

**THE MAKING OF A BRITISH 'UNDERCLASS' IN THE
1990s: A GEOGRAPHY OF POWER/KNOWLEDGE**

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Thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D to the Faculty of Social Science,
Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, Summer term 1998



I certify that I am the sole author of this work

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Signed:

ABSTRACT

The argument of this thesis is that 'underclass' is a discourse of cultural and economic division with both a genealogy and a geography. 'Underclass' is more than a cultural and political construct of particular kinds of poor people and poor spaces at times of socio-economic crisis and change. The spaces of 'underclass' are not only those which are made visible in hegemonic representations, revealed as the concrete spaces of named cities and estates. They are also spaces of knowledge. These spaces are both symbolic *and* material because their production is embodied and their effects are lived.

Following a critical discussion of the theories of knowledge developed by Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour and Nancy Fraser, this thesis shows the spaces of 'underclass' to be *produced* by the workings of power/knowledge, *practiced* by socially embedded individuals and *situated* within networks of relations. They are shown to be connected by relations of power/knowledge in a process of contestation over contemporary notions of welfare.

The delineation of new relationships between gender and economy, and between the 'independent' and the 'dependent' (primarily 'non-working' parents, children and long term benefit recipients) is argued to be central to 'underclass' discourse. This thesis shows how the discourse has partly developed through the work of the mainstream political Left on notions of 'Stakeholding' and 'Welfare to Work', and partly through prominent feminist commentaries on poor, working class masculinities and the 'needs' and 'wants' of single mothers. These hegemonic knowledges are problematised specifically in terms of their class location and contested through both my own and two filmic narratives of working class poverty. In this thesis these narratives are presented as subjugated knowledges of the discourse of 'underclass' which refuse and accuse traditional theories and practices of authoritative knowledge. They are argued to challenge the power-laden binaries of fact and affect, of work and care, of public and private, of the professional and the unqualified; and to suggest a need for the strategic engagement of a socialist feminist politics that is attuned to the classed and gendered complexities of 'underclass' discourse.

Acknowledgements

For my mum, who is the inspiration of this thesis: she brought me up to know that being working class was something to be proud of and taught me most of what I know about the politics of poverty. For my brother who stayed the course at home while me and my sisters studied at University until it was his turn. And for my sisters who helped me along the way.

With thanks to Gillian Rose for being the best supervisor I could have hoped for, most especially for making me feel confident about the way I wanted to write this thesis; and thanks to Alex Howson for patiently reading my weighty tomes disguised as chapters. Also thanks are due to the women who agreed to speak to me about themselves and their beliefs, allowing the continuation of a sometimes difficult 'feminist' conversation.

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PREFACE

During the 1990s the idea of a British 'underclass' emerged through a dominant motif of decay and dereliction in the social fabric. A central part of its production can be located in the realms of press and broadcasting media, often in relation to other authoritative cultural representations in politics and in academia. These productions partly exist as a visual regime of meaning, as particular ways of seeing people and places cast as 'other'. Visions of 'underclass' have become part of personal, public and political imaginations in 1990s Britain. They are presented as entertainment in populist crime based television programmes where police-camera raids are commonplace and where closed circuit televisions supply additional 'evidence'. They are provided as the backdrop for announcements of new policy initiatives, and as illustrations for social affairs programming. The visions are both 'real' and artistic, ordinary and dramatic. In order to convey a sense of the tenor of the themes and meanings which characterise these images I am presenting a number of newspaper representations as a preface to the thesis. The kind of visibilities they construct are based upon reductive characterisations whose hallmark is a stamp of class difference as division from the rest of 'us', but also as warning of what 'we' may become. This is a discourse of familial disorder and dysfunction; of dangerous masculinities and dependent femininities; of anti-social behaviour; and of moral and ecological decay. The photographs are accompanied by different parts of a wider media narrative of 'underclass' whose story is ongoing.

This thesis aims to establish different ways of seeing and knowing the people and places of 'underclass' by looking at some of the practices through which 'underclass' is produced. My choice has been to mainly look at the practices and people involved in representing (both politically and culturally) the people and places of 'underclass'. These practices and people are not located within any one professional realm or political allegiance. A central part of the discourse analysis that I undertake involves the people and practices of politically Left-wing arenas.

To begin with I looked to the political Left with high expectations: my own politics are most at home there and would be central to the analyses I intended. Some prominent ideas and debates on the political Left therefore became part of the subject of my research as 'the thing to be problematised', and a source of different hopes. As a simultaneously critical and hopeful engagement with political discourse this thesis has been difficult to think and write about in both personal and political terms. Completing the writing through a period of time that I had waited a long time for - namely the election of the first Labour government for 18 years - I found myself continually hoping that politically things would change, and that I would have to change some of my estimations and arguments. Apparently Left-wing ideas for a citizenship based on 'rights and responsibilities' and the desirability of certain kinds of 'social inclusion' were being produced apace, directly and indirectly referring to the behaviour of the poor and the idea that they should do more to help themselves and society. The warning signs of such developments were obviously there for the reading before the election, as Labour's flirtation with 'Communitarianism' overlapped with the Conservative's call to go 'Back to Basics'. Indeed I had read them as part of my original research proposal, albeit with a kind of wilful optimism that they would develop in another direction. In many ways this thesis is about tracing the development of these ideas, as they have been variously translated and combined with others, through the workings of 'underclass' discourse. In this tracing process I have not been able to completely shed the wilful optimism that I first started with. It continues in my readings of other signs. Ongoing and growing criticisms of the direction of recent welfare reform as a failure of political imagination and understanding are part of a political *process* (within and outside of the Labour party) that remains hopefully unsettled. This thesis is part of that resistance, as a resistance of ideas expressed in terms of a socialist feminist geography.



Source: The Observer 19.11.95 p9

'Britain's moral economy was born in the North, and its death has been felt there first ... Gun fights in Manchester's Moss Side, ram-raiding in Newcastle, the murder of James Bulger on Merseyside, the Liverpool school at the bottom of John Patten's league table, the media-hyped home alone children of Leeds, the three young children murdered in a house fire at Peterlee... Both states, industrial and welfare have passed to the wind. The plants and mills are derelict, the pits closed, the yards grass-grown ... In their place heritage centres, hypermarkets, high-technology companies, venture capital, private health insurance, the 'lean state'. So great a change cannot be without its moral reverberations ... Are Hillsborough and Bulger - or, rather their petty but far more numerous and significant analogues - grim after-shocks of the collapse of a peculiarly English moral economy?'

(*'The World We Have Lost'* The Independent 27.3.94 p21)



Source: The Observer 3.11.96 p26

'Institutions such as family, school and community which once gave children, regardless of background, a sense of discipline and moral compass, have declined in their ability to impart those values. Where all three have deteriorated, the result is the social anarchy and squalor of today's 'sink' estates, inhabited by a largely white underclass which has come to resemble in crime, violence, illegitimacy, welfare dependency and general hopelessness, the black ghettos of urban America.'

(*'The Brutality of Britain'* The Sunday Times 21.2.93 Section 2 p3)



Source: The Observer 3.11.96 p27

'The underclass is not a degree of poverty; it does not refer to the poorest of the poor. It is a type of poverty: it covers those who no longer share the norms and aspirations of the rest of society, who have never known the traditional two parent family, who are prone to abuse drugs and alcohol at the earliest opportunity, who do poorly at school and who are quick to resort to disorderly behaviour and crime.'

(*'The poor may be richer but the underclass is growing'* The Sunday Times 28.5.95 p3)



Source: The Observer 14.5.95 p25

'Instead of saying 'you're on the margins of society, we're going to criticise you as a scrounger', which is what the previous government did, we're saying, 'we know you want to work, you want to be better off for your sake and for your children's sake and we're going to help you.'

(Harriet Harman, Minister for Social Security, BBC Panorama 29.9.97)



Source: The Observer 27.10.96 p16

‘One fascinating insight into possible reasons why these children commit serious crimes comes from Valerie Sinason, a consultant child psychotherapist at London’s Tavistock Institute. She is concerned about the damaging effect caused by incestuous relationships between single mothers and their sons: ‘I’ve seen a growth in violent behaviour by boys who were brought up with no male figure. They feel close, dangerously close to their mothers and are frightened of it. The mother unconsciously sees the male child as the person who should be in her bed to make up for the missing man. The boy recognises there is something unconsciously incestuous. They start bullying women and girls.’

(‘Are Our Children Out Of Control?’ The Times 21.2.93 p12)

CHAPTER ONE

GENEALOGY AND GEOGRAPHY: TRACING AND SPACING THE CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE OF 'UNDERCLASS'

This chapter introduces the idea of 'underclass' as a production of power/knowledge. It starts by tracing the idea as a *way of knowing* groups of poor people and the places in which they live. Poor people and places have long been the object of knowledge in social scientific templates of research and continue to be so in the contemporary period through the discourse of 'underclass'. In this chapter, the process of knowledge production around 'underclass' is argued to be symbolic and material: it is through symbolic and material *practices* that discourse works and is productive. Moreover, that productivity can be conceived in terms of power: power is *practiced* throughout the social space in networks of relations. The terms and concepts through which this theorisation of discourse proceeds are derived from Foucauldian and feminist theories of knowledge, and are used to construct an image of social space *as* discourse. Foucault's theory of *genealogy* in combination with Haraway's theory of *situated knowledge*, are outlined as the epistemological and methodological framework for the chapters that follow. Their normative perspective is outlined with reference to Fraser's non-reductive socialist feminist politics of welfare.

In the 1990s a dominant notion of 'underclass' as an excrescence of British culture and society has become a central interest of government, academia and the media. It has become the subject, indeed the common denominator of major political and cultural debates in relation to welfare, work, crime and the family. As a way of crystallising a number of social, economic and cultural issues into one, 'underclass' is primarily about the problematic nature of particular poor groups in relation to the rest of society. Definitions and explanations for the nature of 'underclass' are extensive. They are contradictory and often ambiguous but predominantly they are of a reformative kind: whatever its genesis and whoever is to blame, 'underclass' is a problem about which something has to be done. This thesis enters a debate on 'underclass' which has tended to produce oppositions: those for or against the *idea* and those for or against the *existence* of the people of 'underclass'. In many ways the debate can be seen as a play of questions about the relationship between ideas and realities of poverty. My starting position is that 'underclass' exists at the level of ideas *and* in material practice and that it has *come into being* through discourse.

The 'underclass' debate has developed along populist and academic lines which intersect at particular points in such a way that distinctions between the two are difficult to maintain. Nevertheless it is possible to identify the development of the idea within British sociology over the last 20 years via some prominent texts: the work of Anthony Giddens in the 1970s on types of chronic unemployment that have a primarily cultural genesis introduced the idea into mainstream sociology; the work of John Rex in the 1980s developed the idea in a specifically racial context in relation to Black and White areas of Birmingham; and in the 1990s the work of Lydia Morris and William Runciman have both sought to dispose of the idea on the grounds that it is empirically unsustainable.¹ These writings have all sought to locate 'underclass' in structural approaches to the study of society by focusing on its placement within classificatory systems and class formations.

The more populist variants of the debate have focused on 'underclass' as a social phenomenon that relates to the contemporary state of society rather than as a class grouping per se. The work of Charles Murray is most well known amongst these commentators for his linking of criminality, illegitimacy and unemployment to the over generosity of welfare provisions. 'Welfare' is presented as having promoted moral depravity by making it rational for people to avoid work and marriage.² In a more liberal vein the commentaries of Ralf Dahrendorf have proffered the idea of 'underclass' as decay within the wider social fabric induced by government under action on unemployment.³

Academic detractors of the *idea* of 'underclass' rather than its structural integrity as a residual class location have deployed analyses of moral panic, backlash and ideological construct. The problems of the terminology are in this respect well rehearsed.⁴ The concept of 'underclass' that I am using in this thesis fits none of those approaches but does require its referent to be identified. 'Underclass' is generally held to refer to particular social groups at the base of the working class whose characteristics are those of long term unemployment/ highly irregular employment, single parenthood and criminality where some or all of those characteristics are tendentially if not causally related.⁵ Within these groups the order of the

¹ Giddens.A (1973) *The Class Structure of The Advanced Societies* London: Hutchinson; Rex.J (1983) *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* London: Routledge; Morris.L (1993) Is there a British Underclass? p404-413 *Journal of Urban and Regional Research* vol. 17; Runciman.W.G (1990) How many classes are there in contemporary British Society? p377-396 *Sociology* 24

² Murray.C (1990) *The Emerging British Underclass* London: IEA

³ Dahrendorf.R (1992) Footnotes To The Discussion p55-58 Smith.D.J (ed.) *Understanding The Underclass* London: PSI

⁴ See for example Gans.H (1993) 'From 'underclass' to 'undercaste': some observations about the future of the post-industrial economy and its major victims' p327-35 *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 17; Bagguley.P and Mann.K (1992) Idle Thieving Bastards: Scholarly Representations of the Underclass p113-126 *Work, Employment and Society* 6 (1)

⁵ According to the Chief Research Officer at the Economic and Social Research Council's Research Centre on Micro-Social Change this group made up about 10% of the population at the beginning of

two parent family, the work ethic and respect for private property is seen to be undermined. More than an effect of their economic position, 'underclass' behaviours are deemed to be cultural and motivational. Importantly this means that emphasis is given to 'the problem of underclass' rather than the problems of particular social groups. Following this understanding, solutions to 'the problem' include imposing censure, stricture, and compulsions upon the behaviour of particular groups to force them to change or to make particular lifestyles unsustainable in practical and financial terms. Primary among these 'solutions' are changes to welfare provisions and procedures in areas of Social Security and youth crime management. The particular focus of my thesis is therefore those welfare related parts of 'underclass' discourse that encompass issues of work, family, community and contemporary class and gender relations. In this respect the term 'underclass' itself is not of primary concern. A critique of the *terminology* of 'underclass' - its etymology, nuances in its use, and arguments against its use - is not entered into. My interest is rather the different kinds of spaces through which 'underclass' is constituted as a changing regime of ideas, policies and practices. This conception of 'underclass' as discourse is developed as much more than an analysis of terminology. Indeed in some of the spaces that I am analysing the term itself is not used frequently or directly. Of more importance are those contemporary ideas, debates and practices which embed contemporary knowledges about the 'non-working' poor as '*underclass*' widely and deeply in different kinds of social space.

'Underclass' is a highly mutable term: it is everywhere and nowhere, and its production is historically contingent. In historically shifting discourses around 'the vagabond', 'the undeserving poor', 'the scrounger', 'the welfare dependant', and 'the socially excluded' there are marked continuities in the kind of issues that constitute modern knowledges and practices around 'non-working' others. However, historically situated incarnations of the 'non-working' poor are also importantly differentiated in ways that necessitate time-space specific discourse analyses. In this thesis use of the term 'underclass' marks common points of settlement in a range of disparate contemporary debates, representations and practices. Their interconnections are presented as points of stability and coherence which are variously related to some dominant policy formulations. These points of settlement do not necessarily have the same genesis and are often arrived at via different motivations, routes and power-vested relations. Their configuration produces 'underclass' as a complex and multiply sourced discourse with coherences, contradictions and conflicts. It is not however a formless, arbitrary production without consequence. Some points of settlement are more dominant in the discourse than others, and they are more readily related

to particular policy trajectories. This thesis identifies significant points of settlement specifically around welfare-related debates, practices and policies in 1990s Britain.

It is important to note at this early point that I am not dealing with the racialised nature of this discourse. This is partly because the dominant discourse in Britain (as opposed to in America) has not constructed 'underclass' in racial terms. Although many of those identified as 'underclass' are black, or from ethnic minorities, it is specifically the class and gender identity of poor, long term benefit claimants living on council estates that is most strongly figured in dominant cultural and political representations. The work of Charles Murray has made a point of specifying the British problem of 'underclass' as one of predominantly white, working class cultures which he terms the 'New Rabble'. He asserts that 'underclass' is not 'mainly a black problem', because increasing illegitimacy rates as the primary 'underclass' characteristic are overwhelmingly accounted for by whites.⁶ In his politically well connected writings on 'underclass', Frank Field MP, has also been keen to emphasise that 'there is no racial bias to Britain's underclass'.⁷ The two central figures of 'underclass' discourse are held to be the 'benefit dependent' single mother and the unemployed, often 'criminal' young man of British council estates. Their positioning in relation to each other and as possessing a number of problematic social characteristics, produces them as the embodiment of 'underclass', the primary targets of policies for social change. The nature of that change is a mix of oppressive, progressive and contradictory elements whose configuration is the subject of the chapters that follow.

My framework of analysis is partly derived from elements of Michel Foucault's work and partly from the work of contemporary feminist writers Nancy Fraser and Donna Haraway. In common with Foucault, Haraway and Fraser are interested in foregrounding issues about how, why and by whom knowledge is produced, with regard to the role of knowledge in the subjectification of the individual and the production of society. My approach to 'underclass' is therefore through questions and arguments about the production of knowledge itself. In this respect it is part of wider debates in post-structuralist theory about what constitutes 'authoritative' knowledge. Within geography the use of post-structural theories in relation to issues of welfare marks a point of departure from more traditional approaches. I intend to use these theories to question a number of prevalent ideas about how 'welfare' can be researched, theorised and indeed practiced in the 'real world'.

⁶ Murray.C (1996) 'The Emerging British Underclass' p23-53 *Charles Murray and the Underclass: The Developing Debate* London: Institute of Economic Affairs, Choice in Welfare No. 33 p29

⁷ Field.F (1996) 'Britain's Underclass': Countering the Growth' p57-65 *Charles Murray and the Underclass: The Developing the Debate* London: Institute of Economic Affairs, Choice in Welfare No. 33 p57

The structure of this introductory chapter has four main parts. The first locates 'underclass' within a welfare discourse that has developed as part of the *genealogical* project of modernity. The second regards that development as part of a dominant *epistemology* through which 'underclass' continues to be known, and it presents a critique of that way of knowing through the work of Foucault and Haraway. The third part develops those philosophical critiques as the *methodology* on which the thesis is based - namely a discourse analysis of 'underclass'. The final part returns to questions about the relation between modernity and welfare in order to clarify the *political* animus of the thesis and the way that I intend to write it.

1: GENEALOGY

Modernity and Welfare

The provenance of the terminology of 'underclass' is historical, commonly associated with ideas about the 'dangerous classes' of nineteenth century industrial England, and in Marxist history with the lumpen proletariat.⁸ Its contemporary use is a continuous part of that history, not as an expression of determined class structures and crises in capitalist accumulation but in terms of certain patterned continuities in social, economic and cultural relations in which particular groups can be classed in such a way that they are cast as outside of 'normal society'. The identification of such patterns does not amount to a thesis that 'it's all happening again' according to an ideological template of capitalism's cyclical nature or a populist 'fin de siècle' historicism. Rather I am arguing that the nature of discourse is found in the specific historical and spatial details of its production. In this thesis 'underclass' discourse is specified and situated in the 'historically present' spaces of 1990s Britain.

My starting point aims to historically locate the mutual constitution of *modernity* and *welfare* via an engagement with the work of Michel Foucault. It is through the meanings, practices and politics of those two concepts that the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' can be situated in time and space.

The beginning of this inquiry is therefore not an historical past but an historical present that is about welfare as a centrally constitutive part of modern society. Welfare and modernity are linked through the historical period in which they emerged and which they partly created, *and* as part of a set of philosophical ideas about that period as the 'Age of Enlightenment'. This historical-philosophical link is explicated in Foucault's middle work as he traces the origins of social practices surrounding delinquency, madness and sexuality

⁸ See Stedman-Jones.G (1984) *Outcast London* London: Penguin

as the basis of an emergent, enlightened modern society.⁹ In those social practices he discerns the processes of subjectification through which modern society could be created. Such practices were legitimated via an Enlightenment language of Reason, Science and Truth, a language that came to be seen as the guarantor of order.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is my primary source for constructing a genealogical approach to the study of 'underclass' discourse. The approach is principally concerned to understand the role of power/knowledge in the constitution of modern society and the modern subject. The formative nature of that constitutive process - traced in *Discipline and Punish* via penal practices - can be identified as a way of knowing and ordering 'the social' which became instituted in a plethora of modern social practices. Foucault traces these practices to an historical period in which burgeoning and shifting populations were brought under administrative and professional control through management practices based on the application of scientific knowledges. He argues that from the late eighteenth century onwards these knowledges were developed in human sciences - such as psychology, psychiatry, demography and criminology - which could be practiced on individuals and groups of 'disordered' people. In this way the role of knowledge became central to the emergence of modern society as disciplinary society. Indeed knowledge is so intrinsic to the workings of this society that it can be seen as the very arm of power so that power/knowledge becomes the *modus operandi* of governance in modern, disciplinary society. However it is not a seamlessly successful 'delivery system': the social practices of modern society aim to be disciplinary but their effects are in no way guaranteed, the social is not necessarily *disciplined*. Moreover, the workings of power/knowledge are productive rather than being purely repressive. Power/knowledge is an apparatus through which modern subjects as the building blocks of modern society are partly made, but the nature of that making is ultimately undetermined. The nature of social being is contingent, outcomes are more or less likely according to specific circumstances rather than being pre-determined effects of power as 'negative force':

'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production'.¹⁰

The 'individual' as the constitutive subject of modern society becomes the site of power, produced through the workings of power. Part of the role of knowledge in those

⁹ Foucault, M (1978) *The History of Sexuality vol. 1* London: Penguin; (1973) *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* London: Routledge; (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* London: Penguin

¹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p194

workings is to produce the subject as an object of knowledge who can then be classified and ordered - literally 'subjected' - through knowledge based social practices. Thus towards the end of his writing career Foucault claims that his oeuvre has been the development of a theory of the subject:

'My objective... has been to create a history of the different modes by which in our culture, human beings are made subjects... Thus it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research'.¹¹

What can such a theory say about the subject of 'underclass'? First of all it sees the individual subject of 'underclass' as a production, not as something that has come into being by virtue of essential natures and internal drives. Second, it sees that subject specifically as a production of power/knowledge through which s/he is objectified. This is clearly about much more than a negative representation imposed on an *already* constituted subject, it is about a process of individual and social *becoming*. Foucault identifies three 'modes of objectification' as central to the production of the modern subject. The first is 'those modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences'.¹² These are the human sciences which position the subject as an object of study and intervention. The second is the mode of 'dividing practices' through which the subject is positioned together with or apart from others like him/her, not like him/her according to binary constructions such as mad/sane, dangerous/harmless, abnormal/normal.¹³ In the third mode it is by seeing him/herself as an object that the human being becomes a subject as the other two modes fold into his/her subjectivity. Such modes of subjectification can be seen as central to the production of the subject of 'underclass' as a subject who is researched as an object of knowledge in whom various characteristics combine; a subject who is differentiated from others in society - the 'working', the married, the reproductively and behaviourally normal; and a subject who is at least partly recognised by him/herself and others in the descriptions that proliferate around him/her. We can conceptualise 'underclass' as the product of a power/knowledge regime in which modern *practices* of welfare are partly constitutive of the subject of 'underclass' and of society in the contemporary period.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault provides a substantive history of the dual constitution of modern society and the 'carceral network' in which embryonic welfare practices are part of the carceral skein. His elaboration of the emergence of a disciplinary society from the middle of the eighteenth century via a new political form of power developed to replace the sovereign rule of the king, is more than a matter of historical

¹¹ Foucault.M (1982) The Subject and Power p208-209 in Dreyfus.H.L and Rabinow.P (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* Sussex: Harvester Press

¹² Foucault, *The Subject and Power* p208

¹³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p199

interest. Through that historical narrative Foucault develops a conception of modern power whose nature remains fundamental to modern Western governance. During this period of emergent nation-statehood and of capitalism *the* problematic of the State was the introduction of economy and order throughout the social body. Indeed the project was to create 'society' and in Foucault's telling it proceeded via practices of discipline and punishment. From having been an act against the sovereign, 'crime' was produced as an act against 'society' through the disorder that it introduced. It would be punished by the will of the general citizenship instituted in Law. However the constitution of 'society' was about more than just penal power although that was part of its originary moment. As the first State led attempt to regulate 'Life' for the good of society its principles and practices would be replicated throughout the social body in a whole new mode of Western governance.

Sociological literatures have detailed a great deal of what that entailed in the genesis of modern welfare institutions and practices - with an emphasis on the historical development of oppressive welfare practices.¹⁴ In this respect they engage less with Foucault's conception of power as *productive* than with its specifically oppressive nature. In turn they tend to elide much of the contradictory nature of welfare as partly constituted through a progressive political struggle for resources between unequal social groups. The latter is not a subject that Foucault deals with either, but which is clearly part of another history of the class relations of welfare's development.¹⁵ It is those two *productive* and *political* elements of power relations working in the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' that I intend to bring out in my analysis.

The emergence of particular kinds of power/knowledge formations with society as their project has a strong conceptual purchase on the contemporary discourse of 'underclass'. It allows an understanding of the *productive* nature of discourse as a more complex notion of 'underclass' than allowed in a traditional sociologies of moral panic and social control. Moreover, the originary modern processes of knowledge production and social management traced in *Discipline and Punish* have a substantive bearing on the way problems of 'social disorder' have been defined and institutionalised. 'Underclass' is currently pitched as a problem incumbent on society that requires management to ensure general social, economic, political and cultural well-being. A central part of that management is a requirement for knowledge about 'underclass': who are they? where do

¹⁴ Cohen.S (1985) *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification* Cambridge: Polity Press; Donzelot.J (1980) *The Policing of Families* London: Hutchinson; Garland.D (1985) *Punishment and Welfare: A History of Penal Strategies* Aldershot: Gower; Squires.P (1990) *Anti-Social Policy: Welfare, Ideology and the Disciplinary State* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf; Dean.H (1991) *Social Security and Social Control* London: Routledge; Fox Piven.F and Cloward.R.A (1971) *Regulating The Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* London: Tavistock Publications

¹⁵ See Brenner.J and Ramas.M (1984) 'Rethinking Women's Oppression' p33-71 *New Left Review* 144 especially p63-68

they live? what are they like? The quest for a particular kind of knowledge becomes the quest for a particular kind of social order.

In *Discipline and Punish* the modern quest for social order is traced through the mutually productive relationship between social science and modern society. Punishment as a means of social ordering and one particular technology of power, worked through knowledge, and knowledge was produced through scientific practices of observation, examination, measurement and classification. The 'scientific' axiom justified and facilitated the governance of human society as the rational management of populations for the good of the whole. Although the social scientific rhetoric of 'society' came to stand for the social body as a whole, in practice social management was the management of those groups of people constituted as the 'problems' of society, as the objects of social scientific discourses. 'The social' was therefore constituted as a particular sort of space: highly constructed by powerful discourses of human science and differentiated by social group.

In *Discipline and Punish* the nature of that social space is expressed paradigmatically in the form of the Panopticon. In the domed inward facing architecture of the Panopticon (originally conceived by Jeremy Bentham as a model for the ideal prison), surveillance of the many could be facilitated by the central strategic location of the few. The Panopticon can be seen as a metaphor for a social space in which problems of society are temporally fixed on particular groups, and power is institutionalised in that stability:

'In appearance, it is merely the solution of a technical problem; but, through it, a whole type of society emerges.'¹⁶

The type of society that emerged from this construction of social space was a modern disciplinary society, later cast as a modern welfare society whose representation is no longer based on the threat of punishment but on the promise of general well being. Of course in modern social practice those two elements are of a piece, with welfare and penal representations and procedures working *in relation* to each other. Welfare practices of modern society survey the social space to spotlight and intervene in the life of problematic subjects as those who need help of one kind or another.

Of central importance to the workings of the Panopticon is that *all* those within its space are subject to a particular positioning which means that the relation between differently positioned subjects is *mutually constitutive*. That mutuality is the imperative of its working. Moreover the workings of power within this social space do not rely on any particular person deploying power:

'Power has its principle... in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up.'¹⁷

¹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p216

¹⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p200

In this formation the subjects of the Panopticon do not have to be worked upon directly because awareness of generalised surveillance ensures the automatic functioning of power, thus:

‘...the inmates [are] caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.’¹⁸

So in the wider social body the effect of punishing (or helping) the few is to discipline the many in the virtues of self-policing and self-help.

The modern drive to rationalise life in all its aspects took as its model the mode of governance already instituted in the management of ‘criminal’ populations. Scientifically informed policy construction, professional and bureaucratic administration, statutory intervention and therapeutic management of particular ‘cases’ would become a formulaic process whose product would be a self-regulating modern individual. In their originary period these processes did not distinguish between ‘problems’ of the poor and of the criminal. Problems of ‘vagabondage’ defined through a mix of newly emergent physical and moral classifications around disease, immorality, crime and indigence emerged as problems in relation to increasing ‘property crimes’.¹⁹ The social transformations of the late eighteenth century brought about through the development of capitalism instituted great increases in wealth and a new status and legal protection for property. They also effected the displacement of large numbers of peasants, rendered as shifting populations who roamed the countryside. Intrinsic to the new discourse of property was the discourse of ‘vagabondage’: the threat of the vagabond necessitating a ‘new severity’ towards the poor in general:

‘...stricter methods of surveillance, a tighter partitioning of the population, more efficient techniques of locating and obtaining information.’²⁰

Although the vagabond is the initial and most visible target of these new practices, closely followed by poor populations in general, their still wider target is the mindset of all. The opportunities for disorder of multiple kinds are so multiplied by the proliferation of commodity forms and other material expressions of wealth that discipline has to be installed psychologically throughout the population rather than policed individually. Power must work ubiquitously in capillaries of networks deeply embedded in the individual and social body:

‘...the point of application of this power... is the mind or rather a play of representations and signs circulating discreetly but necessarily and evidently in the minds of all.’²¹

¹⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p201

¹⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p87

²⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p77

²¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p101

'The gentle way in punishment' comes to rest on a technology of representation whose desired object is the non-criminal, healthy and willing worker: 'the citizen'.²² The criminal is remade as the citizen via a pedagogy of work, installed in the psyche of the modern subject:

'This useful pedagogy would revive for the lazy individual a liking for work, force him back into a system of interests in which labour would be more advantageous than laziness, form around him a small, miniature, simplified, coercive society in which the maxim, 'he who wants to live must work', would be clearly revealed.'²³

The modern individual, the building block of modern society, would be produced through 'work' as defined by a universal pedagogy. Those outside of such work would be cast as being outside of modern society, lacking what it took to be 'modern'. The 'vagabond' was one such figure, outside of 'society' at the point of its inception, an excrescence of massive social change in the late eighteenth century. Through the definitions, processes and practices of law, economy, politics and the human sciences, the 'vagabond' was produced as the originary non-working and dangerous outsider of modern society. The historical production of the *non-working individual* is therefore part of the production of *modern society*.

Fundamental to both modern subject and modern society are the dualistic constructions of Enlightenment rationality through which both emerged. Modernity and welfare are a product of this dualistic rationality, positioning and adjudicating between the individual and society, the good and the bad, the law abiding and the delinquent, the healthy and the sick, the working and the non-working. Poverty and criminality are instituted as part of the bad and relatedly so through a lack of 'work' as the means of subsistence. However, the poor and the criminal are amenable to reform through the application of particular kinds of knowledge and management to themselves as individuals, to particular groups and to society as a whole. Many elements of these practices of knowledge production and social management are historically continuous in the contemporary period in cultural and institutional ways of seeing, knowing and dealing with 'problematic' social groups. Moreover, the philosophical worldview through which they emerged continues as the Western episteme, a meta-theory of knowledge that is foundational to the pedagogic practices, institutions and dominant values of modern society.

Discipline and Punish works as a critique of the Western episteme and the modern social practices that are its modus operandi. However it is not explicitly normative, there are no judgements about the 'good' and 'bad' of modernity. The critique raises a difficult question about welfare's 'modern' nature and the extent to which it fulfils any of the positive, partly 'emancipatory' potential of modernity. These are questions that Foucault

²² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p104

²³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p122

leaves unaddressed through an implicitly oppositional regard for modernity. In contrast, the analysis of 'underclass' that I am proposing is explicit in the politics of its epistemology and in its regard for 'welfare'. It does not represent a wholesale rejection of either the ideas or the practices of modern society. Indeed a wholesale de(con)struction of the ideas and practices of 'welfare' as part of that society is perhaps my primary reason for not choosing that approach. However, part of my approach is to reject many of the ways in which 'welfare' has been historically, and is currently practiced.²⁴ In this respect some *post-modern* ideas centrally inform my methodological approach as a rejection of dominant historical and geographical *ways of knowing* the social problems, people and places associated with 'underclass'.

2: EPISTEMOLOGY

Modern Ways of Knowing 'Underclass'

From the mid-nineteenth century, a social group of people identified as the 'urban poor' emerged as a problem that dominated the social commentary of bourgeois society. The industrial slums that had developed in the transition to capitalism from the end of the eighteenth century onwards became the focus of burgeoning practices of social science. Those ideas which had been emergent in the mid to late eighteenth century as 'science' were harnessed to the construction of the 'human sciences'. From the mid-nineteenth century they were given a direct social application onto the populations and environments of urban London. The social documentations of Henry Mayhew ((1861) *London Labour and the London Poor*), Andrew Mearns ((1883) *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*), Charles Booth ((1902) *Life and Labour of the People of London*) and William 'General' Booth ((1890) *In Darkest England*) are the best known accounts of an urban poor whose nature had previously been 'unknown' to bourgeois society.²⁵ The terms in which these researches were conducted were often those of exploration, discovery and enlightenment and in this respect they paralleled the colonial journeys to the 'dark continent' of Africa. To different degrees they appealed to a government concerned with issues of social management and a public audience for popular 'travel' literature. The parallel journeys represented a joint

²⁴ I am using practice in the broadest sense here to include practices of representation, research, policy making and administration.

²⁵ It should be noted that these writings are not of a piece: their languages, motivations and imagined audiences varied. Some are more recognisable as 'travel literature' (*In Darkest England*); others have a more empirical style of mapping, grading and systematic tabulation (*Life and Labour of the People of London*); while others are more ethnographic, based on direct 'contacts' and the subjects' own words (*London Labour and the London Poor*).

quest for knowledge of and power over those deemed to be uncivilised, disordered, dangerous and generally a burden upon the Western, bourgeois forward march of Progress.

Through the social documentations of the mid-nineteenth century those previously referred to as 'the lower orders' emerged as the 'working classes'.²⁶ In socially authoritative accounts they were divided into two separate classes using the dichotomy of the respectable and the non-respectable. Such distinctions could be made via scientific methods to ascertain the precise nature of the relation between behaviour and environment:

'First, the observer noted the behaviour of the observed and then asked the question 'Is the behaviour true or false?', or to put it in another way 'Are environmental factors altering the behaviour in such a way that the behaviour is not truly representative of the person's type?''²⁷

If a bad environment was merely obscuring the nature of an otherwise good type of person then that person was respectable, deserving, redeemable. In contrast, the character of the non-respectable was not obscured by a bad environment but revealed by it. They chose their way of living and that choice was the product of their nature. Thus the respectable poor could be observed as - literally seen to be - clean, industrious, sober, evenly tempered, disciplined, civilised while the non-respectable were seen to be dirty, slovenly, loud-mouthed, undisciplined, bestial.

Discourses of nature which fixed a scientific language onto the social world were fundamental to the social sciences as they developed from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century. Ecological and pathological explanations for the behaviour and living conditions of the poor became embedded in the social scientific mode of inquiry. The 'scientific method' valorised as the most authoritative route to knowledge ensures the continuing status of these explanations. Although scientific *languages* of nature are now rarely used explicitly in social explanation, the scientific *method* remains the authoritatively modern way of knowing the social world, continuing the spirit of its originary moment. Thus the scientifically trained observer as a conduit of reality, relays the truth not as he sees it but *as it is*. Scientifically trained vision - empirical and objective - is cast as the primary qualification for the production of knowledge about the social world. I shall turn to the extensive critique of these dominant theories and practices of knowledge below, but first shall briefly review some modern ways in which 'underclass' has been rendered in academic research in the late twentieth century according to a traditional social scientific template.

The main part of that literature remains in the fold of 'objective', empirical inquiry and a substantial part of it is made up of geographical writings in which 'the city' as the

²⁶ Finch.L (1993) 'Two Working Classes' p32-49 *The Classing Gaze* St Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin

²⁷ Finch, *Two Working Classes* p33

place of the urban poor has prominence through ideas of social ecology.²⁸ Most prominent here is the Chicago School's paradigm of urban sociology characterised by a particular *motif* of discovery, a *direction* of research towards socially problematic groups and a focus on issues of spatial organisation.²⁹ Those orientations remain strong in quantitative and policy directed research on social problems in urban environments. The contemporary writing that is closest to the Chicago School's urban ecology, and commonly referred to in British literatures on 'underclass' is that of Professor William Julius Wilson who in the American context talks about the 'concentration' and 'isolation effects' of the urban ghetto and of 'ghetto specific culture'.³⁰ Within that notion of localised cultures of poverty is the idea that the 'underclass' is reproduced through cycles of deprivation. The idea of 'cultures of poverty' and relatedly 'cycles of deprivation' - both as locally and internally generated or at least locally and internally sustained - seemed to have passed in the 1960s and 1970s after being discredited politically and sociologically.³¹ Yet it is through the language of inter-generational, cultural and estate-based disorder that the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' has emerged. This emergence is multiply sourced: the academic, mainstream political, popular cultural and popular scientific are all part of the discourse and not separate realms of knowledge. Moreover, the terminology of pathology and ecology is not confined to historical social scientific discourses through which it gained status. It is part of a wider regime of meaning where connections proliferate across time and space. Psychometric psychology, race scientism, the genetics of criminal and anti-social behaviour, popular Darwinism and social genetics are all subject to extensive media interest in the contemporary period and often have their source in popular academic writings.³² While such writings have been most concerned to make links between pathology and criminality there are attendant links with ecological forms of explanation. The terminology of contagion, and

²⁸ Within recent geographical writings this link has been traced as part of an environmental and moral discourse in the nineteenth century. See Driver.F (1987) 'Moral Geographies: Social Science and the Urban Environment in Mid-Nineteenth Century England' p275-287 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography* 13

²⁹ See Jackson.P (1983) 'Social Disorganisation and Moral Order in the City' p168-180 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography* 9

³⁰ Wilson.W.J (1987) *The Truly Disadvantaged* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

³¹ The 'culture of poverty' terminology was introduced into social science by the American anthropologist Oscar Lewis ((1968) *The Culture of Poverty* in Moynihan.D.P (ed.) *Understanding Poverty* New York: Basil Blackwell), and had some currency in British sociology. In the 1970s the Social Science Research Council devoted a major research programme into inter-generational transmission of deprivation under the direct instruction of Sir Keith Joseph, the Conservative Minister for Social Security. He insisted on linking unemployment to cycles of deprivation through which bad child rearing and unstable families were perpetuated and commissioned research in an attempt to substantiate his claims. See Rutter.M and Madge.N (1977) *Cycles of Disadvantage: A Review of Research* London: Heineman

³² See for example Jessel.D and Moir.A (1997) *A Mind To Crime* London: Signet; Wilson.J.Q (1995) *The Moral Sense* London: Free Press; Wiley.J (1996) *The Genetics of Criminal and Anti-Social*

epidemics of teenage pregnancy in particular areas is common to popular journalism on 'underclass', where council estates are figured as breeding grounds for criminal and reproductive deviance.³³ A focus on the 'inner city' and 'peripheral estates' as the places where 'underclass' happens, have given particular areas and estates paradigmatic status within the discourse - Kingsmead in Hackney, Penywaun in South Wales, Ryelands in Lancaster, St. Pauls in Bristol, Ragworth in Cleveland, the Manor in Sheffield, Moss Side in Manchester, the Scotswood, Benwell and Meadow Well estates in Newcastle. Within academia Professor Julius Wilson's work is most prominently cited as linking 'the ghetto' of North American deindustrialising cities with a partly behavioural 'underclass', and has also been used to question the nature of the 'ghetto' in the British context.³⁴ Charles Murray has named lists of British cities in which 'indicators' of 'underclass' most strongly combine, and where a 'contamination' of values occurs at a neighbourhood level from which individuals cannot 'isolate' themselves.³⁵ In the work of Professor Peter Hall, making the case for better planning in 'ghettoised' cities of Britain and America, an argument is put that problems of 'social pathology' cannot be separated from a discussion of design solutions if 'the city of the permanent underclass' is to be prevailed against.³⁶ More quantitative approaches to the problem of 'underclass' have been adopted elsewhere as a focus on geographical distributions of single parenthood and as comparative criminology at a variety of geographical scales.³⁷ In these accounts spatial perspectives concur with a broadly positivistic conception of space. Space is understood to exist as a variety of different geographical scales and is observed as spatial patterns, distributions and manifestations. Such a perspective suggests there is an objectively conceived spatial phenomenon under study. This approach most commonly shows itself as a continuing obsession with the question - 'is there or isn't there an underclass?' - necessitating an evidential quest in the direction of 'the underclass' to find out. Thus interest in where and whether 'underclass' fits into existing classificatory systems and the common suggestion from 'progressive'

Behaviour Chichester, West Sussex: CIBA Foundation; Brand.C (1996) *The g Factor* London: John Wiley; Murray.C and Herrnstein.R.J (1994) *The Bell Curve* London: Free Press

³³ I have been able to gauge the nature of some dominant journalistic representations of 'underclass' through a comprehensive survey of broadsheet newspapers which have, in different ways, produced and sustained the debate (*The Independent*, *The Independent on Sunday*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* 1992-1996 inclusive)

³⁴ See Peach.C (1996) 'Does Britain Have Ghettos?' p216-235 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography* 21

³⁵ Murray.C (1989) *The Emerging British Underclass* London: Institute of Economic Affairs p4

³⁶ Hall.P (1996) 'The City of the Permanent Underclass' p362-400 *Cities Of Tomorrow* Oxford: Blackwell p395

³⁷ Harris.F and Breugel.I (1995) *Teenage Parenthood: The Local Dimension* Paper given at the British Sociological Association Conference Leicester University, April 1995; Fyfe.N.R (1995) *Crime, Space and Society: Key Research Themes, Findings and Questions in the 1990s* p182-195 *Scottish Geographical Magazine* volume 111: no. 3

social scientists that use of the term be located in research of a particular type - namely structural perspectives of labour market change.³⁸

The academic evidential quest rests on an appeal to the authority of positivistic social explanation - if there is an 'underclass' we will be able to find it, describe it, account for it, and possibly change it. It ignores the extent to which 'underclass' is already 'out there' as a regime of meaning that is materially produced by a range of practices and people and materially productive of spaces and subjectivities. What then becomes necessary and interesting to ask is: what are the terms, spaces, powers and forms of that production. Other kinds of geographical work have moved towards a more discursive engagement with issues of social marginalisation and space. The work of David Sibley on *Geographies of Exclusion* talks about the social production of marginalised identities and spaces in relation to each other. He presents the production of different kinds of spaces as a way of fencing off social groups identified as 'unsavoury' at particular times. The emphasis is on the socially and psychoanalytically constructed nature of identity and space.³⁹ There also exists a more positive (and partly historical) literature on how socio-spatial marginalisation normally conceived in terms of social problems contains elements of transgression, subversion and resistance to dominant socio-spatial orders. In the exemplary work of Richard Sennett and of Elizabeth Wilson these are celebrated as geographies of urban disorder.⁴⁰ With particular regard to ethnographic research issues post-structuralist modes of inquiry have sought to open up to scrutiny the knowledge producing processes through which 'other' people and places come to be represented.⁴¹ However, these approaches are not without their own problems. In particular, the common rendition of 'the represented' as the 'other' of powerful representational elites in media, politics and academia also serves to reify the concept. The use of 'other' should therefore only be regarded as a heuristic device that describes the *rendition* of difference and how that partly *comes to* constitute a material relation of difference and/or inequality. Thus my focus is on *processes of becoming known*, and does not assume the integrity and coherence of categories of 'same' and 'other'. Such an emphasis on process and relations rather than stable entities allows for relations between

³⁸ See Morris.L (1993) Is There A British Underclass? p404-413 *Journal of Urban and Regional Research*; Robinson.F and Gregson.N (1992) The 'Underclass': A Class Apart? p38-51 *Critical Social Policy* 34

³⁹ Sibley.D (1995) *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* London: Routledge. It is perhaps worth noting why I am choosing not to follow Sibley's approach to some similar issues. Sibley's ideas are largely premised on psychoanalytic theories of projection and othering which though clearly relevant are also problematic to the extent that they tend to reify the category of 'other'. My own emphasis is the social *practice* of discourse rather than its psychoanalytic dynamics.

⁴⁰ Sennett.R (1970) *The Uses Of Disorder* London: W.W Norton; Wilson.E (1991) *The Sphinx in the City* London: Virago

⁴¹ See for example Clifford.J and Marcus.S (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* Berkeley: University of California Press

different people and places to be seen as actively produced and therefore actively changeable. It also allows for a complex relation of refusal and recognition with regard to labels and categories through which people and places are known. It is within these kinds of understandings that my approach to the figures, spaces, processes and relations involved in the discourse of 'underclass' is located.

A Feminist and Foucauldian Way of Knowing

Critical theories of knowledge and its production developed by philosophically engaged feminist writers have been central to the problematisation of the category of 'other' as the object of research. Perhaps the defining theme of feminist epistemologies as particular ways of engaging with the world that seek to transcend the subject-object divide between researcher and researched, is that of 'situated knowledge'. Seminally developed by Donna Haraway, the concept gives priority to recognising that knowledge comes from someone, somewhere at sometime and so the knowledges of both researcher and researched should be understood and accountable on those terms, and the knowledge hierarchy between them thereby partly displaced.⁴² Rhetorics which seek to disguise that situatedness with recourse to the language of science, objectivity and truth are effectively attempts to disguise the power laden nature of knowledge and its production and to shore up powerful hierarchies of knowledge. In many feminist epistemologies recognition of location and therefore of difference in the way that knowledge is produced is part of a specifically political project. Part of its purpose is to identify and change the inequalities which characterise some of the most powerful and oppressive realms in which knowledge is produced and applied. Feminist politics and epistemologies are therefore allied in recognition that what is at stake in practices of knowledge is power. Thus Haraway:

'Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. Epistemology is about knowing the difference'.⁴³

The need for reflexivity by those involved in the production of knowledge stems from the call to make the location of knowledge and its production explicit via questions like: who speaks, why, to whom, to what effect? However it should be noted that a sensitivity to such questions does not guarantee answers that can necessarily reveal often intimate, oblique and shifting connections between the subject and the knowledge she has of herself and her social world, nor between the subject and those involved in representing her

⁴² Haraway.D (1991) Situated Knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective p183-203 *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* London: Free Association Books

⁴³ Haraway.D (1991) A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century p127-149 *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*

'situated knowledge'. Neither the subject nor researcher is self-identical, able to open up or be opened up to reveal truths of 'the self'. In other words, situated knowledges should not claim to represent subjective truths as truths of the subject or the social, but should be seen as a 'tactic' in a play of power, a way of disrupting mimetic representations of 'the truth'.⁴⁴

It follows that whilst feminist epistemologies target scientific epistemologies that claim powers of truth telling, they do not posit the existence of alternative truths, ready to assume the same power position. Rather, situated truths are about a permanently critical positioning that is achieved, not given, through practising reflexivity as a specifically partial and disruptive feminist objectivity. In this conception 'subjugated knowledges' have more value than those which have been (and remain) historically dominant. Subjugated knowledges are those of the less powerful, valuable not simply because they are subjugated, but because they allow the knowledges of the powerful to be seen for what they are: a 'god-trick' that is situated 'nowhere' whilst claiming to see comprehensively.⁴⁵ Haraway makes a point of emphasizing that subjugation per se is not 'grounds for an ontology', but rather the potential for political and ethical struggles to be foregrounded in contestation of what counts as 'rational knowledge'.⁴⁶ This understanding does not represent a call to relativise knowledge, rather Haraway's argument for subjugated knowledges is for a *better* because more objective kind of knowledge:

'The subjugated have a decent chance to be on to the god-trick and all its dazzling - and, therefore, blinding - illuminations. 'Subjugated' standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world.'⁴⁷

Feminist critiques of dominant modes of knowledge are rooted in a critique of the Western episteme as constituted by gendered knowledge hierarchies and languages. In the dualistic constructions of male and female, mind and body, reason and affect, subject and object, same and other, there are constructions of value in which the lesser half of the dualism is coded as feminine. The implications of refusing those dualistic ways of thinking as the supports of a power apparatus that seeks to devalue that which is feminised, are vast. Indeed the possibility of refusing them may be only available as a tactic given their centrality to the constitution of modern social practices and subjectivities. Nevertheless, by maintaining a principled and strategic refusal of that symbolic and material order, feminist epistemologies have been able to bring about considerable ruptures in the way that academic

⁴⁴ Rose, G (1997) *Situating Knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics* p305-320 *Progress in Human Geography* volume 21:3

⁴⁵ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p191

⁴⁶ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p193

⁴⁷ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p191

knowledge is theorised and produced. They have opened up a range of methodological possibilities that diverge from traditional empirical epistemologies.

Foucault's genealogical approach is one such possibility.⁴⁸ As an approach that is highly attuned to the connections between knowledge, power and space it is of particular value to a geographical understanding of the way the discourse of 'underclass' works. The practice of genealogy repositions the direction of the research gaze from an empirically knowable, pristine space in the 'real world' to the practices that produce spaces of knowledge. Both genealogical theories of knowledge and feminist theories of situated knowledge can be seen in terms of a spatial ontology. These theories reconfigure the research space as a space of possibility, as a space where neither the voice of the author nor the voice of the researched is self-identical and definitive, the space is interpretative and partial. The researcher is herself part of the research space, speaking from a particular position, seeing others in relation to herself, and seeing all the relations within the research space as relations of power. The reason for her attention to power is to position dominant speakers in relation to the subjugated, and to displace dominant knowledges with subjugated ones. Haraway specifically conceives of this displacement as a changed *view* on the world, a way of seeing that is partial and accountable (it is also necessarily embodied, a point to which I turn later). The knowledges that come from this way of seeing, symbolise a feminist reclamation of vision abused by the truth telling of the master view 'promising Vision from everywhere and nowhere, equally and fully.'⁴⁹ They are produced as:

'...partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.'⁵⁰

Feminist epistemologies do not inevitably produce 'feminist knowledge' as a particular *form* or *substantive* kind of knowledge. They are rather a *way* of knowing in which the power dimensions of the knowledge producing process are problematised, prioritised and politicised by a visual register:

'How to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinkered? Who wears blinkers? Who gets to interpret the visual field?'⁵¹

⁴⁸ It is important to note that the relation between feminist theory and Foucault's work is prolifically contested as well as positively productive. See Diamond.I and Quinby.L (eds.) (1988) *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* Boston: North-East University Press; McNay.L (1992) *Foucault and Feminism* Cambridge: Polity Press; Sawicki.J (1991) *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body* London: Routledge. In the epistemological work of Haraway and Fraser which centrally informs my position, Foucault's genealogical approach to knowledge is seen as both compatible and desirable, albeit not without specifically political shortcomings (discussed later).

⁴⁹ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p191

⁵⁰ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p191

⁵¹ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p194

In this concern with the *power* of vision feminist epistemologies are strongly allied to Foucault's epistemology.

Foucault's genealogical project works to trace the effects of power, to analyse what kinds of subjects, knowledges/truths and social practices are produced by the workings of power at any given time. By tracing the production of dominant truths the genealogical approach also seeks to unfold those 'lesser' truths that dominant types of knowledge want to disqualify. These are the subjugated knowledges that are denied by more powerful discourses rooted in scientific ways of knowing the world. In this respect genealogies are anti-sciences, not against the *form* of scientific knowledge per se but its power *effects*:

'...it is really against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific that the genealogy must wage its struggle.'⁵²

The questions which genealogies need to be asked of those powerful discourses are these:

'What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in the very instant of your demand 'Is it a science?' Which speaking, discoursing subjects - which subjects of experience and knowledge - do you then want to diminish... Which theoretical-political avant garde do you want to enthrone in order to isolate it from all the discontinuous forms of knowledge that circulate about it?'⁵³

In Foucault's genealogies tracing the workings of power involves tracing the spaces through which power is practiced and spaces which in turn are produced by power, including the research space. Thus Foucault's well-cited quote that 'an analysis of power would be an analysis of spaces'.⁵⁴ The sense of this idea is that power relations produce space. Rather than being a given medium in which power has manifest causality, in which social practices take place, space is itself a product of those power relations and practices. It is through this basic understanding that complex connections between power, knowledge and space can be made. Foucault is not simply saying that through power the production of knowledge takes place and the production of space also takes place (or that knowledge is already in a space or place) but that the two are related. Power's production is of different *kinds* of spaces and knowledges in relation to each other: particular kinds of knowledge and particular kinds of space are constituted *through each other*. This means that different kinds of spaces (embodied spaces, symbolic spaces, social spaces of every kind) to those traditionally seen as the legitimate focus of geographical inquiry become the focus of an approach whose aim is to show how different kinds of subject positions, spaces and social practices are produced through the workings of power/knowledge.

⁵² Foucault.M (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* Gordon.C (ed.) Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf p22

⁵³ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* p22

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* p69

Genealogy can be seen as both a philosophical approach and a mode of inquiry. In its philosophical capacity it is a set of ideas about how individual subjects and society are produced, about their *process of becoming*. Central to this process of production/becoming is the role of power/knowledge in establishing knowledges as truths about individuals, social groups and societies. As a mode of inquiry genealogies *trace* those processes of production/becoming through the kinds of dominant truths that are circulating and being practiced at any particular time. Thus in the *History of Sexuality* vol. 1, Foucault traces the social production of differently sexed subjects and of a sexualised society through practices of social regulation around sex. These practices were based on oppositions between ideas of normality and deviance, established as new, scientific knowledges/truths about sex. Through these distinctions the management of particular groups - pervers, homosexuals, prostitutes - as problem populations could be brought about. This understanding is central to my analysis, it means that it is possible to trace the process of truth-making/knowledge production by analysing discourse because it is through discourse that power/knowledge works, indeed 'it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together'.⁵⁵

An analysis of discourse that is based on Foucault's genealogical approach is therefore much more than an analysis of language. It is the analysis of power, of knowledge, of social practice, of space, and of their parts in the production of individual subjects and a wider social body at a particular time. It is through such a conception of discourse that my analysis of 'underclass' in the contemporary period proceeds.

3: METHODOLOGY

Discourse Analysis: Practice, Space, Power, Networks

The discourse analysis of this thesis is constructed around two central concepts: practices and networks. A theorisation of how these concepts are linked is presented as a theory of how 'the social' works. It provides the background to my methodological approach by suggesting that particular methods of inquiry will be best able to explicate the workings of the social.

~Practice~

The social practices which make discourse materially effective do so by producing particular kinds of space: discourse is a spatial production. In my conception, the nature of this spatial production has three constitutive parts. First, it is the production of those spaces in which representations are made, whether that is a book, or a news conference: both are

⁵⁵ Foucault, *History Of Sexuality* p100

seen as particular kinds of spaces of representation. One may be seen as fictional and insignificant in the scheme of things, the other as globally consequential. Those judgements have consequences for the status of different kinds of knowledges contained within different representational spaces. Second, it is the production of spaces of representation in which other people and places are identified, located, and given meaning. For example 'the stock exchange' and 'the estate' are represented as particular kinds of spaces which are occupied by particular kinds of people. Those representations partly come to represent 'the truth' about different groups of people and different kinds of spaces. Third, it is the production of spaces through the material effects of representation, for example through policy directed at particular places or as people act towards others according to prevailing meanings about those others. The latter can be regarded as a production of lived spaces where different possibilities of being are made more or less likely. The separation of those three elements is heuristic, there is no progressive or determined causality about the way they work together.⁵⁶

By thinking about discourse in these spatial ways, the analysis of discourse can utilise three kinds of questions:

How are different kinds of spaces of representation mapped themselves?

What kinds of spaces does that allow them to authoritatively map?

What is the material nature of those mapping processes?

Those are questions that relate spaces of representation to power: who has the power to represent? what kind of representations are powerful? what is the basis of their authority? how is that authority constructed through different kinds of spaces? how does the power of representation relate to other kinds of social power? The initial three questions lead discourse analysis in a particular direction. If discourse works through different kinds of spaces and through social practices then the focus of analysis is those spaces and practices. Before detailing the social practices and spaces of representation that are the subject of my discourse analysis of 'underclass', it is necessary to further develop an argument about the relation between discourse and 'the social'.

~Social Space~

As well as seeing discourse as social practice, 'the social' should be seen as discursively produced. Moreover, after Foucault's argument that discourse is where power

⁵⁶ It should be noted here that I am not drawing on Lefebvre's theorisation of the production of space (Lefebvre, H. (1991) *The Production of Space* Oxford: Blackwell). He talks about relations between three kinds of space (abstract, concrete, representational) as a way of conceiving of modern capitalism's spatiality. I find the links between his spatial concepts too abstract and oblique to be of much use. My own conceptualisation of three kinds of space working in relation to each other is specifically concerned to explicate the nature of *discourse* as a spatial production.

and knowledge come together, the social can be seen as a production of power/knowledge. This is how discourses of sexuality produce sexualised societies, and discourses of delinquency produce disciplinary societies. Power-ful discourses work through representation, through social practices, through space, to produce 'the social' according to particular truths. However, 'the social' does not exist as one kind of space, internally coherent and structured. The concept of discourse allows the social to be seen as constituted by different kinds of spaces, spaces that are materially and symbolically differentiated, and which are therefore also generically diverse. Here, the study of 'social space' can have many different starting points because there is no social or spatial blueprint of 'the way things work' and no right method through which the blueprint can be understood.

Critiques of programmatic conceptions of 'the social' are many and among the alternative conceptualisations available, the work of Bruno Latour on networks has the strongest bearing on my approach to social space.⁵⁷ In *We Have Never Been Modern* Latour forwards a critique of the modern view of 'the social' as composed of structured polarities and bound divisions: primarily that instituted as a divide between Politics and Science, and conceived as a division between Representation and Truth.⁵⁸ Latour contends that this modern view - rooted in Enlightenment thought, and instituted through modern social practices emergent in the seventeenth century - is the basis of hegemonic understandings of the social as composed of structure, hierarchy and polarity. His argument is that such features do not exist as natural divisions but only as reified constructions. Moreover, those constructions act as the main building blocks of dominant theoretical blueprints of the way the social works. Their fixity means that the nature of social space can be known by knowing how the blueprint works. Indeed that knowledge and the reality on which it is supposed to be based is determined by the blueprint. Latour's critique of this Enlightenment template of the social, its polarised constructions and the theories of social and spatial determination that it facilitates, seeks a different image of social space. It is not an alternative blueprint but a boundless, moving image of the way that social space is *practiced*. The image is of social space as network, a network of relations produced through the practices of socially situated individuals (classed, racialised, and gendered for example). These practices are productive of different kinds of space and constitutively of a wider social space at any given time.

⁵⁷ I have not the space to present an extensive critique of Latour's work, but will briefly outline where his ideas can be most productively engaged with the broadly Foucauldian concept of discourse that I am using. This brief introduction is extended in the theoretical background to the second chapter of the thesis where some of Latour's ideas about networks are used directly

⁵⁸ Latour.B (1991) *We Have Never Been Modern* Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf

It is Latour's emphasis on practice that is most useful to my focus on the production of 'underclass'. It means that knowledge and its production can be specified according to the practices, people and spaces involved in its production. These kind of specificities are answers to the *how* questions which are raised by a focus on practice: *how* is knowledge produced? *how* is space produced? *how* does discourse work? Such questions relate back to both Foucault's conceptualisation of genealogy as a richly detailed tracing of power/knowledge regimes through modern social practices and Haraway's situated knowledges as the localised products of *somebody somewhere*.

~Bodies and Power~

Both Haraway's and Foucault's epistemologies require that the production of knowledge is seen to be the work of practices that are both full of power and full of bodies. Discourse is infused with power and thick with bodies. Moreover the two are of a piece: power works through practices, practices are embodied. The cases that make up *Discipline and Punish* show how discourse is fleshy: at the extreme bodies are literally shaped through practices that beat, brand and torture them, while in the everyday, discourse subjectifies individual bodies through practices of social regulation and discipline. In both, the body is the very site of power as the target of practices of subjectification. But the body of discourse is not just acted on, it is a constitutive part of its own subjectification, it shapes and resists particular kinds of subjectification. Equally it is not just oppressed bodies that are the site of power. Those bodies which deploy power authoritatively *over* others are subjectified in the process: particular bodies beat and torture others and particular bodies produce knowledge about others. Bodies are therefore produced *in relation* to each other as particular *kinds* of bodies, produced and differentiated in material and symbolic relation to each other. For example in Foucault's genealogies bodies are relationally majestic, dissolute, adorned, shackled, sexualised, diseased, condemned and ripped apart. Similarly, the bodies of contemporary 'underclass' discourse are those produced through the physical and mental stresses of illness, anxiety, hunger, exhaustion, depression, violence; they are the bodies that are represented, surveilled and marked with meanings that seek to reduce identity to physicality in terms of pathology, contagion and out of control reproductive and criminal urges; but they are also the bodies of suited professionals, famous bodies, bodies that are differently classed and gendered.

For my purposes looking at the embodied aspects of the production of knowledge makes it possible to see bodies as differently embroiled in power relations: which bodies speak? where are they positioned? what are they like? which bodies are materially burdened

with the meanings of others? The issue is one of located embodiment and the power dimensions of location.⁵⁹

At this point my intention is to provide a loose framework of connections between materiality and discourse which will be developed later through substantive case studies. The analysis of discourse that I intend works on the basis of an axis of understanding about relations between bodies, social practice and discourse. It has three mutually related elements: the body as the ultimate marker of location; social practices as embodied practices; the bodily materiality of discourse. In sum, embodied analyses are a necessary part of taking seriously Haraway's conceptualisation of situated knowledge where bodies are literally the *site* of situatedness, the view from *somewhere*:

'I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision, and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere...'⁶⁰

'...objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility.'⁶¹

The principal reason for this thesis partly focusing on bodies is to trace and locate the workings of power through *practice*.

~Networks~

The notion of power working through different kinds of practices, relations and spaces, is facilitated in the idea of network. Here Foucault's and Latour's image of power and space connect. Power is not held in blocks, in situ, shared out or kept back. It is configured in networks of relations through which it travels, generates and is generated by social practices. This figurative image of the social as constituted by power laden networks is fundamental to the way that I am conceptualising the social workings of discourse. In these networks power does not exist in a fixed distribution, although it is often temporally fixed in institutions; it is differently configured at different times, in different places and within those places. However there is not total flux within the networks, they are material as well as fluid, there are continuities and patterns in their configurations. They are networks of historical change *and* continuity. The network image complicates hierarchy and structure

⁵⁹ This is necessarily a cursory mention of one possible set of links between bodies and power as a subject which has been widely theorised from a variety of philosophical perspectives, especially in feminist literatures (See Butler.J (1993) *Bodies That Matter: the discursive limits of sex* London: Routledge; Grosz.E (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press). There is a longer theoretical engagement with some of these ideas in Chapter Two where I focus on particular bodies involved in the practices of 'underclass' discourse.

⁶⁰ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p188

⁶¹ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p190

with complexity and contingency and it necessitates attention to temporal and spatial conjuncture and specificity. Ideas of social space as network, of networks that are practiced and embodied, and of practices that are the workings of power/knowledge, facilitate a different way of seeing and thinking about the study of social space. If social space itself is discursively produced and discourse is produced spatially then it is possible to ask - what is the spatiality of any given discourse? The importance of the answer is that it can locate knowledge, and thereby locate power in practices that are not beyond critical reach. It makes knowledge and power more accessible, more open to change. So, what are the spaces of 'underclass' that are the subject of this thesis and how are they situated within the networks of power/knowledge that produce them?

The Discourse of 'Underclass': Sites and Spaces

The spaces of 'underclass' discourse that I am analysing are multiple and generically diverse. In common they can all be seen as nodes in a temporally connected network of power relations. Their nature as spaces of identity and place, among other things, is the subject of the chapters that follow. The spaces of 'underclass' that I will be analysing are seen as constitutive parts of different sites, where each site is an area of knowledge production within 'underclass' discourse. The sites are a policy conference, DSS waiting rooms, interviews, books, television documentary, newspaper articles, policy documents, newsletters, pamphlets, films, and song lyrics. The particular sites have been chosen in order to bring different spaces and knowledges into the same analytic frame (they are normally kept apart, often poles apart) and to see them as related to each other through relations of power. I will not be mapping these sites as subjugated *or* dominant in relation to each other: the network of power/knowledge relations in which they are situated is more complex than that. The different sites do not oppose or dominate each other so much as internalise each other. The large number of events, institutions, people and practices that relate to 'underclass' produce a configuration whose meaning and power is situated within *the whole*, where relations between sites also *intersect* sites, and where the meanings and powers of each site are produced *in relation* to each other. Importantly this means that some sites may be internally contested and have shifting boundaries while others may be coherent and have enduring boundaries. In the network of sites, spaces and relations that make up the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' it is therefore not possible to describe a modelled configuration of relations between groups like 'the single mother', 'the State', 'the media', 'the political Left', 'the pressure group', 'the feminist commentator'. Nothing less than a tracing of discourse through its spatial and temporal configuration can show the nature of

relations between and within the sites and spaces that make the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' as it is.

Each of the three chapters that follow will focus on different sites within the discourse of 'underclass'. Each site represents an area of knowledge production and representation within the discourse but is constituted by different kinds of space rather than being internally homogenous. The sites of **Chapter Two** are sites in an area of knowledge production of 'underclass' that can be termed welfare knowledges, in particular knowledges about Social Security. In these sites welfare knowledge includes policy debate on Social Security and the future of welfare, and the everyday knowledge of relating to the government agencies of Social Security administration. The chapter presents a comparative ethnography of an international policy conference on 'Stakeholding' and a number of local DSS waiting rooms in the South of England. These sites produce particular kinds of spaces within the discourse of 'underclass': spaces of power laden social practice, spaces of professional and claimant identity, of authoritative and subjugated knowledges of 'work' and 'dependence'. The sites of **Chapter Three** are located under the rubric of feminist knowledges of 'underclass'. Feminist knowledges are expressed in political and cultural debates on community and crime, the state of the family and gender relations, parenting and child care, single motherhood and 'welfare dependency'. The chapter is based on in-depth interview based discussions with six prominent spokeswomen in fields of media, academia and policy related campaigning. The sites on which I focus are the discussions and other texts through which the women's personal and professional identities are produced. The spaces they partly constitute are the spaces of identity of the people and places of 'underclass': the 'benefit dependent' single mother, the young unemployed, often 'criminal' male, 'the council estate', 'the street', 'the home', 'the community', 'the workplace'. The sites of **Chapter Four** can be positioned under the rubric of popular discursive knowledges of 'underclass'. The chapter presents a cultural cartography of two contemporary films which represent experiential knowledges of 'benefit dependent' single motherhood and working class 'criminal' masculinities. The sites of my analysis are the films, the spaces they constitute are those of experiential narrative: of identity, home, street and estate, all presented as spaces of social and cultural resonance, conflict and struggle.

My reasons for choosing these particular sites represent a fusion of personal motivation with academic theory on how dominant ways of knowing - their hierarchies, processes and forms - come to produce dominant modes of social action. My idea was to make that connection explicit and to analyse it through sites which represent some of the most prominent forms of knowledge production around 'underclass'. I identified those sites as being in areas of policy representation (conference), policy administration (DSS waiting

room); academic, media, lobbying/campaign-based representations (feminist speaking positions) and popular culture (films). The selection of particular sites was in many ways suggested by the cultural profile of those sites, gauged by reading the dominant visibilities of 'underclass' discourse. This was of course an interpretative reading of the social space. It happened to include motivations that were quite personal in nature.⁶² There was a dominant discourse of 'underclass' emerging through the 1990s and I had a personal relation to it because of my family and class background. As a student I also started to have an academic relation to it because the issues it was dealing with partly related to my chosen studies. A shared part of my personal and academic identity was an interest in Left-wing politics and feminism, as interests that spilled over into a lot of what I thought about and enjoyed doing. I could therefore present the selection of sites as a selection of things that I was *already* involved in doing and thinking about at the time: going to political conferences, sitting in DSS waiting rooms with my mum, talking about feminism and the state of society, and watching films! However I am not presenting these selections and connections as fortuitous or pleasure driven, preferring Elspeth Probyn's description of such socially embedded research as 'writing the social through the self' to produce 'points of view that allow insight into the construction of particular conjunctural social moments'.⁶³ In Probyn's argument such personal-social connections are not so much coincidental as derived from the nature of the social self.

The presentation of the sites as case studies is loosely related to the case study as research method literature.⁶⁴ The case study approach is particularly well-suited to the idea of an accumulative and compound discursive phenomenon such as 'underclass', without evoking a uni-directional or teleological motor of development. The case study approach can accommodate ideas of contradiction and diversity through different case analyses without detracting from the analytic whole. My case studies are generically diverse and each chapter employs a different research method that is elaborated in each chapter as part of its analysis. They are all traditional qualitative methods - of participant observation, interactive and semi-structured interview based discussions, and textual analysis - employed in order to arrive at interpretative, argued conclusions rather than correct answers. However, the methodology is primarily based on a genealogical approach to discourse. Foucault's post-structural philosophy, genealogical method and substantive focus are inextricably intertwined in a way that refuses the need for a separate elaboration of methodology.

⁶² I will expand on this originary motivation of my research in the last section of this chapter

⁶³ Probyn.E (1993) *Sexing The Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* London: Routledge p107

⁶⁴ Hamel.J, Dufour.S, Fortin.D (1992) *Case Study Methods* Qualitative Research Methods Series volume 32, London: Sage

The chapters that follow are inspired by that integrated approach as a way of writing. The relation between the chapters, like the relation between the sites and spaces of the discourse is conceptual and complex rather than causal or hierarchical. In the discourse of 'underclass' particular events, people or texts are not the effect of a greater causality but are constituted by processes which are often complex and equivocal. The case studies I am presenting are therefore not merely tools or small scale effects of the greater causal power of welfare restructuring. Nevertheless, in particular parts of the networks of 'underclass' discourse there is a coalescence and stability of knowledges which whilst they may not represent a monolithic convergence of intention and result do frame the issues involved in ways that make different visibilities and ways of being, more or less likely. These relations are not those of cause and effect but of constitutive processes. Such processes are much more difficult to trace - indeed may often be untraceable - in comparison to the hard certainties of cause and effect. It is therefore not possible or even desirable to set up direct links between the sites in a way that suggests that the workings of discourse can be fully mapped and accounted for. Their constitutive spaces complexly internalise each other in a variety of ways, some of which may not be empirically knowable. The links that I am making between the sites are therefore largely of my own making, they are possibilities among many others. I am choosing a particular ordering of the case studies to make an argument about ways of seeing and knowing 'underclass'. Although it may be possible to read and analyse all the sites as being as complex and contested as each other, my own interpretation of them is as sites that are differentiated from each other in important ways, and some sites make the reading of complexity and contestation within 'underclass' discourse more available than others.

For the purposes of this argument the ordering of chapters represents an ordering of increasing complexity, heterogeneity and depth in ways of seeing and knowing 'underclass'. The movement is broadly from reductive to expansive ways of seeing, from authoritative fact and evidence to poetic, affective and sometimes ambivalent ways of knowing. The movement can also be spatialised in a way that recognises differences between the sites as differences in the kinds of understandings that they promote. It is broadly a movement from the enduring patterns and closures of the welfare knowledges of the policy conference and DSS waiting rooms, to the temporal fractures and disjunctures of the interview based feminist knowledges, to the fluidity and openness of the popular cultural knowledges of the films. These figurative spatialities are a way of recognising difference between the sites, with preferences implied. However they do not necessarily suggest why openness is better than closure. For those sorts of understandings to be made it is necessary to have a normative frame.

4: POLITICS

Modernity and Welfare: 'an infernal couple?'

I started this chapter with a brief introduction to the ways in which modernity and welfare are constituted in relation to each other, using the genealogical-philosophical critique of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. I have shown how this aspect of Foucault's work overlaps with a particular feminist epistemology of situated and subjugated knowledge through their shared critique of the dualistic nature of Enlightenment thought and its constitution of the Western episteme. Where they differ is in the normative content of their critiques and the degree of importance they attach to its explicit inclusion. Where Foucault eschews an explicitly political normativity, preferring instead an 'ethics of permanent resistance',⁶⁵ feminists concerned to bring about particular kinds of social and political change have insisted on the way that knowledge is always political, should be stated as such and seen in its political capacity to effect change. This thesis adheres to that kind of normative approach, following Nancy Fraser's advocacy of a politics of epistemology, where the politics are those of socialist feminism.⁶⁶

An illustration of the irreducibly political nature of Foucault's own knowledge production around welfare is provided in an interview on contemporary Social Security practice.⁶⁷ His comments on the subject of the 'perverse' and generally undesirable effects of the Social Security system on the subject's dependency, point to an absolute necessity for the modern subject of Foucault's work to be *classed* and *gendered*. His reference is to the 'infernal couple' security-dependence:

'One notes the following fact which is inherent in the functional mechanisms of the machinery: on the one hand more security is being given to people and, on the other, they are being made increasingly dependent. But what one ought to be able to expect from security is that it gives each individual autonomy in relation to the dangers and situations likely to lower his status or subject him.'⁶⁸

It is not insignificant that the subject of this comment is a 'he'. The substitution of a female subject into the autonomy 'versus' dependence opposition forces consideration of the nature of 'independent' female citizenship especially in relation to State support for parenthood.

⁶⁵ Foucault.M (1984) On the Genealogy of Ethics: an Overview of Work in Progress p340-373 Rabinow.P 1984 *The Foucault Reader* London: Penguin

⁶⁶ Fraser.N (1989) 'Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture' p161-191 *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; (1997) *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the Post-Socialist Condition* London: Routledge

⁶⁷ Foucault.M (1988) Interview 'On Social Security' p159-177 Kritzman.L.D (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* New York: Routledge

⁶⁸ Foucault, *On Social Security* p160

The construction of notions of autonomy and independence in strongly masculinist terms has long been disputed by feminists.⁶⁹ It is also a classed construction that is central to the dominant discourse of 'underclass' which reiterates a divide between benefit claiming and independence, equating independence with paid work in the official economy. A normative position on issues of 'dependence' and 'independence' in relation to Social Security and 'work' is absolutely central to the political animus of the discourse analysis that I intend. It is also integral to the epistemological approach of that analysis: the refusal of dualisms of science and politics, fact and affect, representation and truth is also a refusal of those modern constructions of dependence and independence, public and private, work and care. The political position on which that refusal is partly based is socialist feminist and its focus in this thesis is the contemporary state of welfare, in particular benefit provision for the 'non-working' poor. In the kind of socialist feminism that informs my discourse analysis of 'underclass', politics and epistemology are two related parts of that position. Fraser's *politics of needs interpretation* brings those two parts together.

Fraser's politics of knowledge production around 'welfare' provide the theoretical inspiration to combine modern political sensibilities of social justice - in particular an argued necessity for a strong welfare state - with a post-structural epistemology. In the concept of a politics of needs interpretation is a means of making explicit the classed, gendered and politicised production of welfare in an approach that is politically normative and partly engages at the level of policy analysis. In *Unruly Practices* Fraser's concern with everyday practice and politics is marked as a particular criticism of French deconstructionist philosophers:

'In general, they wanted 'the political' without 'politics' so they spared themselves the effort of trying to connect their theoretical reflections with the struggles and wishes of the age'.⁷⁰

In Foucault's work she identifies a 'total critique of modernity' which does not fit with positions of policy advocacy and this she finds problematic:

'...it is essential to be able to distinguish better from worse sets of practices and forms of constraints'.⁷¹

In her own work a Foucauldian analysis of power/knowledge in relation to welfare is made from a particular democratic socialist feminist standpoint - a 'standpoint of the exigencies of political practice'.⁷² In *Unruly Practices* this translates into a focus on the 'problem' of expertise that prevails in social welfare discourses about subsistence level benefits. The

⁶⁹ See Fraser.N and Gordon.L (1994) A Genealogy of 'Dependency': Tracing a Keyword of the U.S Welfare State p309-336 *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 19: number 2

⁷⁰ Fraser, *Unruly Practices* p4

⁷¹ Fraser, *Unruly Practices* p32-33

⁷² Fraser, *Unruly Practices* p4

approach requires a substantive engagement with the processes and content of welfare policy making in any given period. In this respect her own focus on the social welfare programmes instituted in the United States in the 1970s (particularly Aid For Families With Dependent Children) does not have a direct bearing on contemporary British welfare policy, nor indeed on contemporary welfare in America. In particular her analysis of welfare policy's construction of woman as mother-in-the-home via the idea of separate spheres of public and private, male and female, belongs very much to that period. I will be arguing this point through in Chapter Two with regard to the way that the Job Seeker's Allowance has systemised the previously two tier system of National Insurance based Unemployment Benefit and Social Security based Income Support which was widely seen as a gendered tiering.⁷³ Crucially 'underclass' discourse involves powerful attempts to construct the roles, needs and interests of a welfare citizenry according to a dichotomy of 'claimant' or 'worker' where the claimant is 'the jobseeker' regardless of gender. Nevertheless the basic premise of her approach remains apposite: it is to explore how the politics of need interpretation are constitutive of welfare. Her approach to this task concurs with both Foucault's and Latour's focus on practice as constitutive of the social (in Fraser these are called micro-practices). Thus:

'...the analysis and critique of such practices take priority over the analysis and critique of ideology.'⁷⁴

Similarly, power is seen as productive and ubiquitous, investing the very substance of those practices. The practices identified as the most productive elements of dominant welfare discourses are those concerned with framing the issues, deciding the themes, establishing the vocabularies, facilitating and orientating the discussions. Fraser calls these the socio-cultural means of interpretation and communication (MIC), they are the means of producing and disseminating dominant welfare knowledges. Through these means particular modes of welfare governance are established, as attempts to establish particular power effects. This is neither a monolithic nor straightforwardly successful project, but neither is it plurally negotiated. Power relations turn, twist, break and shape that pluralism in ways that are productive of patterns of inequality.

Fraser's attention to processes of power as productive of social inequality is more than a caveat to an otherwise pluralist mélange. It has analytic centrality to political approaches that are concerned with inequality and the patterned nature of social outcomes,

⁷³ Feminist critique of that system was prominently advanced in Wilson.E (1977) *Women and the Welfare State* London: Tavistock Publications; McIntosh.M (1978) 'The State and the Oppression of Women' p254-289 Kuhn.A and Wolpe.A.M (eds.) *Feminism and Materialism* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

⁷⁴ Fraser, *Unruly Practices* p25

especially with regard to resource distribution. It does not work as a total vision of the social and will be less meaningful or useful to those kinds of social analyses that are interested in the nuances of personal identity for example. Of most importance to my analysis is its terminology of inequality, distribution, social justice as words selected for meanings and histories that are aligned to a broadly socialist politics. Indeed the feelings, values and beliefs of those politics are the animus of inquiry. As I will go on to show in the chapters that follow, those feelings, values and beliefs do not require an all-encompassing vision of an hierarchical, structured and stratified social whole in order to have socialist integrity. Fraser's work is therefore important for the way it exemplifies a fit between a Foucauldian discourse analytic epistemology, an explicitly socialist feminist approach to the politics of welfare practice and an engagement with the substance of contemporary welfare policy. The link is made by seeing politics as a constitutive part of discourse which needs to be accountable, and politics as a constitutive part of the analysis of that discourse which needs to be openly articulated.

Articulating a political self

This thesis does not intend to present an analysis of the history or contemporary state of socialist feminist thought or of the relevance of class or gender as bases of social and political identity. However, within those debates are issues that are highly pertinent to my analysis of the discourse of 'underclass' and the contemporary politics of welfare. I will be using the terminology of 'class', 'socialist feminism' and the 'welfare state' which all carry a large baggage of meanings differently understood according to who is writing and reading them. I therefore need to briefly outline my own position on each as a way of clarifying their meaning in the analysis that follows.

~Socialist Feminism~

*'Political objectives are in an important sense constituted on the basis of values and principles... they cannot be grounded in scientific analysis but spring from aspirations rather than proof.'*⁷⁵

I am broadly defining my political position as socialist feminist to mark a partisan alignment to particular priorities and principles in political theory and practice. There is no determined relation between the socialist and feminist elements of that position and I do not have an uncritical identification with what has become associated with their political claims in various hegemonic discourses. Indeed part of my approach is to question how what counts

⁷⁵ Barrett.M (1992) *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* Cambridge: Polity Press p217

as socialist feminist is defined. It is therefore within a broad spectrum of socialist feminist beliefs that my own beliefs are most at home, whilst the issue of how these beliefs are rendered in academic and politically mainstream understandings remains critical to my imagination of other kinds of socialist feminism. I would argue that within British academia a hegemonic idea of socialist feminism has focused attention on women's material subordination primarily in terms of a sexual division of labour that has been instituted by capitalism and that creates inequalities between men and women, workplace and household, public and private. Within this focus the goal of gender equal participation in a well regulated labour market, bolstered by extensive childcare provision assumes priority.⁷⁶ This labour market focus on gendered divisions of labour is extended to problematisations of 'the family' along the same lines, casting the domestic space of the 'traditional' family as a social and economic construct of gender inequality.⁷⁷ Apart from (or perhaps as a consequence of) their substantive orientation these kinds of writings have tended to elide a more value-orientated, affective and experiential language of socialist feminism. This is not to claim that there has been no contestation over the nature of 'socialist feminism'. Indeed critiques of, and debates around, those politics in theory and practice are multiple and emotionally invested.⁷⁸ Nevertheless their way of writing socialist feminism has tended not to be inclusive of positive discourses on domestic space. An important caveat to this broad perception is that in the American context a number of black socialist feminist writers have written passionately about the positive politics and experiences of family and domestic space.⁷⁹ I find these latter kinds of writings more personally resonant.

Ideas about what constitutes a socialist feminist position were most prolific between the early 1970s and mid 1980s. Their currency within academic discourse is associated with

⁷⁶ See Breugel.I and Kean.H (1995) *The Moment of Municipal Feminism: Gender and Class in 1980s Local Government* p147-169 *Critical Social Policy* 44-5. The labour market focus of socialist feminism is exemplified in Phillips.A (1983) *Hidden Hands* London: Pluto; Cavendish.R (1982) *Women on the Line* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Pollert.A (1981) *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives* London: Macmillan

⁷⁷ See Segal.L (ed.) (1983) *What Is To Be Done About The Family?* London: Harmondsworth Penguin/The Socialist Society; Whitelegg.E et al (eds.) (1982) *The Changing Experience of Women* Oxford: Martin Robertson/Open University

⁷⁸ See Hamilton.R and Barrett.M (eds.) (1986) *The Politics of Diversity* London: Verso; Wilson.E with Weir.A (1986) *Hidden Agendas: Theory, Politics and Experience in the Women's Movement* London: Tavistock Publications; Phillips.A (1987) *Divided Loyalties: Dilemmas of Sex and Class* London: Virago

⁷⁹ In particular I am thinking of Patricia Hill Collins (1994) *Shifting The Centre: Race, Class and Feminist Theorising* p45-67 Glenn.E, Chang.G and Forcey.L (eds.) *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, Agency* London: Routledge; Bray.R (1994) 'Growing Up On Welfare' *The Observer Magazine* 2.1.94 p35-38; Taylor.D (1994) *My Children, My Gold* London: Virago; hooks.b (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* Boston, Mass: South End Press, as Black socialist writings which do not follow the more essentialist and mythologised versions of motherhood such as Rich.A (1976) *Of Woman Born* New York: W.W.Norton, Ruddick.S (1980) *Maternal Thinking* p342-367 *Feminist Studies* vol. 6 no 2; Gilligan.C (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press

the assertion of Marxist theories within the social sciences and the extension of Marxist analyses of the capitalist economy to the specific position of 'women in the home', most prominently in the 'domestic labour debate'.⁸⁰ The move away from the Marxist reductionism of casting the informal space of the household in terms of the formal space of the economy, was spearheaded by Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today* which recognised the necessity for a more sophisticated elaboration of relations between women, men and the State with regard to the family, work, welfare and biological reproduction.⁸¹ However, the intention to configure a socialist feminist position from that argument was apparently not met, the dynamic of oppression rather than a complex and sometimes contradictory constitution came to the fore.⁸² There remains no agreed version of socialist feminism, or consensus on the need for such agreement. Its constitutive parts - of socialism and feminism - are equally contested, and only the (shifting) *parameters* of various arguments are discernibly socialist feminist. Nevertheless within those parameters there remains a shared regard for a multiplicity of oppressive relations which are not all reducible to economic status; a shared regard for the heterogeneity of powerfully oppressive discourses and for the specificity of historical and cultural forms and relations. In academic feminist theory, the anti-dualistic politics of Donna Haraway, Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young are exemplary of this approach.⁸³ My preferred position is to maintain an idea of socialist feminisms outside of their public and academically authorised versions, representing knowledges and beliefs that have been learnt the hard way - and passed on - through historical and everyday political struggles. These socialist feminisms may exist in different kinds of knowledges, languages and practices in different spaces, at different times.

In terms of actual political practice the analytical and practical target of much socialist feminism remains those *configurations of inequality* that are traditionally associated with poverty, welfare and labour market exploitation.⁸⁴ Without suggesting the causal or originary pre-eminence of a particular oppression, socialist feminism has traditionally focused on circumstances of material deprivation and the various mediations of class oppression. This is a matter of political prioritisation rather than a claim that nothing else matters.

⁸⁰ See Malos.E (ed.) (1980) *The Politics of Housework* London: Allison and Busby for early feminist writings on domestic labour

⁸¹ Barrett.M (1980) *Women's Oppression Today* London: NBL

⁸² This apparent failure of intention is outlined in Brenner.J and Ramas.M (1984) Rethinking Women's Oppression p33-71 *New Left Review* 144

⁸³ Haraway, A *Cyborg Manifesto*; Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*; Marion Young.I.M (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference* Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press

⁸⁴ In particular I am thinking of the Socialist Campaign Group within the British Labour Party

~Class~

Fundamentally I am conceiving of socialist feminism as a praxis for social and political change, enunciated in terms of social justice, with material inequality as its target. That this materiality is both highly differentiated according to other social constructions and inequalities, and constituted by symbolic and affective elements of social being is the invaluable contribution of post-modern theories of the subject and the social. In relation to the dominant discourse of 'underclass' and the contemporary configurations of inequality that are part of its material and symbolic productions, the socialist feminism politics of this thesis argues for the prioritisation of a class based approach. This approach recognises that the class relations of the contemporary period are constituted through other social inequalities of gender, race, age and disability, and that class is a subject position that is multiply constructed and experienced. However with regard to the discourse of 'underclass' class subjectivity specifically is central to the animus of the discourse and needs to be central to its analysis.⁸⁵

Class subjectivities are not just the 'target' of 'underclass' discourse but are part of its production. In line with a discursive conception of 'underclass', I am regarding *class* as a social category that signifies material conditions of existence, in which that signification is productive of material effects.⁸⁶ The significations of class that are part of the discourse of 'underclass' therefore produce different meanings and material circumstances for differently classed individuals. The understanding that class is produced discursively in processes of social becoming that involve cultural practice, self-definition, and social classification is crucial to a non-reductive socialist feminism. There is no dilution of political purpose with this understanding, indeed with an increased awareness of the way the subject and the social are *classed* differently at particular times, there should be an increased openness to the possibilities of social and political change.

~The Welfare State~

Within the Welfare State as a wide ranging set of principles, practices and provisions, the dominant discourse of 'underclass' centrally focuses on the subsistence level benefits of Social Security provision. Those provisions are also the focus of my analysis of the discourse. References to 'welfare' are therefore primarily meant in the

⁸⁵ Issues raised by this argument including the potential problems of meeting 'like with like' - that is responding to a form of class homogenisation with class solidarity - are addressed in Chapter Four and the Conclusion of the thesis

⁸⁶ For an historical elaboration of the production of 'working-classness' compare Stedman-Jones.G (1983) *Languages of Class* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press ; Riley.D (1988) *Am I That Name: Feminism and the Category of Woman in History* London: Macmillan

narrow sense of that word: as Social Security benefits for the 'non-working' poor, unless otherwise specified. Moreover, these benefits are increasingly the referent of 'burgeoning welfare spending' in everyday media and political parlance. The configuration of welfare provision in what is at least nominally still the British Welfare State suggests that in the contemporary period, class is the structuring instant of inequality. This observation is not a mark of class determinism or an abstraction of capitalist class oppression managed by the State. It is read from the contemporary configuration of transfer payments in the tax and benefit system between the State and particular social groups.⁸⁷ The socialist aspect of the politics that inform my analyses is therefore not expressed as a theory of the State but through personal knowledges, feelings and beliefs about those configurations of inequality. Their expression resonates with those values of social justice historically espoused in socialist thought, in particular a defence of the principle of a strong Welfare State. This principle adheres to an ethics of wealth distribution from richer to poorer that is conditional upon need and represented in terms of basic social and economic rights.⁸⁸

The Welfare State has had an ambiguous status within socialist feminist writings as neither a monument to socialist principle and gender equality, nor a unified functionalist instrument of capitalist appeasement and control.⁸⁹ Its development is characterised by periods of political conflict and of consensus which have shaped it as a non-unitary and temporal set of principles and practices. The extent to which it can be considered beneficent to the working class poor is highly dependent on the cultural and political-economic circumstances of provision. It remains a site of struggle for representation and resources. In the contemporary period the discourse of 'underclass' is such a struggle. I have identified it as a struggle in which questions of who is speaking, where from and what for, are of primary consideration to an analysis of the power and productivity of welfare discourses. Having signposted the normative motivation of my analyses, I finally turn to the nature of the discourse that is my writing.

⁸⁷ The classed nature of these transfer payments is outlined in Sinfield.A (1989) *Social Security and Its Social Division* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; for a discussion of how recent developments within labour market have brought about a non-alignment of gender interests, see McDowell.L (1991) *Life Without Father* and Ford p400-419 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16. This subject is elaborated in Chapter Three.

⁸⁸ There is much debate over the terminology of welfare needs and rights, what they imply and how they might be established (see Wetherly.P (1986) *Basic Needs and Social Policies* p45-65 *Critical Social Policy* 46). I have not the space to engage with these debates and at this point am choosing to flag 'basic welfare needs and rights' as principles which intuitively and intellectually appeal to me. In the conclusion to the thesis I elaborate on what these needs and rights might look like.

⁸⁹ See the debate between Brenner.J and Ramas.M (1984) 'Rethinking Women's Oppression' p33-71 *New Left Review* 144 and Lewis.J (1984) 'The Debate on Sex and Class' p108-120 *New Left Review* 144

~*The Personal*~

Renalto Rosaldo identifies the 'vices of subjectivity' as those of 'passionate concern, prior knowledge and ethical engagement'.⁹⁰ These qualities are antithetical to claims of scientific objectivity. All of those qualities are written into my work as part of a personal, political and epistemological project whose intention is to disrupt the hierarchies of knowledge that make up the dominant discourse of 'underclass'. I want the writing style of this thesis to be read as purposeful: as an interweaving of different kinds of knowledges, languages and voices that creates a feeling for the texture of discourse. It is not meant to reproduce the texture of the dominant discourse of 'underclass' but to analyse it and in so doing produce a different kind of discourse in which the personal, affective and ethical are equally placed with the political, cognitive and analytical and can contest each other on equal terms.

Having already outlined the political and epistemological underpinnings of this discourse, I will make a final note of its personal dimensions. A central part of my motivation to focus on 'underclass' discourse was a personal anger about particular kinds of cultural commentaries and government policies that have surrounded the working class poor for as long as I can remember. Through the 1990s commentaries proliferated and policies towards this group became more prescriptive. The nature of this escalation started to provoke questions in my mind because it was not confined to particular ranks of the Conservative press and politicians and it could not be easily dismissed in terms of moral panic or scapegoating. It seemed much bigger and more important than that. There *were* issues of social and cultural change worth discussing in the morass of commentary around 'underclass' and parts of the political Left were prominent in enunciating them. These were reasons to engage with the discourse rather than to dismiss it in anger. Moreover, I felt that I had a personal stake in engaging because the discourse was partly about who I was, where I was from and the welfare benefits on which my family had always depended. We were certainly categorisable as part of the long term benefit claiming poor after twenty nine years of living on subsistence level benefits, on council estates, as a large single parent family. The knowledges, feelings and politics that are part and parcel of these experiences are now part of the writing of this thesis. Some of them are interspersed in the writing as particular 'moments of knowing',⁹¹ and as a way of locating my analysis in a different kind of authority. These moments are intended to displace distinctions about what counts as

⁹⁰ Rosaldo.R (1994) Subjectivity in Social Analysis p171-183 Seidman.S (ed.) *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁹¹ This phrase is taken from Probyn's idea of 'writing the social through the self'. Probyn, *Sexing The Self* p107

knowledge, they are imagined as tactics whose effects may go no further than the text of my writing. However they are not meant to be read as a relativising move to expand what counts as knowledge or to set up experience as just another reading of a reality that is subject to infinite meanings. They are deployed specifically to valorise experience over alternative accounts *at particular analytic points*. My representation of that experience is not claimed as a conduit of a 'pure' reality, rather experience is regarded as a constructed, mediated and changing domain of meaning. Its value lies within an epistemological valorisation of subjugated knowledge as earlier outlined.

Most of the time my personal feelings, knowledges and experiences are not signposted or named, and are not the main subject of analysis. Nevertheless they remain present in the substance of what is said and in the texture of its meaning. This writing is part of my self that feels imbricated in the discourse of 'underclass'. Of course I am also partially imbricated in academic discourses of knowledge production, a positioning that is evident in the structure and language of my writing. The combination of these two positionings is something that I am presenting positively as the very reason for this work. The value of writing that combination lies in the way that it accords with the nature of the social as a configuration of mutually constitutive elements rather than elements in dualistic opposition. This kind of writing allows me to articulate a speaking position beyond the 'same' of 'us' and the 'other' of 'underclass', and beyond the 'inside'/'outside' alternative of social inclusion and social exclusion that the dominant discourse seeks to establish. It allows recognition of the inextricable nature of those relations and contestation of those dominant knowledges and practices that insist on their division.

CHAPTER TWO

'UNDERCLASS' DISCOURSE AS THE PRACTICE OF NETWORKED RELATIONS: THE SITES OF THE STAKEHOLDER POLICY CONFERENCE AND DSS WAITING ROOM

This chapter is about the politics of knowledge production around 'underclass', in relation to contemporary welfare practices of 'Social Security'. It addresses the nature of that production by presenting a comparative ethnography of a policy conference on 'Stakeholder Capitalism' and a number of DSS waiting rooms in the South of England. The starting premise of my analysis is that the policy conference and DSS waiting room sites need to be read and understood in relation to each other, through the practices which constitute them in relation to each other, and through the networks that situate them in relation to each other. This joint reading is structured around four themes which express the nature of their relational production as *represented* spaces, as *embodied* spaces, as spaces of *knowledge* and as *worked* spaces. Each of these themes is presented as constitutive of 'underclass' discourse as a discourse that is produced through different kinds of practices of representation, embodiment, knowledge and work. In this chapter those practices are shown to be the very substance of networked power relations. The nature of those relations produces different spatialities for the policy conference and DSS waiting room sites, and ensures an exclusionary and oppressive policy making trajectory for the claimant subject of 'underclass' discourse.

Introduction: Another Summer of Hate

At the end of the summer of 1996 the discourse of 'underclass' took a particular turn through some key events that provide an appropriate starting point for this chapter. Primary among them was the introduction of the Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) which dramatically affected large numbers of benefit claiming people throughout the country. It also personally affected me through my family. The JSA is centrally related to my research on the DSS waiting room as a particular kind of social space in the discourse of 'underclass'. It is a space that is personally and politically meaningful. This merging of the personal and political is not a coincidence. I chose to focus on DSS waiting rooms as part of my research because having been brought up through all the changes in subsistence level benefit legislation and administration over 25 years, I knew that these places were central to the lives of poor people trying to sort out enough money to live on from the Department of Social Security.

The space of the DSS waiting room is a significant part of the discourse of 'underclass' for a number of reasons. I will be talking about it in relation to another social space - that of the policy conference, in particular a conference on 'Stakeholder Capitalism' that I attended in March 1996. 'Stakeholding' is a concept that has been promoted as a new Big Idea for the political Left by a number of academics and social commentators. I started with a number of questions about how the conference and waiting room spaces were connected and why that connection was important both in terms of social and critical theory and the wider politics of the 'underclass' debate. At the most basic level that debate and the relation between the policy conference and the DSS waiting room are about the politics of welfare change. The meanings of welfare change are produced in a number of key social spaces from Parliament to think-tanks and job centres: the policy conference and DSS waiting room are two such spaces. The events of summer 1996 brought some of those meanings into perspective.

At home in Portsmouth, an event in our local Social Security waiting room made the headlines - 'Mother's Fury Over Gun Scare.'¹ The police were defending a decision to allow claimants to continue to go into the DSS waiting room despite the fact that there was a suspected gunman inside and the police, in bullet proof jackets, had taken up a low profile surround of the building whilst working out the safest way to disarm him. While the staff had evacuated the building, the gunman, who seemed to be impassive, sat in one of the interview booths and the claimants waited for an hour before the police moved in and the situation was defused. As it turned out the gun was an imitation Glock handgun, but the waiting claimants were nevertheless angry, feeling that they had effectively been abandoned. The incident brought the issue of DSS staff safety to the fore of local media, and it was somehow not surprising that the claimants were the last to know anything - just waiting as usual, for inordinate lengths of time for an uncertain outcome. It coincided with national news events surrounding the immanent introduction of the Job Seeker's Allowance - the new benefit to replace Income Support and Unemployment Benefit as part of the most fundamental reform of benefit for unemployed people in 50 years. More than 60 benefit offices were closed in a two day strike by staff protesting about new working practices associated with the JSA which would endanger their safety. Members of the Public Service, Tax and Commerce Union and the Civil and Public Services Association were asking for protective screens to be installed in Benefit Agency (DSS) offices, fearing for the safety of their members from attacks by 'jobseekers' when the JSA was introduced. The PTC Union announced that assaults on staff had risen and expectations were worsening. The PTC branch chairman in Wandsworth said:

¹'Mother's Fury Over Gun Scare' *Portsmouth Evening News* 13.8.96 p1

'There is a rising tide of violence within the Social Security system. Only yesterday a security guard was threatened with a knife. Our view is that the JSA will lead to even more violent incidents.'²

It was unsurprising to me that the issue of protection for welfare administrators should arise with regard to new welfare legislation, and that this was an issue about erecting barriers between administrators and claimants. People who use DSS waiting rooms know that for a long time they have been a site of conflict to a greater or lesser degree, as the site where decisions are made and presented as to whether the State will meet the particular needs of those without enough money to get by. Benefit policy is therefore central to the way that DSS waiting rooms are administered and experienced.

Currently there is a more or less consensual party political line on the need to implement 'Welfare to Work' strategies. It was a key proposal of the Social Justice Commission set up by Labour to inform their social policy into the next millennium.³ In November 1996 the Conservative government announced that 100,000 long term unemployed people in Hull and Medway would be made to do thirteen weeks full time 'community service' with private, voluntary charitable organisations for an extra £10 on top of their benefits. Called 'Project Work' this was recognised as a US-style workfare scheme, a £100 million drive to move the long term unemployed off the register.⁴ Attending this policy change was a national advertising campaign by the government for a newly set up 'benefit cheat hotline', replacing the free Social Security information line for claimants and public information on available benefits which received 3.25 million calls a year.⁵ Posters on buses, billboards and bus stops carried messages to the public to 'beat the cheats' of benefit fraud with lines such as:

'Know of a benefit rip-off ? Give us a telephone tip off'

In the same period in which these new policies were unfolding, I read a piece in *The Guardian* by Labour MP Roy Hattersley, a figure of the 'Old Left' who in other places has criticised the way New Labour has regarded the poor. But here his attention was focused on the poor themselves:

'The curse of the British working class is their willingness to settle for so little. They are disciples not of the politics of envy but the politics of complacency. That is why they are so regularly ignored when the demands of the middle classes (who

² 'Strike Closes Benefit Offices' *The Guardian* 2.8.96 p3

³ The Report of The Commission on Social Justice (1994) *Social Justice: Strategies For National Renewal* London: Vintage

⁴ 'Tories put faith in workfare: pledge on job scheme' *The Guardian* 24.2.97 p1

⁵ Child Poverty Action Group (1997) 'Benefits Agency Change Programme' p13-15 *Poverty Spring* 1997 p13

suffer from no such inhibition) increasingly dominate the policy agenda of both major parties.’⁶

This commentary struck me as exemplary of something else that directly relates to the work of this chapter. Namely the distance between those who speak about welfare and those whose welfare interests are spoken for, even when there is an expressed political affinity. It is the distance between the DSS waiting room and the policy conference; the difference between knowing something because you inhabit that space, and claiming to know something because you inhabit the designated, qualified space of the ‘knowledgeable’ and the ‘representative’. This is not to say that all the authoritative speakers on welfare - who are themselves a diverse group occupying different sites - dwell in rarefied climes but that the *relations* between different sites of knowledge and experience within the discourse of ‘underclass’ are productive of particular, situated understandings within those sites. This situatedness can be conceived of in terms of sites of power in an extensive network of relations.

It is the aim of this chapter to make connections between the two particular sites of the Stakeholder policy conference and the DSS waiting room as a way of explicating the discourse of ‘underclass’ as something that is practiced, processual and productive. That is to say, discourse does not ‘emerge’ from political-economic conditions but is *processually* constitutive of them. These conditions are constructed through discourse in the *practices* of embodied subjects and these practices are materially constitutive of people’s lives at particular times. Clearly this understanding is drawn from a particular conception of how ‘the social’ works, the nature of things and the relations between them. In this chapter I am conceiving of a network of power relations (symbolic and material) in which the DSS waiting room and Stakeholder policy conference are two sites. Following my three-fold conceptualisation of the ‘spaces’ of discourse in Chapter One, both sites are conceived as ‘spaces of representation’, that is they are *represented* as particular kinds of spaces, occupied by particular kinds of people. Both are also spaces produced through the material effects of representation and in this respect they are also *lived* spaces. In addition, the conference is regarded as a *representational* space where power-ful representations of others (including DSS claimants) are made. As such it is part of a policy process through which the lives of those ‘others’ are materially effected. Although I am conceiving of the conference and waiting room sites in terms of a relational spatiality, the space of the

⁶ ‘Nobody Preaches, No-one Cares’ *The Guardian* 28.10.96 p14. This quote from Hattersley expresses a particular kind of paternalistic view of the poor, echoing the Labour Party Fabianism of the 1930s. A ‘what’s to be done with the poor’ attitude is elsewhere elaborated by Hattersley in starker terms: ‘Society must decide whether or not the pathologically unemployable are to be permanently condemned to lives of grinding poverty’ (‘Things Can Only Get Better’ *The Observer* 28.9.97 p18)

conference is more closely analysed. This bearing is part of the politics of my discourse analysis, intended to 'turn the tables' on prominent analysers and experts, to problematise their knowledge and its production in relation to more commonly conceived spaces of 'underclass'.

In the discourse shaping the relational spatiality of conference and waiting room 'underclass' meets welfare policy. Together they constitute a contested discourse where different groups, sites, ways of talking about and experiencing economic 'imperatives', 'needs' and 'interests', are played out. Questions of welfare provision are central to 'underclass' discourse. Views about the nature of particular groups of benefit claimants, all in some way relate to the question of whether the government will undertake to satisfy the basic needs of this given constituency, if so then to what degree, and on what conditions. In order that the specifics of the relations between the policy conference and DSS waiting room can be explored, it is first necessary to briefly locate the idea of their 'networked relations' theoretically.

Discursive Networks

Chapter One has outlined the philosophical and methodological frame of this whole research project. It is premised upon the idea of discourse/practice from a broadly Foucauldian position, conceiving of discourse as something that is material-symbolic in nature, and practiced, processual and productive in the way that it works. In *We Have Never Been Modern* the emphasis that Bruno Latour gives to those characteristics in his conception of the social as a *network of relations*, makes his work particularly useful: this chapter is most concerned with the *practical* workings of the discourse of 'underclass' and in particular a *relational* analysis of the policy conference and DSS waiting room sites.⁷

Latour's substantive focus in *We Have Never Been Modern* is Science, in particular how an idea of Science has been constructed *as* and has brought about a 'dominion': a realm of belief and practice. His epistemological approach to this subject is widely applicable to other substantive, organisational themes of society - from 'Welfare' to 'Technology' - through a vision of how the social works. Basically this vision is of a network of relations explicable by focusing on the way they are practiced, and in this it is closely allied to the Foucauldian conception of discourse. It is most relevant to my work in pointing to the way that discourse operates through a wide range of heterogeneous materials, rather than for example just language. These materials - from texts to buildings to bodies - combine in power formations and relations that make up 'the social'. By looking at these materials, how they are practiced and how they combine with other materials, a more nuanced and

⁷ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*

potentially empowering understanding of how the social works is possible. The clearest illustration of why that may be so is found in Latour's comment:

'Take some small business owner hesitatingly going after a few modest shares, some conqueror trembling with fever, some poor scientist tinkering in his lab, a lowly engineer piecing together a few more or less favourable relationships or forces, some strutting and fearful politician: turn the critics loose on them, and what do you get? Capitalism, imperialism, science, technology, domination - all equally absolute, systematic, totalitarian. In the first scenario, the actors were trembling, in the second they are not. The actors in the first scenario could be defeated; in the second they no longer can.'⁸

The methodology of this approach expresses a commitment to showing the material character of the social, where formations and relations are the effects of practice rather than inviolable 'entities' and 'orders'. Latour finds in the quality of a network a notion that is:

'...more simple than the notion of a system, more historical than the notion of structure, more empirical than the notion of complexity.'⁹

His application of the idea represents a rejection of three ways of thinking about nature, society and discourse that have characterised social science, namely: the naturalisation of 'facts', the socialisation of 'power', and the deconstruction of 'truth effects'. It is an approach which, in asking 'Is it our fault if the networks are simultaneously real like nature, narrated like discourse and collective like society',¹⁰ seeks to combine all three elements. This is not an entirely new idea. It equates in many ways with the discourse/practice premise of Foucault's genealogies and a social science literature that since the 1970s has made the philosophical and epistemological case for rejecting traditional conceptions of the social that are overburdened with monoliths, dualisms, essences, structures and separate spheres. Donna Haraway's feminist collectives, hybrids and cyborgs are one inspirational example of how such terms have been gutted and remade.¹¹ For me the value of Latour is therefore one of emphasis and conciseness. In this one book he provides the methodological wherewithal to localise the study of the 'building blocks' of society, including Welfare. The connection with Science is not incidental:

'The myth of the soulless, agentless bureaucracy, like that of the pure and perfect market place, offers the mirror image of the myth of Universal Scientific Laws.'¹²

Latour's emphasis on practice means that *how* questions are foremost and these are necessarily the meat of 'ethnographies of practice' which engage at the level of the local, detailed, substantive and meaningful. The terminology Latour uses to convey the difference

⁸ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* p125-6

⁹ Latour, *We have Never Been Modern* p3

¹⁰ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* p6

¹¹ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*

¹² Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* p121

this focus on practice makes is one of process and movement, ideally suited to the sorts of connections that I am making between the policy conference and DSS waiting room. Hybridisation, association, translation and mediation are relations that convey fusion more than purity, simultaneity rather than linearity. They disallow the tidy convenience of boxes and multiply possible ways of seeing relations between things - perhaps as constellations shedding more light than single stars. It is the state of being 'in relation' to other things that gives substance and meaning to the things we look at: the relation becomes the thing and vice versa. Neither thing has 'causality' in a conventional sense 'as sources' because each is a generated effect of the relation with the other.

These understandings are implicated in my approach to 'underclass' and welfare in two ways. First, with regard to the nature of the dynamic of 'underclass' discourse. The expected 'objects' of study - 'poor people', 'criminals', 'welfare dependants' - are too narrated to be *facts*; 'Welfare' and 'Politics' are too fractured, practical and embodied to be reduced to a *power/interest bloc*; and the discourse of 'underclass' is too real and too social to boil down to *meaning effects*. Simultaneous relations generate discourse as all these things. Second, Latour's network analogy is implicated in my approach through the centrality it gives to a relational way of thinking, to relations between things as constitutive of the things themselves: 'In the middle, where nothing is supposed to be happening, there is almost everything.'¹³ The relations between the policy conference and DSS waiting rooms, the mediation or translation of policy related practices and benefit claiming practices, becomes what is most important and interesting about the sites.

The fundamental quality of these mediating relations is that they are all power relations. Latour's 'actor-network' theory is necessarily a theory of power where 'agency' is not driven by power but generative of it.¹⁴ This means that power does not emanate from a particular source and diffuse outwards but is generated in the effects of chains of agents working together in 'associations': 'power as a consequence and not as a cause of collective action.'¹⁵ It is in the originary work of Foucault that the notion of power as produced and productive has fullest expression. Disparaging the idea of causal power monoliths Foucault is interested in the workings of what he calls micro-powers in their specific local effects, and also conceives of this work in terms of a network of relations where:

'...none of its localised episodes may be inscribed in history except by the effects it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up.'¹⁶

¹³ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* p123

¹⁴ This is not agency conceived as the other half of structure: Latour conceives of agency as a generated effect of relations between human and non-human agents

¹⁵ Latour, B (1986) 'The Powers Of Associations' in Law, J (ed.) *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology Of Knowledge* Sociological Review Monograph 32, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

¹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* p27

Latour's actor-network approach to studying the social is therefore congruent with a Foucauldian methodological account of discourse/practice as outlined in Chapter One. Together they can be used to argue for the importance, indeed necessity, of considering the discourse of 'underclass' in terms of a network that is constituted by power-knowledge relations, and in my writing, infused with political stakes. Primarily this is an issue about the *politics* of knowledge and representation, that is the democracy of conceived networks.

Locating (and Limiting) Networks

This section briefly locates and limits the networks on which I will focus. The idea of networked social relations means that every part of the social is potentially so connected to other parts, across time and space, that network research could be limitless. It is therefore necessary to construct boundaries at some point, and to specify as closely as possible the time-space lineaments of the networks being focused on. The nature of these networks is to shift and tracing them can be difficult given that mutability. Yet, the importance of tracing connections remains: it is to better know 'how we got here', which might also suggest something of where we are going. 'Here' in the contemporary period is a dominant discourse of welfare change that is opposed to the idea of increasing subsistence level welfare provisions on an unconditional basis, and in support of the idea of tying welfare improvements to labour market participation. This has become an orthodoxy that transcends party political lines. It means that the Stakeholder conference, organised by politically Left-wing figures to launch their vision for a new Labour politics, can host a Conservative MP as a guest speaker:

'Stakeholder capitalism is closely related to Welfare... I hope this concept of the Stakeholder can successfully develop the role of individual welfare responsibility since there will be unavoidable collective obligations that derive from Britain's unenviable record of divorce and single parenthood... It cannot be the materialist concept of a welfare bran tub with more winners than losers.'
(John Biffen MP)¹⁷

The way current circumstances are held to *require* a transcending of old divides of Right/Left, Old/New, Modern/Postmodern is presented as an apparent consensus. It unites (though not univocally or unproblematically) academic and political convictions that the age of Ideology and Universals has passed.¹⁸ The policy conference on 'Stakeholder Capitalism' was set up to debate how certain 'new realities' effect the British economy and

¹⁷ Biffen.J (1996) *Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley or Best Hope? Conference Proceedings* Sheffield: Political Economy Research Centre

¹⁸ Giddens.A (1994) *Beyond Left and Right* Cambridge: Polity Press; Blair.T (1996) *New Britain: my vision of a young country* London: Fourth Estate; Bauman.Z (1993) *Postmodern Ethics* Oxford: Blackwell; Hutton.W (1995) *The State We're In* London: Vintage

British society still loosely described as a Welfare State.¹⁹ The main figures associated with this analysis identify themselves as politically Left, and seek to combine some of the traditions of that movement with the imperatives of 'new realities' as values to be implemented in a new manner. So for example, the core of the liberal economics of Keynes and Beveridge is out, equality is still in but may have to be detached from its past associations and expectations. Meanings are being remade. Indeed the Welfare State is positioned at the centre of how Left/Right can be reconceptualised in a new politics of 'positive welfare' and 'life politics' (Giddens), and 'proactive welfare' (Hutton) rather than the class politics that prevailed at the inception of the British Welfare State. Crucially these analyses focus on ending the now politically ubiquitous idea of 'welfare dependency', as a central goal of a new Good Society.²⁰ In these formulations Welfare is predominantly something that the working class poor become dependent on, the route to the DSS waiting room office.

The aspects of 'underclass' discourse that I address in this chapter are practices within and about the contemporary Social Security system, namely: means-tested benefit claiming and the vision of change for them expressed in the notion of the 'Stakeholder society'. The DSS waiting room and the policy conference are two key sites where those practices of welfare are located. I have chosen these sites for what they can show about the politics of knowledge production around 'underclass'. The conference provides an opportunity to analyse some of the 'analysers' in action, to study the power relations of 'underclass' discourse by studying some of its powerful players, to see how they perform, how they organise and are organised, how they are involved in establishing regulatory views and actions over the people of 'underclass', and how they are themselves regulated or produced as powerful subjects. The DSS waiting room gives me the opportunity to express different kinds of knowledge about Welfare and Social Security: practical knowledges about being a benefit claimant and about administrative practice; and personal and experiential knowledges about having a 'place' within the Social Security system. In other words, the choice of these sites reflects an epistemological premise that knowledges about contemporary Welfare exist in different kinds of spaces, and that their value is primarily dependent on the power relations between them.

¹⁹ This idea of 'Stakeholding' as a way of ushering in a new politics and society is expressed throughout the conference's promotional literature, from the original flyer to the post-conference book. See Kelly.G, Kelly.D and Gamble.A (eds.) (1997) *Stakeholder Capitalism* London: Macmillan/Political Economy Research Centre

²⁰ The work of J.K Galbraith on the 'Good Society' (Galbraith.J.K (1996) *The Good Society: The Humane Agenda* London: Sinclair-Stevenson) is central to Hutton's own vision of social change as outlined in *The State We're In* (1995); see also Hutton.W (1996) 'New Hope For The Good Society' *The Guardian* 3.1.96 p13. Galbraith gave the inaugural lecture at the opening of the Political Economy Research Centre (PERC) in 1993. PERC are the conference organisers.

To allow me to talk about the power relations of the policy conference-DSS waiting room and the dichotomous meanings that can be associated with that pairing (professional/worker, thinker/doer, taxpayer/claimant, giver/taker among others) I am going to talk about what is in-between those apparent divides: the realm of the relational. I have identified four themes through which I can talk about the relational spatiality of the two sites. They will be used to mediate the two sites, to show them as differentially constituted in relation to each other. They allow the sites to be discussed in the same terms with the same questions in mind. The intermediary themes are: Representation, Embodiment, Knowledge, and Work. My idea is to present the sites as intrinsically related spaces by virtue of key practices (of representation, embodiment, knowledge, and work) that constitute each site, and constitute them in relation to each other. The significance of these particular areas of practice, the nature of the spaces they constitute and the relations that bind them are explicated in the following four sections.

1: REPRESENTED SPACES

Writing Between Sites: The Represented Space of the Policy Conference and the DSS Waiting Room

My research path took me between a policy conference and various DSS waiting rooms not as a first time participant in either, but in a different capacity as participant-researcher. My own position in the research process as a might-be academic and part of a working class family on Social Security, is integral to the way that I will represent those two spaces. The importance of articulating the difference that my position makes to this 'research knowledge' should be clear. The sites are researched through my position in them, they are partly my sites of production. Therefore what counts as significant, and how that is expressed in my writing is rooted in my perspective and my chosen notations. In this respect my work is located in a specifically feminist objectivity and research ethic.

The policy conference and DSS waiting room are sites that I am presenting as 'analytic' spaces rather than as straightforwardly 'empirical' spaces. In other words, they are spaces constructed for the purpose of conveying particular social understandings through myself. The dimensions of this sort of analytic space are quite different to those claimed for empirical, objective space as space that is 'mimetic' of one material reality. They enable the articulation of a different sort of project, indeed different sorts of geography:

'We need an analytic space which can articulate boundaries, distinctions and disjuncture instead of erasing them, a space which can acknowledge exclusion as intrinsic to the process of inclusion... a space of contradictions... a pleated and folded space... which can make space for alterity.'²¹

The use of the term analytic space is not meant to suggest that the policy conference and DSS waiting room are purely ideational spaces. Rather, the idea of space as a product of different kinds of practices, including analytic practices, is meant to transcend the division between the empirically real and personally intuitive, and the cerebral and the lived. In my telling, analytic space is both the lived research space and the represented space of the page.

An idea of the research space as lived *and* representational encapsulates a 'relational' way of thinking. It allows the research space to be figured in terms other than those of authority, objectivity, purity, centrality. It allows positions of 'marginality' and 'alterity' to be seen as constitutive of relations between different groups of people and different spaces, in relation to each other. This idea is powerfully expressed in the writings

²¹ Rose.G (1995) 'Geographical Traditions: Rethinking the History of Geography' p414-416
Transactions of the Institute of British Geography 20 1995 p416

of bell hooks with regard to the identity relations between 'margins' and 'centres'. The first line of her preface to *From Margin To Centre* states: 'To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body.'²² From this position hooks constructs for herself a social positionality and a view that is capable of particular kinds of social insight into relations *between* different kinds of people and places. For her these are the relations between people and places on different sides of the track:

'Living as we did - on the edge - we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the centre as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole...This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us an oppositional world view - a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and solidarity.'

The awareness of connections between margins and centres is critical to the sort of research relation I am setting up between the policy conference and DSS waiting room through my own positionality. My position in both sites is an intervention of sorts. In some respects I should not be in either because children from 'cultures of welfare dependency' do not end up going to policy conferences and 'academics' do not sit in DSS waiting rooms as a matter of course. But someone from a 'culture of welfare dependency' doing academic research may well do both and not feel totally out of place (or in place) in either. The importance of this hybrid identification is that it creates a new area of meaning, the possibility of a different kind of representation.

Part of that new area of meaning is about seeing relations between different sorts of people and places as less fixed, and less distant than is often made to seem the case. One particular hope is to see how an apparently 'consensual bloc could be disarticulated.'²³ For me this is the contemporary consensus of 'underclass welfare dependency' partly represented in the Stakeholder policy conference. The substance of the policy conference-DSS waiting room relation, through which I position myself, is a class relation. The research and writing process has to a large extent been about travelling and writing between classes and concomitantly between different powers and different knowledges. The academic and 'welfare dependency' parts of me are already part of my subjectivity and can be strategically deployed between the two sites to provide insight in my analysis of the welfare practices

²² hooks, *From Margin to Centre* Preface

²³ hooks, *From Margin to Centre* Preface



that partly constitute 'underclass'. Welfare practices are here conceived in the broadest sense, as a realm of knowledge production, policy administration and subsistence living.

Such a thinking and writing process is necessarily self-reflexive, engaged and committed, and it gives priority to the affective and to the material experienced as 'real'. It is the hallmark of much feminist, black and post-colonial writings within academia, but interestingly has not had the same productivity in writings that foreground being working class.²⁴ This is a telling absence, possibly related to the prominence given to class as an economic category in much political and social theorising of the 1960s and 1970s from which gender, race and cultural specification emerged. The fact remains that British working class subjectivities have not been the terrain of the 'cultural turn' in social sciences, and it is very much this aspect of the *classed* nature of the policy conference-DSS waiting room relation and of my own subjectivity as a working class researcher writing between those sites that I want to foreground. Classed relations are primary to the construction of this part of the discourse of 'underclass'; they are also primary to my own feelings of class subjectivity at the moment. The period of underclass/scrounger/benefit cheat/low-life politics has been a long one that has stretched through most of my childhood, teenage and adult years and looks set to condition the party political agenda for some time. It is therefore perhaps a formative and visceral working class knowledge and identification, rather than the newly academic-researcher part of me that will sound the loudest in this strategic articulation of hybridity. In this respect my hybridity is not about migration, displacement, aspiration or moving on. This is not to deny those experiences of class that are more ambivalent about where they are from and at. My class and gender identity has developed without domestic or community based oppression by working class men, and I hold class as a primary allegiance in the particular context of addressing the politics of 'underclass' discourse. Class is written in /into what follows not as a monolithic determining category but simply as a voice.

Being There

Being at the policy conference and being in the DSS waiting rooms for the sort of research purposes I had, required a particular mindset. If observed I would not have been doing anything very different to other people except for occasionally writing. I was mostly occupied with thinking and I tried to think about two things. First, what were the connections between 'all this' at the conference and 'all that' of the waiting rooms and vice versa. I let my imagination roam. Second, *how* these spaces were full - constituted through

²⁴ Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape For A Good Woman* (1986 London: Virago) and Valerie Walkerdine's *Schoolgirl Fictions* (1990) London: Verso, are now much quoted exceptions.

language, bodies, history, symbolic meaning, subjective experiences, performances. I had a great deal to think about, mainly what I would count as significant. From my research scribbles, some tape recordings, memories and later reflections I would somehow order into words these copious social spaces.²⁵

But the research moment itself was made up of just 'being there', forcing myself to remember research objectives, and trying not to slip into habitual motions. I do not want to portray the quality of my research experience as arbitrary or inept in an attempt to distance myself from the traditional research motif of the 'expert in the field'. Neither do I want to suggest that because I am making an issue of the 'represented' nature of these spaces - my productivity as it were - that there was nothing significant there to shape or that any old story about the conference or waiting room experience will do.

My initial selection of these particular spaces was perhaps the most important element of doing this part of the research. This selection, as part of the whole research project has its genesis in personal history and current biography and I am claiming it as a positive strength that can only add to the sort of analyses of power, knowledge and experience that I am making. I am choosing to combine the impressionistic and emotional with the evidenced and analytic as a writing strategy, not as weaknesses to be bracketed off but strengths made to work - to both situate my own partiality and to make sense of some dominant discursive partialities which are equally emotional and impressionistic (even if couched in different sorts of rhetorics). It was these understandings that brought me back to the DSS.

Departure Points: A Remembered Space

Through the summer months of 1996 I spent the waiting time to see a DSS officer (between 30 minutes and one and a half hours) in a number of waiting rooms in the South East of England. They are officially called Benefit Agency offices, but for the people who use them they are called 'the social' or 'DSS'. I had chosen the South East because it is an area with which I am familiar and at ease, and where my accent means I could make enquiries and talk unobtrusively. I followed through the waiting period in offices in Fareham, Portsmouth, Southampton, Havant, Cosham, Brighton and in London - Euston, Kennington, Finsbury Park and Stoke Newington. In these waiting rooms commonalities are more striking than differences. People come to them because they haven't got enough money to live on, usually due to a problem with a first claim; the need for a 'special

²⁵ Research note content was a mix of jotted running description of activities and people; things heard and overheard; parts of conversations with people; mental notes as passing ideas; with fuller and more reflective notes compiled at the days end. This was a version of a general schema taken from Lofland.J and Lofland.L.H (eds.) (1995) *Analysing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* University of California: Davis Wadsworth p94

circumstance' Social Fund grant or loan (due to death, moving house, domestic violence); to notify a change in domestic or financial circumstances; for stamped evidence of claimant status for other agencies; or to sort out administrative delays and mistakes in benefit payments. I made enquiries about getting removal cost help from the Social Fund, initially as a genuine enquiry.

In these rooms the materiality of poverty is palpable. As a child I remember my local DSS waiting room as somewhere where there was often open conflict between the staff and people in immediate need. It was a sort of nerve centre, somewhere where things usually hidden on shopping streets, like people not able to cope, living in an almost constant state of crisis and anxiety, came to the surface. The police would sometimes be called but most often shouting, swearing and trouble of some sort just passed. People smoked, sometimes talked to each other, tried to keep their children 'well-behaved' or let them run around. People often knew each other from where they lived or were just 'back again'. Everyone seemed to be experiencing variations on a theme because the general conclusion was either 'Bastards' or half victorious relief at having sorted some problem or money out from those behind the desks. Sometimes there would be laughter, humour at the expense of those behind the desks or about each other and shared treatment, experience. But it was generally a depressing place, especially as a child with nothing to do, where the waiting sometimes for hours is most memorable. I spent a lot of time in our local waiting room with my mum, sisters and brother and remember particular incidents quite well, usually because of the anger and upset they caused us. The feeling of such experiences remains with me mainly as anger but also as a feature of my childhood that generally affected how I felt about myself and our poverty in relation to other 'middle class' people and those who had the power to relieve it - in the DSS office and in the government. On one occasion my mum's benefit payment book had not arrived at the Post Office from the DSS for our weekly payment so we all had to run across town to try and get it from the DSS office before it shut. Just as we arrived the door was being locked by one of the staff and my mum had to put her foot in the door to stop the woman from shutting it on us. The officer said we could not come in because it was too late and tried to push the door shut against my mum's wedged foot. But my mum did not move and said that they had to see us because they should have sent the benefit book, it was Friday and she only had 50p left in her purse for the whole weekend. She shouted because this was serious, not just about money for food but because the electricity and gas in the house were run on coin meters. The woman was furious but curtly told us to wait there while she got someone else. My mum did not trust her and insisted that we all went in there and then, and we did. In the end we left with the book and ran back across town to the Post Office before that shut. We accepted and even expected this sort of thing to happen in a

normality that consisted of a day to day, week to week getting by and it was in spite of the DSS rather than thanks to them, because nothing was ever made easy or stress free. They made us feel as if we were always trying to get something that was not really ours - from rent rebates to tribunals for money for paint to decorate with because the council would not do it. And the whole time there was a fear that the money could be reduced or taken away. Or that we could be taken from our mum and put into care, especially when she was ill. This nearly happened a few times and we knew other people that it had happened to. The feelings I had about these places as a child and teenager have largely stayed with me, in memory but also because my mum is still claiming benefit and still has problems with the DSS. They are now part of my research perspective.

DSS waiting rooms were overhauled in the late 1980s as part of the government's 'customer service' ideology. Their appearances, functions and processes have largely changed to make them more efficient and more pleasant. But somehow they aren't and it's nothing to do with the decor. It is more to do with the relation between them and other places, better places, cleverer places, more important places, places like the policy conference. Through the policy conference on Stakeholding I am exploring that relation as problematic both personally and politically.

Holding a personal knowledge about DSS waiting rooms, I set off to the conference at Sheffield University in which a number of distinguished figures from business, academic, media, political and social policy fields would come together to discuss 'Stakeholding' as the new Big Idea, for a new Britain. Arriving at London's St. Pancras rail station where the 11.30 train would depart for Sheffield I found myself amongst a crowd of other conference goers - holding recognisable conference bumf, some with copies of *The Guardian* and the bible of 'Stakeholding' - Will Hutton's *The State We're In*. It all seemed quite amusing really, there were nods and smiles of mutual recognition as we got on the train, people made jokes about it, sat down, and some introduced themselves while others clearly knew each other already. And not only was I among them, but I was smiling and joking too. Anger was not really appropriate among these people, everything was so pleasant. This clearly was not the world of the DSS waiting room, it was the world of the policy conference.

In this themed section I have suggested that the policy conference and DSS waiting room are partly constituted through my reading and writing of them and in the case of the DSS waiting room long held feelings and knowledges about them. This is to some extent a preamble to what follows, a personal take on a power relation between two different sites. In the next three themed sections I present this relation as an ethnography of two social spaces, unequally positioned in power laden networked relations of embodiment, knowledge and

work. The first section turns to the relation between the DSS waiting room and policy conference where the policy imperatives of 'welfare change' meet the imperatives of survival. The different evaluation of those imperatives in dominant discourses of 'underclass', rests on a division between different kinds of classes/knowledges/spaces. Knowledge as 'intellect' is held as the preserve of the middle class and the spaces they inhabit. Its correlative is that the working class do not dwell in the mind and other spaces of the intellect but dwell in the bodily and emotional. Consequently, debates about the needs and interests of poor bodies should be produced from the minds of the qualified middle class - at exactly the sort of national, discursive intellectual event that the Stakeholder conference set itself up as. One way of breaking the premise of this divide is to look at the embodied nature of the conference, to break the idea of its space as a rarefied clime of the intellect. The idea of the conference space as intellectual and disembodied, the waiting room as earthy and embodied is central to the classed power relation that constitutes each in relation to the other and that maintains the knowledges of the latter in analytic silence.

2: PERFORMED AND EMBODIED SPACES

Bodies 'On' Welfare: The Policy Conference and DSS Waiting Room as Performed and Embodied Space

'...materiality... power's most productive effect' Judith Butler²⁶

'Social Security spending... has ballooned as poverty drives millions through the drab waiting rooms of the rump welfare state' Will Hutton²⁷

'The marks of all this violence upon individual bodies are not hard to read'
David Harvey²⁸

The contemporary discourse of 'underclass' is embodied. It is about bodies that are criminal, over-fecund, needy, unsightly and unsavoury, abusive, emotional, delinquent, out of control. It is also about bodies that are hungry, exhausted, cold, ill. Bodies that are surveilled and tagged, taken into custody and into 'care', classed and gendered.

The term 'underclass' evokes a repertoire of bodily images that fix upon excess *and* lack, active ill-discipline *and* passive dependence. The body of 'underclass' is at the centre of converging knowledges of criminology, economy, demography, biology, and sociology, which are held to be factual, informed, cerebral. The minds of various experts are thus put to work on the nature and predicament of individual and grouped bodies that are deemed problematic in a variety of ways, according to the expert's discipline.

The discourse of 'underclass' is also embodied as a production, that is, the whole range of ideas about 'underclass' are not free-floating, empirically self-evident but are generated in particular sorts of spaces by specific men and women whose own classed and gendered embodiment is elided as they name and claim as public property the bodies of 'underclass'.

The discourse of 'underclass' is also constitutive of actual bodies: it partly brings about that which it names. This is Foucault's seminal contribution to the way discourse should be conceived of as a material production, conveyed here by Elizabeth Grosz:

'For Foucault, power deploys discourses, particularly knowledges, on and over bodies establishing knowledge as the representatives of the truth of those bodies and

²⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* p2

²⁷ Hutton, *The State We're In* p175

²⁸ Harvey.D (1996) 'The Body As An Accumulation Strategy' Paper at Association of American Geographers Conference Annual Meeting, North Carolina April 1996 p14

their pleasures. Discourses made possible and exploited by power, intermesh with bodies, with the lives and behaviour of individuals, to constitute them as particular bodies.²⁹

In this section I want to explore the productive nature of this discourse through the bodies of the Stakeholder policy conference and the DSS waiting room. The purpose of the exploration is to extend my argument about the material nature of this discourse as something that is practiced and constitutive: here performative and embodied, and about the situated nature of its knowledge: specifically its class and its gender.

The policy conference and DSS waiting room share these characteristics of materiality, performativity, and the situatedness of their knowledge. They are different in terms of the *meanings* attached to them. Those meanings are produced in relation to each other and constitute a power relation. To talk about those relations by talking about bodies however, involves some conceptual acrobatics. Is it worth it? I will attempt to show that it is and that moreover it is necessary, by presenting the DSS waiting room and policy conference as heterogeneous, performed and embodied spaces. But I shall briefly preface this with two questions: *why* bodies? and *how* can the conference and waiting room bodies be rendered/talked about?

Why Bodies?

In the following themed sections my attention to *practice* in the discourse of 'underclass' talks about the ways in which the subjectivities, spaces and knowledges of delegate and claimant, conference and waiting room, are intertwined with each other - creating a power-ful domain of meaning and practice. In order to do this and to answer the question 'what sort of space is this?' in both the policy conference and DSS waiting room I listened, looked, talked, interacted with and thought about where I was. This process was very much a bodily one: experiences, interpretations, feelings and thoughts were all intrinsically part of my bodily space as I related to the DSS waiting room and policy conference spaces. My body was literally the site of all this, as a 'sensory and sentient' bundle of relations. The 'things' I moved among and reflected upon were both human and non-human. Many of the practices I observed were an irreducible mix of both and as such were all embodied. By thinking about both my embodiment and that of the delegates and claimants I tried to achieve a closer understanding of the way the spaces were constituted through practices (both my own and those of others). It was through those practices that I produced an understanding and reading of the spaces of conference and waiting room. My reason for talking about bodies therefore marks a move to *specify* practice. In many respects

²⁹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* p149-50

it is a strategic specification which turns attention to those who assume the mantle of 'disembodied facticity' and it therefore refuses the lived/embodied versus textual/cerebral distinction.

Specification of practice is my aim, with three main areas of interest with regard to the bodies of policy conference and waiting room. First, an interest in the *materiality* of discourse as practice; second, an interest in *performative* aspects of these sites, in their complexities and contingencies as social situations; third, an interest in the *embedded* nature of the knowledges that are produced in those spaces in relation to the situated positions of delegates and claimants. The sort of specification that would allow an exploration of the subjectivities and corporealities of particular delegates and claimants is not covered here because I think that level of engagement would require interviews with individuals and it has not been my intention to provide such an in-depth ethnographic interpretation of the sites. However, this should not detract from an understanding of the irreducible relation between the behavioural, situated, subjective, and corporeal nature of discourse as embodied practice. It is rather a question of emphasis and here embodiment will be presented in terms of materiality, performative sociality, and embedded positionalities. Those terms have large theoretical literatures of their own which I do not intend to review here. Instead, below is a brief summary of my understanding of those terms as they inform my 'bodily representations' of the policy conference and waiting room spaces.

Materiality

Bodies have a fleshy immanence that is irrefutable. 'The body' stands at the opposite of what is held to be the conceptual, the abstract. It can be made to act both as the 'test' and grounding of theory, *and* as the lesser half of a dualism that has pathologised women, black people, homosexuals and poor people as inferior beings controlled by irrational, uncivilised, out of control, bodily impulses. In recoiling from both these constructions of reductive empiricism and pathologising discourse, Social Science has developed ideas about how the physical is mediated and constructed by the cultural and social. Bodies have largely been dissociated from this process (the project of constructionism as it were) and so abstracted from the development of social theory. But through the work of a number of prominent feminists who have developed Foucault's approach to power as productive and therefore materially constitutive, 'the body' has been reclaimed from both pathologising and overly constructionist discourse.³⁰

³⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*; Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*; Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*; Probyn.E (1996) *Outside Belongings* London: Routledge

Judith Butler's concept of 'materialisation' explains how power does not act on bodies but through them, so matter is not a surface but:

'...a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter.'³¹

It is this understanding of materiality that I carry into the policy conference and waiting room spaces. Power relations of class and gender are marked on delegate and claimant bodies but that marking is not an inscription on passive matter. It is a relational process in which those bodies are active. It means that I am thinking about delegates and claimants as classed and gendered bodies, *and* working class and female bodies, without either suggesting a one way notion of socially constructed bodies or an essentialist notion of class or gender. My approach seeks to accommodate ideas about 'the visceral' and 'the regulated'.

Performative Sociality

Butler uses the concept of 'performativity' to describe the way that bodies are infused with power relations that partly make up what they are, how they seem, how they act, think and feel. It is an alternative account to 'agency' in which the emphasis is on the on-going process of 'becoming' who we are through the practices of power relations. Thus:

'...there is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability.'³²

In this conceptualisation, social situations, bodies and identities are contingently produced, processual and relational. I am adopting this notion of the performative in my representation of the policy conference and waiting room spaces in order to escape the associations of 'conduct' and 'behaviour' which are overly rooted in the notion of a fully cognisant and bound individual subject/actor. Instead delegate and claimant bodies are seen as caught up in (as the threshold of) the symbolic and material power relations that converge in the policy conference and in the DSS waiting room and are performative *within* the specific relations of those social spaces.

This does not mean that these bodies are not ontologically grounded because confusion would result from being caught up in continuously happening processes and relations. The social spaces of policy conference and waiting room are lived and experienced as if they were real, solid, actual, even predictable. Claimants and delegates *are* ontologically grounded but their experience is not an ontological *given*. I am not therefore trying to oppose an idea of the authentic experience of claimants or delegates to an idea of pre-determined socialisation or ideological delusion, but am conceiving of experience as

³¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter* p9

³² Butler, *Bodies That Matter* p9

something that is social and processual. To talk about the performative nature of the waiting room and conference is therefore a way of emphasising their processual and relational nature. And the body is the site where processes and relations converge in practices. By talking about it, emphasis is given to the *situatedness* of the whole productive process of discourse. The body is self-evidently located as *somebody* in time and space. It is a site of specificity: of class, gender, race, time, space, and a site of embedded knowledges.

The Embedded

An embodied location is productive of embodied understandings. The body is therefore a site for the production of a particular kind of knowledge. As already said, that knowledge is not an authentic realm of understanding, it is rather a situated knowledge that is partly constituted by bodily experience. A politically strategic approach that seeks to valorise such knowledge will recognise the formative role of experience. This understanding does not only apply to subjugated groups, it is also meant to reveal the situated partiality of dominant knowledges: 'Every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence.'³³ Different markings are a touchstone of specific bundles of power relations. For example, in the discourse of 'underclass' it is possible to say that the body of the 'underclass' as a target of disciplinary power-knowledge relations is classed more violently than the body of middle class professionals who deploy that regime from a bodily position of material ease. It is the nature of that marking that necessarily produces in the benefit claiming poor a visceral knowledge of the discourse. The consequences of entrenched inequalities for the poor can be partly explicated in terms of embodiment. Body-talk can be put to use to draw attention to the bodily consequences of discourses that claim 'disembodied facticity'. The problem is how to speak this composition of materiality, performativity and embeddedness, which is partly the problem of how to speak the body.

Body Talk?

In many ways bodies are the inception, the process and the end point of social practice - a nexus of simultaneous relations. To translate that understanding into a research method makes an enormous assumption that it is possible to convey 'everything and simultaneously so' by interacting with bodies (as a self-reflexive body myself) and then writing about them. The impossibility of 'writing' embodiment is evident, it is unavoidably reductive because the complex substance of 'embodiment' cannot be translatable to words. It is amorphous, unavailable to the world of logic/logos/linguistics.³⁴ This is not a matter of

³³ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* p142

³⁴ See Grosz.E and Probyn.E (1995) (eds.) *Sexy Bodies: the strange carnalities of feminism* London: Routledge

my not having got delegates and claimants to talk about their embodiment, of not probing deep enough. Empirical investigations of embodiment are always an articulation of embodiment that cannot access (by whatever means) that which may be uncapturable, unknowable to those in different bodies. Instead I have been talking about the implications of using embodiment as a concept (its materiality, performativity, embeddedness) rather than trying to evidentially render up a bodily truth. Nor would I want to attempt this because such a persistent 'will to knowledge' does not fit with the politics of my research concerned as it is with the discursive *rendition* of differently classed and gendered bodies. I am reading the bodies of policy conference and DSS waiting room as performative, material and embedded without claiming to know the 'truth' of them. I am thinking about the capillary form of power in the talk and movements of claimants and delegates; I am relating my own experiences - past and present - to that thought process; and I am using my imagination to recreate those spaces on the page.

Bringing it all together

An afternoon plenary session, a morning workshop and an evening social: three different spaces at three different times that partly make up the Stakeholder conference space. They have enough in common to feel 'of a piece' and are enough apart to wonder about the different spatialities of the conference. In other words, differences are there but they do fit together as a sense of place - 'the conference'. This is what I felt.

Do I feel part of this, do I look as if I should be here ?

I can join in lunchtime banter; I know what is appropriate (and not) to say; I clap and laugh at things that I genuinely find funny; I follow directions and instructions that mean the conference can run smoothly and on time. I won't persist with my question once the time is up and I won't shout out swear words to register my angry disagreement, even though I'm thinking them. I seem to fit, does that mean I do fit? My dissenting thoughts, my reason for being here, my personal history, my class, are somehow all held within: nobody can tell by looking at me and do any of those things matter here, if I don't make them matter by making them visible and audible, by being a spoke in the works. But such a performance would make me the centre of attention and I want them to be the focus, my focus, the thing I was looking at and forming opinions about. I could justify my joining in as subterfuge, I'm not *really* part of it. Perhaps other people were doing the same, and even more convincingly by joining in more than me, perhaps this space is full of hidden agendas and strategic manoeuvrings. Perhaps we are all hoping that there are hidden agendas and that once in power, in government, even these ideas will be different to how they seem now. These ideas

will turn out to be the cover for something *really* radical. And perhaps not, perhaps what you see is what you get and this really is as radical as it's going to get. Is it subversive not to wear my name badge? Maybe I'm not radical enough, perhaps that's me just trying to be different when I'm not at all because I'm just like them going along with it, playing the part, becoming the part. But no, I maintain my difference and perhaps it is not that well hidden after all. Perhaps it is there for all to see because after all there are no other women of my age here for a start. They are overwhelmingly middle-aged men, or older women. I laugh and clap at some things but not others. I leave the social event early, I'm not with a group and don't seem to know anyone. I ask the camera man lots of questions. My clothes are too trendy. I can't help looking angry and incredulous, sighing in disbelief at different points. Yes I'm obviously a bit of an anomaly, but not a trouble causer. I am easily accommodated as I sit with the rest of them under the flags of nationhood and academe which regale the hall.

Can I, and therefore possibly the rest of these people be both 'conformist detractors' and 'subversive functionaries'?

I must look for the signs, for the give-aways, for the slips and cracks. But there is so much cover to wade through, can it all be cover? Am I willing the slips to make it all more interesting, and hopeful? I wonder.

The Men in the Suits Take the Stage

The afternoon plenary that launches the conference is made up of a row of soberly suited middle-aged and older men. Smart male bodies, shaven and clean, with a certain stature, who speak with confidence as second nature. Their speech is a mixture of self-positioning and truth claim: a self-justifying ambition of Ideas. These are voices of authority: sonorous, measured, self-assured. The impression is that they know what they are talking about. They are talking about Big Things: Global, Economic and Business, with words that are technical, a professional language. The impression is that these are the 'right' words, spoken in the right way. They demand, expect and receive our attention. Their knowledge is imparted and listened to. Whether it is agreed with, modified or rejected in the minds of the delegates I cannot know, but it is taken on board. Symbolically it is accepted within the stage-audience relation in which it is deployed.

For 20 minutes at the end of two hours that relation is apparently reversed, given over to the 'floor': people stand from their seats, a microphone is brought to them, a comment made or question asked, some short and nervous, others lengthy and at ease. They are all partly critical, challenging the 'newness' of the Stakeholding idea, the closeness of its accommodation with the interests of capital, its overly regulative, authoritarian potential.

They are like shots, quick and disarming, some hit their target more effectively than others, some scrape, others wound. But the session has been cleverly managed so that the target remains in tact: the questions and comments follow from each other while replies are saved up for an extended answer to everything at the end which is not further disputed. It has not really been a debate but has made a gesture to debate which we are assured can continue apace in the following sessions. Disagreement is thus contained in this particular space, the final word is theirs as if in resolution of the problems raised. It would seem that we listened, queried, had problems dealt with. The short burst of dissent has therefore served a purpose: their authority questioned and restored, the stronger for it, having proved itself. Delegates knowing that has been the case, recognising the set up as it were, does not matter a great deal. The speakers' *authority* is affirmed, even if agreement does not attend it. The plenary session is as much about authoritative symbolism and self-presentation as it is the idea of Stakeholding, so the session has worked insofar as authority remains in tact at the end. Their convictions have not shifted, the process of persuasion has begun and proved itself resilient at the first hurdle. Furthermore this situation seems to be an organisational rather than democratic deficit because we are assured that it's about keeping on a timed schedule and discussion can continue elsewhere. The nature of this 'elsewhere' is important because it is somehow less public, divided into smaller spaces, more informal - less of a threat to the dramaturgy of power in the main arena. Out of sight it is marginalised, contained, unlikely to achieve a large scale momentum that could derail the event before it had properly begun. Above all the symbolism of authority delivered by men of stature, in possession of professional knowledges and a technical language, is maintained. So a distance and detachment, a mystique of sorts is produced. The squabbling can go on elsewhere, it is not 'in place' in this grand hall. Having 'mastered' dissent, they have conveyed a sense of competence, the symbolic affirmation of authority is part of authority itself. Like theatre goers, the audience files out, talking quietly among themselves, perhaps not enamoured with the content of the piece but somehow unavoidably impressed by the spectacle.

Strangers in the Night

The evening social is a launch reception for the *New Political Economy* journal, an opportunity for publication promotion and networking. I stand at the back near the table of filled wine glasses, a young male suit approaches:

"Is this a safe place to stand away from the throng, or are you desperate to be near the drinks?"

"Both I think, what about you?"

"I don't know what the point of all this is"

“Networking and a drunken subscription probably”

“Who are you then?”

“I’m Chris and I’m doing a PhD at Edinburgh” (mock serious)

“Oh right, I’m David from Birmingham’s Industrial Strategy Centre” (serious)

“Are you a supporter of this Stakeholding idea then?”

“Well interested really, what did you think of this afternoon’s session?”

Another suit approaches:

“Are you two guarding the drinks or are we allowed another one?”

He looks at our badges and we repeat a version of our first conversation.

This is the stuff of stranger interaction at conferences: looking for reasons to start talking often made easier by the presence of food and drink; introductions according to what you ‘do’/what’s your interest in this; jokey irreverence about the event; references and questions about the last/next session/conference and what you thought about that idea/person, possibly developing into a discussion about a particular idea; questions about what you’ve been doing/ what’s your next move/project, interrupted at points by other approaching participants incorporated by ‘we were just saying about...’ sort of joiners.

There is of course variation within this, but it is nevertheless quite a standard, practised and recognised way of going on. It is half playing-at-being-at-a-conference knowing this is what we’re supposed to do. It is a style of interaction that marks post-event reception rooms as particular sorts of spaces: not as formal as the main events, not as informal as the bar. They are social situations which require skilled practices and an habitual way of going on. Conventions and rules that are adhered to, constitute the event as a fairly predictable sort of social space in which people become ‘conference delegates’. There is recognition of mutual self-interest in such conformity or rather a mutual performativity that is highly intersubjective, produced in relation to others. Its modus operandi is ‘we do this/ this is the way we do it/ we’re like each other/ this is what we’re like/ we are professional people/ this is what we do’. Of course it is entirely normal, ‘natural’ behaviour for those whose identities are partly made up by it, not a conscious thinking process that smacks of paranoid insecurity, of desperately wanting to be like everybody else. It is not a ‘performance’ that is separate from the person, it partly constitutes that person, albeit temporarily within the conference space. This constitutive process is seen in the conference delegates in terms of their shared speech codes, expressions, gestures, postures, all performed intersubjectively through scanning others, interacting with others, being themselves in relation to others. This intersubjectivity is a basic dynamic of sociality in shared social spaces whose specification will depend on the nature of the subjectivities/relations that converge there. In the Stakeholder conference reception rooms, a

scanning, recognition, interaction or withdrawal process is highly visible. It is intrinsic to the process of 'networking' and seen most clearly in the way name/organisation badges are so often the first port of call for the delegate on the move among strangers - this is socialising for a purpose. People are talked to until a better option becomes available, or just until someone preferable appears. The feel of such a space is a subjective matter, although it is possible to visually distinguish delegates at ease from those who are awkward and otherwise 'out of place', those who are not practised, good at or willing to practice such modes of behaviour. There is however the potential for diverse performances within this social space once other commonalities have been established: a shared sense of humour, interest in football, drinking, or flirting can take conversations in very different directions. With another Ph.D student, such diversionary tactics were identified, as we all stood around drinking wine:

"Shall we see if we can edge into Will Hutton's group and see what he's going on about?"

"No because we might have to say something intelligent or pretend we know what Stakeholding actually means."

"Mmm and I could suddenly get carried away and ask for a job at The Observer."

"Giz a job, I can do that"

"Let's just imagine what he's saying. Do you think it's about 'Eastenders'... shall I ask him if he watches it?"

"No you're pissed, think about your future career."

(Both laugh)

Such interactions do not indicate that sociality is about totally improvised performances or 'radical' possibilities! It is still very much grounded in power relations and is in many respects a scripted business that is predictable even in its difference. This is why the conference space, although constituted by a variety of different interactions and spaces, still left a dominant impression of order and predictability. Things are generally conducted pleasantly, politely, observing rules of middle class professional protocol with due regard for the opinion of others. Being civil to people that you may well hate, or at least hate what you think they stand for, is part of that performativity. It means that Conservative MP David Willets is engaged with by delegates, without recourse to violence, and he has attended in the knowledge that that will be the case. It's a practised form of the expression 'We're all adults here'. That quality of pleasantness and civility is not a mark of character but a luxury that is afforded particular social groups in particular social spaces. For example it is not abundantly available as a choice in DSS waiting rooms in the interactions between staff and claimants. It is afforded by a position of material ease where the stakes of debate are not

personally high. Conference debate is not a matter of being able to feed your children or visit a dying relative. DSS waiting room argumentation is about a struggle for survival and dignity against the odds where losing the debate can mean losing your children to Social Services, and there is a certain violence in that relation. Clearly there are conference delegates who know about this, most academically or as a political position. The translation of that knowledge into a mode of behaviour and attitude does not follow for most of them. But no such translation is necessary for the claimant who is living the violence of power-knowledge relations, and for whom violence often does not present itself as 'choice'. The materiality of such relations, is not *felt* here, it is seen only in its opposite as material well-being, healthy complexions, expensive attire, and in the sound of muted conviviality. But on two occasions the translation was made in purposeful attacks on polite conference consensus - the slips I'd hoped for. Significantly both attacks referred to things bodily. The reaction to both revealed a deep seated antipathy and inability to cope with displays of emotional intelligence that have the material position of those in poverty as their focus. The conference space struggled to recuperate them but could not. They simply didn't fit.

Speaking 'Out of Place'

The first incident was during the workshop at which Conservative MP David Willets was a panel speaker. The session was about the constitutional implications of a Stakeholder State but the questioner concerned was not bound by that official heading:

"As a community worker who goes to the homes of people with nothing, I'd like to ask David Willets if he knows what the smell of poverty is , 'cos I don't think he'd like it."

The comment was not exactly shouted, but the tone was angry and accusatory. It threw the workshop. An embarrassed silence followed and then David Willets uneasily looked to the workshop Chair to be extricated from the awkwardness of his position. Significantly the Chair went on to ask if there were any more comments or questions from the audience. This decision following professional decorum, served to relieve Willet's discomfort and so position the questioner as the one who had acted out of place and out of order. In many respects the question could have no satisfactory answer from Willets, it so evoked the material, bodily nature of poverty, it could not be met with the sort of objective, disembodied language that had so far characterised the conference exchanges. Willet's reaction, the all-round embarrassed silence and the Chair's decision all marked a retreat. But this did not imply any sort of gain for the questioner who was automatically delegitimised as 'professional', or for those of whom the questioner spoke. It did, however, highlight the extent to which the conference's stated allegiance with the 'best interests' of the poor was

abstracted from the material, emotional and embedded meanings of poverty. Its inability to talk a language and register an *understanding* of those meanings represented the nature of the distance between the conference and the DSS waiting room - a distance policed by a different language and understanding. This distance is why claimants were not here to speak: the nature of the discourse of 'underclass', in which the conference is one site, means that claimants *could not* be here to speak, and that is not about invitations but fundamentally who claimants *are*.

The conference's way of speaking and understanding are part of a power-knowledge relation that works to produce differences as inequalities between these social groups. Different languages and understandings then become the 'reasons why' claimants can't participate in policy forums of debate. 'Voice' becomes the prerogative of those who can speak an *a priori* language and who have *a priori* understandings. Claimants, excluded from this discursive coterie, are reduced to bodily needs and interests, and spoken about. In this authoritative realm of language and understanding, 'voice' is about controlling what is heard. The refusal of 'emotional talk' and positionality are related parts of that mission to control: it means that 'voice' doesn't come from embodied, sentient beings; it is 'objective' and it does not have to account for itself.

This imperative was revealed by the second 'slip' in the conference's cover of consensual unity. In the last five minutes of the final plenary session, shared by Labour MP David Blunkett and Conservative MP John Biffen, in which Blunkett had started his speech with the words 'I've a lot of respect for John', a delegate from the floor stood up to say:

"All this consensus at political level makes me nervous, those living in poverty don't have a feeling of consensus but of anger and division. I just want to say all this pleasantness makes me sick."

A few of us clapped and heads turned to see who had spoken such a blasphemy against the consensual ethos of Stakeholding. The fact that there could be people unconvinced of the Stakeholding message in this final assembly, did not sit easily with the tenor of the event - the sense of membership and mission that the organisers had offered and had done so much to instil. The suggestion of a divide existing not between Stakeholding advocates and the as yet 'unenlightened', but between those adherents of a consensus politics and the poor and unemployed, was for me the most obvious and damning quality of the conference. It seemed to be a hopeful sign that this had been recognised by others who were equally angry. The fact that it was spoken in the conference's final moments, even if it did not represent the majority view, had a symbolically empowering meaning: letting the organisers know that not only were some of us leaving unconvinced of their idea, but that we were angry about its implications. Significantly the delegate was not answered through an engagement with the

substance of his comment on the appropriateness of consensus politics at a time of entrenched class divisions, but by the suggestion of John Biffen MP that such a notion was the product of an over-emotional, *unthinking* state of mind:

“Stakeholding has to be calm, calculated and developed - the rhetoric of passion gets us nowhere.”³⁵

This seemed to convey the essence of the sort of consensus politics that Stakeholding was about: a dominant discourse of ideas; talk of economic capital over social capital; the working taxpayer over the welfare dependent claimant; the instalment of ‘better experts’ and ‘better capitalists’ in government and the enlightenment of other governing elites; new careers for a new world order; the abnegation of class and the subordination of democratically participatory policy debate. Despite contestation of parts of that view within the conference space, there was still a dominant power relation within it able to *act as if* there was a conformity of view, a unity of purpose as ‘we’ are sent forth:

“We need to carry these changes with us, we must believe we can change the world... that is why this conference has been so important.”³⁶

It struck me how good some groups are at covering up conflict, having the wherewithal to stage manage and relocate dissent, strategically generating the appearance of consensus among networked groups, whilst reproducing divides between differently, less powerfully networked groups: the deserving and undeserving, the responsible and the irresponsible, the Jobseeker and the welfare dependant, the working citizen and the non-working outsider.

We All Sit Together

People in the DSS waiting room are a transient community, they have a common relation to the DSS in the sense of ‘being in it together’, in the same boat. And yet there is difference everywhere. Children’s bodies, black bodies, old bodies, pregnant bodies, middle-aged female and male bodies, old white bodies, young black bodies and different combinations of bodies in different waiting rooms. Different combinations of *Poor Bodies*. That is the reason they are all here, in circumstances of need, needing resolution. Quiet and desperate; desperate and joking; threatening, desperate and vulnerable. Never just one thing but always poor.

³⁵ John Biffen MP, ‘*Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley or Best Hope?*’ Conference, Final Plenary, Sheffield University, March 1996

³⁶ Pamela Gordon, Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council, ‘*Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley or Best Hope?*’ Conference, Final Plenary summing up, Sheffield University, March 1996

Can you read desperation? Could this be an airport lounge? Some of the bodies are even sun-tanned, it's the summer after all. Some have decent trainers and leather jackets. Can they *really* be poor?

As I sat in the waiting rooms I didn't doubt that they were about poverty, whatever it looked like. My own family always had a suntan in the summer, from lying in the garden or on the local beach: 'Oooh, aren't you all looking well, is that a new T-shirt Debbie?' Explain yourself. You must never look better than them, those who've been working in the office all week in tights and skirts, all pale. We're good at making the best of ourselves, that's what you're supposed to do isn't it? Perhaps the trainers are hooky, the lipstick nicked, the coat not yet paid for, a jumble sale find, a cast off from a trendy friend. Who knows. They definitely don't.

So I don't really expect the people in the DSS waiting room to look like anything in particular, people on benefits don't display their poverty for public recognition. People who are poor don't tend to want to look poor, in fact the opposite. But many of the people in DSS waiting rooms do look poor. Clothes that don't quite go together, hair that hasn't been cut for a while, shoes low on the heel, washed out T-shirts, fashions from a few years ago, drawn and ill-looking faces, people trying to look smart. Poverty is material but that doesn't mean it always looks the same, or means exactly the same thing for different people. And it doesn't always exist 'evidentially' in a self-revealing way.

I haven't come to the DSS waiting room for the material evidence of poverty especially not of the bodily kind. The poor are already materially over-represented; their bodies surveilled and targeted in policy; DSS administrative questions pry into living arrangements and sexual partners. But discourse *is* material, real bodies are part of the underclass discourse, materiality is power's most productive effect. This understanding requires a different sort of body-talk where to talk of bodies in the DSS waiting room is not to reduce them to a category: 'the claimant body'. It is to present something more heterogeneous and complex about these spaces; it is to talk of practices that are necessarily embodied and embedded; it is to present discourse as material. Power relations are productive so where there is objectification and subjugation wrought through the body there is also resistance or rather resilient ways of dealing with subjugation that are practiced through the body, through speech, actions, looks and gestures. The aim of my representation of the DSS waiting room as embodied discourse is therefore to make claimants visible in different ways, not through the sort of prurient or disciplinary over exposure that usually renders invisible the complexity of real bodies.

Euston DSS 1.30p.m August 6th 1996

"How long have you been in here?"

"Since quarter past ten"

These two people seem to know each other, they share a packet of crisps. It's now 1.30.

Three young children in shorts and T-shirts are clambering over a row of chairs and running around the queuing partition. It's the school holidays. An older man smiles with amusement at their mother. A woman opposite me is polishing her nails with what looks like a conker.

I'm just looking around. There's about thirty of us in here, all vaguely looking at each other.

A mother leaves with her two sons, one of them asks her something as they leave. "Just wait 'til we get outside, I'll tell you when we get outside". Outside is the real world, of shops and streets where no-one can really tell if you're a DSS claimant. In here we all recognise each other. Sitting and waiting and looking. Most people aren't having big conversations, but occasionally chatting and making the odd remark. You catch snatches of conversations, unless people are right next to you. Two black women diagonally opposite me are speaking French in quiet voices, they're relaxed with their legs up on the seats, bright colours among the drabness.

'Neighbours' has just finished, people occasionally look over at the television on the wall but they're not watching it. It's just a distraction. It's often not even as eventful as what goes on in here.

"Paula Mattas come back to booth six, there's a form for you to fill in". The voicecom tells us all. No-one moves, she must have gone. A few minutes later: "167 to booth six please". A middle aged man gets up and wonders over.

Opposite me there's a man wearing tracksuit bottoms under cotton trousers, trainers and no socks, reading *The Sun*. Next to him two young people are leaning on each other asleep. And on the other side is an older man wearing a thin suit; the creases in the trouser legs have been ironed too hard, they jut out at severe angles. He looks strange and poor, not like a respectable man in a suit. Next to him there's a young black man quietly arguing with a young white woman with a baby, she moves to leave and he takes the baby, holding her closely.

2.10p.m It's all quiet just now except for two young children playing and screaming round the Coke machine, and the too loud voicecom: "Last call for ticket 194 to booth four". The black security guard leans against the window sill casually chatting to a couple of young men wearing long T-shirts and baseball caps, they look relaxed and friendly. Later on he moves over to a middle aged Rasta man who's put his legs up across a few seats and is sleeping. The guard shakes him by the shoulder and gestures for him to leave. "Alright, man", but he doesn't move. He's taken up by the arm and led towards the door. I'm looking at him and as he passes he winks at me, I half smile. He shrugs the guard off and goes quietly.

There must be a hostel for young women nearby because there's a few in here who seem to know each other from the same place:

"I'm in B6 I was going to come down to see you, where are you?"

"B13, it's alright isn't it"

"I've got loads to tell you, have you seen Carol about?"

It's mainly women in here, they tend to be with somebody else or with children. They chat more than the men. Two behind me are talking about how long they breast fed for, they agreed that the longer you did it for the better it was for the baby, that's why their two hadn't been ill, and how could they do that if they were working.

An Irish accent suddenly sounds out: "Youse Fucking bastards youse", and a young woman leaves the far booth and the waiting room, angry looking, and tears. A young man quickly gets up and follows: "Josie..."

"The thing is I can't keep on giving her money - she's my friend but she can't control her spending". A young woman is explaining something to a young man who's just walked in. A younger girl follows him: "I was going to get you some fags with it" she says to the other girl. "Just give me the fiver and we'll forget it". The girl hands her a fiver and walks off. She puts it in her purse then turns to the bloke: "And you can piss off if you're all skagged up".

One of the black women leaves - "Tout à l'heure", and there's a big call out for booth nine that looks like a giro hand out. A list of names are called: "McGraff, Kendal, Pointer, O'Brien..." A group of people walk over, two younger lads start jokingly singing 'we're in the money' as they go.

"He wanted sex all the time, that was enough exercise for me... but I had to run away to me mum's in the end." Two girls laugh loudly and a couple of us smile because we've heard too.

There are no smoking signs everywhere but an older man starts to smoke a roll up. Everyone ignores him, I don't think the security guard is even looking. He finishes it in peace.

My ticket number comes up on the digital screen "213", "213 - booth two". I wander over, "I need the form to apply for help with removal expenses, and can you tell me how I can get it as a grant not a loan?" The officer turns round to speak to another officer about something else I think, then turns back: "Sorry, can you start again?" In the booth next to mine there's raised voices: "Well I don't know do I, isn't that your bloody job?" The tone is a mix of anger and frustration. He's still arguing when I leave with my form.

Outside the building a few people are smoking, an old man's sleeping on the pavement. He looks as if he might be with some others drinking cans of Special Brew. It's 3.20.

Southampton DSS 1.00p.m August 19th 1996

'Welcome to St. Cross House. Thankyou for your co-operation.' A flashing notice board.

It's full, it's a bad time to come if you want to get out quicker: Monday and lunchtime. People are standing round the walls. This queuing system means we have to wait on our feet for ages before seeing anyone. It's always more lively when there's this many people, so somehow it doesn't seem so bad.

A woman behind me is having a joke about there being six women and fifty kids in here "Where do they all come from?" It starts people off, everyone's standing close to each other because it's a wrap around queuing barrier. "It looks better than it used to though", "Yeah it's nice to know they care". A few of us laugh. A youngish man with bright red hair and a beard to match, pipes up in a jokey way: "So who'll join me in a bricklaying gang to Germany?" He sounds a bit pissed. The woman behind me laughs - "Well I would if it wasn't for the kids."

Stoke Newington DSS, Hackney District 3.30p.m July 22nd 1996

A scruffy looking young lad leaves one of the booths and shakes a giro victoriously at those waiting on the seats: "Don't take no for an answer" he shouts to us as he leaves.

In the booth next to me a woman is talking loudly to the officer: "Well I know it's not your fault love but I want it sorted now, I'm here now and I'm not going til it's done." She sounds angry. I lean against a spare booth counter to fill in my form, and about ten minutes later the woman gets up to go, saying to the clerk as she leaves: "Thanks ever so much, thanks".

Outside as I leave a white young man is handing out flyers for a club 'Jungle Dawn - The Inner City Shake Down.' He passes one to me - "Cheers", "Cheers".

Kennington DSS, Wandsworth 11.00a.m July 24th 1996

"Can I just borrow your pen a minute, love?"

I'd just finished scribbling down a few notes on a form and was looking around, pen on lap. The woman was holding one of the huge forms that's more like a booklet it's so thick. She was smiling, frizzy hair and a bit of lipstick, about my mum's age.

"Yeah sure, it's a bit leaky though"

"Falling to bits like the rest of us eh?"

We both laugh.

She opens the form: "You can't fart in here without filling in a form can you? ...Still keeps us busy... this one's a days work..."

She muses distractedly as she starts to fill in the form: "...yeah, nothing better to do... life of leisure..."

"It's nice to know we're keeping them in work though isn't it", I carry on jokingly, nodding in the direction of the officers in the booths.

"Yeah and we get no thanks for it do we!" We both laugh again.

Brighton DSS 3.00p.m August 9th 1996

"Have you been in here since 12 o'clock?"

A young man approaches a group of people sitting together next to me. There's two young girls, two babies and another younger lad. The girls in leggings and cropped tops, the blokes in tracksuit bottoms and T-shirts.

"Alright Jase." He shakes hands with the other bloke and they push each other about jokingly. The talk between the girls is about baby milk and other essentials:

"They've told me I can have 40 quid in Safeway vouchers for two weeks, it's no good is it? - I'm just waiting now", one of the girls explains. A couple of minutes later : "Would Miss Jackson come to booth four."

"Here we go ", she wanders over to the booth.

The other girl starts baby-talking to the babies and the blokes chat about a friend who sounds like he's dealing: "...not living on anything at the moment, just what's going through his hands."

When the girl comes back, she's holding the vouchers and looking annoyed. The other girl takes them off her: "Right what you've got to do is buy a load of stuff that's not food - like a few big items, then take them back and get a refund in cash. They have to do that."

"I don't know, I haven't got the guts to do that."

"Wankers they are", says the girl with the vouchers, and they leave together, the blokes pushing the babies, the girls walking ahead still talking about what they can do with the vouchers.

These are all moments in people's lives. An hour or more spent in the DSS waiting room, hoping for a good result. Their subjective meaning is situated within whole lives: what claimants have already been through, what they can expect of the future, what's going on in the rest of their lives. Part of this meaning will be personal history and psychology, part well-circulated and shared interpretations of particular experiences and knowledges. The multiply possible meanings of all this are not directly accessible by looking at bodies and listening to voices. My reasons for telling some moments and not others are also personal to me: *I think these moments are all significant on their own as part of the embodied texture of the DSS waiting room space and together as part of a wider picture of claimant lives. They are also part of a network of power-knowledge relations that includes the policy conference site. I have tried to avoid the sort of 'contextualisation' that attempts to harness all possible meanings in one interpretative frame. My presentation is therefore not a 'polished knowledge' of what all these moments are about. These are complex pieces of people's lives presented as interpretative possibilities. They are not complete. They are something of what was articulated and enacted in these spaces at particular times, and they include nothing of the claimants' passing thoughts, feelings and imaginations - that whole realm of possibility that is the unreadable. It may be that my presentation of these moments on the page produces very different understandings to my own. My personal recognition and understanding of them is hard to convey in words, it is a domain of feeling and gut level knowledge.*

The moments also present a rich seam of possibilities to understand the performative, material and embedded nature of 'underclass' discourse. They show a whole range of performative behaviours that go with material poverty: postures, deference, humour, angry talk. The polite getting-by side - the nodding and bobbing - as a mix of appearance as strategy is partly about being seen to be willing, part of the habitual practice of a power relation of subjugation. These are demeanours produced by subjugation. But there is also noise, and refusal, when things are not even apparently compliant: the swearing, shouting and insults bespeak some kind of resistance in the face of those who wield decision making power who can maintain calm, quiet, rationality. The noise is momentary, the product of an inability to choke back feeling, a spontaneous gauge of feeling that can also be a collective speaking of people's minds in one phrase - "wankers they are". Much of this is an attempt to retain autonomy and some sort of dignity, a symbolic victory in the face of material loss, the final word. It shows how a power-knowledge relation is productive of different knowledges. The claimants know about their position in this waiting room and in the Social Security system as an embedded knowledge located within their material condition and felt as indignity, anger, fear, resilience, humour. It is to the Stakeholder policy conference and DSS waiting room as 'spaces of knowledge' that I now turn.

3: SPACES OF KNOWLEDGE

Interpreters and Claimants: Knowing 'The Social' as a Space for Making 'Claims'

Knowledgeable Claims

For media commentators, politicians and academics 'the social' is the realm in which their expertise is authorised and deployed. It is something they actively create as they talk about the state of society and make policy interventions. To create the 'good society' is what the economy and politics are for.

For benefit claimants 'the social' is where you go to sort out money to live on. It is what you call the Social Security waiting room of your local Benefits Agency office. It is also something you actively create as you talk about and try to negotiate your benefit entitlement. 'The social' administers the financial means by which you participate in society at a particular level.

These two definitions represent two forms of knowledge about 'the social' and they are linked. The spaces where those different knowledges are produced and performed are multiple. I am looking at two in particular - the Stakeholder policy conference and the DSS waiting room - as two different spaces of knowledge that pertain to 'underclass'. For heuristic purposes I am calling these knowledges 'Stakeholder knowledge' and 'Social Security knowledge'.

Within academic Geography, interest in the nature of knowledge and the sites of its production has developed as a mainly historical interest in scientific knowledges and historical-geographies of the discipline itself.³⁷ Beyond Geography, 'intellectual production' has been studied sociologically as a particular kind of cultural activity which has developed historically, and which can be located socially and spatially.³⁸

This themed section is interested in the classed nature of Knowledge where the production of the working class is held to be one of physical labour rather than of intellect. The idea that people who are denied an equality of access or outcome in formal education, have knowledges and expertise about their own and wider social conditions among other things, has gained status within academic writings associated with the 'postmodern turn'.

³⁷ For example Thrift.N, Driver.F, Livingstone.D (1995) 'The Geography of Truth' p1-3 *Society and Space* vol. 13; Livingstone.D (1995) 'The Spaces of Knowledge: contributions towards an historical geography of science' p5-34 *Society and Space* vol. 13; Driver.F and Rose.G (1992) *Nature and Science: Essays in the History of Geographical Knowledge* Historical Geography Research Series No. 28

³⁸ The most prominent examples are Bauman.Z (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters* Cambridge: Polity Press and Bourdieu.P (1988) *Homo Academicus* Cambridge: Polity Press

Feminist work in particular has spearheaded this development by creating a language around speaking the marginal, subjugated, hidden knowledges of 'the other', as opposed to always speaking knowledges about 'them'.³⁹ Such ideas are central to my understanding of the hierarchies of authoritative sites and knowledges that constitute 'underclass' discourse. They suggest that it is possible to map differently valorised sorts of knowledges to particular sorts of spaces within this discourse.

The relation between knowledge and space is very much part of an historical relation between power and space, illustrated in Foucault's most 'geographical' of quotes: 'the history of powers would at one and the same time amount to a history written of spaces.'⁴⁰ The Stakeholder policy conference and DSS waiting room sites are such power produced spaces. My analysis of them, is based on the following questions: what is the nature of their knowledge and how is it mapped/represented? What is its spatiality in a network of relations? What is the nature of its power? By asking the same questions of both sites the nature of their relational production can be shown.

My representation of the policy conference and DSS waiting room as spaces of knowledge, is concerned with a particular sort of knowledge. The knowledge that I am talking about is that which is formally presented and accessible as the 'substance' of the sites, or literally what they are *for*. It exists as information, a dominant presentation of knowledge, the 'prevailing' knowledge at each site. A more personal or experiential knowledge would perhaps be the subject of an interview based ethnography of those people at the sites. The knowledges discussed here are those of 'Stakeholder Capitalism' and 'Social Security' as the knowledges through which each site is formally located/represented/known.

Stakeholder Knowledge

The Stakeholder conference was part of a drive to set a new cultural and intellectual agenda for both the political Left and the country at large. The terms of this agenda have been defined by a small group of well established cultural and academic figures, chief among them Will Hutton who is editor of the broadsheet Sunday newspaper *The Observer* and author of *The State We're In*, the best selling exposition of Stakeholding as a new political Big Idea. The conference key speakers did not shrink from this agenda setting ambition or their role within it. A keynote speaker, Harold Perkins (a History Professor) made this role explicit:

³⁹ Haraway, *Situated Knowledges* p185-101; hooks.b (1991) *Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics* London: Turnaround

⁴⁰ Foucault.M (1980) 'The eye of power', interview in Gordon.C (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-77* Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press p149

‘...the modern world is the world of the professional expert. It is a product of the Third Revolution, the revolution of the professionals.’⁴¹

The identification of a shared group mission to effect a political and cultural sea change was a prominent part of the plenary speeches. It included thinking through and making explicit the links between knowledge and policy, expressed as:

‘...the need for both cognitive consensus and policy consensus. One is inclined to attach particular weight to what is said by practitioners of such eminence, who are also intellectuals...There cannot usefully be any firm doctrines, but there could be a shared, continuing and developing awareness of available knowledge and of the policy options to which it might relate.’

(Sir Arthur Knight)⁴²

This particular speaker made prominent use of the term ‘straddler’ to describe those who cross professional/disciplinary boundaries in academic, policy, media and business fields and have a strong role to play in requisite changes:

‘...straddler communities... might be expected to play a part in the dissemination of knowledge which bears upon thinking and action related to public policy making’

(Sir Arthur Knight)⁴³

The introductory theme of the need to establish a working consensus across party political and professional lines, focused on the importance of a successful economy. Stakeholding, first and foremost is an economic conception, an idea about a new kind of capitalism. The desired end of the ‘good society’ (as a ‘proximate purpose rather than a fixed model’) is deemed to require a particular economic base:

‘...material well being requires high performance which is possible only if there is high productivity.’

(Sir Arthur Knight)⁴⁴

Significantly this is not an anti-capitalist vision, but one that unashamedly makes a better job of the way capitalism works. A contract between all, for the good of all because everyone has a ‘stake’ in the country. It requires bringing business on board to the cause and making the market work in such a way that business interests are in the country’s interest. To this end is brought the importance of welfare reform and the need for ‘proactive benefits’ in which ‘work’ not welfare is the way out of poverty. The present system is deemed to be

⁴¹ Perkins.H (1996) ‘Are Capitalisms Converging?’ *Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley Or Best Hope? Conference Proceedings* Sheffield: PERC

⁴² Knight.A (1996) ‘An Agenda For Consideration’ *Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley Or Best Hope? Conference Proceedings* Sheffield: PERC

⁴³ Knight, *An Agenda For Consideration*

⁴⁴ Knight, *An Agenda For Consideration*

both 'expensive' and 'inefficient in terms of incentives',⁴⁵ meaning that claimants do not perceive it to be in their interests to make the transition from benefits to work. This work-centred, economic, 'for the interests of *us* all' view of welfare reform, expanded on in *The State We're In*, is the primary way in which the conference speaks about Welfare:

'Nor can *insiders* look at their plight with equanimity. The impact of inequality and insecurity is pervasive, affecting everything from the vitality of the housing market to the growth of Social Security spending and ultimately the growth prospects of the entire economy.'⁴⁶
(my emphasis)

The position of 'outsiders' is the well rehearsed position of 'underclass'. Although here Hutton does not use that term directly, his social diagnosis is resoundingly familiar:

'The widely noticed decline in the number of *marriageable men* who can support a family, which means that the task of child rearing and family building has fallen to *single women* is not an act of God; it is because men can expect little but to work for very low wages or to *live off Income Support and the black economy*.'⁴⁷
(my emphasis)

The solution to this particular aspect of social decline is seen to lie in the second of seven principles of Stakeholding: 'We must all be included in the workings of the economy and society.'⁴⁸ The work ethic is paramount to this social vision:

'[work is] a means of acting and interacting with the world that fulfils an individual's humanity.'⁴⁹

'Above all, work offers a sense of place in a hierarchy of social relations, both within the organisation and beyond it, and men and women are after all, social beings. Inevitably some work is demeaning and poorly paid, but the same need is there. Those who work belong; those who do not are excluded.'⁵⁰

'To work is to be.'⁵¹

The argument is that the division between 'us' in work and 'them' out of work can and should be closed through policy change. However, there is a kind of moral obligation on the part of the claimant to comply with the help and the vision that is 'offered':

'The good society is therefore founded on the right and associated obligation of individuals to be part of that society in which they live.'⁵²

⁴⁵ Will Hutton, 'Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley or Best Hope? Conference, introductory plenary speech, Sheffield University, March 1996

⁴⁶ Hutton, *The State We're In* p109

⁴⁷ Hutton, *The State We're In* p109

⁴⁸ Hutton.W and Kay.J (1996) 'Only Working Together Will Save The Economy' *The Observer* 13.10.96 p26

⁴⁹ Hutton, *The State We're In* p231

⁵⁰ Hutton, *The State We're In* p99-100

⁵¹ Hutton, *The State We're In* p26

⁵² Hutton, *The State We're In* p26

It is underlain by the threat of withdrawing help, when social division becomes a matter of self-induced hardship, a lack of responsibility or obligation on the part of the claimant:

‘But *those who opt out* of the right to work - secured by guaranteeing access to training and work even if in a different part of the country after a clearly defined period - have no strong claims on *the rest of us*. The claim to benefit must be conditional on acceptance of those obligations.’⁵³
(my emphasis)

The distinction between insiders and outsiders translates into the conference stream on ‘social inclusion and exclusion’ which specifically addresses the implications of Stakeholding for Welfare. Here the link is made with the Commission on Social Justice set up in 1992 to direct Labour’s policy thinking on Welfare into the 21st century.⁵⁴ The terminology of social inclusion and exclusion is theirs: inclusion means membership in the mainstream economy, society and politics. Crucially it confers both ‘rights and responsibilities’ on members. For welfare claimants that means benefits are conditional upon certain obligations. Labour market exclusion, pitched as the problem of both claimant and the economy is amenable to change via an accommodation of economy and welfare: ‘high productivity’ and ‘reciprocal balance.’⁵⁵ The two main elements of such balance are conceived of as adjustments to benefit allocations that will ‘reduce disincentives’ to work, and ‘welfare to work’ schemes for single parents and the jobless.⁵⁶ The clearest statement of how such a Social Security policy formulated around compulsory work and training schemes would work is provided in Labour MP Frank Field’s *Making Welfare Work: Reconstituting Welfare For The Millennium*.⁵⁷ Field makes the case for a ‘flexible earnings related system of income security’ and pre-dating Hutton’s conference speech, makes the case for a ‘proactive benefits agency’. In Field’s prescription this consists of welfare to work policies, a ‘case management’ approach to claimants, and the application of benefit sanctions. In his book *Stakeholder Welfare* - published seven months after the conference - Field identifies his use of Stakeholding terminology as being inspired by Hutton himself:

‘The use of stakeholding in welfare is simply the result of listening to Will Hutton talk about economic stakeholding during sessions of the Dahrendorf Commission and thinking that this phrase could be the leitmotif of a whole government programme, and particularly as it related to welfare reform.’⁵⁸

⁵³ Hutton, *The State We’re In* p26

⁵⁴ The Report of the Commission on Social Justice (1994) *Social Justice: Strategies For National Renewal* London: Vintage.

⁵⁵ Lister.R (1996) ‘Social Inclusion and Exclusion’ *Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley Or Best Hope? Conference Proceedings* Sheffield: PERC

⁵⁶ Hutton.W (1996) ‘The Stakeholder Society: How It Might Work’ *The Guardian* Tabloid 17.1.96 p2

⁵⁷ Field.F (1995) *Making Welfare work: Reconstituting Welfare For The Millennium* London: Institute of Community Studies

⁵⁸ Field.F (1996) *Stakeholder Welfare* London: Institute of Economic Affairs, Choice In Welfare Series No. 32 p112

Hutton has endorsed Field's vision of a new Welfare State which ties the principles and workings of welfare policy to the 'imperatives' of the labour market and economy.⁵⁹

Significantly these needs unlike those of the welfare claimant's should not be policed. Thus the fourth principle of the seven principles of Stakeholding applies to business:

'The good economy is one where you do the right thing without being policed... the rules of the economic game we seek to introduce are much better operated by people and firms themselves than by elaborate rule books.'⁶⁰

This is how a 'consensus' is reached: Stakeholding expresses the notion that the best interests of the Economy coincide with the best interests of Welfare, the best interests of the Market and of Society. Under the logic of Stakeholding, each of those things can work as a united group of interests, a collective contract. So for example, the idea is that if companies act as good employers (here companies like British Telecom and Sainsbury's are held as exemplary), and workers make themselves employable, then the best interests of both can be realised. The logic is that of 'rights and responsibilities': if all parties meet their responsibilities, they are entitled to the security of knowing that all will be well for them and everybody else.

Politically the notion is an argument for a type of consensus politics that represents an accommodation between capitalist and socialist positions, the market and the community, the profit motive and the common good. It is located as part of the project of the 'New Left' for a 'third way' which started in the 1970s and developed through the 1980s as a coming to terms with the apparent success of Thatcherism. The magazine *Marxism Today* played a key role in promoting the notion of this third way politics through a series of articles by cultural, academic, and political commentators. Among these was David Marquand who supported the Social Democrat Party split from Labour, and is now director of Sheffield University's Political Economy Research Centre, the conference organisers.

Labour Party leader Tony Blair has identified the 'New Labour' party with such third way politics, as the mainstay of Labour's political programme:

'But there is a big idea left in politics. It goes under a variety of names - stakeholding, one nation, inclusion, community - but it is quite simple. It is that no society can ever prosper economically or socially unless all its people prosper... unless we live up to the ambition to create a society where the community works for the good of every individual, and every individual works for the good of community.'⁶¹

⁵⁹ Hutton.W (1996) 'Raising The Stakes' *The Guardian Tabloid* 17.10.96 p2

⁶⁰ Hutton and Kay, *Only Working Together Will Save The Economy* p26

⁶¹ Blair.T (1996) *New Britain: my vision of a young country* London: Fourth Estate. Preface: x

'That is not to say... there do not remain substantial differences between Left and Right... but they fit within a larger body of consensus and sometimes they cross Left/Right lines.'⁶²

The first media-covered political use of the term 'Stakeholding', seen as its launch, was by Tony Blair to a group of business men in Singapore in January 1996, the same year in which it was given centre-stage party political status in Blair's statement of political purpose for a 'New Britain.'⁶³ The way 'Stakeholding' was taken up by New Labour is important to note because it points to the rationale that would inform a policy field of application post the 1997 General Election. Labour have not made any commitment to scrapping the JSA and indeed amended the first draft of their 'Welfare to Work' policy document in order to distance themselves from the possibility.⁶⁴ Besides which the JSA does represent a particular manifestation of the 'rights and responsibilities' talk that New Labour have developed as the hallmark of their social policy statements. A rights-obligations relationship between the individual and society is represented by the 'stake' in a mutual social contract:

'If people feel they have no stake in a society, they feel little responsibility towards it and little inclination to work for its success.'⁶⁵

The symptom of such a situation seen by Tony Blair to have developed in the contemporary period is an 'underclass':

'The development of an underclass of people, cut off from society's mainstream, living often in poverty, the black economy, crime and family instability is a moral and economic evil... It is wrong, and unnecessary, and, incidentally, very costly.'⁶⁶

The remedy is a 'Stakeholder welfare system' founded on a 'modern notion of social justice - something for something':

'We accept our duty as a society to give each person a stake in its future. And in return each person accepts responsibility to respond, to work to improve themselves.'⁶⁷

The primary importance and dignity of 'work' is the centre of this vision. The working condition is the primary state and a duty of being part of society:

'The most meaningful stake anyone can have in society is the ability to earn a living and support a family.'⁶⁸

⁶² Blair, *New Britain* p312

⁶³ Blair, *New Britain* p312

⁶⁴ 'Labour Targets Jobseekers Allowance' *The Observer* 23.6.96 p36

⁶⁵ Blair, *New Britain* p293

⁶⁶ Blair, *New Britain* p293

⁶⁷ Blair, *New Britain* p298

⁶⁸ Blair, *New Britain* p302

This particular definition of social inclusion is fundamentally economic and labour market based, and it presumes a consensus of interests:

'The purpose is simple - to ensure that the country works for the good of everybody, and everybody works for the good of the country.'⁶⁹

The claimed rationale of this political argument is an accurate 'knowledge' of 'the way things are'. This knowledge base allows a rhetoric of imperatives and realism to be spoken with authority. It positions those who articulate it as interpreters of 'the way the world is' and 'the way the world works', according to particular economic, global, market dictates that can be interpreted and managed. This construction of ideas does two things politically. First it allows the notion of consensus politics - if there are certain imperatives that make the world the way it is, then an accurate knowledge of what those imperatives are is a basis on which politicians can agree and by which good, 'rational' (as opposed to Left or Right-wing) judgement can proceed. Thus the possibility of being able to conceive of things as in the best interests of economy/country/society/welfare, as if that were an indisputable notion. Second it means that the power that particular groups have to change 'the way things are' can be understated, so in the face of global capital movements or the ineluctable development of markets, suggestions of alternative ways of talking and thinking are erroneous, irrational or unrealistic. In the conference's final plenary session that note was resounding. Tory MP John Biffen's address carried a summation of Stakeholding as offering up 'possibilities for Left and Right' and concluded that 'Labour would be unwise to take the radical course'. Labour MP David Blunkett talked about a 'breakdown in traditional sources of power' leading to a 'fragmenting society' as evidenced in one school in Sheffield where 'there's not a single child living with their natural father' and in the emergence of 'underclass': 'there are now underworlds in the neighbourhoods some of us were brought up in'. He then answered his question 'can real alternatives be offered by politicians' with a call for realism: 'let's not delude ourselves or our voters'; all they could promise was 'to make a difference'.⁷⁰

The so-called imperatives of the real world that so constrict political action are presented as those of technological and informational change, viewed through the language of the new (Times/Britain/Left/Labour), the post (modern/industrial/Ford/market) and the third (way/politics/revolution/age).⁷¹ The knowledge that is articulated and produced within

⁶⁹ Blair, *New Britain* p300

⁷⁰ David Blunkett MP, *Stakeholder Capitalism: Blind Alley or Best Hope?* Conference, Final Plenary, Sheffield University, March 1996

⁷¹ It is important to note and distinguish the political economy rhetoric of Third Ages and Post-Societies from the Cultural Studies strand of third spaces and post-structuralism that is rather about an epistemological shift. The main difference is how they conceptualise power: the former allows talk of

this mode of analysis has multiple sources - indeed that is its main characteristic and its prevalence as a discourse. It is applied widely across different spheres from Welfare (the restructuring imperative) to Business (the re-engineering imperative).⁷² The notion and rhetoric of Stakeholding thus merges political knowledge with contemporary business knowledges of the 'third age'. Indeed the book that pairs Hutton's society-wide notion of Stakeholding with economic management theory is written by the business economist John Kay.⁷³ Together their ideas are sometimes expressed as 'the Hutton-Kay' prescription'.⁷⁴ The part-formulation of Stakeholding as a management theory is evident in the political rhetoric of Stakeholding in terms of 'leadership', 'trust', 'flexibility' and 'the team'. Tony Blair has personally endorsed Kay's writings:

'Business leaders recognise that what New Labour is saying fits exactly with current thinking in industry... business advisers like John Kay and Charles Handy say that competitiveness and success comes from a Stakeholder approach.'⁷⁵

Of significance here is the extrapolation of these business writings directly into a political rationale for the way society should work. New Labour's belief in the benefits of reforming welfare by infusing policy thinking with business knowledges was clearly demonstrated in the 1997 post-election period with the Treasury's commissioning of Martin Taylor, chief executive of Barclays Bank. His brief was to work with senior civil servants, on ways to 'reduce poverty and welfare dependency'.⁷⁶ In Blair's *New Britain* the rhetoric and rationale of economic and business management abounds:

'We need to build a relationship of *trust* not just within a firm but within a society. By trust, I mean the recognition of a mutual purpose for which we work together and in which we all benefit. It is a Stakeholder economy...'⁷⁷

'The old means of achieving that on the Left was through redistribution in the tax and benefit regime. But in a *global economy* the old ways won't do.'⁷⁸

'The Stakeholder economy has a Stakeholder welfare system... today's *demands* and *changed lifestyles* require a more *active* conception of welfare.'⁷⁹

all-consuming imperatives and global ineluctables, the latter opens up different possibilities to speak for previously non-articulated differences

⁷² See for example George.V and Miller.S (1994) *Social Policy Towards 2000: Squaring The Welfare Circle* London: Routledge; Hammer.M and Stanton.S (1995) *The Re-engineering Revolution* London: Harper Collins

⁷³ Kay.J (1993) *The Foundations of Corporate Success: how business strategies add value* Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁷⁴ Leadbetter.C and Mulgan.G (1996) 'Stakeholding: Nice Idea Shame About the Reality' *The Observer* 6.10.96 p26

⁷⁵ From Tony Blair's speech in the Assembly Rooms, Derby 18.1.96 quoted in Blair, *New Britain* p293

⁷⁶ Quoted in 'Finished, or just getting started?' p10-13 *New Statesman* 30.1.98 p12

⁷⁷ Blair, *New Britain* p292

⁷⁸ Blair, *New Britain* p293

⁷⁹ Blair, *New Britain* p294

‘Working as a *team* is an effective way of working or playing a sport, or running an organisation. My point is that a successful country must be run the same way. That cannot work unless everyone feels part of the team, trusts it, and has a stake in its success and future.’⁸⁰

‘This is where a new economics of the centre and left of centre must go: towards an open economy working with *the grain of global change*.’⁸¹
(all my emphasis)

The representation of the Stakeholding project at the conference developed themes pertaining to the ‘underclass’ through particular rhetorics. The non-working as ‘outsider’; reality as global change with economic imperatives of ‘flexibility’; solutions as consensual ‘best interests’. In combination these rhetorics belie a particular middle class, economic and masculinist ethic. That ethic is crystallised in the argument for the centrality of paid work to both economic production and socialisation. It is the primary means of economic and social management; the primary generator of national wealth and social identity.

In order that this argument could be convincingly constructed, both the role of the conference speakers as key interpreters, and the space in which their knowledge was presented, needed to be strongly defined as authoritative and necessary to the process of changing the condition of ‘others’ which so affects ‘us all’ in the problem ridden space of the social. Their role and their knowledge is therefore indispensable to the problem they construct. Zygmunt Bauman has talked about this process as part of an historically developed ‘ideology of intellectuals’ in which the pictures of society they paint are self-portraits - visions of likeness to themselves:

‘...the ‘good society’ of which the heroes are believed to be agents, is a projection of the intellectual mode upon the society as a whole.’⁸²

The *right* knowledge is the qualification of the right to tell others - the not yet enlightened assembly and the un/disqualified elsewhere - of the interpreter’s own indispensability. That knowledge is legitimated as authoritative by its nature and the method of its production - conditions of authority which are met in the professional identity and presentation of intellectual labour. Through the deployment of such identities and practices a power-knowledge relation is constituted in which the professional interpreters of the conference have more in common with each other, regardless of stated political allegiance, than they have with the DSS claimant. In this way, the conference space as a space of social proximity based on shared identities and professional practices, expresses a unity (however internally

⁸⁰ Blair, *New Britain* p296

⁸¹ Blair, *New Britain* p296

⁸² Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters* p2

differentiated) *in relation to* the shared identities and practices of benefit claiming. Indeed the policy conference site is firmly located within a network of relations that requires the subjugation of 'other' knowledges for its own meaning, status and legitimacy. In order that the 'good society' can take form in the terms prescribed, those 'others' have to be told what is good for them, according to the imperatives of 'reality', known through the possession of objective knowledge, and instituted by knowledgeable practitioners. The promise of their vision of change/improvement/emancipation, is premised on the silence, subjugation and exclusion of others, from these authoritative spaces of knowledge production. The dynamic of 'inclusion' set up by the conference in their discourse of 'underclass' is therefore as follows: encouraged/coerced inclusion into particular sectors of the labour market (primarily low-skilled labour), effective exclusion from realms of policy debate and influence ('intellectual labour'). This is primarily a class-based division: the authoritative as cerebral is set against the unqualified as bodily as the historical substance of constructions of middle class/working class 'difference'.

The policy conference and DSS waiting room are spaces in which that difference is practically and symbolically reiterated. It is the difference between one space mapped as authoritative, knowledge producing and another as a domain of application for policy knowledge; the difference between knowing minds and unknowing bodies. The apparent necessity of reiterating the status of the conference within an intellectual domain had clearly been identified by the organisers. The self-presentation of *why this conference* is important and in what ways, was shot through the advertising and organisational literature, the conference address and summation. Such a proclamatory self-presentation, is a central part of the substantive business of Stakeholding as a new realm of ideas that requires the work of dissemination by the right people. Thus much of the pre-conference literature was concerned with setting out the relation between the conference and its academic location, under the aegis of the Political Economy Research Centre (PERC) at Sheffield University. In the manner of many large business organisations, PERC has a mission statement:

'...established to address the new problems of policy and theory raised by the world-wide economic and political transformations of the past decade. As the new millennium approaches, the old debates of state versus market and individualism versus collectivism have become obsolete, while traditional boundaries between academic disciplines have become barriers to understanding. New problems demand new solutions and these can be discovered only through dialogue between disciplines and between the worlds of the academy and of policy making.'

The first personally addressed contact letters sent out from PERC 'to invite you to a major international conference' set up a dynamic of inclusion that encouraged the idea of a natural constituency of participants, 'one of us' who should be part of the process of change:

‘Do not miss this chance to help set the agenda of economic and political debate’

‘We are very excited by its potential’

‘A forum for debate as a stimulus to new policy thinking’

The impetus of the conference was large scale change in political economies, world orders, nations, regions, institutions, all subject to transformation and requiring an equally Big Idea in order that its analysis and management do not defeat ‘us’. ‘Stakeholder Capitalism’ is thus positioned to take on the mantle of change, with help from its well connected friends, in which ‘the invited’ are flatteringly numbered.

The location of the conference within PERC as a springboard for debate and policy inspiration across academic, business and political realms signifies an approach to political change through making connections with other already powerful social domains. That aim has been explicitly theorised in terms of ‘connexity’ by the think tank Demos, centrally positioned in the networks of New Labour’s policy making.⁸³ ‘Connexity’ expresses the nature of social relations as networks, identifying the political need to think and act through networks, and to create new ones in the process. With regard to Stakeholding its logic is to move upwards and outwards, embedding professional knowledge in authoritative spaces in a network of relations. Hutton has taken his Stakeholding message to the business leaders, politicians and audiences who are already knowledgeable as specialists in some capacity - capacities that he deems valuable to his cause. Hutton’s chosen practices of disseminating Stakeholder knowledge seem to be based on an idea of intellectual trickle down: encouraging enlightened self-interest amongst social and economic elites which will work towards making things better for society as a whole. The approach certainly does not concern itself with trying to access ‘other’ already knowledgeable domains, whose specialisms and spaces are less well connected.

Social Security Knowledge

The Social Security knowledge that I am talking about in relation to the DSS waiting room is a knowledge about subsistence level benefit administration. As with the conference, in this section my focus is the nature of this formal knowledge, how it is presented and the sort of space that it constitutes in the process of its practice and production.

The DSS waiting room is set up as a domain of application for Social Security policy. Through it claimants know about contemporary discourses of welfare and welfare change, as a practical knowledge about a culture of benefit administration. The Jobseeker’s

⁸³ See Mulgan.G (1997) *How To Live In A Connected World* London: Chatto Windus

Act (1995) wrought enormous changes in that culture, represented as changes from a passive culture of welfare dependency to an active culture of Jobseeking. The Act has tried to institute a new knowledge regime, a whole framework of understanding about what being a benefit claimant is within the Government, Civil Service, DSS administrative staff, the wider public and claimants themselves. What does being a 'Jobseeker' mean? what does it involve in practice? what is expected of 'Jobseekers'? and what they can expect? The legislative frame sets up a regime which is then 'worked' by a number of groups including claimants. They may circumvent parts of it, develop different sorts of knowledges from it and have individual interpretations of what the 'official' regime of knowledge and practice means. A number of possibilities exist to partly shape individual claimant knowledges, but the position of the claimant in the Social Security system is nevertheless *set up* as a domain of policy application and regulation.

As the last major change to the Social Security system of a 17 year Conservative government, the JSA represents a concerted attempt to further regulate the lives of benefit recipients through a number of conditions, strictures and sanctions.⁸⁴ The Benefits Agency and Employment Service that administer the JSA are two of the six executive agencies of the Department of Social Security. Social Security administration within Benefit Agency offices is itself subject to a huge cost cutting reorganisation aiming to reduce administrative costs by 25% by 1999 and involving the sale of headquarters, management centres and prime high street sites to raise £750 million.⁸⁵ Part of this cost cutting exercise will involve greater use of technology, part will shift more of the onus to prove legitimacy of entitlement onto the claimant.⁸⁶ The JSA has already taken the conditions of benefit receipt in that direction. It has replaced a system of two differently rated benefits - Unemployment Benefit (UB) and Income Support (IS) - with a single unified benefit with the same rates of payment, administered either through the Job Centre for National Insurance contributions based benefit or the Benefits Agency for means-tested benefit. This change is meant to take away

⁸⁴ Since the election of a new Labour government (1997) the JSA has been supplemented with a welfare programme called the 'New Deal' for 18-24 year olds who have been unemployed for more than 6 months, starting nationally in June 1998. It is being established in the same framework of compulsion that characterises the JSA, making available four options of work (private sector, voluntary sector, environment taskforce, full-time education or training) but no 'fifth' option of remaining on benefits. Department of Education and Employment (1997) *Design of the New Deal for 18-24 year olds* London: DfEE

⁸⁵ Child Poverty Action Group (1997) 'Benefits Agency Change Programme' *Poverty* vol. 96 London: CPAG p13-15; 'Billion dollar man vies for DSS offices' *The Guardian* 24.7.96 p1

⁸⁶ Changes to benefit administration, in particular the use of new technologies to prevent 'fraud' which include electronic payment/identity cards for claimants without bank accounts, are part of a rolling programme of change initiated by the Conservative Minister for Social Security Peter Lilley, and developed in the new Labour government's Social Security Administration Bill (1997)

the distinction between contributory versus means-tested benefits, to group the 'jobless' together and make the overall reduction in benefits dependency the 'real issue.'⁸⁷

The JSA is part of a long line of changes within Social Security administration and legislation that has been developing in the direction of increased coercion and surveillance, evident in the tightening of 'availability for work' rules in which the claimant must produce more and more evidence that they are 'actively' seeking work and in the levels of personal accountability that are required as conditions for the receipt of benefit. For example the withdrawal of benefits for non-compliance with different aspects of the JSA regime will not be covered by hardship payments before claimants have clearly *demonstrated* that they are suffering hardship. This means that claimants can be left without any income whatsoever for weeks at a time. The Conservative government justified the introduction of this measure in the following terms:

'[the government] strongly believes that a claimant who makes a wrong choice in these circumstances must be personally accountable.'⁸⁸

In this respect the benefit systems that preceded the JSA, were not distinctly different from the JSA in their intentions to make benefit claiming difficult, demanding and demoralising, especially if means-tested. Rather the JSA represents an extension of already coercive and surveillant characteristics.⁸⁹ The knowledge that the claimant has of this system is highly attuned to the demands that it makes: what staff can and cannot make you do or do to your benefit; what you have to say and do to get round the most demanding aspects of 'availability for work' rules or to get priority status when only emergency payments are available from the Social Fund; the different interactions that are required between signing on and fortnightly interviews, the 13 week 'advisory' interviews, the 6 monthly Restart interviews, the 12, 18 and 24 month schemes. The claimant can be called in for an advisory interview at any time if the Employment Service thinks that there is a question over whether they are fulfilling the availability for work conditions. Employment Officers can decide to give individual 'help and attention' known as being 'caseloaded' for the long term unemployed who can be challenged about the things that seem to be preventing them from finding a job.⁹⁰

At the centre of the JSA administration and rationale is the 'Jobseeker's Agreement' which is set up as a contract between the claimant and government. In it the claimant must specify the number of times they will write to, phone and visit potential employers and

⁸⁷ *The Jobseeker's Bill* (1995) London: HMSO

⁸⁸ Government quote in 'Squeezing Claimants' *Red Pepper* June 1996 no. 25 p26

⁸⁹ The intensification of such developments through the 1980s is traced in detail in Dean.H (1991) *Social Security and Social Control* London: Routledge

⁹⁰ Poynter.R (1996) *Jobseeker's Allowance Handbook* London: CPAG p25

employment agencies on a weekly basis. The contract stipulates what the claimant's minimum terms and conditions for taking work will be. On a fortnightly basis the condition of 'actively seeking work' is tested by 'active signing' in which the officer uses a computer questionnaire based on the contracted agreement, to produce a 'score' to indicate whether the claimant is active enough. If the claimant under-scores the officer is mandatorily obliged to suspend benefit for two weeks.

Failure to agree to properly participate in, or attend, the interview regime or the schemes that are set up (for example 'job club' - four and a half days a week for 5-6 months making speculative approaches to employers) are met by two week minimum benefit sanctions.⁹¹ Sanctions for non-compliance with specific schemes are part of a wider sanction regime which covers: *directives* telling you to take specific action to help you find a job, such as a requirement to apply for a specific vacancy or to improve your appearance or behaviour in order to be more presentable to potential employers; and *misconduct rulings* following dismissal from employment or training schemes. There is a benefit sanction of non-payment from one week to six months depending on the seriousness of the misconduct, qualified by strictly defined criteria distinguishing 'good causes' from 'just causes', the latter being most arguable because the adjudication officer reaches the decision by:

'...balancing the claimant's interests against those of all the other contributors to national insurance. The claimant must show that they acted reasonably in leaving and that the circumstances of his case are such that the community should support them.'⁹²

Decisions by the adjudication officer to stop benefit, restrict or disallow other payments, can be taken up with the Social Security Appeal Tribunal System (SSAT). It is independent of the DSS and works through hearings in which a panel chaired by a lawyer will adjudicate on a claimant's case. However most claimants will not experience the tribunal system, and the DSS waiting room booth will be where irregularities, grievances and disputes are dealt with on an everyday basis.

The DSS waiting room is a central part of the highly structured knowledge regime that makes up this part of the Social Security system. Indeed it is the front-line between two different knowledges of that system where a legislative and administrative knowledge meets the meaning of benefit claiming as practical knowledge. The sort of space that meeting constitutes is of a hybrid nature. The DSS waiting room is a distinctly regulatory space that fits with coercive benefit legislation; it is also a space that tries to present a facade of customer service, pleasantness and co-operation; it can be a space of immanent or occurrent disorder and conflict, or compliance and orderly ticking over. The space is contradictory.

⁹¹ Poynter, *Jobseeker's Allowance Handbook* p20-21

⁹² Poynter, *Jobseeker's Allowance Handbook* p52

Perspex barriers between staff and claimants do not fit with the smiling faces of multicultural claimants on the wall posters. The presentation of a consumer ideology of choice and the lie of that choice within the same space does not fit either. Claimant knowledge is of the compulsory contract that is the JSA. It is knowledge of the meaning of welfare reform in practice. It is knowledge of the power relation between Social Security officials, the wider 'tax paying' society and government, and claimants. It is also a knowledge of the way the DSS authorities want to present policy, practice and your condition of existence through their waiting rooms. It is a deep and complex knowledge of the contradictions of 'Social Security', 'Rights and Responsibilities' and the 'Jobseeker's Agreement'.

This is all in contrast with the informational or presentational knowledge of the DSS. The DSS waiting room presents a particular knowledge of what Social Security is about as it supplies information in numerous posters, leaflets, and signs about itself. This is 'charter knowledge': the presentation of empowerment, rights, service, targets. The literature of this knowledge production is the leaflet and the poster.

Customer Charters set out to fulfil the 'rights' end of your 'contract' with the DSS. Individual offices display their service standards:

'You have a right to expect from us a service which is professional, efficient and courteous, which actively seeks and responds to your views and takes them into account.'

The standard statement makes clear the contractual nature of these 'rights':

'Our aim is for your payments to be right every time. You can help us to achieve these aims by giving the information we need to deal with your claims and enquiries. It is important that you keep us informed of all changes to your circumstances and that when contacting us you quote your National Insurance number... We cannot achieve our aims and targets without your assistance.'

Here the double-edged nature of assistance is made clear. Co-operation is framed as being mutually advantageous but on the part of the claimant it is compulsory, it demands self-policing and compliance in order that the security of your claim is not jeopardised. Significantly, whereas the responsibilities of the claimant are to comply with the directives which are stringent, coercive and set up for her, those of the DSS are platitudinous and self-defined. The 'Jobseeker's Charter' set out on the back of the 'Jobseeker contract' (ES3) lays out 'Our Commitment To You':

What you can expect from us: You can expect us to -

- wear a name badge and give our name when we answer the phone or write
- be polite, considerate, open and honest
- respect your privacy. In most cases we can provide a private room for sensitive interviews

- apologise if we get things wrong, explain what happened and put things right promptly

The rhetoric of this form of self-presentation co-exists with other sorts of presentation in the DSS waiting room that construct an altogether different knowledge about what sort of space the authorities believe it to be: burdensome, dangerous, threatening, unpredictable. Thus signs telling you not to smoke or drink; to inform you of the CCTV operating and to tell you that the police will be called after one warning about abusive behaviour. Leaflets advise on appropriate behaviour. The 'Help us to help you' leaflet advises:

'Don't abuse the office staff, they will listen to you and will always try to help'

'You may be angry, upset or confused at the time of the interview but please try to be patient and polite'

The co-existence of these contradictory approaches to the claimant - 'client-customer-poor person-anarchist' - mirrors the contradictory relation between the claimant and Welfare more generally. Benefits are the means by which your survival is made possible and also the means by which you are made to suffer indignity. You are tied up in a system that tries to subsume your identity into the role of the 'Jobseeker' in appearance, manner and occupation, and even tries to control what emotional responses to distress you are allowed in the DSS waiting room. The dynamic represents itself in terms of offering help and independence, whilst working to impose coercion and poverty. The relation is analogous to that constructed in the Stakeholding policy conference: a discourse of welfare change set up as being in the 'best interests' of claimants, effectively coerces them into realising interests that have been decided for them. Fundamentally this is a power-knowledge relation between the policy conference and DSS waiting room which means that *difference, conflict* and *alternative knowledges* can be subsumed and spoken for by authoritative commentators.

Although I have been mainly talking about the DSS waiting room as a site of subjugation, it is therefore also a site of knowledge about that subjugation. I do not intend to try to reveal the nitty-gritty of particular claimant knowledges but to briefly suggest how the nature of this knowledge relates to that of the conference in general terms.⁹³

The conference knowledge is part of a one-off 'event'. Authoritative figures converge in a space represented as the domain of the intellect, invitees come to partake of the superior knowledge of others and leave with more knowledge in their possession. Claimant knowledge is part of an ongoing relation with the Social Security system. The DSS

⁹³ My reasons for talking about authoritative and subjugated knowledges at different points throughout this thesis, include a desire to draw attention to the way these knowledges do not always fit together in the same writing space. I try to create a different kind of space for an extended discussion of some subjugated knowledges about living on subsistence benefits in Chapter 4, where I also discuss more fully the politics of 'revealing' 'poor' knowledges.

waiting room is a space that is about systemising non-working people - a sort of staging post for problematic bodies. Claimants are dealt with then discharged. Their knowledge of the system is routine and ordinary, textured and affective, a way of life, learnt the hard way. The meanings attached to those differences are both worlds apart, *and* totally related as a power-knowledge relation. Claimants experience that relation as a burden of meaning in which they are supposed to forget knowledge, conflict, and self-definition, and present themselves as worthy and accountable 'Jobseekers'. Their knowledge of the Social Security system, as a knowledge of class, subjugation, and survival, is currently deemed to require changes in benefit administration which would cut out the part played by the DSS waiting room as much as possible. The waiting room as a public and often conflictual space is to be increasingly displaced by the 'home visit'. As Minister for Welfare Reform, Frank Field MP has expressed the importance of establishing new local administrative regimes in which local benefit officers are empowered with organisational control. Officers he talked to on a 'fact-finding' excursion to Exeter expressed a preference for home visits:

'At office interviews, those claimants who should not be claiming have come well versed in how wrongly to claim benefit... there is no substitute for visiting claimants in their own homes.'⁹⁴

In the contemporary discourse of 'underclass', circumventive claimant knowledges are a target of control, while claimant knowledge of whatever kind, does not have much currency in the sorts of spaces that 'matter' enough to influence and effect policy change. It has a different spatiality to that of the conference which has the 'right' connections in a network of power relations.

Having Connections, or it's not what you know

The conference space, its participants, and its knowledges, are well-connected, already part of a network of relations which gives them an elite status. The Stakeholding conference was organised so as to embed and extend those connections in a way that would generate a network of interest and consensus in favour of Stakeholding. In this process of knowledge production and dissemination knowledge travels through time and space, is moulded and changed whilst simultaneously moulding and changing the things it meets, uses and crosses: people, policy, events, ideas. That is the nature of discourse. The process works through a network of relations, partly traceable through patterned effects.

The discourse of 'underclass', mediated in the policy conference through the ideas of Stakeholding, is given a particular impetus at the conference site. An already current idea of 'underclass' is given further shape, here specifically in relation to Stakeholding, as it is

⁹⁴ Field.F (1997) 'Give Them The Tools' *The Guardian* 12.8.97 p13

passed among a diverse group of participants spanning fields of media, business, politics, social policy and academia. 'Underclass' is produced as a symptomatic condition of 'the state we're in'.

As a new intellectual initiative the concept of Stakeholding intended to generate a momentum by launching a series of ideas and analyses that would be analogous to the sort of agenda setting and cultural agitation that attended Thatcherism. The start of this project was the launch of Hutton's book *The State We're In*, prefaced with his aim:

'My greatest hope is that the book will offer a way forward that is neither a return to the bastardised Keynesian corporatism of the 1960s and 1970s, nor the forced march towards a wholly deregulated market.'⁹⁵

Its afterword makes the connection between these ideas and an incoming Labour government:

'The next election will be a unique moment. For the first time for over thirty years there is a real possibility of a majority non-Conservative government aiming to move the country decisively in a new and democratic direction. Many now think this is vitally necessary, and I hope that this book can contribute to that shift.'⁹⁶

After being on the hardback best-seller list for more than six months, the book was released as a paperback in 1995 and in two years sold about 250,000 copies.⁹⁷ This success guaranteed media and political attention from all parties: Tony Blair's advocacy has already been detailed, on the Right the accusation was of a renewed ideology of corporatism/ or the theft of Thatcher's popular capitalism. Intellectuals on the Left tried to generate greater expectations:

'[Hutton's] influence on the next fifty years may yet prove to be as seminal as that of Keynes and Beveridge on the last fifty.'⁹⁸

'The state we've been in for 50 years and how a book could change it.'⁹⁹

'Hutton's book is the most important produced on the Left since Tony Crosland's 'Future of Socialism' more than 30 years ago.'¹⁰⁰

'The reality is that Stakeholding had become an important idea, developed by the most coherent and purposeful group of left-of-centre reformers now on the scene.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Hutton, *The State We're In* Preface: xxix

⁹⁶ Hutton, *The State We're In* p343

⁹⁷ Personal communication from Vintage publishers

⁹⁸ Marquand.D and Seldon.A (1996) *The Ideas That Shaped Post-War Britain* London: New Statesman/Fontana p3

⁹⁹ Ascherson.N (1996) 'The State We've Been In For 50 years And How A Book Could Change It' *The Independent on Sunday* 4.2.96 p28

¹⁰⁰ Leadbetter.C and Mulgan.G (1996) 'Stakeholding: Nice Idea Shame About The Reality' *The Observer* 6.10.96 p26

¹⁰¹ Hall.S, Massey.D and Rustin.M (1996) 'What is at Stake?' p5-16 *Soundings* 2 p7

Total alignment with the ideas of Stakeholding was not a feature of all these commentaries but a sense of its importance, its landmark proportions and potential political impact was.

The figure of Will Hutton has been pivotal in sustaining the movement of the Stakeholding train in this direction. His position as the originator of the idea was already well-connected as economics editor of *The Guardian* newspaper, having been economics correspondent for BBC2's *Newsnight* for 5 years, as a member of the governing council of the Policy Studies Institute, the Institute for Political Economy and Charter '88, and a governor of the London School of Economics. In many respects Stakeholding has come across as Hutton's personal project. His style of mission-like zeal to persuade people of his message is in ample evidence in the 'False Economy' programmes broadcast by Channel Four in the summer of 1996 which trace him touring business groups, new City employees and top company directors. He has also been able to use his editor positions in two sister broadsheet newspapers that are politically Left of centre, to publish both his own articles and commission others that engage with the Stakeholding idea.¹⁰² Clearly Hutton has been able to draw on his considerable communicative resources which are part of the privileges of his social position, in order to construct an audience for his ideas. The broadly successful 'response' to them must be located within an understanding of the extent of those resources as a power to disseminate knowledge. That power is not just about a personal position but its meaning as a juncture of relations. Those relations are personal, social and historical. Personal in terms of friendships, intermarriages, relations with colleagues and acquaintances. Social in terms of links with associations, organisations and institutes, research bodies and think-tanks which set and react to each other's agendas. Those which have been closely associated with the Hutton/Stakeholding project are the Policy Studies Institute (PSI), the Social Market Foundation (SMF), the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Demos, and Nexus.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Hutton.W (1996) 'Stake that claim' *The Guardian* 9.1.96 p13 ; 'Trust me, says Blair, as he raises the stakes' Editorial, *The Observer* 14.1.96 p3; 'Labour would transfer powers' *The Guardian* 13.1.96 p9; Phillips.M (1996) 'Just another soundbite or a policy with teeth?' *The Observer* 14.1.96 p9; Hutton.W (1996) 'The Stakeholder Society: how it might work' *The Guardian Tabloid* 17.1.96 p2; 'Blair insists Stakeholding is about giving power to all' *The Guardian* 19.1.96 p2; Hutton.W (1996) 'Raising the stakes' *The Guardian Tabloid* 17.1.96 p2; Mulgan.G (1996) 'A high stake in society' *The Guardian* 30.1.96 p13; Marquand.D (1996) 'New Labour needs a new world view' *The Observer* 7.4.96 p26; Phillips.M (1996) 'Duty is in the eye of the stakeholder' *The Observer Review* 30.6.96 p5; Leadbetter.C and Mulgan.G (1996) 'Stakeholding: Already Yesterday's Big Idea?' *The Observer* 6.10.96 p26; Lang.I (1996) 'Stakeholding is wrong' *The Observer* 16.2.97 p25

¹⁰³ A brief profile of each of these think-tanks reveals the nature of their connection to Stakeholding. The PSI was set up in 1978 with a social policy brief; Hutton serves as a governing council member. The SMF was started up in the mid 1980s by the multi-millionaire David Sainsbury, as the think-tank of Owenite Social Democrats with a centrist free market brief; David Marquand, director of PERC, co-editor of *Political Quarterly* (conference sponsors), SJC committee member, was a founder board member. IPPR was set up under Neil Kinnock as the first Left-wing think-tank, in order to spearhead Labour's intellectual fightback; IPPR was centrally involved in the setting up and publication of the *Report of the Commission on Social Justice* (1994) which provides much of the basis of Hutton's

The historical relations that mean Stakeholder knowledge can be so widely and influentially disseminated are relations of ideas about political change. Since the 1970s these have developed in a particular direction on the Left, that could be generally described as a move away from statism towards a politics of civil society. Stakeholding is very much a successor idea of developments associated with that move, and as such is part of a wide network of people and ideas from different arenas that see themselves as broadly politically aligned. They act through networks of support, attend the same conferences and events, subscribe to the same journals and magazines, and have a shared political vocabulary that has developed to articulate the meanings around mixed economies of public and private, social markets, market socialism.¹⁰⁴ In common these different groupings have addressed the Labour party's modernisation project in relation to themselves and have been engaged with in turn by the Labour party leadership. Indeed there has been an eagerness to sustain an 'ideas culture' with a philosophy that is neither ideologically Right or Left. From the late 1980s the source of such ideas for political renewal shifted through the generation of a think-tank culture - initiated by Margaret Thatcher's use of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and the Adam Smith Institute as mainsprings for her policy ideas. The think-tank rationale is that by not having to follow a party political line, ideas can be provocative, radical and above all new. It is one that is ideally suited to the Stakeholding project, and relatedly to the discourses of citizenship, communitarianism, empowerment, community, rights and responsibilities. It has been called a new political approach to Ideas, by those who are part of it:

'Think-tanks, policy forums, networks of pro-Labour academics: an unprecedented campaign is being waged by Tony Blair and his lieutenants to win the battle of ideas. The Blair rationale is simple. Margaret Thatcher triumphed because she changed the climate of opinion, had a programme to implement and carried the electorate. Labour must do the same.'¹⁰⁵

A number of academics are associated with this trend, most notably professor Anthony Giddens at the London School of Economics.¹⁰⁶ Giddens is said to have regular contact with Tony Blair after being invited to discuss his understanding of 'the way problems such as the

concept of Stakeholder Welfare. Demos was founded in 1993, by *Marxism Today* editor Martin Jacques and Geoff Mulgan; Director Geoff Mulgan has been a commentator on Stakeholding and is now a key figure in the Labour's 'Number 10 policy unit' with a 3 day-a week brief to re-think Welfare ('Blair tries to end vicious circle' *The Guardian* 9.12.97 p8). Nexus was set up in 1996 to provide an intellectual forum (mainly via the Internet) for New Labour; its Parliamentary Co-ordinator is Tony Wright MP, co-editor of *Political Quarterly*, the conference sponsors.

¹⁰⁴ These definitional developments around a new sort of politics on the Left are traced in Wright.T (1996) *Socialisms: Old and New* London: Routledge

¹⁰⁵ Adonis.A (1997) 'Blair and the Brains' *The Observer* 12.1.97 p16

¹⁰⁶ Adonis, *Blair and the Brains* p16

family, the underclass and the Welfare State have leapt up the political agenda.¹⁰⁷ He has been part of a small group of thinkers on Welfare selected by Tony Blair to attend two high prestige meetings named 'Chequers One' (December 1997) and 'Chequers Two' (February 1998).¹⁰⁸ These lengthy 'think-ins' have been promoted as a way for Centre-Left governments to learn from a transatlantic exchange of ideas on domestic issues such as crime, welfare and the family, commonly seen as the preserve of the Right and forged by the Thatcher-Reagan relationship. The translation of American ideas about Welfare into the British context, is a key part of 'underclass' discourse.¹⁰⁹ It is most evident in the kind of terminology that is shared (underclass, welfare dependency, workfare/welfare to work, tough love/hard choices) and the turn towards behavioural accounts of poverty. For example, in *Beyond Left and Right: the future of radical politics* Giddens identifies Charles Murray's criticisms of the Welfare State as having some merit;¹¹⁰ and the Treasury's most recent idea of putting 'welfare' into the pay packets of poor working families via tax credits, rather than giving welfare benefits to poor, non-working families, is directly taken from the idea of the American Earned Income Tax Credit.¹¹¹

The dense network quality of associations within the realm of cultural and political commentary around 'underclass' does not necessarily amount to a consensus. Rather the network is characterised by shifting alliances over relatively short time periods, and often contradictory positions when different figures articulate their ideas in different spaces. While networked sites cannot be regarded as a unified group in terms of interests, they still remain networked even when they are partially in conflict. This is a central characteristic of the way 'underclass' discourse primarily works as a *classed* power-knowledge relation, in which the working class poor are produced as 'the excluded' even by those who claim to represent their interests. It is well illustrated in the way that Stakeholder knowledge draws on the *Report of the Social Justice Commission* to develop its concept of Stakeholder Welfare. The propositions of the report for 'welfare to work' proposals, derived from its basic definition of social inequality and citizenship in terms of inclusion and exclusion from the labour market, are adopted by Stakeholding discourse. The welfare policy stream of the conference is presented by Ruth Lister, who together with David Marquand was a member of the Social Justice Commission. The Commission's report does give emphasis to the idea

¹⁰⁷ Giddens quoted in 'Blair's backroom boffins make strange bed fellows' *The Sunday Times* 8.1.95 p8

¹⁰⁸ 'Chequers Two Beckons' *The Observer* 1.2.98 p20

¹⁰⁹ The subject of American-British links with regard to 'underclass' discourse requires a much longer account than I have room to cover here. Rather it is my intention to note these links as a significant part of extensive networks which are almost limitless in terms of their proliferating connections but need to be bound at some point when they are written about

¹¹⁰ Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*

¹¹¹ 'Tax Plan To Help Jobless' *The Guardian* 10.5.97 p1

of giving voice to the objects of welfare policy, its 'Outreach' section deals specifically with political exclusion. Yet the conference space is clearly exclusionary to these people. That contradiction was even voiced in the session that Lister chaired at the Stakeholder conference, and was recognised, but not addressed in terms of the *productivity* of 'underclass' discourse itself. The identification of a problem 'them' - 'the excluded' - continued in the conference session as the necessary half of the project of 'inclusion', excluded by definition *and* practice, that is *through* discourse. The 'in common-ness' of the conference delegates is their proximity, the inclusivity of *their* shared spaces: in print, on the television, where they live and socialise, and at conferences such as this.

The conference represented a concerted attempt to network ideas, people and institutions. The networking roles performed are explicit, practiced as mutually advantageous power relations between publishing interests, delegates and the conference organisers. This is the deal of attendance. Active promotion of 'the network' is central to the conference's work, the network being recognised as the condition of Stakeholding's success as an idea and as a practical, political strategy. A Stakeholder society works by 'networks of co-operative, working relationships cemented by trust'¹¹² and it requires networks of the right sorts of people, with the right sorts of knowledge, in the right sorts of spaces to bring that about. The conference unites all three, and anticipates the nature of social networks beyond this site, where the work of individual Stakeholder advocates will be generative of success. In the words of one speaker, and as Latour himself might have said:

'...there is no 'capitalism' to fight battles; there are academics, practitioners and straddlers, acting as individuals, or in the context of institutions with which they are associated.'¹¹³

This networked space is a space where understandings are shared: delegates know what 'all this' is about, it is part of who they are. The fact that there are ambivalent and contradictory relations between this group does not detract from a shared elite status whose power is to make its presence felt (in multiple ways) at a distance, in spaces such as the DSS waiting room. It does however mean that their networks can be potentially de/re-routed, that they are not monoliths.

The conference power networks make possible very different kinds of connections to those which produce the knowledges, identities and spaces of claimant cultures. The DSS waiting room is one site in a network of relations through which knowledges of 'Social Security' are produced, presented and changed. Just as Stakeholder knowledge is produced

¹¹² Hutton and Kay, *Only working together will save the economy* p26

¹¹³ Knight, *An Agenda For Consideration*

in relation to other spaces such as think-tanks, so Social Security knowledges are linked to other spaces in a process of knowledge production. In this section I have mainly been interested in looking at the front-line space of the DSS waiting room as a primary site of application for dominant welfare knowledges; however I think it is also important to at least note that the DSS waiting room also exists in social networks of its own, which include other spaces of knowledge production, if not spaces specifically set up for that purpose. These may be neighbourhood or social activity based shops, playgroups, pubs, community centres, credit unions, food co-ops, Lets schemes (local exchange and trading networks), tenant groups and CBEDs (community based economic development schemes).¹¹⁴ Indeed some of these are part of highly developed community based social networks in which claimant status is more than tangential. It is the part of people's identities that is the very reason for social activities that are about everyday existence and survival in poverty. It is not my intention here to 'ethnograph-ise' these networks or the knowledges which partly constitute them, that kind of knowledge is the subject of Chapter Four and I want to present it as part of a different kind of space to that of more formal 'social networks'. This is not to say that such networks are not important in the role they play. It is not only the conference that is embedded in networks of representational spaces: it is worth briefly signposting what the equivalent networks of the DSS waiting room may be.

In terms of the daily, weekly, fortnightly and the less regular practices that being a benefit claimant involves, there are a whole range of different places which claimants move between - from the Job Centre, to local council offices, estate management offices, medical benefits agencies, unemployment offices, and Social Services - that make up their geographies of everyday life. The meanings and practices that characterise these sites are partly productive of claimant identities and knowledges - often based on struggles for basic needs provision and some autonomy in that process. These sites are often linked to the subject of formal welfare advocacy/representation. So for example there are links maintained with these sites by DSS management staff who also hold liaison meetings with social and probation services, Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB), Welfare Rights organisations and organisations campaigning around poverty such as the Child Poverty Action Group and its Citizen's Rights Office. Primarily these links have been used to establish complaint and equality of opportunity procedures within those different sites. The provision of help and advice for claimants to pursue their welfare interests with statutory agencies, is made by CAB, local law centres and Social Services who often have advocates to speak with or for the claimant to strategically negotiate the system of benefit entitlement and related needs provision. Through such representations links between particular needs

¹¹⁴ See Ronnby.A (1996) *Mobilising Local Communities* London: Avebury Press

and formal rights are made - where advocate knowledge of the system and its wider legal framework is the basis of the relationship to the claimant. It is another power-knowledge relation. It either speaks by proxy or facilitates the claimant to speak specifically about her needs/entitlement. It is not there to dispute the terms or level of that entitlement or to promote endogenous welfare knowledges of the claimant.

Sites of claimant knowledge networks that are about speaking more politically orientated discourse that perhaps engages at a polemical level are few. Those which work at a grass-roots level in positions of self-advocacy are the clearest forum for the sorts of claimant knowledges that are produced in relation to the DSS waiting room. They include claimants unions which made up a strong network in the 1960s and 70s (now less prolific), unemployed worker's centres set up in the late 1970s and 80s under independent control, and locally based anti-poverty alliances.¹¹⁵ The widespread dissemination of experiences and knowledges from such groupings is dependent on channels to speak to local or national media publics for example, being provided for them. As far as this power relation with the media is concerned, what claimants can say, how, when and where they say it is not within their sphere of influence. Their practices are often more about self and collective support, and maintaining self worth and dignity, than they are arguing their positions in the media. However, increasingly those practices intersect as the links between media and political representation are recognised as being fundamental to psychological and material experiences of poverty. The Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) is a grass roots national organisation of single parent groups - such as the Brixton Young Single Mothers Group and Glasgow's Allsorts Young Parents Group - which has networking and media influence as a core aim. Members are advised on the benefits of networking in terms of :

'...information exchange; developing relationships of solidarity; developing a sense of common purpose on the basis of shared values and identity; negotiating and articulating a collective view on issues which are relevant to participating members.'¹¹⁶

Such network relations are also conceived of as outward reaching into other advocacy organisations and the media, but in practice are trammelled by both a lack of material resources, by a lack of time (the work of those involved must fit in with the time consuming

¹¹⁵ The National Welfare Rights Movement in America is often referred to as representing the apex of such grass roots strategic organisation around welfare identity. At its height in 1969 the organisation had approximately 25,000 members, the vast majority of whom were African-American women with children who claimed benefits and demanded benefit increases as rights of citizenship, motherhood, and consumption. See Kornbluh.F (1997) 'To Fulfil Their "Rightly Needs": Consumerism and the National Welfare Rights Movement' p76-113 *Radical History Review* 69. Significantly, much welfare rights organising at this time took place in the waiting rooms of local welfare centres, where claimants had come to 'negotiate grievances', see Fox Piven.F and Cloward.R.A (1971) *Regulating The Poor* London: Tavistock Public p327

¹¹⁶ 'What Is Networking?' p7 *SPAN Newsletter* 10 July 1997 Bristol: SPAN

nature of parenting in poverty) and by the limited status of the knowledges they convey. The expert-advocate remains a preferred media source, connecting more efficaciously with the languages, practices and technologies of those parts of the network that produce the dominant discourse of 'underclass'.

It is nevertheless important to note that there is marked differentiation within institutional sites of media, politics and academia whose internal dynamics can produce unpredictable and contradictory lines of connection to claimant knowledges. The *Campaign to Defend the Welfare State* within the parliamentary Labour Party is at odds with the party leadership line on public spending commitments, and together with other prominent detractors of the current direction of welfare reform can be seen as an internal coalition of dissent.¹¹⁷ There are a number of academics who are fierce critics of their own intellectual traditions and practices with regard to 'poverty research' and the direction of government policy.¹¹⁸ Such examples may be limited but they have also generated considerable noise within and beyond their own spaces of authority. They show that the network of relations that generates 'underclass' discourse is not about relations between unified sites but that those sites are often internally differentiated and their allegiances shift over time.

Those indeterminacies mean that only a close and ongoing analysis of the network - its constitutive practices and relations - can reveal the nature of power workings within it. In this section I have shown how the power-knowledge networks of the Stakeholder policy conference and DSS waiting room are qualitatively different. Stakeholder knowledge spans elite spaces, has figureheads and high media profiles, its means of producing and exchanging related knowledges are extensive, its academic knowledges merge with business and government knowledges (even in conflict), its language is inter-disciplinary and international, it can act as if the world is its own to traverse. The social policy academic Peter Beresford has noted that whereas many other subjugated groups have found forums to develop their own debates and knowledges - notably feminist, black and gay groups - the poor have not:

'Poverty is the one issue...where this hasn't happened, so far. It is a last bastion of people's exclusion from discussions of which they are the subjects.'¹¹⁹

One important reason that this should be so is that the specific meanings through which poor people are 'known' disqualify them from participating in the discourse of elite spaces,

¹¹⁷ The *Campaign To Defend The Welfare State* organise through events like lobbies and rallies on the eve of Budgets and through small conferences of their own on the future of Welfare. The emergent opposition to New Labour's Welfare reform within the Labour party is traced in Wintour.P (1997) 'The Resurgence of the Left' *The Observer* 5.10.97 p24

¹¹⁸ For example Beresford.P and Croft.S (1995) 'It's our problem too! Challenging the exclusion of poor people from poverty discourse' p75-93 *Critical Social Policy* Issue 44/5

¹¹⁹ Beresford and Croft, *It's our problem too!* p77

including those which formally represent them. This network of power-knowledge relations - of classed understandings about 'them' produced by 'us' - was evident in the conference's shared plenaries, in the acknowledgement of mutual 'respect' between political opponents ('despite our differences'), in the conference networking, and in the consensus around the use of the term 'welfare dependency' and the 'imperative' of ending it. The next section turns to the ways in which these power-knowledge relations are constituted through different kinds of social spaces, through practices of *work*. Working practices are part of the *modus operandi* of power, that produce the conference and waiting room spaces as unequally significant sites of welfare discourse in relation to each other.

4: WORKED SPACES

Holding Power in Place: The Worked Space of the Stakeholder Policy Conference and DSS Waiting Room

‘Things do not hold because they are true, they are true because they hold’ - Bruno Latour¹²⁰

‘I want to thank all those who have made this conference possible - the sponsors, the chairs, the audio-visual department, the porters, catering department and marshals... and you for acting on this important chance to shape ideas’ - Stakeholder Conference Organiser

‘Security Cameras are permanently recording in this area. Thank you for your co-operation’ - DSS waiting room sign

Why ‘Work’?

The conference on Stakeholding worked. It ran smoothly according to plan and was thus able to do what it set out to. Primarily this was to provide a forum in which the ideas of a number of ‘opinion formers’ could be exchanged and shaped with regard to the Big Idea espoused by the conference organisers. For this to be achieved and the conference named a success, systemised, practical organisation was required. That *work* involved a number of people holding particular practical skills - from cleaners to camera men - and a whole array of physical resources - from buildings to fax machines. The conference, an apparently ideational event, was therefore also an immensely practical achievement. As far as its presentation and its functioning were concerned, it *held* together, it was credible, it rose to the occasion of a political launch.

DSS waiting rooms also work. They facilitate the management of some of the most problematic, confrontational aspects of the Social Security system in every large town and city in Britain. In order that this is achieved with minimal levels of controversy, containable levels of claimant dissatisfaction and maximum levels of administrative efficiency, a complex machinery of human and non-human resources are needed. Perspex fronted booths, claimant record systems, CCTV cameras, digital queue systems and security guards, all allow DSS waiting rooms to *work* from 9 ‘til 4.30 in a more or less uniform manner across the country. The achievement of government efficiency targets, the processing of claimants’ financial crises, the general ticking over of the Social Security system’s most dysfunctional and awkward outcomes, is therefore no small achievement. And yet much like the

¹²⁰ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* p63

conference, the appearance of the benefit office at work is one of relative ease and the experience for those who attend and know how these places work, one of habitual normality.

The theme of 'worked space' which is addressed here is about the elaborate process of work which sustains such appearances. It is not making a case for either the DSS or conference having an entirely mechanistic, consensually achieved or unified effect as far as participation in those processes is concerned but is about the organisational efficiency of these places and this is not simply a matter of operational interest. It ensures the instrumentality of particular power relations. It is the bricks and mortar, or the fax and form of particular welfare practices. At a conceptual level this is about how the workings of power are practically produced and sustained. As is suggested by Latour's opening quote, it is about the way things 'hold together', how they work, and come to have the appearance of normality, order, truth, as if naturally occurrent - 'the way things are'.

The mechanics, the practical achievement of the way things are, is a particular aspect of power working within this part of the discourse of 'underclass'. To study those mechanics, is therefore to study part of the nature of this power. First of all I will look at the most 'solid' parts of the conference and waiting room sites, their physicality as it were. I will then shift to the sites as organisational spaces that are systemised, bureaucratised, technologised - this is the primary 'work' and achievement of both sites.

The Building Blocks of Power

I have been talking about 'the policy conference' and 'the DSS waiting room' as if they might be generic entities. This is because I have been to a good few conferences both academic and political since being a student and sat in many DSS waiting rooms and there *is* a generic quality about both sorts of spaces. The sameness of the feeling of being in both derives from an indivisible mix of physical, social and symbolic relations. The look of each is notable for being a particular sort of building - universities (red brick, 1960s/70s modernism, or a mix of both), and council buildings (modern office blocks or old town hall architecture). Their interior areas are distinguishable in details of style rather than purpose. The conference site has reception areas, theatres with stacked seating, halls with rowed seating, furniture dominated seminar rooms, canteen areas. The waiting room site has rows of open windowed booths, rows of small cubicles with doors, geometrically laid out seating areas, queue divides and barriers. The layouts of both conferences and waiting rooms are about accommodating, organising and moving groups of people for a particular purpose around public buildings.

The physical differences between the two sites are considerable: they are very different kinds of public buildings with access for different kinds of publics. The association

of particular 'publics' with particular buildings is a social-symbolic relation. Buildings which are readily associated with particular people may be used by them but it is the powerful nature of the visibility and knowledge about this use that gives it meaning. That meaning is tied up in the activities and status of the people themselves as they represent themselves and are represented to each other and the wider world. The Stakeholding conference and DSS waiting room sites are produced as meaning-ful and power-ful spaces through such a physical-social-symbolic relation.

The main venue and focus of the policy conference was Firth Hall which is the central chamber of Firth Court, Sheffield University's central administration building. Firth Court is an impressive, church-like red brick building set back from the main road by a short driveway, you *approach* it. Wide steps take you up to a tall arched doorway and through to an entrance hall of archways and high ceilings which face straight onto a grand central stairway. Walking up the stairs I definitely felt as if I had 'arrived', dwarfed by architectural grandeur and suddenly by the possible magnitude of the event itself. The main area in which we were all convened once up the stairway, was a huge wood panelled hall lined with large portraits of University and Civic notaries from the past, all men. Rows of chairs stretched across the floor separated by a wide central aisle, cross cut half-way by another. At the front of the hall a raised stage served as the rostrum from which the speakers and panel members would talk. It was adorned with palms and other greenery, and above it two large flags draped from a horizontal length of pole in an ornately structured wooden arc - one Union Jack and one bearing a golden, Latinate University insignia. Two of these University flags also draped from the back of the hall. On the rostrum was a large rectangular table from which the speakers rose to address the audience, at a lectern situated pulpit-like at its side. And there we sat, apparently united beneath symbols of nation and academe, as distinguished speakers delivered their take on Stakeholding. Other parts of the conference were held in standard lecture theatre workshops and smaller modern reception rooms but Firth Hall was the main event - the place to which we arrived and departed from, enlightened as to what Stakeholding might mean to our political futures.

The DSS waiting room can appear like an airport lounge or the sort of large communal waiting rooms you used to have at bus stations. Usually it is a mixture of both: a bus station with pot plants and a telly. I am going to describe the waiting room that is Euston's district DSS office - probably one of the bigger waiting rooms and most busy, it is also the one I spent most time in.

Euston DSS is part of a large grey stone old building on the main road, a short walk to the right as you come out of the railway station. The standard orange and blue 'Social Security' sign is fixed next to one of the building doorways which you enter to the 'initial

reception' in an ante-room of the main waiting room. As soon as you enter the building there are signs warning about behaviour that will mean you will not get seen at all. These signs proliferate and repeat themselves in different ways on the walls, doors and cubicle fronts:

ANYONE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS WILL NOT BE SEEN.

VIDEO CAMERAS ARE PERMANENTLY RECORDING IN THIS AREA, THANKYOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION.

CCTV CONSTANTLY MONITORS THIS AREA.

RECEPTIONISTS WILL REFUSE TO SEE ANYONE WHO USES ABUSIVE OR THREATENING BEHAVIOUR.

PLEASE NOTE STAFF WILL REFUSE TO SEE ANYONE WHO IS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL. ONE WARNING WILL BE GIVEN AND THEN THE POLICE WILL BE CALLED.

In the Euston office there is also a tatty old sticker on the waiting room door: 'Think you're a bit of an anarchist? Organise for class struggle.'

The layout of Euston waiting room is like other offices in terms of where things are in relation to each other. Rows of metal chairs are joined together and fixed to the floor, as are the seats at each booth window. There's a Coke machine and wall mounted TV in the corner opposite a CCTV monitor. The grey stone floor is strewn with small bits of litter. Two toilets which lead straight off the waiting room are locked so you have to ask a security guard if you want to use them, most people don't. Under a sign that reads 'DSS serving the community' there is a notice board full of DSS information posters showing smiling multicultural claimants. A digital strip notice board flicks on continuous play:

'ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICE? HELP US TO HELP YOU, USE CUSTOMER SERVICES. NO FOOD OR DRINK ALLOWED IN THE OFFICE'

Another digital strip flashes up the last ticket number that was called so you know where you are in the queue. A voicecom announcement tells you when your ticket is up. Euston DSS is a dingy, depressing place and it does get to you. It is the sort of place that you would want to avoid and want to get out of as quickly as possible. But it's a busy office and there's nothing you can do about it. You sit with your ticket and you wait.

In describing both conference and waiting room, the impossibility of separating the physical nature of the sites from the practices that go on there and the meanings that imbue

them, is clear. Indeed it is these practices which make these sites what they are, rather than their walls and ceilings per se. The meanings which attend these practices are a constituent part of the power relations that position the conference and waiting room in relation to each other as different sorts of social spaces. The main conference hall is a room that speaks of tradition, authority and power, while the waiting room speaks of the power of subjugation. You experience those qualities as feelings that are somehow part of the buildings themselves.

The nature of both sites is therefore an indivisible relation of meaning and practice. At the Stakeholder conference site the signs and symbols of academic authority combine with organisational practices of policy debate to produce a site of manifest power in which particular identities and knowledges can be produced as authoritative. There is a coincidence of practice, meaning and physical design - authority figures present important knowledge within a commanding architecture. Everything seems to fit.

In 1988 many DSS waiting rooms were refurbished by refitting them with new logos and fixtures. Some of their functions were relocated to information centres, contactable by freephone only, so face-to-face interaction between staff and claimants was stopped for particular kinds of problems. These changes were intended to institute a different kind of claimant practice and regime of meaning as part of a new consumer ideology promoted by the government in all welfare sectors and conveyed in the Benefits Agency promotional slogan 'benefits are our business, customers our concern'. The idea was to re-position the claimant as the client-customer-consumer, and through environmental and organisational changes in waiting rooms induce different kinds of claimant behaviour and attitude. The result is that in some waiting rooms pleasant appearances belie the meaning of organisational practices. Because Euston DSS has not been done up, the meaning of those practices is more visible. But in the pleasant appearance of some DSS waiting rooms, there is a deep incongruity that feels like a cover-up. However it is also a cover which quite often slips because the organisational practices so contradict the facade of pleasantness. Conflict is inherent in the staff-claimant relation because of those practices. In this regard pleasant surroundings are often a further cause of aggravation because of the incongruity they express. It is to those organisational practices that I now turn as the substance of the power relation which makes the sites what they are in *relation* to each other. They are both organised, systemised, technologised, surveilled spaces, but not in the same way.

Systems and Technologies of Power

This is obviously not a comparison of like with like: the DSS is not a forum for the presentation and debate of claimant knowledges, conferences are different to waiting rooms

because of differences in purpose. However I am not talking about equivalence of function. The connection is that they are united *and* divided by a power relation. It is the productive power relation of policy debate-benefit claiming that constitutes the sites as different sorts of spaces. The nature of this power relation can partly be revealed by looking at the constitutive practices of the conference and waiting room sites.

The workings of both sites are carefully systemised. Both systems are made up of technological and bureaucratic sorts of practices. They produce and sustain particular sorts of social relations.

When you arrive at the DSS waiting room you are already part of the Social Security system, your life is already conditioned by regulatory requirements and waiting room practices are an expression and extension of those processes. If there is an initial reception in the waiting room, a DSS officer asks about your inquiry and if it is short or general may deal with you there. Alternatively you may be directed to the freephones in the main waiting room which deal with some Social Fund, National Insurance contribution and Child Support inquiries through management centres in Glasgow, Newcastle and Belfast. Otherwise you are given a numbered ticket which you take into the main waiting room where you sit until your number is called out. At that point you take up the next vacant booth. That is the system at Euston DSS. The waiting systems vary slightly between different area offices - tickets can be dispensed from a machine when you go in, or you have to stand in a queue from when you arrive and wait anything up to an hour on your feet before seeing anyone. This includes old and ill people and mothers with young children or women who might be pregnant. Waiting is the thing most people complain about in the standing queues and on the seats.

Once installed at a booth window there is an interview of sorts through which your problem is entered into the Social Security system for appropriate action. It is highly based on the claimant giving personal information. Form filling is integral to the process. Each form is known by a number and has an explanatory leaflet to go with it: the Social Fund application is SF33, the Appeal Form NI246, the Jobseeker's Agreement ES3. The system works according to a process of disclosure, questioning, further disclosure, assessment and action/instruction. Much of the officer's work and skill centres on extracting, soliciting, demanding information from the claimant. 'Making yourself accountable' and responding appropriately to interventions is the expected condition of benefit claiming. Help, on their terms, depends on the claimant's information. It is the 'confession' of poverty and it positions the officer as the source of 'delivery'.

Within the DSS waiting room that basic procedural system is shored up by a whole range of technologies from the time ordering mechanisms of the staff; internal and external

distribution systems; freephones to central information management centres; televisions for waiting claimants to watch; digital display systems; microphones behind dividing Perspex barriers. These are not only 'props' to the system, they are part of its lifeblood that make the system what it is. They all serve a purpose which in such a well thought out and budgeted environment, is never superfluous. Primarily that purpose is to ensure order and to remove from the claimant both the opportunity and the inclination for conflict. The Social Security computer system and the CCTV monitors are two of the main technologies in that service.

In September 1997 the Social Security computer databank held records of 77 million names each one identified by a unique code of three letters and six digits - called the NINO or national insurance number.¹²¹ This information is not just kept about benefit claimants but it is used by the DSS as their main identification tag. It is the NINO that carries the details of each claim, how much it is and when it should be paid. The security of that number is an essential part of the security of the system because it means that people cannot work (officially) and claim subsistence benefits at the same time. The policing of that distinction between worker and claimant is what Social Security administration is about at its core. The principle of that distinction is at the heart of the system of the JSA. It is therefore the first piece of information that is required in claimant dealings with the DSS.

The statement of your NINO is one part of a computer systemised process of claim management. This systemisation is set up by the Department of Social Security at Whitehall. It is they who systemise the libraries of statutes and legislature produced by the Parliamentary system, into Benefits Agency administrative procedure. A lynch-pin of the system's practicability is the computer. It regularises administration as something that is 'system generated' and to an extent ensures a broad parity of treatment between similar 'cases'. The claimant interview is therefore often a three way interaction between computer, DSS officer and claimant, and in this respect is part of a technologised power relation. Its practice involves Whitehall prescription, computerised procedure and record, officer assessment, claimant disclosure. Sitting there, the claimant has no access to the information kept about her on the computer and cannot negotiate giving what information she may or may not feel is relevant to her case without jeopardising it. Public 'informants' on the other hand can proffer information which they think may effect the legitimacy of a claim via free telephone hotlines. In the first three months of its operation - August to November 1996 - the National Benefit Fraud Hotline received over 100,000 calls.¹²²

Means-tested claimants who are in receipt of the JSA are subject to other technologised procedures at the Job Centre where they sign on. The administration and

¹²¹ From *'The System'* a BBC2 documentary on Britain's Social Security system 19.9.97

¹²² 'DSS Calls to Fraud Hotline Top 100,000' *DSS News Release 96/238* 6.10.96

payment of JSA is heavily computerised with details of claimants and jobs being kept on a large database called the 'Labour Market System'. This is a new £70 million system which matches details of the claimant's case and the types of jobs they have said they're looking for, with the jobs that are available in the area. The system is seen as integral to the new regime:

'The LMS will provide a direct way for testing the requirement for clients to be available for and actively seeking work.'¹²³

The Social Security system's design to regulate the claimant will not necessarily be achieved as a blueprint of Whitehall's intentions and if it is then that regulation is not always or necessarily oppressive. Nevertheless, the technology is in the exclusive service of a group of people with intentions to discipline claimants' behaviour for particular ends and it makes some outcomes more likely than others. The issue of control over personal information that is extracted from claimants relates to the Social Security Administration Fraud Bill (1996). This bill sets out plans for the pooling of information by government departments to crack down on benefit fraud. As well as permitting the transfer of information from other departments such as Immigration and Inland Revenue, the DSS is permitted to pass information to local council administration of housing and council tax benefit. In this way, an individual's claimant status is writ large and monitored across a range of government departments through a 'data matching' process specifically designed to discipline, catch-out and if necessary criminalise the claimant.¹²⁴

The other main technologised power relation deployed in the DSS waiting room to regulate claimant behaviour, works through the eye of the CCTV monitor. The closed circuit television is now an ubiquitous part of everyday public life for a lot of people. Its place in the DSS waiting room can be seen both as an extension of that widespread surveillance into previously unwatched areas of public life and a development of the specifically classed nature of that gaze.¹²⁵ In the DSS waiting room the camera has an exclusive focus on poor welfare claimants, set apart from the crowds. Here in the waiting room the claimants represent a kind of concentrated deviancy, with a potential for threatening behaviour by virtue of *who* they are or rather what they as claimants represent. The notices that are all over the waiting rooms prohibiting particular sorts of claimant behaviour make it clear that CCTVs are not there to stop claimants from fighting or being abusive to each other. They are there as a 'disincentive' to threatening behaviour against staff, to induce compliant

¹²³ The Annual Report of the Department of Education and Employment (March 1996) quoted in *Red Pepper* June 1996 no 25 p10

¹²⁴ Daniel.C (1997) 'Not Citizen's But Data Subjects' *New Statesman* 13.6.97 p23-25

¹²⁵ It is particular sorts of groups, activities and areas that are the target of these cameras: namely working class young men in shopping areas, and council estates. See Norris.C (1997) *The Unforgiving Eye* Hull University: Centre For Criminology and Criminal Justice

behaviour and in order to provide evidence should trouble arise. Similarly the security guards that patrol the waiting rooms, and the Perspex screens which front the booths are there to police the claimants and protect the staff.

In the DSS waiting room the CCTV can be seen as a disciplinary technology working as a continuous, anonymous gaze that seeks to produce self-regulating individuals. Sitting in the waiting room you tend to forget that it is there but you have usually registered it and know that it is. There are signs to remind you of its operation in case you do forget. Its qualitative effect on the space of the waiting room cannot be measured, but is disciplinary in the sense that it sets up a visual regime in which it is clear who is watching who and why. Its power is therefore partly symbolic: it states that disciplinary power is being deployed. It is an attempt to establish a spatial ordering based on self-surveillance. This does not mean that the space is necessarily disciplined, only that a particular power relation is manifest. In this respect the DSS waiting room CCTV is not about a solution to a technical problem: like the Panopticon it is a political technology and in the waiting room it bespeaks the disciplinary power of 'Social Security'. It also expresses the need and desire for vigilance over particular groups who in some capacity, however limited, pose a threat of disorder to the system. The power relation that the mounted wall camera makes visible, is therefore not one way. Its presence is deemed necessary because the ongoing social relation between the claimant and the system as it presently works, means that tension and violence may not be far from the surface. The DSS authorities know that in the same way that they know to the penny how low a subsistence level benefit can go and still ensure survival. It is a knowledge of what the system is about at a fundamental level, because *they* have set it up. The cameras are therefore installed on the basis of a calculation and the calculation is right: the DSS waiting room is not a space that is always under control, it is sometimes on the brink of being seriously out of control. The CCTV is a check on that potential for disorder which arises because of the *social relations* of benefit claiming and because there is little consensus or respect for those social relations among claimants. The CCTV does not administer control, its very point is to avoid the expense, effort and illegitimacy of physical discipline in this context. It 'works' in as much as it influences behaviour in the direction of discipline, it holds things in place albeit fragily. It does this through the deployment of a visual regime that is a power relation wherein the claimant's recognition of that regime is enough for it to be disciplinary. DSS waiting room surveillance is efficient to the extent that it holds, thus Latour's opening quote that things do not have to be 'true' to hold: 'they are true because they hold'.

The systems, technologies and bureaucracies of the policy conference work to produce the conference as a particular sort of space. Like the waiting room it is a regulatory space but one whose practices are carried out for different purposes.

The choice to attend this conference is not made freely: like the claimant the conference participant is *already* part of a network of social relations. Participation is made available by an invitation process in which personally addressed letters were sent out to a whole range of people in local and central government, voluntary and charitable organisations, trade unions, political parties, business, lobbying groups and academic institutions. Names and addresses were obtained from journal and magazine subscription listings, open membership listings of professional institutions such as the Social Policy Association's and through speculative approaches to organisations. Advertisements were also carried in academic and political journals and magazines as invitations to a specific readership. The participant listing shows 363 people attended. From this list the participant profile was: 45% academic; 16% business; 11% social organisations/charities/trade unions; 10% policy related/politicians; 4% media; 15% non-affiliated. Of these 23% were women; and from my observations the vast majority were aged over 40.¹²⁶

For those who attended, the conference offered the chance to become authoritatively informed about an emergent political idea that seemed likely to have a substantial impact on the policies of an incoming Labour government and thereby on the sort of work with which the invitees were involved. The necessity to be conversant with such potentially influential policy ideas is part of professional work in particular fields from social policy research to business development. In this respect the choice of attendance is one that is strongly located in the 'demands' of employment and career interests that are part of the normalising regulation of professional life. Membership of work related organisations, and journal and magazine subscription listings have a role to play as part of an apparatus in which professional identities are produced and sustained. Invitation to this conference is 'normal' by virtue of who the participants are: they are the *sort* of people who go to conferences. Conference participants are partly produced as subjects by the practices of their professional identities in much the same way claimants are produced by theirs through the normalising practices of benefit claiming. Moreover these identities are produced in relation to each other through a dominant discourse of 'welfare reform' of which 'underclass' is a central part. The discourse divides those who are talked about as objects of policy and those who do the talking as professionally interested individuals. The systemised practices of the Stakeholding conference - from the invitation process to the schedules of participation - are part of the process through which identity, meaning, and power are produced. The practices

¹²⁶ Delegate listing, Stakeholder Capitalism conference March 1996, Sheffield: PERC

that make up the work of defining and debating Stakeholding over two days are as much about securing the power relation between professional identity and its 'others' as they are debating the concept of Stakeholding - they are one in the same thing. Yet seemingly this conference is not about 'us' the conference delegates or organisers, in terms of securing jobs and futures, rather it is for 'them' and primary among them are the unemployed welfare claimants as the biggest casualties of 'the state we're in'. The conference is apparently about securing *their* jobs and futures. This abstraction of 'self' by the conference organisers/speakers is partly achieved through the systems, bureaucracies and technologies that allow the conference to be set up as a particular kind of space, organised well, in a manner befitting an event of this standing. Primarily this is as a space of consequential ideas: professional, ordered, rational, authoritative. To this end, schedules direct delegates purposively towards specific activities on which 'we' as invited participants have a professional bearing; we are badged and identified by our institutional affiliations; we are colour-streamed according to areas of interest and/or knowledge that mean we will attend some sessions and not others. We are issued with promotional literature to locate the importance of the conference, to inform our substantive ideas on Stakeholding and to confirm our reasons for being here. We are encouraged to become 'familiar' with Stakeholding *as a group* by making formal and informal contacts with each other and taking out subscriptions to related journals and other publications. We are socialised at particular times and places. Wine is provided at the launch of a journal called *New Political Economy* : 'very pleased you're all here... new world order... new journal... enjoy your drinks'. Shared eating and drinking ensures conviviality and enjoyment of the event, we should feel good about Stakeholding. Our time is structured into morning, afternoon and evening activities; and further structured into plenary sessions, question opportunities, and workshops, to facilitate a logical, cumulative, progressive knowledge of the subject of Stakeholding. We are spatially ordered via plans for seating and standing and allocations to particular rooms and venues which facilitate certain sorts of interaction. Seated in rows we listen to those who impart knowledge from the raised foreground of the rostrum; seated around a table in a seminar we discuss with a small group of equal others; standing, we can mingle in open spaces which allow freedom of movement between individuals and the temporary possibility of transcending knowledge hierarchies - the chance to approach Will Hutton himself if you dare and some do.

The event flows as our activities are organised and we go along with it, it is what we are here for. This process does not produce predictable 'effects' such as the manufacture of committed advocates of Stakeholding, but it offers the participants authoritative subject positions in relation to Stakeholding knowledge and particular groups of 'others'. Indeed in

the conference promotional leaflet the offer is of power in the policy process itself: 'Do not miss this chance to help set the agenda of economic and political debate'. The practices, regulations and normalising techniques of the conference are therefore not entirely set up to regulate participants who may otherwise be inclined to behave in ways that threaten the conference's purposes. They are also practices, regulations and techniques that produce and sustain a social relation of professional authority over 'others'. They are practices, regulations and techniques that amplify the authoritative power of the participants, as they are subjectified. This two-fold power process is clearest in the particular surveillant technology that marks the conference site, and so distinguishes it from the CCTV of the DSS waiting room.

Among the enormous array of artefacts that shape the conference practices - from flipboards to clocks, microphones, word processors and lecterns - there are those technologies which seem to bear a greater significance because of their capacity to extend across large parts of a network of relations. This significance was conveyed at the conference start when we were informed by the chair that we were going to be filmed, recorded and published.

Television cameras filmed the audience and the speakers from the side of the rostrum at the plenary addresses. They also moved among us at the two social receptions after an evening buffet and at the journal launch. All the plenary speeches, followed by question and answer sessions, and the workshop papers and discussions, were tape recorded by technical assistants. The proceedings were transcribed for an official conference report *Stakeholder Capitalism - Blind Alley Or Best Hope?* published by Sheffield University's Political Economy Research Centre. A year later, a book including particular conference papers as chapters was published by Macmillan in association with PERC.¹²⁷

The television cameras were part of a Channel Four documentary outfit covering the event and the idea of Stakeholding through Will Hutton's presentation of it to different audiences throughout the country. Footage from the conference would be used to illustrate a national process of enlightenment to 'Stakeholding', the cameras fixed on Hutton gesticulating vociferously as the Main Man. The television programmes concerned were part of a series called 'False Economy' transmitted by Channel Four in June 1996. Their direction conveyed a mood of political urgency, speed and immanence as they traced Hutton's movements among political and business groupings. Will Hutton on trains, in meetings, on a mission: 'Will this man's ideas change Britain for good?' the voice-over asked. The programmes opened Channel Four's 'Broke' season as a series of documentaries covering the state of poor people in contemporary Britain. They were preceded by another

¹²⁷ Kelly, Kelly, and Gamble, *Stakeholder Capitalism*

introductory documentary 'on the society we've become' presented by Will Hutton, set up to frame the political and policy context in which the subsequent excursions into poverty could be placed. The 'Broke' season included the broadcasting of the work of Channel Four's Commission on Poverty, especially set up for the series ('The Great, the Good, and the Dispossessed' Channel Four 12.10.96). Chaired by the Social Policy Professor Peter Townsend, the Commission's task was a mission to define, explain and evaluate contemporary British poverty and policies for its alleviation. Commencing 'in search of Britain's poor', the format was one of mission, exploration, and discovery of the poor, for the edification of the television audience. Experts, victims, and self-helpers were presented as the staple ingredients of poverty discourse. Hutton featured as a potent mix of saviour-expert.

The significance of the cameras at the policy conference was more than the provision of illustrative and contextualising footage. The cameras are part of a technologised power relation in which the activities and ideas of those located in authoritative sites of knowledge can be shown to be important, can be disseminated way beyond the physical bounds of the site itself, can be given spatial reach. Like the other conference practices working to amplify the power of participants as they regulate their behaviour and activities, the televisual 'surveillance' of the conference participants sets out to amplify the conference as a site of authority, then used to frame and contextualise/give particular meaning to experiences of poverty. This process also works on the participants, confirming their professional importance, as the importance of the event is further demonstrated to them.

The camera technology of policy conference and DSS waiting room plays a part in regulating the behaviour and activities of two different sorts of assembled groups, but the meaning of that relation derives from the power relation between the groups themselves. Their 'relations of looking' are not the same. The DSS waiting room is a watched and bound space where the CCTV is a visual technology installed for purposes of order and control within the site. The message is that this space needs to be contained: ordered within and limited in importance. The policy conference is a watched but expansive space where the TV camera is a visual technology installed to communicate and disseminate outwards and so expand the space of the conference. The message is that this expanded space is an important, authoritative space. Similarly the work of publication generated by the conference is the work of dispersion beyond immediate sites and selves to other sites and other people who are less authoritative, less qualified on this subject of 'the state we're in'. The conference site has access to televisual and publishing technologies because it exists as a nexus of power-ful social relations spreading tendril-like into other sites of authoritative power which include media sites. The meaning of those technologies (the purpose for which they exist,

their ownership, their specific use) is derived from those power relations. The sorts of knowledges, identities and spaces produced in the policy conference and DSS waiting room, are part of those same power relations working through value-laden oppositions:

DSS waiting room	-Stakeholder policy conference
welfare claimant	-welfare professional
unqualified	-knowledgeable
CCTV	-TV cameras
surveillance	-dissemination
danger	-authority
isolation	-connectivity
closure	-expanse

Power Works

The conference and waiting room sites are partly produced through such relational meanings, practices and technologies. But as a power relation that 'mutuality' is quite differently constituted. The waiting room is about reductive control, the conference amplified authority. In the former, subjects are named, managed and silent, in the latter subjects have authorship, copyright and voice. The relation needs both parts. Conference work is the work of career, the necessity to become conversant with important developments in your field. Waiting room work is the work of survival, benefit claiming as a means of survival. The question 'who needs who?' may not be the most useful way of imagining how this relation could or should be changed: yes, thinkers on policy need 'subjects' to focus on; yes, claimants need debates about change in welfare policy. The problem is that the *practice* of those much needed debates is such that the power relations which produce poverty in the first place are further entrenched, further empowered. The place in which the Stakeholder conference was held; the systems, practices and technologies it used; the signs, symbols and meanings that it relied upon; all produced it as exactly the sort of space that militates against significant political change in the discourse of 'underclass' as a discourse of 'dependency'. It strengthened the power relation through which the policy process works to keep the DSS waiting room as a marshalled and discounted space.

The 'work' of the Stakeholder policy conference was the work of power relations. That work enabled the presentation of the conference as a particular sort of professional event: exclusionary, authoritative, separate from the object of its discourse. In this themed section I have argued that the *way* of doing things does matter. I have looked at the Stakeholder conference and DSS waiting room sites as 'worked' spaces which demanded and relied upon concerted practical and technological organisation. That work could have

been deployed in different ways to produce the conference and waiting room as different sorts of spaces. As it is, the practices of those two sites close off alternative ways of thinking about and practicing Welfare that could otherwise bring together the two in a dialogical and democratic power relation. This would necessarily be a changed power-knowledge relation.

Conclusion: Democratising Networks

Much of the argument of this chapter has been that the embedded knowledges of the DSS waiting room and policy conference are primarily classed and gendered knowledges. This means that the discourse of 'underclass' is often about patterned and scripted relations and performances. One of the most striking aspects of the embodied nature of the policy conference and waiting room was the way the conference space was so dominated by middle aged, white, middle class men and the waiting room space by young black and white working class women with children. These women simply did not feature in the Stakeholder conference space, they were subsumed in the category of 'the unemployed', 'out of work', in need of 'work' and nurseries for their children. Their 'inclusion' into society would be via the economy of paid work. The hard work of these benefit claiming mothers was entirely dismissed and so devalued, as their claimant status as 'welfare dependants' was deemed to position their needs and interests as coincident with 'mainstream' society. The consideration of the *sort* of work these women would be doing once included in society and its comparative value to mothering work was not an issue in the middle class masculinist vision of a Stakeholding society. 'Work' was not differentiated in class or gender terms; 'people on benefits' were an ungendered amorphous mass. Did these women want to be included in this vision, did they have any say at all? Could a different 'culture of welfare' to that produced in the DSS waiting room and policy conference be imagined, in which the dualistic opposition of 'dependence' and 'independence' could be deconstructed to reveal different sorts of dependencies across classes and across genders? This is the subject of the next chapter. The argument of this chapter has suggested that such change might only be possible through a democratisation of the network of power-knowledge relations (of which the conference space is part) which produces the claimant as 'the excluded'. That is necessarily an argument about a reconfiguration of power networks which would produce the power for claimants to speak and be heard in their own spaces rather than having to be included in those of others, and which would also produce new 'hybrid' spaces in which different kinds of expertise could be expressed in relation to each other. Such a reconfiguration would also facilitate claims for economic resources to address the inequalities which mean some people

are always already 'stakeholders'. In other words *their* monopoly of the network and of economic resources has to be addressed in order to see the nature of power relations between their responsibilities and the 'responsibilities' of claimants, between their material ease and already entrenched inequalities.

This chapter has shown the discourse of 'underclass' to be something that is practical, material and embodied as well as being an arena of signification. It has argued that practices are constitutive of power-knowledge relations within and between different social groups and social spaces. With regard to the discourse of 'underclass' as practiced in the spaces of the DSS waiting room and Stakeholder policy conference those power-knowledge relations produce both patterned inequalities and contingent indeterminacies. In the contemporary configuration of that network of relations, the domination of particular classed knowledges by others is ensuring that an exclusionary and oppressive policy trajectory is being generated with regard to 'underclass'. The possible question: 'is this happening as part of an 'agenda' or as 'unintended consequence'?' needs to be displaced by a notion of discourse that goes beyond notions of powerful agents such as Stakeholder notaries having 'effects', intended or otherwise. The discourse of 'underclass' cannot be mapped or traced in those terms, less simplistic notions of how the social is produced are needed. Networks of practice, knowledge and power often work in indeterminable ways so that ideas which start off being well-intended, or seemingly insignificant or marginally related to the mainframe of debate, come to assume a different form or significance within a wider network, in the hands of others, in different spaces, at different times. This multiply constituted, often contradictory and even dishevelled discursive process is the subject of the next chapter, with regard to feminist directions in the discourse of 'underclass'.

CHAPTER THREE

FEMINIST DISCOURSE ON 'UNDERCLASS': FAULTLINES OF CLASS AND GENDER

In the discourse of 'underclass', contemporary debates about family-work relations, parenting, community and crime are related to processes of welfare reform and employment restructuring. These debates are shaped by the language and ideas of certain kinds of feminism, embodied in the speaking positions of prominent journalists, academics, policy thinkers, politicians and lobbyists. This chapter makes links between the discourse of 'underclass' and particular feminist speaking positions through interview based discussions with prominent women from key commentary fields. It examines this feminist discourse by looking at three kinds of spaces which are produced in relation to each other: the spaces of representation through which their voices on 'underclass' are heard and read; the spaces those voices seek to represent - primarily the 'estate', the 'home' and the space of 'work'; and the spaces of production which are the situated speaking positions of the women themselves. Their knowledge is analysed as a power laden production which constitutes 'underclass' as a classed and gendered discourse. The implication of feminist discourse in the reform of benefit dependent ways of being, is problematised via some socialist feminist understandings about the contemporary period of 'underclass'. The chapter is divided into two parts: feminist speaking positions on 'underclass' masculinities, and feminist speaking positions on 'underclass' femininities. The divide is one of presentation rather than substance: the chapter will argue that those masculinities and femininities are produced in relation to each other, in material-symbolic spaces.

Introduction: A New Social Contract

On the 8th May 1996 *The Guardian* newspaper carried a front page headline: 'The End Of The Welfare State.' The article marked announcements from the Labour and Conservative parties on their visions of welfare into the next millennium as 'a decisive and irreversible shift in the role of the Welfare State.'¹ Both political parties had delivered speeches on their vision of government's role as 'enabling' citizens to provide for their own security rather than the State being a sole provider. Chris Smith MP, then Shadow Secretary

¹ 'The End Of The Welfare State - Tories and Labour define a loose compact between people and government' *The Guardian* 8.5.96 p1

of State for Social Security, announced in a keynote lecture to the Institute of Public Policy Research that the rationale of this change was:

‘...to take account of modern family structures, job flexibility and insecurity and the rise of the working woman.’²

In policy terms a main plank of the new welfare strategy would be a restructuring of the comprehensive State run social insurance model so that individual workers would own their own ‘welfare capital’.

Another article in that day’s newspaper by Labour MP Tessa Jowell, then Shadow Minister for Women, called on the government to act with regard to new working patterns for women because the family was presently in crisis.³ The increased numbers of working women was marking a redistribution of work from men to women: 71% of women were working making up 44% of all people of working age in employment (Labour Force Survey 1995). Jowell described the development as beneficial to both women and the economy:

‘It is clear that the labour market cannot do without women and that the economic freedom that this has given women and their families is a good thing.’⁴

According to Jowell the trend was problematic because men and fathers had not adapted to these changes in terms of parental involvement and because of a moral panic about the welfare of children. It required government to establish a policy framework that would produce ‘a new paradigm for the working family.’ Part of that would involve extensive childcare provision and a change of attitude towards childrearing from certain quarters. To illustrate the problem Jowell highlighted a news story that had been covered a few weeks earlier in which a headmistress had suggested that it was inadvisable for two year olds to be put in nurseries for 8 hours a day. She sought to locate the headmistress’s objection in ‘the fundamentalist Right’ amongst whom:

‘...there is still evident unease about the desirability of women going out to work before their children are of school age.’

Both newspaper articles are part of a process in which the meaning of ‘welfare’ is being reconstituted in relation to social and economic changes in the labour market, especially the growth of female employment. Those changes are held to be the reason why the old model of full-time male employment and the family wage on which Beveridge’s Welfare State rested has become an anachronism, no longer suited to the modern workplace or modern family. The argument is that a new welfare or social contract implies a new gender contract between men, women and the government.

² ‘The End Of The Welfare State’ *The Guardian* 8.5.96 p1

³ Jowell.T (1996) ‘Family Fortunes’ *The Guardian* Tabloid 8.5.96 p13

⁴ Jowell, *Family Fortunes* p13

At the end of March 1996 a debate in the pages of the *British Journal of Sociology* spilled over into the pages of the national press:

‘An unprecedented war of words has erupted among a group of feminist academics about whether the majority of women prefer to stay at home and look after children rather than go to work.’⁵

The coverage arose from an article entitled ‘Five Feminist Myths About Women’s Employment’ published in the *British Journal of Sociology* by Dr. Catherine Hakim, a senior research fellow at the London School of Economics. The article challenges what Hakim sees as a long standing feminist assumption that given a gender level playing field most women would opt to work.⁶ Her research suggests that an acceptance of differentiated sex roles underlies fundamental differences between the work orientations, labour market behaviour and life goals of men and women. The research is based on an analysis of part-time work which she says is used to justify feminist discourses about rising female employment as *the* prime indicator of social and economic change. From a sociological perspective she argues that women who work part-time mainly do so by choice and that they should be grouped with housewives rather than wage workers because:

‘...the research evidence shows that part time work does not change a woman’s primary self-identity as a housewife, does not change her bargaining power and weight in decision-making, and does not change her role in the household.’⁷

In reaction to her article the journal published a rebuttal and critique of her research signed by eleven eminent academics working in the area of gender and employment. Hakim claimed that this response was exemplary of the powerful but largely unrepresentative group of women who speak about the sexual division of labour. They were a group of highly educated, highly motivated career women with dominant speaking positions who made up a ‘vociferous minority that gets its voice heard’ but could not be held as representative of majority views amongst women.⁸ The debate that followed in the journal and letters pages of the national press illustrated the contentious nature of the often highly personal and emotive issues involved. It also highlighted the way that certain myths, caricatures and orthodoxies are riven into a diverse feminist discourse about employment and mothering.⁹ In one response to Hakim’s research the reasons *why* ‘women chose to learn to prefer mothering’

⁵ ‘Feminists Fall Out Over Chores’ *The Guardian* 29.3.96 p3

⁶ Hakim.C (1995) ‘Five Feminist Myths About Women’s Employment’ p429-455 *British Journal of Sociology* 46(3)

⁷ Hakim.C (1996) ‘The Sexual Division of Labour and Women’s Heterogeneity’ p178-188 *British Journal of Sociology* 47 (1) p178

⁸ Hakim, *The Sexual Division of Labour and Women’s Heterogeneity* p178

⁹ The publication of a book by Maureen Freely *What About Us? An Open Letter To The Mothers That Feminism Forgot* (London: Bloomesbury 1995) produced similar exchanges in relation to the status of ‘mothering’ in feminism.

was raised, in another 'the freedom of domesticity' and the fear of speaking these desires 'lest we be seen as traitors to the feminist cause.'¹⁰ The exchanges raised a stumbling block to agreement as to what 'women really want'. They also posed questions about the issue of representation in a feminist politics that has to take account of such heterogeneous accounts of women's experiences.

I have started with these two discursive moments from spheres of everyday media culture in order to highlight two interests that structure this chapter. The first is a substantive interest in the way the discourse of 'underclass' is constructed through debates around parenting, gender roles, welfare and employment change. The second is an interest in the networks, politics and modes of 'needs/interests' representation that are produced by particular feminists in everyday media spheres of commentary with regard to the former issues. Part of this interest is to show how particular aspects of historical and complex feminist debates are projected by the media into the wider public and political domain. By making connections between these two interests I will show how the complexities, contradictions and allegiances of various debates produce contemporary 'underclass' discourse *and* feminist discourse in relation to each other through a configuration of classed and gendered speaking positions. The contemporary configuration of both 'underclass' and 'feminist' discourse so unsettle traditional alignments of Right/Left, feminist/patriarchal, that only the closest specification of these terms is useful to an analysis of either. It is a highly class and gender specified analysis that I propose.

The terrain of debates around welfare, employment, and parenting is well traversed by feminists, in many ways it has been the very ground of feminist politics. In the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' which is so much constituted by those issues, prominent feminist commentators are vocally shaping ideas and policy trajectories. Because traditional issues of feminism are heavily embroiled in this sphere, the current period of change in the way welfare, parenting and employment are being conceptualised and practiced, is also a period of change for feminist politics. Questions about what various groups of women 'need' and whose interpretations of those needs are authoritative are central to feminist politics and have a particular relevance to the representational politics of 'underclass' discourse. This chapter is therefore partly motivated by an interest in the nature and adequacy of contemporary feminist discourse as it relates to the politics of 'underclass' where feminists are not outsiders looking in, or part of self-contained networks, but are an influentially networked *part* of the discourse itself. To explore the relation I have

¹⁰ Breugel.I (1996) 'Whose Myths Are They Anyway? : A Comment' p175-177 *British Journal of Sociology* 47(1) p175; 'A Woman's Right To Choose' Letter in *The Guardian* 2.4.96 p14

interviewed six female commentators who are prominent in different fields, occupying positions of relative power within academia, the media, politics and social policy. Their feminism can in no way be considered as part of a univocal bloc: they are united only by the shared terms and networks of the discourse in which they speak and move. Their publications, appearances and activities converge around particular issues in what is a fast moving, shifting terrain. There are, however, points of settlement and continuous strands of debate which mean that they tend to coalesce at important moments of discursive development. I will briefly outline two areas of debate and policy development that are key points of coalescence for feminist discourse on 'underclass'. Both points represent attempts to forward a political language and ways of thinking about contemporary social problems associated with 'underclass' via analyses that have issues of gender and community as their focus. They have been developed by academic, political and cultural commentators on the political Left, although their ideas also range more widely across the political spectrum. In broad terms both have the aim of promoting the development of communities that have notions of gender equality and the social good at their core. They are expressed in political ideas about the need to 'restructure masculinity' and in a 'politics of attachment'.

The Politics of Restructuring Masculinity

The first point of convergence for feminist discourse on 'underclass' is on the subject of 'families, children and crime'. Discussion of how the contemporary state of each is both product and cause of community collapse, was the subject of a conference organised in November 1993 by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) and *The Independent on Sunday* newspaper. This event brought together key figures from political, academic, think-tank and media fields commentating on social fabric/social values debates when the idea of an underclass was an emergent theme of British politics.¹¹ Their papers became the basis of the IPPR's publication *Families, Children and Crime* as part of the Institute's Social Policy programme.¹² The book was evidently following in the footsteps of an earlier IPPR publication *The Family Way* written by three prominent, politically involved feminists: Anna Coote, Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt.¹³ That book sought to develop a number of 'family policy' proposals by examining and developing the way the political Left have traditionally regarded the family.¹⁴ The project was an attempt to reclaim 'the family' from

¹¹ Amongst these figures were David Utting, Anna Coote, Beatrix Campbell, Tony Blair, Angela Philips, David Willets, and Tony Jefferson.

¹² Coote.A (1994) *Families, Children and Crime* London: IPPR

¹³ Coote.A, Harman.H, Hewitt.P (1990) *The Family Way: A New Approach To Policy Making* Social Policy Paper No. 1, London: IPPR

¹⁴ The concept of 'family policy' is variably understood. Generally it is held to refer to a range of perspectives and policy approaches that intentionally impact on the family through a field of policy

the Conservative party as the 'party of the family', a claim on which its appeal to women voters had often been pitched. The book claimed to represent a modern view of what female and male roles within the family looked like and how they should be politically supported:

'...women and men should be free to combine parenthood and paid employment... enabling women to do paid work on equal terms with men is more in tune with the new demands of the labour market.'¹⁵

The delineation of a new role for 'men' would be central to this change to ease the labour market shift to a service-oriented economy which required married women workers:

'Left and Right have different views on men's role in the family: where the Right stress financial responsibility, authority and discipline, the Left places emphasis on sharing, parental responsibility, caring for children.'

In the presentation of their policy suggestions, the goal of gender equality within the family and a buoyant economy would seem to accommodate both particular feminist and labour market demands. Their argument for legislated family support is an argument for families as 'central to the interests of society as a whole.'¹⁶ Moreover, *without* such support, families, communities and societies would be subject to the sort of degeneracy that was the concern of debates about contemporary 'social values' and the 'social fabric'. This was the starting point of the IPPR conference in 1993 on 'Families, Children and Crime': the criminal behaviours of working class groups of young men from unsupported and fragmented families and communities were a particular kind of manifestation of contemporary social degeneracy. With its background position on the family, employment and gender roles outlined in *The Family Way*, the IPPR addressed itself to issues of family, crime and community and so became part of the discourse of 'underclass'. Marking a clear departure from traditional explanations for rising crime on both Left and Right (unemployment and poverty; moral degeneracy and dysfunctional families) the conference made its opening theme the *gender* of crime. Masculinity would be the starting point of an analysis hitherto characterised by '...a remarkable silence about an incontrovertible fact: crime is overwhelmingly a male pursuit.'¹⁷

Whilst recognising that this was not a new fact or understanding ('delinquent subcultures' have been analysed in terms of adjustment problems of the male role) the argument is put that masculinity is a missing dimension of contemporary debates on the links between parenting, crime and community which tend to focus instead on the role of mothers, especially single mothers:

practice. A discussion of the complexity of the concept is given in Fox Harding, L (1995) 'The Quest For 'Family Policy'', Chapter 6, *Family, State and Social Policy* London: Macmillan

¹⁵ Coote, Harman, Hewitt, *The Family Way* p4

¹⁶ Coote, Harman, Hewitt, *The Family Way* p38

¹⁷ Coote, *Families, Children and Crime* p1

'Instead of demonising and punishing single mothers they might do well to focus on the fathers.'¹⁸

The starting point of this gender analysis is a view of the social and economic landscape wrought by industrial change which has displaced 'men' from traditional roles and expectations:

'While women have added the role of wage earner to their traditional role of homemaker and carer, men have so far simply lost their traditional breadwinning role.'¹⁹

The suggestion is that the loss of traditional male rites of passage through work into adulthood means that young men are divided from the young women of their communities who 'can claim adult status by becoming mothers'; who 'have to grow up fast in a way they would not if they spent their time thieving, joy riding or selling drugs'; and who in not marrying the fathers of their children are 'making a realistic assessment of the available options. The boys who get them pregnant may appear to them to have very little else to offer.'²⁰ In seeking other ways of growing up, these boys who are bound by peer security are said to practice traditional male virtues of toughness and bravery through crime, emulating the role models provided by a machoistic popular culture and their own fathers:

'Many will regard their unemployed fathers (if they see them at all) as impotent failures. Not a few will observe their fathers using violence to defend their fragile authority at home.'²¹

This gender analysis seeks to relocate the problem of familial adjustment to social change from mothers and daughters to fathers and sons, as a problem of gender role adjustment for previously socially dominant masculinities. Across media and political fields the idea that the contemporary period of 'underclass' is also a period of gender shift is a main point of agreement:

'If our current 'family values' controversy could be reduced to one problem then it would be: men. We do have a men problem. We have juvenile delinquents... we have large numbers of unmarriageable males, whose economic status has been removed by industrial change, who father and move on, and according to the statistics, have quite likely got criminal records by their early thirties.'²²

The Dahrendorf Commission on Wealth Creation and Social Cohesion (the Liberal Democrat version of Labour's Social Justice Commission) whose committee members included Labour MP Frank Field, Will Hutton and David Marquand, adds to this consensus

¹⁸ Coote, *Families, Children and Crime* p4

¹⁹ Coote, *Families, Children and Crime* p2

²⁰ Coote, *Families, Children and Crime* p3

²¹ Coote, *Families, Children and Crime* p4

²² 'Troubled By The Unclear Family' *The Independent* 5.11.93 p13

on the gender implications of the end of traditional 'male' full-time employment, in terms of family cohesion, gender identity and crime:

'More must be done to bring young men into work before they become unemployable with consequent implications for crime.'

'It looks as if women are more fully employable than men, and it almost looks like men will have to adopt women's lifestyles. Otherwise they will, with their more rigid notions of a job career, be unemployed for very long periods.'²³

Male unemployment is thus figured in terms of the loss of traditional manufacturing and heavy industry jobs, and the analysis of 'men's future work styles' is based on forecasts that job opportunities will be increasingly created as part-time low skilled jobs in the service sector. Agreement on this 'male' employment issue ('fathers', 'sons' and 'men' are referred to generically) creates analytic overlaps between differently motivated politics. The convergence is shown in discussions of inadequate 'fathering', illustrated here in *The Sunday Times* newspaper with reference to a speech by Peter Lilley, then Secretary of State for Social Security:

'[Peter Lilley] blamed the poor employment prospects of many young men for the growing number of babies being born outside marriage... Mr. Lilley is right to see fathers as part of the problem... Encouraging active fatherhood is one good way of reintegrating young men into a society which is widely seen to be disintegrating and forming a new underclass... Looking after children should be seen as an acceptable alternative to employment in a world in which jobs for women are easier to find than jobs for unskilled young men.'²⁴

The suggestion that unemployed men could assume the role traditionally performed by women as the main carer in the family is one that has strong currency in the feminist orientated publications of the IPPR which address changes in family structure and labour market restructuring. It adheres to their central goal of encouraging men and women to be both breadwinners and carers. In these accounts 'fathers' and 'mothers' are not specified in terms of their class: the goal of promoting social change in which 'workers' and 'carers' are not gender differentiated seems to suggest a simultaneous cutting across class differences in those roles. This construction highlights some difficult issues about how we think about the intersections of class and gender, the alliances and fractures within that dynamic and the policy implications of pursuing particular feminist analyses. For the sort of socialist and feminist analysis that I am proposing, these 'difficulties' need to be considered as some of the most important aspects of 'underclass' discourse. It is the nature of these difficulties that

²³ Quotes from the Commission's Chairman Lord Dahrendorf in 'Jobs For All Idea Defunct' *The Guardian* 15.6.94 p6

²⁴ 'Feckless Fathers' *The Sunday Times* 22.6.94 p17

I have sought to bring out in my interviews with prominent female commentators in this field.

The Politics of Attachment

The second point of convergence for feminist discourse on 'underclass' is more recent and less developed than the first but is nevertheless an important discursive development, marked by the publication of a book called *The Politics Of Attachment: Towards A Secure Society*.²⁵ As with *Families, Children and Crime* it arose out of a conference of the same name held at the Tavistock Clinic, London in March 1995. In the book's preface, Patricia Hewitt identifies a task for the post-Thatcher Left to add to and develop a political language that has the interests of 'social capital' and communities as at least an equal concern to economic capital and the market. It situates this project within an exploratory search for the 'Big Idea' on the political Left whose process has created a convergence of questions about 'the qualities that define good societies and good relationships within and between them.'²⁶

In the discourses around 'community, belonging, stakeholding, exchange, gifting, trust', it recognises a foundling coalescence of ideas that 'draw in the political and psychological together' in which the goal of *security* is fundamental. It makes the argument for extrapolating into the social and political realm some of the understandings developed in the 'attachment theory' of psychologist John Bowlby 50 years ago and now widely accepted amongst child mental health workers (although remaining deeply contentious amongst some feminists). Its basic premise is that the formative nurturant bonding between infants and a small, stable group of carers, is the central precondition for both future personal and wider social well being. The implications of developing a politics from that understanding are addressed to the fields of parenting, community and employment policy. In this respect it is claimed that such a politics is pertinent to contemporary issues of 'deindustrialisation and the destruction of occupational communities' which are the terrain of 'underclass' discourse.²⁷ The loss of personal and social security as a central human need is seen as the underlying problem of extensive social malaise as manifested in anti-social behaviours and psychological problems of depression and alienation in different parts of society. These problems are conceptualised in terms of people turning against themselves and others under conditions which do not support either individual adjustment to social and economic change or make supportive provisions for the 'more subtle ways in which the individual and society

²⁵ Kraemer.S and Roberts.J (1996) *The Politics Of Attachment: Towards A Secure Society* London: Free Association Books

²⁶ Kraemer and Roberts, *Politics of Attachment* p3

²⁷ Kraemer and Roberts, *Politics of Attachment* p214

are inextricably bound up with one another' (such as micro-sociological parent-child relations).²⁸ The recuperation of conditions that would allow personal and social well being to flourish is seen to lie in communities and networks as generators of social bonding and a personal sense of worth.

The book's argument for the desirability of 'community' is made with caveats. It makes clear its intention to distinguish itself from the brand of 'Communitarianism' introduced into contemporary political discourse through the work of Amitai Etzioni, an American sociologist popularised by the support of the Demos think-tank. The sense of his argument has been taken up politically as a discourse of 'rights and responsibilities' as a new social contract between the individual and society for Tony Blair's 'New Britain'.²⁹ Rather than a rhetorical nicety, a pre-given collectivity or a means to coercively define terms and conditions of social inclusion, 'community' is seen in 'the politics of attachment' as a construct which is created through 'symbolic attachments' and substantive policies.³⁰ It has material preconditions which need resource commitments and legislative frameworks. The two areas which are identified as fundamental to the sort of security enhancing relationships on which good communities are based are employment and the care of children. A 'politics of attachment' therefore poses questions about relations between different genders, classes and generations, and about support for relations that lie outside of the market in the realm of 'social capital'. It is part of a political language whose ideas are deployed in different ways by the commentators I spoke to, and it is a constituent strand of 'underclass' discourse.

The ideas which have come to formulate a 'politics of attachment' and relatedly, a 'politics of restructuring masculinity' in the contemporary period, are the substantive concern of my interviews with Beatrix Campbell, Ros Coward, Ruth Lister, Ann Spackman, Ceridwen Roberts and Ruth Lilley - all of whom commentate on those subjects. They are each concerned to introduce different elements of personal, psychological, generational, class and gender specified analyses to contemporary debates which link issues of poor parenting, community breakdown, welfare change and labour market change. I chose these women as prominent spokeswomen in fields of journalism, lobbying/campaign work, and social policy commentary as fields which are all centrally involved in producing knowledges pertaining to 'underclass'. All these women assumed status in the media during the time that I was gauging the nature and direction of the dominant discourse. Their coincidence, in debate around particular issues suggested that I could pair them according to three themes: the nature of 'underclass' masculinities (Campbell and Coward); the state of contemporary

²⁸ Kraemer and Roberts, *Politics of Attachment* p2

²⁹ Etzioni.A (1995) *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda* London: Fontana; Blair, *New Britain*

³⁰ Kraemer and Roberts, *The Politics Of Attachment* p224

parenting/families (Roberts and Lilley); and the relations between single mothers, the labour market and child care (Lister and Spackman). These pairings would allow the relations between their ideas to be examined as relations which constitute some of the major areas of consensus, contradiction and conflict within 'underclass' discourse. Far from being mutually exclusive these themes are absolutely related; I therefore try to avoid too discrete a separation between them. Any overlap is intended to show how particular ideas are elaborated, extended, and changed through cultural commentary, rather than being merely repetitive. Each of the women were broadly asked the same questions, in conversations which were conducted more as discussions than as interviews.³¹ For this reason, at particular points in their presentation on the page, my own comments and questions are included with those of the women. This was intended to avoid the idea of presenting these women only as authoritative sources of knowledge. Their ideas and perspectives are presented as knowledges which need to be fully engaged with, related to others and contested, not just 'received'. Indeed the personal and situated nature of their knowledge production was one of the main areas that I wanted to explore in relation to their spaces of representation. My own position in this process was to be clear about where I agreed and disagreed with them, and at particular points to express some of my feelings of personal connection to the discourse. My aim in what follows, is to create a sense of a feminist discourse that is multiply constituted by a network of different speaking positions which at times connect in such a way that ideas in combination have productive effects. The precise nature of these connections cannot be definitively ascertained, the workings of discourse cannot be so easily determined. By its nature it is fluid, amorphous, protean. Nevertheless, it is only by attempting to trace such connections, by exploring the significance of particular figures, languages, comments, and texts in relation to others, and by specifying the nature of categories and motivations that are otherwise taken for granted, that 'effects' can be suggested at all. It is such a close reading of the feminist discourse of 'underclass' that follows.

³¹ The questions broadly addressed the following areas: the ways in which their work could be seen as connected to their personal backgrounds, perspectives and politics; the kinds of representation they believed themselves to be practising; the networks in which they worked; the implications of their work for social policy; their estimations of contemporary social policy discourses that relate to 'underclass'.

Feminist Discourse on 'Underclass' I: 'Underclass' Masculinities

Beatrix Campbell and Ros Coward on: 'Underclass' Masculinities and Socialist Feminisms

In April 1996 there was an altercation in the pages of *The Guardian* newspaper between two prominent feminist commentators, Beatrix Campbell and Ros Coward.³² It was about the status of contemporary fatherhood and its relation to feminist debates on 'masculinity': subjects that both commentators had been writing around for many years.³³ In the contemporary period this debate has turned on a so-called 'crisis of masculinity' as the role of 'men' is thrown awry by the effects of employment change, divorce legislation and feminism as a cultural force. The article by Ros Coward identifies a particular feminist commentary on these changes in which the role of 'men' is cast as redundant. She names feminist figures who via their public positions as feminist writers and spokeswomen have been able to forward ideas about the 'redundancy of fathers': Yvonne Roberts, Beatrix Campbell, Sue Slipman, Suzanne Moore. She claims that these women have been defensively reacting to Conservative party pronouncements on single mothers by Peter Lilley, John Redwood, John Bowis; the emergence of a UK Men's Movement whose publication 'Maleview' campaigns for father's 'family rights'; and academic scaremongering about 'Sibling Society' and 'Fatherless Families' which together have dominated a political discourse of single mother vilification.³⁴ Coward's contention is that particular feminists have become 'bogged down' in their response to these developments, caught between a defence of feminism as having *positively* contributed to the liberation of families from patriarchal norms whilst also saying that because it is mainly men who leave women with children *they* are to blame for single motherhood. She identifies this as a contradictory area of feminist discourse rooted in a particular feminist disinclination to talk about the positive role of actual fathers who have evolved new roles, yet continue to be portrayed as patriarchs, abusers, redundant or absent. She believes this negative discourse about fathers has left a gap which has been filled by 'pro-family' right-wing misogynists.

³² Coward.R (1996) 'Make The Father Figure' *The Guardian* 12.4.96 p17; Campbell.B (1996) 'Good Riddance To The Patriarch' *The Guardian* 15.4.96 p11

³³ Coward.R (1992) *Our Treacherous Hearts: Why Women Let Men Get Their Way* London: Faber and Faber; (1984) *Female Desire* London: Paladin; (1983) *Patriarchal Precedents: Sexuality and Social Relations* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Campbell.B (1988) *Unofficial Secrets: Child Sex Abuse - The Cleveland Case* London: Virago; (1984) *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the Eighties* London: Virago; Campbell.B and Coote.A (1987) *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle For Women's Liberation* Oxford: Basil Blackwell

³⁴ Dennis.N and Erdos.G (1993) *Families Without Fatherhood* London: IEA; Bly.R (1996) *Sibling Society* London: Penguin

Coward locates the problem in a yet more fundamental one related to a feminist rejection of gender essentialism. In relation to the family this is shown in a preference to talk about 'parents' rather than 'mothers' and 'fathers' in order to detach family roles from their gender. It is Coward's intention to raise gender differences in parenting as positive attributes and not to see 'masculine' fathers as a problem per se. She also wants to raise class differences between fathers and families as something that particular elements of a feminist discourse on families find difficult to assimilate to their gender focus on patriarchy and inadequate father roles. Coward's extended analysis of the construction of 'underclass' masculinities as 'whipping boys' critiques Beatrix Campbell's book *Goliath* for its presentation of 'lawless masculinities' on British council estates as somehow definitive of poor masculinities in the contemporary period. Here she discerns overlaps with Charles Murray's uncivilised 'underclass' males.³⁵

Campbell's rejoinder to Coward's *Guardian* article on contemporary fatherhood expresses an important dimension of difference between their positions on 'fathering' and 'underclass' masculinities, and between their feminisms. It is Campbell's assertion that amongst the poor and the prosperous, masculinity comes before co-operation with women. This has meant that 'fathers-as-breadwinners' are historically positioned in terms of domination:

'...as the outcome of a bitter struggle by men to purge women from the labour market and the public domain, and to keep them in a confined space.'³⁶

According to Campbell the historical prevalence of separate public and private gendered spheres has not passed (women still do more than three-quarters of the domestic work and child care) but is currently subject to revolutionary change:

'Fathers and masculinities have emerged as new political problems in the nineties both because of global restructuring and because feminism put them under scrutiny. We are all participating in a new historic settlement between genders and generations.'³⁷

A particular kind of 'redundancy' for men is the product of this settlement in traditional working class communities, one that is made visible by the figure of the single mother:

'To reveal the redundancy of the fathers is the crime of the mothers.'³⁸

Campbell conveys the essence of this change in terms of the labour market participation of women and the 'choice' of single motherhood:

'The breadwinner is an endangered species because all workers are breadwinners now. And men are challenged by the discovery that many women would often prefer

³⁵ Coward.R (1994) 'Whipping Boys' *The Guardian* Weekend 3.9.94 p32-35; Campbell.B (1993) *Goliath* London: Methuen

³⁶ Campbell, *Good Riddance To The Patriarch* p11

³⁷ Campbell, *Good Riddance To The Patriarch* p11

³⁸ Campbell, *Goliath* p313

to parent their children alone and in poverty rather than put up with men who bring them more pain than pleasure.³⁹

Although keen to disclaim celebration of these changes, her note is one of progression from masculinity as an homogeneously sealed domination, which in *Goliath* has its domain in poor communities:

‘My book *Goliath* did not celebrate men’s redundancy, it reported that in pauperised places where men have no escape from the space they share with women and children (the home and the neighbourhood) masculinity is still defended as difference and domination. This is the legacy that mainstream masculinity has given to men.’⁴⁰

In a rhetorical question: ‘Who is Ros Coward feeling for? For men? Or for her man?’

Campbell makes explicit the link between the feminist understanding that the personal is political by suggesting that Coward’s argument is specifically rooted in her own subjective experience. More pointedly the accusation is of right-wing propinquity:

‘Mothering is about care. But fathering by Coward’s account is the bequest of masculinity. And here, whether she likes it or not, she finds herself with the misogynist right.’⁴¹

Coward clearly has ideas about the existence of particular feminist orthodoxies which it is not possible to speak against without incurring angry reactions from particular feminist quarters whereas Campbell will not admit this view of feminism as representative:

‘Her bizarre spectre of a feminist fatwa... doesn’t describe the feminisms I know... feminism is only a conversation, an idea, an argument.’⁴²

This exchange raises two main issues. The first is about the implications of socio-economic shifts in the labour market for gender roles in homes, neighbourhoods and workplaces, particularly those of young men and fathers; the second is about the part of feminism in articulating and shaping these changes. The position of particular working class men and the sorts of masculinity associated with them, is a central element of a number of Centre-Left discourses about gender and employment change.⁴³ These men are identified as the obstacle to particular visions of change on a number of fronts; they don’t fit and are in need of reconstitution. In Campbell’s view some of them embody ‘lawless masculinities’, in Coward’s they are ‘whipping boys’. It is a debate in which the stakes are high for a

³⁹ Campbell, *Good Riddance To The Patriarch* p11

⁴⁰ Campbell, *Good Riddance To The Patriarch* p11

⁴¹ Campbell, *Good Riddance To The Patriarch* p11

⁴² Campbell, *Good Riddance To The Patriarch* p11

⁴³ Mandelson.P and Liddle.R (1996) *The Blair Revolution: Can New Labour Deliver?* London: Faber; Wilkinson.H (1994) *No Turning Back: Generations and the Genderquake* London: Demos; Balls.E and Gregg.P (1993) *Work and Welfare: Tackling The Jobs Deficit* London: IPPR; ‘Flexible Women Take Over The Job Market’ (editorial) *The Independent* 18.12.93 p16; Hutton.W (1996) ‘Why The Workplace Is No Longer A Man’s World’ *The Observer* 8.12.96 p25

discourse that has outcomes for policy, and for configurations of contemporary feminisms. Both *Goliath* and *Whipping Boys* are political representations which are part of the discourse of 'underclass'. My interviews with Beatrix Campbell and Ros Coward set out to elicit a self-reflexivity in relation to the ideas, networks and policy trajectories generated through the discourse of 'underclass' of which they are part. In particular this was intended to show the ways in which the construction of the spaces and identities of 'underclass' masculinities is a personal and political production, a representational space.

Personalising Opinions

The ideas that Ros Coward and Beatrix Campbell have about working class masculinities are partly related to their own backgrounds, which in some respects are very similar. Both were brought up on new, 'respectable' council estates in the post war period, their fathers were both teachers and their parents wanted them to do well:

'My father was a teacher so we weren't underclass by any stretch of the imagination and very aspirant... a family for whom cultural capital was enormously important and our education was absolutely paramount... we all did very well academically.' (Coward)⁴⁴

'They'd do anything to make sure we got what we wanted through the promise of education but never had contempt for people who'd be regarded as rough - the people down the street.' (Campbell)

Both identify themselves as having lived in proximity to poor people and although the sort of poverty associated with 'underclass' (then the 'non-respectable' poor) was not part of their own experience, they were part of communities in which those distinctions were not made in terms of absolute difference or through judgements of worth. That is something that they feel sets them apart from other commentators on 'underclass':

'The school I was at was a new school built on a new estate, high rise... like all the new estates being built in the '50s and '60s, and my friends lived in the tower blocks. And all the sorts of debates that are around now, well they were *there*. I think that did leave a mark in the sense that unlike some of the commentators, well you imagine that Tony Blair has never had the sorts of experiences - he's been to a privileged school, he's been to a private school in Edinburgh, he's been through Cambridge...' (Coward)

'If you look at the protagonists in the debate that touch on or promote the idea of the underclass, their personal circumstances are often very revealing... Andrew Neil (as Editor of *The Sunday Times*) was an assiduous promoter of Charles Murray and the idea of the underclass. And here you've got the respectable former working class boy, goes to grammar school, Oxford or Cambridge, and has a kind of meritocratic smothering contempt for those other parts of his own class which was part of a kind of ideological environment in which that class emerged - Thatcherism. So I think his

⁴⁴ All quotes which follow without footnote are taken from my interviews, with the name of the 'interviewee' following in brackets

animus against people who are poor obviously partly is to do with his '80s... '90s New Right politics but partly sustained by his own visceral feelings about the people at the bottom of the street and a rage that he should be thought to be anything like them.' (Campbell)

In terms of their own commentaries the significance of their backgrounds and their present experiences, is seen in terms of a situatedness that is 'anti-othering', connected to 'underclass' both in terms of experience and empathy:

'You sometimes think that people actually don't know as *people* the people they're talking about... I can only say that for me some of the kind of people designated as a problem exist as real people... I can see them as real people so its not been a problem to separate off from myself... my kids go to a local school in Lambeth and there's a close contact with a lot of people who actually embody some of the things that everyone's worrying about so yes I think my personal experience - it's become something that I feel is important - you know you don't seal yourself off and commentate from Mount Olympus.' (Coward)

'I'm a working class person, who like Andrew Neil, my niche in the working class was respectable, upward striving... The culture of my strata of the working class was very much about active citizenship, in work, and a certain empathy with people whose respectability was always a bit lacking but who were kind of doing their best, but who'd be regarded as maybe a bit disgraceful... If you come from the working class - which after all is the majority class today - you wouldn't think it, you'd think it was a kind of exiled group of people but it still is the majority experience - part of that will be about a sort of empathic just bustling along with all the people who increasingly in the '80s and '90s (which wouldn't be true in my childhood) with people who are on either side of the law. You can't live in a community say like the one I'm living in now which is an average, without half of your neighbours are criminal, the other half struggling respectability.' (Campbell)

From these apparently similar starting points Beatrix Campbell and Ros Coward have developed a number of very different positions in relation to a range of practical and intellectual activities and interests. For Campbell these are the interests of investigative journalism and political activism, primarily focused on working class community politics in the North of England. Her book *Wigan Pier Revisited* is in many respects the forerunner of *Goliath*. It is a journalistic piece of 'travel writing' through the unemployed communities of Britain in the 1980s. It is also a self-reflexive exploration of socialism and feminism as she encounters working class people in places of industrial decline. It reads as a treatise of values, a record of why she believes the things she does in relation to what she finds. She starts by saying that she's the sort of feminist who believed 'it's not men, it's the system' but who came to realise through her journeying that mainstream working class politics were 'stewed in sexual prejudice and privilege' and that both 'individual men and the political movements men have made within the working class are culpable'.⁴⁵ *Goliath* is a similar political exploration of 'what Britain had become' in the 1990s this time via council estate

⁴⁵ Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited* p5-6

riots that occurred in disparate parts of the country. It reiterates many of the gender political understandings found in *Wigan Pier Revisited*. Campbell identifies her gender politics as part of a currently diffuse feminist discourse:

'Feminism has so infused the language we all speak, the consciousness of the times, even though it's a very contested movement, it's a constant reference point... it seems to me that you're either having an argument that comes from feminism or you're having an argument with feminism or against feminism.' (Campbell)

Within this diversity she identifies Ros Coward as an 'anti-feminist feminist' as part of a contingency that expresses itself as a commitment to equal opportunities, and a feminism that has a problem with extending its gaze to masculinity:

'Ros Coward is not alone, Melanie Philips is another one, Ros Miles is one - she wrote a terrible book - 'The Children We Deserve', so there's a whole bunch.' (Campbell)

An 'anti-feminist feminist' means that Coward's feminist position quarrels within feminism, and it problematises women as much as men, and feminism as much as patriarchy: 'that kind of feminism is very often furious with other feminists' (Campbell). Coward's starting point is not 'what's wrong with men or masculinity', but what are the problems of men and masculinities *in relation to* the problems of women and femininities. Her standpoint is not 'on the side of women' but on the side of equality.

Campbell differentiates her own political position as socialist feminist but is keen to separate its constituent parts:

'There are socialist feminisms and socialist feminisms and I don't feel my position is particularly resolved or any of them are because the thing we're about is so unresolved. And the attempt to marry socialism and feminism was always a very unhappy one precisely because socialism had become a politics that was imbued with a sexist set of priorities. I would never describe myself as a feminist-dash-socialist or a marxist-dash-feminist but was interested in those two things and they're not very comfortable with each other.' (Campbell)

The intellectual position and argument of her writings is that gender is inflected by class rather than class inflected by gender, although she does state the need to see this prioritisation in context rather than in abstract:

'The argument around what has priority is only an argument that makes any kind of sense when it's an argument being had with the other.' (Campbell)

In the contemporary period she sees one particular argument as the most important in relation to ideas of social and economic change associated with 'underclass'. It is that the cultural shift in gender identities being brought about by the changing world of 'work' and family relations has to be promoted and supported as a revolutionary opportunity for changes in power relations between genders. This position is forwarded as the imperative of our times, and an imperative that she perceives Coward to be detracting from:

'The problem I have with that is that she is defending masculinity and men at the very moment in history when the cultural and political history of masculinity is being tried as never before, is under scrutiny as never before... What I am saying is that she can't escape and none of us can escape what feels to me like the imperative of our time - which is to say - 'is masculinity always and forever about difference and difference as domination?' If it's not and we can imagine other modes of masculinity and to my mind we have to - that's what the political project is - then you have to begin to talk about what would it mean for men to be human beings as against what it would mean for men to be only men.' (Campbell)

In many respects this is an argument to 'seize the day', to 'go with' contemporary changes in the family and labour market that could lead to the reorganisation of personal and political economies:

'Masculinity is under scrutiny in a way that in my lifetime is unprecedented.'
(Campbell)

Coward sees these changes from a different perspective, related to the interests that she has developed through her academic work. She has been less concerned with the differences between genders within particular community spaces, than with the inextricably mutual relations between men and women, masculinities and femininities. This has taken her work in the direction of exploring the psychological relations between masculinities and femininities from infancy to childhood and adulthood.⁴⁶ She believes that these mutually produced elements of gender identity are central to, but usually diminished in the most vocal of feminist analyses of contemporary gender relations:

'If you're going to look at masculinity you have to look at modes of femininity around it because this is what's giving it its definition, and actually when men define themselves aggressively as men you have to look at what it is they're pushing out of themselves and onto the feminine and vice versa.' (Coward)

This belief has led her towards a critique of those feminist discourses that have mainly focused on problematising men and the masculine, and of those contemporary political discourses that have singled out particular sorts of male gender identities as undesirable. The critique has in many ways affected her personally leading to a re-evaluation of the meanings of her feminist position:

'I absolutely do not identify with the philosophy and views that I had when feminism was at its most active and indeed I would be very critical of some of them. Obviously I fundamentally am still involved in a project about establishing a more egalitarian society, in which gender has to be one of the most important considerations because gender is a potent divisive factor in this society around which certain kinds of things are organised. But in terms of some of the kind of feminism that was around, I would distance myself now quite a lot.' (Coward)

⁴⁶ Coward, *Our Treacherous Hearts*

Coward does not identify a particular constituency of feminists to whom she is opposed on these grounds but a number of feminist ideas with which particular figures are more or less associated:

'Of course feminism is so many different things and no one person is a walking amalgam of all the kind of wrong thinking. But I'm very critical of the kind of thinking that designates things as 'problems of masculinity', you know 'crime is a male problem', 'women do not do this as much as men', 'women are victimised by this and that.' (Coward)

Coward admits to difficulties in locating her critique in gender political terms for a number of reasons: because of the diffuseness of feminist discourse; because it cannot usefully work with categories of feminism (such as 'socialist feminist') whose meanings 'on the ground' are so often different to those expressed by figures in public positions; and because adherence to a particular feminist argument is no guarantee of wider political sensibilities as was more often the case in the 1970s. Indeed feminism's post-1970s maturation into some mainstream quarters has made for some unlikely alliances that she finds problematic:

'In a funny sort of way the worst kind of feminism seems to be being upheld by people who you wouldn't necessarily thought of as feminist - it crops up amongst the Janet Daleys (a right-wing columnist for *The Daily Telegraph*)... you know that middle class women are the salvation of our society. But I think it lurks around quite a lot. I'm quite suspicious of some of the feminism around Harriet Harman, Patricia Hewitt, that kind of discourse that's in the Labour Party now.' (Coward)

In particular Coward is critical of the feminist discourse that has developed around particular working class masculinities, which she sees as uniting parts of Beatrix Campbell's writing with those mainstream elements of the Labour Party associated with the IPPR and certain commentaries on the political Right. This accusation was levelled in her article *Whipping Boys*, to the ire of those particular feminists concerned:

'Well for example the IPPR, I think there was a very unthought out notion about masculinity there that had come in from a particular kind of feminist version. And they were the ones saying things like 'crime is a masculine problem, men are the problem, we've got this problem with men and marginal men who because they don't have a natural feel for the community are busting it up'. So that kind of view was located in particular groups and those were the groups that let me know I'd stepped out of line...

What I really think is that there's a bit of an embattled rather old fashioned feminism which isn't actually terribly widespread but it happens to be in one or two quite powerful positions. But I don't think it's tremendously representative of what socialist feminists in the broader sense think. It feels it's got its line about male power and it sticks to that line regardless of social change. And things have been changing very rapidly over the past 10 years or so and it's not quite the same situation. It is quite a difficult area to specify really... where that kind of feminism is located, and I really do think it's quite a small but quite powerful group of people in Left and Labour kind of positions who've got a notion of 'we need to think about gender and what we need to think about gender is that men have power.' (Coward)

The lineaments of this debate are difficult to trace. Issues of representation and differences in perception loom large ensuring that there can be no definitive version of the feminist power dynamics at work within this discourse. What is clear is that the different priorities of Campbell's and Coward's feminist politics are productive of very different gender analyses of the impoverished communities which are the subject of 'underclass' discourse. Furthermore, feelings about what can and can't be said, and about what should and should not be said, are instrumental in shaping the content of the discourse.

Feminist Representations

Within the discourse of 'underclass' Campbell and Coward represent two different arguments about working class masculinities that are congruent with their particular feminist and Left-wing politics. In this capacity both have a media presence: as journalists for Centre-Left broadsheets, in popular/academic journals and through occasional television and radio appearances. They are published authors whose books are key reference points in feminist bibliographies, crossing academic and popular discourses of feminism. Both are active spokeswomen on academic and political events/seminar circuits. They are able to use their well-established names and distinctive viewpoints to respond to articles that relate to each other's work through the channels of national journalism. As such they occupy positions of discursive power that are able to launch issues into particular arenas of public debate. In this way they are active in bringing elements of feminist theory and practice together through the strategic possibilities of their speaking positions. The degree to which they use their positions to bridge different media, political, academic and popular audiences and seek to influence cultural political debates, reflects both personal ideas about their roles and the power dynamics of some highly contested debates. These issues of representative power are differently considered by Coward and Campbell:

'Through the journalism, well you don't want to be a megalomaniac but I think you do have opportunities and I think I do that. As an example for the 20th anniversary of the Equal Opportunities Commission, writing a critical piece about what they were up to and where they were going, that has had the effect of me now being in contact with the Commission and some of the people in there who are also thinking a bit critically themselves, who can now come out and make alliances with people.'

(Coward)

'Effectivity' is generated by their networked position rather than being a conscious strategy. Opportunities are in-built, connections ready-made, while the manner in which they are practiced gives them shape and makes them exactly what they are:

'Through writing a regular column.. you do start getting invited to these think tanky things.. so indirectly you do get the opportunity to influence... I'm not sure that I *do* but you get the opportunity to! It's one of those things that creates its own momentum, you become a spokesperson for something you just happened to have brought up.'

(Coward)

Networks of allegiance or consensus with a feminist hue are often part of other connections rather than being separately motivated. They are both work and friendship based, and extend into a realm of loose political connections shaped by mutual practices and interests of which feminism is one aspect:

'There'd be support networks, or little groups of people in roughly the same kind of work who you find supportive and empathetic and whose politics you roughly agree with. And then there'd be a sort of second tier with people with whom you're broadly sympathetic for whom there's a kind of mutual trade-off - you know I ring them for information and they ring me if they want something covered.' (Coward)

Coward regards the representative aspect of her position as a responsibility in which she thinks about issues of reception and recognises a loose constituency. It has stopped her from saying particular things that she otherwise would, but it has also been felt as an externally mediated pressure:

'I sometimes feel conscious of that fact, or I have been made to feel conscious of the fact that because I am a feminist I should not say this or that or the other, and to some extent that has stopped me so maybe I do feel there's a kind of constituency there and some kind of responsibility, because sometimes I do feel much more critical than I allow myself to say... so I feel, well they've done all these other nice things and these are good so I won't.' (Coward)

Coward does not conceive her position as either representative of particular issues or particular people as if she were speaking *for* them. But she does see her actual arguments as relatively marginalised within a broadly conceived feminist discourse, even though her actual position is a privileged one. In this respect she believes her arguments are closer to those of feminists and socialists 'on the ground' outside of arenas and positions of power.

In a similar but much more obvious way Beatrix Campbell positions herself as someone whose views are grounded within the communities that she speaks about. She assumes and draws credibility from more organic connections with 'real' communities. It is a trademark of her journalistic style in which she constructs herself as an indigenous figure moving among and between working class communities on bike and foot, talking to people and finding out about things:

'These pieces of work are always pieces of exploration, I don't know where they're going to get from when they start.' (Campbell)

Related to this self-styled honesty, Campbell says that her work is not intended to be policy assimilable:

'Are there things I wouldn't say in order that something could be more successfully assimilated by policy makers? No.' (Campbell)

Whereas Coward has stepped back from commenting on areas that could marginalise her or be very divisive, Campbell positions herself as speaking the 'unspeakable' in the process of

revealing the truth about situations as she finds them. It is not her fault if what she finds is taken up by differently motivated concerns. So in relation to *Goliath* she asks:

‘Does that lend itself to the enemy because what it’s trying to explicate is what produces villains and conflict within the community in terms of crime and things like that?’ (Campbell)

Her answer is that what is most interesting about the question is the motivation behind it:

‘What becomes interesting is who it is who has a stake in saying that my argument is crap or that it’s the same as the Charles Murray argument and that it’s bestialising boys and blaming boys in a way that’s unfair?’ (Campbell)

She believes this question reveals the gender alliances of her critics of whom Ros Coward is exemplary:

‘For her that’s intolerable, to name masculinity, to problematise masculinity for certain sorts of feminists is intolerable.’ (Campbell)

Campbell’s own gender alliances are evident here in a way that suggests her self-presentation as an investigative journalist not knowing what she will find, belies another agenda. Her feminist politics has as its overriding concern, making connections about gender interests between men and between women. It is the conditioning theme of both *Wigan Pier Revisited* and *Goliath* in their exploration of working class communities:

‘What it (Goliath) was trying to look at is what connects so called bad boys with so called good boys. What are the culture’s legitimate and illegitimate masculinities that connect both of them... What I was trying to suggest was that if you could forget the issue ‘are they or are they not on the side of the law?’ and ‘are they or are they not respectable?’, but what these young men share with other kinds of masculinity, that’s what seemed to me to be very interesting.’ (Campbell)

This gender determined position was clarified through my question:

I’m trying to think this through in relation to my own socialist feminism and I find it very problematic. Are you saying that these ‘Goliath’ masculinities have more in common with other - even middle class masculinities from different cultures, than they do with the women in their own communities?

‘Yes absolutely. Generally speaking one of the things they share is a determination to assert difference as difference from the feminine. Now there’s a new inflection to that argument because in the ‘80s and ‘90s there’s a concern with differentiating respectable masculinities or fatherly masculinities or middle class masculinities from those rough, horrible, macho masculinities and again I resist that argument. So for instance the amount of housework that Tony Blair will ever have done won’t be that different from the man two doors up who’s never put a meal on the table in twenty-five years of marriage. Both of them are very much *not* like the women in their communities, but both the women are much more like each other, so the gendering is profound and determined.’ (Campbell)

Campbell’s presentation of events which took place on a number of council estates at the start of the 1990s, and her analysis of the working class masculinities associated with such disorders (joyriding, burglary, street riot) are often quoted as authoritative accounts and

connect with some dominant representations of 'underclass' criminality. So for example the Channel Four documentary series 'Battered Britain' about the 'violent state of British society' that was broadcast through the summer of 1995 had an accompanying booklet designed for viewers in which *Goliath* is described as 'the authoritative account of the rioting in Summer 1991 on the Meadow Well estate on Tyneside'.⁴⁷ It goes on to quote a later piece written by Campbell about Newcastle's Benwell district's 'neighbourhood from hell',⁴⁸ invoking the mythologised language of vigilantes, criminal hierarchies, 'the Lads' and 'the Grass', echoing ongoing tabloid representations of council estate 'neighbours from hell'. Campbell's analysis of the 'political emptiness' of the riots as 'riots that no-one wanted to claim or own, that no-one could be proud of, that could not explain themselves',⁴⁹ has currency with particular representations of the internal degeneracy of council estates. An article in *The Times* newspaper which quotes Campbell as its reference, illustrates the use of that idea:

'They were not kicking at Big Brother but at their own brothers and sisters. Their violence expressed, not political rage but moral and spiritual bankruptcy, their final disconnection from civilised values. Unlike the outbursts of the 1980s, their protest was aimed at nothing and everything, drained of all meaning. They could barely be bothered.'⁵⁰

The idea of working class young men losing their civility and identity on losing their work, and indulging a mindless, meaningless disorder that brings about the destruction of their *own* neighbourhood spaces, has been a constant theme of the Conservative leaning press in recent years:

'This self-loathing, self-destructive tranche of the population [is] far less assimilable into morally constructive social life than any immigrant group...[whose progress is barred by] ...the mindless hatred of the indigenous working classes, who loathe them precisely for their cultural integrity. Long after Britain has become a successful multi-racial society, it will be plagued by this diminishing (but increasingly alienated) detritus of the Industrial Revolution.'⁵¹

The 'estate' is the domain of these working class lads, in Campbell's account as an appropriated space that they will not share co-operatively with women once they are confined there through unemployment and which like the home is not felt to be a naturally constitutive part of their identities:

'Men's relationship to estates tended to be like their relationship to home - not exactly a place to live so much as a place to leave, to return, to come and go.'⁵²

⁴⁷ Channel Four Television (1995) *Battered Britain* London: Channel Four Television p21

⁴⁸ Campbell.B (1995) 'Little Beirut' *The Guardian* Weekend 1.7.95 p14

⁴⁹ Campbell, *Goliath* p93

⁵⁰ D'Ancona.M (1993) 'No Smoke But The Fire Smoulders' *The Times* 11.8.93 p14

⁵¹ Janet Daley (1994) column *The Times* 2.6.94 p16

⁵² Campbell, *Goliath* p320

In journalistic accounts the estate 'is a microcosm of everything that can go wrong with a community.'⁵³ The Meadow Well estate on North Tyneside, one of the council estates of *Goliath's* riotous record, is held as the exemplar of this condition:

'...a magnet for social scientists trying to discover what's gone wrong with Britain's Welfare State... a classic sink estate of impoverished women, deprived children, loutish adolescents and a prevailing nihilism underwritten by the State.'⁵⁴

Within such estates the 'missing' or 'present but inadequate' father is characteristic of the 'underclass' father as bad role model:

'A man who steals, lies and gets into fights is going to teach his son the same tricks... there are women and children a plenty and scores of youths. But where have all the fathers gone? Most of them seemed to have vanished: to the pubs, the betting shop, prison or points unknown.'⁵⁵

The 'missing father' is a theme that Campbell pursues in relation to both working class and middle class men, the latter providing bad role models through the dominance and exclusivity of their breadwinning roles. She believes that the absence of fathers (actually or effectively) is rooted in a shared culture of masculinity, which is *expressed* differently by working class and middle class men due to their different economic positions. Similarly, male domination of social space is a feature of a malestream culture which is indulged in by men of all classes according to their different means. Campbell's complaint is that this understanding about male dominated spaces is rarely, if at all, *extended* to middle class men in the discourse of 'underclass'. Thus *Goliath* focuses on car crime as the prized male-status making activity of Meadow Well's criminal fraternities, with the police similarly expressing their masculinity through high speed car chases of 'the lads'.

The fact that it is the working class young men who end up criminalised or killed in the chase, may be less about the differential expressions of masculinity than a 'difference' that is lived as a class inequality. However Campbell suggests that even that class 'difference' bestows masculinist advantages upon these working class lads: 'Doing time in jail confirms their virility.'⁵⁶ This idea has been recycled as a thinly veiled contempt for the perverse morality of male relations within working class families of which Meadow Well estate fathers are exemplary. The following quote describes a father's defence of his son, at a press conference in which he denounces the media for describing his son as a joyrider after being killed in a police car chase:

'The lad was not a joyrider, the father insisted, he was a professional car thief. So is honour satisfied at Meadow Well. What is unusual about this story is that the boy had a father at all.'⁵⁷

⁵³ Miller.J (1993) 'Estate Betrayed By Its Fathers' *The Sunday Times* 11.7.93 p12

⁵⁴ Miller, *Estate Betrayed By Its Fathers* p12

⁵⁵ Miller, *Estate Betrayed By Its Fathers* p12

⁵⁶ Coote.A (1993) 'The Problem With Crime Is A Problem with Men' *The Independent* 16.2.93 p15

⁵⁷ Miller, *Estate Betrayed By Its Fathers* p12

Campbell does not see the production of these ideas around crime, class and gender in which she is actively involved as part of a strategic feminist project. Indeed she does not think that such a project exists:

‘There is not a thing called feminism there to ‘do’ anything, it barely exists as a movement. Part of it, one shard or two shards of its existence take that movement forward. And in that sense it is a new kind of politics because it has a kind of mobilising moment and it has a feeling for that.’ (Campbell)

In the contemporary period of employment restructuring and gender role changes within the family Campbell identifies such a mobilising moment: a feminist strength of feeling and of position that could have its day, as she believes class politics has had its day in the now disappearing period of industrial employment and the family wage. This is the animus of her argument. However, in the contemporary period this particular ‘shard’ of feminism has taken on the appearance and effectivity of something much more coherent, organised and policy inflected than an ‘idea in conversation’. That is: the problem of ‘underclass’ masculinities in need of policy solutions.

‘Underclass’ Masculinities

Both Coward and Campbell disparage the terminology of ‘underclass’ because of what it is meant to imply. For Coward it is ‘a concocted term’ that expresses a moral judgement about a predictable *type* of person:

‘...the product of a single mother, broken home, lack of employment opportunity, education opportunity, criminal behaviour, likely to be violent... so you’ve got this kind of profiling of people who would be in this category and it is a moral category because if someone is a product of a broken home, single parent but has nevertheless managed to go up the hierarchy and do quite well for themselves, that person would not be a member of the underclass.’ (Coward)

For Campbell it is invoked as an accusation that works as a denial of class belonging:

‘...it doesn’t give to poor people, the unemployed and to communities, their own histories, their own powers and their own cultures. It doesn’t give them anything. All it does is confer a sense of their difference, their otherness from the mainstream.’⁵⁸

Equally, both believe that the debates around the concept of ‘underclass’ express something of the substantive problems that do exist within impoverished communities. For Campbell the concept is in many respects a distraction from states of economic emergency and the actual social dynamics of those places. It recasts problems of criminal masculinity and the

⁵⁸ Campbell.B (1993) *Britain’s Dangerous Places: The Decline Of Our Communities* Scotland: Edinburgh Group, Democratic Left p3

failings of statutory agencies (local authorities and the police) in response, as problems of single motherhood and of working class communities as a totality:

‘It doesn’t help us understand what the dynamics are *within* the neighbourhoods that have been cast into a state of economic emergency, as well as their relationship to the powers beyond them.’⁵⁹

‘Why is it that these entire communities are labelled the underclass when actually their struggle is to survive behaviour by a bunch of boys not OAPs or mothers... You could go down the West End (Newcastle) where there’s a modern housing estate - it won’t be even 20 years old, wrecked, rebuilt at a cost of something like ten million pounds. A waste of time, a complete waste of time, because there are probably 50 boys orchestrated by really a dozen grown up men who run around until that neighbourhood is not liveable for the hundreds of people who actually live there and the various agencies think re-pointing the roof tops will sort it out.’ (Campbell)

Campbell’s main objection to the term ‘underclass’ is the way it lumps *together* poor working class men and women, their behaviours and economic circumstances, as an undifferentiated mass which can be blamed, distanced and disengaged from. She conceptualises this as a problem of abandonment and violence against the women of these communities, which simultaneously blames them for their predicament:

‘These are the women who failed to manage their man, their lads, their boys. These are the people to blame for the incubus within. So what happens is that the political system abandons the neighbourhoods they are supposed to represent and leaves them to their most dangerous enemy... like the old order in the way that it treated battered women. It blamed them for their own endangerment.’⁶⁰

Campbell’s exposition of the gendered violence of crime perpetrated against impoverished communities, conceptualises those activities as analogous to sexual violence:

‘I actually think that burglary is akin to a kind of spatial rape, it’s like the act of breaking and entering which is to refuse to recognise the limits of your own bounds and that you’re entitled to go in and mess up somebody else’s space. That kind of crime isn’t done by women.’ (Campbell)

Similarly Campbell has represented car theft as a metaphor for rampant masculinity where the car is a feminised object, here speaking at the IPPR conference on ‘Families, Children and Crime’:

‘Men love the interior of cars... they want to possess them. I imagine car theft is a surrogate rape fantasy of men’s in which they occupy cars and make them their own.’⁶¹

Campbell constructs crime as an activity that partly constitutes the masculinity of these working class lads, part of which is actual and part symbolic gender violence against

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Britain’s Dangerous Places* p3

⁶⁰ Campbell, *Britain’s Dangerous Places* p10

⁶¹ Quoted in Nick Cohen (1993) ‘The Making of Machismo’ *The Independent on Sunday* 21.11.93 p21

women. She presents this as continuous with the interests and preoccupations of a mainstream, masculinist culture which mirrors that of 'their purported enemy - the police'. In other words as an *interest* that unifies men and unifies them against women.

At the opposite end of Campbell's construction are the women of these communities whose responses to poverty are about self-help and constructiveness, the very opposite of the lads network:

'...typically open, useful, practical, incipiently democratic'⁶²

'...mothers who are as poor as them who are not connected with crime and when they are it is almost exclusively survival crime - organised shoplifting or benefit fraud.' (Campbell)

These are the heroines, the 'spinal cord' of communities struggling to survive sieges from the villains in their midst. Recognition of ambiguity in these relations is secondary to this basic template of adversarial male relations. Co-operation is rarely yielded by these young men, who come and go, take and destroy, who dominate rather than share the domestic and social community space. It is the same complaint that Campbell raises in her piece on fatherhood - co-operation as the elusive factor of men's relations with women:

'Among both the poor and the prosperous, when men and women share the same time and space, something is still more important to men than co-operation - their masculinity.'⁶³

Clearly for Campbell much of the debate about 'underclass', crime and parenting is actually about the problem of masculinity as domination, difference and non-co-operation. Single mothers and 'welfare dependency' are diversions motivated by neo-liberalism and misogyny. This problem manifests itself in specific ways by focusing either too *narrowly* or too *widely* on impoverished communities. The former focus fails to acknowledge the problem of masculinity as society-wide, extending to middle class male commentators, politicians and the police who because of their own masculine preoccupations and interests will not problematise the *masculinity* of the working class lads. The latter focus fails to see that the problem of these communities is the behaviour of *one* particular constituency within them - that of the men.

For Coward this 'most obvious' aspect of these communities - the *maleness* of crime - is a diversion from a more complex analysis of internal dynamics within them, *and* the relationship between commentators and the commented upon. She identifies the substantive problems within and beyond these communities, concocted in the term 'underclass' as those of social and economic marginality, which particular groups are subject to:

⁶² Campbell, *Britain's Dangerous Places* p8

⁶³ Campbell, *Good Riddance To The Patriarch* p11

'There clearly are groups who are becoming socially marginal, having much more difficulty sharing in not just the kind of morality but also the kind of benefits of this kind of society.' (Coward)

Coward does not think this marginality is a straightforward outcome of race, class and gender victimisation. Within that process there is a dynamic of 'self-marginality':

'The problem of people being very marginal and impoverished and behaving like it... I think there is a degree of self-marginality or a *process* really and that's where the kind of issues like crime do erupt because groups can get into sub criminal activities which are partly because of their powerlessness and exclusion but also partly because of what we might call a rather immoral way of trying to get what everybody else has got.' (Coward)

The effect of 'masculinity' within this process should not be over-determined:

'I think we are in times where the kind of macho masculinity that is actually very obvious and fashionable, makes it very easy to mistake some of the problems we're having, with 'masculinity' because very often the people on whom the moral discourse is focused as the problem - the criminals, the violent criminals, the abusive fathers *seem* to come from the group where that kind of machismo attitude is also very much part and parcel of the structure.' (Coward)

In wholesale accusations against 'masculinity', in which particular groups of working class men are presented as embodying its worst excesses, the specificity of social and economic changes are lost. In Coward's view these are about particular groups of working class men in particular areas of particular regions, caught up in a process of employment change which affects them *most* adversely and which offers them the *least* number of choices and subject positions to deal with that situation. It then blames those men for their rigidity, inflexibility, non-co-operation, and blames 'masculinity' as equivalent to those 'bad things':

'I think feminists looking at this might be tempted to think that it is masculinity itself that is the problem because you get these problems where you get these very masculine men but I think the problem is much more complicated than that. I think what we've got at the moment is the kind of situation where machismo has upped the ante for everybody, in the sense that all boys have to relate to it in one way or another, it introduces machismo into the whole process of growing up at the moment. But the kind of things these women are talking about - the signs of lack of social cohesion, lack of a shared kind of community feeling, violence - those things are not necessarily products of masculinity.' (Coward)

They are rather the products of a particular sort of economic dislocation, which most disadvantages working class men:

'The groups who can see nothing in it for them because the employment opportunities are so limited and unappealing, and the quality of life is so unappealing, those kind of changes are that much worse. They're at a much more critical edge of it and kinds of identities have to be found that offer strength and power and status - you know machismo is a quality that comes free.' (Coward)

Coward's argument about contemporary masculinity insists on two things: that it is classed and that it is talked about in relation to femininity. With regard to the discourse of

'underclass' that has two central implications. The first is about the different powers, identities and opportunities available to differently classed masculinities, and it requires masculinity to be specified in class terms at every point:

Are middle class men able to develop and benefit from different kinds of masculinities that are made available to them?

'Absolutely, I think for a middle class male now, they could relate to, in fact are the body of, the moral discourse because they can see the advantages of shared values, earning money, having a decent home, having a decent family - there are very big advantages in it for them. But for those men who don't feel they have any stake in that, these identities are not terribly meaningful are they? I think the kind of moral discourse around at the moment is just mixing up morality and marginal criminality. I mean a lot of people involved in marginal crime are not immoral people, they're people for whom either there are cultural variations or they don't necessarily agree with the kind of laws that there are.' (Coward)

Coward believes that in contemporary 'underclass' discourse this has meant representations of particular groups of working class men that are 'actually interested in making that lot more like us lot'. Where this interest has been spoken by groups of middle class feminists as well as middle class men, the outcome is most problematic:

'No doubt some of the less pleasant aspects of masculinity should be mocked. But when this disparagement of all things male gets linked to the poor, in fact to those who are most disadvantaged in the current economy, the result is much more problematic.'⁶⁴

It is a result that Coward believes 'would cause outcry if used to refer to race or women.'⁶⁵ It also recalls an historical problem that particular groups of middle class feminists have had with particular groups of working class men, rooted in the feminism of late nineteenth century philanthropic movements:

'Women's protests against male dominance have, at times, intersected with or even reinforced middle class efforts to subdue and civilise the male 'underclass'.... in need of moral reform by 'womanly' values.'⁶⁶

Coward's second caveat to contemporary problematisations of masculinity is about positioning masculinity as separate from femininity which she believes marks a retreat from the role of actual women in the production of masculinity. An example is an idea that has currency within particular feminist arguments that single mothers are not the 'real' problem, criminal young men and missing fathers *are*. This serves to reduce the complexity of social *relations* to gender constructions and it also lessens the importance of looking at the process whereby 'problems' are actively produced as such by the commentary role. Coward is interested in the way different masculinities and femininities are constructed and lived in

⁶⁴ Coward, *Whipping Boys* p35

⁶⁵ Coward, *Whipping Boys* p32

⁶⁶ Coward, *Whipping Boys* p33

relation to each other, and in the context of circumstances that are usually not of their making. Those constructions are validated because they appear to be borne out by visible behaviours. Whilst non-co-operation and aggression against different authorities and within communities *have* come about, they are not incidental to policies which have actively impoverished, divided and undermined relations within communities:

'I was thinking about that in relation to things I see a lot around here, which is the mothers saying - 'if anyone pushes you around, you push 'em back'. I think there is a dynamic in the culture to protect themselves because they have learnt that they do have to stick up for themselves... people do fall back on very defensive behaviour and with women I think it sometimes does lead to pushing the men into a rather traditional aggressive role as the people who are out there - 'go on stick up for yourselves, stick up for us' ... I think that is the product of the last 18 years really... it's a bit like the cultural revolution in China - there's been a kind of constant revolution in institutions which has ended up with those very things that held together the meaning of community being completely undermined.' (Coward)

The process of 'setting up' particular people and places as problems determines which masculinities and residential areas are in the frame of discussion in the first place. Both Campbell and Coward identify motivating factors in the contemporary period of 'underclass' discourse which are about social authoritarianism, middle class angst and interests. Campbell chooses to highlight the misogyny around the depiction of 'underclass' families:

'I think these new traditionalists are the new misogynists... what that misogyny sustains is a sense that the world is falling apart because women have become unruly, going around having babies all over the place... To promote traditional family values at a time when that can only mean one thing - the restoration of a certain domestic arrangement headed by fathers and serviced by women - that defence of traditional family values requires that you suppress what we know goes on in family life - half of married women are at some time hit by their husbands, 20-25% of adults say they were abused by father figures and fathers.' (Campbell)

While Campbell is clearly concerned with the potential gender implications of 'pro-family' policies incorporating ideas about 'the problematic single mother', Coward's emphasis is more the broad sweep of the 'underclass' discourse as a particular kind of middle class fixation with themselves as different from and better than the 'other':

'I think the connections are very deep between the kind of culture that is sneered at and the kind of culture of the middle classes. All the kind of problems that are being pointed to, can be paralleled in the middle class lifestyle - that's one of the elements in the dynamic of externalising, making the problem the other, the kids on the estate, these awful estates, these awful people, the lout. You externalise it because the connections run very deep. They are to do with a particular hedonistic, individualistic, materialistic culture that we praise in the middle class and we condemn when it manifests in people we think can't afford it... And do we really think we've got nothing to learn from other groups... we sneer away as if we've got things to teach them but actually a lot of these people who are sneered at for one aspect of their lives have very valuable things in the other.' (Coward)

The different emphases that Coward and Campbell give to the gender and class dimensions of community spaces and cultures, sustain different views of community dystopias, both of which are not far from being realised in their views. Campbell's nightmare is a 'spatial tyranny' against networks of active citizenship sustained by unsupported and abandoned women, attacked by networks of criminal young men. A male dominated space characterised by:

'...rigid hierarchies, authoritarian hierarchies, closed systems, almost exclusive connections to masculinised cultures... a masculinised environment that endangers everybody else.'⁶⁷

Coward's nightmare is 'middle class solutions to everything':

'The middle class assumption that their way is best and some of the solutions around children and gangs on the street is precisely that. This keeping more vigilance and getting them in off the street and actually I think one of the problems is not enough of the middle class are out there on the street. I don't think the kind of lives some of these middle class kids lead is any kind of life at all - they're ferried hither and thither and they're shoved into nurseries and they're made to do French when they're three and they're made to do violin when they're four. I remember Angela Carter used to live round here and I was quite friendly with her and I can just remember on one occasion we were gossiping about someone and I said 'what you mean they had the usual privileged middle class childhood?' And she said 'Privileged! - what's privileged about a middle class childhood - bloody oppressed!' And I thought 'yes, she's absolutely right, and yet we take so for granted that the solution to problems at the moment is things like after-school clubs - let's get them in, let's corral them in, let's stimulate them. Actually I think it would be a much better society if they were all out on the streets from dawn to dusk!... I think the problem is actually about getting the environment more friendly, to get the cities redesigned. When they look at cities and spaces the first consideration should be how can we make it safe for kids to hang about here on their own, not going to their piano lessons... Kids can't walk to school around here because of the traffic, local shops have disappeared because of the supermarkets so there aren't people around on corners, there's no kind of community space... I don't agree with saying that the middle class shuttling around and us going off to our jobs, and the children shut away, and being a Blairite is the solution - that's not my idea of life!' (Coward)

This argument recognises that the estate and the street are classed concepts, classed spaces. With different emphases Campbell and Coward here converge in recognition that 'community' requires a willingness to share space across genders and across classes, to *make* community space. That possibility of shared community space also requires policy and investment. The ability and inclination to 'share' space needs to be valued, facilitated and resourced.

⁶⁷ Campbell, *Britain's Dangerous Places* p5-6

Discussion: Dangerous Estates, Dangerous States of Being

The council estate of 'underclass' discourse is constructed as a different sort of space according to who is talking about it. It is also a space in which people experience their co-existence in different ways according to gender, race, locality and a whole range of variable personal experiences. These two aspects are inextricably related because the space of the estate is a product of power relations within and beyond its real and imagined boundaries. Its spatiality is made up of power laden social relations; its spatiality is known and understood through power laden discourses. My interest here is the way in which differences within estates, and between estates and other living areas are discursively rendered.

Both Campbell and Coward are part of the process in which the meanings and experiences of council estate living are being made. Campbell notes the way the terminology of 'underclass' and 'the estate' together entered a popular vernacular at the end of the 1980s. A media glut of stories about things going wrong on estates centred on crime and family disorder, represented these places and the people living there as 'junk'.⁶⁸

Campbell relates the gender inflection of those representations to an imported American analysis of the black 'underclass' ghetto (the American equivalent to British council estates). Since the 1960s it had blamed the matriarchal structure of black communities for the development of fragmentary family relations because the 'Negro' male was sidelined as both father and provider.⁶⁹ Campbell reverses the gender dynamic of that construction refuting both Moynihan's misogynist critique of the black mother *and* the conclusion that it was white racism that created 'ruthless exploitative relationships' reached by the Kerner Commission set up by the government to study riots in the cities of 1960s America. Her feminist take on these events is that 'a decade later those cultures would be called sexism.'⁷⁰

Campbell applies this same frame of analysis to the causality of the riots in the early 1990s on British council estates in Cardiff, Oxford and Newcastle. They were not rooted in the dysfunctions of single motherhood, were not simply the expressions of oppression and poverty, or the pathologies of poor 'ghettoised' people. Campbell gives them another meaning, an alternative emblematic status, through a particular feminist analysis. These were estates under siege from within by criminal masculinities and were 'telling us something bigger than themselves, something about Britain.'⁷¹ In short they were telling us

⁶⁸ Campbell, *Goliath* p302

⁶⁹ This analysis was largely initiated by Patrick Moynihan's 1965 *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*, report for the U.S Department of Labour

⁷⁰ Campbell, *Goliath* p314

⁷¹ Campbell, *Goliath* p283

about a masculinist culture in society which will not support and has abandoned impoverished communities of women struggling to survive. Campbell's replacement version of events, is driven by a will and a claim to 'know' these estates better than those who offer alternative analyses. The underclass theorists 'did not know how to read the estates', and so 'mothers were culpable for the lads culture of predation that tyrannised the places of the poor.'⁷²

Into this misogynistic agenda and the 'political emptiness' of the events themselves, Campbell brings the 'real' culprits. Up to this point the 'failing' of the riots seems to have been an inability to explain themselves: 'riots that no-one wanted to claim or own, that no-one could be proud of.'⁷³ The events did not yield themselves up to explanation, the council estate was somehow less 'knowable' after these events than after other riots which had 'revealed' something about 'the estate'. The Brixton and Toxteth riots a decade earlier gave clearer messages about who or what was to blame, these later riots did not and so were politically disengaged. In Campbell's view the disengagement was the retreat of male-interested politicians from facing an unspeakable problem of masculinity: their own, society's, and that of the working class lads. *Goliath* presents itself as speaking this problem of gendered spaces and identities in negative terms: spaces where the girls want to be 'mams' and the boys want to be 'robbers'.⁷⁴ These council estates are masculine, criminal, all but doomed social spaces, where female community networks are struggling against breaking point:

'It is hard to imagine anything in fin de siècle Britain that will change the conditions of existence among the poor people... their identities as boys and girls are assigned to the tasks of taking from and taking care. Their futures are already ancient history...'⁷⁵

Campbell largely disregards the traditional Left-wing representations of council estate spaces which ascribe problems of working class criminal masculinities to unemployment, as masculinist and rather deficient:

'That kind of approach - one that's soppy about class and soppy about men... involves a kind of sympathy for a fantasy, an homogenised sentimentality, and a sympathy for masculinity and men.' (Campbell)

It is such a position that she identifies Coward with. Yet in common with Coward's approach *Goliath* does partly countenance the existence of more ambivalent relations than those of ubiquitous confrontation between working class young men and women within the communities it talks about. It just does not choose to make them the mainframe of its

⁷² Campbell, *Goliath* p322

⁷³ Campbell, *Goliath* p93

⁷⁴ Campbell, *Goliath* p324

⁷⁵ Campbell, *Goliath* p323-4

analysis. Coward does, in a more tentative view of male-female relations inextricably linked to each other and constructed through social, economic and cultural conditions. In relation to 'male' crime this view emphasises different aspects of Campbell's 'evidence' for different ends. For example in relation to boys joyriding, the stated disinclination of mothers to turn their sons over to the police shows working class family allegiances and community wide allegiances after the riots. Only a handful of statements were gleaned from 600 police interviews on the Meadow Well estate.⁷⁶ There was widespread hostility to the police and media invasion giving the estate a bad name in order to sort out a joyriding 'problem' for which people had a 'widely held tolerance' and even enjoyment of its entertainment value.⁷⁷ Estate residents expressed beliefs about the riots as the fault of the police as much as that of the lads;⁷⁸ or said that they weren't riots at all, that the estate isn't dangerous but is actually a 'nice estate'.⁷⁹ Residents gave justifications for behaviour deemed 'criminal': insurance covering the lads pleasure of using cars that aren't from their neighbourhoods;⁸⁰ one father esteeming his son as a 'professional car thief'; parents seeing their children's activities as morally bound: 'He doesn't rob banks, he doesn't hurt old people and he doesn't do it for profit'.⁸¹ There is also a recognition in Campbell's work that different elements of criminal activity offer benefits to impoverished communities, that stolen goods in particular are part of an economy that ensures both survival and a level of participation in a wider culture that is otherwise denied them.⁸²

Coward does not set out to 'reveal' the council estate as a space that is gendered in one way or another, but sets up a question about the focus and about the motivation of a dominant middle class gaze. In relation to the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' such a question suggests two things. Firstly, it suggests the need to think about a multiplicity of relations, conflicts, inter-dependencies, loyalties and betrayals between men and other men, women and other women, and between men and women who live on the estates. Campbell chooses to highlight the significance of particular episodes of council estate disorder as symbolic of end of century Britain for particular groups of people in gendered terms. She chooses to represent a tranche of working class masculinities as lawless, marauding, incendiary, fraternal and uncooperative, and those council estates with 'criminal' constituents as male dominated spaces ('less a class culture than a male culture').⁸³ Such representations are a negation and reduction of *differences* between these young men, of the

⁷⁶ Campbell, *Goliath* p71

⁷⁷ Campbell, *Goliath* p47

⁷⁸ Campbell, *Goliath* p71

⁷⁹ Campbell, *Goliath* p46 - 47

⁸⁰ Campbell, *Goliath* p41

⁸¹ Campbell, *Goliath* p47

⁸² Campbell, *Goliath* p319

⁸³ Campbell, *Goliath* p313

complexities of identity formation and of the *affliction* of unemployment. In arguing against the presentation of 'community' interests as a homogenised community space Campbell replaces a classed unity of interest with one of gender, and a spatial unity ('the neighbourhood', 'the estate', 'the manor') with a spatial divide: one network ('criminals') against another ('mothers'). Her gender focus takes precedence over other power relations through which council estate identities and spatialities are produced, and that focus is primarily about division:

'Crime and coercion are sustained by men. Solidarity and self-help are sustained by women. It is as stark as that.'⁸⁴

This is a matter of being more interested in focusing on how working class men and women on estates deal differently with distress, than in how that distress is firstly 'emplaced' on such estates and is then represented. It is also a matter of setting up 'class unities' as unified spatialities which need to be broken down, and specifically broken down into gender divides, rather than recognising a more complex set of relations that do not adhere to templates of 'unity' or 'division' within neighbourhoods, genders or classes. In other words, it is a question of emphasis. Amongst the different relations possible between and within families, streets and estates, the choice of focus is a political one, related to priorities held in a given period, in a given representational space.

Coward's second question is about the motivation of the gaze on council estates. The chosen internal focus of disorder and criminality that marks 'underclass' discourse to a large extent obscures the way those developments are discursively produced, as the product of a process of material and symbolic degradation. Material conditions and representational practices over 18 years at least *may* have rendered people and places divided. However these divisions are neither gender determined, nor necessarily the omnipresent feature of living on these council estates. Campbell views the criminal activities of these young men in terms of power gains and domination over women and space rooted in cultural misogyny. She does not consider how such cultures are themselves an abuse of young men, or how the gains of criminal activities may be small change in comparison to the way these groups and places have been fleeced and rubbished. These sorts of considerations do not negate community anger at the devastation that crime may cause to women and men in these communities at particular times, or mean that community crime strategies are not needed. But neither do they dismiss feelings of empathy, shared experiences, political and class anger at the social and economic conditions to which estates full of people have been subject. Far from being 'soppy about men and class' such feelings are the product of living in families and streets that are part of who you are, they are not affectively, intellectually or politically separate.

⁸⁴ Campbell, *Goliath* p319

This is an argument for the sort of strategic representations of space that bell hooks argues for in relation to working class black households and black masculinities, questioning whether certain aspects of black life should be talked about in a non-black context where those images adhere with white representations of black men as brutal and animalistic.⁸⁵ This is a matter of political strategy: choosing specific times and specific places to talk about particular issues. It is about what context issues are best brought up in, whether they are located in a critical framework, how they will be taken up beyond the immediate space of representation. It is also an argument for a sort of political responsibility to ensure that particular issues and identities do not become the evidence for essentialised or generalised accusations. Those dangers of representation are most important to be aware of where 'evidence' is set up as expressive of a community's authentic or real predicament. It is sometimes therefore necessary to keep a strategic distance from revealing 'truths' about particular groups rather than assuming a position of familiarity or equivalence. That is especially the case when there is a political climate which is set on over-exposing and scapegoating particular groups of people. This position obviously presents problems for particular feminist agendas set on revealing 'masculine oppression' wherever it occurs without sufficient consideration given to class or race based cultural and political implications:

'Given the popularity of an anti-male reactionary aspect of radical feminism, there is an audience for works highlighting and exposing male violence. When black women writers suggest that the most exploitative and oppressive force in the lives of black females is black men, white society is free from the burden of responsibility.'⁸⁶

In *Goliath* that burden of responsibility is shared among masculinist politicians and statutory agencies, by middle class men as well as the lawless working class masculinities that are the book's subject. Nevertheless the sort of depictions of council estate street life and mob rule represented as foreboding drama, are replete with the sorts of wild and dangerous constructions of a different working class masculinity and spatiality that instil fear and fascination in particular middle class audiences. This immersion into working class male 'difference' comes at the expense of a discourse about shared political interests within classes and a more complex understanding of the dynamics of inter and intra class disempowerment. Such an understanding sees the possibility of middle class women empowered by producing discourses that disempower working class men. It is such a power relation that is highlighted by the Campbell-Coward debate, and which can be seen as a centrally productive element of 'underclass' discourse in the contemporary period. Working

⁸⁵ hooks.b (1991) 'Representations: Feminism and Black Masculinity' p65-79 *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* London: Turnaround

⁸⁶ hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* p72

class male unemployment is seen to have opened possibilities for discussions about the reform of men, family and work lifestyles. The policy discourse around 'underclass' criminality and welfare dependency which seeks to represent particular groups of working class men in terms of criminality, inflexibility, redundancy and irresponsibility, is settling on coercive and punitive 'solutions'.

In the discourse of 'underclass' particular feminist ideas about masculinity crises and gender revolutions meet policy ideas about the reform of criminal justice and welfare. Coward's and Campbell's prominent spaces of representation partly constitute that meeting, albeit in different ways, with different intentions. Their debate is embedded by wider discussions about how a period of prolonged employment change and related changes in family form and gender dynamics provides the rationale for the restructuring of the welfare state.⁸⁷ Part of the reasoning behind arguments for the necessity of change is that criminal and welfare dependent cultures have developed where traditional working patterns and related family forms have disappeared. At a number of points the arguments settle on the figure of the young, working class, unemployed male. The main issue is how his role and identity as a man is being or needs to be remade. The idea of a crisis in masculinity with regard to working class masculinities posits links between the loss of traditionally male working class opportunities for work, and crises in social order (manifested in crime and the inadequate performance of fatherhood roles). The apparent refusal of these men to 'willingly' take work in part-time, service sector areas of employment growth,⁸⁸ to adjust fatherhood roles accordingly, and to avoid resorting to crime is the apparent justification of socially authoritarian policy discourses in welfare and criminal justice. The construction of 'underclass' masculinities, imbued with an accusatory and reformative zeal, is central to this discourse. Geoff Mulgan and Helen Wilkinson writing for the think-tank Demos, which is seen to have the ear of the new Labour government, have characterised these young men as 'underwolves', the feral underlings of 'underclass', dispossessed from society and increasingly a threat to its social order.⁸⁹

The policy responses to these developments have been strongly inflected by an idea that young people (especially young men) are in need of moral education, intervention and control. Proposals from the Commission on Social Justice for a 'Citizen's Service' focused on encouraging social responsibility and responsible citizenship amongst young people as a

⁸⁷ 'Welfare: The New Deal' *The Observer* 11.5.97 p1; Hutton.W (1997) 'Now There Is An Alternative' *The Observer* 11.5.97 p26

⁸⁸ Balls and Gregg, *Work and Welfare: Tackling The Jobs Deficit*. Balls is currently the economic adviser to Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. 'Super-brain with keen eye to the puzzle of power' *The Observer Business* 11.5.97 p9

⁸⁹ Mulgan.G and Wilkinson.H (1995) *Freedom's Children: Work, Relationships and Politics for 18-34 Year Olds in Britain Today* London: Demos; The British Youth Council (1996) *Never Had It So Good? The truth about being young in 90s Britain* London: Barnadoes

community version of national service.⁹⁰ The idea that young people need to be inculcated with moral values and direction because otherwise they are not socially responsible is historically continuous.⁹¹ In the contemporary period it is inflected with a stated need for a new moral economy throughout society, and has been couched in the rhetoric of 'back-to-basics' on the political Right and 'rights-and-responsibilities' on the political Left. Thus cross party support for proposals on moral education in schools to include instruction on matters of personal, familial and social responsibility as outlined by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community.⁹² The Commission on Social Justice represents the liberal end of a spectrum of proposals which include a range of disciplinary measures directed at the relationship between families, schools, communities and the police. Policy provisions have been made for home-school contracts, street curfews for young people, electronic tags for child criminals, and truancy round-up programmes (with boys as their implicit focus) - all positioning parents in the role of policing their children's behaviour by being made to take legal responsibility for it.⁹³ Compulsory parenting classes and fines for parents whose children are seen to be out of control form a plank of 'parental control orders' that the new Labour government has legislated for in the Crime and Disorder Bill 1997.⁹⁴ These parental orders are buttressed by 'community safety orders' which allow local councils to place curfews and eviction orders on particular 'unruly' families, and whose infringement can lead to imprisonment. They build on the already restrictive conditions set up with regard to young people's occupation of public space in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. These policies are paralleled by a new range of punitive developments within the youth criminal justice system. Under proposals by the Home Secretary Jack Straw, the 'Doli Incapax' law which prevents criminal prosecution for children under 14 years old will be abolished so requiring children to take responsibility for their 'criminal' actions; National Task Forces will be directed at 'young offenders'; and individually tailored 'Action Plan Orders' will issue directives for 'reparation', to ensure school attendance and prohibition from certain places.⁹⁵ These developments in civil and criminal law mark a stated intention by Jack Straw MP 'to bring welfare and crime initiatives together', in strategies which deal with social problems by holding young people

⁹⁰ *Report of the Commission On Social Justice* p306 - 374

⁹¹ Muncie.J (1984) *The Trouble With Kids: Youth and Crime in Post War Britain* London: Hutchinson; Pearson.G (1983). *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* London: Macmillan

⁹² Macleod.D (1996) 'Schools Moral Code For all Seasons' *The Guardian* 28.10.96 p6

⁹³ 'Labour's Plan To Tame Tearaways' *The Guardian* 1.11.96 p4; 'Electronic Tags For Children' *The Independent* 9.11.96 p1; 'Youth Crime Crackdown Targets Parents' *The Guardian* 22.9.97 p3

⁹⁴ 'Straw to combat crime-breeding 'excuse culture'' *The Guardian* 26.9.97 p10

⁹⁵ 'Children Aged 10 Face Prosecution' *The Guardian* 4.3.97 p5; 'Straw to combat crime-breeding 'excuse culture'' *The Guardian* 26.9.97 p10

responsible for their actions.⁹⁶ More than that they represent the imposition of a particular vision about how, and by whom, public space should be occupied; how families should be units of disciplinary socialisation; and the State the arbiter and jailer of newly criminalised children.

At the less punitive end of policy solutions to 'problematic' working class masculinities, are those solutions posed in terms of changed attitudes to gender and work, particularly of men's attitude to particular sorts of jobs:

'...they will have to begin to show some of the same flexibility as women if they are to compete effectively in the jobs market.'⁹⁷

'...until men learn to be more flexible, to swallow their contempt for such 'soft jobs', their prospects will remain grim.'⁹⁸

The need for such attitudinal changes by 'men', is accompanied by the need for policy changes in which 'women's' needs coincide with those of a competitive economy:

'Women are leaving behind the world of familial domesticity everywhere in the West. The emerging structure of the economy requires them to do so... (we need) interventionist policies that change the world to suit women's priorities.'⁹⁹

It is clear that the economy, driven by the imperatives of employment restructuring requires different sorts of masculinities and femininities to those associated with the post-war settlement and differently classed policies to bring about the requisite changes. For young working class men these include welfare and employment policies to create self-reliance, to reduce aspirations for full-time, permanent employment status, and to challenge macho templates of masculinity in favour of parenting and traditionally 'female' jobs. Together with a number of surveillance and public order controls, the outcome of this policy process would seem to be a sharing, caring family man with a productive work ethic and strong sense of social responsibility: the ideal male citizen no less. As desirable as this may seem in some quarters, it is a vision that is strongly normative and prescriptive: a replacement normality for the 1950s template of the breadwinner and family waged domestic unit. In this new vision of family and work flexibility, the goal is the gender-neutral parent-worker. In the immediate term the most problematic figures for this development are those associated with 'welfare dependency': working class young men who won't take the sorts of jobs on

⁹⁶ Jonathan Dimbleby interview with Jack Straw on *Jonathan Dimbleby* ITV 2.9.97. The legal ramifications of these developments in civil and criminal law are immense. The prospect of somebody facing five years imprisonment for the breach of 'community safety orders' has led the Law Society and a host of academic lawyers to mount criticisms against the Bill as likely to breach European human rights legislation. 'Straw's disorder bill 'will create outcasts and breach human rights' *The Guardian* 3.2.98 p8

⁹⁷ 'Flexible Women Take Over The Job Market' Leading Article *The Independent* 18.12.94 p16

⁹⁸ Driscoll.M and Thomas.D (1995) 'Give Boys A Break' *The Sunday Times* 2.4.95 p1

⁹⁹ Hutton.W (1996) 'Why The Workplace is No Longer A Man's World' *The Observer* 8.12.96 p26

offer, and working class women who parent on benefits rather than doing paid work. Their crime is to put other activities before paid work. They are the central figures of 'underclass': dwelling on council estates, indulging in crime, fiddling social security, working in the black economy, having babies on benefits. They are the obstacles to realising the promise of the 'new economic realities' - for society and for their own advancement out of poverty. They must be made to realise that their real interests (like everyone else's) lie in the redemptive spaces of the work ethic and the labour market. Such spaces are set up as the antithesis of the problematic spaces of identity and locality occupied by benefit claimants on council estates, the material-symbolic spaces of 'underclass'.

Feminist Discourse on 'Underclass' II: 'Underclass' Femininities

'Underclass' spaces - represented, representational, lived - are shaped by gender. The counterpart of the young, unemployed and often 'criminal' male on the estate/street is the benefit claiming single mother and the domestic space of the council estate. She is also the subject of feminist discourse on welfare change, parenting and employment. My interviews with four women from those fields of commentary had that figure as a main concern. I had the same central questions in mind for them as I had for Campbell and Coward: questions about the personal and the political nature of their representation, how were they positioned in relation to the subject of their discourse and what were they saying about her?

Ruth Lilley and Ceridwen Roberts on: 'Parenting Policy' and Feminism

The organisations headed by Ruth Lilley and Ceridwen Roberts both seek to influence government policies which relate to 'the family' with regard to child care, community welfare, the tax and benefit system and provisions for parenting. 'Full Time Mothers' (FTM) and the 'Family Policy Studies Centre' (FPSC) assume positions of family policy advocacy for society as a whole through the welfare of families. Those positions are very different in terms of their aims, rationale, and organisational practices, but they both have commentary positions which occupy prime media space.

The social implications of gender changes in employment patterns, changes in family life and family forms, and parenting problems are all issues which place 'the family' at the centre of 'underclass' discourse and which are partly shaped by the commentary of Lilley and Roberts. Neither Lilley nor Roberts regard 'underclass' as their main concern, but both are implicated in its production to the extent that they produce ideas about 'the family in trouble'. My interviews with them sought to make those connections apparent, and to locate those connections in both the personal politics and organisational speaking positions of the two women.

Choosing Full-Time Motherhood, Choosing a Career

The starting point of Ruth Lilley's involvement with FTM arose from personal experience and political opportunity when personal distress coincided with the emergence of a political organisation that gave vent and shape to her feelings at the time:

'The reason I got involved personally was because I was feeling very lacking in confidence after my second child was born, and I think a lot of women go through

this because all the propaganda says unless they're going back to work they're less of a person. So I was here sweeping the floor, tidying up toys, doing really mundane things and from the outside world I wasn't getting any support. And the key thing is, I thought I was the only one who felt like this and I thought all my friends had got their act together and were loving what they were doing. So I asked around because I wanted to know if I was the only one who didn't have the confidence about what I was doing and a lot of my friends were going through the same and that got me really angry.' (Lilley)

The FTM organisation had been set up in June 1991 - six months prior to Lilley's involvement - by a number of mothers who had gone through similar experiences: either returning to work full-time or feeling that they should be, having had babies or whilst caring for young children. The founder Kathy Gyngell had been inspired to set up a formal organisation after writing a piece in the *Daily Mail* newspaper about her own experience of motherhood and her felt lack of social, cultural and economic support. The article entitled 'Why Must We Treat Mothers As Second Class Citizens?' received hundreds of replies that affirmed her feelings. The motivation for starting up the group was a determination to make the case for mothering as full-time work in need of political support, cultural affirmation and financial recognition.

Particular understandings about young children's emotional needs are central to the experiences of the founding members of FTM and the discourse on 'mothering' they want to promote. Under the slogan 'Full-Time Mothers - A Child's Need, A Mother's Right', they campaign for changes in the tax and benefits system that would allow women 'a free choice to be full-time mothers' at least until their children are 3 years old and preferably up to school age. Beyond that age, mother's work in the paid economy should be supported but until then their work as mothers should be allowed to be of primary importance, in the interests of their children, of themselves and of society. The valorisation of mothering-work would be a requirement of that aim:

'We believe that a woman working in her own home is a member of the working population. As such, employers for example should be encouraged to perceive mothering as valid work experience, and provide further training, should a woman wish to return to paid employment once her children are older.'
(FTM policy document)

The financial infrastructure proposed to allow the choice of full-time motherhood to be made would alleviate the economic and social pressures to work as soon as possible after the birth of children. It consists of: transferable tax allowances for married couples, increases in child benefit, index linking of the married couples allowance, and the reintroduction of child tax allowances for all children. It is based on a particular set of social and familial values. The organisation itself is non-denominational and non-political and it does not associate

itself with any forerunning 'maternalist' tradition. However it does have an obviously 'maternalist' ethos and disputes a definition of feminism that refuses its own credentials:¹⁰⁰

'It's interesting because people accuse us of being anti-feminist but I don't actually think that we are. I mean feminism is huge... I think it's about how feminism is defined. The things that I would say 'no I'm not interested in' is a strident idea that all women must be career women and therefore they must have child care because that is the thing that is holding them back from getting on in the workplace. And that I don't agree with because I think that is just being a woman on men's terms... which is not my idea of winning the day.' (Lilley)

Lilley believes that both the public image and most vocal and visible public manifestations of feminism have not expressed the importance of mothering full-time at particular times in women's lives. She maintains that her view remains feminist as a claim for power, legislation and choice for mothers in the contemporary period who are economically and socially pressured to work:

'If you're talking about feminism in terms of power then it is more powerful to have it enshrined in law that you can be at home for five years when your children are little, and then you will be *entitled* to retraining.' (Lilley)

Lilley's personal beliefs, the influence of her mother ('she was always at home for us... it was her that gave us the opportunities that we have') and a Christian family background inflect her own argument for the family as the initial provider of personal security and values. She is however aware of the associations that their cause has with religious and Right-wing positions and is keen to distance the organisation from those:

'The issues are strong enough, they stand on their own... you don't have to be a Christian to be a mother and we're appealing to a wider audience here... There's one organisation who would love us to join with them, it used to be called the campaign for the feminine woman - they're against homosexuality, women in the forces, any job that isn't 'feminine' - they're extreme and I don't agree with what they're saying. I try to keep a distance from those sorts of groups because otherwise we'd get lumped together and the media would come along and say 'oh that's that Right-wing nonsense group.' (Lilley)

Working around the same issues of 'family' representation in relation to public policy the Family Policy Studies Centre in some ways represents the social scientific version of FTM's position. In terms of their substantive focus both are interested in promoting the idea of 'family policy' in which children have some priority. The main difference is FPSC's insistence on a 'parenting' rather than 'mothering' focus. As Director of the organisation

¹⁰⁰ In her review essay 'The New Literature on Gender and the Welfare State' (p171-197 *Feminist Studies* 22: 1 Spring (1996)) Felicia Kornbluh describes maternalist politics as a relationship of mutual obligation and respect between mothers and their governments. She distinguishes between different types of maternalist politics from their complex historical emergence at the turn of the 20th century in Europe, America and Australia. Not all are necessarily feminist but whatever their specific motivation all carry a central element of belief that motherhood should be 'a legitimate basis for women's citizenship, that women as mothers deserve a return from their governments for the work they perform in child-rearing'. In this way they politicise motherhood through demands for social support.

over the past decade Ceridwen Roberts is keen to stress their non-aligned, traditional social scientific research ethos in terms of their 'independent' status. The FPSC was set up in the late 1970s from a short life organisation called the Study Commission on the Family which was dominated by general social policy concerns in a way that was often overtly political. Departing from partisan views their aim was to establish a focus:

'...to contribute to informed public debate about change in families, by looking at the interchange between public policy and family life.' (Roberts)

A claim to independent knowledge production is promoted in order to carry out their 'information' dissemination role and service to other family organisations. Their funding is 'soft money' from research foundations and charities to produce research reports and papers around issues of poverty and family resources, crime and the family, and trends in family forms and lifestyles. They also receive money from the government for the voluntary sector: in 1995 as part of a Department of Health parenting initiative which together with the OPCS produced a 'National Study of Parents and Parenting Problems.'¹⁰¹ The organisation's denial of an overtly value-based discourse is presented as importantly different from the political and religious affiliations that characterise contemporary debates on the family. Roberts is keen to draw distinctions between intellectual and personal value-based motivations within her work. This is partly to do with the nature of the organisation itself in which 'objectivity' is largely the basis of its claim to authority, and therefore a requirement of the job. Personal issues therefore echo rather than motivate intellectual ones:

'I think it's impossible not to work in issues like families and look at issues like why do marriages break down or survive or how do people parent without bringing part of your personal biography. A lot of what we do here is necessarily linked to what our own lives are like but the issues we may pick up and examine are not a direct consequence of our own personal interests.' (Roberts)

For Roberts, feminism is a tradition which has been part of her career path and which in its contemporary manifestations is distinct from her work. The suggestion is that feminism for her has been more a matter of utility, profession and career than something that is part of her and something that she may be part of changing:

'I was someone who was active in the feminist movement in the 1970s and professionally I've done a lot of work on the position of women in the labour market. So I've never not thought of myself as someone who has not come out of that tradition. But I am out of sympathy I think with some of the public manifestations of feminism so I'm not quite sure what feminism is any longer really. With regard to my work, I would say most of all I see myself as a social scientist.' (Roberts)

¹⁰¹ Roberts.C, Cronin.N, Todd.D, Kelly.M (1995) *A National Study of Parents and Parenting Problems* London: FPSC/OPCS

In this respect Lilley's position which is based on a discourse about mothering as a social relation and lived experience, is more engaged with challenging some of the public manifestations of feminism. In their campaign, explicit values are a necessary and positive advantage, but as an organisation FTM do not have the status of FPSC as a professional body that assumes a mantle of authority and truth. FPSC's work is specifically geared to this reputation for objectivity:

'[to] debunking the amazing amount of hype and rubbish spoken about the family that's completely fatuous and wrong precisely because [they are] pursuing their own personal agendas... We don't have any formal representative role because we don't have a clear constituency. If we're representative of anything it's rational social science, contributing to unpicking myth on the basis of theoretically informed empirical research.' (Roberts)

Representing Mothers (Like Us), Representing Reality (As We See It)

Lilley regards FTM's representative role as the main strength *and* problem of the organisation. The latter in terms of the way they are represented by others, the former as she believes they express the unrepresented and unsupported view of a great mass of mothers with young children. She quotes comments that are sought in FTM's membership campaign as evidence of a widespread distress caused mainly by the economic pressure to return to work, a pressure that even for those not directly effected by it serves to undermines mothering-work in general. The conviction of her argument comes from her own experience and shared communications on the subject with other women:

'I've just said what I feel and it actually happens to be representative of the way an awful lot of mothers think but because full-time mothers are busy people and they're not organised as such, they haven't got a voice - you know 48% of mothers with children under four are at home full-time - that's 1.6 million mothers who never get any representation. And if you add on to that the number of mothers who do work and work part-time, well that percentage only get a voice for the part of them that goes to work and that needs extra child care, no-one is addressing the side of them that is a mother.' (Lilley)

Lilley points to Dr. Catherine Hakim's research as a way to include those mothers who do work, but would often prefer not to, as 'the unrepresented and subsumed' of the vocal cause of the 'career woman'. Although she does not wish to negate their choice, she resents the way it dominates the policy agenda and undermines the masses of actual mothers who believe (through their own experiences) that what they're doing is very important, difficult and rewarding:

'I find it very difficult now... if someone has decided not to have children, to say 'well actually you don't know what it's like' but I really feel that until women have had children they don't know what it's like. They think their own children will be like their friend's children or their sisters. And if they're not going out to work and doing this, that and the other then they're not achieving their full potential... and you know you just cannot compare, there is no comparison to be made with either of those things.' (Lilley)

Prior to her involvement with FTM Lilley worked as a journalist and in many respects continues to use those skills in writing and broadcasts to forward the position of FTM in the media. The organisation has been the subject of extensive media coverage in *The Daily Mail*, *The Times*, *The Evening Standard*; in women's magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, *Living*, *Family Bulletin*, *Woman Alive* through a mix of letters, interviews and articles; on 'controversial issue-led' morning television chat shows like 'Kilroy' and 'The Time and The Place'; in two appearances on *Newsnight*; and in a number of BBC radio interviews. FTM is news for both populist and more hard-edged contemporary debates on the state of the family, childcare policy and changing gender roles. Actively seeking a controversial position as a means of self-promotion they address mothers as a means of support, and politicians and decision makers in the hope of influencing them ¹⁰²:

'Every time we get mentioned as an organisation, that is support if someone is sitting there watching the television, feeling alone, it affirms her in what she's doing.' (Lilley)

FTM appear as a group of well-educated, articulate, white, middle class, married women. The group are not threatening in their manner or too radical in their aims. Their target is limited to particular parts of the tax and benefit system, and is practically rather than ideologically driven. In broad terms they are assimilable to professional, media debates. They have a limited network of support for their own position which is loosely aligned through umbrella organisations: the Parenting Education and Support Forum (includes the NSPCC and National Childbirth Trust) and FEFAF - the European Federation of Women Working in the Home. FTM's preference is to work autonomously within the wider network of lobbying and campaign groups with whom professional and pragmatic relations are maintained:

'I get on well with... I had lunch with Lucy Daniels who's the Director of the Working Mother's Association (now called Parents At Work)- really diametrically opposed to us. But in a way there are things that organisation does that are fine like campaign for flexible working hours. And they put people our way and give people our telephone number and vice versa. So there's a working relationship but we sort of each know that at the end of the day the big sticking point is this child care thing.' (Lilley)

Their differences are argued over shared lunches and in *Newsnight* appearances. There is an ease and expectation of inclusion to these social and media circles, in the promotion of a position that is marginal but not extreme in its presentation. Indeed there is a sidelining of the more radical aspects of FTM's position, their potential cut short by a tendency for the conservative aims of a 'family values' discourse to be emphasised when used by campaigns

¹⁰² This 'cultural' support is in addition to quarterly members newsletters and 16 local groups

like the *Daily Mail* newspaper's for a restoration of the 'traditional family';¹⁰³ or by liberal feminist efforts to caricature the position of 'stay-at-home mothers' as regressive.¹⁰⁴ FTM's other arguments - about the financial recognition of mothering-work; about the way business and economic priorities dominate the political agenda for childcare; in opposition to the time regimes of paid work and the social and economic pressures for parents to work - are thereby elided. Instead the 'mother in the home' is evoked via the most conservative and reductive meanings associated with 1950s family-type ideals, by conservatives and liberals alike. This representation obscures other elements of FTM's maternalist discourse that have feminist weight and political expression. Their affiliations to international organisations like UNICA (the World Congress of Housewives), and FEFAF (the European Union for Women Working in the Home), express a more radical stance in relation to the politics of mothering in European and Latin American countries. FTM formed a British contingent at the 1995 first congress of UNICA held in Buenos Aires at which a joint statement was issued to the United Nations. Their president Tina Leonzi expressed the basis of this as a need for women's domestic labour to be recognised through financial security in Social Security and pensions.¹⁰⁵ Similarly at the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 FEFAF's president Brigitte Le Gouis represented demands for social non-remunerated work to be recognised in social protection programmes in the same way as productive work in the labour market in order that mothers are not economically marginalised.¹⁰⁶ This element of FTM's position is both less represented in the media *and* less developed in FTM's own work, a situation that reflects the tendency for FTM's spokeswomen to stress middle class and politically conservative ideas, and which has allowed them to be summarily dismissed for forwarding a regressive argument to get women 'back to the kitchen sink'.¹⁰⁷

In its social scientific mode FPSC is freed from the obligations of an explicitly representative role. The research is held to 'speak for itself' via the public domain of the media. FPSC is powerful enough to adopt a media management role in this process:

'The media is useful to us in two ways: as a way in which the general public can find out about things, and by spreading the word about our publications and the work we do, giving legitimacy to it and meeting the policy influencing process. Politicians are busy people and are more likely to remember things if they've seen it

¹⁰³ For example *The Mail on Sunday* newspaper published a feature called 'The Price Of Feminism' in which the case for 'A woman's place in the home' was exemplified as FTM's position (7.3.93 p7)

¹⁰⁴ See Walter.N (1997) 'Work Sweet Work' *The Observer* 9.11.97 p25; Harman.H (1997) 'Forget the Fifties, we have a better deal now' *The Observer* 9.11.97 p27

¹⁰⁵ *FTM newsletter* Winter (1995)

¹⁰⁶ *FTM newsletter* September (1995)

¹⁰⁷ Coward.R (1993) 'Women At War' *The Guardian* Tabloid 22.3.93 p10. The shifting nature of this critical relationship is illustrated by FTM's support for other commentaries by Ros Coward in which she expresses anxiety about the messages coming from the government about mothers, childcare and work. See 'Single mums and double jeopardy' *The Guardian* 24.11.97 p17; 'Our children's absolute right to be bone idle' *The Guardian* 9.6.97 p17 and FTM's supportive response: *FTM newsletter* Summer 1997

in the papers and on Newsnight....[the media] are very greedy of our time and energies and they're very difficult to deal with in the sense that they cut up what you say so we do have an implicitly or indeed explicitly targeted version that we send to particular broadsheets or even within broadsheets to named journalists. I decide if I'm going to give anyone a headstart or I might decide it would be much better to do it on 'Woman's Hour' so I won't talk to 'Today' because I know both won't do it.' (Roberts)

FPSC's professional strategies and rhetorics effectively position those who do work with personal agendas and in a 'partisan' capacity as less than 'true' and as less authoritative. For FPSC that knowledge hierarchy is a central strategic resource. And yet within that power position Roberts is *personally* bound because maintaining the distance from personal agendas also restricts her speaking position. She is not 'allowed' to be seen in a lobbying capacity even when she believes strongly in a particular issue or believes something that relates to family policy to be wrong. Her position, as the position of FPSC, is only allowed to be stated through research not through independent commentary:

'My board will not allow me to sign up to any sort of public declaration for example. Just recently I was asked about aligning the Treaty in Europe to say something about families and children and despite having modified the line and got the line I wanted, my board wouldn't allow me to be publicly associated with it. And that's important because at the moment family policy in the European context is completely dominated by a labour market perspective and it's completely wrong.' (Roberts)

Similarly, professional networks create restrictions as well as offering connections for FPSC's public position. Roberts believes that the 'family lobby' exists as a number of groups characterised by particular strands of thought and policy goals. Some groups are marginalised within those discussions through not adhering to particular dominant strands. The International Year of the Family in 1994 revealed the limitations of these organisations working together because of the restrictions it placed on voicing their different priorities:

'We were trying to come up with something in terms of delivering the International Year of the Family that was a broad based coalition that managed to cope with family diversity and stick together. And basically saying something as banal as families should be on the policy agenda. That was about as much common ground as it was possible to get.' (Roberts)

She also identifies the way their ability to work together is conditioned by how receptive the government is at particular times. Opportunities are used then let go of, as circumstances change. Networks are loose, strategic and time-limited:

'There was a group running from about 1992 called the Family Organisations Group consisting of 6 to 8 family organisations and we did a lot of work over the period 1992-95 on trying to talk to politicians and move forward. That's on hold because this is a very difficult political period... we've turned ourselves into a sort of dining club for a period because the Labour party is all over the place at the moment and we can't be sure of the government either.' (Roberts)

Through a broad based cultural discourse about family change generated by media commentaries and academic research Roberts believes there is increasingly less dependence on politicians to make research count, indeed in many ways there has been a power shift:

‘After years of calling for the needs of families to be taken more seriously, a perceptible change has taken place. Families have gained more confidence in demanding that politicians listen to them.’¹⁰⁸

Within this ‘upturn’ of interest in the state of ‘the family’ FPSC sees itself as well placed to speak about ‘actual’ family trends in refutation of media-led panics. Roberts identifies issues around fatherhood, stressed parenting and child care as main areas of concern around ‘the family’ converging in populist and political analyses which are marked by contradictions, unrealistic proposals, the unsaid and the unsayable. In many respects Robert’s position is close to Lilley’s in being dubious about the benefits to women and families of labour market change; in departing from a particular feminist line that men’s inflexibility is to blame for many of these problems; in questioning the advisability and desirability of extensive childcare provisioning as a resource priority; and in pointing to the pressures and contradictory messages given to mothers and fathers about the relative importance of paid work and parenting work. Like Lilley she poses policy solutions that are geared to family life patterns through fiscal support and family support centres rather than to labour market demands. She is also keen to stress that their work is interested in *all* family life, with families who are not suffering disadvantage as much as those who are. This is reflected in a carefully stated but implied preference for particular family forms. Here, backing a similar comment made by Tony Blair in July 1994:

‘We feel that the research evidence is clear that on balance children do better with two loving parents looking after them.’¹⁰⁹

It is also evident in an expressed wish to highlight normalcy, stability and continuity in family relations in addition to ‘difference’ and change. In this vein FPSC’s latest research output on contemporary fathers and fatherhood seeks to challenge:

‘...some of the wilder ideas about feckless and vanishing dads that we have heard so much about: 84% of fathers are living with all their children under 18.’ (Roberts)¹¹⁰

Where Roberts significantly departs from Lilley’s position is in believing that a particular macro-economic framework should be set up in order to enable the most favourable outcome of a two parent stable family. She points to the need for wage level

¹⁰⁸ Roberts.C (1996) ‘Families Are Coming Home’ *Family Policy Bulletin* November 1996 London: FPSC p2

¹⁰⁹ Blair quoted in ‘Labour’s Stance On Single Mothers ‘Slap In Face’ *The Guardian* 26.7.94 p2

¹¹⁰ This is a reference to Burghes.L and Clarke.L (1997) *Fathers and Fatherhood in Britain* London: FPSC

legislation, employment creation, and employment legislation on home-work flexibility and working hours all as pro-family policies, in order to:

‘...at least cover the basic costs of family formation and family life... For too many young people the lack of jobs not only denies them adult status and income but also undermines their chances of setting up a home and having their own families in stable settings... The employment costs of bearing children should be borne more equally between all employers, parents and society.’ (Roberts)

Together with family support and advice centres (for break down prevention, marriage counselling, parent and toddler groups, parental skills, early intervention) these policies are the mainframe of the family infrastructure needs identified by FPSC.¹¹¹

The Politics Of Contemporary Mothering, and/or Parenting?

The particular applications of FTM’s arguments are productive of a limiting class-interested bias. However, such a bias is not inherent in their arguments per se. This can be seen in relation to the position of the single mother. FTM’s basic argument is actually highly salient to benefit claiming single mothers who are the primary focus of policies to encourage labour market entry via institutionalised childcare, and poor mothers who are under the *most* social and economic pressure to ‘work’. As a couple of letters to FTM’s newsletter have made clear there are different economies at play (in terms of gender, class, and personal values) in support of full-time motherhood than those often equated with arguments for ‘stay-at-home’ mothers.¹¹²

‘It’s quite possible to be a Left-winger, a feminist and a stay-at-home mother.’

‘I am extremely unhappy at the use of the term ‘feminist’ to describe women who have children and work outside the home. To me the term means women who want to see women enabled to reach their full potential without artificial obstacles being put in their way and if that means staying at home with children (as I have for the past nine years) then fair enough.’

‘The problem is that as long as society defines success in terms of an impressive job title and sizeable bank balance then us full-time mums will remain at the bottom of the heap. I prefer to define my success in the more durable terms of my children’s development.’

‘The strain of lone parenting and the need for economic security tend to drive the mother out of the home just at the time that the children need more than ever her security through her presence.’¹¹³

¹¹¹ Roberts, *Families Are Coming Home* p2

¹¹² Assumptions that these arguments are regressive/ conservative/part of a backlash against feminism were demonstrated in the reaction of centre-Left broadsheets to the Conservative government’s pre - 1997 election announcement of plans for the re-introduction of a married couple’s tax allowance to allow mothers to stay at home . For example in ‘Women Still Left Holding The Baby’ Natasha Walters argues that ‘stay at home’ wives are an anachronism and part of middle-aged men’s wishful thinking (*The Observer* 6.4.97 p27)

¹¹³ Quotes from letters in FTM’s newsletter September 1995, Winter 1995, Summer 1996

Nevertheless, in Lilley's arguments there *is* a distancing and a narrowing of these member's opinions through her delineation of *which* mothers and families FTM is most concerned to represent: 'I think our arguments most apply to the two parent, one-earner family'. In terms of their specific policy recommendations this is clearly seen to be the case. Where other teenage and single mothers could benefit from the realisation of FTM's aims, it is by default rather than intention. Although there does remain some affinity with such mothers it is in no way a central campaign issue:

'It's families that we address but I think the arguments also apply, well I hope they apply to single parents as well, to all mothers... Transferable tax allowances for married couples - that wouldn't be relevant for a lone parent because there would be no partner to transfer their tax to if they're the one who wants to be at home. On the other hand they've got a tax allowance, maybe they could be paid that in cash to be full-time mothers. A realistic increase in child benefit - well that applies to all mothers who ever they are. Index linking of the married couples allowance - we include that because we think that most stability comes from married couples.'

(Lilley)

However, FTM's position is not specifically *anti*-single motherhood, and neither is it exclusionary of other parenting arrangements where the main carer is stable:

'We do recognise in our statement aims that sometimes the traditional role of the mother is carried out by another family member. John Bowlby talked about a mother or a permanent mother substitute. As long as the child knows that the person looking after them is a permanent fixture - that's really where we're coming from.'

(Lilley)

Robert's assessment of the problems and needs of contemporary parents does not seek to be gender-neutral. Both mothers and fathers parent but not in the same way:

'The term 'parenting' recognises it as a process, so in other words you can talk about parenting and it needn't be the parent that does it. I think that if you're then going to take it further and say that parenting is a unisex activity and that good parenting is exactly the same whether it's done by a man or a woman I think that's a load of nonsense and that that's quite dangerous.'

(Roberts)

According to Roberts the reasons for those differences are not intrinsic to a parent's sex but there are gender differences, many of them positive, which can and should be distinguished in terms of role performance and for needs provision:

'I think that probably you do need two parents but that the division of labour between two parents tends to be about society... I think you can see small children have nurturing needs and that in our society that is predominantly provided by the mother... I think I would say mothering type behaviour - the activities we traditionally associate with mothers *is* very important, I prefer to call it nurturing.'

(Roberts)

Roberts identifies changes in the gender role of parenting, attended by confusion, inadequate provision and a lack of voice from fathers:

'What we need now is a much more serious debate and men must take the lead about what men's role should be - far too much emphasis has been on stripping many of them of their main breadwinning role, and then telling them that the only way to be a father is to be a nurturer and that actually women are better at that... actually feminists and politicians have got to shut up because men have got to talk.' (Roberts)

What organisations do you think should be facilitating that talking?

'I think that's got to emerge, I don't think there are any mainstream men's organisations, I think that's part of the problem.' (Roberts)

In this respect Roberts believes that individual men are caught up in the contradictions and rigidities of changes that have as yet no legislative or cultural support:

'We've been saying as a society and metropolitan feminists taking the lead in this - 'staying at home is not a very sensible thing to do, that's not the way to be a worthwhile parent, *person*'. And we've been saying what you do as a breadwinner isn't important, the important role as a father is to be a nurturer. Combine that at an ideological level with a complete collapse of actual financial support for parenting and also macro-economic change in male and female employment patterns and you've got a real conundrum.' (Roberts)

These changes are discrepant in the effects they have on differently classed parents, something that Roberts acknowledges but does not foreground in her drive to address issues that effect 'all' parents.

Similarly, FTM's professed class neutrality is in practice laden with preferences and priorities for some family 'types' over others.¹¹⁴ Through a minimal pro-active engagement with other family forms in its media commentary and specific policy proposals there is a *de facto* questioning of their legitimacy. Emphases and connections are not made or sought across class-based distinctions: FTM is more about families than mothers per se; non-state dependent middle class mothers rather than benefit claiming working class mothers; and married mothers rather than single mothers. Lilley deploys a number of justificatory reasons as to why they are most representative of the middle-class married mothers. 'Family' support because 'most stability comes from married couples'; mothers because 'mostly it's mothers who do the job and it's mothers who need affirmation in their role' particularly when children are very young and 'certainly for breastfeeding.'

The class perspective of Lilley's ideas about 'good' parenting can also be seen in the way she differentiates between the 'good' father figure as middle class and the 'bad' father figure as characterised by a lack of official work and stability. His characteristics are those of a staple figure of 'underclass':

¹¹⁴ The same neutral stance was claimed by the Conservative government with regard to 'family policy' although the effects of their policy discourse were differentiated according to family type. Bradshaw.J (1994) 'Family Policy In The UK' Paper for the conference 'Changes in Family Patterns in Western Countries' Bologna, Italy 6-8 October

'There's a difference between a floating father who turns up, lives with his girlfriend, has a kid and moves on. There's a difference between a child occasionally seeing him and the child who has a father who goes out to work everyday and spends 12 hours at work. That child may never see her father much but she knows her father is a permanent fixture... I'm not saying that the middle class father who's out to work for 12 hours a day is a particular role model, but at least there's a work role model.' (Lilley)

These class-based distinctions between parents characterise the discourse of 'underclass' as alternative understandings about, and prescriptions for, different parents on the basis of class, marital and financial status. The 'truths' about contemporary parenting that Lilley and Roberts seek to establish in their different ways, embed and are embedded by wider normative understandings about preferable kinds of families. The incoming Labour government in 1997 signalled their intention to retain Conservative benefit changes for single parents and to implement a 'family-friendly' tax system in which state help for families would come through the tax rather than benefit system in order to favour 'working families'.¹¹⁵ Thus the retained abolition of the One Parent Benefit of £6.30 a week (non-means tested) and the Lone Parent Premium of £5.20 a week (Income Support) for new claimants and in April 1996 the freezing of those benefit levels for current claimants.¹¹⁶ A major pre-election policy proposal of the Conservative government was to re-introduce the married couple's transferable tax allowance (after 3 consecutive cuts since 1991), as called for by FTM. This has been rejected by the 1997 incoming Labour government, choosing instead to install in-work tax and child-care benefits for low waged mothers.¹¹⁷ The logic of this change is not, however, dissimilar to that brought about by the Child Support Agency (CSA), established by the Conservatives in 1993 in order to enforce the financial obligations of separated parents as a means of reducing benefit dependency among lone parents.¹¹⁸ Its rules were such that mothers would only be significantly better off if they moved from Income Support to paid work and Family Credit. The Conservative government's motivation, far from a concern for child welfare, was about encouraging benefit dependent mothers to work. Child support only represents a direct financial gain without change to employment or mothering choices for single mothers *not* on benefit or with an ex-partner in well-paid regular employment. In other words the CSA intentionally has unequal effects on differently classed mothers:

'There is a division in the population of lone mothers between those with and without choices. At the bottom end of the income scale there is no choice about pursuing child support, except with a considerable benefit penalty, whereas at the top end some choice still exists. For women on Income Support with little prospect

¹¹⁵ 'Tax Plan To Help Jobless' *The Guardian* 10.5.97 p1

¹¹⁶ 'Tax Plan To Help Jobless' *The Guardian* 10.5.97 p1

¹¹⁷ 'Women: Blair's New Deal' *The Guardian* 26.2.98 p1

¹¹⁸ Millar, J. (1996) 'Family Obligations and Social Policy: The Case of Child Support' p181-193 *Policy Studies* Vol. 17 no. 3

of raising their incomes above Income Support level, whether in or out of work, the Child Support Act represents an erosion of their (limited) right of citizenship as lone mothers, in as much as their entitlement to independent Income Support via public benefit has become conditional on the obligation to be financially dependent on the father of their children and to co-operate with the State in pursuing him, even when there is no benefit to herself or her children.'¹¹⁹

It is clear from these most recent policy developments that 'family policy' via the tax and benefits system is not based on the same construct of *gender* roles for all 'women'. Instead there is a strongly *class* inflected policy discourse in which parenting choices for the benefit claiming mother are heavily restricted. Indeed the most desirable outcome is that she should move off benefits into paid work. This outcome is not just intended because of her 'welfare dependency'. It is part of another class-gender construct about the nature and quality of poor women's *mothering* itself. Rather than something to be supported - financially or culturally - it is a realm of intervention to be criticised, pathologised, undermined, changed.¹²⁰ This class-gender construct is central to the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' where judgements - including those of Lilley and Roberts - about what sorts of family and what sorts of parenting are socially desirable and deserving of support proliferate. In their fullest expression these judgements are socially eugenic: demographic trends of reproduction are presented as socially unsustainable because those least able to financially support families are the most reproductive.¹²¹ This kind of sociobiology draws on an historical mode of representation which has sought to construct working class mothers as burdensome and dangerous to their children's and society's development. The accusation that these mothers fail to discipline their children, emasculate their sons, retard their children's educational achievement and perpetuate cycles of disadvantage and dependency through bad role modelling is an ongoing theme in social and 'psy' professions around parenting.¹²² In the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' the theme is widened from 'bad mothering' to 'bad parenting' covering the wider terrain of issues associated with 'welfare dependency'. Poor parenting is seen as one of the main contributors to the sorts of unruliness, delinquency and criminality exhibited by the children of 'underclass' - in schools, on estates, on the street. The idea that parenting behaviour is potentially dangerous and burdensome to other people in the 'wider' society, is part of a strongly regulative policy discourse in favour of legislation around the family and civic

¹¹⁹ Wasoff.F and Morris.S (1994) 'The Child Support Act: A Victory For women?' Paper presented to the Social Policy Association conference 'Families in Question' University of Liverpool 12-14 July 1994

¹²⁰ The cultural lineaments of this particular discourse are traced in Walkerdine.V and Lucey.H (1989) *Democracy In The Kitchen: Regulating Motherhood, Socialising Daughters* London: Virago

¹²¹ 'New Breed of Non-Parents Turns Back on Family Way' *The Observer* 16.4.95 p10

¹²² See Walkerdine and Lucey, *Democracy in the Kitchen*; Hill-Collins.P (1990) 'Black Women and Motherhood' p115-139 *Black Feminist Thought* London: Unwin Hyman

order ranging from nursery care to curfews and parental court orders. Launching such policies in the Labour Party's strategy to improve parenting in Britain Jack Straw indicated the political rationale of the proposals:

'We have to accept that having a child is not a totally private act, but one that has significance for the whole community if that child grows up into a pattern of anti-social offending behaviour.'¹²³

In the populist political representation of 'parenting problems' the behaviour of working class children is used to flag issues of child 'behavioural' problems as manifestations of where parenting has most visibly gone wrong. A prominent example was the prolific media commentary and programming that surrounded the discipline problems of the Ridings school in West Yorkshire during October-November 1996. The Ridings was a 'sink school' serving three working class estates in the Halifax area that over a period of three weeks became the focus of a moral discourse about parenting, discipline and unruly children. Expelled children became media figures in a discourse of moral outrage that something 'had to be done', eventually leading to the closure of the school.¹²⁴ The General Secretary of the NASUWT teacher's union blamed the parents of the pupils:

'Parenting is getting worse. The problem kids of the 1970s are now producing the impossible children of the '90s.'¹²⁵

Academic analyses of parenting problems with childrearing and the anti-social behaviour of children include issues about the relationship between parenting and paid work. One of the most prominent writers on this subject - Amitai Etzioni - has addressed the subject as 'The Parenting Deficit'.¹²⁶ The devaluing and effective abuse of young children in

¹²³ Straw.J and Anderson.J (1996) *Parenting: A Discussion Paper* London: The Labour Party

¹²⁴ 'Ridings Closes As Control Is Lost' *The Guardian* 1.11.96 p1; 'School's Out Forever' *The Observer* Review 17.11.96 p6

¹²⁵ 'Schools 22 Month Curriculum of Chaos' *The Daily Telegraph* 23.10.96 p4

¹²⁶ Etzioni.A (1993) *The Parenting Deficit* London: Demos. Etzioni argues for the necessity of a Communitarian political project in which families are positioned as social goods at the core of 'a web of interpersonal attachments and a shared set of values'. The relationships between children and parents, and parents and work are key to this project. They are most strained and most in need of change via a revalorisation of relations outside the paid economy and a restructuring of the relation between family and working time that accords priority to parental time with children. In particular he identifies the early pre-school years of childhood as most in need of support for full-time parenting. The argument has some political currency with the new Labour government which has engaged with Communitarian ideas in terms of the need for legislation to ensure balance between family and working life. Etzioni's analysis is actually a much stronger critique of a cultural value system than that implied in Labour's project for change in which labour market and economic demands for parents to work outside the home take precedence. He conceives economic pressure at the lower part of the income scale and the desire for material success at the middle and upper ends as part of a persistent culture and economy promoted in the 1980s that undermines civil society. Both the energy and inclination to invest in this inter-personal and social capital have been dissipated in the push for parents to prioritise work in the paid economy. In this respect Etzioni's position is strongly aligned to that of FTM in which community is seen to be undermined by the daily absence of mothers as the traditional stalwarts of community work. Etzioni is similarly criticised for presenting a veiled agenda for women to be 'returned' to the home: for example Beatrix Campbell insists that his arguments

the push for maximal labour market participation by parents is central to both Etzioni's 'Communitarianism' and FTM's 'maternalism'. They prefer to present their positions as a positive discourse on 'care' rather than a negative discourse on 'paid work'. As a debate it is marked by controversy over what are often highly personal and emotive issues around the relationships between childrearing and paid work, resources and parenting. Party political engagement with these relationships tends to settle on the issue of childcare provision, a consensus reflected in the recommendations of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Parenting established in 1993.¹²⁷ Their starting question was how government could respond to the changing needs of families and the parenting needs of children, and how policy could be formed and co-ordinated to assist families. The report presents a striking consensus between the 47 submissions from family-related organisations. Its concluding proposals reflect a wide field of representation around 'the family' that reflect available ways of talking authoritatively about contemporary parenting, its problems, and policy relations. Its part in the discourse of 'underclass' is shown in the way it settles on particular recommendations for the problems of poor families to be solved through participation in the paid labour market:

'Reform the benefit system to remove disincentives to work for people on benefits; Provide and encourage a range of good quality childcare to help families work their way out of poverty.'

Those aims are the central policy objectives of the new Labour government's approach to 'underclass'.

The Politics of Child Care

Roberts believes that the answers to complex changes in parenting, 'work' and gender roles have been too dominated by a labour market perspective as a drive to get everybody working with childcare provision rather than considering ways to get everybody parenting with necessary provisions and support:

'We've got a project on families and work and what I suppose we're looking at is why is there this rush to the labour market, why is everything more important - why is the public *via* the market more important than the private and the non-market relation?' (Roberts)

This question is the crux of contemporary feminist discussions around the parenting-paid work relation. It necessarily goes beyond childcare as the answer to gender inequalities in paid work and parenting roles. Indeed Roberts questions the consensual call for extensive

attribute the parenting deficit to women's entry into the labour market (Campbell.B (1995) 'Old Fogeys and Angry Young Men: A Critique of Communitarianism' p47-65 *Soundings* 1).

¹²⁷ The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Parenting (1994) *The Report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Parenting* London: Exploring Parenthood and The International Year of the Family

childcare provision on a number of counts: in terms of the way it values paid work and parenting work in relation to each other; the realism of the resource demands it makes; unspoken issues about the sorts of changes in the worlds of work and care that parents really want; and unspeakable issues about child welfare:

‘I think there’s real problems about childcare that no one’s willing to talk about. It’s going to be completely out of court to provide a degree of good quality institutional childcare on a highly subsidised basis for all parents. And then there’s the other issue about whether a) that’s actually good for very young children b) whether that’s what the parents of those children really want.’ (Roberts)

In government the labour market perspective dominates:

‘As far as I can see the powers that be in the Labour party think that everyone should work’. (Roberts)

The publication of the Conservative’s consultation paper on childcare in 1996 ended the traditional Conservative tension between family and work priorities in favour of the latter.¹²⁸

It is a position that the FPSC is positioned against:

‘This document does not seem to have thought coherently about the long-term effects of deeper penetration of the labour market into the family. If you take a family perspective, you would say that people should be able to choose whether to stay at home to look after children or go out to work.’¹²⁹

In this dominant political discourse around childcare, discussion about child welfare rather than their ‘educational success’ is almost entirely absent, other than with regard to the utility of early education for future exam ‘success’. FPSC seeks a child-centred view of these issues:

‘We should have a national policy based on the social and development needs of children and the diverse support needs of their parents, rather than starting from the point of view of the needs of the labour market.’¹³⁰

The reason for that absence is an unwillingness to deal with a different sort of ‘needs’ discourse to that of employers, the economy and the traditional case made for child care in terms of equality for women. There are conflicts of interest in which the time patterns, lifestyles and lifecourses of children and parents do not necessarily fit well with current labour market demands. Rather than question those demands the onus is on parents to be ‘flexible’ in order to accommodate labour market priorities. In this there is a supposition that the needs and interests of children, parents, employers, the economy and society can be

¹²⁸ Department of Employment (1996) *Work and Family: Ideas and Options for Childcare* London: DOE

¹²⁹ Bayley.R (1996) ‘Questioning the Labour Market View of Childcare’ *Family Policy Bulletin* November 1996 London: FPSC p11

¹³⁰ Bayley, *Questioning the Labour Market View of Childcare* p11

brought in line. FPSC is concerned to delineate the needs and interests of children as the least powerful players in that complex.

The figure of the benefit dependent single mother highlights the extent to which those different interests are not aligned, standing as she does at the axis of very different 'needs' discourses. Roberts is keenly aware of the class-based nature of the current political drive to position these single mothers as workers with the argument for their childcare 'needs' at its core. Indeed the idea of flexible but supportive family-work regimes being delivered across occupations, across differently classed families, to the equal advantage of all women obscures class issues. There will be differently classed needs, interests and outcomes within that regime. At the moment the most vocal interests of a particular group of women are being made to stand for the interests of all:

'What worries me about the whole family-work debate, in particular the campaigns organised by groups like 'Parents At Work', 'New Ways Of Working', 'Opportunity 2000' is that they are disproportionately about advantaged, qualified, healthy, professional, white collar women to advance them in the labour market and to enable them to combine family life with work. What they are not about is ordinary people and it's something I can understand under a Tory government but I find it rather distressing with the Labour party.' (Roberts)

However FPSC stops at outlining anti-poverty policies for those disadvantaged, unqualified, often exhausted and ill benefit dependent mothers beyond 'getting them back to work'. Even as she critiques one aspect of this discourse Roberts is caught up in another about the desirability and acceptability of single parent welfare expenditure. With regard to the question of whether these mothers should be required to seek work once their children were at school if other childcare provision were available, Roberts is ambivalent:

'I find that quite difficult. I'm tempted to say yes because why should the state support them. I do think there's not enough public discussion about the economic consequences of lone parenthood. And this might well be the solution. But I'm also aware that sometimes these children need more care.' (Roberts)

Certainly her predecessor as director of FPSC Malcolm Wicks (now a Labour MP) is clear on that line, insisting on defining independence for single mothers through paid work:

'The emphasis should be on independence. The current entitlement of lone parents to stay on Income Support until their youngest child is 16 belongs to an earlier era and should be scrapped.'¹³¹

FTM approach the issue of government resourcing for parents by arguing for tax allowances and child benefit increases as opposed to government funded childcare. Their central and least contentious demand for a tax system that recognises and rewards married couples with children, is in the contemporary period agreed upon by both Labour and

¹³¹ Wicks.M (1995) 'New Deal For Families' *The Guardian* 21.6.95 p16

Conservative parties. For FTM it is a policy direction which lessens the necessity to pursue those arguments which relate to wider change for *all* mothers which would address questions about the status accorded to different sorts of motherhood. The contradictions of their position are revealed in relation to childcare.

FTM's strong objection to the current priority given to childcare, is not equalled by a strength of support for the mothering status of benefit claiming mothers even though they are targeted as the main users of extended childcare provision as part of Labour's New Deal for single mothers. Indeed it is the position of benefit claiming mothers that is politically used to show most clearly why childcare provision is needed and to flag demands for it. Beyond the simplified idea of childcare as a facilitation of paid work are arguments about the sort of children and the sort of mothers that childcare would most benefit. The dominant position is that single parents and their children should be prioritised as beneficiaries for their own sakes and for the widest benefits to society and the economy.¹³² Here we are on the terrain of 'underclass' whose parents are also the most socially problematic and economically burdensome. Those mothers who will benefit most are those who are currently 'welfare dependent' whose loss of earnings cost themselves and the economy too much.¹³³ Those children who will benefit more from child care provision are those who can be better parented - better stimulated, educated, disciplined, socialised. This position is advocated by a number of teaching professionals who question the quality of lone mother's parenting skills.¹³⁴ And it is prominently argued for in the media by Polly Toynbee, a prominent journalist on welfare matters who is a fervent advocate of single mothers working and of the benefits of childcare socialisation: 'children of non-working lone parents do far worse than children of single mothers who work'.¹³⁵ A principal reason for this is that the absence of a 'working' role model inclines children towards becoming:

'...a burden on the state for life... [they] grow up with no work ethic expecting money to come from the post office giro.'¹³⁶

Public voices against the total benefits of childcare provision for industry, for the economy, for better parenting-work relations, better parent-child relations, better gender

¹³² This position is argued by both Labour and Conservative parties: the former in The Labour Party (1996) *Getting welfare to work: a new vision for social security* London: Labour party ; the latter in Department for Education and Employment (1996) *Work and Family: Ideas and Options for Childcare: A Consultation Paper* London: Department for Education and Employment

¹³³ Joshi.H and Davies.H (1995) 'Mothers' Human Capital and Childcare in Britain' *Mothers In Employment* volume 3 London: HMSO p507

¹³⁴ For example see David.M.E (1993) *Parents, Gender and Education Reform* Cambridge: Polity Press p3-4

¹³⁵ Toynbee.P (1997) 'Scaring Mothers? It's Panorama's Bit Of Fun' *The Independent* 4.2.97 p15

¹³⁶ Toynbee.P (1995) 'Who Should Be Holding The Baby?' *The Independent* 16.6.95 p17

relations and as an effective anti-poverty strategy are very few indeed.¹³⁷ It is against this consensus that FTM opposes itself. However, Lilley's stated support for the *parenting* role of single mothers, and her objection to their use in childcare campaigns is not developed as a resource issue via the benefits system for example. She believes that motherhood could be imbued with status via relatively small financial changes within available and tested means of family support in tax and child benefit. In this respect FTM's policy proposals are for much less than the pitch of their argument would otherwise suggest.

Their most vociferous opposition is towards the childcare lobby for having promoted childcare as the most powerful idea about 'what mothers really want'. Lilley insists that the development of this consensus is based on an economistic devaluation of mothering-work and of children, that far from having realised 'what mothers really want' now forms a grip on what mothers can hope to expect and what they are persuaded to regard as important:

'Childcare is overridingly considered as an economic good... these people are coming from two angles. Firstly, helping employers - the 'Employers For Childcare' thing. Why is it called that? Because they can retain their staff and improve their profit margins because if they've got to take on new staff and retrain staff then they're going to be out of pocket. So it's coming from the employment lobby and secondly it's coming from this sort of feminist career lobby that says most mothers want to work. It says 'women cannot achieve full equality of opportunity when they're prevented from taking the job of their choice by a lack of suitable childcare.' Well where's the child in either of those? We're talking about small, developing children with feelings - we're not talking about commercial transactions.' (Lilley)

FTM's proposals are for a mother and child centred policy frame not dictated by fiscal and economic priorities:

'Young mothers are in the workforce as a function of existing fiscal and economic *policy* more than as a statement of their real choice. It is a spurious argument to say 'this is', therefore 'must be' and therefore we have to work out childcare policies to enable this state of affairs to continue.' (Lilley)

Following the research of the child development writer and fellow of the British Psychological Society Dr. Penelope Leach, FTM identify the 0-3 years of infancy as crucially in need of full-time one-to-one care, with nursery education and playgroups thereafter.¹³⁸ Employment policies should be geared to motherhood as the norm given that most women will become mothers, rather than as aberrant inconvenience so that mothers can mother on their own terms once their children are at school:¹³⁹

¹³⁷ The consensus that has developed around childcare as an unquestionable good is further traced in: Morgan.P (1996) *Who Needs Parents?: The Effects of Childcare and Early Education on Children in Britain and the USA* London: Institute of Economic Affairs

¹³⁸ Leach.P (1994) *Children First* London: Penguin

¹³⁹ Figures suggest that 80% of women are or will become mothers: Boulton.M (1983) *On Being A Mother* London: Tavistock Publications p1

'Instead of more childcare, more creative employment schemes are needed - flexible working hours, five year career breaks, longer maternity leave, anti-ageist policies.' (Lilley)

Where the predominance of the childcare consensus sets motherhood up as something to be escaped from and improved upon primarily through paid work and often *any* work, Lilley believes this feeds into the actual experience of mothering and is productive of the sort of 'self-esteem depression' that is so prevalent amongst mothers as they are pressured into the workplace and denigrated in their motherhood.

However, the more conservative aspects of FTM's approach - a campaign which prioritises some mothers over others, sets up classed notions of 'good' parenting and shows an unwillingness to address issues of how resource distribution effect differently classed families - means that the discourse of FTM is very limited as a maternalist agenda. This is necessarily related to the conditions of its emergence culturally and politically where support for motherhood per se and any sort of benefit dependency is less than forthcoming.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless it is the only contemporary organisation that brings issues of mothering-work and the dominance of an economistic approach to the family into prime media space in a way that has challenged the mantra of 'getting mothers back to work'.¹⁴¹ It has introduced to the discourse about parenting and paid employment questions about the value and social support given to mothering. In doing so it partly challenges arguments for the necessity and desirability of benefit dependent mothers placing their children in childcare in order to take up paid work, which are central to 'underclass' discourse. FTM present an alternative, experiential and personally committed voice to a political consensus around 'getting mothers back to work'. Albeit indirectly, they pose important questions about the sort of feminist politics that are necessary to challenge particular hegemonic discourses around the problems, inadequacies and solutions to parenting in poverty.

FTM and FPSC both suggest that there is a dominant consensus about childcare as a panacea for a number of social, economic and familial problems. The childcare issue is a strand of 'underclass' discourse which brings together issues of inadequate parenting and welfare dependency, often posed as the solution to both. Childcare provision represents a way of facilitating a huge change in the conditions of benefit entitlement for lone parents by making them 'available for work'. It becomes the condition for releasing mothers from poverty and 'dependency' on men or the State *and* to push lone mothers into becoming

¹⁴⁰ The limitations of FTM's maternalist agenda, also reflects the historically class-ridden nature of much 'maternalist' politics when it meets poverty. See Ross.E (1993) *Love and Toil: Motherhood In Outcast London 1870-1918* Oxford: Oxford University Press

¹⁴¹ The Wages For Housework Campaign did so prominently in the 1970s but has much less media currency in the contemporary period. Their marginalisation is discussed later.

workers in the paid labour market. The latter development shows the necessity of updating long-standing social policy discourses which have identified a *lack* of childcare as a barrier to choice over mothers working with regard to *contemporary* welfare discourses where labour market participation is the expressed priority and likely to become coercively so for particular mothers. Through the discourse of 'underclass' childcare provision is being set up as a means of removing from single mothers the right *not* to work in the labour market until they decide. In other words, for *these* mothers there will be no excuse not to work. This development raises serious questions for feminists interested not only in the paid-unpaid work relation, but more widely in assessing the nature of contemporary power relations between the public and private, the economy and family life.

Discussion: Classed Discourses on Parenting

In contemporary discourses around parenting problems and work-family relations FPSC and FTM have sought to make high profile issues of the support needs of parent-child relations within the family. Their organisations deploy different tactics in that process. FTM have purposefully presented a controversially titled campaign on an experiential basis to promote motherhood and infancy as distinct and fundamentally important time periods in the lifecourse. Their argument is for financial and cultural recognition and support for that period *unrelated* to labour market participation. FPSC present themselves as a research base organisation given over to debunking myths about the family through traditional social scientific research objectives. Central to that work is distinguishing parenting and family relations from labour market ones, as in need of attention and support in their own right. Both FPSC and FTM discern that their positions are often against the grain of dominant political developments, and of particular feminist commentaries in which the centrality of paid work to economic and gender equal states of well-being is promoted. They are concerned to question the basis on which policies around the family-work relation are being made and identify a labour market premise as productive of limiting, devaluing and increasingly pressurising elements that negatively impact on the status of parenting-work.

Both represent particular middle-class perspectives on these issues. FTM through a primary concern to promote the interests of two parent families especially married partners where the husband is working for a good wage and the wife wants to choose full-time motherhood. FPSC through a disinclination to recognise or support welfare entitlements for single mothers in poverty over and above the support needs of 'all' families. In this their personal perspectives and interests are significant: Lilley as a middle-class, full-time mother; Roberts as a professional, career woman. Both Lilley and Roberts claim particular feminist connections whilst disputing particular publicly dominant manifestations of feminism.

Although both are concerned to speak about stressed parenting and the devaluation of parenting work, they are not concerned to represent people for whom those issues are most amplified in the contemporary period. 'Underclass' parents are problematic for them because their apparent characteristics do not fit their preferred template of the family. Both promote ideas about parenting on benefits as undesirable. These discriminations of class converge in attitudes to the benefit dependent single mother.

Getting Poor Mothers 'Back To Work': Devaluing Working Class Home Places?

Feminist critiques of Amitai Etzioni's work on 'the parenting deficit' have identified the re-introduction of a conservative and woman-blaming element to his analysis of family decline.¹⁴² It is seen as a proposition for women to 'get back to the kitchen sink' and as a moral exhortation against working mothers. The discussion runs parallel with particular political and media commentaries which support policies for welfare dependent mothers to 'get back to work'. It seems clear that the idea of women being told to 'get back' to anywhere is an affront to women and to feminism that should be resisted. But this matter is unfortunately more complicated because arguments against the idea of paid women workers 'getting back to the kitchen sink' are being used to provide contemporary welfare discourses around single mothers with an apparently feminist credited argument for 'getting mothers back to work'. In other words, the idea that single mothers want to take up paid work which they were previously denied access to, is now being used to encourage benefit claiming mothers to be seen primarily as unemployed workers.

Lilley and Roberts both seek to counter the idea that the home can be reduced to the 'kitchen sink' with ideas about the importance of parent-child relations, of family-based attachments and interdependencies which are increasingly stressed and undermined by external market pressures. However these arguments are not fully extended to 'underclass' single mothers whose 'benefit dependency' positions them as 'other' and is an affront on two counts. Firstly it is an affront to tax paying working mothers and fathers who are parenting and 'working' for whom benefit mothers are presented as an unemployed tax burden. Secondly it is as an affront to particular middle class parenting sensibilities. 'Bad' parenting is inflicting juvenile delinquents and pregnant teenagers on the wider society who must pay the price.

Both these 'affronts' can be addressed by a socialist feminism that is attuned to the power dynamics of class and gender which constitute the contemporary period of 'underclass'. The issue of child care is a salient starting point. The relation between

¹⁴² Campbell.B (1995) 'Old Fogeys and Angry Young Men: A Critique of Communitarianism' p47-65 *Soundings* 1; Murray.L (1995) 'The Politics Of Attachment' p65-76 *Soundings* 1

feminism and childcare is highly contentious because it forces together issues of labour market gender equality and domestic power relations, with issues about the boundaries of State-family relations, the status of motherhood and the value of paid work. It also necessitates questions about resource priorities in relation to paid and unpaid work. The issue of childcare has in many ways been central to feminist discussions around domestic and labour market inequalities.¹⁴³ It is of renewed interest in the contemporary period which projects high increases in the numbers of mothers entering the labour market.

A demand for '24 hour nurseries' was one of the four original demands of the first women's liberation conference in 1970, seeking to challenge:

'...women's de facto responsibility for the care of young children... [as] a fundamentally determining aspect of their social subordination.'¹⁴⁴

The radical nature of this demand has been tempered by an acceptance in mainstream politics of the national economic and demographic necessity for mothers to enter the labour market.¹⁴⁵ The need for childcare has therefore largely become a resource question rather than an ideological one about the desirability of mothers working. Along with this development by the late 1970s a feminist literature on motherhood had challenged many of the negative meanings around motherhood associated with the early feminist movement in which childcare was conceived of as an escape route from the domestic role. These new writings on motherhood embraced it as an experience, developed it in terms of a maternal value system, and used it to reconstitute meanings around the value of paid and unpaid work.¹⁴⁶ Reflecting women's own ambivalent feelings about child care these theoretical developments within feminist writings mean that there is no one 'feminist position' on childcare.

However, contemporary political and media commentaries on the subject have reverted to the language of sexual equality in the labour market and liberation from 'dependency' as a means of gaining support for provision. And in the context of declining political support for benefit expenditure and the vilification of 'non-working' families, these original aims have new meanings.

Harriet Harman's book *The Century Gap* gives a good indication of where contemporary political ideas on childcare are located.¹⁴⁷ As Secretary of State for Social

¹⁴³ See Coote.A and Campbell.B (1982) *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle For Women's Liberation* London: Picador

¹⁴⁴ Randall.V (1996) 'Feminism and Child Daycare' p485-505 *Journal of Social Policy* 25: 4 p486

¹⁴⁵ The Report of the National Economic Development Council which talked about demographic short falls of working people in the 1990s and beyond is seen to be decisive in this shift. See Randall.V (1996) 'Feminism and Daycare' p485-505 *Journal of Social Policy* 25: 4 p491

¹⁴⁶ Rich.A (1977) *Of Woman Born* London: Virago; Ruddick.S (1989) *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* New York: Ballantine

¹⁴⁷ Harman.H (1993) *The Century Gap: 20th Century Man - 21st Century Woman* London: Vermillion

Security under the 1997 Labour government and as chairwoman of the cabinet sub-committee on women, she is positioned to place childcare as a central plank of a new welfare regime. The premise of the book is that there is a gap between the lives of men and women in terms of the distance women have travelled from domesticity into the world of work. Her thesis is that men have not filled this gap through a parallel journey into domesticity and in this respect they are a century behind. She outlines the increasing importance of women's paid work to society and calls for greater female equality and representation through policies that accommodate women's 'unwillingness' to sacrifice their 'careers' and their relationships with their families. Society needs men to 'catch up' via moves into domestic roles and for them to recognise the loss they bear by not participating in the upbringing of their children. This shift can be partly facilitated by childcare provision to enable both sexes to share work and home responsibilities. The case for childcare is further made in terms of economic savings and children's social development. Public money invested in childcare would bring a return when the savings to the Exchequer from tax and national insurance receipts and benefits savings from additional mothers going out to work are calculated into the equation. This argument is clearly directed at mothers on benefits for whom 'work' has the added advantage of breaking 'cycles of welfare dependency'. This is a major motivation of New Labour's 'welfare to work' strategy which has been promoted by Frank Field MP as Minister for Welfare Reform, in terms of restoring links between welfare, human nature and morality which translates into cutting the welfare 'supply routes' to single parenthood.¹⁴⁸ In this regard childcare's role of facilitating economic participation, is part of a wider role of socialisation. In line with the perspective of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the much quoted IPPR report *Childcare in a Modern Welfare System*, Harman argues that children with pre-school nursery care are more likely to complete their schooling than those without it. They are also more likely to be employed and to support themselves, and nursery educated girls are more likely to have jobs and less likely to be teenage mothers.¹⁴⁹ Childcare is therefore an investment to reduce benefit expenditure and 'dependency', to better socialise working class children and to move towards a gender neutrality in relations of 'work' and 'care'. To this end an initial £300 million will be made available for extended childcare provision from April 1998, and 50,000 18-24 year olds will be trained as childcare assistants as part of the 'welfare to work' New Deal. Two-thirds of the New Deal recruits are male and it is therefore expected that they will make up a large number of the new childcare workforce.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Field, *Stakeholder Welfare* p9 and p114

¹⁴⁹ Equal Opportunities Commission (1990) *The Key To Real Choice: An Action Plan For Childcare* London: EOC; Cohen.B and Fraser.N (1991) *Childcare In A Modern Welfare System* London: IPPR p81

¹⁵⁰ 'Father Figures' *The Guardian* Society 25.2.98 p9

This pro-childcare discourse is highly prescriptive about what is best for children, mothers, the economy and society. Where mother's and children's needs happily coincide with those of the labour market, the values of that prescription are overwhelmingly economic and rationalistic. Dissenting voices come from the margins of mainstream politics. The 'Wages For Housework Campaign' (recently described in *The Guardian* newspaper's 'Women' section as a 'cult') contests the too easy equation of working women with careers and choice.¹⁵¹ Traditionally conservative defenders of the family such as the 'Family and Youth Concern' group here overlap with WFHC:

'Women are now forced to work even if they would like to stay at home. When we read about working women it always seems to be women judges and professionals. There's nothing desirable about a career for women who have to stuff frozen chickens or be chamber maids.'¹⁵²

This perspective insists on the difference that class makes to 'working women'. Careers, salaries, self-realisation, and empowerment are not part of the same reality as waged work, casualisation, low wages, alienation.

Positive understandings about the difference that class makes to the politics of mothering are exemplified in the black feminist writings of bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins.¹⁵³ Their work on the way black mothering is represented in negation of the economic and cultural experiences of black family lives resonates politically with the contemporary situation of working class, 'welfare dependent' single mothers. Despite the different cultural histories between these groups many of the same stereotypes are deployed about families that are inadequately and irresponsibly parented, cause pathological gender development, are over-reproductive, scrounging and lazy. In this context the meanings of motherhood and the home are very different to those produced by many of the white, middle class discourses around parenting and work that constitute politically vocal and powerful expressions of feminism in party politics, lobbying groups and organisations like the Equal Opportunities Commission. Hill-Collins talks about interlocking social inequalities in which particular oppressions are more keenly felt than others. She identifies the discourse of flight from the 'private' by middle class women seeking personal autonomy via the 'public' sphere as characteristic of the early Women's Liberation Movement. That discourse in many ways still constitutes public manifestations and understandings of what 'feminism' is about and continues not to speak to large numbers of poor and/or non-white women for whom the

¹⁵¹ 'Wages For Housework Revisited' *The Guardian* 6.8.92 p17

¹⁵² Whelan, R., Family and Youth Concern (1993) 'The Family At War' *The Sunday Times Focus* 7.3.93 p1

¹⁵³ hooks, 'Revolutionary Parenting' p133-147 *From Margin To Centre*; Hill-Collins, *Black Women and Motherhood*

meanings of 'home' and 'family', of 'public' and 'work' are differently experienced. For these women conflict is often located elsewhere:

'The locus of conflict lies outside the household, as women and their families engage in collective efforts to create and maintain family life in the face of forces that undermine family integrity.'¹⁵⁴

In terms of the theorising that this understanding produces there are different themes and priorities around material survival, struggles against the intervention of external agencies, pro-natalist values, and the affirmation of cultural difference. For the subjects of 'underclass' discourse the realities of poverty, unemployment, imprisonment and children being taken into 'care', mean that their 'parenting problems' will be differently understood. These differences often constitute the home as a site of resistance to the incursions of dominant middle-class family norms and the external oppressions of low waged, degrading work. hooks talks about the experiences of those mothering in poverty as struggling for economic survival with poor work or poverty level benefits undermining their ability to parent; stress and depression taking away their time and energy and importantly 'the right of children to effective child care by parents and other childrearsers.'¹⁵⁵

I would argue that it is such conditions that increasingly prevail for working class single mothers in poor work and on benefits whose parenting abilities and choices have less than marginal political representation in current welfare discourses. For the benefit claiming single mother (in degraded alliance with the unemployed young working class male) the 'public' space increasingly represents a surveillant, coercive and punitive space. This is a space occupied by unruly children on the streets, criminal young men on public housing estates and single mothers greedy for public resources. At the same time the 'poor home', the 'poor private', is presented as a sphere in need of public intervention. It becomes fixed in a public gaze as the source of dysfunction, and for the poor it often becomes a place of refuge. The 'underclass' need to be ejected from their sofas and into the workplace. The 'poor' home and its family relations are no longer private because their 'bad' choices are at a cost to the public purse and to public order. They become public property. The 'underclass' *must* work and their children placed in public childcare.

Two places where political representations against such developments have traditionally been located are the welfare lobbying group, the 'National Council For One-Parent Families'(NCOPF), and in discourses of social justice supported by the Labour Party and exemplified in their 'Commission on Social Justice'(CSJ) set up in 1992. My last

¹⁵⁴ Hill Collins.P (1994) 'Shifting The Centre: Race, Class and Feminist Theorising About Motherhood' p45-67 Glenn.E, Chang.G, Forcey.L (eds.) *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency* New York: Routledge

¹⁵⁵ hooks, *From Margin to Centre* p140

interviews were with Ann Spackman NCOPF Chairwoman and Professor Ruth Lister, a spokeswoman for the CSJ.

Ruth Lister and Ann Spackman on: Welfare Policy for Single Mothers and Feminism

Between 1970-1990 the number of single parents in Britain more than doubled to over one and a quarter million which is one in five of all families with children. Over 90% of those were single mothers and two-thirds of that 90% in receipt of Income Support or Family Credit.¹⁵⁶ Since the beginning of the Welfare State, policy discourses around these benefit dependent single mothers have illustrated ambiguity over whether they should be regarded as mothers or workers, or how those roles should be balanced.¹⁵⁷ In the current period their increasing numbers has posed the question anew with their 'cost' to the State as its emphasis. Current policy for benefit dependent single mothers with dependent children under 16 years of age does not require them to register as unemployed and 'available for work'. In April 1997 the Conservative Government launched a £20 million 'Parent Plus' pilot project in 12 areas, in which single mothers attend job centres to discuss work availability and childcare provision in an attempt to build individualised job and training packages. This is very similar to the new Labour government's plans for every single mother with children of school age to attend job centres for 'career interviews' and access to government funded individual learning accounts which would enable them to purchase training.¹⁵⁸

Differently motivated arguments about single mothers being enabled, encouraged, or pushed into 'work' make for a highly contentious policy area. The distinctions between these approaches seem increasingly blurred, raising questions about State support for women's roles as mothers and workers. The discourse of 'underclass' is centrally constituted by these discussions with regard to the benefit dependent single mother. At the nexus of a range of different trends and political causes, it is unsurprising that the single mother of 'underclass' is a highly contradictory figure: a production of conflicting motivations, needs, wants and interests. In the contemporary period two powerful players in that production have been the National Council For One-Parent Families and the Commission On Social Justice.

¹⁵⁶ Millar.J (1994) 'State, Family and Personal Responsibility: The Changing Balance For Lone Mothers in the United Kingdom' p24-39 *Feminist Review* 48

¹⁵⁷ Lewis.J (1988) 'Lone-Parent Families: Politics and Economics' p595-600 *Journal of Social Policy* 18(4)

¹⁵⁸ Labour Party (1996) *Getting Welfare To Work: a new vision for social security* London: Labour Party

From Welfare To Work

NCOPF was originally established in 1918 as a campaigning organisation and pressure group called the 'Unmarried Mother and her Child', representing almost the entire range of welfare organisations for single women and their children at the time. Its stated objectives were to reform the Bastardy Acts, and to provide accommodation and nurseries to allow mothers to work, mainly in domestic service. These aims are continued in the contemporary period through campaigns to change public and political attitudes to single parenthood and to facilitate single parents' employment.¹⁵⁹ Since the mid-1980s under the direction of Sue Slipman the predominant campaigning and organisational role of NCOPF has been geared to a national 'Back To Work' strategy as the most realistic means of producing 'an independent life in the mainstream' for single parents. This strategy is reflected in the title of its 75th anniversary publication *1918-1993 From the Workhouse to the Workplace*.

The relation of NCOPF to the discourse of 'underclass' works through a powerful commentary role on issues of benefit 'dependency', parenting and family form. Perhaps the most significant moment in media and political attention to the single motherhood-'underclass' relation in the contemporary period was the transmission of the BBC Panorama 'Babies On Benefit' in September 1993. Watched by 5 million viewers, the programme generated an enormous media response, public reaction through newspaper letter pages and a year long legal dispute between the BBC, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC) and NCOPF. The programme hit the nerve of a debate which had started in July of the same year after comments by John Redwood, then Secretary of State for Wales, who had used a visit to the St. Mellons estate in Cardiff to evidence the notion that young women were choosing single parenthood as a means of guaranteeing entitlement to State benefits and housing. That idea had been an ongoing Conservative theme of populist conference speeches and tabloid media attention from the 1980s through to the 1990s. Panorama set out to 'investigate' this trend in response to Redwood's comments and presented evidence from the mouths of single mothers on the estate which seemed to confirm them. It then revealed how benefit capping in the American state of New Jersey had been able to stymie such developments: reducing the number of babies conceived by 50% in the first month of becoming law. The programme started with an interview with Michelle Ellis aged 22, a never-married mother of four children expecting her fifth child. The commentary extrapolated her situation:

¹⁵⁹ Reform of the 'Bastardy Act' came in the 1987 Family Law Reform Act. Slipman regards her part in its genesis as her greatest achievement ('Woman With A One Track Mind' *The Guardian* 14.7.93 p8)

‘There are nearly half a million women in Britain like Michelle. She’s single, she lives alone with her children and she relies on the taxpayers to provide for them.’

The programme’s conclusion, in relation to the New Jersey ‘success story’ was:

‘Those behind the reforms claim this is proof that people’s behaviour can be changed by removing free handouts from the State.’

NCOPF’s refutation of the programme was largely based on the *typicality* of the cases presented in terms of numbers and the attitudes of the women represented. They also challenged the programme’s examination of the policy options to reduce ‘welfare dependency’ in particular the dismissal of childcare out of hand as ‘too expensive’ while American style benefit reductions were presented as a tested solution. NCOPF’s complaint was supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing whose Policy Director said the idea of single parents jumping the housing queue needed to be laid to rest.¹⁶⁰ The Broadcasting Complaints Commission finally ruled in favour of NCOPF, and in response the BBC, for the first time in its history rejected the BCC finding and took the case to judicial review. It won on the issue of NCOPF’s right to have brought the case in the first place.

The debacle was a central part of what Ann Spackman calls ‘the year of the single mother’. As the Chairwoman of NCOPF, a journalist and a barrister who represented NCOPF’s case against the BBC at judicial review, Ann Spackman has been centrally involved in the development of this central part of the discourse around ‘feckless’ single mothers.

The Commission on Social Justice was set up by the Labour Party under the auspices of the IPPR in 1992: the 50th anniversary of the Beveridge Report. It was intended to reconfigure welfare policy on the political Left via a wide-ranging debate of ideas and policy between a number of independent, prominent experts. To that end it took written and oral evidence from a large number of organisations and individuals including FPSC, Frank Field MP, NCOPF and the Wages For Housework Campaign. As a contemporary Left-wing statement on social justice it assumed a powerful and much quoted position with regard to the future of welfare. Many of its ideas are now part of the policy debate that surrounds ‘underclass’ on the political Left in ideas about social exclusion and the necessary constitution of a modern welfare state. It has been given party political and feminist affirmation:

‘Its report will inform Labour’s policy making and provide the basis for a vital national debate about the future of work and welfare.’¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ ‘BBC Bites Back as Watchdog Savages ‘Unjust Report’ *The Guardian* 13.9.94 p2

¹⁶¹ This quote from Tony Blair was the front page and back cover endorsement of *The Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* (1994)

'The Labour party is certainly more tuned in than it has been to the issues and problems that confront women, as evidenced in... the impressively 'feminised' understanding of the contemporary labour market that underpins the report of the Commission on Social Justice.'¹⁶²

Its policy proposals for transforming the welfare state, for education and training, and for community regeneration all relate to the policy discourse around 'underclass'. Its discussions on the contemporary position of women in society *generally*, are central to the sorts of policies that it proposes for the problems of benefit claiming single mothers in particular. Those problems are primarily figured in terms of exclusion from the labour market, marginalisation in a social and economic revolution conceived as a gender revolution:

'...a revolution of women's life chances, of family structure and of demography.'¹⁶³

The first proposal for its vision of social justice as a 'fair and efficient distribution of unemployment and employment', is directly targeted at lone mothers as part of the unemployed:

'We propose a new Jobs, Education and Training strategy (JET) to get the long-term unemployed and lone mothers back to work.'¹⁶⁴

This is envisaged as being part of a wider re-organisation of work and family life in which there should be no difference between women's and men's work - paid or unpaid. It requires women and men to change stereotyped notions of what sorts of work they do so that:

'...women are able to share financial responsibility for their children and men to share the emotional and practical responsibilities of parenthood.'¹⁶⁵

There is an acceptance that because growth in the economy is in part-time, service sector work (traditionally occupied by women), men will have to lower expectations which otherwise act as barriers to gender equality:

'Concern about male unemployment should not lead to romantic notions about the re-creation of the male breadwinner earning a family wage. The old jobs which offered a reasonable wage to men without a good education will not return.'¹⁶⁶

Social justice in these terms is primarily about enabling participation in the labour market, whilst the nature of available work is secondary and amenable to positive change via a minimum wage and signing up to the European Social Chapter. With regard to benefits provision, social justice comes from an 'intelligent welfare state' that 'works with rather

¹⁶² Phillips.A (1996) 'What Has Socialism To Do With Sexual Equality?' p27-45 *Soundings* 4 p34

¹⁶³ *Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* p33

¹⁶⁴ *Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* p6

¹⁶⁵ *Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* p11

¹⁶⁶ *Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* p187

than against the grain of change.¹⁶⁷ That grain of change is primarily labour market driven necessitating 'welfare to work' benefits that are a 'hand up' rather than a 'hand out'.¹⁶⁸

The Commission's Report does engage with the issue of 'social capital' produced by caring work outside of the market relation but for those parenting in poverty the central emphasis is on routes out of poverty via paid work rather than higher benefit levels as an investment in social capital. Indeed social capital is not viable on its own, only *in relation to* economic capital via labour market participation:

'Labour market and family policy go together; the social revolution in women's life chances demands a reappraisal of the role of men as workers and fathers as well as that of women as employees and mothers.'¹⁶⁹

As a Commission member, Professor Ruth Lister was responsible for some of the report's recommendations and allied to most of them. Since the report's publication she has assumed a commentary role on its proposals in which she occupies a powerful interpretative position. As such she has been able to develop its discourse with caveats, clarifications and her own priorities.

Representing Pragmatism

Both Lister and Spackman identify themselves as feminist and believe that the work of the CSJ and NCOPF respectively contain strong elements of a feminist agenda. For Lister that is a positive choice related to her personal politics and to her direct involvement with the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s. Her active feminist politics emerged in relation to her work as Director of The Child Poverty Action Group whose campaigning made direct links between women and poverty. Lister worked on issues such as sex discrimination in the Social Security system:

'I'd definitely describe myself as a feminist... it has to be said these days. I came to it in a sense through my work, obviously I think I was sympathetic but I hadn't become involved. When I was working at CPAG, I'd written a pamphlet about co-habitation rules and a group of women contacted me. They were organising a conference - kind of launching the fifth demand of the Women's Movement - a campaign for financial independence. Then I joined the group, became very active in it and it broadened from that.' (Lister)

Lister now regards feminism as an intrinsic element of her work and as something that is part of her personal identity. This merging of the personal and political is something that has implications for the sort of feminism which is represented through her work and speaks to a range of concerns in social policy. Because her 'personal' happens to be located in a relatively powerful social position, it partly acts as a public manifestation of what feminism

¹⁶⁷ *Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* p223

¹⁶⁸ *Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* p 224

¹⁶⁹ *Report Of The Commission On Social Justice* p223

'is'. Moreover, as a middle class, professorial academic and political spokeswoman her authority to speak inheres in her social position, something of which she is reflexively aware:

'In a way I suppose many of those things I fight for both politically and academically are for me, well the things I have... I think my very strong emphasis going back through my work in the fifth demand group on women's economic independence - I think reflects my own terror of being economically dependent on a man. That is very much for me where the personal and political fit together... But I think to say you can only write about things you've experienced then it becomes completely reductive. I mean you don't know that what you're arguing for is necessarily the things that the people you're arguing for want but I think if you're in that kind of position you can't agonise over that too much. I think you have to try and find a way. Partly writing in the third person is a kind of recognition that I can't speak for all women.' (Lister)

The 'representation' problematic is central to NCOPF's position on 'feminism'. Spackman is careful to specify the sort of gender politics they are aligned to, in order that they can maintain a reputation of being 'representative'. Unlike the work of the CSJ, NCOPF has a particular constituency which it claims to represent and which it represents itself to. Spackman regards feminist politics as inherent in the nature of the work of NCOPF but something that is also implicit rather than being an official line. How feminism might relate to single parenthood is a pragmatic question rather than an *a priori* position. Indeed some of their stances are opposed to the sort of feminist position NCOPF are often assumed to take:

'I think you could assume that most of the people who sit on the Committee are feminists in the broad modern sense of the word and many of us would feel very supportive of other parts of a feminist agenda. Having said that we don't in any sense see ourselves as part of a campaign to say that lone parenthood is a good thing, to promote lone parenthood, to say that women have rights to have children whatever their circumstances. In fact we have quite consciously taken a negative stance with some of those positions that could be described as radical feminist. We don't support those and the reason we don't as a principle is because we think they're actually alienating to the vast majority of people, because they don't actually accurately reflect their problems.' (Spackman)

NCOPF are not about supporting single parenthood as a lifestyle choice or as a family form that is anti the 'patriarchal' or nuclear family. Their representative pitch is that they are a mainstream organisation for a mainstream group of parents who have particular problems often related to discrimination. This involves 'mainstreaming', normalising single parent families and even distancing themselves from those lone parents who are atypical, 'bad examples' of single parents. The Michelle Ellis figure on the 'Babies on Benefits' Panorama was one such atypical bad example, on whom Spackman comments in a newspaper article:

'No-one would consider her to be anything other than feckless and irresponsible.'¹⁷⁰ Most single parents are not so by choice and for them:

'...hope springs eternal... most continue to want to find a good man as opposed to the one who left them or they left and felt let down by.' (Spackman)

It is these women who are most representative of single mothers and whom NCOPF is most keen to represent:

'We have spent most of our time trying to say to people: 'lone parenthood is your sister who's divorced', you know - 'it's someone I know', that lone parenthood is a part of society, it's not some odd person who's made some odd decision. It's sort of mainstreaming it. And in a sense lone parents have got a bad reputation through the very people who do choose to have children on their own which is something that a lot of people are very hostile to. The vast majority of lone parents are not happy to be in this position and they never thought they would be either. If we were to spend our time and other people's money campaigning on things like that it would make us very unpopular.' (Spackman)

The note of pragmatism is clear. NCOPF are involved in a very managed sort of representation, that is as much about themselves *as* representatives as it is 'what single mothers are saying'. This style was instituted under the ten year directorship of Sue Slipman (who left in 1995):

'She essentially decided we were in a very strong period of Conservative government and there was no political mileage to be gained at the time campaigning for increased benefits - which is actually the way directly you'd make lone parents better off, because nobody had that on the political agenda. That was our position when there was mileage in that, there was a party committed to that - to increasing benefits - and there was a party opposed to it. In the early '80s that political ground started to shift and shift quite fast.' (Spackman)

The result was a shift of focus for NCOPF to make support for single mothers entering the labour market their main campaigning issue. Benefits became something to escape from rather than something to be defended or increased. Through that change, the position of NCOPF was itself politically mainstreamed. It was taken seriously by all political parties as the 'pay-off' because its line could be politically accommodated. It could nevertheless claim to have set the agenda:

'Basically Sue Slipman has set the agenda and now there's not a political party that's not signed up to that. So it has not become a political position because the Conservatives took it up, because the Labour party has also taken it up....We have become a group that is reasonably well respected within the family lobby, we have sensible ideas, we carry projects through, we do a lot of service provision, so we're involved in a lot of things they can sign up to. And also we represent a group that they all find now politically very difficult. The reason we're talked to is not because we're their mates, we're not. The reason we're talked to by both parties is that they think we've got something sensible to say and if we don't have that we're nothing.' (Spackman)

¹⁷⁰ Spackman.A (1994) 'Feckless or Not? The One-Parent Panorama' *The Independent* 13.9.94 p1

The sense of all this is that NCOPF have been able to gain a power to influence some parts of policy through adopting a 'realistic' position seen as the only position-with-power available at the time. Having something 'sensible' to say is the condition of the power relation. One of its outcomes is that the content of what they are saying is derived from a highly political accommodation: the *politics* of their representative position are constitutive of its substance. This discourse on the needs of single mothers is therefore a product of what is 'sensible' for the times, and the process of its production ensures a power position for NCOPF. The needs of single mothers are generated through that power play, and they are seen to be met when provisions are made. NCOPF can thus be affirmed as a success, as an organisation which meets the needs of single mothers. In the contemporary period those needs are defined in terms of escape from benefit dependency via the labour market. It is a position which suits a number of political objectives, where the allegiance of NCOPF as a potentially oppositional force is clearly desirable. It means that conflict can be subsumed: NCOPF has facilitated the understanding that the needs of the single mother, are the same as the needs of the labour market, are the same as those of the economy, of society, of 'public opinion'.

In this respect the idea of NCOPF as a pro-active lobbying organisation is undermined to the extent that their 'success' is shown to fit a particular political agenda. Spackman's comments make it clear that they are essentially reactive:

'We haven't tended to be proactive because lone parenthood has been such a hot political issue.' (Spackman)

They work with other big power players:

'On welfare to work we set the agenda and we've been proactive in a business way - in business partnerships with people like Northern Foods. We want to be in there with business, business institutes - the CBI and TECs, persuading them, working with them.' (Spackman)

They are interested in maintaining a professional identity:

'We don't put our resources into lobbying. Most of the people here are involved in producing high class information, or setting up options, getting people back to work.' (Spackman)

They are not aligned with traditional anti-poverty political organisations who they believe represent different gender interests, and different ideas about the material interests of single mothers:

'We have found some of the TUC links to Labour quite difficult because in a sense what do they want with us getting more lone parents to work when they're trying to get their male members back to work. So that other aspect of Labour is quite antithetical to the things we want to do.'

'We departed from the Welfare State, 'increase benefits' line, parting ranks with a lot of charities and voluntary organisations and we haven't been forgiven for that even now.' (Spackman)

The trade-in for 'disconnection' on these fronts is being well-connected and resourced on others:

'We run option fairs where we have government money, private sector money to actually help lone parents get back to work.' (Spackman)

With the media they have developed a parallel track as providers of 'factual' information and pragmatic positions rather than polemic and campaigning:

'Generally we have a very favourable position with broadcasters and all broadsheets who come to us for matters of fact, although we're still not status quo because lone parents are such a political hot potato.' (Spackman)

Spackman regards the Babies On Benefit/BBC debacle as a very separate and anomalous case. Generally they are seen to have reaped the media reward of 'modernising' themselves:

'We're highly regarded because we changed in a way lots of other organisations didn't in the late 1970s/ early 1980s with political infighting and internal differences. We were purposefully not agit-prop and we were credited for it. We wouldn't fight battles we knew we couldn't win.' (Spackman)

This same note of pragmatism is sounded, but much more resignedly and ambivalently by Ruth Lister in relation to both her academic position and the work of the CSJ. Her academic work is strongly policy related because of its disciplinary nature in the field of Social Policy but in order to establish a political audience it still requires active promotion. It is a process in which she is advantageously positioned as a well-established policy commentator:

'A lot of the stuff I'm asked to do is a semi-accommodation of the academic and political. On the book I've just written on citizenship people have said 'ooh it'll be out just after the election' but I don't think it's the sort of book politicians would read - it's too theoretical. I hope it's accessible but politicians aren't very interested in theory although there are policy implications there. Ideally what I'll do is pull them out and try and get more publicity around that side of it.' (Lister)

These academic-political links can be thwarted, as well as actively promoted. Either way they are dependent on the complexion and dynamics of wider political discourse. The apparent shift brought about by the Labour party's 'modernising' project has changed the influence that her work might have had. Her political line to the Labour front bench has become 'less and less' so that she is now more likely to be represented to them through the media and regarded as a critic:

'As an ex-member of the Commission on Social Justice I have a position that the media will use as someone who is critical of where Labour is going and not many people are willing to stand up and say that. So they quite like someone who is linked to politics but not of politics that they can turn to.' (Lister)

The development of a party political terrain that is less easily defined along a traditional Right-Left axis means that Lister no longer sees herself as part of a particular lobby but as occupying different positions in a shifting network of alliances:

'There's so many shades of positioning now, I suppose it depends on which way you're facing - if you're facing towards the Conservatives then I still identify with the poverty lobby. If I'm facing towards the Labour party I feel quite uneasy because I do feel it difficult to pigeon hole myself there politically. So I find myself getting involved with things like Red Pepper to try for strategic intervention, but then I also get involved with this Nexus thing which is much more Blairite because I still feel I ought to try to use my relative insider position in some ways. So I sort of straddle.' (Lister)

This 'straddler' position includes work with the Right-wing think-tank the Institute for Economic Affairs:

'I've actually just written an introduction to the IEA books by Charles Murray - they're doing a sort of omnibus version and they asked me if I'd edit it. That I did have to think very hard about, thinking 'well who's using who here?', thinking 'well do I want to write for the IEA?' But the term 'underclass' and the way it's used is something I feel very strongly about, so I thought 'well actually this is a way of actually getting my views across in a different forum than I normally would.' (Lister)

However Lister maintains that there are definite limits to these sorts of 'unlikely' relations which are political attempts to broaden particular discourses:

'They're very odd at the IEA - it's the Health and Welfare Unit. A few years ago they had these consensus conferences where they invited kind of Centre-Left academics to meet with Right-wingers to discuss some of these issues and I think they had this sort of naive idea that all sensible thinking people will come to the same conclusions in a very civilised way. I mean a lot of this Norman Dennis stuff originated from that.'¹⁷¹ (Lister)

One result of this shifting political terrain is a shift in what is considered to be a 'realistic' argument for party politics, a consequent marginalisation of what were previously mainstream Left-wing positions and a realignment in which people are more strategic than principled in their politics:

'I think there has been a shift in where the centre ground is, so everything's shifted to the Right. So yes I think I probably have shifted to the Right from where I was in the 70s - it's this whole thing about what's realistic in this situation we're in... The kind of people now who are writing things in this area - I suppose trying to influence Labour front bench, they're the kind of people that 20 years ago would have been writing rather different things and they'd say of course it's different times. There is a sense that you're made to feel old-fashioned if you're saying the same thing... I think for some it's a genuine change, for others a kind of negative decision - 'do you want to marginalise yourself?' (Lister)

¹⁷¹ This is a reference to the Norman Dennis publications by the Institute of Economic Affairs: *The Invention Of Permanent Poverty* (1997) and *Families Without Fatherhood* (1993) which set out an 'ethical socialist' position against traditional Left-wing analyses of poverty.

There are some issues however, on which Lister believes principled positions need to be maintained and the use of the concept 'underclass' is one such issue:

'When Frank Field published *Losing Out* I think he got publicity because it was actually about 'the underclass' rather than the poor, you know because it's newsworthy and it's very media-friendly - the fear and danger stuff.¹⁷² So some people argue that therefore we should use it. I just think it's counterproductive, that alright it might get more publicity but if you're creating an image of fear - 'they're different from us', it's not going to make people open to policies that will actually do something about it. It'll be Law and Order and just keep away from them really... we should not use the term except when critiquing it.' (Lister)

Lister distinguishes the level of pragmatism associated with the work of the CSJ, originally set up as Labour's welfare modernising project, as mild in comparison to the way it has been used by the Labour party:

'The Labour party policy documents which came out, bits of which were heavily influenced by the CSJ, had no mention of the CSJ. It was like they felt they had to distance themselves because already they were positioning the CSJ as almost Old Labour.' (Lister)

There are clearly strong elements of a pragmatist agenda in place in the report of the CSJ, in particular their 'welfare to work' approach to benefits provision and positioning of single mothers in terms of their 'unemployment'. There was also not an absolute consensus about all aspects of the final report but an overall agreement that strategic unity was needed. Since its publication Lister has made moves to specify and emphasise different aspects:

'Most of us made compromises a bit and went along with some things that we weren't as happy about as others. We were all very keen not to write a minority report or anything like that and there were no huge splits. When I'm out speaking about the report I'll emphasise some proposals and not others.' (Lister)

'Underclass' Femininities

NCOPF's perceived need to maintain a particular sort of representative role requires adherence to a management strategy. Spackman acknowledges that NCOPF's position on 'unrepresentative' single mothers (rather than the 70% majority) is problematic in this regard:

'We have been defending the 70% more than the others and are now more aware of how this might be seen - as somehow going along with the idea of the 'feckless poor'. And we are keen to be seen as representing all single mothers really. So we're not supporting the trends but them as human beings in difficult circumstances, especially now this is a growing group - the 20-24 year olds are about 36% and the other group of widowed, separated and divorced single mothers are shrinking to 60-65%.' (Spackman)

¹⁷² This is a reference to Field.F (1989) *Losing Out: The Emergence of Britain's Underclass* London: Basil Blackwell

These mothers need to be carefully managed. The terms of their support are therefore still very much conditioned by the limitations of their preferred and predominant image of older, once married, responsible single mothers. As 'human beings in difficult circumstances' these 'other' single mothers are in need of social support of a particular kind. NCOPF is keen to promote 'parenting and family initiatives' for these mothers:

'...supporting schemes like grandparent mentoring to give advice on parenting non-judgmentally - rather than arguments for big welfare change.' (Spackman)

NCOPF is also targeting these groups for education programmes which will show cohabitation to be even more insecure than marriage:

'They need to know what the risks and trends of particular sorts of relationships are.' (Spackman)

The emphasis of support is for education against particular relationship choices and parenting behaviours. Moreover, their problems are defined in terms that position NCOPF as providers of solutions. Other problems such as poverty level benefits are not prioritised because NCOPF do not deem them to be realistic. The way NCOPF speaks for this represented constituency is therefore highly selective and rather 'matrician' as a 'we know best' and 'don't mess it up with your out-of-favour atypicality' approach. This matter is something that was a major point of contention in the 'Babies On Benefit' furore. NCOPF were accused of trying to dictate *which* single mothers should appear on television, saying that the programme makers should have used different single mothers who were not 'breeding like rabbits on the taxpayer'.¹⁷³ By attacking the programme through the Broadcasting Complaints Commission which is meant for individual complaints of unfairness NCOPF was accused of bringing a case that was more about defending its own reputation than those of the single mothers concerned. Indeed NCOPF described these mothers as - 'feckless and irresponsible' and 'at the worrying end of the scale of parental and human competence'.¹⁷⁴ Panorama's editor took particular objection on that front:

'So the BCC finds itself ruling against the individual's right to say what she likes and believes just because it goes against the lobby group's party line. What right does anyone have to say that other people cannot speak for themselves?'¹⁷⁵

This complaint brokers the issue of the representative power of pressure groups. NCOPF's response to the programme was clearly set on issuing a replacement 'truth' about single mothers: one that was basically more palatable and *more* representative. Michelle Ellis, according to Slipman was 'a statistical freak' because:

¹⁷³ These are the words used in the NCOPF complaint, quoted by the Panorama Editor Glenwyn Benson in her newspaper defence of the 'Babies On Benefit' programme in 'Feckless Or Not? The One-Parent Panorama' *The Independent* 13.9.94 p23

¹⁷⁴ Benson, *Feckless Or Not?* p23

¹⁷⁵ Benson, *Feckless Or Not?* p23

'...only 3% of the 1.3 million lone parent families in Britain have four or more children and the vast majority of those are divorcees and widows.'¹⁷⁶

NCOPF's defence of their reasons for having brought their case in many ways confirms the problems with the nature of their representation by highlighting the extent of their own power and resources in comparison to that of single mothers who were given some voice at least in the Panorama. Spackman gave the following justification:

'Yes we were speaking for the single mothers in the programme because they haven't got the resources or competencies in terms of being articulate. They couldn't have defended themselves by pursuing a complaint... Michelle didn't even have a phone.' (Spackman)

Presumably however Michelle's defence would not have been that she was a 'statistical freak' and therefore should not have been represented in the first place. In many respects she was used by NCOPF to defend the reputation of other single mothers by highlighting her 'atypicality'. The difficulty of NCOPF's stance and style of representation when it comes to young, working class unmarried mothers is historically continuous. Their position historically was one of speaking for mothers regarded as generally lacking: whether in competencies, resources, articulacy or responsibility. Such mothers originally made up the majority of NCOPF's represented cases when discourses about the immorality of these mothers were rife and the Council was not immune to them. Indeed it was partly constitutive of them in its insistence that their efforts would produce a decline in illegitimacy rates and afforded 'the best hope of [the mother's] moral regeneration'.¹⁷⁷ Its motivation was 'to save the child, to restore the mother to good citizenship and make effective the role of the father.'¹⁷⁸

The guiding principles through which NCOPF's historical practices were accounted for, were those of 'realism and humanity',¹⁷⁹ qualities which remain the rationale of their contemporary positions and are therefore strongly implicated in the way figures like Michelle are spoken for by the Council. It could be described as 'matronising': an attitude of class-based superiority dispensed as help and advice, in this case by middle class women to particular working class mothers. It is also in evidence in NCOPF's attitude to fathers who are 'irresponsibly' missing from the lives of single mothers. Historically 'the shadowy figure in the background' such men were to be brought to light by the Council's attempts to support mothers in pursuing child maintenance - then called 'affiliation orders' - through court:

¹⁷⁶ Slipman.S (1994) 'The Babies On Benefit Battleground' *The Guardian* 13.9.94 p20

¹⁷⁷ NCOPF (1993) *1918 - 1993 From the Workhouse to the Workplace* London: NCOPF p10

¹⁷⁸ NCOPF, *From The Workhouse to the Workplace* p10

¹⁷⁹ NCOPF, *From the Workhouse to the Workplace* p15

'The Council maintained an almost missionary zeal in pursuing affiliation orders, seeing it as both a way out of poverty and a way of making the father face up to his responsibilities.'¹⁸⁰

In the contemporary period NCOPF's broad support for the 1991 Child Support Act was driven by those same motivations and not unproblematically so. For both single mothers and fathers who are already economically disadvantaged, the apparent feminist credentials of the Act are of no positive benefit.¹⁸¹ NCOPF's support fits with a particular attitude to the feckless fathers of 'underclass'. So whilst not disputing the existence of an 'underclass' NCOPF wants its referents specified so as not to include single mothers. This position emanated from Slipman's directorship:

'Yes she would say that most of these men in single parent's lives are pretty useless and she would say the same of middle class men too - there just hasn't been the same agenda requiring that... Much of what's being said is necessarily class-based because the problems are. But we don't want to talk about the underclass in relation to single parents because it suggests a class below and we're keen to show they're your neighbour, sisters, aunt, part of society. Slipman and Murray debated this and she wanted it specified - not to include single mothers.' (Spackman)

Slipman has identified the young men of 'underclass' as useless because they lack the skills that make them employable and do not 'care', while women have become breadwinners *and* carers:

'If a young man can no longer bring home the bacon and plays no role in caring for children, why should young women put up with them? This is recognised by the Institute for Economic Affairs pamphlet 'Fatherless Families' which depicts gangs of young men roaming the streets causing trouble because they are no longer civilised within the family. What the pamphlet does not explain is why any woman in her right mind should want to take one of these things home with her and why its authors think it would be in the interests of children for her to do so.'¹⁸²

This note of class contempt for poor working class young men as fathers also comes at the cost of derogating the woman who does have such a man as part of her life - as not in 'her right mind'. For 'humanity's sake' and the sake of NCOPF's representative claims such women are nevertheless included within particular programmes for action, the conditions of their inclusion revealed in terms of behavioural and vocational guidance.¹⁸³ The choice offered to these women invariably leads to reproductive control and the labour market.

The labour market is also set up as the main solution to the poverty of benefit dependent single mothers in the pragmatic stance of the CSJ. In their proposals choice does not operate through necessity as in the NCOPF route-out-of-poverty scenario, instead it is replaced by an element of compulsion to work. Lister maintains its feminist credentials:

¹⁸⁰ NCOPF, *From the Workhouse to the Workplace* p24

¹⁸¹ Wasoff and Morris, 'The Child Support Act: A Victory For Women?'

¹⁸² Slipman.S (1993) 'Who's Left Holding The Baby?' *The Independent* 6.7.93 p23

¹⁸³ Slipman, *Who's Left Holding The Baby?* p23

‘This is the first report that has put women reasonably in the centre rather than tacking them on the end and that just wasn’t being recognised in a lot of the criticisms made, I do feel a lot of men just didn’t recognise the importance of that.’ (Lister)

However criticisms of the report cannot be equated with a ‘male’ perspective. Instead criticism has been made with regard to its classed perspective on gender:

What do you think of other feminist criticisms of the report for forwarding a particular sort of labour market feminism or middle class career orientated feminism as suggested by some Women Sections of the Labour Party?¹⁸⁴

‘I don’t think that it was a ‘feminist’ document but I do think there were strong feminist influences on it - there were enough feminists on the Commission to ensure that there was a feminist perspective on a number of the issues and that it wasn’t marginalised. It’s true that there is a tension between on the one hand a strong labour market orientation, not just in relation to women but generally, and also the emphasis we placed on care and that being valued. And we were very conscious of it - I mean it’s a big dilemma - how do you square those two things? I accept that the actual recommendations are more orientated towards the labour market than the care side but I don’t think it was just middle class - because of the importance we attached to part-time workers, bringing women into social insurance, the minimum wage - which for middle-class women is not such a problem.’ (Lister)

Was the specific proposal for single mothers on benefits with children over five to be ‘available for work’ if there was nursery provision available something you were happy with as an economic perspective rather than one which forwards a feminist perspective on ‘care’?

‘Yes I supported it, in fact I proposed it. And it’s something I’ve talked about quite a lot in feminist academic circles. I’ve sounded it out. That’s not to say I wasn’t conscious of the problems but I do feel very strongly that in a sense to leave lone parents to rot on income support ‘til their youngest child is 16 is not in their long term interests. I do find it difficult to see... well once the children are either at school age or say possibly teenagers... well you know why should a woman be at home all day when her children are at school and they’ve reached a certain age?’ (Lister)

Do you think that element of compulsion to work is necessary? I mean why would a woman choose to stay at home on such low benefits if there were real alternative choices available to her. How do you square that element of compulsion with the availability of real choices where she could make that decision on her own rather than according to somebody else’s definition of her ‘best interests’?

‘I suppose on the basis that it’s a kind of signal we’re putting out, that compulsion would be subject to a lot of safeguards. But I’m not convinced a government would do all that if there wasn’t a presumption that lone parents are part of the labour market. I’m not really sure what the age would be and five may well be too young but I think if you look at other countries we’re very unusual and lone parents don’t

¹⁸⁴ This is a reference to the Labour Women’s Action Committee, a group affiliated to the Trade Union’s Congress that maintains arguments for full employment and against welfare retrenchment. See Pettifor.A and Kane.A (1995) ‘Hijacking Feminism’ *Tribune* 23.6.95 p6; Pettifor.A and Kane.A (1995) ‘Women Demand Social Justice’ *Socialist Campaign Group News* May 1995

exactly do well in this country compared to other countries. I think you may have a better chance arguing for good support while the children are young to enable them to stay at home and then very good infrastructure as support to enable them to enter the labour market. Now I know also that I'm sure if I were arguing from the other side, that's terribly naive because the safeguards are never met and they'll still impose it and that's the danger of course. But it is something I've thought a lot about and discussed quite a lot in feminist, particularly academic circles and I've been surprised by the number of people who've said 'Well no actually I don't think it's helpful to assume that lone parents will stay at home that long'. When our group proposed it, we said 'Look we could get a lot of flak for this so you have to be clear what you're signing up to' and everyone was happy to sign up to it. And I certainly would oppose it if all the conditions weren't provided for.' (Lister)

This sort of proposal for elements of compulsion for benefit claiming single mothers to work when their children reach a dictated age, being built into the benefit system seems highly dubious as a feminist position. In many respects it is an authoritarian move to make 'them' (poor mothers) become more like 'us' (paid workers) at points decided by us in our definition of their 'best interests'. It accords with a dominant political position that is espoused on feminist grounds, with regard to labour market restructuring:

Do you agree with the sort of gender analysis that's put forward in Harriet Harman's book 'The Century Gap' with regard to the 'feminisation' of work as part of women's 'long march into public space'?

'I suppose 'yes, but' would be my position. Yes but I have been grappling with how do you combine that with policies and practices that do value care. For me it links in with one of the issues I've been grappling with ever since the Fifth Demand times as to how you place a value on care without locking women who are doing the caring into the home, because at the end of the day I personally don't think that's in the woman's interests in the long term. I suppose in a sense, as someone who's always worked full-time, that is where my own perceptions are influencing, partly influencing, my feminist position. I see the need for full-time work as something that is crucial.' (Lister)

This exchange goes to the heart of feminist debates about gender equality and difference, public and private spheres, paid and unpaid work, and the ethics and politics of representation. In the contemporary period of socio-economic change, cultural debate and policy making, those traditionally feminist issues are part of 'underclass' discourse. The nature of this engagement has strong policy implications. With regard to policy discourses around welfare reform, for benefit claiming single mothers the right *not* to work is being seriously undermined. The political motivations of this agenda are clear. Harriet Harman has promoted it as a feminist agenda to do with balancing work and family life. Yet routes out of 'welfare dependency' are openly discussed in terms of cutting welfare expenditure by restricting benefit entitlement via 'availability for work' legislation.

For those feminists who have long argued for women's 'right to work' to be facilitated, often using the language of equality and choice, these policy soundings should

have been highly problematic. Yet in the contemporary configuration of feminist voices around this subject there is a telling silence on benefit claiming mothers having a right *not* to work. Part of that silence can be accounted for by ambivalencies, indeterminacies and alternative awarenesses that are both unresolved and in the making. Organisations such as NCOPF have been working through some of the dilemmas and contradictions of this policy discourse where 'underclass' meets the parenting-paid work relation. Recent political developments are now causing a re-evaluation of their own policies and priorities which seem less appropriate than they did at the time of their inception in the mid to late 1980s:

'It's a real dilemma for us at the moment especially given the turn of events with the Job Seeker's Allowance. We don't want coercion to work but maintain that the chance to work is still the best chance out of poverty. But we really don't want to minimise the parental role through an over-emphasis on work especially for one-parents when they are the only fall back for a child in ill health or general need. One thing single parents have in common is that 99% of them want what's best for their children and many of them are torn between physical environment provision - material stuff, and being there personally for their children, for listening and security. So NCOPF is refocusing at the moment on parenting. NCOPF don't agree with the SJC proposals because there are all sorts of complicating reasons why that wouldn't be possible or desirable for lone parents whose children may be sick, handicapped, in emotional need. Although we don't have a broad based membership we don't believe this would be reflective of single mother's views. Work must be about choice.' (Spackman)

As part of this most recent of shifts which has not yet crystallised in NCOPF policy, Spackman suggests there are crucial differences between single mothers as mainly poor mothers and other mothers. Parenting issues are different for them because their mothering is often the only available source of security for their children, whose needs are often greater than those of other children:

'The health of single mothers and their children is an issue already. These children often need more care and attention because lone parenthood is often a traumatic time for them. They need the support of the one remaining parent and if the other one has left they feel abandoned enough already especially at young ages. Going into nursery means they have no idea whether that parent is ever coming back, and for all intents and purposes that child feels abandoned.' (Spackman)

This sort of understanding is very close to that promoted by Ruth Lilley of FTM. Although not yet part of NCOPF's public position it is a significant crack in their 10 year long pro-labour market front. Spackman sees the introduction of compulsion to 'welfare to work' discourses as the crucial change:

'Compulsion to work is not appropriate - you know work at any price. And 'in work' good, 'out of work' bad is no longer the case, work and poverty are going together.' (Spackman)

There remains a question over NCOPF's responsibility in the *process* of single mothers being coercively reconfigured as paid workers having allowed politicians to claim

NCOPF for credibility and support at a critical time of welfare retrenchment. The line: 'we didn't know it would end here' may well be too late now that a broad based political consensus has been reached in which single mothers are likely to be denied choices around their parenting role.

Spackman's ending comment was on the relationship between working class male unemployment and single motherhood. In facing the controversial question of whether some of the answer to single mother's poverty is increased employment for working class men, she departs from the idea that the answer to those problems associated with single motherhood is necessarily their own employment:

'Yes working class male unemployment is very much part of the single motherhood trends. It's part of the problem because they're not a good prospect for the women. It's a very difficult perhaps ineluctable problem because we can't force women 'back to the kitchen sink' either. But yes, better employment for men would help the women - these women have always had children - the difference is that they were married and had working husbands. The prospects aren't any better for these women now there are jobs they can do and it'll actually be much worse if compulsion is introduced.' (Spackman)

This analysis refocuses on the effects of male unemployment on gender roles, relations, and communities where 'change' has not been for the better just because it has unsettled 'traditional' gender relations. The enormous strains that unemployment, low benefits and poverty level wages have placed and continue to place on personal, family and community relations have very often not been positively revolutionary as some elements of feminist commentary seem to suggest. To make the case for better prospects and forms of employment for working class men does not have to be an argument for the return of a 'patriarchal family wage' and the nuclear family as the only viable family form. It nevertheless recognises that in most respects poor wages and no wages has in many ways been no improvement on 'the family wage'. Furthermore, as Spackman has argued single motherhood is not usually made as a lifestyle choice and trends of increasing numbers of young single mothers are not unrelated to the social and economic upheavals of deindustrialisation. Those areas with highest unemployment rates are also the areas with the highest rates of single mothers.¹⁸⁵ In this respect far from the idea of employment trends having opened up positive opportunities for 'women', for particular women those trends towards a 'flexible' restructured labour market have brought about a constriction of choices around parenting and paid work roles. The trajectory of welfare reform associated with these 'new economic realities' is set to exacerbate this situation.

¹⁸⁵ A good example of how the links between single motherhood and male unemployment may be played out is provided by David Adamson in his sociological study of the deindustrialisation of the South Wales valleys: Adamson.D (1996) *Living on the Edge: Poverty and Exclusion in Wales* Llandysul: Gower Press Changing Wales Series

Discussion: Welfare Policy For Single Mothers: Making Space For Choice?

The National Council For One-Parent Families and the Commission on Social Justice have been central players in the emergence of welfare policy discourses around single mothers in the 1990s. Their aims have been to effect social change by making links between their own research and debate, and government policy in the 'best interests' of single mothers as a group. Although both are informed by normative and political ideas about feminism and social justice, their approach has been pragmatic, geared to achievable results rather than principled but marginalised campaigning. With regard to benefit dependent single mothers this has meant an emphasis on labour market participation and childcare provision, rather than increased welfare benefit provision. Both have reaped the reward of party political inclusion through this pragmatism: NCOPF in cross party political support for their 'welfare to work' strategies, CSJ in the 'welfare to work' proposals of the new Labour government's modernising project. More widely both have contributed towards a broad based consensus about the gender dimensions of a restructured economy in which employment opportunities for 'women' are said to have been positively extended and need further extension, provision and protection. In this process they have presented a range of 'truths' about the lives, needs and interests of single mothers. In particular the need for poor mothers to become economically productive and contributive, is presented as in the best interests of their children, themselves, the economy and society. The idea that prolonged absence from the paid economy is bad for them because it leads to 'depreciation of whatever human capital they have' is part of an argument stated in overridingly economic terms.¹⁸⁶ The argument is given validation by the reiterated statistic that 90% of single mothers want to work but are unable to because of a lack of childcare provision.¹⁸⁷ The research on which that figure is based actually states: 90% in 'due course', often after children are older, 63% liking to work 'later', and for single mothers with children under 5, 40% said they would want to work mainly part-time.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, such statistics take no account of the way expressed wishes relate to social and economic pressures to work, the availability of and provision for other sorts of choices and the value placed on motherhood itself. Instead there is a widespread consensus that the economic necessity to work should dictate policy and resource provision towards encouraging labour market participation for all mothers but especially those who are claiming benefit. This requires that benefit dependent mothers are seen as 'unemployed' as opposed to working as full-time childrearsers. If the issue was

¹⁸⁶ Joshi.H and Davies.H (1995) *Mothers In Employment*, Evidence to Employment Committee, House of Commons London: HMSO p499

¹⁸⁷ The Equal Opportunities Commission (1995) *Mothers In Employment*, Evidence to Employment Committee, House of Commons London: HMSO p64

¹⁸⁸ Morgan, *Who Needs Parents?* p110

instead presented in terms of childrearing in poverty, the 'solution' would not necessarily be labour market participation. 'Welfare to work' solutions come as one possible interpretation of the problems of single motherhood - namely 'absence of work'. Yet 'absence of work' does not accurately describe the position of mothering in poverty. Furthermore for many working class women, labour market participation will not equate with the alleviation of poverty. There are more fundamental issues to be addressed here, namely: class-based educational and occupational disadvantage regardless of marital status; the unpaid-paid work relation; and unequal choices around parenting for benefit dependent and other mothers. If this discourse was really about choice for these mothers rather than welfare reform and labour market demands, they would be allowed to have a childcare allowance to do with as they wished. Instead childrearing on benefits is made to equate with poverty, poor living standards, stress and depression with feedback effects on child welfare.

Feminists have written prolifically about the gendering of citizenship as an historical construct that to a greater or lesser extent excludes women on the basis of their reproductive difference.¹⁸⁹ Within those discussions there is variation between arguments for a conception of citizenship that is gender-neutral and one that is gender-differentiated reflecting the 'equality versus difference' debates within feminism.¹⁹⁰ Lister summarises the big question as this:

'Is the aim to change the nature of social citizenship rights so that earning is no longer privileged over caring in the allocation of those rights or is it to improve women's access to the labour market so that they can compete on equal terms with men and can gain the same employment-linked social citizenship rights?'¹⁹¹

Lister admits that her own position on the question remains unresolved, but says that broadly it hinges on changes in public-private divides, work-family roles, and male-female relations towards gender role similitude. The details and balances of such changes are a matter for government policy which eventually stabilises and subsumes the disagreements, different priorities and shifting positions which characterise the discourse as a whole. This process is illustrated historically by changes in welfare policy and cultural attitudes towards mothering in general, single mothering in particular. It has meant that the status and experience of different mothers has been 'transformed in contradictory non-linear processes with gains and losses.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Coote.A (1992) *The Welfare Of Citizens: Developing New Social Rights* London: IPPR; Lister.R (1990) 'Women, Economic Dependency and Citizenship' p445-67 *Journal of Social Policy* vol. 19 no. 4; Pateman.C (199) *The Disorder Of Women* Cambridge: Polity/Basil Blackwell

¹⁹⁰ Lister.R (1991) 'Citizenship Engendered' p65-72 *Critical Social Policy* 32

¹⁹¹ Lister, *Citizenship Engendered* p70

¹⁹² Bortolaia Silva.E (1996) 'Introduction' *Good Enough Mothering?: Feminist Perspectives On Lone Mothering* London: Routledge

What has remained a constant is the play of normative expectations around different mothers in which working class unmarried mothers are most disruptive of 'norms'. Indeed in the contemporary period it is specifically the classed nature of single motherhood status that is most problematic for the representational practices of NCOPF and CSJ. The personal and organisational stances of Spackman and Lister express the problem through their attachment to a particular set of classed meanings about being on benefits, being at home and being at work. I would argue that the strength of such attachments is most clearly demonstrated as a reluctance to talk about increased resource commitments to the value of full-time parenting work for those on benefits. Amongst the six commentators that I spoke to there was some divergence on the question of welfare support for parenting *per se*. They all backed away from the idea of parenting-based citizen's allowances or wages whether time-limited, universal or means-tested:

'No but a child benefit increase' (Campbell)

'That's sort of like wages for housework - not really but probably for quite complicated reasons' (Coward)

'Not if it was pay, maybe a tax allowance for those working and pay for those who aren't' (Lilley)

'I don't see that as any different to child benefit, so no an increase in child benefit' (Roberts)

'That's pie in the sky' (Spackman)

'I think only if it was paid to those in work as well as those out of work, but I'd rather do it through a decent parental leave scheme' (Lister)

The sense here is of a variety of different personal and political motivations leading to the same reluctance to support the idea of parenting *per se* being financially supported as a resource priority. And yet such support would be most likely to balance the value of the work-family relation, change the value and experience of motherhood, and negate the idea of mothers on benefits as dependent and scrounging rather than productive and autonomous.¹⁹³ Economic arguments against such a development as 'too expensive' do not hold when compared to the costs of demands for a national strategy for high quality, affordable childcare which are presented as manageable and necessary. In 1992 the lobbying organisation 'Working For Childcare' estimated a 25 place workplace nursery would cost £4,920 minimum per child/per year in running costs, while places in local authority are an

¹⁹³ I prefer the notion of 'autonomy' to 'independence' because it expresses the idea of personal and social status and a level of self-determination without necessarily having economic means of self-support. In hegemonic welfare discourses 'independence' has become overly associated with economic means. This issue is further developed in the conclusion to the thesis.

average of £7,228 for England.¹⁹⁴ Sally Holtermann's childcare proposals for the National Children's Bureau envisages a total national expenditure of £8 billion a year,¹⁹⁵ recent calculations put the figure for comprehensive provision nearer £10 billion.¹⁹⁶ Clearly the case against financial recognition of parenting-work is about the political priorities of an agenda to encourage mothers (and coerce if benefit dependent) towards labour market participation. The particular version of feminism that is being used to support this agenda fits the contemporary period of welfare reform and capitalist restructuring very well. As such it is negatively implicated in the discourse of 'underclass'.

¹⁹⁴ Working For Childcare (1992) *A Practical Guide To Contracting For Quality Childcare* London: Working For Childcare

¹⁹⁵ Holtermann.S (1992) *Investing In Young Children: Costing An Education And Daycare Service* London: National Children's Bureau

¹⁹⁶ 'Brown to pour billions into childcare' *The Guardian* 27.2.98 p1

Conclusion: The Talk of 'Feminism', the Talk of 'Underclass'

'The gaps, silences and ambiguities of discourses provide the possibility for resistance, for a questioning of the dominant discourse, its revision, or mutation. Within these silences and gaps new discourses can be formulated that challenge the dominant discourse. This theory of discourses and their mutability provides an accurate understanding of the talk of feminism.'¹⁹⁷

'We used to say gladly: I am a feminist. Then: I am a feminist but... Then: it depends what you mean by feminism. Then: what is feminism anyway? Some people label this gradual crumbling away of certainties the backlash, but most recognise it, less conspiratorially as a deep and authentic confusion about how feminism - once a coherent and backboned theory - can fit the scattered nineties.'¹⁹⁸

These two quotes point to different understandings about what feminism 'is' and through those understandings two different versions of its contemporary state. The difference is in some ways generic: Hekman's is largely an academic and theoretical position while Gerrard's is more of an impressionistic reading of a cultural feminism. It would be wrong to present those understandings as absolutely split given that both are informed by each other in a process of cultural and political dialogue and exchange. Nevertheless the quotes are revealing in their presentation on the one hand of a multiply positioned ongoing conversation between different feminist discourses and on the other a crisis in what has publicly come to be known as 'feminism'. In my interview with Beatrix Campbell she pointed to the difficulty of 'socialist' positions that try to dissociate themselves from 'actually existing socialism', arguing that: 'that's not just practice as opposed to ideology - you can't separate the two - that's what it is'. This was in reference to difficulties she had with socialism as 'masculinised and sexist'. The same argument can be applied to the state of contemporary feminism. The sense of feminism as multiply positioned and shifting discourses, should also recognise that a particular version of feminism can dominate particular times and spaces. To the extent that it is perceived as doing that it constitutes 'actually existing feminism'. In the contemporary period of 'underclass' discourse I would argue that there is a dominant version of feminism that forwards a vision of the labour market as the solution to a number of social and economic changes, as the condition of welfare entitlement, and of social inclusion. The perspective is located in particular middle class and professional positionalities. It is manifest in particular policy related organisations, think-tank, party political publications and in broadsheet journalistic

¹⁹⁷ Hekman.S (1990) *Gender and Knowledge: Elements Of A Postmodern Feminism* Cambridge: Polity Press p189

¹⁹⁸ Gerrard.N (1997) 'The New Feminism: Whatever Happened To Sisterhood?' *The Observer* Review 27.4.97 p5

commentary, as partly conveyed in the interviews and texts that I have presented. Those interviews do illustrate the sorts of discursive 'mutability' that Hekman calls the talk of feminism, but are simultaneously part of a dominant discourse in relation to 'underclass' - however internally contradictory and changeable it may be. It is dominant in terms of the access it has to culturally well-mediated spaces; it has power to disseminate ideas and inform party political positions; it has established not one monolithic idea but a number of strands of thought and ways of talking about the issues that constitute 'underclass' discourse.

My interest in presenting the preceding interviews as I have has been twofold. Firstly to show the relations, contradictions and complexities of different feminist positions in relation to 'underclass'. There is no *one* feminist position on 'underclass' and these commentators do not themselves hold polarised, unified or unchanging positions. I have suggested where the most significant faultlines of this discourse lie in discussions about working class masculinity and community; parenthood, motherhood and fatherhood; childcare; the value of paid work and the value of care; restructured labour markets and welfare reform. It has been my intention to show this discourse as part of a process of knowledge production by particular commentators whose perspectives are located in their own experiences, values and interests but are often hidden in their public representations. The spaces that they represent: the estate, the home, the workplace; and the groups that they speak for and about: working class men, fathers, 'working' women, single mothers, full-time mothers, are all discursively constructed. That construction is partly a dynamic of their own classed and gendered positionalities.¹⁹⁹ It is therefore strongly classed and gendered in terms of the emphases it gives to particular men and women, the nature of its focus on them, the languages it deploys, the values it harnesses and the policies it implicates. It is the classed nature of this feminist discourse on 'underclass' that relates to my second interest in presenting the interviews the way that I have. This is to show that a dominant story continues to emerge, not at every moment in every represented space, but to a sufficient degree to have powerfully informed particular policy trajectories. Different points of connection between these commentators that could be made and promoted to quite different effect, have not been. This may well be a characteristic of a feminism which positively admits 'difference'; it may also signal a disengagement from necessary conflicts which bear a material cost to other women. In this respect the spaces between different feminisms can

¹⁹⁹ I do not want to suggest too reductive a view of these 'personal positionalities' based on class and gender positions. Rather, I am talking about how these women have personalised (or not personalised) different aspects of their work in my interviews with them. I have broadly conceived of their class and gender positions as discursive positions in networks of power rather than as detailed positionalities. I am not suggesting anything about deep subjectivities, which might only be gleaned from detailed biographies

be remote and disconnected spaces in which regard for the way other women, other people, may be affected by 'your' discourse is lost. Many of the gaps, silences and ambiguities that are found in the feminist discourse of 'underclass' are not without consequence. They convey classed meanings and agendas into the policy realm, they are about power inequalities in the representational politics of 'underclass'. Amongst the commentators I spoke to there were different levels of reluctance to be self-reflexive, forward thinking and strategic with regard to how the representations they make will be taken up, used by the media and politicians, or will impact on different groups of people. In particular I would argue that this reluctance showed itself most acutely when considerations about how discussions and policies might relate to working class groups were being made: whether young working class 'criminals' and 'bad' fathers (Campbell, Spackman, Lilley), 'welfare dependent' or irresponsible poor mothers (Lilley, Roberts, Lister, Spackman), less than preferable-family-form single mothers (Lilley, Coward, Roberts), inexpedient working class children (Spackman, Lister). 'Class' if freely mentioned at all, does not emerge as analytically central. Working class based perspectives are not systematically considered or consistently used to qualify arguments. The dominant story is not about the strictures of the JSA, the humiliations of the medical benefits agency, economic pressures and regulations to take up low paid/status work, harassment from the Child Support Agency, or unliveable benefit levels. This story of welfare which is a working class story, has been subsumed by a middle class story about 'welfare dependency' and the redemptive public space of the labour market. In the course of telling that story 'feminism' has not been 'hijacked' for ulterior motives (as if it were an agreed position), rather there are particular kinds of feminism that happen to fit well with a particular sort of capitalism.²⁰⁰ For socialist feminisms this shows the central importance of a class analysis of the fit between a dominant strand of liberal feminism and the contemporary labour market. Such an analysis leads to very different understandings than those conveyed in particular arguments for labour market solutions to benefit dependent single mothering and for the 'demasculinisation' of working class men's attitudes to life. What those understandings may be is suggested in essays by two feminist writers which allow different interpretations of the contemporary nature of the labour market and 'welfare dependency'.

In an essay entitled 'Does Capitalism Really Need Patriarchy?' Carol Johnson argues the necessity of reassessing the relationship between feminism and capitalism in the contemporary period:

²⁰⁰ This is the unstated premise of Harriet Harman's *The Century Gap* and Patricia Hewitt's *About Time - The Revolution In Work And Family Life* (1993 London: IPPR/Rivers Oram)

'The question remains of whether the existence of class relations necessitates the continuing subordination of women... a question that often gets lost in the attempts to escape from privileging either class or gender.'²⁰¹

This is an important question in relation to those feminist analyses of 'underclass' which seek to privilege gender issues over those of class (working class male crime, male 'unemployability' and 'unmarriageability', 'feckless fathers') and to interpret social economic changes primarily in gender terms (the 'feminisation' of work, the 'crisis in masculinity', the 'genderquake', 'the working mother' as prototype worker). The discourse of 'underclass' is partly made up by arguments which suggest that particular trends are being driven by women, are necessary, desirable and require policy provision. At particular points those same arguments crystallise as classist representations of other people's realities. This is exemplified in arguments for the catch-all benefit of labour market participation and childcare provision. In the contemporary labour market, low wages are paid across genders for those working class people who make up the bottom end of the growing service sector. The supply of workers has needed to be as cheap and politically atomised as possible, and the workers that most fitted that requirement were working class women. Johnson argues that the labour market changes that have been developing through the 1980s and 1990s are therefore about 'a redistribution between wage earners... not from capital to labour'. These changes are less to do with notions of gender equality than they are an equal sharing out of class inequality between particular groups of working class men and women:

'The market is no great respecter of sexual distinction when it comes to employment practices: there has been no wringing of hands over the decline of male employment in the old bases of manufacturing industry and the simultaneous increase in female employment; the market has not stepped in to restore masculine pride. But while we may well rely on the forces of free competition to equalise participation rates between women and men we cannot rely on these forces to reshape the hours and conditions of work.'²⁰²

This understanding of labour market trends as being about competitive advantage, suggests that a working poor will be part of that advantage, both economically and politically when welfare reform is on the agenda. Johnson believes that although the outcomes of these employment changes are still unclear the prognosis is not good. For those in poor families contemporary developments have *already* led to a modernised version of historical pre-family-wage labour markets and may well be leading to pre-welfare state conditions in which mothers and children in the poor working class had to work. In the face

²⁰¹ Johnson.C (1996) 'Does Capitalism Really Need Patriarchy?' p93-202 *Women's Studies International Forum* vol. 19 no. 3 p194

²⁰² Phillips.A (1996) 'What Has Socialism To Do With Sexual Equality?' p27-45 *Soundings* 4 p44. See also: McDowell.L (1991) 'Life Without father and Ford: the new gender order of post-Fordism' p400-419 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16; Massey.D (1991) 'Flexible Sexism' p31-57 *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 9

of such developments particular feminist arguments that these changes represent opportunities to bring about gender neutrality at work and in the home, are shown to be seriously wanting in their neglect of class. Indeed in a period of decline in the traditional industrial and manufacturing trade unions a particular version of capitalist-feminism could replace the capitalist-patriarchy mode of social organisation. A sense of the desirability of that direction can be traced in those particular elements of 'underclass' discourse that argue for the necessity of particular working class job expectations to be 'de-masculinised' and for poor mothers to become gender-neutral 'workers'.

Such changes have a rationale of welfare reform that relies on a particular understanding of the concepts of welfare and dependency. The sort of 'dependency' which is said to characterise benefit claiming mothers is exemplified in the idea that they can be freed from 'welfare' by the labour market. This rationale deploys certain feminist ideas about 'work' as freedom from the home and economic dependency. The idea of such 'dependence' as something always to be escaped from is highly problematic for another feminist analysis that has a notion of citizenship and autonomy beyond labour market participation. Such an analysis is presented by Iris Marion Young in relation to motherhood.²⁰³ She departs from those liberal feminist positions which seek equality rights in the public sphere as an extension of male citizenship rights to women:

'Promoting equal citizenship requires abandoning the idea that those who are not self-sufficient are of lesser worth. On the contrary, public policy should provide social support to promote the autonomy of people who need help from others. Only such an abandonment of the norm of independence understood as self-sufficiency can grant equal citizenship to at-home carers.'²⁰⁴

For her, this understanding must be at the core of any concept of equality. Without it 'dependence' becomes a coercive taunt that is used to undermine work which is differently productive such as care work. She traces the notion of 'independence' as the 'citizen virtue of the male head of household and property owner'.²⁰⁵ It is the underlying basis of the distinction between ideas about public and private spheres around which much social organisation still rests. The disparagement of dependency rests on the 'private' being seen as lesser than the public. It devalues motherhood and all forms of care and it makes citizenship a male domain to which women can aspire and escape:

'Privileging independence as a citizen virtue thus amounts to defining dependency workers as second class citizens.'²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Young, I. M (1995) 'Mothers, Citizenship and Independence: A Critique of Pure Family Values' p535-556 *Ethics* 105

²⁰⁴ Young, *Mothers, Citizenship and Independence* p536

²⁰⁵ Young, *Mothers, Citizenship and Independence* p286

²⁰⁶ Young, *Mothers, Citizenship and Independence* p548

However, Young does not settle on an 'ethics of care' as the basis of a gender reformed notion of citizenship.²⁰⁷ She broadens the idea of a 'sexually-differentiated' view of citizenship to a 'group-interests' view in order to take on board other exclusions that are maintained by the construction of 'public' and 'private' divides.²⁰⁸ She points to the way that the construction of the 'public' in terms of homogeneity and universality discriminates against particular people who do not have equality in the public realm because of their class, age or ethnicity for example. Those sort of marginalisations are the hallmark of 'underclass' discourse in which 'dependence' as long term dependence on subsistence level benefits is used to devalue poor people of different ages, genders and ethnicities. It works to *induce* abject dependence because it does not accord the sort of social support that only 'citizens' could expect. Particular forms of dependence that are not inherently problematic thus become problematic as 'dependants' are denied the possibility of civic and political participation. Dependence then becomes something that it is rational to escape from. For example those mothers who take up paid work can then be used to increase the stigma that is attached to the dependency of other mothers.

The benefit claiming single mother who does not want to take 'available work' and may even continue to have more children is most stigmatised of all. She is the archetypal dependant. She needs to be restricted in her choices, made to 'work'. The discourse by which that end is brought about has to be careful in the language it uses: being freed from welfare dependency sounds much better than being effectively coerced into work. Coercion into independence is the paradoxical result of such a discourse: 'dependants' being pushed into self-sufficiency, attended by judgements about their 'best interests'. Their own choices, judgements and values are negated. While the status of their private care is undermined, public care as childcare is lauded as valuable 'work' and as a 'feminist' gain for 'women'. Choices about bearing and rearing children are thus limited to women who have the means to support themselves or be supported, while mothering on benefits is delegitimised and made less and less possible. Political representation for the choices and autonomy of poor mothers has in the contemporary period passed over to a classed colonisation of their 'best interests'. Reproductive freedom as the freedom of poor women to have children and be able to look after them, defended as a democratic right by the 1974 Finer Committee on One-

²⁰⁷ An 'ethics of care' is used by Carol Gilligan to describe a feminised, maternalist philosophy in opposition to the masculinist and liberal 'ethics of justice' that underpin dominant notions of 'citizenship' rights: Gilligan.C (199.) *Maternal Thinking: Towards A Politics of Peace* New York: Ballantine

²⁰⁸ Young.I.M (1989) 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship' p250-74 *Ethics* 99

Parent Families, is losing out to sanctions against childrearing according to people's ability to pay.²⁰⁹

This chapter has examined feminist discourse on 'underclass' through the representational spaces of some key commentators. These spaces are constituted in books, pamphlets, newspaper columns and interviews (including the interview sites of this thesis), and they relate to lived spaces of 'underclass' by setting up policy-related understandings around the 'needs' and 'interests' of poor people and places. The formal and often institutionalised nature of this feminist discourse ensures a strong vocality and visibility for its representations. Although discursive 'effectivity' can only be partially and suggestively traced, connections to a policy trajectory are at certain points readily apparent. Thus whilst some ideas in this process of translation become qualitatively different or are lost from the dominant discourse altogether, others retain the core of their meaning and are easily co-opted. Similarly, it is true that the originators of ideas also change their positions over time, that their status shifts accordingly, and that new networks emerge. But however temporal discursive positions are, they are not without consequence. The flexibility of one commentator being able to shift her position does not equally exist as a choice for another less powerful woman not to be 'affected' by her discourse. Thus whilst the discourse of commentators may shift, their power positions often do not: they remain in place to start new productions of knowledge. In the next chapter I will look to an alternative discourse on 'underclass' which is not part of any formal or organisational political representation. It does not talk directly in terms of the 'needs' and 'interests' of particular social groups, but constitutes different claims, and power relations. It is found in popular cultures of film and music, its representational spaces are poetically political and constitute a form of cultural empowerment.

²⁰⁹ Finer.M (1974) *Report of the Committee on One-Parent Families* London: HMSO

CHAPTER FOUR

TELLING EXPERIENCES OF CLASS AND POVERTY: PERSONAL AND POPULAR DISCOURSE ON 'UNDERCLASS'

In the dominant discourse of 'underclass', poor working class identities and places emerge through an aggregation of statistics and characteristics about family, crime and work, inferentially linked to group attitudes and behaviours. This chapter seeks to contest the reductive characterisations and typologies of identity and place which dominate this discourse. It is not, however, interested in issuing replacement 'truths' about particular *sorts* of people and places. Instead it presents a case for refusing such a quest for 'truths' about poor working class identities and places, and argues for an epistemology based on personal and popular discourses of experience and feeling that are both 'real' and 'imagined'. My personal readings of the films *Hate* and *Ladybird* are presented as two such narratives. By representing relations between classed ways of living and their social regulation as a battleground, these filmic spaces constitute a political battleground of ideas within the wider discourse of 'underclass'. My readings of the films, represent the outcome of that battle as a temporal victory for more complex and strategic knowledges of poor working class subjectivities and the spaces through which they are constituted.

Introduction: Realising a Research View

This chapter is about experiences of being working class and poor represented through stories, views and voices that are all very different to those which make up the dominant discourse of 'underclass'. The narrative is popular, the view is changing and the voice is personal. This representation is different in terms of both the particular aspects of class and poverty that will be raised and the ways in which they will be talked about.

I am using two films which offer a political representation of working class poverty that is primarily experiential, highly subjective and deliberately partisan. They are Mathieu Kassovitz's *Hate* (1995) and Ken Loach's *Ladybird* (1994). These films are not a source of 'authentic experience' nor a discovery of hitherto 'unknown worlds'. I am presenting them as a representation of experience that crosses a divide between material reality and symbolic fiction. Through them I am choosing to represent particular experiences of contemporary working class lives lived in poverty. This is an explicitly personal endeavour in three respects: the reasons for my choice of the films, my interpretation of them, and my relation of the experiences shown in the films to aspects of my own. My own

experiences are not held as a test of the veracity of the films or something in which to authentically locate them. They are part of a situated view of the films, represented through some personal reflections. The films and the written words of this chapter are spaces constituted through both material existence and imagination. They are spaces of refusal and anger; recognition and pride.

Originally I planned for this chapter to be based on recorded interviews with people who are the subject of 'underclass' discourse. After much consideration, this idea changed to recording conversations about experiences of poverty, with family and friends that I had grown up with. By the time of the summer in which I went home to carry those out I had decided to use the personal responses of family and friends to two contemporary films about class and poverty. When I came back I was using the films themselves, interpreted through personal experiences of my own, to talk about representations and experiences of poverty and the research process. This chapter has two parts reflecting this change. The first is about the genesis of the change itself. I think that it is important to explain what brought me to this point and why my original ideas for this chapter became antithetical to my research ethic and thesis. This is an argument for my use of the films as the very *best* way of making some points about particular over and under represented experiences of working class poverty. Part of this argument is necessarily a comment on other kinds of research processes that directly and obliquely refer to such experiences. It is also a strategy of choosing things to tell a particular audience whilst refusing to name, categorise, parade or reveal 'unknown' others according to social scientific norms. It is a choice of representation which chooses voices of political resistance in preference to some hegemonic voices talking about 'underclass'. The second part of the chapter presents the films as part of a realm of experience and knowledge about the way particular working class lives are lived and felt. In this way they redistribute some ideas about the lives of people and the nature of places described in terms of 'underclass' - specifically single mothers on benefits and young, unemployed working class males, living on council estates - to partly challenge a gross inequality of representation.

The possibility of being able to talk about 'working class experience' from a subjective and personal standpoint in academic work, and rejecting some traditional academic tenets in doing so, has partly come from the realms of academe itself, in particular from the challenges of feminist and cultural studies.¹ The sorts of issues which have structured these challenges address what it means to be working class; how the fabric of

¹ See for example Walkerdine.V (1995) *Subject To Change Without Notice: Psychology, postmodernity and the popular* p309-332 *Mapping The Subject* Pile.S and Thrift.N (eds.) London: Routledge

everyday life is productive of cultural meaning and value; how popular discourse is a lived and creative realm that is politically meaningful and can be productive of oppositional insights about the way societies work. The idea of working class based perspectives on classed experiences as political discourse, is a central proposition of this chapter. This is not to suggest that there is an authentic, indigenous working class political discourse or that such politics are necessarily resistant in particular ways. It is rather a suggestion that accords with feminist valorisations of 'experience' as a political situatedness and a situatedness which in particular circumstances can exist as a political knowledge and orientation for change.² In this formulation discourse is seen as a realm of experience in which material ways of life become meaningful, and where part of that meaning is political. I am forwarding the notion of a politically critical discourse on working class poverty where there are possibilities of making and remaking working class subjectivities and class relations in affirming ways. I am exemplifying such possibilities with the use of two films which offer politically subversive understandings of poor working class lives insofar as they make being working class a site of positive identity and political anger.

Political feeling is not however the only positive value of popular discourse and there is no suggestion that all forms and practices have an inherently emancipatory or subversive value, or that those that do have intrinsically more 'worth' than those that do not. Valerie Walkerdine writes about her experience of watching films as an 'ordinary girl' of the 1950s as a direct criticism of that strand of cultural studies theorising which serves to inferiorise those elements of discourse which are about pleasure, desire and fantasy.³ She attempts to give value to a feminised realm of discourse that does not address political 'reality' and political change but that is personally meaningful and tells a story about the psychological relations of class. In her case this was a relation about envy, desire, the wish to escape, and dreams and longings that find no expression in the sorts of class experiences described by the men who first forged the 1950's Cultural Studies tradition.⁴ She contends that these working class grammar school boys constructed a romanticised view of working class culture and community and were followed by a cultural studies discipline full of 'redemptive readings of what the masses make with the popular'.⁵ Walkerdine talks about the difference that her undemanding view of popular discourse makes to the sort of cultural studies research that is conducted around working class people. In relation to research based

² The theoretical articulation of this feminist position is outlined in Chapter One

³ Walkerdine, *Schoolgirl Fictions*

⁴ Key figures of this tradition are Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. See Hoggart.R (1958) *The Uses of Literacy* London: Penguin; Williams.R (1961) *Culture and Society* London: Penguin; (1965) *The Long Revolution* London: Penguin; Thompson.E.P (1968) *The Making of the English Working Class* London: Penguin

⁵ Walkerdine, *Subject To Change Without Notice* p323

on audience reception of films - 'trying so hard to understand what people see [in them]'⁶ - she rejects the attempt of middle class voyeurs to intellectualise people's pleasure in order to either romanticise or feel disappointed with the resistant or passive working class subject. I wholly agree with Walkerdine's rejection of the will to 'know' the working class driven by impulses to observe and classify working class habits and behaviours, especially by middle class social scientists. However this does not mean that all attempts to read representations *politically* are doomed to produce a fiction of working class heroism or failure. I do not recognise myself in her story of culture, class and gender, her will to escape through fantasy, through education towards a (middle class) dreamland as all that is on offer to her longing for something else. The films that I have chosen to talk about are stories of working class heroism that stand out from 'ordinary films' for exactly that reason. When I first saw them I thought they were extra-ordinary, powerfully political, highly resonant and deeply affective. They talk to me about my class and my gender in a way that unites pleasure and politics. They are not about 'escape' to things better (as things 'middle class') and in some ways they could be seen as rather bleak and hopeless stories. The pleasure comes from the affirmation of experience and feeling that they offer.

Just as Walkerdine's own family background is part of her experience of watching particular sorts of films in the 1950s, and of finding particular meaning and affirmation in them, so my own family background relates to the pleasure I find in particular discursive forms. This means that the mythologies of class that are part of my subjectivity are quite different to those she talks about as hers. My Left-wing politics and feminism were not something discovered through a University education but were part of me long before I got anywhere near University. They were the class politics and feminism of my home, of growing up, things that my mum had talked about, of the films and music we liked as a family. They were not about dreams of 'escape', which does not mean I thought our economic situation was good enough - it wasn't - but neither was it attended by 'upward' aspirations. I think this was probably because of the political understandings I had of our poverty from quite an early age which meant that I carried a sense of pride, anger, and even a kind of ethical superiority in relation to middle class people. And yet, these positive feelings of class pride were not the whole story: they were also a defence, against pain and against attack. In some ways they represent a way of mythologising my experiences of being working class, a way of imagining as a way of dealing with aspects of who I am, in what seems the best way possible. This personal take, is the starting point to this chapter's exploration of the relation between the 'myths' and 'realities' of poor working class living.

⁶ Walkerdine, *Schoolgirl Fictions* p174

Being named, being classed

'Writers generalise from personal experience, but they also need to mythologise that experience in order to give it meaning. This mythologisation is one of the ways of justifying both existential necessity and existential choice.'⁷

'Who's your dad? Oh I forgot, you're a bastard aren't you.'

Those words said to me by an older boy on the school bus when I was thirteen or so, came back to me when I read *The Name of the Mother*. The above is a quote from that book by Marie Maclean, which is an attempt to 'write her illegitimacy' not as a negative experience but as a positive one, not as a disabling context but as an enabling one. She acknowledges the mythologising tendency that writing personal experience sometimes produces, but revalorises its worth against those public mythologies which work to suppress that which is constructed as private, lived, felt. Here, I take a similar tack: my experiences are part of me, and my myth is in my writing.

That boy on the school bus was wrong, I wasn't a 'bastard' but my dad had died when me, my brother and sisters were much younger and we hadn't known him. I didn't really care about that boy, I thought he was stupid then: a big, spotty adolescent male whose name I forget. I remember him now and the feeling of being upset and embarrassed even though wrongly labelled. We had our father's name but no father and this was a source of some embarrassment, insecurity and difference among school friends - especially being poor, on Social Security, getting free school meals and living on a council estate. School friends at secondary school didn't know much of this to start with, and when they found out said things like 'you'd never know', as if that was a compliment or something. Our mum had done a 'good job', she was a widow, the 'deserving poor'. She wrote poems about it. When I read them now, I have more than pride in who we are. Even then I was not ashamed of who we were, only occasionally upset by what other people said. But our poverty, in itself *was* distressing. So I have a strangely ambivalent relation to that environment which partly made me who I am - in thinking and writing against the poverty which is part of my identity, but not against myself.

As I got older I dealt with the feelings associated with our poverty and its treatment by being political, embarrassment gave way to anger which could be expressed not just in personal terms but in wider political understandings: our situation was not due to our failings but due to the government and its political constituencies. That government had been Labour until I was nine, then in 1979 the Conservatives came to power. I experienced what went on in school, in the family, in the benefit office, not as one of Thatcher's children but often among and against them. I knew that I was as good as they were, and often better.

⁷ Maclean.M (1994) *The Name of the Mother* London: Routledge ix

However I don't think that I would have felt this if all the coded messages and the ways other people related to me - some 'friends' and teachers especially - had given me my sense of self. It was my family, especially my mother, who made sure that I could deal with all that, between ourselves and on my own. So my sense of pride in who I am and where I'm from, has not just come from formal political engagement or education in a learnt or rationalised way, it has come from the knowledge of experience.

My mother was (and still is) a working class single parent - resourceful, intelligent and strong, as are the other single mothers on our estate, and I am one of the children of those women. So when speeches and benefit policies against single parents and their children emerge from government, and even a long-awaited Labour government identifies single mothers as problematic in their 'welfare dependency', and when certain feminist spokeswomen argue for nurseries and 'liberation' to the workplace for single mothers, I know that these arguments are a negation of other knowledges, experiences and values. I do not recognise myself, my mother, or those I grew up with in these representations and have looked elsewhere for cultural affirmation of who I am. I have often found such affirmation in music, in particular in music which lyrically resonates experiences of difference: in anger, pain, humour and celebration. There is a particular song which encapsulates some of my strongest feelings on the meanings of working class difference, how middle class others often deal with it, and how it can simultaneously exist as both a positive and negative identity. It is Pulp's 'Common People'. As part of the generic category of 'Britpop' it has been accused of being part of a distinctly white, working class, and yobbish cultural renaissance. To me this accusation best expresses class contempt for the unfashionably non-exotic. I think it's worth quoting some of it because in many ways it is the beginning of my discussion on class difference and class inequality. It is a starting point that is an attitude of class anger and pride, about encountering some middle class people as working class wannabes. It is based on a personal experience of the singer, a working class bloke starting college and meeting a middle class girl who tells him she wants to live like 'common people', he replies:

'Are you sure you want to live like common people, you want to see whatever common people see, you want to sleep with common people, you want to sleep with common people like me?'

But she didn't understand, she just smiled and held my hand.

Rent a flat above a shop, cut your hair and get a job, smoke some fags and play some pool, pretend you never went to school. But still you'll never get it right, 'cos when you're laid in bed at night watching roaches climb the wall if you called your dad he could stop it all. You'll never live like common people, you'll never do what common people do, you'll never fail like common people, you'll never watch your life slide out of view, and dance and drink and screw because there's nothing else to do. Sing along with the common people, sing along and it might just get you

through, laugh along with the common people, laugh along even though they're laughing at you and the stupid things that you do because you think that poor is cool. Like a dog lying in the corner they will bite you and never warn you, look out they'll tear your insides out. 'Cos everyone hates a tourist especially one who thinks it's all such a laugh and the chip stains and grease will come out in the bath. You will never understand how it feels to live your life with no meaning or control and with nowhere left to go. You are amazed that they exist and they burn so bright whilst you can only wonder why.'

This song could be seen as a resistant narrative of 'underclass'. It juxtaposes the meaning of 'common' as ordinary, and 'common' as an insult to make a point about class 'difference' as class inequality. It is about class tourism, middle class envy, intrigue and voyeurism, a notion of 'workingclassness' that is divested of poverty. It is about working class knowledge, experience and a way of being that cannot be bought into or acted out by middle class people. It is about class difference that is sometimes amazing and bright, class inequality that is sometimes desperate and squalid. And it is about a middle class preference to dabble in difference in the same way that so much talk of 'underclass' prefers to focus on behaviours, habits and personalities, rather than on the denial of basic needs. 'Common People' makes a different sort of position available to those who are normally positioned as envious. It reverses the psychological impetus of 'embourgeoisement' as the working class wanting to become middle class, desiring middle class lives. Instead the middle class girl of the song wants to be 'working class' or rather she wants a bit of 'workingclassness' - that bit which she thinks is 'cool'. However, whilst rejecting the notion of poor as cool, the song does not negate the idea that there is something positive in being working class that cannot be acquired as a fashion. There is no suggestion that the poor want to be like those who may glorify or commodify them. Middle class envy and appropriation are met with a working class based resilience and pride in survival that confounds the middle class voyeur: 'You are amazed that they exist and they burn so bright whilst you can only wonder why'.

My understanding of 'Common People' is of course a personal one, but the lyrics do make particular meanings apparent and promote some interpretations over others. The middle class girl in the song 'who had a thirst for knowledge' may not recognise herself in this and have a different song to sing. Amongst a number of interpretative possibilities, I hear a defiant answer back to the attack on working class poverty, pride and self esteem; a refusal of the idea of class as style based difference; and of the imagined working class preference for 'embourgeoisement'. It is a voice that is not often heard by those who are routinely denied discursive affirmation. I do not include it here as part of a search for resistant narratives of 'working classness'. However given the dearth of resonant and positive representations of 'working classness' from a working class perspective I feel that representations like these *should* be talked about and made important in a way that they

rarely are. Similarly I want to register the films I have chosen as *better* than other representations for and about the working class poor on a number of counts. In particular their stories, aesthetic styles, and political meanings make them different from other representations in ways that I want to promote.

In *Outlaw Culture* bell hooks talks about representations which limit the possibilities of what it may mean to be poor and she puts forward the idea of an alternative regime of representation around poverty which would work as a refusal of worthlessness, of shame, of the primary valorisation of material status and the idea of perpetual aspiration.⁸ To me this sort of representation is one that makes you feel 'at last', somebody else knows. It is a sort of discursive collectivism that explicitly and directly validates your class position in a number of ways and connects it to others. When everything else around you tries to individualise that position so that 'it's just you that's not coping, that's angry, that's failing', then to hear or see something that says 'it's all of us and we're not the problem' is empowering. Lack of self-esteem is not an inherent part of poverty but a possible product of a regime of meaning that is created around poverty. hooks notes the uncomfortableness of linking poverty to a meaningful life which exists beyond material deprivation lest it suggest that nothing should be done to improve poor people's lives. And yet, those material improvements are in a large part dependent on changes in perception about poverty because representation is intrinsic to politics and economics, to the policies that effect change. Moreover, discursive affirmation is not about 'being positive' all the time, rather it is about a fuller picture that speaks to people about their lives, not as walking problems but as people in relationships, in families, with opinions, emotions, talents. A discourse that is predominantly negative will work to psychologically beat down the poor:

'When intellectuals, journalists or politicians speak about nihilism and the despair of the underclass they do not link those states to representations of poverty in the mass media... To change the face of poverty so that it becomes once again, a site for the formation of values, of dignity and integrity, as any other class positionality in this society, we would need to intervene in existing systems of representation.'⁹

Here, hooks is remembering back to her own childhood poverty when she feels nihilism and despair were not promoted by a mass media. One of the powerful themes of the two European films that I have chosen to explore, is about poor people carrying on, looking, trying and hoping for the best even if fearing the worst. This understanding is more resonant to me than that of the nihilism and despair hooks describes. In this respect the films may be part of both representational and economic differences between the welfare regimes of Europe and America. The films that I have chosen reflect and create a site of values, dignity

⁸ hooks.b (1994) *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* London: Routledge

⁹ hooks, *Outlaw Culture* p169-171

and integrity and they act to affirm working class lives even though they show things near their worst in terms of material circumstances. As such they are an oppositional part of 'underclass' discourse, proudly working class. They are films that speak to and about my class in a way that does not grate or jar.

Researching Class Through Film

The place of film within research on cultural representation is well established. Over the past 20 years film research has emerged as a legitimate and important part of a human and cultural geography that is interested in looking at the construction of space and time, place and meaning.¹⁰ However the study of relationships between *class*, culture and film has been most developed within Cultural Studies as an interest in the classed realities *produced* in films and the class nature of their *consumption*. Questions like 'how is the working class represented?' 'how do those representations relate to working class histories and experiences?' and 'how do working class people understand these films?' predominate. The empirical nature of such work involves working closely with text, its meaning making devices and filmic languages, and with the audience through various kinds of 'audience research' to draw out socio-cultural meanings.¹¹ Walkerdine sees those traditions of audience research in particular as quests for evidential knowledge of working class lives and minds, often in order to better regulate them, and she recoils from such quests in a call for: 'a more complex blending of fact and fiction, of materiality and fantasy.'¹² It is such a blending that I intend.

My approach is interested in the mythologies of filmic narrative in relation to the realities of working class lives. My readings do not maintain a purity of distinction between reality and myth in the films or in the lives they represent: realities and mythologies of class blend in both. The stories of class told in the films are refracted through my own readings of them in which I suggest that the films make possible class based identifications, recognitions and resonances that are part of a collective story. In this respect, mine is a personal reading of a collective story. I reject the idea that it is only through 'audience research' that a film can be given significance beyond the formalities of its text, to a wider culture. That idea persists as a belief in evidence:

¹⁰ See for example Aitken.S.C and Zonn.L.E (1993) (eds.) *Place, Power, Situation and Spectacle: A Geography of Film* London: Rowman and Littlefield p3-26; Clarke.D.B (1997) (ed.) *The Cinematic City* London: Routledge; Kennedy.C and Lukinbeal.C (1997) *Towards A Holistic Approach To Geographic Research On Films* p33-50 *Progress In Human Geography* 21: 1

¹¹ Variation within these approaches is considerable. The text/audience relation has opened up to a much wider range of speculative, experiential, theoretical readings through developments in postmodernism. See Crawford.P and Turton.D (1992) (eds.) *Film As Ethnography* Manchester: Manchester University Press

¹² Walkerdine.V (1991) *Fantasy and Regulation: (From 'The Mass Psychology of Thatcherism' talk at the ICA)* *Schoolgirl Fictions* p209

'Audience research is... the accumulation of evidence about the meaning of things... Where's the evidence? Without evidence, everything is merely speculation.'¹³

Such prioritisation of evidence in the study of discursive meaning is rigidly tied to categorical notions of text and context, viewer and viewed. It holds the idea that with enough of the right sort of evidence then the meaning, status and effect of representations can be 'known'. Rather the rhetoric of evidence can only be a claim to knowledge, an idea of meaning which works to hierarchise particular sorts of meaning as more or less significant (where the subjective, personal, individual are less). The idea that the personal reading is less, carries a particular notion of individualism in which the individual is less social, less public, less trustworthy. That notion ignores both the social aspects of subjectivity and of the interpretative process itself. This argument is made by Elizabeth Long specifically in relation to the reading of books, an activity that because widely held to be private relegates the individual reader to an inconsequential position within 'macro' socio-cultural processes measured in aggregate.¹⁴ The refusal of a public-private value hierarchisation in social life, and the association of the individual with the private, the collective with the public, has implications for discourse analytic research. It rejects the 'trickle-down' model of culture which constructs 'linear processes of cultural dissemination' where the individual reader is at the very bottom of the 'significance' range.¹⁵ I am claiming my readings to be part of overlapping social communities of experience and understanding, as a claim to social significance. How convincing such claims are is a matter of judgement not fact. It so happens that the films I have chosen are also part of a historical tradition in film making in which they explicitly make the claim of social significance for themselves.

Both *Hate* and *Ladybird* are explicitly about contemporary social issues and their directors have articulated commitments to the political representation of working class experiences. This commitment is no mark of quality, authenticity, or depth of understanding. To point it out is rather an acknowledgement of the special nature of these films in terms of the motivation of the stories they tell. Such films are not new to cinematic history but part of a tradition variously termed 'social realism', 'naturalism', 'working class realism'. The tradition is associated with a period of British film making at the end of the 1950s, although Loach prefers to locate his influences in the Czech cinema of the 1960s and Kassovitz claims more recent cinematic influences from Martin Scorsese to Spike Lee.¹⁶

¹³ Lewis.J (1994) 'The Meaning of Things' p19-32 *Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception* Cruz.J and Lewis.J (eds.) Oxford: Westview Press p20

¹⁴ Long.E (1994) Textual Interpretation As Collective Action p181-211 *Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception*

¹⁵ Long, *Textual Interpretation As Collective Action* p207

¹⁶ Simon Hattenstone interviewing Ken Loach *The Guardian* G2 29.9.94 p10; Sheila Johnston interviewing Mathieu Kassovitz *The Independent* 19.10.95 p8

Since the majority of the British films of the realist tradition have been strongly criticised for their political conservativeness and reductive characterisations I should make clear that I am not talking about *Hate* and *Ladybird* as the bearers of a long and great tradition. I believe them to be both positively different and positively similar. John Hill's analysis of British Cinema from 1956-63, the period during which films specifically focused on working class lives and contemporary social issues first emerged, suggests that the political quality of the films was a double-edged sword:

‘The views of the world which they promoted, may well have obscured as much as they enlightened, and obstructed as much as they initiated the potential for social change and reconstruction.’¹⁷

Hill levels this criticism of political ambivalence at both the ‘social problem’ films that had an observational and unsophisticated approach to characterisation and such narrative themes as youth delinquency and immigration, and at the ‘new wave’ films of social realism - kitchen-sink dramas - which were widely credited as aesthetically and politically progressive. At the end of the 1950s the latter films represented a landmark change in cinema direction, rejecting conventions of character and place for location shooting and unknown regional actors as part of an ethos that was about giving value to the ordinary. The direction of Kassovitz and Loach can be seen as fitting the template of that style. *Hate* is black and white verité, with wide angled location shooting producing shots full of detail. Ordinary characters are shown with rough edges, in their daily lives. Kassovitz's camera work is also authored with a few stylistic shots conveying entrapment, circularity and downward spirals. The effect is to show the ordinary as extraordinary, as lyrical and extreme. Loach prefers ‘naturalism’ to ‘realism’ as a description of his style. *Ladybird* *Ladybird* is in colour and there are no overtly stylistic shots, the feel is more documentary. Part of Loach's method of direction is to use the gut reaction of characters who do not know what will happen next, some lines and movements are unscripted. He mixes professional with non-professional actors and will not cast against class.¹⁸ The ethos of both directors echoes that of Lindsey Anderson, a prominent director of the 1950s period who is quoted by Hill as exemplary of changes in 1950s cinema:

‘I want to make people - ordinary people - not just top people - feel their dignity and their importance.’¹⁹

Yet despite their good intentions, Hill contends that the vast majority of the 1956-63 films produced an outsider's view of the working class, a middle class idea of working class

¹⁷ Hill.J (1986) *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956 -1963* London: British Film Institute p2-3

¹⁸ ‘Rock Steady’ *The Guardian* G2 29.9.94 p10

¹⁹ Hill, *Sex Class and Realism* p128

squalor and sexuality, and a patronising if not contemptuous view of a working class degraded by the newly emergent culture of mass consumerism. The disdain for working class women was particularly strong with female figures serving as appendages to the narrative and psychological development of male characters; and as the easy targets of consumer frivolity.

It would seem that the very fact that these films dealt with social issues which had not been broached before, through lives which had never before been made filmically interesting or important, was enough to mask their reductionism and conservatism. On political grounds Hill identifies their give away failings as a preponderance of individual over collective situations; interpersonal over socially structured conflicts; cultural attitudes over political-economic relationships; anger with no direction; a tone of nostalgia and pessimism. These are 'failings' which are not apparent in *Hate* or *Ladybird Ladybird* but not because they meet Hill's political checklist where their predecessors did not. Indeed *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* are very much inscribed with individual situations, interpersonal relationships and cultural attitudes. The difference is that they are shown to be absolutely part of collective situations, social conflicts, political and economic relationships. The individual, interpersonal and cultural are not inherently conservative although they can be constructed as such. That changed construction is perhaps the main difference between these old and new stories of working class lives. The issues and characters are in many ways the same and in that there is shown to be a continuity of working class historical time, but the *perspective* has changed from a relation of exteriority to one of interiority. In *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* the perspective is very much that of their working class protagonists. If something has changed in the interim years of the 1950s and 1990s perhaps it is the intervention of feminism, a catching on that the personal is political and that insider perspectives can make for better stories of class. Their filmic space merges the personal and political, the real and imagined. It is the antithesis of an observed space of 'difference' and of 'truth'. It is a space of possibility, of recognitions and resonances, of real and imagined identifications with identities and places. In this respect their filmic space produces a particular kind of cultural cartography.

Hate and *Ladybird Ladybird* map identities and places of working class poverty. The spaces they produce are antithetical to the observed spaces that are the view of traditional ethnographic research. If ethnography is understood as the traditional social scientific fieldwork method based on the empirical observation of 'people in culture' then any sort of fiction is decidedly non-ethnographic. On the other hand, if ethnography is understood as a reflexive, power laden method of creatively constructing reality, as it is in postmodern templates of ethnography, then there are some radical methodological

implications for ethnographic form. Writers inclined to pursue these implications have conceived of a 'poetics and politics of ethnography' opening up a whole new terrain of possibilities in which intertextual, plurivocal and interpretative forms and methods of practice take over from the authorial voice of scientific, empirical endeavour.²⁰ Indeed particular 'non-traditional' ethnographic forms would seem to be well suited to express the 'happening-all-at-once' quality that constitutes social life. Forms which can represent such simultaneity become ideal for the study of social life. Ethnographic poetics, novels and films are all therefore possible alternatives to traditional ethnographic accounts which 'have failed to convey cultural differences in terms of full-bodied experience'.²¹ The potential of using filmed ways of life ethnographically already has a history in the sub-discipline of 'visual anthropology'. Historically the use of such ethnographic films has been strongly tied to the making of films specifically for the purpose of anthropological research in a strongly evidential mode.²² The use of drama documentaries and fiction films therefore makes possible modes of enquiry that go beyond the evidential surface, to fully realise the potential of film's semantic richness. That fullness of meaning creates complexity, possibility, and ambiguity which refuses both the viewer and the director absolute control over the subject's story. Claims of intellectual authority are immediately out of place. The difference that a filmic ethnography makes to the lives it represents lies in both the detail and the openness of meaning it allows. These are meanings made in the conjunction of multiple events and non-events; conversations and interactions; looks and movements. Such meanings do not exist in language and therefore cannot be conveyed in forms such as the research interview. They cannot be repeated in speech, are unspoken and possibly unspeakable.

The films I have chosen are myriads of temporal and spatial complexity from which 'reality' is constructed from the intersection of outward appearance and inner depth, the transient moment and enduring lives, marginal spaces and encompassing landscapes. For my purposes the central strength of this filmic space is the sort of visibility it creates. The way visibility is achieved has consequences for those whose lives are deemed to require surveillance and intervention. These films defend and complicate what they show, they do not leave their subjects exposed or revealed. They also give voice in a way that is not part of an injunction to tell, that is not recorded as evidence. 'Not telling' in a culture of 'telling' that falls most heavily on the poor - to welfare professionals, to the DSS, to the police, in media confessionals, to researchers - is in many ways a defence. Both these understandings

²⁰ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*

²¹ Marcus.G and Fischer.M (1986) *Anthropology As Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in The Human Sciences* Chicago: Chicago university Press p73

²² See Kuehnast.K (1992) 'Visual Imperialism and the export of prejudice: an exploration of ethnographic film' p183-195 *Film As Ethnography* Crawford.P and Turton.D (eds.) Manchester: Manchester University Press

about voice and visibility developed as part of a research process that took me home to reflect on the place of 'experience' and 'affect' in the discourse of 'underclass' through conversations with friends and family. When I came back, the films had become part of a meaning making process in which their stories, were part of my own stories. My re-telling of them is not about trying to reproduce the filmic space or my home space, they are told specifically with the purpose of refuting some dominant meanings of 'underclass'. That motivation is at the centre of my interpretations, partly creating the reality it describes.

Going Home

My idea of going home was to put onto the page in 'conversations' something of what it is like being working class and poor amongst the contemporary glut of interpretations and prescriptions for your life. I also wanted to express something of the meaning of being home which did not fit either a specimen style sociology of 'people in council houses' or an alienated narrative of 'people in council houses who go to University'. I could have been spending that summer in 'participant observation' of a working class family and their friends who had lived in the same street for most of their lives. It just happened that the street, family and friends were my own and that they were a continuous part of me. At first I thought that situation would be enough to be able to make a point about closeness and distance in research; to convey the difference that proximity, immersion, and continuity make to the research view; and to produce something experiential in which the idea of 'the other' would be rendered obsolete because there was no yawning gap between researcher and researched. Yet the evocation of 'difference' was somehow inherent in even this idea as the explication of something 'unknown'. I would be making these people 'unknown' in order to then make them 'known' to another audience, when really we were entirely familiar with each other. In my University office I had not anticipated the distaste I would feel at trying to recreate this experiential realm. Once I was part of things again at home, the idea was out of place. This was very much a personal feeling, a gut feeling that the idea was all wrong. I decided that it was important and that my disinclination was probably part of the very reason that I had chosen a discourse analysis in the first place. Part of this reason was a desire to 'turn the tables' on those who are not usually talked about but do the talking about 'others'. Part was a huge misgiving about the sort of information that is obtainable in 'interviews', the idea of the spoken word as a route, albeit a winding one, to self-identity. The nature of this misgiving is expressed in one of the 43 episodes of Edinburgh 'underclass' living found in Irvine Welsh's novel *Trainspotting*.²³ One of the main characters - Renton - is forced to discuss his identity with a counsellor. He reverses the

²³ Welsh.I (1993) *Trainspotting* London: Minerva

relationship between the knowing 'interviewer' and the 'subject' of the interview as a refusal of the injunction to tell (the 'truth') and to be accountable:

'Sometimes ah telt the truth, sometimes ah lied. When ah lied, ah sometimes said the things that ah thought he'd like tae hear, n sometimes said something which ah thought would wind him up, or confuse him.'²⁴

Renton's refusal, or rather the confusion it produces, ends up with him being sent for more counselling, an outcome that makes him think his mate got the easy option in going to jail. Nevertheless he maintains a protective distance, a refusal to be convinced of the necessity to 'tell it the way it is' in order to be better 'known':

'Once ye accept that they huv that right, ye'll join them in the search fir this holy grail, this thing that makes ye tick. Ye'll then defer tae them, allowin yersel tae be conned intae believin any biscuit-ersed theory ay behaviour they choose tae attach tae ye. Then yir theirs, no yir ain.'²⁵

I was not a counsellor but I was about to ask people about their subjectivities, and to ask them to repeat things I already knew about. These were people who knew my politics and motivations, had known me all my life, there was no great distance. It was the 'ideal' which I thought I had wanted. In that closeness I realised that my approach to this experience based chapter needed to be a defence, a strategic refusal of the injunction to tell, the revelatory end. In the end some family and friends watched the films on video, as films we might watch anyway and I said I was probably going to talk about them in my Ph.D. Everyone responded to the films much like I had when I first saw them and I knew that I had made the right decision not to make either their lives or their viewings of the films the subject of the chapter. I decided that that these were the sort of films that we might choose to represent something we know about, something of who we are or could be, or imagine ourselves to be:

'We're amazing aren't we' (*Ladybird, Ladybird*)

'Oh it's not subtitles is it....

(and later)

... I wouldn't mind seeing that again' (*Hate*)

'Fucking brilliant' (*Hate*)

'Pam has *got* to see this' (*Ladybird, Ladybird*)

'It's like a French 'Made In Britain', nearly as good, 'Made In France'!' (*Hate*)

I didn't want or need to ask why but I *had* needed to go home to realise that.

²⁴ Welsh, *Trainspotting* p184

²⁵ Welsh, *Trainspotting* p184

These reactions are those of people familiar with negative representations about who they are, their class, their poverty, their 'problematic' nature. Such representations were part of experiences of growing up, being children and teenagers or being parents through the seventies, eighties and the nineties: living through prolonged periods of impoverishment, as others were living through periods of consumption and materialism. For a large part of that time poverty was accompanied by a degradation of poor working class people, a cultural contempt expressed about people who wore 'shell suits', 'Sharons and Tracies', 'losers', 'yob culture', 'low life', 'scroungers'. At the same time there was a total degradation of both the idea and provision of welfare which was the most important aspect of lives lived on benefits, moving in and out of low paid work, being unwell, living in council housing. We were the groups that were associated with crime, yobbery, social security fraud, welfare dependency. During the eighties especially we were the most marginal and most despised, perverse in our failure to 'succeed', dragging our feet over change, wanting the old jobs back, still having babies instead of careers, stuck in outdated class and gender moulds. I include myself in this story because going to University at the beginning of the nineties did not extract me from the meaning of all this as part of my emotional and material relation to class. My class is about a felt connectedness to experientially similar others and a political connectedness in terms of welfare interests. That connectedness is shown in *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* as a relation of the personal to the cultural and economic. Those connections are made in a myriad of ways between people of the same class, they are not fixed and cannot be determinedly stated. You recognise them when you see some of yourself in others; and you feel their pull emotionally, intellectually, politically at different times, in different places. Representations which affirm those connections feel like winning a prize, wresting something valuable from those who don't want you to have it. This is about class as much more than material inequality: class as stories, values, feelings, as something positive. It is an expansive notion of class: stories which do not need to be identical to my own in order to affirm me. They can be about the North of England; they don't even have to be British; they can be set in the past; they can have black male protagonists. In common they produce a feeling and a recognition that this is somehow about me. In *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* the positive nature of the feeling comes from the recognition that things are not alright and the reasons for things being as they are is to do with other social groups, *their* authority, *their* privilege, *their* values. Thus a central part of the positive feeling is being justified in feeling angry about the way things are and directing that anger towards those who set things up and carry them out that way. In large part that involves antipathy towards 'things middle class' in feelings that are a psychic defence built from experience, maintained for protection. This class feeling is about positive affirmation and expression of

conflict. The films are pleasurable in being part of an insistence that parts of middle class society should be accountable, are problematic, should not be allowed to be comfortable in their privilege, power and class. The feeling is personal because I take contemporary debates about cultures of benefit dependency and criminality personally as part of my affective relationship to 'workingclassness'. The films offer a particular sort of affective relation to material deprivation and social identity. They express something of the feel of being working class which cannot be reduced to a description of a political ideology such as socialism or a social scientific analysis of class relations. That feeling necessarily goes beyond external perceptions of what being working class should be, described here by Annette Kuhn:

'Class is not just about the way you talk, or dress or furnish your home... Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being.'²⁶

Raymond Williams describes the 'feel' of a social group as a 'structure of feeling: '[the] specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships'.²⁷ The notion works as a mediating category between social, experiential and representational practices. *Hate* and *Ladybird* similarly work to mediate some of the social, experiential and representational practices and meanings of being working class and poor. In this respect they can be located as part of a structure of class feeling that is made up of a myriad of material circumstances, emotional responses, psychological defences, personal and political meanings. I have tried to structure some of that feeling in three themes, which I use to explore the films. They are: Oppression-Resistance, Time-Space, Subjectivity-Collectivity. Oppression-Resistance is about the social relations of class and poverty; Time-Space is about the way those relations are lived on a daily basis according to situation; and Subjectivity-Collectivity is about their politics as matters of difference and belonging.

My discussion of the films through the themes will not be using a traditional academic voice. I feel that the things they are about will be communicated best in a language that is not totally alien to the lives and experiences being talked about; a language that does not need references to authoritative others because it is a claim to an experiential and subjugated knowledge of its own; and a language that is not too heavily structured by the formalities of academic writing, as a classed form of writing. While that writing has use and purpose elsewhere, it is not part of the space of knowledge and understanding which I want to create here.

I will briefly set the stories of these films in relation to contemporary hegemonic stories of the breakdown in law and order in working class young men and council estates,

²⁶ Kuhn.A (1995) *Family Secrets: Acts Of Memory and Imagination* London: Verso p98

²⁷ Williams.R (1977) *Marxism and Literature* Oxford: Oxford University Press p132

and the breakdown in family and reproductive norms of working class single motherhood. Both films confront the spectre of these contemporary political issues.

The Films

'There were 28 recorded violent disturbances or riots between 1991-93 and about a hundred lesser disorders as the police clashed with groups of young men on residential streets. The riots took a different course in different parts of the country, and varied in intensity, but they shared many features. Twelve of the thirteen riots in 1991 and 1992 took place on council estates - most of them large, and all outside London... The vast majority of rioters were white, British born boys and young men, aged between 10 and 30... The riots always happened in low-income areas with long-standing social problems and poor reputations - most of them built to re-house slum clearance families in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. Unemployment levels were far above the national average, three times as high for the local authority areas as a whole and more than twice as high as in other areas of social housing... The concentrations of young people in these areas were much higher than in the country as a whole. In some more than half the residents were under 24... In some cases the police were criticised for inaction before the riots. More frequently, serious violence followed an unusual level of police intervention.'²⁸

'A woman was put under pressure to have an abortion and sterilisation by Lancashire social workers... Cathleen McCullagh was pressured into aborting twins by social workers who told her that if they were born, they would try to have them taken into care. Two doctors refused to give their permission for the termination because there were no medical grounds for it. Mrs. McCullagh was never accused of abuse, but social workers argued that she was an 'unfit' mother because they said she had a low IQ and they claimed she was prone to aggressive mood swings.'²⁹ 'Now, more than 60 families have formed an action group, Mothers In Action, each with a story to tell of overt interference by social workers... The Children Act which came into force in October 1991, was supposed to control many of the abuses of power by social workers... Many of the cases examined in Lancashire, however, indicate that the law is being used to separate families and children are being placed with adopters before any reasonable attempts have been made at reunification.'³⁰

These are reports of 'real' events in contemporary Britain. *Hate* and *Ladybird* *Ladybird* are the stories of individuals involved in such news, both films being inspired by such 'real-life' events. *Ladybird* *Ladybird* is 'based on a true story'; *Hate* refers to riotous occurrences on public housing estates in France and was seen to have been instrumental in their re-occurrence. Both films have been met with criticism and censure: Loach for having 'blurred fact and fiction' and Kassovitz for 'fostering confrontation'.³¹ In different ways

²⁸ Power.A and Tunstall.R (1997) 'Estates Of Siege' *The Guardian* G2 25.6.97 p9, taken from Power.A and Tunstall.R (1997) *Dangerous Disorder: Riots and Violent Disturbances in Thirteen Areas of Britain 1991-1992* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

²⁹ 'Social Workers 'Pressured Mother To Abort Twins'' *The Independent* 12.12.94 p1

³⁰ 'What Are Social Workers For?' *The Independent* 13.12.94 p18

³¹ 'Milk Bars? Marxist Theory? Wake Up and Smell the Cappuccino, Ken' *The Observer Review* 19.6.97 p4; 'Concrete Jungle, Where Life Imitates Art In The Concrete Jungle' *The Independent On Sunday* 11.6.95 p15

both were seen to be reckless: Loach with the 'truth', Kassovitz with social consequences. Both films have also been followed by official reactions to their 'real' content to bring about positive changes and compensations. Part of the French government's response after Prime Minister Juppé screened *Hate* for the education of his cabinet, was to propose a £2 billion 'Marshall Plan for the estates'.³² There are injunctions against the case of the woman represented as 'Maggie' being talked about in the media, and the Broadcasting Standards Authority have upheld a complaint that because of the film's violence and bad language Channel Four overstepped acceptable boundaries in screening it on television. However it is only since the film has been made that 'Maggie', after being refused a Social Work enquiry, has been able to find some recognition that what happened to her was wrong via the criminal justice system. A case of assault against her is being pursued through the courts.³³ Both films have broken bounds of representation in their subject matter and response, making a purity of distinction between fact and fiction unsustainable.

Hate chronicles 24 hours in the lives of three working class friends from an outer Parisian housing estate in the aftermath of a riot. They are Hubert, Said, and Vince - who has found a gun lost by the police the night before. The riots had been started after Abdel - a 16 year old from their estate - was beaten into a coma after being taken into police custody. Vince announces to his friends that if Abdel dies, he'll use the gun to kill a policeman. They wander the terrain of the night before, recalling its events, making small time deals, avoiding the police and the television cameras, drifting and talking. They travel a few miles away to Paris, are picked up by the police and abused. In Paris they are like strangers in a foreign country. Much of the tension and dialogue centre on whether or not Vince will use the gun as a tension between survival and getting revenge. The talk is street slang laced with violence, bravado, friendship, humour and reflectivity. Music systems blare gangsta rap and hip-hop, the television brings post-riot news. The 24 hours are shown ticking by, a mixture of boredom and immanence, ordinariness and extremity.

Ladybird *Ladybird* is the story of Maggie Conlon, a single mother with four young children. She has left a violent husband and council flat to enter a women's refuge with her children. On the one evening she decides to go out to a pub karaoke, the children are caught in a fire at the refuge. Social Services remove all four children from her, and she is fighting to get them back. This we learn in flashback as Maggie tells some of her story to Jorge, a Paraguayan asylum seeker, who she meets in the pub on a night out with her sister. Meeting Jorge is the start of a new life for Maggie. They fight together to get her children back but without success. They go on to have two children who are also removed by Social Services

³² 'The Angry Sound of the Suburbs' *The Independent* 26.10.95 p2-3

³³ 'For Once Ladybird's in the Right' *The Observer* 10.8.97 p24

because Maggie's past and her personality are used to mark her as an unfit mother. The narrative and dialogue centre on her relationship with various welfare authorities, her relationship with Jorge and with her children. As she is continually denied the relationship with her children, her grief, anger and despair come to define her way of being, coping and not coping. The 'truth' represented is Maggie's truth, defended by Loach in these terms:

'It isn't whether the film is true but what is the truth in the film? The material events happened.'³⁴

I have divided some of the 'truth' that is found in the stories of *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* into three themed areas. The first is Oppression-Resistance.

³⁴ Quoted in 'Still Worried About Maggie's Children' *The Observer* Review 4.9.94 p2

1: OPPRESSION-RESISTANCE

Getting by when you're working class and poor often means presenting a front to those authority figures who have direct power over your life. The things you say, the way you look and act, the tidiness of your home or state of your garden, are all things which can be used against you. They can have consequences that mean you have to be vigilant and that mean you have an investment in making things look 'good' and non-problematic. This is not to say that things always do look good, just that you are aware that outward presentation is often made to count against you. The front that is put up is in many ways a denial of who you are, what you're going through, how you feel. If you *look* 'normal', *look* as if you're getting on fine, coping and abiding by the law, then you are less likely to have your life subjected to external intervention whether by Social Services or the police. Yet this means that things can look as if they really are alright: you *can* manage on that amount of money, you *are* going along with the way things are. Very often that is not the case. You're not coping, you're ill, you're angry, you don't feel part of things and you don't agree with 'the way things are'. Even when everything may look fine, the cost of that look is an immense physical and psychological struggle that brings you down. A sense of what that struggle might be is often only guessed at when things go wrong. When the investment in keeping things looking 'normal' does not seem worth it or is not possible to make, some of the 'truth' spills over in the way you look, the way you behave, the things you say. Relations with authority and middle class society generally are therefore a mix of conformity, good impressions, politeness, and resistance, defiance, anger. Either way it is a struggle against what are very often oppressive social relations, manifest in a wide range of behaviours, outcomes, interactions. *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* convey a great deal of what the struggle, material and psychological, is like.

Both films are stories of class-based oppression, inflected with race in the former, gender in the latter. In *Ladybird Ladybird* the primary channel of Maggie's oppression is her local Social Services department. Social workers are not presented as an homogenous monolith. Maggie sees a good selection of different workers who are variously well-meaning, patronising and sanctimonious individuals, but the role they fulfil, and the social behaviours and conditions they police, tend to work in one direction. They work to define Maggie's situation on their terms and the bottom line when their terms are not adhered to is coercive intervention. Maggie is subjected to surveillance, coercion and violence as she

struggles to keep her children and to get them back once they are removed from her. Her contact with social workers ranges from the intrusive to the brutal. Backed by police officers they forcibly snatch one baby from her at home and wait outside the hospital delivery room to remove another as soon as she has given birth.

These overtly violent events are part of an aggregated officialdom made up of a phalanx of agencies presenting a united and inflexible front, backing each other. Their intimidation and lack of understanding are not shown as personally or departmentally motivated, but as institutionalised. Actions are backed by the legality and procedure of the 'case conference', the 'at risk register', the 'place of safety order'. Maggie is told: 'The Law says if you don't co-operate we will have to take all your children from you'. The front of their practices is the language of her 'best interests' and their justification is made out to be her individually motivated behaviour. In combination, her reproductive choices, her choice of partners, and her intellectual and emotional responses to her situation, are defined as the problem. Before Maggie goes to her first court hearing to try to get her son back, her social worker tries to load responsibility for the outcome onto Maggie's sexual behaviour: 'Now there are no men in your life are there Maggie?' She is continually told that she has the power to change things, that negative outcomes are her fault: 'If you would help yourself Maggie, we're here to help you'. As she tries to escape with her children, a social worker shouts after her: 'If you go now you'll lose the kids forever, I'm trying to help you Maggie'. Finally the family court judge uses her behaviour as the reason that he has to act to remove her children from her: 'Her choice of partner is in her control... she seems likely to continue her pattern of abusive relationships.' Thus Maggie's treatment is permanently attended by a rhetoric that attempts to reverse the causality of events, to position her as the master of her own destiny. Under the guise of 'help' and the proffering of 'advice' is accusation and threat, both geared towards individualising her predicament as a matter of behavioural choice. In her actual experiences Maggie permanently faces the lie of their rhetoric, the meaning of their formal niceties and sanitised legalities. She is told by her social workers that if she does not swear, behaves with decorum, wears a suit to court, does not get involved with other men, then it will be alright, she will be able to have her children back. Maggie knows that it won't. This is the lesson that she has continually learnt and that she is expected to continually forget. She is expected to forget her own knowledge, intelligence and experience, indeed to see her use of them as against her better interests. She knows how she is seen in their eyes, according to her records, and the evidence of her 'bad language' and 'aggressive behaviour'. She knows that on their terms she will always fail. In the interim she will be subjected to social work practices of surveillance and monitoring, and placement in a residential 'family centre' to treat those problem elements that are deemed capable of

'reform'. The permanent removal of her children to more suitable socialising contexts of State 'care' and foster homes is the ever present threat that conditions all her relations to authority.

Maggie's own ability to assess and direct her situation (struggling but coping), the value of her own priorities (love and emotional security for her children), and the value of what she has already achieved in raising four children, are all rendered worthless. The physical, emotional and psychological work of her child rearing in circumstances of poverty and domestic violence are made to count for nothing. The violence of these judgements against Maggie's autonomy and intelligence is hidden in the polite, quietly spoken, middle class voices of proper statutory channels. Their meanings are realised in actions against her: police officers hold her down and hold her back as she seeks to keep hold of her children; hospital staff sedate her with an injection, attended by police and security staff.

Maggie's social and economic position - subject to poverty, homelessness and violence - is marginalised by the authorities assessments. Social Services can do nothing to significantly improve those circumstances so they must act as if the problem is with Maggie herself. To *admit* those economic and environmental injustices as primary, and moreover that there is nothing they can do about them, would be to negate their role. Their way of dealing with this impasse, is to judge as inadequate the very thing that Maggie is most capable of providing for her children and to deny the central significance of her material hardship. Thus the family court judge tells her that she cannot have her children back because: 'Children need more than love, they need support and stability'. She later sees a picture of her eldest son Sean up for adoption in the classified adverts of the local newspaper, under his photograph it reads: 'I've never had much love, can you give me some now?' The nature of this oppression is emotionally and psychologically exhausting, Maggie is traumatised as blame is added to brutality: 'They won't be happy 'til I'm dead'.

In *Hate* such a feeling is symbolically justified when Vince and Hubert are finally shot by police authorities which have hounded and abused them over 24 hours. The shootings are carried out by psyched up officers, the first happening when a gun goes off accidentally. However, the shootings themselves are not the main measure of the oppression to which the three friends are subjected. They happen in the very last minute of their story; they are preceded by a day and night of provocation and harassment by riot police, community-based police, city police, security guards, and television cameras.

12.43 p.m. As Vince, Hubert and Said hang around a dilapidated playground, a media truck pulls up on a raised road that borders the estate. A woman hangs out the window with a microphone while the camera films from its roof. They peer down as if into a pit: 'Hi we're from the TV, did you burn anything, break cars....?' The friends react angrily: 'What

d'you think we look like?' 'Stirring up shit for a juicy scoop?' 'No camera! Stop snooping fuckface. Stop taping!' 'Get outta the car, this ain't Thoiry' (a drive through safari park). As they throw stones and shout, the film frame becomes the view from the media camera lens and we see them as they'll be presented for the news: aggressive, shouting, throwing stones, as evidence.

The scene ends with Hubert saying to the others: 'This ain't no zoo', but for the media it is exactly that. They are presented as a dangerous social species in their natural habitat, the concrete jungle of the estate. The oppressive presentation of their reality, and the intrusion into their lives will be hidden in the camera view which positions 'society' as justifiably anxious and aggrieved by their problematic behaviour. The scene shows representational violence wearing a cloak of objectivity in a quest for the 'truth' of the riots.

20.17 p.m. Hubert and Said have been pulled into a Parisian police cell from the city streets having been identified as being from the estates and found to be carrying small amounts of cannabis. The police officers taunt them for their appearance, their clothes, their accents, and their attitude, in a tirade of sick abuse, humiliations, sadistic cruelty and violence: 'They'll be out in two hours, let's make the most of it'. A younger officer is unwillingly initiated into these practices, his sensibilities brutalised as he is forced to watch, and into silent acquiescence. The event horrific as it is, is not anomalous, it is perhaps an extreme example of what they are subjected to on a daily basis. The sense is that such oppression is a central part of their experience, part of the fabric of their lives which they have learnt to expect. They stagger out, do not talk about it, or breakdown, they do not refer to it when they meet up with Vince, do not report it or tell their parents. They just carry on. The 'normality' of such violence is part of the condition of their lives. It is a casual brutality backed by legality so that everything looks and sounds alright on the surface. The police officers are clean and smart with Parisian accents, the forms will be filled in - 'drug users from the estates'. They are the problem, *their* oppression does not register.

6.01 am Emerging from the events of the night in Paris the three friends return to their estate. They seem to have survived all the provocations, frustrations, degradation, abuse and violence that has been loaded upon them, and without retaliating with the police gun that has been in their possession. Their incredible restraint, psychological defences, discussions, reflections and finally their choice of survival over confrontation, have all brought them back. Hubert's role as the older and more experienced of the three has been central as a pragmatic philosopher reiterating that survival is what counts most: 'hate breeds hate', they may be falling but 'so far so good'. They have made it home, so far so good. Vince hands the gun over to Hubert as if to acknowledge that Hubert was right, and walks off with Said still joking after everything they have been through. Hubert watches them as a police car

pulls up by their side and three local police officers jump out. One of them starts to push Vince about, taunting him: 'You were the two on the roof earlier weren't you, think you're tough?' Hubert walks over and as he does the police officer shoots Vince in the head as the gun accidentally goes off in his hand. Vince slumps to the ground dead. Hubert holds the gun that Vince had just given him to the police officer's head, the officer holds his to Hubert's, and they shoot each other. The significance of Hubert being the one to finally use the gun, having argued the futility of violence and revenge all day, is to show that Vince's argument against turning the other cheek ('they'll kill you anyway') is just as valid. Hubert finally unleashes his hate from pragmatism, in full knowledge of what he is doing. This outcome, far from extreme, is entirely in keeping with the preceding 24 hours as the ongoing possibility and looming bottom line of a violent and oppressive reality. The ending is a refusal of hope when everything points in the other direction. A realisation of the aphorism: 'if they don't get you one way they'll get you another'. Yet it is the struggle against that realisation that makes up most of their life, most of the time.

Hate and *Ladybird* both show that the struggle in the lives of those who are oppressed by external agencies, produces relations other than oppression. Part of those relations are about acts of balancing the just about manageable with the threateningly catastrophic: things are bad but they could be worse. The films show that certainly whatever motivates social compliance and conformity, is missing, even when it seems not to be. Identification is replaced by compliance that is based on pragmatism and fear. In *Ladybird* Maggie's fear of losing her children means that she will go along with the social workers for part of the way; in *Hate* it is the fear of arrest, abuse and imprisonment that makes the young men as tolerant of things as they are. A central part of both films is the way their protagonists are working around the contradiction of 'compliance and resistance'. They are trying to resolve the question of how they should deal with their predicament, which is to say how they should deal with the oppression in their lives. Should they be defiant and make conflict explicit, or should they put survival before pride, self-control before free expression, and do they have a choice?

In both films defiant ways of being teeter on the edge of outright conflict, but most of the time are held in check. Maggie struggles with this constantly, knowing that to reveal the truth of her feelings jeopardises getting her children back and being allowed to keep them, yet the enormous strain and emotional trauma she is going through makes self-restraint near impossible. She is too stressed and too angry to 'pretend', to play with appearances, to be polite when inside she is screaming. She forces into the open the nature of the power relation between herself and the social workers, the health visitors and the foster parents: it is a conflict of interests. Maggie refuses an amnesiac approach to the things

she has learnt from experience, and states things as she sees them: 'Social workers is what's got my kids... they like to keep busy', 'They've done nothing for us whatsoever', 'You said I'd get my kids back'. To the Social Service's 'offer' of a place in a family centre to 'help' her 'rehabilitate and cope', and for them to be able to assess her situation, she replies: 'I'm not going to a detention centre, if you want to help me get me a flat'. To the social worker's polite enquiry as to why she's got a black eye, which Maggie knows is not motivated by concern, but by a necessity to gather 'evidence' of the unsuitability of her home environment for children, she replies: 'Ooh you've got fucking x-ray eyes today, well I hit in on this cupboard if you must know'. She tells the 'respectable', privately and securely housed foster mother that she has come round to see her son not to indulge in chit chat as if they were friends, the woman has her child: 'I haven't come here to drink your fucking coffee'. When the social workers talk about her relationship with Jorge as a means to assess its suitability they continually try to see problems and are looking for evidence. One tries to use the idea of language barriers as a fault in the relationship: 'Do you find it difficult to communicate?' Maggie immediately reveals the motivation and implication of the question: 'How do you think we communicate by tom-tom drums? I can't stand his guts is that what you want to hear?' However, the high stakes of letting such feelings through have to be constantly taken into account, she is constantly having to explain and excuse herself: 'Me mouth works before me brain... I'm mouthy it's just me, I can't help it'. While Jorge counsels restraint so that the social workers and judges can see her gentle side and cannot find the excuses to act against her, Maggie cannot easily transplant her feelings in this way and will not allow their calm tones to disallow her anger. This is at least partly because she knows deeply, in a perfectly rational way that they are not to be trusted. She is permanently vigilant of their language and intentions, she is quick to translate questions like 'How are you Maggie?', and the jargon of 'family centres', local authority and foster 'care', at 'risk' registers, place of 'safety' orders. The display of her feelings make explicit the truth of how things are for her: 'How can I be nice when they've got five of my kids?' She knows her enemy well, knows to expect the worst, and produces a defensive strategy as part of a siege mentality: don't let them near you; don't let them get hold of the children in the first place; once you're in the system they've got you; they'll try to push you to say things and act in ways that confirm their perspective and justify their actions; get as far away as possible; try to be anonymous; it's not going to be different next time.

When things have reached their lowest point and all six children have been taken away from her, the relationship between her and Jorge is taken to breaking point under the stress. At the point that Jorge becomes as angry and grief stricken as she has been all along, she shouts: 'What's wrong, got to you have they?' The meaning is that they got to her long

ago. Throughout the unfolding events Maggie carries a terrible expectation that things will not turn out well, as a knowledge and experience of oppression. But she also has a knowledge of survival. She knows that they can do terrible things to you and you have to carry on. Indeed it is that struggle to carry on that partly defies the odds against her. Part of the struggle is therefore a resistance to the ideas and effects of oppression. It is about maintaining a sense of integrity, of your own values, and a sense of what is really going on.

Maggie's mothering role is a defining part of her identity and a site of her resistance. Before Social Services get hold of her children, she struggles to look after them well in conditions of poverty. She knows and loves them as individuals and has developed warm, close relations with them. She is fussy about what they eat and wants the best for them. Different qualities of child rearing and home environment are one of the reasons she won't go into the 'family centre' and dislikes the foster parent. She pitches her own values against those of the social workers definition of 'good' families as generationally distinct, autonomous and individualising, stable and comfortable. Maggie tries to deal with the pressures put on her ability to mother with a resilient, protective and nurturing orientation to her family. It is in stark contrast to the alienation, violence and oppression that defines her relationship to the authorities.

After the removal of Maggie's first four children, her determination to have more children acts as a resistance to the determination of official authorities to control her mothering: 'We're going to have a family if it takes the rest of our lives'. Her refusal to give up wanting and trying to have a family shows not only the importance of maintaining hope as a spirit of resistance but specifically shows a highly positive value attached to children and the family as the reason for carrying on, the best thing life offers her. Motherhood and child rearing in these circumstances of poverty, stress, scrutiny and sustained efforts to prevent them are a site of positive value. They are also a site of resistance to the control of her reproduction by professionals and wider middle class social norms. This is all powerfully symbolised when Maggie is in labour with her fifth child and she refuses to push along with her contractions. She does not want to release the child from the safety of being inside her to be taken over by the professionals and norms of an outside world that are alien to her. The nature of this resistance, which is central to Maggie's story, is rarely understood by the professionalised classism that tries to pathologise reproductive behaviour that is not their own. Thus, some of the reviews of *Ladybird Ladybird* seemed to miss this meaning of Maggie's reproductive struggle:

'The only permanently worrying aspect in this searing film is the assumption that Maggie is right to have one child after another. Has no-one heard of over-population or condoms?'³⁵

³⁵ *The Times*, Film Review 22.2.94 p39

'...the chronic inability of his heroine Maggie, to practice birth control, seems to run counter to his usual left-wing tolerance.'³⁶

Maggie's resistance to a sanctioned reproductive role is not about conscious protest, but is part of her everyday life as a struggle to maintain a positive identity against externally imposed values and interests. She refuses their attempts to negate the meanings that she attaches to her own life: 'I'll tell you what's best for my kids, it's to be at home with me'; 'My interest is to have my son back, my kids interest is to have their brother back'. This is a struggle against taking on board their estimation of her, a struggle against feeling worthless. It is made so difficult that it is not always possible to sustain, she tells Jorge: 'I see trouble and I go to bed with it, me' 'Love's for fucking fairytales... I'm not worth it anyway'. But most of the time she is able to maintain distinctions between herself and those who seek to define her as a way to maintain self-esteem. Her resilience to their ways of thinking, talking, and acting are part of her defence against their attack on her difference.

Maggie's personal relationships with Jorge and her children focus the nature of her struggle as a struggle for optimism, hope and the future. Her relation to them is the positive meaning of her life, part of an emotional and psychological defence against unrelieved bleakness and defeat. The strength of her values, feelings and relationships are resilient ways of being poor and oppressed. On Maggie's first meeting with Jorge it is her humour, sensitivity and positive nature that are most apparent. These are underlain by the sadness and grief expressed in the poignant song she is singing for the pub Karaoke, but her spirit of survival in dealing with them is what comes through to Jorge. The pub is a place that Maggie can try to escape from her sadness and anger by trying to have a good time, singing, chatting, smoking, drinking. When she first meets Jorge she tells her sister: 'Eh I've copped off with Julio Iglesias!', and refuses to wallow in her sadness after telling Jorge something of her situation: '...but we've all got worries haven't we?' Much of this positive attitude is fragile and temporary. Once out of the pub her pain re-emerges: 'You don't realise how much sound goes round in your head 'til it's not there do you?' It's then, in the quiet that she breaks down and starts to tell Jorge her story.

In *Hate*, Vince, Hubert and Said are also involved in a struggle to find the best way of dealing with their immediate predicament and ongoing oppression. It is a struggle to achieve a balance between defiance and compliance which allows them some dignity but without jeopardising survival. Like Maggie's it is a struggle for positive identity and feeling in order that they are not totally consumed by hate and the oppression in their lives.

³⁶ *The Sunday Times*, Film Review 30.10.94 p10

The everyday lives of Vince, Hubert and Said express a variable but ubiquitous anti-authoritarianism that is related to exclusion from, and their rejection of, identification with wider society. It is not organised protest but is manifest in their social practice as a number of different ways of dealing with negative authority. They are *expected* to accept their economic powerlessness, their isolation on estates, their lack of choice, mobility, and status, and to be deferential to various forms of authority. The riots which start their story are a moment of spontaneous refusal to go along with this set up but their refusal is also shown in more diffuse ways of giving meaning to their lives which make up a cultural identity. They have ways of temporarily reversing the authority of situations, making something out of the nothing of boredom and desolate space: in the jokes and stories they tell each other, in their bravado and street style, in the way they face up to the police and answer back.

Vince's possession of a police gun provides the impetus for assessing their relation to authority, for thinking and talking about the possibility of taking it in different directions. The central narrative is their struggle with the understanding that there are no easy answers to the question of 'what to do' about their predicament. Through the events and reflections of the day and Hubert's rationalising, Vince comes to realise that having the gun changes nothing, that the gun in the hands of the police is an expression of power but that in his hands those power relations are not changed. It offers a momentary means of revenge, an illusion of power. However it is also a means of creating a fantasy of power, an imaginative resistance. Vince wants to keep hold of that idea of a dramatic resistance for as long as possible. As the story goes on we can see why.

A riot has taken place and their friend has been beaten into a coma, all their interaction with external authority figures is fraught with abuse and immanent conflict. Vince, in particular, is unwilling to keep up a consensual front. He wants to maintain the honesty of actual confrontation as an expression of how he is feeling and as a principled stance. The three friends try to visit Abdel in hospital but are refused access. Angry that they should be refused while the media is allowed in, they will not leave. A scuffle with security breaks out and while the media cameras snap the news of 'continuing trouble' Said is arrested. He is quickly released after the intervention of a community liaison police officer. These community police men are seen by the boys as buffers, explaining, defusing tension, keeping things ticking over. They facilitate the management of tensions, the management of the boys on a daily, ground level basis. However, they also try to position themselves as neutral mediators: 'We're only doing our job', and are more or less tolerated, providing a 'safe' outlet for defiant jibes and attitudes about the police. On his release Said insists that he's not looking for police favours but will still shake the officer's hand, Vince refuses the

compromise hand shake as a phoney consensus, maintaining integrity through distance:
 'You don't shake a pig's hand.'

For most of the time Vince and Hubert seem to represent opposing views on the question of balance between defiance and compliance, action and emotion versus reflection and rationality. Vince is emotional, ready to fight, puts principles first, saying of Hubert: 'The jerk thinks too much'. Hubert rationalises keeping out of trouble, is pragmatic, puts survival first, saying to Vince: 'You're headed for big shit.' Their sparring is really an attempt to resolve their predicament, a working through of two possibilities. As friends and as positions they are inextricably part of each other. The turn around ending as a reversal of positions - Vince having given the gun to Hubert is shot, Hubert uses the gun to shoot a policeman - shows just how inextricable their positions finally are. Neither positions were 'right' because the outcome was out of their control, there was no 'right' answer that they had failed to reach. The outcome recalls the story that Hubert has told earlier in the night as a metaphor of their lives: a man is falling 50 storeys, reassuring himself on the way down - 'so far so good, so far so good' - 'Like us on the estates, so far so good, it's not how you fall but how you land'. Its meaning conveys a mix of the arbitrary, the hopeful and unbearably predictable as characteristic of their own experiences. They cannot make plans, can only get by for the moment, trying not to think about the nature of their future as inevitable. It means that for most of the time they walk a knife's edge of risk between defiance and compliance. The price of defiance can be high: Hubert has done time in prison and refuses to glorify it, telling Vince that he's got to change his attitude before it is too late. His position is backed up by the failed attempt of Abdel's brother to shoot a policeman on the estate. The drive-by shooting is witnessed as a disaster when the car they're in won't re-start and they are quickly ambushed by waiting riot squads. The incident shows that guns and attitude are not enough, that permanent endangerment is the overriding aspect of violent confrontation with authority. Later in the day the friends focus their arguments:

Hubert - 'Wanting to kill a cop is jack shit'

Vince - 'I didn't say that, I said if Abdel dies, not for the hell of it.'

Hubert - 'Do you expect us to bring you gifts in prison?'

Vince - 'I expect nothing from someone who kisses cops arse. I'm fucking sick of all this. We live like shit in rat holes, you want to do fuck all to change things, you're my friends so I'm telling you if Abdel dies I'll kill a cop, so they'll know we don't turn the other cheek now.'

Said - 'Wow what a speech, half Moses, half Mickey Mouse.'

Hubert - 'Forget it, it's out of your league, if a cop dies do all cops go away? You can't blow them all away.'

Vince - 'You know what's right and wrong, why d'you take sides with them?'

Hubert - 'In school didn't we learn that hate breeds hate?'

Vince - 'I didn't go to school, I'm from the street and you know what it taught me? Turn the other cheek and you're a dead arsehole.'

These understandings about the stakes of confrontation and non-confrontation show that the absence of organised resistance or individual spontaneous action cannot be held to show a lack of knowledge or feeling about oppressive experience. The friends know the issues involved, the difficulty is deciding what to do about them in the knowledge that there may be nothing they can do. The conversation is a mixture of frustration, anger, idealism and realism that expresses a no-win situation. For most of the time their way of dealing with it is to try to counter on a daily basis those aspects of their oppression that work to deny them a positive identity, self and group esteem.

Positive expressions of who they are, are necessarily caught up with the negative meanings associated with them and where they live, and with dominant cultural values about what is desirable. The means through which they are able to articulate different meanings about who they are and where they live and to find value and worth in them, are partly taken from what is available to them economically and culturally from mainstream society. They improvise, make the best of what they've got, are inventive and resourceful. They do small time deals in cannabis and in stolen goods, not as an exclusive criminal fraternity but as part of an everyday way of getting by on their estate. Hubert leaves his drugs money for his mum to pay the gas bill, she asks him if his friend who is a fence for stolen goods in one of the other blocks has got hold of her new sewing machine yet and whether he can get hold of any text books for his brother who is taking his exams in the detention centre. Their ways of getting by are not empty of values and morals but have their own standards, situated within the lives they lead. None of the friends are living with their fathers, family authority is negotiated between siblings, and its outcomes respected among friends. Said is told to go home by his brother when trouble looks immanent; Said tells his younger sister she can't hang around particular areas or talk to Vince; Vince tells Said not to insult his sister; older groups have some authority over younger ones on the estate. Sticking together and looking out for each other are part of their code of living. It creates some safety, security and group identity when most other things work to create insecurity, danger and isolation.

A large part of the struggle of Vince, Hubert and Said to maintain pride in themselves and group esteem is about appearance: resisting the idea that they are unstylish and unsophisticated just because they're poor. In this they are very much part of wider social and cultural estimations about what has credibility. Their own fashions and music styles mix with mass trends. The influence of American culture is strong: they play American gangsta rap; wear American sports labels; their conversations are full of references to American films. Their ability to be part of fashions that are denied them because of their economic status is an achievement and a stand against a cultural exclusion that is at least partly forced upon them. They still look like they are 'from the estates' when they venture into Paris, but

among themselves they have enough of the right sort of style to maintain esteem within their groups. The disaster of Said's haircut - carried out by Vince with an electric shaver - is therefore a terrible thing in the style stakes. Said believes that it has ruined his chance of attracting women and has to wear a hat to hide the damage. The humour found in this incident is another aspect of their struggle to maintain a positive outlook and some happiness against the odds. Indeed the humour expressed in the 24 hours, in spite of some of the terrible things that are taking place, is a central part of the resilience that means they can carry on. Humour arises as a natural part of the way they relate to each other, from the situations they find themselves in, as an everyday way of being that often tries to find the best in the worst. Their botched attempt to hot-wire a car to try and get home, sets off alarms and wipers, attracts an advice giving drunkard, and is carried out with a running commentary of insults, jokes and laughter: 'it's the night of the living car'. It is a moment of madness and hilarity, just hours after Hubert and Said have been abused in the police cell. It is a way of coping, being young, making their own entertainment, being happy, when so much of their experience is about attempts to deny them those things.

The struggle to carry on and to resist in small measure, is shown in both *Hate* and *Ladybird*. *Ladybird* to be a struggle of many parts. The word 'struggle' carries a baggage of associations that are about working class/political/revolutionary struggle, often as the only struggle that is good enough to talk about. I have used it in the sense of a phrase that I have often heard - 'It's a struggle isn't it' - as a recognition that when you're working class and poor it is a struggle to just carry on. In these films it is shown to be a struggle against a daily oppression that is more extreme at particular times, but that commonly exists as a casual brutality. The capacities of these people to deal with this oppression in the best way they can, manifests itself in a myriad of ways from the defiance of authority figures to the sustenance of personal relationships. Both films give recognition to those who struggle in this way, they are shown as heroes and heroines doing something amazing.

2: TIME-SPACE

There is a line in the film 'In the Heat of the Night' where Sidney Poitier is trying to warn a black woman against ending up in prison : 'We all know there's black time and there's white time'. This is about the difference that being black makes to what might appear to be the same time passing, in this case prison time. It is also my starting point. What does class do to time? Not just time spent in prison, but everyday time. Both *Hate* and *Ladybird* are about working class time, poor time, and poor time-space. They are about the difference that class makes to living in what appears to be the same time-space dimension as everyone else.

In both films 'time' is not employed time, as the time that is traditionally associated with the working class. When work is removed from working class men and women, and child rearing is not seen as 'work' for either, then the meaning of 'working class' would seem to be ambiguous. In these circumstances it has different meanings but also historically continuous meanings. In the stories of *Hate* and *Ladybird* being working class is about more than working and more than work as traditionally defined. These are stories about working class time on benefits: time that is made up of everyday extremes and everyday ordinariness. The temporalities of the films are apparently different: *Hate* is a chronological 24 hours, *Ladybird*, *Ladybird* is made up of flashbacks into the past, elapsing time, and epilogue. However I am talking about a parallel time to the time of clocks that cannot be so easily measured and classified. Classed time is not just about minutes and months passing, the rhythms of life, although they are part of it, it is about the working class poor living time in a different way to the mainstream, living time differently though the time passing is the same.

In both stories, time has an unstructured character. It is unplanned, unknowable, out of the control of the protagonists who are driven and buffeted along by the schedules, plans and intentions of others. They deal with events as they happen, arrangements are not possible. Carrying on, getting on with it, getting through the day are ways of everyday living. In a very real way these are lives that feel like they have no future, the future is so much out of their control: it exists mainly as an imaginative time swinging between hopeful and hopeless anticipation.

The everyday of Maggie's time is about her children, the struggle of bringing them up, staying together, and when they are taken from her, visiting them, thinking about them, fighting to get them back. Time passing is marked by her nine month pregnancies, going from court hearing to court hearing, being visited by social worker after social worker. The

outcome of these activities is always unknown: they represent time taken up, consumed, invested in but with no security or guarantees attached to it. In this way Maggie's time is devalued, it is not viewed as something that entitles her to anything, it is something she must give without expectation or reward. This derogation of her time is the hallmark of external intervention in her life. She must perform, please, appease, be accountable, be ever-prepared for check up visits by health visitors and social workers and ever wary of just answering the door once intervention has become an intention to remove her children permanently. The sheer time consuming nature of this intervention is represented through a sequence in which one plate of biscuits after another is offered to different social workers on a seemingly endless merry-go-round of visits in which Maggie must impress, appear to be deserving, respectable, amenable, continually taking into account *their* perceptions and feelings. The time that she has invested in her six children, in pregnancy and child rearing can be written off at a stroke by the report of a social worker, in the decision of a judge. Such time has no monetary value: it is seen as freely and naturally given and therefore can be dismissed without compunction, or compensation. Through the actions and judgements of Social Services Maggie's time spent with her first four children is rendered disposable, a waste of time. The personal relationships, interdependencies and ties of understanding between her and her children are discounted and severed. The decisions represent an assault on Maggie's worth: she has given everything she can give and it is not good enough. Yet Maggie has shown nothing but the highest regard for her children's well being in the circumstances that she is in. In the refuge she tries to keep them away from the other children - 'the little sods' - who are running around; she tells the foster mother she doesn't want Sean eating 'muck' like Tomato ketchup all over his food; she leaves the family centre when she hears the shouting and sees the older children hanging around. She knows the personalities of her children and sings their praises, telling Jorge about her second son Mickey: 'For someone who's got nothing and wants to be everything, that's brilliant'. Maggie's efforts to do the best for her children are therefore shown most of all in the time she spends with them, talks and thinks about them, and puts into getting them back.

This sort of time cannot be accounted, it is 'inside' as part of her own and her children's psyches. It is (dis)missed by the superficial, transient regard of the Social Services and family courts. They see material poverty, bleakness, a record of violent partners, her angry outbursts. They do not see the fullness of Maggie's time: the details of her everyday that carry so much of the truth of who and how she is. They cannot credit her ability to be different in other circumstance: in her everyday life she is changing and spontaneous while their snapshots are static and reductive. The social workers see the fire at the refuge and her burnt son, her karaoke singing in the pub, her black eye, the shabby flat,

her fleeing from them with the man who has beaten her. But they don't see the life that these things are embedded in which gives them their meaning as part of her life. Instead their estimation of particular snapshots of her life, come to assume the definitive 'truth' of its totality. They pass through seeing what they need to see as evidence to justify their intrusion and protect their careers. In the family court, five quietly spoken sentences of carefully selected professional judgements wipe out the purpose of half of Maggie's life. In less than an hour her own understandings of her identity as a mother, her children's best interests, her life of time-invested struggle, are made to count as nothing by professional judgement of their worth. *Their* meanings construct her past and that of her children, and reset their future.

'Everyday life' is meant to imply 'the ordinary' as that which usually goes unremarked upon. The idea that the everyday is worthy of attention, that it is about more than an expanse of time where nothing much happens has academic status within geography's cultural turn.³⁷ *Ladybird Ladybird* is about everyday life where for a lot of the time, the ordinary is extra-ordinary, the normal is extreme. Maggie's story shows the difference that working class poverty and oppressive relations with various authorities can make to the 'everyday' as conventionally understood as the unremarkable. It requires that in this case the meaning of 'everyday life' is seen as strongly classed and gendered. A large part of 'working class time' is lived in extremities of poverty, stress and violence, with little if any financial security or collateral of any means to extract yourself from desperate situations. This creates precariousness and vulnerability in which time is not in your control and is not your own. Maggie's time is spent in anticipation, preparation, presentation, vigilance. She is in a state of siege that is mentally and physically exhausting. The fragility of holding things together is shown by a total susceptibility to trigger events. Such events are apparently ordinary, routinely happening, or temporary fixes: locking the door of her room in the refuge from the outside; starting a new relationship; an argument with a social worker; oversleeping the morning she plans to escape with her children; a swear word in court; a visiting relative unthinkingly opening the door, to the police. For Maggie their consequences are huge and uncontainable. She cannot afford risks and is not allowed to make mistakes, when things go wrong for her she is accused and punished.

Where events and decisions gather negative momentum, and Maggie's time is ruptured by traumatic interventions, the significance of 'starting again' in personal relationships and through pregnancies is considerable. It marks a refusal to be beaten, to have your future controlled by what others have made of your past. When they have labelled

³⁷ Connections with earlier geographical work on the 'everyday' should be noted here (see Ley.D (1977) Social Geography and the taken-for-granted-world p498-512 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography*) as well as the influence of traditionally non-geographical writers on the subject (De Certeau.M (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Trans. Rendall.S.F) London: University of California Press; Lefebvre.H (1991) *Critique of Everyday Life* London: Verso)

and pathologised her, taken away all six children, undermined her relationship with Jorge to the point that she turns on him, Maggie's ability to 'start again' is her greatest resistance. It is an attempt to take control of her time, by refusing to have it ordered by a system of sanctions and of values that are nothing to do with *her* life. For Maggie 'reproductive control' is not about planned pregnancies when her life is got through on a daily basis, or being able to 'afford' children when she can't afford anything much, or limited numbers of children by the same father when fathers disappear or turn violent. It is about being allowed to make decisions about having children without intervention, choosing to go on having children even though she is poor. Her struggle to have this family takes time, she keeps on trying with time at last on her side. The epilogue tells us that Maggie and Jorge go on to have three more children who are not removed by the Social Services.

Hate starts with news footage of clashes between riot police and groups of young men on a public housing estate. We see the riot as the opening credits roll. The riot is not the story, it is what is shown to the country: a prime time image of these people and places. What follows is another story that starts as 10.38 flicks onto the screen, the beginning of 24 hours of working class time. The 24 hours is that which is normally unseen, not conventionally measurable, known only by those who live it. In *Hate* it is the everyday time of Hubert, Vince and Said passing in the aftermath of a riot, seen entirely from their perspective. Unlike the momentary media snapshot, it is a changing view, a developing narrative of passing time. The activities of small time drugs dealing, police chases, stealing cars, shoplifting, when situated in the fullness of their time, as part of 24 hours of experience, are normalised and naturalised. Everything fits together on the same level of experience, things happen and follow on from each other. They do not exist in hierarchies and categories of the 'criminal' or 'petty' as opposed to the 'normal', but are all of a piece and make sense in relation to each other. Their meaning is intrinsically part of the day and the lives in which they occur. The choice of the 24 hours is therefore not about that number of hours per se, primarily it expresses the difference that being-a-part-ness and the bigger picture, make to understanding and meaning. It is that quality which is so lacking from so many representations of working class lives, abstracted from their bearing in working class time.

Most of the time Vince, Hubert and Said are not involved in the sort of extreme or 'criminal' events which are used to define the totality of their lives. This is not to say that events which may be commonly understood as extreme - such as police abuse - are experienced as anomalous rather than continuous with the rest of their lives. It is to situate their meaning in the myriad of other happenings that make their time a way of being. The

friends sit around talking and not talking in bedrooms, in playgrounds, on roofs; they hang around with other young people on the estate, sharing food, joking, bragging, recounting stories to each other, watching each other break dance; they sit and talk with their family, do shopping for family food, try to help out with homework, they cut each other's hair, listen to music, watch the television. The minutiae of the day - from the price of a milkshake in town, the new cut of a hairstyle, to their perception of the advertising billboards which line their journey to and around Paris - all has significance, and no less significance than the riot itself. It defines their relation to each other, to the place they live in, to their families, to the world off the estate. It is a multi-layered complex relation through which they know themselves and their place in the world. It is through this spent time that their lives find meaning, through which experience and identity become classed. Their time is classed because it is actively made so, by everything that they go through and the meaning that is attached to it by themselves and by others. Even the most apparently insignificant parts of the day go to make up that meaning. At 14.12 p.m. Vince, Hubert and Said are sitting on blocks in a playground, 'doing nothing', no-one is saying anything, they look at a graffiti covered wall behind them, Hubert kicks a syringe needle that's lying at his feet. This is apparently unremarkable time, but it produces particular sorts of understandings for those living it, they know what this means in their lives and it is no less significant than the riot itself.

For Said, Vince and Hubert, time passes unstructured by plans or expectations. It is fluid and precarious, events are often unpredictable and seemingly arbitrary. Their lives are not made up of pre-meditated actions, individual decisions or choices about the lives they want to lead, wilfully carried out. The overriding feeling about their time is that it is haphazardly directed by the will of others, things happen and they react, not in pre-determinable ways but clearly not in unpredictable ways either. As Hubert says of the gym that took him two years to get a grant for: 'I knew it'd go up in smoke one day'. Like Maggie they are susceptible to trigger events: situations escalate in unforeseen ways, actions of others on the estate embroil everyone, their lives are wholly connected and consequences shared. Thus the attempt of Abdel's brother to shoot a policeman on the estate leads to his ambush by riot police, the onlooking crowd's attempt to defend him leads to the police turning on the crowd, a desperate escape to avoid arrest leads to Vince pulling the gun on a policeman and only being prevented from shooting it by a last minute intervention of Hubert knocking the policeman out instead. These moments reveal how precarious their lives are, poised to collapse in breakdowns or explode in conflict. The arrest and abuse of Hubert and Said in Paris leads to them missing the last train back to the estate so that they arrive back the next morning to encounter the policemen who taunt them and 'accidentally' shoot Vince.

Clearly this apparent arbitrariness is part of a bigger picture, a pattern of endangerment. Both the actions and reactions of those living on the estate and of the police are part of a continuous social relation, manifest in apparently arbitrary ways but with outcomes tending in one direction. These are not isolated events that can be explained individually in terms of the behaviour of a few, whether a 'criminal hard-core' or a 'bad policeman'. They cannot be guarded against or prevented from happening again by a change in behaviour. They are part of particular circumstances, social relations and power inequalities that do not change much through time. This is powerfully symbolised when one of the young men on the estate turns the speakers of his music system outwards onto the courtyard where people have gathered the morning after the riot. Using his mixing turn tables he creates his own music: a powerful mix of NWA's (Niggers With Attitude) gangsta rap 'Fuck the police', and Edith Piaf's 'Je ne regrette rien'. The message is that they don't regret the riots and are still defiant. The NWA/Piaf mix expresses the continuity between two cultures of class through time: the old and the new, across generations, voices from the 1940s 'slums' to the 1990s estate 'ghettos'.

The places where poor, working class people live have historically been used to make judgements about the sort of people who live there. Working class places and working class people are put together in a degraded alliance: both problematic, unsightly and unsavoury. Outside of their own areas such people are 'out of place', liable to contaminate other people and places with their problems. Burglaries, vandalism, and violence attend their presence. In the contemporary period people from council estates, especially young men are set up as the prime culprits of such disorder, roaming and permanently overstepping the boundaries of other people's space. *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* choose to invest 'poor space' and poor subjectivities with different meanings, meanings about working class space, its contours and its boundaries.

Both *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* have issues of public housing at their core. This is shown by the meaning it is given as a marker of identity; its social relation to other spaces such as middle class residential areas and the city; and its material centrality to the lives of the working class poor in terms of its quality, availability and physical location. In *Ladybird Ladybird* it is a lack of availability of council housing that drives Maggie and her children into dangerous and untenable situations and accommodation. It means that on leaving her own council flat to escape her violent partner Maggie must go into a refuge that is itself unsafe due to faulty wiring and damp. A resultant fire sets off the train of events leading to the removal of her children. After the fire, it is the lack of availability of a council flat which means she has to return with her children to her old flat where her violent partner still lives, in order to keep a roof over their heads. Both moves are seen by social workers as evidence

of Maggie's inability to provide a safe home for her children. The foster home in which her eldest son Sean is placed, in a middle class residential street, is deemed to be such a home. Its stripped pine dressers and unshared bedrooms are in stark contrast to the home that Maggie can provide. The visible, material nature of this home is made to represent what a 'good' home is like: 'evidence' on the basis of which social workers and judges differentiate the good and the bad, suitable and unsuitable. Early on Maggie provides her own definition of her needs and interests in terms of basic needs provision: '...if you really want to help me get me a flat'. In doing this she reveals the nature of a system of resource distribution in which social workers are paid to manage *her* as a substitute for the material help that would alleviate her problematic *circumstances*. The fact that Maggie is denied a home at crucial points in her life is the catalyst of disaster for her. It represents her powerlessness as a total lack of material resources, and the failure of a Social Services system that her material poverty is so used in judgement against her, conflated with estimations of her parental abilities. It is easier for them to remove her children than to secure the provision of a council house.

After the removal of her children into 'care' and foster homes Jorge and Maggie, pregnant with her fifth child, manage to get hold of a small flat on another estate. It is damp but still 'lovely' because it represents space of their own which makes possible the having of a family. However, Maggie's home space does not have the same meanings of 'property, privacy and ownership' that define other sorts of housing in middle class areas. The meanings that define Maggie's housing are strongly related to those which define her identity. Their basis is a relation to public resources through which public management is sanctioned: Maggie's council flat is public property, and her reproductive behaviour and choice of partners are also public property. She can be commented upon, judged, subjected to intervention, treatment and punishment. External agencies trample on personal space which is deemed to belong to everyone but Maggie herself. She is never granted the expectation or right to be housed, safe and left alone. The flat which Maggie secures with Jorge, is a casing that provides no defence. Indeed it is part of her relation with the State that makes her easy to find. Social workers peer and shout through the letter box; they survey the flat for evidence of her ability to provide a good home; home visits by social workers and health visitors check up on her mothering; social workers and police ambush the flat, pushing past her sister who opens the door to seize her new baby. After the birth of her sixth child Maggie is not even allowed to take her from the public space of the hospital, the child is removed by social workers and police officers hours after being born. It is the final violation of any autonomous space that she thought she had. It marks her struggle as a

struggle for different kinds of space - for public housing, and for domestic and personal autonomy - against public interventions to deny her them.

For Maggie public space is where judgements are delivered and sanctions enforced. In it she can find no safety or defence. This is powerfully represented by the court space where professionals sit in judgement and pronounce upon her life. Within that space Maggie's future is cast. The evidence is static, the judgement fixed. Her life is circumscribed within the boundaries of their perspective: '[she has shown] a refusal to avail herself of efforts by Social Services to help her'; '[she is] beyond help... a woman of low intellect and little self control'. To Maggie it is a cold, hard, inhumane space, impenetrable, unnegotiable. The contrast between her reaction of emotional trauma, and the business-like delivery of legal judgement is extreme. Hers is entirely out of place, the sort of reaction that is too personal and emotional for the court space. It symbolises the total collapse of boundaries that has been brought about between Maggie's personal space and the public realm so that by the end of the film her entire life has been taken over as public space. Her final attempt to refuse that colonisation is shown in her efforts to fight her labour contractions to keep her child within, knowing that her womb is a space they cannot get to.

In *Ladybird Ladybird* working class space is materially and figuratively a bound space. Maggie is trapped in her first flat, she cannot take her children and escape to alternative housing; her children are locked into the refuge while it burns; she is trapped into returning to her violent partner in order to keep a roof over her head; she is trapped as she sits through home visits of officials one after the other. She is boxed in by external perceptions and judgements: her identity fixed, her future considered to be a foregone conclusion, her life circumscribed. For Maggie, Jorge and her children this bound space has no defences, is never safe. Their insecurity and lack of control over their lives is shown by the total lack of boundaries to the spaces they occupy. Whatever space they are in is taken over by events that are driven by others. The pub as a place of escape and pleasure; the hospital as a place to bring her child into the world; the home as a place of safety and retreat. All have their meanings changed by a permeating violence and oppression. Within their home Jorge must hide from social workers in cupboards; they cannot freely answer the door of their flat; they must hide and pretend to be other people by using other names. There is no space that Maggie settles in, she is almost continuously in transit between flats, the refuge, the family centre. She is running as fast as she can back from the pub to the burning refuge; running away with her children from the social workers who chase after her; running away from her violent partner. She cannot control the access that others have to her because she cannot afford to buy safety, privacy or distance. Far from a middle class idea of mobility

as travel and freedom from boundaries Maggie's mobility is about being unsafe, uprooted, trying to escape, being pushed, being on the run.

Maggie's paradoxical occupation of space - bound yet unprotected, going nowhere yet transient - is about her social position. She has overstepped the mark of particular middle class norms and behaviour and the reason that she cannot get away with it is because she is poor. Transferred to a middle class space as a 'lifestyle', her family form would perhaps be considered bohemian, her personality tempestuous, her residential instability choosy; her choice of partners unlucky and then adventurous. In working class space they are the mark of an unfit mother. As a consequence she is allowed no boundaries, no defences, no autonomy, security or freedom. She is made to feel that her occupation of any space at all is illegitimate: 'They won't be happy 'til I'm dead'.

The feelings of Vince, Hubert and Said about the estate they live on are highly ambivalent. They express a complex way of relating to a place of virtual confinement. The estate is part of who they are because most of their time is spent there. They have grown up with and grown familiar with both the people and the space of the estate and they identify with it. It is also a place that is negatively implicated in the way they are perceived and treated by outsiders. It is somewhere that has hardly any amenities, is cut off from the rest of the city and often feels boring when they have no money, and no choice about being there or not. The standard of the housing is poor: cramped, noisy and too hot in the summer. 'The estate' is not really theirs because it is occupied not owned, allocated to them not chosen by them, but still it's all they've got. This ambivalence is pronounced in the aftermath of the riot in a mixture of horror, amazement and satisfaction at the destruction that has taken place. On the one hand they have turned against all they had - burnt out their gym, cars and community buildings; on the other, it was not much anyway, their anger has been registered, they have shown that they have to be contended with. They do not blame each other and there is no interest in finding out who destroyed what or who 'started' it. Hubert and Said were not part of the riot and the extent of Vince's involvement is deliberately unclear: the point being that it does not really matter who did what. They all share the space, the disaffection and the consequences.

Nevertheless, for Hubert the riot is a sign that things are getting worse and could spiral out of control at any time. He feels the need to extricate himself before it happens, expressing his sense of foreboding to his mum after Vince has shown him the gun: 'I'm fed up with the estate, I want to get out'. His mum replies: 'Well bring me a lettuce back', in recognition of what remains a fantasy of escape. This day is to be his last, escape routes if they ever existed, are now too late. Importantly, the escape he wants is not about aspiration

and self-betterment, but survival. He tries to make his friends see things in the same way that he does, he does not want to leave them behind physically or in terms of ideas. As they travel into Paris on the train he is acutely aware of their shared confinement and the lie of a wider culture as they pass advertising hoardings of travel companies offering unlimited possibilities of choice, travel and escape: 'The World Is Yours'. He knows they are going nowhere and own nothing. Said graffiti's over the same advert later in the day so that it reads 'The World Is Ours', indicating that it is the travel companies not theirs. Their travel, shown in the trip to Paris, is not about escape or choice. Who they are travels with them, making their passage endangered by the perceptions and actions of others. Ultimately they must return to where they come from because escape - like the promise of en masse upward mobility - is mostly fantasy.

Of the three friends, Vince is most enthused by the collective meaning of the riot and defiantly proud of the estate as part of his identity. At one point he shouts at the others: 'I know who I am and where I'm from', as a criticism of what he sees as half-heartedness in their feelings about the riot. He is also the one most angry about their living conditions: 'We live like shit in rat holes'. He struggles to combine pride in who he and where he is from with anger about what it is like to live there. As he wanders through the estate he hallucinates a cow, symbolising his heightened subconscious awareness of the incongruity of these concrete expanses in the middle of nowhere, built on green-field sites and given bucolic names - theirs is 'Chanteloupe-les-vignes' - recalling the woods and fields that were once there. These 'suburbs' like many British council estates were conceived as improved housing for urban slum dwellers, they are sprawling and crowded at the same time and most of all they are isolated. The camera frames this isolation through distant shots in which space is used to convey separation and alienation. In French, suburbs ('les banlieues') literally means place of exile. For Vince, Hubert and Said its meaning is manifest in their daily feeling of displacement from the mainstream, felt most acutely when they travel off the estate into Paris. The Parisian police who pick them up tell them: 'You're far from the slums now', as a threatening taunt that they are not on home ground. Missing the last train back leaves them stranded in Paris over night, their apparent mobility replaced by a sense of isolation, vulnerability, stasis.

Distance from the metropolis as socio-spatial marginalisation, exists with the sorts of global cultural connections and inequalities which mean that the experiences of Vince, Hubert and Said are almost instantly recognisable. Their housing is the product of the same ideology of slum clearance and modernisation that gripped much of the Western world, its problems are not unique; their unemployment is the product of the same processes of deindustrialisation and employment restructuring that have adversely affected a generation

of young working class men in the West; their poverty is the product of the same monetarist ideology that has undermined the ethos of welfare provision in America and Europe wide; their cultural dissonance in relation to these developments has global-local expression in hybrid forms of music and fashion which includes mass consumption of American films, sports fashions and street slang. These global connections mean that in a number of ways Vince, Hubert and Said have more in common with the sort of harassment that young black men on the streets of London are subject to, with the isolation of Edinburgh's outer council estates and with the poverty of young people on benefits in Liverpool than with the uptown economies and cultures of Parisian society. This is humorously shown in a scene in which the three friends enter the elite space of a Parisian art gallery that has free entry: 'What can we lose?' They help themselves to food and wine, hardly able to contain their amusement and disbelief that it is freely available. They treat the exhibition with a mixture of fascination and irreverence. The gallery goers look over at them suspiciously, and they jokingly reprimand themselves: 'Behave arseholes'. Said persuades Hubert to approach two attractive young women and to chat up 'the sister' for him. Hubert approaches deftly and tells them that Said - romantic, shy and a poet - would like to talk to her. Said follows him over and almost instantly offends the women with direct chat up lines. Vince and Hubert stand by laughing as the women get more and more irate: 'You're so aggressive, how can we respect you?' The situation quickly degenerates into a noisy exchange of insults to which the quietly spoken, liberal exhibition manager tries to intervene. His pleas for them to calm down go unheeded and the friends are ejected back onto the street, laughing, shouting and swearing at the crowd as they go: 'Have fun... You're all ugly... Fuck you all'. Once they are out, the manager turns as if to explain, shrugging his shoulders: 'Off the estates... troubled youth'. The scene is about them being out of place, alien in a middle class space that is not about them, despite its open access. It is about a liberal arts crowd who might well have been gathered to see a photo exhibition of 'troubled youth off the estate'. It is a crowd who would know about the problems of 'troubled youth' but only in abstract. In the flesh, in proximity, they exceed the fantasy, cause offence and have to be expelled. The black 'sister' turns out not to be like the black sisters Said is used to. She expects a particular sort of social interaction with young men of her own class and is outraged when Said does not act according to those norms. Their social distance in terms of class cannot be brokered by physical proximity. The situation is fraught as soon as Hubert's construction of Said as a shy, romantic poet is not in evidence. As soon as they stop pretending to be something that they are not, 'difference' becomes conflict. The expectation that they should adjust their behaviour because they are the ones who do not fit, reveals the classed nature of the space. The scene shows a recklessness on their part as they recognise that they have no investment

in this space: 'What can we lose?' In relation to the two hours of police cell abuse that Hubert and Said have just walked away from, they have nothing to lose, it is just a laugh. The scene shows how some differences can deny others expression because of power relations (here manifest in the gallery space), and how conflict is produced when differences refuse to be denied. The gallery scene is a head on collision of working class 'difference' in middle class space.

The gallery is not the only space in which the friends are deemed to be 'out of place'. Through the 24 hours their occupation of public space both on and off the estate is deemed problematic. There is nowhere 'safe', nowhere they can be left alone. Cameras pry when they are just sitting around outside; they are ejected from the hospital on trying to visit Abdel; they are cleared from the roofs where they hang out, for the mayor's visit; on the streets of Paris they are arrested; they are ejected from the public gallery; they return to their own streets to be harassed and then shot. Indeed it is only in the domestic space of their homes that they can escape from the danger and constant vigilance that is required outside. They all have domestic lives as well as street lives, and in many ways their homes are a refuge from outside. Here they do not have to permanently show bravado, instead practising in the mirror styles and attitudes to be performed outside. In their family relations there is inter-generational dependency, financial help, affection, tolerance. It is mainly through these domestic scenes - Said's botched haircut; Vince's morning routine with his family; Vince and Said practising street styles in the mirror scenes; Hubert confiding in his mum and retreating to his bedroom - that we see the underbelly of some of their aggressive stances outside. The main difference is that outside they have to occupy a space in which they are subject to disparagement and danger as part of their everyday experiences. Throughout the 24 hours they are continually reminded that public space is not theirs: they are out of place, illegitimate, inappropriate or unwanted. They occupy it under hostile conditions, and create behavioural and psychological defences in order to survive it.

In *Ladybird Ladybird* Maggie produces her own behavioural and psychological defences in order to cope with the exigencies of her life. As with Vince, Hubert and Said that struggle to cope involves a defence against oppressive parts of the public realm as the spaces regulated by police officers, social workers, judges, council officers, and health visitors. Such defences are a way of occupying 'unsafe' space. At the beginning of Maggie's story that is the domestic space of the flat she shares with a brutal partner. From there, there is nowhere she can go to be safe. With the arrival of Jorge she struggles to have a home space that is free from external intervention, while he struggles to remain anonymous in public space as a refugee without papers. Like Maggie he must be permanently vigilant, escaping the

surveillance that regards him as an alien who has crossed the borders of national space. The nature of Maggie's domestic space changes through time. For her, the processual nature of time and space is the possibility of change and the hope that things will one day be better. Similarly in *Hate* the space the friends occupy at home, on the estate and in the metropolis of Paris, is not 'one thing'. 'The estate' is both part of their displacement and confinement, and part of their social awareness, anger and pride in their identities. In both stories change and complexity does not detract from the notion of classed time and space. For Maggie, Vince, Hubert and Said their class remains intrinsic to who they are, shaping and being shaped by their experiences, its meaning made through the nature of those experiences. Their experiences of subjection and oppression happen because of their class; they are lived through modalities of gender and race; and they are felt in personal ways. Both stories show the detail of that class experience, as situated in the space of the home, the city, the estate, through the passing of time. In common is a feeling for the meaning of working class time and space as bound and undefended, isolated and globally connected, changing and continuous.

3: SUBJECTIVITY-COLLECTIVITY

The idea of 'class consciousness' is so associated with the history of Marxism in theory and practice that it sounds outdated and awkward in use. In those traditional formulations associated with the proletariat and revolution, 'class consciousness' is a collective understanding of a shared social position and an awareness of how that can be politically changed. Yet the phrase itself only means an awareness of class and in that respect can also be used to convey personal feelings and understandings about yourself as part of society. This does not mean that subjective feelings about different parts of yourself and how they fit into society will necessarily register in terms of 'class'. Class is a personal and potentially divergent notion, so its use as a means to express shared social positions and possibly understandings which are about more than economic location, is potentially problematic. To use it in that respect is therefore to engage with a *mythology* of class, or a *strategic* notion of class, and to recognise that these ideas of class are an important part of its meaning. This last themed section addresses the nature of class subjectivities in the films in those terms: class is not explicitly referred to but is played out as an intrinsic relation between subjectivities and collectivities, and between 'ideas' and 'realities' of classed social positions. These are relations between the personal, the shared, and the different: the 'I', the 'we' and the 'they'; and between the apparent, the imagined, and the possible of classed ways of being and becoming.

Both *Hate* and *Ladybird* tell stories about subjective experiences of poverty, oppression and class. They do not show what those things *are* but what they *mean* to those who are living them. The story is their story, in all its complexity, from their point of view. We are not shown things that they cannot see. Maggie's sense of the impenetrability of decisions made against her, and her horror about what is happening to her is the sense and horror of the film's perspective. It is hardly possible to anticipate what is going to happen next: 'surely they *can't* take this child too', 'how can this be happening?' The camera view is part of this subjective mode, inside what is going on, never apart from it. Despite this relation of interiority, the film does not individualise Maggie. Similarly, what is going on in *Hate* is not about the protagonists per se: they are socially embedded, relations are thoroughly socialised. Through this 'socialisation' of the subjective, a sense of the collective emerges. We are looking at social outcomes, institutions and professional practices that involve groups of people. The perspective is one-sided and angry, creating a political edge that forges subjective-collective meanings. Those meanings are not

necessarily articulated by the characters and they are not 'one thing'. They are lived in myriad ways, negotiated as matters of difference and belonging.

In *Hate* both difference and belonging are partly lived through the play of appearance and fantasy. They are partly about the images that Vince, Hubert and Said want and need to project to others, how they imagine and describe themselves, in relation to meanings that others read from those appearances and project onto them. This relation between visibility and meaning is at the core of both films. Outsider views of Maggie and Jorge, Vince, Hubert and Said are based on their appearance *via* the perspectives of middle class professionals in media, law and welfare agencies. That perspective - extrinsic, superficial, evidential - is above all a denial of the selfhood of those it views.

The start of *Hate* is the media view of the riot: lads throwing missiles, running, setting fire to cars, fronting the police. A while later we see Vince waking up in his bedroom, looking the epitome of the sort of youth that would be associated with riots, typically 'thuggish' with his skinhead haircut and knuckle-duster jewellery. Then follows the first of two mirror scenes, the second being Said's, which show the two of them getting ready to go out onto the street where style and attitude are a way of being and getting by with some respect. In the mirror they perform as hard men like the contenders they see in American films. Vince, like Robert de Niro in 'Taxi Driver', acts out an adversarial street encounter - the look, the stance, the attitude - 'You talkin' to me?' Later, Said does the same, mimicking aggressive taunts: 'You wanna fuck me? I'm going to screw you all, you, him, her..' The scenes are about the importance of style as cultural capital; about defences that are cultivated against violence and rejection; they are about the sort of masculinities and role models that are made available and the heavy influence of American film culture; they are about highly mediated, fictive and performative aspects of subjectivities produced in particular circumstances.

The identities of the young men from the estate are not seen in those terms by outsiders, they are seen as the direct expression of their aggressive, violent and machoistic natures. Such views are devoid of understandings about the exigencies of their lives, its psychological and performative defences, where status and credibility are something that they must create for themselves with the economic and cultural resources that are made available to them. This is about recognising the genesis and meaning of particular behaviours which in the case of Vince and Said are about desiring appearances which offer them positive degrees of engagement with a wider culture. Such appearances do not represent the totality of their lives: the mirror scenes themselves are partly comical, Vince and Said are playing with identities as fantasies not moulding themselves into macho strait-jackets. Furthermore those masculinities also intimidate them, they struggle to make the

grade as part of a struggle with drugs, with violence, with boredom, with who they are. They are not aficionados: Said's haircut goes wrong and Vince humorously riles him about it - 'Is this the fashion in New York?'; Vince does not become a gun-touting-hard man, he cannot sustain the attitude, is ill at ease, uncertain, improvising and ultimately he is unprotected by it. These images, partly achieved, give them a very limited sort of power. The police still abuse them, the media make monkeys of them, but within that they are able to cultivate some personal and peer group esteem. Appearance is therefore a central part of the way they deal with a class identity and predicament that mostly renders them powerless in relation to societal ways of dealing with them.

Of the three friends, Vince most plays with his identity as the realm of the possible, a fantasy realm which the others partly deflate ('You dreamt it more like') and partly foster as a source of excitement and entertainment. Vince's retelling of the riot scenes is a story of the rioters' heroism, the police's fear, a spectacle of riot and rebellion. This is not about self-aggrandising exaggeration, it is part of the way that he has experienced the events. Fantasy as reality, reality as fantasy, are collapsed as opposites, merged in 'the way that it was'. He replays the confrontation like a film or drama in which power relations are reversed and the rioters have control: 'I kicked a pig right in the head'; 'They stepped aside to make a path for us'. This is partly an expression of what he would like to do to the police, the truth of his feeling located within actual events, given meaning through his emotional, psychological and physical experience. Part of that is about a realised desire to be part of the action on their terms when usually they are denied a role as their lives are mediated and made into entertainment and news for others. Said and Hubert dispute the terms of that participation, while Vince insists that the riots combined authentic entertainment and empowerment:

Said - 'Tear gas, two nights with the police, all the fists you can eat, hell at home, sorry mate but I ain't buying it'

Vince - 'Gimme a break! It was war against the pigs live and in colour'

The point made is that the riots were both these things: a battle with the police with small victories for the rioters, but a battle with a price. Good and bad, fantasy and reality. That fluid meaning allows different stories to emerge, and is part of a particular way of being in the world that is an imaginative engagement with an otherwise often depressing existence. This is further shown in the talk of groups of young men hanging around the day after the riot, apparently doing nothing but creating exciting realities for themselves through sex talk, gun talk, film talk. These episodes show them collectively forging classed masculinities, testing the boundaries of individual identities in relation to the group, moulding collective identities as understandings, attitudes, and values. They all recognise the fantastic elements of each other's stories and there are limits to the imaginative license they grant each other. When Vince admits he cannot drive as they try to hot-wire a car in Paris, his story of having

driven a beautiful girl around the Israeli desert in a Mercedes, is hurled back at him. The accusation of 'fraudulence' is humorous rather than serious: they never wholly believed him anyway, their willing belief was part of the fantasy. Mostly there is an openness to personal and symbolic meaning that transcends distinctions between what is 'real' and what is not, that credits and shares imaginative resources.

The nature of their relation to the media has a similar fluidity, its value depending on the terms of engagement. They are angry at the intrusive media cameras trying for 'a juicy scoop' the day after the riots; they are transfixed by the news coverage of the riot itself, scrambling to get a better reception, Vince looking for himself, riled when he doesn't appear: 'It's David, how'd he get on TV, I was over there - they missed me!' These apparently contradictory reactions are about an inability to resolve the relation between the exploitative aspect of their representation with the value that is accorded to 'being on TV' as part of the glamour and pull of media culture. The integral part of that culture to their lives makes it difficult for them to draw lines and boundaries to maintain protection and integrity. They try to select media images that they can positively engage with. The media is part of their living fantasies in which they see themselves as part of the action, often as a substitute for action elsewhere. The riot gives this fantastic element of their subjectivities ultimate expression. In it they feel part of a film style drama and it is recounted in those terms; it is televised, real and fantastic; they have been part of it, they watch themselves being part of it. Later they learn about Abdel's death on the giant indoor television screen of the mall like metro station, on their own in the early hours of the morning. The moment is surreal, the screen is made up of tens of smaller screens, the image of Abdel is fragmented and illusory. Abdel's death has been distanced, removed from them, its meaning has changed. Vince's earlier anger is displaced, he disappears from the others and imagines himself shooting a traffic warden. The sense is of lives and subjectivities being made through a relation to the media. The event of Abdel's death is a media event, and Vince's reaction is an imaginary revenge conditioned by the circumstances in which he hears about it. There is no implication that Vince's feelings are less authentic because he does not carry through his threat, instead he expresses them through fantasy *as part of* the fantastic circumstances in which he hears about the death. It is part of a changing subjectivity that is part of situations, where feelings find different sorts of expression and change with time and place. It is therefore not only the immediate circumstances which condition Vince's reaction but everything else he has been through in the course of the day.

Each of the three friends change through the 24 hours, assuming different roles in relation to each other, showing different elements of their personalities, responding to circumstances as they arise. These are not fixed or easily categorisable identities, they are

fluid and changing. Vince is emotional and impulsive but he is also self-controlled and ultimately not willing, or perhaps able, to kill. Said is hyperactive and comedic but carries out a calming role of negotiation and compromise between Hubert and Vince. Hubert is thoughtful and pragmatic but in the end he is the one who 'kills the cop' as a mix of impulse and principle once Vince has been shot. These are not the behaviours of one-dimensional 'no-hopers', dangerous or macho 'jobs' that are the standard characterisation of 'underclass' masculinity, they are part of young men with distinct personalities whose behaviours are enmeshed in social conditions and contingent situations.³⁸ They are both angry *and* funny, hateful *and* vulnerable, reflective *and* impulsive.

Neither are the friends without self-understanding or insight into their lives. At 2.57 in the morning, still in Paris, Vince, Hubert and Said are sitting on the roof of an old building looking over the Paris skyline. The city lights illuminate the sky and at the centre of their view are the bright lights of the Eiffel Tower. They are silent, just sitting there, getting stoned. Then Hubert starts talking, reflecting on their predicament: 'Sometimes you feel so fucking small'. The others listen as he carries on, then join in:

Said - 'Got any more bullshit wisdom?'

Hubert - 'The early bird catches the worm... a stitch in time saves nine... haste makes waste.'

Vince - 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity - I save that one for special occasions.'

Hubert goes on to tell the story of the man falling 50 storeys reassuring himself 'So far so good... Like us in the projects but how will we land?' As they leave Said tells the others to watch as he switches off the lights of the Eiffel Tower, but they walk on, Hubert replying: 'That only works in the movies'. The scene expresses something of their feelings about how they fit into society. Their disbelief in the idea that they can change their lives by adhering to the sort of common sense self-help implied in the simplicities of adages. Their disillusion with the myth of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' - the values for which the French Revolution was fought - having any relevance to their lives. Their knowledge that things are not going to change, miracles do not happen, magical endings only happen in the movies. They are falling and things are only going to get worse. It is in the silence, away from the television, off the streets and having to just carry on coping with things on a treadmill basis, that they reach some perspective on their lives. On the roof they have a view of the city and a view of

³⁸ It is worth comparing this understanding with that promoted by the commentator Charles Murray, and those who produce related characterisations of 'the underclass male': 'Male teenage behaviour is often a caricature of the barbarian male: retaliate against anyone who shows you the slightest disrespect. Sleep with and impregnate as many girls as possible. Regard violence as a sign of strength. To worry about tomorrow is weakness. To die young is glorious. What makes these attitudes so disturbing is not just that they describe behaviour but that inner city boys articulate them as principles. They are explicitly the code they live by.' Murray.C (1994) *The New Victorians and the New Rabble* p12 *The Sunday Times* 29.5.94 p12

how those on the estates fit into this bigger picture. They know about their social position, the difference between what is sometimes shown (in the movies) and what happens. They also know that there is nothing much they can do about it, that they are falling, and that the only way they can deal with it is on a daily basis, carrying on and keeping up hope. If that is partly an illusion, a fantasy, it is also all that is available to them - 'So far so good, so far so good' - a psychological defence against admitting that one way or another they're not going to make it.

In *Ladybird Ladybird* Maggie keeps up a similar defence, hoping and coping, knowing that there is no alternative. As for the protagonists in *Hate* it is not the positive nature of that struggle and resilience that is seen by professional outsiders, but a caricature of disorder. In Maggie's case that professional view is summed up in the Social Work magazine 'Community Care'. In the childcare practice section a principal social worker complains:

'The film rarely rises above Maggie's portrayal of the social work role... Maggie is every professional's nightmare - an abused child grown into a feckless mother whose addictions are violent partners, violent language, and a fondness for karaoke pub culture.'³⁹

Newspaper reviews show a similar understanding of Maggie's appearance:

'...an ambiguous portrait of a passionate, angry, none-too-bright, impossible woman... a Mother Courage whose all-devouring maternal love can turn dangerous and destructive.'⁴⁰

Such views are in close agreement with the judge in the film who characterises Maggie as a woman of 'low intellect and little self control'. It is this reduction of the complexity of her subjectivity and life that is Maggie's main burden. She cannot escape the professional image of her, recorded in her files and 'evidenced' in their ongoing interpretations of her behaviour. She is fixed as a damaged person who will reproduce damage in her children. She selects bad partners, avoids and lies to officials, tries to run off with her children and refuses to practice birth control. Their inability to recognise everything that is going on behind these 'choices' and in addition to them, is a failure to credit Maggie with a life and being beyond that which they can perceive. It is not that Maggie is 'not really like that', her behaviour is an intrinsic part of her subjectivity and what she is going through materially, emotionally and psychologically. There *is* an emotional rawness to her behaviour which makes professionals uncomfortable and unable to deal with her on an interpersonal level. But their awkwardness becomes part of their professional judgement of her as a difficult,

³⁹ 'Loss and Belonging' *Community Care* 13-19th October 1994 p8

⁴⁰ *The Independent*, Film Review 30.9.94 p25

problematic person. What we see is the clashing of classed cultures translated into pathologisation and class contempt.

Maggie's subjectivity is complex and changing. We see her behaviour change according to who she is with. In the presence of officialdom she feels threatened, angry and judged and responds by being angry and uncooperative. As situations and external pressures change so Maggie shows different parts of herself: she is warm, funny and tolerant. With her children she is eminently caring and capable; with Jorge she is understanding and communicative; with her sister and friends from the refuge she is sociable and good company. These are parts of Maggie's subjectivity that find expression when she feels happy, secure and confident. They flourish when she is allowed to be herself, free from reproach. As 'the accused' she is an unwilling participant in the system and makes the professional's work more difficult. The distrust that is generated may be mutual but it is the inflexibility of the view of the authorities which conditions situations and drives events. Her stridency actually bespeaks powerlessness while their quiet tones articulate social and institutional power. They have no need to shout. The power of their right of intrusion and judgement actually creates the forms of behaviour which are used to further indict Maggie. Her life becomes embroiled in a system that is productive of situations which justify its purpose, generating 'evidence' as it goes.

Maggie's behaviour means that she cannot be cast as a straightforward 'heroine' and in many ways that is the point: she is not there to 'please' an audience of social workers or film goers (some reviewers turned on her 'unlikeable' or 'unwatchable' nature).⁴¹ Her ambivalence about her history of partners and her reluctance to let Jorge get too close to her are part of her psychological defences. She projects an image of being able to handle herself as a means of protection from external intervention and from being let down by partners. She admits to having loved her violent partner so is ambiguous as a 'victim'. The ambiguity of her desires make her question her own worth: 'If I loved him, what did that make me eh?' Maggie's swearing, heavy smoking and refusal to use contraception make her an affront to a wide range of middle class norms on 'good mothering', she makes their exponents feel uncomfortable. It is the perceived nature of her maternal femininity that is the focus of decisions made about her, specifically her sexual and reproductive choices. Her choice of partner: multiple, bad and violent; her choice of having four children by four different fathers in poverty; and her refusal to stop reproducing even when her entitlement to mother has been officially withdrawn, are the unacceptable face of her motherhood. She embodies a refutation of powerful norms that are made to symbolise unfit mothering. That symbolism subsumes Maggie as a person who is complex, ambiguous and changing like any other.

⁴¹ See for example 'Rock Steady' *The Guardian* G2 29.9.94 p10

Instead she is a 'case'; a list of disasters waiting to happen; a file of evidence; a failure of criteria; a risk. The 'objectivity' of these 'facts' is ultimately a denial of her subjectivity.

Both *Hate* and *Ladybird* are stories about the denial of subjectivity in terms of complexity and difference within individual lives. In both cases the denial is of poor working class subjects by state authorities: police officers, judges, social workers, health visitors, council officers. The practices of these authorities are manifest in the casual and systematic brutality of individual professionals in the daily lives of people who are largely unable to defend themselves, individually or as part of a group. The focus and justification of intervention are behavioural activities: 'criminal', reproductive and sexual. These behaviours are made to represent the totality of individual lives, as problem and threat. Maggie, Vince, Hubert, and Said have in common this external mode of identification and the sorts of interventions that attend them. Central elements of their experiences are the same. Their stories are about common experiences in as much as they share a social relation of impoverishment, brutality and disempowerment. They share *particular aspects* of experiential commonality which are similar enough to suggest that they have shared interests in particular areas. In this respect to conceive of 'collective' relations, is to imply a specifically *political* commonality, which does not have to be articulated in a conventional, well-recognised language in order that it can be said to exist.

Distinction between groups of working class people is the key tenet of the hegemonic discourse of 'underclass': the working class and the 'underclass', the deserving and the undeserving, the married and the single parent, the male and the female, the younger and the older, the black and the white. To talk of the collective in this context is therefore a political refusal of the use of differences as divides. Given the divisive nature of the hegemonic discourse of 'underclass', the idea of keeping hold of a notion of the collective would seem to be an important strategic resource. Race and gender specification is in no way antithetical to that notion, indeed it is part of it in recognition that the working class is not white and male, it's female and male, black and white. I am not suggesting that politics and strategy are the only justification for the use of ideas about the collective in relation to the working class poor. Solidarity, sociality, altruism and mutual aid *are* also important parts of lives lived in conditions of poverty and oppression. Both *Hate* and *Ladybird* show how complex solidarities and interdependencies are lived as part of everyday experiences, where 'collectivities' are about strong interconnections rather than absolute sameness.

Vince, Hubert and Said find togetherness in being hated and hating back. Vince is Jewish, Said an Arab and Hubert is black; they are all working class and poor living on an outer city housing estate. Theirs is an outcast solidarity. They exchange racial jibes, stripped

of racist meaning, which are all about each other's lack of racial 'authenticity': 'You bogus kike', 'You're both frauds', 'You phoney Arab'. Their collective experience through 24 hours does not mean they are an all-forgiving, all-accepting fraternity, but the differences between them are both less meaningful to themselves and to outsiders who perceive them than what they have in common as working class young men from the estates.

The everyday, experiential, as opposed to organised nature of that collectivity is clear in the post-riot scenes. There had been no battle plan and there is no reconnaissance. It was a spontaneous event, an upsurge of shared feeling. The next day there are nods of friendship and recognition between different groups of friends as they all mill around the estate. Common meanings are evident as part of their shared lives, their understandings are implicit rather than articulated. Some of the details of those meanings are talked about by Vince, Hubert and Said as a group of friends. The riot, the gun and how to deal with their predicament are the subject of the argument that runs the course of the 24 hours. It is an argument within their group, with shared terms of reference, with no question as to who their adversaries are. The significance of this argument is central to the story because it shows how difference is expressed and negotiated within their group without detracting from their commonality which is based on the fall they share, on lives that are part of each other's, and as Hubert's decision to kill and be killed for Vince shows, on inextricable feelings for each other. Thus, while the subjective-collective dynamic in this 24 hours is no one thing - they argue about personal survival versus collective retaliation - as far as daily living and daily outcomes are concerned they are in it together. This is also the case in relation to their families and other groups on the estate. Differences, inter-relations and mutualities are multiple. Their shared interest is in sustaining the positive elements of those relations, from the ties of the black economy, to responsibilities for each other within families, to stepping in to defend each other from police arrest and violence. These positive connections based around shared class positions extend beyond the estate. An old man in the public toilets in Paris tries to give them the benefit of his own knowledge and experience of oppression in a strange fable; a drunk man on the street advises them on which wires need to be joined to successfully hot-wire the car they are trying to steal and then jumps onto the bonnet of the approaching police car to stop them being chased. These scenes are about connections between people who recognise each other beyond being personal strangers and they are not afraid. Both men are concerned and want to help, they come to the fore at critical moments. Similarly there is recognition of class difference amongst strangers and conflict in place of aid. In the early morning metro Hubert watches a business man on the escalators as he looks away from him, and accuses him: 'Look at these sheep... they ride escalators carried by the system... they can't move without escalators'. Hubert's perception

is of difference as oppression, of people who are prepared to benefit from the way things are, to be carried along at the expense of others. He registers his hate.

Importantly, all these relations of shared experience, recognition, of aid and of hatred, are not the product of positions that are 'held'. We see positions develop as expressions of what is happening in their lives - through events, through interactions, through relations. Those developments, or outcomes, are then met by the authorities with the type of approach which says 'you can't help some people' as a way of naturalising and justifying the way things turn out. Said is pleasantly shocked when the first policeman he meets in Paris and asks for directions, politely calls him 'Sir', he thanks him in turn. The point is that such behaviour is unusual, even anomalous. If there is a stability of positions and predictability of events, it is because of the ongoingness of particular relations. It is this continuity that in *Hate* is shown as things hurtling in one direction, hate breeding hate, palpable distrust, seemingly inevitable disaster. It is clear that the impetus of this motion is not those who have the least power within it. The hate of Vince, Hubert and Said is about their powerlessness in relation to the hateful power that is exerted against them.

The story of *Ladybird Ladybird* is less clearly expressed in collective terms. Maggie's isolation is at times stark. Her position as a single parent with no money, on the move, is one without many ties of support. Yet it is also clear that Maggie will not be the only one experiencing such treatment and feeling the way that she does. The ease with which the system works against her is about family courts, Social Work departments and ties with the police, ticking over on a daily basis, channels set up, ready and waiting. Maggie's is one story about how that system can work.

When Jorge enters her life she is able to express her feelings and share her experiences in a way that gives them shared meaning and validation. Her relationship with Jorge is forged on a recognition and understanding of what they have both been through before they met, and go through once they are together. Jorge is a political exile from Paraguay who has had to leave the country. He tells Maggie of how he worked with homeless orphan children whose parents had been killed by the government for their land. He tried to set up safe homes for them and to publish writings about their dispossession. For these activities he was seen as a danger to the country, forcing him to seek asylum in Britain. When he first sees Maggie singing in a London pub, the poignancy and sadness of her song communicates her own feelings of pain and loss, and speak to his. He recognises someone like himself and once they talk about their experiences the commonalties are apparent. They relate to each other in a myriad of different ways which cross language barriers and the barrier of language itself, expressing the meaning of the sorts of experiences they have had

without having to speak about them directly. At one point a social worker tries to suggest that there must be a communication barrier between Maggie and Jorge as a means to undermine the suitability of their relationship. Maggie replies that: 'It's not only words you use to communicate'. The deeper meaning of her reply is lost on the social worker caught up in the evidential realm of the visible and the articulated. Maggie and Jorge share a language of class, experience and knowledge that is not dependent on the structures of language. It is based on a deep feeling for who they both are and for most of the time it sustains their relationship through the pressures against it. Rather than a divide, Jorge's ethnicity and experiences in a different country and culture are something that is both an attraction and basis of understanding between them. Two of Maggie's first four children are black and the issue of ethnic difference is problematic only for the authorities who see Jorge as another choice of 'violent' partner because of his status as a political refugee.

The violence in Maggie's life is primarily about her powerlessness, firstly in relationships with men and then with social workers and police as her violent past is used to justify enacting a different kind of violence against her. A central part of both Maggie's and Jorge's subjectivity is therefore tied up in experiences of class-based violence, expressed in different ways. Most of the time Maggie externalises it emotionally in bursts of grief and anger, while Jorge tries to deal with it quietly and reflectively. Their feelings and understandings are shared even if they are not exactly the same. This is the antithesis of the way various authorities relate to Maggie where nothing is understood outside of visible and spoken 'evidence'. Maggie and Jorge also share a political understanding of their situation which crosses cultural, ethnic and gender differences. They are both people on the run, denied basic rights, intimidated and poor, and they have both been terrified by a state of siege. Jorge tries to describe the reason for their experiences based on what he knows in Paraguay, which is that fear prevents change: 'It's dangerous to alleviate suffering, suffering has a job to do for the government'. It is the only directly political line in the story, making connections between different kinds of oppression carried out against the working class poor, in the name of government, for the good of the country.

In both *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* matters of class conflict, hatred and incommensurable difference are addressed as central to their protagonist's experiences. They are not expressed polemically with characters as political mouth pieces and their stories are not illustrations of any certain, monolithic political truth. They are shown as part of everyday, lived experiences for poor working class people on the receiving end of oppressive practices. Those experiences are shown to be often extreme, desperate and painful, and ways of coping with them are multiple, from the comedic to the anarchic. What the characters do with their class

and where they are from is different from character to character, and within individual characters at different times and places. Class subjectivity is ambivalent and changing. Complexity, ambivalence and change are therefore part of relations of class conflict, hate and incommensurable difference. Neither film shies away from or tries to resolve those relations, they keep things moving and do not give us happy or conclusive endings. That openness is related to the perspectival integrity of their representation: these are stories consistently told from the perspectives of those whose experiences are shown for whom there are no easy resolutions. The films are not about 'problem solving' according to mainstream definitions or seeking 'inclusion' for the characters. We are asked to engage at their level, on their terms. Our ability and willingness to share the view rather than to be made uncomfortable by it, is the political challenge of the films. It is a challenge to collective dialogue about matters of material and representational violence against others. The filmic space is therefore the possibility of a different space of understanding about the working class poor. It does not seek to position the characters as 'deserving', aesthetically pleasing, or 'not like *that* really'. Instead it gives them dignity by showing the fullness of their stories, its meanings and complexities.

Conclusion: Filmic Discourse as Social and Political Becoming

My main argument in this chapter has not been about the positive value of *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* in terms of their ideological or practical effectivity, although a case could be made for both films on those grounds as noted earlier. Rather it is about their epistemological value: that is their value as a means of representing subjugated knowledges and experiences that are so often reduced to journalistic snapshots or evidential social scientific truths. Such abstract truths when seen embedded within lives, as stories, have wholly different meanings. This is really an argument about the best way of approximating a representation of 'the whole'. For my purposes this is about trying to produce understandings of subjectivities that are situated, complex, changing, especially where such expression is usually denied as with 'underclass'. It is a refusal to make an issue of one or a few particular things, usually the most visible (the riot, the children by different fathers) and to abstract it from everything else (everyday exigencies, humour, relations) in order to draw conclusive meanings (about class, masculinity, estates). The refusal is not about replacing such representations with a more authentic subjective experience but recognising that 'what we are like' individually and as people from the same class or gender, cannot be known through static reproductions. This is why films which constantly move, showing lives in myriad, have such potential to avoid fixing on the 'most obvious' aspect of lives and reducing them to formulation.

This is necessarily an argument about the nature of social being itself, as a process of constant subjectification. A central element in that process is the relation between the material and symbolic through which meaning about our selves, our lives and those of others, is produced. *Hate* and *Ladybird Ladybird* can be seen as part of this meaning making process. Rather than suggesting what the 'outcome' of the meaning making process has been, for me personally or for others who watch the films (given that it is largely indeterminable anyway) my choice has been to say something about the experiences they represent. Like my own, these experiences include representations with which they can identify. It is in this meaning making realm that subjectivities are formed in relations between the real and the imagined, material and symbolic. It is also in this realm that connections between subjectivities and collectivities are productive of political meaning. The realm can be called 'discourse': a diffuse and untraceable process of social and political becoming. The stories of *Hate* and *Ladybird, Ladybird* as part of the discourse of 'underclass' provide a cultural and political representation of and for the working class poor. They offer bold, alternative meanings about lives, people and places that have been

rubbed by dominant cultural and political representations of them. The films will not necessarily create strong sources of positive identification for poor working class young men and single mothers on council estates.⁴² Neither will they necessarily change the attitudes of audiences with intransigent views of their own. Luckily the same can be said about those dominant representations of 'underclass' discourse whose 'effects' are also indeterminable, although it needs to be said that such spaces of representation are more culturally and institutionally powerful and well connected. In place of such audience research, I have interpreted the feelings and experiences represented in the films through my own, as a claim to partial knowledge. My hope and feeling is that their stories of class and poverty are *likely* to ring true, for different audiences in different ways, and that for many this truth will echo the commonly expressed sentiment of those queuing from the French estates to see *Hate*: 'This is about us, this is our film'.⁴³

⁴² The question of how many people will even see these films, is not addressed here. It is worth noting however that they have both been broadcast on the television since their cinema showings, so have probably been more widely viewed than might otherwise be assumed

⁴³ 'Concrete Jungle Where Life Imitates Art In The Concrete Jungle' *The Independent On Sunday* 11.6.95 p15

CHAPTER FIVE

WELFARE UNIVERSALS AND CLASS DIFFERENCES : TACTICAL CONCLUSIONS ON THE DISCOURSE OF 'UNDERCLASS'

This chapter starts by summarizing the different ways of knowing and kinds of knowledge that characterise the sites of the preceding chapters. Each site has been presented as a realm of knowledge and practice through which 'underclass' is produced. The productivity of these sites is derived from their place in a network of power relations which partly works to formulate social policy around poor people and places. This concluding chapter proceeds by disputing the key terms of reference of these policy formulations as they have developed in the contemporary period. In prevailing notions of *social exclusion/inclusion* expressed by vocal elements of the contemporary new Labour government among others, I argue that a particular kind of middle class value system has tried to institute the primary citizen value of 'public' participation via the labour market. In contestation of the productionist ethic of 'underclass' discourse I suggest the value of discourses made up of positive collective representations of working class difference, as well as economic representations for unconditional welfare entitlements and for unpaid labour.

The starting point of this thesis was a question about the nature of the relationship between welfare and modernity. My starting premise was that the relationship is non-determined: neither exist as a set of discrete principles and practices with inevitable outcomes, both are made through the discursive practices of particular periods. With regard to the contemporary period of 'underclass' discourse, the nature of the relationship between welfare and modernity cannot be absolutely stated or concluded upon. I have presented a discourse analysis whose politics, motivations and values are explicit, and whose conclusions must therefore be argued and tactical. My approach has engaged with the contemporary discourse of 'underclass' to draw out some of its coherences and its contradictions as produced through an extensive network of power/knowledge relations. It has presented this network as a shifting and changing configuration in which the particular meanings of 'underclass' are contested even as they are entrenched. Contestation does not therefore prevent the entrenchment of some of the most powerful meanings of 'underclass' in policy making fields but it does represent the unsettled potential of things being different. In the contemporary period, as policies pertaining to 'underclass' are pushed through by a new Labour government, there is widespread dissent (differently motivated and expressed)

from those quarters of media, politics and academia that have also been part of producing 'underclass' as a regime of meaning and policy practice. 'Underclass' discourse cannot therefore be represented in terms of contestation/dissent *versus* promotion/agreement, but should be seen in terms of the production of a multiply positioned and changing regime of ideas, feelings, meanings and policies. In this conclusion, discussion of the policy related aspects of this regime will be given precedence over and above other possible endings. This decision accords with the political emphasis of the thesis as a whole - seen in both its substantive focus and in the underpinnings of its analyses. I shall briefly summarize the main points made in each chapter before pulling them together in order to draw some policy related conclusions about the contemporary discourse of 'underclass'. These conclusions develop an argument about the relations between welfare universals and class differences. They bring together modernist political principles and postmodern epistemologies to argue for the strategic visibility and voice of the people and places of 'underclass' through a socialist feminist analysis of welfare equality and cultural representation.

This thesis as a whole works with a notion of 'underclass' discourse as symbolic and material *practice*, where practices both produce and are the products of different people and different kinds of spaces. These productive processes are conceived as working through networks of power relations. The particular configurations of these networks allow and condition the circulation of ideas, the meeting of people and of minds, the effectivity of policy making, the making of careers and the momentum of social change. They also allow the isolation of other ideas, the containment of disputes, the forging of common oppositional understandings, the stasis and the worsening of social conditions for particular groups. The different and changing nature of those configurations mean that power relations, through social practice, create and shore up particular social outcomes, put down and hold back others.

In Chapter Two the nature of networked relations between a policy conference on Stakeholding and DSS waiting rooms in the South of England is argued to produce largely negative social outcomes for the benefit claiming poor. The different knowledges partly produced through these spaces - about Social Security, about the imperatives of a modern Welfare State and about the 'best interests' of claimants and society - are shown to be unequally placed within those power formations affecting policy developments around 'underclass'. The absence of poor people from a discourse of which they are the subject, in those networks which are made to matter, works to enthrone particular ideas, people and spaces as authoritative, whilst denoting others as less worthy and important. Conferences, policy events, academic texts and think-tank reports are all forms and forums in which the poor are overwhelmingly situated according to the professional expertise of others. They are

targeted and interpreted, spoken for and about by the political Left and the political Right. Their absence is not an incidental matter of organisational failure but an expression of the success of predominantly class-based power relations working to effect discursive dominance. This is more than a practical issue of facilitation and involvement - such practical arrangements are merely part of a discourse of Knowledge that has developed historically to ensure different public voices and visibilities for different groups.¹ In Chapter Two that discourse is expressed in the differences between the staged visibility of extensive expert commentary at the Stakeholder policy conference and the surveilled silences and contained comments of claimants in the DSS waiting rooms. The relation between daily practices of subsistence benefit administration and receipt, and the one-off event to locate those practices in Stakeholding's political imaginary may seem remote but their practices are intrinsically related. The gap of understanding and contact between them is yawning, even as they are tightly bound by power relations. This is shown to be the case even when their relation is stated as being close in terms of advocacy, indeed when representations for social change and anti-poverty goals are part of the reason for staging the conference. This disjuncture is less the product of practical decision-making on ways of generating and disseminating the kinds of knowledges that are made to count, than of a class-based division between those who are deemed knowledgeable in the *right* ways and those who are not. The discourse through which authoritative knowledge is acquired by institutional sanction and which claims the mantle of objectivity, works to occlude differently classed knowledges on the basis of their not fitting standards of rigor and rectitude. It is through that dominant discourse that other forums, publications and knowledges, though *existing*, can be assured a *lesser* kind of existence than their authoritative counterparts. That different kinds of welfare knowledge *exist* does not in itself create a plural realm of knowledge on the subject. In order to have effectivity in policy realms it is necessary for those knowledges to be approved, valued and connected to the *right* kind of people and spaces: such features are designations of power. 'Poor' welfare knowledges are networked in different ways and through the designations of power those differences are produced as inequalities. As the referents, statistics, and evidence for a better class of discourse, the knowledges of the people of 'underclass' are unequal to the knowledges *about* them produced by authoritative others. In these knowledges the poor are

¹ The welfare reform 'roadshows' being undertaken by the Prime Minister and other key Ministers of the new Labour government from the early months of 1998 illustrate a similar kind of exclusionary effect. Although billed as 'consultation' exercises with 'the public', in practice they have worked as sessions in which Labour Party members have the opportunity to hear ministerial justifications for initiatives that are perceived to be unpopular and likely to provoke grass-root dissent. Although such dissent has been allowed expression in question sessions, it is not part of a policy making process, the policies have already been made. 'Blair's Mission To Reassure' *The Guardian* 16.1.98 p2

rendered in the languages, views and understandings of others: the terms of their production are largely those of outsiders. The *productive* nature of this relationship between different kinds of authoritative discourse and their 'underclass' referent is analysed in Chapter Three.

The networks of 'underclass' discourse are made up of more than exclusionary or occlusive representational practices, and their focus extends beyond socio-economic conditions of Social Security to an extensive field of commentary. Through such commentary 'underclass' is constituted as a condition of particular family forms, criminal behaviours, parenting, gender and community relations. The positions of the commentators interviewed in Chapter Three are configured in broadcasting, academic and campaign networks. Together they are seen to constitute a feminist discourse on 'underclass' through which their own personal and professional identities are partly produced, as well as 'underclass' masculinities, femininities and the material living spaces that are directly and indirectly their referent. Through the representational practices of these women there emerges a range of needs, wants and interests around the young unemployed working class male and the benefit claiming single mother, that are power-fully related to dominant policy formulations around those figures. Notions of dangerous and redundant masculinities; of disordered council estates and non-functioning communities; of welfare dependent single mothers who would 'work' if only childcare were available; and of family crises in need of tax and benefit policy solutions, are variously mooted as issues necessitating government action. The policy trajectories that have developed around these notions in the contemporary period show how different ideas can be harnessed to work within dominant schemas as they are selectively interpreted, translated, creatively combined and unfettered from the caveats of 'but only ifs...', and apparent good intentions. In this way some diverse feminist ideas have been incorporated into socially authoritarian policies around the conditions and levels of benefit provision for the 'non-working' poor and the council estates on which they live. Many of these ideas are translated from strains of feminist thought which have become instrumental in arguments to support policies of welfare 'restructuring', labour market 'flexibility' and 'zero-tolerance' crime management. The kinds of visibilities of poor people and places created in these 'feminised' discourses have become central to the policy lineaments of 'underclass' discourse.² In this process the classed and gendered complexities of the lives they claim to know about and/or to represent have been reduced and circumscribed by a burden of meaning. That these meanings are conceived as expressing the

² My use of the term 'feminised' reflects the way that many contemporary changes within the family, labour market and gender relations have been positively conceived, indeed heralded, as the 'feminisation' of society. Will Hutton, *The Observer* editor, has been prominent in advocating this position. See 'The new sex war: Will Hutton versus Melanie Phillips (he's the feminist) *The Observer* 22.3.98 p13

'best interests', 'needs' and 'wants' of 'underclass' groups - the ever quoted 9 out of 10 single mothers who 'want' to work, and the 'communities' who do not want 'criminal young men' and 'neighbours from hell' amongst them, for example - shows the complexly classed and gendered nature of the politics of needs interpretation that characterise the discourse. The extent to which these 'needs' and 'wants' may be expressed by groups so stigmatised, lambasted and bombarded with images and arguments about their material conditions and best interests that they seem to demand the policy frame set up around them, shows the power of discourse to work *through* the subjects that it names. Equally the nature of discourse as a non-determined process means that its constitutive parts are neither monolithic nor guaranteed in their 'effects'. The culturally creative and politically dynamic nature of contemporary 'underclass' discourse is the subject of Chapter Four.

In the forms, practices and relations of popular discourse there are knowledges, feelings and understandings which refuse and accuse dominant forms, practices and relations of knowledge production around 'underclass'. In the films *Hate* (1995) and *Ladybird Ladybird* (1994) are the kinds of discursive resources which allow personal and collective meanings around poverty and oppression to be created in contestation of dominant and politically formal representations. That creativity works through resonances, identifications and feelings that go beyond relations of formal representation about or on behalf of 'them' as 'others'. It works through imaginative, affective and subjective modes of knowing in relation to more authoritative discursive modes and it opens up an interpretative process. The non-determined nature of the interpretative process does not mean that personal certainties and convictions are precluded by the filmic view. The films present a space for such understandings to develop by engaging antecedent judgments and knowledges and making possible collective recognitions and identifications in the process. Loach's *Ladybird Ladybird* deals directly with the social welfare issues around State intervention by welfare professionals into the parenting practices of poor, single mothers, while Kassovitz's *Hate* deals with criminal justice issues of State intervention by the police into the lives of unemployed young men on 'problematic' public housing estates. Both films set up strong narrative identifications with their protagonists and credit their characterisations with the kind of value, dignity and complexity that is so often denied in dominant representations of these most problematic excrescences of 'underclass'. Their characters' predicaments are shown to be socially embedded and part of oppressive relations and institutional practices that extend beyond the plight of the individual. In this way they collectivise social problems and make available collective reactions to them: indeed I argue that the films are a kind of collective oppositional representation in which voices and visibilities of the poor have been strategically honed rather than evidentially revealed. A

particular strength of the kind of cultural and political representation they offer is that they show working class understandings of social conditions and struggles to be already 'out there', as part of experiential knowledges and everyday practices. These people are not waiting to have their consciousness raised or their false consciousness de-mystified, they are conscious experts of their own lives. In this respect the films should perhaps be partly regarded as strategic: offering positive representations that are partly *suggestive* of an everyday class consciousness as well as being reflective of it. In other words the films themselves act as arenas for the expression and creation of political understandings and as such are part of a cultural politics through which poor groups can garner self and group esteem and political anger, whilst other groups are opened to non-reductive understandings of those people and places normally cast as 'other'.

While the films promote representations that refuse the dominant knowledges of 'underclass' discourse, the significance of their refusal is partly contained by their status as 'popular culture', and therefore as less knowledgeable and consequential than more formal representational politics. This is not just a feature of contemporary 'underclass' discourse but is part of a wider hierarchisation of the social in which some forms of discourse are cast as superficial and extrinsic to 'realistic' economic, political and social commentary. A network view of social space allows for films to be seen as discursive forms and arenas that are no less socially relevant than other kinds of representation but which are habitually constructed and hierarchised as such in order to ensure the workings of dominant power configurations. It is such a hierarchisation that discourse analysis eschews: knowledges of 'underclass' exist in all kinds of forms and arenas, their mainstream status and effectivity strongly conditioned by the way they are networked to each other and other discursive forms and arenas, not by the *intrinsic* value of their knowledge or its *proper* location on a particular social 'level'. It would therefore be a mistake to assume that oppositional knowledges to dominant ideas of 'underclass' need to be created and represented by *different* politicians and commentators. The point is that they *already* exist in other forms and types of understanding but that power relations network them in such a way that they are marginal to the 'real' business of social policy as practised through well-connected, authoritative forms and institutions of knowledge production and dissemination.

This is not to say that issues pertaining to 'underclass' that are expressed in terms of political economy for example, should have less status within the discourse when they are already marginal. An understanding of the production of 'underclass' in relation to deflationary economic policies, labour market 'flexibility' and 'welfare to work' programmes is not excluded by a discourse analytic approach. Indeed such political-economic knowledges would be crucial to an analysis of 'underclass' as a neo-liberal

economic discourse (this has not been my main focus). It is not, however, *enough* to say that the production of 'underclass' can be solely understood via a political economy of welfare restructuring, and it would be blinkered to say that political economy is its driving or causal power. Crucially, 'underclass' has been produced through a dominant discourse whose spaces of production range across (and intermesh) contemporary feminist, popular, and political knowledges. It is only through reading those spaces that the complex constitution of 'underclass' discourse can be traced. Moreover, that tracing *may* include issues of political economy because those issues do not 'naturally' reside in particular theoretical or statistical forms. Political economy can be in a poem, or can be in a film at the level of meaning.

The discourse analysis of this thesis has aimed to show how a wide range of different kinds of spaces are differentially imbricated in policy formulations around the people and places of 'underclass'. Fundamental to powerful discursive spaces are stubbornly dualistic constructions of the social in which notions of same and 'other', inclusion and exclusion, public and private, work and care, have been used to construct reductive analyses of, and solutions for, the social and economic problems associated with 'underclass'. Chapters Two and Three show that those analyses and solutions do not only hail from the political Right and tabloid press but that many of their ideas have emerged from, or at least in relation to, individuals and organisations which claim Left-wing and feminist credentials and which have been selectively taken up by an incoming Labour Government (1997). The idea of ready-made political-economic alliances along the lines of Left-Right, Feminist-Patriarchal, has proved all but redundant in relation to many of the ideas that have assumed status within the dominant political discourse of 'underclass'. There are few certainties about what such political categories represent when their most prominent manifestations are so problematic: tied to claims of radicalism and reliability from the first Labour government for 18 years and the strongly classed expressions of feminism associated with it. The welfare visions derived from these networks are built around notions of good citizenship as public and inclusive. Respectable and respected voices and visibilities are rewards of social inclusion equated with the public realm of labour market participation. The realm of full-time familial or non-'work' based activities by those claiming subsistent level benefits is socially excluded, spoken for, exposed as aberrant in 'normal' society. In other words the political exclusion of that 'non-working' realm as legitimate or viable is pivotal in bringing about the social exclusion of which it speaks. In these circumstances even the identification of unemployment as undesirable becomes problematic, necessitating questions about its definition, *why* it is undesirable, to *whom* and *how* it will be righted.

Inclusion/Exclusion: Whose Terms?

The notion of social exclusion/social inclusion is the central axis of new Labour policy solutions around 'underclass'.³ In August 1997 the Labour Minister Without Portfolio, Peter Mandelson MP, announced at the annual Fabian Society Lecture that a special Social Exclusion Unit headed by the Prime Minister, would be set up to tackle 'the greatest social crisis of our times'.⁴ Amongst the targeted groups to be re-integrated into society are the 5 million in 'workless homes', 3 million on 1,300 council estates, single parents and those with disabilities, and those children not attending school, at risk of teenage pregnancy, criminality and drug taking. These groups are deemed to be the socially excluded, the product of the previous Conservative government's failure - 'an underclass shut out from society'. The task of the Social Exclusion Unit is to bring them back into the mainstream, a task whose success will go beyond economic inclusion:

'This is about more than poverty and unemployment. It is about being cut off from what the rest of *us* regard as normal life.'⁵ (my emphasis)

Here the key referent of 'social exclusion' is 'underclass', where exclusion is partly about poverty but importantly also goes beyond an economic predicament. Inclusion to 'normal' society is also cultural: it is inclusion to the values, aspirations and ways of living 'of the rest of us'. This construction goes to the very core of 'underclass' discourse, raising an important question about the relation between economic inequality and class differences: should discussion of class differences be part of deciding policy formulations for the alleviation of poverty? The question forces consideration of how relations between margins and centres are about more than economic inequality. If 'inclusion' to the economic well-being of the centre has conditional terms that demand changes in the values, attitudes and behaviours of the margins then is it necessarily desirable? Does rejection of those terms mean acceptance of economic inequality? Are there poor, working class discourses which are different and valuable, that should not be characterised as entirely negative? Such questions point to the notion of poverty being part of working class subjectivities and collectivities that are *not* problematic. The danger of promoting such a notion is of playing into the hands of those who suggest that poverty itself is a product of cultural difference. Nevertheless in a political climate where poor people themselves are the target of change, then it becomes necessary to question the terms of 'help' and to consider arguments about *cultural* resistance as well as economic equality. The promise made by Harriet Harman, as

³ The theme of 'social exclusion/inclusion' is also central to The Economic and Social Research Council's current funding structures, allowing a cross-referencing of understandings between political and academic networks on the basis of that shared terminology.

⁴ Mandelson.P (1997) Fabian Society Lecture '*Labour's Next Steps: tackling social exclusion*' London: Fabian Society p9

⁵ Mandelson, *Labour's Next Steps* p1

Secretary of State for Social Security, to help new single mothers by removing previous income entitlements makes the questioning of terms of 'inclusion' highly necessary on both cultural and economic grounds.

I want to argue the desirability of two related approaches to this inclusion/exclusion problematic. They can be regarded as subjugated knowledges within the dominant formulations of 'underclass' discourse. The first contests the continuing potency of dualisms of public and private, work and care, as they are currently entrenched in policies which herald the superiority of public participation and paid work in relation to domestic participation and unpaid work. Part of that contestation is about the way in which particular arguments have been justified in the name of feminist progress as argued in Chapter Three. The second approach contests the idea that the concept of inclusion is preferable to that of equality. The Centre-Left think-tank the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), has chosen to promote the idea that 'inclusion' might be the successor of 'equality' for a radical Centre-Left politics that accommodates difference and diversity.⁶ In this telling, equality is an anachronistic notion which carries with it a heavy baggage of sameness and homogeneity. The next two sections address these approaches in turn, the first by problematising the notion of 'public' participation as an inherent good, the second by discussing a notion of equality and universality as preferable to the politically predominant notion of social inclusion in terms of both principle and policy.

'Public' Participation

Nancy Fraser identifies the 'public sphere' as the realm in which democratic debate and deliberation occurs, allowing distinctions to be made between 'state apparatuses, economic markets and democratic associations'.⁷ The association of the public with politics, democracy, citizenship and debate seems to assure its status as a good to which everybody should have access. However there is a need for caveats to this warm embrace of the 'public' in a critical approach that allows ideas of inclusion to the 'public sphere' to be examined and specified rather than assumed to be necessarily good. Central to Fraser's approach is the conception of modern society as characterised by a 'multiplicity of public spaces' with conflicts between and within them. This multiplicity fits with the idea of social networks configured through many different kinds of spaces and through power relations that produce their knowledges as more or less authoritative in relation to each other. In Fraser's conception of multiplicity, the public/private divide - being a classic spatial

⁶ See Franklin.J (1997) (ed.) *Equality* London: IPPR

⁷ Fraser.N (1995) *Politics, Culture and the Public Sphere: Towards a Postmodern conception* Nicholson.L and Seidman.S (eds.) *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics* Cambridge University Press p287

hierarchy among other things - is replaced by relations between different kinds of publics and privates. With regard to the discourse analysis of 'underclass' presented in this thesis, the goal of equality in such configurations cannot be achieved by compulsions to enter the 'public space', or by granting 'inclusion' into it. Instead the task must be to democratise the power relations of networks in order that those informal voices and spaces *already* spoken and practiced elsewhere can be heard and seen without necessarily having to join formal, dominant voices or re-locate to their spaces. In this way movement from a 'bad' thing to a 'good' thing as implied in the notion of inclusion is seen to be both unnecessary and undesirable. There can be no conflating 'entry' or participation in the 'public' with social equality.

Fraser's approach to the 'public' therefore starts with the idea that it is multiply constituted by different kinds of publics and its embrace necessitates caveats. Firstly, public participation is no guarantee of political inclusion: the public is where different inequalities may meet and groups be seen to be unequal but 'being there' is not enough to overcome those inequalities.⁸ Herding Social Security claimants into policy conferences and compelling the unemployed into workplaces is therefore no panacea for unequal power relations that define the nature of their existence most of the time *wherever* they are and which attaches value to some kinds of spaces - spaces made in the image of the powerful - as opposed to others. Secondly, 'the public' can only fulfil its positive democratic potential if different kinds of publics are openly admitted and actively encouraged to develop as autonomous and inter-dependent spaces. In this regard 'the public' should not be about transcendental consensus - a space where everybody has to have the same values and aspirations - but about discursive contestation.⁹ The goal of social inclusion to 'normal' society, definitive of contemporary policy formulations around 'underclass' can therefore be seen as undemocratic in its drive to create the common good as a citizenry working in the paid economy. Thirdly, notions of the 'public' need to be detached from *prima facie* meanings especially those of 'common good' and from assumptions about 'the private'. Such meanings are all contestable and should be temporally defined through different experiences, not read off from anachronistic political constructs.¹⁰ This means that the construction of public and private in gender terms, a dualism whose meanings commonly favour the 'benefits' of 'the public' cannot be sustained. It is that simplification that I have shown to be so useful to prevailing arguments for labour market participation as the route out of poverty and out of the home - arguments which often serve to naturalise the relation between the home and poverty (especially female poverty).

⁸ Fraser, *Politics, Culture and the Public Sphere* p289

⁹ Fraser, *Politics, Culture and the Public Sphere* p292

¹⁰ Fraser, *Politics, Culture and the Public Sphere* p294

With regard to 'underclass', these understandings about the 'public' as less than favourably inclusive, go beyond issues of compulsion to work in the labour market, to the wider issue of 'publicity'. Clearly 'underclass' has extensive publicity in broadcast and print journalism, serving as highlights of crime-based light entertainment, of 'real-life' documentary footage, and of current affairs and news reportage. Images and commentaries proliferate but the nature of that public presence is predominantly reductive because of its primarily classed view that seeks exposure, evidence, censure or justification for policy action. For the people and places of 'underclass' the issue of publicity is as much about the right to silence, to invisibility and the right to be left alone as it is the right to participation, voice, visibility. Such rights are currently non-existent where the media and police can agree contacts for joint police-camera raids on unsuspecting households in poor areas. Tenants on some of Middlesbrough's poorest estates are currently suing the media over intrusions into people's homes set up to provide public relation exercises for the police and 'real-life' cheap footage for the media.¹¹

For the people of 'underclass', strategic invisibility, silence and the right to withdraw from particular kinds of spaces at particular times is less and less of an option. The problem is acute when a real need for communication about matters of poverty from those who are experiencing it is met with a surfeit of representations in which their voice and presence is forced, surveilled or made into voyeuristic entertainment. As with effective compulsion to work in the public sphere, the terms of their 'public' presence are not their own: the 'public' becomes a space of over-exposure, generalised harassment and degradation. In the contemporary period there are a number of kinds of inclusion where the need and right to decline the 'offer' of inclusion should be apparent, namely: inclusion to the values of the dominant discourse of 'underclass' - where every child is a 'wanted' child who will be brought up to respect the authority of the law and the value of the work ethic; where needs, interests and wants constructed in powerful representational modes will always happily coincide with those that are 'self-defined' by poor people and places; and where any work that ensures labour market inclusion is better than no work. In this regard it may be necessary to counter that dominant discourse of 'underclass' with discourses which resist the idea that poor groups have no subjective or collective value and need to be 'included' via a process of middle class subjectification/acculturation. This may require the defence of subjectivities and collectivities that are partly premised on social inequality, not in order to represent inequality as a 'difference' but rather to admit the contradictions and ambivalences of needing to speak against poverty without speaking against yourself and your kind. Such a move is only likely to work when it is those people who are subject to

¹¹ 'Here Comes Mallon's Law' *The Guardian* 2nd December 1997 p17

poverty doing a central part of the talking, defining the parts of their shared lives that they value, criticising those that they do not. The outcome of such discussions being colonised by those who have never known poverty is exemplified in the dominant discourse of 'underclass' where poor working class lives are cast in wholly problematic terms, or where an expressed concern for material inequality dare not mention class difference lest that be turned against the poor.

The idea of a positive poor working class discourse is expressed uneasily, it seems to be a contradiction in terms. How can material disadvantage ever be a positive thing? Its 'loss' will always be perceived as a gain. Yet as I have argued in Chapter Four class is more than a material relation, feelings of class belonging can remain when material relations have thoroughly changed. In this respect the notion of class-based (rather than poverty-based) subjectivities and collectivities can be used to positively express different values, behaviours and desires to those that the 'rest of *us*' regard as 'normal'. Indeed their expression may be needed in order to resist cultural negation. This idea does not require a notion of the poor working class having a univocal discourse or identical subjectivities, nor does it imagine that such voices are self-identical: instead it recognises the advantages of discursively engaging in politically strategic or other purposive ways which may include the deployment of positive narratives of poor, working class life. The suggestion is not that such narratives should displace issues of material inequality but that they should not be relegated to a lesser significance or seen as diversionary just because the dominant discourse of 'underclass' has cast cultural aspects of life in such reductive ways and traditional approaches to challenging poverty have shied away from offensives on that front. The kind of discourses that perhaps need to be promoted with regard to single mothers on benefits for example, are those which relate to their feelings and understandings about the value of motherhood itself rather than just concentrating on the economic predicament of their poverty. A recent study by Edwards and Duncan based on extensive interviews with single mothers suggests that a predominant reason for non-participation in the labour market is the value they attach to mothering *time* itself.¹² These values are represented as 'gendered moral rationalities' which oppose dominant norms of prioritising paid work and marginalising mothering time as 'quality time'.

Ideas of 'cultural difference' are intrinsic to the dominant discourse of 'underclass'. However, such a 'difference based' discourse is not inherently problematic. The particular *nature* of its production and use in the contemporary period has made it so for those poor working class people and places made to carry the burden of its meaning. It is tempting in

¹² Edwards.R and Duncan.S (1998) Supporting the Family: lone mothers, paid work and the underclass debate p29-49 *Critical Social Policy* 53 vol. 17

these circumstances to recoil from a discourse of class difference altogether. Indeed some have succumbed to that temptation by making strong arguments for the prioritisation of issues of material inequality over those of cultural difference, often for strategic purposes. For example, a recent exchange in the *New Left Review* between Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young and Anne Phillips has once more pitted issues of 'culture' and economy against each other. In this case Fraser argues that issues of cultural identity, difference, domination and recognition have supplanted a socialist imaginary concerned with 'exploitation as the fundamental injustice'.¹³ She points to the problems of combining a 'cultural politics of difference' with a 'social politics of inequality' and argues that it is through the faultlines of that ill-fitting combination that a radical Left politics has fallen. Primarily this is cast as a problem of deconstructing socially constructed identities whilst imagining that substantive political programmes of social change can be simultaneously constructed around them. She argues that not only has this failed to happen but the injustices to which materially deprived groups are subject have been thoroughly marginalised if not pushed off the political agenda by struggles for cultural recognition.

In contemporary America - the context in which Fraser writes - welfare politics have passed through a period of terrible decline culminating in the 1996 Welfare Act installed by a Democrat government led by President Clinton. His 1992 campaign comment that 'the best welfare programme is a job' was followed by the imposition of a two year limit on the amount of time welfare benefits could be paid, and the passing over of responsibility for the administration of welfare from Federal to State government thus ending the principle of welfare parity established in President Roosevelt's 'New Deal'.¹⁴ The states of Wisconsin and New Jersey have led the way in implementing workfare programmes for single mothers previously on welfare. That this has happened whilst a discourse of multiculturalism has assumed a powerful political role is not necessarily causally related. Indeed a very similar political trajectory with regard to welfare reform has developed in Britain with the election of a Centre-Left government after an extended period of New Right governance, and here there have been no major 'diversions' by multiculturalist political lobbying. This thesis has tried to show how symbolic and material representations and distributions are inextricably intertwined. The idea of separating and prioritising economic inequality over issues of cultural representation is patently inappropriate to an analysis of 'underclass' where those elements are intrinsically of a piece.

Moreover, it is not necessary to separate discourse analyses of class difference from economic analyses in order to argue that issues of distributive justice have been politically

¹³ Fraser.N (1995) From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a Post-Socialist Age p68-93 *New Left Review* 212 p68

¹⁴ Cockburn.A (1996) 'From New Deal to great betrayal' *The Observer* 4.8.96 p27

marginalised in the contemporary period. Indeed central to that process has been a widespread discursive degradation of the lifestyles and values of those poor groups for whom such issues are so important. The marginalisation of issues of distributive justice has been achieved through a discourse about poverty as much more than the outcome of an economic predicament. Moreover, the discourse itself is produced through practices that are culturally embedded. The classed and gendered views about work, family and crime expressed in the dominant discourse of 'underclass' are power-fully derived from the social positions of those who articulate them and their discourse of Knowledge. The arguments of Stakeholding, Third Ways, 'Feminisation', Welfare to Work, Social Inclusion/Exclusion and Rights and Responsibilities, represent a pointed avoidance of articulating notions of class, whilst continuing to express *strongly* classed notions. To the extent that they depart from the modernist goal of achieving equalities of outcome for different class groupings with regard to the distribution of social and economic goods and benefits they can also be seen as part of a post-socialist discourse of welfare. It is to the policy related part of this discourse that I now turn.

Academic arguments about a postmodern welfare state have directly linked post-1970s changes in culture and economic organisation to the kinds of welfare discourse that predominate in the contemporary period.¹⁵ The questions they have been interested in asking concern the nature of relations between modernist welfare universals and postmodern conceptualisations of social difference, and between Keynesian economics and Post-Fordist economic change. Disputes about universalist discourses of welfare needs are at their core. In particular, modern ways of conceptualising welfare are seen to have constructed 'needs' in rigid and homogenising ways in order to fit with the requirements of bureaucracies for rationalisation and large scale provision. However, while large scale bureaucratic forms of policy making and administration would seem to be conducive to the characteristically postmodern changes of informal, decentralised, flexible practices, in practice class differences, among other differences, may be used to justify differential treatment based on the discretion of welfare administrators. This possibility was highlighted by Frank Field MP, as Minister for Welfare Reform, in his suggestion that individual DSS benefit offices be given control of their own budgets. This idea breaks with the 1966 Social Security Act which established clear national entitlements in order to wipe out local and regional

¹⁵ See Leonard.P (1997) *Postmodern Welfare* London: Sage; Lipietz.A (1995) 'The Third Sector: Resolving the crisis of the welfare state' p141-144 *City* 1/2; Burrow.R and Loader.B (eds.) (1994) *Towards A Post-Fordist Welfare State ?* London: Routledge; Thompson.S and Hoggett.P (1996) 'Universalism, Selectivism, and Particularism: Towards a Postmodern Social Policy' p21-43 *Critical Social Policy* vol. 16 (1); Mann.K (1996) *One Step Beyond: Is There Still a Critical Social Policy in 'Post-Modern' Britain?* Paper for Social Policy Association conference, Postmodernity and the Fragmentation of Welfare: A Social Policy for New Times? University of Teeside September 9th and 10th 1996

variations due to administrative bias and prejudice.¹⁶ Significantly such organisational changes are largely premised on a post-Fordist business prototype, and are strongly related to arguments about the 'imperatives' of new global economic realities where investment, production and consumption are supposed to be characterised by flexibility and rapid change.

The extent to which such economic developments inhere the kind of imperatives for welfare reform that are presently underway is arguable. Clearly the idea of defending a system which is in many ways failing is not acceptable; sustained critiques of welfare failures by single parents, disability groups and claimant unions among others are already well advanced.¹⁷ They do not however represent a wholesale rejection of the principles of the Welfare State. Indeed the kind of welfare reform likely to worsen an already inadequate system of basic needs provision is antithetical to such critiques.

Much of the current debate centres on the relation between universal contributory benefits and means-tested subsistence level benefits, reflecting the classic welfare division between the middle class and the working class poor, the 'working' and the 'non-working'. The question of whether the principle of universality should be maintained is central to the welfare reforms of the new Labour government. However, given that it is subsistence level income supplements and benefit conditions that have been 'reformed' first (lone parent premium cuts, Welfare to Work) while the stringencies of the JSA have been maintained, the question of reforming the principle of universality should seem less momentous - in many ways the worst has happened first. It may be no longer possible to argue for 'universality' as a means of protecting the benefits of the poorest, ensuring a non-ghettoised/stigmatised Welfare State, by using the idea that middle class welfare beneficiaries maintain the dignity and right to those benefits for *everyone*. As it is, the contributory benefits of the Welfare State have been defended while means-tested benefits have been the first to be cut. Indeed, Tony Blair has voiced his concern that middle class people have been needlessly agitated about the prospect of 'affluence tests' - as the middle class counterpart of means-tests - when no policies have been formulated in that regard.¹⁸ Rather than making a defence of the principle of universality as the corner stone of a socially inclusive, non-stigmatised Welfare State, it would therefore seem necessary to

¹⁶ Field.F (1997) 'Give Them The Tools' *The Guardian* 12.8.97 p13

¹⁷ See Ginsburg.N (1992) (ed.) *Divisions of Welfare* London: Sage; Williams.F (1993) 'Gender, race and class in British Welfare Policy' in Cochrane.A and Clarke.J (eds.) *Comparing Welfare States: Britain in International Context* London: Sage; Lewis.J (1992) 'Gender and the development of welfare regimes' p7-32 *Journal of European Social Policy* 2

¹⁸ 'Middle Classes to be hit by 'affluence test'' *The Observer* 11.1.98 p1. It should, however, be noted that the strong possibility of taxing child benefit for higher earners, mooted by Chancellor Gordon Brown in his March 1998 Budget, would represent a move to end the principle of Universal benefits for the middle classes

highlight the way universalism has become part of a classed rhetoric through which contributory benefits are less touchable than subsistence level benefits which are permanently open to 'reform'. It is perhaps necessary to introduce a different kind of vocabulary in which the ostensible *reason* for protecting universalism - namely the achievement of fairness and social equality - is presented as foremost to its defence. In particular, a discourse of basic needs and of interdependence could orientate discussions of welfare reform around the kind of concepts that locate principles of social justice at the centre of the Welfare State, rather than having the primary value of labour market participation penetrate its core meanings. The lineaments of such a discourse are addressed in the next section.

'Real universality is actual interdependency'¹⁹

An argument for welfare reform in which the concept of interdependence is central can maintain traditional socialist welfare principles associated with social modernism, in particular the idea of social improvement through redistributive policies and basic needs provision. Here basic needs are held to be the requirements for a degree of material well-being that enables individuals to participate in society, rather than just 'subsist', and so if necessary enables them to engage in political discourses of needs interpretation.²⁰

A concept of interdependence can also offer a way of accommodating modern and principled postmodern critiques of welfare as practiced in the contemporary period. It can express the positive, even intrinsic, relation between concepts of social solidarity and social difference, that is the *connectedness* of individuals in society but also their *inbetween-ness* in social positions that are multiply constituted and changing. In Balibar's conception of real universality as actual interdependency, this idea is expressed in his contention that:

'[No] discussion about universality... can usefully proceed with a 'univocal' concept of 'The Universal' [but] has to take into account the concept's insurmountable equivocality.'²¹

This view is extended by Iris Marion Young in her idea of a *heterogeneous public*:

¹⁹ Balibar.E (1995) Ambiguous Universality p48-74 *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 7 (1) p51

²⁰ This definition is based on Doyal and Gough's 'Theory of Human Need' ((1991) *A Theory of Human Need* Basingstoke: Macmillan). It is purposefully a limited statement which does not engage with the 'Theory' part of Doyal and Gough's formulation. In this respect I am following Iris Marion Young's suggestion that a rational discourse of justice that holds ideals and principles, does not require a 'Theory of Justice' (here I am substituting justice with 'need'). Young posits that 'Theory' suggests a Universal normative system and so militates against the idea of 'situated political dialogue' that is culturally specific. Young.I.M (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference* Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press p5

²¹ Balibar, *Ambiguous Universality* p48

‘...in a heterogeneous public, differences are publicly recognised and acknowledged as irreducible, by which I mean that persons from one perspective or history can never completely understand and adopt the point of view of those with other group-based perspectives and histories.’²²

This position leads Young to reject a notion of Universal citizenship, preferring to conceive of citizenship as a perpetual process, a dialogue between often irreducible differences, but which maintains a sense of belonging through universal dialogue. Similarly, acknowledging difference and diversity within and between groups of welfare beneficiaries - including middle class recipients of fiscal, contributory and occupational benefits²³ - does not require the abandonment of the principle of welfare universalism expressed through a *democratic* and *situated* policy process and politics of needs interpretation, which keeps social equalities of outcome as ideal and principle. Indeed the commonality of basic welfare needs must be one of the strongest illustrations of how unity exists within difference and why those differences should not be erected as divides. The welfare principle of universalism should not therefore be regarded as an expression of absolute sameness but of interdependence.

The strategic importance of a concept of basic needs is that ‘needs’ work as a basic justification for claims to State welfare provision. The political importance of the concept is found in Marx’s still resonant dictum - ‘from each according to his ability to each according to his need’, locating the concept in a principle of redistributive justice which remains central to socialist beliefs. It is not my intention here to test the concept in relation to specific policy proposals, nor to engage with debates about the relationship between needs and rights (suffice to say that the identification of basic needs would suggest certain rights of needs satisfaction). Rather my focus here is the value of the concept of interdependence where provision for interdependence involves both basic needs provision and redistribution.

The notion of interdependence expresses the nature of social between-ness that I have been arguing for, in contestation of the dualistic constructions that are foundational to the dominant discourse of ‘underclass’. Here there are clear links to be made between critical theory and social policy. An understanding of the social as thoroughly interdependent - contesting processes that seek to construct it through division and polarity - provides the background to the kind of ‘ethic of solidarity’ necessary to sustain support for

²² Young, I.M. (1989) ‘Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship’ p250-74 *Ethics* 99 p258

²³ For a discussion of how these tend to be excluded from conceptions of public welfare See Sinfield, A. (1989) *Social security and its social division: a challenge for sociological analysis* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

a strong Welfare State.²⁴ The notion of interdependence can be used to express the nature of social relations beyond ideas of absolute sameness and absolute difference. It does not suggest homogeneity but can be marshalled to the cause of equality, and in this respect it is central to a non-reductive politics of social justice. Within this conception welfare universalism does not imply an homogeneous population, or an homogeneity of claimant groups. Moreover the aim of equality expressed in welfare universals does not imply sameness of treatment. Indeed its starting point must be the recognition of the differences and inequalities that *do* exist and which mean that policies intended to achieve social and economic equality cannot deploy blanket approaches. It is such a basic understanding that I have shown to be so amiss from current policy drives to achieve equality in the labour market and Social Security system by legislating for the social desirability of 'the worker' as a labour market participant undifferentiated by gender among other things. According to that logic the worker mould is to be equally cast around the single mother and the married mother; the parent with one teenage child and the parent with four young children; the parent with a sick or disabled child and the parent with a healthy, able-bodied child; the disabled or incapacitated unemployed man and the healthy unemployed man; the parent who wants to be a full-time carer at home and the parent who wants to work in the labour market. Difference is thus quashed in the name of equality, indeed partly in the name of feminism and anti-discriminatory practice. This policy trajectory places labour market participation as a condition of enhanced social provision: for those individuals and families who have no part in the formal labour market, social benefits and provisions will be withdrawn, or at best maintained at poverty levels rather than improved. This logic unites a host of current and emergent welfare policies. Family Credit, Child Maintenance support, Childcare provision, New Deal packages and Tax Credits all support the principle that more will be given to those who participate in the labour market.²⁵ In this respect the logic is not about making 'cuts' per se but redistributing spending towards encouragement, facilitation and increasingly compulsion into paid work for those who refuse to see what is in their 'best interests'. The drive of the logic is to make the 'welfare dependant' into the 'independent worker'.

Clearly the construction of dependence and independence in these terms is ethically lacking. In the notion of the interdependent subject is the refusal of that dualism, the refusal of the construction of the modern individual as an independent unit and the insistence that interdependence is intrinsic to the different ways of being a person *in* society. Recognition

²⁴ The idea of an 'ethic of solidarity' is forwarded by Iris Marion Young as being critical to the combination of social justice with a politics of difference. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*

²⁵ See thesis postscript on March 1998 Budget

of such interdependence grants rather than denies autonomy.²⁶ This conception opens up the possibility of notions of the universal being used to express difference as *constitutive* of the whole, creating solidarity as opposed to fragmentation between parents and children, the young and the old, men and women, the disabled and able-bodied, the community worker and the office worker, the sick and the well and in-between all those groups.

The practicalities of this ethical understanding of social relations are of course potentially problematic, implementing an ethic through policy will always be more difficult and subject to constraints than the statement of the ethic itself. That discourses of 'need' replete with ethical justification are so easily used to homogenise and oppress particular groups either for 'their own good' or for 'the greater good' is the permanent risk of social modernism. Benign outcomes can never be guaranteed. The risk-laden predicament of modernist drives for social change points to the critical contribution of those postmodern approaches to society that have heightened sensitivities to the power relations of cultural and political representations of the way 'things are' and should be. In particular it points to the need for ongoing discourse analyses of the languages, spaces and practices through which notions of the Social Good get defined. It is such an analysis that this thesis has developed with regard to the contemporary discourse of 'underclass'. Central parts of the socially reformatory element of 'underclass' discourse have been shown to be thoroughly imbricated in the languages and practices of conventionalised, power-vested knowledges.

The discourse analytic approach of this thesis does not represent a denial of the existence of serious troubles that are part of many poor people's lives and the places in which they live. Nor does it attempt a glorification of 'communities' under stress battling against material and symbolic degradation. Poverty often exists without positive meanings and practices of working class subjectivities and collectivities. It can be brutal and destructive, turning those who are subject to it against each other and the places in which they live. Such predicaments need neither demonisation nor glorification but an analysis that recognises the way people living through poverty have understandings that can be very different to those assumed by 'objective' knowledges about them. Such an analysis should be able to recognise strengths and survival strategies where they exist whilst trying to understand the heavy burdens placed upon people which sometimes result in their being unable to cope. My analysis has looked at the way different kinds of social distress are produced and experienced through different kinds of knowledge about them. It has mainly

²⁶ The notion of autonomy as opposed to self-sufficiency as an ideal citizen value, and moral value, is explained by Iris Marion Young as the basis of egalitarian citizenship. It is created via a recognition that some people may require more social support than others and that such support should never be used to detract from personal autonomy through judgments - 'about where they will live, how they will live, how they will spend money, what they will do with their time' - which make them into second class citizens. Young, *Mothers, Citizenship and Independence* p550

analysed the producer end of that process: the way that different 'truths' are installed around those who require social welfare support as 'truths' about what society can and cannot afford, 'truths' about entitlement to subsistence level benefits and 'truths' about different *kinds* of people and places. Through the workings of discourse such 'truths' about communities in crisis and a lack of 'public' willingness to support them culturally or financially, are at least partly realised. Within this regime of meaning and practice around 'underclass' struggles for material survival are also struggles for measures of autonomy, dignity and empathy. Meaning and power are symbolic *and* material resources that are wrested, granted, or denied.

The matter of proposing 'solutions' for the alleviation of poverty tends to direct attention to the material conditions of the poor and thereby often elides understandings about the nature of poverty's *production* and the role of the non-poor in that process. It also tends to suggest a locus of action in a way that fails to take account of the way the production of poverty is thoroughly embedded in, and extended through the practices of society, especially in the practices of the non-poor. Moreover, the notion of policy prescription can itself seem reductive at the end of an analysis that has insisted on the nature of the social space as configured through shifting networks and multiple axes of some temporal and spatial complexity. Nevertheless in my presentation of this complex network ontology I have also insisted on the centrality of a normative, political analysis of it. In particular, in this concluding chapter I have indicated the kinds of political understandings of social justice and equality - with interdependence and basic needs as central concepts - that have informed my analysis. Below I will briefly outline those policy ideas that emerge from the kinds of political understandings that I have forwarded. They come with the caveat that a discourse of social justice needs to be seen as produced within a specific time-space and specific policy ideas are part of that contingency. Following my analyses of the networks, spaces and power relations that configure the contemporary discourse of 'underclass', some policies can be tentatively suggested. They do not represent a 'new' political project but are drawn from ideas that are at least partly, already constituted in the oppositional and subjugated spaces that I have presented. They do not represent a plan to be imposed on a failing system but are part of a process that is already working as new welfare forms, ideas and campaigns emerge from the crises, successes and contradictions of the 'historical present'. In such developments it is possible to identify three broad areas of policy ideas that could together work towards the alleviation of the problems associated with 'underclass'.

The first is a politics of parenting and child welfare which could express the right of parents to look after children as full-time carers should they so wish and to be given

financial support for that work at a level that accords cultural value and ensures material well-being for their children and for themselves. The provision of welfare entitlements for babies and children could form part of a child welfare programme which recognises children's emotional and psychological needs for attachment as well as their needs for basic material security. Such a programme would recognise conflicts of interest between children and a society dominated by paid work and it would adjudicate on the side of children as the least powerful group in society rather than seeing them as deviations from an adult norm. It would not assume that the best way to alleviate problems of parenting in poverty is for the State or commercial interests to take over the parenting role, enabling more 'productive' work to be done. This kind of politics would need to be instituted in relation to a positive discourse on the family as a realm of life that should not be predominantly defined in relation to, and penetrated by the demands and values of the labour market. Avoidance of the conservative aspects with which this idea has become associated could support an idea of the home as an important place of identification, education and politicisation, as potentially as radical and progressive as any workplace.²⁷

The second policy area that could achieve the alleviation of poverty amongst long-term 'benefit dependent' groups is a politics of basic or minimum income. This would involve the introduction of a universal form of basic or citizen's income as a social dividend in recognition of social interdependence beyond the taxpayer-claimant divide. The income would replace the social insurance principle of the Welfare State which regressively links social support to labour market advantage, and would serve to integrate the tax and benefit system in favour of the principle of redistribution. A basic income could be used to confer symbolic and material value upon unpaid work in the family and community.

The third policy area that I have identified as central to a refusal of the politics of 'underclass' is a politics of representation. This could establish a Commission of the Low Incomed managed by staff who have extensive experience of poverty, including community project workers. The Commission would have a lobbying role and a proactive consultancy role within the policy making process and within the media. Such a Commission would be a policy priority, and have a central role in formulating the politics of parenting, child welfare and basic income suggested above.

These three policy areas are not meant to be comprehensive: policies for the creation and better regulation of employment in particular, and investment in education, housing and

²⁷ For a discussion of a progressive reformulation of the meanings of the private see Squires.J (1994) *Private Lives, Secluded Places: Privacy as Political Possibility* p387-401 *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12. Also hooks, 'Homeplace: a site of resistance' p41-51 *Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics*

health are of equal importance in addressing the kinds of social issues associated with poverty. The above are presented as three areas that are given very little serious consideration in policy terms even though their ideas relate to central points of reference in the discourse of 'underclass'. Moreover all three areas could have extensive theoretical support from the kinds of feminist and critical theories that have been used in this thesis. As it is the implications of such theories are rarely developed in terms of contemporary relations between poor children and society, working lives outside of the labour market, and the politics of subjugated experiential knowledges of poverty. In this regard there is room for greater academic advocacy in these areas.²⁸

The presentation of these policies is not meant to suggest that the failings and contradictions of current welfare practice (and relatedly of society) are fully resolvable. Rather they are part of a discursive process in which concepts of collectivity, solidarity and interdependence are given analytical and political priority. The tension between those priorities and the values of diversity and difference both in principle and in practice may well be a constitutive dynamic of contemporary society. Acceptance of this tension should not however suggest that social outcomes are contingent upon the arbitrary working of the dynamic: power relations *can* be more equally configured. Cultural and political discourses are an integral part of those configurations and can work towards ensuring that the risks and dangers of modern society's quest for social improvement are more equally borne. In this thesis my own representations are part of an academic practice and network that is personally and politically committed to reconfiguring knowledges about those people who unequally bear the burden of such risks.

²⁸ Such advocacy around issues of child welfare, basic income and political representation specifically is presented elsewhere without reference to Social Theory. See Leach, *Children First*; Meade.J.E (1995) *Full Employment Regained?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Holman.B (1993) *A New Deal For Social Welfare?* London: Lion Publishing

POSTSCRIPT

'The 's' word was not used, but this Budget was a first step in creating a stakeholding economy and society.'

(Hutton.W (1997) 'The Budget' *The Observer* 6.7.97 p22)

'...the Chancellor has pulled off the magic trick. He has done what he most wanted to do about the growing underclass. He has changed the future for hundreds and thousands of women and children (and Harriet Harman here deserves the credit for making him understand the importance of childcare).'

(Toynbee.P (1998) 'Wooing Women' *The Guardian* 18.3.98 p22)

'I say this to those who can work: this is our New Deal. Your responsibility is to seek work. My guarantee is that if you work, work will pay...

Because in the future work will pay, those with an offer of work can have no excuse for staying at home on benefits.'

('Extracts from Chancellor's Speech' *The Guardian* 18.3.98 p19)

Developing the 'welfare to work' theme of their interim budget (July 1997), the first full Budget of the new Labour government marks a powerful symbolic moment in the discourse of 'underclass'. It also sets an economic framework for the material existence of large groups of poor working class people. Its cultural and economic significance is considerable: the meanings of Welfare and Labour ('work' and the political party) have been cast in new moulds with a view to long-term social change. This is not a budget on-the-hoof but part of a programmatic vision whose genesis has been at least as long as 18 years in government opposition. This thesis has traced part of the development of that vision, through the discourse of 'underclass': through knowledges, practices, and relations that have chartered a route of 'social becoming' for poor groups and places in 1990s Britain. Though neither univocal nor linear in nature, this discourse has been able to achieve a momentous stability, of which the Budget is now part.

Welfare reform, as one of the Budget's key themes (the others are Stability and Enterprise) is based on a distribution of benefits to the poor conditionally tied to paid work and childcare. The Working Family Tax Credit and the Childcare Tax Credit are its centrepiece. Both are directed at low-income families as a means to create a minimum, work-based income. The value of the childcare credit is £100 a week for a first child, £150 for two or more children. The child premium for families on full Income Support has been increased by £2.50 a week per child, in addition to a £2.50 increase in Child Benefit for all families. Cuts to lone parent premiums have been maintained.

The disjuncture between the in-work monetary value of childcare and the at-home value of child care is clear. Also clear, is the intention to regard single parent poor families as requiring the same level of social support as two parent poor families by not granting any single parent benefit premiums. In this formulation, two parent working families are instituted as the ideal. Welfare benefits will deliver most to those who conform to that ideal. *These* benefits, however, are not to be regarded as dependency-inducing benefits. By administering them through the pay packet, the Inland Revenue rather than the DSS, the cultural and psychological value of 'independence through 'work'' is apparently assured. Subjectivities, psychologies and economies are being re-made through that regime of meaning, a regime of power/knowledge for new times.