must be questioned, quite the reverse. I have no doubt that the stories I have been told and which this project is based on have been told in perfectly good faith. The veracity of a person's story cannot be established through its immediate acceptance, it emerges under interrogation. This interrogation must be based upon care and respect but it must be scrupulous. One reason for the required depth of interrogation is because much the greater part of the wealth a life story offers is latent. Later in this thesis a life story of Paul Beer is told. Paul recounts how in a Further Education college a lecturer who taught front of house restaurant management lost his hair as a result of ill health. He was obliged by the college managers and despite his own unwillingness, to work in the restaurant wearing a wig. All involved were aware of the desperate inadequacy of the wig. Today, some twenty years later, chefs in Thanet still recount the story with evident embarrassment. In two cases chefs who have corroborated Paul Beer's report have pointed out that the wig looked awful and have finished their account with the question 'Why did they do that?' Why indeed? Trying to grasp the meaning of this event involves us in consideration of such things as power, fissiparous social and cultural values, perceptions of health and 'aesthetics', human empathy and in certain contexts, its paucity.

From the very start of this project just after my first interview with Hannah Cooper on a cold Friday afternoon in February five years ago, I felt a sense of responsibility emerging because of the importance to my interviewees of the stories I was being told. The researcher in this form of research collects the story of people's lives. There is inescapably an expectation that people will be prepared to share what can only be some of their most valued and intimate possessions.

Hannah began her story by asking me why I wanted her life story as it was 'pretty boring really', she also told me that she didn't 'really have anything to say'. After the first interview with Hannah I walked along Margate sea front, by now it was dark and the town had an indistinct menace. Inside I felt privileged that Hannah had told me her story. With such privilege comes responsibility.

In all the interviews there were points when those telling their stories stopped to consider what they were saying, pausing for thought, or mentally replaying what had been said in order that they themselves might better understand its meaning. All stories must involve the communication of meanings. The sequencing of events appears as the first characteristic of the story, but even this immediate temporal arrangement is itself inseparable from the giving of meaning to what has happened. It was also apparent that in almost all, if not every single case, the storytellers were telling their stories for the first time.

As the project developed the problem of meaning, along with many others took on a new type of salience. Professionally and academically 'meaning' had been one of the 'things' of which I was expected to have knowledge. Life story work was to involve me in the appreciation that my understanding of 'meaning', along with a lot more besides, needed to develop along the path which Marx describes as proceeding from 'the abstract to the concrete'. I had understood 'meaning' in the terms used by linguistics, in working with the life stories I needed to see 'meaning' not only in these terms but also as something far more vivid. 'Meaning' to be understood more concretely had to be apprehended as it related to people's lives, their relationships to others and what might be called their cultural and historical circumstances.

In the immediate aftermath of the first interview with Hannah I felt that part of my task as a life story researcher was to demonstrate how life stories such as hers, if handled sensitively, could never be boring. Lives like hers might be untidy, and in some senses 'everyday' but they were also perfectly formed unique 'units of analysis' from which a much wider history can be created. Although Hannah would be surprised to find her life described in such terms, there was a real sense her life embodied and therefore gave life to this wider history. I feel the same way about all the stories I have been told. When I say I am 'questioning their relevance', I am referring to the process of trying to understand the meaning of these stories, not doubting the sincerity of those who have shared them with me.

In many places in this thesis I will refer to the dialectical relationship between the processes of writing, and the clarification of thinking. Sometimes when thought is



materialised on paper the result is disappointing; what seemed like a new and important idea is revealed in black and white as common place or even embarrassingly trivial. Occasionally this sequence happens in reverse. A re-reading of what seemed unremarkable when first typed brings to light a matter which holds some promise. In the case of this thesis it was quite late in the process of putting it all together that I realised just how in one way or another most of what I wanted to say was concerned with an exploration of 'meaning'. This took two main forms.

The first form in which the thread of 'meaning' weaves its way through this project may be described as epistemological or ontological. Here the problem was to try and develop what, with reservations, will be called a Marxist approach to life story work.

In most approaches to life story work and narrative approaches in general there is a tendency for researchers and writers to promote what many refer to as 'subjectivity' over 'objectivity'. In turn this leads to the proposition contained in the title of Bruner's seminal essay 'The Narrative Construction of Reality' (Bruner, 1991). Interpreted at its strongest this might mean that 'reality' is wholly constructed by, and has no existence outside of, human 'narrative'. These extreme relativist positions are stated rarely, most people shy away from the outer reaches of 'social constructionism' where everything, even such common or garden objects as furniture (Edwards et.al., 1995), are seen as being created by discourse. Yet if relativist arguments are not usually taken to an extreme conclusion, it is nevertheless quite possible to argue that the logical development of more mainstream ideas which hold positions such as 'everything is cultural' tend in essence toward the type of argument put forward by Edwards et.al. The central argument of such fundamentalist 'social constructionism' holds that 'reality can only ever be reality-as-known, and therefore, however counterintuitive it may seem, produced by, not prior to, inquiry' (Edwards et.al., 1995, p.39).

In arguments such as these what is denied is the possibility that 'reality-as-known' is some type of reflection of a 'real world' existing independently outside of discourse, instead it is argued that everything which most people take to be of the really existing world is a social construction. It will be argued later that this social constructivist type of position is fairly ubiquitous in life story work even though most of those involved in such

projects would (unlike Edwards, et.al.,1995) recoil from the consequences of the logical development of their positions.

A Marxist approaching life story work and trying to get to grips with the problem of how and why 'meaning' exists in such stories is faced by a number of problems. Marxism is a materialist world view. It holds that a material world exists outside of consciousness, and is the final determinant of the world of thinking. It must be stated clearly that this is not at all a denial of the existence of a very real world of thought.

That the material determines is the fundamental and axiomatic argument of all forms of materialism. Such a starting point gives rise to very important problems, especially when statements of materialist principle are interpreted dogmatically or mechanically whether by those who consider themselves to be Marxists, or by those opposed to Marxism.

The fundamental principle of materialism holds that matter is the primary determinant of consciousness, but this does not mean at all that consciousness has no role in the construction of the social world in which we live. In some mechanistic interpretations of materialism and Marxism the assumption is made that all things existing in the social world of human consciousness can only be more or less direct and immediate reflections of the material world. In the dialectical and materialist philosophy which Marx himself developed, the material world is indeed the final determinant of the social world of consciousness but this relationship cannot be understood if it is taken as direct and immediate. Such a mechanically materialist approach to life story work will not get very far. Even the most cursory attempt to understand a life story soon throws up plenty of material which defies any type of direct and immediate materialist interpretation.

Several thinkers have been especially important in helping me to develop what I see as a Marxist approach to life story work. In this introduction special mention will be made of two; Edward Palmer Thompson and Evald Vassilievich Ilyenkov. It is sad to reflect that their names have probably never before appeared together in such close proximity. There is a strong case for arguing that Thompson's approach to the study and interpretation of history and Ilyenkov's to philosophy have important ideas in common.

Throughout his work Thompson developed an approach to the study of history which whilst being materialist sought to understand and give proper attention to the role of such things as culture and tradition within historical investigations. For Thompson it was the interplay of culture and what might be called tradition with the developing material conditions of society which gave rise to the richness and variation within historical development. Thompson put forward a materialist interpretation of 'class' which rejected the idea of it being a 'thing'. For Thompson class existed as a relationship and:

Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomise its structure. The finest meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class, any more than it can give us one of deference or of love. The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context. (Thompson, 1963, p.9)

It was this 'real context' of 'real people' that concerned Thompson in his historical and political writings. If classes were not to be seen as an empty abstraction they had to be embodied in the culture and relationships of real people. The reverse must also be true, and is essentially important for this project. That is to say that the study of real lives of real people in real contexts will also lead us to an understanding of class which those lives embody.

In the half century since Thompson (1963) wrote 'The making of the English Working Class' there have arisen and developed trends which have made culture and discourse themselves into absolutes. The remarks quoted above by Jerome Bruner are an example, and most certainly not one of the most outré, of this trend. Lest the impression be given that Thompson, in placing such emphasis on culture, was distancing himself from a materialist approach to history and class it is worth quoting a sentence a little later in the same introduction where he points out that that although class is a 'relationship' embodied in culture and experience it is still itself rooted in the material world. As Thompson says 'The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born-or enter involuntarily' (Thompson, 1963, p.9).

Evald Ilyenkov (1960, 1977) approaching a similar set of problems to those which concerned Thompson, though from the perspective of philosophy rather than history, developed a view which saw 'the ideal' or the 'cultural' as something which could be understood as exercising a material force. As with Thompson, Ilyenkov was concerned with arguing against a mechanical tendency within what were then dominant trends of Marxist thought. Ilyenkov was throughout his work concerned with the 'abstract' and the 'concrete' and how these stood in relationship with each other. Ilyenkov was also concerned to show that the abstract and the concrete exist not only in opposition to each other but also in a dialectical unity. This is a problem which is related to that which concerned Thompson. Later in this project it will be argued that life story work presents a very productive field for bringing together the 'abstract' and the 'concrete' in a way that is materialist and dialectical and therefore 'Marxist'.

There has not, as far as I know, ever been an attempt to bring together life story work and Marxism though it is certainly the case that some researchers in both areas have been sympathetic to the possibilities. I will argue that there is a rich theoretical background which can give life story work a sound philosophical underpinning within a Marxist tradition.

It will be argued that linked to the rise of theoretical perspectives broadly described as 'postmodernist' a very narrow interpretation of Marxism has come to predominate in academic and left wing circles in Britain and more widely. Sometimes this narrow perspective is put forward by those who see themselves as working within a Marxist tradition. It is more often the case that the mechanical interpretation of Marxism and therefore its intrinsic and inevitable shortcomings are based on what we might call a 'post Marxist' presentation of Marx.

In the decades following 1968 it became increasingly fashionable to argue for one or another type of 'post-marxism'. By the mid nineteen nineties Marxists who believed that the fundamental precepts of their world view did not need to be radically revised or better still abandoned were everywhere on the back foot. Within much academic discussion there was an assumption that Marxism had been 'discredited'. The post-marxists all too often did not really try to understand how the world view they claimed

to be developing might be used constructively but instead set out to destroy a caricature.

It is this caricature of 'Marxism' which is widely described as having been 'proved wrong' or to have shown itself as being incapable of coming to terms with one thing or another. The list of things Marxism is supposedly incapable of grappling with is very long indeed and at times includes feminism, mass media, changes in class relations and consciousness, modern times, globalisation, fashions, identity, psychology etc. This 'failure of Marxism' is very definitely assured when that which is to be discredited is unfairly or inadequately presented.

The failure of Marxism is guaranteed when it is presented in a distorted form. The following is a very influential statement by Stuart Hall made in a volume entitled 'New Times' (Hall and Jacques, 1989). The cartoon picture of Marxism presented is archetypal:

Classical marxism depended on an assumed correspondence between 'the economic' and 'the political': one could read off political attitudes and objective social interests and motivations from economic class or position. (Hall, 1989, p.121)

The problem is of course located in words such as 'correspondence' and 'reading off'. Already from the brief acquaintance made here with the work of E.P. Thompson we can see that Hall's statement is less than fair to Marxism. What Hall presents here is a sophisticated Aunt Sally. The Marxism dismissed in such cases has little to do with what Marx or those working in that tradition actually argue.

For the moment and for the purposes of this introduction it is enough to state that a Marxist approaching life history work in the contemporary academic and theoretical climate has a lot of persuading to do if their work is to be taken seriously. I hope to make some contribution to this project.

## Meaning

Mention has already been made of the concern taken by those interviewed for this project in the retelling of their life stories. This care was rooted in a desire to 'get it right' in other words the life story tellers were concerned that the meaning I should take from their stories was as far as they could make it 'true' to what they felt had happened in their lives. This relationship between story and 'truth' is a hugely, some argue interminably, complex process, but there is, I think, almost universal agreement that this is at root a problem of 'meaning'.

A second mode of meaning is related to the first but is, at least superficially, more straightforward. If the tellers were concerned with my attributing the meaning they intended to their stories I also found that I needed to explore something of what might be called 'latent meaning'. In the interpretation of the life stories themselves and trying to understand what they mean certain concepts appeared to take on great importance. This was not always because they were stressed by the interviewees but because as I looked at the lives of literacy teachers certain themes struck me as being important. I do not know what importance the story tellers would themselves have attached to these themes 'in my absence'. The life stories became a sort of heuristic device through which it was possible to study phenomena which were, I felt, salient in the existences of these teachers. These themes were also of interest and importance to me in my own academic and professional life.

From the life stories the concepts of class and identity, managerialism, and place, emerged as being of particular interest and each figures as the focus of a chapter later in this thesis. As Vygotsky points out 'thought reflects conceptualised actuality' (Vygotsky, 1962, p.7), through a study of the meaning that these terms held for the people interviewed it was, in Vygotskian terms, possible to consider and even 'understand' more deeply the actualities which these terms 'conceptualised' in the life stories.

The life stories as recounted offered a lens (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 28-48) through which to view firstly, the stories themselves, and secondly, to consider how these concepts as presented in the stories might be compared and contrasted with the meanings of the same terms as they are presented in some of the academic literature.

Having realised that 'meaning' was central to this thesis other ideas began to emerge. Ideas which had been there all along but which I had not appreciated in anything like their fullness.

I am probably not alone in discovering later in life that I had failed to grasp the full importance of arguments I had first encountered much earlier. Even in some instances where I can now see that the writer had done their best to try ensure that a reasonably perceptive reader, as such I like to count myself, would grasp what they were trying to convey. I have managed to miss so much of what was important, and even worse logic tells me that I will never be able to measure the full extent of what I have missed. This happened first with the work of L.S. Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1962).

I had first read Vygotsky some thirty years ago. I had of course noted that Vygotsky attached enormous importance to meaning and its relevance for psychology. I had been thrilled by what he said and felt instinctively that his 'Marxist' psychology was full of life when much of what passed as psychology, Marxist or not, was as dull as ditch water. It was not until I turned to Vygotsky in the development of this text that I came to understand that for Vygotsky 'meaning' is actually the quintessence of what it is to be human. In a remarkable unfinished pamphlet written in 1875 or thereabouts Engels had talked about 'The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man'. This pamphlet is based on very sketchy and often incorrect archaeological information but it is taken to be the first systematic formulation of the 'modern materialist theory of human evolution' (Trigger, 2003, p.36). Engels' pamphlet speculatively traced the part played by labour and language in the phylogenetic development of humankind, Vygotsky's work very much looked at the part played by language in ontogenetic development. I began to see how it was for Vygotsky that human development, both phylogenetic and in the development of each individual human, centred on meaning.

Following on from my early reading of Vygotsky I had started to read something of the work of Alexander Romanovich Luria, who had been his close friend and collaborator until Vygotsky's early death from tuberculosis in 1934. Luria studied Marx and used his work not as doctrinal matter but because he saw Marxism as something which brought together the historic achievements of philosophy. I had been massively impressed with two small books which Luria had written about the lives of his patients. Luria wrote

these two books from notes he had made as a neurologist. I saw in these deeply human stories that Luria was presenting two life stories, but the full significance of a leading Marxist psychologist choosing to present his work in this form had escaped me.

Luria's 'The Man with the Shattered World' (1972), and 'The Mind of a Mnemonist' (1968), have become classics of neuroscience (Sacks 1983). In Luria's accounts, both told as life stories, the first of a man fighting against the consequences of a devastating head wound, and the second about the consequences of an unlimited memory, the neuroscientist is working against the strict conventions of scientific writing to try to explain the 'meaning' of such afflictions. Put simply, for Luria the statement that a young Red Army officer suffered from a shrapnel wound which destroyed 'the parietal lobe of the left hemisphere of his brain' (Luria, 1979, p.184) is almost meaningless. Luria devotes his book to showing what this 'means' for the life of this incredibly brave man interpolating the life story with 'neurological' digressions. This was a key moment as I realised that Luria had sought to convey to the world the proposition that life story work in certain circumstances is a most appropriate mode of communicating the 'meaning' of clinical neuroscience. Luria's rationale for his two 'life histories' approach was based in the work of Goethe; especially the latter's philosophical reflections on the general and the particular. This too was particularly revealing as the work of Goethe was of considerable influence on Marx.

'Meaning' even became vital in, what I saw as, the unlikely area of geography, and this is why there is a chapter on 'place' in this thesis. A few years ago I first came across David Harvey's article 'Monument and Myth' (Harvey, 1979) on the history of the Basilica of the Sacré-Coeur which sits atop the Butte Montmartre and dominates much of the Paris skyline. In this seminal essay in modern geography Harvey traces the links between the construction and consecration of the Basilica and the defeat and massacre of the Parisian Communards in 1871. The building of such a prominent Basilica, it is visible from almost any elevated position in Paris, was seen by those Catholics terrified by The Commune as a monument of thanks to God for having delivered them from the Parisian working class 'rebels against heaven'. As Harvey points out the Basilica:

by a quirk of topography ... cannot be seen from the famous Mur des  
Fédérés in that same Père Lachaise cemetery where on May 27<sup>th</sup> 1871 the



last few remaining soldiers of the commune were rounded up after a fierce fight and summarily shot. (p. 362)

Harvey then draws attention to the irony that today the Mur des Fédérés is a place of pilgrimage for socialists and communists from all over the world, likewise the Basilica for ardent Catholics. The 'quirk of topography' hides these pilgrims each from the other. For Harvey and the study of 'Myth and Monument' the Basilica is an example of the importance of 'meaning' in the creation of place. For poor, troubled and depressed Thanet no less than for the Sacré-Coeur 'place' cannot be adequately described in terms of physical features: an understanding of 'place' must combine space with 'meaning'.

Place figures prominently in the life stories presented here and Harvey's article became a starting point for a consideration of how in the particular case of Thanet social and cultural forces achieved a geographical fix on this corner of East Kent.

Even in what many believe, absolutely wrongly in my opinion, as the arid pages of 'Capital' I realised that Marx was, above anything else, trying to communicate to his readers what 'Capital' meant to humanity.

Anyone who has read Marx's Capital will have struggled at many places to grasp fully what Marx means by many of the words and phrases he uses. Part of this difficulty arises because Marx is asking the reader to see things anew. Marx was well aware of this difficulty. In 'Capital' he was writing a critique of political economy radically different from anything which had gone before; it represented simultaneously a fundamental philosophical rupture with, and a development of, that science. As Marx's categories of analysis and his purpose were new it was inevitable that many of the words and phrases used needed to be invested with meanings somewhat different to those which had gone before. That this would render the text inaccessible without hard work on the part of the reader was in Marx's opinion unavoidable:

That is a disadvantage I am powerless to overcome, unless it be by forewarning and forearming those readers who zealously seek the truth. There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the

fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits. (Marx, 1887/1990, p.104)

There are points in *Capital* where Marx strives to communicate a different type of meaning, namely aspects of the psychological impact of capitalism on humans. This is not to claim that Marx developed any type of worked out theory of psychology only to point out that he saw it as important to try to capture the 'meaning' in human terms of the social processes he was describing. The extraordinary depth and complexity of Marx's literary references are widely recognised. The classic study in this area is that of Praver, first published in 1976, which for all of its erudition even in the writer's own estimation is only the beginning of the work necessary to draw out the full implications of Marx's allusions. In preparing this thesis I have come to see many of these literary references as evidence of how for Marx it was an essential part of his work to try to communicate 'the meaning' in human terms of the political economy he was subjecting to a critique. There are many examples but here just one can be explored.

Marx argues that under capitalism the worker has no choice but to sell her or his labour power to capitalists. It is the buying and exploitation of such labour power along with the control over the social processes which facilitate it that lies at the core of what makes a numerically tiny class of people into all powerful capitalists. The selling of labour power will not happen without some form of compulsion as the worker with a viable alternative way to secure survival and prosperity is unlikely to subordinate his working life to the capitalist. Anyone who has witnessed young people entering a factory system to sell their labour power as a commodity for the first time especially if they fear that this will be their working life 'forever', will attest to how shocking and terrifying the experience is. This cannot be achieved without compulsion. If workers are unwilling to sell their labour power as a commodity the capitalist can compel them to do so.

Writing of this fear and compulsion Marx makes use of the story taken from Goethe of the "Der Erlkönig" (which may be translated into English as either 'The Elf King' or 'The Alder King') (Goethe, 1792). The poem tells of a young boy being carried on horseback by his father at speed through the forest at night. The boy is anxious, perhaps delirious, and his father is in a great haste to bring him safely home. The boy tells his father of the evil figures he can see in the dark forest and how they are trying to claim his soul. The

father tells the boy not to be afraid and offers a rational explanation for each of the boy's terrifying visions. Eventually 'The Alder King' a particularly frightening figure calls the boy to the dark spirit world with the words "'Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt; Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch ich Gewalt.'" ("I love thee, I'm charm'd by thy beauty, dear boy! And if thou aren't willing, then force I'll employ.") The father on arrival at the homestead discovers that his child has died.

In Capital Marx talks about how 'commodities' (including labour power) can be forced to go to 'market':

It is plain that commodities cannot go to market and make exchanges in their own right. We must, therefore, have recourse to their guardians, who are the possessors. Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man. *If they are unwilling he can use force* (my italics IJ); in other words, he can take possession of them. (Marx, 1887/1990, p.178)

And so it is with the worker forced to sell her labour power, dark forces will claim her soul. Throughout Capital Marx makes references to such things as ghosts, hell, and spirits in a series of images to illustrate how things which mankind has created come to exert an almost 'supernatural' influence over all aspects of life. Marx himself did not entertain any belief whatsoever in 'the spirit world' though in 'Capital' he widely employs such images precisely because he tries, at key points, to bring out the darker meaning in human terms of processes which might appear neutral in the dry language of political economy. Something similar is the case with life story work. Terms from social and cultural history, the language of management, or even the desiccated vocabulary of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) may take on a vital meaning in a life story.

As I collected the life stories and worked to understand them, I came to see this process as being one of the interpretation and therefore the creation and re-creation of the meaning of these texts. I have given the above examples drawn from a range of Marxist thinkers of the ubiquity and importance of 'meaning' in their work. As the project progressed I felt myself being drawn to a further implication of 'meaning'.

A thorough going belief in 'meaning', the possibility of understanding how it is created, its history, how it is shared, and how it is imbued with ethical values is inextricably linked to a Humanist world view. Conversely a rejection of all possibility of the existence of any objectivity in 'meaning' must be logically linked (and often this is explicitly stated by those thinkers who believe that meaning only has a subjective dimension) to the rejection of all types of Humanism.

In turn it is hard to imagine how the rejection of all possibilities of all types of objectivity in meaning and the resulting rejection of all types of humanism can avoid the acceptance of nihilism in one or other form. Once nihilism is embraced, the idea of human agency becomes either meaningless or is seen to exist only in a nihilistic form. This happens even when it is the very last thing that the thoroughgoing subjectivist would want. This I believe is the case with those people working within the narrative paradigm, and here Jerome Bruner was at the very forefront, who tend toward subjectivism. Jerome Bruner is rightly seen by many working with life stories as an inspirational figure but one who at times appears to accept an outlook based on a more or less complete relativism (Bruner, 1990, pp.24-30). Bruner almost comes to personify the dilemma of what might be called the Humanist subjectivists. These are bold claims, advanced with some trepidation, and a good part of the thesis is given over to arguing for them though the argument is made implicitly throughout the entire text.

### **The layout of the chapters**

Given below is the order in which the chapters of this thesis are arranged. This order is very much a result of the project itself as the process by which this arrangement was reached followed a course which looking forward appeared far from predictable. Of course hindsight far more than foresight makes things look predictable. The chapters within a project such as this take on a relationship to each other fairly similar to what Bruner described as the relationship between different books by the same author. Chapters must appear to be self-contained but often they:

... are like mountaintops jutting out of the sea. Self contained islands though they may seem, they are upthrusts of an underlying geography that is at once local and for all that part of a universal pattern. And so

while they inevitably reflect a time and a place they are part of a more general intellectual geography. (Bruner, 1990, p. ix)

A good part of the work in writing the chapters themselves will be about developing the thinking which connects them. The life stories form the central part of this thesis so there is a need to introduce them at the earliest point possible. This cannot be as early as I would have liked and should be explained.

I approached life story from the viewpoint of someone who for the last four decades has described himself as a Marxist. This 'self diagnosis' has suited me more or less well through thick, and far more often, thin. It seems fair to say that life story work and Marxism are not often closely linked together, neither by those working in the narrative tradition, nor by Marxists. Many of my colleagues and friends who share an interest in life story work, and who I dare say are fond of me, find it odd that I also see myself as a Marxist. Much of this project is about trying to answer the very reasonable question which my colleagues and friends have asked me and which I have set myself 'How can Marxism and life story work be brought together?'

### **Antecedents 1**

The first chapter in this presentation is given the title Antecedents 1. In all, three chapters are designated as 'Antecedents', collectively they represent preparatory matter for the study of the life stories. From my perspective the 'Antecedents' chapters represent the thinking that underlies the analysis of the material in the life stories themselves. This whilst true is also something of a presentational stratagem. In reality much of the content of the three 'Antecedents' chapters was developed in the light of working with the life stories, some of it took shape in the final stages of the preparation of the whole document.

As the 'Antecedents 1' chapter developed it became apparent that for me an important part of its purpose was for me to make clear the difficulties I have with some forms of postmodernism. Unfortunately Laurel Richardson's work (1994, 1997) seems to me to encapsulate many of these problems. Strangely, some of my colleagues whose work I respect greatly draw on Laurel Richardson's work and use it productively. I hope they will forgive me not least because I think that Laurel Richardson's arguments contain

some important points. I will mix metaphors horribly but I think that Richardson's problem is that she insists on throwing out the realist baby with the positivist bathwater.

### **Antecedents 2**

The 'Antecedents 2' chapter looks at the methodology used in the collection and production of the life stories. In this chapter a case will be made for the justification of the dialectical approach used in this project. At the centre of this have been the discussions between the researcher and those whose stories appear. In turn this has been characterised by what I hope is a productive tension between three imperatives which often pull in opposing directions. The first is the need for the stories to be truthfully those of the people who have told them. The second is that these stories should be presented with sufficient academic honesty and detachment for claims to be made about their truthfulness and 'objectivity'. When this is achieved then the problem of 'generalisability', a perennial concern in life story work, can be seriously considered. The third imperative, no less important than the other two, is that the stories are presented in a spirit of solidarity and sympathy with those who have offered them for this project. Throughout the chapter Antecedents 2 consideration is given to both method and methodology in life story work.

### **Antecedent 3**

'Antecedents 3' is an outline of some arguments from Marxism as they might apply to life stories. One way to look at this section and the chapters in which the concepts of place, class, self and managerialism are considered would be to see it as a contribution to the project of the French thinker Henri Lefebvre who worked to develop a Marxist view of everyday life (*la quotidienne*). As he put it 'the everyday is a kind of screen in both senses of the word; it both shows and hides' (Lefebvre, 1988 p.78). In this project the life stories show how personal troubles (and joys) reflect social issues (Mills, 1959), and how much of the energy and strength of these lives is given over to the management and concealment of profound problems. These are not initially the problems of the individuals but are social problems as manifested in the particular lives considered here. In the course of this project I have actually come to believe that much of that those with power within the institutions of post compulsory education consider to be professionalism is in fact the capacity of those who work for them to sublimate and keep out of sight the real tensions of their world.

### **The Life Stories**

The introduction to the life stories needs to read before any of the life stories. This introduction explains briefly why the stories appear in the form which has been elected.

The presentation of the life stories is not without problems. These arise because I feel that it is imperative that the stories appear in the form agreed with the story tellers. The academic gloss and annotations on these stories is my own and therefore is presented outside of the stories themselves.

In the first part of this thesis there are chapters designated as 'Antecedents'. These chapters are antecedent in that they give some of the background thinking to the analysis of the life stories. Each of the 'Antecedents' chapters is followed by two life stories. The life stories are not in a particular order, except for reasons which will be clear Hannah Richards' story is presented first. All the names for the stories are invented by the people whose stories they tell. When asked to choose names for their stories only Paul Beer gave his character a family name. Paul is the only man in these stories. I gave Hannah the surname Richards to help avoid confusion between real and fictitious names of people involved in this project..

The interleaving of the life stories with the 'Antecedents' is done so that sequentially the life stories are presented as soon as possible. In real life I began the collection of the stories initially with an interview with Hannah. The other interviews happened as and when I could meet with the story tellers. The order of their presentation does not correspond to the order of their being put together.

I feel that the stories must as far as possible be presented in the language of those who told them. The stories have a minimum of academic intrusion. The reader will be given pointers as to where I have looked into the stories with the aims already stated but it is also hoped that the reader will be free to reflect for themselves on what is presented. I am aware that in all cases the stories were volunteered because those who told them wanted to record what they saw as 'the truth' about their lives as literacy teachers.

In all six cases those whose stories are presented have expressed their faith in the representations. In several cases I have been told something like 'You have really caught what I wanted to say', and in one case 'Yes that is me how did you do it'. Respondent validity might be one of the most important forms of validity for life story work. If the stories are themselves presented without academic interruptions this is because I think that they work better that way. The rest of this thesis is taken up with the interruptions, clarifications and 'yes ... but' nature of academic work.

The last chapters are concerned with the topics; class and identity, managerialism, and place as they appear in the life stories. This might be better stated the other way round which is to say that the life stories are used as a sort of heuristic device through which the themes in the last chapters are investigated. For example, in the case of 'managerialism' it is clear that the practices which attract this label feature in the lives of the people interviewed but not in ways identical to their description in academic texts. In the interviews the picture of managerialism which emerges is not the same as that in textbook descriptions. In the actual lives of teachers 'managerialism' might come down to a row over how literacy students should be interviewed, or who has the right to the keys to a cupboard. In the life stories an issue such as 'class' is far more likely to lie behind a comment such as 'I never felt comfortable at that school it was not for me', than anything which amounts to 'grand theory' to use C. Wright Mills' famous formulation (Mills 1959).

There is a short concluding chapter as the last three chapters each reach their own points of conclusion. The last remarks are concerned with discussing the problem posited earlier in this introduction : How can Marxism and life story work be brought together?

This introductory chapter must cover one more area before closing. This concerns the use of the terms 'Marxist' and 'Marxism'. The terms 'Marxist' and 'Marxism' are used throughout this text because there is a lack of a better alternative even though they have problems and unfortunate complications.

The question 'what is Marxism?' is not easily answered. I am not aware of an instance in his own writings in which Marx himself referred to his method of work as 'Marxist'. It



was at one time fashionable to argue that Karl Marx himself rejected 'Marxism'. This supposed rejection was based on a remark reported by Engels which Marx almost certainly made. The remark was 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist'. Why this remark was made is not always explained fully. Friedrich Engels (1890) mentions Marx's remark in a letter to Conrad Schmidt. According to Engels, Marx found it necessary at several points to disassociate himself from people who whilst declaring themselves to be 'Marxist' proposed programs or arguments which he could not support. Engels tells Schmidt that: 'Marx used to say, commenting on the French "Marxists" of the late [18]70s: "All I know is that I am not a Marxist."' The same type of problem has persisted over the decades since Marx's death and is in our own epoch perhaps more complex than ever.

In the same letter to Schmidt, Engels went on to point out that the work in which he had assisted Marx did not at all constitute a doctrine 'our conception of history is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction ... . All history must be studied afresh'.

In the project attempted here the approach to 'Marxism' which has been adopted is as 'a guide to study'. In this particular case the object of study will be the six life stories of teachers of literacy to adults on the Isle of Thanet in Kent.

A Marxist approach to particular problems cannot be achieved through any type of scriptural exegesis from Marx's writings. When the terms Marxist and Marxism are employed in this thesis they will signify an attempt to creatively use the method of analysis developed by Marx. There is another very important connotation to Marxism which is sometimes neglected by academic Marxists, this too results in a misrepresentation.

Marx believed that the struggle of the 'proletariat, the modern working class' (Marx and Engels, 1888 p.12) represented the only possible way forward for humanity. There is room for discussion about why he believed this, the nature of 'the modern working class' or many other questions. What is beyond dispute is that for Marx the philosophy and the analysis which he offered could never be neutral with regard to this struggle.

Paolo Freire when talking about education for the 'oppressed' pointed out many times that in the contest between those with power and those without to adopt a position of affected neutrality meant to side with the powerful. Marx had much earlier made a similar point as when both sides of a dispute were attributed equal status this favoured those who possessed 'force'. As Marx put it in matters of the context of the working class struggle for a shorter working day 'between equal rights, force decides' (Marx, 1990, p. 344). In the context of this project, with due respect for academic integrity, the standpoint adopted is fundamentally one of solidarity with the teachers and their students.

## **Antecedents 1 - The Poverty of Postmodernism**

*Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom. The art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out.*

*Walter Benjamin, 1936 'The Story Teller'.*

The chapters titled 'Antecedents' taken together constitute a combination of a literature review and a setting out of the methodology behind the thesis. The literature review is unusual in that it opens by concentrating on material which might be said to represent rather personal antecedents to the arguments of the thesis. Personal in the sense that the two figures around whom this chapter is based Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Honoré de Balzac have in different ways contributed to my belief in the viability of life story work as a valuable method of academic inquiry. Furthermore both Goethe and Balzac have an interesting relationship to Marxism. The other figure who features prominently in this chapter is Laurel Richardson.

More than twenty years after its publication Laurel Richardson's essay 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry' (1994) exerts a fair degree of influence among people working with life histories. This power is due in part to the essay having something of the qualities of a manifesto; Laurel Richardson sets out the theoretical underpinnings of a postmodern approach to life story work and combines this with a programme of action. The essay offers in a brief compass much to consider. An evaluation of the ideas in the essay forms the first part of this chapter.

In the case of Goethe a brief presentation will be made of his use of the concept of an 'Urphänomen' or archetype, as a tool of investigation. Goethe held that the study of the natural world should proceed through the detailed study of individual phenomena and that carefully considered work at this level made it possible to work from the individual 'case' to more general levels of understanding. It will be argued that life story work shares important similarities with the 'Urphänomen' method used by Goethe. In life story work an examination is made of a limited number of 'lives' with a view to seeing how these relate to, and might inform, a study of wider social issues.

The reverse process is also employed. Knowledge of wider social issues is used to understand and underpin an interpretive narrative of the lives studied. Both movements taken together, from the individual to the social, and then from the social to the individual, form a heuristic counterpoise to each other.

A single episode from 'Old Goriot' Balzac's novel of 1835 will be used to show how a great 'realist' writer presents a vision of the relationship between individual stories and social developments. The episode is a moment of 'epiphany' (Denzin, 1989, p.27) in the life of Eugène de Rastignac a character central to the whole of Balzac's 'Comedie Humaine'. In the hands of Balzac Rastignac's epiphany is simultaneously historic and deeply personal. This relationship between the individually personal and the wider, sometimes tectonic, shifts in the social also lies at the heart of life story work, and reflects what C. Wright Mills saw as the interplay between 'biography', 'personal troubles' and 'social issues' so important in a 'sociological imagination'. (Mills, 1959/2000).

Whilst Goethe is not generally taken into consideration by those involved in life story work Balzac in contrast does sometimes get mentioned. Laurel Richardson offers Balzac as an example of a writer who spearheaded an attempt to make 'literature a part of science, something which she decries in the name of postmodernism, furthermore she criticises Balzac for his 'realism' (Richardson, 1994, p. 519). The point is sometimes made that it is not enough to disagree with something; it is much more beneficial to deeply understand why you disagree and even more so to understand why others have come to conclusions different to your own. Throughout my life I have believed that the novels of Balzac have offered me a glimpse of people and places in Paris as it was two hundred years ago. So the reasons why Laurel Richardson feels differently are intriguing.

### **The Postmodern Condition**

Within the wider areas of 'qualitative research' and 'narrative studies' there are many academics and scholars who would describe themselves as accepting most of the intellectual tenets contained within the 'postmodern' portfolio (see for example Denzin and Lincoln, 1994 and 2011). The essay in which Laurel Richardson criticises Balzac by name, and the wider tradition which he helped to create, is entitled

'Writing: A Method of Inquiry' and has achieved an archetypal status. What is initially striking about the dismissive stance taken toward the writing of Balzac is that he set out most definitely to use writing as a method of inquiry and the result is a series of novels which chart the rise of bourgeois Paris. The example of Balzac is given below as an illustration of how the embrace of a certain type of postmodern outlook can lead to the rejection of 'realism', the denial of any possibility of a 'scientific' approach to social investigation and the dismissal of any type of humanism. The use of the word 'science' is problematic here; it is sometimes used as a general term when what is actually being referred to is a rather narrow form of science. When some postmodernists criticise 'science' it is not at all clear what they mean by the term. 'Science' might mean activities typically used in the natural sciences, engineering or mathematics or it might refer to any type of rational or systematic scholarly work of the type undertaken by historians or musicologists. Sometimes it appears to be the case that critics of the wider notion of 'science' as any type of systematic study deliberately conflate this with a narrow form of 'positivism' so as to more easily discredit it.

Laurel Richardson presents the case for writing itself being seen as a method of inquiry. The argument is interesting as she advocates that social scientists should pay far more attention to how they write. Richardson believes that social science writing should be developed around processes of creativity. She sees 'creativity' (Richardson, 1994, p. 517) in the production of writing as being contributory to the overall quality of the research process. In a more restrained form than that which Laurel Richardson actually advocates, the proposal is sound enough. A student in the social sciences reading the lively prose of C. Wright Mills or Rachel Carson and comparing their work to that of the dull texts of many of their counterparts would support calls for lively writing, but Laurel Richardson is calling for far more than lucid writing.

For many who might agree with the merits of Laurel Richardson's basic suggestion an alarm bell starts to ring when we are told that this writing should not be constrained by a reluctance to 'nurture our own individuality' (1994, p.517). She also tells us that 'Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests'. Accordingly Richardson drawing on the work of Patricia Clough (1992) sees Balzac,

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Zola and presumably the whole realist tradition as representing a devaluation of 'literary writing'. This devaluation has come about;

'... because literary writing was taking a second seat in importance, status, impact and truth value to science, some literary writers attempted to make literature a part of science. By the late nineteenth century 'realism' dominated both science and fiction writing...' (Richardson, 1994, p.519)

This proposal is based on a variety of 'postmodern' arguments especially those which suspect 'all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles' (Richardson, 1994, p.517). In particular Balzac is selected as representing the trend which ensured that realism dominated 'both science and fiction writing' (Richardson, 1994, 519). In the same chapter Richardson sets out a central plank of postmodern or poststructural argumentation:

Poststructuralism links language, subjectivity, social organization and power. The centrepiece is language. Language does not reflect social reality, but produces meaning, creates social reality. Different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another. Language is how social organisation and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves our subjectivity is constructed. (p 518)

More than a few people working in the area of narrative enquiry consider themselves to share the arguments put forward in the above passage from Laurel Richardson. The nub of this argument is the contention that language does not reflect social reality but creates it.

It is quite possible that in more than a few cases the full implications of fundamentalist postmodern arguments are not fully grasped by those who believe themselves persuaded. Richardson is not always completely consistent in the essay quoted, at times she appears to allow for the possibility that a reality of some type might exist beyond 'narrative', but the overall thrust is fairly steady; the claim is that the social world is basically a narrative construction. It should also be noted that whether or not Richardson realises just how extreme she is in her philosophical idealism what she has

written is consistent enough to put her squarely in that camp. The idea that language gives meaning to the world is a profoundly different philosophical proposition to the contention that language achieves and creates meaning in its relationship to the world.

The existence of the social world of humans is unimaginable without language but it is equally true that language and meaning have no existence outside of this world. Language alone does not create the world in which humans exist. This is as true for the social as it is for the natural world. In the processes of the creation and continuation of the social world language is ever present and permeates every aspect of human activity and understanding. Language not only creates and recreates this world but it also reflects it. Reflection and creation are but different facets of the same processes within the social world.

Formulations of the relationship between language and the social world which pitch reflection and creation into a mutually excluding opposition lead to two equally unsatisfactory world outlooks; on one hand to a materialism which can only be mechanical, and on the other to complete philosophical idealism.

In both cases, that of mechanical materialism, and consistent idealism, the dialectical link between the social world and material world is broken. This rejection of dialectical relationships is to be found in many instances where the chances of developing understanding would be much improved if instead of setting things in a mutually excluding opposition to each other they were seen as being related. Examples of such unhelpful oppositions might be; the ideal and the material, time and space, abstract and concrete, individual and social, subjective and objective, particular and universal, local and global or a host of other things too often posed as excluding antinomies. In each of the above examples it is only possible to understand both sides of the opposed terms through grasping the relationship between them.

On the side of idealism the break between the material world and the social world allows for the development of a relativist world outlook. If we accept the proposition implied in the idea of 'the narrative construction of reality' then all and any ideas of 'truth' as something which might be objectively established are gone. Here it is necessary to present an important caution concerning the ideas of 'objectivity' and

'subjectivity'. To argue for the idea of 'objectivity', or indeed 'subjectivity' does not mean their acceptance in a 'positivist' form.

The history of the terms objective and subjective is enormously complex, sufficiently so for the two terms to have been transposed in their meanings more than once, with what we understand today as the meaning of 'objective' being covered by the term 'subjective' and vice versa (Williams, 1983, p.308). Today there are relatively few people, even in the natural sciences, who argue for a straightforwardly positivist form of 'objectivity' or 'objective truth'. With the demise of true positivism Martyn Hammersley refers to the idea of the possibility of a scientific form of 'objectivity' as 'objectivism' (Hammersley, 2011, 2011a). It is not unusual to find that when 'positivism' is levelled as an accusation it is a caricature of the position of an opponent. The original 'Positivist' philosophy of Auguste Comte argued for the application of a 'positive' science to most if not all aspects of society. In his essay 'Plan of the Scientific Work Necessary for the Reorganization of Society' Comte suggests that the social problems should be resolved through the application of methods from the natural sciences (Comte, 1822/ 1998 pp. 47-144). For Comte 'truth' could be established with the objective precision which appeared possible in the natural sciences of his time. It is often this discredited idea of 'positive' objectivity which is rejected by postmodernists. Comte's positive notion of 'objectivity' is rarely put forward today in its original form, its most common mode of existence by some distance is as an 'Aunt Sally' proposition by which some postmodernists attack all notions of objectivity. Laurel Richardson puts the argument thus:

Qualitative writers are off the hook so to speak. They don't have to play God, writing as disembodied omniscient narrators claiming universal atemporal general knowledge ; they can eschew the questionable metanarrative of scientific objectivity and still have plenty to say as situated speakers, subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it. (1994, p.518)

Clearly there is an implication here that those working with qualitative forms of research are 'off the hook' when it comes to pretty much any attempt at objectivity. What appears most strangely fascinating in arguments such as this is the extraordinary



symmetry between the more outré propositions of postmodernism and those of the more ardent supporters of 'objectivism' (Hammersley, 2011 and 2011a). Both substantially accept the terms in which they both define each other's' outlook, and they largely agree on the non-dialectical opposition of 'the subjective' and 'the objective'. What separates both the postmodern 'subjectivists' and the most hard-line of the 'objectivists' is their choice to stand on one side or the other, of the wall they place between themselves.

There is clearly a logical nexus linking the belief that language 'creates social reality' and the capacity for 'subjectivities' to know and to tell 'about the world as they perceive it'. Those who hold the view that reality is a linguistic creation do not need 'to eschew the questionable metanarrative of scientific objectivity'. There would be no possibility of any type of objectivity existing in a world which is created, and changed by 'subjectivities' who ordered things simply by 'knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it' (Richardson, 1994, p.518).

### **Types of Relativism**

Linked to this rejection of an objectively existing social reality, and this is what Richardson and others are arguing for when they claim that reality is created by narratives, are parallel avowals of a more general relativist philosophy and a rejection of all and any recognisably humanist standpoints. The logic of this is simple enough and goes as follows.

The social world is a creation of language. Things are as they are because of language. We cannot appeal to anything outside of language to help us judge what is erroneous and what is less so. By the same token we cannot go outside of language to help us decide what is truthful and what is less so. From this it follows that attempts to impose any universal, or even general, standard of truth outside of a specific and local 'discourse' is irrational. In the introduction mention was made of the arguments of some more radical social constructivists (Edwards et.al., 1995, Gergen and Gergen, 2003) who argue along these very lines. As a concise statement of this relativism it would be hard to better the following:

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The relativist, like everyone else, is under the necessity to sort out beliefs, accepting some and rejecting others. He will naturally have preferences and these typically coincide with those of others in his locality. The words 'true' and 'false' provide the idiom in which those evaluations are expressed, and the words 'rational' and 'irrational' will have a similar function. (Barnes and Bloor, 1981, p.27)

Sokal and Bricmont (1998, p.87) point out that in this statement of a relativist approach the words 'true' and 'false' have been given a special meaning far removed from how they are generally understood in 'everyday life'. As Sokal and Bricmont point out:

If I regard the statement 'I drank coffee this morning' as true, I do not mean simply that I *prefer* to believe that I drank coffee this morning, much less that 'others in my locality' think that I drank coffee this morning. (1998, p. 87)

The truth or falsity of the statement 'I drank coffee this morning' can be satisfactorily established on the basis of deciding what the statement means and then by judging the extent to which this meaning coincides with something that happened in reality. The truthfulness of the statement 'I drank coffee this morning' rests on its **relationship** to a reality which exists or existed. What is interesting about this 'realist' formulation is that truthfulness is indeed 'relative' but this relativism is not at the same as it is for the postmodernists. For postmodernists like Laurel Richardson 'relativism' is wholly internal within language, it is 'created by subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it' (1994, p.518).

A Marxist approach to life story work must also be 'relativist' but in the sense that it explores the relationship between what is written and the wider, really existing social world in which those lives are lived. A Marxist approach to such life story work must continually establish, explore and work for, the relative congruence of the life stories as they are lived within their social world, and the text in which those lives are inscribed. In this endeavour truthfulness and meaning are established through the nature of the congruence between text, experience, and reality. This is, at bottom, the relationship between language and the real world. This relationship is mediated by history, social relations, culture and even individual experience, in many complex ways but these

relationships too exist in 'the real world'. A Marxist viewpoint will always see the real world, including the social world, as 'the ultimately determining element' (Engels, 1890, no page) in the relationship between this world, language, meaning and truth. What must not be lost sight of is that language, meaning and truth are also necessary and integral though not sufficient for the existence of this world.

### **Humanism**

The worldview which informs this project would be described by some as 'Marxist Humanist'. I have no objection to such a description but I would want to make two provisos. Firstly, I do not think that it is possible to understand much of Marx without seeing his work as being both a development within, and a culmination of, developments within the wider humanist tradition. Viewed this way the epithet 'Marxist Humanist' is something of a tautology. Secondly, the 'humanist' part of 'Marxist humanist' should not be taken as indicating a dilution of the 'Marxist' part. The phrase 'Marxist humanist' developed important associations in the light of developments in the Soviet Union and with the prominence of the philosophical arguments of Louis Althusser (1969).

In both official Soviet and Althusserian versions of Marxism there was a playing down of the part played by the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in the development of Marx's own philosophy. This was especially important in the presentation of what Althusser posited as the 'early' and the 'developed' work of Marx. In two collections of essays first published in the mid to late 1960s (Althusser, et.al., 1965/2016, and 1969) Althusser contended that in his developed work Marx had eradicated traces of 'Hegelianism' from his philosophy. In the Soviet Union the presentation of Marx's work was massively influenced by the role of 'Marxism Leninism' as the official state ideology. This latter version of Marxism too found Marx's relationship to the 'idealist' Hegel to be awkward and sought to play it down. In the light of both of these developments and others it came to suit some Marxists to describe themselves as 'Marxist humanists' or even as 'Hegelian Marxists'. There is no need to explore this further here but it is only as this project is pulled together in the late stages of development that I notice that almost all, if not quite all of the Marxists mentioned in the text, whose work I have found most useful, take a positive view towards the idea of an intimate link between the Marx's youthful and mature work and that of Hegel. In the cases of Lev Vygotsky, Alexander

Luria, and Evald Ilyenkov, the positive stance towards Hegel was clearly taken despite personal risk.

Amongst postmodernists there is a widespread disdain for humanist world outlooks whether in their classical, neo classical, modern, or Marxist guises. This rejection of humanism is based upon rejection of all and any notions of such a thing as human nature; this in turn arises out of another instance of the misconceived opposition of two things which exist in a dialectical relationship. In this instance the opposition is between 'nature' and 'nurture'. All forms of humanism hold a belief in some or other form of human nature, and believe that this nature should be cultivated or developed. Most postmodernists reject any idea of human nature as 'metaphysical'. The philosopher Martin Heidegger writing in 1949 puts the argument thus:

Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the grounds of one. Every determination of the essence of man that already presupposes an interpretation of being without asking about the truth of Being, whether knowingly or not is metaphysical. The result is that what is peculiar to all metaphysics, specifically with respect to the way the essence of man is determined is that it is 'humanistic'. (Heidegger, 1949/2003, p.178)

The argument which can be levelled against formulations such as Heidegger's is that it is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of humans. These views presuppose 'human nature' to be some kind of primitive, even atavistic instinct something along the lines of an essence. In the case of Marxism human nature is seen as being something created, shaped, and developed socially. Humans are themselves creations of and also the creators of their own societies.

The problem of a supposed 'human essence' and the resolution offered to this was a key point in Marx's own intellectual development. In 1845 he was involved in a critique of the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, a 'Left Hegelian' as Marx himself had once been. As part of this criticism Marx wrote in the form of notes his 'Theses on Feuerbach'. These notes were not published in his lifetime and were only discovered by Frederick Engels after Marx's death. There are eleven theses in all, the sixth deals with what Marx saw as Feuerbach's misconception of the problem of 'human essence';

Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. (Marx, 1845/1974, p.123)

The ramifications of the 'human essence' being 'the ensemble of human relations' are far reaching. One way of understanding 'Capital' and everything else which Marx wrote would be to see this work as drawing out the implications of this statement on 'the human essence'. What is undeniable is that Marx holds that there is such an essence and that it is social. On this basis Marxism must be viewed as a humanist intellectual venture.

### **Postmodernism and 'Grand Narratives'**

First published in French in 1979 Lyotard's extended essay 'The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge' set the scene for much that was to come. Importantly Lyotard also argued for the rejection of those intellectual ventures which were seen as being 'grand narratives'. Such a rejection was most certainly applied to Marxism and humanism:

In contemporary society and culture - postindustrial society, postmodern culture - the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation? (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 37)

Rejection of humanist philosophies in all forms has become a central tenet of most forms of postmodernism. This is of some consequence for life story work as many of those working in this area see themselves as being motivated by humanist concerns, and paradoxically many also believe themselves to be supporters of one or another variant of postmodernist thinking. There is also a wider problem here as the rejection of 'grand narratives' of all types appears to militate against any reasonable basis on which to base a system of ethics.

In what is now a classic text of life story work Ken Plummer (2001) put forward a case for what he termed a 'critical humanism'. Plummer is well aware that he is arguing for

humanism in the face of accusations that it is the justification for much that is evil. He points out that humanism is blamed for leading to 'subjugation' (Foucault, 1979, pp. 159-60), colonialism and imperialism (Césaire, 1972, pp. 23-24), and for the terroristic imposition of truth regimes (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiii and p.63). Although the Marxist humanist arguments put forward here differ in important ways to the 'critical humanism' of Ken Plummer it is not difficult to make common cause.

In terms of the objections of Foucault, Césaire, and Lyotard to humanism it should be sufficient to present, for the moment, a short and simple argument. It is undoubtedly true that some of the most terrible chapters in human history including Nazism, the trans- Atlantic slave trade, and colonialism were routinely justified through arguments couched in terms which might broadly be described as 'humanist'. Often terrible things were, and still are justified, as being part of a 'civilising' mission, the bringing of light to dark places, the fulfilment of a legal responsibility, or even the 'Right to Protect'. To oppose humanism on the grounds that it has been used as a cloak for evil is no more reasonable than it would be to oppose 'civilisation', 'light', 'law' or 'protection' on the grounds that they too have been used to put a positive gloss on malfeasance.

In this thesis the underlying argument against much postmodernist thinking is that if we reject all 'grand narratives', 'truth claims', 'humanism' and 'science' we are also substantially rejecting much of the idea of 'meaning' as it is generally understood.

To say that some postmodernist thinking reduces substantially the idea of 'meaning' is a substantial claim. For the moment it is sufficient to draw attention to the fuller implications for 'meaning' in two of the postmodern arguments already quoted above. The first is from Laurel Richardson:

'Different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another' (Richardson, 1994, p.518)

The second is the claim of Barnes and Bloor repeated below about the meaning of 'true' and 'false', 'rational' and 'irrational' being little more than a matter of 'local preference'.

The relativist, like everyone else, is under the necessity to sort out beliefs, accepting some and rejecting others. He will naturally have preferences and these typically coincide with those of others in his locality. The words 'true' and 'false' provide the idiom in which those evaluations are expressed, and the words 'rational' and 'irrational' will have a similar function. (Barnes and Bloor, 1981, p.27)

In both of these cases the argument is being put forward that there is little or no chance for 'meaning' to transcend different languages, genres or locality. If this is correct then the idea of 'meaning' has been very much reduced to something only communicable within relatively narrow circles.

It is quite true to say that the 'meaning' of something in one language or even in one discourse cannot be reduced to the exact same meaning in another language or discourse. At one level the statement is no more than a tautology pointing out nothing more than that different languages and different discourses are different. But there is a deeper implication in what Richardson saying, and this rests on the idea of what she intends by the word 'reducible'. The point is that while different languages and different genres cannot be reduced to each other translation between languages and genres is eminently possible. There is often a loss of nuance or implication within translation but on the whole it works. If we take the famously untranslatable German term 'Bildung' it is possible in English to build up approximation to its meaning. Quite possibly the full cultural implications of 'Bildung' do not exist in English but it is possible to learn about how the term works in German. Languages and genres do not need to be reducible one to another for meanings to be negotiated between them. The 'locality' argument of Barnes and Bloor (Barnes and Bloor, 1981, p.27) is a variant of that made by Richardson it can also be countered in a similar way. It is perfectly possible for meanings to be more or less satisfactorily negotiated, shared and communicated between languages, genres and localities. This communication might never be simple, might never be complete and sometimes might not be possible, but this is very different to claiming categorically that it cannot happen.

In life story work it is often possible to find that the story tellers experience a great pleasure in seeing their story told. In reading a text which represents their life those whose stories are told see a value in what they have communicated; there is a 'meaning' in their life.

Laurel Richardson states that 'we are fortunate, now, to be working in a postmodernist climate' (1994, p.517). She and others often talk about the liberating nature of their form of postmodern criticism but it is hard to understand what this liberation might mean given the scope of what it rejects. According to Tacitus the Scottish chieftain Calgacus said of the Roman pacification of his homeland 'they make a desert and call it peace'; in intellectual terms postmodern liberation might appear to offer something similar.

### **A Literature Review?**

In two companion works which feature on many courses for 'Research Methods' at post graduate level Chris Hart discusses how to do a 'Literature Review' and a 'Literature Search' (Hart, 1998, 2001). Hart's books explain to students the purposes of the search and review. Hart states that a primary purpose of the review is to;

... demonstrate skills in library searching; to show command of the subject area and understanding of the problem: to justify the research topic, design and methodology. (Hart, 1998, p. 13)

This statement receives the backing of David Silverman who is seen by many as the doyen of British qualitative research. Silverman, directly addressing research students, makes the observation that 'Once you start to see your literature review as dialogic rather than a mere replication of other people's writing you are going in the right direction'(Silverman, 2005, p.295). This 'dialogic' quality of a literature review will be to the fore in what follows. The form of presentation will try to capture the process by which my 'reading' and the 'data' established through the research project were brought together to develop each other.

For Hart the purpose of the 'literature search' lies in the researcher's:



... need to become completely familiar with your topic. This means searching out, obtaining and then reading as much as possible in the time you have available. (Hart, C. 2001, p. 2)

Anyone familiar with research will no doubt have reason to pause and reflect when reading this formula; the real world implications of the words 'possible' and 'time' are grave. It is also interesting to consider other dimensions of the statements made by Hart, for although he is often considered to be very orthodox he actually presents a view of literature search and review which goes beyond the 'display' of 'scholarly skills' (Silverman, 2005, p.295). There is a need to show an 'understanding of the problem' which has motivated the research and 'to justify' and 'become completely familiar with the 'research topic'. With a little imagination to take us outside the walls of the library the idea of 'searching out' not only texts but also stories and opinions becomes quite exciting. Life story work must to a large degree happen outside of the library, the materials from which it is made cannot be gathered in a place where, for good reason, silence is maintained.

Hart's prescriptions together with Silverman's recommendation to become 'dialogic' can be reordered to justify the approach to literature search and review which will be taken here. In what follows a type of literature review will be presented as a story of the intellectual origins of this thesis. As with all such projects this one has a life story. It is not unusual to find PhD. students, who when talking about their doctoral work employ vocabulary more often associated with family life or fecundity. PhDs often pass through a moment of 'inception' next follows a period when what will be key ideas 'germinate' and then 'take root'. At some point after this there is often a time of 'gestation' while the project develops, there might be a 'nurturing', sometimes a 'blossoming' then a 'coming to fruition'. Woven through this fertility narrative there is often a parallel story set in terms which evoke the tribulations of all long term relationships it is not unusual to hear people say that 'I often thought of just dropping it and walking away' or 'I eventually realised that I would just have to get on with it'. If such metaphors are justifiable, their ubiquity might indicate that they are, then we might also talk about the 'life history' of a thesis.

Taking this idea further we might imagine this text as a young adult and in this chapter something of the family history, the ancestors, and the genomic dimensions will be represented with a view to explaining why it looks like it does and possesses a certain temperament and outlook.

This is what lies behind the use of the word 'antecedents' in the title. The purpose of the chapters with this in their title is that they are intended to tell the reader something about the 'space' (to use a term in the same way as Lefebvre ) from which it originates. In taking this 'antecedent' approach to the literature search and review it is important to understand that it works back from a more or less established starting point.

It was only at the time that the thesis took on a more or less well defined direction that it could be said which readings had played a part in its direction, and how they had played a part. Of course the reverse process has also been extremely important. In the course of preparing the thesis texts have been read which might not have been read in other circumstances. To read new texts in the light of this project is not however such a surprising activity as that of re-understanding the arguments and thinking in books and articles which were once familiar in other ways.

Overall when surveying the main thrust of the project I am struck by how much influence has been exerted by texts I read before I had begun life history work, and how much the impact of these texts has changed in the light of their being viewed from a different vantage point. In many cases these texts have been re-read in the light of work for this project and largely new understandings have emerged. To return to books read many years before and to realise how much was missed in earlier readings is at once illuminating and unsettling.

It has already been said that this chapter should be seen as dialogic in intention. All rich dialogue is not only conducted with an (in this case a largely imagined) external interlocutor, but must also have an important internal dimension with the interlocutors, not only addressing each other but also themselves. I too am trying to simultaneously formulate, present and understand, what it is I want to say and why I

want to say it. This is stated openly and perhaps in contravention of the normal rules of the 'methodology chapter' genre.

Silverman makes a remark about the purpose of a literature review which might not reveal its full importance on first being read 'Any literature review connected with a piece of research has as much to do with the issue of **generalizability** as with displaying your academic credentials'. (Silverman, 2005, p.295, emphasis as in original)

It is precisely this point about 'generalisability' which some see as an Achilles' heel of life story work (Fieldhouse, 1996, 1997). It is very difficult in life story work to interview and produce the life stories of large samples of people, it simply takes too much time (Evans, 2004, pp. 67-68).

Life story research usually focuses on a relatively small number of life stories. Among critics of this method of research it is argued (more often than not *sotto voce*) that if a study is made of a particular life or a small number of lives then, by definition, there will be problems of the generalisability of such a study. It is intended to show how, at its best, work in the area of life stories or auto/biography accepts this problem and through grappling with it produces studies which reveal the dialectical workings of the general and the specific. A small number of life stories properly analysed will reveal much of the relationship between and interpenetration of the social, cultural, and political with the individual or personal. It is precisely this type of relationship which is referred to as the philosophy of 'internal relations' (Ollman, 1970, pp.227-42, Sayers, 1990).

Fundamentally the philosophy of internal relations holds that all phenomena, whether material or ideal, are constituted by the relations they have with other phenomena and within themselves. In our particular case of the life story a life might be viewed as being composed of a myriad of 'internal' developments and also by the way in which the same life stands in relation to a culture and society. It should already be apparent that the life story is an interesting example for the philosophy of 'internal relations' as in a human life the natural, the social, the particular and the general all exist as expressions of each other.

Approaching the same issue from a different perspective Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that a small sample approached with careful treatment of the individual differences (derived from such factors as age, gender, and context) between the people in the sample might well produce more insight than a larger scale survey in which individual differences are either ignored or aggregated. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe developed an approach to scientific study which had at its centre the development of a deeper understanding between the general and the specific. He developed this in part because he believed that the tendency of other scientists to aggregate, and thereby eliminate, individual difference would lead science astray.

### **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

Both Goethe and Balzac in different ways demonstrate something of how the philosophy of internal relations might be applied to the idea of 'generalisability' in life history work. The case against life history, or auto/biographically based approaches to social studies usually rests on the claims that small populations cannot be taken as representative and that we cannot generalise from such small samples. For Goethe (and later for Hegel and Marx) this problem of 'generalisability' worked very much in the opposite direction, the basic contention being that it is from the careful study of the particular that we proceed to the general.

In the case of Marx the study of the particular was important as it was the only way to approach the more general. The classic example of this for Marx would be the way in which in his writing of 'Capital' he starts with an analysis of what he sees as its unit:

The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities," its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity. (Marx, 1887/1990, p127)

Marx after years of struggling, with both the subject matter of 'Capital' and its presentation, starts with the commodity. The next few thousand pages begin to deal with its implications.

For Marx moving away from the particular, if sight was lost of the way in which the particular always exists in interconnection with other things, led to generalisations being abstract. Earlier in this chapter mention was made of the complex relationship between the thought of Marx and Hegel. Both Marx and Hegel were familiar with the work of Goethe. It is not difficult to see how Marx's approach to the 'commodity' in 'Capital' might be compared to Goethe's 'Urphänomen'.

### **The Urphänomen**

An essential feature of Goethe's approach to 'science' was his contention that it should be based on 'a delicate form of empiricism which enters into the closest union with its object and is therefore transformed into an actual theory' (Goethe, 1833/1998, p.75.). Here the message of Goethean science for life history work is particular clear: a navigable path to a developed understanding of 'the social' may be based on the delicate empirical study of the lives of individuals.

The issue of generalisability itself should be seen as being embedded (again, an example of the 'philosophy of internal relations') in wider problems of epistemology and ontology. Generalisability cannot be taken as a self evident concept. What is understood by the word 'generalisability' itself leads us to a theory of knowledge. As Goethe explained even the simplest noting of a 'fact' already implies something that it is to be understood within some type of theoretical framework

Everything factual is already theory: to understand this would be the greatest possible achievement. The blueness of the sky reveals the basic law of chromatics. Don't go looking for anything beyond phenomena: they are themselves what they teach, the doctrine. (Goethe, 1796/1998, p.77)

From the point of view of a Goethean approach to 'scientific study' it can be seen that a small number of life stories carefully examined might be a productive basis from which to proceed in a 'generalising' direction. This is not at all to claim that from the study of a few lives alone that a view of the whole universe of the social or the psychological can be formed. In the approach to life story work taken here the lives studied are the principle points of departure from which to move towards the social. At the same time

there is of course a wealth of knowledge already available in the form of theory which is to be utilised in order to move from the general back to the particular.

How well the general fits with the particular and how a knowledge and understanding of each informs and deepens our understanding of the other is an important test of the veracity and utility of our theories as they relate to both the general and the particular. It was precisely this type of movement between the general and the particular which Liz Stanley referred to when she pointed out that 'if structural analyses do not work at the level of particular lives then they do not work at all' (1992, p.50). An argument entirely in keeping with those made earlier by Goethe.

Today it sounds more than a little strange to talk about the merging of science and poetry but this was an important part of Goethe's thinking. At the core of his approach to the study of natural phenomena there is a belief that understanding may only be achieved through investigations and contemplation which combine aesthetic judgements with what Goethe saw as scientific rigour. At the heart of what Goethe saw as being the essence of scientific rigour was the training of the scientist to observe.

In his ground breaking and widely respected study of plants Goethe (1790/2009) employed what he called a 'genetic method' alongside what are most definitely aesthetic judgements and ways of classification. This should not be confused with the modern science of genetics but is based on an approach to study which traces lines of development back to what Goethe saw as the archetypal form, the 'Urphänomen'. In some of the notes for his study of plants sometime after 1786 Goethe outlined in the following way how he would apply this genetic method:

If I look at the created object, inquire into its creation and follow this process back as far as I can, I will find a series of steps. Since these are not actually seen together before me, I must visualize them in my memory so that they form a certain ideal whole.

At first I will tend to think in terms of steps, but nature leaves no gaps, and thus, in the end, I will have to see this progression of uninterrupted activity as a whole. I can do so by dissolving the particular without dissolving the impression itself. (Goethe, 1790/1998, p.105)

The 'dissolving' which Goethe talks about here is the process by which the scientist moves from the particular case to a more general impression. This is to be achieved by observing what is general in each particular case; the general picture is produced by dissolving the particular into the general. Here Goethe is talking about plant physiology but this could be applied to any area of his studies.

There are obviously very important and illuminating ways in which the method Goethe proposes here might be applied to the study of life histories. We might consider each life story as a 'created object' in the way Goethe described. In the narratives from which the life stories are created incidents and events are interwoven with explanations and interpretations etc., these must then be 'visualised' so that they form a 'certain ideal whole'. Various stories may in turn be brought together, juxtaposed and synthesised with a 'gentle empiricism' which must also recognise and respect each story's individuality. When Goethe talks about 'dissolving the particular without dissolving the impression itself' he is describing an aspect of his scientific method in which the search for the 'Urphänomen', or archetypal form, is a key process in understanding the form of each particular occurrence of a phenomena. In a very real sense the six life stories presented in this study are examined with a view to discovering something similar to an 'Urphanomen'. Goethe whilst looking for the 'Urphänomen' also believes that the scientist must work simultaneously with 'gestalten' or complete shapes, figures or complexes. In his 'Maxims and Reflections' first published posthumously soon after his death in 1832 Goethe describes the relationship of the general to the specific in aphoristic verse form:

What is general?

The individual case

What is specific?

Millions of cases

(Goethe 1833/1998, Reflection 558)

The above maxim is one of many which Goethe set down during the latter part of his life which deals with the relationship between the individual or particular and the general. For Goethe the particular is always an expression of the general and very

importantly the general can only exist in particular cases. Elsewhere in the same collection of maxims Goethe states that 'The general and the particular coincide; the particular is the general made manifest under different conditions' (Goethe, 1833, p.76). This idea, so prevalent in Goethe's thought, is extremely important for life story work.

In terms of generalisability Goethe's work might well give pause to those who argue that generalisability is not possible without large sample sizes. Goethe's argument is that generalisability is not possible without very close observation of all that is deemed to be particular in any given case. It is only the close study of the particular which allows for the postulation of what might be considered to be truly generalisable.

Goethe urges scientists, or any other systematic observer to closely study individual phenomena in order to grasp the real life manifestations of 'the general'. For Goethe the general is in essence an abstraction from the particular. Here abstraction would be the process by which we look at many particular cases of certain types and then try to see which features of these cases are also general. Goethe put it this way in an article first written in 1792 but not published until 1823:

In living nature nothing happens that is not in connection with a whole. When experiences appear to us in isolation or when we look at experiments as presenting only isolated facts, that is not to say that the facts are indeed isolated. The question is: how do we find the connections between phenomena or within a given situation? (Goethe, 1792/2010, p.22)

Goethe's understanding of the relationship of the particular to the general and his insistence on studying 'gestalten' led to him opposing an approach to science which took as central to its method the isolation of elements from the whole. It was on this basis that Goethe famously criticised Newton's approach to the study of light which relied on breaking light down into what the latter posited as constituent colours of the spectrum.

In the particular case of the study of light it is salutary to know that Goethe's approach to colour has achieved a certain type of dominance in the world of art. J.M.W. Turner



received an early copy of Goethe's 'Theory of Colour' and may indeed have contributed to its translation into English (Hamilton, J., 1997, p. 289). Certainly there can be little doubt that Goethe's theories guided Turner in his own attempts to communicate the sublime through the medium of colour (Finley, 1997). The sublime would scarcely be a category permitted by Newton.

In his approach to the scientific study of colour, plants, and other subjects Goethe always believed that a true appreciation and understanding could only be achieved if what might be called the 'affective' dimension was also comprehended. This might go some way to explaining why 'science' adopted Newton's approach to the study of light and colour whilst among artists it is Goethe who is seen as offering a more productive approach. Life story work has always stressed the 'affective' dimension of comprehension and investigation. At the core of most life story work there is the intention of developing empathy with others whilst working within an academic frame.

Bearing in mind Goethe's approach to science it must also be mentioned that Goethe produced what might well be taken as the first modern autobiography. Goethe's autobiography, published in instalments over more than twenty years finally emerged in 1833 (Goethe, 1833). It is interesting to note that Goethe gave the title 'Aus Meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit' (From my life: poetry and truth) to this autobiography. This poses difficulties to translators as there are deliberate ambiguities in the original German. 'Dichtung' might well be translated as either 'poetry' or 'fiction'. If we take Goethe's work as a key example of early modern biography it is intriguing to realise that Goethe himself wished to point out the problematic nature of 'truth' in this genre. In this autobiography Goethe also drew attention to the need for biography to be based on 'what is scarcely attainable' the need for the writer to 'know himself and his age' because 'the main object of biography, (is) - to exhibit the man in relation to the features of his time' (Goethe, 1833/2008, p. xxviii - xxix). This latter motivation also played an enormous part in Goethe's best known dramatic creation 'Faust'. If 'Aus Meinem Leben' is classically autobiographical then 'Faust' is in large part a dramatic rendering of Goethe's 'relation to the features of his time'.

Goethe is generally seen as being a key person in the movement known today as 'Weimar Classicism'. This movement represented the development of a progressive

form of humanism on German soil. In this respect too it is important to look at Goethe's method of studying the 'individual' as the form of existence of the 'general' as this is also closely related to his understanding of and belief in the values of 'humanism'. Erich Fromm, very much with Goethe in mind, defined humanism as 'belief in the unity of the human race and man's potential to perfect himself by his own efforts' (Fromm, 1965, p.vii) this brief definition could certainly be questioned but it does contain some of the key tenets of most forms of 'humanism'. In 'Faust' Goethe seeks to show the fate of mankind in the interplay between the two ambiguous characters of Faust and Mephistopheles the entire play in this regard becomes a treatise on 'humanism'. Elsewhere Goethe promotes what he sees as the importance of human reason and truth in allowing humans to learn how to live in their world:

The reasonable world is to be seen as a great individual not subject to mortality and forever bringing about what is needed, in this way even mastering chance events. (Goethe, 1833/1998, p. 57)

Goethe's concept of humanism is dialectical in that it is based on the relationship between the potential of individuals to realise their humanity within a particular social and cultural context and in reverse recognises the effect of particular historic settings to condition 'humanity'. Goethe's outlook was expressed by Korff an eminent Goethe scholar in the following way:

Man carries within himself not only his individuality but all of humanity, with all its potentialities, although he can realize these potentialities in only a limited way because of the external limitations of his individual existence."(Korff, 1958, p. 123)

What might be said to sum up Goethe's place in the understanding of life story work presented here? Goethe would not have seen a barrier existing between his own scientific studies on one hand and his literary, dramatic and poetical works (including his autobiography). Indeed for Goethe the creation of any such barrier would have been seen as destructive of the possibility of attaining understanding through the pursuit of knowledge in any particular area. Goethe's science relied upon the cultivation of aesthetic appreciation whilst he also saw attempts at artistic

comprehension of the world as necessarily relying upon a particular approach to scientific method. But in this present context what is of greatest importance is that Goethe's whole method based around the careful study of individual cases provides a reasonable rationale for life story work.

### **Balzac**

Goethe saw the task of the writer as being to 'know himself and his age' (Goethe, 1833/2008, p.5). If this measure is taken as the yardstick by which to assess the stature of a writer then Honoré de Balzac is a colossus. Balzac is considered by many to be perhaps one of the greatest among the great names of nineteenth century fiction such as Stendhal, Eliot, Dickens, Zola, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy. There were undoubtedly 'realist' writers before Balzac but he more than perhaps anyone else might be considered the first self-consciously 'realist' writer.

To draw out the importance of Balzac to this project an analysis will be presented of a scene which occurs at the end of 'Old Goriot', Honoré de Balzac's novel of 1835 (Balzac 1835/2011). This scene has been commented on by many writers including David Harvey (2006, p.51) who draws attention to Balzac's capacity to capture and create the 'physiognomy and character of the city' in this case Paris.

The scene occurs in the Père Lachaise cemetery in the year 1819 four years after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. The Bourbon monarchy has been restored and much of Parisian high society is (at least in Balzac's view) characterised by corruption and cynical calculation. A kindly retired tradesman known as 'Old Goriot' is being buried; he has died in poverty having given over his modest wealth to his daughters who now move within middle class society. One of these daughters is now Madame du Nucingen, the wife of a powerful financier. Goriot's destitution has become a cause of shame to the daughters who he loved with such generosity. In their vanity they will not attend what they see as their father's wretched and shaming funeral. Among the very small group of people in attendance is Eugène de Rastignac a young man from the lowest levels of the nobility who has come to Paris as a 'student'. He too has spent a considerable amount of his family's money trying to make his way in Paris. In 'Old Goriot' Rastignac is shown as a would be 'parvenu' who has until now, resisted being drawn into some of the darker sides of Parisian life. Balzac shows how this tension

between ambition and a residual morality drives Rastignac forward. In the final paragraph of 'Old Goriot' we learn how this tension is finally resolved. Rastignac is outraged by the daughters' heartlessness at refusing to attend the funeral whilst simultaneously he realises that those who would succeed in Restoration France must avoid disgrace by association with such things as pauper funerals.

Rastignac weeps as the funeral ends. Balzac tells the reader that a tear fell upon Goriot's grave and 'with that tear ... Eugène de Rastignac's youth ended' (Balzac 1835/2011, p.256). In an instant Rastignac decides which way his future lies and those who retain any innocence had best beware:

Alone now, Rastignac walked up towards the cemetery's highest point and saw Paris below him, winding along the banks of the Seine, its lights beginning to sparkle, his eyes came to rest almost greedily on the area between the column on the Place Vendôme and the Dome of the Invalides; the home of the *beau monde*, which he had been so determined to enter. He gave the droning hive a look that seemed to drain it of its honey in advance and pronounced these grand words; 'Now let us fight it out!' And by way of firing an opening shot at Society, Rastignac went to have dinner with Madame de Nucingen. (Balzac 1835/2011, p. 257)

In this short passage Balzac captures a crucial moment in the social transformation of a young lesser nobleman into a Parisian financier of the Bourbon restoration. Rastignac becomes a figure representative of a social class in formation. The genius of Balzac lies in his ability to present this social change through a compellingly convincing portrait of the psychological development of a young man. The character of Rastignac appears in more than a dozen novels of Balzac's 'Human Comedy' a series of some 90 novels. From the point at which he leaves Goriot's funeral through each subsequent appearance in Balzac's 'Human Comedy' Rastignac's 'fight' progresses with him becoming increasingly wealthy, duplicitous and emotionally depraved, indeed the personification of a financier. Rastignac eventually makes a play for the highest office in France having corruptly amassed a colossal fortune. For all of his determination, calculation, cunning and misanthropy Rastignac's life also becomes meaningless. Rastignac is portrayed by Balzac as a being whose humanity has been consumed and

replaced by an obsessive, but void ambition. As the consummate financier Rastignac is only 'capital personified' (Marx, 1990, p. 342) from each of his of dazzling pecuniary victories in his 'war' with humanity Rastignac emerges wealthier and further diminished as a human being.

From the point of view of a 'literature review' and especially the question of 'generalizability' Balzac is extremely important. Balzac was able to present the workings of a society through the lives of the characters who at once represent, set in motion, and are shaped by the forces which impel that society forward in historical terms. Another character from the 'Comedie Humaine' the perfumier Cesar Birotteau appears as one of the very first characters in fiction to be involved in commercial advertising. Balzac had a prescient awareness of advertising becoming a key feature of modern life. Birotteau is drawn into the world of property speculation and becomes a victim of fraudulent practices which lead to his bankruptcy. It would be hard to imagine a more powerful description of the terrors of bankruptcy than Balzac's account of the hopeless attempts by Birotteau to secure loans from the bankers of Paris who unbeknown to the perfumier are involved in the fraud and stand to gain from his insolvency. The point here is that Balzac uses fiction with devastating accuracy to portray the realities of his society. Balzac might well be considered to be the grandmaster of French realist writing but viewed from another direction he is a consummate presenter of life stories and history.

Marx's admiration for Balzac was immense. This might appear to be quite incredible at a superficial level as Marx, above all a political and philosophical protagonist of the 'proletariat', could scarcely have been more different, in political outlook, to Balzac a supporter of the French ancien régime and a royalist. Marx believed that Balzac in his 'Comedy Humaine' gave a living form to the social and economic forces which Marx analysed in his own work. Balzac's incredible insight into the dark workings of business, finance, and political huckstering along with the novelist's ability to create memorable characters mean that his work gives an unparalleled social and economic insight into the world he wrote about.

The story is told that immediately prior to the publication of 'Capital' Marx implored Friedrich Engels to read Balzac's 'The Unfinished Masterpiece'. Marx drew parallels

between this story and his own struggle to complete 'Capital' which Marx saw not only as a work of political economy but also of significant literary value (Wheen, 2006). It is certainly true that Marx often alludes to Balzac (and a host of other writers) throughout his work. After the death of Marx, his son-in-law Paul Lafargue remarked that Marx 'ranked Cervantes and Balzac above all other novelists'. Writing in 1890 Lafargue also suggests that Marx intended to write an extended review of the Human Comedy once he had completed Capital.

He considered Balzac not only as the historian of his time, but as the prophetic creator of characters which were still in the embryo in the days of Louis Philippe and did not develop until after his death, under Napoleon III. (Lafargue, 1890, p.24)

In the twentieth century there has been a tendency to give an exaggerated and one sided 'economic' view to 'Capital' and other works of Marx. Though it must be said that there are some wonderful analyses of Marx's work which run counter to this tendency. This tendency toward the construction of a Marxism as a type of positivistic economic science assumed an extreme form in the work of Louis Althusser when he talks about the work a 'young' Marx which is full of 'Hegelianism' and the work of a 'mature' Marx supposedly purged of humanism etc. The work of Althusser has been thoroughly (and in my opinion devastatingly), criticised by E.P Thompson in his 'The Poverty of Theory' (1978). What is not generally recognised is that what E.P Thompson referred to as the 'Geschichtenscheissenschlopf' of Althusser. The philosophy of the latter bears important family resemblances to the work of many of the French postmodernists many of whom looked to Althusser as a teacher and originator of their own brands of opposition to humanism.

There has been occasion in this project to look at Balzac because as already detailed, among some of those working with life stories there is a rather laconic type of criticism of what they describe as 'realism' because it makes 'a demand for some referent, and objective reality' (Lyotard, 1984, p.73).

What is most interesting about the rejection of realism and especially the deprecation of writers such as Balzac among those working with narrative or life history is that if we

## Antecedents 1: The Poverty of Postmodernism

were to ask ourselves for the names of those who have achieved most on an historical scale through the use of writing as a form of inquiry then the names of such 'realist' writers as Balzac, George Eliot, Zola and Tolstoy would surely be among those who come to mind. The more extreme postmodernists with their adherence to 'anti-realism' and radical 'social constructivist' thought cannot avoid placing themselves in absurd positions such as arguing the case for investigating social phenomena through fiction whilst decrying the greatest exponents of this art in its realist form.

## **Introduction to the Life Stories: Method and Methodology**

The first two life stories following follow this chapter. These first two stories follow after the preceding chapter which was entitled 'Antecedents 1'. The remaining four life stories are interspersed between two more chapters entitled 'Antecedents'. There are three principal reasons for this layout. Firstly, in a project centred around working with life stories there is a clear need to get on with presenting the life stories as early as possible. Secondly, it is also necessary to present material which constitutes a form of literature review and explanation of the methodological considerations if not before then at least alongside the life stories themselves. Thirdly, as has already been mentioned the frameworks within which the life stories are 'theorized' came to life, and developed, symbiotically through their contact with the life stories. That said there is a need to present the method used in the collection, the transcription and the presentation of the life stories.

As far as I have been able to I have sought to preserve 'the voice' of those individual teachers whose stories are told. Referencing has been kept to an absolute minimum, and as the writer of the stories I have as far as possible tried to avoid academic intrusions into the stories themselves. This non-intrusion is, I hope transparently, something of a stratagem as from the recorded material I have edited and selected what is to be included and what, metaphorically speaking, will remain on the cutting room floor. The focus in the examination of the life stories is on the three themes already mentioned, class and identity, place, and managerialism.

For all of its merits there are also considerable inherent problems in life story work. These are discussed in the paragraphs below, both in general terms and with specific reference to the project developed here. It is hoped that by dealing with these problems in an open and honest manner some of the strengths of life story work will be thrown into better relief. One of the greatest of these strengths is perhaps is the way in which some of its best proponents present with the honesty and seriousness the problems of the method, such a presentation of necessity involves a discussion of methodology. It is never possible or desirable to separate an evaluation of method from methodological considerations.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical clearance for this project was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University before any research work was done with the



people whose stories are told here. The research proposal was prepared with close reference to the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA). The key principal underpinning the BERA guidelines is 'that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for: the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research, academic freedom' (BERA, 2011, p.4). At one level such underpinning principals appear straightforward and it is clear that they should be followed. In practice how to best respect such ethical principals in spirit and letter is not at all self-evident.

Potential participants were identified on a purposive basis. This is described in one classic text on research methods in education as a process by which a researcher hand picks:

the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality, or possession of the particular characteristics being sought. In this way they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs. (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011, p. 156)

The picking of a potential sample presented itself initially as a simple process. On reflection it presented some interesting ethical problems.

At the time of this project there were fewer than sixty people working as literacy teachers on The Isle of Thanet. There was a single further education college, a single adult education centre and a small range of private providers. For the purposes of this project it was necessary to interview people who had worked in the field of adult literacy teaching for some two or more years. It was decided that potential participants with a background in the management of adult literacy teaching would not be suitable candidates as they could be rather easily identified. This would probably have meant that these managers would have been unwilling to present a picture of their work which might have been perceived as divergent with that this was presented officially by their organisations. The result was that the pool from which a purposive sample could be recruited was rather small, counterintuitively this meant that the six people who agreed to participate in the study found themselves becoming more 'representative' in terms of the ratio of participants in the study relative to the total size of the population which could be studied.

The study looked at the lives of adult literacy teachers on The Isle of Thanet, by my estimation some fifteen per cent of the total population of this category agreed to participate in this study.

This meant that in some cases, it became necessary to fictionalise some details of the participants' lives deemed to have little or no relevance directly to the objects of the study, but which made their identification more difficult. For example, in the case of a person who left the area after informally agreeing in principle to participate in the study, it had been agreed that she would have been identified as living in the opposite town to that which she actually lived in. There are only two large towns in Thanet; Ramsgate and Margate.

All participants were initially contacted and asked to participate on the basis of their anonymity being protected. The purposes of the project were explained to the participants and all were asked to sign a consent form. All participants were informed of their rights as set out in the BERA (2011) guidelines. Especially important in this regard to me as the researcher and to them as the person whose life story would be represented was that they were asked to participate in the final production of the version of their life story presented in this thesis. Firstly, participants were asked to ensure that their anonymity was protected in their story and that they felt the presentation of their 'persona' was fair. The participants had to feel that their life story presented here was as far as we could make it 'authentic'. Later when the transcripts of the interviews were worked up into the life stories the idea of 'authenticity' took on an even greater importance than had been initially expected.

### **From interview via transcription to life story**

The interviews were conducted with the participants over the course of the two years which ended in December 2014. All the participants were interviewed twice and the interviews, transcripts, and life stories were discussed repeatedly. It should be said at this point that my own enthusiasm for these discussions exceeded that of some, if not most, of the participants. This is not to say that the participants were unwilling but there was sometimes a feeling that I was more interested in their opinion of, for example, 'Skills for Life' or the previous year's OFSTED grade than they were.

The interviews themselves were 'semi structured'. A list of questions was provided but these were used only as prompts if the 'life story' faltered. At the beginning of the interview the first question was always the same 'Could you tell me how you came to be a literacy teacher?' Later I would ask 'Could you tell me your life story and especially explain how you think this led to your becoming a literacy teacher?' All those interviewed had previously discussed with me in a very brief outline the reasons why I was approaching the project using the method of 'Life Story'.

From the first interview, it was apparent that a life story interview presents the researcher with some very interesting dilemmas. Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008, p.37) makes the point that 'Transcripts contain invisible taken-for-granted theories of language and the 'self.' This is undoubtedly true but 'taken-for-granted' theories have already shaped the interview itself ahead of the transcription. In the case of the question mentioned above, there is an implied assumption that to some extent or another the interviewee can tell their story more or less in accord with the rules of the 'life story' genre, which must itself be a sub division of 'narrative'. In fact, there is a vast amount written about the difficulty of accepting such assumptions, here it will suffice to give as an example the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (especially 1982 and 1984). Another seminal text, which discusses the difficulty of working with narrative whilst arguing for its indispensability is Jerome Bruner's article, entitled 'The Narrative Construction of Reality' (1991), the central argument of which is contained in the title. More recently, the philosopher Galen Strawson has argued against, if not the possibility of a 'narrative self', then certainly against its universality (for example Strawson 2004, and 2015). Strawson's arguments seem to be based on what he believes to be the complete lack of narrative in the construction of what he argues is his own 'self'.

Riessman when discussing an interview, she had conducted with a woman named 'Sunita', gives two ways in which she might have presented the transcription of her conversations and argues that each way embodies a different theory of 'the self'.

Simply stated: (1) the act of storytelling in dialogue *constitutes* the autobiographical self, that is how the speaker wants to be known in the interaction; vs. (2) autobiographical narrative *reflects* a preexisting self; there is constancy across speaking situations because the self exists independently of social interaction. (2008, p.20)

This is worth very careful consideration. From a dialectical viewpoint it would be necessary to take issue with Riessman's either/or approach to the counterposed aspects of self. The two views of the self must surely exist together; furthermore, the self would be the result of much more than these two things. The self, which 'Sunita' represents, would certainly exist as the conjunction of both constituted and reflected aspects of her world but it would also have been constituted by history, culture and reflection thereon. When all of these dimensions are brought together in real life interviews and transcriptions, the researcher and the researched are trying to reproduce a text not primarily for its function as data but for what it means to them both. Data in all research is nothing

until it is put into some type of qualitative form, in almost all cases, including that of the natural science the form, which gives real meaning to data, is usually an explanation or a narrative.

Going back as far as 1986, Elliot Mishler (p.49) made the point that the efficacy of the process of listening to and transcription for interview material did not depend so much on the actual method itself but on the purpose for which the transcript was to be used. As Mishler put it 'The experience of transcribing is likely to convince the investigators of the need for repeated listenings to ensure the most accurate transcript possible for their own analytic purposes, irrespective of the notation system chosen.' It was thinking very similar to that described here by Mishler which led to the choosing of the transcription system described below. The purpose of the transcripts in this project was above all to provide material for the researcher to write a life story for each person interviewed as far as possible in collaboration with the person whose story was told.

The transcription of the interviews was done in such a way that the speech of the interviewees was written more or less as Standard Written English. There was no phonological dimension to the rendering of the written transcript beyond nonstandard rendering of certain words or phrases elisions etc. Certain features of speech, which reflected local accent or departures from Standard English, were included in the transcript as was laughter, hesitations, or 'stumblings'. It should be noted that several of the interviewees did not like the inclusion of these features into the written transcripts as it made them feel embarrassed. The interviewees were given recordings of the interviews and also transcriptions which had been anonymized and included the minor 'fictions' to safeguard identities. They were invited to ask for the excision of anything which they did not want included. No-one made such a request.

In my analysis of the transcripts I began by going through the texts and looking for themes which could then be coded. The initial system adopted was very similar to that described by both Barbara Merrill and Linden West (2009, pp. 128-146). A particular aspect of the method of approaching coding suggested by Barbara Merrill became important at this stage:

When reading individual transcripts, I am always looking for shared experiences and patterns which connect across the transcripts so that the individual stories become collective ones. I am also looking at how structure and structural inequalities impact upon biographies. At the same time, I am identifying whether and how individuals have been able to use their agency... (p.133)

At various points in this project there are discussions of the dialectics of the particular and the general and the interplay of determined and indeterminate elements in life story work. This is exactly the point Barbara Merrill makes above. In the 'coding' of the life story transcripts presented here the interplay between individual and collective stories came to be focused on class and identity, managerialism and place.

After discussion of the transcripts the interviewees were sent copies of their life stories as written by the researcher. In each case an emphasis was placed on the recipient of the life story accepting that it was 'their story'. There were a few very minor alterations made with respect to details, by far the most significant was that in her life story Grace insisted that her father should not emerge in a favourable or even neutral light. This led to the inclusion of more detail which had been present in the transcript but which had been omitted in the life story.

It has already been pointed out that Merrill and West (2009) present two differing but not dissimilar approaches to working with life stories and with transcripts. Linden West stresses that in his approach to working with life stories he places an emphasis on the involvement of the person whose story is told in trying to make sense of the story. West believes that in this endeavour he is concerned with issues similar to those which concerned Hollway and Jefferson (2000). In both cases a value is placed upon the person being interviewed discerning some pattern in their life. To see their life as a configuration in which they can relate details to the wider life story as a type of 'gestalt'. Although in this project I was definitely interested in trying to see patterns, and it was imperative that those interviewed were involved in 'authorising' their life story this was so that the stories could claim 'authenticity' rather than for psychological or phenomenological reasons. Here what was desired was that the subjects could say that the story presented to them was a 'fair enough' account of what they believed had shaped their lives as literacy teachers living and working in and around 'The Isle of Thanet'.

At the level of practical writing, there is the problem of how best to present the life stories themselves. In reading the work of others and in discussions with colleagues it is evident that opinions are divided over the optimum way in which to present the stories. These divisions centre on how best way to negotiate the problem of 'telling the story itself' as far as possible in the authentic voice of the person whose story is told whilst also subjecting the same story to academic analysis. Here I have opted to present the stories as far as possible without intervention. Some

readers might argue that stories presented in this way with a minimum of commentary amount to little more than the raw 'field notes' an ethnographer might prepare prior to the academic analysis of such 'data'.

Often in life story work the stories themselves are presented with what might be called academic annotation or ecphasis. This is not how the stories are presented here. Three chapters and a conclusion follow the life stories. In the chapters titled 'Class and Identity', 'Managerialism', and 'Place' episodes and examples from the stories are integrated with an analysis of the subjects which form the section headings. In the stories themselves letters have been inserted at certain points to indicate where, in my opinion, the story has a particular pertinence to one or more of the themes treated later. This is explained more fully below.

In no case have I omitted anything from the transcripts which I would consider to be of such importance that it would transform the life story. It is beyond doubt that those interviewed have chosen to leave out of their stories some issues which would have helped us to develop a more complete picture of their lives. This is a matter of less importance than some might think. Whilst the stories are highly personal, they are also social and cultural, they are the stories people have told to me in interviews which were 'interpersonal' and therefore social. It was far easier than I initially expected to avoid 'prying' in the interviews; it would in any case have been obviously distasteful and unnecessary.

A second reason for accepting the stories on the terms in which they were told is that for the purposes of this study the stories are perfectly adequate. I will explain this a little more. There is plenty of material which would be rich and would offer insights into themes not examined in this thesis. Those interviewed talk about bereavements, problems of adolescence, intergenerational tensions and many other things which are left unexamined.

I notice re-reading these stories that everyone visits the experience of the breakup of a long term romantic relationship. In certain cases, I know that these experiences must have been life changing, traumatic and emotionally desiccating. Yet despite the undoubtable importance of this and other themes in the lives presented, they pass unexamined on my part. Some readers will of course wonder about what happened in these break-ups and divorces etc. It is reasonable for me to assume that in reading some of the stories presented here the reader, in their mind's eye, might well wander into some scenarios which might reasonably be inferred even though no evidence is offered. The

reader is free to do so, I have no objection, and I only scan the issues of love, marriage, divorce etc. where in my opinion this impinges on the areas I have chosen to consider in more detail.

I think that the themes listed below which are the main focuses of analysis emerge from the texts and are well represented. In many ways the more complete life stories here serve as background, albeit essential and important, for the themes which are examined in greater detail. I am happy to accept the life stories on the terms in which they were offered; to go more deeply into areas the subjects themselves avoided is unnecessary.

As has already been said those teachers whose stories are told here have welcomed the presentation of their lives which I have made. In the majority of cases the subjects have received their stories enthusiastically no one has rejected what I have presented as their story. In one case I felt that that the subject might be described as nonplussed with regard to my interest in her story, believing that little of interest had happened in her life.

Once the individual stories had been agreed by the researcher and those 'researched' it was considered expedient to annotate each story as presented here with a code to indicate where in the opinion of the researcher the life stories made reference to the themes of class and identity, managerialism and place. These choices and themes are my own and I do not think that any of the people whose stories are told would have thought of their lives in terms of these themes in the ways they are presented and explored in this project.

It has been useful to indicate in the texts certain sections or particular comments which I have taken to have a more or less direct bearing on the three themes which have been selected for scrutiny in this work. These parts of the text are marked by letters relating to the three themes

**(C&I)** Class and identity

**(M)** Managerialism

**(P)** Place

There is a 'collage' effect at work when producing life stories. When reading the stories, it is hoped that the reader will consider why I have linked particular episodes or observations to particular themes. If the link is not immediately obvious to the reader it is hoped that it will become so when read in the light of the sections to which the letters refer. Tracing the links when they are not

obvious to the reader might even be intriguing. I also have no doubt that the reader will see links I have not drawn attention to and it is almost certain that readers will feel that the stories could be viewed in aspects different to those selected by me.

In life story work we can never come remotely close to presenting a complete life. We can only present what we hope and believe to be judiciously selected scintillas of the real life. Life story work itself proceeds from two premises. The first is that these scintillas can attain 'representativeness'. The second premise is that in collecting these fragments and juxtaposing them an overall picture emerges which tells us things which are 'true' in as much as they relate one story to what we imagine to be the stories of many others. Again, we see 'internal relations' at work. We understand a particular life story by interpreting it in the light of the stories of others and what we know, or want to learn, about our society and culture.

Some passages are obviously related to the three themes set out above. In these cases, I have tried to avoid labouring the reader with the obvious, and I have not marked the passage as being relevant to the theme as the reader should have no difficulty drawing the nexus. In other cases, I have inserted the relevant letters, **C&I**, **M** or **P**. In some cases, the insertion of the letters might not be immediately obvious, in other cases the mark may appear to be obtuse. In these cases, I hope that the process of trying to understand why a reference to a theme has been inserted helps the reader to understand my thinking. Hopefully this use of what initially might appear as 'broken images' facilitates 'a new understanding of confusion' along the lines suggested in the Robert Graves poem cited at the beginning of this thesis.



## Hannah Cooper

Hannah was the first person interviewed for this project. In my eagerness I had arrived in Margate where we were to meet about an hour too early. I decided that I would take advantage of the time by walking along the sea front and the old town. It was a bright, cold and blustery February afternoon; I was to meet with Hannah as she finished work.

J.M.W. Turner painted sea and skylscapes around Margate many times. He was particularly impressed with the way that on occasions light would suffuse the sky above this north facing bay. This afternoon was of the type that Turner must have hoped for, as I looked out to sea there was an ethereal quality to the lightly clouded blue grey sky above the cold winter sea. This celestial triumph pointed up the terrestrial poverty, the boarded up shop fronts and the groups of poorly clothed people waiting in bus shelters. I had met with Hannah on several occasions in various professional contexts before asking her to work with me on this project. She had impressed me as a serious person who always tried to do the best she could even in very pressing circumstances. When I first met her she was teaching very large groups of unemployed men, many of whom had significant social problems. Once when I visited her workplace I found two of my old literacy students who I knew had been to prison and were obliged to attend another literacy class upon their release, they were sitting there among a class of some forty people most of whom I did not know. They were pleased to see me, and I was impressed that they regarded me as a friend. It was even more surprising to find that they were still working at the same level as when they had been in my class some three years previously. In this group of almost forty men there were two women. Hannah explained to me that practically she had no say over the class size or composition. The company she worked for was obliged to accept whoever the Job Centre sent to them. Somehow Hannah managed to get the class to work productively for an hour. (P)

When I next met Hannah she was working in a different far less oppressive place and as we walked toward the room where we would hold the interview she was able to tell me that the situation I had visited her in before was in some important ways even worse

than it had appeared. As she told me about the pressure she and the other people working in that environment had been under I found myself starting to feel gloomy.

Hannah works in a large Edwardian building which in the past must have projected an image of municipal dignity, nowadays although faded and slightly down at heel the building is not shabby. As we walked up a grand staircase she asked me where we should go to conduct the interview, a strange question as this was her workplace. Once we were in the room where the first interview would be held Hannah explained that she had been waiting for me and trying to think about what she might say. She appeared slightly excited and told me that she was a 'bit nervous' because she didn't think that she had enough to say for what I had told her would be an interview of about 50 minutes. I suggested that we went to a comfortable place where we were least likely to be disturbed. She led me up a wide polished hardwood staircase to a large third floor classroom which reminded me of a primary school. Hannah explained that despite what we had agreed she would have to leave her mobile phone switched on as she needed to respond to a phone call.

Hannah arrived in Thanet in 1965. Her family moved down to the coast from South London. She must have been nine or ten years old. Hannah's father had become disabled after twisting his back awkwardly. This did not happen in a major incident but as he was standing up after working under a car. His back problem was a major trouble as he owned a small building business and he could no longer do physical work or spend extended time on a ladder. Hannah explained that 'some bright doctor' who examined her father 'recommended that he'd be better at the coast' and so they moved to Cliftonville an area to the east of Margate. (P)

I am really glad that we moved down here. It was quite a nice place to grow up. It was lovely having the sea at the bottom of our road and being able to run down for a swim when I came home from school ... I remember I was nine when we moved and I remember my mum saying that my headmistress in Bromley had told her that if we moved that I wouldn't pass the 11-plus and my mum was really worried about that – and I did pass. So she thought it would have been better if we had stayed in Bromley, but in every other way it was a nice life. Obviously I didn't have anything else to compare it to

but I am glad we moved there and my parents were always glad. And my mum was glad; later in her life even though she could no longer walk by herself she would go out and, would go out by the seafront and never get over how lovely it was there.

Hannah judges that the move from London was beneficial to her family and she remembers the Margate of those days with fondness.(P)

The family took on the ownership of a small guest house. It was around this time that the fortunes of the regional holiday industry and particularly those of Cliftonville entered a decline. At this time Margate could be reached from London in a train journey lasting a little over an hour. Margate itself had a reputation for brashness, even vulgarity.

Within Margate the district of Cliftonville to which Hannah and her family moved was considered slightly upmarket. T.S. Eliot suffering from a psychological crisis had repaired, on his doctor's advice, to 'The Albemarle' in Cliftonville in October 1921. In the words of Eliot's wife Vivien 'The Albemarle' was 'such a nice, comfortable, and inexpensive hotel. Very Lucky.' (Eliot, V., 1988, p.479)

From 'The Albemarle' Eliot would walk to a small pavilion with a sea view at the 'rougher' end of Margate from which he could look out onto the North Sea or, turning his head slightly, the gates of 'Dreamland' and the rollercoaster beyond. (P)

The seaside hotels of Cliftonville attracted prosperous workers and lower grade professionals usually for one week holidays 'during the season'. It was precisely these groups who from the mid 1960s took advantage of the growth of budget holidays with air travel. Why take a risk on the weather with a holiday on the North Kent coast when the alternative was Mallorca or Marbella. Even the numbers of day trippers declined. The growth in car ownership and the development of motorways meant that Londoners could now drive to more attractive places than Thanet. It was just as this trend started that Hannah's family bought their Cliftonville hotel. (P)

Hannah says that her parents were not worldly wise to the ruses of how best to survive in the declining world of running a guesthouse. At several points in our discussions Hannah has talked about the rights and wrongs of claiming state benefits and it would seem that this was also something of an issue for her parents.

Her parents registered their small hotel business in both of their names, whereas 'What other people did' was to register the business in the name of the wife and register the husband as an employee. When the winter months came and the numbers of holidaymakers dwindled the wife would then 'lay off' the husband from the business. This allowed him to claim earnings related unemployment benefit throughout the winter months. **(P, C&I)**

As Hannah puts it when describing her parents 'they weren't kind of wise in the way that things worked'. Hannah's parents were prevented from claiming benefit and this forced them to stretch their income from the summer so that it lasted the whole year. As Hannah says 'in the winter there was no income'.

Hannah and her brother worked as waiters in the dining room of the guest house if needed. In the high summer season and Christmas holiday periods, there was the possibility of letting out all the rooms in the main building of the guest house. When this happened Hannah's family had to give up their rooms to guests. Hannah, her brother and her parents would occupy a small chalet at the end of the garden. Hannah recalled how after finishing their shifts the family would walk through the garden in the dark. Hannah remembers crushing snails underfoot. Listening to this I wondered what a young woman must make of her bedroom being periodically let out to guests. **(P, C&I)**

Later Hannah's parents sold the guesthouse and ran other small businesses most notably a taxi business and later an independent shop selling china, glassware and hardware. The shop despite her parents' hard work did not prosper. Hannah believes that if the shop had been located a few hundred yards further along the long the road it might have stood a better chance. Tragically it was a few hundred yards closer to the 'rough' end of town rather than the more 'comfortably off end'. Given the particular problems of Thanet and the general difficulties of many small businesses at a time when

large scale companies were taking over ever greater chunks of all British high streets it is no surprise that her parents' businesses did not flourish. **(P, C&I)**

Again the family went through difficult times. When her parents eventually decided to sell up the shop it was on the market a long time and Hannah's mother took a job in a factory where she worked until she was into her seventies. Something of the harshness of the fate which befell most of the guest house owners and shopkeepers of Thanet comes across when in what feels like a great understatement Hannah says 'they struggled a bit' or when she explains in a matter of fact manner that her mother who was by this time over sixty 'went to Hornby's because they were struggling to pay the rent'. The factory for Hornby Toys was one of the very few industrial sites in Thanet. Hannah mentioned that when the family lived in Bromley they owned a spacious four bedroom semi-detached house. At the end of her life Hannah's mother lived in a small flat in Margate. From the way in which Hannah talks about her mother it is evident that she was, indeed is, very proud of her. **(C&I)**

Hannah's parents, from the time they first moved down from South London were being drawn slowly, but inexorably, into the whirlpool of Thanet impoverishment. Hannah's parents' had a small, and we may assume, dwindling capital. This they invested in ventures which, it can be seen with hindsight, were never going to succeed. In each venture the family had to work ever harder but with the net result that the ever increasing workload at the very best only served to retard the fall into hardship and to avoid the complete devastation of bankruptcy. What might also be seen from this is the way that the precariousness of economic life in Thanet is manifested in individual lives. When geographers or politicians talk about the decline of the British sea side it is easy to lose sight of the hundreds of thousands of people like Hannah's parents for whom this decline led to ruin and penury.

The recognition of economic insecurity is a constant theme in Hannah's life, as it is for many people in Thanet. In a later interview Hannah explored the idea of poverty and money problems even further. It appears that her father's business in Bromley had already suffered a decline as a result of his disability.

I don't think that it was so much an accident as they think it was a long delay after damage done in the war ... because he was under a car doing something and his discs did something very strange and his spinal cord came out of place. But he was in the navy and they think it may have been related to that. But he didn't have an accident as such, it just happened and then he had to deal with the fact that his nerves were just shot away ... I don't understand it.

Whatever the cause of her father's injury there seems to be no doubt that it was a stroke of ill luck which played a part in the ever more straitened circumstances of first Hannah's parents as a couple and then later her mother as a widow living alone. (C&I)

Hannah has mixed memories of school. After the move from south London Hannah had only one year left in primary school and this was a 'miserable' time. Hannah was lonely and in what must be an interesting memory for a person who teaches literacy she says of this time 'I was a shy little girl and so it was horrible, I can remember sitting in the playground in the summer and I had a book because hiding in a book avoided the fact that I didn't have any friends'. After this year Hannah got a grammar school place and moved to Gladstone High School for Girls. At the 'High School' Hannah made friends several of whom she is still close to some forty years later.

When asked what happened after she left school Hannah replied 'Well what I didn't do was go to university'. I felt that this now bothered Hannah. She had a place secured at university but instead she moved to a medium sized commuter town outside of London where she lived in a Christian evangelist community. At nineteen Hannah met and then married an older man who was 'quite controlling'. The marriage lasted for 'many years' and then Hannah 'stood up to him'.

...what he said always sounded very good and would tie me in knots and then basically what he said sounded right but in my gut I knew it wasn't. It took me a lot of years before I realised, hang on, he's a load of rubbish and when I did then the whole thing fell apart and even now to this day ... he still can't deal with anybody standing up to him. I'm not the wife he had you know and it was like, it was quite funny really...

I had a strong feeling that this rupture marked a decisive period of Hannah's life. When Hannah speaks about the end of her marriage she draws attention to how she believes that in her family something happens to people, especially women when they are around thirty. Hannah is quite certain of this 'I hit that age of around thirty and started developing as a person'. In her case she believes that this spurt of development led to her 'seeing through' her husband. Hannah believes that her children will change or already have changed at this age. (C&I)

After the end of her marriage Hannah found herself living in Ramsgate as a single mother. She survived on benefits until her youngest child reached sixteen. She says she spent:

I don't know how many years in Ramsgate, bringing up my kids by which time I was a single mum, so I have four kids, and then, somebody told me, somebody warned me that when your youngest child got to sixteen the Job Centre would send you to any job that was going ... I decided that I didn't want to be stuck in a shop or anything like that so I thought that I would train to teach English to foreign students.

There are several interesting features of Hannah's story at this point. Firstly there is the impression that she did not see herself as a 'real' unemployed person but as a single mother at home bringing up children. This adds to the impression, present elsewhere in Hannah's story and in the narratives of other participants in this project, of someone not seeing themselves as being a true representative, or even a possible example of, the social role that others might see them in. Hannah looking back over that period sees herself as a person, a single unemployed mother, but very definitely nothing like the stereotypical single unemployed mother living off benefits as portrayed in tabloid media. When shown a draft of this chapter Hannah noted my interest in how she felt about social security and being a single mother. The picture which emerged from what I had written was something which Hannah wished to adjust:

One of the things that I think quite interested you was the way I feel about the social security system and the job centre and all of that stuff. And that

was quite interesting because I think there are two things coming out of that really that are linked. One is that I am quite grateful that we have a system like that in this country. I really am. From a personal point of view it allowed me to stay at home and be with my children. And I actually think it was really valuable. And the other thing linking to that of course is I don't think government, I don't think the country or people in general value parenthood. And that came out. You said something about you said something about 'I didn't see myself as a real unemployed person', well in one sense I didn't because actually I think I was doing a really valuable job but I don't think that is recognised by whoever makes policies. I don't think that is recognised as a valuable job. You are only recognised as a person if you have job. I am not saying you think that I am saying that is the way the system is set up. That is in a way the whole law-making thing is, isn't it?

**(C&I)**

This section from Hannah's transcript is quoted at length because it reveals several points. Firstly it is an example of how those telling their life story analyse and reflect on transcripts, not only to clarify points for the interviewer but also to piece together their own thoughts and narrative. In the above example it can be seen that Hannah is not only trying to make things clear to me but also to herself. Hannah would be surprised by how the point she makes about her support for 'the system of social security' expresses what, in more systematically political terms, might be called a strong 'collectivist' sentiment. It is very likely that Hannah is herself relatively unaware of the 'political' implications of her views and she might indeed decry such opinions in other circumstances. It is also interesting to reflect on what Hannah understands by 'government' 'country', 'people in general' and 'the whole law making thing' (C&I)

As with her parents so with Hannah, there are indications that she sees the Job Centre and the state behind it as something which is not to be made part of your life. Later Hannah herself worked for the Job Centre, albeit indirectly, and became part of the process of putting people into jobs. How she navigated herself through that is discussed below.



Hannah completed an introductory course to become a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). She was one of the few people in Britain to have this course paid for by government money. The government did not allow people to claim any type of grant towards these qualifications yet for some reason the state employment service in Thanet unlike the rest of the United Kingdom paid for potential teachers to follow such courses.

With her new qualification Hannah secured a job in a private language school. At first Hannah took a series of short term contracts with a large school. Initially Hannah enjoyed the teaching but later she came to view this school as heartless, becoming particularly disillusioned with what she saw as the unfairness of the pay and conditions. Above all Hannah despaired of what she took to be the underhand way in which the inadequate amount of work was allocated:

I got very disillusioned with EFL basically, it's very insecure isn't it, and I was in a language school where ... the Director of Studies had big favourites and I wasn't one of them. If you were young and female, or male and any age, you had the pick of the work, if you were middle aged and female then you didn't. **(C&I)**

Hannah was of course middle aged, female and a mother of four, aspects of an identity which she felt relegated her, in the eyes of the Director of Studies, into a category of person who need not be treated justly. Looking back on this time Hannah talks about how as a single mother this period of her life was dominated by the need for 'financial survival'.

Hannah went to work in a small family run EFL school in Cliftonville in a building which had once been a hotel. In Hannah's opinion this school was marked by its outstanding decency within an industry in which many small scale private companies might be characterised as 'fly by night'. At the end of the first summer season this school, facing the winter slack period had no work for Hannah. For extensive parts of the economy in Thanet such glimmers of prosperity as exist appear only for a few short summer months. For Hannah and many other EFL teachers, in an echo of her parents' time as guesthouse owners, seasonal prosperity is by November no more than a spectre.

Hannah decided that she needed a job with more stability and direction so she decided to leave EFL teaching.

I got really fed up and I thought I'm not going to do this anymore and there's no future, I need something more secure, so I'll do admin and I went off and did a few computer courses ... then one day I thought hang on this is really boring ... I really don't want to be doing this, I want to be doing counselling so then I went and did a counselling course and I went through the whole counselling stuff which you probably know is really expensive but I went right through it and got the diploma and everything , got grants for it, it just fell into place.

In Thanet at this time 'something more secure' in all probability meant employment in an enterprise dependent on state funding. Today it is hard to imagine what a person in Hannah's position might do. Hannah took advantage of government funding to complete courses in Information Technology, Management, and Counselling. Eventually Hannah applied for a job working with people who were long term unemployed 'and then the job at 'Present and Correct' came up 'and they took me on, they didn't bother to check references, it was just bizarre really'.

Hannah certainly feels that the beginning of a career as a teacher of literacy to adults was a very important time for her. Hannah feels that God was involved in this:

I'm not saying that God orchestrated everything but everything just fell into place at the right moment. And even all of the training, I just took the opportunities that were there... but the doors were open at the right time ... and it was there and it was free.

I was aware that Hannah is a very devout Christian but I was taken aback on learning that Hannah believed that God played an active role in directing her life. From my thoroughly secular perspective I easily forget that to many religious people events only make sense if they are seen in relation to God's will. **(C&I)**

'Present and Correct' was a medium sized private company which emerged in the years following the election of the Blair government. The company secured a contract to work with 'Job Centres Plus' preparing the long term unemployed to return to work. For the unemployed attendance was compulsory on the penalty of withdrawal of Jobseekers Allowance. 'Present and Correct' along with all other 'providers' of literacy teaching on such contracts depended to a significant extent on placing the unemployed into employment for their funding. For the purposes of Hannah's story here mention will be made of the personal impact on her own life of working under the 'Skills for Life' umbrella. (C&I)

Hannah's work in 'Present and Correct' was challenging but the increase in pay, and relatively speaking, the improved job security, were welcome. Hannah says that with this job her financial situation dramatically improved 'when I started at 'Present and Correct' my income doubled overnight, literally doubled overnight'.

In the clamour of the contemporary political discourse surrounding the supposed need for spending cuts it is very easy to overlook how the public spending of the Blair and Brown years meant that for the 'personal economy' of Hannah and thousands in positions similar to hers the creation of new employment opportunities made a far better life possible. It is also worth considering the ridiculousness of the company name, which to my mind, also captures something of the Blair- Brown years when training companies were often created solely to bid for government contracts. These companies often gave themselves 'can do' names and philosophies. It was almost as though these companies chose names as a declaration of how different they were in outlook to traditional educational organisations. When Hannah talks about 'Present and Correct' the name causes no problems: if it did once sound strange to her it has long since passed into familiarity.

On my first visit to Hannah at 'Present and Correct' I walked past the entrance to the building several times before realising that what appeared to be a disused building did have offices within it. The 'training centre' was on the fourth floor of an office block. Several of the other floors were unoccupied, from the stair case one could see abandoned and unused office furniture. On some of the walls notice boards carried announcements of events past for the employees of organisations long since wound up.

Leaving the staircase and entering into 'Present and Correct' I could see the training room was extremely busy with scores of unemployed men and a few women doing literacy work, or writing out letters of application for jobs, some were working on computers. The smell of Jeyes' fluid filled the corridor and as I waited for Hannah the receptionist very coldly told me that mobile phones were not allowed. I remember thinking 'this is the workhouse for the computer age'; an opinion I have not revised.

For Hannah the work at 'Present and Correct' involved teaching large classes, composed overwhelmingly of young and middle aged men who had been unemployed for at least six months. Many found it difficult to secure employment because they had prison records. Many had problems connected with alcohol or other substances. On top of all this these people lived in an area with some of the highest unemployment rates in the country. For almost all of the students the outlook was bleak. **(C&I, P)**

Hannah explains that often the atmosphere at 'Present and Correct' was very difficult as the men and women mandated to attend courses could feel very resentful towards the establishment and their teachers. As Hannah said:

at the height I'd got 60 odd people in that training room, but the height of it was a one year pilot scheme which the Job Centre ran and their theory was if you can give these unemployed people who had been unemployed long term, if you can 'up-skill' them and they can improve their literacy and numeracy, when they get a job, they're more likely to get at a job, and when they get a job they're more likely to keep it.

The 'government' as Hannah puts it saw the achievement of basic qualifications by the unemployed as a way of reducing unemployment. **(C&I)**

I have visited many 'training rooms' in Thanet, other parts of Kent and in London. Despite the considerable efforts which the teachers make I have often come away with the feeling that the first purpose of these places is to punish the poor for being unemployed whilst simultaneously offering them modest 'prizes' for passing tests and attending .

... they gave all these incentives for a year that if they got a qualification at entry 3 and level 1 they got a £100 bonus, they got an extra £10 a week on top of their money while they were there.... those kind of things and so that's why we had...and they had to come to us because we were the only provider for that so they all came to us.

As Hannah points out the theory was that if the unemployed improved their literacy and numeracy they were more likely to get a job, and then having got it they were more likely to keep it. 'Present and Correct' did everything possible to produce statistical proof that this was in fact happening.

Hannah came to the realisation that in the terms in which it was set up the Job Centre programme was failing in solving the problem of unemployment faced by its clients. The unemployed people who were sent to 'Present and Correct' were expected to attend for 26 weeks. At the end of this time if they passed the tests set they would probably achieve a level known as Literacy Level 1. Those who passed could receive a 'bonus' payment of £100. Hannah gave the following as her summation of the effectiveness of this programme:

... some people we'd had three times, though we knew that the sort of market that we were feeding or being fed from was really dwindling and interestingly enough...the whole theory that it was based on, this whole thinking that if you could get them to be improved on their skills they would hold jobs down, the statistics showed that it didn't make a haporth of difference didn't make any difference to their figures ...

Hannah describes how the realisation that the model adopted by the 'Job Centre' and the 'government' to 'up skill' the long term unemployed came about. Hannah completed a small scale research project as part of a course for literacy teachers and as part of this talked with a manager of 'Present and Correct' who had access to the data of 'success rates' for students.

Well, I think it was when I was on a literacy course actually, I think it was then, there was an assignment that I had to do, I can't even remember what

I was particularly looking at in the assignment, but I know I was looking at that whole angle and I spoke to a guy called Trevor who worked ...he used to come and do observations for the Job Centre and what have you, and he gave me some figures, it really didn't make any difference obviously that was only locally, from the figures that I saw it hadn't made any difference.

A curious aspect of what Hannah says here is that whilst she and Trevor and presumably many others involved in this type of work felt that it achieved almost nothing (in the terms set by those who put such policies into motion) this scheme and other similar arrangements were perpetually hailed as successes by all who designed and managed them. It is important to make the point that whilst the reported figures showing 'success' should be treated with care it is nonetheless a generally held view among those who worked at the level of teachers in such projects that many individuals benefitted from these programmes. Hannah does not feel that her work was pointless, far from it. **(M)**

Hannah claims that in her work at 'Present and Correct', despite her official role, she was not really a literacy teacher. It appeared to her that real literacy teaching was going on in Adult or Further Education classes.

Well, I suppose I didn't see myself I didn't define myself really define myself as a literacy teacher in 'Present and Correct', I didn't feel I was a proper teacher at all. I always felt I was a bit of a fraud you know ... I just felt I was kind of play acting at doing it while everyone else in the FE colleges were really doing it, you know, that was my perception. It wasn't until I started to meet with other teachers that I realised that I was actually a better teacher than I thought I was. But it didn't feel like that and actually, I mean we had them for thirty hours a week, I would be lucky if I could deliver an hour's teaching in a day.

Hannah points out that when she became more familiar with what teachers do in Adult Education or Further Education she realised that she was more of a literacy teacher than she thought. At 'Present and Correct' she felt that 'listening' and giving support to her students was more important than teaching:

the people came with all kinds of needs and I felt that the skills that I was really using were counselling skills really because it was about turning people around, about changing people's attitude, and it was about listening sometimes to people that had been written off. So they'd come in really bad tempered and with real attitude and it was actually quite fun to turn them around because they'd come in like I was the enemy because the Job Centre has sent us to you and the Job Centre is the enemy and so you must be the enemy too. (C&I)

If we think back to Hannah's parents relationship to social security, or her own feelings about claiming unemployment benefit and her fear of the Job Centre forcing her to work in 'a shop' there is a certain continuity emerging in Hannah's outlook on at least the role of the state. Hannah always felt that the Job Centre was best avoided. Here she does want to be identified with the Job Centre or really even with 'Present and Correct', but, very importantly, she feels that what the Job Centre wants her to do with these unemployed people is not what she and her colleagues felt was most useful. Indeed in order to go at least some way to fulfil the Job Centre's stated policies she felt it necessary to work in a way which was distinct to those demanded in the terms of their project.

... often I was the first person who had listened to them in a very long time, ... and I can remember sitting with some of them saying hang on, you are not stupid, this is not your fault, you are not stupid and the absolute astonishment because they thought they actually were stupid or they thought it was their fault that they couldn't write or whatever. And that really is what made it worth doing, this, seeing people's attitude turning round. And some of them did go on and get jobs but I wasn't really...from the Job Centre's point view that was what it was about and obviously I got a buzz out of getting people through qualifications and seeing people get jobs and what have you, but there was always that tension as well because the Job Centre wanted us to be getting jobs and 'Present and Correct' wanted us to be getting qualifications because we got paid for that

Here Hannah is touching on a dilemma which lay at the heart of an approach toward the teaching of literacy to adults. To teach any type of literacy it was necessary for Hannah and her colleagues to distance themselves curriculum as set by the bodies funding the activity and then to pay attention to problems faced by their clients. As Hannah says 'the most important things were not recorded, they weren't the qualifications or the jobs it was just that human contact'. **(M, P, C&I)**

Listening to Hannah's account of working as a literacy teacher at 'Present and Correct' the picture which emerges is one of chaos constrained. In truth no significant part of the activity fits with any other part. The students and to a great extent the teachers cannot identify with, or believe in, the set objectives. The students are being 'upskilled' for nonexistent jobs, and the certificates the students achieve are largely worthless in the employment market. From Hannah's point of view the project was intended to deal with aspects of the clients' plight which were not those which were most pressing. There was still an element of surprise in Hannah's voice when she tells how the teachers, the Job Centre managers, the managers of 'Present and Correct', and the 'government', were all more or less knowingly, involved in mutually misleading each other about what was happening.

Hannah began to hear rumours of arguments and serious tensions among the managers of 'Present and Correct'. There was also talk of the organisation being seen by the Job Centre as a 'failing provider'. Hannah decided to leave and by good fortune found a place in a more 'mainstream' teaching organisation. A few months later 'Present and Correct' collapsed amid rumours of unpaid bills, money being misappropriated and stories of the management running away with each other's spouses. Behind the 'can do' mantra it emerged that little actually was 'Present and Correct' with this training company.

Similar problems about how to square the circle of meeting targets, securing funding and doing what is considered to be the right thing continue for Hannah, though in a far less acute form. In her present role Hannah is very happy and believes that she holds her position because she has been blessed. She explained to me that she feels herself to be one of the last people left to be able to teach the students she likes most in a way she feels is suitable even though this involves some fairly heavy compromise. Hannah spoke about some of the managerial aspects of her work which demands that she put on



courses which attract government funding. Sometimes in her opinion this leads her to organise classes in a way which teachers complain does not recognise the true needs of the students. Talking about these conflicting vectors guiding her working life Hannah explains:

I have to balance both, but on the other hand if you don't balance the two then you don't get funding, and you don't have any classes, then you have no one to teach so in a roundabout way when you do come full circle so when you come full circle it does benefit the tutors in a long way round, but I feel I have to justify it all the time which is a bit frustrating. It's a pity that we can't just put on the classes that we want to put on but we can't.

Hannah recounted a very odd story about how a group of students wanted to study a short grammar course and asked her to organise it, she says that the students were prepared to pay for it themselves. Even if it was independently financed her institute insisted that this course could not be arranged. Hannah believes that this was because under the terms of the contract between her institution and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) there was a ban on organising courses which did not lead to an accredited examination. **(M)**

In our final interview I asked Hannah if she felt 'attached' to Thanet. She pointed out that she could not really see herself moving away:

I think where you live is ... about the relationships that you have around you, and lots and lots of my friends are here so that makes a lot of attachment. I don't know that I would want to move away simply because of that, those connections are important to me. I am not sure whether, it is not an option, but I am not sure whether, if the option came to move away to get more income, to be better off whether that would be an attractive proposition, I think probably not actually because I am not sure that that is the most important thing in life, I don't think it is really. **(P)**

For Hannah place in the form of friendships and relationships is important especially in its connection to what she refers to as 'recognition'. This theme is present in Hannah's

story in various forms. Looking back to the period when she was a single mother Hannah described herself as 'a single mother living in Ramsgate' as though the place was integral to the identity. Hannah talks about the end of her marriage in terms of her own emergence as a person, and then she talked about the lack of recognition of the important social role of 'single motherhood', later she felt that she was not given sufficient work at the EFL school because she was an older mother. Now an aspect of Hannah's present life which she particularly enjoys is the recognition which she gets from her job. It is not only the fact of being recognised in this role which counts for Hannah. It is that she feels the role to be a positive one representing values which she supports.

I do think that the recognition aspect is quite important for me and maybe that is because of what I went through with my husband, maybe it is just a human instinct that we like to be recognised, I am sure that has got a lot to do with it. Maybe it is because society does only recognise you when you are in a job and maybe that is why people are made redundant sometimes they go into depression or lose their sense of identity because their identity is their job. So while I am not stupid enough to think that what I am recognised for and what I achieve doesn't build and help and increase my sense of self-worth I would hope that that is not the only thing it is founded on, because that would be equally sad.

The impression I took away from my last meeting with Hannah was of a person who at the time was quite content with who she is and life in general. It is her belief that God has favoured her, I could not share this opinion but reflecting on her contentment pleased me.

The last time I interviewed Hannah we finished at around five in the afternoon. As I walked towards the railway station it was already dark and Margate was entering into the raucousness of a Friday night. Small groups of people were 'going out'; there was an angry altercation between a woman with a Staffordshire Bull Terrier and two young men already half cut. Even though it was only late afternoon there was a sharp edge to the jolliness of the weekend starting. The feeling of vague menace pointed up Hannah's contentment making it at once both more precious and precarious. (P)



## Grace

Of all the people interviewed for this project it was in conversations with Grace that I felt the 'sense making' process most noticeably at work. Sometimes Grace said things and then watched for my reaction as though what she was saying was being put forward tentatively. At other times Grace would straightforwardly ask me for my opinion of what she had said. The tone was set in Grace's first utterance of our first interview: 'It's a strange place education, isn't it? The tag question was the most important part of this opening. Grace waited; I confirmed that I agreed with her answering, 'yeah', about the strangeness, though I was not sure why she referred to it as a place. I really did agree about the strangeness, but I spoke also to build solidarity at the start of an interview like this. She then continued referring to her relatively recent move from an FE college to a secondary school; 'I haven't known anything like it. I thought it was just college but now I go to school it's even worse.' I found myself laughing. That's how we began, within seconds it was clear that Grace preferred to speak directly.

Grace was born in Dartford just over fifty miles from Margate where her parents moved when she was about five years old. Grace's father was from Peckham in South London an area which had been solidly 'middle class' in the early part of the twentieth century but which lost status as the century progressed and especially declined in the post war years. Reconstruction and slum clearance programmes in other parts of London meant that many people were re-housed in Peckham. The new flats were initially seen as being desirable but the estates began to become the focus of social problems as early as the 1970s. Grace's mother was from Coulsden in Surrey, a classic commuter town which was absorbed into the London urban area during the early part of the last century; it is now in the southernmost part of the London Borough of Croydon, where London officially ends. Grace's father was considerably older than her mother; they had an affair when he had already been married for twenty years. When Grace's mother became pregnant with her older brother her parents decided to get married, and moved to Dartford. Grace's father was in road haulage and owned a small business. Grace does not remember very much about Dartford but she attributes the move to Margate to her father's love of the sea. He owned a small boat and she

alone would accompany him on it as neither her mother nor her brother could swim  
**(P)**.

Grace's father emerges from her story as someone who expected other members of his family to do what he said. Indeed from Grace's description it almost appears as though he found it difficult to imagine that Grace or her mum might legitimately hold an opinion different to his own. Whenever Grace recounts what her father said it seems to be emphatic:

I had a thing about being told what to do. I think I still have it now. I think that because my Dad was twenty years older than my mum, so I think I have grown up with ... I hate authority ... Well I hated it back then. I had no respect for it.

This dislike for authority was fed by, and fed into, Grace's attitude to school. Junior school was not such a problem but in secondary school Grace found herself at loggerheads with the 'system'. At the end of her secondary school time her parents were asked to pay for her O level exams as the school did not trust her 'not to truant'.

I just tried to beat the system, trying to bunk off, just thinking that I could win. Just looking for an easy route out, really ... But obviously that messed up all my ... sitting my maths, English. My parents had to pay for my exams because they didn't trust me not to truant. **(C&I)**

At the end of school Grace could not consider attending college to obtain professional or vocational training.

... when I left school my Dad said to me, 'well you're not going to college 'cause your brother's gone and we can't afford for you to go.' So that was just fine, I didn't wanna go. So I had to get a job. I got this little job in a shop and I didn't want to do the YTS, yes it was back then. It was £50 a week. And that was fine, it was a little sweet shop and I worked really hard. **(C&I)**

Grace at 16 years old set out to be an exemplary worker in her sweet shop. After a short time she was moved to another shop a few doors away but owned by the same

people. The shop sold general house ware and cleaning products. Grace saw it as a promotion not least because she received a small pay rise; again she continued to work hard and eventually when she was eighteen she was put in charge of an off licence, again under the same owners:

Then he promoted me to the off licence because I'd really worked hard there. I worked so hard that when my shift ended say it was the end of the day and I was closing up the shop, I used to stay on extra to make sure that everything was all nice and neat. But they didn't know that. I don't know why I did it but I took real, great pride in it.

Reflecting on Grace's story it seems reasonable to wonder how far the shopkeeper's ignorance of Grace's commitment to their shop was real or feigned:

Then I got promoted to the off-licence and it went a bit wrong there, cause I was turning eighteen and my friends were coming in and we were going out and I used to give them free alcohol and fags. But I got caught! So that sort of ended that.

Grace was prosecuted for theft by the shopkeepers. She entered a plea of guilty but at her father's insistence she changed the plea to innocent. Because of the change of plea the case was heard by a jury over a three day trial it was a process she describes as 'horrendous'. Grace was found guilty and fined £1,000, the value of the goods stolen was put at £9. **(C&I)**

While awaiting her trial Grace obtained work selling double glazing to shoppers at a DIY superstore. As Grace describes it her 'looks' played a part in securing and then succeeding in the job, as she told the story I also imagined that her good looks and rebellious attitude might also have played a part in her 'harsh' treatment by the court.

So they were advertising for this job; 'demonstrators'. So, I went along and got on really well with the guys, the owners and that and they said, 'Well you've got to work in the superstore.' You know handing out 'discount vouchers' ...and ....I worked really hard at that. They kept me on although I

was guilty. ... I think that at that age a lot goes for you on looks and everything else doesn't it? You know, girls that sort of ... in that type of work, when you're younger and ... well they were understanding.

Grace's conviction was picked up by the local media she recalls how a real 'stigma' attached to her for a while. Even today working in education she must declare the conviction whenever she applies for a job(C&I). It is interesting to consider how in the, perhaps dubious, world of selling double glazing she found more comprehension and forgiveness than in areas she describes as being more 'straight laced'. In later interviews Grace returned more than once to this idea of the world of business being, in her experience, more comprehending and forgiving than education. Grace was not happy in this regard with what she termed the 'stuck up' attitude in education toward youthful misdemeanours and lawbreaking. Grace with some effort, especially through what she again refers to as 'hard work' in her job managed as far as possible to get the conviction behind her.

At this time Grace met her future husband who worked as an accountant in a highly reputable small local company.

Then I met my husband-to-be. At that point in time ... he'd come from a really nice background, really posh and completely the opposite to me where everything fell off the back of a lorry! So I thought I'd study further so I went to college to do the BTEC in Business and Finance.

When Grace initially told the story she was not aware of the implied reason for studying at college: because her husband came from a 'really nice background' and that she felt this was the 'opposite' of her own circumstances. Grace completed her course over two years working during the day and studying in the evenings. She wanted to leave at the end of the first year but felt she couldn't as that would have meant that she left without anything to show for the year. So she stayed on to complete the second year. By the end of the second year she 'really enjoyed it'. Once again Grace talks about 'hard work' and how that contributed to her success:

I really enjoyed it by the end of it. It was hard work, I was working all day, and then in the evenings I was attending college. After that I had homework to do.... Then I got a job working for Primrose Care Homes in the accounts department managing the pay roll ... I don't know how I got it ... but I did.

Grace implies that her husband encouraged her to leave selling double glazing as it was not sufficiently respectable. The accountancy firm which he still works with is well known in Thanet. Grace worked with the care homes for perhaps two years then as she explains it she 'had a break' and moved jobs to work in a computer company selling network systems.

Grace married whilst working at the computer company. Again, and in an unusual way, she talks about the influence of her father:

We got married when I was in computers. Then he had an affair but because my Dad was always messing around I wasn't going to tolerate it and I just said no. Evidently he'd only seen her a couple of times and ... it's irrelevant really ... but I just wasn't having it. But I remember my Dad saying to me, 'He's only having an affair!' I said 'Dad I'm not going back. No way.' My Dad couldn't understand my rationale. **(C&I)**

Grace looks back on this decision to split with her husband as one of the most important in her life. She recounts how she had always made decisions in consultation with others, her mother or perhaps more crucially, her father or husband. Splitting with her husband in some important ways is seen by Grace retrospectively, as entering into the world as an independent person:

I just thought, 'No!' So yeah that was quite ... the biggest ... no, not the biggest decision ... at that time it was the biggest decision because you've been so used to making decisions together – just stupid things like car insurance – I was literally tossed out into this world at about thirty something and I had to make all the decisions. **(C&I)**

Grace's husband married the woman with whom he had the affair. Grace very rarely sees her ex husband but occasionally when she needs specific advice on financial



matters she will approach him as she trusts his advice in this area completely. When the divorce papers came through Grace read something that struck her as important:

I started reading everything. I went back over the divorce papers and on the back it said that the marriage was officially 'dead'. And I thought right in this marriage now it's come to an end ... and on the back of it ... it said that I'm 'dead' in this marriage. ... he went on to marry her and is still with her. Yeah, but all that put me off marriage ... I thought I'd married for life. This makes a mockery of it all.

From what Grace said I felt that she didn't feel particularly let down by her husband and certainly does not think ill of him, but as she said the marriage 'died' and she came to see that in instances such as hers it was the institution itself which became empty.

Sometimes the criticism is made of life story work that it concentrates on the detail, or even the trivia of life. This charge merits consideration if only because there is something to be gained by trying to understand the thinking from which it originates. Here looking at Grace's thoughts on the end of her marriage it is revealing to view them as reflecting some important concerns of feminism. Certainly her remark about being 'tossed out into the world' is evocative and can be seen as capturing albeit ambiguously something of the emotion of breaking away from 'patriarchy'.

Viewed from this perspective we can consider Grace's text about how she could not accept her husband's 'messaging around' in part because it echoed similar behaviour on the part of her father and then the latter's attempts to persuade her to overlook her husband 'just having an affair'. In a later interview Grace told of how her mother had discovered her father's affairs and how this devastated her mother. In part she attributes her mother's suffering from depression to her father's affairs. Grace links her mother's dislike of Thanet and her home to the pain experienced in these places. Listening to Grace describe the anguish her mother endured because of her father's affairs it is evident this experience must have influenced Grace herself. After Grace read back over the transcript of the interviews and her story she asked that I ensure that her father did not emerge as a sympathetic character. (C&I)

Later Grace described how her father's business was 'done for by Maggie Thatcher' and he became bankrupt. Although his company was limited liability her father sold the family house to pay off the debts he owed as a matter of principal. Grace is clear about her father's philandering and how it injured her mother. The same man was prepared to sacrifice much to satisfy his creditors. Grace pointed out that her father was a very upright man in things of business. Reading Grace's story and listening to her interviews a major theme of gender emerges strongly. In Grace's account there is unexpected juxtaposition of a single man in two contrasting lights; the honourable small businessman and the heartless philanderer. In Grace's story patriarchy and sexism attain a palpability at once both quotidian and visceral. (C&I)

Grace describes how after her own divorce she enjoyed 'partying' and going on holidays. Being 'tossed out into the world' was not without compensations. Grace met another man who she says is not at all like her first husband;

He was completely the opposite to my husband and more probably like my Dad's side of the family ... for some reason he fascinated me and he was very intelligent so he kept my mind stimulated. He would tell me stories and I believed him. They were true stories and it just opened my mind. He thought I was very ...not stupid ... very naive.

Grace became pregnant and had to confront her fear of being a single mother. Earlier when some of friends became mothers Grace had thought 'Oh god, there's another friend gone'. Grace pointed out that she had 'lost' several close friends to pregnancy and motherhood, and she was fearful of following their path. Grace superimposes her apprehension of the difficulties of single motherhood onto her memories of her own childhood. She had disliked the idea of pregnancy considering it to be almost akin to an illness. In her description of the anxieties connected to her pregnancy Grace recalled her visits to her own grandmother.

Grace remembers the process by which she chose to go through with the pregnancy:

No, it'll be a rough ride ahead but ... My mum was very ill at the time and I thought 'no I'm not going to.' ... but you're dicing with someone's life or death ... It frightened me thinking what does the future hold? My worst fear

of ever being in that ... you know in London you see these estates with all the washing? That was my worst fear. I don't know it only came back to me just then but that was my worst fear of actually being the parent of a child without anyone. And hanging my washing out for everyone to see.

Grace linked her fear of being a single parent with her dread of London as seen from the windows of the suburban trains travelled on when she and her brother would accompany her mother to visit her grandmother in Coulsden. To her the scene was one of South London housing estates with the washing hanging out in full view of passers-by. Mixed with this was her fear of the concentration of people visibly different to those of Thanet. Grace remembers feeling alarmed by 'black people' (P). Grace's father never joined them on these trips to London:

We used to go up to Nan's quite a lot, which was Surrey my mum used to take us through Victoria on the train, cause Mum didn't drive. My Dad was probably out womanising somewhere so he'd never take my mum up to London even though he worked in London. So yeah I just didn't like it and everyone was a different colour ... it was just frightening ... so yeah I hated London.

Grace's son was born and now she cannot understand her past fears though now she talks of the terrible nature of a decision on whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. The motif of washing hanging out on housing estates is still for her an image of poverty and loneliness. (P)

Almost as an afterthought Grace explained that by the time she became pregnant she had left her job with the IT company and had opened a small shop selling soft furnishings. This shop was now dragging her toward 'financial devastation'. The inevitable happened the shop had to be closed compelling her to sell her home and live in rented accommodation in order to repay a loan of £20,000. Grace like her father before her had been forced to deal with bankruptcy and moving home. As she explained this I realised that this particular ordeal of bankruptcy was present in the life history of at least four of the people interviewed for this project. (C&I, P)

Three months after her son was born she returned to work in IT. As Grace explains it she has been able 'bit by bit' to rebuild her life as a single mother paying off debts. Her son's father is a 'good dad' and Grace explains how he supports her with their son but as she says 'Dale and I never stayed together'. Grace gives the impression of being quite happy with her life the way it is, living in a new home in a neat cul-de-sac in Margate with her young son.

After the birth of her son Grace started to look for a change in her work. She told a friend that she was fed up with selling IT equipment and the friend suggested working with a Thanet based charity which taught young people excluded from school.

I just got to the point where I didn't want to do it anymore. I had my son I was bringing him up on my own and I just thought, 'Do you know this is a waste of time. I can't do it' Just literally the thought of selling networks again was like 'I just can't do it'. My friend said to me what about working for 'The Pathway Project'. I said I can't work for that money. I said it is crap. ... so anyway I went into a classroom and I thought 'oh my god I can't do this either'. But for some reason I felt attached to the kids. I don't know why but I started to like them.

Grace got the job on the strength of her knowledge of 'business' and 'finance'. The charity which offered her the job specializes in working with young people who were either offenders or at risk of being drawn into crime. Grace was asked by the charity to complete the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS). Quite unexpectedly Grace was drawn into Higher Education many years after she had assumed that 'university' was not for her.

When Grace had completed her BTEC she had been 23 years old and she had not studied formally since then; a gap of some 20 years. Grace enjoyed studying again but it was not without its problems. Grace criticises some lecturers who were 'not clear' and it took a while to get back into the habit of studying. Again Grace mentions 'hard work' as being the mainstay of her completion of DTLLS:

I did research and finding out about different things. I don't know what happened to my brain ... I'd get frustrated sometimes... Ideologies - I just could not get it. It frustrated the hell out of me ... and then Christ Church pulled one of my essays ... the tutor slated me. I really wanted to have a go back but they said 'Don't, just stay quiet. You passed it that module.' It was my Gran she said to just be quiet. ... I passed it in the end. **(C&I)**

Grace's workplace at this time was known to me. I had observed more than one class there. The charity specialised in teaching literacy, numeracy, and 'Work Skills' to young men and women usually in their mid to late teens who had been excluded from school. Almost all of these young people were troubled, some in many ways. In the lessons I had observed I had been struck by the *modus vivendi* of the classrooms.

The successful teachers such as Grace learnt to engage with the students pretty much on terms which the young people could tolerate. I was required to grade the lessons I had observed. In such instances I usually found myself at a loss. I knew the criteria we were supposed to apply which were drawn up along guidelines given by OFSTED. For a teacher to receive a good grade or above the students should be more or less fully engaged throughout the lesson.

The young people in this charity were in many cases awaiting sentencing by the courts, many struggled with substance dependency, some had mental health problems and all had been excluded from school. The classes were generally unruly with an almost permanent threat of a more serious eruption of some sort or another. When I observed Grace I was amazed at how she managed the tightrope, maintaining order by being firm and holding some type of line, whilst avoiding placing any obvious barrier in front of the young men. I gave Grace a 'Good' grade for the lesson I observed. She maintained an environment in which some learning, though very little, had taken place but amazingly there had been no eruption despite the continuous and alarming tremors. I was convinced that no-one could have taught the class better and yet on the official criteria it was a lesson that would have been judged a failure. **(M)**

Of the teachers whose stories are considered in this project I have seen five teach. All of them have had to deal with classes which by any reasonable reckoning would be

difficult. The class I saw Grace teach was by some way the most intractable yet somehow she did it. I have never understood how teachers working in contexts similar to that in which I observed Grace are supposed to be graded.

In the class I observed Grace teach there was one young man in particular who appeared to be finding the classroom environment very difficult indeed. After the observation Grace and I discussed the lesson and when I mentioned this young man she told me that he had several convictions for burglary and he was awaiting sentencing. She feared, and expected, that he would be imprisoned. She told me how under the surface of the coarse bravado these young men they were all really vulnerable. I was not convinced but I felt that Grace knew much more about these young men than I did. I found her ability to empathise with them remarkable.

In her first interview I told Grace how I had been very struck by what I understood as ambiguity in her teaching role and the relationship in which she stood with the young men she taught. I found it difficult to put my finger on exactly what it was that puzzled me. I managed to get out that I was impressed by how it was that even though I felt that the students liked her they could not bring themselves to be cooperative, in fact they could not even begin to be civil. She remembered the young man awaiting sentence:

Yeah, he was, yeah he went down. He was a bit of a bad burglar. Yeah ... it was horrendous actually. The police came to the centre to try and arrest him. All he wanted was his mum. He was only fifteen. And yeah he went to jump out of the window and it ... that will stay with me forever.

Grace explained that she had been told that the police were coming and that she was to ensure that the young man was kept in the classroom. This she flatly refused to do:

I said 'I'm not going to keep him in the room.' He heard this and he darted to the window. We were on the second floor ...I got him back to the door and he said 'I want to speak to my Mum.' I thought I can understand this because you are frightened. .. What if he had jumped out of the window? ... and I opened the door and let him go.

Grace explains how the young man ran home and then together with his mother took a bus to the police station and, with his mother beside him, presented himself for arrest.

He went down for six months and it wasn't anywhere local. It was Birmingham way and his mum didn't have much money. Yeah horrible ... I'm not saying he didn't deserve but ... I don't know... I've seen the other side of it ... It's just that he was a child and kids make mistakes. Not to the same extent that he did ... but...

Grace did not complete that last sentence '...but ...' as she points out he had committed many burglaries. It is hard to imagine that anyone can be happy considering a fifteen year child going to prison.

I have now come to understand the ambiguity of Grace's attitude to the young people she taught. Grace and teachers like her work with groups of young people which characteristically behave in ways which are not officially recognised. The young men I saw Grace teaching routinely used bad language and habitually evinced an attitude which was not (officially) accepted by the college. It was also unlikely that they were going to make any real progress in literacy or numeracy as they were not able to concentrate and were unwilling to work.

Grace has told me that if her students left the premises for any period of time there was a good chance that they would return under the influence of drugs. This behaviour is not unusual among these students though most colleges and other institutions in which these young people are taught tend not to officially recognise the nature of the problems encountered by the teachers, this is perhaps in no small part attributable to the fact that OFSTED expect the same levels of achievement, retention, attendance for all types of student. **(M)**

Grace gives an example of the type of problem she has encountered in this regard. She talks about how at a secondary school she worked in for one term she found that the institution through one of the senior teachers, tried to discourage a young woman from attending because they believed that she could not achieve a suitable GCSE grade.

Grace believes that this young woman's story is representative of the type of problem which 'misfit' young people can face. Grace describes this story as a 'classic':

This girl she wanted to do her GCSE English. My [*unclear speech sounds like 'view'*] on this girl— now this is my viewpoint on it, now. I only been at the school for a couple of weeks ... I'd only been given this girl and she's in the Sixth Form, so she didn't have to be there. Her Mum's claiming on benefits so she had to go. She'd missed three months of schooling which is quite major 'cause she was doing her GCSE again ...Romeo and Juliet, Of Mice and Men ...and anyway, I meet her. She's a nice girl. No, let me describe her ...can I describe what she looked like? She wasn't like a normal teenager 'cause normal teenagers they're quite pretty, very conscious of what they look like, they're quite vain and very appearance-minded. Well she wasn't.

She didn't really care, she was quite chunky, unfortunately she was ginger haired ...not unfortunate it was ginger, but most girls would dye their hair to avoid being picked on. D'you know what I mean? She was quite gingery, and I'm afraid she wasn't that clean. But anyway, I admired her because the hardest thing must be to walk through the school gates. She didn't have many friends either. When I saw her attend school I thought, "I really admire you because that takes guts." And I just thought that, I did. I respect anybody who could walk back inside after they've been ill for three months. So I needed to get some books from the English faculty, 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Romeo and Juliet'. I thought that 'Of Mice and Men' would be easier. So I go up to the Head of Department, Mrs. Lewis-Pritchard. She's a scary looking woman and she shouts but she's a very, very good English teacher. I like her. She does scare me at times but she's very...So I say, "Is there any chance I could borrow a book Of Mice and Men for Georgina?" And she says to me, "She is never going to achieve a GCSE. She's wasting your time, my time, and the school's time." And I was horrified. I was absolutely horrified. Because I had no preconceived...you know. And at the end of the day, whatever she'd done in the past was irrelevant. The fact that she'd walked through those gates was enough for me.



Georgina did in fact go on to pass her GCSE English but this was in Grace's opinion despite the school trying to 'lose her'. In Grace's estimation this is because schools and colleges do not want to risk their achievement and retention targets not being achieved. Grace was quite clear on this 'and then they bang on about targets but for the ones that really struggle...that's it!'

I listened to Grace's story I was struck by the scholasticism of a 'system' which could require students to study 'Of Mice and Men' whilst trying to exclude those who were deemed to be unlikely to succeed. **(M)**

For the last three years Grace has worked in an FE college. Her students are not dissimilar in many ways to the young people she worked with at 'The Pathway Project'. **(P)**

Grace enjoys her work as she says 'the team are great'. She has encountered similar problems to those she confronted in previous jobs. A performance indicator for her 'team' is the proportion of young people who progress from what are called 'pre-vocational' to vocational courses. In effect the students that the 'team' work with are upon entry to the college deemed to be unsuited to entry onto a vocational course. Grace is aware that her students who she refers to as 'children' as if to stress the point that they are usually only 16 years old are not generally popular or even well regarded in the college:

Almost everyone of those children, whether you like them or not and a lot of people don't like them, in 99% of the cases there is something that you can like about them, it is very rare that you find someone you cannot like, and they all come from troubled backgrounds of one form or another, and it wasn't their fault. They are capable of making their own decisions but they are very young,

For Grace and her team it is not easy to get their students accepted onto 'mainstream' vocational courses. This is required if they are to meet their targets but is seen as a problem by the lecturers who teach vocational subjects who, if they accept these young people, find that they are running the risk of not achieving their own targets if the students are not able to successfully complete their course. These lecturers are also

reluctant to offer places on their courses because of the additional stress associated with working with people who have 'challenging behaviour'. Grace has more than once pointed to ways in which she believes targets are met through practices which are within the letter of the law though she feels them to be unduly creative.

...but the achievement targets we can't help fabricate them because we have to get them onto further courses within the college and we certainly have to suck up to a lot of the staff in different departments because our kids are like pains in the arse and we want to get them on to mainstream courses ... but they know our kids ...so yes but there is a lot of "oh they are the pre vocational kids" and they are just seen as unruly and not really seen for what they are.

Grace does not believe that the 'managers' have any real interest in the problems faced by teachers like her, beyond the need to manage the institutions as far as possible in accordance with the demands of OFSTED or other regulatory bodies. It is a theme in all of the interviews conducted for this project that all the teachers, whatever their degree of sympathy for their managers, and by and large there was extremely little, see the problems of management as being distinct from the problems confronted by the teachers. Talking about one particular manager, Matthew Anderson, that she knew Grace said the following:

The team that I worked in was solid but I felt that...Matthew Anderson I thought was too removed from students. I think the senior management...they got rid of all the old school ones that knew everything and replaced them with new ones and solicitors and accountants and everything else, but they are sort of further and further away they are well paid but no...they paid you an appalling wage when you were training, which is fine because you were training but when you qualify there were no opportunities, there were no jobs to progress onto yet they want to govern you, not govern you, they want you to do all these qualifications. They will support you, they won't pay for it or anything like that ... but there is no further opportunity.(M)

## Grace

Opening this chapter on Grace I said that she more than any other participant in this process had been involved in 'sense making', at times even asking me questions about how I made sense of her story so that she might evaluate episodes or ideas herself. As the person writing the story I found this positive as I hoped that Grace had found her participation in the project to be valuable. If I might make one further observation it would be that I wondered if Grace's commitment to her students had the unexpected effect of making her isolated in a certain sense. Grace appears to genuinely put her students first, if she feels that doing so might be construed as acting against the interests of the institution she is working in then she will proceed with great discretion. Given the challenging behaviour of the students she works with, and her advocacy of what she feels to be their interests this means that Grace too looks askance at 'the system'. Something that has not, in essence, really changed since her own days in secondary school.

## **Antecedents 2: Subjects, Objects, Methods, and Digging**

*Language has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is the medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging.*

*Walter Benjamin 1932 'Excavation and Memory'*

Much of Walter Benjamin's work was concerned with the idea of exploring memory, history and the language in which they are best described. The above is not the only time that he framed this work in terms of excavation and digging. This chapter discusses the process of digging in this project and the principles which guided it.

This will be done in the following way. Firstly method and methodology are differentiated. Next some definitions of methodology are discussed with a view to showing how these might be applied to working with life stories. Not only are method and methodology differentiated but the case is made for considering them to be distinct but deeply interconnected things this becomes of crucial importance later in this chapter when the case is made against the methodological exaggerations of both 'objectivism' and 'methodology as autobiography'. The methods of research used in this project are then discussed and some of the issues and problems of their use are set out. The case is made for the validity and reliability of life story based research, if these are understood in terms which are reasonable but wider than those normally enforced within 'objectivist' limits.

The next section of this chapter will provide a description of the research methods used. This description forms the basis for a wider reflection on what constitutes the particular and distinguishing features of the life story method within the overall paradigm of narrative research. Next consideration will be given to some of the questions of methodology which this form of research raises, especially with regard to reliability and validity. Key to this will be the contention that life story work should be (and often is) both reliable and valid even though some of its most prominent proponents claim to

eschew what they dismiss as an outdated 'modernist' foundation to methodology. It will be posited that 'objectivist' arguments raised against all life story research in principle are based on unduly narrow conceptions of what constitutes reliability and validity. This is not to deny the perfectly justifiable rejection of some approaches to life history work. At the same time it will be argued that the rejection of validity and reliability by many working within life history research is based in misconceptions which are broadly similar to those fostered within the positivist and neo positivist camps.

The final part of the chapter will consider how the methodological viewpoint of this project is at variance with many of the relativist and 'postmodern' outlooks which are common, perhaps dominant, within the wider area of life history research. It will be argued that this relativism must be rejected if any philosophically coherent case is to be made for the validity of life history work as a form of social science.

A further line of reasoning will be put forward to the effect that in life story work relativism is necessarily associated with the rejection of all forms of humanism. Without any sort of humanist basis it is not possible for life history work to make any methodological claim to be seen as valid. In many important ways humanism must be at the core of life history methodology.

### **Method and Methodology**

It is now useful to talk about the meanings of the terms method and methodology as used in this chapter and throughout this project. Method refers to the actual practical procedures of a research project; the way in which information is collected.

Methodology is concerned with the intellectual and academic rationale or principles which lie behind method. One widely respected text puts the difference between method and methodology as being the following:

- Methods: the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyses data related to some research question or hypothesis.
- Methodology: the strategy, or plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes. (Crotty, 1998 p.3)

In the last chapter mention was made of the how some non-dialectical approaches place things in opposition to each other when they can only be apprehended adequately if they are approached as being 'part and parcel' of the same thing. One of the examples offered in that discussion was the relationship between 'objective' and 'subjective'. 'Method' and 'methodology' are another such pairing it is not possible to imagine how it is even possible to speak of one without expressing it terms of the other.

According to Moses and Knutsen (2012, p.3)) methods can be understood as 'problem specific techniques'; a particular method being chosen because it is believed to offer an appropriate way to investigate a particular question. For Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p.31)) the job of method is 'to hold apart' the researcher and the 'objects researched' a description of a particular method should 'tell us the circumstances under which the researcher met the object' Here the meaning of 'object' is not straightforward. Clough and Nutbrown go on to argue that 'Postmodern accounts', of which theirs is an example, hold that it is impossible to provide a guarantee that the researcher and the object researched are distinct. According to Clough and Nutbrown some more traditional accounts of method argue for the possibility of such a distinction between the researcher and the object researched (p.31). In the context of life story work it is hard to imagine how a reasonable case might be made for separating the research from that which is to be researched as everything revolves around how the researcher interprets a particular life story. Moreover the teller of the life story is, in all likelihood, engaged in the process of representing their life in the form which they understand to be that which the researcher expects.

Methodology can be understood as the 'frame-work' (Stanley 1990, p.13) within which methods and the information they reveal might be understood. For Moses and Knutsen (2012, p.5) methodology 'denotes an investigation of the concepts, theories and basic principles of reasoning on a subject'. Again it is interesting to look at Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p.36-37) for their particular take on the meaning of methodology 'A methodology shows how research questions are articulated with questions asked in the field. Its effect is a claim about significance.' An interesting explanation of this particular definition is offered which again is in contrast with more traditional definitions. For Clough and Nutbrown despite apparent differences many definitions of methodology share the common idea of a justification of research designs or methods:

This is why, in our own definition, we do not emphasise a *conceptual* essence for the term, but rather suggest an *operational* description which will be positively useful in justifying any given research design. (p.37, original emphasis)

All four of the attempts by Crotty, Stanley, Moses and Knutsen, and Clough and Nutbrown, to describe methodology seem to share a fair degree of common ground and there is certainly no *prima facie* case for arguing that they contradict each other. Later in this project an outline of what is called a 'philosophy of internal relations' will be presented as a fundamental idea in a Marxist world view and as being of considerable utility in life history research. The relationship between methods and methodology is itself a very interesting immediate example of something which can be grasped only if it is understood as a matter of internal relations between the two things. This theory of internal relations is very much linked to relationships which are also referred to as 'dialectical'.

In a well conceived research project 'methods' are chosen on the basis of methodological considerations: a particular research method being chosen because it is expected to elicit valid information. Conversely it is not possible to conceive of methodology completely apart from considerations of the merits or limitations of particular methods. Martyn Hammersley in his 2011 book 'Methodology: who needs it?' is concerned to point to an important aspect of the relationship between method and methodology:

We need to begin by looking at the meaning of the term 'methodology', as currently used. In its core sense this refers to a discipline concerned with studying the methods employed in carrying out some form of enquiry. However its meaning also extends to include the body of knowledge built up through this methodological work. (p.32)

Hammersley identifies 'three broad genres within the literature on social research methodology' these hold that 'methodology' can be seen 'as technique', 'as philosophy', and 'as autobiography' (p.20). For Hammersley each approach has important strengths

when approached with balance and sensitivity. The 'overdevelopment' (p.32) of each of these three approaches to methodology brings with it serious problems. Chief among these problems is the tendency of each of these three approaches to methodology when 'overdeveloped' to seek to radically devalue, or dismiss the others. This 'overdevelopment' of a postmodern critique was the main subject in the first chapter of this project titled 'Antecedents 1'. In recent years governmental pressures for 'Science Based Research' in the United States and more widely have tended to boost 'methodology as technique' at the expense of other approaches (Denzin and Giardana, 2008; Denzin, 2009; Torrance, 2014).

Using Hammersley's framework it is interesting to observe that much of the methodological criticism aimed at life history work *per se* originates from the camp which sees methodology as 'technique'. According to Hammersley methodology as technique in an extreme form 'is proceduralism: the idea that good practice amounts to following a set of rules' (p.20). Overly rigid claims about a sample needing to be of a certain minimum size before it can be viewed as 'representative' would be an example of an exaggerated 'methodology as technique' position.

Many of those working in the area of narrative research would see their methodology (in Hammersley's terms) as resting in 'methodology as philosophy' and 'methodology as autobiography'. 'Methodology as philosophy' is held to have developed somewhat as a reaction to what might now be seen as extreme forms of viewing systematic enquiry as being almost completely a question of 'technique' without great importance being attached to philosophy. The extreme behaviourist dismissal of any philosophy of mind from psychology might be an example of what 'methodology as philosophy' might react against. Behaviourism promoted the technique of measuring that which was observable to such a point that it excluded anything which was not open to being measured. Behaviourist psychology therefore reached a point where it excluded any notion of mind. As Hammersley points out there are very definite advantages to philosophy, methodology and hopefully method being carefully calibrated so as to work together. The danger of the overdevelopment of 'methodology as philosophy' is manifest in the way in which in some of its forms it comes to challenge and reject foundational assumptions of all scientific thought and claims to knowledge. Hammersley offers the 'diverse body of French writing that has come to be labelled postmodernist' (p.35) as



examples of this overdevelopment. Two related arguments from leading lights of French postmodernism (both of which are considered more extensively in this project) might be offered as instances of an exaggerated methodology as philosophy.

### **Is there an Outside Text?**

The first would be the claim by one of the architects of postmodernism Jean François Lyotard that science is no more than a language game (Lyotard, 1979, p.41). The second would be Derrida's claim that 'There is nothing outside of the text' [there is no outside text: *il n'ya pas de hors texte*] (Derrida, 1976, p. 158).

Both of these claims amount to more or less the same thing and to some extent they were dealt with in the previous chapter. Both Lyotard's and Derrida's argument depend upon on the idea that it is impossible to establish the truth or falsity of a claim by recourse to evidence beyond language. These claims in turn are related to Richardson's claim that 'Language does not reflect social reality, but produces meaning, creates social reality (1994, p 518)'.

What precisely Derrida meant by 'There is no outside text' is a subject of discussion. Some of his opponents say that he meant it quite literally. This seems to be unfair on Derrida and interestingly after Derrida 'explained' what he meant, the problem pretty much remains. Derrida argued that the claim made by some of his opponents that he believed the world was only a text was false. He explained that he was arguing that our understanding of this world was only possible through and was therefore limited to 'text' (Derrida, 1998, p.148). To my mind this second claim amounts to something essentially similar to that which his opponents originally levelled against him, as it seems to deny the possibility of our using the externally existing world to set parameters to, and to humanly shape, the texts themselves. A materialist argument follows the lines that the relationship between 'texts' and the world is fairly similar to that between maps and the landscapes they represent. When we use a map it shapes our understanding of the landscape, we interpret the landscape through the map, but we ultimately decide on its validity (and utility) as a map through our experience of the landscape outside of it. Derrida would argue that the landscape or any other social reality is also a text:

What I call "text" implies all the structures called "real," "economic," "historical," socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that "there is nothing outside the text". (Derrida, 1998, p.148)

But this seems to miss the point that the landscape, or a social reality, has an existence beyond and independently of the text. If Derrida persists with his claim that everything is 'text' he seems to end up in exactly the position which his opponents attributed to him and which he denied holding.

Of the three types of methodology in Hammersley's account 'methodology as autobiography' is closest to the methodology most often used in life story research. This is of course entirely to be expected. Hammersley links this form of methodology to the 'craft tradition' (Hammersley, 2011, p. 36) in research and he associates it closely with the work of C. Wright Mills. In the description of this approach Hammersley points to what might be called the personal involvement of the researcher in what is to be researched as being a methodological tenet. This is also connected to the accounts of research conducted within this methodology often being described as 'reflexive accounts' (p.26). The characteristic aspect of reflexivity in social science research is that the researcher admits to, or even explores, the effect of their own presence, in their work.

As with the other types of methodology described by Hammersley 'methodology-as-autobiography' is to be treated with caution when it is 'overdeveloped'. Two principal dangers are given. Firstly the idea of research being reflexive may become exaggerated if it is believed that the researcher must provide a fully comprehensive account of their involvement in the research. Such a labour must be in vain as it is impossible to bring all of the researcher's life into an account of how research was conducted and what was found (Hammersley, 2011, p.38).

Hammersley sees a further set of problems with an overdeveloped, 'methodology as autobiography' standpoint, arising from 'its insistence that methodology should be descriptive not normative' (p.38). This will be discussed more fully a little later when I

consider how an exaggerated insistence on description is used to justify the complete rejection of validity in methodology and to replace it with what is described as the quality of 'verisimilitude'. For the moment this problem will be introduced but not explored.

In some cases it is possible to detect in narrative and life story work the idea that reflexivity alone is a sufficient condition to guarantee methodological soundness. This latter point is not made explicitly in Sarah Delamont's much discussed criticism of autoethnography (Delamont, 2007) but it seems to be the underlying argument when she complains that research of this type is 'lazy'. Paul Atkinson (2006, pp. 400-404) writing a year before Delamont, pointed out how far reflexivity had long been a quality of sound ethnographic research and he also drew attention to the 'overdeveloped' claims of some 'postmodernists' that reflexivity had not featured in ethnographic work prior to its development at their own hands (p.400). Atkinson points to a further problem which:

...stems from a tendency to promote ethnographic research on writing on the basis of its experiential value, its evocative qualities, and its personal commitments rather than its scholarly purpose, its theoretical bases, and its disciplinary contributions. This in turn reflects a wider problem in that the methodological has been transposed onto the plane of personal experience, while the value of sociological or anthropological fieldwork has been translated into a quest for personal fulfilment on the part of the researcher. (p.403)

Atkinson's comment above is aimed at 'autoethnography', a particularly controversial form of scholarly work. It should be noted that it is by no means clear that Atkinson would agree to the designation of all forms of this writing to be called scholarship. Atkinson is opposed to 'autoethnographic' research which sees 'reflexive' earnestness as a substitute for academic discipline. The criticism can logically be extended to any type of narrative research in which 'personal commitment rather than ... scholarly purpose' (Atkinson, 2006 p.403) is its *raison d'être*. It would be invidious to give a string of examples of pieces of work in which this might be said to have taken place but it seems

fair to give an example in which this is stress on 'reflexivity' over discipline is openly stated.

Stacy Holman Jones (2005) in an essay entitled 'Autoethnography: making the personal political' opens with the statement 'This is a chapter about the personal text as critical intervention in social, political, and cultural life' (p.763). A little later she explains that the essay is 'about how looking at the world from a specific, perspectival, and limited vantage point can tell, teach, and put people in motion'. It seems fair to say that 'the specific, perspectival and limited vantage point' to which Holman Jones is referring is, quite simply, her own. This is exactly the problem with exaggerated autobiography-as-method. It is perfectly tolerable to write highly self centred and confessional text, it is perhaps even passable to deliberately limit one's horizons to the purely personal. It is not reasonable to then claim that this writing constitutes either social science or academic writing both of which must view the purely personal as an inadequate standpoint from which to work.

The inclusion and exploration of the personal in social science writing can produce good results. Apart from anything else all research work and social science writing demands the involvement of the researcher to such a high degree that any finished piece of work from which all that is personal is excluded will almost certainly make for jejune reading. Some extraordinarily good social science openly explores the personal involvement of the writer but the work cannot be justified solely, or even substantially, on the basis of its being personal. Social science must include but it also needs to transcend the personal. The problem here is not with reflexivity itself but with the tendency of some writers to see the purpose of social science as being solely about themselves as individuals.

In many discussions of research methods and methodology it might be noted that the two terms are often used as though they were interchangeable. Viewed from the standpoint of a philosophy of internal relations this type of confusion arises because methods and methodology are bound together by internal relations, they are dialectically related.

Looked at from a non dialectical viewpoint things (such as method and methodology) can only be different and therefore essentially separate, or they are seen as being the same and therefore identical. From the point of view of Marxist or other forms of dialectics the revelation and investigation of the 'internal' relationships between things is a central part of apprehending how things exist in the world. It has already been mentioned that in the discussion of the methodological approach used in this project issue will be taken with some elements of what is described as a post-modern approach to working with narratives. One such example is the tendency of some authorities to eschew the traditional requirement for a research method to be able to claim 'validity', suggesting that it be replaced with, for example, something which following Jerome Bruner they call verisimilitude (Bruner, 1986, pp. 11-12). I will argue that in some cases this opposition of verisimilitude to 'validity' (e.g. Connelly and Clandinin, 1990 p.7; Richardson, 1994, p. 521; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.24) is an example of a limitation arising from a non-dialectical approach and actually is typical of a mechanical way of viewing the world. In such an approach things are considered only in an abstract and one sided way.

In the case of validity and verisimilitude a more concrete, less dogmatic, and dialectical point of view would show that validity and verisimilitude are ideas which can only be understood if they are seen as being related concepts. In the case of narrative, we might say that both verisimilitude and validity are concepts rooted in the relationship between things in the really existing world and the way in which we talk or write about them. The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning of 'verisimilitude' as 'appearance of being real, semblance of actuality' and validity as being the quality of being 'solid, defensible, well grounded'. Approached at the level of linguistic meaning it seems very odd indeed to place validity and verisimilitude in opposition to each other. In life story work in particular it would seem that 'validity' and 'verisimilitude' would, of necessity, be mutually dependent, each acting as the others guarantor.

It might appear as though most research projects proceed in the following way. A start is made with the consideration of 'a problem', and then method and methodology are decided upon together before the actual research begins. In the next stage the research is conducted, and then finally the findings are discussed and evaluated. In the case of this project this was not the case although it might appear so given the order of the

chapters in which the project is laid out. In fact at the conceptual level method, methodology, and findings continued to interact holistically at all stages of the process. A simple example of this process will be useful. Although a decision was first taken on the method to be employed (using a methodological framework) the exact nature of what happened during the interviews, the creation of the life stories, and their interpretation continuously evolved during the whole process. At the stage in which the 'findings' were considered new methodological issues emerged. This in turn meant that the methods themselves needed re-evaluation. To refer back to Clough and Nutbrown's statement (2012, p.31) the whole process continuously and perpetually revolved around the basis on which claims for its 'significance' might be made, and justified. I cannot speak for other research projects but in this case I felt sure that this incessant interaction constituted the life force of the project. It seems reasonable to assume that in any viable and vibrant research project, certainly in the social sciences, this process of continuous re-evaluation must be going on.

Before presenting a methodological case for life history research as a method it is necessary to describe the actual research practices (methods) which formed the basis of this current project. For Ken Plummer (1983, 1995, and 2003) the problem of what constitutes 'Life History Method' within social science can be posed at least superficially in a very simple proposition: 'A life history is the story a person tells about the life he or she has lived' (2004, p.564). For Plummer as for most others working in this area it is far easier to say what a life story is than to say how what it means or how it should be understood. It is the investigation of the rich puzzles which follow in the wake of this deceptively simple statement about what a life story is which gives value to life history research. In turn most of these puzzles have at their core the problem of how the life story is to be evaluated. If we eschew relativism this latter problem is a facet of a more fundamental problem of how a life story stands in relation what might be called 'truth'. This is far from being a simple problem.

In life story work, as in other areas of research, it is a requirement that a method makes a reasonable claim to be able to get at findings which are 'valid'. The evaluation of such claims cannot be separated from some notion of 'truth'. If Plummer's definition of what constitutes a life history is accepted then the method of life story research is concerned firstly with the collection of the stories and secondly with the interpretation of their

meaning. The same methodological issues are present at both stages though more obviously salient in the second.

In this project life stories were collected from six teachers of literacy to adults. All six teachers work or have worked on the Isle of Thanet. The shortest period that any of the teachers worked in Thanet was two years and in this particular case the teacher concerned had spent many years teaching in a school less than 10 miles from the Isle. Of the other five teachers all had worked in Thanet for at least ten years and four had worked in Thanet for the greater part of their working lives in one case for four decades. Four of the teachers had lived in Thanet for most of their lives and were living there when this study was conducted. Totalling up the years in a rough calculation between them the six participants in this study had between them more than two hundred years of living in Thanet and around a hundred years of working there.

There is some discussion about what is and what is not to be considered as literacy teaching to adults. There is for example an argument sometimes raised that teaching English Literature to young adults is not literacy teaching. Here adult literacy teaching is understood as being professional teaching work with people over the age of 16 years to develop their literacy in one area or another. Understood in these terms then all of a hundred years experience of the six teachers in this study has been spent in literacy teaching. In this broad definition the years which some teachers had spent teaching subjects such as GCSE Sociology or History would count as literacy teaching as the teachers and students would have been required to develop relevant literacy skills (reading, writing, or discussing with others) as part of their development towards the taking of exams. If literacy teaching was defined more narrowly as being the teaching of literacy to adults as part of an officially designated literacy course then between them the participants had taught adult literacy so defined for some eighty years.

Five of the participants in the project were women all of whom were aged over forty years. All five of the women had been or were married and all had children. Of these five women three had been divorced and had spent at least five or more years as single parents. All the women in the project had children and all five had spent considerable periods of their life caring for older relatives. The only man in the project, had lived in Thanet for more than fifty years, and was married. He was a father and as a son devoted

much of his life to caring for his elderly parents. During the interviews no explicit attempt was made to find out the marital status of the participants or their ages.

Two more female literacy teachers were interviewed with the intention of using their life stories in this project. One of these teachers June retired after a long and difficult series of negotiations with her employers and as part of her securing a redundancy agreement she was obliged to sign a confidentiality agreement. This teacher was concerned to 'tell my story' but after consideration decided it was not possible to do so. In order to render the story safe enough to tell within the conditions imposed by the confidentiality agreement it would have been impossible not to alter details to such an extent as to render it fictional. It would have been necessary to invent a place of work for this teacher and that would have involved the invention of work practices etc. This is not possible or desirable in a project which consciously based itself in a particular locality. Thanet has one FE College, one main Adult Education centre and a small number of private providers of adult literacy. To accurately describe some of the practices which this teacher found intolerable would have rendered her identifiable. In many other areas this teacher told a story which could be classified as one of celebration as she had clearly found adult literacy teaching to be fulfilling until the final stages of her career. As a researcher I found myself wondering about the cumulative effect of such confidentiality clauses in limiting the recording of developments within the area of adult literacy teaching. June was the only participant to withdraw after the project had started in one other case a potential participant was unwilling to get involved as a result of involvement in negotiations similar to those which June had completed.

The second case of the life story not being used in this study raised very interesting methodological problems and provided an opportunity for reflection which was not so readily available in the case of life stories which were deemed suitable for inclusion. In an initial extended interview this teacher talked about her life and work. The workplace and the duties she was engaged in at the time of her interview were portrayed in very positive terms and she described herself as being very happy and contented. A scant fortnight later I heard that this teacher had left her job with little or no notice. I was told by several friends and colleagues of this teacher, who themselves had no knowledge of the research project, that leaving her job had become inevitable as her work situation had become intolerable and she was being bullied. Despite my efforts it proved



impossible to establish stable contact with this teacher again. I was left to mull over the apparent discrepancy between her account of her position, her actions, and her friends' assessment. I wondered if when she had spoken about her work the teacher was telling me the story she herself wished to believe. It also crossed my mind that the interview with me had perhaps influenced her behaviour. The point was that the teacher's life story as told was incongruent with her actions. The ill fit between the life story and the teacher's actions from the point of view of this project immediately cast issues of 'validity' and even 'verisimilitude' in an intriguing light. This point will be taken up and developed later as it proved to be an invaluable starting point for a deeper consideration of life story work from a methodological point of view.

From the above the reader will be able to accurately surmise that eight literacy teachers were initially approached to participate in the project. In two cases participation proved unworkable and these life histories do not form any further part of this study. It is now necessary to say something about the sampling procedures which were employed.

In life history research sampling is almost always problematic not least because the philosophical basis of life history research questions some precepts of 'representativeness' as it is understood in positivist or post positivist frameworks. In what might be called traditional forms of research claims to representativeness are usually advanced on the basis of the extent to which 'the sample is actually representative of the target population' (Davern, 2008). This raises a range of issues in the case of life history research.

### **The Life Stories Themselves**

In this research project six life histories are studied. A calculation of sample size will be based on the narrow definition of adult literacy teaching as being the teaching of literacy to adults on a government sponsored programme of adult literacy instruction. Through a rather rough estimation it is suggested that a sample of six teachers represents not more than one tenth and not less than one twentieth of all adult literacy teachers in Thanet. One important dimension of the study is the connection of the life histories of this small group of teachers of literacy to The Isle of Thanet. A reasonable estimate of the overall number of people who might be both professional teachers of Adult Literacy and have

working connection to the Isle of Thanet might put their overall numbers at something over sixty. In this case something less than ten per cent of the overall target population could be said to have participated in this study. Obviously if the findings of this study were extended to cover all adult literacy teachers in England there would be very definite problems of representativeness as Thanet has distinct regional traditions and a discernible culture. If a study were conducted nationally, even one which went so far as to study the lives of ten percent of all teachers of literacy to adults, questions might well be asked about the extent to which a random sample would be able to represent the particular and important circumstances of those working in decaying seaside towns such as Margate and Ramsgate in Thanet where all teachers in this study worked. The question 'In what exactly does representativeness reside?' is not easily settled. For the moment it is quite justifiable to suggest that the sample used in this study of teachers in Thanet can claim a degree of representativeness.

In all cases the teachers were formally interviewed and their life stories recorded on at least two occasions. In all cases there have been follow up discussions on the transcripts from the interviews and the life stories as I have written them. In each case the final life story as it appears here has the approval of the person whose life is represented. In all cases and at all times the procedure of this project has been in accord with the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Association (BERA, 2011).

The interviews were all scheduled to last for approximately an hour and this was agreed with the interviewees prior to their interview. In every single interview the interviewee was happy to talk for the hour and indeed in almost all cases it was felt that we could have gone on longer. Some days prior to the initial interview the interviewees were presented with a list of seven questions which I suggested we might discuss. It was pointed out that these questions would only form the basis of our discussion and provide pointers as to what we might cover. It was not so intended that these questions serve to elicit answers to the specific questions asked but that they worked as prompts to get the interviewees talking about their lives within what might be called a focussed framework. The questions are given below.

1. What is your relationship to the Isle of Thanet?
2. Could you tell me something about your own educational history?

3. Could you tell me about your life as a teacher of literacy to adults?
4. What if anything from your life has helped or hindered your work as a teacher of literacy to adults?
5. How well do you think your family and friends understand your work as a teacher of literacy to adults?
6. Could you tell me about the place where you work now and from your point of view what would you need to explain so that I might understand this place?
7. Are there any other things you would need to tell me so that I might better understand you, your life history, and your work?

In none of the interviews were these questions answered in a strictly methodical or systematic way, working through them as a list completing each before proceeding to the next. It was explained to the interviewees that what was being looked for was their life story with some coverage of the seven questions. In each case after completing the interview and looking at the transcripts it emerged that the areas indicated in the questions had been covered.

As far as was possible the interviews were conducted in a relaxed manner in a number of different locations. As far as possible the interviews were conducted outside of the interviewee's workplace. In the one case where an interview was conducted in the interviewee's workplace it was considered sufficiently relaxed and quiet to allow for a full discussion. The remaining interviews were conducted in Canterbury Christchurch campuses in Broadstairs or Canterbury. In one case an interview was conducted in the interviewee's home.

Immediately after the interview a recording was provided to the interviewees and when completed the transcript was provided for them to read. A discussion of the transcripts and what they felt emerged from it was a topic for discussion in subsequent interviews.

A second interview was conducted after we both had time to read the transcript and listen to the recording. In these second interviews the transcript from the first interview formed the basis for the interview. After the second interview the recordings and transcripts were sent to the interviewee again. When the interviewees agreed to the accuracy of the transcriptions I completed the life story from the interview. This was

then sent to the interviewee for their comments. In every case the life stories were received with at least positive agreement, in most cases they were received with a measure of enthusiasm. In all cases of the people whose life stories appear here felt that the story whilst accurate or in their opinion truthful, nevertheless left much unsaid or unexplored. In some instances it was evident that from the subject's point of view that the story had loose ends. Two examples should serve to make the point. Sarah felt that the end of her first marriage was not something that she wanted to explore in any greater depth in this project though she told me that it was by no means fully examined. Grace indicated that in writing her story I should not leave any space for the reader to come away thinking that her father was a decent sort of man.

I formed the impression that the more deeply the subjects engaged in an assessment of the texts of their life story the more these took on elements of incompleteness or even ambiguity. The process of reflection on the stories raised more questions and problems for the storytellers themselves. Far from detracting from the overall value of the stories it can be strongly argued that if the validity of research resides in its 'truthfulness' then these stories accurately reflected the participants view of their lives as presented. It is worth saying a little more on this.

### **Truth**

Martyn Hammersley defines validity in research as being 'truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers' (1990, p.57). In a similar vein Michael Crotty describing the idea of 'truth' in what he calls a 'constructivist epistemology' writes that:

There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. (1998, pp. 8-9)

If we agree with Hammersley, and Crotty, some more 'objectively' inclined authorities do not (Moses and Knutsen, 2012 p. 60), then the relative indeterminacy of life stories in general (and of those presented here) is a precondition of their validity. This is because

the process of interpretation of a life story can never be finished, there is always something more to say. This indeterminacy does not at all mean that the life story does not 'accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers' nor that it insufficiently engages with 'the realities of the world' quite the reverse. It can be argued that a valid life story is indeterminate precisely because it 'represents' and 'engages with' realities.

If those whose life stories are presented accept them as accurately representing their lives then it is to be expected that those same stories cannot pretend to say everything in a definitive form about those lives. Any life story narrative making a claim to omniscience would have to be questioned but it is entirely reasonable to follow Hammersley in claiming that a life stories may 'accurately represent the phenomena to which it refers'. The key point here is that all of those whose stories are presented felt that the texts were adequately communicative of their life stories.

As said above those whose life stories are presented in this study were satisfied with what they held to be the accuracy or the truthfulness of the life stories as presented even if there was an acknowledgement of some of the problems. This was extremely important as I felt that if the life stories appeared truthful to those at their heart then there was a basis on which to proceed. It might be possible in some circumstances to work with life stories in which there is a discrepancy between the interpretation of 'researcher' and the 'researched' but in this project I felt that it would have undermined the project to an impossible degree.

As far as I am aware none of the people whose stories are presented are aware of processes by which the life story was created from the transcripts. The process used was based largely on the work of Merrill and West (2009) in which there is a wide ranging discussion of biographical methods in social research but in particular one chapter is devoted to the practical method of working with 'raw' transcripts to produce biographies (pp. 128 -149). The work of Merrill and West provides practical guidance on how a researcher might systematically work with transcripts of interviews. This guidance is particularly useful as both authors in outlining their own particular approaches encourage others to adapt the principles involved to best suit the nature of their own research. In my own particular case in the latter stages of working with the transcripts

this involved interpreting them in terms of what I see as overarching themes. I should immediately point out that these themes were mine and not at all those of the people whose life stories were analysed. The process of working with a transcript to produce a life story is something which needs careful consideration from the point of view of methodology.

### **From transcript to life story; methodological considerations**

If we look above at the comments by Hammersley (1990, p.57) on truth and validity, or the comments by Crotty on 'objective truth' in qualitative research (1998, pp. 8-9) it is immediately apparent that working from transcripts to create life stories is going to present some very difficult challenges. The particular challenges of the methodology of this project are considered in the chapter with the title 'Introduction to the Life Stories', some of the 'methodological' issues discussed are approached implicitly in other places in this thesis but there remains a need for their explicit consideration. This is done so before the first of the life stories are told as it is intended that the reader should understand more clearly the process by which the life stories were created.

Immediately after the initial interviews those who had been interviewed were provided with a recorded of the interview. Once the interviews had been transcribed they were given a transcription. Those recorded were asked to check the recording and transcript for accuracy and to comment on anything they wished. A second interview was held in all but one case. In the second interview themes which had emerged in the first interview were explored in greater depth and some parts of the story were supplemented. I was impressed by the seriousness with which all those interviewed approached these tasks. Everyone tried to be 'fair' even when dealing with episodes in which they clearly felt that they had been wronged. A majority of those interviewed were initially unsure of the value of what they told me. Comments such as 'Why are you interested in this?' or 'My life is pretty boring' were made by several of those interviewed.

### **Exactitude**

Interviews such as those described here pose a serious problems of 'detachment' as the interviewer must steer a course between the two somewhat contradictory requirements to firstly build rapport and 'solidarity' with the person interviewed and, secondly to avoid leading or directing. From the early work of Garfinkel (1984), Sacks (1992), and Goffman ( 1959, 1974) in the 1960s which developed into the academic area today known as Conversation Analysis (CA) it has been understood that all more or less normal conversations require that the interlocutors observe the rules which govern such interactions in their particular milieu. If these rules are not followed communication becomes strained, artificial, and even stressful. Rules involved in conversation require that the interlocutors extend what we might call communicative solidarity to each other. This requires not only that a show is made of empathy but also that conversational rules such as those which govern turn taking are also followed. The style of interviewing used in this project could certainly be described as conversational although the interviewees took the lead. It is not easy to balance the need for empathy against the strict requirement not to lead or steer the interviewee. Even so the need to co-construct some type of conversation inevitably means that the life story interview is a joint venture if only to a limited degree.

After concluding the interviews the transcripts, as opposed to the recordings, were analysed following somewhat more closely the procedures indicated by Linden West than those of Barbara Merrill (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 128 -149). This analysis by theme produced some interesting results but as would be expected with narrative research there is a sometimes a problem of correspondence between the importance of something said in the interviews with its salience in the life story. A positive example of this which came as a revelation to Grace was how in the transcripts it emerged that she regularly sought to impress her employers by working to a standard higher than she believed they expected of her. I noticed how this emerged from an analysis of the transcripts of her interviews, when I drew her attention to it Grace was initially surprised and then on reflection agreed that it had probably been true of her actions in all the jobs she had done since being a teenager. Analysis of the transcripts also produced some very striking evidence of the problem of attributing weight to comments made.

In the interviews with Hannah she mentioned the importance of religion in her life only twice and then relatively briefly. From the quality of her comments it was clear that she

believed that much of her life was determined by religious considerations and that key turning points were down to acts of God directly shaping her life. Although the comments made in her interviews and transcripts about the place of religion in her life were explicit they were fleeting. These comments about the part of God's will in her life were almost offered as asides to her story but it was evident that it was far from being a 'background' influence.

In the case of Catherine a similarly short comment offered a view on something very important in her life. Catherine mentioned only once that she had broken the rules of her workplace to support an adult male student who she saw as being 'alone'. Catherine had gone with him to a centre where he was to take a test which would be of considerable importance to him. As the test was not connected to her work with this student it was against the rules of her workplace for her to accompany him. From the way she described this small incident I inferred that in many areas of her life Catherine would break or subvert the rules if this was required to do what she believed to be humane. Catherine had told me of problems she had experienced in some workplaces because of what she saw as the need to give students what she saw as the best support she could. From the way she talked about this single incident I felt that this determination was adamant, if Catherine thought that she needed to break rules to act morally then she would do just that. Both of these relatively small features from the interviews with Catherine and Hannah raise problems with the analysis of transcripts. Relatively short and even 'isolated' comments can lead the interpreter to quite abruptly see the whole life story of the person interviewed in a light of a different hue. This means that the process by which different elements of the life story are evaluated cannot be attributed a weight of meaning by any linguistic analysis alone. It is largely a matter of judgment for the researcher and those whose life stories to attribute 'importance' to different things feature in the life story. In this case the word 'importance' is very similar to 'significance'. This importance cannot be established through any metric form of measurement. This type of problem is a typical reason why some 'objectivists' reject life story work on the grounds of what they see as 'validity'. This understanding of validity whilst perfectly acceptable in some areas of research is unduly narrow and prohibitive when applied to life story work. Validity in research is traditionally taken to mean that the research findings genuinely represent the phenomenon being measured or investigated and that the research is



designed in such a way that it measures what it purports to measure. In the case of life history work and most other areas of narrative based research, the words 'assess' or 'gauge' might be helpfully substituted for 'measure' when talking about validity. If we refer back to the definition of validity given by Hammersley as being 'truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers' (1990, p.57). Where the 'objectivists' insist upon validity residing in measurement in life story work it is perfectly possible to advance a logically coherent claim that validity resides in accurate representation. If the life story accurately represents that life as a social phenomenon it should be taken as valid.

What is problematic however is the way in which the researcher attributes importance to comments which might not be extensive, nor even made with obvious emphasis. This might be illustrated with the examples above taken from the life stories of Catherine and Hannah. As the researcher I was at the centre of the process by which the importance in their respective life stories was attached to Hannah's religious convictions and to Catherine's determination to do what she feels is right. When telling life stories the person being interviewed will be selective and the researcher will further select what to include and how much importance is to be given to different elements. This selectivity transcends the whole process of life story work. This too causes problems for 'objectivists' who dislike the idea of being selective with data. These objections can be met with two arguments.

### **Exactitude is not Truth**

Firstly, if in life stories the researcher must be selective with data this in itself does not necessarily affect the validity of the story told. It is interesting to note that in the classical definitions of validity the requirement is that the results obtained in an investigation should accurately *represent* the phenomena being researched. The life story is a representation of the life that is actually lived. That this life story might be given different representations does not necessarily say anything about the truthfulness of any particular representation or range of representations. It is unlikely that anyone would advance the claim that any particular representation of a life is comprehensive in the sense of being all inclusive. It would be equally impossible to make a claim that any representation of a life in a life story could claim to be exact. When once asked about

the truthfulness to life in his paintings the artist Henri Matisse pointed out that he agreed with Eugene Delacroix that 'exactitude is not truth' (Matisse, 1925), the point being made is an absolutely serious one. The truthfulness of a representation does not necessarily depend upon it being an exact copy of the original.

The second argument against the objectivist claim that the selection of which data to include in a life story and the importance to attach to it makes life stories invalid concerns the methodology of more traditional science. Very often 'mainstream' scientific investigation is itself very selective in selecting which data is included in its studies. This is exactly the argument which Goethe (1810/2006) raised against Newton in his criticism of the methods used by the latter in his study of light. For Goethe the study of light and its understanding could only be achieved by its apprehension in the real world. Goethe objected to Newton studying light in laboratory conditions, he especially objected to its being studied in the decomposed forms of refracted light through manufactured prisms and lenses. For Goethe light and colour needed to be comprehended as they occurred naturally. Goethe criticised Newton's methods for studying light because he felt that the latter studied light only in the forms in which it existed as artefacts of his own experimental set ups. Goethe was very direct, even truculent and unduly dismissive in his comments on Newton.

The argument being advanced here is that science depends upon selectivity in its methods. Contrivance in the sense of the creation of conditions which do not naturally occur is at the heart of classic experimental design. No one would deny that results obtained under highly selective experimental conditions can in the right circumstances be applied to the real world. Such results are perfectly valid if they truthfully represent the phenomena to which they refer. In much social science experimental methods are not possible because of a wide range of problems both practical and ethical. Here only one set of problems will be mentioned in connection with life stories, the problem of abstraction. Complex social phenomena only ever occur in complex interrelationships with other social phenomena if they are removed from context in which they exist they are altered or indeed emptied of content. This is the case even where something can be objectively measured. The case of female students studying construction at FE colleges might be taken as an example.

It is well known that vanishingly few construction students are female, certainly less than 5%. On its own 5% tells us very little except that a measure has been taken and a statistic produced. To give this statistic meaning it is necessary to start producing narratives around it in order to give it a social context. This is a problem which advocates of quantitative methods in the social sciences need to address if they 'overemphasise' the efficacy of such methods *vis a vis* qualitative methods. There seems to be no escape from the problem that quantitative measures must depend upon qualitative explanation. In some particular circumstances it might be possible or desirable to isolate a few factors in order to measure them but this cannot be done in life story work beyond a few simple measures. It is hard to see how an objectivist claim that life story work is intrinsically invalid because it is selective can be argued logically when it appears to be the case that much objectivist social science is equally if not more selective in its approach.

### **Objectivity as Judgement**

It is not possible to deny that in the creation of life stories the storyteller and the researcher will exercise a considerable amount of personal judgement over what is selected for inclusion or emphasis in a life story text. Whilst this clearly affects the 'objectivity' of the life story it does not necessarily render it less truthful. Here objectivity is simply being understood as the opposite of subjectivity, and the latter is taken to refer to the exercise of choice or judgement over what is included. Objectivity in this context would be impossible. Firstly, it is not possible to include everything in a life story so choice must be exercised. Secondly, There is no possibility of any objective set of criteria by which to decide what should be included this can only be done subjectively. The creators of the life story exercise choice over what is included or excluded or the emphasis placed on certain things. The argument about objectivity is in principle the same as that about selectivity. The problem of what goes into a life story cannot be understood as one of 'objectivity' in the sense of the elimination of personal judgement.

Another meaning of the word 'objectivity' is very important in life story work. This is the idea of objectivity as honesty; as checking against, or at least declaring, biases; as explaining how and why selectivity is employed; and as far as possible being true to the facts. This list includes some very troublesome terms and could no doubt be extended

to include even more unruly notions. In principle this list includes many problematic issues which are similar to those that confront the academic historians.

### **Historical Logic**

The historian E.P. Thompson recounts a story of how when he was asked at a seminar in Cambridge how he could justify a proposition he was making replied that he could do so by 'historical logic'. Apparently his hosts dissolved into open laughter. In the essay in which he presents a strong case for this 'historical logic' (2001, pp. 445- 459) Thompson puts forward a number of propositions all of which with sufficient thought might also be extended to life story work. Firstly that the 'immediate object of historical knowledge is comprised of facts' (p.447). This is indeed the same in life story work. In the stories in this project there are thousands of facts which constrain the life stories and against which they may be compared. Facts such as dates of birth, rates of unemployment, introductions of government initiatives, syllabi, fluctuations in funding for post compulsory education, redundancies, deaths etc. are multitudinously present. What is interesting in this regard is that very little, if anything in any of the life stories contradicts any of the known facts. This lack of contradiction is itself an indication of the ways in which the life stories have been constrained by and are consistent with such facts. Thompson goes on to advance further arguments in support of 'historical logic' which are in their basic thrust similar to those made above about selectivity and objectivity. It is worth quoting Thompson at length:

Historical knowledge is in its nature a) provisional and incomplete (but not therefore untrue), b) selective (but not therefore untrue) c) limited and defined by the questions proposed to the evidence (and the concepts informing these questions) and hence only true within the field so defined. (2001, p.447)

The phrase 'life story based research' could happily be substituted for 'historical knowledge' in the above. Thompson continues to outline further dimensions of his 'historical logic' but to develop these adequately would demand the writing of a different chapter to that undertaken here. However one further insight from Thompson's 'historical logic' is very important for life story work and is now presented.

Thompson makes the argument that although particular histories will reflect the values and ethical considerations of the historians who write them this does not call 'into question the objective determinacy of the evidence' (p.449). It must be taken as read that when life stories are presented in academic work they are never going to be complete and objective but will reflect the values and the purposes of those who have prepared them. These stories must be presented with complete respect for the 'evidence' and any claims that are advanced are broadly congruent and commensurate with the evidence. Where the writer feels that they may exceed the evidential basis and 'intervene' in the life story this should be made clear. When writing up the stories for this project it was necessary to make inferences, estimates and what I hope are reasonable conjectures. It is therefore of great importance that the people whose life stories are here all feel convinced of the truthfulness of their life story as presented. It must always be remembered that there can be no guarantee of the 'objective' truthfulness of life stories nevertheless some very strong assurances can be offered. First there is the 'determinacy' of the factual evidence, secondly the reader can utilise their own experience and knowledge to assess the plausibility of the story. In any reasonably well written life story there will be plenty of opportunity to triangulate what is read against a wealth of other information. In this way life stories can be seen as a form of evidence which can be interrogated not only to assess its truthfulness but also to look at our own suppositions, values, and beliefs.

It is tempting to say that if the reader is satisfied that the story has a justifiable claim to be truthful then the next step is to consider what it means. In fact the process also works the other way. It is from our decision about what a text means that we decide if it has a claim to be taken as truthful. For me in this project this was a key process as I found areas in which my own understanding of the meaning of the stories was either inadequate or, more positively, where the deeper consideration of the stories offered an opportunity or forced me to develop ideas. E.P Thompson talks in this respect of how historical logic 'proposed questions to the evidence' and in a way which calls for consideration not only of the evidence itself but also of the questions put to it.

... This in no way calls in question the objective determinacy of the evidence. It is simply a statement as to the complexity not just of history

but of ourselves (who are simultaneously valuing and rational beings) – a complexity which enters into all forms of social self knowledge and which requires in all disciplines procedural safeguards. (p.449)

In many research designs the exactitude of the measurements taken is itself seen as indicative of their validity. In life story work exactitude is not achievable but nevertheless an argument can be made that the researcher is assessing or investigating what they are purporting to be researching. This argument forms the core of the final part of this chapter. A second and related argument is that validity in research rests upon the idea of the possibility of research putting forward arguments and narratives which have the quality of truthfulness. What might constitute truth is a far from settled question and in much of what is described as postmodern argumentation the possibility of a 'non suspect' claim to truthfulness is discounted.

In the important sense outlined in the above paragraph life stories can be seen as a valid form of research. In the case of the teacher in which there was a prima facie discrepancy between what was said in the narrated life story and her real life actions. This discrepancy was itself interesting. Firstly because it was the only case in which the life stories in this project were significantly at odds with the actions of those whose stories were told. Secondly, the process of comparison and divergence between the 'story' and the 'facts' might allow for the investigation of both.

The instance of incongruity in the one life story (in which the teachers leaving her job appeared to contradict what she had said in the interview) alongside the apparent congruence in the others in an almost Popperian sense seemed to support the 'validity' of the life stories in that at least key elements of the 'life stories' were very definitely falsifiable. Those stories which were open to be falsified but which withstood being measured against the 'facts' could at the very least be treated as having 'face validity'. Thus it can be claimed that there is at least an important degree of correspondence between the stories told and the observable or verifiable facts of those lives. In addition to this correspondence between the stories told and 'the facts of the matter' the stories are also coherent internally and externally. Internally the coherence of the stories rested in the way in which different elements of the life stories made sense and did not contradict each other. Externally the life stories were coherent in that as stories they

were consonant with what might logically be expected to feature in the life stories of people similar to those whose stories are at the centre of this project.

Mention was made above about what E.P. Thompson referred to as the process by which 'logic proposed questions to the evidence'. In this project it was very much the case that the process described by Thompson must also work in reverse; the evidence poses problems for the logic. The last three chapters of this project, on 'Class and Identity', 'Managerialism' and 'Place' have come out of the attempt to develop 'a logic' in this case a Marxist logic in a form adequate to engage with these as they appeared in the life stories. A reader must judge for themselves the extent of any success achieved in this process. I am very aware from my own point of view that any development which has been achieved has come from the real life validity of the process of sharing stories. For this I am indebted to those who not only gave me their time but also their trust

## Catherine Edwards

I have known Catherine Edward's for about ten years. The world of literacy teaching in Thanet and East Kent is not large. After a few years most literacy teachers get to know of each other, at least by sight and quite possibly by name. Catherine and I, as far as we can both remember, have never worked together. Before this project started we had conversations about literacy teaching and I remember that in one such conversation she told me that anything which helped to cheer up Thanet was to be welcomed even if it involved having to put up with an appearance by Tracey Emin **(P)**.

Whenever I had encountered Catherine she had always impressed me with her candidness, I had seen her voice her opinions frankly, though politely, in a number of situations in which I had supposed that those organising the discussions did not expect or view positively such straightforwardness. The word 'politely' needs to be explained in this context. Among those who read this there will probably be a familiarity with the type of gathering in which the organisers ostensibly seek honest opinions and genuine contributions but in reality it is considered unhelpful or at least ungracious to express sentiments which run in opposition to those required as displays of support for some official policy or another. Catherine although always polite at a locutionary level was unafraid of being 'unhelpful'. I liked and admired Catherine's plain speaking.

Catherine had a reputation for taking her work very seriously and I was not surprised to find that she gave considerable thought to issues and problems in literacy teaching. Catherine is very serious about commitment to 'students'. At one point in our interviews Catherine herself told me about the difficulty of having to work with literacy students in ways that she considers to be inappropriate and how she managed to cope in such contexts:

With difficulty really ...I mean as I said when I am working for this company ... I don't know yet ... but certainly at other places, because I do speak my mind, I say what I think you know, so often at team meetings and things like that people don't want to hear those things because they want to be able to say oh yes tick that box. **(M)**



I was also aware, from a distance, that Catherine had encountered serious problems in various teaching contexts. This, in my opinion, was in large part due to her already mentioned honesty. She resisted anything which she felt worked against what she saw as the real interests of learners or was, as she saw it, unfair in a wider sense(C+I, M). In the interviews for this project this facet of Catherine's personality emerged time and again becoming something of a leitmotif.

In the chapter on methodological issues in this autobiographical research I have said something about the way in which the interview and the text it produces determines not only what subject matter and themes emerge but also how these might best be presented. This tendency was very pronounced in Catherine's interview and transcript. Whereas with, for example, Hannah Richards or Paul Beer the transcript has a regular or smooth feel to it, with Catherine the text goes smoothly for a while and then something difficult emerges. Unexpectedly in the transcript there is something which for Catherine is adamant, non-negotiable, a point of principle, something laudable but unyielding. I am reminded of a carpenter working with a high quality wood like oak, the material is fine, maybe the best there is, but the woodworker cannot shape the knots and must as far as possible leave them as they are. If handled with proper regard for their qualities the knots add texture and give the finished article a special quality if mishandled the finish of the wood is ruined. I hope that I have been able to work with Catherine's story in a manner so as to re-present her steadfastness which is both strength and a source of trouble.

Catherine was, I felt, a little apprehensive as to what the interview was about. Over the years she had encountered problems in her work and there was a good deal of circumstantial evidence to indicate that things had happened to her as a result of processes conducted behind her back. I learnt later that Catherine had justifiable concerns that at points she might have been a victim of 'blackballing' by senior managers within the local world of adult literacy teaching. More than once she had been employed and then encountered problems where none needed to arise. As far as she was aware within certain management circles there might have been some feeling against her originating from an occasion when she challenged the rate of pay she was receiving and produced evidence to support her claim. This led to her receiving the payment that had originally been agreed. Those who had been contracted at the same

time as Catherine and worked alongside her raised no objections though it is to be assumed that they too were being underpaid according to their original agreement. Catherine alone did not receive an extension to her contract (M). Catherine, more than most, had reason to feel wary about interviews. Catherine was balancing her reasonable caution against what she felt was a responsibility, she wanted to present a 'straight' story of how she saw her life and literacy teaching.

In a previous meeting I had explained to Catherine that, for me and the other participants, part of the purpose of the project was to record something of how literacy teaching had evolved from the days just before the advent of 'Skills for Life' in 2001 until around 2010. From Catherine's response to the invitation I was reminded again of how she that she placed huge store by ideas of truth. Catherine would often stop what she was saying, consider if she was being fair and then proceed or restate what had been said in a way which she presumably felt to be more accurate.

For Catherine, possibly more than for anyone else interviewed, truthfulness was everything. As the interviews progressed I sensed that prominent among the reasons for striving so hard to be truthful was the desire to ensure that when she delivered blows against what she felt to be wrong her remarks would be all the more telling.

Catherine has lived all of her life in Thanet. She is now in her fifties. Catherine's mother was from Newcastle, born in the mid 1920s she was one of eleven children from a mining family. Conditions in the collieries of the North East of England were at that time as difficult as any experienced by miners in any other part of Britain. Catherine does not seem to know the details of her mother's early life but from what she did tell Catherine it was brutally hard. Catherine's father came from London and 'was a working class man'.(P)

Catherine does not know how or where her parents met. More than once Catherine remarks about her parents 'old fashioned' approach to talking to children. It would appear that her parents told her very little about their lives before her birth nor did they discuss many of the things that parents usually talk to their children about. Her parents had been married for twenty years before Catherine was born and as she puts it 'they were quite elderly when we were born, not elderly, but in their forties, but that was

elderly in those days' (the early nineteen sixties). Catherine indicated that she is sure her parents' conservative values contributed to them finding it particularly hard to cope with her when she was a teenager. This especially affected her mother as for much of their lives the relationship between them was 'difficult'.

Catherine describes herself as having been 'a complete rebel' as a young adult. As an explanation for her rebelliousness Catherine says that she 'wanted to escape from the confines of teenage years'. When asked her how her parents viewed this she said:

Well they had Victorian values so not very good. I had a difficult relationship with my mother, for most of her life to be honest, not too bad at the end of her life, I mean she lived until she was 83 or something, but yes, difficult years with her really.

Catherine's parents had a rather peculiar experience of life. At some time after his marriage to her mother Catherine's father became, by chance, the owner of a greyhound which went on to become a world champion. Catherine explained that this 'was a complete fluke' which began a 'run of luck'. The dog raced in Europe and Australia and won what could be described as a handsome though not vast fortune. As Catherine describes it this providence came completely out of the blue; 'from poverty they went to having quite a lot of money'. Catherine even today smiles in disbelief when she talks about how the dog established his record here in Britain before her parents took this and other successful greyhounds by boat to Australia. She explained that when she was young 'We had a big gold trophy, a real gold trophy'. Recounting the story decades later Catherine still appears surprised by this good fortune. Though in a rather odd way it appears to explain how Catherine at least in the early part of her life saw herself as being out of place. At several points in her story Catherine indicates that her parent's and therefore her own 'class' became confused (C+I).

Sudden and unexpected wealth dramatically changed the circumstances of Catherine's parents. It is very rare indeed to find cases of such people having wealth and what might be called celebrity thrust upon them, but this was the case with Catherine's parents. Looking back over the transcript it is clear that Catherine sees the coming into a fortune as having a massive impact on the life of her parents. I am struck by how this

was virtually the first thing Catherine said in the first interview. This peculiar and unexpected good fortune seems to have contributed to a type of 'foundling' story. At certain points in her story Catherine seems to feel that in some ways her parents' life and her own did not turn out as it as destiny would have had it in normal circumstances.

When Catherine describes her parents' habits or her own education there is a strong feeling that she sees an ill fit between their 'class' as Catherine believed it to be and their actual financial circumstances. This discrepancy between what should have been their life and what the reality was is especially strong when Catherine talks about her schooling(C&I, P).

Catherine's parents decided that she should go to what was at the time one of the most prestigious of Thanet's independent girls' schools. The school was a central part of the Convent des Oiseaux, in Westgate-on-Sea. It was run by nuns who belonged to the Congregation of Our Lady Canonesses of St Augustine, an order of nun's famed, even in convent circles, for being 'disciplinarians'.

Westgate on Sea was developed from the mid nineteenth century as a resort for the Victorian middle classes and was in many ways uncharacteristic of Thanet resorts. The developers insisted on the town being developed in line with the strictures of their own temperance beliefs. Margate was raffish and, even in its heyday, somewhat vulgar, Westgate in contrast was genteel. In his poem Westgate-on-Sea, written in the nineteen thirties Betjeman captures what was even by then becoming the slightly fading gentility of the town. Westgate – on - Sea was home to several independent schools, Paul Beer attended one, in very few stories or accounts do those who attended these schools remember them fondly. Betjeman's poem written some three decades before Catherine attended 'des Oiseaux' describes the children of the independent schools as they walk through the town.

Striving chains of ordered children  
Purple by the sea-breeze made,  
Striving on to prunes and suet  
Past the shops on the Parade.

Some with wire around their glasses,  
Some with wire across their teeth,  
Writhing frames for running noses  
And the drooping lip beneath.

(Betjeman, 2004, p.13)

Catherine, I suspect euphemistically, describes herself as having been something of an outsider at Les Oiseaux. She felt:

‘very out of place there, and I didn’t like it.... I hated being there ... I passed my eleven plus and begged my mother to let me leave but she wouldn’t, so I had to stay but I always felt that it wasn’t right for me there because they were very posh and they did have a lot of money and my mother’s friends were not like that they were working class people. (C+I)

Catherine does not mention her father’s role if any, in keeping her at ‘Les Oiseaux’. It is possible to imagine Catherine’s mother’s view of the school problem. It might well have been the case that to Catherine’s mother it was incomprehensible that her daughter would not accept ‘advantages’ of a type she could not have dreamt of as a child herself. Catherine talks about this time of her life with an evident frustration. She did not want to attend ‘Les Oiseaux’ but it appears that her parents were not to be persuaded. It is notable that Catherine felt out of place at the school not only because she was not like the other girls but because her parents were different to the others:

So there was a conflict going really going on ... they would go off on their skiing holidays and we would go to France and places but we would go in the car ... you know go over the mountains in the car ... so I didn’t like it there and I was kept there until I was seventeen. And I really didn’t do anything while I was there. It was much later that I wanted ... which is why I think I like helping people ... because of my roots where I didn’t get on at school.

It might reasonably be imagined that her mother took Catherine's dislike of 'Les Oiseaux' as a form of rejection of the new found family status. In this regard that Catherine points out that her mother herself had working class friends. It is even possible that Catherine's rejection of the school pointed up some lack of ease which her parents felt towards their wealth. Whatever the reasons Catherine very definitely believes that her attendance at 'Les Oiseaux' was 'anachoristic'. This, along with other things, became something which was never really discussed with her mother even much later in life.

After leaving school Catherine worked in a number of jobs without becoming settled in any of them. Catherine's story then breaks off for almost two decades. She was married, had a daughter, and got divorced. Catherine does not go into detail about her first husband though the breakup of the marriage appears to have been particularly difficult and might even have contributed to her daughter's not enjoying secondary school.

... she went to Queen Edith's Grammar in Ramsgate and she could not get on there ... there were other reasons as well, because I'd become a single parent at that time so we had a lot of disruption in our home life which obviously didn't help her .... she left Queen Edith's at fourteen and went to Ramsgate Secondary but of course they didn't want her because she was a grammar school kid so she got bullied and all sorts of things happened to her there.

Catherine's story of her daughter's time at the grammar school is reminiscent of her own. Later when Catherine talked about her own work as a literacy teacher it appeared that her experience, and that of others around her, exercised an important formative influence on her attitude to her own outlook as a teacher. Catherine talks about schools from the perspective of an outsider.

In her late thirties Catherine joined an access course at the University of Kent. A year later she enrolled on a degree course and three years after that in her early forties she emerged with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English. Catherine made a few friends at university but notes that she was much older than anyone else on her course and continued to live in Margate making the journey only when necessary while the majority of the other students lived on the campus or in Canterbury (P). Twenty years, a divorce,

and a child differentiated her from almost all the other undergraduates. Catherine today enjoys studying topics related to work or wider issues. Catherine said that after school it took her 'a long time to get back on track with academia' and this she attributes in significant measure to the problem of the organisation of education and an inability to cope with young people who are rebellious:

I think the education system, well that's a whole other conversation in itself really, but I think it isn't there to educate people really, and I feel now that if anything it is worse now than when I was at school. So I don't feel bad in myself for having left it so late to get an education, but I can see the same pattern of many children today going that same way.

Catherine is very struck by what she sees as the failure of educational institutions to work with people on their own terms instead she sees them as obliging those who would be educated to comply with the requirements of an 'education system'.

My own daughter, and I have got a very intelligent daughter, who hasn't got a GCSE to her name, but she's super intelligent, because she couldn't get on with the education system and now I've got a granddaughter of nine who is also intelligent but I would love her to go through the system and achieve, and I encourage her. I work with her at home and I give her every support to try and have a success story in our family with education because, I mean, I was the first one from our family to go to uni right throughout history. **(C&I)**

Some time before entering university Catherine met her partner Derek. When Catherine talks about her life today and her views on different issues it is very evident that she and Derek continually discuss issues and concerns. Derek teaches part-time at a secondary school and in a community based literacy teaching project. He moved to Thanet from Manchester where for many years he worked as a youth worker and teacher with young people from troubled backgrounds. This type of youth work massively contracted in the nineteen eighties and nineties and is today almost non-existent. Catherine explains how she and Derek agree on their interpretation of changes in literacy teaching:

... he spent nearly twenty years in Manchester you see as a teacher. He was in Manchester teaching teenagers really on the old youth programmes so that's how he got into teaching. So we are very similar, I mean he does a bit of literacy teaching at the moment. He is just doing a post – graduate course. So slightly different but yes we have similarities in us both ... most of the people who come to him aren't wealthy people they want to learn but they can't through the system.

Catherine graduated in 1999 and took a temporary job in Margate. At this time she had developed an interest in IT and secured a temporary job in an FE college working with literacy teachers engaged in a project intended to foster adult literacy through the use of word processing technology. At that time the basic qualifications for teachers of literacy to adults was the '9281' . Catherine completed this at Canterbury College. Soon after Catherine started work with Kent Adult Education as an outreach tutor based mainly in Canterbury but with links to Adult Education Centres in Thanet, Dover and Folkestone.

After the Blair government had come to power in 1997 the Moser Report had been commissioned into the perceived 'problem' of Adult Basic Skills. In the wake of the report, even before the onset of the governments 'Skills for Life' policy, directors and organisers of adult literacy projects of all types found themselves able to access funding on what was an unprecedented scale. Catherine still relatively fresh from doing a degree herself and in the process of completing a teaching qualification was asked to work in 'outreach' in centres established in a number of East Kent villages long associated with coal mining.

They were the best of times really, looking back, of all the basic skills times. I got a job through the Canterbury office with a lovely lady who was my boss whose name was Rachel Phillips. I think it was from there that it was identified that a lot of the villages, particularly the mining villages, so we had Adisham, Aylesham and Betteshanger. A lot of the villages round there had a lot of young mothers who needed skills and so I began doing basic skills through IT. I used to take the laptops and go out round to all the villages, set up all the classes and that was really



successful. I felt that it really empowered those women because a lot of those women were stuck in the villages ... stuck in their lives, stuck you know with husbands who weren't always sympathetic to women getting educated and I really enjoyed those two or three years that I worked in those places ... watching those women's confidence grow and achieving.

From becoming an outreach teacher Catherine took up a post working in main or what by then were referred to as 'hub' Adult Education centres in Thanet, Canterbury and Dover. It was at this point that Catherine met Gill an adult literacy teacher of many years experience who had first become interested in this area in the wake of the television series 'On the Move'. Catherine was profoundly impressed by Gill's dedication and facility for adult literacy teaching. Catherine, Gill, and their colleagues were swept up in the tide of 'Skills for Life' and the expansion of adult literacy and numeracy teaching. In the years immediately after the introduction of this new policy there was a huge injection of funding together with a feeling that adult literacy mattered. Over the next few years the funding continued to flow but with it came new, sometimes outlandish, targets. Teachers found themselves increasingly subject to stricter methods of control. There was overall a huge increase in what 'managerialism' not only quantitatively (in terms of instruments of compliance) but also qualitatively in terms of 'detail' and 'intensity'. It was not long before Catherine, Gill and most of those teachers who believed in a liberal, or a personal developmental approach to adult literacy work found themselves swimming against a tide which was running ever faster. Eventually almost all drowned.

Describing her work with Gill Catherine recalls the amount of time she would spend talking to potential students and how Gill would work to assure the student that they would be treated with care and respect:

It was great because she was so experienced, and I think she used all her skills in interviewing. She had very strong opinions about how basic skills should be taught really, and the whole process ... it was a whole process. From the initial interview she would interview every student who came through the door for half an hour initial interview, it was mainly talking and finding out about their problems, their barriers and from there she

would hand pick which class they should go to feel most comfortable. I sat in on the interviews and I learnt so much from her, about how to how to go about it, how to find out what people need.

Catherine later explained that a great part of Gill's thinking about the initial interview was to ensure that the prospective student would understand that they were entering an institution which would value them and would proceed from the student's perception of what they needed. Catherine believes that Gill's initial interview techniques played an important part in what was then regarded as the success of literacy teaching in Adult Education; 'it was a whole process'. Adult literacy teachers from the tradition to which Gill belonged did not believe in 'initial testing'. This was a policy which emerged from Skills for Life and was enforced by OFSTED and other regulatory bodies. To Gill it appeared wrong ethically and educationally to enforce an initial test on an adult.

Prior to Skills for Life it was accepted practice within adult literacy that people approaching a centre with the intention of working to develop their literacy should not be tested until they themselves suggested it or the teacher felt that the student had gained sufficiently in confidence for the test not to be a demoralising or traumatic experience. The logic was fairly straightforward; if an adult decided that they needed to develop their literacy it was almost always the case that they had the experience of 'failing at school' and it was not helpful to begin a course with an experience which was probably linked to dismal memories.

An interview of half an hour conducted by someone with the skill which Catherine attributes to Gill would reveal almost everything a teacher would need to know to begin teaching someone and might also allow for the establishment of a bond between the interviewer and interviewee. Within this paradigm it was assumed that this supportive relationship was itself a key part of literacy development. Under the rules introduced in the wake of Skills for Life all students were to be assessed by a test, usually computer based, before being placed. The grade achieved on the initial assessment was then used to place the student in a class. Progress was then measured according to how long it took students to work their way 'up' through the grades. In effect 'initial testing' came to replace, or at least significantly supplant, the 'initial interview' (**M**). For teachers such

as Catherine or Gill this appeared as evidence of a trend towards the removal of much that was professional and personal from adult literacy teaching. Catherine remembers that these changes started to become noticeable around 2002:

So for two or three years everything was great, and the classes were full but then probably, and I was thinking about this today when I was at work, probably because of Moser new policies were brought in which effected change and so over the next couple of years we saw at Adult Ed ... we had three restructures as well, had to keep applying for our jobs which wasn't great, but we saw all these changes so the main thing was they wanted bigger classes ...

Catherine makes the point that the managers of Adult Education centres were obliged to increase class sizes and came under pressure to pass tests in order avoid failing OFSTED inspections and also to secure funding. At this point funding for Further Education and Adult Education was almost all 'drawn down' from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC set quotas and targets for passes at various levels of test. At the same time OFSTED inspections became increasingly focussed on the measurement of what was termed 'student progression'. The picture Catherine paints of the consequences of these and other policies is one of increasing intensification and the channelling of learners through a 'system':

No one ever really took into the picture how often chaotic ... the basic skills needs ... these people's lives were, how chaotic, and why they don't attend always and so, you know ... but you know you need twelve to run a programme ... they wanted to join together the ESOL classes and the special needs classes and the basic skills classes which was never going to be a success.

Catherine's fundamental objection to this rests on what she sees as the inappropriateness of placing ESOL learners who might well be very literate in their other languages but not in English in classes with learners who do not have learning difficulties but wish to develop their literacy and with learners who have moderate learning difficulties. As she pointed out this 'lumping people together' happened at the same

time as the official discourse stressed 'Individual Learning Plans' and meeting 'individual needs'.

Catherine found it increasingly difficult to come to terms with a range of changes which were being made to the way in which literacy teaching was done within Adult Education. Especially telling was a remark Catherine made which was very similar to what others have said 'I think it is all just chasing funding now'. 'Chasing funding' as a phrase has occurred in almost every interview I have conducted. The only other particular theme more prominent in the transcripts would be 'paperwork', which interestingly most interviewees comment on as being worse in their own particular workplace than it is in other institutions of which they do not have firsthand experience. Sometimes the challenge is seen as the sheer volume of the paperwork to be completed but mostly the problem seems to lie more with its perceived pointlessness. Catherine recounts how she and others were asked to go for a training day with an outside consultant on how to complete a new style lesson plan:

I remember one of the things at Adult Ed. Probably in about 2007 not long before I left, this consultant came in with a 13 page lesson plan and said this would be the new model, you know they handed it out and projected it onto an interactive screen. Gill and I looked at each and said what is that ... you must be joking ... no ... you want 12 or 14 in a class and for each lesson you want this completed ... when will we do the teaching? ... as long as they have got a paper trail and as long as you've got progress it's got to be enough ... you can't be expected to fill out those ridiculous sheets after sheets ... I personally don't agree with it. (M)

At several points during her interviews Catherine talked about the unending arguments about the changes which were introduced into literacy and ESOL teaching in Adult Education. Gill as Catherine's line manager did not enforce the new regime and from what Catherine says Gill's refusal was not exceptional; 'Gill never made me do it, I never once had to do anything like that ... I never did ... but that is why we are not working there anymore'. Catherine spoke about her last years working with Adult Education without realising that once transcribed and set down in black and white it would emerge that almost all of her colleagues from 'the best of days' have left'. It is not unreasonable

for Catherine and the others to see this as having been to a considerable extent an intended by-product of the processes variously referred to as 'streamlining', 'modernising' or making Adult Ed. 'OFSTED ready'. Catherine attributes her final break with Adult. Ed. to her refusal to apply for a job 'managing' a computer based 'skills centre' where students 'dropped in' and worked on computer exercises. Under such a model there was very little traditional literacy teaching. In such a centre the teacher's role would be to explain to individual students how to complete the exercises correctly.

... it all just transferred to the Skills Plus centre and when the vacancy came up at the Skills Plus centre I decided not to apply for it. Then over the next few months I had just less and less classes until I didn't have any I think at the end.

Catherine assumes that the reduction of her work was deliberate although she received conflicting messages from the managers (**M**).

The last time I interviewed Catherine she was happy and enjoying her new post as an ESOL teacher. The only problem in her new post was the long motorway journey she had to make each day from Thanet to North Kent (**P**). In her new post she had come to terms with many of the things which she had struggled against in her days in Adult Ed. but she was teaching students in classes and was to a large extent able to build up the personal contact with students which she believes to be so important. Catherine made this point directly when she talked about her memories of Adult. Ed. and her new teaching position. I put it to her that when she had talked about the days in Adult Ed. before the full onset of 'Skills for Life' she had talked about it as having been a 'perfect time'.

I think I see it as a very positive time for the education provision that was being offered at that time. For me it was looking back, it was a very holistic system really if those two words don't contradict each other. People ... funnily enough what a lot of crossovers (with) what Anna and I are doing here working as ESL support tutors ... we are giving that same holistic approach to people because we are not just seeing them as whole groups, we are getting involved in their lives. I am very involved with my

students ... their asylum backgrounds, their pastoral care, we go way beyond the duty that we actually have here in our job roles.

Catherine then offered some examples of ways in which she and Anna (a new colleague) help their students and she explains that she thinks this is essential because of the isolation in which these mostly young asylum seekers live. Catherine's logic is unassailable, she believes that the lives of these young people are so hard and their histories so terrible that it is not possible for them to make any educational progress without assistance in other areas of their lives. She also explains that this support is not a recognised part of her job. I put it to her that this would involve her taking risks and asked what her employers would do if anything 'went wrong'. She pointed out that most, if not all, institutions which work with asylum seekers on ESOL courses had no interest, as institutions, in supporting their students away from the narrowly interpreted classroom requirements. Catherine summed up a key part of her view on working with asylum seekers and on education in general in the following:

Well a lot of people I work with, not all of them ... I feel that if my own children found themselves in another country without the language, without the culture, without any family to help them I would want someone to help them ... education to me is more than ... to me education is more than just teaching someone from an academic point of view. It's a whole life experience. For me it was anyway ... for my own journey through education, and when I look back it was meeting people who did go that one step beyond their role that helped me to succeed and achieve. **(C&I, M)**

This reflection by Catherine on the teacher's responsibilities raises many questions but principally that of the discrepancy between the teacher's official role and what Catherine professes to be the essential importance of a much wider remit. This is itself a reflection of what for Catherine is a wider conflict between 'helping people' in a way that she believes serves them best and 'the system' which requires that she push people 'through' in the required manner.

## Sarah

Sarah is in her fifties, she is a mother and grandmother. After only a fairly short time talking to her it is evident that she is busy supporting her family and others who live near her. She speaks in a manner which is deliberate and direct but also gentle. Within a few minutes of our conversation starting I feel sure that that her decision to participate in these interviews was considered carefully. Sarah has decided to make time for this project, time which is at a premium for someone who evidently puts the needs of many others before her own.

Sarah is now a teacher in an independent school, having worked for twenty years in state education as a secondary school classroom assistant. Sarah took a PGCE while in her forties and then started work in a Further Education college.

From what I knew of Sarah she always seemed to talk about students in a way that was not judgmental. Great efforts were made to see things from the students' point of view, to be reasonable and fair towards people who often rejected or held in disdain the efforts of their teachers, Sarah included. Simultaneously Sarah held the view that the work which was done in class especially in literacy and numeracy work with these 'unpromising' students was very important and Sarah was strict in the demands made on her students. Sarah thought it important that students judged to have low levels of literacy should do something about it. I wanted to try and explore an apparent contradiction: Sarah appeared to be a teacher who is passionate about the potential value of her subject but who has learnt to treat rejection by her students with a fair degree of equanimity..

Sarah grew up in Canterbury some nineteen miles from Thanet. She went to a small village primary school, Sarah remembers it fondly. The school is situated just outside of Canterbury. In the nineteen seventies when Sarah would have been at school this outlying district of Canterbury was already losing its character as a working village and was becoming a suburb of the city. Today the village character has completely disappeared.

When Sarah was young her father died leaving her mother with three young children. Although Sarah it would appear that a period of some poverty followed her mother becoming a widow. Sarah explains that her mother had sold her house and had 'run out of money' by the time she saw a job advertised in a local newspaper for someone to look after the daughter of a man who had himself been widowed. She worked for the man, and later they married. Sarah's stepfather was an adviser in the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries. Sarah describes her stepfather as being caring, generous and indefatigably devoted to his family. **(C&I)**

Sarah prospered in the small village primary school and in the final year of primary school she sat and passed the Kent Test. All secondary education in Kent is hugely influenced by the Kent Test which is to all intents and purposes the '11 plus' test. In the final years of primary school an assessment is made as to whether children have the 'potential' to attend grammar school. Those deemed worthy sit a battery of tests in the last year of primary. Some thirty percent of children who attend primary school are then 'passed'. In this way almost all non-privately educated primary school children are tested or assessed and seventy percent are rejected or failed. Of the thirty percent who achieve 'a pass' most go on to grammar school. In the normal course of affairs these successful children are offered places in one of the, more or less, local grammar schools. This is pretty much how the situation is described officially. It is hardly ever pointed out that in Kent primary children of the age of ten or eleven are set a test which is so designed that some seventy percent will fail, and thereby be excluded from attending the more highly regarded schools. The majority of the children who fail the Kent Test are not actually entered for the exam itself but are simply deemed to have no chance of passing. Within most primary schools the Head Teacher and a team of senior teachers select those who can go forward to take the test. **(C&I)**

For those who fail, or never take the test, the situation is very complicated. The 'non-grammar' schools are also selective, some on grounds of perceived student abilities or potential, others on religious criteria. When Sarah took the Kent Test a school known as the 'Frank Hooker' vied with another known as the 'William Nottage' as the secondary school of last resort. Outside of Canterbury the 'Frank Montgomery' was considered by most concerned parents to be so low as to be beyond the pale. All of these schools have



to this day, whatever formal indicators might suggest, continued to struggle along a very difficult path.

It is hard to communicate to those unfamiliar with it just how much of an impact the Kent Test has on those who are put through it, or even more on those who are not. In discussions with people who are well into middle age or beyond the Kent Test is often viewed as a defining moment in their educational career.

Statistics for the Kent Test convey something of its effect. To understand it fully one should have firsthand experience. Talking to Sarah more than 30 years after she took the test it is clear that it still has an emotional impact.

Sarah was in an unusual situation with regard to the Kent Test. The year she took and passed the test there was an insufficient number of grammar schools places. 'That particular year, apparently loads, far too many, passed the Kent Test – I was one of them – and there wasn't enough places at the grammar'. As Sarah puts it her 'mum and dad went absolutely mad' about what had happened terrified at the prospect of their daughter having to attend the 'Nottage'. After that Sarah is not clear about what exactly happened but she 'ended up' at 'Archbishop' a local Church of England secondary school. Sarah was not alone in this as there were five others from her primary school who had passed the test but did not get to grammar school. Today the 'Archbishop' has as one of its entry criteria regular attendance at church for several years from prospective students or parents. This attendance must be attested to by a vicar or other church functionary. Strangely Sarah passed the Kent Test and should have gone to Grammar school and conceivably on to University or work. In effect Sarah was forced along an alternative track because the year she sat the test 'too many students passed'.  
**(C&I, P)**

Sarah enjoyed her time at secondary despite the somewhat inauspicious circumstances of her arriving there. Sarah describes the school in the most positive terms 'It was super there, really, really lovely, I had a wonderful time'. Sarah entered the sixth form of the school with 'O' levels, and she was especially happy with her Domestic Science GCSE in which she had achieved the top grade. When Sarah talks about the domestic work she did at home and how she looked after her younger siblings she explains that she was

‘practically a housewife already’. She chose to do domestic science for ‘A’ level, at that time her sights were set on qualifying to become a teacher in the same subject. Then suddenly she left education. As she puts it ‘I ran away from home’.

In our first interview Sarah explained that her mother ‘was very strict’ and suggests that the discipline at home was the reason for not only her, but also her elder brother and sister, ‘running away’. In later discussions she talked about her mother being completely inflexible and unable to deal with teenagers without confrontation. ‘I got to 17, obviously I’d had enough, left, and then got a job, ... needed money to live on’. She also developed the point already made about living the life of a housewife whilst at school:

You have to remember as well since I was 10 and right up until I left home then I became the eldest there were five children under me so I was looking after them all the time and doing an awful lot at home. I was like a housewife at 13, 14 anyway so I suppose when I got to 17 I felt like that I was more like 27. **(C&I)**

Sarah’s running away involved her getting engaged to and living with her boyfriend who was a stockman on a farm close to Canterbury. At this time Sarah was only a few weeks beyond her seventeenth birthday and she lived in a tied house on a farm not far from Canterbury. Sarah told her mother nothing of her circumstances and on the day of her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday she married the man she lived with. Sarah learnt later that her mother had contacted the police to try and find a way to compel her to return home. As Sarah was over sixteen years old, and not in any demonstrable danger, nothing could be done. Sarah looking back at this time believes that her mother was correct about the unsuitability of her boyfriend and later husband but she also stresses that life at home was unbearable. **(C&I)**

Sarah did not go into great detail about her early married life but it appeared that at first she was more or less contented. The ‘more or less’ was later explored a little more deeply by Sarah. Her first husband became enormously controlling and at a point many years later Sarah came to see him as being ‘morbidly jealous’. I did not press this but I felt that the term ‘morbidly jealous’ had first entered into Sarah’s lexicon through contact with some type of professional agency.

Throughout the years of her married life Sarah worked in a number of jobs notably as a dental assistant and later in a building society. Her husband required her to account in great detail how she spent her time away from the house.

I was put on a pedestal I was a possession but his jealousy was such that not just with other men my own family I couldn't phone my own mother and tell him that I had phoned her he couldn't bear it he was that bad. So, can you imagine what it was like when I was going off to work and there's other people about and then when I wanted to go to university. You have got no idea what I was up against. ...

In the interview I asked Sarah about this jealousy. I could not understand if he imagined that she was having affairs or if he was simply jealous of her doing things like going out to work:

No it's both and completely unfounded. You get to the point when you go out you keep your eyes down because you daren't look at anybody in case you are accused of looking at them. It's a horrific thing to have to suffer with ... but you know ... so he wasn't keen on me doing things with my own life, my life belonged to him.

After a few years of marriage restlessness had very definitely entered her life this was not only due to her belief that she could do more with her life but also a feeling that she had to escape from being obsessively controlled. She had her first child after some four or five years of being married.

'I would have been about 22 or 23 when I had my first, Carol. Then I had another. Two, I wasn't having anymore. Then the third one came along and I thought 'Right'! He got to a few years old and I thought 'Right I need a life now, that was it.'

Sarah started work as a classroom assistant at a secondary school about 11 miles from the village where she lived. The job seems to have constituted something of a rebellion

against her husband and having taken an initial step Sarah made another move. 'I thought I need more than this so I applied to Kent University to do an Access course'. Sarah was interviewed by a distinguished professor at the university. She took along samples of the work she had been doing as a classroom assistant so that the professor might be able to gauge her suitability for entry to the Access Course. He was so impressed that he recommended that she enter directly onto a degree.

When Sarah talks about this interview it is clear that it was extremely important to her and has come to be seen as a turning point. We can imagine the scene.

A mother of three, no longer a young woman arrives at a university to be interviewed by a professor. The woman has no suitable formal qualifications. The woman is married to a farm worker. More than a dozen years previously and against most expectations this mother of three had left school at seventeen and turned her back on what was considered 'normal'.

In some senses applying for an entry to the Access Course is, for her, an act of rebellion as her husband is far from positive about it. But it is a strange sort of rebellion as it marks the beginning of re-entry into the world she left at seventeen. The implications and the full meaning of what was happening would almost certainly have not been apparent to the professor conducting the interview and the full meaning of what was happening would have been only partially understood by Sarah. Where Sarah was after only acceptance to the access course the professor gives her a ringing endorsement and invites her to become an undergraduate. It should also be noted that Sarah's counterparts could not do today what she did more than two decades ago.

When I asked Sarah how her husband had reacted the reply was unequivocal:

He didn't want me to do it ... But then I left him. ... not long after anyway so, he didn't want me to do it ....I'd been doing it a short while and I left him because I bought a house next to my mum where I live now; I took the children with me. He didn't want me to do anything like that, dead against. He didn't want me to learn to drive, if you can imagine anyone like that, because it gave me independence didn't it, if I could drive.

The above quote came from the first recorded interview with Sarah, later it emerged that the separation and divorce from her husband was a deeply harrowing and drawn out process but something she was impelled to complete.

Sarah took six years to complete her part-time degree; missing a year because of the divorce and moving house. Interestingly she remarked that when she interrupted many people told her that she would not return to the course, but she never had a doubt that she would return to complete it. Sarah remarks that her children say that an abiding memory of their childhood was of their mother demanding that she not be disturbed as she completed university work. From what Sarah says it is interesting that the children accepted this and have no negative feelings about it.

Their lasting memory of mum doing a degree is me upstairs in the bedroom at home , because I had my laptop there and they go 'Mum'(laughter) and I was 'Shut up I'm trying to concentrate'. They all laugh about that now, but they did support me, yeah, very much.

Sarah describes the day she graduated in the following terms:

I was very, very proud, it was the proudest moment of my life graduating, because I'd fought against all the odds to do that and six years is a long time . ... But it's one of the best things I've ever done in life certainly. **(C&I)**

After graduating Sarah continued to work as a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) at the same school as she had worked when she left her husband. As a graduate she decided to do a PGCE. It would appear that Sarah enjoyed her course and found it rewarding. Again it is interesting to try and grasp how Sarah's identity must have changed over the period of less than ten years between becoming a LSA, entering university as an undergraduate, graduating and becoming a fully qualified teacher.

We will now turn to Sarah as a teacher in Further Education. Towards the end of her PGCE Sarah applied for a teaching job in Thanet and was successful. She began with very high hopes.

‘When I went there for the interview I loved the college, I found it a really nice place with the campus, everything, just the right size. ... I’ve always liked Thanet anyway, I’d been to another college closer to home but I remember thinking I’d sooner travel down and work at Thanet. ... I always liked the college and the campus, the layout and everything. I thought it was a nice compact college’

Sarah was convinced that she would get on with the students and throughout her time at the college she always liked and ‘understood’ them, ‘because of their backgrounds the type of school they would have been to would have been a secondary school similar to where I had been teaching’. A large part of Sarah’s confidence in being able to work with the students she expected to find was due to her certainty that she would be able to ‘care’ for them.

‘I’d been to Thanet; yeah I’d been to Thanet quite a lot. My daughter Carol and I, we always use to go shopping and because you’d see the girls around the town and the boys, it was no different to the children I’d worked with so I knew I’d cope. ... and a caring personality, I knew if I had adults I could do that as well.’

Several things emerge from the way Sarah talks about these students, firstly it is clear that although she sees them as leading lives different to her own or to that of her family members there is only a limited distancing of the students. These adults who are obliged to follow literacy programmes do not appear to Sarah as ‘others’.

It is often suggested that teachers of literacy to adults need to be able to create and develop a bond with their students if they are to be successful. This dimension of literacy teaching does not feature in the descriptions of the profession found in official government literature (‘Skills For Life’, DFEE, 2001 for example). It is commonplace in government publications to find the type of young people Sarah is talking about referred to as NEETs, the acronym for ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’. Although teachers use the expression to refer to their students it is usually apparent that they do so because it is the official designation not because they accept this wholly negative designation. Sarah herself explained that she detested the term NEETs.

It appears paradoxical even oxymoronic that the term NEETS is applied to many young people who attend FE colleges. Clearly if these young people are attending college they are in education. The apparent contradiction is not so difficult to explain. It is the official designation of a 'type' of young person who is still seen in these terms even when the strict definition could not be applied. Effectively what NEET means is that a person is young unemployed and by inference from background circumstances of some poverty. **(C&I)**

When pressed to try and explain her ability to get on with students generally seen as challenging or unrewarding Sarah is not sure what to say:

Goodness knows. I don't. It's always been there ever since I started work at Seaview High ... went as a classroom assistant – and you immediately get put with the worst from the two estates that fed into it ... and lots of children in care there. I don't know it's just part of me that always empathises with them. ... cares for them. Quite often they have nobody else, and I mean *nobody*, to care about them. So ... you don't become a mother figure ... I don't know what it is, but I just wanted to bring out the best in them and show them that there was something in life for them, because they have lost hope.

Again it is worth pausing and considering the term NEETs in order to register the discrepancy between Sarah's appreciation of her students and what we might call the managerialist understanding of the same people as NEETS. **(C&I, M)**

The young people who Sarah taught at the FE college were mostly completing literacy and numeracy qualifications as part of a wider vocational curriculum. Some of her students were young people who had been obliged to leave before they were sixteen but most as Sarah says had left school at sixteen and had entered FE because:

They'd gone into vocational courses because they had nothing to go for. And of course the ones I was teaching on the whole were having to redo their English and Maths, so I would say their secondary schools hadn't let

them down but they just hadn't achieved anything there, because I know how hard it is for secondary school teachers, I've witnessed it for years.

The problem of young people feeling that they hadn't 'achieved anything' or believing that 'I'm useless, I'm crap, I can't do anything' is something that recurs through Sarah's story and clearly causes her anxiety. The picture of the young people who Sarah describes as being at the bottom of the pile in secondary school is truly sad:

I don't know ... a lot of the children I taught in the secondary school, or used to help, it had come from their parents that there was absolutely no hope left there, they said, "there was no point in even trying because there was nothing for them." That was just so wrong I thought what a waste ... you can't be like that. If you could just boost their confidence a little bit it was terrible to have no hope at such a young age to be so negative.

On the obverse side of Susan's anxiety about the young people she worked with is the reward of playing a part in successful attempts 'to turn them around' to give them a feeling of success and purpose. Again somewhat at odds with official policies when Sarah talks about measures of success she looks to a range of indicators of what might be called personal development on the part of her student's becoming more confident, or positive, or even developing the ability to speak and interact with others.

A teacher placing overriding importance stress on what might be called the 'soft development' of student skills is at odds with official college and government policies which eschew personal development in favour of passes in examinations. It is now considered wholly inadequate by most FE college managers and certainly by OFSTED for a teacher to argue for their work in adult literacy to be successful on the basis that students have achieved personal development. Again and again in her interviews Sarah elides what would officially be described as a literacy problem with questions of self worth and a belief that there is a possibility of a purposeful meaningful life. When comparing her days at Sea View High and the FE college what Sarah sees as the importance of belief comes across very clearly.



Sarah talks about the young people at the school who had no belief in anything, least of all themselves. She believes that a significant proportion of the young people leaving the school saw themselves as having no real possibility of achieving something which in life story work is sometimes referred to as 'agency'. Sarah sees the young people who enter college as being from a different milieu even if they might have come from the same schools as the most marginalised and 'depressed' young people. Those who go on to college in Sarah's opinion are mostly those who believe that a vocation is worth pursuing and to some extent we might even say that these students have a belief in their own powers.

Of the young people at the college Sarah talked about how in many ways she saw them as the same people she had taught at Sea View though now they were a few years older. What is interesting here is that except in a very few cases they were not, of course, the same people but young people further along on what Sarah sees as the trajectory of young lives of this type. As I write this I am aware of the problems of the use of the word 'type' (C+I). Working with the young people at the college as they followed vocational courses was a source of pleasure for Sarah when asked which students she most liked to teach she replied:

I liked them (laughing) ... them all actually. I had the community group ... they're all different, so I had everything, I had musicians, I had drama students, cabin crew girls, they were quite something else – I had the chefs, holistic therapy, the artists – artists weren't that keen on maths at all, they were the ones most against it – the boys from wood occupations, the carpenters. I liked them all, I put it down to the experience I'd had in secondary school so I was prepared. Bearing in mind the type of children I worked with at Sea View ... were mainly boys so funnily enough the people I taught at the college had been at Sea View.

Sarah told the story of one young man in particular who had caught her attention in part because he had actually been known to her when she had taught in Sea View. When she had first met this man he had been among the group she believed to be almost without hope. He had been 'permanently excluded' and as Sarah puts it, 'if you had met his

father you would have understood why'. Years later she when she came across him in FE he was training successfully to be a carpenter.

... there was one particular one , he was permanently excluded and he kind of floated around having a bit of home tuition and had been to this special place and not lasted there and there he was down at the college.

I asked Sarah if the young man had been pleased to see her.

Yeah ... (laughter) yes, he was doing well, he was doing wood occs ... wood occupations, and he was seeing his course out, because it was a two year course and he was in his second year, so he survived.

Sarah clearly thought such a young man to be something of an exception. It was her opinion that for most of the group who struggled to remain at secondary, let alone those like him who were excluded, the prospects were very poor. **(C&I, P)**

Sarah particularly enjoyed teaching literacy to people who can be viewed as non-traditional learners in an FE environment. She talks about one project in particular where people from the local area attended classes in the college and she knew that for many of them it took a considerable effort to take themselves into a place which was daunting if not foreboding despite the efforts which go into trying to make it hospitable. She mentions one particular example in which a mother brought her two reclusive children to the college both of the children were in their in the late teens or early twenties. At first they would only talk to each other but by the end of the course they had started to talk to other students and had become 'friends' with some. Sarah felt that such things might sound like relatively modest achievements but in the context in which she worked she felt them to be hugely important as they represented really positive effects within people's lives. Sarah also mentioned evening classes at the college to which older students would come. **(C&I)**

When Sarah talks about her work at the FE college and her earlier work as an LSA at the school the theme of 'poverty' seems important. The problem is trying to formulate an idea of what poverty is or more importantly to try to come to terms with what might be

understood about 'poverty' as reflected in Sarah's account. Certainly Sarah's understanding of poverty was complex. At its core was the idea of a shortage of money, but this was only a constituent factor. Poverty was also connected to ideas of no-one caring about people, lack of belief in oneself or the possibility of 'getting on' and at its widest the idea of a generalised deprivation of which a low level of literacy is but a part. In listening to Sarah and others talking about 'poverty' in this wider meaning I found myself intrigued not only by my own efforts to understand 'poverty' but also my attempts to grasp how 'poverty' is understood by others. (C&I)

Sarah's reasons for leaving Further Education are from a retrospective view clear cut though in the story she tells the actual events and developments which led up to her decision are not straight forward. Sarah explains that the 'teaching itself' was not only 'fine' but 'very rewarding'. When she talks of the aspects of the job which caused the problems that led to her leaving she puts the workload at the top of the list:

I did like the job very much I would have been quite happy to stay there if the workload was doable which it wasn't it was impossible and it wasn't just me because staff didn't stay they just couldn't cope with it. I don't know about other departments but our department they moved on regularly I think when I started in that September 3 had left in the July and I think some have since left since ...

In fact many have left and if anything the workload has increased since Sarah worked in the college. As Sarah went through the list of people she had worked with who had subsequently left I was reminded of the interview with Catherine where she recounted the story of her workplace. Sarah is clear that for her and for most people teaching full time in this area of PCET the workloads are unsustainable. Again and again in all the interviews conducted for this project the issue of unsustainable workloads occurs. Sarah believes that in the long run almost everyone leaves, suffers from 'burnout', or some other type of collapse. She compared the pressures of an OFSTED inspection in FE with those that she had experienced at Sea View. Sarah describes very forcefully how the pressure of OFSTED was like 'an enormous weight':

I definitely couldn't have survived another OFSTED there... I have been through many OFSTEDs many, many OFSTEDs fine okay I couldn't do another one at the college. ... I can tell you that now no matter what they paid me that was just the worst experience ever. I did enjoy my time there yes it was what I wanted to do I enjoyed all the different classes 'cause you know you went into everybody and everything you know like music, art, drama, carpenters, builders it was fine. It was the expectations of workload you know if only it hadn't been like that which is a great shame because I think that's the same for colleges everywhere.

**(M)**

Sarah recounts how a close friend had a similar type of experience in a different FE college where she taught 'childcare' after moving there from teaching in a primary school had a similar experience with the workload.

My friend who was at St Cuthbert's thought she would go for a complete change from (teaching) little ones. She went to a college and she did childcare ... she loved it she was in her element ... she'd always been mad on babies and everything ... this particular friend she liked the girls she found them a challenge very different to St Cuthbert's children. I thought we will see how it goes after a term or so she said this is ridiculous I can't do this you know what they expect of me...

A considerable part of Sarah's workload appears to have come from the need to continually file reports on test data. Oddly it seems as though Sarah had to file this data with the management of the college and with managers or teachers working in the departments from which Sarah's students were drawn. In turn these managers or teachers then lodged the same data with the college management. The result would appear to be that a considerable part of Sarah's job was taken up with testing to provide data and then in a process involving much redundant effort circulating the figures for the results:

... the college's criteria used to drive us mad because it was all figures and this was what we all had directives from above. We had to keep filling in these spreadsheets with all that they had gained and you had to show

improvement all the time on their grades. It was all achievements but then I suppose did they have to do that for the government I don't know. ... They had to do online tests, which is what the college favoured unless the student specifically said I can't do it online, and then they would print off a paper one. This was for the English and maths so they would take the level one first and then when they had achieved a pass in that they would go for their level 2, which was the equivalent of an A to C, (at GCSE) but it was much easier wasn't it? Certainly, the maths there was an awful lot missed out from the...that's not on the GCSE. So life there revolved round improving grades and you always had to try and get them higher for me that did interfere a little bit with me because all I wanted to do was carry on what I had always been doing.

Sarah explains how the students were obliged to keep taking tests in maths and English until they achieved the grades required by the college. Many of the students were very negative about the whole process and complained about the testing:

So some of them were quite negative and didn't want to do it so you would say, "I'm sorry, but you have got no option you have got to do it I'm here to teach you," blah blah, and so on. Then you would get the others who were doing it because they wanted to especially the evening class which I think they have since stopped? ... That was more rewarding because they really wanted to do it so you could really give them help.

Sarah talks about how the 'data' had to be inputted and how this data became the main method by which the college managers, and presumably in their turn OFSTED, judged the 'performance' of the college.

It was all on spreadsheets ... on the system ... so you just input everything. So, you were doing it for your own department skills for life. Then you would be constantly getting emails from heads of all the departments so like care, decorators, carpenters, caterers all the time from them they wanted to know how the students were doing because they had to have it for their records as well so it was like on-going the whole time.

In the discussion later about 'managerialism' several of the key ideas present in Sarah's description of 'the system' will be picked up on. **(C&I, M)**

One relatively minor incident in Sarah's time at the college seems to be somewhat emblematic; at least Sarah discusses it in such terms. Thanet is located on a corner of Kent, indeed it is the most Easterly part of the England save for the East Anglian coast. It is shaped like a triangle with two sides bound by the sea. It therefore has something of a milder microclimate. Sometimes when the rest of Kent has bad weather Thanet escapes it. Sarah lives on the top of ridge of higher land outside of Canterbury. One winter's day during the year that Sarah worked at the college it was not possible to get from Sarah's house to Thanet she called the college to explain that snow had made her journey impossible. The next day when the snow had cleared she managed to reach the college but was asked to further explain her previous day's absence. She was told that she could not be paid for days missed in such circumstances. She was also told that if this was to happen again she must take electronically transmissible images of the snow preventing her travelling and that these should be transmitted to the college. **(M, P)**

Sarah gave a final example of the workload problem in the FE college where she worked. Sarah describes how her colleagues and she believed that the OFSTED inspection process caused them more stress than their divorces. In part this stress was engendered by the fevered, even manic attempts of the college management to try and ensure that they had covered everything that OFSTED might require. To some extent managers preparing for OFSTED have to guess what will be required and it can be argued that OFSTED are sometimes ambiguous, therefore the college managers must try to cover all eventualities.

You could have apportioned a slight blame to OFSTED because any school/college gets nervous when they know OFSTED is coming because if they get a bad OFSTED then it really goes against them. I had the feeling it came from the very top level filtered down to the individual departments, and that was passed onto the workers. It was the worst experience of my life OFSTED at college definitely ...it was the first time ...I had this stress, I'd experienced stress. If you have had stress you might know what it feels like ... there's this hard block of concrete lying

on your chest that doesn't move, it was that before and during, and the line manager was unbelievable, it was just a nightmare.

Sarah recounts how the demands on them in preparation for OFSTED kept growing and in an atmosphere bordering on hysteria no demand was seen as being too extravagant. Sarah tells how she and other members of the teaching staff were asked to produce lesson plans to be able to show OFSTED:

...and then management wanted lesson plans for every single lesson you taught – highly detailed. I don't know if they were checked, but you had to have them ... we were told you had to have lesson plans, really differentiated; you had to show all the differentiation you'd done for different levels. Did the management ever check? I don't know, we were just told we had to have lesson plans. Oh they kept a bank of them; thank God [laughter] or else I don't know what we would have done. So there's a bank of lesson plans and there were like blank copies, but then they all email...or put them on USB's – I've still got them at home – put them on USB's and all you'd do is change dates and names and things, because there was no way on God's earth, I would have had to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to do what they wanted. And then we'd be scrabbling around trying to find resources, worksheets and things, because there was no money really to buy anything.

Here Sarah is explaining how the staff met the impossible demand for lesson plans. The staff e-mailed lesson plans to each other and then changed dates and times etc. As OFSTED would have been unable to check and verify these plans the management demand was satisfied though in a purely formal manner. **(M)**

Sarah explains that she left FE because of the workload, but not without regrets. Sarah is aware of how she achieved a degree and became a teacher and feels that these opportunities are now disappearing for people in the position she once occupied. Sarah's new job is in a private school where she works with students who have learning difficulties. She has especially developed her work with students deemed to be 'dyslexic'. Towards the

end of our final interview Sarah once more returned to the idea of poverty and how so many young people at FE college 'drag themselves up'.

The vicious circle that they've lived through poverty, the majority of them, as a child and what's going to be different for them? I couldn't see anything. So the courses they were on – yes, they would get qualifications, but then the jobs they were likely to be going for would still be fairly low paid, so they'd never...not all of them, but a lot of them would never be able to get out of the poverty circle, I couldn't see it. **(C&I, P)**

Despite these views Sarah is not despairing. She offers no solution to what she sees as the poverty of those she taught in Further Education or Sea View School but as already said whatever the odds Sarah sees the challenge as being fundamentally one of having 'to carry on'.



## Antecedents 3: Marxism and life stories

*Seek for food and clothing first, then*

*The kingdom of God shall be added unto you*

*-Hegel, 1807*

*The class struggle, which is always present to a historian influenced by Marx, is a fight for the crude and material things, without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. Nevertheless, it is not in the form of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They are present as courage, humour, cunning, and fortitude. They have retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers.*

*Walter Benjamin 1940 – Theses on the Philosophy of History IV.*

This chapter sets out to cover three main propositions which it is argued might be taken together to give an outline of a Marxist understanding of how to work with life stories. These three areas are the individual and the social, the abstract and the concrete, and alienation.

In the introductory chapter a case was opened for considering life story work as having as its core purpose the understanding of the processes by which ‘meaning’ is attached to life stories. This in turn requires that very serious consideration be given to what is meant by making meaning. In particular what will be attempted in this chapter is to show some important ways in which Marxism can play a part in understanding the processes by which meaning is made.

The first part of the discussion will look at the idea of the ‘individual’ in Marx and this will be done with a view to demonstrating that the claim that Marx was not interested in ‘individuals’ is wholly erroneous. It will be further argued that a Marxist view of ‘the individual’ offers something to life story work as it allows for a dynamic and dialectical view of the individual and the social. Secondly the idea of the ‘individual’ person will be considered in the light of Marxist thinking on what is termed ‘the abstract’ and ‘the

'concrete'. Thirdly something will be said about Marx's concept of 'alienation' and how this can be used in the academic understanding of life stories. In the case of this project specifically the presentation of Marx's concept of alienation will be made with the intention of later using it as a way to understand and interpret those developments in the organisation of teaching which taken together are given the label 'managerialism'. The three propositions are therefore a Marxist approach to the study of 'the individual', 'the abstract and the concrete' and 'alienation'.

In the case of the three areas outlined, the individual and the social, the abstract and the concrete, and alienation there is a problem which needs to be brought into view immediately. In many areas of his work Marx used terms which were already in existence but they were often given a new meaning. Occasionally these meanings are quite markedly different to their more customary meanings. To make issues even more complex it is not unusual for Marx to use words in ways which give them a slightly different meaning in different contexts.

### **Individuals in society**

Throughout his writings it is clear that Marx was aware that he required his readers to form an understanding of ideas and concepts which differed from those dominant in the society of his time. This meant that although the words used to describe notions had an accepted and established semantic content when Marx used them they often carried a new content and this made demands on the reader.

Friedrich Engels writing in the preface to the first English Edition of Capital in 1886 explained almost apologetically how the reader of Marx's work could not be spared the difficulty of coming to terms with new meanings of words. Engels puts forward the argument that developments in understanding lead to developments in word meaning. These new meanings are unavoidable because they are intrinsic to the entire project of Marx's work. Engels asks the reader to grapple with the way in which certain terms are used in 'a sense different from what they have, not only in common life but in ordinary political economy' (Engels, 1886/1990, p.111). Engels explains how 'every new aspect of a science' must involve a revolution in the vocabulary in which it is couched. That Engels and Marx were aware of how the sense of some key words would be altered by their

work attests to what they both, but especially Marx, saw as the originality of their work. In the case of the three ideas selected here as a basis for using Marxism in life story work the key words also take on meanings somewhat different to those in 'normal' usage. This is definitely the case with the way in which Marx understands 'individuals'.

The 'individual' in Marx is a thoroughly social concept and is not intelligible in the sense of the single person living a life in isolation from their society. Marx ridiculed the idea of the individual as a discrete single person referring to such ideas as 'Robinsonades' (Marx, 1858/ 1993, p.83 and 1859/1970 p. 188) in a mocking reference to Robinson Crusoe who created what was supposed to be a capitalist economy on an island on his own. The dismissal of such Robinsonades was important enough for Marx to make it a central argument at the opening of what were his preparatory notes for 'Capital':

Individuals producing in society – hence socially determined individual production – is, of course, the point of departure. The individual and isolated hunter and fisherman, with whom Smith and Ricardo begin, belongs among the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades... (Marx, 1858/1993, p.83)

Far from ignoring 'individuals' in his analysis Marx posits them 'producing in society' as his starting point. Later in discussions on class and alienation it will be seen that the relationship of individual to the social is of paramount concern to Marx.

### **The abstract and the concrete**

The 'abstract' and the 'concrete' are terms employed in Marxist analysis which cannot be understood at all if by abstract we mean something which exists only in thought and by concrete something which has only a material, real existence. For the moment it will have to suffice to say that for Marx the 'concrete' is pretty much how things are in the real world; always existing in interrelationships and concatenations with other things. The 'abstract' can be understood as referring to elements extricated from the concrete.

Marx made the following remarks which reveal something of how he viewed abstraction when he discussed the money form of value:

... the human mind has sought in vain for more than 2000 years to get to the bottom of it ... Why? Because the complete body is easier to study than its cells. Moreover in the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both. (Marx, 1867, p. 90)

What Marx meant by the power of abstraction is also important in relation to the discussions of Goethe's scientific method. In his writings on scientific method Goethe advocated the study of individual cases as the way to understand the more general. Abstraction occupies a broadly similar place in Marx's method whereby a particular aspect of something more complex is studied with a view to determining how this aspect exists within a wider context.

### **Alienation**

The third idea taken from Marx which will be used in connection with life story work is 'alienation'. Alienation is one of the few terms used by Marx which has passed into general usage (Sayers, 1998, p.39) though in Marx it does not have quite the same connotations of ennui or disaffection present in common usage. For Marx 'alienation' is above all a term used in connection with ideas about how it is that the majority of Humankind see the societies in which they live and their relations to each other and to work not as human creations but as something independent and exercising power over them. In short humans are alienated from the world in which they live. Ennui and disaffection might be seen as results of this alienation rather than something at its core. Three outstanding works of scholarship on Marx's idea of alienation available in English by Bertell Ollman (1970) Istvan Mészáros (1970), and Sean Sayers (2011), each written with insight have been important in preparing the present text. These works have not only been valuable sources but they have also provided a great deal of inspiration. The writers have all approached 'alienation' with a view to making it understandable. For some reason the concept of 'alienation' has attracted the attention of far too many Marxists whose writing was often impenetrable.

### **Marxism and 'particular lives'**

In 'The Auto/biographical I' Liz Stanley discusses the modern origins of life story work in social science. Stanley draws attention to what she says were 'two principles' of the biographical approach which characterised it from its emergence in the early 1980s:

The first was a rejection of psychologically-reductionist accounts of 'the individual', instead insisting that individual people are social and cultural products through and through. The second was the recognition that if structural analyses do not work at the level of particular lives then they do not work at all. (Stanley, 1992, p.5)

To be in keeping with the 'principles' of biographical work as stated here requires that the three Marxist propositions of 'the individual', 'the abstract and the concrete' and 'alienation' need to be applicable in a form consonant with Stanley's requirement that 'structural' analysis works at the level of individual lives. In the present discussion the word 'structural' is used in what is possibly a slightly different sense to that which Stanley had in mind. It is quite possible that Stanley is considering 'structuralism' as a designation of a certain view of history, or sociology. Here the word is used in the related, but slightly more open sense which Raymond Williams employed it. For Williams 'structural' had a key connotation as describing 'the mutual relation of constituent parts or elements of a whole as defining its particular nature' (1983, p.301) What is important here is that in the context of life story work it is imperative that structural analysis captures the mutual relations between lives as lived and a wider social, cultural, and historic analysis.

Below it will be argued that a Marxist approach to life story work can be successful in meeting both of Liz Stanley's requirements. Firstly it must reject reductionist accounts, whether structural or 'agentic', of the individual. Secondly a Marxist approach to life story must show itself to be a viable way in which to analyse how the 'structural' works at the level of 'particular lives'. Marxist analysis can work extremely well but only if approached with sensitivity and creativity. Above all when working within a Marxist tradition this creativity is centred around the ways in which Marxism can be used as a

way of taking some raw data from the life stories and giving it a particular type of meaning.

A Marxist approach to life story work must proceed from the stories and explain them. It would be quite wrong to approach the story with an array of mechanically conceived 'Marxist' categories and then proceed to fit the story into the prejudged and prearranged terms of such categories. It should be noted here that in this use of 'explain' we are entering into the business of attributing certain meanings and not others to these stories. This is not to down play theory but to put it in its correct place of explaining and shaping the appreciation of reality. Theory as Goethe pointed out is no substitute for a genuine engagement with reality. In 'Faust' Goethe has Mephistopheles tell us that 'My friend, all theory is grey, and green the golden tree of life'. An approach to theory which conceives of it as being derived from life and not preceding it is characteristic of many of the thinkers whose ideas have been used in this project. Not only was Marx interested in the work of Goethe but later Lev Vygotsky and, most importantly for life story work, A.R. Luria were impressed by the way in which Goethe sought what we might describe as a holistic approach to science. In the case of Luria this actually contributed to his decision to use what are in effect life stories to present pioneering work in neuroscience and psychology.

A discussion of some of the difficulties with using the term 'Marxist' has so far been avoided, but they are real. It would be possible to feign innocence and simply say that Marxism is the intellectual and practical content of the writings of Karl Marx and at a certain level of thinking this is entirely correct but this statement is really no more than a truism and will not get us very far. This is where the creativity mentioned above must play an important part. To combine a Marxist methodology with life story work requires not the mechanical application of a few quotations taken from Marx and then 'applied' to a particular set of circumstances. To describe someone as a 'capitalist' a 'proletarian' even a 'teacher' tells us nothing. What is important is to investigate and disclose what such a term might mean, to present it in its full social and cultural context. To adopt a Marxist approach to life story work is to try to show how the understanding of some particular lives can be informed by thought and insights from the Marxist tradition. It must go well beyond the attachment of readymade and poorly understood labels. The great promise of life story work for Marxism is that by proceeding from real lives the 'labels' might be given content anew.

If 'Marxism' does not go beyond the mere process of labelling it can be no more than a set of lifeless maxims. Any approach to the problem of how to relate Marxism to life story research which is limited to a mechanical exegesis of Marx's texts will produce nothing capable of 'ascending to the concrete', nothing that can be practically used, nothing possessing meaning.

Nothing becomes true because Marx or those working in the tradition which he originated say that it is true. The truth of Marxism (and indeed any other world outlook) rests fundamentally in its capacity to describe and analyse that which exists. Conversely the movement from that which exists towards theory breathes life into what might otherwise be a rather desiccated scholasticism. Again we might listen to the counsel of the devil talking to Faust 'My friend, all theory is grey, and green the golden tree of life'.

Sometimes attempts to create 'Marxist' scholarship have rested on the gathering together of quotations in an almost scriptural manner. This is related to what Raymond Williams writing in 1976 called 'legitimizing theory' (p.84). In the context in which Williams was writing he was referring to different claims being made by political factions to being the only truly authentic Marxists. The same term, 'legitimizing', might be applied to the attempts by some academics to make their analyses 'Marxist' through the insertion of quotations from Marx. Through a strange symmetry it is also possible to find a parallel process at work in the writings of some who attempt to 'delegitimize' Marxism. In these cases that which is opposed is rendered absurd through the use of quotations which are often poorly understood and taken out of context.

It is interesting to view how creative Marxists approach the development of their studies. Here two instances, both highly relevant to life story work, will be considered. The first is Lev Vygotsky and the second is E.P. Thompson. These two will be looked at very briefly as illustrations of the way in which Marxism can inform systematic (scientific?) principled academic enquiry. Both Vygotsky and Thompson have exercised an important influence over the writing of this thesis especially over the methodology which has been employed. It is in my opinion particularly important that they both sought to work within a Marxist tradition which placed great emphasis on 'meaning'. As has already been said from the point of view of the researcher life story work is essentially about the problem of meaning in the stories told.

### **Vygotsky and Marxist method**

In his attempt to create a Marxist psychology in the second and third decades of the last century Vygotsky came up against some particularly dangerous form of 'legitimizing' theory. With the ascendancy of Stalinism in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union the 'official' Marxist currents became increasingly mechanical and dogmatic. In psychology official Marxism centred on attempts to create a 'science' based on exegesis from a few quotations gleaned from the works of Marx and Engels. Vygotsky was dismissive of this scriptural hermeneutic approach to Marx's work. In his efforts to develop what he saw as a psychological science genuinely consonant with Marxism, Vygotsky rejected any idea of making a patchwork by bringing together quotations, which whilst accurate and insightful enough in their own right were never intended to be the basis of a new branch of scientific enquiry. Vygotsky argued that such an approach could never create a viable basis for a scientific study of the mind.

Vygotsky's position was particularly interesting as he actually paid a great deal of attention to quotations from Marx which might be directly relevant to a psychological understanding. He saw these comments as profoundly insightful and they often provided a starting point for his own enquiry. Vygotsky nevertheless rejected the idea that these scattered remarks in Marx's work could be taken on their own as an adequate foundation from which to begin a systematic study of psychology. Instead Vygotsky argued that it was necessary to 'create one's own Capital'. It is worth quoting Vygotsky on this point:

I don't want to discover the nature of mind by patching together a lot of quotations, I want to find out how science has to be built, to approach the study of mind having learned the whole of Marx's *method*... In order to create such an enabling theory-method in the generally accepted scientific manner, it is necessary to discover the essence of the given area of phenomena, the laws according to which they change, their qualitative and quantitative characteristics, their causes. It is necessary to formulate the categories and concepts that are specifically relevant to them – in other words to create one's own Capital. (Vygotsky, unpublished notebooks quoted in Cole and Scribner, 1978, p.8)



Whilst not forgetting that the above comments are from unpublished notebooks and might not have been intended for publication it is interesting to consider some of their implications. Firstly Vygotsky sees Marx's writings as constituting an 'enabling theory-method'. In other words it is Marx's method which enables scientific study and not the application of quotations from Marx. Vygotsky points out that it is primarily through the use of the method that he plans to proceed and Marx's texts are useful first and foremost as a way of learning about and understanding that method. It is this type of approach to Marx's work which I hope is characteristic of the view with which this present life history project is imbued. Marx's work undoubtedly contains many memorable and profound quotes but the real value of his work comes from and is attributable to the method of thought which it embodies.

It should be noted that in the above quotation Vygotsky places the 'qualitative' dimension of enquiry ahead of the 'quantitative'. This is entirely in keeping with the general direction of his thinking and is particularly noteworthy in the context in which he worked. Vygotsky was often in opposition to the founding fathers of the psychology of 'reflexes', Ivan Pavlov and Vladimir Bekhterev. The majority of Soviet psychologists in one way or another were influenced by the psychology of 'reflexes' in a way in which Vygotsky and those closest to him eschewed. The dominance of the psychology of 'reflexes' could be in part attributed by its apparently materialist basis, this meant that it was seen as being closest to orthodox 'dialectical materialist' philosophical positions. In the Soviet Union especially after the rise of the philosopher Mark Borisovitch Mitin whose work became the accepted, or better said, inescapable orthodoxy (Bakhurst, 1991, chapter 2, and pp. 92-99). For the latter part of his life Vygotsky worked in a climate in which it was dangerous to be seen to question the, officially sponsored and enforced, mechanical version of 'dialectical materialism'. Vygotsky and those in his circle whose approach to psychology was materialist and dialectical in the tradition of Marx's own work therefore found themselves in some danger.

Later we will return to the work of Vygotsky (and that of his close colleague Alexander Luria) but before continuing with the discussion of Marxism and life story work a note should be made of the importance to Vygotsky of 'meaning'. In Vygotsky's 1934 essay 'Thought and Language' (1934/1962, p.5) vital importance is placed upon 'word meaning' as being a fundamental unit of a future psychological science. If a word, either as sound or in its written form depends for its existence on the communication of

meaning then it is this qualitative aspect of the word which is its most important dimension:

A word without meaning is an empty sound, no longer a part of human speech. Since word meaning is both thought and speech, we find in it the unit of verbal thought we are looking for. Clearly, then, the method to follow in our exploration of the nature of verbal thought is semantic analysis ... (p.5)

This very important statement is not generally given the prominence that it would seem to merit. Vygotsky is calling for 'semantic analyses' or the exploration of meaning to be a central part of psychological science. It is also interesting to consider the idea that life story work is also a type of 'semantic analysis' in which the researcher explores meaning in the life stories which are collected. As such life story work takes us very close to part of what Vygotsky understood to be psychology. It was exactly this aspect of psychological work which Vygotsky's collaborator and colleague A.R. Luria was later to develop in his own work on life stories.

### **E.P Thompson, Marxism, Historical Logic and Meaning**

The British historian E. P. Thompson is today well known for a series of historical studies, the most celebrated of which is the 'The Making of the English Working Class' (1963). These studies present a view of history which Thompson was happy to call 'History from Below' (2001, pp. 481-490). Writing after his death the historian Dorothy Thompson said of her husband:

He always acknowledged the debt that he and the historical profession in general owed to Marx, but he increasingly hesitated to call himself a Marxist. He preferred to say that he wrote within a Marxist tradition. (Thompson, D. 2001, p.x)

In hesitating to call himself a Marxist it is reasonable to assume that E.P. Thompson was primarily worried about some of the company he might be seen to be keeping because his work 'The Poverty of Theory' (1995) is not only an

inspired defence of Marxism it is also a devastating critique of Louis Althusser the intellectual forerunner of so many of the, especially, French philosophers and writers, who through a strange process of rejection and continuation of his thought, were to become well known as 'post modernists' (Gutting 2011).

That the critique of Althusser was also aimed at some of the emerging post-modernist thinkers is stated quite openly in 'The Poverty of Theory' (p.3 and pp. 27-28) where Thompson attacks and elucidates the consequences of 'relativism'. Although it is not his primary intention in 'The Poverty of Theory' it is important here to note how Thompson as a historian writing in a 'Marxist tradition' at several points indicates how his viewpoint assumes an 'ethical' and therefore humanist viewpoint which is also connected to the idea of 'meaning' in the study of history. This point will be taken up later and developed further in the context of what will be argued to be 'the necessity of humanism' but for the moment all that is required is to say something about the value Thompson attached to 'meaning' as a factor in writing history.

Thompson argued that the writing of history must always be based on what can be considered to be 'objective' evidence but that it was essential to go beyond this:

When we speak of the intelligibility of history, we may mean the understanding of the rationality (of causation, etc.) of historical process: this is an objective knowledge, disclosed in a dialogue with determinate evidence. But we may also imply the significance of that past, its meaning to us; this is an evaluative and subjective judgement, and to such interrogatives the evidence can supply no answers. This does not entail the conclusion that any such exercise is improper. ... provided we are clear that this rests not upon scientific procedures, but upon a 'choice of values.' (Thompson, 1978. p.55)

It might be possible to question whether or not Thompson's division of the objective and the subjective is overly definite. But this must not obscure the polemical point he is making. What Thompson goes on to argue is that the attribution of meaning to history is an essential part of writing about the past in a form that renders it intelligible, we might even say meaningful. Thompson

makes a number of points about why 'the attribution of meaning' is not a consequence of the historian's fallibility nor a matter of regret but is an important aspect of historical work especially when considering what might be called the role of subjective forces in history:

this is only a special case of a more general question. Only we, who are now living, can give a meaning to the past. But that past has always been among other things, the result of an argument about values. (1978, pp. 56-57)

The importance of values in the past was important to Thompson, and in his opinion to all of us, he argues that such values play a part in our own formation and the understanding of our own history. 'Voting' for one side or another in history is important because it makes history meaningful, and it can be suggested that it humanises history.

Our vote will change nothing. And yet, in another sense, it may change everything. For we are saying that these values, and not those other values, are the ones which make this history meaningful to us, and that these are the values which we intend to enlarge and sustain in our own present. (page 57)

This principle is as applicable to life story work as it is to historical studies. Thompson was motivated to write these lines in response to Althusser's rejection of empirical historical studies as being 'ideological' and not 'Theory' (Althusser, 1969, p.162), but in his assertion of the importance of 'values' Thompson is also, at least implicitly, supporting a humanist approach to history.

### **Marxism, Post –Marxism and the individual**

Sometimes in life story and other closely related areas of research work discussions arise over what are sometimes seen as the conflicting roles of agency and structure. These discussions mirror those of a parallel debate in sociology. On the 'structure' side is the argument that human beings are products of their environment and the social structures within which they conduct their lives or in which their lives are 'inscribed'. On the other

side is the idea of 'agency', based on the idea that humans living in what might be called 'modern' societies make their own choices, lead their own lives and shape their world in accordance with those ideas. Most contemporary viewpoints in the wider social science seek in some way in which to accommodate and combine the two views. In terms of considering Marxism and Life story work the debate is important because ideas of 'agency' are closely linked to those of 'individuality' and in one way or another one of the reasons why many people who believe that Marxism is 'outdated' or of no real use is a tool of analysis is because it fails to deal with the 'individual'.

The debate is an interesting one and the particular approach taken by Marxism is outlined below. Before presenting something of Marx's extensive writing on this point it is necessary to say something about what is said and written about Marx's approach to the agency structure problem.

The arguments drawn below are very important as the post-Marxist line of reasoning they present are still dominant today. There is a fairly strongly established intellectual consensus not only within social science but in the wider political left that Marxism has been demonstrated to have very significant shortcomings as a world outlook, a point which is returned to later in this chapter.

About a quarter of a century ago in Britain a significant number of left-wing intellectuals who were defined, indeed they often defined themselves, as post-Marxist (Steadman-Jones, 1983; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Hall and Jacques, 1989) developed far reaching criticisms of Marxism. The journal of the Communist Party which, with ever growing irony, which was named 'Marxism Today', became an important platform for many of these post-Marxist views. The post-Marxist trend was somewhat wider and more complex than what was represented in the journal but 'Marxism Today' exercised an important symbolic and organising role for the most important figures within the post-Marxist left. This influence could be attributed in large part to the remarkable; some would say inexplicable, support it received in the wider media which, then as now, characteristically displayed an atavistically hostile attitude towards what were recognisably left wing ideas but could be quite indulgent towards 'post Marxism'. The peculiar history of many of the post-Marxist intellectuals, many of whom had been significant figures within the Marxist left, led to their opposition to Marxism being particularly fierce.

One of the key criticisms of Marxism made by post-Marxist critics was closely related to the agency and structure debate. Marx and Marxism were accused of believing in a type of structural or technological determinism. Stuart Hall, for many years a leading British academic sociologist and champion of 'post-Marxism', edited and contributed to a collection of essays entitled 'New Times' (Hall and Jacques, 1989). In this collection Hall wrote that :

Classical marxism depended on an assumed correspondence between 'the economic' and 'the political': one could read off political attitudes and objective social interests and motivations from economic class position. For a long time these correspondences held the theoretical analyses and perspectives of the Left in place. However any simple correspondence between 'the political' and 'the economic' has now disintegrated – practically and theoretically. This has had the effect of throwing the language of politics more over to the cultural side of the equation (Hall 1989, p.121)

Those around Marxism Today were certainly enthusiastic in their rejection of Marxism and the embracing of 'New Times'. The exuberant headiness of this passage from Stuart Hall probably explains three of its important features all of which are uncharacteristic of his writing. Firstly it is starker in its intentions than most statements of post-Marxist argument. Hall himself was at most times brilliant at conducting polemics with studied equivocality, a characteristic noted by both Ellen Meiksins Wood (1986, p. 2-3) and Terry Eagleton (1996). Secondly, it contains elements which are starkly, and indeed clumsily, contradictory. In this quote Hall seems to be saying both that in the past there was a correspondence between the economic and the political, and simultaneously that there was only an assumption of such. Thirdly it sets out several important facets of the misrepresentation of Marxism which emerged with post-Marxism and which continues to exercise an important influence today. It will also be noticed that it implies that 'classical Marxism' leaves practically no room for agency in that it supposedly holds that 'the political', 'political attitudes and objective social interests and motivations' could be 'read off' from 'economic class position'. In other words we are told that classical Marxism assumed that people's 'political attitudes ... objective social interests and motivations' could be read off from their economic position. This would constitute a

very crude form of inscription. We are told that the 'simple correspondence' which was assumed (or not) has now 'disintegrated-practically and theoretically'.

Within 'classical Marxism', which must mean Marx's writings, it was never assumed that there was a direct correspondence, nor anything like it, between the economic and the political let alone a correspondence in which political attitudes etc. could be 'read off' from the economic. Marx's writings on this make his position clear and it is hard to understand how Stuart Hall could have been unaware of the many examples in Marx's work in which a worldview entirely opposite to what he claims to be his position is set out. Throughout Marx's work whether it be as a young man writing about the thefts of wood from the forests in the Rhine provinces, to very late in his life when he is writing about the unpredictability of the future in Russia he is in a very real way looking into social and cultural phenomena and the complexity of their relationship with what he might have referred to as 'the mode of production'. Across his work Marx rejected ideas of simply 'reading off' from the economic; indeed had he believed that such a thing was possible his work would have been largely unnecessary, as he himself remarked 'all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided' (Marx, 1887/1991, p. 956). If Marx had believed that there was a 'simple correspondence' between 'the economic' and 'the political' much of his own work would have been superfluous; it would only have been necessary to analyse economics as the political could simply have been read off from such an analysis. This would also apply to Marx's thinking on the relationships which in contemporary terms are posed as the 'agency' versus 'structure' debate.

The above comments should not be taken as a denial of the existence of Marxist dogmatism. Hall goes beyond the rejection of dogmatism arguing that all that is vital in Marxism has 'disintegrated – practically and theoretically'.

Among those engaged in life story work there is sometimes a disdain for Marxism. It is not unusual to hear people talk about Marxism, or related ideas such as 'class' as being limiting or reductionist. The presentation of Marxism in a dogmatic manner and intolerance towards alternative viewpoints among some Marxists has undoubtedly played a part in creating this disdain.

Reasons for rejecting Marxism are often grounded in a misapprehension of what Marxism is, this is sometimes due to an unscholarly acceptance of what is said about

Marx and Marxists in the place of an engagement with original sources. To keep with the above line of thinking I would argue that it is above all the influence of the post-Marxists which prevents many people looking for alternatives to the ideas dominant in our society (and most people working with life stories would accept being so described) from seeing Marxism as a valuable resource. This is particularly sad when it comes to life story work as Marx was above all someone who believed that the purpose of his scholarship was to develop an understanding of human history. When once asked for his favourite maxim Marx answered 'Nihil humani a me alienum puto' which might be translated into English as 'I consider nothing human is alien to me' (McLellan, 1973, p.430). This might be a suitable motto for a life story researcher.

#### **Marxism and the Individual**

Life history researchers collect and interpret the stories of individuals. At all stages this is a profoundly social process. The 'identities' of those whose stories are collected are social, the meanings of the stories are social, the languages in which the stories are told are social, and on the part of the researcher and the researched the categories of understanding and re-presentation of the stories are social. The life stories themselves are the way they are because they tell of a life lived within a definite sets of social circumstances at distinct historic times and in particular social settings. Yet life stories themselves are individual, each different from the next in important ways.

In the minds of those who tell the stories their story is seen individually and tells of their own personal story. Even when listening to life stories which are bright and positive the researcher might be struck by how the individual recounting their own life story seems to be not only telling an individual but even a 'lonely' story. At certain points in their life stories several of the storytellers in this project described periods of their lives when this individuality was so intense as to engender feelings of solitude and of isolation from society.

It is exactly this relationship between the social and the individual which life story work seeks to understand. To use Liz Stanley's expression 'individual people are social and cultural products through and through' (1990, p.5) and it is this interplay which must be explored. Liz Stanley's use of the word 'product' is something which must be explored as



it has connotations which are probably not in keeping with the arguments that Liz Stanley puts forward more generally.

If we are to keep a meaningful idea of the word 'individual' then care must be taken with the word product. Although individuals are very much of their social and cultural context they are not inevitable 'products' of this setting in the way that 4 is ineluctably the product of 2 multiplied by 2. This is no small point as related issues in the work of some Marxists have resulted in what appear to be arguments that 'individuals' are products of society in ways very similar to that of the example given above from elementary arithmetic. This type of conception of the individual reached something of an apotheosis in the work of Louis Althusser (see for example 1965, pp. 89-116) and was integral to his thinking. It was exactly this idea of the individual as a mathematical type 'product' or 'vector' of an 'economic base' which was subjected to fierce critique by E.P. Thompson (1978). In Marx the relationship between individuals and society, we might almost say between structure and agency is far more complex.

In 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' Marx (1859, pp. 20-21) outlined his view of an important aspect of the relationship between individuals and society. There are two reasons for choosing this work. Firstly, it is a central work of Marx's oeuvre, and he himself referred to 'Capital' as being the continuation of the work he had started in this earlier volume. It is also one of the places in which Marx talks about 'a legal and political superstructure' coming into existence on the foundation of the economic structure of society (Marx, 1859/1970, p.20). This is sometimes rendered in a crude and totally unacceptable way as 'the economic base determines the superstructure of a society'. This latter formula takes us close to the idea of people living out lives as 'vectors' of the economic base. A closer reading of the particular passage in which the talk of 'economic structures' and 'political superstructure' appears reveals a far more subtle picture.

### **Thefts of Wood from the Rhenish Forests**

In his introduction to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' Marx explains briefly how this work and thinking developed after 1842. As editor of the 'Rheinische Zeitung' Marx explained that he found himself 'in the embarrassing position of having to

discuss what is known as material interests' (1859/1970, p.19). This particularly arose in the reporting of debates in the *Rhenish Landtag* over thefts of wood from Rhenish forests. Marx found the debates disturbing not only for their injustice but because the collection of fallen wood had been an ancient right (Adams, 1965, pp.62-66; McLellan, 1970, pp. 95). It was in part through the consideration of the 'material interests' behind the new laws that Marx began a critical review of Hegel's philosophy on questions of law and jurisprudence. This might seem a little overly recherché but it is important to the argument here on two counts.

Firstly what was happening to the Rhenish poor who depended on the fallen wood for winter heating was very much linked to processes involved in what was to become Marx's understanding of alienation. An ancient right to 'the commons' was being taken away or alienated, but there was a further aspect to this alienation in that the creation of new law appeared to be something other than the actions of a group of men but appeared as a reified unveiling of something that was eternally ordained. It was this type of problem which led Marx to first consider the related problems of 'alienation' and 'fetishism'.

Secondly the Rhenish timber theft laws led Marx to 'a critical re-examination of the Hegelian philosophy of law' (1859, p.20). Marx in his youth and in his early period as the editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* had been associated with the left Hegelians (McLellan, 1969). In philosophical terms the young Hegelians were idealists believing that the development of ideas within 'civil society' was the moving force of history. When considering the timber theft laws and other questions Marx came to an understanding that the material influence of activities in the areas analysed in political economy which were determining of social and cultural processes. Following Althusser (1965, pp. 51-85) it was at sometimes fashionable to talk about an epistemological break within Marx's work which separated the young Marx from the mature Marx. Key to this supposed break was Marx's purging his work of the vestiges of Hegelian philosophy. This is important because in the Marx of Althusser there is little or no room for the development of a rounded idea of the 'individual' instead classes and individuals become the 'product' in the sense already discussed of an 'economic base'. Althusser put the date of this 'epistemological break' at 1845 when Marx and Engels wrote 'The German ideology' and Marx his 'Theses on Fierbich'.

That Marx's thinking developed and to some extent changed during his adult life is beyond dispute. If proof was needed of this it should suffice to point out that the first volume of 'Capital' went through innumerable drafts and that the second and third volumes despite years of work were in various stages of incompleteness at the time of Marx's death. This is not what Althusser would have us believe. According to Althusser it is not until after 1845 that young Karl became the mature Marx, at this point the development of his thought was practically complete and therefore ceased. It is as though after 1845 all Marx has to do is fill out the implications of his discoveries. The real Marx did not and could not have ever believed in any such closure.

Writing in 1859 Marx (1859/1970, p.20) looked back on the period following his editorship of the Rheinische Zeitung, his exile to Paris and his deportation from there during which time he continued his 'critical re-examination of Hegelian philosophy of law'. He described the results of this study in the following terms; the extended passage in which these are found must be quoted in its entirety:

My enquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society'; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. (Marx, 1859, p.20)

This formulation contains some important but often overlooked aspects. Firstly Marx is pointing not only to the depth of his break with Hegel but also to its limits. Put simply, whereas Hegel put the totality of the material conditions of life under the term 'civil society' for Marx the 'anatomy' of this civil society was to be understood through the study of political economy. Marx here seems to be expressing not only the materialist fissure which separates his thinking from that of Hegel but also the continuity between them. It would also appear that for Marx legal relations and political forms 'originate' in the material conditions of life. That he talks here of origins implies that there is also an important role for development from those origins. Marx continues:

The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows. In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness. (1859/1970, p.20)

This passage too can be given a narrow interpretation, that Marx is talking about how the economic base determines (as a product) the legal and political superstructure. This was precisely the interpretation which Stuart Hall imposed on Marx when he wanted to knock down a straw man.

Classical marxism depended on an assumed correspondence between 'the economic' and 'the political': one could read off political attitudes and objective social interests and motivations from economic class position. (Hall,1989, p.121)

In such a formulation it is not possible to see much, if any, space for the idea of agency, or the individual. But a closer look at what Marx is saying is revealing. Firstly, Marx is talking about 'guiding principles' to be used in harmony, and only so, with empirical investigation. Secondly, where Hall talks about 'economic class position' he implies something far more brittle and narrow than what is present in Marx's work. Something of the complexity of Marx's conception may be seen in the idea that the economic structure is in turn 'constituted' of the 'totality of relations of production' or the 'social production of existence'. Later in the passage quoted above Marx talks about how the 'mode of production of material life conditions social, political and intellectual life' the choice of the word 'conditions' is itself significant had he wanted to he could have used 'produces'. What emerges from this is that for Marx 'relations of production' encompass something far wider than narrow 'economic class position' and would appear to take in social life in its totality.

It is now time to consider how the 'individual' fits into this picture of the 'social production of life'. We have already looked at how 'individuals' come into existence socially through language, culture, socially organised activity, etc. indeed the whole socially constructive world within which an individual exists goes into their creation as a social being. But within each of these spheres people confront the social world individually and often reflect on it likewise. Although each person who confronts their social world is also its creation this does not remove the individual dimension of their experience.

In 1844 some fifteen years before writing 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' Marx together with Engels had produced a book for publication entitled 'The German Ideology'. Significant sections of the book remained unpublished until well into the twentieth century. More than forty years after the failure to publish the original edition Engels wrote about how he and Marx had been forced to abandon the manuscript:

'We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose – self clarification. (Engels, 1888/1974, p.335)

When Engels says that the main purpose of the text became 'self clarification' and that looking back on it showed 'how incomplete our knowledge of economic history was' (p.336) he is at once truthful and also a little too modest. 'The German ideology' is full of spectacular insights and to the outsider the authors' process of 'self clarification' is itself fascinating. What is particularly pertinent to the discussion here is that Marx and Engels approach the relationship of philosophy to reality (p.41) or what they call the 'First Premises of Materialist Method' (1846-1974, p.42) from the viewpoint of the 'individual'.

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their own activity. (Marx and Engels, 1846/1974, p.42)

There are a myriad of problems left to be explored before a rounded understanding of 'the individual' can be formed but this 'First Premise' is a solid basis from which a materialist philosophy might initially proceed. What is essential to this analysis is that this premise offers a dialectical solution to the problem posed in Life Story work as the structure/agency problem.

We have the individual, albeit a socially formed individual 'finding' already existing material conditions. These material conditions should not be understood as only really material things but also social relations, culture, history, science etc. indeed everything which the individual encounters as objectively existing reality, that is everything that has an objective existence vis a vis the individual.

We could take innumerable examples to illustrate this point but here we will take only two. The individual in our modern society will encounter the concept of economic 'value'. Every time a purchase is made, every time a person considers what they think would be a 'fair' level of remuneration for their labours, every time they recoil in horror at the price of a small flat in London they are encountering and working with notions of value. They encounter value as something existing objectively in the world yet as Marx was fond of saying we could scour the globe with a net of finest mesh and we should never come across a scintilla of 'value' yet it exists objectively.

A second example to illustrate the objective, material existence of the 'immaterial' might be gender-relations. Any person participating in our society (or indeed any other) will find that relationship of gender exist objectively. Types of work, working relations and payment are all likely to be affected by issues of gender but outside of the workplace childcare, care in general, sexual mores and censure; along with innumerable other social phenomena will also be 'gendered'. Every individual woman, and indeed man, will encounter these relations of gender as endlessly complex but very definitely objectively existing. Gender is essentially about relations between groups of people. These relations might have material consequences but their primary objective existence is social and non-material.

Within this 'First Premise' it will also be noted that among those material conditions which 'individuals' encounter are those 'produced by their own activity'. Again it is necessary to understand 'their own activity' as being a very wide category; it might be the activity of an individual, a group, a class, a nation or indeed the whole of

humankind. Again we could consider 'gender' in terms of what it might mean as a material condition created by 'activity'. In contemporary Britain women encounter gender very much as a creation of their own activity and that of others.

A woman working as a nurse will encounter 'gender' as something created by others and indeed to some extent by her own activity. It is worth considering what some of these 'material conditions' might be. First of all there will be the culture of being a nurse as created historically. These cultures our nurse will encounter as being objectively given. It matters not that these cultures might be extremely complex, and contain elements in contradiction with each other. For example in Britain today there is still the idea of the nurse as an 'angel' in conflict with the view, created largely as a result of media campaigns, of the nurse as someone who now considers herself above dealing with bed pans (Delingpole, 2009), or as someone who as a result of 'feminism' has become too self important to care for patients (Phillips, 2011). The latter view appears to be tied in with a visceral misogyny which extends well beyond nursing but which of course has a bearing on the cultural world in which a nurse lives. Each individual woman working as a nurse will have to negotiate her own course around these types of vision as well as those from her own nursing 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). The idea of 'community of practice' becomes wide ranging as people here interact with multiple communities of practice each intersecting and being interwoven with many others. The smallest community of practice is the single individual when they interact with themselves. This might sound strange but it is actually simple in principle. For example when making individual decisions about many things we are influenced and learn from past social experience, or we apply and adapt lessons from one area of life to another. The nurse already discussed will learn about which particular contexts in which it is possible or expedient to challenge, or not, gender stereotypes. The course our nurse steers will in part constitute her identity as a woman and a nurse. In turn her identity as a woman and a nurse will determine, in part, how she manages and interacts with different cultural and historically formed visions of what a nurse is. The picture becomes very complicated but it allows for a dialectical solution to the problem posed as the opposition of structure and agency. What actually emerges is that the counter posing of structure and agency is in fact a misrepresentation of things as they are in the world.

It might be argued that the focus on the 'individual' in 'The German Ideology' was something that Marx moved away from in what are sometimes called his mature writings. There is plenty of evidence to show that although in writings such as 'Capital' the focus is on wider social and historic questions there remains a concern with individuals. 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852/1966) contains a famous formulation of the interplay of structure and agency:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted by the past. (p.398)

One way of reading the 'Eighteenth Brumaire' is as an examination of the role of the individual in social events. Just how important this is in Marx's estimation emerges in his introduction to the book. Marx points out with his customary modesty how apart from his own there were only two other writings on the subject of the rise to power of Louis Bonaparte worth attention; one by Victor Hugo and the other by Joseph Proudhon. Marx criticises both books. In the case of Victor Hugo Marx claims that by concentrating on the role of Bonaparte and not paying attention to the historic circumstances surrounding his rise to power he makes him appear as 'great instead of little' (p.6). Proudhon very interestingly is criticised for not recognising the 'agentic' role of Bonaparte:

Proudhon for his part seeks to represent the coup d'état as the result of antecedent historical development. Unnoticeably, however, his historical construction of the coup d'état becomes a historical *apologia* for its hero. Thus he falls into the error of our so-called *objective* historians. I, on the contrary, demonstrate how the *class struggle* in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part. (p.6)

Marx and Engels in 'The German Ideology' relate 'real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live' to the idea of a 'mode of production'. Some time will be spent considering this as need to look at the ways in which some authors disconnect lives examined in Life History, auto/biographical, or narrative work from the real conditions of the society in which those lives are lived.



Here for the sake of space we must assume that the proposition that we, and those whose lives will be the subject of this study, live in a capitalist society. From the point of view of the individual entering out into the world she will find there that objectively capitalism has ordered things in a particular way. As Marx and Engels put it:

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. (Marx and Engels, 1846-1974, p. 42)

For Marx and Engels what is being proposed here is a further working out of the 'First Premise of Materialist Method' that the way in which real material life is produced determines the nature of society. This then becomes 'the mode of production' which is not the empty dogmatic phrase which it sometimes appears to be. The mode of production is the way in which societies reproduce themselves.

The mode of production must not be considered simply as the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of the activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. (emphasis as in original, Marx and Engels, 1846/1974, p. 42)

In the terminology of some modern sociologists what Marx is saying here is that not only are the lives of individuals inscribed within the mode of production but the activity of those individuals is also constitutive of the mode of production. Later in his work Marx developed a rather more poetic and evocative metaphor for what is described here:

In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence over the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialised within it. (Marx, 1858, pp. 106-107)

Life Story work always starts from the stories of the individuals and for this reason it and other kindred forms of research are sometimes criticised for not being sufficiently rigorous in their sample size or selection methods. A common element to this criticism is that in Life Story work we can never be sure of how 'representative' the stories are, allied to this is the idea that research must be based on large samples. Viewed from what might be described as a Marxist tradition this particular criticism is hard to understand. Firstly looking back over the argument made above each individual life story is itself above all an expression of a social and cultural history, both that history and the particular lives studied can be viewed in the 'general illumination' of the overall society. Of course it is necessary to understand individual lives in wider theoretical terms, often in terms unfamiliar to those whose stories are examined, but the examination of these lives offers empirical material on which to base consideration and investigation into the nature of the society which is constituted by the activities of these lives and of which they are expressions.

#### **The Abstract and the Concrete**

Throughout Marx's writing reference is made to abstraction, and the abstract, or to 'the concrete' or 'real material conditions'. The relationships between the abstract and the concrete are from being straightforward, their investigation and a sound understanding of the dialectical relationship between them is at the centre of Marx's materialist approach to the study of history, political economy, and wider questions of philosophy. Yet it is central in a way that often escapes many Marxists and certainly those who would oppose this way of trying to understand 'reality'. Rarely does Marx explicitly deal with the abstract and the concrete, and as far as I know they are never neatly defined. In general, as we will see, Marx's method works against any such finished or complete definitions. Yet the whole of Marx's is based on the relationship between the abstract and the concrete. A useful way to look at the dialectics of the concrete and the abstract is through the study of the consequences of a one sided and abstract presentation of 'class'.

Many significant aspects of Marx's work are never expressly defined in terms that will satisfy 'positivist' criteria. In addition to the concrete and abstract never being 'adequately defined' we might also cite 'class' and what is today called the 'philosophy

of internal relations' (Ollman, 1970, pp. 27-42; Sayers 2012) as being prominent examples of Marx's failure to delimit ideas with Comtean rigidity. The example of class has a particularly interesting if convoluted history which cannot be fully explored here though it is worth making space to highlight some of the peculiar consequences of searching for definitions. The failure to understand what 'class' means for Marx can produce some extraordinarily strange results and is also illustrative of the consequences of substituting abstraction for the concrete. There is in fact an extremely strong tradition of 'Marxists', 'post Marxists' and 'anti-Marxists' entirely missing the point of Marx's presentation of class precisely because they get into a muddle over the 'abstract and the concrete'. It is salutary to go back to a time before 'post -Marxism' to get a glimpse of one of its precursors. It would be possible to go back even further than the example selected here but Dahrendorf is offered because of the strange resemblance between what he argues and elements present in postmodern and post-Marxist writers who may know nothing of his work.

Ralf Dahrendorf was an important figure in European, especially British and German, sociology for much of the second half of the twentieth century, he was the only person to have been a parliamentarian in the Bundestag and at Westminster and by any measure was an important influence in post war 'Social Democrat' political theory. Perhaps the most important of Dahrendorf's publications was 'Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society' (1959). Dahrendorf points out that Marx never produced a 'systematic exposition' of the 'theory of class' (p.8) because he repeatedly postponed doing so as he sought to refine his 'empirical' analysis. Dahrendorf draws the reader's attention to an unfinished chapter in the third volume of 'Capital' (Marx, 1894/1991, Part. vii., Chapter 52). He then completes this chapter himself using quotes, often fragments, from other pieces of Marx's writing. The final 'systematic' presentation of Marx's theory of class is approximately half Dahrendorf and half Marx:

Classes are based on the differences in legitimate power associated with certain positions, i.e. on the structure of social roles with respect to their authority expectations ... An individual becomes a member of a class by playing a social role relevant from the point of view of authority ... He belongs to a class because he occupies a position in a social organisation; i.e. class membership is derived from the incumbency of a social role. (p. 149)

E.P. Thompson drew attention to the inadequacies of this definition by pointing out that it said nothing about how individuals get into a particular 'social role' nor how the 'social organisation' came into existence (Thompson, 1963, p.10). In fact what Dahrendorf has done here is to abstract the idea of 'class' from any sort of context in which it actually 'happens' in the real world. This one sided and impoverished abstraction is then substituted in place of a concrete presentation of class.

In his 'The Making of the English Working Class' Thompson (1963) sets out to provide a concrete analysis of the 'Making' as 'a study in an active process' owing 'as much to agency as to conditioning' (p.8) and he presents the above quotation from Dahrendorf as not being historical. We can go further in our criticism of this abstraction. Class can only exist as a historical and cultural phenomenon its existence cannot be separated from the processes by which it comes into existence and continues to exist. To return to Dahrendorf: We might ask how did these 'differences in legitimate power' come into existence? By what processes is this legitimation and, very importantly, de-legitimation of power continued? How is authority and therefore subordination brought about? How are these social roles brought into existence? Why do these social roles assume specific forms? What does it mean 'to belong to a class'?

Attempts to understand and present 'class' in a formal and abstract way certainly didn't end with Dahrendorf. A survey of some leading names in sociology who believe themselves to have moved on from class shows that in many ways the problems of Dahrendorf's presentation of class are present in contemporary work.

Ulrich Beck talks about how 'individualization' has replaced class as defining social relations within 'Risk Society' (Beck, 1992, and Beck, 2009). Beck's analysis is akin to that of Anthony Giddens (1991, 1998, 2000, and 2010) in that it sees what he calls 'individualization' being imposed on 'individuals by modern institutions' (1992, p. 95). For Beck 'individuation' is something which Marx was aware of but which he rejected in favour of 'class':

The individuation of social inequality may be regarded as the exact mirror image of the Marxian position. Processes of individuation as I have described them, can only become entrenched when material immiseration, as the condition for the formation of classes predicted by Marx have been *overcome*. (1992, pp. 95-96)

Basically Beck is arguing is that the processes by which class is created have changed and therefore it no longer makes sense to talk about class. Leaving aside what might be seen as the dubious empirical grounds on which Beck rejects class it is an extremely strange argument to say that if some aspects of the process by which something is created have changed therefore that thing no longer exists. Indeed if something is imposed on 'individuals by modern institutions' would it not be the case that common patterns in the imposition and consequences of these circumstances would themselves constitute something which could properly be called 'class'. most importantly it would seem that we have seen enough from Marx in the above passages to know that he viewed the processes that Beck calls 'individuation' as being very much part and parcel of the experience of class. Zygmunt Bauman (1991, 2000, and 2007) appears to share much of the analysis of Giddens and Beck but, in my reading at least, his indignation at what might be called injustice puts him apart. Bauman when discussing the threat to humanity posed by unrestrained consumerism talks about the indignities suffered by those people who are collectively and contemptuously referred to as 'the underclass' (Bauman, 2007, pp. 122-123). Reading such passages it is not easy to understand why, or even if, Bauman rejects notions of class.

The basic point of these arguments about the abstract and the concrete as it relates to an understanding of class is that in the examples provided above from the field of sociology the fundamental approach to investigations of class start from what could be called 'academic' abstractions and then proceed through stages to ever thinner abstractions. This is precisely the analytical procedure which Marx constantly argued against perhaps most concisely in the 'Grundrisse' (1857-1858, p.100). Marx points out how political economists typically took the starting point of their analysis to be 'population'. For Marx this was a profound error as it was necessary to look at what made a 'population' if any understanding was to be achieved. Marx therefore advocated an approach which would proceed from an investigation of the elements which made up a 'population' and how these elements interacted in order to see how the 'population' had a real concrete existence. This is exactly the path advocated by Vygotsky in psychology when he called for the investigation of units or elements of psychological science to be part of a process of 'ascending to the concrete'. It is also the way to understand the concept of class. Class is not a category which pre-exists and to which people are designated. Class exists as relations between real people and the circumstances of their lives.

The dialectical relationship between the abstract and the concrete is very much present in life story work. The lives of humans are above all concrete phenomena and to echo the point made by Liz Stanley if abstractions do not have an existence at the level of particular lives then they do not exist at all. Conversely how abstractions for example 'class' exist in particular and actual lives, and how this is reflected in the narratives of those lives, provides a vital and concrete starting point for investigation.

That life stories reflect the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete is also brought out in ways of which those telling their life stories might be completely unaware. Later on in this thesis there is a discussion about 'place' in life stories. In the last decades the economy of Thanet has experienced a decline relative to that of other areas of England and in particular to much of the South East. The people whose life stories are examined here would be very unlikely to attribute the relative poverty of Thanet to capital flows or to the idea of the extraction of surplus labour. In many of the stories here reference is made to the decline of the British seaside holiday and how that affected the economic health of Thanet. The construction of enormous tourist complexes in Marbella or The Algarve, the explosion in holiday air travel etc. the disappearance of Butlins or the present dilapidated condition of the Margate Winter Gardens, the absence of any significant commercial shipping from the port in Ramsgate, or the bankruptcy and closure of Thanet International Airport are very real consequences of the movements of international capital. The profits to be made from employing the people of Thanet are not in many cases sufficient to attract large investors. It could almost be said that in Thanet the economic tide ebbed in the sixties and seventies and has yet to flow. If 'value' exists for Marx as an abstract form (albeit one with very concrete consequences) it has certainly had an impact on the lives of those whose stories are told here even if they themselves do not see the problems of Thanet or indirectly therefore their own lives in such terms.

### **Alienation**

The last Marxist category to be discussed here in terms of its bearing on life story work is alienation. It has been pointed out that the widespread use in English of the term 'alienation' is largely attributable to the writings of Marx, even if the term is used most often in a sense very similar to that of 'ennui', this particular meaning being related

though different to that intended by Marx. In the translation of two German words 'entäussern' and 'entfremden' which have different (though related) meanings the word 'alienation' has been most often been used as the closest English equivalent though at times the word estrangement might also be encountered (Williams, 1983 pp. 33-36; Sayers, 2011, p.ix). Here alienation and estrangement will be used interchangeably. For Marx alienation has a particular meaning and an importance which is all too often overlooked. The most explicit references to alienation appear in earlier works of Marx and in particular in the 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844' in his later works the term appears rarely if at all in his work intended for publication though it is used to a considerable degree in the 'Grundrisse' (Sayers, 2011 p. xi).

The full importance of the concept of 'alienation' is not easily or immediately understood upon reading those passages in which it is explicitly mentioned. The passage in which Marx talks most explicitly about alienation occurs in his 'Economic and Philosophic manuscripts of 1844' in a chapter entitled 'Estranged Labour' (Marx, 1844a, pp. 69-84). The book itself was not published in Marx's lifetime. Even among many who justifiably consider themselves to be Marxist it is not always understood that in these passages Marx is presenting an idea which underlies all of his subsequent writings. In the 'Manuscripts' Marx takes an idea which was present in the work of Hegel in an idealist guise and re-presents it in materialist form (Sayers, 2011, p.5). Sayers points out the extent of the continuity as well as the rupture existing between Marx and Hegel's concept of alienation. For Marx the human condition under capitalism is one characterised by alienation but as Sayers points out 'The historical theory of the self is one of Hegel's great achievements' (2011, p.10). For Istvan Meszaros (2005, p.18) it is with the development of the concept of estranged or alienated labour in a materialist form that 'Marx systematically explores for the first time the far reaching implications of his synthesizing idea – 'the alienation of labour' – in every sphere of human activity'. In the key texts by Meszaros himself (2005), Ollman (1971), and Sayers (2011) it is exactly these far reaching implications of 'alienation' which are examined. In this project in the context of life story work with a small group of literacy teachers the implications of the theory of alienation as the 'historical theory of the self' will be examined.

In 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844' Marx presents what might be called four facets of the alienated condition of humans living within capitalism. The first form of alienation was that of the alienation of the worker from the product of labour 'the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien object*'. Here we need to make careful note of what Marx is arguing because when he talks about the 'product of his labour' Marx is not simply talking about objects which are created from materials in the process of production. For Marx such objects are the realisation of the labour process. It is in this process that the worker comes into being and exists socially: work creates the worker. The life of the worker, as a worker becomes real, takes on form in exactly those processes of work. This itself constitutes a second facet of alienation as

estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the act of production – within the producing activity itself. How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself?  
(Marx, 1844a/1998, pp. 73-74)

Something of the extent of alienation or estrangement of labour under capitalism should now be emerging. That part of humanity which is in a vast majority under capitalism, the labouring classes, is estranged not only from what it produces but also from the process of its production.

These two facets of alienation; from product and from the process of production will be used in the later chapter on managerialism in the lives of the literacy teachers examined in this project. In the chapter on 'Estranged Labour' (Marx, 1844a/1998) Marx mentions two more facets of alienation which are inextricably linked to the two already mentioned; Man's alienation from what Marx calls 'species being', and the alienation of man from man. Although in this project the focus will fall most heavily on the first two forms of alienation any reader of the 'Manuscripts' who is not hell bent on creating rigid taxonomies will see that all four facets of alienation fold into each other through very profound internal relations.

For Marx alienation from the product of labour and from the process of its production leads on to the alienation of man from his 'species being'. This latter term needs explaining. Marx argues that humanity itself, all that we hold to be truly human, as opposed to animal, in humankind has developed on the basis of the productive work to



transform the things found in the natural world so that life itself may be sustained.

Elsewhere Marx refers to this as:

...the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature imposed condition of human existence, and it is independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which humans live. (Marx, 1887/1890, p.290)

This evolving relationship to nature is what has brought and constitutes what we might call human development. It is this uniquely human relationship to the natural world that has made us, and continues to make us, human. This relationship to the natural world, the way in which humankind interacts with the natural world has evolved in history and has passed through various forms. The particular features and overall type of this productive relationship with the natural world constitute what Marx calls the 'the mode of production'. As has already been argued for Marx the 'mode of production' shapes the whole ensemble of social relations in which individual humans live. The 'mode of production' therefore constitutes 'a definite form of the activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. (Emphasis as in original, Marx and Engels, 1845-1846, p. 42).

In the 'Manuscripts' Marx argues that production, understood in the widest possible sense, is the expression of human life itself, therefore it also lies at the heart of what it means to be human. It is this which Marx refers to as humankind's 'species being' and alienation from this constitutes the third facet of alienation:

In estranging from man (1) nature and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labour estranges the species from man. It turns for him the life of the species into a means of individual life. First it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form. (Marx, 1844a/1998, p.76)

A little later in the same chapter Marx almost in the form of an aphorism describes an effect of this form of alienation which will resonate with everyone who must sell their labour power to secure a living ' Life itself appears only as a means to life'. Certainly for

all the adult literacy teachers interviewed as part of this project it is evident that their work whilst it formed and shaped their whole existence also appeared 'only as a means to life'. For these teachers as for so many others 'life itself' appeared to be principally an activity which took place in their free time. Paradoxically the teachers in this project all spoke of an enormous commitment to their students. That it has come about that 'life itself', 'labour', or 'species being' appear to most humans only as a 'means to life' and not as 'life' itself might well be seen as something very strange. It is in the very nature of the thing being discussed that it should simultaneously appear to be both normal and alien.

In the argument which Marx develops alienation of man from 'species being' engenders the fourth facet of alienation the 'estrangement of man from man' (p.78). We have already argued that for Marx all human relations, even those which on the surface, appear to be most personal or private are in reality profoundly social. Putting this argument another way we might say that all human social life exists as a relationship to other humans. If man is alienated from his 'species being', the production processes, and the product of his labour then it can only be the case that man is also alienated from other men.

If a man is confronted by himself, he is confronted by the other man.  
What applies to a man's relation to his work, to the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other, and to the other man's labour and object of labour (Marx, 1844a, p.78).

Crucial to this argument is the idea of alienation from 'species being'. If this form of alienation exists then it is logical by extension that man being estranged from that which essential to his own existence as a human being must be estranged from his fellow humans. Each of these fellow humans is, of course, similarly estranged from their 'species being'. In the chapters which follow this, especially those on 'Class and Identity' and 'Managerialism' the wheels of 'alienation' will be whirring away in the background. Alienation is indeed a strange thing so omnipresent as to rarely be apparent, it appears in the life stories here in much the same way that it is present in a Brecht play. Alienation is most apparent when there is the promise that though humane agency it might be overcome.

## Paul Beer

Paul recently retired from his post as an FE lecturer and although he misses contact with students and colleagues he is happy. He is now able to spend time doing things which were not possible whilst he was working. When he talks about being retired he points out that it was not until he retired that he fully realised how much of his time and energy was spent working. Now he enjoys walking and gardening. Paul's wife continues to work for a small local company. Paul's children work as school teachers in Thanet. I spoke to Paul occasionally whilst he was working and meeting him now, after his retirement, I am impressed at how much younger he appears. In his voice there is a brightness which I do not remember. It was the final decade of his career when Paul found himself teaching 'literacy' in a Skills for Life form but as he pointed out in our interviews this was only the new name for it. Looking back Paul thinks that he taught 'literacy' in one form or another for almost two decades before it became known as 'Skills for Life'. **(C+I)**

As the interviews progressed I became aware that Paul was very much an 'observer' and as he observed he made mental notes. Much of what he noted would have been considered unimportant by most people but in our interviews Paul enjoyed piecing together his thoughts and as an interviewer I had a very strong impression that although he was happy to talk he was very much in control of what he was and was not saying . **(C+I)**

When Paul had first been approached he said that he would be interviewed in Canterbury one afternoon when he would have to go shopping. He explained that he would find out when the shopping trip was planned and he would tell me so that I could arrange a place for us to meet. A few days later he got back to me, we arranged to meet in the student refectory. It was the week before the end of term, with Christmas coming it seemed as though all classes had been cancelled. I set up the tape recorder as Paul looked out of the window. In the few minutes it took to get ready darkness fell. Paul was very cheery and appeared to be relishing the opportunity to tell me his story.

Paul gave great importance to the type of details which other people I have interviewed do not mention. When discussing the problems of the ill fitting windows in the college

he had taught in Paul told me how it was possible to pass a piece of paper between the window pane and the frame. Although this must have happened some 25 years before I knew that this detail had been remembered and was a fact which had been stored so as to be produced in discussions such as this. **(P)** When talking about changes in the curriculum Paul was determined to establish whether something happened in 1981 or 1982, or to give the exact year when 'O' levels became GCSEs. Paul was also very concerned that I did not form, as he saw it, an incorrect understanding of what he said. When discussing the broad question of whether it was better to work in FE in the 1980s or today he was very clear about it being better before but insistent that I should listen as he explained that it was not possible to give a simple one dimensional answer. In our discussion this was a theme he returned to several times.

As I worked through the transcripts of Paul's interviews I became aware of how painstaking he could be when trying to ensure that my impressions of what he was trying to say were as close as he could make them to his intentions. Another key, related theme, which emerged was Paul's insistence that 'more time was needed' for things to be learnt or understood. At several points in our interviews Paul drew attention to insufficient time being available for discussion, for the teaching of courses, or the drawing of conclusions. When listening to Paul I was aware of my own impatience at certain points. Paul would explain things in what sometimes felt like excessive detail. Reading back over the transcripts I began to question why I felt that this detail was excessive. Where Paul gave detailed explanations it could be justified. An example would be Paul's explanation of the renaming of a department sometime in the eighties from being the 'General Education Department' to being the 'Academic Studies Department'. Although Paul did not make the point explicitly I feel that this 'detail' was in fact very important. The 'General Education Department' taught a range of arts, science, and social science courses as part of what was considered to be necessary for a rounded general education. With the renaming there was a strong implication that these 'general' subjects were now being viewed as specialist 'academic' subjects.

Paul drew attention to how over the years, the curriculum of the college had become much more concentrated in vocational subjects with 'general' and 'academic' subjects becoming marginal. He also pointed out how the expansion of the 'Skills for Life' agenda signalled that literacy and numeracy were seen increasingly as necessary support for

vocational preparation rather than as entry points to the 'Arts' or 'Sciences'. It would not be an exaggeration to say that today in the college Paul worked in any teaching which is not demonstrably 'vocational' is seen as being indulgent. **(C+I)**

Paul in response to my prompts in his interview responded differently to the questions about his personal life story and professional life story. Paul began with the story of his professional life and then went back to so to speak about the time before that. He especially remembered his own difficulties in school and later in university and it was easy to see how these might well have shaped his attitudes towards his own students.

Paul came into teaching through what he now considers to be 'a bit of a fluke'. He had graduated from University in London in the mid 1960s. His degree was in Engineering and had things gone differently he would have continued to study for an MSc. in the same subject. At the time of his graduation Paul had a girlfriend who was completing a PGCE and together they planned to emigrate to New Zealand a country for which Paul had always held a fascination. Paul took up what he calls his 'historic' summer job working on the cross Channel hovercraft. He applied for a PGCE at the Institute of Education in London so as to be close to his girlfriend but never received a reply. Canterbury Christ Church offered him a place for the following year as his application was late and so Paul decided to stay on in Thanet working on the hovercraft and living at home. At this time wages for most workers involved in Channel crossings were considered to be good and certainly compared well with similar work based on land. As Paul points out the downside was the pattern of shift working. Many saw the shift work as disruptive of personal life as it was not unusual to spend days or even weeks away from home. For a young man trying to save money for a life abroad the higher wages were attractive. **(P)**

In the autumn after completing his degree two crucial things happened in Paul's life. The relationship between Paul and his girlfriend came to an end. From his description it appears to have petered out rather than to have come to a clear finish and although it must have been a serious thing at the time Paul now talks about its ending without great feeling, it is now important only in the explanation of how he entered the world of FE.

Shortly after the prospect of a move to New Zealand disappeared Paul noticed an advert in the local newspaper for someone to fill a temporary post as a science teacher at his local FE College. He applied and heard nothing during the weeks leading up to Christmas. Immediately after New Year's Day Paul received a letter asking him to attend an interview on the first Thursday of the year. He did so and was asked to begin work on the following Monday which was the first day of term. As Paul told his story he pointed out that when comparing FE as it was before and now this is a feature that has never changed: the managers are aware of something that needs to be done, in this case to find a replacement teacher to cover maternity leave, nothing is done for months, and then at the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, or 13<sup>th</sup> hour, there is a frantic rush. **(M)**

Paul explained how the ferry company were as helpful as they could be allowing him to swap shifts, take leave, work weekends etc. so as to provide them with something like his expected period of notice. He began work on the Monday after his interview and taught at the same college with one three year break (while he taught at a similar college) for the rest of his working life. Remembering the chaos of the first months and the College's inability to prepare for the maternity leave despite having several months' notice Paul pointed out that

So I duly had my welcome letter from the principal and from the county authorities. I got my contract for essentially a probation and it was followed up a year later with the full contract or permanent let's say. So that is where, how I started at the college .... in terms of planning, anticipating, and getting things in place so that not everything is a last minute rush to interview and appoint people not a lot has changed.'

In other ways according to Paul much has changed. Paul received a letter from the college and the local authority offering him a post which he says, had an air of prestige and permanence. Paul contrasts this to his latter days in FE when people, including him were regularly asked to re-apply for their posts. As Paul pointed out his 'silver book' contract had disappeared by the mid nineties.**(M)**

Although in his interviews Paul never talked in such terms the end of his dream of moving to New Zealand with his girlfriend and the start of his work at the local FE

College meant that Paul was never to leave Thanet again for any period longer than a holiday. His walking and interest in local affairs meant that he developed an extraordinarily acute appreciation of its geography, buildings and street names.

Paul describes his early years as a lecturer in very positive, though realistic, terms. He taught on a range of courses most of which took him away from the area of expertise in his first degree, but he enjoyed this and more than once in our interviews pointed out that in those days there was 'time' to prepare and develop courses. For Paul what was especially important appears to have been the contact time which lecturers had with students. Paul specifically mentions how on 'A' level courses tutors had seven and a half hours a week of contact time plus more time set aside for library study periods whilst 'O' level students had hour and a half hours per week per subject. Paul feels that this is far better than the teaching time allowed for similar courses today. **(M)**

Paul talks about his first experience of teaching what today would be called 'literacy' as happening when early in his career he along with 'a team of about six or seven of us' was asked to put together a programme of CPVE. Paul remembered the acronym of the course but it took a little while to remember the full title which was Certificate in Pre Vocational Education. As Paul puts it the course was designed for 'the awkward squad ...the disenchanteds. It was almost an attempt to create an alternative curriculum'. From a contemporary perspective it is interesting to note that the team of six or seven were given a week to design and put together a course. From what Paul said I understood that as it was a new venture for the college the six or seven were given a week without other teaching duties to prepare the course, furthermore they were given almost complete freedom. They had to create a curriculum 'for the students basically to do whatever we could to engage them'. According to Paul this was in the early 1980s and represented the first attempt by the general education department to engage with disaffected young people who were not at a level from which they could study the 'O' level curriculum. Today teachers would be unlikely to be given this much time to prepare their own course. **(M)**

Paul spent the best part of the next three decades working with students who had left secondary school without the qualifications deemed to be the minimum necessary to progress in education. Paul felt that in the early years the students he worked with,

although they were at least nominally the same as those of later years were in fact more open to 'education' although officially classed as 'disaffected' or similar. As Paul puts it:

Even if they were those that had got grades, 'O' level grades, they would be head and shoulders above the sort of typical entry on the new college programmes these days. Pro- rata ..... I mean I'm convinced of that. **(C+I)**

It is notoriously difficult, if not impossible and pointless to try and compare today's students with those of past years but it is important to consider carefully the opinion of a teacher who dedicated so many years to the education of the 'disenchanted'. Paul would occasionally despair of the young people he worked with but he never spoke of them disrespectfully. From the interviews it emerges that Paul believes that on the whole more of the young people he worked with in the latter days of his career were more deeply 'disengaged' and more thoroughly estranged from the world of learning than had been the case in the early part of his career.

Paul was made Course Leader for CPVE, because of the mixture of students in the class including some who were slightly older than him the average age of the class was a year or two less than his own age. Among the students of those early days Paul gave particular mention to students who he assumes now were in Britain as refugees he particularly mentioned Iraqi women, and Thai students who he believed were also refugees. In one particular case he mentions students from Thailand:

I will say this out loud we also had a fair number over the course of two or three years who were from Thailand at the time that Thailand had its considerable convulsions...no one knows....I know I had one lad who was quite badly scarred , one can only imagine what might have gone on.

Paul either knew or assumed that this young man was a victim of torture. What remained with me was the deep loathing which Paul felt towards any idea of torture. His compassion for the young Thai was mixed with incomprehension Paul could not conceive of being cruel to anyone. It was also apparent that he was shocked that a probable victim of torture could be present in his class in Thanet. Paul also pointed out that the well recognised contemporary problem of hostility towards 'foreigners' in



Thanet was less noticeable 'back then'. Whilst Paul was very consciously determined not to be racist, and was angered by 'foreigners' being treated as he believed unfairly he like others interviewed for this project objected to Thanet being treated as a 'dumping ground'. **(C+I)**

In the College at this time lessons were at fixed times and a bell sounded the end of each lesson, there was also a lunch hour and the last bell of the day sounded some time after four and marked 'home time'. I am not aware of any contemporary FE college using the bell system to organise the day. Paul also drew attention to some extraordinarily large classes in the eighties. He particularly remembers one particular 'A' level law class with over fifty students. As Paul talked about the early eighties and the beginnings, for him, of what he saw as literacy teaching it is evident that although he thought that the contemporary situation was poorer in most regards his memories of the early eighties are certainly not of a magical lost time. Indeed when talking about the life of a teacher in Colleges prior to incorporation, before the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1993, Paul points out that in some regards incorporation improved things considerably. When comparing modern college buildings to those he worked in prior to incorporation he said the following:

Forget the buildings the only room with double glazing in it was the old operating theatre. ...one of the double glazed units was half full of water, the walls beneath the windows were absolutely saturated, shelves had been put up with ordinary steel screws , these screws were totally corroded inside three years , very often we had water coming in through the roof ... you could pass a sheet of paper between the glass of the window and its frame , the temperature would vary from being unbearable and not being able to cool it sufficiently in the summer to being unbearable because in winter you wouldn't get a temperature much above zero.**(M)**

As Paul spoke about the these conditions I had a feeling that the point about steel screws rusting out within three years was a fact he had stored for about twenty years . Paul liked facts. I know he has an interest in map reading and now as I read the transcripts of his interviews I feel that these 'facts' function as a landmark does for an

orienteer. Whatever might happen one's present position can be calculated through the triangulation of facts.

In the less than perfect world of FE in the 1980s but he seemed to think that, for him at least, there had been more of a sense of purpose and a feeling of belonging to a college he says of the part of the college which dealt with academic subjects:

there was a buzz, a very, very good rapport between the staff and the students and I think it was probably quite different to the rest of the college the fact that we were separated ... there was actually...there was actually quite a difference between the business and the general studies sections both between staff and outlooks and between the students but the feel was very, very good, very positive.' **(C+I)**

Paul did not find it easy, perhaps not even possible, to give an explanation of why he felt there had been such a positive atmosphere in the eighties though it was clear that he felt that this was certainly not the case in later years.

When Paul talks about the old style of 'pre – incorporation' management of the FE college he worked in terms which defy easy categorisation. He very definitely does not see the past as a disappeared golden age, and he talks about certain aspects of the past in terms which are really daunting. More than once he talks about 'County' in very critical ways. Whatever criticisms are levelled against post incorporation college management one never hears from Paul, or indeed anyone else, any hint of a lament for the passing of 'County' control. Paul was aware that when he talked about 'County' and the organisation of the college before incorporation that most of his colleagues found such talk recondite, quite possibly tedious. I too found myself challenging the same feelings as Paul spoke, I asked myself 'how is this relevant' and then came a realization. The historical depthlessness of contemporary thinking within Further Education is itself a product of the new order. There is no past; each new initiative bleaches away without trace that which it replaces and there are few people who hold the memory of 'that' which came before 'this'. **(C+I, M)**

As an instance of the type of thinking of the old management of FE Paul recalls how staff

members at the college in the early nineteen eighties were not allowed beards. Academic staff were allowed moustaches but even this was not permitted in the catering section of the college. Paul told the story of a member of staff in the catering section who worked continuously with the public and who suffered hair loss through illness. The principal of the college insisted that this man wear a wig. As his hair grew back the principal continued to insist that he wore a wig as during this man's recovery his own hair re-grew somewhat patchily. As Paul tells it:

He had alopecia .... and obviously had lost all his hair, and he was effectively bullied into having to wear a wig. Which probably...That was a knock down .... for somebody bald headed it probably wasn't a particular problem or issue for him at that early stage, when there was a total loss of hair, but when his hair started to grow back he actually said he didn't want to wear the wig because obviously he was hoping that his hair would fully grow back, it never did unfortunately. **(M, C+I)**

Paul remembers the principal as being aloof, perhaps even imperious. The staff had little to do with the principal who would come into classrooms when taking visitors around the college offer no greetings to students or the teacher and then would leave without an introduction, apology or explanation:

If the principal walked in a room everybody stood up to attention in the classroom, there was no by your leave from him in terms of 'oh, excuse me' or whatever, if he was showing guests around he would just walk into a room with the guests, talk to the guests and so on and show no recognition of the teacher..... **(M)**

Paul remembers that the principal had been a steward and he believes, but cannot be sure, that he had no background whatsoever in education. This is itself an indication of the nature of the regime as Paul was generally fastidious in finding out about the credentials of senior managers. Even though Paul did not like the principal he recalls an incident when a member of the support staff was concerned about his wife who was suffering from a serious illness. This member of staff seems to have been permitted a great deal of time off work without loss of pay. When the man returned to work the principal enquired after his wife's health. What is remarkable about this is that for Paul

this contrasts with what he believes would happen today. Paul tells the story in the following way:

He was a steward that was his background, who rose to become principal of a college. Now whether he was a steward on the boats like a certain Lord Prescott or a steward in some other respect I don't know. I mean I always found him aloof; he rarely visited the site where I worked anyway. But one of our sort of construction technicians would not have a bad word said against him which would suggest another side and the fact that when this technician's wife was very ill the principal said 'well why are you here, go on home' and when he came back he did enquire and so on so there is a different sort of cultural, social, time element to it but there again you see, the principal is the figurehead, and that authority figure, and that wouldn't be unusual, even though that was the seventies into the eighties, that wouldn't be unusual for that sort of authority figure. That sort of deference in society was still around. **(M)**

Paul's generally positive memories of teaching literacy before the incorporation of the college are certainly tempered by his recalling that 'county' was scarcely an inspiring employer and his attitude toward the pre-incorporation management of the college might be described as disdainful.

Paul could scarcely be drawn into talking about the college management after incorporation. I assumed that he found it difficult. He was prepared to discuss teaching and changes in what he saw as the type of work done by teachers. Away from the tape recorder he said to me things such as 'You know what it is like' or 'I'm retired now so it doesn't matter'. Nevertheless he would from time to time pass comments on things at the college which signalled a mixture of despair and loathing but above all an encompassing disappointment. Towards the end of the last interview Paul responded to a question of mine about contemporary managers and expressed an opinion that they managed as though they were not part of the college. The college was the thing they managed without caring about what it did. As an example of such an attitude Paul told the following story which clearly delighted him as it encapsulates an outlook which he found mystifying.

In the early days of OFSTED inspection, in preparation for their first inspection the college managers prepared a Self Assessment Report (SAR). The managers understood that OFSTED took a dim view of colleges rating themselves too highly as this would indicate that they set themselves standards which were too low. An order was given out that each section of the college was to grade itself no higher than '3' on a scale of one to seven, most departments were given clear orders to grade themselves as '4' and to give a plan of how they would 'pull their socks up'. It duly passed that almost all the section managers graded their section or department of the college as a '4'. Overwhelmingly the college officially graded itself as mediocre. Paul laughed as he recounted everyone's surprise when they discovered that the managers had awarded themselves a '1' for 'Management and Leadership'. As Paul said to me 'get your head round that'.

At a point quite late into our conversations Paul started to talk about the historic dimension of his link to Thanet, going back to a point before where he had initially started his story in his graduation year.

Paul was born in London but his father worked in the British colonial administration in Guyana. He thinks that he first went to Guyana when he was two when his mother joined his father. He stayed in Guyana until he was ten and remembers his final summer holiday visit to London in 1963. He saw his trips to Britain as visits to a foreign country which was nevertheless his parents' home. Paul's grandmother lived in Thanet but Paul knows little about her. Her father had been wealthy and owned several garages. Paul believes that he was ruined by problems with tax with the result that Paul's grandmother was left nothing in his will. Through some strange process which Paul knows nothing about 'a couple' left Paul's grandmother a cottage in Ramsgate. Paul believes that this happened in the early 1950s. Paul also knows that his grandmother worked through the war years in the NAAFI at RAF Sandwich a radar station long since disappeared but which was crucial during the war years for its part in 'Ground Control Intercept'.

Paul's father decided to leave Guyana a few years before independence sometime around 1960. Paul was ten. He remembers that his dad wrote several hundred of letters of application for posts in Britain. Every night he drove to the main airport to post his

letters and to receive the latest newspapers which he would then look through and begin again the cycle of letter writing. I found this small fragment of Paul's story to be very evocative. I imagined the junior colonial official driving his Morris Minor each night to the airport in the tropical sunset feeling increasingly desperate about his return to the country whose interests he was serving so far from home:

... he was working for the British government and then subsequently contracted through an agency with the Guyana government, people employed at the time he was were on a year's notice, and in that year he wrote hundreds of letters, he had a car, so he was able to get the daily paper, he would go out to the airport to get that day's paper, see the adverts, he would then write, he wrote hundreds of letters in that year, and had absolutely nothing. He came home about three months before the end of the notice period so he took his leave until the end of his notice. **(C+I)**

Paul was sent back to England slightly ahead of his parents. He started to attend a boarding school in Westgate-on-Sea. This was to be a fairly miserable experience. Catherine whose story is also told here attended another, more up market, boarding school in the same small town. According to Paul there were at that time several of these boarding schools in the area. It appears that his school Canterbury House was run by retired army officers who Paul thinks were probably not trained teachers:

... the actual buildings they were never owned by the family who ran the school, they actually owned the house just off the seafront. But, so by chance I ended up there and I know my parents looked at other boarding schools and in fact this may be interesting in the way that it was run or not is the fact that I wasn't even, wouldn't have been considered for other boarding schools because I couldn't read. **(C+I)**

Paul does not understand why he had the problem with reading but it seems to have been traumatic. From about the age of seven Paul's parents had been aware of his problems as he had not learnt to read in the colonial schools. Paul revealed that when his parents tried to place him in a prestigious public school in England he was asked to

read at the initial interview. When he failed the headmaster was dismissive and this spurred Paul's father to try to teach him to read.

I went to one close to Canterbury I don't remember exactly what it was called then but that was one of them. I remember being interviewed and then them wanting me to read something and I couldn't, I think that maybe the one where the head was so – 'oh you can come back again when you can read' that sort of thing. And thereafter my father tried to teach me to read in the front room at my grandmother's cottage with me in tears and apparently my mother and my grandmother in tears in the back room because I was in tears in the front room.

Paul believes that he has never been able to read as well as most people though he does talk about being able to 'struggle through' things today. He never reads for pleasure. He revealed that he read his first book when he was either eleven or twelve years old. The book was 'She' by Rider Haggard, he read it because 'it was on the shelf' at his grandmother's house and he was drawn to it because it reminded him of the jungles and mountains of his childhood in Guyana. Paul feels that his problems with reading can be of some use to him when he works with students who experience some broadly similar problems.

I could always use the lack of reading with students who are very poor readers and so on and even today, I mean I tend to read every word, if I read anything, I read every word, if I'm under pressure If I'm trying to prepare something for class then yes I can skip, filter out what is the most important, but I don't read for enjoyment generally ... to actually read books is very rare, there needs to be some reason for doing it because I don't tend to read for enjoyment in that manner but I've been able then to use that I suppose when I have worked with students.

It is not possible in this excerpt from a transcription to capture the emotional intensity of Paul's remarks about his struggle with reading but it is clearly something which he still views as a major shortcoming and in particular his dislike of the attitude displayed by the

Paul Beer

headmaster with his 'oh you can come back again when you can read' was full of a sad redolence.

Paul progressed through secondary school without too many problems as he excelled in maths, technical drawing and more practical scientific type subjects. He recalled his schooldays without enthusiasm and at times appeared to find discussing this as tedious; the only sparkle which entered his account was connected with cricket which he played well.

As we approached the final part of our last interview I tried to draw Paul out on the subject of the changes he had witnessed in his work. I asked if he thought the college had been a more or less liberal place when he started compared to when he retired from working.

... there's a yes and a no. Now you had the chairman of the governors, so he was almost always there, there were six people, I think it was six, certainly and there were staff members whose opinion counted. The meetings were clerked by somebody from KCC (Kent County Council I.J.) and the principal was there. You could discuss virtually anything but remember of course the college was run by county ... sort of more democratic in a sense...If you had issues you could discuss them there and if the governors saw fit that there was a genuine issue, they wanted it resolved and they directed the principal. **(M)**

Against the idea of a more 'democratic' college Paul had already offered the story of the staff member forced to wear a wig and the disregard shown by the principal when entering classrooms. One unexpected and counter intuitive opinion which Paul offered was that the college of the days before incorporation was a place where relations between staff and students were closer and easier than is the case today.

'it was quite liberal in terms of the relationship between the staff and students because the staff room was next to the refectory which was the common room for the students. If we were walking through the students could always collar us'



It is worth noting that in many FE Colleges today there is no staff room as such, but Paul points out that in the past the staff room would be full before classes started, at lunchtime and for a short period after classes finished in the afternoon.

In our final interview Paul Beer set me the task of trying to understand how the management of the college in which he worked could have awarded themselves a 'Grade 1' for 'Management and Leadership' whilst insisting that the college which they managed could not be graded higher than a '3'. Like the story about the wig, and the story about the screws rusting after 3 years Paul had clearly saved this story and relished setting me the problem of trying to understand how this could happen. It was his final comment on the college leaders and when he told me about this episode he asked me to 'figure it out'. The challenge has been fruitful and offered a way into thinking about 'managerialism'. Paul's is at the heart of the chapter on 'The management of illusions'.

In trying to sum up Paul Beers comments story there is a real risk of imposing judgements on events and developments which are not Paul's. He was reluctant at most points to say anything which could be seen as definitive, his declared reluctance to say whether the college was more or less liberal today than before is a good example. I am prepared to hazard one opinion in summation. I think Paul felt that over his working life the sense that in some ways the college belonged to its staff and students was reduced and in its stead there was a strengthening of the feeling that the college staff worked for the management. In my mind this contributed to what I felt to be Paul's feeling of disappointment over how things had worked out in FE.

## Susan Moore

Initially Susan appears to be a person who could be quite tough if she thought it necessary. As our discussions continued and I felt that I was getting to know her better this toughness appeared to be a defence: necessary for a person who revealed herself to be gentle and idealistic working in an environment where those qualities might be exploited. As I talked to her and later listened repeatedly to the recordings and read and re-read the transcripts of our interviews I felt that Susan had made firm decisions about what she would say, and the areas she was, and was not, prepared to talk about. My feeling is that she kept to this. I wanted to know more about some parts of her life but I did not try to frame questions which would lead into these areas, if I sensed that Susan did not want these to form part of the discussion. When I had got to know Susan better I ventured a question about her being slightly reticent and whether she had held herself back at the start of our discussions. She was aware of this and explained that my impression that she held back was perhaps accurate.

I think I do. Yeah, I think I do. I think I'm a bit of a free spirit and, it depends who I'm with really, I kind of like to observe the situation before I let myself go, if that makes any sense. If I feel comfortable with people then yeah, I am me, if not I'm quite quiet.

I had explained to Susan that the research project was concerned with the lives of literacy teachers living and working in Thanet. She intended quite reasonably to treat this as a type of brief and what she said largely kept to this.

Susan is in her forties. I have seen Susan in her place of work and the impression there is of someone far more circumspect than is the case when I have met her for these interviews. She has a striking appearance and the clothes she wears to work and her overall presentation are probably more restrained than they would be if she had a free choice. As she said above she gives the impression that when necessary or advisable she is adept at muting herself in order that she should not stand out in a way that would attract attention.

Susan appears to keep her home and work life separate. Although in the interview it was necessary for Susan to traverse this division I feel that the text we produced would in her opinion be overwhelmingly rooted in the territory of 'work'.

Susan comes from Sandwich a small town with a history stretching back at least to Roman times. It was still in the twentieth century a busy though small port and even today there is trade conducted through the harbour. Sandwich appears genteel to the visitor, it is home to one of Britain's most exclusive golf courses but as in almost all of the towns along this coast there are huge and widening social divisions. A modern visitor might never guess but at the time Susan was growing up in Sandwich many working people depended on the coal industry for employment. Today the area's largest former employer the Pfizer chemical works has all but shut down and the future appears uncertain for many. Sandwich is on the very edge of Thanet and less than two miles outside of the town the now ruined Richborough Fort formed part of the Roman Saxon Shore defences.

Susan did not go into detail when discussing her early life, and the picture formed is very incomplete. Her mother died when Susan was young. Susan's father was a senior army officer who moved around a great deal.

... my father was an officer in the army and I spent most of my childhood with my grandparents because I didn't like travelling around so my grandparents were the stable influence in my life and my granddad was a builder and my Nan was the stay at home sort of housewife.

Given the seniority of her father's rank it is a little unusual that Susan describes her grandparents as being modest people, and I was struck by the word 'nan', it is not a word usually associated with the way senior army officers address family members. Susan lived with her granddad and nan whilst her brother attended boarding school. Susan did not want to move away from her home and she also believes that her father did not see education as important for young women

...my dad's opinion was that you know girls didn't particularly need an education that if you were going to work it was for pin money so that was

kind of the influence on my life really. That you would get married and have children, your husband would look after you and all that sort of stuff.

(C&I)

Susan summed up her relation with her father in the following way 'My father and I don't get on, we don't see each other'. Susan seemed to view it as impossible to even maintain a viable, let alone rewarding, relationship with her father.

From Susan's comments it would appear that she has chosen to live a life which does not accord with her father's idea of what a woman's life should be. Exercising what she sees as her own choices she has become anathema to him. In the transcript there are indications of problems from an early age but it seems that the rupture with her father reached an irredeemable intensity at around the time she left school. As Susan puts it 'I grew up and I met other friends and saw a different way of life, moved out of home and you know, joined CND'. Susan's father implacably rejected her life and what she believed in. Susan enjoyed her time in CND and attended festivals and other events which according to her 'my dad really disapproved of, really, really disapproved of'.

For a senior British army officer having a daughter who was active in CND during the cold war would in all likelihood have appeared tantamount to her having decided to betray her country. It must be remembered that at this time it was believed within the senior ranks of armed forces that CND was a 'Soviet Front', and British Military Intelligence officially framed it as an 'enemy' organisation. Given the seniority of Susan's father's rank it is very likely that he would have been expected to explain his daughter's participation in CND as he was of sufficient seniority to have been routinely 'actively' vetted by the secret services. (C&I)

Susan was not a successful school student she left school after completing year 11, without having achieved any really successful results. It was not that Susan particularly disliked school; it seems to have simply been the case that school passed her by, she simply left at 16. Susan did not say anything more about her family's attitude to her failing to get much out of school. Her father's outlook has already been noted and it would seem consistent for him to have not seen any problem with her lack of academic achievement at school. What is unusual for someone who appears to have been

somewhat disengaged is that Susan says that she enjoyed school and had really nice teachers. It is hard to believe that anyone in a conversation with Susan would not be impressed by her intelligence.

After school Susan worked 'in factories like most people did where I came from' (P, C&I). Susan began what might have been a promising career in the clothing and textile industry. At first she made clothes for Marks and Spencer but it would appear that she became skilled at working with textiles as she later worked in a specialist company 'making samples for Liberty's and places like that'. This area of work is in general notoriously low paid given the high levels of training and skill required at all levels. In many ways the 'top end' where Susan was working is relatively most poorly paid of all as it requires high levels of skill which are not paid much, if at all, above the industry average. Susan must have shown considerable ability to have been working in such a specialised area at such young age. Making samples for Liberty's would indicate that she might have succeeded at the 'top end' of textiles and work as a seamstress. (C&I)

At this time, and Susan can't remember exactly how or why it happened, she started to work in old peoples' homes and she 'loved it'. This seems to have been something of a turning point in her life and from the text of our interviews it would certainly be reasonable to postulate that from this stage onward the story of Susan's working life takes on a recognisable direction. Before working in the old peoples' homes Susan's description of her life gives the impression of her being employed in jobs, with success but without the type of conviction she now feels.

From the moment in her life story where she describes starting to work in a role in which caring and helping others is key Susan's story takes on the shape of 'a mission'. The word mission has been chosen with care. Away from its Victorian religious overtones or the absurd modern idea of the 'mission statement' the word has the potential to denote a decision made about what someone wants to do with their professional life when that life becomes imbued with a deeper moral dimension and purpose. In Susan's life this mission was based on the reward she got from helping others and is also closely tied to her return to education and a belief in education and learning. There was no trace in Susan's story of this in anyway taking on the religious dimension which it has for Hannah but it nevertheless has what might reasonably be

called an 'ethical' or even a 'spiritual' quality. To a certain degree this is present in all the life stories examined in this project with Susan, and Catherine this reaches great intensity whilst being completely secular. **(C&I)**

As a result of working in the old peoples' homes Susan decided that she would like to become a nurse. This required a return to education. Susan set about this with great determination entering FE in preparation to take GCSEs and then to continue all the way through to degree level. Susan began Higher Education (HE) on a nursing course at university this happened under the auspices of Project 2000 in the early days of this policy.

I did a short course at college actually because I didn't have the O levels that you needed for the course so I did a short course and then I sat a one off exam which I passed and then I got my place at university to do the nursing qualification but there was almost a year's gap in between me starting, getting my place and starting and then I started to worry that I wouldn't be able to cope, so I then did an A level at night school in English and then I wasn't going to take the exam, I took the exam and got the exam. **(C&I)**

As Susan spoke about re-starting and developing her educational career I felt that her story picked up a new slightly faster tempo. With the achievement of nursing qualifications Susan's life had got moving at this point and her voice echoed this as she recounted it.

In an interview of this type it is far from uncommon to find that people who have participated in government projects offer an assessment which diverges startlingly from the official assessment of that policy. Project 2000 is sometimes criticised for supposedly treating nursing as a degree based occupation and there is the implied criticism that nurses are not taught true vocational values. Project 2000 which is today perhaps regarded as something undesirable at a governmental level actually offered an opportunity to thousands of people especially women. It created a pathway and therefore an opportunity for some people to change their lives in a direction which they liked. Project 2000 is usually

criticised for not combining theory and practice in a suitable way, it is sometimes said to be 'too HE' and insufficiently practical. Often these criticisms come from the political right and tap into very interesting prejudices about 'the right type of qualifications' for professional and vocational jobs. Project 2000 did not suit everyone and many women who started on this pathway did not eventually qualify but it was far better than no path at all. In defence of project 2000 it should also be pointed that it offered a route through Higher Education for mainly working class female students into a profession which historically had been rather condescendingly designated as 'vocational'. However Project 2000 might be judged in official terms it is difficult to sit across a table from someone whose life was transformed by it and to assess it as anything other than a success. Susan felt that she had personally benefitted from Project 2000 and from HE study. This tension between what is viewed by the state as vocational and professional training and what is viewed by those undertaking these programmes as education and development is present in several of the life stories in this project. **(C&I)**

After she qualified Susan worked for 10 years or so in nursing, specialising in the area of mental health. During this time she also worked for the Worker's Educational Association (WEA) teaching classes on family well being. This later came to be the entry point into her career as a teacher.

The work with the WEA brought Susan into contact with adult learning and she decided that she would like to teach adults on a permanent basis. She joined a full time PGCE course and through a series of accidental events found herself being asked to teach literacy, something she welcomed. I realised that she had perhaps completed a sort of cycle. She had entered FE on pretty much the same type of course as she was now being asked to teach. I asked her if she recognised herself as a young woman in the students she now teaches.

Absolutely I do. ...Well it's just great because a lot of the students. I mean I've been teaching R to L for two years now and a lot of the students want to go on to do 'Access to Nursing', and so Rachel and I who are developing R to L now are starting to include modules that are more for people that

Susan Moore

want to progress on to access courses whichever access course it might be, whether it is access to Humanities, or Teaching Training or Nursing, so it is quite nice to be able to be in a position to sort of help women like I was really. It's mainly women like I was. I mean we do have men as well.

Susan throughout her career has always received the support of her partner. This is something which she really appreciates as he 'has always been 100% supportive' and she explains that this has greatly strengthened their partnership as each has allowed the other to do what they want to do. In this regard Susan's story is in contrast to those of the four other women in this study. Susan has two sons. When both sons were in school Susan returned to University to study a part – time degree. After graduating she completed a teaching qualification and has since worked as a teacher of literacy to adults.

Susan directly relates her experience of returning to education and the travails and rewards it brought to the experience of the women she teaches. Susan is especially aware of the way that support from a partner or family is crucially important as she sees that many students do not have this type of support.

I think it is really important you know, in the two years that I've taught you see the relationships break up for women that are on the courses you know mainly because their partners don't like the idea of them being educated and getting on you know. I think it is a controlling thing for a lot of the male influences, I mean it wasn't, in my case at all, Mark has always been 100% supportive, you know, 'you do what you want to do' you know, which is part of the attraction really. **(C&I)**

In several cases Susan has found herself dealing with women who are in fear of their husbands disapproving, or worse, of their participation in education.

... with some of the women on the Return to Learning courses that is a big issue. You know I mean I've had phone calls from women who haven't



been able to come in because their partner has kicked off you know and I have to e-mail stuff to them so that they can do it at home.

Most of the interview with Susan was taken up with her direct description and analysis of her work as a literacy teacher. In our interviews it seemed fairly clear that Susan had not often if at all, talked about her work and her feelings towards it in such a long single stretches as occurred in the interviews. I felt that, quite naturally, Susan was pulling together opinions which had in some cases already been formed, observations which had previously been made, and in some cases she might have been repeating things that she had previously said elsewhere. Alongside this I also felt that Susan was involved in an active process of monitoring and evaluating the text which she was producing much of which she was saying for the first time. She was trying to see how it all fitted together and she was trying to make sense of what she was saying for herself as well as for me. In this way the story was being produced not just for my research purpose but very much for Susan herself to try and synthesise what she was saying and to also judge whether she felt that what was being said was congruent to her professional life as she saw it.

Susan organises a course titled 'Return to Learning' (R to L) and this is at the centre of Susan's teaching life. She describes this course as providing adult learners with a chance to study a programme of Literacy, Numeracy and Information Technology (IT). The students are almost always people who left secondary school pretty much at the first opportunity invariably with few or no qualifications and often with no intention of ever returning to education. As time goes by these people begin to feel that if they could actually get qualifications they might find it advantageous. Often the return to education is motivated by the hope that with qualifications they might be able to get a job which they like or pays more. More generally the return to learning is linked to the desire to feel better about themselves in some way. It is very common to find mothers entering the course and giving as a reason for studying that they want to be able to help their own children at school. Susan's opinions expressed in the interviews are consonant with those expressed in conversations with teachers on similar courses and from my own experience.

Although students like those on Susan's R to L courses say it only rarely they often have a strong belief in the idea that education and knowledge can make life more rewarding. The expression 'knowledge is power' might be something which academics who feel themselves to be lacking in power find hard to take seriously, but among those who see themselves as lacking in both knowledge and power there is a respect for what is perceived as the grace which comes with education.(C&I)

When I asked Susan if she saw herself and her own life experience in the R to L groups she simply replied 'Absolutely I do'. Overall when Susan talks about her R to L students there is a strong feeling that she sees them primarily as individuals fundamentally similar to her. This is not unusual among teachers and others who work directly with literacy students. Among people who have little or no contact with adult literacy and numeracy' students and indeed in many official announcements it often appears that these learners are viewed as people of a slightly different species.

In presenting Susan's professional story I will take this identification with her students as being a key to interpreting the greater part of the text as her notion of advocacy permeates her interviews. Having told her life story as a type of scene setting in which I felt that she did not wish to discuss her life outside of teaching Susan moved to presenting a carefully constructed discussion of her life in the FE college where she works. Susan discussed literacy teaching, and her professional life with some animation. It was evident that she had given considerable thought to the problems she discussed and I felt that she welcomed the opportunity to set down her views and feelings.

Susan makes an important differentiation between her R to L and other courses she works on. The first difference is that the R to L is a discrete course in its own right which focuses on literacy and then mathematics and IT. Most, though not all, of the students intend to complete R to L as a means of progressing onto higher levels of study. In many though not all cases this is with a view to entering one or other type of Access course and then progressing on to university. It might be said that R to L students see the course not as an end in itself but as a

preliminary course to be completed as a precursor to some progression. There is a strong tendency for students on such courses to believe in education and 'literacy' as something with merits beyond the straightforwardly instrumental.

Susan also works to develop the literacy levels of students on a range of vocational courses. For these latter students 'literacy' is more often than not seen as something they must achieve otherwise they cannot complete their vocational course. Susan believes that this type of teaching is overwhelmingly 'teaching to the test' by which she means that the students have little interest in the course for its own sake and see it solely as something they must complete. When she was asked to compare the two types of teaching Susan explained that there was more time on R to L and that it was not defined so strongly in terms of 'test preparation'. In comparing the courses she said;

Well, for a start, you get longer and that makes a difference, it may only be a half a hour or an hour longer but that makes a difference, it gives you the time to go over things properly with them. You don't feel like you're just teaching, to shove them through the literacy test you know, because you do feel with the cross college teaching that it is like a sausage machine, you've got to you know, teach to this particular scheme of work and you know, shove them out at the end with their piece of paper. (C&I, M)

Susan appreciates the time to go over things 'properly' when teaching her R to L students. At several points in her texts she points to the limitations of 'teaching to the test'. What she refers to as 'the sausage machine' type of literacy teaching which she is asked to do is largely centred on preparing students to pass tests which are based around the completion of battery instruments on computers. These tests typically require the student to answer multiple choice questions, correct a spelling error or correctly punctuate a piece of text, the point being that the preponderance of items on the test can be marked 'mechanically' by the computer. Being computer based these instruments can only test discrete items of literacy knowledge 'we're teaching to test as far as I'm concerned, the test that we're using at the moment, really all it tests is their ability to read and understand'.

Susan like the majority of literacy teachers finds herself preparing students for literacy tests in which students are not expected to produce any text of significant extent. Instead students are required to respond to short texts in ways prescribed by the computer. This might take the form of inserting missing punctuation, correcting spellings, or answering comprehension question about the text usually in multiple choice formats. In contrast Susan talks about her R to L in which she is able to encourage students to undertake 'creative writing' even encouraging some autobiographical writing.

What I tend to do with them is to just say to them you can either just go for it or you can pick a particular moment in your life that you want to write about and some of the stuff that you read is really, you know these women have been through the mill, a lot of them ...

For these students Susan believes that autobiographical writing or other forms of 'creative writing' have the benefit of deepening and developing the students relationship with literacy something which she feels does not happen with what she refers to as the 'sausage machine' type of approach. Susan stresses how the students who 'have been through the mill' can potentially benefit from this freer type of literacy.

They don't have to do it as part of their creative writing but sometimes it helps people to write about what they know about you know so we tend to start with a little autobiographical piece that they can build on ... if they want to or they can pick something completely different. It is up to them, there is no pressure. I mean to some people it is quite cathartic, to others, they just don't want to touch it you know. That's fair enough, it is up to them.

What Susan is expressing here is the view that she is involved in two distinctly different approaches to literacy teaching; 'the sausage machine' approach to 'teaching to the test' and an approach to literacy teaching which seeks to develop the relationship between the student and literacy as a way of saying something. At the time of the first interview Susan had hopes that the introduction of 'Functional Skills' might lead to students on

vocational courses being offered an approach to the teaching of literacy which could go some way to increasing the student perception of it as being worthwhile. The idea behind such an approach is to contextualise literacy teaching within the students' particular vocational areas, for example a catering student would develop the literacy skills needed to produce a brochure for a company providing food for wedding receptions. The problem for the teacher of such an 'embedded' literacy course is to engage the students in activities which have genuine vocational plausibility whilst covering the rather obtuse demands of the official literacy syllabus. To return to the case of the catering student making a brochure: in reality the caterer would approach an agency to design a brochure, the caterer would in reality need the literacy skills involved in describing what was needed to the agency and then those needed to check their work. Students who are not convinced about the supposed advantages of 'improving their literacy skills' are not necessarily going to feel positive about any activity which they perceive to be 'pointless'.

Susan is very clear about what she sees as the most important determinant of 'college' policy towards literacy teaching.

... my understanding of it is that it is for money, it was the college principal I am given to understand, I mean I've only been at the college for three years, but it was the principal who decided that regardless of the course, everybody had to do literacy ... (M)

Susan is in all probability correct but what she does not mention is that for the college to continue and to maximise its revenue it must comply with government and official requirements. At the time Susan was speaking colleges were tied into agreements with funding agencies to provide certain numbers of passes at different levels each year in order to qualify for funding. Failure to reach these targets would be punished by the removal or reduction of funding and presumably at some point a condemnation by OFSTED. As Frank Coffield has many times remarked government policies in FE are 'doomed to success' and targets will, one way or another, be met, even if the means employed are unduly creative.

Susan talked about the administrative burden which accompanies her teaching and how record keeping and documentation exert a grip on her time. Susan like most others participating in this project complains about the need to produce 'paper trails' or e mail records. She explained that whilst she enjoys most of the teaching work which she does there are problems with her 'role' overall:

It's all the other nonsense about sending ten million e-mails and backing them up, you know you're just covering yourself the whole time ... Because you know that things will come back later on to bite you on the bum. I've seen it happen with other people you know ... (M)

As an example Susan explains the college policy on students who are at risk of failing their course. In those cases where she would be considered responsible for providing support to a student who might fail she must produce a set of records to show that she did everything possible to liaise with the student and the department. At one point Susan explained how the college introduced a policy of 'withdrawing' students who were unlikely to complete their course. Withdrawing the student before their failure meant that students did not count as having failed. Susan describes a situation in which a senior manager who was exercised by the numbers of students failing because they were not withdrawn in anticipation required evidence that her department had done its best to keep to the management policy, Susan describes how the manager demanded 'evidence':

He came back to – why haven't these people been withdrawn you know, what have you done about it? - ... I spent a good hour yesterday going through my sent box finding all the e-mails that I'd sent ... I mean it's just nonsense, to prove that I had contacted ... and I wasn't the only one, the whole department was doing it, it's not a good use of time as far as I'm concerned. You know, I'd rather be getting on with you know marking stuff that I've got to mark. But there you know ... there is this feeling that you need to cover yourself the whole time.

Susan gave this example as evidence of the more important point in the last sentence 'you need to cover yourself the whole time'. This was a point that she developed in

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other places. Susan mentioned a teacher called Judith who had recently left their college. It seems that Judith enjoyed the respect of her colleagues and was apparently popular with her students. Judith left unexpectedly and from what Susan said it seems that she felt that Judith had been defeated by too many demands being made on her.

I mean I was really sad to lose Judith because she's a really, really good literacy teacher and really well liked, really well respected, I think the problem is that with the best will in the world, although I like our manager she's not a very good manager and I think that she pushes a lot onto the people, you know, they're getting squashed, they're getting shit from us, shit from there and that's what was happening with Judith. Too much of, 'can you just do this', 'can you just do that' on top of everything else that you had to do and there just comes a point where you reach a breaking point and she met hers, so that's why we lost her.

Here Susan touched on the position of the middle manager in an FE college. Susan sees her manager as coming under pressure from the senior management to meet targets and to implement policies which are unpopular with teaching staff or are in some cases simply unworkable. This in Susan's estimation led to her manager getting 'shit from us' and 'shit from there'. Susan has a clear strategy to ensure that she is never impaled on the horns of the middle management dilemma:

My plan is to remain a plain 'lecturer grade' forever - that's how I am going to avoid it because I'm not interested in climbing the ladder, I want the holidays and I get the holidays and I want to be teaching ... my experience of people who have climbed the ladder is they get to do less and less of what they wanted to do initially and I really don't want that, I just want to be teaching, that's what I want to do , I don't want to be an administrator at all. You know I do the administration that we have to do because we have to do it but I don't enjoy doing it and I don't want to do it

This plan offers some protection but it also means that Susan for all of her widely appreciated capabilities rules herself out of 'climbing the ladder',

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which in effect means eschewing the possibility of career development within the institution in which she works. The consequences of such an attitude if it is generalised across all lecturers would be the consolidation of middle and senior management tiers which was content to not teach, and to be ever more 'managerial'. **(C&I, M)**

Susan laughed when she spoke about not 'climbing the ladder' but she knew the implications of such a policy. Perhaps this also brings her closer to the students who she sees complete her 'Return to Learning'. Susan recognises herself in these students who at best will go on to find a place in the 'professional' world very similar to that of Susan: a mixture of pleasure, belief and resignation.



## Class and identity

*The historical materialist must sacrifice the epic dimension of history. The past for him becomes the subject of a construction whose locus is not empty time, but the particular epoch, the particular life, the particular work.*

*Walter Benjamin 1937, 'Edward Fuchs Collector and Historian'.*

It might at first appear strange that in an essay on 'Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism' E.P. Thompson (1967, p.56) opens with a passage from Thomas Hardy's 'Tess of the d'Urbervilles'. This short quote describes how Tess, leaving her younger brothers and sisters has to make a journey through her village late at night to force her parents return from the public house:

Tess, locking them all in, started on her way up the dark and crooked lane or street not made for hasty progress; a street laid out before inches of land had value, and when one-handed clocks sufficiently subdivided the day. (p.19)

As so often with Thompson he makes it clear that what initially appears as poetic is also deeply historic. Hardy wants the reader to know that by the 1870s in the really impoverished villages on which Tess's fictional village of Marlott is modelled 'inches of land' had value and 'one handed clocks' were no longer sufficient to divide the day. Tess 'lived' at a point in history when time was being compressed. Thompson shows in his essay that the lived experience of time, how time is apprehended, is part and parcel of the experience of class. Time and space compression was part of the life experienced by the fictional Tess.

Thompson begins his essay with the quotation from Tess because the thrust of his argument is that the experience of 'class' is linked 'internally' to the apprehension of time, place, identity and much else. Later in the essay Thompson draws attention to how it was that in sea faring towns the idea of a day having twenty four hours coexisted with time patterns based on a need 'to attend the tides' (p.60) thereby affecting the nexus

between people, place and time. In another example he talks about factory owners allowing only their supervisors to possess watches thereby making the right 'to keep' time a matter of identity (p.86). From a reverse angle it can be argued that for Thompson class is itself constituted through the particular way in which the whole experience of life is apprehended under the particular historical conditions in which different groups of people live.

The historic conditions or contexts, in which people live, shape the experience of class. As Thompson puts it:

If we stop history at a given point then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships their ideas and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live their own history and in the end this is the only definition. (Thompson, 1963, p.11)

It is this idea of 'class' being defined as the way in which people 'live their own history' which underpins this chapter. It is the experience of 'life as lived' which permeates both Thompson's, and Marx's, understanding of 'class'. Examining this experience might not itself tell us all that we need to know in order to fully understand 'class', but there can be no meaningful comprehension of the idea of class without an appreciation of how it is lived out. Once again it is the idea that class is not 'a thing' but a complex of relationships. It will be contended in this chapter that life story work in general, and more specifically the life stories examined here can tell us much about class what they reveal is the form in which class exists, what Thompson refers to as the 'logic' of class (Thompson, 1963, p.9), the theme of this chapter is the presentation of this logic.

### **Class in Life Stories**

This chapter will present and then analyse understandings of class and identity as they appear in the life stories of those literacy teachers whose stories are presented here. The approach taken to both class and identity will be very much based on the idea of their both being constituted by 'internal relations' with other social phenomena.

The decision to examine class and identity without explicitly considering at length 'gender' needs to be explained and indeed justified. Given that the overall project is centred on six life stories, five of which are the lives of women the apparent omission of gender might be seen as unforgivable. In fact, questions of gender are very much present in this examination. One aphoristic, though useful, description of the philosophy of internal relations, which underpins the approach to Marxism taken throughout this thesis, would be that it holds that all things are made up of, and exist in relation to, other things. For the women (and indeed the man) in this study gender exerts a profound influence over the experience of both class and identity but here 'gender' itself is not explored in depth. Gender is most certainly present, pervasively so, even where it is not brought immediately into view.

An example of gender not being brought into view but being present is in the discussion on time. The experience of time (in this case the shared experiences of the six teachers) is very much linked to class and identity with the teachers feeling increasing time pressure and the linked feeling that their time is never enough and their work cannot be completed satisfactorily. There can be little doubt that although time space compression is experienced by all six teachers in this study this common experience of not being able to cope also has a gendered dimension. It will of course already be evident that the experience of time and workload is 'internally related' to managerialism.

In a further example of the way in which aspects of the teachers' lives are internally related it will be argued that in forming an understanding of 'place', in this case the specific place being the Isle of Thanet, three of the teachers interviewed told stories which indicated that their families' move to Thanet was very much linked to what can be seen as downward social mobility. It is far from easy to see which came first, the move to Thanet, or downward social mobility. In the stories of Paul, Hannah, and Grace, there is both the fear and the reality of bankruptcy. Bankruptcy is clearly related to issues of class and in many ways it would be possible to argue that 'bankruptcy' itself is a legal expression of the transition from one experience of class and property to another, in each of these cases it was the experience of moving from the lower middle class, as owners of minor businesses, to becoming waged workers via the folding of

their businesses. Paul's uncle became bankrupt, Hannah's parents' business ventures in hoteliery, and later retail, collapsed, and Grace's father lost his transport business. Certainly in the cases of Grace and Hannah these issues are complexly related to 'class' and to questions of gender and motherhood. Many examples of this could be chosen from the life stories but one strand in Grace's story provides an intriguing insight into this connectedness.

Grace states that her father's 'womanising' blighted her mother's life. At various points in her own life Grace's father attempted what we might call 'patriarchal interventions'; telling her how she had to plead in court or requiring her to overlook her husband's infidelity. Yet when Grace's father went bankrupt despite his company's limited liability he sold his house to pay off his (male) creditors. This meant that the family had to move to far less comfortable accommodation and Grace and her family lost their patrimony. The last years of Grace's mother's life were spent in close company with Grace and she believes that without her husband her mother was happier though she always mourned the loss of the house. To some observers looking at the events from 'outside' it might appear that Grace's father acted in a very honourable way by paying bankruptcy debts which he could have escaped. In such a case Grace's mother would have been able to remain in the house she loved rather than 'downsizing'. Listening to her story I felt sure that Grace viewed this honorableness in bankruptcy as another, particularly cruel, manifestation of her father's machismo. Grace's father preferred to visit a tremendous disappointment on her mother, if it meant maintaining the esteem of other men. In such ways are class, identity, and gender interlinked in the real world.

The story of Grace's father is one among many examples of the importance of gender as an aspect of class and identity. In the cases of Hannah and Sarah there are clear indications that breaking free of their husbands' control of their lives was a precondition for their becoming the people, and the literacy teachers, they are today. Susan Moore explicitly states that helping women to develop changed identities through education is an important part of her own professional identity and sense of purpose. The lives studied here, including that of Paul Beer the sole man in the study, are all clearly and inextricably linked to questions of gender; yet in this study gender is not one of the primary 'portals' through which the lives are viewed. This is not because gender is considered to be of insufficient importance, indeed it is the importance of gender and its

inextricable relationship to class and identity which makes its study here so difficult. The relationship between class and gender is, as stated above, archetypally dialectical it is a social relationship between two things closely bound together 'internally'. Stated crudely, in all their countless possible forms class relations are experienced by all people in a way that is gendered, and these 'gendered' lives are also lived in ways shaped by class. It is for this reason that viewed from the point of view of a materialist dialectic, the debates of the last few decades about whether 'class' or 'gender' is 'more important' in radical politics were and remain, mostly jejune. It should be noted at this point that the most dogmatic and formulaic misunderstandings of 'gender' and 'class' typically came from those participants in the debates who saw themselves as 'Marxists'. In most cases such debates began and inevitably ended with gender and class being opposed to one another as two separate sets of social relationships. In real life class and gender must always be constituent of each other. If for a Marxist 'class' is historically the more decisive element in its relationship with gender, this does not mean for a second that the lived experience of class can ever be anything but gendered.

Those 'Marxists' who opposed the analysis of class to gender as though they were alternatives to each other would have done much better had they studied how Marx approached the problem. In some of the most memorable passages in 'Capital' (1887/1990) there is evident outrage, on a titanic scale, at the particular plight of working women and children, especially those reduced to pauperism. In such passages it is clear that Marx, behind the 'front' of the detached language of political economy, is enraged by what he clearly saw as the historic degradation of the most vulnerable sectors of Victorian British society. Among many memorable passages in which Marx talks about gender and class in Capital are his descriptions of the plight of young female brick makers (pp.592-594), or of 'domestic workers', especially lace makers (595-599). In his analysis of the poorer parts of the 'relative surplus population' (pp 796-802) it is evident that Marx sees domestic and other women workers, as inevitably being a mainstay of that part of the population which at best, find that their:

...conditions of life sink below the average normal level of the working class, and it is precisely this which makes it a broad foundation for special branches of capitalist exploitation. It is characterised by a maximum of working time and a minimum of wages. (p. 796)

Below this level there is the 'the lowest sediment of the relative surplus population' that section of the population which 'dwells in the spheres of pauperism' (p.797), again it is evident that Marx sees women as being particularly at risk of being pulled into, and least likely to escape from, these most miserable of circumstances. In all of the passages referred to the experience of class, as described by Marx, is shaped by, indeed we might even, with caution, say that it is determined by gender.

Marxists who see class and gender as being separable would do well to read the above passages (and a host of others) to see how Marx approached the problem. From the point of view of the main concern of this thesis which is the development of a Marxist approach to working with life stories, it is interesting to note that when working expressly with 'Political Economy' Marx often found himself drawn toward descriptions and explanations of the lived experience of especially the most exploited people. What is attempted here is the reverse process working out from life stories to examine in Marxist terms, that lived experience.

Today it is acceptable in almost all areas of educational research to talk about 'gender', the terms of these discussions are wide ranging and highly differentiated. Whatever the merits or weaknesses of the various arguments put forward, the topic itself is acceptable. This is not at all the case with 'class'.

The place of 'gender' is now accepted in social science. Two things need to be said about this. Firstly, openly sexist arguments and the rejection of 'gender' as a legitimate field of study, are today encountered relatively rarely in academic discussion. Now that this acceptance has been won it is quite possible for 'new arrivals' at the site, to have little awareness of how hard the battle was. Secondly as the remarks made about class will show, it is possible that these advances in the area of 'gender' might be reversed or confounded. This is pretty much what has happened to the academic discussion of 'class'.

The acceptance of class as an indispensable dimension of social science has diminished markedly over the last few decades. The cardinal intention of this study is to show that life story might work be approached fruitfully from a Marxist direction. A Marxist

approaching the study of class must not lose sight of the way in which class is inseparably connected to issues such as gender: but in what might be called the dominant academic paradigms of today it is the view of 'class' much more than gender, which is obscured. Even when arguments are presented for the importance of class analyses it is almost *de rigueur* to disavow Marxism. It is for these reasons that in this study class is placed front and centre in the discussion. This is not to downplay the importance of such things as gender or ethnicity in shaping the experience of the lives discussed here. It is simply to say that here the focus will fall on class.

Several leading figures in social science who at one time argued for the centrality of class in understanding the area in which they worked published what amount to repudiations of 'traditional' understandings of class. In a book published posthumously the renowned sociologist Ulrich Beck argued that in the contemporary 'risk' society social and economic ideas of class had given way to the idea of exposure to risk as determining life (2016, pp. 83- 86). Beck had previously referred to 'class' as being a 'zombie category' (Beck and Willms, 2004). The latter 'attack' on class prompted Diane Reay to point out that if class was a dead category it was a 'zombie' very much stalking British classrooms. Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2007) argues that class has largely lost its meaning and importance in what he refers to 'Liquid Modernity'. Goran Therborn (2012) has recently presented strange arguments in which he talks about the world becoming increasingly 'middle class' whilst moving very far away indeed from traditional notions of class. Anthony Giddens (1991, 1998, 2000, 2010) is particularly noteworthy as a sociologist whose work was politically 'operationalised' by 'New Labour' and this is considered more extensively below. These four figures have been selected as they are seen as esteemed figures in the contemporary sociology 'scene'. All four might be seen as leaders of a wide trend which is opposed to the traditional idea of 'class' being a central sociological concern. All four are opposed to Marxism, some viscerally.

There are of course voices raised against the eminent sociologists mentioned above. Three notable figures in the academic hinterland of this thesis are Beverley Skeggs (1997, 2004), Diane Reay (2006, 2008) and Andrew Sayer (2005) for whom class remains a paramount consideration. It is also noteworthy that Skeggs and Reay whilst arguing for 'class', approach the topic with particular concern for its gendered nature and do so with great academic creativity. It is also noteworthy that all three supporters of class,

though not hostile to Marxism would not see themselves as working at all within a Marxist tradition. In all three cases the authors explicitly distance themselves from Marxism.

For the above reasons this project has preferred to focus primarily on 'class' from a Marxist perspective as it features in the life stories studied here. It is also the intention that if 'class' is the immediate object of examination it is also a prism through which issues such as gender might be viewed even if they are not expressly considered.

The case of the lace makers given above might be taken as exemplifying the approach to 'gender' taken by Marx in 'Capital'. In this example Marx is considering particular groups of predominantly female workers as representative of a section of the working class who experience particularly oppressive working conditions and insecurity. He is concerned with these workers as women but in these passages this is not his particular focus. Here he is concerned with the lace makers as a particular form of worker. It should of course be remembered that in the analysis Marx presents here, the objective is stated in the subtitle of 'Capital' it is 'A Critique of Political Economy'. It is to be supposed that Marx intended, the ambiguity present in the title of his work. Is the critique aimed firstly at the historic social formation in which 'the capitalist mode of production prevails'? Or is the intention to reveal what Marx saw as the inadequacies of the theoretical presentations of 'political economy' prior to the promulgation of his own? It would be entirely in keeping with Marx's general outlook if we assume that he believed the two projects to be entirely inseparable. Either way it was Marx's intention to look at those aspects of reality germane to the examination of capitalist political economy. The word 'germane' is used in a somewhat unusual way here because Marx's method necessitates that he casts an extraordinarily wide net.

Throughout 'Capital' Marx incessantly takes his analysis in different directions and follows up a myriad of illustrations and instances of the implications of his 'critique of political economy'. As Marx believed that 'capital' had the power to either capture or at least bring into its gravitational pull everything in the human social orbit there was not only a case for but a need to show how everything came together. This inner logic of Marx's 'Capital' goes some way to explaining its incompleteness; Marx was trying to present a comprehensive account of something which expanded with each attempt to survey it. In modern terms we might say that the author of 'Capital' in his presentation



of a 'critique of political economy' was overwhelmed by problems of 'intersectionality'; each area examined intersected 'essentially' with so many others. It is by no means a huge leap from Marx's comments on the sweated home labour of English Victorian lace makers, girls, or women, working with cotton produced by slaves in 'The Americas', or linen from Europe to the type of 'intersectional' arguments put forward by contemporary social theorists. Patricia Hill-Collins, seen by many as a foundational thinker in the area of intersectionality puts the argument thus:

a general consensus exists about intersectionality's general contours. The term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities. (2015, p.1)

The above argument is of particular importance when considering why in this project the focus is on class, although what might be called an 'intersectional' analysis would have been an alternative approach. It is hoped that in the above the case is made that the Marxist argument being put forward here must itself be seen as 'intersectional'. Going further the feminist theorist and activist bell hooks stresses how it is that 'class' is so often not given sufficient attention in contemporary studies. In her book 'Where We Stand: Class Matters' bell hooks opens with the statement 'Nowadays it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class (2000, p.vii). She goes on to make the argument that class has become 'uncool' at least in part because it is a category which creates fear. For bell hooks this fear is attributable to the hegemonic influence of 'the rich':

Many citizens of this nation, myself included, have been and are afraid to think about class. Affluent liberals concerned with the plight of the poor and dispossessed are daily mocked and ridiculed. They are blamed for all the problems of the welfare state. Caring and sharing have come to be seen as traits of the idealistic weak. Our nation is fast becoming a class-segregated society where the plight of the poor is forgotten and the greed of the rich is morally tolerated and condoned. (p vii)

If bell hooks is correct in this assertion, and I believe she is, then it becomes incumbent on those who believe in the importance of 'class' not to be intimidated. It is quite

conceivable that for some social theorists the strategic cultivation of a 'lacuna' when it comes to 'class' allows them to escape at least some of the mocking and ridicule that the dominant culture meets out to those who offer a challenge. It is perhaps for this reason that it is in the United States with its particular history of opposition to Marxist theory where forms of 'intersectionality', denuded of real class content, are popular currency among progressive and radical social scientists.

Within the Marxist tradition 'class', seen from a historic view, must be accorded a greater weight within intersectionality than is accorded to other 'sections'. Here an all important '*but*' needs to be stressed; class can never be separated from race, gender, or any of the other 'sectional' categories with which it is interlocked in the real world. For the purpose of analysis and discussion of a particular section of the whole it is expedient, even necessary, to 'abstract' a particular section from its concrete 'intersectional' context. When doing so it must be remembered that this process of abstraction is exactly that, to fully apprehend the abstracted section it must be returned to the 'intersectional' concrete whole. It is on this basis that here, 'class', is taken as the primary focus of analysis. In terms of all six lives studied in this project some aspects, especially of their professional lives, are abstracted and considered under the heading 'Class and Identity'. This is not at all to deny the importance of gender or ethnicity in these life stories, only to say that these are not here the subject of analysis, even so their presence is felt, even if it is not examined.

It is sometimes argued that it is not adequate, or even possible to talk about life stories or class without accepting that postmodernism, in all, or at least some, of its forms has completely transformed the 'terrain' on which such discussions are held. These developments are held to have rendered work within the class based Marxist tradition outdated at best, or at worst downright reactionary. In many important ways these claims, or some which are very similar have already been discussed in sections of this project. Here it would be possible to mention the discussion of the arguments advanced by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques in their presentation of 'New Times' (1998), the rejection of 'realism' by Laurel Richardson (1994), or indeed the remarks made against Derrida's 'there is no outside text' (1998) to list some of the more prominent brushes with postmodernism. When referring to postmodernism the concern is chiefly with an approach to social investigation which promotes or in some cases makes absolute the role of 'discourse' whilst downplaying or rejecting outright humanism and most, if not

all, forms of realism. It should be noted here that it is not possible to talk about social theorists as feminists, intersectionalists, or postmodernists in general terms. Within all of these 'designations' there are significant differences, even profound and irreconcilable philosophical oppositions. In this respect it is essential to specify which particular work from within this diverse and contradictory field is being referred to.

In the above paragraphs mention has been made of several feminist theorists who would each take at least a slightly different theoretical approach to problems of intersectionality and feminism. Barbara Merrill, Beverley Skeggs, Diane Reay, Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks approach feminism, class and intersectionality in different ways, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that between them all there would be an acceptance that in addition to the discursive aspects of the creation and maintenance of class relations there are also very important material and 'real' dimensions to class. This cannot be said of those theorists who hold that class is, in effect, either an exclusively discursive formation, or so close to being a purely discursive formation that any residual materiality is of no more than trivial importance; such perspectives exercise considerable influence.

Here it will not be possible to examine this particular strand of thought in great depth but briefly an attempt will be made to delineate something of its troubled relationship to class. Briefly mention will be made of some of the thinking about 'class' as it appears (or perhaps better said does not appear) in the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. These two thinkers are chosen for several reasons. Both are significant figures in what might be called postmodern social theory, both have made important contributions to not only the study of gender but also to the ways in which power operates and indeed how it is resisted. Foucault might be said to be the originator of a tradition and Judith Butler is one of its leading contemporary developers. Neither can be considered to be Marxists, both Foucault and Butler are opposed to what might be seen as Marxist approaches to 'class', yet both Butler and Foucault at many points in their arguments could be reconciled to Marx without doing any great violence to the thinking of either party, it is also to be supposed that this last comment would horrify them both and they would deny its possibility.

Throughout much of his most important work Michel Foucault insightfully traced the way in which power operated in society yet Foucault would not explicitly consider power in terms of class, in fact as far as I am aware Foucault in his later work would not

consider class even in its intersectionality with gender or regimes or coercion. The following celebrated passage on power is considered to be a kernel of Foucault's thinking:

... power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy; that its effects of domination are attributed not to "appropriation," but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle, rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short, this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege," acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions-an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated.. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 26-27)

The passage is characteristically ambiguous, and is so at the points where clarity is most required, but it appears that in the final sentence of this quotation that Foucault is arguing that 'power' is not the possession or privilege of a dominant class but rather power is the power to exercise power, and that this power might even be extended by 'those who are dominated'. In sum this is an argument against a notion of class as the 'privilege, acquired or preserved' to exercise power. From the perspective employed in this study this idea of 'power' without class is inadequate, the question of how power is exercised and in whose interest it is exercised, and above all against whom is power deployed must lead to notions of class. Foucault's work stands at the beginning of a tradition which, from a Marxist perspective, is characterised by a peculiar and unnecessary obfuscation of questions of class.

Much of Judith Butler's work is concerned with the discursive creation of gender and she is seen as a leading figure within what is often referred to as 'third generation feminism'. The feminist writers mentioned above would in most cases also be considered to belong to this 'third generation'. Butler's 1990 work 'Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity' is widely and justifiably seen as being ground-breaking, her subsequent work has continued to develop the thesis that gender is essentially a discursive formation. Indeed,

Butler goes as far as to see 'gender' as constituted by the performance of gender, some of the implications of this are discussed later. As with Foucault, Butler has a difficult relationship with questions of class, a difficulty she readily acknowledges.

In Butler's work there is little or no mention of 'class'. This is in keeping with the tenets of a type of postmodernist thinking which looks to individual variation far more than to commonalities. Butler is concerned with that which makes difference, to that which might divide or separate far more than to that which might unify or at least allow for meaningful solidarity. For Butler what she calls 'new social movements' which have come to replace 'class' must be based around the recognition of 'conflictual encounter' between 'particularisms':

When new social movements are cast as so many 'particularisms' in search of an overarching universal, it will be necessary to ask how the rubric of a universal itself only became possible through the erasure of the prior workings of social power. This is not to say that universals are impossible, but rather that they become possible only through an abstraction from its location in power that will always be falsifying and territorializing, and calls to be resisted at every level. Whatever universal becomes possible – and it may be that universals only become possible for a time, flashing up in Benjamin's sense – will be the result of a difficult labour of translation in which social movements offer up their points of convergence against a background of ongoing social contestation. (Butler, 1998, p.38)

What is being offered here where many would look for unity, is pretty much a 'bellum omnium contra omnes' with an occasional 'flash' of mutuality. First of all Butler seems to be saying that what she calls the 'rubric of a universal' was only made possible through a classless 'social power' erasing differences. Here of course history tells a far more complex story. If we were to take the struggles for women's suffrage as an example it is true that little attention was paid to 'particularisms' as those very diverse participants in the movement all united around the demand for universal suffrage in effect 'Votes for Women'. In the more recent examples of say, the campaigns against nuclear arms, or wars of

aggression in the Middle East it is a principal that as many groups and currents as possible unite for a universal end to nuclear weapons and for peace. It seems unlikely that Judith Butler would oppose either of these 'universalising' movements, nor it is to be hoped, would she wish their unity to be possible only in flashes set against a perpetual background of 'of ongoing social contestation'. It is hard to imagine what type of **viable** social movement Judith Butler has in mind.

This is not to say that Judith Butler's arguments are without merit whatsoever. Within the Marxist tradition of 'class' there has always been the idea of 'unity in diversity', undeniably this often only received lip service whilst being ignored in practice with the result that the limits and types of permitted diversity were narrowly prescribed and unity was all too often made in the image of leaders. The arguments raised by Judith Butler serve as a warning that unity in diversity, and diversity in unity, are preconditions of democracy yet it is exceedingly hard to see how continuing and even finer division, proceeding until it reaches the level of the absolutely particular in a context of unending contestation of difference, is a progressive prescription. What is logically unassailable is to argue there can be no class perspective if all that is brought into view is ever finer division aimed at maximising particularity over 'universality'. The central thrust of Judith Butler's logic is the obliteration of class, not its recognition within 'intersectionality'.

A different but telling argument is brought to bear against Judith Butler by Seyla Benhabib (1995) who draws attention to the tension between feminism and post modernism in the context of postmodernism declaring the 'death of the subject'. Benhabib in particular draws attention to Judith Butler's argument where she takes one of Nietzsche's statements against humanism and a humanist conception of agency and turns it against the idea of a gendered identity behind the performance of gender:

The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim that in 'On the Genealogy of Morals' that there is no being behind doing, effecting, becoming, 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything'. In an

application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary: There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be results'. (Butler, 1990, p. 23)

In an argument parallel to that made by Benhabib it could be said that what Butler is doing here is presenting gender as a 'performance' behind which there is no performer. This argument by Butler, in keeping with Nietzsche's own philosophy, is deeply anti-humanist. If there is only performance without a performer behind it, if the narrator, or the subject or the agentic human do not exist there can be no meaning. A bleaker viewpoint is unimaginable. We have now reached a point where it is possible to say why a view of gender similar to that put forward by Judith Butler has not been chosen for this project.

Firstly the perspective chosen is one based on class. It has been stressed several times that the choice of class as a primary focus is not made to downplay gender; it has already been said that in our society (and that of The Isle of Thanet), class is gendered and gender is classed. Class might be foregrounded but gender is ever present. Indeed some of the aspects of class brought to the fore in this project are so gendered as to make their intersectionality overwhelmingly evident. All of the teachers in this study, including the only man, talk about the need to cope within regimes which are chaotic. All talk about the need to try and make things as beneficial as possible for the students, and the perceived obligation to support people who need them. Such human values are here linked to class in the first instance. They are held to be class based values. Yet it is also perfectly possible to see these as gendered values, if fair minded people were asked to 'gender' this particular class culture of coping, supporting others, and working with impossible demands I think it is not difficult to imagine what the vast majority would say.

It is not possible to make sense of class if it is abstracted completely from the lives of real people; it occurs in these lives intersected with race, gender, ethnicity, and indeed with history, but in order to study how lives are worked upon by class it is necessary to temporarily 'abstract' class. The bell hooks title considered above 'Where we stand: class matters' makes just such an

abstraction of class from its intersectional context. Intersectionality must allow for these abstractions. It is not possible to consider class from a viewpoint which essentially argues that class is either effectively, a 'zombie', or non-existent, category of analysis.

Thanet is an area which from the 1960s has been in economic decline, having never been particularly prosperous for most of its inhabitants. In individual lives this can be manifested in such things as small business people being ruined and in so doing becoming ordinary workers. Hannah's mother, long past retirement age, was forced to work in the Hornby factory in order to make ends meet. Here we have another example of how class and place are internally related. Hannah's mother's modest wealth was substantially lost at the same time as Thanet lost its attraction as a holiday destination. Class and identity, even downward class mobility, must happen in a place and when this downward mobility is in some way a generalised experience in a particular geographical area then place, class, and identity are interwoven.

In order to further bring out how an internal relations approach to class works it is expedient to contrast Marx's approach with another. The alternative approach to questions of class is that associated with the sociologist Antony Giddens. Giddens is a point of reference for thinking about class and identity for several reasons. In the years following Blair's election in 1997 Giddens' 'The Third Way' supposedly encapsulated the nature of the type of governance Blair and his 'New Labour' administration sought to develop in Britain. Giddens himself was routinely referred to as 'Tony Blair's favourite sociologist'. The period during which Giddens star was supposedly guiding the navigators of the state coincided exactly with the period in which 'Skills for Life' was reshaping literacy teaching. By any account 'Skills for Life' was a policy which followed logically from Blair and Giddens' vision of 'The Third Way' (for example Blair, 1998a, 1998b, and Giddens, 2000, 2008). If we take the work of Giddens as a whole combining his vision of 'self identity', 'the trajectory of the self' (Giddens, 1991, pp. 70-108) and 'The Third Way' then we will be able to gauge how congruent his vision of identity is with the policies formulated in their name. These policies very much shaped the professional lives of the six people whose life stories are told here.



At no point in the process of interviewing am I aware of any questions being asked which explicitly mentioned the words 'class' or 'identity'. It will nevertheless already be apparent that the life stories recounted in this thesis are crammed full of remarks and references which have a direct bearing on class and identity. Following on from the idea of class being constituted through internal relations with other things we find that most aspects of a life story can be approached from the perspective of its relationship to class. In this chapter we look at time, employment, discipline, poverty, and humanism.

### **Dialectics of Class**

Marx did not and could not have given a succinct definition of 'class', to do so would have gone against his entire dialectical approach, however there are in his work many passages which can be read to gain an understanding of the basic lineaments. One such passage has already been discussed and is worth quoting again in the context of analysing life stories.

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness. (Marx, 1859, p.20)

What is important here is that humans in order to 'reproduce' their social existence 'enter into definite relations'. Here Marx refers to these relations as relations of production. In some readings of Marx it is assumed that these relations of production refer very narrowly to nothing much wider than what we might think of as 'the world of work'. At its most extreme it seems to sometimes be assumed that actually Marx was referring only to what might be called industrialised production. This is not at all the case and in passages such as the one quoted above Marx refers 'to the totality of these relations', this might be viewed as almost all the relations which people enter into independent of their will including what are referred to as superstructural relations such as those considered to be 'legal and political'. Clearly it is not possible in a chapter such as this to consider class from the perspective of the 'totality of the relations' into which

the teachers enter but class will be considered in the light of a selection of a few of these relations. A similar argument is used by Thompson when he refers to questions of class and class consciousness:

The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way these in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms. We can see a logic in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any law. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way. (Thompson, 1963, p.9)

The main contention of this chapter and of the project as a whole is that in the six lives discussed we can trace what we might call the class 'logic' and indeed to a certain extent the class consciousness of these teachers working in adult literacy on the Isle of Thanet in the first thirteen years or so of this century.

Thompson and Marx in the quotations above both agree that the class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which people are born or enter into against their will. These relations of production play the most decisive role in shaping the experience of class, and therefore identity but they do so in concert with a much wider 'totality' of social relations. It is worth considering what 'decisive' might mean. Something can be decisive without in anyway determining exactly how things will work out.

We can imagine the 'decisive' role of the relations of production as being broadly analogous to the way in which the laws of hydrodynamics determine the flow of water. These laws are numerous but are far from being innumerable. The laws of hydrodynamics govern all flows of water throughout the world, of that there is no doubt, but this in no way should be taken as an argument that all rivers and streams flow in the same way. Each watercourse has a practically infinite variety of whirls and eddies changing over time in myriad forms but all flowing in accord with the same limited number of laws. One way of approaching an understanding of class and identity

is to see it as the experience of similarity and regularity in the experience of groups of people occupying similar social positions. It is these experiences and their correspondence to similar social conditions in comparison to the experience of other individuals in broadly comparable contexts which give rise to class and identity. This gives rise to enormous variation and complexity to 'class' whilst simultaneously giving regularities in what might be described as the logic of class.

The first point to make about class and identity in relation to the six lives discussed here is that in all cases the teachers concerned all needed to work in order to survive. If we wanted to use a more 'fundamentalist' Marxism term (no less true for its lack of nuance) all the teachers discussed here were obliged to sell their 'labour power' in order to survive. At the time at which the interviews took place all were obliged (or had been during their working lives) to sell their labour power as teachers of adult literacy. They might well have elected to do this in preference to working in other areas, for example both Hannah and Grace preferred teaching to working in IT, but if they did choose literacy teaching purely on the basis of individual agency, then the conditions of that work were overwhelmingly, 'independent of their will'. In the cases of both Grace and Hannah the choice of selling their labour power in the domain of teaching and not in IT was based on much more than remuneration. In terms of identity and work we can see that in their choices there was a significant 'moral' element.

In each of the life stories the teachers complain of 'not enough time' or 'too much to do' or a combination of the two, Susan was particularly interesting in this regard when she talked about the reasons for preferring teaching on her particular favourite course 'Return to Learn' as opposed to the general cross college literacy courses. Susan preferred 'Return to Learn' because there was time to be more expansive in the teaching of literacy, students could, for example, write an autobiographical piece. On the cross college literacy courses the target was the test and there was no time for much more than test preparation:

You don't feel like you're just teaching, to shove them through the literacy test you know, because you do feel with the cross college teaching that it is like a sausage machine, you've got to you know, teach to this particular

scheme of work and you know, shove them out at the end with their piece of paper.

Susan's comments in this area tell us something about the logic of class. Unbeknown to her the argument she puts forward is reminiscent of Marx himself talking about 'alienation. Susan identifies herself in the process and the product of her labour. She sees the 'real teaching' with sufficient time and space allowed as being socially superior to the automated, machine governed drudgery of sausage makers. Here we certainly find ourselves getting into the realm of 'class' as it can be imagined that the 'sausage machine' approach which she decries is something her managers view as an ideal.

Catherine made a telling point about the initial interviews which her colleague Gill would conduct with students who wished to enter a literacy programme. These initial interviews were at least half an hour long. As the pressure to increase 'throughput' on courses increased these interviews became impossible. This was in line with the policy enshrined in directives associated with 'Skills for Life' which required all students to be put through an initial test, usually computer based, at the earliest possible opportunity.

In Sarah's interview many comments are made about workload and the impossibility of the demands made on teachers:

I definitely couldn't have survived another OFSTED there... I have been through many OFSTED's many, many, OFSTEDs, fine okay I couldn't do another one at the college. ... I can tell you that now no matter what they paid me that was just the worst experience ever. I did enjoy my time there, yes it was what I wanted to do, I enjoyed all the different classes 'cause you know you went into everybody and everything, you know like music, art, drama, carpenters, builders it was fine. It was the expectations of workload, you know if only it hadn't been like that, which is a great shame because I think that's the same for colleges everywhere.

It is argued here that narratives of literacy teaching such as those above are also descriptions of the experience of class. In the extract from Sarah's interview above she explicitly states that she believes the OFSTED experience is the same everywhere. In all

the interviews the experience of time is similar, the attitude towards managers and beyond them the government is recognisably 'us and them', there is a common feeling of not being in control over work processes. In many different aspects these teachers' experience can be viewed as experience in common; surely a constitutive element of 'class'.

It is also worth considering how Paul used the criteria of time as a way of differentiating the experience of teaching in pre-incorporation FE from what he perceived as the speeded-up requirements of his latter years. Paul pointed to how he and a team of other teachers were once given a week without teaching so that they could design a course. Paul also remarks about how much contact time teachers could 'enjoy' with students in the first years of his teaching career. Teachers on comparable courses at the end of his teaching time were expected to achieve the same level of results, or indeed much higher levels with less teaching time. This, of course, is the teaching equivalent of the production line 'speed up'. To vaguely paraphrase Hardy's description of Tess's journey it could be said that Paul remembered a time 'topics' for lessons sufficiently described what was to be done, and the teacher's life was not divided into SMART learning outcomes. This memory too is part of the experience of class.

From the point of view of life story work in each of the teacher's accounts, and each in their own way, we can begin to gain an impression of the experience of time and how they believe that experience to be changing. Each says something slightly or even markedly different but in Thompson's phrase in each there emerges the 'logic' of an occupational group undergoing broadly similar experiences in very much the same historical circumstances. Here the pressure to have more students pass largely automated tests in standardised time periods together with an intensification and an expansion of tracking and record keeping leads to the feeling of the workload, as Sarah says, not being 'doable' even if a teacher worked '24 hours a day, 7 days a week'. If we consider this time problem in the light of C. Wright Mills' categories of 'public issues' and 'personal troubles' (1959, pp. 8-13) we begin to see how something which each teacher confronts individually as a 'personal trouble' also exists as a 'public issue' when it is understood that the problem of time is confronted by all six teachers in similar ways. In the same way the problem of 'time' becomes an issue of class and identity. The specific ways in which time and workload confront teachers of literacy to adults also

shapes the experience of being an adult literacy teacher. To paraphrase Thompson, if we watch these people over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships their ideas and their institutions. Class is defined by people as they live their own history and in the end this is the only definition. (Thompson, 1963, p.11)

### **Class and a Neo-Liberal Regime**

We can also widen the focus of our purview look at the question of time for the literacy teachers as being a specific form of a wider historical problem. David Harvey writing in 1990 suggested that at sometime in the early 1970s the world started to enter a new period of 'time-space compression'. Harvey suggests that this space time compression is deeply rooted in what is now referred to as neo-liberalism.

In 'The Condition of Postmodernity' David Harvey (1990) produced a critique of philosophies, artistic movements, and forms of academic criticism linked to 'postmodernity'. Although very much opposed to what he sees as some of its more outlandish manifestations Harvey seeks to produce an understanding of postmodernism in its historical context. In the work of many postmodernists there is a focus on how incessant change is a characteristic of postmodernity. Harvey argues that this change, volatility and ephemerality (p.285) is a consequence of the increased speed of the turnover of capital. As Harvey says the acceleration of capital circulation has many consequences most of which are experienced by the literacy teachers in their lives even if they do not see it in these terms:

The first major consequence has been to accentuate volatility and ephemerality of fashions, products, production techniques, labour processes, ideas and ideologies, values and established practices. The sense that 'all that is solid melts into air' has rarely been more pervasive (pp. 285-286).

In the six lives studied here time-space compression is experienced and commented on in many ways as increased work load, unending government initiatives, micro-management of the teacher's work, and in the reduction of independence in what might be called the professional 'life world' of the teacher. With regard to the latter point it is

interesting to note that Catherine, Sarah, and Susan spoke at length about the required detail needed in lesson plans. As one teacher, not part of the study, remarked to me 'I spend more time filling in forms saying what I am going to do, and saying what I have done, than I spend doing it'.

Time-space compression (Harvey, 1990, pp. 201-308) is a very complex phenomenon which can be seen operating at various social levels. At one level it is seen as being very closely linked if not synonymous with globalisation, as capital circulates faster and over ever greater physical spaces producing the effect of a shrinking world.

From the perspective of the six teachers whose life stories appear here 'time-space' compression is experienced primarily as the demand for everything to be done more quickly, but it is also present in other important ways. Among these developments we might point out the way in which teacher's time has been homogenised so that it looks more like any other regime of industrial work time. Teachers are expected to 'deliver' a 'product' in an ever more frequent and metrically moderated rate. Their work is more commonly compared to those people working in manufacturing or service industries and the demands on their work time, with the allied expectation of teachers being more 'flexible' (in the neoliberal parlance) with their time. Technological advance has further intensified space compression through 'advances' such as email. This technology is credited with having produced more effective communication; it has certainly increased 'information' exponentially. It has also inundated teachers with constant and unending supervision, invigilation and almost unlimited responsibilities to comply with, and to provide contents for, forms.

Over the last twenty years it has become commonplace and no longer remarked upon that teaching activities must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timebound (SMART). What is particularly interesting about this is that although SMART targets are enforced I know of no reasonable claim being advanced that this SMART approach actually corresponds in any real way to the processes of learning. Indeed in the chapter of this study on 'Managerialism' it will be argued that SMART targets have come into education from the 'Management by Objectives' school of business management associated with Peter Drucker. It is more than coincidence that the latter's thinking became influential after the mid 1970s.

I am quite sure that when Catherine laments the passing of the extended interview for literacy learners as part of their entry onto a course she does not consider this in terms of time-space compression or management by objectives. I think we can be equally sure that those who called for an end to such interviews did so because they had no specific content, produced no measurable result, achieved no palpable outcome, were not realistic, and were insufficiently time-bound. Students, it would have been argued could be placed more accurately by a computer based test and in far less organisational time.

### **Emplotment and 'a pathway through life'**

Throughout all the life stories it was possible to trace the idea of what those interviewed felt should have been the 'correct course' of life. Only in the case of Paul Beer, the only male interviewed for this project, was there a feeling that his life had followed the 'correct' course, though even in his case he felt that he could not be entirely open about essential elements of his life. In all the other life stories there was an element of life not having followed the course which should have been expected. Where those telling their life stories felt that their lives had not followed the expected course it was evident that 'class' had in many ways shaped the expectations which had been thwarted. In several of the life stories (at least those of Catherine, Hannah, Sarah, and Grace) there were points at which the narrators talked in terms of their lives 'having got back on track' or something similar. Catherine's story is the most remarkable in that her parents came into a small fortune by sheer chance. For Catherine this almost takes on something of a 'foundling' type of story as she believes that she and her parents found themselves in the wrong class. In another example of the idea of a life going down the wrong path I was struck when Hannah asked what she did after leaving school replied 'Well what I didn't do was go to university', Hannah had apparently secured a place but instead became active in evangelical Christianity. The idea of a correct course through life will be considered in terms of class and what Polkinghorne (1988, pp. 61-62) refers to as 'emplotment'.

Polkinghorne develops the idea of 'emplotment' as being a characteristic of narratives such as those used in life stories. Polkinghorne initially argues that life narratives are a



type of chronicle, or a discourse form based on the temporal sequencing of events. The idea being quite simply that in a chronicle first one thing happens and then another and so on. In all chronicles the events are related one to another and the chronicle achieves the status of discourse because the elements from which it is made cohere temporally and linguistically. Polkinghorne refers to this as first order coherence (p.61). What is special to narratives is that in this form the chronicle also possesses a second order of reference or coherence. As Polkinghorne puts it:

The meaning produced by the chronicle discourse is related to the temporal order of objective time. When the same set of facts found in a chronicle list are emplotted into a narrative the meaning produced is of a different time order – the historical or recollective order of time.

In order to bring about the transformation in meaning and show the second referent, the events, agents, and agencies referred to in a chronicle must be encoded as story elements (p.61)

Here Polkinghorne is simply making the point that all narratives presented as stories (or emplotted) take events, agents, and agencies and link them together in a meaningful way. A life story does not just link events together in a logical, but also a meaningful way. The elements of the story are invested with meaning. Polkinghorne then proceeds to make a claim about truth in narrative:

The kinds of truths with which narrative history deals are of a different order than those generated by the formal logic of scientific paradigmatic discourse. The test of the truth of historical narrative is its capacity to yield a plot from a set of first order real events. This is the truth of coherence. (p.62)

Materialists and therefore Marxists would have no significant grounds for disputing Polkinghorne's theory of emplotment as stated here save for a possible reservation about limits to the capacity of narrative to yield a plot. Coherence with the reality of 'first order events' is a precondition of truth. Narrative cannot itself create truth if it does not 'coherently' reflect first order events.

Emplotment is a key feature of the life story form of narrative. Crucially it is an important aspect of the process by which those telling the story make sense of the

events in their life and the context in which they happened. At first it seems unremarkable, even obvious that a person asked to talk about their life and career as a teacher of literacy to adults tells their story in a 'this is how I got to here' sort of way. But as with other narrative forms the study of the conventions is revealing, not least because emplotment is the process by which people explore and create coherence in their life story. It is especially interesting therefore that in several of the life stories presented here there was a sense that people felt that their lives had for extended periods gone in the wrong direction. This idea of having gone astray implies that there was an intended, expected or correct course. Implicit within such ideas are notions of a 'logic' of class.

The sense of life having gone astray is strongest in Catherine's story. Catherine's parents' greyhound brought them a considerable amount of prize money. Catherine makes the point about her parents being 'working class' but being able to send her to a private school which she attended alongside people who were different to her. As Catherine says 'I always felt that it wasn't right for me there because they were very posh and they did have a lot of money and my mother's friends were not like that they were working class people'. Later this feeling of class is extended even to cover the correct form of transport to take to travel to ski resorts 'they would go off on their skiing holidays and we would go to France and places but we would go in the car ... you know go over the mountains in the car'. That Catherine feels that there was a correct way of travelling to a ski resort, that her parents did not respect the convention was down to their being of the 'working class'. By implication Catherine believes that 'class' determined how one should or should not travel. Catherine's feelings of unease and incongruence are particularly strong in relation to class and it is as though her feelings of being in the wrong place permeate her whole history of school education. Even when recounting her return to education and university in later life there is a feeling that Catherine saw herself as something of a misfit compared to her fellow university students.

In her book 'The People: the Rise and Fall of the Working Class' Selina Todd (2014) gives significant space to the story of Viv Nicholson who became famous for her 'Spend, spend, spend' comments as she and her husband collected their football pools win in 1961. Viv the daughter of a miner had been born in Castleford in 1936. A more stereotypical 'working class origin' is hard to imagine.

For Selina Todd the life story of Viv Nicholson 'in exaggerated form' echoes many important class themes (p.360). Viv's lifestyle (or rather its tabloid rendering) was held up to condemnation for some four decades as her money was spent and she fell into debt. The tabloid press mixed into the condemnatory narrative of Viv's life a prurient interest in her marriages and friendships. When Viv returned poor and 'humbled' to her life in Yorkshire the tabloids presented her story as one of 'a brassy upstart getting her just desserts'. In attributing an emblematic importance to Viv's story Selina Todd points to what many who knew her felt to be the personal warmth and sincerity of the real person at the centre of the story. From her viewpoint as a social historian what Selina Todd considers to be of importance is the way in which Viv's story demonstrates just how strongly social values constrain class mobility in Britain:

If Viv's story is one of aspiration, it is also a story that demonstrates the limits of fantasy ... that anyone can reinvent themselves and must do so ...For ultimately Viv couldn't: the money drained away and she remained a working class woman in Castleford. Her experiences before the win were just as important as the thousands she won in defining her place in the world. Viv's story shows that even the largest pools win in history could not make social mobility easy. Once she had reached the private estate of her dreams, she realized that the goal wasn't worth the effort it took her to attain it. For class implicates and contains everyone ... (pp. 363-364)

When Catherine recounts the story of her parents or Selina Todd tells the story of Viv Richards the normally almost imperceptible constraints of class become visible because they are broken or frayed. Hannah Richards' comment about not going to university when she was expected to, or Sarah's about the unsuitability of her first husband initially in her parents' opinion, and then later her own, are examples of the same process by which a few strands of the myriads of constraints which hold people in their class position become visible only because they are, often only temporarily, unravelled.

The idea of a transgression indicating class constraints along the lines suggested by Selina Todd is also present in several episodes in Grace's story. Grace's conviction for shoplifting is one such episode. The shopkeeper who prosecuted the eighteen year old

Grace had put a gregarious and vivacious young woman in sole charge of an off licence in a deprived town with a reputation for night time roughness. Later Grace with the encouragement of her friends stole drink and cigarettes to the value of some nine pounds. Grace initially pleaded guilty but at her father's insistence changed the plea to not guilty. We might imagine the scene in court of an attractive young working class woman 'with attitude' appearing before the court. Changing a plea and thereby costing the court and the police time and money is never popular and those who elect to do so generally realise that if found guilty their punishment will be more severe. Grace's punishment was indeed at the more severe limit of what might have been expected for a first and only offence.

Grace's conviction, her fine, and the demand that even into her fifties after a life without any problems with the law she must declare her conviction every time she applies for a job within education seems to be an outstanding example of how behaviour deemed to be transgressive can play a part in the construction of class and identity. It seems particularly strange that the state in the form of the police and courts should be involved in the case of an eighteen year old involved in a minor theft from a shop. The shop owners who put her in the way of temptation were not even reprimanded according to Grace. In a very ordinary, quotidian context Grace transgressed the laws of private property, she and her friends took and consumed that of which she was the custodian and vendor but not the owner. That she might have been reprimanded and dismissed was not sufficient; we might imagine that arguments were raised about the need to make an example of her. Grace's demeanour and appearance in the court attractive, defiant and feigning a lack of fear would, we might imagine, have contributed to the magistrate's feeling that the court needed to teach her a lesson. From the point of view of the court, and therefore the state, Grace's punishment was a wholly mundane part of its work. In Grace's life story it was one of the most important events of her life. This leads us into a consideration of the state.

### **The State**

The Marxist Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) whose life academic and otherwise led him to consider the state from a variety of viewpoints writing in 1966 argued that:

The theory of the state is the core, or if you will, the culmination of Marxian thought. Very naturally from the outset it has led to particularly passionate controversies. No other aspect of Marxian thought has been so blurred, distorted, and befogged as this. (p. 122)

In his own work Lefebvre developed a Marxist analysis of the state which not only encompassed Marx's later writings, such as 'Capital' but also his earlier 'Hegelian' manuscripts. Lefebvre also drew on his own extensive experience both academic and practical in the areas of the sociology of everyday life (1947/1991, 1961/2002, 1968/2005) architecture and the theory of space (1974). Henri Lefebvre's particularly rounded approach to the question of the nature of the modern state was we must assume also influenced by his years fighting with the French Resistance in the Pyrenees and his return there to study the interplay of peasant life and agriculture with the development of physical and social space in mountain communities. In his 'Critique of Everyday Life' Lefebvre (1947/1991) argues that study of 'human reality', something which for him would most certainly include class, identity, and the state can be effectively studied by moving from the everyday and trivial, in addition to the study of the exceptional:

The critique of everyday life involves an investigation of the exact relations between these terms. It implies criticism of the trivial by the exceptional - but at the same time criticism of the exceptional by the trivial, of the elite by the mass - of festival, dreams, art and poetry, by reality. (p.251)

The fragmentary views of class or state to be found in these life stories cannot provide a full sociological account of these things, but fragments must always be related in shape and nature to the whole of which they are a part; this makes their study worthwhile.

As with 'class' so with 'the state'. Friends and foe alike have searched without success for a definition from Marx. Marx wrote extensively about the state throughout his life without ever offering a single definition. Much of Marx's early work in which he developed a critique of Hegel was concerned with an interrogation of the latter's writings on the state. Marx's 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon' (1851) might well be seen as a treatise on the state written from the perspective how a minor and rather

ridiculous figure came to be head of the French state. Read from this perspective the 'Eighteenth Brumaire' shows why Marx does not produce a definition of the state as he sees it as being constituted in an endless flow and flux of relationships existing simultaneously as a polity, laws and institutions, armies and militias, cultures and traditions to name only some of its constituents.

One of the biggest problems in discussions of 'the state', including in discussions among Marxists has been the tendency to take descriptions or definitions of 'the state' which are in themselves one sided, put forward in a particular context, or for a particular purpose and to then see these as being all encompassing. In many of these cases the original producers of the descriptions of 'the state' were aware of their limitations, their particularity and their partiality but those who have taken up the definitions are less aware than the originators of the problems of these characterisations of something which entails manifold complexity.

Bertell Ollman whose approach to Marxism is characteristically based on the philosophy of internal relations believes that many definitions of the state are of use in certain contexts but become wrong once the comprehension of their one sidedness is lost:

The main interpretations of Marx's theory of the state – that it is an instrument of the capitalist class (Lenin and Miliband), an objective structure of political functions interlocked with capitalist economic functions (early Poulantzas), an arena of class struggle (late Poulantzas), the illusory community arising out of alienated social relations (early Ollman), and the hegemonic political ideology (Gramsci) – are such one sided relations. (Ollman, 1993, p.89)

Ollman is not saying that any of the views of the state listed here are wrong only that these views are one sided, furthermore this one sidedness is inescapable because in each case the authors have taken a particular aspect of the state as their viewing point. When anything is viewed the vantage point effects its appearance. The example of Lenin given above exercised an extreme historic importance. In this case I think Ollman is referring to Lenin's pamphlet 'The State and Revolution' which was written in early 1917. The pamphlet was written in the middle of a period of violent revolutionary

upheaval and war it especially considered questions of state violence. Certain quotations lifted from this pamphlet without any regard for the context in which they were written dominated Marxist discussion of the state for decades and in the worst cases were used to justify crimes. It was just this narrow vision of the state that Lefebvre refers to as 'blurred, distorted, and befogged'.

The view of the state which will be taken here is also 'one-sided'. The life stories contain within them glimpses of the attitudes of the teachers towards the state and therefore their perceptions of how it shapes their attitudes and socially positions them. The simple contention here is that elements of an understanding of class and identity can be gleaned from the accounts of interactions with the state in the life stories presented here. These accounts can be analysed not to produce any overarching account of the state but to give instances of its effect in everyday lives which might then help to evaluate more expansive accounts.

Although it is not mentioned by any of the teachers whose life stories are discussed here a most important and basic fact is that all are employed by the state even if indirectly. Those working in FE colleges, or Adult Education are employed by corporations which are nominally independent of the state but in practical terms receive almost all of their funding from state agencies. The same applies to private providers of literacy teaching. 'Present and Correct' was one such example dependent for its income and students on The Job Centres. OFSTED despite claims to the contrary is very much a state organisation, so much so that the more senior inspectors and employees of OFSTED sign the Official Secrets Act. OFSTED itself is officially described as a non ministerial government department in exactly the same way as the National Crime Agency or the Crown Prosecution Service. This is of considerable importance as all the more senior managers working in the area of adult literacy must manage their colleges in line with OFSTED requirements. In the early years of this century a process began which by degree has led to the existing regime in which OFSTED inspection handbooks and notices have become the manuals by which colleges are managed and governed. In this regard it is worth recalling Sarah's description of her reasons for leaving further education (FE):

I definitely couldn't have survived another OFSTED there... I have been through many OFSTED's many, many OFSTED's fine okay I couldn't do another

one at the college. ... I can tell you that now no matter what they paid me that was just the worst experience ever.

If we accept what Sarah says it follows logically that she left FE because of the regime of state inspection. A more powerful shaping of class and identity for a teacher of literacy to adults is hard to imagine. In all of the interviews with each of the teachers OFSTED was discussed. For example in each comment made about lesson planning and the keeping of records it is implied that the exact manner in which records are kept and the extent of record keeping is connected with OFSTED inspections and the managers frantic efforts to be OFSTED compliant.

OFSTED requirements exert a continuous influence in almost all aspects of the teachers lives far beyond the few days of the actual inspection. In recent years OFSTED has stressed that it reserves the right to inspect at very short notice often less than a week. These inspections are bizarrely referred to as 'light touch' or 'snapshot' as those to be inspected have little or no lead time to prepare especially. The result is that preparation is perpetual, the only time during which it is possible to rule out an inspection is immediately after one has been completed. This means that the preparation for inspection happens day in day out and determines almost everything which the managers and the teachers must do. Susan alludes to this regime when she talks about things coming back to 'bite you'.

It's all the other nonsense about sending ten million e-mails and backing them up, you know you're just covering yourself the whole time ... Because you know that things will come back later on to bite you on the bum.

Later in this project in the chapter on managerialism some of the themes mentioned here will be examined in greater depth. Managerialism clearly overlaps with questions of the state and in many ways becomes one of the most direct manifestation of state intervention in the day to day working life of the adult literacy teacher. The OFSTED regime leads in effect to all teachers at all times having to conduct their work in accordance with what the representatives of the state expect to find conducting inspections.



We have already talked about workload and the feeling, present in all the teacher's life stories, of not being able to manage their work in the ways expected. This is reflected in the accounts they give of exceedingly high expectations of students in terms of attendance and achievement of certificates, and the detail of teachers reporting back on their work. The official discourse from OFSTED typically frames the requirements placed on teachers in terms of 'standards', indeed the title of the body itself is Office for Standards in Education. Writing some years ago about 'standards' Raymond Williams remarked that the word standard often had a 'future' meaning, in such cases standard referred not to what existed but to what should exist in an imagined or idealised future world:

The old measures, or the existing grades are inadequate and we will aim at something better. ... Instead of referring back to a source or of authority , or taking a current measurable state, a standard is set, projected ideas about conditions which we have not yet realized but which we think should be realized. There is an active social history in this develop of the phrase.  
(Williams, 1983, p.291)

The particular meaning of 'standards' as used by OFSTED is very similar to that suggested by Williams. OFSTED introduced new standards in September 2012 (OFSTED, 2012). The grade of 'Satisfactory' was replaced by 'Needs Improvement'. It is felt by many in the sector that 'Needs Improvement' effectively became 'Unsatisfactory'. This had the knock on effect of making the 'Good' grade effectively 'Satisfactory'. There has been a steady stream of comments from OFSTED since 2012 about the need to tackle and demand improvement from 'coasting' institutions (e.g. Department for Education, 2015) and teachers through a process of continuous performance review (e.g. OFSTED,2014). These comments have contributed to the feeling that OFSTED is only satisfied with teachers and institutions which achieve an 'Outstanding' grade. The language of OFSTED with regard to 'standards' is uncompromising to the point of bullying. In a report on Further Education for 2013/2014 OFSTED pointed out that as a result of its own inspections teaching and learning had 'improved':

Teaching and learning has been a major focus for OFSTED inspections over the past two years. ... the quality of teaching, learning and assessment inspected

in 2013/14 was substantially better than in previous years. This has had a positive impact on the proportion of providers judged to be good or outstanding this year. However, within this broadly positive picture, only 18 providers – about one in 20 – were judged to have outstanding teaching. (OFSTED, 2014a, p. 15)

OFSTED setting itself the task of improving teaching and learning gave as its first priority improving teaching and learning through what they saw as the need to impose ‘relentless and rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching’ (OFSTED, 2014a, p. 16). The OFSTED vision appears as one in which all those involved in such things as teaching literacy to adults will only be saved from their own mediocrity by ‘relentless and rigorous’ inspection. The use of the word ‘relentless’ is of particular significance carrying within it notions of harshness, inflexibility, and incessant intensity. The OED actually defines the word ‘relent’ in terms of yielding to compassion (OED, 1982). This is certainly not the only time that OFSTED and its spokespeople are associated with a lack of compassion (Paton, 2012; Henry, 2012; Legge, 2013).

The argument which I wish to put forward is that in the life stories studied here the teachers express their anxieties about the demands of their work, because they feel that they are always measured against a standard which it is impossible to attain. This standard is to a great degree enforced and measured by a state agency. All of the teachers interviewed for this project saw themselves at least as reasonably good teachers achieving respectable results and providing their students with something better than a respectable service. Each of the teachers interviewed worked within an institution which was officially graded as ‘needs to improve’. Officially therefore ‘needs to improve’ constituted a significant part of these teachers’ identities.

There is a further aspect to the relationship of the literacy teachers to the state as it affects their class and identity. From the point of view of their students the teachers are themselves involved in enforcing of a literacy regime, this is more or less apparent in each of the life stories. In the stories of Hannah, Catherine, Sarah, Grace, and to a lesser extent Paul and Susan there are mentions of the work they do, or have done, to try and ‘get peoples’ lives back on track’. For Hannah (at Present and Correct), Sarah, and Grace much of this work was directly concentrated, at least officially, on getting people into

work or making people 'employable'. At certain points the Government and OFSTED linking of employability and literacy took on an openly, even proudly 'Human Capital' approach to the problem which in turn justified a coercive approach to literacy teaching and learning. Over the history of Skills for Life following its introduction in 2001 it is possible to trace an ever heavier accent in official Government policy on the idea that those deemed to have low literacy skills had an obligation to 'improve' their literacy skills in order to improve the position of Britain vis a vis other competitor nations, Charles Clarke the Secretary of State for Education and Skills writing in 2003 put it this way:

Four out of five jobs created now will require skill levels above A-level. Only one-third of Britons have these compared to three-quarters of Germans. It's not just the learner's personal success that hangs in the balance. What of the cost to British business? (DFES, 2003, p. 3)

Something of the incongruence of stated government policy and the actuality of literacy teaching comes out if we think of Catherine teaching young unemployed women in former mining villages, Sarah teaching on a deprived housing estate trying to coax reclusive identical twins into relations with classmates, or Grace teaching young men awaiting prison sentences. It is fair and reasonable to assume that for those involved in this work, including the teachers and even the college managers it was at least very, very, difficult to see their work as being aimed at improving British competitiveness with the high tech industries of the German Mittelstand. Charles Clarke's plans for international competitiveness would, if they had known anything about them, have appeared pharaonic to literacy teachers working with apprentices in Further Education Colleges let alone to those in dilapidated community centres or pupil referral units. Even if very few literacy teachers knew anything of the detail of Charles Clarke's plans, or indeed anything of the plans of his present day Ministerial contemporaries they do find themselves 'aligning' their activities with the states intentions even if this alignment is far from being straight and true.

We have already mentioned how often the teachers interviewed for this project talked about lesson planning and record keeping. A key part of this process is the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) a document which is supposedly the property of the student but is

more realistically a record completed by the teacher, or the student and teacher working together. This record documents what the teacher and student have covered in class; it is supposedly a record of activity and achievement. It forms part of the 'audit trail' for OFSTED inspectors, FE managers in general and those who manage 'teaching quality' in particular. These learning plans also formed the lowest level at which auditors managed how public money was spent by a college or other institution. It was supposed that by studying how much had been covered in class auditors could assess to some extent whether or not the public purse was in receipt of value for money.

Something of the way in which state objectives are interpreted and enforced in classroom practice was captured in an article by Mary Hamilton which looked at literacy teachers and students using ILPs to align student and teacher 'identities' with what Hamilton refers to as 'system goals' (Hamilton, 2009). Hamilton explains that the purpose of her study is 'to demonstrate' how 'the ILP is a key technology of alignment between local and systemic practices and identities' (p.222). Hamilton's study analyses how teachers and students in literacy classes are obliged to record their activities and indeed to organise what they do in line with a national syllabus for adult literacy learners, and the requirements of auditors both educational and financial. The ILP must show metricated and time constrained 'achievements'. In the parlance of OFSTED, and most other bodies charged with monitoring 'quality' the targets must be in accord with the acronym SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound). Measurable in this context means that the teacher and learner are not encouraged, or in practice permitted, to record any activity which is not open to being tested. It is not permitted for example to work towards a stated target of increased understanding or appreciation of something as it is held that neither understanding nor appreciation are measurable. Hamilton talks throughout the article in terms of the alignment of 'identities' with what are called 'system goals'. This is remarkable on two accounts.

Firstly what Hamilton calls system goals are in the terms used in this chapter nothing more or less than the state goals. The ILP whilst it is many things is undoubtedly a document which relates teaching and learning activity to the state objectives in adult literacy. There is much more that could be said about this, not least as Hamilton shows in her article and indeed all the teachers interviewed for this project would affirm the teacher and the student find ways to complete the ILP which satisfies the auditors but

hides (or at least leaves undeclared) activities which they legitimately enter into in class which are not in accord with the ILP. This then will be taken up and developed in the chapter on managerialism but for the moment it will be stated that managers and inspectors do not worry too much if the ILP is the educational equivalent of a set of false ledgers in accountancy, what matters most is that the ILP appears to be in conformity with what Hamilton calls 'system goals'.

Secondly the insistence on only including the measurable, and the testable in the ILP means that 'officially' only that which can be observed and examined 'objectively' is permitted in class. This would place teaching within an entirely 'behaviourist' paradigm. As Watson pointed out more than one hundred years ago when setting out the tenets of behaviourist psychology with the argument that it was necessary to:

dispense with consciousness in a psychological sense. The separate observation of 'states of consciousness', is, on this assumption, no more a part of the task of the psychologist than of the physicist. .... This suggested elimination of states of consciousness as proper objects of investigation in themselves will remove the barrier from psychology which exists between it and the other sciences. (Watson, 1913)

This convergence of OFSTED enforced exigencies of audit trails with the foundations of behaviourist psychology is far from a random coincidence. Behaviourist psychology sought to eliminate consciousness from psychology because it was neither measurable nor observable. I think that it can be plausibly argued that 'consciousness' in the forms it takes in education ( things such as 'understanding' and 'appreciation')are similarly excluded from the world of educational audit trails. From the point of view of both teachers and auditors to acknowledge the existence of that which can be neither measured nor metricated is to acknowledge some element of mystery in education. Catherine who talked about impossible 'paper trails' and the time it took to complete might be taken as speaking for all the teachers:

when will we do the teaching? ... as long as they have got a paper trail and as long as you've got progress it's got to be enough ... you can't be expected to fill out those ridiculous sheets after sheets ... I personally don't agree with it.

It would be possible to go through all of the life stories and collect similar expressions of unease with this 'alignment of identities'. The point is that the identity of the teachers and students is constrained and shaped by these practices. This is not at all to deny that teachers and students resist official interpretations of their identity and try to shape their own experiences. The point is that this extensive record keeping which excludes much of their real identity and activity thereby officially making it illegitimate or even clandestine. To be officially accepted these teachers must present an image of their activity which is not completely truthful.

In this analysis of class and identity as it appears in the life stories the focus so far has been on their professional lives. Looking more widely it becomes harder to generalise their experiences outside of their professional context. Three of the women interviewed (Sarah, Grace, and Hannah) had experienced long periods of their life as single mothers and had lived in straitened circumstances if not poverty during this time. Surveyed across generations three of those interviewed could be said to have experienced downward social mobility, though this was clearly the case it did not appear in their life stories as an important theme. Paul's family had its roots in small scale business ownership in Thanet, or in the case of his father, colonial administration. Paul and his wife depended on wages for their income. Susan's father from whom she was distanced had been a very senior army officer, she was a confirmed teacher who did not want to be anything 'higher'. Hannah's parents had lost or used up their savings and she had spent many years living on unemployment benefit. If Catherine had benefitted from her parents winning a modest fortune with the greyhounds this had not extended significantly into her own life and she and her husband very definitely needed to work.

In the case of Grace her experience with the courts and the considerable influence that has had on her life seems to contribute to her feeling that 'the system' determines what is expected of the person. Grace in middle age sees herself as having largely given up on trying 'to beat the system'. In this regard it is very interesting to see how in her 'life world' (Williamson, 1998) Grace elides the state and her father:

I had a thing about being told what to do. I think I still have it now. I think that because my Dad was twenty years older than my mum, so I think I have grown

up with ... I hate authority. Well I hated back then authority. I had no respect for it. It wasn't something that I chose it was just something that was obviously in me. ... I just tried to beat the system, trying to bunk off, just thinking that I could win.

Grace also points to how later in her life becoming the person she is today involved her breaking away from her father, and her husband whilst developing what might be described as a tolerable *modus vivendi* with the state. When considering the latter it is interesting to note how Grace will (*sotto voce*) demur from doing what authority requires. In the case of the young man whom the police sought Grace could not bring herself to facilitate his detention, in the case of 'Alberta' Grace worked with the young lady who was 'not that clean', against the direction of her school. That this should happen in the context of studying 'Of Mice and Men' is more than ironic. Within Grace's story this incident could be considered a poignant example of the alienated nature of a school curriculum which whilst enforcing the study of a modern classic celebration of the humane tries to exclude a lonely teenage 'misfit'.

Taken together it would seem that in terms of class and identity the professional context of the teachers had exerted a more important influence than any other factor at least when the interpretation of their lives takes their work as its starting point.

It is possible that if the life stories had taken for example an exploration of 'gender' as its starting point then at least identity if not class might have emerged in a different form. Even if this different starting point had been chosen then the professional life of these teachers would have been of great importance.

In our society what work we do exerts a considerable (I would say determining) influence on who we are. This allows for the 'category' of work to be interpreted broadly, it must go beyond the idea of simply how a wage or salary is earned and incorporates ideas of our wider engagement with the world through social activity. In the case of all six literacy teachers in this project it would appear that their professional work constitutes a very significant part of their total social activity, as such it has an important part in their class and identity. This is not at all to say that these teachers are a product of their work. Real people are never the 'product' of a set of circumstances

with the same conditions producing the same results. Real people exist as the way in which they as individuals live within these circumstances they are not a product of them.

One way of trying to grasp the idea of class and identity as it appears in these life stories is to look for those areas in which regularities or similarities appear between them. These similarities are usually not to be found as measurable objective facts but as rough parallels or as correspondences of experiences held in common. Here the experiences of being language teachers in the first twelve years of this century in Thanet gives rise to these similar experiences being held in common and has played a central role in shaping the social experiences of all six lives. Each life is very different but each evinces broad similarities of class and identity, here only a few of the features shared have been discussed and highlighted.

So far in this chapter a case has been presented for the consideration of class and identity in the lives of the six teachers. This has of necessity only looked at certain features of these lives as the contention is that it is not possible ever to give an exhaustive account of class. Marx dealing with a similar problem, that of trying to understand what was meant by 'property', wrote the following:

In each historical epoch, property has developed differently and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing else than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production.

To try to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart, an abstract and eternal idea can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence. (Marx, 1847/1975, pp.141-142)

The word 'class' might be substituted in each case for 'property'. The point here is that class cannot be understood as 'a category apart'. This again means that any consideration of class and identity must be conducted with due attention paid to the opposition of the abstract and the concrete. In the above quote Marx is arguing against the possibility of giving an abstract definition. Concretely class and identity exist in relationships which function on many levels and in different areas. It is not possible to



consider class and identity abstractly. This is simply another way of saying that class and identity cannot be considered apart from, separately, or away from the actual circumstances in which they 'happen' or exist.

In this chapter it has been possible to consider class and identity in only a few of the concrete circumstances in which it occurs in the life of the literacy teachers on whom this study is based. It would be wrong to believe that these limited insights can ever provide more than fleeting glimpses of class and identity. To build up a complete picture in its full concreteness it would be necessary to consider every aspect of class and identity in the lives of the teachers throughout the whole of their lives and in all their interconnections with the social world they inhabit.

If a complete picture of class and identity is not possible at least we can make the case that these 'glimpses' are themselves revealing. A strong case can be made for saying that these insights which might be gleaned from the life stories do at least have the ring of authenticity which comes from an understanding of the account as rendered by the people themselves.

### **The Reflexive Project of the Self**

This brings us back to the approach to class and identity associated with Anthony Giddens. It will be argued that Giddens attempts an abstract approach to class and identity based on a self-constructed narrative.

The attempt by Giddens to analyse class and identity clearly has value and repays consideration. It will be argued here that what he puts forward is not 'wrong' but only looks at one dimension of identity and in his presentation of this as the whole picture his work on contemporary identity becomes one sided. To use an analogy from art it is as though Giddens believes he has produced a 'realistic' picture of class or identity while they have actually reproduced an image of their subject working in only one, or at best two, dimensions.

Anthony Giddens takes as a starting point the idea that 'new mechanisms of self-identity' are 'shaped by – yet also shape -the institutions of modernity' (1991, p.2). Giddens then argues that what is 'new' about the mechanisms of identity is that:

‘the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging their self identities, no matter how local their specific contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications. (p. 2)

Giddens’ writing in passages such as this makes for demanding reading on two counts. Firstly there are many places where it is not easy to grasp what is being said at the straightforward ‘locutionary’, or ‘what does this mean?’ level. Yet more profound challenges are posed when trying to gauge the validity of the assertions contained in the writing. In the above short quote Giddens stresses ‘new mechanisms’ yet only one mechanism is given, ‘the reflexive project of the self’, and there appears to be no argument to support the idea that the mechanism(s) is/are new. It would seem only reasonable to believe that ‘the self’ exists historically and is therefore historically contextualised. The self identity of a mediaeval villain, the eighteenth century plebeian wife seller(Thompson, 1991, pp. 404- 465) or a twenty first century teacher of literacy to adults are formed under very different historically given conditions and for this reason we take them to be different. This is not to accept the argument which Giddens seems to be making which is that the ‘mechanisms’ by which self identity is formed are different in different historical contexts. The word ‘mechanisms’ itself is a little unfortunate here as it obviously implies something mechanical, which is not likely to be what Giddens wished to communicate. For ‘mechanisms’ we can justifiably substitute the term ‘processes’. What we have here then is Giddens basically saying that ‘identity’ is formed through interaction with the ‘world’ and that the contemporary world is different to that which existed in different historical times. Giddens argues that the ‘reflexive project of the self’ is a contemporary phenomena, a result of ‘new mechanisms’ or processes which have appeared only recently at least for the greater part of the population.

Giddens does not present any evidence that the processes are new, indeed when they are described they appear to be very similar to what they have always been; processes by which people individually and, more importantly socially, interact with an existing objective world. Giddens does not establish how the processes of interaction have changed historically but he does stress that the self is not a passive entity. There is a

clear implication that in the past the self was 'determined by external influences' and that today it is much less so. Giddens appears to offer no evidence to demonstrate that in times past the self was 'a passive entity'; the implication is that if the 'reflexive project of the self' is new and has come into existence only in the contemporary period then it was by default hitherto non-existent. Giddens proposition that the 'reflexive project of the self' is a new thing does in fact seem to run counter to most historical accounts of the self. There is not time or space to present here a historic account of the self; pointing to a logical problem in Giddens argument will need to suffice. The logical problem which lies at the core of Giddens argument is that it is very difficult to imagine what 'a self' might be if it was not 'reflexive'. We might suppose therefore 'selves' as long as they have existed have been reflexive.

It would appear to be quite logical to argue that what is understood by 'the self' must of necessity be integral to processes of self reflection. Without the presence of self reflection it is hard to conceive of what a 'self' might reside in. Indeed the etymological origins of the word 'self' in English go back to at least Old English where its use was recognisably similar in important respects to that found today. To kill oneself in old English being the act of 'selfbana', self love was 'selflice' and most surprisingly free will was known as 'self will'. Such evidence points not at all to the Old English self and the contemporary self as being the same but it does indicate that the self has for at least a thousand years been inextricably linked to processes of reflection, and considering the Old English vocabulary quoted here it is also clear that 'self' has always been linked to ideas of agency (Self: Oxford English Dictionary 1989).

It is not possible to accept that the self as presented by Giddens is an entirely new phenomenon. It appears that what is actually new in all this is that Giddens sees the self as 'a project'. Unsurprisingly the 'reflexive project of the self' is in keeping with 'Third Way' thinking, something which Giddens himself argues. In 2010 Giddens wrote a piece for the Policy Network in which he argued that although the term Third Way had become corrupted (Giddens, 2010) what he saw as its true mission the renewal of social democracy was still important and that reflexivity remained at its core. Giddens points to the role of the internet in intensifying reflexivity in the period between the book's publication and his 'revisiting' it in 2010:

When I wrote *The Third Way* the internet was in its infancy. Yet for the most part the internet has deepened and extended processes that were already visible at that time. I referred to these generically as the increasing reflexivity of modern social life. Reflexivity means that individuals and groups have regularly to decide how to act in relation to a flow of incoming information relevant to those decisions. (Giddens, 2010, no page)

This interplay between the internet and the 'reflexive project of the self' might be illustrated in the lives of the literacy teachers in this project. Those teachers talk of form filling, being monitored by computers, dealing with large numbers of e-mails etc. Whilst the internet has brought benefits to these teachers it seems a little optimistic to refer to them 'regularly deciding how to act in relation to a flow of incoming information'. Overwhelmingly for these teachers the only option open to them was compliance with internet based systems of work discipline and at an intensifying pace.

When trying to evaluate the reflexive project of the self we keep returning to the problem of what, if anything, is new in what is argued by Giddens. Approached from a Marxist viewpoint Giddens reflexive project appears as something voluntaristic and this is of interest. The term 'voluntaristic' here refers to a view which sees individuals as being able to act in a manner which is relatively unconstrained. Consider the following:

'A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.' (Giddens, 1991, p.54).

Here Giddens is promoting an approach to identity which is akin to, if not identical with, the post modern approach which holds 'narrative', or 'text' to be absolute. This view holds that things are the way they are because of the way we talk, or write about them. The more traditional approach which many post modernists reject is that the way things are exercises an important, or even inescapable, constraining influence on how we might talk or write about them. When the limits of this constraint are exceeded the text

will be seen as unbelievable, incredible, or delusional. That an individual's biography cannot be 'wholly fictive' seems to imply that it might be possible for it to be 'substantially' or 'principally' a piece of fiction. Biography is not fiction. There are certainly fictional biographies, some of which do a wonderful job of presenting realities, but this is very different to someone presenting an account of their life which is fictive. Biographies, autobiographies, and peoples' accounts of who they are must all come into being through the imagination of the person producing the narrative and there is plenty of room for things like interpretation, elaboration or even self deception, but this is very different to just making something up.

It might be the case that Giddens' use of the expression 'wholly fictive' might be considered to be unfortunate or of negligible importance but it seems to be more than that especially when occurring after the first sentence in the quotation which presents an unusual idea of how 'identity exists'. A person's identity must be found in their behaviour, the reactions of others and in the way they in turn react to others. All of these reactions and relationships exist in the context of people leading their lives in circumstances which they encounter as objectively existing. It is impossible to think of identity existing outside of all or any of these things. The aspect of identity which Giddens refers to as 'the the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' must be a function of behaviour and social interaction within given social contexts. If instead the creation or maintenance of a 'narrative' is seen as the source of identity and the other processes are wholly, or even substantially subservient to it we are faced with a post modern form of solipsism.

Giddens' 'self' appears as though it is the creation of an individual as though this process of constructing the self did not happen in fundamentally social process. In accounts such as that presented by Giddens the self is fundamentally something which comes about as a result of individual choice. Sight is lost of some fundamental social facts which mean that in reality not only is choice limited to socially available options but also the process of choosing between options is based on socially determined criteria. This is not to deny agency to individuals but to recognise that individuality is a social phenomena.

Considering the lives as lived by the teachers in this project it seems difficult to imagine their stories as being 'reflexive projects' of the self. This is not at all to deny that there

are very important dimensions of 'agency' in these lives. At a human level it is apparent that the battle to establish and maintain agency involves courage and determination. The image of these lives being seen as the navigation small craft on big seas has already been employed but it seems very fitting. The teachers in this project find themselves facing an objectively existing social world which is harsh, constraining and exhausting and it is in this context that they try to chart and maintain a course. It is also clear that often this life course is determined by factors well beyond their control. To talk about the lives of people such as these teachers as being 'reflexive projects of the self' makes little sense.

## **The Management of Illusions; Managerialism, Performativity and Alienation**

*The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity; clearing away. ... The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age:*  
*Walter Benjamin, 1931. The Destructive Character.*

It would be possible to argue that all the life stories presented in this project, or at least the portions of these which deal with the professional life of their subjects, are filled with incidents which provide illustrations of managerialism. To just draw attention to incidents would however fall short of capturing the full influence of managerialism; incidents alone cannot depict the pervasiveness of its influence. Managerialism is a force ever present in the lives of these teachers.

This chapter will endeavour to show that the professional work of the teachers discussed is so permeated by managerialism that no aspect of their endeavours completely escapes its influence. Some aspects of the teachers' lives are not within a tight managerialist grip but there is little which exists in complete independence. Before entering into an analysis of 'managerialism' it is necessary to make the point that it is distinct from the notion of 'management'. The latter might be limited to such 'neutral' issues as organisation and scheduling. 'Managerialism' is very much a doctrinal world view.

The basic contention of this chapter is that the form of contemporary managerialism which is established throughout the entire Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector is best understood as a fusion of 'bureaucracy' with 'scientific management'. The development of managerialism within PCET has its own history and this explains the particular form it finds in the lives of the teachers presented here.

It is the intention of this chapter to explain how it is that the specific forms of managerialism manifested in the lives of the teachers presented here relate to much wider issues of 'the cult of efficiency' (Callahan, 1962) and its roots in 'business' theory and practice. It was always intended that this project would 'look at' managerialism but as the life stories at the centre of this project were collected not only did the influence of managerialism in the teachers lives appear to be even more salient than initially imagined but there was also a developing sense of discrepancy between its description in theory and its manifestation in real lives. This discrepancy is itself very interesting as it reveals something about the merits and utility of life story work. In the chapter on 'Class and Identity' part of the reason put forward for rejecting Giddens' model of 'The Reflexive Self' is that it simply fails to critically evaluate such things as 'Managerialism' which are present in real lives. An examination of the life stories with their details and incidents reveals the working of bigger social phenomena, such as managerialism. This is what Lefebvre calls 'The Critique of Everyday Life', as he puts it 'It implies criticism of the trivial by the exceptional – *but at the same time* criticism of the exceptional by the trivial,' (Lefebvre, 1961/2002, p. 251).

Many teachers in PCET coming across the ideas of 'managerialism' and 'performativity' for the first time in academic literature are amazed by the way in which writers describe what they might previously have felt but have never articulated. It is not unusual to find a PCET teacher who on encountering, for example, the work of Stephen Ball (Ball, 2003) is quite seized by the academic capture of part of their lived professional experience. Nevertheless it might be argued that in the life stories presented here aspects of this same experience evoke a 'rawness' not immediately present in more traditional academic forms. The presentation of immediate experience is relatively seldom a major part of academic writing. The actual reality itself is nonetheless rewarding when it is used a base for theory.

A story which Paul Beer told about managerialism served as an interesting jumping off point for wider considerations. Paul was telling a story that he found noteworthy and in the narration he provided an example of what Clifford Geertz describes as a process of forming an understanding through the 'making strange' of that which is familiar. For Geertz this playing off of the familiar and the unfamiliar against each other was at the heart of the ethnographers approach to the study of cultures (Geertz, 1973, p. 319)



In the life story told by Paul Beer an incident is recalled which is at first sight simultaneously quotidian and puzzling. This episode merits consideration as beneath the apparent paradoxes a peculiar and important logic may be revealed.

### **Paul's Conundrum**

Paul tells of the early days of OFSTED inspection, a time when the senior managers of FE colleges were unused to inspections as the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) had only recently been introduced following the introduction of the Education Act (2006). At this time the Senior Management Teams (SMTs) of Further Education Colleges (FECs) were expected to complete a document which was initially known as a Self Evaluation Form (SEF), but later in line with the increased strictness of inspections the SEF became known as the Self Assessment Report (SAR).

The SMT believed that in the SAR they were required to prepare for OFSTED, they should 'admit' to the existence of areas in their institutions in which there was a 'need for improvement'. The SMT would then present to OFSTED their plan to address these weaknesses. The expectation among the SMT was that OFSTED would take the existence of plans as a positive factor to be taken into account when giving a grade. The SMT therefore asked all the middle managers who oversaw 'sections' of the college and actually managed the teaching within those areas to grade the teaching, learning, and 'achievements' of those departments. No middle or junior manager running a department or 'section' was allowed to award anything higher than a 'satisfactory' grade and most were required to assess themselves as being below, or well below, this standard. In all cases the SMT required that the 'sections' devise improvement plans which the SMT would 'manage'.

What Paul Beer found paradoxical was that the SMT awarded themselves the highest grade available for 'management and leadership' declaring themselves 'Outstanding'. When Paul told the story he challenged me and by implication all who knew it to try and understand. For Paul the paradox was that an SMT could see themselves as being faultless when what they managed could not achieve anything beyond the barest satisfactory level and most was well below 'mediocre'. The miserable 'self assessment' grades had been forced upon the junior managers by the very same SMT who graded

themselves as 'Outstanding'. Paul's paradox merits consideration; it is a thread which, when pulled, unravels and tells us much about 'managerialism'.

### **The Emergence of Managerialism**

In an article published in 1997 entitled 'Managerialism in the 'Cinderella Service'', Randle and Brady presented what was probably the first widely read analysis of the development of managerialism in the post compulsory sector of education. Similar ideas had already been raised about managerialism in other areas of the public sector but Randle and Brady related this theme directly to what they saw as teacher professionalism. Their study of 'Cityshire College' argued that managerialism had exercised a determining influence on changed and changing forms of professionalism in FE colleges following the process of incorporation which had begun following the passing of the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992. Randle and Brady linked these changes to professionalism to the introduction of new regimes of management following the introduction of a culture more closely linked to that of 'business'. Post-incorporation SMT teams modelled themselves closely on what they believed to be 'private sector' type practices, which management referred to as 'good management' (Randle and Brady, 1997, p. 125). Many of the features now taken to be characteristic of managerialism are broached in Randle and Brady's seminal article. Re-reading this almost twenty years later there can be little doubt that the trends which appeared to Randle and Brady have today come to exercise a hegemonic influence over all teaching in Further and Adult Education.

At the heart of managerialism Randle and Brady place ten points which they have extracted from Pollitt's (1990) volume 'Managerialism and the Public Services' .

- strict financial management and devolved budgetary controls;
- the efficient use of resources and the emphasis on productivity;
- the extensive use of quantitative performance indicators;
- the development of consumerism and the discipline of the market;
- the manifestation of consumer charters as mechanisms for
- accountability;
- the creation of a disciplined, flexible workforce, using
- flexible/individualised contracts, staff appraisal systems and

- performance related pay;
- the assertion of managerial control and the managers' right to manage. (Randle and Brady, 1997 p. 125)

Reading through the six life stories presented in this project, it would be a straightforward task to cull explicit examples of Pollitt's features of managerialism. As useful as a list like this might be, it still does not get close to an understanding of the lived experience of managerialism.

More important than the presence of factors in Pollitt's list which are not themselves necessary aspects of managerialism is the absence of extremely important affective features of this type of institutional regime. The dramatic title of Stephen Ball's (2003) article, 'The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity' points toward the dismal panoply of emotions and anxieties which managerialism engenders in teachers. Ball's 'performativity' is certainly not synonymous with managerialism but it is an always present feature. It will be a major contention of this chapter that for teachers under managerial regimes their affective lives can only ever suffer negatively under managerialism.

Ball is particularly interested in a range of practices which together create what he terms a regime of 'performativity'. An examination of Ball's definition performativity shows its clear relationship to Managerialism:

What do I mean by performativity? Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change - based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement. The issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial. (Ball, 2003, p. 216)

When the institutions of post compulsory education are under the hegemonic control of regimes which are deemed to be managerialist, then Ball's crucial issue of 'who controls

the field of judgement' can only be approached in one way: performativity, its imposition and maintenance is part and parcel of managerialism.

In a subsequent iteration of the concept of performativity Stephen Ball (2008) has addressed what he sees as the failure in some presentations to give the concept in its 'full sense' (p.51):

What I mean by that is that the usefulness of the concept is not just as another way of referring to systems of performance management, but it alludes to the work that performance management systems do on the subjectivities of individuals. (Ball, 2008, p.51)

Ball goes on to talk about the 'framework of judgement' within which what counts as 'effective', 'quality', 'productivity', and 'improvement' is measured (p. 51). Ball cites Shore and Wright (1999) who argued that the audit culture associated with performativity and managerialism represents a 'new form of coercive neo-liberal governmentality' (p. 557) which deliberately introduces uncertainties into teaching professionals' sense of self as a 'tactic of destabilisation' (Ball, 2008, pp. 51-52). Ball further suggests that 'Performativity 'works' most powerfully when it is inside our heads and our souls' (p.52).

When Ball argues that performativity is not just about 'performance management' but also the effect of this on the 'subjectivities' of those whose performance is managed (Ball, 2008, p.51) he is making an extremely important point. This is where life story work can present a 'concrete' understanding of the role of social processes in human lives. It is precisely in the narratives of the teacher's lives that we can begin to see and therefore to examine how managerialism exists in 'real lives' and how it shapes subjectivities.

The presentation of a selection of episodes gleaned from the life stories will help to create a picture of managerialism. Some of these episodes represent extremely important points in the lives of those whose stories are told, others recount relatively small, even trivial events. Taken together these episodes start to capture the pervasiveness of managerialism. It is hoped that these impressions might also be strengthened through reference to the life stories where a wider selection of instances

was made; these were marked with the signal **(M)**. Paul Beer's conundrum has already presented. Now from each of the other life stories instances are presented each of which is offered as an instance of managerialism.

In Hannah's story the realisation that the targets being set at 'Present and Correct' made 'no difference' to the problems of the long term unemployed in Thanet was, for her, something of an epiphany. Hannah also came to the further realisation from conversations with Trevor that it was widely recognised that despite the 'sunshine' narratives woven around projects of this type many of those involved realised that 'success' was limited if it existed at all. It should also be remembered that Hannah and others were aware of the help they provided at an individual level. It is interesting to draw attention to the ways in which managerialism as a form of bureaucracy is involved in what might be described as the fictionalisation of its own activity, or at least this is how it might appear to those outside of the managerialist circle. This is a theme that will be explored more fully later in this chapter.

There was also a rather odd 'managerialist' cameo in Hannah's story when she tells of how a despite student requests she was prevented from putting on a grammar class because the managers in her institution forbade it. Hannah seemed uncertain of just why it was not allowed but she believed that it was because there was an unspoken rule between the managers and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) which prevented the organising of any course which did not lead to an accredited test.

A particularly striking part of Sarah's story is the requirement that the FE College where she worked asked her to electronically send pictures of the snow that prevented her from attending work. Quite why the college required these pictures Sarah did not understand, but she was told that if she was to be paid her wages for any days when she was prevented from attending work the pictures would need to be sent. In my imagination I can see an electronic file in a computer system controlled by 'Human Resources' attached to this file there is an icon which when clicked on opens up a picture of a snowy pathway leading from a front door to a snowy suburban road; this would be proof that an absence from work has been neatly 'managed'.

From Grace's story we might take the incident of the ginger haired girl who the school wanted to lose from the register as she was not expected to pass her GCSE. As Grace tells it a young woman was to be prised out of her school as part of that school's efforts to meet its targets for attendance and attainment. Grace also explained how the 'managers' of her college had 'got rid of' the old style teachers 'who knew everything' and had then replaced them with younger people. Grace says that these younger people were lawyers and accountants. This is as far as I can tell not actually the case though Grace might be saying that these people were from these professions because that is the impression they cultivate.

In Catherine's story there is a similar thread to that mentioned by Grace which tells of teachers from the pre-managerialist incarnation of her institution being robustly encouraged to leave. In the chapter on Class and Identity mention has been made already of the introduction by the managers of her institution of the new forms of lesson planning. Catherine described how sometime around 2007 a consultant was brought in to explain how the teachers should use a thirteen page lesson plan. This lesson plan was presumably for an hour of teaching. What is interesting here is that the inference might be made that the new lesson plan was extensive because of its function not as a plan for a teacher to deliver a lesson but as a document which was to be part of an 'audit trail' for inspectors and accountants.

Susan it will be remembered swore that she would never become a manager because it would take her away from teaching. This is an interesting observation in itself but one which is realistic. Few if any senior managers in post compulsory education would consider teaching in their institutions and a substantial number of SMT members in colleges even have no or little experience of teaching. Increasingly these managers see themselves as a caste apart from teaching. It has sometimes been remarked that today one of the perks of promotion into management is that those promoted 'can get out of teaching'. Susan also talks about the need to keep thousands (literally) of e-mails to provide documentary back up to prove she has performed fundamentally clerical tasks which have now become part of her job. She cites the example of spending extended periods of time providing documentary proof that she had, in line with college policy, begun the bureaucratic procedures for withdrawing students just a little ahead of their expected failure in the end of programme tests. This was a bureaucratic measure by

which institutions ensure that the numbers of students failing courses appears artificially low.

This collection of incidents in the lives of the teachers begins to put real flesh and blood onto the bones of an academic and theoretical presentation of managerialism. These incidents are only snapshots. To fully appreciate the effect of managerialism on the professional (and indeed non professional) life of the teachers in this project it is necessary to grasp the idea everything in their workplaces is permanently under its influence. The institutions in which they work are subjected to the pull of managerialism no less than they are to that of gravity.

The life stories of the teachers presented here and their descriptions of what is described here as managerialism present what might be called 'authentic' examples of phenomena of which the teachers feel the full effect. It is often the case that teachers believe that phenomena such as managerialism are attributable to 'key troubles' of 'themselves as private individuals' and are not understood as instances of 'issues for publics' as discussed by C. Wright Mills (1959/2000, p.11 and *passim*). Put at its simplest teachers often attribute what is here called managerialism to the foibles, or disorders of their 'line managers', their SMTs or their particular institution. What life story work does provide is a very solid basis from which to proceed from the study of managerialism in real life contexts and then to proceed to what might be called its apprehension in theory. This of course is an instance of something which has already been discussed; in Marxist terms the discussion of managerialism will move from its *concrete* manifestations in real lives towards its *abstraction* in theory. The value of starting from, and keeping hold of the life stories themselves should not be underestimated, the greatest and most real impact of managerialism is affective and is experienced by those whose 'subjectivities' it shapes (Ball, 2008, p.51).

The move from the concrete to the abstract approximately coincides with Mills' 'private troubles' and 'public issues' (1959, p.11) because an issue cannot be public without some process of theoretical generalisation taking place. Indeed it is the examination of dialectical link between the individual experience and the socially general which Mills saw as being the life force of superior sociology. In the reverse of this process it is the move from the abstract to the concrete which permits teachers to use the concept of

managerialism to understand its manifestations in their own lives. If the teacher's grasp of this concept is unelaborated or partial it does not diminish in any way of value of using their experience as a starting point from which to develop a more rounded and complete understanding.

In the previous chapter the ideas of class and identity were discussed in relation to the teachers whose biographies are presented in this project. The argument was advanced that class and identity are internally related and strongly so. In a society based on class a great part of identity is based on the lived experience of class. In the lives of the literacy teachers presented here managerialism is an important element of their life experience and therefore is very much part and parcel of their experience of class.

Randle and Brady explicitly linked the goals of 'managerialism' to ideas of the 'three Es' of 'economy, efficiency, and effectiveness' (1997, pp. 125-126). When discussing managerialism all 'three Es' must be borne in mind but 'efficiency' is the most important. It is the special definition of efficiency under capitalism which drives forward changes and developments in the organisation of labour.

In the previous chapter mention was made of how all the teachers life stories are talked about their teaching in terms of a 'sausage machine' or 'production lines' or 'targets' it is not difficult to argue that from a teachers point of view this is how the 'three Es' are manifested. Hannah's statement that 'the training room' where she taught at certain points held sixty or so people who were long term unemployed is an extreme example of 'economy' and 'efficiency' but her situation was by no means unique. These notions of 'economy' and 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' taken together with the comments by the teachers already seem to suggest something of the idea of the production line, factory systems, and output.

In Randle and Brady's article (1997, p.126) there is a single mention of the work of Harry Braverman (Braverman, 1974). In this reference Randle and Brady refer to Braverman having asserted that during the twentieth century craft labour had 'undergone a process of de-skilling'. The full title of Braverman's book is 'Labor and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century', rather than the relatively simple, and one dimensional process of 'de-skilling' it is the far more complex and far reaching process of



the 'degradation' of work which Braverman explores. At the heart of Braverman's volume is an account of the ways in which labour has undergone 'alienation' within most work processes. 'De-skilling' is certainly a part of this process but by no means can it be reduced to this. Braverman's study of 'the degradation of work' is a vivid example of the potential productiveness of a Marxist analysis.

It is perfectly possible to look through these stories and find instances of the teachers drawing attention to processes of de-skilling; Paul Beer's wistful look back at the times when teachers were allowed time to plan their own courses and then to arrange for these courses to be recognised might be an example of de-skilling. Today courses are mostly designed by the 'Awarding Bodies' with practically no input from the teachers who will 'deliver' them. It is also possible to argue that most of the complaints about 'workload', 'paper trails', and 'targets' etc. can be linked to 'de-skilling', but the processes at work are deeper than this. When the teachers' life stories are considered more concretely then 'de-skilling' appears as a reflection of a deeper more profound process. This deeper process is, in these particular instances, a manifestation of what Braverman refers to as the 'degradation' of labour'. Here degradation does not carry moral connotations but refers to 'damaging', 'reduction' or 'decay'.

It is not difficult to link Braverman's processes of 'degradation' to Ball's concept of 'performativity'; especially in the way in which he argues that under the latter everything the teachers do is measured and evaluated with a corresponding impact on their 'subjectivities'. Braverman too emphasises that measurement and evaluation are at the heart of modern industrial production and a great part of his book is devoted to the role this has played in the development of modern industrial processes. In the very practical everyday world of the teachers in this project measurement and evaluation takes a central place. The measurement and evaluation of their work by those who oversee them, forms the teachers' core experience of performativity, managerialism, and indeed the degradation of their work.

Writing in the 1970s Braverman was not in a position to discuss the full contemporary impact of the 'degradation' of work for those working in education though he was certainly aware of the potential for what might be termed 'proletarianisation' of clerical, and professional occupations a trend which he portrayed as inexorable (Braverman,

1974, pp. 279-283). Throughout his work Braverman discusses how Marx approached the contradictory processes in the formation and the disappearance of what we might call the 'middle classes'. This is most famously outlined in a widely misunderstood section of 'The Communist Manifesto' where it is said that

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product. (Marx and Engels, 1848, p.14)

The passage is often understood as Marx and Engels making a claim that there would in the future be an undifferentiated 'proletariat' confronting a single 'bourgeois class'. Critics point to the existence of the 'middle classes' in advanced capitalist societies as being proof of the incorrectness of 'the prediction' of Marx and Engels. More important here is the idea of the development of the 'proletariat' as an essential product of 'modern industry'. Marx denied neither the contemporary nor the future existence of 'intermediate' layers between those of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The point was that these layers were 'intermediate' that is the conditions of their existence put them between the two great 'polar' classes of capitalism and as something intermediate they are inevitably pulled one way or another. For both Marx and Braverman the stronger pull was towards the proletariat. Part of the 'decay' of the professional classes, according to Marx, would be the result of the 'de-skilling' and mechanisation of their specialist labour. Managerialism is very much part of this pull, increasingly teachers such as those in this study find the regimes of their employment to increasingly resemble those associated with more recognisably 'working class' conditions.

Braverman is very much concerned to show how the ideas and managerial practices, especially the pursuit of 'efficiency', associated with Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856 - 1915) have played their part in the degradation of work and especially of craftsmanship. Working from a Marxist perspective Braverman sought to show how the drive to efficiency inevitably led the degradation of work. In this process he saw the development of 'scientific management' as being particularly pernicious.

Braverman analyses how processes set in train by Taylor evolved and developed to the point where they became the cornerstone of 'scientific management'. In the contemporary world of PCET unbeknown to most teachers it is possible to study one line of the genealogy of managerialism back to industrial practices first developed by Taylor at the Midvale Steel Works in the late nineteenth century.

Taylor studied work and sought to break down the activities of working people, especially craftsmen, in order to study how to increase efficiency. The rise of scientific management coincided with the development of production of industrial goods on a much larger scale. Scientific management and its hyper division of labour processes into the repetition of (ideally single) tasks at maximum speed had an impact on work and the psychological world of the worker which had long been understood. In fact it had been noted and denounced by Adam Smith himself.

Adam Smith had famously drawn attention to the efficiency advantages of the division of labour with the illustration of the manufacturing of pins (Smith, 1776, pp 11-30). Smith describes how the process of pin manufacture could be broken down into its component parts and if in a 'production line' workers completed only the most simple tasks in series then the output of that production line could be increased in geometric proportions over that of each worker producing pins separately. What is a striking contrast between Smith and Taylor is the latter's complete lack of concern for what Smith saw as the injurious effects of such a division of labour on the 'humanity' of the workers concerned. In a passage which appears almost as a precursor to Marx's writing on alienation Smith argues that an important influence is exercised by 'ordinary employments' in the development of the worker's mental disposition. Smith especially draws attention to how the division of labour would destroy mental faculties. If a life was spent 'performing a few simple operations' without thinking then the worker will find that

He naturally loses ... the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender

sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgement concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. (Smith, 1776/1993, p.429)

Smith goes on to point out that in the so called 'barbarous societies', those which were undeveloped in capitalist terms, the 'shepherds' 'hunters' and 'husbandmen' were in his opinion not so intellectually dulled as were the members of the nascent proletariat working in the most advanced economies (Smith, 1776/1993, p.429). Where Smith saw the danger and the destruction wreaked by the division of labour Taylor saw only the need to extract from the worker the absolute maximum value.

Taylorism and scientific management was applied throughout the early years of the twentieth century to all the main branches of industrial production. Its application to the production of automobiles led to the processes known today as 'Fordism'. These same processes were later applied to the production of 'white goods' and today, for example to the mass production of computer chips and even computers.

The contemporary production of computers is particularly interesting as it represents a most intense example of the trend described by Adam Smith above. A large part of the global production of personal computers takes place in the factories of the Pearl River Delta in China's Guangdong Province. The Apple and Microsoft etc. computers made in this region of China are produced in massive quantities and must be among the most complex items ever produced by human industry. Much the greater part of this labour force producing these computers is employed in low or semi skilled work. Most members of this workforce work long hours at tasks which are simple and routine. Most workers are employed on short or medium term contracts, and live in great industrial barracks. The division of labour has removed from the producers of these incredibly complex commodities practically all intellectual work.

This trend which has reached its apogee in the computer industry is illustrative of a fundamental trend within the division of labour. This trend is also evident in managerialism in PCET centres on the removal of real decision making and control from those most directly engaged in productive labour process (teaching) and relocates these 'powers' within the layers of management. Here we should also view OFSTED as an institution of management.

Under scientific management 'thinking' and intellectual work in general were to be taken away from what might be called frontline workers, wherever possible their work was to be rendered as a routine. What might once have been craft work was to be analysed into a set of routine actions each broken down into its most simple component operations and wherever possible each completed by a single worker or ideally by a single worker performing a single operation. The effect of this was to remove from the worker all planning, organising, judgement and other operations with mental content. Very definitely labour was to become subservient to mechanisation. There are plenty of indications in comments attributed to Taylor to indicate that he saw the removal of decision making and the exercise of intellect in all its forms from the shop floor and its investment in management as a positive end in itself.

In what is the most authoritative broadly sympathetic biography of Taylor the writer Robert Kanigel gives examples from speeches made by Taylor to show how he believed in the virtue of 'alienating' knowledge from the shop floor. When referring to management and workers Taylor is quoted as saying 'Both sides must recognize as essential the substitution of exact scientific investigation and knowledge for the old individual judgement or opinion' (Taylor quoted in Kanigel, 1997 p. 473). The actual content of Taylor's meaning is more accurately revealed in a section of Taylor's own volume 'The Principles of Scientific Management' wherein he states that under the new regime which was to replace traditional management:

The managers assume new burdens, new duties, and responsibilities never dreamed of in the past. The managers assume for instance the burden of gathering together all of the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen then of classifying, tabulating and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulae...  
(Taylor, 1911, p. 15)

Throughout his life and work Taylor never relented from expressing his intense dislike of what he referred to as 'soldiering' (Taylor, 1911, p.3). Taylor believed that 'soldiering' consisted in workmen doing less than could be achieved if they worked at the absolute maximum levels of speed and effort. When setting norms for the required amount of work for a workman to complete in a given time Taylor would work from the basis of

what could be achieved by the fittest and most able workers working in optimum conditions at absolute top speeds. In a modern echo of this we might consider how OFSTED abolished the grading of teachers as 'Satisfactory' to replace it with 'Needs to Improve'.

### **Measurement and Standards**

It is worth briefly turning back to Paul Beer's conundrum and the life stories in a more general sense. There is more to say about managerialism and its effects on those whose life stories are examined here. Even this preliminary examination of scientific management and Taylorism begins to show how analogous practices shape the contours of the teachers' work. In all the life stories the teachers express a frustration with measurement, testing, recording and then the reporting of this 'data' to management.

Ball's concept of 'performativity' has the idea of measurement at its core and it is not difficult to see how this relates to Taylor's requirements that managers should 'classify' and 'tabulate' the 'knowledge' of the worker so that it might be reduced 'to rules, laws, and formulae' (Taylor, 1911, p.15). The link between performativity and 'soldiering' might appear to be clear enough but it is still worth drawing attention to the practice of 'benchmarking' in all the institutions in which the teachers whose life stories are presented here worked. Under benchmarking teachers and departments are set targets for student retention, and rates and levels of achievement. It is unusual to find a teacher who believes these targets to be achievable, or if achieved it is only through the employment of practices which maximise creativity to a point which is demoralising for those involved.

The setting of unreasonably high 'standards' makes sense when considered in the light of managerial efforts to eliminate what it sees as 'soldiering'. Only the maximum (im)possible level of achievement is to be accepted. The effect on the lives of the teachers in this project was that they felt that 'Outstanding' was the only grade acceptable to the management when they were observed by 'Quality'. The result of this latter practice is that the only satisfactory grade is 'Outstanding'.

To return to Paul Beer's challenge we can also begin to see how under a 'managerialist' regime the management can view itself as being far better than the institution which it

manages. In the first place the managers view their work as being separate to that of the work of the institution managed. If the managers are accurately measuring, collecting, and tabulating information and through their 'Quality' teams they are 'driving up' standards and moving towards the elimination of 'soldiering' or 'coasting' then it can be argued that the managers might be outstanding even if the institution is deemed to be 'mediocre'.

We might take a practice which appears in several of the life stories as being in some way illustrative of the way in which scientific management appears in the life of the teachers. In several places the teachers talk about the need to ensure that they have reported problems to the management, as Susan said this must be done in case the issues comes back to 'bite you on the bum'. What is interesting in such cases is that it is not the problem which matters but that it has been reported. If a problem has been properly monitored and recorded and the teacher can demonstrate that they did so then the management will not discipline them. In Taylor's words the information has been 'gathered' and reported. That the substance of the real problem remains or was not acted upon is viewed as a far less serious problem.

The world in which Taylor first brought scientific management to bear on problems of production is very different to the world of contemporary literacy teaching to adults. It is not only time which separates these worlds but also the nature of the work itself. The time and motion studies of classical scientific management cannot be taken from the world of bricklaying or the franking of documents and immediately applied to the classroom, though it is interesting that Taylor's acolytes certainly believed that time and motion studies could and should be applied to surgeons in hospitals. There is an incident recorded in which Frank Gilbreth, a noted disciple of Taylor, observed a surgeon working and then informed him that 'if you were laying brick for me you wouldn't hold your job ten minutes' (Kanigel, 1997, p 489). What has been, developed under the auspices of scientific management in PCET is the process of concentrating decision making, 'quality control', and the regulation of classroom activity in the hands of managers and away from teachers.

In all the works so far cited in this chapter, with the exception of that by Braverman who was writing in the 1970s, there is a very marked link drawn between managerialism,

performativity, and the political economy of neo-liberalism. This link needs to be explained.

### **Neo-Liberalism and the Reflexive Project of the Form Filler**

What might be called the neo-liberal paradigm of government and economic policy might be said to have first emerged in the mid 1970s. David Harvey dates the first emergence of neo-liberal political economy to the 1973 coup d'état in Chile (Harvey, 2005). A key feature of neo-liberalism is 'globalisation' and the establishment of a 'world market'. In the last chapter a critique was presented of the ideas of Anthony Giddens in relation to the 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991). An argument was presented against Giddens which held that individuals had only partial or contingent powers of 'agency' when it came to the construction of their identity. Giddens' position was criticised for being excessively 'agentic'. It was argued that much of what constituted the individuals subjectivity (Ball, 2008, p.51) took place behind their back so to speak. To use Marx's famous phrase:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.  
(Marx, 1852/1966, p.399)

Neo-liberalism provides an excellent example of something which exerts a pervasive influence on the lives of almost everyone without the great majority being aware of what exactly it is. In the life stories presented here it is contended that managerialism is inextricably linked to neo-liberal precepts. These influences are very much felt in the lives of the teachers at the centre of this project even though they would probably not describe their experiences in these terms.

Neo-liberalism is beyond doubt the most profoundly important feature of the development of capitalism in the last 50 years. It is not possible in this chapter to describe to fully describe its rise and development. It is however worth making something of a detour in order to present some features of neo-liberalism which are



transcendent. No more than a very few, if any, adult literacy teachers in Thanet relate their working experience to neo-liberal doctrines but their stories allow for the criticism of the historical by the everyday.

It can be argued that at a macro level neo-liberalism is closely associated with three fundamental overarching policies. The first would be market de-regulation (Prasad, 2006) the processes by which markets are freed of regulation or control. Market de-regulation especially benefits the largest and most powerful economic concerns and is generally their favoured policy as it increases 'competition' in areas where due to their size and power in the market they possess the greatest advantages. Paradoxically it is increased competition which has seen the elimination of many smaller companies over the last 30 or so years and has led to the increased domination of the world economy by a much reduced number of giant corporations (Foster, 2014). This basic and inescapable feature of the 'free market' lies behind the enthusiasm of the biggest private companies for 'marketisation' and increased competition.

The second feature of neo liberalism would be 'financialisation' and is far less to the fore in public awareness but is very important indeed. It is normally defined along the following lines:

Financialisation means the increasing role of financial motives, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of the domestic and international economies. (Epstein, 2005, p.3)

It is tempting to say that what the above definition boils down to is that financialisation is the term used to denote the growth of indebtedness in the world economy after the early nineteen eighties; an explosion of credit which continues today notwithstanding the most profound economic crisis.

The third feature of neo-liberalism is 'privatisation' or what David Harvey sometimes refers to as 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2014, pp. 60-61). Privatisation is perhaps the feature of neo-liberalism which might be seen as having the most immediate links to managerialism. This relationship between privatisation is complex and managerialism has often appeared in institutions as a precursor of their privatisation. In the life stories examined in this project it might be argued that the development of managerialism in PCET was inseparable from the process of replacing a

'liberal' model of education with one more orientated towards the development of human capital. When Harvey talks about 'accumulation by dispossession' he is principally referring to the way in which what might be deemed to belong to the public is taken from them and sold, or given into private ownership. The public are depossessed (we might even say alienated) from what was once theirs. Very often they are then obliged to pay the new owners for the goods and services once produced by economic entities they once owned.

When considering the privatisation of education it is useful to think of this as happening in two separate but related ways. Stephen Ball calls the first of these two forms 'endogenous' and the second 'exogenous' privatisation (Ball, 2004, p. 2). Exogenous privatisation is the relatively straightforward process of taking an educational institution and placing it in private ownership, in the United Kingdom this is a relatively uncommon practice. More important in general, and especially in the context of this project, are the processes of endogenous privatisation. Ball himself attributes the identification and the drawing of a distinction between these two forms of privatisation to Richard Hatcher (2000). Hatcher whilst not using the terms 'exogenous' and 'endogenous' gives a detailed description of these processes in later work (2006) when looking at what he calls the 're-agenting' of schools.

It is fairly clear that 'financialisation' is inseparable from 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' privatisation. Although figures are not easily obtained, the designation of Further Education Colleges as private sector entities means that colleges are not obliged to publish details of loans they are liable for as these are deemed commercially sensitive. The government officially relinquished the requirement for FE Colleges to make public their indebtedness to the private sector in 2012 (ONS, 2012). This was achieved by re-designating FE colleges as being 'Non Profit Institutions Serving Households' (NPISH) as opposed to 'Public Sector', by the same token all FE and Ad. Ed. employees were considered to have become private sector employees. As the ONS note put it

One of the main changes removes the requirement for Further Education Corporations in England and Sixth Form College Corporations to gain the consent of the relevant government body for any borrowing they wish to undertake. (p.4)

In 2012 many of the new jobs which the government claimed to have created in the private sector were achieved through this re-designation of what most people still see as 'public sector' employment. Interestingly very few teachers and others in PCET realised that they were no longer deemed to be working in the public sector. It is unlikely that any of the teachers whose life stories are the subject of this project realise that this has happened.

Harry Braverman wrote 'Labour and Monopoly Capitalism' just a little before the emergence of the first neo liberal experiments. The processes which he describes as engendering the 'degradation' of labour he associates most clearly with the 'scientific management' pioneered by Frederick Winslow Taylor. Braverman following Marx most certainly saw this process of degradation as something integral to Capitalism itself. The pressure of competition among rival capitals and the relentless drive to increase or at least maintain profit leads to ever increasing pressures to raise labour productivity. Taylor was doing nothing more applying scientific management to specific labour processes with a view to increasing production. The eradication of 'soldiering', which Taylor viewed as a moral imperative, and the speeding up of labour processes generally met with the general approval from those who believed that they would gain from these new practices. Those women and men whose work came under the scrutiny of Taylor and other scientific managers typically experienced the new 'more efficient' working processes as being more oppressive than those which were superseded. Anyone today reading 'The Principles of Scientific Management' cannot but notice that for Taylor any opposition to increasing the intensity of labour was to be seen as a defence of laziness. Here we find ourselves entering into an area which very definitely has contemporary resonance, and definitely so in the lives of literacy teachers.

An aspect of neo-liberalism which does not always receive the attention it merits is the way in which financialisation, and endogenous privatisation exercises an influence on working practices in education. The processes of privatisation in education have been well analysed in terms of what might be called the ownership, financing and macro-management of schools (Ball, 2007; Chitty, 2009; Benn, 2011; and Ball and Junemann, 2012; amongst others). The link between neo liberalism, micro management (or managerialism) and practical classroom activity is less well analysed. What analysis there is, and Balls idea of 'performativity' is particularly important here, does not usually trace

the connection between the inner logic of neo-liberalism and managerialist control of teaching activity, it will be argued here that these things are linked.

In the lives of the teachers examined in this project there are permanent pressures to increase 'efficiency', to 'improve performance', to fulfil 'challenging targets', or even to respond to such patently ridiculous slogans as 'Only excellence will do.' (Chapman and Cartner, 2008, p.5). These pressures which the teachers are under might superficially appear quite different to those of industrial workers in the last century who came under Taylor's scrutiny but there is a logic which links these experiences.

As was evident from the excerpts quoted above from the 'Wealth of Nations' by Adam Smith (1776) capitalism carries within it the tendency to promote the division of labour and especially the separation of mental and physical tasks. Line production increases output per worker by narrowing the task required of each person in the process until the maximum level of specialisation has been achieved. Adam Smith pointed to the injurious effects of this division of labour and its tendency to produce what he described as ignorance and stupidity (p.429). The tendency of the division of labour is to remove from the worker all control over the process of production, all decision making, questions of judgement, and planning. As Marx repeatedly points out in 'Capital' and elsewhere the tendency is for the worker to increasingly become an 'appendage of the machine'. Marx argued that the incorporation of science and technology into the production process was normally at the expense of the worker:

All methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of the machine. (Marx, 1887/1990, p.799)

This process described above by Adam Smith and Marx is the same as that Braverman traced in his analysis of Taylorism and scientific management. What is crucial for understanding the working conditions of the teachers in this project is the same tendency as described above. The tendency to remove from the worker control over the processes of work, planning and thinking and to place these more and more in the domain of management. The development of scientific management methods in

education has followed a broadly path similar to that described by Braverman when looking at the longer term effects of Taylorism:

Scientific management gave the office a monopoly over conception, planning, judgement and the appraisal of results, while in the shop nothing was to take place other than the physical execution of all that was thought up in the office... But once the office was itself subjected to the rationalisation process this contrast lost its force. The functions of thought and planning became concentrated in an ever smaller group within the office. (Braverman, 1974, p.218)

Considering the above description from Braverman it is salutary to reflect back on the life stories of the teachers and consider how in all cases the collection and reporting of 'data' plays a crucial part in their working lives. This 'data' is required in order that the managers can monitor the conception and planning of 'teaching and learning', and of course make judgements and appraisals on the basis of the information provided through the reporting processes.

In keeping with the processes described by Braverman it should be noted that whilst in most contemporary Further Education and Adult Education institutions around half of all staff employed occupy clerical and administrative posts, in most cases within the reporting and monitoring processes. Increasingly the main task of 'middle managers' is the organisation of monitoring procedures, the collection and reporting of 'information' for senior managers. All strategic thought and planning are the preserve of the SMT within any particular institution.

The conundrum mentioned by Paul Beer looks a little easier to understand when viewed in the light of the above. The senior managers of the SMTs in their respective institutions come increasingly to view their 'leadership role' as being not so much the management of the real world going on of their institution as the management of the bureaucratic reflection of that activity. In answer to Paul Beer's question it might be suggested that the SMT in his institution could believe themselves to be outstanding because they had complete confidence in their own capacity to collect, manage, and act upon data. Such data is not of course itself 'reality' but a bureaucratic reflection of the real world.

### **Circles of Deceit**

The parallel coexistence of the SMT vision of the world and the teachers' vision gives rise to many odd phenomena. In the life stories presented it could be argued that it was this coexistence which lay behind Hannah Cooper's failure to understand how Present and Correct could claim to be successful when she felt that it was not. Trevor who worked for the 'Jobcentre' explained to Hannah that the figures he collected from Present and Correct and which he presented to his employers made 'no difference' to the real world position of the long term unemployed though they satisfied 'the government'. In a very simple and matter of fact aside Grace talked about the 'new managers' of her FE college in the following terms:

I think the senior management...they got rid of all the old school ones that knew everything and replaced them with new ones and solicitors and accountants and everything else, but they are sort of further and further away.

It might not actually be the case that these new managers are 'solicitors and accountants' but Grace sees these new managers as different from the 'old school' managers and most certainly sees them as more remote from the world she works in. Again and again in the life stories the real problems of teaching literacy to disadvantaged, disaffected, and impoverished adults is contrasted to what might be termed the official version. It is this remoteness as much as the reliance on 'information' systems which engenders the bureaucratic nature of managerialism. The problems which the teachers confront in real life are difficult to manage and often have no completely satisfactory solution, this is not at all to deny the successes which are often achieved and which sustain the teachers. What is certain is that these real life problems are never solved, and are not even adequately presented in a 'bureaucratic' form.

Writing in 1936 Karl Mannheim explored what he saw as a fundamental trait of bureaucracy when confronted with real social and cultural issues. In contrast to this bureaucratic approach Mannheim argued these problems were actually political and bureaucracy could not grasp this, as Mannheim argued 'the fundamental tendency of all bureaucratic thought is to turn all problems of politics into problems of administration' (Mannheim, 1936, p. 118). This argument might actually be taken further, or turned on its head so to speak. Those involved in management who represent political problems

as administrative matters constitute a 'bureaucracy'. In the life stories here we could consider how the 'political' problem of disaffection among young people is never discussed in PCET it is instead managerially rendered into the problem of retention and achievement.

When Trevor commented to Hannah Cooper about the ways in which the 'data' he collected for his employers at the 'Jobcentre' bore little resemblance to reality he would certainly not have been aware that he was echoing and giving a contemporary example of a phenomena commented on by Marx in the 1840s. In a critique of Hegel's appraisal of the Prussian state Marx traced how modern states related to their bureaucracies and how different levels of the bureaucracy itself related to each other. We have already considered a little of how OFSTED functions and especially its role in the creation of teacher identity, college SMTs and their bureaucratic managerialist practices also shape the environment in which teachers function. For Marx the different parts of bureaucratic hierarchy worked together to construct what might be considered to be a counterfeit parallel world to that which existed outside of the bureaucratic imagination:

Since bureaucracy converts its formal purposes into its contents, it everywhere comes into conflict with real purposes. It is, therefore compelled to pass off what is formal for the content and the content for what is formal. The purposes of the state are changed into purposes of the bureau and vice versa. Bureaucracy is a circle no one can leave. Its hierarchy is a *hierarchy of information*. The top entrusts the lower circles with an insight into details, while the lower circles, entrust the top with an insight into what is universal; and thus they mutually deceive each other. (Marx, 1844, pp. 187-188)

All those people who worked in the area of Adult Literacy teaching during the Skills for Life years and who witnessed the mutual congratulatory pronouncements of policy makers and senior managers on the tremendous successes they were achieving will probably find themselves smiling wryly at Marx's description of mutual deceit.

### **The self as a stranger**

From the above discussion we might now move to a consideration of the alienation or estrangement of the teachers in their life stories. We have already considered alienation

or estrangement in a more abstract form, now we might again look at it in a more concrete way; the way it is manifested in the teachers' lives.

estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the act of production – within the producing activity itself. How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself?  
(Marx, 1844a/1998, pp. 73-74)

The subject of alienation has sometimes been subjected to particularly arcane theorisation, even obfuscation; in some academic discussions in most cases by writers who would consider themselves Marxist. These presentations of alienation portray it as almost a mystical process. In fact alienation is something all too familiar.

Fortunately there are also figures that stand out for their presentation and elaboration of the theory of alienation in a way which has allowed for its utility in this project. In its lucid presentations (Ollman, 1970; Mészáros, 1970; and Sayers 2011) the theory of alienation becomes something which can be employed with good effect, to understand real life phenomena. If we look at how Marx posed the problem in the excerpt above it will be seen that it alienation is far from being a 'mysterious' business, indeed the whole problem of alienation is that it is all too quotidian.

Liz Stanley required that the 'this sidedness' of social theory be demonstrable, if a social theory cannot be linked to the lives of any person then we might well doubt whether it is a theory at all or some type of academic chimera. In Liz Stanley's words 'if structural analyses do not work at the level of particular lives then they do not work at all' (Stanley, 1992, p.5), the logic of this seems unassailable. Conversely if some aspect of a person's life can be linked to 'theory' in such a way as to explain, or 'theorise' that reality in a convincing manner then we should take the theory seriously. Viewed in this way the theory of 'alienation' as presented by Marx needs only to be demonstrated as having explanatory or at least expository power, to be taken as useful. The remainder of this chapter will take the form of an argument to show that it has this power in the case of the teachers lives presented here. A further argument will be made that managerialism itself can be viewed as being part and parcel of the process of alienation.



Braverman (1974, pp. 218-245) demonstrates how Taylorism reinforced the separation of mental and manual labour. In the earlier stages of this separation 'thought' became the property and the right of all administrative and clerical workers and was removed from those most directly engaged in production. Over time as managerial systems strove to become 'flatter' the majority of clerical and administrative work in turn became more systematic and mechanical. In the modern educational enterprise such work has in the main part been reduced to form filling and processing or what is sometimes referred to as 'box ticking' and maintenance of information systems. The making of real decisions and much strategic 'thinking' has become increasingly the sole preserve of senior managers within particular institutions. This concentration of control in the hands of managers is also the alienation of the control of work from teachers.

In many real ways in the contemporary world of PCET the power of OFSTED and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has reduced even the power of senior managers to make decisions, or rather they still make the decisions but these must be in agreement with the guidelines, explicit or implied, set down by these government agencies. Ironically the era of no notice 'light touch' inspections requires all institutions to operate on a regime of permanent inspection readiness and therefore of permanent and profound 'compliance'. All of the literacy teachers in this project repeatedly stressed different ways in which 'reporting' and record keeping were omnipresent in their work. For the literacy teacher the preparation and post lesson evaluation of lesson plans, the keeping of records, the monitoring of students, and much else is completed by the teacher herself but in actuality much of the work and the form in which it is completed is largely determined by the need to prepare a trail for inspection. To paraphrase Marx the literacy teacher habitually confronts parts of her work not as her own creation but as that of an 'alien' person. The teacher must learn to watch herself and her work as the subject of 'inspection'. Furthermore the inspection system becomes the only 'view' of the teachers work which matters. OFSTED has developed an institutional disregard, and even hostility for any viewpoint which it has not itself adopted. Where an assessment or opinion diverges from its own OFSTED sees only an indication of failure.

### **Discourses of Alienation**

There is an alienating effect experienced by teachers of their work always being measured within the overall framework of performativity. The measure of the literacy teacher's work is not to be judged by her but by the standard by which she will be judged by 'inspectors'. If the literacy teacher is to judge herself then the only evaluation which might carry official weight must be in accord with the view of OFSTED or other 'inspectors'. Every working day and at all hours she is forced to 'to face the product of her activity' as though it were that of 'a stranger'. The quote above which is endorsed by the Centre of Excellence in Leadership, and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service that 'Only excellence will do' (Chapman and Cartner, 2008, p.5) gives an indication of the fabulous standards required. It is also a small example of something pervasive; a form of talking about the teachers works which might be called a discourse of alienation. Examples of this discourse of alienation occur throughout the life stories of all the teachers in this study. In Catherine's life story for example she talks of how the official curriculum is not what teachers or their students really want but in her work she must appear to follow this curriculum, Catherine also remarked on the demoralisation she and close colleagues felt when they were instructed in how to complete what they felt were overly long lesson plans.

The alienating effects of managerialism in the lives of teachers are inextricably bound up with problems of language. All of the works referenced in this chapter which argue that managerialism is a force in the life of teachers in one way or another look at problems of language especially at the way in which the language of business and commercial management has come to occupy a central, even hegemonic, place in discussions of education. Words and expressions which when they first appeared in educational discourse sounded oddly 'commercial' are now accepted without demurrer. An early example appears in Randle and Brady's 1997 article with the term SMT, or Senior Management Team being used to designate those who managed colleges. It is easy to forget that in the years before the incorporation of colleges the Term SMT would not have been heard and that for several years most teachers found the term to be very strange, in Randle and Brady's article mention is also made of how the appearance of the term SMT roughly coincided with the provision of 'lease cars' and corporate hospitality events for the same SMT. Today it is quite possible to find that SMT has itself been superseded by the term 'Executive' marking a further degree of separation.

Several of the teachers in this study have worked for a college which now has such an 'Executive Team' of four people including two 'Strategic Directors' one for 'Corporate Services' and another for 'Finance and Commercial Development'. The first strategic goal of the college states that the college 'curriculum' will be 'aligned to the East Kent economy', this in itself is of interest as an ambition given that even the 'official optimism' of Thanet District Council website (2016) cannot conceal that prospects for people in Thanet continue to worsen or at the absolute best do not improve. As 'financialised' language becomes more entrenched in colleges it tends to do so in parallel with a belief that 'success' depends upon the ever closer alignment of institutional values with those of a utopianised world of business and entrepreneurship. The real economic plight of Thanet is a problem of long term decline in the regional political economy but these are not the terms in which it is described by the executive of the college. We might recall Mannheim's maxim about how bureaucracies strive to render political problems into purely administrative issues (Mannheim, 1936, p. 118).

In the language of the teachers in this project there is an unsettling ambivalence in the use of business language; at once accepting and alienating. The word 'progression' is an interesting example. This word features in several of the life stories sometimes 'progress' refers to what the teachers see as real world progress and might refer what are seen as modest but important gains 'Sarah' talks about how in a community setting she was able to coax twins away from being reclusive, an achievement which her college might respect though not officially recognise. When talking about institutional goals the meaning of progression is bathed in light of a different hue, it refers to students meeting institutional targets in terms of entering other courses or employment. For teachers such as Sarah the problem with this is that a significant portion of their work, as they see it, is delegitimized by the 'system goals' with alienating results. In some cases real 'progress' is officially ignored whilst other measures achieved by some contrivance are accepted, an example of this might be Grace's successful pleading with course directors to accept student onto courses which are not really suitable so that her own department might claim them as 'successful outcomes'.

Grace provides a stark example of divergence between her own measures of success and those of her employers in the case of the ginger haired girl who the institution tried to lose but who Grace offered support. Another particularly interesting example of the

progress problem is presented by Susan who measures the advances made by her Access students primarily in terms of their gaining in cultural capital whereas we assume that the college would be exclusively interested in 'completions'.

When one lexical item makes way for another or indeed when something new enters a vocabulary this usually signifies some more profound change. Mention has already been made of the monograph 'Education and the Cult of Efficiency' by Raymond E. Callahan (1962) a strangely neglected work which can be read as an investigation of the way in which 'efficiency' talk entered into education. Callahan traces the genealogy of 'efficiency' and shows how its advance into education was typically linked to wider scientific management based approaches, in the early part of the century many of these were linked directly to interventions in education by professed supporters of Taylorism. The cult of efficiency in turn leads to the problem of what is deemed to be the correct form of measurement of what is deemed to be efficacious. Reading contemporary discussions around topics such as managerialism, performativity and measurement it appears that many present concerns might be viewed as having their origins in the way in which the discourse of 'efficiency' entered into and then colonised educational debates. An interesting example of this might be some of the recent work by Geert Biesta (2010, 2013) which examines the dominance of measurement in education and how this has led to the degradation of values.

### **Smart Leadership and Followership**

The analysis of two more terms of contemporary importance in adult literacy teaching will conclude this chapter. These terms are 'Leadership' and the acronym SMART. Both terms, in different ways represent fragments of the overall process of alienation, both have entered education having originated in scientific management. A case will be made for showing how both terms contribute to the process by which literacy teachers come as 'strangers' to view the product and the process of their work as strangers.

Scientific management as originally pioneered by Taylor and associates was never popular with those people described in the literature of the movement as 'workmen'. Braverman (1974) cites various incidents which attest to the unpopularity of Taylor's methods. Even today the 'time and motion study', at the core of Taylor's method

remains unpopular even dreaded in popular culture. The scenes from Chaplin's 'Modern Times' showing ever increasing speeds of work on a conveyor belt and the monitoring of workers are the abiding popular images of Taylorism. For many 'scientific managers' in USA the necessity of refining methods and techniques had become apparent after the Second World War with the growth in industrial militancy and the need to improve the quality of goods produced in the face of competition from renascent Japanese and European industry. It was this which led to the growth in popularity of the particular form of scientific management associated with W. Edwards Deming at the centre of which was the doctrine of 'leadership'.

Prior to the war Deming had worked in American industry primarily as a statistician working within a Taylorist paradigm. In the immediate post war years he had worked with first the American occupying powers and then later domestic industrialists in Japan. Deming had been impressed by the intense loyalty which Japanese big industrial conglomerates fostered among its 'company men' executives and industrial workers (Walton, 1986, pp.3-21). It was this loyalty and ideological commitment to the goals of company which Deming successfully promoted in the United States as 'leadership'. According to Deming himself:

The aim of leadership should be to improve the performance of man and machine, to improve quality, to increase output, and simultaneously to bring pride of workmanship to people. Put in a negative way, the aim of leadership is not merely to find and record failures of men, but to remove the causes of failure (Deming, 1982, p.248)

Much of the Deming approach to 'leadership' is couched in such a way as to give an impression of 'empowering' the employee. The growth in the use of the word 'empowerment' itself within post compulsory education often accompanies the development of 'leadership' among managers. For Deming as for most scientific managers empowerment is actually the system of making people responsible for compliance with the demands of the system they work within. According to Deming it is imperative that each individual employee should be statistically monitored and should also be responsible for the correct achievement of pre-calculated targets. Deming advocated that it is these statistical indicators which must be monitored. Deming refers

to the process of compliance with targets and statistics as being either 'in' or 'out of control' (Deming, 1982, p251). Deming argues that 'anyone out of control on the good side' (p. 251), or exceeding targets, should be studied so that others might learn from what we today know as 'best practice'. In those cases in which people 'do not come up to a certain standard level' a fairly straight forward calculation is to be completed.

The standard can be fixed by statistical theory for maximum profit in consideration of:

The distribution of abilities in the reservoir of people not yet tried out

The cost of training a man to the point where you decide whether to retain him or let him go

The discounted profit in retention of a man that meets the goal. (Deming 1982, p.251)

The chapter from which the above chapter is taken is entitled 'Training and Leadership' the final twenty or so pages of the chapter following the above quote are given over to formulae for the calculation of whether to retain, retrain, or to dispose of those 'out of control'. The link between leadership and the contemporary 'benchmarking' processes of managerialist regimes and institutions such as OFSTED will be all too apparent. Two of the strongest themes which emerge from this glimpse at leadership as promoted by Deming and others are statistics and 'followership' as the obverse of 'leadership'.

W. Edwards Deming's most influential volume was titled 'Out of the Crisis' (1982) and although the aim of the book is clearly and ambitiously stated as being the 'transformation of the style of American management' (p. ix) there is no concise or even identifiable statement of the nature of the crisis out of which it seeks a path. An indication of the understanding which Deming has of 'crisis' can be gleaned from his statement of '14 points for management', these mostly relate to ways of increasing productivity whilst continually raising quality and to what might be seen as a 'deep and inclusive team building' within an enterprise (Deming, 1982, pp. 23-24). It must be clearly understood that this team building is conceived of in a very particular form. Team building is to take place around narrow objectives; increased productivity and quality. Team building is defined exclusively by management and any trade union involvement, if permitted, is to be minimised: 'company unions are the rule' (Deming, 1982, p.47).

Although Deming is at pains throughout his later work to stress that successful management must look beyond statistics it is also apparent most of the information his 'leadership' demands is dependent upon and geared towards the collection of measurements. In the real world context of the lives of the teachers in this project the drive for measurements manifests itself as the endless, and many believe often pointless, system of reporting 'data' to line managers. Leadership implies followership and all of those whose life stories are given here find themselves in this role.

The nature of 'followership' is fairly extensively discussed in business literature and has been considered, though not widely, in PCET (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000; Collinson, 2006; Collinson and Collinson, 2009).

Discussion of leadership and followership is mostly concerned with questions of charismatic as opposed to pragmatic leadership and issues of 'top down' or 'bottom up' direction. In the six life stories presented here there was no discernable trace of something which might be described as a democratic approach to leadership, even if the narrators had some sympathy with the problems faced by leaders. David and Margaret Collinson argue that there is a varied picture of PCET leadership and followership experiences in England, though it should be pointed out that they were both leading figures in the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) an organisation which described its purpose as being to:

foster and support leadership reform, transformation, sustainability and quality improvement in the Learning and Skills Sector. CEL's Research Programme is sponsored by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to whom all the results will be reported. (Collinson, 2008, p.1)

CEL was therefore dependent for funding on the body whose policy it was required to both evaluate and implement. The experience of leadership and followership recounted in the life stories here is at odds with that described by David and Margaret Collinson. In the work cited above by Lumby and Tomlinson (2000) the authors make the point that it is very difficult to capture the complexities and variety of approaches to leadership evinced by College Principals. In several of the views expressed the reader gets the impression of college leaders seeing themselves as being permanently tossed around on

the horns of dilemmas. This must be the case for the majority of 'leaders' in PCET who find themselves balancing the desire to be democratic and ethical against pressures to conform to other imperatives. The 'leader' facing such dilemmas will undoubtedly find that the OFSTED framework for inspection and 'business imperatives' determine how choices must be made. Even if the competing claims commanded equal rights Marx's dictum would still apply 'Between equal rights force decides' (Marx, 1887, p. 344). In Lumby and Tomlinson's survey one college leader at least could see how ethical dilemmas might be dissolved. Principal H saw the role of 'a leader' with disquieting clarity:

'The first job of leadership is to define reality ... I think effective leadership has to be quite directive. You know the theory that everything will come from the ground and everyone will be involved ... but I think there has to be some directive leadership. There has to be some leadership that defines reality and puts forward a vision.' (Principal H) (Lumby and Collinson, 2000, p.143)

In terms of relating 'Managerialism' to alienation the statement by Principal H merits consideration. What could be more alienating for the employee than the manager's arrogation of an exclusive and excluding right 'to define reality'?

### **Smart Targets Come From Where Exactly?**

The history of SMART targets provides an interesting illustration of managerialist practices being taken from an industrial context and being uncritically applied to educational practice. All the teachers in this project like their counterparts throughout public, as opposed to private, education are required to set and achieve SMART targets for each class they teach. The achievement of these targets to a significant extent forms the basis of the grade awarded to teachers by OFSTED or their institutional 'Quality' inspectors. This observation process is interesting in itself as in most cases the teacher is graded on the basis of the observation of a single lesson each academic year. In reality this often means that a teacher may be graded as 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' on the observation of approximately one thousandth of the time they spend teaching annually.



SMART objectives require that the teacher identifies targets which can be objectively assessed for each lesson. This usually requires that the students complete some type of assessment in class which provides evidence that all the students, or at least a preponderance of them have learnt the lesson. For adult literacy learners a national curriculum provided several hundred such objectives which taken together were deemed to describe what should be taught and learnt at five different levels ranging from 'Entry Level 1' for students approaching literacy as complete beginners to 'Level 2' which was taken as being equivalent to GCSE level. Each literacy lesson had to achieve one or more objectives. An example at Level 1 might be that 'By the end of the lesson students will be able to use punctuation to help their understanding' (DFES, 2001, p.82) or at Entry Level 'By the end of the lesson students will be able to speak clearly to be heard and understood in simple exchanges' (DFES, 2001, p.24). It will be immediately apparent to a person approaching such 'objectives' from outside that they are very strange in several ways. Most obviously anyone who writes would realise the use of punctuation to help understanding is not something which is achieved once and for all in a one hour class, nor is it at all clear that it is possible to leave a lesson after one hour with the capacity to speak clearly and to be heard in simple exchanges if one had entered the same class unable to do so. The division of the literacy curriculum into such discrete fragments was necessitated by the need for SMART targets.

The acronym SMART was formed by the requirement that targets for each lesson were at once 'Specific', 'Measurable', 'Achievable', 'Realistic', and 'Timebound'; everything which is known about education in general, and adult literacy education in particular indicates that the processes of learning and teaching cannot meaningfully be divided according to any such metric.

The managerialist imperatives, to measure, to set targets, to benchmark, to compare performances, and ultimately on these bases to judge, punish, or possibly reward requires the imposition of such things as SMART targets. It is an essential requirement of managerialism that in those areas where reality resists measurement then it is actuality itself which must be rendered into something tractable dimensions. All of the teachers in this project tell stories which show examples of how the reality of their work was ignored, by passed, or simply discounted. What mattered was the managerialist representation of their work. The making strange of the labour processes of the teachers

in this project in ways which prevent them from recognising themselves in the 'official' representation is most certainly a process of alienation.

As a final word on managerialism it is interesting to point to the origin of the SMART target. Given its pervasiveness and its reification throughout PCET it is surprising that almost no one knows where it first appeared, or perhaps it is not strange at all.

To know the history of the SMART target is to see its contemporary sway as something incongruous. SMART targets originated first in a short article penned for the journal 'Management Review' by George T. Doran. Doran had been a manager for a company selling hydroelectric power. At the time he wrote the article he was working with a small business consultancy in Idaho. The original article is some 500 words long and contains no references. Doran coined the acronym SMART and urged other managers to follow him in using this in target setting because it gave quantitative 'support and expression to management's beliefs' (Doran, 1981, p.35). How many 'quality' inspectors in education today even know that the SMART lesson plans they require originated from something no more 'evidence based' than a mnemonic first coined to help managers set targets for electricity salesmen?

## Place

*History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now.*

*Walter Benjamin 1940 - Theses on the Philosophy of History xiv*

Leaving the railway station in Margate to begin the first interview for this project I walked along the sea front. The skies and clouds above Margate bay refract sunlight in an often dramatic manner when this is combined in interaction with the sea it gives rise to an effect which J.M.W. Turner devoted much of his painting to capturing and developing. The peculiar ethereality of these sea and sky scapes of Margate can be heady. The poet T.S. Eliot apparently spent considerable amounts of time in sitting in a shelter facing the same bay which Turner had surveyed some 120 years earlier. Eliot was suffering what in the terminology of the time was known as a 'nervous collapse' and he apparently sat in the shelter for long periods as he worked on the verses which would become 'The Wasteland'. I had read 'The Wasteland' at school, more recently I had noticed that a part of the poem had been used as an epigraph in 'Beyond Fragments' by Linden West (1996). I now found myself walking past the shelter and remembering the lines:

"On Margate Sands.  
I can connect  
Nothing with nothing.  
The broken finger-nails of dirty hands.  
My people humble people who expect  
Nothing." (Eliot, 1922)

The ambiguity of the lines 'I can connect, Nothing with nothing' seemed to me to be a leitmotif of the poem itself. 'The Wasteland' moves from one evocative scene to another leaving the reader with a sense that each episode is connected by something simultaneously palpable and mysterious. The ambiguity of the nexus between these scenes in 'The Wasteland' often relates to places, here the glimpse of Margate Sands comes between a fragment of conversation overheard in Moorgate London, a fragment

of song from the Lorelei, and a reference to ancient Carthage. For the early part of the year 1921 Eliot lived in a hotel in Cliftonville, an area which was then genteel but is today marked by its extreme deprivation. Cliftonville features prominently in this study.

In the context of the themes in 'The Wasteland'; the devastation of the First World War; the profound crisis of Eliot's own social milieu; and the general feeling of desolation which pervades the poem it is hard not to see his mental problems as themselves being a symptomatic of a historic malaise. Just opposite the shelter in which Eliot sat composing his iambic pentameters and clearly visible to the poet was the newly opened 'Dreamland' amusement park with brash sideshows and daring rides. This 'attraction' had itself been built to attract the weekend and holiday crowds from especially South London. Dreamland was never intended to attract the wealthy but rather those with sufficient money to pay for the train fare to the coast and the entertainments offered. The juxtaposition of the poet enduring a breakdown whilst composing verse which captured the bleak zeitgeist and Dreamland itself as the raffish embodiment of the world Eliot loathed and feared is, to the modern reader extraordinary. Yet it is certain that in 1921 no one in the crowds passing Eliot on their way from the Margate station to Dreamland and the beach had any inkling of what was happening. The relationship between Margate Sands, Carthage, Cliftonville, and Dreamland, The Great War and Eliot in his shelter might be taken as a particularly extraordinary example of what Henri Lefebvre would refer to as 'space' (Lefebvre, 1947).

Hannah told me part of her story on the first day of this project she explained that in the years before her death her mother had enjoyed sitting on the shore, looking out to sea across the bay. When Hannah told me the location of the spot where her mother preferred to sit I realised that it was opposite Eliot's shelter. After these forays from her retirement flat she habitually told Hannah that 'Margate is still beautiful'. Catherine, Grace, Paul and Hannah all talked about how the Thanet of their childhood and youth had been a beautiful place. The Thanet they remembered has now gone, or so they say. I have only ever seen it in its troubled contemporary form. Even allowing for the accounts of Thanet's past to have been coloured by nostalgia, it is evident that its past appears brighter than its present. It is also worth noting that the contemporary meaning of 'nostalgia' itself grew out of, and came to replace an older original meaning of 'yearning for the land of one's birth'.

### **The Problem of Place**

From the start of this project the problem of how to understand place was present wherever I looked. On that first afternoon I found myself trying to understand the significance of the divergent views, if such they were, of Eliot and Hannah's mother on the beauty or ugliness of Margate Sands. Each subsequent interview with each of the teachers further impressed upon me the problem of attempting to apprehend the full implications of 'place'. Three threads emerged around which I endeavoured to develop an understanding of place. The first of these was the interrelationship of place with life story. The second thread was the relationship of place and social class. The third thread was the existence of place as a historically and culturally permeated form of space. I will return to these threads throughout this chapter.

Comments have been made at several points in this thesis about the organic nature of life story work. Each life studied appears to give rise to a range of problems and interpretations which are unique and yet related. Here the selected stories of the lives of six teachers of literacy working on the Isle of Thanet have been related to each other and to wider social and cultural relationships. Each of the six lives presented has happened within a particular social and cultural ecology. The word ecology is used in the sense of the 'study of interaction of persons with their environment', (OED) with the environment being understood not only as something physical but also as something which is thoroughly social and cultural.

Looking at the lives of the six teachers in this study the fact that they have all spent years teaching literacy to adults has been a key part of the ecological system, or context, within which their lives have been conducted. This context has shaped the experiences, outlooks, value systems, indeed the whole *weltanschauung* of the teachers. In this chapter consideration will be given to 'place' as a part of the context in which the six teachers' lives are lived. It will be argued that place, like class, is something which is simultaneously pervasive and resistant to any neat definition. From the very beginning of the study and in its development there was a realisation of the importance of 'place' as a 'thing' and a 'concept' interwoven with the life stories themselves but this awareness proved elusive when the attempt was made to formulate it in words. The problem of trying to understand place from the perspective of life stories is certainly not

new, in this study mention has already been made of the occurrence of the problem in literature with Balzac's Paris and Raymond Williams' Welsh Marches (Balzac, 1835; Williams, 1960) being given of two instances judged to be relevant to this thesis. The problem as it appears in fiction is related but distinct to the issue as it appears in life story work. In fiction the writer has more freedom to construct place in accord with the constraints and freedoms of the art of writing. In the approach to life story work adopted here a greater emphasis must be placed on 'truth to life' not only in a creative way but also crucially in a more 'documentary' sense of truthfulness. The creative writer might have recourse to dramatic licence, to pathetic fallacy, or to the invention of incidents to give greater life to the place in which their fictions take place. In life story work there is a similar need to reveal the part of that place in the life story. In the approach taken here there will be no straying away from prose. In Balzac's and in William's work the characters and the setting cannot be understood separately. In life story work too, even without the use of poetry, there is a need to show the link between people and place.

There are also academic traditions within the area of geography which have explored place not only as a physical phenomenon but also in ideographic, social constructivist, and even phenomenological terms (Cresswell, 2004, p.51). The work of some of these geographers has played an important role in the approach to place in the life story work which is explored below.

Concern with physical environments and their relationship to capitalism has influenced the work of Marxist theoreticians most saliently in the case of this project Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. Both of these thinkers have worked to understand the relationships between space, place and the development of capitalism. In the case of Henri Lefebvre 'place' is an important theme in much of his work, especially so in two of his major works 'Critique of Everyday Life' and 'The Creation of Space'. The three volumes of the former work were written in French in the decades after the Second World War but were translated into English sometime later (1991, 2002, and 2008). 'The Production of Space' was first published in 1974 but did not appear in English translation until 1991. Above all Lefebvre was concerned with using Marxism as way of developing an understanding of 'everyday' life, a great part of this is therefore concerned with the various forms of 'space' which humans create and live in. David Harvey often refers to

how Henri Lefebvre's work has informed his own. Harvey points to what he sees as crucial themes in the work of Henri Lefebvre, especially the concept of 'urbanism'. In an 'Afterword' to the English translation of 'The Production of Space' Harvey points out that Lefebvre was not satisfied with the idea of the 'city' as an adequate synonym for 'urbanism':

...consideration of the urban question quickly led him to deny that the city was any kind of meaningful entity in modern life. It had been superseded by a process of urbanization or, more generally, of the production of space, that was binding together the global and the local, the city and the country, the centre and the periphery, in new and quite unfamiliar ways. Daily life, the topic that had engaged his attention before 1968, as well as Marxist theory and revolutionary politics had to be reinterpreted against this background of a changing production of space. (Harvey, 1991, p.431)

Space and place are very important themes throughout Harvey's own work not only as a geographer but more widely. In much of Harvey's own work space and place are related to wider social and cultural questions (1979, 1990, 1996, and 2012). In 'Justice Nature and the Geography of Difference', Harvey devotes considerable space to the analysis of the fictional writings of Raymond Williams and the importance of 'place' therein. It is far from coincidental that the chapter devoted to this analysis comes immediately before a chapter in which there is a brilliant exposition of 'Dialectics'. It is very interesting indeed that Raymond Williams' 1958 essay 'Culture is Ordinary' (Williams, 1989, pp. 3-18) was approaching questions similar to those which absorbed Henri Lefebvre albeit from a different angle. This essay marked a nodal point in Williams' intellectual development in particular his concern with the link between 'ordinary life', culture, and place. In the 'Culture is Ordinary' essay Williams looks at many issues but key elements are illustrated through the presentation of fragments of his life story including a memorable account of his own relocation from a working class childhood and youth in the 'border country' of Wales to the university and genteel tea shops of Cambridge. In the work of Williams, Edward Thompson and Henri Lefebvre there is a very strong weaving together of what Lefebvre referred to as 'everyday life', what Williams meant by 'culture', and what Thompson called 'History from below'. All three worked within what Thompson referred to as 'a Marxist tradition'. This chapter is an attempt to bring together a Marxist

perspective on place and its influence in life story work. There are three central premises to this approach.

First is the contention that place and life story are internally related. Places shape the life stories of those who are located within them, and in turn the life stories of people shape the places in which they happen.

A second premise is that place and class are also inseparable, though this must be understood as being far more complex and nuanced than might appear from such practices as post-coding as applied when judging school and college recruitment. Place and class have a particular relationship within British culture, if we are told that someone lives in Kensington, Durham, or Cowley assumptions will be made. But these assumptions change radically if we find that the person from Kensington lives on the Athlone Gardens Estate with its problems of deprivation, or that in the case of Durham the individual comes from the former mining village of Bear Pit, or that the Cowley person is 'diplomatically' introduced as hailing from Oxford. Relationships between class and place exist throughout the modern, or indeed postmodern world and within each society the relationship between place and class will take a form special, quite possibly unique, to that society. The relationship between place and class is so 'everyday' that it almost always goes unremarked yet the experiencing of place and place permeate each the other to such a degree that they cannot be separated. The doctor's surgery, the classroom, the living room, the corridors of power, all workplaces, and the school entrance, with mothers collecting their children, are all experienced in class related ways. Indeed how places are experienced is conditioned by and is constitutive of the experiencing of class itself.

A third premise is that place is created by infinitely complicated and interrelated historical and cultural processes. These processes work simultaneously in what we might call their *specific* and *general* forms. When we talk about the general form of social or cultural processes we have in mind the way in which the development takes place across the wider society. The consideration of 'the specific' of social and cultural processes in terms of place looks at how those processes are manifested in a particular locale. The financial crisis of 2008 has had an effect across the whole political economy of the United Kingdom and indeed the Western world. It is absolutely no exaggeration to refer



to this process as a general crisis. Yet this general crisis took different forms and shapes in different places. We might almost say that the general crisis 'adapted' itself, and found particular forms in which to express itself, in specific 'places'.

The 2008 *general* crisis in the economy of the United Kingdom was centred in the City of London. A visitor to the City will see little difference between the place today and pre crisis, the important differences are hidden from view and are to be found in balance sheets stored electronically in thousands of computers. The distance from the City to Thanet is a little over 80 miles. A walk along Margate sea front will show it to be a world apart from the United Kingdom's financial hub. In the *specific* case of Thanet the general crisis of 2008 and subsequent years has had a very particular manifestation. At a most obvious level the crisis led to the closure of Manston airport, the end of ferry services from Ramsgate to Europe and the closure of the Pfizer plant at Sandwich. It is even said that development of the High Speed Rail link to London which coincided with the crisis has led to the drug trade in Thanet falling under the control of London based gangs. The burgeoning client base of these drug dealers is assumed by almost everyone to be linked to the growth of unemployment, poverty and other aspects of the economic crisis itself. Despite the crisis the Turner Contemporary gallery opened, a group of dedicated enthusiasts manage to restore Dreamland, and to the surprise of the small handful of their supporters Thanet Wanderers Rugby football club have managed to avoid relegation from the London and South East League Division 2. The crisis played into and intensified processes, some of which were already evident in other troubled coastal areas of Britain, and some of which were more or less unique to that Thanet. Unique features, for better or for worse which differentiate one place from another.

### **Place and Other**

The connectedness and complexity of the relationship between class and place was in many ways the theme of Lynsey Hanley's book 'Estates: an intimate history' (2012) which looks at the way in which for many people in inter-war and especially post war Britain the council housing estate rendered class in bricks and mortar and how it influenced the lives of millions of people like her (and me) who grew up on housing estates:

I started out wanting to write about the relationship between class and the built environment, and ended up writing about the internal walls that we build to keep us from collapsing under the weight of that relationship's implications (p.xvi)

What Lynsey Hanlon refers to as 'the relationship between class and the built environment' and 'internal walls' is of particular interest when considering the lives of the six literacy teachers here as the built environment of Thanet has played an important part in shaping their lives both in external and internal shape.

Two forms of housing have exerted a strong influence in shaping the character of Thanet. First and foremost is the cultural influence of 'the council housing estate' even if today many of these houses have passed into private ownership the estates are seen as being socially distinct and are certainly stigmatised. For most Thanetians, including those who live in these areas the Millmead, Dane Valley, High Fields, Whitehall or Newington estates are seen as being sites of 'failure'; as places which signify an inability to participate in the fabled prosperity of contemporary Britain. To the 'council estate' must be added the bottom rungs of the private rented sector which is characteristically unsafe, unstable and unaffordable (de Santos, 2012). In the particular case of Thanet and especially areas like the East Cliff of Ramsgate or Cliftonville in Margate the private rented sector is particularly disadvantaged. In these areas and others the private rented sector is to a significant degree comprised of small flats and bedsits in buildings which were once boarding houses or hotels catering to the holiday trade. As this sector declined so the properties were utilised by social service departments for the resettlement of families outside of their own boroughs. In the two areas mentioned significant numbers of 'problem' families and individuals along with resettled offenders have been re-housed by London Boroughs (White, 2012). In the Centre for Social Justice report (2013, p.12) Councillor Clive Hart is quoted as saying of Cliftonville that 'there isn't a day that goes by where you don't see a family pushing their possessions around in a shopping trolley, moving to their new home'. All the teachers whose life stories are discussed here would be able to attest to the accuracy of Councillor Hart's description of such miserable scenes.

Hannah's parents shop, their last attempt at a small business, was located on Northdown Road the main thoroughfare in Cliftonville. Today Hannah, Grace, and Susan all live within an easy ten minute walk of the same road. Later in this chapter an examination will be made of the picture Tracey Emin presents of Margate and Thanet. It is significant that in her story Emin marks the change in her family's circumstances when she notes that her father and mother became bankrupt and lost their hotel in Cliftonville, her father left her mother and the family were forced to move into a privately rented flat.

In the two previous chapters the topics of class and managerialism have been examined through a process of extrapolation from the six lives studied. Certain of the lived experiences of the teachers have been taken as 'real life' instances of wider social phenomena. From the reverse angle there has also been a process which, as the opposite of extrapolation, might be referred to as *instantiation*. Here *instantiation* describes a process by which wider social and cultural theory is used as a lens through which to view events and relationships in the life stories. In other words the way in which the life stories provide real life instances of social and cultural phenomena described in theory. An example of these processes of extrapolation and instantiation is provided in Grace's story when she recounts her relationship with her father; although this aspect of her story was not examined in depth it provides an instance of 'patriarchy'. To understand the authoritarian stance of Grace's father it would certainly be reasonable and illuminating to draw upon various forms of feminist theory to see how this relates to the specific case of Grace and her father. But it is also invaluable to move from Grace's personal story towards a wider view of the social implications of an individual's 'macho' attitude towards fatherhood etc. Proceeding from the individual story of Grace to a wider social view, whilst retaining the liveliness of a personal narrative important elements of this particular problematic relationship may be preserved whilst they are also considered in more general terms.

To explain the problem between Grace and her father as being one of patriarchy might be true enough but it misses a great deal if only seen in terms of sociological, or even feminist theory. It is a story of a relationship which is stunted and warped although both Grace and her father probably wanted it to succeed. Both daughter and father were wounded by this failure yet they were unable to do anything to ameliorate their

sadness. Important as these emotional dimensions are they do not exist in most schools of social theory. In this particular case the reader of Grace's story might be struck with her sense of vexation at her father's philandering and boorishness but also with a feeling of poignancy towards what we must imagine at some level to be his estrangement from those who were, despite everything, closest to him. Her father's attempts to control Grace's life, and a deep inability to communicate emotionally with his daughter contributed to her losing regard for him.

It is these processes of extrapolation and instantiation as they work to create place in the lives of the six teachers which is the basis of this chapter. As with class and management the six life stories provided the starting point for what might almost be described as a wholly secular, though far from spiritless, 'meditation' on the meaning of place. The relationship between lives and place became apparent from the first interview for this project. Trying to understand Thanet as a place I found myself thinking about it as a collage with images and histories piled one upon the other. It has already been mentioned how novelists and geographers among others have long been concerned with the problem of how to understand place. The starting point, and that is all it is, seems to lie at least in part in understanding 'place' as a complex of developing, contested and unstable processes by which social and cultural meanings are attributed to physical spaces. What follows is a fraction of the overall collage which contributes to the creation of Thanet as a place.

Staying with the relationship between Grace and her father it is even possible to see how place and patriarchy can be seen to be 'internally related'. Grace's father and mother moved from Dartford to Thanet. Her father had been married when he started an affair with Grace's mother who at the time was not yet twenty. It would appear that the move to Thanet was in some way linked to his having affairs and to wanting to keep a boat. Grace's mum missed her home and especially missed not being near Grace's grandmother. The move from the outer reaches of London to Thanet had its own particular causes yet it was also simultaneously a move made by tens of thousands of other Londoners in the 1960s and later. It was a move made in a broadly parallel fashion by the parents of at least three others in this project. In each case we find a 'general' trend made manifest in individual cases which are very different.

Grace's mother missed contact with her mother and she would take her children with her on journeys back to Coulsdon. On their way to Surrey they would pass through London. Grace remembered the washing drying on clotheslines and seeing 'black' people. Both of these impressions struck and alarmed Grace. When Grace recounted these journeys back to her grandmother's house she very definitely saw Coulsdon as her mother's real home from which she had been removed as a consequence of her marriage to her father. When she was asked if her father accompanied them on these journeys Grace said very directly 'no he was probably womanising somewhere'. Grace's resentment towards her father for not accompanying her mum on what must have been very important journeys was palpable and she saw it as a symbolic failure on his part. Four decades later recounting these journeys and remembering the washing and 'immigrants' Grace talks of these things as pointing up the difference between Thanet and London; at once reinforcing her sense of a 'home place' and her feeling of being 'out of place' in London. The sense of something or someone being out of place is given the label 'anachorism' by the geographer Tim Cresswell who makes the point that:

The creation of place by necessity involves the definition of what lies outside. To put it another way the outside plays a crucial role in the definition of the inside. (Cresswell, 2004, p.102)

### **Planet Thanet**

The Isle of Thanet is no longer an island in the real sense of the word. Topographically Thanet is a limestone dome the highest point of which has an altitude of less than sixty metres. In mediaeval times the River Stour and sea channels separated the island in a very real sense. An expanse of water several hundred metres wide meant that the Isle of Thanet was accessible only by ferry. Over the years the channel filled with silt and extensive drainage works carried out especially by monks drained much of the marshland. The highest point of the Isle of Thanet at Manston was a centre of Saxon governance; later it was a key Battle of Britain airfield. There are no rivers or streams on the limestone dome as surface water quickly drains away.

Today the edges of the Isle of Thanet are marked by the Wantsum Channel and the River Stour. To the North the Wantsum Channel which is really no more than a large drainage ditch running through the baleful flat land of the drained marshes. To the South the

edge of the island is marked by the River Stour. The Stour is not more than ten metres wide at the point it becomes estuarine a few kilometres from Sandwich where it enters the sea. The Isle of Thanet is today no longer an island except in name, culture and history.

Westgate on Sea, Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate were once popular holiday destinations, initially for better off Victorian holidaymakers. Vincent van Gogh taught at a small private school in Ramsgate not far from the site of which is the house of Jenny Marx the daughter of Karl. Marx's wife Jenny von Westphalen spent the summer of 1881, the last of her life, at her daughter's house.

Ramsgate which had once received the captured colours of the vanquished French army after Waterloo was the most important marshalling port of the 'small boats' flotilla which rescued the defeated remnants of a later British army from the beaches of Dunkirk.

With the advent of holidays for the working classes and good rail links to London in the early twentieth century the tourist industry in Thanet expanded. Many new houses were built whilst others were converted to become hotels or guest houses. Margate became virtually synonymous with sea side trips or holidays for the working classes of South East London. A subsequent development in transport brought the age of cheap air travel. Ordinary people could now holiday in foreign places which had reliable weather, warmer waters, and cheaper alcohol. The holiday industry in Thanet fell into a steep decline, today it exists only in the form of bucket and spade day trips. The last ferry service from Ramsgate to Europe closed in 2013.

People who live on Thanet still refer to it at times as 'the island'. Sometimes unkindly it is referred to as 'Planet Thanet' both by Thanetionians and those who do not live there. 'Planet Thanet' is an ugly and derogatory epithet its use would not be socially acceptable if applied to a different social group.

There is a belief on the island and elsewhere that in Thanet things and people are different. This belief is strong enough to create its own element of truth. When a place or people are seen as being socially different this becomes a constitutive element of

their social and cultural identity. When the people directly affected by this process come to see themselves as different, or apart from what they believe to be the 'mainstream' or 'normality' they will have become 'other'. We might recall Grace's attitude to London or Hannah's desire to return to Thanet after leaving on her evangelical mission, or even Susan seeing the University of Kent at Canterbury some 19 miles from Thanet as another world, as instances in the life stories presented here which indicate a strong feeling place. It is once again worth stressing how a strong feeling of 'home' in Thanet also involves the creation of a strong sense of 'other'.

As already mentioned in the discussion of 'anachorism', any understanding of 'place', has to be connected to ideas of 'otherness'. At its simplest we distinguish places, one from another, on the basis of their standing in a relationship of 'otherness'. The continuing designation of Thanet as 'The Isle of Thanet' long after it ceased to be an island puts it in a relation of otherness to 'the mainland'. This is very much in line with a description of 'otherness' given by Zygmunt Bauman:

Classifying consists in the acts of inclusion and exclusion. Each act of naming splits the world into two: entities that answer to the name; all the rest that do not. Certain entities may be included into a class – made a class – only in as far as other entities are excluded, left outside. (1991, p.2)

At a simple geographical level the designation of this fragment of the county of Kent as an 'island' is no longer justified, nor is the persistence of the epithet simply a historic relic. That Thanet endures as an 'island' is in large part rooted in contemporary culture. The rather more dismissive designation of the area as 'Planet Thanet' with its allusions to ideas of weirdness are also connected to ideas of poverty, deprivation and alienation from prosperity.

### **Images of Thanet –Dreamlands and Wastelands**

It is possible to demonstrate something of the extent of poverty in Thanet through statistics and this is necessary but the statistics do not fully capture the dimensions of the problem. Kent is often assumed by outsiders to not have communities living in deprived circumstances. Kent itself is of course within the part of England all too glibly

described in the media as the 'affluent South East'. Whilst areas such as 'The Isle of Sheppey' Hastings, and of course Thanet stand out for their indices of poverty much of the 'South East' cannot really be described as 'well-off' in any really meaningful way. In Kent the largest conurbation is the Medway Towns which itself would stand comparison with many of the troubled urban areas of Northern England. Outside of London, which itself contains widespread areas of deprivation, the centres of affluence of the South East form a fairly thinly dispersed archipelago of small urban islands in a much bigger sea of average or worse conditions. Within the South East Thanet is recognised as being one of the 'pockets' with the worst indices of poverty.

Margate the largest town in Thanet is described by the Centre for Social Justice as being:

... a town of over 43,000 people. In terms of overall deprivation, approximately 30 per cent of neighbourhoods in Margate are in the poorest 10 per cent of the country. A third of children live below the financial poverty line, more than a third of pupils at Margate schools are eligible for Free School Meals, and 70 per cent of households are recorded as being deprived... (Centre for Social Justice, 2013, p.13)

Ramsgate the second town of Thanet is a little smaller and although not quite as impoverished as Margate it is, by any statistical standard, very similar. The Marlowe Academy previously known as the 'Ramsgate School' stands on the edge of the town limits of Ramsgate. The Marlowe academy abuts three of Ramsgate's best known council estates Highfields, Whitehall and Newington. These estates are often referred to collectively as 'Newington'. Carl Parsons (2012) produced a report on the Marlowe Academy its title; 'Schooling the Estate Kids: a Very English Scandal' captures the main thrust of the author's argument. Parsons takes issue with the view that the 'performance' of a school can be separated from the living conditions of its pupils outside of the school environment. Twice in its history, in 1997 and then again in 2003 this school whilst still called the 'Ramsgate School was publicly 'named and shamed' as the worst secondary school in England. It would be redundant to explore the extent to which this humiliation helped and supported the school, its students past and present, or the general population of Ramsgate.



The greater Newington estate comprises something slightly less than 2,000 dwellings. As Parsons explains it:

Newington shows up at every assessment as a lower income, poorer health, lower educational achievement and higher crime area...(It) has double the Thanet percentage claiming a benefit, four times the national rate. One estimate for 2011 was that 41% of households were workless and this was expected to rise to 51%. Incapacity benefits are twice the Thanet rate and three times the national rate. The assessed achievement of five year-olds entering school is very low. At age 16 their percentage achievement of 5+A\*-C grades at GCSE stands at a little over half the national average...(Parsons, 2012, p.3)

According to Thanet District Council (TDC) in 2011 some 65% of the population of Thanet deemed to be of working age were either employed or actively seeking work (TDC, 2013). This means that in 2011 over one third of the population of Thanet of working age were not economically active or were not seeking work. In 2013 TDC calculated that some 17% (TDC, 2013) of the working age population of Thanet were in receipt of some type of out of work benefit. If a total is calculated by adding the numbers of those 'not economically active' with those in work but paid the minimum wage, and those on zero hours contracts the true picture of 'subsistence' Thanet begins to emerge. This grim picture darkens further if the earnings of those in work are taken into account. The median weekly wage in Thanet was £416, the second lowest level in the South East of England (Kent County Council, 2015). This of course means that something very close to 50% of those in Thanet actually earn a 'take home' wage of less, or very likely significantly less, than £22,000 a year.

The perception of the poverty and destitution of many people who live in Thanet forms an integral part of the creation of this place as something 'other'. This 'othering' can take the form of the cruel 'Planet Thanet' jibe or the more restrained talk about places having suffered a 'loss of aspiration' (Centre for Social Justice, 2013 p.5). In either case there is an idea that 'poverty' is something aberrant or even deviant, and not the wholly inevitable consequence of economic, social, and cultural processes.

The poverty of Thanet is, in certain analyses seen as being attributable to the moral shortcomings of the people who live there. This moral dimension to poverty is certainly present in, for example the report by the Centre for Social Justice which stresses the role of what it rather ambiguously refers to as 'aspiration' in developing prosperity:

there is a clear case for additional transport infrastructure, increased localism and renewed investment in struggling seaside towns. But prosperity will not spread unless people are given the aspiration, education and skills that they and the economy need... (p.7)

Such formulations appear to suggest that poverty is in part attributable to a lack of aspiration. In the above quotation it is also indicated that an education and skills 'deficit' are also part of the problem of areas such as Thanet. In the Centre for Social Justice Report, illicit drug use, teenage pregnancies, and the presence of resettled offenders are added into the list of problems faced by Margate. All of the problems of Margate are offered as explanations for its failure to attract 'prosperity'; the reasoning is that places are poor because they fail to attract wealth. Poverty conceived in this way is explained and therefore almost justified by itself; social ills are not caused by poverty, rather poverty is caused by the unattractive nature of social ills.

In the six life stories which form the core of this thesis the narrators in their discussion of Thanet and place are continually negotiating ideas of poverty. In five of the life stories, those of the women, poverty, or at the very least being 'hard up' had exercised a formative influence for extended periods of their lives. In three of the life stories 'bankruptcy' loomed large. Working with adult literacy learners in Adult Education or Further Education in Thanet has meant that in their professional lives all six teachers have been in continual contact with people living in poverty. At this point it is interesting to consider how poverty and place are reflected in the life stories.

### **Images of Thanet – Tracy Emin and Poverty Chic**

In her narrative Catherine made the joke (much appreciated by me) that anything which cheered up Thanet was to be welcomed, even if it involved a visit by Tracey Emin! In this

brief remark we can find much to comment on and behind it something of the experience of place. In the contemporary world. Tracey Emin is perhaps the best known daughter of Thanet. It is not easy to describe the nature of Emin's -Thanet. Most importantly Tracey is a weaver of autobiographical fiction elaborated at least in part with the intention of developing her 'celebrity' as an enfant terrible of the British art scene. The 'Tracey Emin' image is of interest here for the role it plays within the construction of Thanet as a place and indeed the way in which Emin has utilised Thanet in the construction of her highly marketised identity. In various pronouncements Tracey Emin has employed a presentation of Thanet and especially Margate as an emblematic 'place' from which to claim provenance. An investigation of the nature of the 'emblematic' in Emin's discourse about Thanet takes us some way to an understanding of how she contributes to the creation and utilisation of Thanet, and Margate as a place.

The existence of Thanet as an emblem for Emin is important as what she has said about Margate has come to have wide currency if even if it is not universally accepted. In none of the long list of interviews given by Emin for national media is there ever a significant measure of disagreement between her and those conducting the interview over her description of Thanet. It might therefore be supposed that at least among the art critics of the national media Emin's Thanet is a generally accepted portrayal. The stories which Emin tells about her Margate childhood are overwhelmingly, quite literally, sordid and sad episodes in which sexual abuse is mixed with other forms of violence. Reading Emin's autobiographical 'Strangeland' (2005) published when she was in her early forties a picture emerges of a middle aged woman still suffering from the consequences of what in what are presented as childhood experiences of neglect, hurt and iniquity. This is also the case with her semi autobiographical film 'Topspot' (2004) which was subject to reviews which might euphemistically be described as fiercely critical.

It may sound harsh but Emin's autobiography simultaneously combines a strange mix of denunciation of the circumstances of her youth with a sense of indulgence in what appears to have been its awfulness. Rather bizarrely both Emin and the majority of the correspondents who write about her art seem to consider misery, anomie, and extreme violence both sexual and physical, as being integral part to working class life in general and in Thanet in particular. Under Emin's entry for the Zabludowicz Art Trust we are told that her work as an artist draws 'on her working class roots in Margate, Kent, the

evocative stories of Emin's youth and adulthood are held up as a mirror to our own private experiences' (Zabludowicz Collection, no date). This is significant as the Zabludowicz Art Trust, along with the Saatchi Gallery are major holders and promoters of Emin's art work. The Saatchi Gallery itself describes Emin as 'a consummate story teller' (Saatchi Gallery, no date). Both Charles Saatchi and Poju Zabludowicz are major donors to the Conservative Party to which Tracey Emin has now, in line with her sponsors, declared her support. This is significant as the art businesses of Zabludowicz and especially Saatchi are believed to use the media and advertising to promote the work and the personas of the artists in which they invest. The persona of Emin is extremely important to both her and her sponsors as she is an artist to whom self promotion and publicity has been intrinsic. By a strange twist Emin is also the most important interpreter of Thanet and especially Margate to a wider British public.

Reading Emin's 'autobiography', watching her films, and reading her interviews it is hard to hold on to the more nuanced and 'humane' Thanet which is present in the life stories told here. More importantly Emin's picture of Thanet is very similar to, and has helped create, the dominant image of Thanet within British culture. Linden West has drawn attention to somewhat similar processes at work in the case of Stoke-on-Trent. West offers a more nuanced alternative and rejects a simplified picture of miserableness which strips real places and people of much of the humanity and light which they somehow, despite their troubles, preserve (West, 2016). In the case of this project the determination on the part of all the literacy teachers to do what they thought was their best for their students stands in contrast to portrait of Thanet presented by Emin and others.

The presentation of Thanet and Margate as her site of *misery chic* has been integral to the image of herself as an artist which Emin has developed. Those who speculatively invest in Emin's art happily collude in this project as it lends her work a specious intensity.

Emin arrived somewhat late to the artistic fashion of writing with fluorescent light but the work which she did produce in this medium was highly marketable. Tracey's neon works were renditions of phrases or words which are in reality no more profound or meaningful than those used to decorate 'Refreshers' sweets. 'I don't believe in love but

'I believe in you' says one 'You loved me like a distant star' says another. In some Emin uses bad language in a show of 'edginess'; exclamations such as 'Fuck off and die you slag' or the syntactically puzzling 'your name try cunt international' are intended to shock. In 2010 Emin presented a neon to Margate, this was then installed on the sea front. It carried the legend 'I never stopped loving you'.

When taken in the context of Emin's relationship to the town of her youth the sign appears to have to have a degree of artistic depth. Tracey's commitment to Margate does not transcend the egocentric but this particular work does achieve a quality lacking in her other neon work. Its achievement is very similar to something the critic Robert Hughes identified in the very best work of Andy Warhol, which he said attained a 'lack of relative shallowness' (Hughes, 1982).

Catherine, and Hannah are slightly older than Emin but not so much as to be from a different generation and Grace is a more or less exact contemporary of the now not quite so youthful 'Young British Artist'. Hannah never mentioned Emin except in general terms although they share certain key experiences. Emin tells us that her family like that of Hannah owned a bed and breakfast hotel close to Margate Sands. It is also interesting that when Emin was an infant her family moved from South London to Margate part of the same exodus as that which Hannah and Graces families joined. As has been said it is not easy to gauge the measure of truth in Emin's story of her youth but given her age and her description of where she claims to have grown up she should have been a fairly close contemporary of Hannah, Grace, and Catherine.

### **Place, Space and Relationships: Between Stories**

So far in this chapter we have looked at several views or impressions of Thanet. These might be taken together as a type of collage in which one impression is juxtaposed or superimposed upon others building an ever more complex picture of Thanet as a 'place'. We have so far glimpsed at T.S Eliot, Hannah's mother, capital flows and prosperity, poverty, housing estates, and Tracey Emin's Margate.

The complexity of understanding place was very evident in the way that in Grace's account images of the world outside Thanet pop up again much later in her life. Grace's early trips to Coulsdon helped create her understanding of Thanet as a place without the range of ethnicities visible in London. Years later on learning that she had become pregnant and approaching single motherhood with trepidation the image of the washing drying in public view came back to haunt Grace. What is strange here is the way in Grace's life being turned upside down is associated with an image of another place.

The very short portrayal of the regional geography of the Isle of Thanet sketched something of the end of the mass holiday industry and gave a very brief portrayal of the faded glories of Thanet. Despite the unavoidable brevity and therefore shallowness of these impressions they too make a contribution to the collage of place.

The process of reflection on the lives of the six teachers in this project and how they relate to the place in which they live and work is not simple. Place emerges as something with many dimensions, something which is created from many different standpoints, something which can be analysed and appreciated in many different ways. This multidimensionality and complexity lies at the heart of Henri Lefebvre's conception of space as presented in his 'The Production of Space' (1974).

In all the life stories it was evident that the narrators all believed that their lives had been influenced and we might say 'affected' by the simple fact that these lives had at least in part 'happened' in Thanet. It would also be true to say that all concerned had 'affection' for Thanet though it was always tempered with other contrasting feelings. Among the people whose life stories are told here it would be difficult to draw together more than a half dozen 'place' related themes which are present in all six stories. Though place itself as expressed in the life stories plays a significant part in them all. The complexity and the multifarious nature of place mean that its presence in the life stories arises in different forms and guises. There are relatively few aspects of place which find iteration in each and every story.

The first theme present in the stories of all those interviewed was the belief that in the past Thanet had been a more prosperous place than it was today, it might well be argued that this impression is rather more stark in memory than in reality. In interviews

with older people which are not part of this study I have been told that in the post war years and after there most certainly was extreme poverty in Thanet. The first of these interviews was with a man who had taught in a secondary modern school in the 1950s who recalled that he was shocked to see 'poor children in an area with money'. This teacher had himself grown up in dreadful poverty in London's East End. The second interview was with a retired miner who had moved to the East Kent coalfield as a young man in the 1960s. This miner had lived in rented room in the West Cliff area of Ramsgate when he first arrived and recalled his shock at seeing 'kids playing football in bare feet' so as to preserve their shoes.

A second theme most of the teachers would subscribe to would be the prevalence of strange or unsavoury people in certain areas of Thanet. These undesirables might be rehoused ex-prisoners, mental health patients, 'Kosovans', 'Slovakians' or 'Black drug gangs'. From the point of view of this chapter the interesting theme is that the preponderance of undesirables come from 'outside'. This contributes to a third theme which is the idea of Thanet as a 'dumping ground' for outside government agencies. There is not space to explore the complexities of these views. To simply label such views as 'racist' or something similar does not advance the discussion at all. None of the people in this project indicated in any way that they sympathised with the political right or extreme right, though these trends have significant support throughout Thanet and UKIP is probably the biggest political party on 'the island'.

A fourth theme would be the lack of any real expectation of the long promised economic 'regeneration of Thanet'. Indeed there is a near universal expectation in Thanet that things will get worse or that anything happening in Thanet is likely to fail, or at least to disappoint. This even extends to such obviously successful projects as the Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate. The gallery is an undoubted success and enjoys a good reputation among gallery goers. It is also financially viable. Thanet District Council in pushing for the gallery argued that it would lead to the 'economic regeneration' of Margate. Such an impossibly high expectation has led to a venture which is very much a success in its own right being viewed as a failure by many. A similar fate awaited the re-opened 'Dreamland' amusement park.

Taken together these themes begin to draw a very few lines of the outline sketch of what Thanet as a place means in the life stories presented here. 'Place' brings together ideas as disparate as memory, history, myth, topography, architecture, social class, identity and public transport. Place is created in the dialectical interrelationship of these things and many others.

### **The Production of Place**

By any standard Henri Lefebvre's 'The Production of Space' (1974) is a difficult book. The reader would search in vain for a standard type definition of the term 'space' itself. This is hardly surprising given that Lefebvre worked within a Marxist tradition which saw dialectics not only as a form of understanding but as the mode of existence of not only all that is social, cultural, and mental but also the material world itself. For Lefebvre there can no more be a finished definition of space, than there can be a definition of 'capital' for Marx. Both Marx and Lefebvre are looking at processes and relationships which can exist only as they continue to evolve.

Earlier the 'criticism' of Marx for never having provided a definition of 'class' was rejected on the grounds that pretty well everything Marx wrote could be seen as a contribution towards such a definition. The same might be said of Marx's approach to 'Capital' inasmuch as at those points where he appears to come closest to providing a definition this invariably proves to be not the finishing but the starting point. Marx saw capital not as a 'thing' such as money, gold or 'property' but essentially as relationships. At many points Marx explains how capital cannot exist without 'labour' or 'the proletariat' or 'wage slavery' or in whatever other guise in which its antithesis appears. Here the problem of definitions is posed quite clearly for those who seek to work with a dialectical approach. Where traditional definitions try to delimit, a dialectical investigation is drawn ever forward towards trying to understand things in their full interconnectedness. The work of Marx or Henri Lefebvre are therefore inescapably complex even when clearly written.

The dialectical approach in 'The Production of Space' is at its most evident where Lefebvre approaches the analysis of concrete examples. Writing about the social character of space Lefebvre makes the point that it typically has the quality of 'visibility'



but that this does not mean that what he refers to as its 'decipherability' is in any way straightforward. The social relations which have given rise to a particular manifestation of 'space' cannot be understood from the appearance.

What can be said, for example, of a peasant dwelling? It embodies and implies particular social relations; it shelters a family – a particular family belonging to a particular country, a particular region, a particular soil; and it is a component part of a particular site and a particular countryside. No matter how preposterous or humble such a dwelling may be, it is as much a work as it is a product, even though it is invariably representative of a type. (1974, p.83)

Two points may be made here. The first is to draw attention again to the dialectical nature of Lefebvre's argument. The peasant house must be understood in terms of 'the social character of space – those social relations that it implies, contains and dissimulates' (1974, p.83). Key to understanding the conception of space Lefebvre is putting forward is the notion of its being created through a series of 'internally related' processes.

The second point is that the framework put forward for the 'deciphering' of a peasant house might be adapted and adopted as a way of approaching the interpretation of place in the present study. If a substitution is made for Lefebvre's peasant house it is apparent that a dialectical approach to place starts to emerge. We might substitute an adult literacy classroom for the peasant house mentioned by Lefebvre. This classroom embodies and implies a series of particular social relations; it contains adult literacy learners - a particular group with differing individual backgrounds but enough in common for them to have been brought to this particular classroom by the same, or at least broadly similar social processes. It is a classroom for a particular type of person engaging with literacy in a particular way, in a particular region, within a particular social and economic context. But this region exists as it does because it is in a relationship with a wider economy and culture. As a region within that wider entity it constitutes one of its parts but simultaneously it is a region because it has its own individual characteristics which mean it differs from the whole.

This chapter concentrates on the idea of 'place', Lefebvre's work is concerned with 'space'. The idea of 'space' is more comprehensive than the idea of 'place'. In Lefebvre's work one of the problems he grapples with is the establishment of some type of limit to what can be designated as 'space'. Once it is accepted that there are mental and imaginative spaces, architecturally constructed spaces, natural spaces, cinematic spaces, and so on it becomes difficult to think of anything which would not be 'space'. When the point is reached that everything can be seen as a form of space then the term risks losing its explanatory power. Place is a simpler notion than space for the reason that it is fixed at least in one dimension.

Place must always refer to something with a physical existence and location. That is not at all to say that an exposition of place is limited to the material or physically spatial: quite the reverse is true. Place can only be understood when it is interwoven with narratives. The degree of understanding of a place is proportional to the 'thickness' (Geertz, 1973) of the description given to it. The more rounded, the more complete and the more truthful the narratives are for any particular place the more that 'place' becomes 'concrete' in the sense in which that word is used by Marxists.

Place must always have a locale. This is true even if a 'place' exists only in the imaginary, as in the case Hardy's Wessex, or Tolkien's Middle Earth. In the case of fictional places much of the success or failure of their creator is judged on their capacity to give life to these 'simulations', to make them real in the imagination of the reader. Most men and not a few women who attended children's matinee cinemas in the 1970s developed a good working knowledge of how the social conventions of the 'Wild West' were observed, who was good, who was bad, who should get the girl and who should not and who needed to be dealt with in a genocidal manner. The cinematic 'Wild West', a place which never existed, came to be substituted in millions of minds, for a world and nations which had been destroyed.

Places can only be apprehended through their being related to narratives. The typical way in which to present place is to start from a physical location and work outwards in terms of time and culture. The adult literacy classroom mentioned above must have some type of physical and material embodiment. Starting from this place we can begin to understand it as we weave it into a story this process is started below for the

particular case of Hannah. Before Hannah participated in this project I had visited her classroom to 'officially' observe her teach.

It might be remembered that Hannah taught for an organisation named 'Present and Correct'. She taught in a large but very overcrowded room within an otherwise disused office block. As a result of the vagaries of property ownership and rental agreements Hannah's classroom was on the third floor of a six storey building. Walking up the staircase to observe her lesson the building felt almost derelict. The staircase smelt strongly of Jeyes fluid. The 'receptionist' sitting at a desk at the end of the corridor was impolite even aggressive towards me when I explained that I had come to meet with Hannah. Hannah was called for, and when she arrived at reception it was pointed out to her that the lesson observation would not be allowed if she did not have permission from the 'Director'. We were both told that I would have to put the 'Visitor' lanyard around my neck and not carry it in my hand as I was doing. Hannah explained that she had permission to be observed. I said that the lanyard was perfectly visible if I carried it. The receptionist told me that it was a rule that lanyards were worn around necks because of 'security'. On the walk from the reception to her classroom Hannah apologised to me for the attitude of the reception desk and explained that 'they don't like me doing a university course'.

Hannah's 'learners', forty three souls in all, sat at grey Formica topped tables. All were long term unemployed, three were women and I assumed that they must have felt deeply uncomfortable in the presence of so many men. Hannah had already told me that many of the 'learners' had problems with drugs or alcohol, and several had mental health problems. All in the class had been referred to 'Present and Correct' by the Job Centre, failure to attend led to 'sanctions' and the inevitable loss of benefits. When I entered the classroom a young man came to greet me, he had been a student in one of my classes several years before. He had attended literacy classes with his mother. He had been imprisoned for aggravated burglary and was now attending 'Present and Correct' as a probation condition. He viewed me as an old friend I shook his hand though I was nervous of him. It was a cold afternoon but Hannah had opened the windows to 'freshen' the air. I looked at Hannah's lesson plan it was well organised. I checked and saw that she had referenced it in the prescribed manner against the syllabus of the 'Adult Literacy core curriculum: including spoken communication' (Cambridge Training

and Development, 2001) a copy of which she had handed me as part of the paperwork required for observations. At the time we had been instructed that any failure to reference to the 'core curriculum' would mean an automatic failure. This curriculum had a foreword written by the then Minister for Lifelong Learning, Malcolm Wicks MP. Below the photo of the minister there were four paragraphs extolling the utility of the syllabus. The opening paragraph alluded to Government policy towards adult literacy which contextualised it in terms of international competition and neo liberalism. The first sentence of the foreword stated that 'Improving the nation's literacy and numeracy skills is one of the Government's top priorities'. Recommended Reading on Hannah's had in some cases put forward a hopeful vision of the future of Lifelong Learning (Field, 2000) but sitting in this class I had remembered Norman Fairclough's excoriating discussion of this type of discourse in his 'New Labour: New Language' (2000) . There was a clear foreboding that the optimistic vision would not win out. I was sure that in not a single example of that fraction of the 'nation' assembled in that classroom was there any immediate concern for British international competitiveness. I tried to reconcile what Hannah was doing in this classroom with the world as New Labour imagined it. Now, as I write this, I am thinking in terms of place and the strange intersection in space between the worlds of 'The Third Way' , Whitehall, and 'Present and Correct'.

Hannah struggled to gain the attention of 'the learners' some of whom were sharing a joke made at the expense of one of their number who had an 'Iron Cross' tattoo on his neck. Whatever the joke, the man who was the butt of it was blushing and becoming angry. Other students pointed to my presence in the classroom and insisted that they should all support their teacher. I realised that most of those present, whatever their feeling about what they were being made to do, felt it only proper to show respect to their teacher. As the admonished joke sharers looked my way I averted their gaze by looking once more at Malcolm Wicks' foreword to the syllabus. One particular paragraph caught my attention:

It provides teachers with a comprehensive framework to help identify and meet each person's individual learning needs, including examples of teaching strategies they can use. For learners, it will ensure that, no matter which type of course they choose or where the learning takes place, they can be confident

of a common approach and effective support. (Cambridge Training and Development, 2001 p. v.)

I thought again of Norman Fairclough and how he would enjoy this example of 'New Labour: New Language'. Two promises were being made. On the one hand the syllabus was to be seen as a part of the process of identifying 'individual needs'. On the other hand it told us that its task was to ensure that 'learners ... no matter which type of course they choose or where the learning takes place', would experience 'a common' approach.

Hannah had to move around the classroom at pace as she was answering many queries from students and it was evident that she had to be 'on top' of some individuals or they would become disruptive. Because of the numbers in the small room students had to move their chairs to allow her to move around. Even within these confines the three women who were sitting together maintained the maximum space they could manage between themselves and the men.

Somehow Hannah made the class work. The students completed worksheets which they could put into their files. There were no eruptions, no tears, and in some places there was even a satisfied hum of students getting on with their work.

This brief account of my visit to Hannah's classroom has been reconstructed from the notes I made of the observation. Little of what is here was discussed with Hannah when we went through the post observation discussion. Today 'Present and Correct' no longer exists its owners absconded with a considerable amount of money leaving unpaid bills and salaries. At one time the organisation had received huge praise from Charles Clark as he held it up as an example of the 'efficiency' of 'private providers'. The office block which housed 'Present and Correct' is now still unoccupied. The last time I looked there was a small business, completely unrelated to 'Present and Correct' working out of offices on the fourth floor. Gone too is the 'Adult Literacy core curriculum: including spoken communication' (Cambridge Training and Development, 2001). Malcolm Wicks died of cancer in 2012 he had emerged from the parliamentary expenses scandals of later years with an enhanced reputation and had transferred his parliamentary career

from the area of Lifelong Learning to Energy. At the time of his death he was a Privy Councillor.

Neither I nor Hannah now know anything of the thirty nine men and three women whose 'individual learning needs' were to be addressed in that 'place' on that afternoon in Ramsgate a few hundred yards from the house where Jenny von Westphalen spent her last summer with her daughter Jenny.

From these elements a sense of 'place' is created for 'Present and Correct' and for Hannah in her desperation to try and make a 'success' of her teaching role. Hopefully from looking at 'Present and Correct' the place it is possible to see it as a moment in Hannah's life story; a moment which can only be understood by locating that place and time within a wider 'Lefebvrian' understanding of the space in which the moment happened.

Like all other forms of space, place must have a meaning. In the above description of 'Present and Correct' certain elements of what went into 'the meaning' of 'Present and Correct' as a place at that particular time were given precedence over others. I now know for example that Hannah felt that it was completely unfair that she was observed in such an unfortunate teaching situation, she had expected to fail the observation for all manner of reasons which were beyond her control. In the event she received a 'Good' on the strength of having done a reasonable job in a horrid situation. In the above description this aspect of the lesson observation an aspect of great importance to Hannah, was ignored in favour of things which in other accounts might be considered completely trivial, the smell of Jeyes fluid for example.

The three women in the 'Present and Correct' classroom might also be a starting point for a reflection on place, gender, and class. Firstly and most obviously it can be stated that these women felt 'out of place'. They were in this classroom because they, just like the men, had been unemployed for more than six months and when obliged to sit a computer based test they had failed to achieve the necessary score. These three women were working class and long term unemployed. For them the experience of 'Present and Correct' was class and gender based. It would not be fanciful to assume that they felt uneasy, even vulnerable, in the classroom. This vulnerability was probably not an issue

of personal safety but it was definitely a problem of 'identity'. Even as an observer I found myself wondering along the lines of 'What have these women done to deserve this?' The answer is fairly straightforward; these people had the misfortune to be female, poor and unemployed in Thanet.

Following Cresswell (2004) the term 'anachorism' has been used in this chapter to denote something being 'out of place' or in a particular place as a result of an error of some type. It is not a straightforward thing to say that these three women in this classroom is a case of anachorism. The bureaucratic and administrative procedures, the interviews and the online tests, the warning letters, the registers, and the reports which delivered these women to this classroom were all designed to eliminate error and to ensure that these women were properly processed. These bureaucratic procedures were also constitutive of these women's experience of class and identity.

Applied to the case of these three women and the particular place they were in we find that a consideration of how simultaneously they were, and were not, anachorate is also an aspect of how place relates to gender. How place is experienced is dialectically linked to gender and of course the converse is also important in that the experience of gender is also linked to place.

As would be expected the theme of how to relate gender to place and space is a central concern in the work of feminist geographers. Doreen Massey (2004, p. 144) makes the point that historically places which played a part in the generation and legitimation of science and knowledge were also places which created and maintained differences of gender:

...the spatial history of these places enfold... through Western history they have been part and parcel of the struggle around the creation of intelligible genders, of certain forms of 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Over and over again the establishment of these places was bound up with the distinction of genders and the expulsion of women. (p.144)

Massey's point is well made but what was happening at 'Present and Correct' was different in that as places of learning go it was far from a prestigious place. The point has

been made that in many ways the forced 'education' of the long term unemployed in 'Literacy, numeracy and ICT' has taken on the form of a 21<sup>st</sup> century adaptation of the poor house. For these women to be included at 'Present and Correct' was a 'gendered' part of their punishment for being who they were. Being simultaneously in a place where they had to be and should not have been was a part of their oppression.

In all of the life stories told in this project there is a more or less strong idea of the changing nature of places where literacy teaching happened or still does happen. In these cases little attention is paid to the physical aspects of 'place'. Place is overwhelmingly described in terms of the practices which happen there.

Catherine's story has a strong theme built around the changes in the Adult Education centre where she worked. For example Catherine talked about the doing away with the initial personal interview for adult literacy learners and how it was eventually replaced with a standardised online test. This change in the practice of Adult Education was introduced as part of the new policies which Malcolm Wicks described as identifying and meeting 'each person's individual learning needs'. In a similar way Catherine described the unworkable new lesson plans which in her opinion required far too much detail.

In Paul's life story the theme of the 'pre' versus the 'post' incorporation college is to the fore. Yet this too takes the form of a discussion of place. Even when he was discussing the tardiness of the employers in sending his confirmation letter of a job offer in the early 1970s Paul had remarked in 2012 about 'this place is doesn't change, they left it to the last minute then just as they do now'. Incidentally looking over the life stories here Paul Beer is the only person who talked about changes in the physical fabric of the workplace, changes which he thought were improvements. Paul also talked about how in the past there had been more time available; he mentioned time having been available for the planning of courses, for lunch hour, or for library sessions.

The theme of 'time' and especially its compression has already been discussed in the chapter on managerialism. It is remarkable to now look back over all of the life stories and to see how the experiences of place and time are related. Overwhelmingly all the teachers talk about the compression of time, being required to do more in a reduced compass of time is the unanimous view of all. But as a part of this compression the



teachers are under continual pressure to produce ever more detailed accounts of how their time is used. The lesson plans are a most obvious example but there are other interesting and perhaps less obvious issues of time. All the teachers in this project are under pressure to ensure that they 'achieve' minimum pass rates for their students. These increased levels of passes are to be achieved within the same or reduced time frames as operated previously. To be required to achieve more in the same time is itself a form of time compression.

As with other areas looked at in this project the life stories have provided a platform from which to investigate themes which arise from the stories themselves. In the case of place this has been particularly rewarding. The last few paragraphs of this chapter will attempt to sum up something of what has emerged in connection with 'place' and to set out the final argument that in any instance place has the potential, in terms of its apprehension, to be inexhaustible.

We have already seen that in 'The Wasteland' Eliot mentions Margate Sands in juxtaposition with snippets of banal conversation, allusions to classical history, the timeless figure of Tiresius, images from the Tarot pack, scenes from Shakespeare plays and much more. The reader of 'The Wasteland' trying to see how the different elements relate one to the others is left with the sense of the poem achieving a type of endless depth. In my own reading of the poem I have always felt fear in the lines 'I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter' (line 18) though I am not sure why this is so, the words alone do not justify this unease. In his artistry Eliot knew much, if not everything about the effects his work would evoke. On trips to Margate I almost always pass by the shelter in which Eliot sat. It is certainly not a grand place. The knowledge that the poet sat in this shelter conjuring powerful and sweeping images in poetic space very definitely affects how this shelter is understood as a 'place'. Few of the people passing this shelter know much about T.S. Eliot even among those who do know something of his poetry he is not always held in high regard. In each case and for each person the shelter will have a different meaning as a place.

For each of the teachers in these life stories Ramsgate, Margate, Thanet, their classrooms, and their homes mean different things as places, but not completely different things. The sharing of the meanings or the shared understanding which is much

the same thing, of different places is an important part of the complex of processes by which the social is constructed. The regularities and irregularities of these meanings and understandings contribute to the experience of class, gender, age, and identity. It is perhaps time to offer some conclusions. In the spirit of dialectics these conclusions can only be points of departure but hopefully they have some merit.

Life stories are inseparable from 'place'. A life must happen somewhere not only in physical, but also in social and cultural space. The social and cultural relationships which happen in these places are mostly the same as those which shape the lives that are lived therein. In a class society these social and cultural relationships give a 'class' shape to the experience of place. Places which have a physical, social, and cultural dimension also have a history; they have an existence prior to our experiencing them and our experience of them as places is shaped by that history.

In a previous chapter mention was made of how critics of Marxism sometimes held up the crudity of some types of analysis in order to justify throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The crude dichotomy of 'base' and 'superstructure' interacting in a mechanical form was one of the points on which this critique would take place. Without doubt there were and still are people who continue with this rudimentary approach in the belief that is 'Marxist'. To claim that 'material life', the 'reproduction of a particular society' or the 'mode of production' have a determining role in structuring social life does not need to imply a crude approach. In the Marxism of Henri Lefebvre it is possible to see the complexity which his materialist philosophy demands. Thinking of the role of 'place' in the lives of the six teachers here something of that complexity certainly emerges. As Lefebvre puts it:

The places of social space ... are not simply juxtaposed; they may be intercalated, combined, superimposed – they may even sometimes collide. Consequently the local (or punctual), in the sense of determined by a particular 'point' does not disappear for it is never absorbed by the regional, national, or even worldwide level. (Lefebvre, 1991, p.88)

The usefulness of the interpenetration of these 'spaces' for life story work is paramount. Indeed the argument has been made in this project that life story work has at its core

the study of working out from the individual lives towards the social, or working from the social to the level of the individual lives. This was certainly a project which Lefebvre would have supported. In his afterword to 'The Production of Space' David Harvey draws attention to how 'Lefebvre insists that life should be led as a project and that the only intellectual and political project that makes sense is a life' (Harvey, 1991, p. 431). In fact following Lefebvre we might view a life itself as a variety of social 'space' and it is this which makes its study important;

The principle of the interpenetration and superimposition of social spaces has one very helpful result, for it means that each fragment of space subjected to analysis masks not just one social relationship but a host of them which analysis can potentially disclose. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 88)

A 'life' is just such a fragment.

## Concluding Comments

*In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge comes only in lightning flashes.*

*The text is the long roll of thunder that follows.*

*Walter Benjamin, Convolutes N, The Arcades Project.*

The title of this chapter is 'Concluding Comments' rather than the more final 'Conclusion'. There are two principle reasons for this. The first is that the mode of both life story work and Marxism eschews the idea of a definite conclusion, there is always more to do, more to say, and more to explore. In life story work conclusions are provisional not representing 'the end' but merely the places at which we choose to pause or to break off.

A second reason for preferring 'concluding comments' is further developed in this chapter; Marxism as a philosophical system and, in my opinion, life story research are best seen as having at their core the study of dialectical relationships. It is in the nature of such relations that they are never settled or, in fact never 'concluded'.

Earlier in this thesis various attempts were made to describe how this constrained indeterminacy (or if preferred unconstrained determinacy) works. The example was given of the way in which the movement of fluids is constrained, or determined, by the laws of fluid dynamics. Although the flow of all fluids is constrained by these laws every single water course in existence is unique. Much the same type of dialectic relationship between the determined and the undetermined is at work in life history. The ideas of agency and structure appear to be mutually exclusive if they are viewed as separate from one another. This gives rise to what are typically jejune arguments counter posing structure and agency as opposite. Viewed as two vectors of a dialectical relationship within the life of a human being, they begin to make sense. As Marx put it this way when exploring the same problem of structure and agency:

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Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. (Marx, 1852/1966, p.394)

This statement is at first glance quite straightforward, but the dialectical relationship of structure and agency and the way in which they pull each other around gives rise to patterns so complex that an exploration of the ways in which they condition each other can never be concluded. Hence this is the second reason for 'Concluding Comments' rather than a 'Conclusion'.

The question set earlier in this project was 'How can Marxism and life story work be brought together'? There cannot be a neat and simple answer to this question any more than there can a straightforward answer to the question 'what is class?' or 'what is capital'. A simple answer to such questions cannot capture how something exists in all its social, cultural and historic concatenations. In other words, a straightforward dictionary type definition cannot begin to capture the forms in which the things to be defined exist in the real world. In the particular case of the relationship of life story work to Marxism, the impossibility of an answer lies in the indeterminacy of the things which are being brought together. 'Indeterminacy' here refers to a form of open-endedness; it is not possible to state simply that Marxism and life story work can be brought together in a set number of ways.

Something of the nature of the complex relationship between Marxism and the study of life stories will be evident if we take the concept of alienation as it appears in Marx's work, and how it manifests itself in the life stories studied here. What is evident is that alienation firstly exists in real lives. If we wish to begin to understand alienation, we must start from its existence in real lives. Alienation is not the visitation of a theory of alienation upon those lives.

A Marxist understanding of alienation is not something which is imposed on reality from outside so to speak, the concept of alienation is formed from reflection on what happens in real lives, it is a way of understanding part of the experience of real people. The explanatory or analytical power of the concept of alienation resides in its capacity

to capture, interpret and conceptualise things which really happen. In several places in this thesis mention has been made of Liz Stanley's dictum which holds that, 'if structural analyses do not work at the level of particular lives then they do not work at all' (1992, p. 5). The converse of this is equally true, theories which seek to present generalising concepts of what might be common to lives can only proceed from these particular lives. This takes us back to Goethe's ideas about 'urphanomem' and the postulate that:

What is general?  
The individual case  
What is specific?  
Millions of cases  
(Goethe 1833, Reflection 558)

Goethe's aphorism might be seen as a succinct but comprehensive justification for life story work itself.

### **Marxism as the philosophy of materialist dialectics**

In the course of this project what has emerged for me is that the original posing of the problem as being one of how to bring together life story work and Marxism served as a starting point, but as with so many 'research questions' the success of the process of investigation can be measured in the extent to which the inadequacies of the original question were revealed. The idea of bringing together two things, in this case, life stories and 'Marxism', carries an implication that these things are actually separable. Marx was famously partial to the remark attributed to the classical Greek philosopher Publius Terentius Afer (usually referred to in English simply as 'Terence'), '*Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*', which is sometimes translated into English as 'I am human, and nothing of that which is human is alien to me.' For the purpose of what is argued here it might be said that there is nothing in life story work alien to Marxism, nor is there anything in Marxism alien to life stories. It is necessary to decisively move away from an understanding of Marxism as being something essentially doctrinal.

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On a more personal note I should point out that the struggle and the reward of the preparation of this thesis lay in the development of an understanding of Marxism not primarily as a canon of works and ideas, but in its essence as a way by which to best apprehend the human world. The published work of Marx might best be viewed as the record of his struggle to examine and understand the world, the history and the potential futures of humanity rather than as a set of edicts or credos; Marxism is in essence the method developed to achieve this end.

Throughout this thesis I have used the term 'Marxism'. At various points reservations have been expressed about the use of the term especially its associations with dogmatic or 'exegestic' renderings of the works of Marx. It is characteristic of dogmatism, and certainly not only dogmatic Marxism, that it attempts to foist upon the world interpretations and understandings drawn from doctrines and pre-existing beliefs, rather than starting from the apprehension of things as they exist. In this way dogmatism is not a way of interpreting and apprehending the world but it is more an attempt to make reality take on the shape prescribed by some or other schema. It was for reasons similar to these that the historian E.P. Thompson 'hesitated' to describe himself as a 'Marxist' and 'preferred to say that he wrote within a Marxist tradition' (Thompson, D. 2001, p. x). For E.P. Thompson Marxism was not a framework into which such things as 'The making of the English working class', or the development of the understanding of time were to be made to fit. It was more the case of working from a study of the various forms of historical records to try and present the lived experience of those people to whom the records referred. For this reason Thompson looked to all the available sources including such things as songs, rhymes or records of divorce proceedings when writing his histories (Thompson, 1991). Thompson sometimes playfully referred to himself as an 'empirical Marxist' but behind what so many took to be an oxymoronic jest there was a very serious point being made. Like C. Wright Mills before him Thompson was opposed to 'Grand Theory' and 'Abstracted Empiricism' (Wright Mills, 1959/2000, pp. 25-75, Thompson 2001 p.455). Thompson was particularly scathing of the 'Grand Theory' of the self proclaimed, and at one time fashionable, Marxists, Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas. In one particular statement of the reasons for his opposition to 'Grand Theory' Thompson produces an argument which runs parallel to that being put forward here to explain the link between Marxism and life story work.

History is not a factory for the manufacture of Grand Theory, like some Concorde of the global air; nor is it an assembly-line for the production of midget theories in sequence. Nor yet is it some gigantic experimental station in which theory of foreign manufacture can be 'applied', 'tested' and 'confirmed'. That is not its business at all. Its business is to recover, to 'explain,' and to 'understand' its object: real history. (Thompson, 2001, p.454)

For E.P Thompson the destruction of 'unhistorical theory mongering' was an indispensable precondition to 'recovering', 'explaining' and 'understanding', 'real history'. A similar and related set of tasks must be carried out by anyone wishing to take a Marxist approach to life story work.

The business of life story work approached in a Marxist manner is to 'recover', to 'explain' and to 'understand' its objects; the stories of people's lives. Marxism is to be employed to explain and understand the life stories and to locate them in history. It is not a question of making the lives fit into a schema, or 'Grand Theory': to quote Thompson again 'if Marx had one supreme methodological priority it was precisely, to destroy unhistorical theory mongering' (p.444).

The relationship between Marxism and life story work is mutually strengthening. Life story work benefits from the being developed within a theoretical perspective which not only embraces Terence's idea that everything human is part of its purview, but can go on to investigate all that is human. Simultaneously Marxism can only be enriched by contact with life story work all that is human can contribute to Marxism.

In parts of this project there has been a discussion of Marx's theory of alienation. If the idea of alienation is kept in mind when approaching life stories, many things in those stories might be better comprehended. Paul Beer sought to understand how it could be that managers could judge themselves to be 'outstanding' when all they managed was deemed to be mediocre or worse. In considering his question, it might not be possible to produce a rationally coherent answer, but the conundrum can perhaps be better appreciated if it is considered in the light of an idea of management which sees itself as wholly separate to that which is managed. More generally for all of the



teachers in this study the all-pervading feeling that they worked in institutions for which their labour was the *raison d'être*, yet all felt as though they worked for something alien to them. At one interview for this project I was shown a memo which gave the dates for Christmas closure, the communication opened with the words 'The college wishes to inform all students and staff that ...' as the teacher pointed out 'what is this college if not the students and staff?' This is a comprehensive and yet quotidian and succinct statement of an alienated relation between the staff, students and 'The college'. Alienation is not a 'Grand Theory' which is located above human existence 'like some Concorde of the global air' (Thompson, 2001, p.454) but is integral to the lives of all who live in societies in which alienated relations are the 'norm', as is certainly the case of Adult Literacy teachers in Thanet. In ways such as this Marxism is enriched by being brought to bear on the understanding of life stories whilst simultaneously life stories can be understood and critiqued from a Marxist viewpoint. Alienation is first and foremost part of the experience of being human, it is not the result of 'Grand Theory'. Simultaneously we also begin to notice that there is a great deal of shared ground between the Marxist theory of alienation and the concept of 'Managerialism'.

To oppose 'Grand Theory' is not to reject for a second the viability of Marxism as something with a far reaching potential for explanation and exposition. The reason for rejecting 'Grand Theory' is not for the scale of its pretensions but for its failure to take real history, or life stories, or anything else of the real world as its starting and end point. The problem with 'Grand Theory' is that it starts and ends with theory and deigns to give any genuine respect to the realities of the world. At those points where 'Grand Theory' gives consent to talk of realities it characteristically does so only to show how reality in some particular instance provides an example of the working out of 'theory'. In contrast to 'Grand Theory' Marxism must always strive to work mainly in the direction which goes from realities towards theory, having made the journey in this direction the theory must then be capable of moving in the reverse direction by ascending once more to the concrete.

As a Marxist, I am aware of Marx having been accused of almost every form of academic or scholarly malfeasance, but he is rarely, if ever, accused of false modesty. It is therefore noteworthy that when describing his philosophical approach, he tended to

give a great deal of credit to those who he saw as having developed the philosophical tradition from which his own work emerged. Marx clearly saw his philosophical approach as a development of, and a break with, the work of many other scholars and philosophers, in particular the work of Hegel and his presentation of 'dialectics'.

Although Marx himself never used the term his philosophy came to be known, but not in his own lifetime, as 'dialectical materialism'. The term comes with some strict cautionary provisos. Marx was a materialist philosopher and thinker and his work is thoroughly dialectical. Yet the term has come to be associated not so much with the spirit and the letter of Marx himself but with the particular form, some would argue malformation, of Marxism as it existed as the official ideology of the Soviet Union. The philosopher Evald Ilyenkov, trying to work within a genuinely Marxist tradition whilst avoiding head on conflict with the Soviet authorities, rather craftily talked in terms of 'materialist dialectics' rather than 'dialectical materialism' (Ilyenkov, 1979). For Ilyenkov 'materialist dialectics' meant a rapprochement with the original spirit of Marxism as an open philosophy in the materialist tradition which held the material, rather than the 'ideal', world as its primary starting point. Within this materiality things existed in relationships with one another and indeed nothing could exist except for, or outside of these relationships, hence 'dialectics'. In essence it is this materialist dialectic which Marxism brings to life story work. To trace how this might begin to be achieved has been the purpose of this thesis.

### **The dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in life stories**

It is at this point advantageous to turn again to the dialectics of the abstract and the concrete and to consider their relationship to life story work. It has already been argued that the abstract and the concrete in Marxism exist in a dialectical relationship with each other. For Marx the concrete is 'the unity of diverse aspects' (Marx, 1859/1971, p. 206). Lives are 'concrete' because in them many different and diverse aspects of that life are unified. Lives are simultaneously wholly social things whilst also being individual experiences of, and interactions with, the social. Each particular life might be viewed as the bringing together in a unique form and combination not only social experiences, but also their evaluation and assimilation. Yet within these particular lives the very fact that they are lived socially gives rise to particular patterns

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of regularity. In this study the focus has been on trying to establish the regularities to be found in the way class and identity, managerialism, and place have been individually experienced.

From the point of view of the six 'concrete' lives studied here the three areas of particular focus have been abstracted from the lives so that they might be better studied. The case of 'managerialism' will be considered as an example. Some of those aspects of the life stories deemed to most relevant to tracing how managerialism is manifested in the lives of the literacy teachers are drawn out. In this sense the experience of 'managerialism' is 'abstracted' from the life story and concentrated upon. Obviously the life story itself is made up of many more experiences than managerialism. Nevertheless managerialism is one of the 'diverse aspects' of the life stories studied here. The 'concrete' lives, in reality exist as the drawing together into a unity of many 'diverse aspects'. Moving the other way from the 'abstract' to the 'concrete' is also of interest. 'Managerialism' is discussed widely in academic literature which examines the world of post compulsory education yet it is not unusual to find it discussed as though it existed only as an abstraction, as though it has an existence separate and 'above' the actual practices in which it exists. To understand 'managerialism' it is necessary to study its 'concrete' manifestations, such as those identified in the lives of the literacy teachers studied here.

On teacher training courses for trainees working in post compulsory education there is often a moment of significance when the meaning of the term 'managerialism' is first assimilated. Until this point it is very likely that trainee teachers will have discussed some of their experiences of working in post compulsory education in which events, policies, and practices which are reflective of 'managerialism' but without the word itself being used because it is not known or understood. When the concept of managerialism is introduced, often through reference to the work of Randle and Brady (1997), or Stephen Ball (2003), there is often a process of re-comprehension of the experience of working in post compulsory education. In such instances what is happening can be described in terms of moving between the abstract and concrete, between the 'abstract' concept of managerialism and its 'concrete' manifestations. Viewed from another side the process of comprehending 'managerialism' also involves the dialectical relationship between the general and the particular. It is not unusual to

find teachers who are all too aware of the manifestation of managerialism in their particular experience but nevertheless find it something of a surprise when they come to see that is a 'general' experience throughout post compulsory education. Goethe's epigram at the opening of this chapter is precisely about this dialectical relationship between the general and the specific. Liz Stanley's remark that 'if structural analyses do not work at the level of particular lives then they do not work at all' (1992, p.5) is also a comment on a particular aspect of the specific and the general. What Stanley is saying is that a general statement about a social structure means nothing, if there are no instances of this structure evident in the lives of people. The point is being made that theory must be capable of ascending to the concrete, this is very much the argument presented by Marx (1859/1971) in his exposition of his method of analysis.

It is possible to present this present study simply as an examination from the standpoint of a life story researcher of the themes of 'Class and Identity', 'Managerialism' and 'Place', in the lives of the six 'Teachers of Literacy to Adults' working on the isle of Thanet. Those opposed to life story work might well argue that the lives of six teachers is a dismally small sample, if viewed in traditional terms of a 'representative sample', but this is to miss the point entirely. Six individual cases are studied with the intention of trying to find what is general in these specific examples. Or viewed the other way, the lives are studied to show how the general exists in these specific examples. I think that many people involved in life story work would join with me in arguing that there is something very deeply humane in considering the dialectics of the specific and the general whilst treating life stories with respect.

### **Determined indeterminacy**

In this thesis at various points it has been necessary to draw attention to what is seen as the destructive influence of some instances of postmodernist theory. It has been argued that some of the tenets of postmodernism, above all its anti-humanist stance, exert an unhealthy influence on life story work. Postmodernism in many of its forms, above all those which tend toward nihilism, are deeply opposed to Marxism. Marxism offers something to life story work which is of real value. It offers a serious defence of knowledge and humanism where postmodernism instead offers a chaotic vision of a

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world without 'knowledge' (for example see Lyotard, 1984, p. 60; or Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pp. 118-120).

Marxism offers an alternative outlook to both 'chaos', and positivistic determination. This is extremely important as involvement in life story work cannot but convince the researcher of the individuality of lives; but how is this individuality of each life to be reconciled with the idea of a social science which by its nature demands some form of 'regularity'?

In a Marxist worldview indeterminacy can never be something absolute, it exists always in a dialectical relationship with its opposite; which is simply to say that indeterminacy exists in a unity with determinacy. To many this relationship between determinacy and indeterminacy will sound nonsensical. In fact this type of thinking is by no means uncommon and is found in most areas of systematic enquiry. The relationship between language, dialect and idiolect is an interesting example of the relationship between determinacy and indeterminacy. In the study of language, it has long been accepted that each individual human user of language uses that language in their own particular way. Each individual possesses an idiolect, unique to that person, which will be different from the idiolects of others who speak the same language, and even the same dialect. Each individual uses grammar, vocabulary, voice, and other elements of pronunciation in a combination slightly different to that of any other individual. Yet within any particular language and dialect this variation is governed by rules of language and its use. These rules are shared among language groups. This coexistence of determinacy and indeterminacy allows for each individual's idiolect, whilst also allowing for mutual comprehension within dialects and languages. The idiolect of each person is intelligible to others operating within a particular dialect and is usually mostly intelligible to others working with the same language. The relationship of language, dialect, and idiolect is therefore an example of a dialectical interrelationship which combines determinacy and indeterminacy.

The relationship of each individual's idiolect to dialect and language is mirrored in other social phenomena such as class and identity, managerialism, and indeed place. In each individual case social phenomena have their own individual form and expression but they are simultaneously *social* phenomena. Each individual life story is unique, but

all are governed, through history and culture, by the societies in which they are lived. It is the contention of this project that not only is Marxism the most developed and valid body of knowledge through which to apprehend this history and culture, but it also allows for an understanding of the dialectical nature of the various relationships between individual lives and the historic and cultural contexts in which they exist. The argument put forward here is that it is the dialectical nature of Marxism that makes it indispensable in the study of life stories.

### **Indeterminacy of life stories**

As objects of study life stories are multifaceted and in many ways inexhaustible. In the stories presented here even an introductory attempt to view them in terms of class and identity shows that both of these things reveal problems of great depth, and that is before they are interpreted or conceptualised in connection with any of the other issues with which they must always be linked in the real world. In contemporary Britain class and identity will always exist in a relationship to such things as gender, ethnicity, culture, place and age, the list could certainly go on. Grace and Hannah in this study share certain features of class and identity but their experience of these things is widely different. Both of them believe that breaking away from controlling men and establishing a more independent identity marked turning points in their lives, but in any discussion I feel that they would struggle to agree to any great extent on their views on feminism. There is not only unity in diversity but also much diversity in unity. In all the life stories presented here it is hoped that the dialectical relationship between diversity and unity (and of course determinacy and indeterminacy) is evident.

An understanding of 'class' as it exists within Marxism is based upon an understanding of the way it is present in real lives. In this way a great novelist such as Thomas Hardy, who would not for a second have seen himself as a sociological writer, is able to show how the young Tess is living at a time when different class based conceptions of time are in conflict. E.P Thompson (1991) begins his essay on time, class and work discipline with exactly this passage from 'Tess of the Durbervilles'. Thompson believed that an understanding of class could not proceed from a definition but from the synthesis of real life experiences. What is possible therefore for those working within a genuinely Marxist tradition is the possibility of proceeding from the study of real lives towards a

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truly sociological understanding of class. This latter project is opposed, perhaps diametrically, to a way of working which sees its goal as the development of succinct definitions which cannot avoid being abstract in the worst way. The sociologist working with such narrowly determined definitions of class will, when these fail, as they must, in all likelihood argue that class does not exist in the contemporary world, or that class based understandings of society are inadequate etc. In fact what has failed is not at all Marxism, and definitely not class; what has failed are the narrow definitions employed by the sociologist. The whole process being similar to that outlined in Robert Graves' poem 'In Broken Images' given as an epigram at the opening of this present study: in the quest for a mechanical clarity a new confusion of understanding is the inevitable result.

It has often been said that Marxism fails at the level of the individual or the personal. The various criticisms of Marxism made by Stuart Hall (1989) were exactly of this type. Marxism is accused of proceeding from the economic and then simply 'reading off' the characteristics of 'class' and offering no engagement at all with individuals as such. If we take from this study only the single example of the presentation of 'managerialism' it should be possible to dispense with arguments such as those made by Hall.

The examination of the influence of managerialism in the teachers' lives seems to simultaneously provide answers and explanations whilst posing new questions, which is precisely what should be expected with 'determined indeterminacy'. Starting from Paul Beer's question about how managers can grade themselves as outstanding whilst grading as inadequate that which they manage. In asking this question Paul Beer was at one and the same time asking a question about managerialism, but also a question about his lived experience. At the end of the examination of managerialism it is possible to better appreciate, though not understand, the alienated logic of managerialism. At a personal level I believe that the improved understanding of such things leads towards a higher form of bafflement. At some levels the phenomena of managerialism can be better understood but at a human level the problem of how it can come about that a college manager makes a lecturer working in a restaurant wear a wig when it appears to all who witness it as ridiculous and cruel becomes more deeply troubling. It might be wondered what logic is at work when in the name of the 'individualisation' of learning, personal interviews are abolished and computer tests

enforced. 'Managerialism' rationalises, and makes normal, such assaults on the sense making capacities of those who are its objects as well as on the managers themselves. Managerialism is in this regard the essentially a form of alienation.

### **Indeterminacy of Marxism**

There is no doubt many Marxists who would view the statement that Marxism is indeterminate as apostasy. This is not at all the same as saying that Marxism provides no answers; it is actually very far from saying any such thing. It has already been argued that Marx himself avoided aphoristic definitions of complex social phenomena. Instead Marxism seeks to view things in their development and in their interconnectedness. So indeterminacy here means that no explanation is ever fully complete. We might take the example of economic crisis to illustrate this point. It is a fundamental tenet of a Marxist analysis of capitalism that the system must engender crises. Furthermore, Marxism outlines the processes intrinsic to capitalism which make such crises inevitable and shows the lineaments of their development. What Marxism cannot tell us is exactly when, how and where such crises will develop and what the specific consequences will be. A look through Marx's work will show that he 'predicted' very little, if anything. In this sense prediction was something that would be in contradiction to what Marx was about. For Marx what might be 'inevitable' was also 'contingent'.

In a fashion similar to the way that Marxist political economy explains crises within capitalism we might consider how it explains things which happen in life stories. The concept of alienation is a useful example here. Central to the analysis of alienation in Marxism is the idea that in their social interactions people come to see relationships as things and then see these things not as something they have created but in a reified form as forces which govern them. A prosaic, but nonetheless pertinent example might be the SMART targets of lesson plans. OFSTED and others insist that every lesson has a SMART plan or it must be inadequate, yet everyone agrees that learning is never specific, measurable, discretely achievable, realistic in the sense of being predictable, nor time bound. Mr. Doran's (1981) SMART targets are an unchallengeable 'fetish' (in a Marxist sense) of 'Quality' managers throughout FE.



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In their professional lives the teachers in this project are involved in attempting to answer many questions which arise from their professional practice. Often there are no satisfactory answers forthcoming; it might be argued that in an alienated work environment there can only be limited understanding. When no answers are found these teachers are faced with the problems of living and working in a context which baffles them, but they have no choice, they are impelled to find a way forward. From the evidence in the life stories presented here it can be suggested, without extravagance, that although compromises must be made the teachers navigate their lives with the idea of 'trying to do their best for the students' as a constant bearing. Theirs is a deeply humane endeavour.

Marxism as a body of theory might be seen as a way of drawing the social and cultural silhouettes of people such as the literacy teachers in this project. Their features and colours, their turns of phrase and their moral outlooks indeed everything which converts a silhouette into a portrait, they must provide themselves. Yet each aspect of these lives can be examined from a Marxist viewpoint. As Marx (after Terence) used to say 'Nothing human is alien to me'. Life stories and Marxism work well together; life stories work as portraits, Marxism as a way of seeing.

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