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A cultural history of cinema-going in the Illawarra (1900-1950)

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Volume I

Audience members at the Whiteway Theatre, Port Kembla on 13 May 1950 watching *Ma and Pa Kettle Go to Town* (1950)

Courtesy of Wollongong City Library *Illawarra Images*

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, Nancy Elizabeth Huggett, declare this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Nancy Huggett

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CONTENTS

VOLUME I

VOLUME II –APPENDICES

LIST OF FIGURES / PHOTOGRAPHS

FIGURES:

PHOTOGRAPHS:

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores a cultural history of cinema-going in the Illawarra region of New South Wales over the first half of the twentieth century through oral history interviews with cinema-goers of the period.

The research was originally intended to explore the Australian cinema industry from a regional perspective. However, while the interviews contained fascinating details and stories of cinema-going in this period, they did not fit seamlessly into existing academic discussions about cinema which often focus on film texts and national cinema industries. Therefore, as well as considering how the oral histories I collected contributed to pre-existing academic discourses about the cinema industry and national screen content, I have also explored other discourses that are articulated in audience narratives.

Through exploring the debates in cultural studies about audience research and the work of the Popular Memory Group and other critical oral historians, I critically evaluate the oral history narratives as well as the methodology of oral history itself. I look at the intersection of oral history practice with cultural studies in order to highlight issues of representation and power and to celebrate the way that differences between written and oral histories can foreground processes of meaning-making.

My contention in this thesis is that cinema-going is a strategy of mediation through which people make sense of themselves, their lives and their relationships with others. I test this theory by considering cinema-going in relation to a series of identifications: national identity, local identity, personal identity and political identity (age being one strategic location from which older individuals can draw on age-related discourses and experiences to achieve particular narrative ends).

In conclusion I argue that any cultural history of cinema-going is a mediated history which is constructed within a matrix of meaning-making strategies. It is created through audience members' narratives of cinema-going which re-configure memories in accordance with particular discourses of significance either in the narrated past or in the narrating present. The researcher, who tells the story with reference to specific research priorities and current academic discourses, further mediates such a history. Therefore, as well as setting out *a* cultural history of cinema-going in the Illawarra for debate and further research, the emphasis on *mediation* is intended to encourage reflection on the creation of history as a complex, collaborative and political process which creates one story as it silences others.

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My thanks go to Bob Parkinson for his words of advice at the start of this project and for his detailed and invaluable research into Illawarra cinemas published in the book *Guaffered Velour*.

I would also like to thank the Illawarra Retirement Trust at Woonona for generously allowing me to undertake the first set of oral history interviews. I am particularly in the debt of the Trust's administration staff who helped me to track down former residents and their families some years after the interviews in order to provide interview tapes and transcripts and to gain written consent for the use of the interviews.

I couldn't have completed this thesis without the support of my friends and family. In particular, I would like to thank my parents for taking my daughter, Nina, out in her pushchair in the rain so that I could get some writing done and to Dad, Pete and Emma for reading and commenting on my thesis drafts. My greatest supporter has been my husband Shane whom I thank for his faith in my ability to see the project through to the end and for his patience, love and understanding (and childcare and catering services!)

My greatest debt, however, is to the men and women who agreed and volunteered to be interviewed about cinema-going for this project. Their fascinating, humourous and touching narratives taught me to think about and rethink my subject matter and without their generosity, kindness and, in many cases, friendship, this thesis would neither have been possible or half as interesting.

INTRODUCTION

This research started off with the straightforward objective of piecing together a history of cinema in the Illawarra region from various primary and secondary sources, using in particular interviews with residents of the Illawarra about their cinema experiences. I first set about delineating the scope of the study, considering how the Illawarra was to be defined and what period I intended to cover.

AREA

The Illawarra region has a history of shifting boundaries. Peter Knox points out that the term has been used to describe areas of vastly different sizes, from a single site near Lake Illawarra to an aboriginal language district reaching from Botany Bay in the north to Jervis Bay in the south (2). Even today the region's boundaries are elusive, constituted in a variety of ways that suit particular agendas:

> There is an Illawarra Catchment Area, which is confusing because it describes areas where water from the Illawarra mountains runs down to and is stored (mostly to the west and not within the Illawarra local government areas). There is the Illawarra as serviced by Telstra, as well as the local government area, the Illawarra and South Coast Police District, a TAFE district and the Illawarra Tourist Region. Each of these Illawarras has different boundaries. (3)

In 1997 the Mayor of Wollongong even wrote to the Premier of New South Wales seeking a resolution of the matter, which was not forthcoming (3). Knox settles for the definition used by the local government and by the Illawarra Mercury newspaper that encompasses the areas of Wollongong, Wingecarribee, Shoalhaven, Shellharbour and Kiama. I choose to follow a smaller map of the region, common to tourist brochures and to Bob Parkinson's book about Illawarra cinemas, which considers the Illawarra to be between Helensburgh in the north and Kiama in the south (See fig. 1).[1] To the north

[1] This information was gleaned from various maps including those produced by Wollongong City Council, the Illawarra Regional Information Service, the Illawarra Historical Society and those appearing in tourist brochures of the region.

of this area is Sutherland, part of south Sydney, and to the south Nowra marks the heart of the Shoalhaven region. From the point of view of the study of cinema this definition of the Illawarra is useful as it loosely describes the scope of Wollongong Theatres Proprietary Limited, the region's main cinema chain in the first half of the twentieth century (Parkinson vi).

Fig 1 – This thesis' definition of region

Courtesy Bob Parkinson's *Guafferred Velour (v)*

It is important to point out, however, that there is more to defining a region than geography. Although the Illawarra is described as an area united by steel production, coal mining and dairy farming, these industries are not tightly interleaved. While the northern suburbs have been the traditional coal mining areas, central and southern

districts of Wollongong house the main steel production sites and further south, towards Kiama, the dairy farms are located. The separate locations of these very different industries divide the region, and this is before other factors such as population, wage distribution and ethnic background are considered (Richardson xii).

In his study of the Illawarra region during the Depression, Len Richardson remarks on the problematic process of grouping together diverse towns and suburbs and lending them the cohesiveness of the term "region":

> In the title and throughout the text "Wollongong" has been used in its modern form to indicate the entire district. In an important sense, however, this usage is misleading for the 1930s. So imbued were contemporaries with the intense parochialism of the individual communities that people from settlements a few kilometres apart considered each other outsiders. This parochialism was conditioned historically by the manner in which the separate communities had grown up around the coal mines that gave them life. Yet even now there is scarcely a Wollongong identity. Many locals still consider themselves to belong to Coledale or Bulli or Port Kembla and only secondarily to Wollongong. (xii)

To inscribe a region very often implies setting an agenda, be it social or political. It is about inclusion and exclusion. The way a region defines its boundaries is therefore an important aspect of any study. With the exception of Cec Clark who visited various parts of the region on his picture show circuit (interview 25), the people I interviewed did not talk in terms of the Illawarra region but with reference to the specific towns and suburbs where they grew up. My adoption of the term "Illawarra" therefore enables me to group stories together and look for similarities and differences of point of view in terms of regionalism. The Illawarra becomes a way of making the personal and parochial into the regional. It is a path by which the lives and stories of others can speak to experiences of our own through the similarities and identifications of a particular region.

In an important sense, the Illawarra is also not-Sydney and this thesis is therefore also making claims about regional cinema experiences being different from those of metropolitan areas, a point that is also being made by Robert C Allen in relation to the diversity of US cinema-going experiences ("Decentering Historical Audience Studies: A Modest Proposal"). As I shall show in chapters 1 and 5, cinema exhibitors and cinema-goers in the Illawarra defined themselves through both comparisons with and in opposition to the city of Sydney. These discourses of regional identity, which work through binary terms, can be evidenced through examining cinema advertising and memories of cinema-going. The fact that the Illawarra is variously seen as better than, just as good as, and not as good as Sydney shows the complexity and the relativity of the term regionalism. These distinctions can also be applied to oppositions and associations made between towns and areas within the Illawarra region, in particular the northern suburbs compared to the south, small communities compared to larger suburbs and those larger suburbs as compared to Wollongong city itself. Such distinctions reveal the different agendas at play within the discourse of place.

PERIOD

The period this study refers to is the first half of the twentieth century. This was first determined by my initial interest in the old cinema buildings in the northern suburbs that operated in the 1920s-1950s.[2] After researching cinema at the local library, I realised that the first half of the twentieth century saw picture shows and theatres spring up in towns and suburbs across the region making cinema-going a popular leisure activity enjoyed and easily accessed by the whole community. This contrasted sharply with the second half of the century when the older theatres closed down and the few that remained became concentrated in the city and the southern suburbs of Warrawong and Shellharbour.

The first half of the twentieth century is a dynamic time in terms of the history of cinema, as has been pointed out by numerous writers in the field both in Australia (Shirley and Adams; Collins; Bertrand; Tulloch) and overseas (Maltby *Hollywood Cinema*; Staiger; Stacey). A comparison of industry developments in America,

[2] In 1995 I was nursing at the Illawarra Retirement Trust in Woonona and began to ask the residents I worked with about their memories of cinema in their home suburbs. Our conversations about cinema-going during the first half of the twentieth century eventually led to my formal research into this topic.

Australia and in the Illawarra is provided in chapter 1. With the emergence of moving pictures in the late 1890s, the first years of the twentieth century saw the moving pictures gain popularity and wider coverage as the pictures were taken to more towns and suburbs by travelling showmen. Their popularity was such that moving pictures were soon given a permanent setting in almost every suburb, first within pre-existing venues such as town halls or schools of arts and then in purpose-built structures which grew and developed into elaborate picture palaces and luxurious theatres (Collins *Hollywood Down Under* 108-9).

In the early twenties cinemas spread so that most communities hosted regular moving pictures. Local chains were formed and at a national level, the exhibition chains of Hoyts and Union Theatres spread into suburban and regional areas. Meanwhile American distributors gained almost complete control of the screen content that was released into Australian cinemas. While British content rose to just under 10% in the 1940s, Australian productions in the same period, even when combined with other non-British and non-US productions, still only reached 3% (Segrave 120). Thus, while Australian productions did find their way to the screen, for the most part screen content, especially features, came from the US (Bertrand; Shirley and Adams; Vasey).

After the Second World War a combination of factors signalled a change in fortune for the cinema industry in Australia. The post war baby boom and increased affluence led to further suburbanisation and investment in the home. Families found it more convenient to stay at home for their entertainment and embraced the new medium of television following its introduction to Australia in 1956. Cinema attendances fell and the days of cinema as an unrivalled source of screen entertainment were over (Collins *Hollywood* 214).

The pace of change and development of the cinema industry in these decades provides significant opportunities for the study of cinema in the Illawarra. Over a relatively short period of time Illawarra audiences saw many changes in the ways they experienced going to the pictures.

The first half of the twentieth century was also a time of dramatic social change at a national and regional level in Australia. World War One, the Depression and World

War Two are obvious examples of historical factors that caused significant social change to communities. These events affected everyday life for the people of the Illawarra and form a background to peoples' memories of cinema-going.

The Illawarra region also experienced more local upheaval. In 1918-19 it was host to a major influenza pandemic, which spread into the Illawarra from Sydney (*Illawarra Mercury* 11 Apr. 1919 2). The period also saw the growth of new industries, and the decline of older ones, which greatly affected population distribution and regional identity. The development of the railway saw the creation of more stations on the Illawarra line and a central marshalling yard at Thirroul in 1917, which greatly enhanced the importance of the suburb (Singleton 22). More significantly, the construction of the Port Kembla steelworks from 1926-28 transformed the Illawarra from a coal-mining region centred in the northern suburbs, to a steel-producing region based in the south. This dynamic change in the industrial predominance of the region caused a population shift from the northern to the southern suburbs of the Illawarra (Richardson 11). The number and location of picture theatres mirrored this shift.

The social changes that affected the people of the Illawarra both at a local, regional and national level in this period lay behind their accounts of cinema-going and were often mentioned in the oral history narratives. The people I interviewed often used cinema as a way of articulating more over-arching concerns of the times such as the hardships of the Depression and the shortages in the Second World War. Social factors are therefore significant to this research in that they infuse experiences and memories of cinema-going and provide the framework around which cinema experiences are discussed.

Although this study describes cinema in the Illawarra in the first half of this century I should make a few qualifications. The people who I talked to tended to recall cinema stories from the 1920-50s and there are therefore not many memories from the First World War and before. This is not because cinema-going did not feature as a regular activity but because the people I was interviewing (with a few exceptions) were born during or after the First World War. Similarly, when cinema stories stretched into the 1950s and beyond I have sometimes included them within this research. The "first half of the twentieth century" is therefore less a strict delineation than a convenient way of speaking about a period of cinema prominence and wide-ranging social change.

* * *

After thinking about the period and the region I intended to cover in my history of cinema in the Illawarra, I turned my attention to the sources of information I would use to find out about it. I wanted to be able to situate the history of cinema in the Illawarra within the context of the development of cinema in Australia and America. The American cinema industry was important to my considerations because US production/distribution companies secured significant control of the screen content that was shown in Australia and influenced the conditions in which this content was shown in certain respects (see chapter 1). I therefore researched histories of cinema in the US and in Australia (Gomery; Maltby; Staiger; Vasey; Bertrand; Collins; Shirley and Adams; Tulloch). Further information about the cinema industry in Australia was found in trade magazines and fan magazines held at the Mitchell Library and I also examined advertising material and photographs at ScreenSound (formerly the National Screen and Sound Archive).

As well as looking at the historical context of cinema I also considered another major discourse through which Australian cinema is written about, that of national screen content (Dermody and Jacka; O'Regan). The debates over what constitutes Australian cinema and how Australian films compare to their Hollywood counterparts during different periods have formed a significant body of academic work about cinema in Australia. Consequently I was interested in finding out what Illawarra audiences thought of screen content from different national origins (see chapter 4 for further discussions of this discourse).

To find out more about cinema in the Illawarra I consulted local history books (Hagan and Wells; Mitchell and Sherrington; Bayley; J Davis; King; Richardson; Singleton) as well as primary sources such as local newspapers and picture archives. The newspapers and picture archives revealed details about how the cinema was advertised and exhibited in the region. However, a more thorough source of information about the cinemas themselves and their various owners and exhibitors was Bob Parkinson's book *Guaffered Velour* (published by the Australian Theatre Historical Society) which meticulously recounts the history of theatre construction and exhibition in the Illawarra.

Parkinson's book has proved an invaluable resource with which to compare oral history narratives about cinema-going. It was the oral history narratives, co-produced with local residents, which were my primary source of information about cinema in the Illawarra.

THE INTERVIEWS - METHODOLOGY

This research comprises 26 interviews with 35 people aged between 61 and 93 (median age of 77) at the time of interview. The interviews were conducted in two sets during 1995 and 1999 (see appendix I for numbered transcripts). The first set of interviews (interviews 1-14) was mainly produced with residents of the Woonona Village Retirement Units. The second set (interviews 15-26) were produced with respondents to an advertisement placed in the *Voice of the Seniors* newsletter and with members of senior citizen centres in Wollongong, Port Kembla and Dapto.

Most of the people I interviewed were cinema audience members but interview numbers 2, 22 and 25 were with a projectionist, a cinema manager and a travelling picture showman respectively. These interviews, especially 22 and 25, provide a fascinating insight into exhibition practices in the region. The majority of interviews were conducted one-to-one. However, four interviews were with married couples (interview numbers 2, 12, 20 and 22), one was with a mother and daughter (interview 19), one with two friends (interview 21) and one with five members of the Dapto Oral History Group (interview 26).

Most of the interviews I co-produced were recorded in one sitting. The length of the interviews was largely dependent on an interviewee's enthusiasm, stamina and the amount of stories he or she wanted to tell. In two instances I returned for a second interview (interviews 16 and 22) and in one instance three interviews were conducted (interview 3). This was because the interviewees had more to tell me about their cinema-going experiences and offered information in a particularly analytical or articulate way.

I choose to conduct informal, unstructured interviews with the aim of achieving largely free-flowing conversational narratives. This was not always easy to achieve. The presence of the tape recorder often unsettled people at the start of the interview and some interviewees seemed conscious of the tape recorder throughout, sometimes giving

stilted responses whilst casting worried glances at the tape recorder (see in particular interviews 1, 14, 15).

I was also conscious of what Middleton and Edwards call “the discursive frame”, or the conversational context in which subjects are discussed. Middleton and Edwards cite the example of British schoolchildren who recalled different aspects of the film *ET* (1982) depending on whether a teacher in a classroom discussion was asking them or whether they were talking about the film amongst themselves (31). This made me realise that the interviews I co-produced would be different in style and content to discussions about cinema that might arise between peers. Nevertheless, I tried to aim for a conversational interview style rather than a formal question and answer framework in order to facilitate more exploratory and wide-ranging comments.

The material surroundings in which an oral history interview takes place are also an important consideration. In the Middleton and Edwards collection, Alan Radley’s essay proposes that material surroundings can aid or inhibit remembering: personal effects and familiar surroundings being conducive to detailed and more personal narratives while unfamiliar surroundings prove distracting (46-59). Consequently, I tried to go to the homes of the people I interviewed so that they would feel comfortable and could draw on items around them, such as photos and pieces of furniture to help illustrate their accounts. This was often to prove helpful in maintaining the conversation flow as interviewees could introduce characters into their narratives and point out their photographs at the same time (as occurred in interviews 4, 16 and 25). Cec Clark took the greatest advantage of his surroundings, drawing on the resources of photo albums and scrapbooks to illustrate his travelling showman days and even fetching a large handbell which he used to call attention to the coming picture show features (interview 25).

During the second set of interviews, however, I sometimes had to conduct interviews at various senior citizens’ centres that I was visiting. This proved less satisfactory than interviewing in people’s homes as the personal resources of photographs and mementos were not available and the hustle and bustle of the senior citizen centres often distracted both myself and the interviewees from the discussion topics (interviews 17, 18, 20 and 21).

Although I had a set of questions in mind that I usually asked at some stage during the interview (see appendix IV), I did not have these questions written down in front of me. This was because I feared the presence of a clipboard and pen may have created the impression of formality that could have restricted responses. It also seemed to me that written questions ticked off through the interview would be constructing a barrier between interviewer and interviewee, emphasising formal roles that were contrary to the informal and conversational exchanges I wanted to encourage. I also did not wish to impose a specific order on the narrative by asking set questions, one after another. As Luisa Passerini, an oral historian of popular memories of fascism in inter-war Italy explains:

> To respect memory also means letting it organise the story according to the subject's order of priorities. I would ask questions designed to probe, get additional information, and clarify questions of time, place and intention without having to resort to further questioning on the matter. It entailed accepting, instead, the sequence of narration as it slowly threw up new questions and information. (8)

Consequently I would use the questions I had formulated prior to the interview to start off a conversation or to get it moving again if it stalled. But, for the most part, I asked questions or encouraged more information conversationally, as the narrative centred on various subjects.

Before each interview I explained my research project to the interviewees and gave them my phone number and the name of my academic supervisor in case they wanted to ask my supervisor or myself any questions about the research after the interview. After most interviews I gave the person interviewed a permission slip (appendix III) which they signed if they agreed to the interview being used in my research and stored at the University of Wollongong's oral history archive.[3] In one instance, a person interviewed wanted to remain anonymous. That person's name has been changed in the text and

[3] However, eight interviewees were not given a permission slip at the time and permission has been sought afterwards from interviewees or their next of kin (interviews 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11).

their interview tape has not been placed in the University of Wollongong's oral history archive.

The first set of interviews (interviews 1-14) were conducted in 1995, mainly with residents of the Woonona Village hostel complex where the interview selection process seemed to take a course of its own. On occasion, residents would recommend that I talk to friends or relatives living outside the hostel complex. It was through a resident of Woonona Village, Cecelia Jackson (interview 1), for example, that I was introduced to Ron and May Klower of Thirroul who used to work at the Kings Theatre (interview 2). Residents soon spread the news that I was conducting research and this resulted in discussions and reminiscences of cinema occurring over the dining room tables of the canteen or at social gatherings. These unofficial channels led to one resident volunteering information about cinema-going to me and presenting herself for interview (interview 9).

The people I interviewed came from a variety of different backgrounds and from areas as far apart as Port Kembla and Sutherland. However, there was a concentration of residents who came from the northern suburbs of Wollongong where Woonona is situated. This preponderance could be explained simply by the location of the Woonona Village retirement hostel in the northern suburbs. However, it also reflects the fact that in the 1920s, when many of the people I interviewed were growing up, over half the district's population came from the north. It was the northern suburbs where the escarpment coal mines were situated and mining accounted for the majority of the region's employment before the coming of the steelworks at the end of the decade.

After the first set of interviews I moved away from the Illawarra and spent two years interstate. When I returned to the region I decided to carry out more interviews, partly as I wanted to hear from more residents of Wollongong City and of the southern suburbs and partly as I wanted to gather more information about cinema-going in order to see whether further patterns of attendance, cinema-going preferences and ways of speaking about the cinema emerged. I also wanted to interview people I had no prior relationship with to see whether oral history interviews were any harder or easier without a pre-established rapport. Consequently, the second batch of interviews (numbers 15-26) was conducted in 1999 with respondents to an advertisement placed in

the *Voice of the Seniors* community newsletter and with volunteers from local senior citizen centres in the south of the region.

As a result of the newsletter advertisement Bill Jardine (interview 15) was recommended to me by his sister, Darryl Walker (interview 23) contacted me and three people wrote to me about their memories of cinema-going. One writer, Cec Clark (interview 25), I later interviewed (the remaining two either did not give their contact details in the letter or talked about cinema-going in Sydney). Alan Jeffrey (interview 24) was introduced to me by Charlie Anderson who, in turn, had been recommended to me by one of the members of the Port Kembla Senior Citizen Centre. I met the Dapto Oral History Society (interview 26) through Arthur Parkinson, a member of the society and of the Dapto Senior Citizen's Centre. The remaining interviews (interviews 16-21) were volunteers from senior citizen centres in Wollongong, Port Kembla and Dapto.

The two batches of interviews differed from one another in their geographical focus but also in other important ways. The initial set of interviews were produced at the start of my research into cinema and into oral history as a methodology while the second set were conducted at a later date. My interview techniques and knowledge of my subject matter were therefore more developed in the second set interviews than in the first. I also took greater care to involve the people from the second set of interviews in commenting on my transcriptions and provided them with copies of the interview tapes so that they also had ownership of the interview material. Consequently the second set of interviews was conducted with a greater awareness of issues of representation and power raised by the Popular Memory Group and by oral historians such as Alessandro Portelli and Alistair Thomson. These issues are detailed in chapter 3.

The people I interviewed in 1995 saw me as a nurse first and an academic second. In fact, because of my age at the time (23), I was seen more as a student than an academic, a position of significantly less power. However, as a nurse, I was still in a power relationship with the residents I interviewed as they depended on me for service and assistance. I would like to think my age as well as the close relationships I had formed with these residents diminished the inequality of the relationship between us. However, as the interpreter of their narratives and attributer of meaning to their words, the relationship is inherently unequal (see chapter 3).

Whether or not rapport was established in an interview depended on expectations and personalities, both mine and those of the people I interviewed. It is important not to overlook my own expectations and experiences which no doubt affected the interviews. For example, my left-wing, feminist background probably made me more sensitive and encouraging of stories that reflected these issues than others. John Fiske calls the process of examining oneself and one's motives "autoethnography" ("Ethnosemiotics" 89). I think such a process is important for oral historians in order to examine both sides of the interview relationship so as to understand the politics of the discourse better and to acknowledge the role of the researcher in the production of meaning. These issues are further examined in chapter 2.

The interviewees from the second set of interviews also differed from those of the first in that they volunteered whereas most of the interviewees from the first set were approached by me specifically. This has the effect of making the second set of people interviewed far more interested in the topic of cinema. Caused partly by their interest in cinema and partly, I suspect, through not knowing me well enough to involve me in conversational tangents about topics other than cinema, these interviewees stuck to the subject matter more closely than the first set.

Finally, the people I interviewed first were generally older than those I interviewed in the second round of research (a notable exception being Cec Clark whom I interviewed in 1999 and who at that time was 93 years old). The difference in ages between the interviewees can be explained by the fact that the first set of interviews were with people living in a retirement complex who were more likely to be of an older age group than the self-selecting seniors from the second sample. Memories from the 1920s and 30s were prevalent in the first set of interviews while the second set of interviewees reminisced about the 1930s, 40s and 50s.

Copies of the interview recordings will be lodged in the University of Wollongong's oral history archive on completion of this thesis. Numbered interview transcripts are presented in appendix I.

Although my audience research mainly consists of oral history interviews, I also refer to other primary sources from cinema audience members. Two of the people I interviewed sent me letters and pictures regarding their cinema-going experiences (interviews 22 and 25). I have also drawn on part of an oral history interview recorded with N. B. Smith during heritage week in 1984 by the pupils of Keira High School. This interview was the result of a joint venture between Keira High School and Wollongong University and was recorded at the university's open day. The interview is held in the university's archive collection. The pupils interviewed their elderly subjects according to a set of questions they were given about leisure activities and family life. Consequently the experience of cinema-going was a feature of some accounts. These additional sources have been included at appendix II.

REFLECTIONS ON ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH AND CONTENT

When I first started interviewing people about their cinema-going experiences in 1995 I believed oral history would be a relatively unproblematic way of accessing information about cinema in the region. However, as the interviews progressed I realised that both the process of interviewing and the content of the oral histories were more complex than I had first thought.

In terms of the process of oral history interviewing, the first set of interviews I co-produced raised questions that complicated the idea of oral history as a way of accessing details about the past. In the section on interviewing, I have alluded to some of the issues that were raised through conducting the first set of oral history interviews. These included considering how my role as a nurse might have affected the first set of interviews I produced and how conducting the interviews in certain ways and not others (for example, whether or not to ask set questions or where to conduct the interview) altered the type of interview that was produced.

Other issues developed as I started to transcribe the interviews and realised that the act of transcribing interviews is a translation that unavoidably alters the form and content of oral narratives. How was I best to represent oral dialogue in written form? Should I attempt to include people's accents and their speech mannerisms (and if so how did I intend to represent my own accent or speech characteristics)? Should I involve the interviewees in commenting on the transcript or on the later interpretation of their

words? And how was I representing the narratives of the people I interviewed? What did I include and what did I leave out? The political implications of the transcription process are discussed in chapter 3.

Another set of issues arose from considering how people narrated their stories about cinema-going in the Illawarra. I began to realise that memory and identity play a significant role in the way a narrative is constructed. People do not recall events direct from the past. Instead narratives are constructed through a series of negotiations between past and present discourses about a particular topic; between past and present versions of one's self and one's identity; between the agenda of the interviewer and the interviewee; and between the stated topic of the interview and other prescient topics in the mind of the narrator.

These issues surrounding interview protocols and interpretations complicated the process of oral history. I felt that I needed a wider framework for assessing such issues than was provided by the rudimentary oral history handbooks and interview guides I had initially consulted and so began to undertake further research into the critical evaluation of oral history.

* * *

In terms of the content of the interviews, I assumed that local residents would recount stories about cinema-going which reflected on the development of the cinema industry in the Illawarra and which also compared Australian screen content to that received from Hollywood and perhaps from Britain. Although the interviews did provide information about both these aspects of cinema (discussed in chapters 1 and 4 respectively) they did not represent the main topics of discussion or of interest to audience members.

In terms of the cinema industry in the Illawarra, with the exception of Cec Clark (interview 25) and Charlie Anderson (interview 22) who worked in the industry, and Olga Ferguson (interview 3) who mentioned the plight of small exhibitors, the interviews did not discuss developments in the cinema industry unless it was to talk about the personality of particular exhibitors. Similarly, the country of origin of

particular films did not seem to matter to the people I interviewed and although some could name a couple of Australian films, others thought that local content was simply not being produced (see chapter 4). While I have examined the interviews in terms of national identity and industry development elsewhere in this thesis, it was apparent that the interviews were constructed around different discursive agendas.

The interviews provided numerous anecdotes and details about the practice of cinema-going in different parts of the Illawarra. I learnt which theatres people preferred to attend, who they went with, what parts of the programs they liked best and how the cinema venue in each suburb contributed to its sense of identity and was used as a venue for a range of other community activities. Through stories about cinema-going, I learnt about the Depression and the Second World War and found out about different local personalities as well as about the lives of the narrators themselves.

Consequently, I discovered that the main ways of discussing cinema that are offered by Australian cinema studies (in terms of national identity, screen content or industry history for example) do not adequately cover the type of information provided by cinema audiences. What emerged from the interviews was a sense of the cultural importance of cinema-going in the Illawarra. My original objective of describing the history of cinema in the Illawarra was therefore superseded by the desire to reflect the actual content of the interviews by exploring the *cultural history of cinema-going* in the region. The results are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Audience Research

As a consequence of co-producing and reflecting on the first set of oral history interviews, my research began to take new directions. As cinema studies did not seem to provide an adequate framework for discussing the oral narratives of audience members I looked to television and other media audience research in the field of cultural studies and how it might be made relevant to research with cinema audiences (this is discussed at length in chapter 2).

One of the important developments within television audience research has been a broadening of the scope of audience studies. Instead of concentrating on people's

interpretations of specific television programs, ethnographic audience studies have considered the wider conditions of television reception such as the viewing context and the way in which television is used by various segments of the viewing audience (Morley; Gray; Hobson). Borrowed from the field of anthropology, ethnography refers to the intimate study of small groups or communities through a variety of methods, of which oral history interviewing is one.

Janice Radway recommends that ethnographic audience research take into account the ways in which a single leisure practice like reading, watching television or going to the pictures intersects with people's everyday lives ("Reception Study" 367). Through the examination of audience members' accounts of cinema-going, therefore, it is possible to reveal how cinema-going is linked to perceptions of personal identity, social hierarchy and community to name but a few factors.

Another important issue discussed in detail in chapter 2 is that of power and representation, or, the extent to which researchers speak on behalf of the audiences they study. Radway admits that her own study of romance readers distanced herself as "knowing analyst" from the women she was studying ("Romance and the work of fantasy" 214). Indeed, much early audience research presents the "thinking analyst" interpreting the "doing audience" so that the tasks of viewing and interpretation are seen as separate entities. It is only when this paradigm breaks down that the potentially damaging nature of such distinctions is revealed.

Such an example is provided by Ellen Seiter in her article, "Making distinctions in TV Audience Research - Case Study of a Troubling Interview", where Seiter and her co-interviewer questioned Oregon television viewers about their favourite TV soap operas. Seiter recounts a particular interview conducted with two male housemates, Mr Dubois and Mr Howe that she found awkward because of conflicting expectations about what was required from the interview.

According to Seiter, Mr Dubois and Mr Howe wanted to impress the interview team and show them that they were wise to the ways of television and able to interrogate the medium critically. Seiter, on the other hand, wanted the interviewees to talk about their favourite soap operas and what they liked and disliked about soaps in general.

Consequently the interview exhibited a lack of fit, which Seiter terms a "miscommunication". The two interviewees wanted to be regarded well by the academics interviewing them and appealed to them as self-educated men who could look down on television and soap opera viewers in a kind of conspiracy of superiors. Meanwhile Seiter wanted to hear from enthusiastic television soap viewers who made interpretative readings of programs but did not attempt to get the interviewers on side in a kind of class alliance. These assumptions and misreadings led to a distinct lack of rapport within the interview.

Seiter is obviously troubled by the interview as she bases a complete journal article on it. She acknowledges that the interview situation is one where the interviewer usually has more power than the interviewee as the interviewer gets to tell the story and make the interpretation of the narrative. Seiter can be commended for incorporating the interview transcript within this article so that readers are encouraged to view her interpretation against the transcript itself.

However, while she critiques the interview as being unsatisfactory because of gender and class assumptions, Seiter recounts the interview in a very one-sided manner, concerned mainly with her interviewees' misunderstandings instead of any of her own. The language she uses in the article to describe the interview is revealing. At various places in the article she describes one of the interviewees as "eccentric", "mixed-up" and a "crackpot". Despite claiming she intended to produce unstructured interviews, Seiter goes on to describe how she and her colleague attempted to redirect the interview towards their own goals. The description which follows is infiltrated with the language of domination, the interviewers, "cutting short [Mr Howe's] joke", contradicting him, admitting "no real interest in his encyclopedic knowledge or his generalisations" and eventually attempting to "force him back into the position of the everyday television fan" (64-65). These remarks, especially the final one, clearly mark the interview situation as contested terrain, whereby some researchers and their subjects struggle over meaning and purpose. In Seiter's study, she is more comfortable if the television fans she interviews stick to enthusiastically describing their favourite programs rather than criticising them. While Seiter could have used the article to examine both parties' assumptions and expectations of the interview project she ends up detailing only one half of the miscommunication process.

Some audience researchers have seen a solution to the interviewer/interviewee divide in conducting studies from within audience communities of which one is a constituent (Jenkins; Harrington and Bielby). Such studies of fandom (perhaps because the researchers count themselves as members of the fan communities they study) tend to emphasise fan culture as an "active" process whereby fans interact with screen content and construct new meanings around it. However, in attempting to erase the distinctions between fan and academic, the writers of such studies fail to explore the relations of power that still occur when one party produces meaning and speaks on behalf of another. Therefore, although studies of fans have attempted to bridge the divide between academic and the research subject, they risk suppressing questions of power and representation to the same extent as separatist audience studies.

These and other issues about audience research in cultural studies are explored in detail in chapter 2. Suffice to say, debates about audience research in cultural studies have enabled me to consider issues of power and representation and to widen the research field from screen content to the cultural significance of particular media. These considerations were useful in providing frameworks within which to discuss my research about cinema-going.

Oral History Methodology

In order to examine the methodological issues raised in the first set of interviews I looked towards more critical thinking on oral history provided in the work of the Popular Memory Group and by oral historians such as Alessandro Portelli and Alistair Thomson.

While the Popular Memory Group and its work are discussed in detail in chapter 3, it is important to signal the group's importance to my work briefly at this point. The group is interested in the ways in which official and popular versions of history intersect and divide. Its political objective is to reassert popular memories against official histories of particular events and eras. The group puts forward oral history as a key methodology with which to examine popular memory.

However, whilst advocating oral history, the Popular Memory Group also critically examines this method. The group is critical of overly-empirical oral history research that merely serves to back up official versions of history and disregards information that cannot be substantiated by other written sources. In doing this, it points out, the researcher risks ignoring the most interesting aspects of the interviews such as exploring the possible reasons why an interviewee remembers something different from the official record or why the interviewee fails to talk about particular aspects of an historical event.

The Popular Memory Group, together with other critically evaluative oral historians (Passerini; Portelli; Thomson), takes particular interest in contradictions between oral and written sources and tries to posit reasons for the differences. For example, written sources may have been constructed from a very different viewpoint than that of an oral narrative. Consider, for example, the different accounts that would be provided by a newspaper proprietor describing in an editorial a strike by print workers and an oral history interview conducted with one of the print-workers themselves.

Furthermore, most oral narratives are not organised around a chronological set of facts but around other principles such as how an event is pivotal in an interviewee's life experience or is illustrative of particular themes or perspectives. In the service of such narrative agendas, separate dates and times are conflated and disparate events are linked in order to make a particular point in a meaningful way. Therefore, the idea that oral histories are not always empirically reliable is a strength rather than a weakness as "errors, inventions and myths lead us beyond facts to their meanings" (Portelli *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other Stories* 2).

This has particular pertinence for my cinema interviews. It suggests that although the interviews may not disclose a vast amount of information about screen content or about the cinema industry, they reveal how cinema-going was made meaningful to narrators through discussions of preferred venues, seating arrangements, local characters and the central place cinema occupied in the social lives of Illawarra communities.

In common with some audience researchers, one of the major points that the Popular Memory Group makes about oral histories is the danger that lies in supposing that the

researcher speaks directly on behalf of the people he or she interviews. Instead, the group makes explicit the question of representation and points out that the oral historian or academic is the one who has most to gain (prestige, financial rewards, promotions) from writing about oral history. The danger, according to the Popular Memory Group, is that the voices of ordinary people become sanitised or lose potential political significance through academic interpretation. Instead, the group proposes that interviewees should be involved in the process of transcription and interpretation and that they are included in the imagined audience for any research paper or book.

Whilst considering questions of representation in oral history the Popular Memory Group draws attention to the fact that many interviewees are older adults. It emphasises the need for oral historians to consider age alongside factors such as gender and class when interpreting narratives. Through the work of the Popular Memory Group and through reading other texts about oral history research with older adults, I became aware of a double standard operating in some research. Older people are regularly used as a research resource through which to gain access to historical information about the past, and yet their viewpoints and opinions about the information they provide are not discussed, and sometimes are even questioned for being overly-nostalgic or unreliable (Henige 46). Thus older narrators are approached for the nuggets of information they provide rather than from any consideration of how issues of age inform or organise their narratives. Hence older adults are often silenced when interpreted by the academic community.

Cultural studies, for example, which champions a plurality of viewpoints, does not generally include considerations of age among other perspectives of difference such as gender, race, class or sexuality. What is needed, therefore, as I argue in chapter 7, is an examination of the way discourses about age and growing older mark and organise the oral history narratives of my research. Furthermore, I ask whether the stereotypical associations made about the narratives of older adults – that they are overly-nostalgic and backward-looking – are not, to a certain extent, produced by interviewer expectations.

* * *

In summary, through exploring the debates in cultural studies about audience research (chapter 2) and the work of the Popular Memory Group and other critical oral historians (chapter 3), I have been able to turn the problems I had with the content of narratives and the process of interviewing into valuable areas of discussion. I will look at the intersection of oral history practice with cultural studies in order to highlight issues of representation and power and to celebrate the way that differences between written and oral histories can foreground processes of meaning-making.

Instead of merely fitting the oral histories I collected into pre-existing academic discourses about the cinema industry and national screen content I have attempted to explore other discourses that are articulated in audience narratives. Information about where people sat at the cinema, who they went with and how they dressed and behaved might at first appear trivial. However, such information actually produces important discussions about how screen content is negotiated, how class, gender and age hierarchies are articulated and how cinema-going is co-opted to enhance individual and group identities. From these new areas of discussion I formulated a theory of cinema-going as a strategy of mediation.

CINEMA-GOING AS A STRATEGY OF MEDIATION

My contention in this thesis is that cinema-going is a strategy of mediation through which people make sense of themselves, their lives and their relationships with others. In chapters 4, 5 and 6 I test this theory by considering cinema-going in relation to a series of identifications. Chapter 4 looks at national identity and considers how cinema-goers and cinema entrepreneurs made sense of screen content of particular origins in terms of the extent to which is fitted local and personal discourses. While the traditional paradigm of comparing national screen content to Hollywood fare is not relevant to audience testimonies about cinema-going, it might be possible to suggest that the cinema-going experience constructs a set of local, perhaps national cinema-going practices that point towards an Australian mode of reception.

Chapter 5 looks at the discourse of local identity and how cinema-going was embedded in the life and routine of Illawarra communities. By examining the case study of Thirroul I suggest that the presence of various cinemas in the town has contributed to a

sense of local identity and that cinema-going therefore provides a way of imagining one's community. It also gives residents an opportunity to make sense of each other.

Chapter 6 looks at the discourse of personal identity, primarily how cinema-going enables interviewees to reflect on themselves both as audience members in the past and as narrators in the present. Therefore it shows how stories of cinema-going mediate the changing sense of self. Chapter 6 concentrates on cinema-going and personal identity, exploring the oral history narratives for what they reveal about the process of meaning-making and identity consolidation. The narrative strategies employed by the people when reminiscing about cinema-going are considered as well as what is revealed about constructing oneself and one's past through the interleaving of history and memory.

Chapter 7 considers issues of ageing articulated in the narratives. As well as drawing attention to the ways in which narratives of older persons have been questioned or silenced, I will examine expectations of the elderly audience through the politics of remembering and the strategic use of nostalgia. I suggest that older interviewees use their age in particular ways when narrating their cinema-going experiences. These range from constructing themselves as a historical witnesses and master story-tellers to weaving past and present identities together in a narratives so as to produce more complicated and rounded accounts of themselves than age-stereotypes would permit. Age is thus seen as a strategic location from which older individuals can draw on age-related discourses and experiences to achieve particular narrative ends.

In conclusion I will argue that any cultural history of cinema-going is a mediated history which is constructed within a matrix of meaning-making strategies. It is created through audience members' narratives of cinema-going which re-configure memories in accordance with particular discourses of significance either in the narrated past or in the narrating present. The researcher, who tells the story with reference to specific research priorities and current academic discourses, further mediates such a history. Therefore, as well as setting out *a* cultural history of cinema-going in the Illawarra for debate and further research, the emphasis on *mediation* is intended to encourage reflection on the creation of history as a complex, collaborative and political process which creates one story as it silences others.

CHAPTER 1: THE CINEMA INDUSTRY IN THE ILLAWARRA

In this chapter I will focus on describing the cinema industry in the Illawarra region in the first half of the twentieth century. In the introduction, I have already discussed the shifting boundaries of the Illawarra and established that the Illawarra I refer to in this thesis is a loose conglomeration of suburbs and towns between Kiama in the south and Helensburgh in the North. This largely coastal version of the Illawarra follows the geographical scope of Wollongong Theatres Proprietary Limited, the regional cinema chain that operated from 1923 until 1966 (Parkinson 21). The written and oral, primary and secondary sources I use refer at different times to the whole region and to particular settlements within it. My discussion draws on information about the suburbs and towns that are mentioned by these sources rather than attempting to provide systematic coverage of each and every suburb or town in the region. However, the city of Wollongong and the larger suburbs of Port Kembla and Thirroul feature prominently in my discussion.

As I have discussed in the introduction, the first half of the twentieth century charts the emergence and growth of cinema as an entertainment medium. This period is fascinating because it is a time when large-scale global processes, two world wars and the Depression impacted directly on the lives of the local communities in the Illawarra. Similarly, and in may ways as a consequence of these global events, American production/distribution companies developed the power to determine screen content and business practices across the globe so that the cinema audiences of the Illawarra watched many of the same features and were presented with the same advertising material as cinema-goers in London and New York. Therefore, both in terms of cinema and in terms of the larger historical agenda, this period sees the intersection of the international with the national and the local. These intersecting spheres of action and meaning-making provide the backdrop to many of the discussions in this thesis.

As will emerge as this thesis progresses, there are many ways of thinking about cinema in the Illawarra, as there are of thinking about cinema in general. For the purpose of this chapter I will be examining cinema in the Illawarra using an historical materialist

approach, now an established discourse within academic cinema research. The historical materialist approach emerged in the 1970s as an alternative to mainstream academic research into film texts (see chapter 2). Instead, it looked at the history of cinema, analysing how industry developments shaped screen content as well as the social experience of going to the pictures.

In this chapter I shall first set out the historical materialist perspective and will then provide an overview of the development of the Hollywood cinema industry in the first half of the twentieth century, largely with reference to the work of Douglas Gomery, a key exponent of the historical materialist approach. Then I shall look at the comparative development of cinema in Australia using the work of Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, Ina Bertrand and Diane Collins, before concentrating on analysis of cinema in the Illawarra using a variety of sources, including oral histories, to aid my discussion. I shall finish with some concluding remarks on the historical materialist approach.

THE HISTORICAL MATERIALIST APPROACH

In his introduction to Douglas Gomery's *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, David Bordwell distinguishes between cinema studies' traditional concentration on screen content and film theory and the growing movement towards an historical materialist approach that started in the mid-1970s (x). Bordwell praises researchers such as Douglas Gomery and Robert C Allen (whose work will be discussed in chapter 2) who began to uncover how the economic practices of the American film industry shaped film production and consumption. This work was particularly important, in Bordwell's view, as it challenged the hegemony of the film text within cinema studies, situating screen content within the large-scale institutional practices of the film industry.

Bordwell's own work has also drawn attention to the importance of a historical perspective. For example, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, published in 1985, linked the stylistic conventions of Hollywood films to the historical and economic forces that have characterised the Hollywood film industry (xiv). Other prominent film scholars using the historical materialist positions include one of Bordwell's co-authors, Janet Staiger, who outlines the historical materialist position in her book, *Interpreting*

Films. Staiger's book will be examined further in chapter 2. Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey have also explored the cinema industry as well as considering various films in the context historical developments in the American film industry.

Douglas Gomery's *Shared Pleasures* provides a good example of the historical materialist approach to film studies hailed by Bordwell. In this book, Gomery shows how the institutional development of the movie industry in America shaped the practices of cinema-going. Thus, the Hollywood studios' control of film production, distribution and exhibition, which was at its peak during the 1930s and 40s, arose through a systematic process of capitalising on changing audience demographics and technological innovations and instituting economies of scale. The following is a brief and generalised overview of the American cinema industry to the 1950s through the historical materialist approach of Gomery and others. It is included so as to show that both going to the pictures and screen content changed as a consequence of US industry developments and also because the trade practices employed in the American film industry also apply to the activities of the Australian and the local Illawarra film industries.

THE AMERICAN CINEMA INDUSTRY (1900-1950S)

Gomery traces the growth of cinema in America from the early days of travelling showmen and shows how the technology of moving pictures was a hit and miss affair that developed through its failures. For example, Thomas Edison first used the technology of moving pictures to market peep-shows which could be accessed by one person at a time. However, when the Lumiere brothers hit upon the idea of projecting moving pictures to an audience, peep-shows lost their appeal because of the far greater financial rewards that could be accrued from having lots of people watch moving pictures at the same time (5-13).

As the moving pictures became more popular, permanent venues were established. In American cities the Nickelodeons, shop front theatres that charged a small entrance fee and showed back-to-back programs, were very popular in the 1900s. However the nickelodeons were soon to be replaced by grander and more luxurious movie theatres and picture palaces. Gomery points out that the change in premises attracted a higher

class of audience that could afford more expensive admission prices. Once again, financial returns prompted changes in the way people saw movies (18-56).

In the 1920s regional and then national theatre chains formed, merging and applying economies of scale until a small group of powerful industry players had emerged by the end of the decade. The period of tightest company control followed in the1930s and 40s. The "studio system", as it was known, achieved vertical integration of the industry, controlling the production, distribution and exhibition of cinema in America and elsewhere in the world. The studios comprised the "big five": Paramount, Warner Bros, 20th Century Fox, RKO and MGM, and the "little three": Universal, Columbia and United Artists (Segrave 9).

The economic practices of these production/distribution companies have been widely written about (Gomery; Maltby; Vasey; Bertrand; Shirley and Adams) so I will not dwell in detail on them. However, I will briefly touch on some of the economic strategies that made this era into "Hollywood's Golden Age" (Gomery 70). The studios set up a series of film "runs" at different prices and controlled the number of movie prints available so that they were released through a hierarchy of theatres. Generally the large metropolitan theatres controlled by the studios received the first run of new releases followed by the suburban theatres and later regional theatres, with preference given to company-owned theatres over independent exhibitors.

These companies also introduced the procedures of "block booking" and "blind buying" whereby exhibitors were required to purchase a block, or a collection of films, some of them lucrative star-studded features sure to bring in audiences but others cheaper and less popular films which were nevertheless secured purchase and release through the block-booking system. Exhibitors had to buy the blocks of films "blind" not knowing what each block contained and were thus prevented from picking and choosing in order to suit their particular audiences or budgets (70).

These strategies were not just applied to US markets but were aggressively pursued overseas. Additionally, with the star system now firmly in place, the production/distribution companies marketed their products at home and abroad with publicity material about the films and their stars as another way of securing box office

receipts. David Cook describes the star system as “the creation and management of publicity about key performers, or stars, to stimulate demand for their films” (45). Richard DeCordova distinguishes “stars” from “picture personalities” by the fact that stars are marketed through their private lives as well as through their on-screen roles and professional abilities (24). Gradually, newspapers devoted more column inches to star gossip and information and a host of fan magazines and women’s magazines came onto the market in the 1930s that traded on the stories, secrets and styles of the stars.

The success of the Hollywood studio system in the 1930s and 40s spanned the Depression and the Second World War. In the Depression, the studios survived by introducing a number of cost-cutting measures including reducing staff and simplifying the style of theatres. Competitions, give-aways, contests and “two movies for the price of one” were initiatives introduced in the Depression to keep people coming to the movies. Theatre owners also diversified by selling popcorn, sweets and drinks which were to provide a continuing source of reliable revenue (Gomery 76-79).

During the Second World War, the studios had to adapt to changing international market conditions but as film production in the US was not as adversely affected during the war as in other countries, Hollywood again gained a competitive advantage (Segrave 120). Furthermore, directly after the war, the American film industry moved in to consolidate its position in “liberated” countries. For example, Segrave points out that the US Office of War Information through its Overseas Motion Picture Bureau had a film plan in operation to deliver films subtitled in Italian to Italy within 24 hours of the fall of the Italian mainland to the allies (133).

The year 1946 was the most profitable year to that date for the major Hollywood studios with roughly ninety cents in every dollar spent on entertainment in America going to the movies (R Davis 2). However, the might of the studio system was already being eroded. Labour disputes broke out in 1945-6 amongst the craft unions and the studios were further divided when the House of Un-American Activities Committee focussed its anti-communist hearings on Hollywood in 1947 (6). The vertically integrated structure of the major studios was destroyed the following year when the US Supreme Court judged the actions of the majors to be anti-competitive and restrictive under anti-trust laws. The studios were ordered to divest themselves of their exhibition arms and cease

restrictive trade practices such as block booking (12-13). This ruling marked the end of the studio era but did not stop the dominance of the American film industry in world markets.

The growth of television as popular entertainment in the early 1950s in America (Maltby *Dreams for Sale* 148) and its emergence and popularity in the late 1950s in Australia has been blamed for the fall in cinema attendances that occurred during this period. However, Gomery makes the point that cinema attendances in the US began to fall before television really took hold in 1946 (85). He points to an increase in spending on consumer durables and housing that occurred from 1946-52 and considers the post-war baby boom and the mass movement of people to the suburbs to be the main changes that caused the decline in the number of people going to the pictures. Increased affluence meant people moved out to the suburbs and spent their money on their houses. And with the baby boom in progress families stayed in for their entertainment turning first to the radio in the late 1940s and then to television in the 1950s (88). This explanation is backed up by the fact that, while city cinema attendances fell, the popularity of drive-in theatres increased, as they were located closer to the suburbs and were more convenient for families to attend (92). Collins points out that while there were 100 drive-in cinemas in the US in 1946, by 1956 the number had risen to 5000 (*Hollywood* 219).

In *Shared Pleasures*, Gomery examines the process of watching movies at the cinema and on television and on video, seeing the desire to watch movies as continuing in strength and just changing in form. As my study deals with the first half of the twentieth century I will not go into these arguments in detail here. Suffice to say that Gomery in the US and Jancovich in the UK are now re-writing the history of movie-going as a continuum which includes television, video and other technological changes. For the purposes of this study, I am instead concentrating on cinema-going and the different meanings and social relationships that formed around going out to the pictures rather than those which occur as a consequence of watching movies on television, video or DVD.

The purpose of this brief overview of the Hollywood film industry is to sketch the historical materialist approach as evidenced in the work of Douglas Gomery and others

and also to provide an historical context for the consideration of cinema-going in Australia and, specifically, in the Illawarra. Cinema-going in the region was often directly affected by trade practices of the American market which dictated many of the practices of the Australian film industry during the period. It is to the Australian film industry that I now turn.

THE AUSTRALIAN CINEMA INDUSTRY

The history of Australian cinema has traditionally been written in relation to the structure and development of the American film industry (Tulloch; Shirley and Adams; Bertrand; Collins). Often this takes the form of a media imperialist discourse whereby plucky local film producers are squeezed out of the market by the overwhelming power of the Hollywood film studios. John Tulloch cautions against too readily accepting the media imperialism thesis as it can encourage an erroneous view of a passive Australian industry readily overrun by the studio system (not to mention a passive audience, who are forced to assume the cultural values disseminated by Hollywood movies). As Tulloch points out, Hollywood control over Australian markets emerged from competing imperialisms within Australia (between American and British cultural influences, for example) and out of a continuing local struggle, culturally, politically and economically, with a dominant force that possesses its own internal conflicts (40-41).

The following overview is informed by histories of the Australian film industry written by Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, Ina Bertrand and Diane Collins who deal with the Australian cinema industry in far more depth than I can here. This overview is intended to summarise key developments in the Australian film industry and to highlight issues and trends that are relevant to the Illawarra cinema industry or that are later referred to by Illawarra cinema-goers.

The first moving pictures shown in Australia were presented by the magician Carl Hertz in Melbourne in 1896. Moving pictures were circulated around Australia as a technological novelty, often presented as an item of a vaudeville program. However, as the moving pictures became more popular they began to be shown in permanent venues and on a regular basis in the metropolitan centres. Smaller regional and rural communities saw the moving pictures courtesy of travelling showmen, who were to

remain frequent visitors, sometimes well into the 1920s and 30s (see interview 25). In Sydney, a number of prominent local exhibitors set up distribution companies in 1907 and in 1909 Pathé Frères became the first overseas company to set up a distribution office in Australia. By 1911 Sydney had over one hundred temporary or permanent picture shows (Shirley and Adams 23).

The production of films also grew quickly. When the Lumière Brothers sent their agent, Marius Sestier to Australia in 1896, he not only showed films but also recorded scenes from around Sydney Harbour, which he showed to appreciative local audiences (7). Recordings of the 1896 Melbourne Cup followed and started what was to become an early local production boom. The Limelight Department of the Salvation Army was responsible for some of the first narrative films made in Australia, recording scenes from biblical stories (10). Other early entrepreneurs were the Tait brothers who in 1906 produced what has been called the first feature film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang*. In 1911 film production could be financed before shooting began by pre-sales to local exhibitors. The favourable climate meant films could be shot quickly and cheaply outdoors (studio shooting was far more expensive) (24). Production output was such that in 1911 fifty-two narrative fiction films were made; a level not attained again until 1975 (24).

However, after 1911 the fortunes of the fledgling film industry suffered a marked downturn. By this time film-makers and producers were already being isolated from the distribution and exhibition components of the Australian film industry and this divide became more marked in 1913 with the creation of "the combine", an entity that arose from a series of mergers between the major distribution and exhibition companies. Union Theatres, the exhibition wing of the combine, controlled 29 cinemas throughout the country. The distribution wing, Australasian Films, controlled the major studios of Sydney and Melbourne but seemed to have no interest in commissioning locally produced features, opting instead to purchase screen content from overseas markets to supply its theatres (Bertrand 41).

With the onset of World War One in 1914, the American film industry was able to dominate the international market as other nations diverted their attention to the war. During this time, American distribution companies began to set up offices in Australia,

directly selling their screen content to Australian exhibitors. By the early 1920s, most major American production/distribution companies had offices in Australia. Australasian Films soon became redundant as distribution offices of the major American studios controlled the flow of American content to the Australian exhibition chains, Greater Union and the then smaller company, Hoyts (Shirley and Adams 33).

There was no need for the Hollywood production/distribution companies to purchase cinemas in Australia as they ensured exhibition of their products though restrictive trade practices such as block booking and blind buying outlined earlier (Collins "More than Just Entertainment" 70). The American companies controlled publicity for their films and stars and sent comprehensive press packs to accompany their prints detailing exactly how their films should be marketed. The companies even directed the Australian exhibition chains to upgrade their theatres so that their films were shown in only the most modern and stylish theatres.[4] Hollywood control over Australian film markets was formalised in 1924 with the formation of the Motion Picture Distributors' Association of Australia where six out of the seven companies it represented were American (71).

In the 1920s Hollywood screen product accounted for 95% of the material screened in Australia. Australia imported the greatest number of American movies in 1922 and from 1926-9 (Segrave 49). Not surprisingly, local film-makers found it extremely hard to break into the market. However, Australian feature films such as *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), *A Girl of the Bush* (1921) and *Those Who Love* (1926) directed, respectively, by pioneering Australian film-makers Raymond Longford, Franklyn Barrett and the McDonough sisters, still managed to secure exhibition.

In 1927 a Royal Commission into the film industry was announced as a result of protests against Hollywood dominance from Australian film-makers and from empire loyalists and morals campaigners (Shirley and Adams 75). The Commission heard evidence from film-makers like Raymond Longford and other industry figures who spoke of the restrictive trade practices of the American production/distribution companies. However, the Commission's recommendations, released in 1928 amounted

[4] Stuart Doyle, Managing Director of Union Theatres, later told the 1934 NSW Film Inquiry that the theatre building program of the late twenties was a direct result of pressure from the American production/distribution companies (Bertrand 73).

to a 5% rejection clause that exhibitors were to apply to block-booking contracts in order to make room for Australian product. Even this recommendation was tempered by the fact that the "local" content quota could include films produced in Britain. Consequently, the effects of the quota were minimal at best (Collins "Entertainment" 75).

During the 1920s, cinema attendances rose. By 1927 cinema admissions totalled 110 million with most Australians going to the pictures at least one a week. These figures make Australian cinema attendances one of the highest in the world at the time (Shirley and Adams 77). This decade saw unparalleled suburban growth[5] and as early as 1921, suburban attendances had overtaken those of the city (78). Diane Collins has pointed out that cinema was an integrating force at this time, attracting middle class and working class audiences and all sections of the local community ("Entertainment" 68). The passage of legislation stipulating the six o'clock closure of hotels in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, also contributed to the popularity of the cinema (68).

Most large communities had their own cinema in the 1920s and small communities saw regular picture shows courtesy of the travelling showmen. The two main exhibition chains, Union Theatres and Hoyts embarked on a major cinema-building program in the late 1920s which included the erection of luxury "picture palaces" in the cities, such as the State Theatre in Sydney which was opened in 1929 (Shirley and Adams 78). This program was a result of increased attendances but also, as outlined above, as a result of direct pressure from the American production/distribution companies.

The theatre-building program came at a cost to Union Theatres who were financially unready for the coming of sound at the end of the decade. With Union unable to install sound in all its theatres the American production/distribution companies withheld content and upped their rental rates (Segrave 90). The banks halted the theatre building activities of Hoyts and Union Theatres in 1929 and, as the Depression took hold, large theatres began to lose money. By 1931 film returns nationwide were at their lowest

[5] The suburban growth of the 1920s was due to a number of factors, in particular the growth of bus transport systems, increased ownership of motor cars and the War Service Homes Scheme introduced after the First World War to provide homes for returning servicemen and their families (Freeland 121)

level in five years (Shirley and Adams 108) and Union Theatres were forced into liquidation in 1931.[6] Hoyts was under similar pressure and in 1930 the Fox Film Corporation bought a controlling interest in the company and became the first American producer/distributor to directly enter the exhibition market (109).

With the Hollywood studios firmly in control, cinema exhibition during the Depression took on many of the diversification tactics adopted in the American market. Competitions tempted people into the theatres to win furniture and other prizes and theatres began selling their own food and drink. The Depression meant that one in three breadwinners in Australia were out of work, a situation that could not fail to influence the cinema industry. In 1932 taxable admissions to the movies fell as much as 42% (Collins *Hollywood* 16-7).[7] However, although people may not have been able to afford to go to the pictures as often during the Depression, cinema-going was still the most popular form of entertainment alongside betting on the horses (Bertrand 128). An estimated 60% of cinema patrons were women (146) and, to cater for their appetite for information about films and film stars, newspapers began to feature more and more articles about the cinema and interviews with film stars. Women's magazines also began to concentrate on film news (for example the *Australian Women's Weekly* which was launched in 1933 [Collins *Hollywood* 172]) and this proliferating publicity encouraged people to continue to go to the pictures.

Australian features during the 1930s continued to break through intermittently. Australia's first talking picture was *Showgirl's Luck* (1930) and other popular Australian films included *On Our Selection* (1932), *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933) and *The Silence of Dean Maitland* (1934). With the introduction of the talkies, American accents caused more concern with morals campaigners and, alongside complaints from local producers about the restrictive market practices of the American companies, caused another film inquiry to be launched. The New South Wales Film Inquiry of 1934 failed to deliver action against the restrictive trade practices of the American companies

[6] Doyle formed another company, Greater Union Theatres and purchased the assets of Union Theatres. Doyle's company, managed to hold out through precarious financial situations. However, Doyle was replaced in a bitter management struggle in 1937 (Shirley and Adams 150).

[7] Although Collins points out that the actual decrease in attendances would have been less as people bought tickets for cheaper, non-taxable seats (16-17).

but again imposed a five-year Australian quota, this time 5% for distributors and 4% for exhibitors, which boosted the confidence of producers. As a result more Australian films went into production, resulting in releases such as *The Flying Doctor* (1936) and *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938).

Outside of feature production, documentaries also proved increasingly popular with Australian audiences. With the coming of sound, the newsreel came into its own. In 1929 Fox Movietone (Australia) was formed which made *Movietone News*. Its main rival, Union Theatre's *Cinesound Review*, commenced in 1931 and the two newsreels continued to dominate cinema screens until they merged in 1970 (Shirley and Adams 106). The newsreels' popularity was evidenced by the opening of the State Theatrette in Sydney in 1931, which screened hour-long newsreel programs continuously and proved extremely popular and profitable (see interview 20).

Worldwide, the fortunes of the film industry improved after the Depression with a 25% increase in gross film receipts in 1936 (Shirley and Adams 139). The optimism in Australia led to another round of theatre building and modernisation by Hoyts and Greater Union Theatres. Messrs Crick and Furse were Australia's leading cinema architects of the time and remodelled over one hundred cinemas (140).

The onset of the Second World War saw the fortunes of the film industry rise higher. Greater Union Theatres (formed from the ashes of Union Theatres in 1933) finally posted a profit (Collins *Hollywood* 198) and admission numbers rose from 102 million to 151 million between 1942/3 and 1944/5 (Shirley and Adams 170). Diane Collins points out that the Second World War was effectively the first cinema war, with regular bulletins provided to cinema audience of the progress of the Allies (*Hollywood* 201). Cinesound's presentation of scenes of Australian troops in New Guinea, filmed by the Department of Information's cameraman Damien Parer, earned Australia its first American Academy Award and many newsreel features produced in Australia were shown in allied countries (Shirley and Adams 164). Shirley and Adams point out that, during the Second World War, both Movietone and Cinesound newsreels received the reports of the war produced by the Department of Information but presented them to the public in different ways. Cinesound used the reports to provide an Australian-centred

report whereas Movietone interspersed the footage with that from other countries and provided a more international context (166).

While newsreel and documentary films flourished with the subject matter and subsidies during the war, feature production was still running low. Only five independent Australian features were made during the war, including *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944) that directly drew upon the wartime experience of Australian troops. It was the newsreels that proved to be a more consistent source of Australian content than locally produced feature films. Meanwhile Hollywood features continued to dominate Australian screens with the percentage of imports from America consistently around 85-90% from 1940 to 1945 (British films account for just under 10%) (Segrave 128).

But it wasn't only screen content that reflected on the war. The cinemas themselves became promoters of campaigns to buy war bonds and support the war effort. Some theatres became very crowded with the influx of troops to certain towns and cities in Australia. For example, 60,000 American GIs were based in Townsville and patrons recall it being very difficult to get a seat (Collins *Hollywood* 210). The distribution exchanges provided mobile cinema units and prints to troops stationed in remote parts of Australia and even in New Guinea (Shirley and Adams 164). In every theatre, the exterior lighting that advertised the movies was extinguished and cinema-goers were subjected to frequent power outages and air-raid sirens during performances (see interviews 20, 22 and 23).

The decade after the war, 1946-56 saw cinema attendances peak in the late 1940s and then begin to decline in the 1950s (Bertrand 244). As mentioned above, the downturn can be seen as the product of the post-war baby boom keeping families at home and also as a result of specific Australian factors such as the introduction of daylight saving legislation in many states which allowed for outdoor leisure alternatives to the cinema and the granting of entertainment licences to hotels (244). The exhibition sector in this period was becoming increasingly dominated by the major chains of Greater Union and Hoyts. Shirley and Adams point out that in the mid 1950s of the twenty-four cinemas in central Sydney, only two were independent, two were controlled by MGM and the remaining twenty were controlled by Greater Union and Hoyts (186).

In the area of production, 1946-56 saw only two or three Australian feature films made each year although these included popular successes such as *Smithy* (1946), *The Overlanders* (1946) and *Jedda* (1955) (Cunningham and Routt "Fillums become Films" 180). With the feature output so low, this period in Australian cinema history has been viewed as a cultural desert. However, as Stuart Cunningham and Bill Routt have pointed out, the period is significant in other ways ("Fillums become Films" 180). They highlight this period as one wherein films began to be discussed critically by emerging film societies and film festivals and point to the growth and maturation of the Australian documentary during this time. In this respect, they cite the influence of the Film Division of the Commonwealth Department of Information that produced quality documentaries such as *Mike and Stefani* (1952) dealing with immigration, *The Steelworkers* (1951) and *The Cane Cutters* (1948). The Australian Branch of the Shell Film Unit commissioned John Heyer's popular documentary, *The Back of Beyond* (1954), which follows the 300 mile route of an outback postman. Also of note are the documentaries produced by the Waterside Workers Film Unit which were produced for the Waterside Workers Federation and other units prepared to fund and assist in documentary production (Milner; Shirley and Adams 195-6).

In the USA, the first regular television broadcasts began in 1931 although the medium didn't achieve widespread popularity until the 1950s (Maltby *Dreams* 90). By 1953, 56% of American families were estimated to own a television set (Collins *Hollywood* 214). At the same time the American production/distribution companies were being split up as a consequence of the Supreme Court's anti-trust suits (see above). Cinema companies tried to diversify to stay in business and came up with a number of initiatives aimed at distinguishing television from the cinema experience. Of these, some (like 3-D cinema) were commercial failures whereas others, such as cinemascope and the introduction of drive-in theatres had more lasting appeal (214-221).

With cinema attendances beginning to fall in the 1950s, the emergence of drive-in theatres ensured a minor resurgence in cinema-going. As Collins points out:

> Burdened by children and mortgages, most young couples found it easier and more economical to stay at home for entertainment. When a market research company interviewed 300 families in 1953 in the vicinity of a

> proposed drive-in at the Sydney suburb of Frenchs Forest, 66 per cent of families said they never went to a film because of the age of their children, but 90 per cent would gladly attend a drive-in theatre in the district (223).

Television arrived in Australia in 1956 and by 1960 over 70% of the population of Sydney and Melbourne owned a television set. Collins suggests that the popularity of drive-ins saved the film industry from total obliteration during this period with the number of drive-ins tripling between 1956 and 1962 (226). However by 1959, 33% of Melbourne's cinemas and 28% of Sydney's had closed (*Hollywood* 228) and the downturn continued.

While cinema-going did not end in the 1950s and 60s and continues to be a popular form of entertainment today, from the point of view of this study, I will conclude this overview in the 1950s, when the reign of the cinema as an unrivalled entertainment medium ended. In this section, I have attempted to outline the fortunes of the Australian film industry. From the First World War onwards, the Australian cinema industry was substantially influenced and controlled by American production/distribution companies. However, within the dominant paradigm were other struggles. British film interests also represented a significant amount of screen content and fostered lively arguments about which culture Australians identified with (see chapter 4). And Australian producers did manage to secure exhibition for their product, in the form of a small number of features but also in terms of a significant output of newsreels and documentaries, at regular intervals, despite overwhelming difficulties.

Furthermore, in the field of exhibition, this period saw a long line of travelling showmen who continued to present film programs to regional audiences into the 1930s as well as independent exhibitors who struggled to compile alternative programs to those of the major cinema distributors. And we must not forget the local cinema managers who had to show the content they were sent by the parent companies but who did exercise some control over how the programs were advertised and arranged for their local audiences (see chapter 4). I will now turn to the cinema industry in the Illawarra and will examine how this regional cinema industry both departs from and conforms to Australian and international cinema industry histories.

CINEMA IN THE ILLAWARRA

The people of the Illawarra have been going to the cinema since travelling showmen first bought moving pictures to the region in 1897. The following sections outline a history of the cinema exhibition industry in the Illawarra, highlighting the fortunes of individual exhibitors, companies and theatres along the way. They look at the cinema industry in the Illawarra through cinema ownership and moving picture exhibition, as well as focusing on the impact of advertising on the discourses available to audiences about the experience of going to the pictures.

To do this I have drawn on secondary sources, especially Bob Parkinson's *Gauffered Velour*, detailing a history of the picture theatres in the Illawarra, but also local history books and publications about leisure in the Illawarra (see the introduction). The primary resources I have consulted include local newspapers, trade journals, picture archives and documents held at ScreenSound (formerly the National Film and Sound Archive). The oral history interviews I conducted were used as a primary resource which, it was anticipated, would correlate with the other source material.

Early Cinema (1900-20)

The first moving pictures to appear in the Illawarra came in the form of a one-night performance of "Edison's Cinematograph" in Wollongong on 10 February 1897 (Parkinson 1). After occurring next in Kiama, the exhibition of moving pictures gradually continued throughout the region's suburbs courtesy of various showmen who travelled the suburbs of the Illawarra and surrounding districts from the late 1890s. It is difficult to say exactly how many showmen operated in the Illawarra region because not all of them advertised in the local press (for example Cec Clark – interview 25). According to Cec Clark, who was a travelling showman in the region in the 1920s and 30s, showmen would not have a particular territory but would scout out locations in advance to determine which communities were without regular pictures and would build up a circuit from their initial investigations (interview 25 2).

At this time the moving pictures were the novelty act of a show that might also have featured photography, drama, prestidigitation and recitals on the program. The travelling picture showmen were usually jacks-of-all-trades: operating the equipment,

providing commentary to the moving pictures and often supplying the additional entertainment. The showmen hired their selection of screen entertainment from film exchanges based in Sydney and were charged with exhibiting the moving pictures to audiences across hundreds of miles, using equipment which was often a fire hazard, and with getting the films back to the exchange with minimal damage.

Cec Clark and his partner Matt Baumgarten travelled a large circuit in New South Wales taking in towns in the Illawarra and Southern Highlands as well as those in the south of the state near the Victorian border. During the 1920s Cec was vividly reminded of the potentially costly fire dangers involved with picture exhibition:

> **NH**: You had to get [the films] back [to the exchange] in good condition I suppose?
> **CC**: Yes, but when we had the fire we had to send the film back less two reels! Two days later - back comes an urgent telegram, "Parts 7 and 8 Missing: Please Explain". I couldn't tell them that a man threw his cigarette on them! I said the film got caught in the projector. In those days there was a powerful light shining through onto the film and if the shutter didn't fall down the machine stopped turning. We told them that shutter didn't fall down … It was insured, of course. (interview 25 12)

Cec told tales common to the life of the early travelling showman (refer Penn): of sleeping in flea-infested local halls; of travelling miles to pull in enough returns to pay off the film rental; and of cajoling local women into playing the piano accompaniment to the silent reels for just 10 shillings every 3 hours. However, though the life of a showman was hard, Cec claims it was a good one as audiences around the Illawarra were appreciative, both in the screenings and afterwards, often providing free home-cooked meals to show their appreciation.

The Kiama Independent reveals the type of moving pictures that the travelling showmen first screened in the Illawarra:

> ... a view of Elizabeth Street, a Cavalry charge in Austria, a dancing girl at the court of the king of Abyssinia, a procession of an African

> tribe, the president of France receiving a bouquet of flowers, a negress washing her child, a snow scene ... and a Spanish bullfight (26 Aug. 1897).

Aside from the novelty of recognising Elizabeth Street, this type of program offered few Australian scenes, concentrating instead on the thrill of the exotic. However national images gradually appeared: street scenes of Melbourne and Sydney and the now famous footage of the Melbourne Cup. Following in the footsteps of Marius Sestier (see above), some showmen took their own films of local people and landscapes and played them back to appreciative audiences (Parkinson 5).

In the first few years of the new century the medium began to be used to tell stories as well as recording documentary items and longer length "features" began to make an appearance. *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), for example, which was made up of about 4000 feet of film and ran for approximately an hour (depending on the speed that the projectionist ran the picture) was presented at the Wollongong Town Hall by E. T. Grigg in December 1907 (*South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus* 14 Dec. 1907 10).

As moving pictures proved to be a continuing attraction in the Illawarra, showmen such as Sidney Cook, Harry Chapman, Mr Phelan and John Parker – who also entertained local audiences as "The Blind Tenor" – became regular exhibitors (Parkinson 6-7). Mr H. Gordon travelled the length of the Illawarra with his moving pictures, exhibiting to audiences in Helensburgh, Woonona, Corrimal, Wollongong, Dapto and Kiama between 1910 and 1914. The showmen exhibited regularly at local town halls and public buildings such as Schools of Arts and Friendly Society halls. In some suburbs these halls were all that was required. For example, the Dapto Agricultural Hall was officially licensed to show pictures in 1907 and leased picture exhibition rights to different showmen for thirty years until Dapto saw the erection of a purpose built theatre (95). For most suburbs, however, entrepreneurs quickly realised the financial benefits of having purpose built structures. The success of the picture showmen soon encouraged local entrepreneurs to seek permanent venues for the moving pictures in the towns and suburbs of the Illawarra.

Wollongong and the Illawarra's first designated picture venue was the Wollongong Garden Picture Palace which opened in Church Street in July 1911. It was joined three months later by the Crown Picture Palace in Keira Street (see photograph below). Elsewhere in the district, the Woonona Princess theatre and the Corrimal Princess opened in January 1912 and in 1913 Thirroul also had a purpose-built venue in the Kings Theatre. Port Kembla's Empire Hall became the region's first purpose built theatre south of Wollongong when it opened in June 1915 (Parkinson 163). Theatres appeared at a fast pace through the first and second decades of the new century with seven purpose built theatres erected in the 1910s and a further seven in the 1920s. There were many more in the northern suburbs of the Illawarra than in the south as it was in the north that the population was growing fastest due to the coal mining industry. However, larger suburbs and towns in the south such as Kiama and Port Kembla were also able to sustain picture theatres of their own.[8]

The Crown Theatre, Wollongong ca 1915

Courtesy Wollongong City library *Illawarra Images*

The first purpose-built theatres in the region were initially open-air venues that showed pictures on fine evenings. However, the loss of revenue through inclement weather in New South Wales would have soon made owners reconsider. For example,

[8] Employment patterns at the time show most work was from the coal industry although Port Kembla and Dapto were industrial and Kiama was a centre for dairying. With the introduction of the steelworks in the late 1920s there came an employment shift to southern suburbs that has grown more pronounced over the century as the mines have closed or reduced numbers (Sherrington and Mitchell). Now most cinemas are to be found in the southern suburbs reflecting the current geographical make-up of the workforce.

Olga Ferguson of Scarborough recalls going to the Arena open-air theatre in Thirroul in 1920 when a southerly blew up, overturning seats and upsetting the audience (interview 3 5). Similarly, Cec Clark recalls trying to exhibit outdoors in Shellharbour where he and his partner had a hard time keeping the film steady as the wind got up and flapped the screen so fiercely (interview 25 7). Consequently most of the picture venues soon became partly or wholly roofed.[9] At first barn-like structures, the picture venues gradually became more solid and elaborate as the popularity of cinema grew so that in the 1920s some suburbs, such as Thirroul, had more than one "luxury" theatre competing for patronage.[10]

The teenage years of the twentieth century saw the era of the picture showmen decline, some retiring from the business and others becoming independent exhibitors. However, smaller towns and suburbs in the south of the region were still serviced by travelling showmen into the 1920s and 30s. Cec Clark (interview 25), for example, exhibited in the towns of Jamberoo, Robertson and Shellharbour at this time. Nevertheless, many Illawarra suburbs had their own regular picture presentations, in existing or purpose-built venues by as early as the 1910s.[11] As the decade drew on, the independent exhibitors in the region faced tough competition as certain local theatre owners/exhibitors became involved with more than one theatre and slowly the major players began to move towards setting up a local chain.

Cinema and Business (1920-1966)[12]

[9] For example, in Wollongong, the Garden Picture Palace was roofed in 1912, and the Crown Theatre was also roofed by December 1912 (Parkinson 9,11).

[10] For example the New Kings Theatre and the Arcadia competed for moviegoers in Thirroul for a year in 1925/6 (Parkinson 55). The Arcadia's luxurious fittings are described in more detail later in this chapter.

[11] Towns and suburbs in the Illawarra that had regular picture shows in the 1910s were Helensburgh, Scarborough, Coledale, Thirroul, Bulli, Woonona, Corrimal, Wollongong, Dapto, Port Kembla, Albion Park and Kiama (Parkinson 163-4).

[12] The dealings of Wollongong Theatres Propriety Ltd. and other local cinema owners and operators are available largely thanks to the extensive research of Bob Parkinson for his book *Guaffered Velour*. Other observations about these men have been taken from the local press and my interviews with local residents.

In 1923 Herbert Boland formed Wollongong Theatres Propriety Limited, a company that dominated cinema exhibition in the Illawarra until 1966. Mr Boland had been active in the industry long before Wollongong Theatres was formed. In 1912 he bought the recently erected Crown Theatre in Wollongong, which he ran with the assistance of his family. He was the first recorded exhibitor at the Thirroul School of Arts in December of 1913 and he and subsequent Wollongong Theatres partners Alexander and Edwin Cox also held the lease on the Strand Theatre at Corrimal from 1921. Wollongong Theatres was made up of seven major shareholders with Mr Boland as managing director (Parkinson 11, 13, 21, 52, 79).

Under Mr Boland's influence the company soon extended its scope, building and acquiring picture theatres around the Illawarra and forcing smaller independent exhibitors to diversify or bow out. In 1924 Wollongong Theatres took out a long-term lease on the Theatre Royal in Bulli and, in 1925, built the New Kings Theatre in Thirroul. In order to protect its interests the company soon bought out rival picture theatres the Arcadia, in Thirroul, and the Princess, in Woonona, and turned them into dance halls in order that their own theatres would have no competition (55, 69).

The Kings Theatre, Thirroul ca 1956

Courtesy of Wollongong City Library *Illawarra Images*

Parkinson suggests that a combination of business pressures and ill health seem to have been behind Boland's decision to lease the circuit to the national cinema chain, Union Theatres, in 1928. Shortly afterwards Boland left on an extended overseas holiday (15).

As I have already outlined, Union Theatres came to prominence as the exhibition branch of the notorious "combine" in 1913 but was soon answering to the demands of the powerful American production/distribution companies. The American companies wanted their product shown in the most modern theatres and in as many theatres as possible. Hence in the late 1920s Union Theatres embarked on a large-scale modernisation and theatre-building program. This program was likely to be behind Union's decision to lease Wollongong Theatres in 1928. However, the scope of the program extended Union Theatres finances to the limit so that the onset of the Depression, combined with the pressure of having to equip all its theatres for the coming of talking pictures, saw Union Theatres facing liquidation (Bertrand 124). Consequently, their twenty-year lease on the Wollongong circuit ended prematurely in 1931 and Boland's Wollongong Theatres resumed control.

Boland died from cancer in 1933 but his company continued to be very successful in the region. In 1936 Wollongong Theatres erected another theatre in Wollongong City, the Savoy, took over the Port Kembla Whiteway and continued to build up the chain in the 1940s and 50s (Parkinson 20, 33, 106). According to the *Film Weekly Directory* of 1960/61, Wollongong Theatres controlled the Crown and the Savoy in Wollongong, the Bulli Royal, the Kings at Thirroul, The Corrimal Strand, the Port Kembla Whiteway, the Dapto Regal, the Kiama Antrim and theatres at Unanderra and Shellharbour.[13]

Wollongong Theatres cinema chain was the largest in the region and, despite working closely with the national circuit, Union Theatres, and ceding control to them for three years, the company stayed under local ownership for the majority of its history. Owning many theatres enabled the company to employ economies of scale, hiring films that they then showed across their venues. Theatres in close proximity to one another would even swap film programs in the same evening. The Bulli Royal and the Thirroul Kings, for example, would screen the main feature and the supporting program in different halves of the evening to allow the program to be split and exchanged by courier during the interval (interview 2). Indeed, control of more than one theatre often meant that program swaps could occur within the same evening without the film exchange

[13] *Film Weekly Directory*, 1960/61 - 1966/67, held at the Mitchell library, Sydney.

knowing about the switch, thus proving double takings for the price of one program hire! (interview 22).

Wollongong Theatres was able to capitalise on its connections with larger production companies and film exchanges by securing visits by Australian film stars to theatres such as the Whiteway, and providing cinema managers with a large amount of publicity material from the American production/distribution companies to use in their advertising. Charlie Anderson, manager of the Whiteway Theatre in Port Kembla from 1946-52, recalls using large photographs of Hollywood stars to decorate the foyer of the Whiteway (interview 22 12). Wollongong Theatres may have employed ruthless business practices against its rivals to ensure it dominated the local cinema scene, but Charlie remembers the company as a good employer that allowed its managers creative control and arranged social get togethers for staff such as annual picnics and sports carnivals (11, 16).

The Board of Wollongong Theatres Pty Ltd 1950

Left to right: Arthur Byron (Royal Theatre, Bulli), Vic Parkes, Bernie Brodie (Kiama), Charles Anderson (Whiteway Theatre, Port Kembla), Fred Shepherd (Program and Booking Manager, Sydney), Cliff Anderson (Regal Theatre, Dapto), Walter Boland (Strand Theatre, Corrimal and Director of Wollongong Theatres), AD Frost (Director and Circuit Manager), Frank Rau (Crown Theatre, Wollongong) and Jim Kerr (Kings Theatre, Thirroul)

Courtesy of Wollongong City Library *Illawarra Images*

Parkinson quotes an editorial from the October 1965 *Australasian Exhibitor – Forum of Australia's Showmen* on the demise of the hard-top theatres which cites the then recent example of the closure of the Crown Theatre in Wollongong, owned by Wollongong

Theatres. The article attributes the closure of cinemas in the 1960s down to several factors, chiefly the exorbitant rental charges levied by distribution companies, but also increased taxation. Furthermore, the article also looks to changing entertainment patterns bought about through the introduction of television and licensed clubs coupled with a wage explosion (21). These factors combined against independent exhibitors and even the larger chains like Wollongong Theatres.

By the 1964/5 issue of *Film Weekly Directory*, Wollongong Theatres' interests had been dramatically reduced to just the Wollongong Crown and the Kiama Antrim. In the Illawarra, in the late 1960s, only six cinemas remained in the region, two of which were drive-ins, compared with 24 theatres that were in operation in the late 1950s (Parkinson vi, 163). Boland's first theatre, the Crown was the last to be sold and by 1965/6 the company had disappeared from the *Film Weekly Directory*. From 1966, Wollongong Theatres continued in name only as it was sold and used as a shelf company by a finance group (Parkinson 21).

* * *

During the reign of Wollongong Theatres other entrepreneurs also secured ownership of more than one theatre. Early challengers to Wollongong Theatres were the Yardley brothers of Coledale, who first became interested in cinema when the Coledale Empire fell into their hands through a defaulted loan in 1918 (Parkinson 50). The two brothers were soon also running the Palace theatre at Scarborough, switching features, newsreels and serials between the two theatres via motorbike courier (interview 3 8). Like Boland, the Yardleys had exhibition rights at the Thirroul School of Arts at the later date of 1920-23, but it was in 1923 that they made their mark with the construction of the magnificent Arcadia theatre in Thirroul. Local author, Joe Davis, has spoken of the Arcadia as the most architecturally significant theatre of the region (*Illawarra Mercury* 26 May 1988 15). The *Illawarra Mercury* provides an impression of the building and its decor:

> There is attached to the dress circle a luxurious lounge Axminster carpeted and furnished with lounge chairs. A balcony there overlooks the town and a good part of the surrounding district. (15 Jun. 1923 18)

Despite wrangles with the council over poor sanitary conditions, the Yardley brothers were successful in Thirroul until Wollongong Theatres constructed the New Kings Theatre just a few yards further up Lawrence Hargrave Drive. The Yardleys had been planning to operate a picture show in Wollongong and had persuaded the council to accept them as sole operators of the pictures that were to run twice weekly in the new Town Hall complex. However, this nomination was contested by a few of the council aldermen and after a protracted battle with the council, Wollongong Theatres successfully convinced the Yardley brothers to sell their assets to them. In 1926 the Yardley brothers withdrew from the Town Hall project and sold their theatres in Coledale and Thirroul to the dominant local chain. Wollongong Theatres soon sold the Coledale Empire on and converted the Arcadia Theatre into a Palais de Danse (Parkinson 50, 55).[14]

Another pair of brothers who ran picture shows in the northern suburbs were the Dyers, who exhibited at the Scarborough Palace and the Coledale Empire halls in the late 1920s. This period heralded the introduction of the "talkies" and many of the larger and more affluent theatres had begun to install the specialised equipment required to screen the talking pictures. The Dyer brothers, who could not afford to equip their small picture halls for talking pictures, relied on entrepreneurial spirit to keep their audiences coming back. As Jack and Rene Hodgeson, audience members of time, explain:

> **JH**: They had a picture show there [Coledale] … It was the Empire Theatre … A chap by the name of Dyer used to run it, and his brother and the brother's wife.
>
> **NH**: And how did it compare to the Scarborough Theatre?
>
> **JH**: Well it was a dance hall too.
>
> **RH**: You danced down [the front] and then in the seats up the back you'd watch the movies over the dancers' heads.

[14] The Yardley's exhibition days in the Illawarra were over and they moved to the northern NSW town of Glen Innes where they exhibited in the suburb of Watson's Bay. Percival Yardley was to return to manage the Coledale Empire once more in 1946 (Parkinson 51).

> **JH**: The silent pictures, you know – and you'd sit up the back and look over the dance. The lights would be out and you could look over the dancers and watch the silent pictures.
> **RH**: So when you were dancing with a chap and you wanted a bit of a canoodle, you'd nick up the back [to the picture stalls] and then got back on the dance floor before the dance was finished.
> **JH**: Four steps from the dance floor up to where you sat watching the pictures. (interview 12 1-2)

This enterprising idea combined the two most popular leisure activities of the period not only at the same venue but at the same time! Thus, the Dyer brothers found a way of prolonging their silent picture business into the reign of the talkies.

Another exhibitor, George Parkes, ran picture shows all over the Illawarra region screening silent and talking pictures in a career that involved nine different local picture venues[15] over more than forty years (1919-62). Mr Parkes exhibited at Balgownie School of Arts on and off from 1919 until 1929 when he took over the Port Kembla Whiteway Theatre. At the Whiteway, Parkes installed only the thirteenth Racophone sound system in Australia and thus bought the talkies to Port Kembla as well as to other suburbs. Mr Parkes controlled picture exhibition in local halls in Figtree, Mount Kembla and Albion Park as well as at larger cinema venues such as the Whiteway, the Dapto Regal and the Empire Theatres at Shellharbour and Helensburgh. Parkes was related to Herbert Jones, another well-known exhibitor in the area, and often leased pictures from Jones that he screened at his own venues. Eventually George Parkes sold out his theatre interests, mainly to the Wollongong Theatres chain.

Herbert Jones exhibited pictures at School of Arts halls in Balgownie as well as Mount Keira, and ran the Corrimal Princess Theatre in the 1930s and 40s (Parkinson 71). In 1934, Parkinson reports, Mr Jones bought a block of land in Keira Street, Wollongong to build a theatre, but didn't further his goals – probably because Wollongong Theatre issued an announcement that it was planning to install sound in the Town Hall theatre.

[15] Balgownie School of Arts; Port Kembla Whiteway; Dapto Agricultural Hall and Regal Theatre; Shellharbour Empire; Albion Park School of Arts; Helensburgh Empire and at unidentified venues in Figtree and Mount Kembla (Parkinson 46, 91-2, 95-6, 106, 110, 117; interview 22).

As Parkinson surmises, the prospect of a Town Hall theatre with sound as well as the Crown Theatre may well have been too much competition for Mr Jones. However, when Jones withdrew, no more mention of sound at the Town Hall was made by Wollongong Theatres (25).

However, Mr Jones did eventually exhibit pictures in Wollongong. When the ten-year lease of the Town Hall theatre to Wollongong Theatres ran out in 1938, the council decided not renew it and instead Mr Jones won the tender for a seven year lease in 1939. The success of this lease would eventually result in the building of the Regent Theatre in Wollongong by Jones' wife and son in 1957. This theatre is still operating in the face of the big national chains (at the time of writing), as it did despite the power of the local chain so many years before. The Jones family made their mark on cinema-going in the Illawarra. They pioneered ideas such as showing films for extended seasons; installing hearing aids in the Town Hall Theatre so that the hard of hearing could enjoy the film comfortably; and took a particular interest in screening Australian films (Parkinson 27).

Also committed to cinema innovation in the Illawarra was Mr Turnbull who exhibited in the Town Hall Theatre in the late 1920s. According to the *Illawarra Mercury* (24 Feb. 1928 13) he produced a short drama, *The Adventures of Dot*, which was set locally and used local people for the main characters and the rest of the cast. Further research at ScreenSound (formerly the National Film and Sound Archive) has revealed that *The Adventures of Dot* was one of a handful of "community pictures" made in Australia. Community pictures were movies that were re- made in several regional locations. For each movie, the plot remains the same but the cast and settings change so as to be specific to the town where it was being made. *The Adventures of Dot*, for example, was made separately in towns across New South Wales such as Harden, Temora and Wollongong.[16]

Newspaper reports about Wollongong's *The Adventures of Dot* were encouraging and the crowds were reported to be large, but this production seems to have been a one-off

[16] ScreenSound holds archival footage of some of the versions of *The Adventures of Dot* including Temora (Cover Title Number 142) and Young (Cover Title Number 1201)

venture as no more experiments with local talent or scenery were reported.[17] Turnbull also tried simultaneously screening pictures and holding dances but this too only lasted for a short time and Mr Turnbull was succeeded at the Town Hall theatre by Wollongong Theatres in 1929.

Finally, mention should be made of Mr Sandor Berenyi, who migrated to Australia in 1949 with his family and sought employment at the BHP steelworks. While living at the Migrant Hostel in Cringila, Mr Berenyi established a film club where he projected films to hostel residents on a 16mm projector. With the success of these films at Cringila, Mr Berenyi decided to show films at other venues and exhibited at the migrant hostel in Fairy Meadow as well as in local halls in North Wollongong, Oak Flats and Unanderra in the early 1950s (Parkinson 95).

The history of the cinema industry in the Illawarra includes individual showmen, independent exhibitors and innovative managers. Common to the Australian and American model, individual players have formed local chains, demonstrated by the success of Wollongong Theatre Proprietary Limited but also in the smaller operations of people like the Yardley Brothers, the Dyer Brothers, George Parkes and the Jones family. While the American production/distribution companies controlled the flow of screen product to a large extent and the national exhibition chains such as Union Theatres encroached on local markets, the exhibition of pictures in the Illawarra during this time remained a remarkably local industry. The success of these local players was dependent on many factors, such as the size and buying power of their operation, the capital and connections they managed to establish and the talents of being able to keep up with public demands and tastes and of being enterprising and innovative in their exhibition tactics. While this section has sketched some of the individuals involved with the history of cinema in the Illawarra, the following section explores how cinema was marketed to prospective audiences.

ADVERTISING AND CONSUMPTION – DISCOURSES ABOUT CINEMA

[17] *The Adventures of Dot* screened at the Civic Theatre in 1928 and was given newspaper coverage by the *Illawarra Mercury* (17 Feb. 1928 10; 24 Feb. 1928 13).

The moving pictures were promoted to the people of the Illawarra through a number of methods including the local press, film posters and stills, competitions and parades and associated fan magazines and women's magazines. Furthermore, the movies were advertised through a number of different discourses that involved different aspects of the cinema-going experience. Thus advertising strategies reveal much about the ways in which audiences were encouraged to think about and buy into the cinema experience. It is through these strategies that I now examine the way cinema in the Illawarra was advertised.

The Technological Marvel

When the travelling showmen first bought moving pictures to the Illawarra, the experience was advertised as a wonder and a marvel not to be missed. Audiences seemed drawn to the novelty value of the moving pictures but, as Parkinson points out, promoters were initially unsure of the continuing popularity of moving pictures as an entertainment and so included them as part of a program of other acts, such as singing, prestidigitation and even bell-ringing (2). The pictures themselves were advertised as technological marvels presented on many colourfully named contraptions from standard "Bioscopes" to the "Chronoscope", "Electric Wonderscope" and the Royal Crown Animated Picture Company's "Phono-bio-tableaux-graph" (6-7). Each machine seemed more intricately named then the last and promised fewer and fewer vibrations. The advertising promises mirrored those of Sidney Cook, a frequent exhibitor in the Illawarra, who claimed, "Everything Bigger, Brighter and Better than before." (*South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus* 1 Dec. 1906 10)

Advertisements, such as the one quoted above, concentrated on the technical virtuosity of the moving pictures. This emphasis on technology came from the invention-laden spirit of the times and from the showmen themselves, many of whom had already travelled the country marketing other mechanical wonders. The early years of cinema saw the appearance of many key inventions, such as the telegraph and the aeroplane, which changed people's lives and challenged the limits of their imagination. In the early years of the twentieth century people became fascinated by technology and innovation. As an example, the Great Exhibition of 1901, which was held in Paris, attracted large crowds to the range of inventions and innovations that were presented there. Set against

this backdrop of innovation and public curiosity, it is little wonder that the first film projectors were introduced through discourses of marvel and ingenuity.

This discourse was prevalent in newspaper reports and advertisements of 1890s and early 1910s. When it became clear that the moving pictures had lasting appeal, as audiences began to attend the pictures on a regular basis and as permanent venues began to be established to show them, newspaper advertisements began to concentrate less on each new type of projection equipment and more on the moving pictures themselves.

Program Variety

As permanent venues were erected during the next two decades, the travelling showmen began to be replaced by local entrepreneurs who exhibited films in dedicated picture venues. The entertainment programs on offer to audiences also began to change and develop as fictional features joined short documentaries. The moving pictures claimed more space in printed advertisements and, gradually, a higher billing amongst the vaudeville acts that were on the same program. However, the combination of live entertainment and moving pictures lasted for some time. A typical Friday night show at the Crown Theatre, Wollongong, in 1919 offered, top of the bill, "Frank Reis Vaudeville". The advertisements read as follows:

> This evening part first will be the vaudeville, and second part "making movies" audience participation as at the Tivoli; an opportunity it is announced to try one's abilities as a movie artist. On Saturday night there will be two big pictures, *The Hun Within* and a Wild West drama. For Monday, a holiday programme in which are two big ones *A Soul Without Windows* and photo play of five parts, *Marriage a la mode*. Then on Wednesday, *Men*, which is a six part story and more of the *Master Mystery*, in which the slippery Houdini appears. The conservatorium orchestra is fixed for Monday. (*South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus* 3 Oct. 1919 8)

The entertainment billing featured regular items, such as the feature and the serials, combined with a variety of live acts, thus mixing novelty with stability.[18] Each week a selection of different genres could be relied on with programs mixing genres to provide a western, a melodrama and a comedy, often all on the same program. In the above example, there is also a role for audience participation, "as at the Tivoli", in the invitation to "try one's abilities as a movie artist" (note the word "star" does not yet appear). The indirect invitation here is into a favourable comparison between the Crown Theatre in Wollongong and the more high-profile Tivoli Theatre in Sydney, therefore boosting both the profile of the Crown and of Wollongong itself as a centre with facilities on a par with its metropolitan neighbour.[19]

Although cinema-going became more popular in its own right during the 1920s, advertisements in the local press still include the drawcard of live entertainment. However, the live acts were advertised less frequently and when specific newspaper columns dedicated to the movies began to appear in the early 1920s, they were largely confined to screen content. When Union Theatres took over the Wollongong Theatres circuit in 1928, a spokesman from their head office was asked whether the company would confine their programs to pictures only. While the spokesman, Mr Ellis, told the *Illawarra Mercury* that his company intended to attract "big vaudeville names for their Australian circuit which would be bought to the Illawarra district" the fact that the question was asked would suggest that there was a declining number of live acts on the picture program (9 May 1928 11).

The advent of the talkies led to major changes in the make up of cinema programs. Orchestras and piano accompanists lost their jobs and with the Depression hitting at the same time, the talking pictures were more economical to run (if the exhibitor could afford the initial outlay for the installation of sound) than live entertainment acts. Diane Collins has suggested that with the coming of sound, cinema exhibitors could provide a complete package of entertainment without the necessity of live acts. At the

[18] The Crown Theatre had a variety of novelty acts. For example, in 1925 it featured 'A Circus on Stage' which was a show given by Clivalli's miniature animals for the afternoon matinee to be performed 'with the usual high class Picture Program ... send the children to the matinee' (*South Coast Times* 18 Sep. 1925 12).

[19] Interestingly, Mr Boland, who owned the Crown Theatre at the time, went on to manage the Tivoli in Sydney in the early 1930s (Parkinson 15).

same time cinema gained more fans as, with the addition of sound, screen content now rivalled theatrical entertainments (*Hollywood* 33). In the *Illawarra Mercury*, venues like the Wollongong Crown and the Town Hall that had heralded live acts in their advertisements in 1928 and 1929, had switched exclusively to screen entertainment by 1930.[20]

Stardom

The advertisement describing the program at the Crown Theatre in October 1919 offers a taste of things to come as it trades, to some extent, on the star status of the escape artist, Houdini. A reference to "the slippery Houdini" is all that is needed in the advert as a shared discourse has already been established about this screen personality. During the 1920s movies themselves and movie stars began to receive more detailed coverage in the local press that ranged from individual movie reviews to intermittent columns dealing with several films at a time. From 1928 the *Illawarra Mercury* featured a regular column on the movies called "The Pictures" and occasionally the film distribution company, Master Pictures, sponsored an alternative column called "In Movieland" (30 Mar. 1928 10). Both columns featured reviews of films that could be seen in the picture theatres in Wollongong. The column talked about the lead actors in various films but concentrated on the roles they occupy in a given movie and the plot of that movie. For example, the column, "In Movieland" has this to say about the film, *Beware of Married Men* (1928):

> Ms Rich has a wonderfully strong role in the picture, the drama coming in her efforts to save the reputation of her flapper sister at the peril of her own good name. The piece has a notable cast including Myrna Loy, Audrey Ferris, Clyde Cook, Stuart Holmes and Richard Tucker (*Illawarra Mercury* 30 Mar. 1928 10)

[20] Compare, for example, the advertisement for the Crown Theatre in the 1 Jun. 1928 *Illawarra Mercury* (2) that features Leo Martin and Marie, "the prince of syncopation and his dainty partner" to the advertisement in the *Illawarra Mercury* on 5 Jun. 1930 (2), the second week of the "Monster Talkie Month" where there is no longer any live entertainment on the program.

From 3 May 1929, in conjunction with Union Theatres' lease of the Wollongong Theatres circuit, a new column appeared called "Movie Moments". The introductory spiel of the column stated:

> Realising the important part that entertainment plays in the lives of our readers and the popularity of Motion Pictures, we have decided to devote this column weekly to forthcoming picture productions and other news from filmdom, and have appointed a "film critic" - our Sydney correspondent as editor of this page. (*Illawarra Mercury* 3 May 1929 18)

This column represented a more "chatty" format than its predecessors and included photographs of stars and cartoons interspersed with reviews of films and serials currently showing or coming to particular theatres. Although it is not clear who the "film critic" was, it is probably safe to assume that he or she was connected with Union Theatres as all the films discussed in the column were those showing at the flagship theatres of the chain, the Wollongong Crown, the Bulli Royal and the Thirroul Kings (advertised alongside of the column). The publicity stills and information about the films could also have easily been garnered from the press pack material sent ahead of the film by American production/distribution companies. The reviews are all positive and features showing at rival theatres are not mentioned. When the column made its unannounced disappearance on 22 May 1931, it was just a few months before Union Theatres, who had taken over Wollongong Theatres' circuits, went into liquidation and relinquished control back to the local chain.[21]

In the "Movie Moments" columns, the information about the stars, although more chatty and personalised, is still confined to their performances in particular films or serials and there is not yet any gossip or information about their private lives or ongoing career moves. For example:

[21] After "Movie Moments" disappeared the *Illawarra Mercury* resurrected their previous column, "The Pictures" which continued on and off into the early 1940s (last appearance found 5 Jun. 1942 7). During the war the paper's length was reduced and 'The Pictures" column did not reappear at the end of the war when the paper returned to its old length and began running daily instead of weekly editions (8 Dec. 1949 5).

> If you saw "Varsity" you must have liked "Buddy" Rogers, and you'll like him more still in "Someone to Love". So Boyish and true to life are his emotions, that he might even be yourself or your boy friend. He is so invigorating, so fresh, and so lovable. (*Illawarra Mercury* 3 May 1929 18)

This advertisement conforms to DeCordova's discussion of the key aspects of the picture personality. As I have mentioned above, DeCordova writes about the emergence of the star system in Hollywood and suggests that, whereas the movies had been discussed in terms of technical innovation, with the growing popularity of the narrative form, a discourse about the picture personality gained dominance. He suggests that the discourse of the picture personality encompasses three key aspects, one being the circulation of the actor's name, another the inter-textuality of that name whereby the actor is used to link the features he or she is involved in, and the other is professionalism which involves discussion of the merits of an actor's style and performance (24).

DeCordova distinguishes between the "picture personality" and the "star" by suggesting that the star is an articulation of an actor's professional and private life (26). We can see this distinction occurring with local cinema advertisements by 1930 where the following comment appears in the *Illawarra Mercury* about Douglas Fairbanks:

> Fairbanks gives a whirlwind performance and proves he needs no bizarre locale or characterisation to bring out his dashing romantic temperament. (5 Jun. 1930 18).

This comment is as much about Fairbanks the man as about Fairbanks the actor. The star discourse emerges clearly in advertisements after this time, especially as the *Illawarra Mercury* changes its format again, introducing first a "Women's Column" (7 May 1937 7) and soon after a "Women's Page" (25 Jun. 1937 14) dealing with parenting tips, homemaking advice and fashions which were often linked with the popular movie stars of the moment. Such articles were titled "Hollywood Beauty Notes" or "Hollywood Fashion Service" and contained tips like the one below:

> Norma Shearer, who takes better care of her hair than any girl in Hollywood. Note how her boyish bob is set off by the stylish beret she is wearing. (14 Aug. 1931 9)

During the 1930s cinema advertising and articles were increasingly targeted at the female audience members. *The Australian Women's Weekly*, introduced in 1933, provided pages of Hollywood fashions and gossip about film stars, causing Diane Collins to comment that the success of the magazine depended as much on film publicity as it did on dress patterns and recipes (*Hollywood* 172).

Meanwhile children found out about movie stars in other ways. Olga Ferguson found out about film stars from the information that used to be printed on the wrappers of the sweets "Silver Sammys":

> **OF**: The film stars, you know Rudolph Valentino and all the early ones. Us kids used to save them. When I think now, the kids save all their basketball cards - well we could have done that [with the Silver Sammy wrappers] but we didn't. Some people might have done I suppose but we didn't. We threw them out. But you used to swap them with one another if you got two of the same kind … Dorothy Dix and all the different ones - all the really early stars – that's how we got them. They used to have all the information on the back – their age and all the films they had been in and different things like that. That's how we got most of our news. (interview 3 8)

Alternatively kids could gaze at their favourite characters on the numerous movie posters that were pasted all over the Illawarra. Cecelia Jackson remembers looking at the posters that used to advertise the coming attractions at the Kings Theatre in Thirroul and remembers Ron Klower, projectionist at the Kings during the 1940s and 1950s, walking around the town pasting the posters up as part of his duties for Wollongong Theatres. Posters for the Kings Theatre even turned up in surrounding suburbs. As Olga recalls:

> **OF**: They used to put posters outside the picture theatre. You know - what would be on the next week. Those paper ones - they used to stick them in different places. That's how you knew what was on Saturday night or Wednesday night, Saturday afternoon ... They used to put them on lamp posts. Even the Kings Theatre in Thirroul used to put them on lamp posts in Scarborough … We used to watch them sticking them up on the lamp posts with paste and water. We were very likely to go along the next day and rip them off – ha ha! Or draw whiskers on the actresses! (interview 3 7)

As I have mentioned earlier, Charlie Anderson (interview 22), manager of the Whiteway Theatre between 1946 and 1952, used large glossy photographs of Hollywood stars to decorate the foyer of the Whiteway Theatre and remembers the films that were most successful as the ones with the "big-name" stars in them. Through the connections of Wollongong Theatres, who owned the Whiteway, Charlie also hosted visits from Australian stars who came to the Theatre to promote their pictures. He recalls:

> **CA**: We had Chips Rafferty there in person … [and] Ron Randell.
> **NH**: So Chips came down to promote his film?
> **CA**: Yeah, I forget which one he came down for - whether it was *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1941) – I forget.[22] And Ron Randell, he came down as *Smithy* (1946).
> **NH**: Did that used to draw the crowds in if there was a star coming down?
> **CA**: Oh yes … Oh we had five or six used to come down. And they always had a little something in my office. It was always beer and ham and onion sandwiches! (interview 22 6)

As a manager Charlie successfully used the popularity of movie stars to secure large audiences at the Whiteway. While Australian stars could sometimes be relied upon to

[22] Considering Charlie was manager of the Whiteway from 1946-52, Chips Rafferty was likely to have been visiting promoting *The Overlanders* (1946) rather than *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1941).

visit in person, their Hollywood counterparts remained on the screen and stared down from posters and photographs in the lobby. The discourse of stardom helped sell the movies as well as many other related products such as clothing and hairstyles. As movie stars were sold to the audiences of the Illawarra through newspaper advertisements and articles, women's magazines, posters and even sweet wrappers, this encouraged a sense of intimacy with the stars of the screen that led local people to identify with them as if they knew them. A detailed discussion about how local people talked about and mimicked their favourite stars is included in chapter 4.

Local Identity

I would like to briefly refer to another way in which the experience of cinema-going was sold to Illawarra audience – that of local identity and pride. Even in the early advertisements there is a sense of the world coming to Wollongong with promises that local audiences were seeing "the very latest pictures from every part of the world" (Parkinson, 4) on "the only Machine of its kind in Australia (1) or "the only one of its kind in this State". Thus audiences were given the feeling that theirs was an exclusive opportunity, and that their town or suburb had proved its worth by being considered important enough to attract such cutting edge entertainment.

With metropolitan theatres securing the majority of film premieres and regional audiences having to wait sometimes weeks for their turn, each time the theatres of the region secured fast releases of the latest movies or showcased new technology, the newspaper reports and advertisements championed them as examples of the importance and high standing of a particular town or suburb. One example of this discourse occurred when the Union chain announced its intent to bring sound to its theatres in the Illawarra. The impending talkies were heralded in superlative style in the *Mercury*:

> Yes its true! The Talkies are coming to the south coast and very soon. The opening production will probably be presented during June. This is indeed wonderful news - in fact it is the greatest announcement in the entertainment sphere that has ever been made in the history of the south coast ... Just think of it - very soon in our own centre, in our own theatre [the Crown] we can see and hear the talking picture masterpieces that are enthralling the public of the cities of the world. (17 May 1929 18)

The media hyperbole ensured high attendances when the talkies came to the region. The first talkie in Thirroul caused a "traffic scene worthy of a city" when audiences flocked to the premiere of *The Rainbow Man* (1929) (*Illawarra Mercury* 27 Sep. 1929 14). It is interesting to note that, in both the above reports, the *Mercury* uses the talkies to equate the status of Thirroul with that of major cities that had also hosted the talking pictures. Thus cinema was co-opted to promote the autonomy and success of regional centres encouraging residents to see their town or suburb as just as good as major cities such as Sydney. The intention was to boost local pride in the town and community and therefore increase spending in local businesses, not just the theatres.

As Diane Collins has suggested, the presence of a cinema in a suburb meant that the local people stayed within the suburb for their entertainment and so gained a sense of local autonomy and confidence ("Entertainment" 69). In chapter 5 I discuss the intimate relationship between cinema and local identity in greater detail. However, for the moment it is sufficient to acknowledge that this discourse was utilised by advertisers to attract audiences to the pictures through promises of experiences on a par with, or one step ahead of, city audiences.

Innovative Marketing Strategies

As well as through established discourses of technical innovation, stardom and local pride, cinema exhibitors in the region also utilised other techniques to attract people to the movies. Cec Clark and his partner Matt Baumgarten (interview 25) used posters of their own design to advertise their travelling picture show in the 1920s and 30s. Ever the entrepreneurs, Cec and Matt also used to advertise the pictures in hotels and restaurants where they stayed and would pay local school children to dress up in costumes and parade around the streets with a hand bell advertising the picture show:

> **CC**: *The Man They Couldn't Hang* (1934) … that was a really good one. That's how we came to dress a boy up as a convict in the streets [shouting] "Tonight, tonight, come along and see the movie *The Man They Couldn't Hang*. Why couldn't they hang him? Come along tonight and find out!" (interview 25 9)

Children advertising the film *The King of Kings* (1927)

Courtesy of Cec Clark

Charlie Anderson employed many marketing strategies and techniques to publicise the pictures that were showing at the Port Kembla Whiteway. He advertised films on the local radio stations and made use of widespread press advertising every week, which occasionally included large pull-out "holiday programs", that listed the forthcoming cinema programs for a two-week holiday period (interview 22 11).

During holiday periods Charlie often decorated the Whiteway in the theme of the holiday. For example one spring festival, he and the staff made hundreds of paper flowers and decorated the Whiteway with them. Charlie showed films with a spring theme in order to match the festival. Similarly, on Anzac Day, the theatre stage would be decorated in green raffia with the words "Lest We Forget" printed boldly. Then the Anzac Day service would take place at the theatre (7-8).

To promote the theatre Charlie also organised beauty contests with heats in local caravan parks and a cash prize going to the winner. The women entering the contest paraded on the back of a semi-trailer that was decorated to advertise the theatre (8). The innovative methods that Cec Clark and Charlie Anderson employed to advertise their

respective cinema businesses show that novelty attracted people as much as star gossip and industry publicity.

To sum up, over the first half of the twentieth century, as cinema grew from a mechanical wonder to a feature dominated mass entertainment, so the discourses used to advertise the medium altered. At first caught up in technological innovation and mechanical marvels, advertisements gradually became more confident of the permanency of the moving pictures themselves and so concentrated on the screen content. The advertisements were genre-focused, pulling in audiences with the promise of comedy or melodrama, and then they proceeded to rely on the power and popularity of movie stars to attract audiences. Meanwhile, throughout the period, substantial technological developments in the industry, such as talking pictures, technicolour and cinemascope, provided renewed impetus for winning more business. With the secondary employment the cinemas provided to businesses in the vicinity, it is not surprising that the advertisements also tapped into the discourse of local identity and regional pride.

SUMMARY

This chapter has examined cinema exhibition in the Illawarra from the perspective of an historical materialist approach. My initial overviews of the American and Australian cinema industries were intended as points of reference for the Illawarra cinema industry which developed both in subservience to national and international film industries and yet also in departure from them. Screen content seen in the Illawarra, for example, was in the majority secured through block booking and blind buying programs instigated by the American production/distribution companies through film exchanges and later through their own offices in Sydney, which determined what films would be seen and what publicity material would be available about them. Similarly, the local chain briefly came into the possession of one of the major national distribution companies, Union Theatres in the late 1920s, although circumstances led to its return to local control within three years.

In departure from the national trends, however, the regional circuit remained for the most part locally run, even throughout the 1950s when Union Theatres and Hoyts between them controlled most of the Sydney metropolitan and suburban theatres

(Shirley and Adams 186). Additionally, local managers and exhibitors controlled and packaged the content they received in ways that they believed would best appeal to local audiences (see chapter 4). Thus the screen content was packaged creatively at a local level and made for very different cinema-going experiences.

Additionally I have looked at how cinema was marketed through discourses of technological ingenuity, stardom and local identity. Using newspaper advertisements and articles, the data gathered by Bob Parkinson for his book about Illawarra theatres and my interviews with local residents I have constructed a picture of a successful local industry that adapted to changes in the way pictures were shown as well as to changes in the regional and national economies. While coal mining in the north gave way to steel making in the south and the Depression and the two world wars took their toll on the region, cinema remained a constantly popular leisure activity until into 1950s by adapting to changes and redefining itself as integral to local leisure activities.

Critique of the Historical Materialist Approach

The historical materialist perspective is a useful discourse with which to consider cinema in the region in that it organises the story of cinema charting technical innovations and changing business strategies. However, although the oral histories I co-produced provided material which increased knowledge of the history of the cinema industry in the Illawarra, they were also silent on many of its aspects. In particular, with the exception of Charlie Anderson and Cec Clark (a cinema manager and travelling showman respectively), there were hardly any references or anecdotes about the local cinema industry itself or the problems that cinema owners had in competing with other national and international chains. Neither was this a discourse available in the local papers.

Olga Ferguson was alone among the cinema-goers, in reflecting on the way the cinema industry developed over her lifetime when talking about the fortunes of her local picture hall, the Scarborough Palace:

> **OF**: The man from Coledale used to do the theatres. Him and his brother.
>
> **NH**: Was that the Yardley Brothers?

OF: Yes, Yardleys. One week we'd have the main picture on first and then it used to be taken at half time on a motorbike down to Coledale. And they'd bring their picture back up for the second half and they'd swap over. Perhaps the newsreel and the main picture would be up at our place in Scarborough and the other ones would be on at Coledale. That's how they worked it.[23]

NH: The Yardleys went on to get the Arcadia in Thirroul.

OF: Yes, yes … There was another lot. Dwyers [sic], something like that.[24] When Yardleys sold out another chap took it over.[25] Can't remember his name - he used to live at Scarborough. They used to get their films come through on the train from Sydney in tins. They used to have to be taken up to the station. The postmaster often used to take them as he was taking up the mail and they'd be sent back away with him… People with money got into it. Especially when sound came - they had to have bigger projectors. You had to have money to buy [the equipment]. The smaller fella…well I don't suppose he made much of a living out of it - he had to sell because he couldn't afford to buy the machinery. Then it got up to a concern when money came into it with management people and all that. Then I think different ones like Fox Film used to put money into it to help them out. But when it first started up it was more amateur. (interview 3 8)

Olga's comments show an awareness of the problems of local exhibitors in the face of technological change and more advantaged market competitors. However her comments, although perceptive, do not show a detailed awareness of the fortunes of her local cinema, certainly in comparison with the detail and insight in which she talked about the rituals associated with going to the local cinemas. Indeed, it was the local

[23] The Yardley brothers ran the Scarborough Palace hall and the Coledale Empire for a period prior to 1926 when both halls were taken over by Wollongong Theatres Propriety Limited (Parkinson 46-51).

[24] Olga is probably thinking of the Dyer brothers who ran the Scarborough Palace hall and the Coledale Empire from about 1928 until 1934 although they did not show movies continuously in this period (Parkinson 47, 50). See also interview 12 for mention of the Dyers.

[25] This is likely to have been a Mr Furse who managed the Coledale Empire for Wollongong Theatres in 1926-7. As he was managing on behalf of the local chain he would have received his films from Sydney as Olga recalls (Parkinson 50).

practices of cinema-going and the ways in which cinema-going contributed to a sense of personal and community identity that were the main areas of discussion by all the people I interviewed about cinema in the Illawarra. These topics were hard to fit into the historical materialist, industry focused discourse.

Therefore, although an historical materialist approach is one way of looking at cinema in the Illawarra it is not necessarily a more complete way of talking about cinema than are debates over film texts. The approach fails to find a space for the issues and subjects which were discussed by the cinema-going audience and is therefore not sufficient a way of organising this thesis as it leaves so much interesting material out.

Consequently, it is important to move outside of the historical materialist agenda in order to explore audience memories of cinema-going and to see amongst which discourses these memories are organised. The next two chapters therefore focus in more detail on audiences and oral narratives in order to more appropriately examine personal accounts of cinema-going in the Illawarra in the latter chapters of the thesis. Chapter 2 looks at research about media audiences in order to see how they have been approached and constructed by other disciplines and chapter 3 considers the particular methodology of oral history in order to explore how people organise their memories into narratives.

CHAPTER 2: AUDIENCES AND RECEPTION

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, an account of cinema in the Illawarra based on the history of the cinema industry does not adequately reflect the kind of cinema information discussed by Illawarra audience members in the oral history interviews I co-produced. In fact, the business manoeuvres of the local cinema industry, like national or international industry developments, were of peripheral concern to the cinema-goers I talked to. Instead, they talked about the way cinema fitted into their everyday lives, played a part in social relations and provided an entertainment that became associated with pleasurable routines and rites of passage. Curious as to why audiences talked about cinema in very different ways to historians, I decided to look in greater detail at audience research in order to explore how audiences are represented and through which discourses their insights are discussed.

In this chapter I would like to take the opportunity to distinguish different approaches to audience studies. Research into cinema audiences is a fairly new phenomenon in cinema studies, emerging in the last two decades and slowly becoming more confident of itself. I shall look at some of the reasons why audience studies were so late to develop within cinema studies departments. I shall also suggest that it was largely through the development of the historical materialist approach that a consideration of cinema audiences finally began to emerge, even if, as I will argue, we have to move beyond this approach to fully get to grips with the meanings audiences invest in their cinema experiences. I will look at the work of Robert C Allen, Janet Staiger and other historical cinema researchers who have contributed to putting cinema audiences on the cinema studies agenda. However, ultimately I find many of these studies fall short of providing an explanation of how audiences assess their cinema-going experiences as they are primarily concerned with how audience interpretations reflect certain moments in history. Therefore I turn to the discipline of cultural studies, where other cinema audience researchers (Bobo; Stacey; Kuhn) have suggested different ways of considering audiences.

Cultural studies has a strong tradition of producing research about media audiences, particularly television audiences. I shall look at cultural studies' investment in audience

research and will provide an overview of significant audience studies whilst outlining some of the debates over power and representation that are currently circulating in this field. As well as illustrating the growing importance of the audience to a broad range of media studies, this chapter will situate my research in the space between cultural studies and cinema studies alongside a small but growing number of studies (Stacey; Kuhn) that consider the importance of the cinema audience to cultural analysis.

CINEMA STUDIES AND THE AUDIENCE

Cinema audiences have been asked about their film preferences and viewing habits since early on in the medium's history (Bertrand 146; Koszarski 25; Turnbull 175); therefore, in a business sense, there has been a continuing interest in audiences. The commercial film industries of, for example, the United States and Australia continue to seek out and publish statistics, garnered from audiences, concerning the demographic make up of their clientele and their preferred viewing habits in trade press (such as *Variety* [USA] and AFI publications [Australia]). Such information ensures that successful film formulae are repeated to the most profitable ends. Newspaper articles and social commentary about film audiences and the movie going experience have also accompanied the fortunes of the film industry (Bertrand). However, although the cinema audience continues to be important in a business sense, it has been largely neglected in film theory.

So what are the reasons for this? Firstly, the audience seems to have been distanced from critical considerations of the medium since the institutionalisation of film theory after the Second World War. Francesco Casetti provides a useful overview of this process in his book, *Theories of Cinema*. He attributes this institutionalisation to several phenomena. He suggests that after the war, cinema became acknowledged as a cultural fact. It became acceptable to talk about cinema in scholarly terms and eventually cinema began to be studied as a subject in itself in Italy and later Europe and the United States (7-8).

At the same time film theory began to develop specialized characteristics. A more exclusive field of expertise began to be defined which included a specific lexicography (for example, the terminology associated with filmology, semiotics and psychoanalysis) that effectively limited the number of people who could talk about film in theoretical

terms. Casetti also describes a separation occurring between film theory and criticism (so people talked about how films could be talked about rather than just about specific films) and between theory and practice (thus distinguishing between what ideal films should be and what films being produced actually were) (8-9).

Casetti also points to the internationalisation of film theory as contributing to the process of institutionalisation, as the debates about cinema transcended local circles and moved to international debates across academic institutions and film journals (9). The institutionalisation of film theory relocated film debates from film clubs and magazines to universities and journals. The average film-goer was provided with non-theoretical discourses on cinema (centred mainly on film stars and their on and off screen lives) through fan magazines and gossip columns, whereas serious film theory was seen as the province of experts and academics. Thus a polarization occurred between the theoretical debate about film conducted within critical circles and the popular discussion of film amongst audience members. Not only was the audience not included in debates about film: film theory stopped talking about the audience.

The main concern of film theory after the Second World War (until the development of historical materialist research into the economics of the film industry in the 1970s and then, recently, the tendency toward film audience research) was the film text. In this approach films are studied from a number of angles, for example, how they affect the hypothetical spectator, how they represent concerns of the time or how they contribute to the profile of a genre, director or star. On a practical note, of course, textual analysis is easier to perform and advance for the solo researcher than is audience work. Audience research involves overcoming practical and methodological difficulties and negotiating the differences that inevitably occur between abstract theoretical positioning of the spectator and the opinions and complex motivations of actual audience members. As Jackie Stacey points out:

> The film text is a discrete object of study which is *usually* accessible, in contrast to spectators who have to be selected, contacted, and whose tastes, opinions and feelings have to be collected before any analysis can even begin. (*Star Gazing* 12)

Further explanations are offered by Robert C Allen who points out that methodological and theoretical difficulties arise "when questions of audience are cast in the past tense" ("From Exhibition to Reception" 351). For cinema, the period of greatest audience consumption (when it could best be deemed a "mass" medium) was in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Therefore, to study cinema at the height of its popularity one has to talk to people about what it was like to go to the pictures in these decades. Relying on peoples' recollections of cinema (as opposed to asking them about a television program they have just watched or are watching) requires a close examination of memory processes. As accounts are necessarily re-presentations of remembered events and feelings, they are influenced and shaped by the passage of time and the storytelling process. As Jackie Stacey suggests:

> Memory ... involves a set of complex cultural processes: these operate at a psychic and a social level, producing identities through the negotiation of "public" discourses and "private" narratives. These histories of spectatorship are retrospective reconstructions of a past in the light of the present and will have been shaped by popular versions of (the past) which have become cultural currency during the intervening years. (63)

I will deal in more detail with the issues of memory and representation in the following chapter but it is important to understand from the outset that these intersect with theories of the audience. Cultural studies of television audiences have mainly been undertaken with audiences of contemporary television programs and therefore have not had to deal with the in(ter)vention of memory across a long period of time whereas researching the popular eras of the cinema necessitates getting to grips with its complexities.[26] The problems that the passage of time and the intricacies of memory bring to research about cinema audiences might account for the scarcity of cinema audience studies dealing with the first half of the twentieth century.

[26] There have been historical studies of the reception of television (Spigel; Mellencamp quoted in Brunsdon, D'Acci and Spigel 60-73) but these have generally been researched through popular magazines, newspaper articles, cartoons and televisions programs themselves rather than through audience testimonies.

Finally, there have been significant theoretical differences between film and television studies that have tended to point cultural studies towards audience work and cinema studies towards textual analysis. One television audience researcher, David Morley, suggests that cinema studies has neglected the audience because it has concentrated on the film as a text and its effects on the theoretical spectator without pursuing the politics of the viewing context or actual audience readings (*Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* 157). Hence, television studies have been concerned with "social audiences" whilst film studies have concentrated on the theoretical "spectator" (Staiger 49).

Cinema studies as a discipline has often been aligned with psychoanalytic theories that have sought to explain the identification processes that occur when spectators watch a film. This method sees identity as fluid and changing and is interested in the way hypothetical spectators align themselves with positions in the movie during the film showing. As Stacey explains:

> … the methodological emphasis on textual analysis within film studies has its foundations in the belief that feminine and masculine "identities" are produced by textual practices and not vice versa. This derives from the poststructuralist view that language speaks us and not the other way around. Hence, theories of spectatorship in film studies frequently demonstrate little interest in the spectator before she enters the cinema, focusing instead on the production of spectator positions by film texts. (*Star Gazing* 73)

By contrast, as I will explain later in this chapter, cultural studies has become particularly interested in the social and cultural background of the television audience and sees these locations as a way of deciphering the meanings produced by viewers from specific texts. This assumes that social identities are formed prior to watching a program and can account, in part, for the politics of the viewing context and the decoding of certain television texts.

At its most basic, cultural studies, while acknowledging the problems of interpretation, takes audience accounts as evidence whereas psychoanalytic film theory argues that these audience responses themselves have to be "read" in order to decipher their

unconscious meanings (Stacey 77). Both positions are, of course, problematic, as the first does not allow for the possibility that personal motivations may affect the construction of an audience member's account, whereas the second assumes that the "researcher knows best" and is capable of deciphering what a particular audience member's account "really" means.

Historical Materialism and the Cinema Audience

Casetti has suggested that a turn towards audience studies in film theory began to occur in the early 1980s (277). Given this is now two decades ago, it is surprising how small the body of cinema audience work is that has been produced to date. I have detailed some of the practical reasons for this above. However, I would now like to draw attention to what work has been produced and the theoretical positions that have been taken.

Although psychoanalytic approaches to the film text imagined a theoretical spectator, a consideration of actual cinema audiences didn't begin to occur in cinema studies until the historical materialist approach gained currency in the late 1970s and beyond. The historical materialist approach to cinema studies is introduced in the previous chapter. Researchers in this field (Bordwell; Gomery; Staiger; Maltby; and Vasey) conducted historical research into the American cinema industry and asserted that a film text cannot be understood on its own but should instead be considered in the context of the historical development of the film industry, in particular through the practices of production, distribution and exhibition.

The cinema audience began to be invoked, but not studied separately, in some historical materialist texts as the cinema-going section of the American public to whom the industry marketed its films and stars and whose dollars the industry's various economic strategies were aimed at securing. Writers such as Douglas Gomery began to talk about audiences in terms of their cinema-going experiences and how those experiences changed with various technological developments and marketing strategies. The cinema audience was realised through trade magazines quoting audience attendance numbers and through social factors which affected audience priorities and so caused the industry to rethink its marketing strategies. Gomery's development of the American cinema industry is summarised in chapter 1.

While Gomery provides a straightforward historical account of industry developments in the US which includes comments about the ways in which cinema audiences experienced going to the pictures, other researchers have used a historical materialist approach to consider the audience more directly in terms of reception. The term reception *should* be considered a compulsory fourth term within cinema studies after production, distribution and exhibition, but it has not yet become synonymous with them. Instead, opinions about reception studies vary from the study of the reception of various films (Staiger) to a broader range of reception practices that an audience member engages in when going to the pictures (Allen "From Exhibition to Reception").

Janet Staiger, for example, chooses to look at how historical discourses affect the interpretation strategies open to audiences when they discuss particular films. Staiger's book, *Interpreting Films*, provides an overview of reception studies that compares cultural studies and film studies approaches to interpretation. Like Morley, Staiger asserts that the majority of film (and literary) criticism has been "text activated": that "the reader is constituted by the text" (9). She also outlines "reader activated" theories, found in cultural studies, which look at how texts are appropriated and meaning is made by the reader (see discussion of the active audience later in this chapter). Staiger herself chooses a "context-activated" method that attempts to hold up the text and reader as equally important in the creation of meaning that occurs in specifically historical contexts.

Staiger's historical materialist approach is concerned with locating audience readings and interpretations of film texts within their historical context, taking into account and tracing as far as possible the discursive strategies available to and the subject positions or "imaginary selves" taken up by individuals. She says of the method: "It would not interpret texts but would attempt an historical explanation of the event of interpreting a text" (80-1).

To illustrate this approach Staiger uses Hitchcock's film, *Rear Window* (1954), as a case study. First she looks at text-activated readings made by film critics who have seen the film as generating questions of spectatorship, voyeurism and social commentary for the audience. She then suggests how a British Cultural Studies academic might approach

the text, by examining how audiences from various social groups might make various readings of the film depending on what characters and situations they can identify with.

Finally Staiger turns to her preferred historical materialist approach to the text by examining the "contextual reading strategies" available to the film-goer in the 1950s (89). To do this she looks at reviews of *Rear Window* from the time of its release and concludes that they tend to be concerned with what the text reveals about society, most concluding it was a treatise on urban living, a major social concern at the time. In this short example Staiger illustrates how historically situated concerns and discourses can influence how a text is interpreted.

Staiger uses film reviews of the 1950s to elicit the historically situated reading strategies available to audiences. However, she acknowledges that her conclusions are "tentative" and do not cover the wide range of reviews available or seek out marginal readings of the film (89). While Staiger's approach is useful in reminding us that an audience member's opinions of cinema-going and particular films are intimately bound up with discourses of the time, she clearly fails to engage with audience readings of this film. People who remember seeing *Rear Window* on its release would have provided an interesting counterpoint to the film reviews Staiger uses and could have helped explore the extent to which the film reviewers' discourses affected audience readings.

A different approach is offered by Robert C Allen who, in 1990, proposed a model through which to consider film reception. Allen's interest in film reception was formed when he was asked to teach a film history course and found that there was little or no mention of film audiences or exhibition practices in the material. The course he was expected to teach, like so many other film courses at that time and still, looked at film history as a succession of film texts and influential film directors.

Instead, Allen proposed that due attention be paid to reception. In this article, he divides reception into four components worthy of separate attention: *exhibition*, *audience*, *performance* and *activation*. *Exhibition* concerns the "institutional and economic" aspects of reception; who saw which films at which venues under whose auspices (349). Allen suggests that American film audience tastes and behaviour had been surmised from research about New York exhibition practices, which he claims

were atypical from those in the rest of the country. Allen points out that that 71% of US citizens saw their first movies in rural settings, in local halls and tents through itinerant travelling showmen or small exhibitors. He calls for further studies into local exhibition practices to be undertaken and draws attention to research his graduate students are undertaking into exhibition practices in North Carolina (350).

In terms of the *audience*, Allen notes the methodological difficulties involved in collating audience research but insists that scholars need to consider, "the size and constitution of audiences for specific films; and the relationship of movie-going patterns to race, gender, class, ethnicity, and other variables" (351). He calls for research to be undertaken into the social meanings attached to movie-going and the ways in which film advertising constructs and aims itself at particular audiences. Thirdly, Allen calls for research into aspects of the cinema *performance*: what else makes up the experience of cinema-going, apart from the movie.[27]

Finally, Allen describes *activation*, a term borrowed from literary criticism to describe the ways in which audience members and particular groups make sense of certain aspects of reception. Here, Allen lists a variety of sources for researchers of activation, including unearthing local records, looking at old newspaper advertisements for films and theatres, studying old town architecture and "interviewing grandparents" (355). Although oral histories with audience members are included in Allen's list of sources, they come last in his list after written sources revealing, perhaps, a preference for written over oral sources common to many historians.

Allen has continued to research cinema audiences in the US, encouraging his students to find out more about cinema-going in their local area. He has an article awaiting publication on the experiences of rural cinema audiences ("Decentering Historical Audience Studies") which reveals marked differences in the cinema-going experiences of regional and metropolitan American cinema audience members and challenges cinema historians to find out more about the diversity of the cinema-going experiences across class, race and geographical locations. Other researchers have also taken up his

[27] Philip Corrigan has described some of the aspects of performance as "… the queues, the entrance stalls, the foyer, cash desk, concourse, entering the cinema, the gangway, the seats, the music, the lights fading, darkness, the screen which begins to glow as the silk curtains open" (quoted in Morley *Television* 158).

call for further studies into film audiences. For example, in the United States, Gregg Bachman has written about audience memories of silent pictures and Tom Stempel has recently published a collection of cinema-goers' descriptions of their movie experiences in the second half of the twentieth century. In Britain the British Film Institute has recently published three collections of essays on film audiences edited by Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, Annette Kuhn has been researching British cinema audiences of the 1930s and Mark Jancovich is about to publish a book about cinema-going in Nottingham.[28] However, these researchers have yet to provide a model for considering audience narratives within a framework of cultural analysis.

After failing to find a way of representing the issues raised by Illawarra audiences within cinema studies, I decided to turn to cultural studies. Audience research has played a significant role in cultural studies and has developed within different theoretical frameworks that attempt to link specific media practices such as television viewing or cinema-going to meaning-making in everyday life.

CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE AUDIENCE

> As we know, in the bad old days television audiences were considered passive consumers, to whom things happened as television's miraculous powers affected them. According to choice, these (always other) people turned into zombies, transfixed by bourgeois ideology or filled with consumerist desires. Happily, so the story goes, it was discovered that this was an inaccurate picture because in fact, these people were out there in front of the set, being active in all kinds of ways and making critical/oppositional readings of dominant critical forms, perceiving

[28] *Film Consumption and the City*, which is awaiting publication by the British Film Institute is the result of a research project coordinated by Mark Jancovich at Nottingham University. This ambitious project uses oral history interviews with local residents to find out how film consumption in Nottingham has changed over the years as the venues for watching movies have also changed. The study seems to take an historical materialist approach to film-going which outlines the changes in watching movies that have happened in the last century. However, while the use of oral history interviews is to be commended, what may be absent from this study is a consideration of what cinema-going meant to Nottingham audiences and how changing reception conditions changed the significance of the practice for audience members. Instead, as with the other examples I have mentioned above, the cinema audience may well be used to describe cinema exhibition practices in a particular location rather than to illuminate the cultural significance of cinema to its audience.

> ideological messages selectively/subversively etc. So it seems we needn't worry. (Morley *Television* 18)

Here David Morley, an experienced audience researcher and commentator whose work I shall examine shortly, tells a cautionary tale about attributing all power to either the media text or to the audience. I would like to expand on this potted history of cultural studies and the audience in order to draw out theories and methods that are pertinent to my own research and to the field of audience studies and film theory in general.

One of the main areas of focus for cultural studies has been television and the degree of influence and control it exerts over the lives and opinions of viewers. Stuart Hall developed a fundamental theory of how meaning is circulated in the production and reception of television programs which he termed "encoding/decoding" (first published in 1973). It was fundamental because it broke with the previously unquestioned linear communication models that described communication as proceeding from the sender through a message to the receiver. This is also known as the "hypodermic" model (Morley *Television* 45), whereby viewers are conceived as passive recipients of the messages of television, a view associated with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s.[29]

Seeing such communication models as too linear and fixed, Hall broke down the communication process into a more complex series of relations:

> It is possible (and also useful) to think of this process in terms of a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked and distinctive moments – production, circulation, distribution / consumption reproduction. … The object of these practices is meanings and messages … organised … through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of discourse. ("encoding/decoding" 128)

[29] While members of the Frankfurt School (eg Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse) conceived what is now deemed the 'hypodermic' model of communication in response to the rise of fascism in Europe many members emigrated to America in the 1930s and their communication model came to be seen as American (Morley *Television* 45-6).

According to Hall, before a message is sent it has to be coded into a recognisable discursive formation. He uses the example of an historical event and explains that television producers cannot relay the whole event on television; instead they must condense it and package it according to codes within the televisual discourse circulating at a given time (129).[30] When the program is aired a number of meanings are possible. However, the television viewer then decodes the program in either a dominant-hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional way.[31]

Hall describes a "lack of fit" (131) between encoding and decoding that arises from the different viewpoints and structures of broadcasters and audiences. Therefore, people interpret television programs depending on the extent to which they conform or diverge from the dominant message that the program producers seem to have intended for a particular program.

A *dominant-hegemonic* reading is one in line with the status quo and the intent of the program producers. A *negotiated* reading takes on aspects of the producers' intent but is interpreted through other personal meaning making strategies. Hall uses the example of a news item on an industrial relations bill that will limit wages and take away the right to strike action. The report is presented in a *dominant-hegemonic* way that sees the bill as necessary in the national interest. A *negotiated* reading is one that accepts the dominant interpretation whilst also maintaining contradictory personal exceptions. For instance, a viewer who sees the industrial relations bill as being in the national interest may at the same time stand by her right to strike for better pay. Finally, an *oppositional* reading works directly against the dominant-hegemonic reading; as exemplified by the viewer who sees the news item and reads every mention of the national interest as a reference to class interest. Hall concludes his essay on "encoding/decoding" by stating that a significant political moment is achieved when someone who would normally hold a negotiated reading takes on an oppositional reading (135).

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[30] Although Hall uses the example of an historical event being transformed into a news item it could just as easily be a dramatic interpretation of an event or a fictional program that reflects the discourses and televisual codes of the time. He acknowledges that the process by which television producers encode stories and events into dominant forms which coincide with the views of the dominant groups in society is a process worthy of more attention but does not go into details of that process in this essay.

[31] These three readings follow the work of sociologist, Frank Parkin who conceived of *dominant, subordinate* and *radical* positions.

Judith Mayne provides constructive criticism of the encoding/decoding model in her essay, "Paradoxes of Spectatorship", suggesting that all readings are in fact negotiations:

> It is highly unlikely that one will find any pure instances of dominant or oppositional readings. In other words, a purely dominant reading would presume no active intervention at all on the part of the decoder, while a purely opposition would assume no identification at all with the structures or interpellation of the text. (172)

This point seems to have been taken up by Hall himself in a later interview when he acknowledges:

> The problem, if you translate these two positions (dominant and oppositional) into politics, is that you get back into a very determinist position. You either have a false consciousness of a perfectly transparent reading or a perfectly revolutionary … always oppositional subject. So I want something in between. So I simply talk about the negotiated code. And the negotiated code is in the paper as one position but, of course, it is not one position at all…the truth is negotiated readings are probably what most of us do most of the time. ("Reflections" 265)

David Morley's now famous study published in 1980 on *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (quoted in *Television* 75-118) was an attempt at examining Hall's "encoding/decoding" model with reference to a specific television program, *Nationwide*, and particular viewers' readings of it. *Nationwide* was a British television program shown in the 1970s and 80s on weeknights in the early evening, and its content was a mixture of current affairs and human-interest stories. In this pioneering study Morley showed episodes of *Nationwide* to members of various socio-economic groups (trade union members, art students, student teachers, bank managers, apprentices) with the intention of finding out whether certain groups shared, modified or rejected the dominant-hegemonic ways in which the programs had been encoded.

Morley found that the people he showed the episodes of *Nationwide* to decoded specific programs in a variety of different ways, often making dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings from different segments of the same program. He suggested that a person's readings were, to a certain degree, common to his or her socio-economic group.[32] For example, shop stewards were more likely to produce oppositional readings and bank managers to produce dominant-hegemonic readings which were broadly in line with whether their class interests were being represented by the program or not. However, class was not clearly aligned with all readings and it was not easy to predict which group would come up with which type of reading. For example, Morley found that apprentices, print managers and bank managers were the groups most likely to make dominant readings even though they were not all from the same class, or from the class whose interests were most obviously aligned to those of the dominant-hegemonic group (117).

Morley's research showed that audience members decode programs in individual and socio-cultural ways that are complex and sometimes contradictory. Most importantly this study refuted the notion that a dominant ideology is necessarily passively absorbed by all television viewers and supported Hall's model of decoded readings. He concluded:

> It might be best to think of the audience less as an undifferentiated mass of individuals than as a complicated pattern of overlapping sub-groups and sub-cultures within which individuals are situated. (87)

Hall's encoding/decoding theory, tested out by Morley in the *Nationwide* study, changed the way cultural theorists treated the audience. Whereas it had been assumed by followers of the Frankfurt School that the popular audience more or less received the doctrine of the ruling classes through the media, it was now accepted that not all audience members received this message unquestioned but made readings of their own which differed because of their lived experiences and backgrounds. In this way some audience members were resisting cultural hegemony by making oppositional readings to

[32] However Morley does not explore the extent to which group members (consciously or unconsciously) policed themselves so as to achieve common readings.

the intended program messages. Morley's conclusions also point towards a number of television audiences rather than "the television audience" as a single entity. His research recognised that particular groups and subject positions lead to particular program readings.

During the 1980s cultural studies saw a rapid expansion of audience-centred research. Feminist researchers began to look at television audiences in terms of gender. As Brunsdon, D'Acci and Spigel have pointed out, the turn to audience studies in feminist research came from a concern about gender stereotypes within television programming, but also in response to what was seen as a patronising and dismissive attitude to female viewers and viewing choices (4-5). Concentrating on television programs popular with women, in particular soap operas, research exploring the relationship between female viewers and specific soap operas, such as Ien Ang's study *Watching Dallas* and Dorothy Hobson's research about *Crossroads*, began to reclaim women's viewing choices as legitimate areas of concern and analysis.

Alongside Janice Radway's research into readers of romance fiction, early feminist television audience research provided a significant body of work that attempted to account for women's investment in cultural forms which appeared to uphold the conditions of patriarchy. Consequently the results from these studies pointed to negotiated readings being made demonstrating that women were not cultural dupes succumbing to capitalist and patriarchal cultural formations, but were reading characters' predicaments and traits from a feminist perspective or trying different subjectivities on for size, as in the case of Ang's *Dallas* viewers:

> In the play of fantasy we can adopt positions and "try out" these positions without having to worry about their "reality value" … At the level of fantasy we can occupy these positions without having to experience the actual consequences. It may well be, then, that these identifications can be pleasurable … because they create the possibility of being pessimistic, sentimental or despairing with impunity – feelings which we can scarcely allow ourselves in the battlefield of actual social, political or personal struggles, but which can offer a certain comfort if we are confronted by the contradictions we are living in (134).

Feminist cultural studies research into television audiences began to articulate the relationship of female viewers to particular programs. This research sounded a warning about the sexism that had previously been employed to dismiss female viewing choices and therefore put the politics of representation on the agenda for audience studies. Cultural studies researchers who legitimised audience studies, such as Radway, Ang and Morley, soon began to realise that representing audiences was not an uncomplicated process. These early studies were largely text based, concentrating on how people interpreted specific television programs (or romantic novels in Radway's case). They did not consider the viewing context: the situations in which people watched television and what television viewing meant to different viewers. Researchers like Morley and Hobson, therefore, started to investigate the viewing context and also began to consider the extent to which meanings are produced by audiences or determined by producers: the degree of activity that can be ascribed to audience readings. These particular issues, the viewing context, power and representation and the active audience shall now be considered in turn:

The Viewing Context and the Ethnographic Approach

Morley's *Nationwide* study had been conducted by screening episodes of the program to groups of people from the Midlands region (where the programs were broadcast) and from London who were enrolled in particular educational courses, including trade union and management training courses as well as further and higher education programs. The screenings of the program and the discussions were conducted in the educational venues.

Although the results were informative in terms of program readings, Morley became concerned that this study did not consider the impact of the viewing context of each audience member. He realised that he was asking groups to analyze a program that they might not usually watch in a situation that was very different to that of television viewing in their individual homes.

Therefore, in 1986, Morley's next study, *Family Television* (quoted in *Television* 159-69), involved interviewing working class and lower-middle class families from South London in their own homes to further examine the dynamics of television viewing.

While the *Nationwide* study was controlled to examine class differences, *Family Television* was designed so as to examine family viewing differences. Significantly, the methodology reveals a concern with determining differences *within* families rather than *between* them, as the families studied were all nuclear families from the same area, similar social classes and the same race (144).

This time Morley was interested in learning about how television was watched within families: who controlled what the family watched, which programs were preferred by different family members and how different family members watched television. The results pointed to strong gender differences and specific power relations played out in family viewing situations. In general, the father considered television a leisure pursuit to be enjoyed with his full attention. Meanwhile, the mothers saw television as a guilty pleasure and watched distractedly whilst doing other household chores. Gender differences also determined program choices; the men preferring news and current affairs programs, while the women enjoyed serials and drama (147-155).

More often than not the father controlled the remote and determined what programs were watched in the evening. However, in one case where a man was unemployed and at home for most of the day, the rest of the family picked their evening programs first, as it was supposed that the father could catch up with the programs he missed on the video the next day. Morley's results suggest that while a person's socio-economic group along with their gender or race can indicate what cultural codes they have access to and so what likely readings may be made about television programs, the context of television viewing circumstances can also effect particular readings (169).

This study and others like it (Gray; Hobson) began to develop an ethnographic approach to audience studies that took account of the viewing context as much as individual program readings. Borrowed from the field of anthropology, ethnography refers to the intimate study of small groups or communities through a variety of methods such as participant observation, interviewing and commenting on the experiences and interactions.

Ethnographies are "essentially contestable" (Morley *Television* 189). Therefore it is wise not fall into the trap of claiming to represent the "reality" of any particular group,

as it will be automatically bound up in the suppositions and opinions of the ethnographer, not to mention being affected by her or his very presence or questions. Nevertheless, attempts to explore as much of the social situation as possible so as to guess at the meaning behind certain aspects of culture and behaviour moved towards a more holistic approach to cultural analysis. Ang explains:

> The critical promise of the ethnographic attitude resides in its potential to make and keep our interpretations sensitive to concrete specificities, to the unexpected, to history; it is a commitment to submit ourselves to the possibility of, in Paul Willis' words, "being surprised", of reaching knowledge not prefigured in one's starting paradigm. (*Living Room Wars* 52)

This approach is further explored by Janice Radway in "Reception Study: Ethnography and the problems of Dispersed Audiences and Nomadic Subjects". Radway criticises previous ethnographic studies of media audiences as too "narrowly circumscribed". She explains:

> Ethnographers of media use have … tended to rule out as beyond our purview questions of how a single leisure practice intersects with or contradicts others, how it is articulated to our subjects' working lives. (367)

As the title of Radway's article suggests, individual subjects are nomadic, taking meanings and messages from a variety of cultural experiences and practices. Therefore, in Radway's view, cultural studies needs to move away from media specific audience studies based on particular cinema or television content responses, and start to grapple with the ways in which audience members move between the various subject positions that are on offer from a variety of cultural forms.

Radway is calling for a holistic approach to audience studies that looks at how individuals articulate and make sense of their lives and take up certain versions of the world and their place in it over others. Here she uses Hall's emphasis on the dual meaning of the term "articulation" as both speaking and making a link. Radway calls for

a large scale community study which looks at reception practices across institutions, such as the home, at school, and in "leisure worlds", in order to see how meaning making strategies intersect in everyday life (372). Although less ambitious, my project has a similar aim in that it attempts to trace how cinema-going as a leisure practice fitted into a network of meaning-making and identity-forming strategies.

Power and Representation

Radway now criticises her initial study of romance readers for distancing the readers she studied from her own position as interpreter of their reading patterns. She points out that, although the conclusion of *Reading the Romance* attempted to valorise her readers' suggestion that in some ways romance reading might empower women,

> Nevertheless that conclusion still repeats the familiar pattern whereby the commentator distances herself as knowing analyst from those who, engrossed and entranced by fantasy, cannot know. ("Romance" 214)

Radway's comment highlights one of the dangers of representing audiences, that of using the audience one creates to highlight the difference between the viewing audience and the knowing commentator. This is a problem that is not easy to fix. As I shall suggest later in this chapter, all audiences are inevitably representations that serve the needs of the researcher. However, although it may not be possible to avoid such representations, it is important to examine the way in which these relationships are constructed and defined (see also chapter 3).

One of the ways in which this problematic has been challenged has been in recent work on television fans. Studies such as Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* and Harrington and Bielby's *Soap Fans* have attempted to deal with the distinction between knowing commentator and fan communities by locating the researchers as participating members of the fan communities they are studying. This is a deliberate attempt to redefine the concept of fandom as a legitimate area of study and a normal everyday practice rather than uphold previous stereotypes of fans as atypical and social misfits (Jenkins 11). These studies, like feminist audience studies in the eighties, aim at rescuing the viewing habits of fans from negative and dismissive stereotypes and seriously examining the meaning-making activities of fan subcultures.

However, although the political objective of research into television fans is laudable, the methodological background of such studies raises questions about audience representation. To take Jenkins' study as an example, *Textual Poachers* criticises the distancing of academics from their audience and likens this to Clifford and Marcus' criticism of traditional ethnography where the ethnographer's comments on the community being studied are distanced from the ethnographer's own position (Jenkins 4). Jenkins aligns himself with "the newer ethnography" which

> … offers accounts in which participation is often as important as observation, the boundary between ethnography and community dissolves, and community members may actively challenge the account offered of their experience. (4)

Although this appears to be a fair and democratic process, I am troubled that such an ideal does not take into account real power relationships between audiences and academics, even academics that see themselves as part of their audience. Jenkins is at pains to point out that he has presented versions of his chapters to fellow fans for comment and "*in some cases*" [italics mine] has incorporated their suggestions into chapter revisions. He maintains that the book has been written, "in active dialogue with the fan community" (7). Again, this process is to be commended, but it cannot do away with the inequalities inherent in the audience-academic relationship. After all, as the Popular Memory Group has pointed out, it is the researcher who has final edit on the text, the researcher who decides what suggestions to take on board and it is the researcher who receives financial and cultural recompense after the book is published (Popular Memory Group 219-220).

Although Jenkins acknowledges that a power relationship exists between himself and the fans he studies he seems to think this through rather briefly and only in terms of gender rather than in terms of the unequal control of the fans and the researcher over the final text (6). Furthermore, Jenkins' book does not go into detail about the people that comprise the actual fan community he studies. His quotes are from fanzines and from other studies about fandom rather than from interviews or direct conversations with the fans he interacts with and, although he describes moments of observing and helping

with fan activities – such as the creation of slash texts and with fanzine mail-outs – he fails to describe these fans in any critical detail that would allow the reader to get a picture of the fan community he is describing and his relationship to it.

What would be useful in such work would be an exploration of where the identities of fan and academic coalesce and where they are contradictory. Jenkins acknowledges that his account oscillates between the position of fan and academic and that these roles do not always peacefully coexist (5); however, he does not further explain how these positions contradict each other or attempt to mark any points of departure between his own views and those of other fans. There is, therefore, a blurring of boundaries between Jenkins' academic and fan identities and between his own views and those of the fans he studies.

The danger inherent in studies of fandom is, therefore, that in assuming a common identity with the fans one studies, the fans are seen as a projection of the researcher's views and experiences. Taking Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* as an example, Judith Mayne illustrates how the views of the researcher are projected on the audience one studies:

> The white, heterosexual, middle-class women that Radway discusses may well be complex agents who live the contradictions of middle-class patriarchal culture in equally complex ways, but they are also projections of American, middle-class, academic feminism. This is not meant in any way as a condemnation – far from it. But the desire to name real readers is neither transparent nor innocent, for the women readers who appear in Radway's analysis are mediated by her questions, her analyses, and her narrative. (162)

As Mayne illustrates, an audience is defined through its academic commentator as well as in contrast to him or her. Perhaps because these studies (Radway; Harrington and Bielby; Jenkins) have been closely aligned with the researchers who have written them, the message they produce, that fan culture is active and inventive, does not contain any caution about any dominant ideology enshrined within them or worry about the negative as well as positive readings that may be made.

What is essential in audience research, therefore, is to articulate the politics of representation that are inherent in the individual research project. Then, the conclusions and interpretations made of any audience research can be read alongside such considerations. (These discussions about power and representation are discussed in relation to my research in chapters 3 and 7)

The "Active" Audience

The studies of fandom referred to above champion the active audience model. The most well known exponent of the active audience in cultural studies is John Fiske who first argued for a celebration of audiences who can take and create multiple meanings from polysemic texts in 1987 (*Television Culture* 65). Ang (*Living Room Wars* 10) sees this active audience as a postmodern phenomenon; claiming technological and industry developments in the modern world now enable the viewer to be more active (even interactive) in their reading of programs.[33] She describes audience "fragmentation and demassification" and contends that, in a postmodern world rife with contradictions, it is not surprising that audiences are activating a large variety of meanings from television fare (10).

On the other hand, critics (McGuigan; Golding and Ferguson quoted in Storey 150-2) question the notion of active audiences, contending that such interpretations ignore the "determining role of production on cultural consumption" (Storey 151) and consequently relations of power. This view suggests that the dominant-hegemonic ideology invested in television programs should attract more attention than the small proportion of audience members who may read dominant messages against the grain. Such critics accuse audience studies of detracting from and masking the transmission of dominant ideology through the television media and, therefore, of ignoring the determining effects of capitalist ideology through cultural forms.

[33] Ang notes that powerful television networks are giving way to more diverse, smaller operations; television scheduling can now be manipulated by most viewers with a video recorder; cable and satellite TV stations proliferate and target their material to particular audience sectors; and, a proliferation of alternative screen entertainment (video games, Internet, CD ROM) (*Living Room Wars*10).

A middle ground is set out by those (Morley *Television* 38) who argue that active audience celebrants are in danger of confusing ambiguity with polysemy. That is, although texts may be subject to several encoded and decoded meanings, we should not begin to suggest that all members of the television audience have the power to resist and make oppositional readings to those inscribed by the dominant ideology. Ang also retains notion of media power, cautioning that an active audience is not necessary a resisting one. Rather, media institutions may now be allowing for and encoding multiple readings into texts.

Morley suggests that access to discourses or "ways of thinking" may determine a person's available readings, an explanation which Turner (*British Cultural Studies* 124) relates to Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital", whereby education, class, upbringing regulate people's access to different discourses and hence their preferred program readings. Such theories allow for individual differences in readings whilst also maintaining that there is an unequal distribution of "cultural competencies" that allow some groups of people a greater range of readings than others.

The relevance of debates over active audiences to my research may at first seem slight, as my study is not so much concerned with the interpretations that Illawarra audiences made of particular films as with the meanings that they made about the whole cinema-going experience. These debates over whether dominant hegemonic powers or active audience members have greater control over interpretation are, however, applicable to a discussion of film practices. After all, the choices exercised by audience members in determining their personal experiences of cinema-going are in many instances controlled or deliberately set up by the cinema industry. For example, in chapter 5, I discuss seating patterns in the cinema and show how progressing from the cheaper seats to the upper circle was like a rite of passage that was a marker of maturity for some and class for others. However, having seats at different prices within the same theatre is also a capitalist strategy that plays on distinctions in order to achieve increased revenue. Are audience members dupes of this market strategy, and, are the meanings they placed on movement within seats actually managed choices that were controlled by the cinema industry? And are the people who preferred the cheap front row to the expensive upper circle seats resisting this strategy; and are their numbers negligible or significant in terms of industry profits?

This example shows how debates over power and meaning are relevant to practices as well as program readings. Like Morley, I subscribe to the view that there is a certain amount of control and a significant amount of creativity within hegemonic structures that the cinema industry is a part of. The difficulty lies in determining the extent to which individuals create their own meanings and help define cinema-going, against the possibility that audiences only exercise choices that are presented by and contained within dominant-hegemonic powers. This issue is debated further in the conclusion.

Is there an Audience?

Questions over the amount of power audiences really have over the interpretation and dissemination of meaning about cultural products and practices; possibilities for nomadic subjects to move between audiences and subject positions; unbalanced power relationships that privilege the researcher's interpretation over the audience they study – all these issues serve to destabilise the idea of an objective, knowable audience. Some would argue (Hartley "Television Audiences, Paedocracy and Pleasure" 125; Ang "Stalking the Wild Viewer") that all conceptions of an audience are constructions based on an author's particular agenda. Thus "audiences are only ever encountered ... as representations" (Hartley 125). John Hartley describes audiences as "invisible fictions" (*Tele-ology: Studies in Television* 105) that are produced by institutions for particular reasons. Writing about the television audience, he describes some of the institutions that claim to speak on behalf of the audience: the television industry, political and legal institutions such as regulators or government committee inquiries and critical institutions such as academia, journalism and, very rarely, viewers associations or pressure groups (105).

Using the example of the television industry, Hartley shows how it constructs its audience as childlike and in need of guidance, entertainment and distraction. Hartley suggests that the industry needs to unite disparate aspects of the viewing population into one group in order to conceive of them as manageable and to direct programming towards the audience's perceived needs. Treating this group as children is safer than appealing to "comrades" or "national citizens" because of possible negative associations. So, the image of the child is employed:

> A fictional image of the positive attributes of childlike pleasure is invented. The desired audience is encouraged to look up, expectant, open, willing to be guided and gratified, whenever television as an institution exclaims, "Hi Kids!" (111)

As a result of this paedocratic view of the audience, Hartley argues, attitudes of program makers and thus the programs themselves patronise and over-protect the imagined audience instead of challenging and stimulating them. The way one conceives of an audience therefore shapes the attitudes towards and the treatment of audience members.

This example shows how a particular version of "an audience" serves the needs of the institution that creates it. However, this is not just the province of the media producers and industry figures but occurs whenever an "audience" is invoked. Hartley also suggests that academics create versions of the "audience" in order to further their research agendas and their careers. Even those academics that conduct audience research in an attempt to ask individuals about their viewing habits and preferences analyse their findings to present their "audience" in particular ways. Hartley uses the example of Morley, now widely acknowledged in cultural studies as one of the pioneers in television audience research, to show how his research has produced audiences variously determined by class and gender distinctions. These distinctions, Hartley contends, are Morley's research preoccupations and not distinctions that would have been offered or discussed by television viewers themselves (106-7).

In the same way my own project can be seen to create particular versions of an audience. The cinema audience members I talked to were constituted through my own agenda rather than, or as much as, through any commonality in their experiences. I gathered together a collection of Illawarra residents whose only similarities, at first, appeared to be that they were from the same region. They were different in age and background and even attended different cinemas. They became my "audience" by virtue of volunteering to be interviewed and because they were able to fulfil my agenda of providing stories of cinema-going from the first half of the twentieth century. The audience I construct recalls their cinema-going memories through specific discourses. I argue that discourses of age, national and regional identity and community are common

to this imagined audience – topics that the individual narrators themselves may not have believed were the principles organising their narratives.

Problematising the audience as Hartley does is useful in so far as it reveals the agendas operating behind the construction of specific audiences and encourages self-reflexivity when considering the way one's own "audience" is represented. As Morley points out, those who believe they can objectively assess the audience they study are in danger of indulging in "naive realism" (*Television* 170).

However, criticisms have been made of Hartley's position. In his book, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*, Morley takes issue with Hartley's anti-essentialist arguments, pointing out that although researchers are unavoidably subjective when they try to pin down an audience, it doesn't mean that there is no point in conceiving of an audience in the first place (170). Morley argues, following Feuer (quoted in Morley *Television* 180), that the process of condemning audience studies because they only "serve the needs of the imagining institution" actually defers meaning and displaces interpretation. The danger is that one avoids making political judgments, for example about media power and audience activity, and that political and cultural analysis becomes displaced by a debunking of the notion of a "real" audience.

Morley recommends that researchers should still attempt to draw conclusions from the group they study while at the same time acknowledging their unavoidable involvement in the construction of their audience (180). This is what Gayatri Spivak has termed a "strategic essentialism" (quoted in Landry and Maclean 214), which acknowledges the grouping of subjects as problematic, but also recognises that such generalisations sometimes need to be made in order to describe sectors of the community and draw meaning from their experiences. After all, as Spivak notes, "the ones talking about the critique of the subject are the ones who have had the luxury of a subject" (quoted in Morley *Television* 192).

Strategic essentialism is an approach that I return to in this thesis as it acknowledges the criticisms leveled at post-structuralism in general (that endless deferral of meaning and deconstruction of concepts may lead to an absence of political analysis and critique [Morley 169; McGuigan 30]), whilst allowing the advantages of post-structuralism (an

examination of the motives behind the construction of particular topics and subject positions including the complicity of the author) to be explored.

Cultural Studies of Cinema Audiences

As I have mentioned earlier, cultural studies has offered little research into cinema audiences. However, there have been some exceptions. Such studies have commonly been conducted in conjunction with the textual analysis of particular films (McRobbie quoted in Mayne, 160; Taylor quoted in Stacey *Star Gazing* 34; Bobo). I will use Jaqueline Bobo's 1988 study as an example as it was one of the first to apply cultural studies theories to a film text. Bobo wrote about black women's readings of the film, *The Color Purple* (1985), using Hall's encoding/decoding model.

Although the film was criticised by film critics and black action groups alike as portraying offensive stereotypes of black people, especially in relation to the portrayal of black men as violent, Bobo found that black women in the cinema audience took a different view. Bobo talked to a number of black women about their reaction to the film and found that the most common reaction was, "Finally, somebody says something about us". By examining these readings through Hall's encoding/decoding model, Bobo concluded that the women were making oppositional readings to those of the dominant hegemonic values encoded in the film (95).

Bobo points out that the dominant-hegemonic values inscribed in the film provide racist stereotypes of the characters that are not apparent in Alice Walker's book of the same name. She shows that, despite good intentions, Spielberg, the white male director, inscribes the film with black stereotypes, such as the wild and violent black man and the humorous foil. Despite this, Bobo suggests that the black female audience of *The Color Purple* manages to construct a positive reading of the film, overlooking the treatment of black men and the stereotypical portrayal of some black characters in order to take pride in the portrayal of black women on screen, in major roles, as desiring and desirable people. Thus their negotiated readings can be seen as positive and empowering (103).

Bobo takes a traditional cultural studies approach to her project, analyzing black women's readings of the film through the encoding/decoding model. She demonstrates that film texts are just as available for cultural studies readings as television programs

and provides a clear and astute analysis of the reading strategies employed by the women she interviews. However, like early cultural studies research into television audiences, Bobo does not attempt an analysis of the viewing context and does not need to deal with the methodological difficulties involved with interpreting the reception patterns of an older film or of older audiences.

A more recent study of cinema audiences which takes into account both cultural studies and cinema studies theories on audiences is Jackie Stacey's book, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema And Female Spectatorship*, which provides a comprehensive and accessible account of the issues facing cinema audience researchers. Stacey uses questionnaires and letters from female cinema-goers of the 1940s and 50s in Britain to explore how women identified with Hollywood films and stars of that time. As the title of her book suggests, Stacey looks at how cinematic theories of spectatorship have defined women's relationship to film. However Stacey also employs cultural studies theories of audience analysis, highlighting the importance of the viewing context as well as the politics of remembering to her analysis. Stacey's theoretical considerations are, therefore, important, because they explore the differences between the contextually-based audience research of cultural studies and the psychoanalytic approach to spectatorship in cinema studies.

Stacey acknowledges that psychoanalytic models provide a useful framework through which to look at processes of identification, pleasure and desire. However, whilst acknowledging the relevance of psychoanalytic theory to discussions of identity and identification, Stacey points out particular deficiencies of the approach. Firstly, she suggests that psychoanalytic theory is rigid and over-deterministic in terms of gender and identification. Psychoanalytic theories of cinematic identification (see Mulvey, for example) often appear to see female identification as a negative process whereby women can only be complicit in the patriarchal system by identifying with the position of the male gaze. Secondly, psychoanalytic theories fail to locate spectators historically and contextually. What Stacey does in her project is to try and reconcile psychoanalytic theories of identification and desire with the lived experiences of female audience members; "to develop a notion of the spectator as an 'historical subject'" (47). Hence Stacey attempts to reconcile the psychic and the social approaches to audience identity (135).

Stacey also takes into account the historical materialist approach to show how discourses of the period, such as national identity and consumerism, were woven into her respondents' testimonies. She examines the "imaginary selves" narrativised by her interviewees and looks at the subject positions open to the women in her sample in the 1940s and 50s. Moreover, Stacey suggests that discourses from intervening years and from the present also shape and change the way meaning is made. Thus she incorporates contextual reading strategies of the 1940s and 50s, as well as exploring discourses which have appeared since that time, to explain how the women in her sample narrativise their experiences from a wide range of possible positions and discourses. She therefore brings considerations of the interplay of memory and narrativisation into her exposition that other research omits.

Stacey is interested in the ways in which the women who wrote to her constructed their identities through the process of recalling their favourite Hollywood movies and stars. I am also interested in the way in which identity serves as an organising concept for the re-creation of memories. As Madan Sarup puts it:

> Identity … is a mediating concept … a convenient "tool" through which to try and understand many aspects, personal, philosophical, political – of our lives … Identity is not something we find, or have once and for all. Identity is a process, and that is why it is so difficult to grasp. (28)

Identity (involving personal, local, regional and national configurations) is a common factor in narratives of cinema-going I co-produced and is used to frame my discussions of cinema-going in the Illawarra in the first half of the twentieth century (see chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7).

Stacey's work comes closest to the cinema audience research I have collected in that she is interested in the ways in which female audience members of the 1940s and 50s make meanings from their cinema-going experiences and use them to articulate a sense of their own identity.

Stacey is currently working on further research into cinema audience in a joint project with Annette Kuhn. Kuhn has been commissioning interviews throughout the UK about memories of cinema-going in the 1930s. Along with Stacey, she is investigating the importance of cinema-going to the lives of British people in the 1930s and exploring national and regional histories of cinema-going as well as methodological issues arising from oral history research. Although papers regarding the project have been published[34] a detailed analysis is not available at the time of writing.

OVERVIEW – APPROACHING AUDIENCES OF THE ILLAWARRA

This foray into audience studies has been valuable in that it has enabled me to examine the ways in which audiences are studied, constituted and interpreted in cultural studies and cinema studies. Cultural studies of television audiences have led the way in legitimating audience-centred research. This research has shifted away from text-centred readings (Bobo) to a broader conception of the context of media use and from conceiving of one undifferentiated audience to a plurality of audiences. Instead of categorising audience readings purely by socio-economic group or by race or gender, there are now attempts at a more intricate analysis of how people make sense of and interpret the media, making complicated and often contradictory readings according to a variety of subject positions as well as personal preferences, prejudices and perceptions.

While these readings are complicated and individuated, I do not hold that meaning is freely made by audience members; rather, that there are networks of circulating discourses, both past and present, which influence readings and encourage certain interpretations over others. I will also continue to examine the effect the researcher has on defining and interpreting an audience. The unequal relationship between researcher and audience is shown in different ways, sometimes through a distancing of the audience from the "knowing" researcher position, but also through over-identification with one's audience when it is assumed that power relationships and differences have been eliminated. These considerations have important implications for studies of cinema audiences.

[34] For example, "Memories of Cinema-going in the 1930s". *Journal of Popular British Cinema* No 2, 1999, 100-120.

Cinema studies is a late comer to audience-centred research but such research slowly began to emerge with the development of the historical materialist approach in the late 1970s that took into account audience preferences and habits as part of detailed research into particular film industries. While historical studies of audiences situated cinema-going experiences within particular moments of film production, exhibition and distribution, they did not refer to audience members themselves, constructing audience behaviour from industry surveys and other secondary sources. They therefore failed to explore how audience members themselves viewed their cinema-going experiences.

Such an approach has only recently emerged in the work of researchers such as Jackie Stacey who demonstrates the value of audience-centred research and considers a number of theoretical traditions (historical materialist, psycho-analytical and cultural) in order to examine how audiences reflect on and construct their cinema-going experiences. The way in which memories and interpretation strategies interact to produce a narrative is a concern common to Stacey's research and that of the Popular Memory Group whose work will be examined in detail in the following chapter. It is also a central pre-occupation within my own research.

The Illawarra audience I refer to in this thesis, therefore, is not just approached through the films they remember on screen but through the rituals and practices of cinema-going, and the meaning of cinema-going for these audience members' lives, both then and now. In this respect I tell a tale of two audiences: a community of cinema-goers from the first half of the twentieth century and an audience of elderly cinema commentators. This thesis represents an attempt to connect the experience of cinema-going (and the re-telling of that experience) to the meaning-making strategies that constitute and give weight to audience members' lives.

The special contribution that I hope this research makes towards debates over the construction of identity is to introduce audience narratives as sites of identity formation. While Stacey used letters and questionnaires to elicit information about cinema-going, I use oral history interviews. The difference between these two methods is that the former, whilst involving the writer in a reconstruction of past events does not have the advantage of exposing the dialectical construction of a narrative.

In the following chapter I want to concentrate on oral history as a means of learning from and studying an audience. I shall examine the issues that arise from oral history and will look further into the questions of memory and history that Stacey raises, which are complemented by the work of the Popular Memory Group.

CHAPTER 3: ORAL HISTORY AND POPULAR MEMORY

TO WHAT END SHOULD ORAL HISTORY BE USED?

> It is frequently the case that an oral source confirms or enhances information from written materials. *In fact this ability to complement the written record is the principal purpose of oral historiography* [my italics] (Henige 71)

So there we have it. At first glance, at least, the purpose of oral history appears simple: oral accounts can thicken our perception of events and provide details that substantiate and support written versions of the past. But is it really that straightforward? After closer examination, oral history becomes a problematic process over-laden with choices and value judgements: What happens when an interviewee does not complement the written record but tells a different story? What happens when an interviewee contradicts him or herself? What performance strategies are employed in the re-telling of history? Do some groups employ certain discourses and strategies over others? How should a researcher re-present their interviewees' accounts as a text? What power relationships are involved between the interviewer and the interviewee?

Any oral account has more going on prior to, during, and after the interview than the finished transcript betrays. An oral account that backs up other written records or the dominant version of history is one consequence of this process. However, equally important are the accounts that do not. In fact, it is these accounts that often shed most light on the nature of memory and the paradoxes of history.

I have been thinking about the practice of oral history since examining textbooks and guides written for prospective oral historians. Some of these publications (Henige; Sawyer) reflect the opening quote of this chapter in that they are principally concerned with interviewing people as historical sources, living records that can provide additional details about the past. To this end they suggest that the interviewer ask the type of questions that restrict their sources to particular events and eras in order to encourage

detail that is consistent with existing written accounts. They privilege the oral historian as the "expert" who asks the right questions of their sources and then fits the accounts with other evidence about a particular topic or era and builds up a coherent historical narrative.

However, like some of the audience research presented in the previous chapter,[35] such oral history manuals oversimplify the complex negotiations that go on during a communication exchange between people. As I began to interview Illawarra residents about cinema-going I found that they would not always adhere to my line of questioning or interpret my questions as I would have expected. Often the people I interviewed had alternative conversational agendas that were worth pursuing as they showed how cinema-going was intrinsically linked to other stories of identity formation or community participation. Sometimes the people I talked to contradicted written sources, sometimes they contradicted themselves and sometimes there were misunderstandings and miscommunications between myself and the people I interviewed. Instead of disregarding such occurrences as some oral history books seemed to recommend (Robertson 53; Sawyer 7-8), I wanted to explore them further as they were so clearly connected to the processes by which interview relationships were established, narratives chosen and, consequently, histories constructed.

Fortunately, during the course of my audience research I came across Lynn Spigel's article, "From the Dark Ages to the Golden Age: Women's Memories and Television Reruns", which introduced the work of the Popular Memory Group in order to explore the process of remembering. Spigel interviewed students about their opinion of the portrayal of women on television over time and found that the students believed 1950s television images of women were considerably more stereotypical and sexist than contemporary ones. She suggests that although modern depictions of womanhood are not necessarily more enlightened than those of the past, her students wanted to see the depiction of female roles on television as having progressed over time. The students used selective memories of the past to assert that there has been a positive linear

[35] Much audience research takes its methodology and findings for granted and does not question the way that research subjects are represented. See, for example, studies listed in chapter 2. For a reflexive look at audience studies see, in particular, Janice Radway's criticism of her own *Reading the Romance* study and also criticism of Radway by Judith Mayne. See also my criticism of Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* in chapter 2.

progression in women's roles on TV, even when this was not necessarily the case. This mis-remembering seems to have been employed as a self-empowerment strategy, whereby her female students constructed their position in society as being better than that of the previous generation of women.

Spigel's article asked why it was that women remembered women on television in particular ways and not others. Such an approach seemed more in line with the questions I was asking about the construction of cinema-going memories in the oral history narratives I was conducting. Instead of cutting out contradictions and misrememberings, Spigel chose to explore them and to try and account for them. In doing this she referred to the Popular Memory Group, who sees oral history not as a direct line to the past but as a site of negotiation over meaning. After tracking down the work of the Popular Memory Group, I adopted its critical and reflective approach to oral history.

As the following discussions indicate, there is less to be gained by trying to make oral history fit into established historical narratives than there is by using the differences that are apparent between oral accounts and written records to debate the construction of history. The following chapter explores the work of the Popular Memory Group and situates it within the field of oral history. I examine the development of oral history as a method of research, highlighting the tensions that exist between oral history and more empirical modes of historical research. Here, I emphasise the contribution of the British oral historian, Paul Thompson, in making oral history an acceptable method of academic research. The Popular Memory Group's work is then introduced as a critical reflection on the practice of oral history. I detail the group's arguments and examine criticisms of its approach as well as looking at current research which uses a popular memory approach. I then reflect on the work of oral historians, Alessandro Portelli and Alistair Thomson, whose work complements that of the Popular Memory Group and provides insights that are of useful application to my own research.

DEVELOPMENTS IN ORAL HISTORY

In their 1998 *Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson use the following definition of oral history:

> The interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction. (ix)[36]

I find this definition useful because it applies equally to contemporary interviews and to those going back hundreds of years. In fact, as many oral historians have pointed out (Thompson; Lummis; Douglas and Spearritt; Perks and Thomson) oral history has been practiced for centuries. As early as the fifth century BC, Herodotus was interviewing eyewitnesses to inform his chronicles (Thompson 3rd ed 31) and it is a method that has been used in different cultures all over the world.[37] In the nineteenth century the notable French historian, Jules Michelet, used oral history to develop an alternative account of the French revolution from those that had been suggested by official written sources (Douglas and Spearritt 52). However, despite Michelet's work, in the nineteenth century oral history began to be considered an inferior source of information. With the development of history as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, universities began to create "professional" historians by separating their skills from those of the general public. This was done by giving prospective historians archival training in seeking out and interpreting written documentary evidence (Thompson 3rd ed 56). Thompson describes how rigorous archival research seminars, that were started in Germany, soon spread to other parts of Europe to the extent that the widely used *Introduction to the Study of History* by Langlois and Seinobos, that was published in 1898, could proclaim:

> The historian works with documents … there is no substitute for documents: no documents, no history. (quoted in Thompson 3rd ed 56)

This reification of the written record led to the view within academic history departments that oral history was an unreliable and undisciplined way of finding out about the past that soon came to be considered the province of amateur enthusiasts. This distinction between written and oral evidence has marked the treatment of oral

[36] Definitions vary according to the purposes for which oral history is being used. Some specify the use of tape-recorders (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* quoted in Thompson 3rd ed xi); some highlight oral history as verbatim recording (Douglas and Spearritt 53); and others distinguish between raw oral evidence and the eventual 'history' that is constructed from that evidence (Lummis 27).

[37] For a detailed and informative account of the development of oral history, see Paul Thompson's, *The Voice of the Past*.

history ever since, despite a now growing institutional acceptance of the benefits of the practice.

Writers on oral history have pointed to a revival of the methodology in the twentieth century that came about through projects such as Columbia University professor Allan Nevins' interviews with "persons significant in American life" in the 1940s (Perks and Thomson, 1; Thompson 3rd ed 65). In fact, as a consequence of Nevins' work, oral history became a formal discipline at the University of Columbia in 1948 and Nevins is credited for coining the term, "oral history" (Douglas and Spearitt 52). Nevins' interviews are an early example of the oral history project that concentrates on interviewing people of power and influence in particular societies. This use of oral history has been particularly popular with government collecting institutions. In Australia, for example, ScreenSound (formerly the National Film and Sound Archive) continues to seek out interviews with significant figures in the film, television, radio and music industries. Similarly, in 1967 the National Library instituted a long-running program to collect interviews with "Australians whose achievements or whose positions have brought them fame or notoriety throughout the country" (Douglas and Spearritt 55).

An alternative use of oral history is to interview people whose lives are seen to be representative of the experiences of ordinary people. This type of project is particularly associated with periods of social change. For example, in America in the 1930s, as part of Roosevelt's New Deal, the Federal Writers Project interviewed people across the United States, including former slaves, homesteaders, workers and the unemployed, about their experiences. Some of these testimonies were published in the 1939 book *These are All Our Lives* (quoted in Thompson 3rd ed 64). British accounts of life in the Depression were collected through a radio appeal in 1933 and published in *Memoirs of the Unemployed* (65).

It was the potential of oral history to record the stories of ordinary people that first attracted British historian Paul Thompson to the methodology in the 1970s. Like Nevins, Thompson was to be a significant figure in the development of British and later international oral history, co-founding the British Oral History Society in 1973 and successfully presenting oral history as a credible research methodology to academia. I

shall talk more about Thompson and this strategy later in this chapter. In his influential *The Voice of the Past*, Thompson provides a comprehensive overview of the development of oral history and charts the emergence of oral history projects across the world in the twentieth century that focus on the lives of ordinary people. Some examples are Jewish survivors' accounts of the Holocaust in the Yad Vashem archive in Israel; interviews of life under fascism in Italy (see Portelli and Passerini); and accounts of the experience of apartheid in South Africa (3rd ed 68). Thompson also notes that the 1970s oral history projects amongst under-represented groups in specific societies have also multiplied so that interviews with women and ethnic and cultural minorities are now also a priority. This type of project sees an important goal of oral history to be giving voice to those who have been silenced.

Though different in their subject matter and focus, Nevins and Thompson's work has contributed to re-establishing oral history as significant research tool within the humanities. Some departments and universities have accepted oral history more readily than others. For example, oral historian Alessandro Portelli notes that there is still much resistance to oral history within Italian universities and points out that institutionally oral history is not recognised in spite of the high profile of individual Italian oral historians overseas (*The Battle of Valle Giulia* xv). However, in general, academia is now far more accepting of oral history with many universities (especially in the US) encouraging course specific or university wide oral history programs or contributing to national oral history projects.[38]

Many academic oral history projects are available on the Internet. In this regard the H-oralhist website in the US provides a valuable resource for oral historians, hosting discussion groups and providing a list of resources which includes links to a wide range of oral history projects worldwide.[39] These sites often include oral history tips and

[38] For course/university specific oral history projects see, for example, the websites for the Miami Cultural history project run through the University of Miami: http://www.muohio.edu/~oralhxcwis/welcome/index.html [8 Apr. 2002]; the City University of New York's American Social history Project: http://www.ashp.cuny.edu/ [15 Jun. 2002]; or the University of California: Santa Cruz's Regional History Project: http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/index.html [16 Jun. 2002]; the University of Leicester (in conjunction with the local council and the Heritage Lottery Fund are producing the East Midlands Oral History Archive: http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/ [15 Jun. 2002]; and the University of Cape Town's Western Cape Oral History Project: http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/history/ohp1.htm [15 Jun. 2002].

[39] http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~oralhist/ [15 Jun. 2002].

handbooks that provide sensitive and responsible ways of interviewing people.[40] The sheer number and variety of oral history websites demonstrate the growing popularity of the practice and the ways in which local oral history projects are compared and made relevant outside of the situations in which they were produced.

Just as the availability of the tape recorder encouraged more people to conduct oral history research after the Second World War (Perks and Thomson 2), so new technology is assisting the recording and dissemination of oral history today. Digital recording techniques now provide better sound quality and are better able to be preserved and disseminated via the Internet. On some websites it is possible to read about an oral history project, examine an interview transcript and listen to a digital recording of the interview.[41] Such technology enables a local project to be disseminated across the globe, reaching a far wider audience who can access the original interview recordings.

These Internet oral history resources indicate how widely oral history projects are being taken up by many different fields. As well as those run through academic institutions there are many state sponsored oral history programs[42] as well as oral history projects

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[40]For example, the Institute of Oral History at Baylor University, Texas, provides guidelines for oral history that recognise the importance of looser interviewing techniques, suggesting an interview outline rather than a formal set of interview questions to be asked robotically. They also recommend letting interviewees talk at will even through their narratives may stray from the original interview topic, not just because of common courtesy but because they could turn out to be commenting on, or be more interesting than, the main narrative: http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Do%27s.html [15 Jun. 2002]. The merits of particular forms of questioning and of other oral history processes, such as transcription and interpretation, will be examined further in this chapter.

[41] See the Miami Valley cultural History Project: http://www.muohio.edu/~oralhxcwis/welcome/index.html [8 Apr. 2002], "the Whole World was Watching: An Oral History of 1968" produced by Kensington High School and Brown University's Scholarly Technology Group: http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/1968/ [15 Jun. 2002]; and 20th Century Vox, a project run by the BBC which includes RealAudio links to oral history interviews on a wide range of topics: http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/20cvox/ [15 Jun. 2002].

[42] For example, in Australia the Commonwealth Government sponsored the 'Bringing Them Home Oral History Project' managed by the National Library. The project involved over 200 interviews with indigenous people and others involved in or affected by the forced removal of aboriginal children from their parents: http://www.nla.gov.au/oh/bth [16 May 2002]. Other international state sponsored oral history projects include the BBC's 20th Century Vox initiative: http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/20cvox and the archive of oral histories about war experiences held at the Imperial War Museum: http://www.iwm.org.uk [15 Jun. 2002] in the UK; the Cambodian site including oral histories about life under the Khmer Rouge: http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/oral_hst.htm [15 Jun. 2002]; the Museum of the Person in Sao Paulo, Brazil: http://www2.uol.com.br/mpessoa/engl.htm [15 Jun. 2002]; and the National Library of New Zealand Oral History Centre http://tepuna.natlib.govt.nz/abouttp/abkilbirnie/about.html [15 Jun. 2002].

undertaken as part of reminiscence work with the elderly,[43] by local communities[44] and individuals.[45] The variety of uses for oral history and the different approaches taken in producing them can also be illustrated by looking a little more closely at oral history in the Australia.

Oral History in Australia

In Australia, oral history projects grew markedly in the 1970s to the extent that in 1982 Douglas and Spearritt confidently claimed, "oral history is not only alive and well in Australia, it is kicking" (51). Douglas and Spearritt point to the oral history collections of noteworthy individuals encouraged by government collecting institutions since the 1960s as well as the significant body of work about the lives of ordinary Australians, particularly during the Depression (Bolton; Lowenstein). They also highlight Aboriginal oral histories, such as Kevin Gilbert's *Living Black* (later examples being Coral Edwards and Peter Read's [eds] *The Lost Children* or Stuart Rintoul's *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History*).

One of the most prolific and well-known oral historians in Australia is Wendy Lowenstein, who has been collecting and publishing oral history accounts of working class people since the early 1970s. Lowenstein is a labor movement activist and writer rather than an academic, and does not seek to look at the topics she is

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[43] For example, the Age-Exchange charity in the UK has been interviewing older people and publishing their memories for 20 years. The group runs a reminiscence centre in Blackheath which includes a 1930s shop which is set up for school visits and for reminiscence visits by older groups. The centre also holds computing courses for older people to learn about word-processing and desktop publishing so that they can publish their life-stories: http://www.age-exchange.org.uk [15 Jun. 2002]. See also the International Institute for Reminiscence and Life Review, http://www.reminiscenceandlifereview.org (15 Jun. 2002). Guides to reminiscence with older people are published by Age-Exchange and Help the Aged in Britain and by the company, Achievable Concepts, in Australia: http://www.achievableconcepts.com.au /publicat.htm [15 Jun. 2002].

[44] For example, the Ethnic Communities Oral History Project founded in London in 1987 records, translates and publishes the stories of migrants to London in the postwar period and is funded by Hammersmith and Fulham local council. Small towns also publish oral history interviews about life in the town over the years, for example, in England, the town of Ambleside in the Lake District: http://www.ambleside.u-k.org\clubs\aohg [8 Apr. 2002]; in Scotland, the town of Ardersier: http://www. fortunecity.org/bally/mulligan/203/index.html [8 Apr. 2002].

[45] For example, in the US, Mike Brostoff has an Internet site dedicated to his grandmother, "Grammy Mirk", Miriam Brostoff. The site consists of oral histories taken with other family members that recount stories and anecdotes about "Grammy Mirk". Each interview gives a different interpretation of Miriam's character and provides a fascinating insight into the changing conception of personality: http://www. ipl.org/exhibit/grammy/Mirk/home/mirkhome1.html [15 Jun. 2002].

interested in (be it the Depression, immigration or the condition of waterside workers) from a wide range of class positions or social backgrounds, concentrating instead on interviewing working-class people. Neither does she situate her accounts amidst her own commentary about the subject matter, instead presenting the interviewees' accounts as stand-alone pieces, sometimes with the briefest of introductions or biographical details. These factors have made her work the subject of criticism over the years from academic historians who have accused her of only telling the worker's side of an issue. Douglas and Spearrit quote Patrick O'Farrell, then professor of History at the University of New South Wales, writing in *Quadrant* in 1979, as an example:

> The basic problem with oral testimony about the past is that the truth (when it *is* true) is not primarily about what happened or how things were, but about how the past has been recollected. That being said – hardly a startling revelation – at once all the claims made for oral history – accuracy, immediacy, reality – come under the most serious suspicion, and we move straight away into the world of image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity. (5)

Here, O'Farrell unfavourably contrasts the constructed "truth" of oral history with historical "truths" about what happened and how things were. Lowenstein provides a suitable riposte in the foreword to her and Tom Hill's book, *Under the Hook*:

> Is it "true"? The question is academic. The truth of a ship owner is not the truth of a waterside worker. When writers support the establishment few critics demand that they should "give both sides", but when a working-class or alternative viewpoint is presented, the air becomes thick with voices deploring "bias". (4)

Lowenstein makes two important points here. First, that the "truth" is academic. Indeed, the "truth" has been a sticking point for academics who suppose that with the right empirical methods the "truth" of history can be uncovered (Henige; Lummis). Instead, as Lowenstein points out, all truths are partial. Secondly, she suggests that histories constructed by the establishment are rarely challenged for bias, whereas oral histories, particularly with subordinate groups, are often questioned as unreliable and

skewed. In fact all histories, regardless of the sources used and the methods employed, are constructed and partial. As many historians now acknowledge, oral history and documentary history alike involve interpretation and subjectivity (Poster; Thomson 3rd ed 79). However, criticisms like those of O'Farrell mark the divide that existed (and still exists in some cases) between academic history and oral history. Lowenstein's triumph has been the widespread appeal of her published oral history accounts both with the general public and now within academic circles.

Douglas and Spearritt's account of oral history in Australia in the early 1980s describes a field marked by a series of different groups and institutions, ranging from government collecting establishments such as ScreenSound (formally the National Film and Sound Archive) and National and State libraries (from which the Oral History Association of Australia is run) to academic historians, local history societies and politically committed individuals. For each interest group oral history has a different use and meaning and is therefore treated in different ways. The libraries collect accounts of the past that can be preserved and catalogued, hence an emphasis on standardisation and recording techniques. The universities are gradually accepting the use of oral history to construct particular pictures of the past and are interested in questions of truth and representativeness. Local history societies publish community histories and use oral history to better get to know their local elders and their local environment. Politically committed individuals, such as Wendy Lowenstein or Michele Turner, use oral history to tell stories not included in official history books and, therefore, are more likely to present the unobstructed narratives of their interviewees in line with their motive of giving voice to the voiceless.

Oral history in Australia at present is a multi-faceted and vibrant field that is now gaining wider acceptance within a variety of academic subjects. While there is not yet a strong Internet presence for oral history outside of the National and State libraries,[46] oral history projects continue. These range from local oral history projects, such as the Dapto Oral History Group (interview 26), who meet, discuss and record memories about their suburb, to continuing academic work, such as that of Paula Hamilton and

[46] With the exception of the University of New South Wales's oral history project about the university itself: http://www.oralhistory.unsw.edu.au/ (17 Sep. 2002).

Alistair Thomson, who not only carry out oral history interviews themselves but also write about the relationship and tensions between history and memory and the way in which the past is created in this country. With Robert Perks, Thomson has edited *The Oral History Reader*, a collection of readings that illustrates the development of and critical approaches to oral history. He has also written about his interviews with Anzac soldiers in Australia, which will be examined later in this chapter.

Paula Hamilton has also contributed a great deal to the current oral history field, co-editing with Kate Darian-Smith the collection *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, which examines the relationship between public and private histories and individual and popular memories. Hamilton is currently working on a book about popular culture and memory (Forthcoming, Oxford University Press).

Paul Thompson and Oral History

The fact that academia is becoming more interested in the use of oral history is, in part, due to the work of British oral historian, Paul Thompson. It is widely agreed that Thompson has played a leading role in making oral history a legitimate research methodology within academia (Perks and Thomson 2; Douglas and Spearritt 53). Like the pioneers of British Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), Thompson was influenced by the post-war interest in labor history and the exploration of working class culture, exemplified in works such as Richard Hoggart's, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and E. P. Thompson's, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) (Thompson 3rd ed 72-3). Furthermore, the publication of oral history studies which complemented the books about working class culture, such as Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village* (1969) and Robert Moore's *Pit-Men, Preachers and Politics* (1974), persuaded Thompson that oral history was a practice which could lead to the incorporation of working-class experiences within the history books (Thompson 73). With Thea Vigne, Thompson carried out an interview survey of work, community and social life before 1918 in Britain, published as *The Edwardians* (1975).

But it is for his services to oral history as a methodology that Thompson has been most widely recognised. In 1973 he played a leading role in the creation of the British Oral History Society and in 1978 he published the authoritative *The Voice of the Past*, which

is recognised as a seminal text in the advancement of oral history as a credible research method. The guidelines for the practice of oral history set out in this text are widely deferred to by others working in the field (Henige; Lummis; Popular Memory Group; Perks and Thompson).

Thompson defended oral history against critics who viewed oral sources as unreliable and not the province of academic historians. To do this Thompson first set out a history of oral history from antiquity to the present, which gives the reader a sense of an established tradition. Then he sets about constructing oral history as an empirical research method that can be controlled and monitored and authenticated by the trained oral historian, and thus be deemed a reliable source from which history can be constructed.

Thompson's argument for oral history is necessarily one that bends oral history to the purposes of the empirical historian. However, it has been pointed out (Popular Memory Group 220-226) that, in trying to legitimate the practice of oral history, Thompson has chosen "the wrong defence" and inevitably compromises his democratic goal by sacrificing the ambiguities of memory (which is what makes oral narratives so valuable) to the reproducible and fact-orientated demands of historical empiricism. *The Voice of the Past* leaves intact two assumptions: that to be accepted as an historical research method oral history needs to be proven to be reliable and empirical, and that oral history can lead to the discovery of history as it really was. These assumptions have since been questioned (notably by the Popular Memory Group but see also Frisch, Portelli, Thomson, and Hamilton) and it is to the problems of empiricism and "historical truth" that I now turn.

In his book, Thompson makes several recommendations as to how oral historians should conduct their interviews. His plan seems to be to eliminate as much human error and uncertainty as possible, so that all that remains are the historical facts within a narrative. Thus, oral history is aligned with other empirical research methods. For example, Thompson advises prospective interviewers against asking leading questions that could encourage an interviewee to merely give the answers that she or he thinks the interviewer wants to hear (1st ed 171). Although well intentioned, the trouble with this advice is that it assumes that leading questions can be eliminated. In fact, all questions

lead somewhere and privilege certain responses over others. Researchers who believe historical facts can be accessed through the careful elimination of leading questions may think they have succeeded in removing bias from their interview. This risks ignoring other subtle influences and assumptions that affect how the oral history narrative unfolds. These include, for example, the interviewer's and interviewee's prior expectations of one another and the impressions formed during the interview exchange; the interviewee's feelings about the subject up for discussion; and the distance between the event being recalled and the present. Expectations, intentions, and the complex nature of memory are all factors that affect an interview and are examined in detail later in this chapter.

Thompson downplays the influence of interviewees in his writing on oral history, as he assumes that oral historians can and should exercise total control over the interview environment:

> The strategy of the interview is not the informant's responsibility, but yours. It is much easier to guide if you have a basic shape already in your mind, and questions can lead naturally from one to the other. (171)

Despite warning interviewers against asking leading questions, Thompson seems to have no qualms about the interviewer guiding the interview, which seems somewhat contradictory. Thompson implies that an interviewer can somehow anticipate and compensate for the reactions of his or her informant. In suggesting this, he risks reducing the people to whom he most wanted to give a voice to one-dimensional "subjects", according them the status of readable texts rather than creative and unpredictable individuals. Thompson's problem is that he believes he has to justify oral history as a controllable science in order for it to be accepted by the academy. In doing this, he is prevented from celebrating and exploring the contradictions and biases that are bound to occur in such an interesting environment.

Thompson's defense of oral history sounds a warning about what can be lost when trying to claim oral history for empiricism. Instead, empiricism itself should be questioned. Oral historians, including Thompson, have pointed out that written sources are not necessarily "more empirical" than oral ones. For example, Trevor Lummis

notes, “even ‘hard’ contemporary statistical data is only what somebody told somebody and if they had good reason and the opportunity to conceal the truth, then the ‘facts’ will be erroneous” (75). Similarly, Alessandro Portelli points out that, “orality is woven into the very texture of the written record” (*Trastulli* 5). The danger of attempting to claim oral history for empiricism is that empiricism can take over as the main purpose of the exercise. This is apparent in my opening quote from historian, David Henige, who also provides us with the following example:

> The historian’s purpose, of course, is to try to construct as accurate and as complete an interpretation of the past as he can, in light of the evidence he creates and uses. (Henige 46)

Henige’s approach works if its only purpose is to tie oral testimonies as closely as possible to other written records. Trying to eliminate bias on the part of the interviewer and interviewee represents a wish to reconstruct a provable past. Such an approach inevitably supports the official version of history in a self-fulfilling process that is inherently conservative in that it fails to challenge the status quo.

Henige’s own book, *Oral Historiography*, exhibits this conservative historical perspective. While Thompson is caught in a dilemma of wanting to popularise working-class historical accounts and yet feeling like they must fit into an empirical framework, he at least questions the academic construction of history which ignores the views of a significant proportion of the population. Indeed, in the third edition of *The Voice of the Past*, he acknowledges the contribution postmodernism has made in challenging the confidence with which history is constructed (79). Henige, however, wants no truck with theory and, despite the title of his book, wants only to consider how oral history should be carried out. In his introduction he stresses:

> The reader seeking a discussion of historical theory will be disappointed. The concern here is only with the lesser species called method and there is no attempt to take into account the various theories or ideologies now vying for the allegiance of historians. Some of these claim to explain the past (eg historical materialism or psychohistory), whereas others try to explain why the past cannot be explained (structuralism or ritual folklorists). In order to

> have any validity beyond rhetoric and persuade the unconverted, these theories must be built on a solid foundation of accepted fact. When the data have not been carefully gathered and critically scrutinized theorizing of this kind is ultimately so much wasted effort. Our emphasis then is squarely on accumulating data effectively, testing them thoroughly, and meshing them with other evidence so that they can be widely regarded as reliable. (5-6)

Like many who write from the position of the establishment, Henige believes he can do away with theory, not realising that by favouring "facts" over opinion or empiricism over reflection he is already subscribing to a theoretical position. Such a position theorises history as an accumulation of supporting data rather than a negotiation between points of view. It ignores the role of the historian of reproducing an historical account that preserves the status quo. It also erases contradictions and unsubstantiated claims in order to position an account within a provable past, rather than celebrating oral accounts as a dialogue between the past and the present and between popular and official versions of history.

It is precisely those areas that both Henige and Thompson caution against (contradictions within narratives, leading questions and unrepresentative answers) that can be the most fertile for study as they have the most to offer to the task of deconstructing history. By examining the contradictions and differences that arise from the interview process we can explore how any oral narrative reflects on the nature of memory and the process of historical construction. It is these areas that are explored by the Popular Memory Group.

THE POPULAR MEMORY GROUP

The Popular Memory Group consisted of a small number of academics and postgraduate students[47] who came together at the CCCS in Birmingham from 1979 until 1985. The group defined popular memory as both an object of study *and* a dimension of political practice ("Popular Memory: Theory, Politics And Method" 205). This two-part definition is indicative of the group's twofold objective that seeks to explore the

[47] The group consisted of: Michael Bommes, Gary Clarke, Graham Dawson, Jacob Eichler, Thomas Eock, Richard Johnson, Cim Meyer, Rebecca O'Rourke, Rita Pakleppa, Hans-Erich Poser, Morten Skov-Carlsen, Anne Turley and Patrick Wright.

construction of a popular memory as the intersection between private memories and public representations while attempting to installing a reformist socialist agenda. It is the former that I shall concentrate on here saving reflections on the latter for the conclusion of the thesis.

It was while Richard Johnson was Director of the CCCS that the Popular Memory Group was formed with Johnson himself a member and key contributor.[48] In common with the goals of the CCCS in general, the Popular Memory Group was interested in exploring the power relations inherent in cultural formations. However, as might be expected under Johnson's influence, the group was particularly concerned with the construction of history: who writes it, whose interests it serves, whose interests it does not represent and how the interests of people not represented by dominant versions of history can be recovered.

The parameters and goals of the group's project were set out in the article, "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics and Method", published under the name of the Popular Memory Group (this article was written by Richard Johnson with Graham Dawson). The article appeared in the book, *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics* (201-252), published in 1982. Another article in this collection, "Charms of Residence", by two other members of the Popular Memory Group, Michael Bommes and Patrick Wright, is a companion to the Popular Memory Group article. "Charms of Residence" (253-301) explores public representations of British National Heritage and provides details of public representations of the past against which popular memories arise.

Although *Making Histories* introduced popular memory as a field of study and political practice, no further publications under the name of the Popular Memory Group appeared, neither does the online archive at the University of Birmingham list any

[48] The CCCS itself was formed in 1964 under the directorship of Richard Hoggart with the aim of studying "cultural forms, practices and institutions and their relation to society and social change" (Turner *BCS* 70). When Stuart Hall became the Director in 1968 the Centre altered its focus away from Hoggart's project of understanding the everyday lives of the working class towards a concentration on the role of the mass media and theoretical deliberations on the workings of culture and power (Turner *BCS* 71; Schulman 5). When Richard Johnson took over the role of Director in 1979 his tenure was characterised by a move away from textual analysis towards the historical construction of subjectivities and by a concentration on research about specific groups and media audiences (Turner 73; Schulman 5).

unpublished, "stencilled" papers by the group. From the footnotes to their published article it is clear that the members of the group were working on specific projects in popular memory. They refer to Rita Pakleppa and Hans Poser's presentations about representations of the Second World War in Britain and West Germany (357), and remark that the whole group was working on present-day memories of the 1940s (358). From the group's emphasis on the Second World War and as a result of a summer school run by the British Film Institute in 1983, Graham Dawson published two essays about history writing and the Second World War in the 1984 collection *National Fictions*. These essays considered the popular memory of World War Two in fiction and with reference to mobilisations of national identity. In 1985 another member of the group, Patrick Wright, published *On Living in an Old Country*, which also developed the themes of historical construction in contemporary Britain. No other publications by the group or by its members could be located.

The Popular Memory Group eventually disbanded in 1985 (Thomson 257). Although Alistair Thomson refers to an unpublished book about the Popular Memory Group being developed by Richard Johnson in 1994 (257) such a book has not yet been published. Consequently, any details about why the group disbanded and discussions about the group's theoretical developments are not available at the time of writing.[49]

In fact, surprisingly little is known about the activities of the group considering that the methods and discussions raised in their article have been so widely referred to in recent times (Lummis, Thomson; Hamilton; Perks and Thomson; Robins; Spigel; Brabazon). I shall examine the ways in which popular memory has been used by subsequent researchers later in this chapter but first I would like to examine the theory, politics and method of popular memory research.

The Popular Memory Approach

MICHEL FOUCAULT

[49] The articles about popular memory that I have consulted fail to provide any details about further publications or about the work and demise of the group (Darian-Smith and Hamilton; Robins; Stacey; Perks and Thomson). Neither could I find any reference to the group in published books and articles about the CCCS (Turner; Schulman; Grossberg). I have also not been able to contact former members despite thorough Internet searching and emails.

The Popular Memory Group borrowed the phrase "popular memory" from Michel Foucault who used it to describe oppositional forms of memory in an article in *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1977:

> There is a real fight going on. Over what? Over what we can roughly describe as *popular memory*. It is an actual fact that people – I'm talking about those who are barred from writing, from producing their books themselves, from drawing up their own historical accounts – that these people nevertheless have a way of recording history, of remembering it, of keeping it fresh and using it. This popular history was, to a certain extent, more clearly formulated in the 19th century, where, for instance, there was a whole tradition of struggles which were transmitted orally, or in writing or songs etc (quoted in Bommes and Wright 255).

Foucault's conception of popular memory is of an oral or unpublished tradition that exists in opposition to official versions of history produced by the ruling powers. According to Bommes and Wright, Foucault's work in the area of popular memory is essential because it explores how some versions of history come to be dominant and others subordinate. The Popular Memory Group suggest that Foucault's discussions of history and popular memory generated debates in France over the way history was appropriated by specific groups and political causes, for example, how history is represented in film or by government during heritage celebrations. Hence, Foucault is credited by members of the Popular Memory Group with clearing a space for a strategic reassessment of the ways in which the concept of history is used (218).

However, Bommes and Wright point out that Foucault himself soon abandoned the term "popular memory" and concentrated instead on discourse and relations of power. Bommes and Wright see two reasons for this: firstly, because there is a danger that "the popular" could be seen as a unified concept when in fact it is never unified and always exists as a conglomeration of different points of view and politics. Secondly, because there is a risk that the popular would be seen as separate from the dominant and, therefore, would not be expected to function in response to or in relation to it (255).

However, while Foucault abandoned the notion of popular memory in favour of discourses which determine what can and cannot be said in the public sphere, the Popular Memory Group instead chose to retain the term "popular memory" but to redefine it using the work of Antonio Gramsci. Bommes and Wright, themselves members of the Popular Memory Group, explain that they cannot follow Foucault into the realms of discourse because they believe that Foucault does not adequately account for the conditions of production for discourse (256). Instead, the Popular Memory Group turn to the writing of Gramsci as both share a Marxist conception of history that links dominant construction of history with class relations.

ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Using the work of Gramsci, the Popular Memory Group make an important distinction from the way in which Foucault initially conceived of popular memory in that they emphasise popular memory as *relational* to dominant forms rather than oppositional. Here they use Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Hegemony is the process by which a group achieves power by winning broad consensus. As Bommes and Wright explain:

> The analysis of hegemony addresses the problem that while capitalist social formations are always determined by class contradiction they are not always riven by open class conflict. In the development of Marxist theory this has led to a more complex concept of class domination, conceived now as a unity of dictatorship and leadership through which the ruling class alliance is not only able to control the means of force – in the end the basis of domination – but also gains political, intellectual and moral leadership. The ruling class alliance must be able to create a collective will by articulating the interests of the dominated classes in hegemonic terms … it is important to recognise that the process of articulation works by mechanisms of transformation, inclusion and exclusion. (258)

Hegemony is a useful conception in that it accounts for the interrelations between dominant and subordinate versions of history. As the Popular Memory Group state, "The social production of memory is a collective production in which everyone participates, though not equally" (207):

> Private memories cannot, in concrete studies, be readily unscrambled from the effects of dominant historical discourses. It is often these that provide the very terms by which a private history is thought through. Memories of the past are, like a kind of geology, the selective sedimentation of past traces (207).

The Popular Memory Group, therefore, keep Foucault's notion of popular memory but redefine it as the study of two sets of relations:

> It is concerned with the relation between dominant memory and oppositional forms across the whole public (including academic) field. It is also concerned with the relation between these public discourses in their contemporary state of play and the more privatized sense of the past which is generated within a lived culture" (Popular Memory Group 211).

Dominant memory produces an official version of the past that is current in society and enshrined in official historical sources, from textbooks to museums to television programs. This history, to a large extent, is the history of the ruling classes. To challenge this official, dominant version of history, the Popular Memory Group call for popular versions of history to be gathered, defined as "a knowledge of the past and present [as] produced in the course of everyday life" (210). This is a sense of the past and present which is produced through personal narratives and events and through mementos such as photographs, letters and diaries. Ideally, they see the practice of popular memory as looking at the testimony of ordinary people to see how the dominant memories outlined above interact with a person's private memories and their "common-sense" opinion of the past.

The Popular Memory Group and Oral History

The Popular Memory Group identifies oral history as a key methodology for examining the construction of popular memory. The group stresses that it is essential to dispel the notion that oral history can provide a direct line to a radical rediscovery of the past. Instead, oral history foregrounds the tension between past and present, between interviewer and interviewee and between official and personal versions of events. Oral history therefore emphasises the contradictions apparent in the creation of history. In

keeping with this view, Australian historian, Paula Hamilton questions the supposition by socialist oral historians such as Thompson that oral history is inherently radical, "recovering the voice of those previously 'hidden from history'" ("The Knife Edge" 14). Rather, oral history is the terrain on which competing constructions of history are negotiated. It is the site where an interviewer and interviewee compete for control of the narrative and also where an interviewee produces an account from a multiplicity of positions that stretch from the event in question forward to the moment of the interview. It is where personal and public versions combine to produce a narrative performance.

The Popular Memory Group calls for new histories to be written, using popular autobiography and oral history research, which reveal the experiences and expectations of many people rather than the deeds of an elite few. Using the example of the Second World War, the group calls for more histories like a *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain, published in 1933, which examines the losses and contradictions experienced by many during the war.

The group sees the tendency to envisage oral accounts as merely representative of one individual rather than of larger meaning-making strategies or historical processes as one of the factors that can undermine the promise of popular memory. It points out that the individual is only seen to speak for history if they are a figure of substantial historical power and influence and give the examples of Churchill and Mountbatten (219). Therefore when one interprets popular oral accounts, it is important to consider individual interpretations as somehow representative of particular public ways of remembering and points of view.

The Popular Memory Group also points to the problem of empiricism that I have already discussed in terms of Thompson's work. The group insists that "the study of popular memory can only begin where empiricist and positivist norms break down" (226). In other words, it is only when the nature of empiricism is thrown into doubt by acknowledging that all presentations of "facts" are partial and socially constructed that it is possible to conceive of a project of popular memory that is concerned with examining the way in which versions of history are constructed.

The other factors the Popular Memory Group sets out as barriers to the popular memory project – a refusal to acknowledge the past-present relationship and the process of scholarly interpretation – are examined in more detail below.

THE PAST-PRESENT RELATIONSHIP

As I have mentioned above, the Popular Memory Group takes issue with the traditional view of history as being solely concerned with "the past". Instead it states:

> The proper object of history is not the past but the past-present relationship. So obvious a point would not be worth stressing had not historians striven so strenuously to deny it. [Oral histories] are necessarily influenced by present events and by the restructuring of what is possible to think and say. Oral history testimonies do not form a simple record, more or less accurate, of past events; they are complex cultural products. They involve interrelations, whose nature is not at all understood, between private memories and public representations, between past experiences and present situations. (240)

It is crucial that the past-present relationship is considered because it brings into focus the determining aspect of time on the ways in which histories are constructed by dominant and subordinate positions. As historian and cultural theorist, Michel de Certeau points out "the coming back of time restores an ethics" (*Heterologies* 218). For history is not just a process of archeology, of uncovering facts to find out the truth of what happened: it is the ordering and construction of information in particular ways at specific times in order to present oneself or the group one represents in a certain light.

The Popular Memory Group follows Foucault when it cautions that the maintenance of a static past is a convention which serves the ruling powers because it does not leave room for a consideration of the past-present relationship. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault insists:

> History must be detached from the image that satisfied it for so long, and through which it found its anthropological justification: that of an age-old

> collective consciousness that made use of material documents to refresh its memory … History is one way in which a society reorganizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked. (7)

Foucault therefore disrupts the notion of history as a continuous and unproblematic description of events and instead points to its discontinuity: to the importance of looking at how societies periodically re-describe history in terms of their own agendas. In this respect, Foucault is echoing Nietzsche's statement that "everything that exists, no matter what its origin, is periodically rethought by those in power in terms of fresh intentions" (Thacker 33). Foucault and the Popular Memory Group, therefore, both insist on the importance of the present in determining the past.

The implications of acknowledging the past-present relationship are considerable. As David Lowenthal has it, "The prime function of memory is not to preserve the past, but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present" (quoted in Middleton and Edwards 82). Oral history is therefore the strategic reorganisation of past events, self-consciously or unconsciously, in order to make a point in the present. Oral history narratives can, at the same time, reveal the salient discourses of the day, the personal agendas of the interviewee and interviewer within a story that seems to be about the past.

One way of using the past is to illustrate certain personality traits or characteristics of the speaker. A narrative may therefore draw a comparison between the present (narrating) self and the past (narrated) self, suggesting, for example, that a personality trait possessed in the present was in evidence in the past. The same narrative may also take on expectations and discourses of the day, erasing inappropriate and out-dated discourses, for example, sexism or racism, and re-locating the narratives within conventional discourses.

The narrative may also take into account popular dramatisations or documentaries about a particular topic or era being remembered that have occurred since the event. An example of this is oral historian, Irina Sherbakova, who interviewed former prisoners in Russian labour camps and found that many of their narratives resembled stories from Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (quoted in Hamilton "the Knife Edge" 27).

Hamilton also notes how popular historical dramatizations for example the movie *JFK* (1991) or the television series *Brides of Christ* (1991) influence the way people reconstruct their memories about historical events (26).

An awareness of the past-present relation restores strategy to narrative and agency to narrators. People are not just vessels containing untainted accounts of the past, they are active meaning-makers creating their memories in order to preserve or suggest certain aspects of their identity, argue a political point, put forward a philosophical viewpoint. An oral history account is also the product of the encounter between interviewer and interviewee: the interviewer can insert her own agenda into an interview and affect the answers and the interviewee can create her narrative in relation to what she thinks her interviewer wants to hear. The interviewer may also reorganise the narrative in accordance with a past-present relationship in order to prove a research hypothesis and to erase uncertainty, hesitation or errors from her own early postulations. In all these ways the past-present relationship makes the construction of history more overt and dynamic. Therefore, the Popular Memory Group insists that the conventional definition of history as the past, "cannot be held without a radical depoliticisation of research practice".

TEXTUALISATION, SCHOLARLY INTERPRETATION AND POWER

The Popular Memory Group uncovers the way in which the conception of history as "the past" relies on research practices to be viewed as apolitical and unproblematic. In fact the practice of research works through its own discourses and systems of control which privilege the researcher/historian as the gatekeeper or "professional monopolist of historical knowledge production" (Popular Memory Group 249).

In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault posits a series of questions with which we can interrogate how discourses are constructed:

> Who of the totality of individuals is speaking? Who is qualified to do so? From whom does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? (50)

Such questions help to clarify the relations of control and reward exercised through academia. The Popular Memory Group provides the answers:

> The practice of research actually conforms to (and may in practice deepen) social divisions which are also relations of power and of inequality. It is cultural power that is at stake here, of course, rather than economic power or political coercion. Even so research may certainly construct a kind of economic relation (a balance of economic and cultural benefits) that is "exploitative" in that the returns are grossly unequal ones. On the one hand there is "the historian" who specialises in the production of explanations and interpretations and who constitutes himself as the most active, thinking part of the process. On the other hand, there is his "source" who happens in this case to be a living human being who is positioned in the process in order to yield up information … It is, however, [the historian] that produces the final account, *he* that provides the dominant interpretation, *he* that judges what is true and what is not true, reliable or inauthentic. It is his name that appears on the jacket of his monograph and his academic career that is furthered by its publication. It is he who receives a portion of the royalties and almost all of the "cultural capital" involved in its authorship. It is his *amour propre* as 'creator' that is served here. It is his professional standing amongst his peers that is enhanced in the case of "success". (219-220)

The Popular Memory Group shows how the structure of academic discourse frames the ways in which oral history narratives are interpreted and presented in the public domain. Often the people who have been interviewed are seen solely as sources, used to add flesh to the bones of whatever theory the researcher is proposing. The researcher rarely runs his or her conclusions past those he or she has interviewed and the papers and monographs produced from research are not designed with the interviewees in mind as readers. Neither are academic textbooks made available or affordable to the general public.

To counter some of these effects the Popular Memory Group suggests that interviewees are involved in the secondary analysis of their interviews and are thus given the opportunity to comment on their original interviews. The group also encourages

community-based projects which involve self-publication and dissemination of testimonies,[50] as well as a rigorous examination of the ways in which a researcher is complicit in "speaking for" her or his subjects. By exposing and detailing how popular memories are filtered through academic discourse it is hoped that the process of textualisation becomes visible and therefore less easy to ignore.

It is also important to extend this critical awareness past the treatment of the finished interview to the way in which the interview is carried out. After all, academic and other discourses produce narratives as much as it they interpret them. To do this one must be self-reflexive and open to the many ways in which the interviewer controls and co-produces the oral history interview. These strategies are examined further in the section of this chapter on textualisation and power.

Criticisms of the Popular Memory approach to Oral History.

In *Listening to History*, oral historian Trevor Lummis provides the only systematic critique of the Popular Memory Group that I have found. I would like to look as Lummis' criticisms as they also illustrate the problems that the Popular Memory Group has with certain approaches to oral history. Ultimately the position one takes depends on the purpose for which oral history is being used.

As a practicing oral historian[51] and proponent of an empirical approach to oral history, Lummis is troubled by what he regards as an excess of theory on the part of the Popular Memory Group that is not backed up by practical suggestions and research examples (124). Certainly the group's examples of good popular memory analysis are thin on the ground. It uses examples from two studies that accord with the group's aims, *Working Lives* and *Dutiful Daughters* (245-249), and also shows how Vera Brittain's book *Testament of Youth* exemplifies popular autobiography in its aim to "write history in

[50] This suggestion is not without its own set of problems: Although the community-published history has those that are interviewed as editors, writers and publishers of their material, the publications only reach a limited audience (sold locally or distributed through local libraries and councils, rather than reaching the wider or differently constituted audiences that academic publishing achieves). Perhaps one answer could lie in a partnership between community history and academic research whereby community projects are funded and disseminated using the same facilities as academic researchers.

[51] Lummis is author of *Occupation and Society: the East Anglian Fishermen 1880-1914* (quoted in Lummis 170).

terms of personal life" (238). However, the group points out that their writing on popular memory is an "exploration" and stresses "We do not have a completed project in 'popular memory' to report". It is therefore important to notice that Lummis and the Popular Memory Group are already coming from different perspectives: from practical versus theoretical standpoints. Can the two be reconciled?

Fortunately it is now possible to see examples of the popular memory approach in practice (Simpson; Spigel; Taksa; Thomson; Stacey; Brabazon). Earlier in this chapter I explained how Lynn Spigel used a popular memory approach to suggest why the students she interviewed about television images of women over time tended to recall a positive progression of female role models over time even when this didn't appear to be the case.

Similarly in Lucy Taksa's essay, "The Masked Disease: Oral History, Memory and the Influenza Pandemic 1918-19" (77-91), popular memory is explored to suggest why oral history interviewees misremembered the influenza pandemic as being the "bubonic plague". Taksa makes interesting connections between history and myth, showing how her subjects took in old reports of the bubonic plagues both in Australia and Europe and incorporated them into their memories of the 1918-19 influenza outbreak. Taksa refers to Lenore Layman's work on metaphor suggesting that metaphor is used as a process through which fears and misunderstandings are articulated. In this case the bubonic plague came to represent the fear of the influenza pandemic and the death of loved ones both from the outbreak and from World War One.

But popular memory research is not just about interpreting how people misremember events or conflate one experience with another. If this were the sole purpose, then the popular memory researcher risks alienating her or himself from his subject by taking a person's words and saying "what they really meant was…" Instead, it is about being sensitive to the way meanings are made *whilst* illuminating, in a person's own words, new perspectives on official versions of history.

In my opinion, the best example of popular memory in practice is *Anzac Memories*, Alistair Thomson's oral history research with Australian veterans of the Great War of 1914-18. Thomson is interested in the interactions between discourses of masculinity

and national identity offered by the Anzac legend and individual soldiers' identities. He explains how public discourses since the war (visible in many sources, including books, songs, television documentaries, the Returned Servicemen's League and political speeches) have hijacked the Anzac experience for the cause of national identity. As such, the Anzac legend constructs the soldiering experience as awash with the noble qualities of altruism, mateship and grim humour which are now so intimately associated with the Australian national character, so much so that the Anzac experience is seen as the baptism of a nation (300, 308). Thomson's interviews show how the veterans he interviews interact with this Anzac discourse, at times accepting the myth and drawing on its features to shape their accounts and occasionally resisting the stereotype and relating stories of fear, pointless sacrifice and carnage (305-306).

In "Embattled Manhood: Gender, Memory and the Anzac Legend" Thomson examines the Anzac legend as a discourse of masculinity (158-173). The values of courage, stoicism, mateship and humour offer a strongly masculine identification that has the advantage of allowing stories to be told without recourse to "unmanly" shows of emotion or self-examination. One Anzac soldier Thomson interviews, Percy Bird, mainly defers to the Anzac legend in his narrative, but this periodically breaks down when he describes his feelings about enlisting or about what happened during the war. Bird's occasionally confessional and emotional self-disclosure does not sit comfortably with the masculine discourse of Anzac history. This is an example of how discourses are not tailor made to fit individuals and how disjuncture within a narrative reveals more complicated subject positions and identities than the dominant discourse permits. A discourse analysis such as Thomson provides offers the opportunity to see these meaning-making strategies in progress.

Thomson's work is closest to the methodology highlighted by the Popular Memory Group in that he examines how private memories intersect with public myths. He also structures his methodology so as to examine his interviewees' reflections on their narrated selves, asking the Anzac veterans how they felt about their younger selves and how well they thought public portrayals of the Anzac legend represented their own experiences. In this way Thompson incorporates the Popular Memory Group's call for "self conscious political reflection upon first accounts" (239).

The above examples illustrate that the Popular Memory Group's method has been successfully applied to practical research, Thomson's research, in particular, addressing Lummis' criticism that the popular memory approach has not been clearly demonstrated in the practical context of an oral history project.

The second of Lummis' criticisms of the Popular Memory Group is that it seeks to install a political agenda within the oral history interview – a mistake as far as many oral history handbooks are concerned (Thompson; Lummis). Lummis writes:

> The CCCS [sic] complain … that the process of producing history from oral sources leaves untouched the "first constructors of historical account", that is, the informants. Once again, it is not entirely clear what they want the historian to do, but it appears to involve entering into a dialogue with the informant and, by some means (presumably superior intellectual capital), obliging them to re-valuate their experience and to relate it as an overtly political position. (142)

The Popular Memory Group's actual recommendations in this regard are as follows:

> … the method needs to maximize opportunities for second thoughts, for further analysis of primary results and first impressions, for retheorizing and "making strange" familiar appearances. Some of us rebel against this, because the ugly figure of the "historian" (or 'sociologist') once more intrudes, telling us what our explanations *should* be, fitting *our* "facts" to *his* theories, presenting our experience back to us, sometimes in unrecognizable forms. But secondary analysis need not take this form, or be constrained within the existing social divisions of intellectual labour. It *could* be a more internal process, a working up of first accounts by authors themselves, in the light of further research and thinking … Our point is that it is not enough that the production of first accounts be respected in the sense of being left untouched. Really, to "respect" them is to take them as the basis for larger understandings, for the progressive deepening of knowledge and for active political involvement. (240)

The Popular Memory Group recommends that researchers re-consider their secondary analysis of oral testimonies so that the process includes the interviewees themselves. Thomson's project shows how this can be achieved by open-ended questioning of interviewees about their first accounts, their opinions of their narrated self and comparisons between their own experience and any public representation of that experience. Unfortunately, the Popular Memory Group's failure to present a project of their own does it no favours as the group cannot present examples of how this re-evaluation works. Hence the group's recommendations for involving interviewees in the analysis of their narratives can be interpreted as an instruction to question interviewees until they produce answers that conform to the group's stated socialist agenda. Instead, I prefer to think that the Popular Memory Group is calling for an approach like Thomson's, whereby interviewees reflect on their first accounts and critically evaluate their experiences making their own meanings from them. The latter interpretation is in line with the group's aim of breaking down the binary opposition of researcher as interpreter and interviewee as informant, suggesting instead that interviewees are not only capable of re-evaluating their first accounts but are in the best position to do so.

By contrast, Lummis is of the opinion that secondary analysis is best left to the researcher who is qualified by his profession to interpret oral accounts. He does not accept that an empirical method blocks progress in the field of oral history analysis. He refers to Paul Thompson's work and says that his original interviews are available to be listened to and interpreted in many different ways, but that Thompson is an historian and, as such, is better placed to interpret his material than most. He writes:

> One of the difficulties experienced by academics using oral history is that they do not want to appear elitist by interfering with the direct testimony and, genuinely, want to let informant's experiences and opinions shape our knowledge of history. But one should not be frightened by charges of elitism by pointing out that people who can relate their experiences of a particular milieu are not always the same as the person most able to assess its historical significance. Many have spent a lifetime working to produce goods and services with other skills,

> and they would no more claim expertise in history than an historian or social scientist would as an electrician or tailoress. (138)

There are a couple of points worth making here. Firstly, when Lummis points to the availability of Thompson's interviews for many different interpretations, he is ignoring the negotiations that have already gone on to produce those interviews. Some questions are asked at the expense of others; the interviewee is led in certain directions and in a certain manner. Such intrinsic elements of the interview alter the narrative content of the interview. The Popular Memory Group and other recent proponents of popular memory ask researchers to be aware of the intrinsic malleability of oral testimonies. Lummis, on the other hand, is suggesting that the content of an interview would remain the same regardless of who was interviewing and what was asked, leaving historians only the problem of arguing over interpretation. In fact, answers and meanings are a product of negotiation between both interviewer and interviewee.

Secondly, without wanting to diminish the interpretative contribution of historians through their experience and privileged position of being able to synthesis information from a variety of sources, I disagree with Lummis' position that it is the historian who is necessarily better equipped to analyse oral testimonies than the interviewees themselves. Here Lummis is claiming historical interpretation as the sole province of an academic elite. The historian is thus left to analyse the wider implications of another's words, shaping them to "fit" with other theories of history and social relations. There is a deception taking place here whereby historians claim to be pursuing a democracy of voices but, in fact, only filter them through the same elite channels. As I have mentioned before, it is the historian who has most to gain from the practice of oral history. She or he gains academic respect, possibly a published article or book with his or her name on it, as well as the cultural capital that is accorded with research and publication. The Popular Memory Group contends that this power inequality affects the dynamics of an interview and the way the results are eventually interpreted.

Lummis is skeptical that there are power relations involved in the production and interpretation of oral history. In fact, he contends that it is because the Popular Memory Group are so concerned with proving that oral narratives are shaped by contemporary power relationships that they insist on the importance of the present to memory

processes. Lummis denies the power of the interviewer/historian and, therefore, sees no need for a memory model that includes the present. He points an accusing finger at the Popular Memory Group who, he contends, are selling their sources short if they think that their "informant's" memories can be affected by the power of the interviewer:

> My experience of informants is that, although their responses may have been elicited by questions which reflected the areas of my interest, I have never had the power (nor the desire) to produce the answers. The scores of real people I have interviewed are made of rather less malleable clay than their hypothetical informant ... The attitude, values and personality of the interviewer will have some effect on what is said and how it is said: but to extend this factor to claim that material is "produced" by the power of the interviewer is nonsense. (139)

Lummis positions his readers here by inserting the term "real people" into the essay when he refers to his own interviews. He has gone through the rest of the essay calling these individuals "sources" or "informants" – both equally impersonal, and this switch to the personal is a manipulative strategy that is effective. Lummis accuses the Popular Memory Group of not giving interviewees any credit for producing their narratives. However the group makes it clear that the interviewer is only one of many factors that affect interview content and point out that it emphasises the effects of the interviewer in its article in order to make a political point (220).

As the Popular Memory Group would agree, Lummis is correct in pointing out that the person who is interviewed also has a controlling stake in the narrative and is capable of placing his or her own interpretations on the events recalled. However, it is the interviewer who has the last word and who exercises control and authority over the oral history interview.

Lummis and the Popular Memory Group are both socialist historians but with different objectives in mind. Where Lummis follows in the footsteps of Paul Thompson[52] within

[52] Indeed Lummis' oral history of the fishing industry in East Anglia was directed by Thompson as an addition to the oral history archive at Essex University.

an empirical model of oral history which seeks oral testimonies from "ordinary people" in order to present detailed accounts of working life in the past, the Popular Memory Group is concerned with the cultural construction of history and the way in which historians use oral history to reproduce dominant relations of power. Lummis wants to provide a history of the working past whereas the Popular Memory Group wants to use oral history to look at how the past is constructed in the present.

In summary, the Popular Memory Group provides an essential critique of oral history that questions the common assumptions that it provides a direct line to the past. Instead the group reveals oral history to be a field fraught with tensions and negotiations but with the potential to reveal the ways in which meaning is ascribed and histories constructed. The Popular Memory Group highlights particular barriers to popular memory research, which I have outlined above. These include the tyranny of empiricism, the failure to acknowledge the role of the present in narratives about the past and the power of the researcher/historian as the person who eventually interprets the narratives and gains credibility form the presentation of the oral histories. Paying attention to these issues can lead to a greater awareness of the ways in which historical narratives are constructed by a person interviewed, the interviewer and by the researcher/historian.

REFLECTIONS ON TEXTUALISATION AND POWER

There is a link between the Popular Memory Group's critique of oral history and the concerns I voiced about audience research in the introduction (Seiter and her "Troubling Interview") and in chapter 2. The link is the danger of representation whereby the researcher/academic speaks for and writes on behalf of the people she or he studies. As the Popular Memory Group has shown, the researcher/academic has a good deal of control over how audience research is carried out, interpreted and presented. I shall now concentrate on the three main components of oral history – interviewing, transcribing and interpreting – and critically reflect on issues of academic practice and power in relation to my own oral history research.

Interviewing

As I have argued, interviewing people about the past involves a complex set of negotiations between interviewer and interviewee, between dominant and personal interpretations of history and between past and present versions of an interviewee's identity. Although oral historians provide tips and recommendations aimed at reducing "interviewer bias", in fact, all interviews are unavoidably affected by preconceptions on the part of both interviewer and interviewee which affect the content of the interview. During the course of my research and writing I have, therefore, been examining my own involvement in the co-production of oral history to try and find out how the role and status of the interviewer affects the interview.

For example, I quickly found that the interviews proceeded in different ways depending on whether I was being regarded as a seeker or a holder of knowledge, a novice or an expert.

The first set of interviews was mainly conducted with residents of the Illawarra Retirement Trust's hostel care units in Woonona where I worked as a nursing assistant and where I was known and liked by the residents. By contrast, the interview I conducted with Ron and May Klower at their home in Thirroul (interview 2) and the second set of interviews that resulted from advertisements in newsletters and senior citizen centre visits were with people I had not met previously. These people did not know me personally or as a nurse and so saw me either as a student seeking knowledge or as an "expert" seeking clarification or confirmation of a body of knowledge. Similarly, not knowing the Klowers or the people from the second set of interviews led to assumptions on my part about the interviewees and the limits and possibilities of our relationships.

The hostel-based interviews covered many subjects and were generally more easy going as a prior relationship between interviewer and interviewee was already established and my academic identity was, therefore, secondary to our interpersonal relationship and my role as nurse. Interviewees often departed from the topic of cinema to talk about other subjects, some of which, for example, family or medical history, had been discussed between us on previous occasions in the framework of nurse-resident. At first this tendency to depart from the subject of cinema was frustrating. According to the handbooks I was failing to control the interview and steer it towards the interview topic.

The relationship that existed between us prevented me from changing the subject as such an intervention would breach the established rules of politeness and respect between us. At first I covered up for these lapses by surreptitiously turning the tape recorder off when the conversation turned to other subjects and turning it on again when I eventually managed to politely turn the conversation back to cinema (interviews 4, 7, 8 and 12).

Thankfully I soon began to alter this view. One reason for this change of practice was that the tangents were so interesting and informative on subjects such as local experiences of the Depression or the First or Second World Wars that I no longer wanted to switch off the tape recorder. Another reason was that I realised how much some of these topics meant to the people I was interviewing. Hence it was the prior relationship with these interviewees that forced me to listen to conversational diversions and led me to new realisations about the experiences of the people talking and about the investment given to certain subjects within an interview.

Another important consideration in regard to this first set of interviews was the possibility that the relationship of power that existed between nurse and resident may have affected the interview. For example, the people I interviewed may have kept to "safe" subjects that were already established between us rather than risk telling me things that they thought I might not agree with, or which might reflect on them in a negative way. To introduce certain subjects or talk about moments they were not proud of may have threatened to undermine our future relationship, a relationship in which the interviewees had more invested as they relied on me for nursing services.

The importance of how I was perceived by those I interviewed did not become clear to me until I interviewed Ron and May Klower (interview 2). Ron was a former projectionist at the Kings Theatre in Thirroul and was introduced to me by one of the women at the hostel. Unlike the people from my second set of interviews who had volunteered after I had advertised in their local magazine or had given a talk to their senior citizen community centre, Ron and May agreed to see me as a favour to their friend Cecelia Jackson (interview 1).

On this occasion, therefore, I was regarded as a stranger, an academic who was an "expert" on cinema. Ron, in particular, seemed to regard the interview as a kind of test of his cinema knowledge. He frequently asked me what it was I wanted to know. He downplayed the past and kept coming back to the present where he talked about modern films and wondered at current projection practices. This disturbed me as I had been used to interviews proceeding as friendly, relatively unforced conversations where interviewees benevolently passed on their stories and taught me about cinema-going in previous eras. Instead, Ron wanted me to explain things to him, how current equipment functioned, what I thought of particular movies, what it was I wanted to know. I wanted to keep Ron in the past, and in the role of storyteller Ron wanted to relate to me in the present and for me to assume control of the knowledge he was offering.

The awkwardness of the interview arose through a confusion of roles. I learnt that, as an interviewer, I am most comfortable when assuming the role of novice. I prefer to listen and encourage stories about cinema from the "experts", who I deem to be the cinema-goers themselves. Other interviewers, in a style just as valid as my own, may prefer to take the "expert" role, setting out the field of their knowledge and asking interviewees to contribute to it. Consequently, for me, an awkward exchange arises when the interviewee also asks me to be the "expert", to hold forth on certain subjects and to explain things to them.

As is clear in Ellen Seiter's examination of her troubling interview (detailed in the introduction), expectations on the part of the interviewee and the interviewer can affect the dynamics of the interview. Seiter describes the men she interviewed about their television viewing as being eager to show off their knowledge and debate soap operas with an academic. Unfortunately Seiter's analysis of these expectations is rather one-sided, in that it focuses on the interviewees as problematic, and is too mindful of her academic status rather than on the ways in which Seiter's expectations and assumptions may also have contributed to the troubling interview. In the case of Ron and May Klower I submit that it was mutual misunderstandings that made for an awkward exchange. Ron wanted to discuss current cinema practices and films and I wanted him to keep his discussions to the past and to teach me rather than to ask me questions.

Alessandro Portelli provides another useful example about how perceptions affect what comes out in an interview. He was interviewing a man called Trento Pittoti about the folk songs he remembered from the fascist era. Mr Pittoti responded by singing and reciting fascist tunes and nursery rhymes. When Portelli came back to visit Mr Pittoti a year later he found out that Pittoti was a communist and asked him why he had not sang any communist songs for him. Mr Pittoti replied that he did not know Portelli and so when asked to sing he had recalled the songs "they used to make us sing when we were young" (*Trastulli* 29-31). Mr Pittoti had assumed that, as a stranger and an academic, Portelli might not be on the side of the workers and had modified his repertoire of songs accordingly.

Portelli's example is a reminder of how interview content is affected by expectations and assumptions that are made during and even before the first words of an interview are uttered. In fact, interviews are built on many instances of bias, second-guessing and miscommunications that are impossible to eradicate and, therefore, it is crucial that they are examined and documented by an interviewer so that oral history interviews become not just insights into the past but insights into the way meaning is made and power is articulated through the interview exchange. By making ourselves sensitive to the way an interview takes shape, we become better attuned to our interviewees, to our own preferences and assumptions and to the complex negotiations over meaning that take place between both parties to produce the interview.

Transcribing

> No matter how much we talk about ourselves as "oral" historians, the very technology of our work is to turn the oral into the written word, to freeze the fluid material at an arbitrary point in time. This is perhaps neither "good" nor "bad"; there is probably nothing to be done about it anyway. But we ought to be at least aware that this is what we do. (Portelli *Trastulli* 63)

Oral narratives contain a vast amount of information that is very difficult to translate onto the page. Portelli points out (47) that punctuation marks indicating pauses and exclamations are usually arbitrary and do not match up to those of the narrator.

Similarly, timing and pace within narratives cannot be reflected in a written transcription. When someone's speech speeds up if excited or nervous about a story or slows down because of uncertainty or emphasis, it is very difficult to translate into text. And, as Portelli adds,

> Even if we tried to print interviews in their entirety, we would end up with lengthy and almost unreadable texts (in which the mechanical fidelity of the transcriptions thinly veils the qualitative betrayal of turning beautiful speech into unreadable writing). (76)

Linguists use complicated systems of signs to try and denote stresses, pauses and emphasis. For example:

- \- abrupt breaks or stops
- . falling intonation
- ? riding intonation
- _ (underline) stress
- [simultaneous talk between two speakers with one utterance represented on top of the other at the moment of overlap marked by the left brackets
- = interruption or next utterance following immediately
- [ ] transcriber's comment (Wortham 26)

These signs are intended to recreate the exact speech patterns of a narrator in order to break up his or her speech into component parts. The following is a linguistic transcription of a part of a classroom conversation between students and their teacher about the ancient Spartan practice of killing weaker babies and letting the strongest survive. I have then transcribed the same piece of conversation using a transcription style more focussed on meaning and intention:

T/S: [and if you bring someone in=

JAS: [[3 syll]

T/S: =there that isn't going to do their share as the wall of Sparta. You're giving that- that person, something that could be used better bu- by someone else. I-I sort of think that's perfectly right

[if a baby=

JAS: [that's not-

T/S: -can't hack it if you get rid of it. That's going to be a problem in the future.=

JAS: they- they not equal if- if shead a baby and hers lived and I had a baby and mine didn't. we not equal.

T/S: yeah you're right. you didn't produce a healthy baby.

T/B: that's [right

JAS: [how do you kno that. They just say that one ain't healthy. And lookit. mine probably grew up to be taller and [stronger

(Wortham 25)

Or

T/S: And if you bring someone in there that isn't going to do their share, you're giving that person something that could be used better by someone else. I sort of think that's perfectly right. If a baby can't hack it – is going to be a problem in the future - you get rid of it.

JAS: That's not [fair]. They are not equal. If she had a baby and hers lived and I had a baby and mine didn't, we are not equal.

T/S: Yes, you're right. You didn't produce a healthy baby.

T/B: That's right.

JAS: How do you know that? They just say that one isn't healthy. Mine [will] probably grow up to be taller and stronger.

The first example suits the linguistic task of examining the ways in which words are put together but it hampers readability and detracts from the meaning and intention of the original conversations. The second example is easier to read and focuses on the perceived intention of the speakers rather than on their actual words but it also eliminates the sense of ambiguity found in the first transcription. The purpose of the transcription therefore shapes the way the words are transcribed. Both examples differ

from the original conversation thus illustrating that every transcription, no matter how "true" it intends to be to the spoken word, always interferes with it. Hence there is no such thing as an unedited transcript.

In the same way, some oral history transcripts attempt to incorporate an interviewee's dialect, accent or specific oral idiosyncrasies. For example, the cultural studies introductory textbook, *Communication and Culture - An Introduction*, investigates "Language as Social Practice" (Kress 79-129) and looks at various "texts". It presents a transcript of a conversation with a woman in her eighties who is talking about the construction of a dam by the water authorities which might affect her house. An excerpt is presented below:

> …and ah/…well/whether they will come/or whether they won't come/or whether they're ready to come/I don't know/…'spose they'll notify us/but oh we've had/…oh/…had letters from them/…but oh gosh/eh/…they/…well the letters they write are away over your head/…you know/er/…about this/about something else/…well I said to Perce/well look let the/…let the tail go with the hide/I said if they want the place/they'll take it/and if they don't want it/well we'll still live here/…we're not going to worry about it/
> (The oblique strokes indicate the boundaries of "sense-groups"; the dots indicate the relative length of pauses.) (992)

This transcription uses punctuation to indicate pauses and breaks of sense. It also translates every "oh" and "ah" made by the woman and yet the interviewer is not presented in the text at all, despite being the counterpoint of the woman's conversation. Although the intent of this passage is to juxtapose it against a letter written by the water authorities in a complicated and overly governmental style, the effect is that the reader is actually more distanced from the woman, as the transcription inhibits readability and highlights her stammering to the detriment of her spoken intent. By diminishing the coherence of the interviewee's original speech it therefore diminishes the speaker. It is also an example of the way in which older narrators are marked as different and poorer communicators (see also chapter 7).

The transcription style I chose is standardised in that it does not attempt to reflect accents, hesitations or speech mannerisms. I corrected the syntax of both the interviewer and the interviewee to the extent that the transcript became more readable and coherent. While realising that it would impossible to accurately reflect oral conversation in written text, I wanted the interviewees to recognise themselves in the transcripts so I also attempted to gain feedback about the transcripts from the interviewees where possible.[53] I presented the interviewees with a copy of the interview cassette tape as well as a copy of the transcript and encouraged them to let me know if anything in the transcripts had been translated incorrectly or was not to their liking.

I received feedback from three interviewees who corrected names and sometimes dates in the transcript. One interesting point of feedback I received was an interviewee who asked that I changed her "yeah" responses to "yes". She acknowledged that she said "yeah" frequently, but that when she saw this reflected in the written transcript she was embarrassed as she had been brought up to say "yes" instead of "yeah". In making the changes requested I note that I am being true to the interviewees' intentions and not to their exact words. I believe such changes are justified in that they allow both parties the chance to edit their responses for the hypothetical reader. This is usually only the interviewer's privilege. To this extent, and because I feel that both interviewer and interviewee affect and produce an interview, I consider the interviews to be co-productions and refer to them as such elsewhere in this thesis.

I commend readers to compare the interview transcripts presented in appendix I to the oral history recordings in order to see how transcription inevitably alters the oral form and in order to judge my own transcription efforts. However, even the interview recordings, while capturing the spoken word, still do not allow access to the gestures and expressions of both interviewer and interviewee that subtly affect the meaning of what is being said. Although the answer to this problem might be seen to lie in video recorded interviews, the medium has its own set of problems, not least that interviewers are even less comfortable in the presence of a video camera than they are in the

[53] I hit upon the idea of presenting transcripts as well as interview tapes to interviewees when I was working on the second set of interviews. Interviewees in interviews 15 to 26 therefore were given a transcript. Interviewees in interviews 16, 17 and 22 made comments about the transcripts, which were then incorporated into the transcript text. Where possible, I also sent a copy of the transcript to the people interviewed in 1995 or to their relatives for comments and for their own use.

presence of a tape recorder. Alessandro Portelli points out that video oral histories are rarely presented in their entirety as oral history audio recordings are. Instead, they are edited and presented through montage and the hesitations and miscommunications on the part of both interviewer and interviewee are left on the cutting room floor (*Battle* 14). Finally, an important problem with video oral histories, also highlighted by Portelli, is that the interviewer often disappears from sight on the videotape and is always dwelt on far less than the interviewee. This creates the illusion that the oral history is coming from the interviewee more or less unmediated. Oral history audio recordings, on the other hand at least present the spoken words of both interviewer and interviewee (14).[54]

Interpreting

As the Popular Memory Group has pointed out, the historian usually has a monopoly on the historical interpretation of oral sources (249). Alessandro Portelli also sets out traditional attitudes to the separation of fieldwork and interpretation:

> As Denis Tedlock noted, Frank Boas used to warn his students … beware … of "intelligent Indians" who may have "formed a theory" about the research in progress. Tedlock juxtaposes this injunction against theorizing informants to Margaret Mead's intimation against interfering researchers: "The Fieldworker is not in the field to talk but to listen" and should never "express complicated ideas of his own that will muddle the natives' accounts." A fearful symmetry structures this hierarchic separation between the interviewer's *ideas* and the informant's *account*. The fiction of noninterference turns the dialogue into two monologues: informants supply a monologue of brute facts, while the historian and anthropologists will supply – later, from the safety of their desks – a monologue of sophisticated ideas that the informant never hears about. (*Battle* 11-12)

As Portelli points out, interpretation is thought to take place after the gathering of research in the field. It is done by the "expert", who, it is assumed, takes raw data and finds the profound "truths" embedded in it so as to produce meaning. In an academic

[54] Portelli's work will be discussed later in this chapter.

context interpretation occurs within a particular framework, meanings are made with reference to previous academic work in the field using specialised terms and complex theory to advance a new way of looking at a particular subject. An interpretation is usually presented in the form of a written document, a book, a thesis or a research paper. Occasionally there is an oral presentation within the environs of an academic conference. However, in most cases the interpretation is made for an audience of fellow academics. The language of interpretation, the arenas where it is discussed and the expensive price of academic books all combine to exclude from interpretation the non-academic community. With oral history the process of interpretation generally excludes the people originally interviewed.

The Popular Memory Group suggests that this process should be challenged and that interviewees should have more involvement in the process of interpretation. As I have already mentioned, the group recommends that original testimonies be examined by both parties to provoke further reflection. Alistair Thomson has advanced this theory in practice. Instead of talking to Anzac veterans about the war and then drawing conclusions about the ways in which the veterans related to the Anzac myth, Thomson decided to re-interview five veterans to ask *them* how they felt their experiences did or didn't reflect the Anzac myth (*Anzac Memories* 235).

In the same way I tried to encourage reflection on the experiences of cinema that were related to me by the people I interviewed. For example, Charlie Anderson told me about the different methods he used to attract audiences to the Whiteway Theatre in Port Kembla, which he managed from 1946-52, including beauty pageants, English film nights, competitions, and sports broadcasts. Instead of listing these methods and drawing my own conclusions about the audiences that they attracted, I asked Charlie whether he pitched certain strategies to particular sectors of the cinema audience. Charlie then talked incisively about the viewing habits of people from different geographical regions of the Illawarra and different social backgrounds, interpreting his marketing strategies in the context of the analysis of local audience groups (interview 22 14-15).

As well as involving interviewees in reflection and interpretation of their initial responses, the Popular Memory Group praises community history projects such as the

Durham Strong Words Project and *Working Lives*, a two volume account of life in Hackney produced and published by the Hackney community (217), for collecting and publishing community histories. The group also recommends popular autobiographies and dramatizations such as Vera Brittain's book, *Testament of Youth*, the television drama, *Days of Hope* (1975), and the film, *Song of the Shirt* (1980), which reach a broader audience and yet speak about the effects of war on ordinary men and women (218).

Another strategy of involvement is to consider the oral history interviewees as part of the community of readers of the academic thesis or paper. With that aim in mind I have undertaken to provide copies of this thesis to those interviewees who have asked to read it. Such an approach is challenging because the problems encountered are symbolic of the problems of academic writing. For those concerned that a thesis would be too specialised to be of interest or to be understood, I suggest that the answer lies in clearly explaining theoretical influences and in setting out their relevance to the project and in not under-estimating the reader before she or he has had the chance to read. Such a process also encourages clear writing and provides a constant check against drawing unrealistic conclusions from the comments provided by the people I interview.

It is also important to challenge the figure of the academic as sole owner and interpreter of the interviews. One solution is in making all the interviews available for inspection and for presenting full transcripts with written papers. Another strategy is to provide tapes and transcripts of interviews to the interviewees and to assist them to interpret and disseminate the interviews as they see fit. Charlie Anderson, for example, requested printed copies of the transcript in booklet form and designed covers for them to present to the members of his Rotary Group and for the local high school. Similarly Cec Clark added the interview transcript and tapes to the growing collection of material he holds that has been written about his days as a travelling picture showman. Extra copies of other interviews have been provided on request so that they can be passed on to family members, particularly children and grandchildren. A copy of the tape and transcript ensures that the material is literally owned by both parties.

Another way we can break down the hegemony of academic authority is to recognise and reflect on the way in which interpretations are constructed. I have already

mentioned some of the ways interpretations are made (in the language used, the audience addressed, the availability of the written interpretations). It is also important to look at the written conventions of interpretation. Where oral history is concerned, this is often regarded as *narrative analysis*, presenting oral testimony and then extrapolating meaning from it. However, in effect this is a process of *narrative construction* whereby interviews are conducted, edited and presented with certain interpretations in mind.

For example, in this thesis I use parts of certain interviews to build up a picture of cinema-going in the Illawarra which draws together similar experiences and explains them within a common methodological framework. I aim to convince the reader of the validity of my interpretation by presenting quotes to back up my arguments so the interviewees seem to speak in favour of my interpretation. In fact, this is a highly selective exercise where I both construct a picture of my oral sources and then interpret my construction.

The interpretations generally follow a narrative form, presenting the interpretation in the form of one or several interlocking stories. There are structural conventions: the scene is set, a problem is introduced, overcome and a resolution or conclusion is posited. Quotes from the interview sources provide authenticity and "proof" of my suggestions, as do supporting theoretical standpoints that are presented in flattering formations. These narrative conventions allow the reader to be persuaded by my arguments and make acceptance a logical resolution.

These storytelling conventions that construct research narratives are explored by Nancie Burns-McCoy in her article, "Water is to Chocolate like Story is to Qualitative Research: Questioning Credibility and Narrative Studies". Burns-McCoy, a researcher in the field of education, reflects on a previous research paper she had written and the way in which she represented her research subject, Alicia. She suggests that interpretative strategies serve to stabilize narratives by fitting them into agreeable methodologies and storytelling frameworks. However, at the same time, they restrict the polyvocality of the research subject's narrative. In an attempt to avoid the traditional research paradigm Burns-McCoy creates a fictional dialogue between herself and her

version of her research subject (Alicia), in which Alicia questions how her words have been treated by Burns-McCoy's practice:

> **Alicia**: … once the methodology is in place, it becomes a rigid frame functioning as truth and validity and chips away at the stories participants might have told. The interdependency and collaboration fades, and what we have left are the methodological machine driving the study forward and the researcher's voice organizing, choosing, interpreting, silencing. The methodological framework in the write-up works to insure the researcher's autonomy and power not the participant's, no matter how emancipatory the study's original intention. (7)

> **Alicia**: Your concern with issues of credibility and validity silenced my story … you took my voice and silenced my story's resonance … In a fifteen page study I am allowed to speak seven times, in short sentences sandwiched between theory and your interpretation. (5)

Burns-McCoy's fictional dialogue is helpful in that it imagines the research subject in a dialectical involvement with the researcher's interpretation, questioning and challenging her representation. However, Burns-McCoy's approach, while innovative, is also restrictive because, while she calls into question research practices, she does so with a fictional version of her research subject rather than returning to the "real" Alicia and asking her to comment on her original research paper. Burns-McCoy's self-reflexive endeavour removes the article further from the original communication exchange, leaving only a symbolic emancipation of the research-subject.

Nevertheless, articles like Burns-McCoy's encourage an awareness of the narrative conventions of academic writing and interpretation. They forewarn the reader and ask them to be suspicions of the narrative paths down which they are to be led. They also encourage the reader to look to the discourses within which interpretations are grounded; after all, once interpretation is recognised as a process of construction it is easier to be critically reflective about it and to suggest other possible interpretations.

* * *

What I hope to have done in this section is to problematise the process of oral history and show how the interviewer is an active co-producer of oral history texts along with the interviewee. From the first interview, through the transcription process and eventual interpretation of accounts, the oral historian is complicit in creating the accounts and in speaking for the people she or he interviews. The Popular Memory Group provides a systematic critique of the sort of oral history that merely serves to reproduce written versions of events. Instead the group shows that oral histories speak as much to and from the present as from the past and that historians should examine oral history as the site in which public and private, past and present, and dominant and popular versions of history are negotiated.

Aside from the Popular Memory Group, the two other oral historians whose work has been most useful in thinking about oral history methodology and ethics are Alessandro Portelli and Alistair Thomson. I have already quoted both in some detail but I would like to conclude with some final observations from these two historians of popular memory.

ALESSANDRO PORTELLI

Alessandro Portelli's studies of Italian and American working class culture are, at the same time, critiques and celebrations of the form of oral history (*Trastulli*; *Battle*). Portelli and the Popular Memory Group share many abiding interests including a shared theoretical interest in the writings of Gramsci. They also share methodological concerns such as a commitment to exposing the complicity of the interviewer in producing an oral narrative, highlighting the indissoluble relationship of past and present within the oral narrative and raising awareness about the problematic nature of representation. Both are also looking for a way of connecting the individual oral history account to the lived experiences of everyday life and in examining how oral histories both reproduce dominant ideologies and also represent unique experiences and interpretive strategies.

However, Portelli, as a practising oral historian, provides ample examples of popular memory in practice. One fascinating example is the story of the death of Luigi Trastulli. Trastulli was a 21-year-old steelworker and resident of Terni who was accidentally shot

by police on 17 March 1949 during a workers' demonstration against the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. However, many narrators later remembered this event as taking place in October 1953 during street-fighting that erupted after the steel factory announced that over 2000 workers were to be laid off (*Trastulli* 1-2). Portelli explores the narratives and suggests several reasons for the conflation of the two events.

First, Portelli supposes, the conflation has a symbolic function whereby the death of Trastulli comes to represent the working class experience in Terni. That Trastulli's death occurred at a minor protest against the signing of Italy to NATO seems disproportionate and nonsensical. The cause did not adequately justify Trastulli's death, especially as the policy of the Communist Party later changed to one of support for NATO when it looked as if US tolerance could lead to Communist representation in the Italian government. Therefore, the death of Trastulli made more meaningful sense as having occurred as the result of the lay-offs that had a huge effect on the town and became a turning point in the fortunes and narratives of its residents. Trastulli was, thus, made into a martyr of the struggle of the factory workers and of the working class in general (15-16).

Secondly, Portelli describes the conflation of events as serving a psychological function. After Trastulli's death there were no repercussions, no scuffles or attempts at vengeance. Consequently, Portelli surmises, narrators sought to move the death forward to the time of the lay-offs where a fight-back against the authorities did occur (17-20). Finally, Portelli suggests that the conflation of events fulfills a formal function as the death is used to provide a pivotal marker of the time of the lay-offs (26).

Portelli's incisive analysis of the death of Luigi Trastulli highlights the way oral historians can use instances of misremembering and different ways in which stories can be related in order to critically reflect on the processes of meaning making:

> The discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents. It is not caused by faulty recollections (some motifs and symbols found in oral narratives were already present in embryo in coeval written sources), but actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in an effort to make sense

> of crucial events and of history in general. Indeed, if oral sources had given us "accurate", "reliable", factual reconstructions of the death of Luigi Trastulli, we would know much less about it. (26)

Like the Popular Memory Group and oral historians such as Alistair Thomson and Michael Frish, Portelli's work has contributed to a more critically reflective approach to oral history. Portelli has been amongst those who have encouraged an intellectual engagement with the methodology, highlighting the importance of the way a story is told to a narrator's sense of meaning and identity and, as I have shown elsewhere in this chapter, dissecting the many ways in which oral historians "speak for" the people they interview. Portelli credits critical self-reflexivity with the maturity of oral history, but he also warns of possible dangers:

> While [self-awareness and self-reflexivity] indicate a heightened maturity and sense of responsibility in the discipline as a whole, these attitudes may also include a degree of self-enclosed narcissism; a healthy recognition of partiality and limits may slide into an acceptance of irrelevance and irresponsibility. Indeed – and this is my no means exclusive to oral history – the increasing attention to metadiscourse (history of historiography, and anthropology of anthropologists, theory of theory etc) also signals the weakening of the relationship between our intellectual practices and the world outside. To be aware of ourselves is essential for a delineation of otherness, but to confine our conversation to our own self-reflexivity is a way to erase the other from our discourse and negate the very reason for the discourse itself. This is why by *practice* I refer to oral history as an *intellectual* and as a *social* practice. (*Battle* xiv)

Portelli urges oral historians not to lose sight of the interviewee in the excitement over critically reflexive oral history. Indeed, of the many insights that Portelli brings to the practice of oral history, the emphasis on the social in oral history is the most enduring:

> … never turn your attention off, and always show your respect for what people choose to tell you. This was the first reason I listened; the second was that the stories were beautiful and well told, and I know that there's no

> beauty without meaning. Respect for my partners in dialogue and attention to the meanings of the verbal form were to be the foundation of my work ever since … (*Trastulli* x)

> We must bear in mind that the field situation is a dialogue, in which we are talking to people, not studying "sources"; and that it is largely a *learning* situation, in which the narrator has information which we lack. It is part of the interpersonal nature of fieldwork that the agenda of the interviewee be given equal time and respect with that of the interviewer … there's a lot more to be gained by leaving ourselves open to the unexpected than by a repetition of our own conceptualizations. (xi)

Portelli's sensitivity to the dynamics of the interview exchange has been highly influential for my own practice. Where the Popular Memory Group sometimes seems to want to teach or persuade interviewees to re-evaluate their experiences in political terms, Portelli looks for the political and personal within the stories he is told, untangling the elements of the story from the methods and choices that go into telling it. Hence he draws out motifs and themes from amongst oral history accounts that extend our knowledge of the ways in which people make sense of experiences and tell stories about their identities. Portelli's work teaches oral historians to listen carefully and to listen to everything in order to draw out meaning making strategies from oral accounts.

ALISTAIR THOMSON

Alistair Thomson draws on Portelli's insights about oral history as well as the methods of the Popular Memory Group. Thomson's work is particularly useful because it situates the Popular Memory Group's writing within a practical oral history project, that of exploring the relationships of Anzac identities, memories and myth through interviews with soldiers from the Great War. It also reworks the Popular Memory Group's concerns with the past-present relation, public and private representations alongside explorations of memory and theories of identity.

In *Anzac Memories*, Thomson utilises the dual meanings of the word "composure" to explore the process of articulating oral accounts. Composure thus refers to the process whereby public languages and representations are used to compose memories and to the ways in which we make our memories "safe" and "composed", so that they sit comfortably with our sense of personal and particular group identities (8).

Taking the second meaning first, Thomson looks at the safe and comfortable situation of memories within the framework of psychological memory processes. He suggests that people compose their memories so as to affirm particular versions of their personal identities and to create "a sense of the past they can live with" (9). Thomson proposes a dialectical relationship between memory and identity, whereby we compose our memories by fitting them into forms which we think will gain the approval and affirmation of those around us and which will also conform to valued identity traits and characteristics. He re-iterates the importance of storytelling, which is how memories are constructed and composed, and echoes the Popular Memory Group's point that memories are constructed differently over time as public representations and personal identities change. Therefore, the notion of a stable identity founded on polished and final memories of experiences is rejected. Instead, memories are remade incorporating some details and excluding others so as to fulfil different identity descriptions as they become useful.

However, Thomson proposes, it is important to note that this process of reworking identities and memories into safe and composed forms is never wholly successful or fully achieved and that repressed feelings are often revealed in silence, jokes and errors which can be examined in the oral history situation (10).

Thomson's other sense of the word "composure" refers to the process of articulating one's memories within the public representations available. Thomson points out that we compose our memories using the public meanings and discourses available to us. These might include opinions on a certain subject in the media, things we learn about that subject at school and opinions on that subject that are held by people we know. Thomson points out that the links between the two sense of composure lie in making our memories socially acceptable and in keeping with the sense of personal identity that we wish to project at any given time. In order to monitor our success we seek

recognition from others that the frameworks within which we situate our stories are acceptable and approved of. As Thomson points out:

> Our memories are risky and painful if they do not fit the public myths, so we try to compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable … "Recognition" is a useful term to describe the process of public affirmation of identities and memories. Recognition is essential for social and emotional survival; the alternative of alienation and exclusion may be psychologically devastating … our memories need the sustenance of public recognition, and are composed so that they will be recognized or affirmed. (11)

Thomson's account of the way in which people compose their experiences into acceptable narratives is useful in that it relates individual concerns of fitting in and having our identities affirmed with public discourses on particular topics and events.

Thomson also helpfully distinguishes between "general" and "particular" public representations. The "general" public representations are provided by institutions such as the media, educational establishments and government agencies, which present a particular view of history at specific times. As I have pointed out earlier with regard to the Popular Memory Group, these institutions themselves are not necessarily in accord and provide dominant versions of the past through hegemonic consensus. However, common to the general public forms is that there is little opportunity for individual agency or intervention.

By contrast, particular publics are smaller groups to which individuals belong and have a more active involvement with. Here Thomson uses the example of a soldier's wartime platoon, but other examples might be a mother's group, a local resident's group, a sporting club or a particular circle of friends. Particular publics allow for more active relationships between the individual and the group:

> The particular public is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, a member of a particular public may participate in and contribute to the development of those meanings. Secondly, because of the importance of

> social acceptance and affirmation the particular public is especially influential, and potentially repressive, in the construction of meaning and identity. Thirdly, a particular public may provide an important site for the maintenance of alternative or oppositional meaning, a source of public strength for its members to filter or even reject or contest more general meanings. (9)

The idea of "particular" publics is, therefore, useful as it articulates a second order of meaning between the general and the personal. Examples of particular publics that have affected the interviews I have co-produced come from past and present groups. From the past, interviews are composed with reference to the local suburban community, the local cinema audience or the tight-knit mining community. However, particular publics from the present also affect the narrative. These include, for example, the community of residents in a nursing home or senior citizens group, one's peer group and one's family.

It is easy to see how such groups can collectively oppose some aspects of general publics whilst upholding others. For example, Scarborough miners may disagree with portrayals in the media of pit closures as necessarily economic; the local population may disagree with media reports that a good night out can only be had in Sydney. Because one's particular publics are smaller and more intimate, it also may be easier, in some instances, to express personal opinions which conflict with the rest of the group. However, it is important to note Thomson's second observation about particular publics, that they can be forces of repression and influence as well as avenues of resistance to dominant forms, policing the individual rather than liberating them.

I find Thompson's work crucial in that the distinction between general and particular publics starts to explore the mediation of narratives across several contexts. It is my contention that oral history interviews are created within a complex matrix of intersecting publics. Both interviewer and interviewee are involved in negotiations over their identities and their places within multiple communities. What each interview shows is a series of strategic mediations whereby general and particular public discourses are mined for the significance they can bring to personal experiences of the past and present. The process of mediation, of negotiation between past and present and

public and private representations, is the context against which I will explore memories of cinema-going in the Illawarra.

The following four chapters will examine examples of the strategies of mediation that are employed in producing individual narratives within multiple publics. Chapter 4 will look at the intersection of cinema memories with the discourse of national identity. Chapter 5 will examine how the practice of cinema-going fits into discourses of local identity. Chapter 6 looks at personal identity and at how the interviewees articulated a sense of both their past and present selves and chapter 7 looks at the articulation of political identity associated with the testimony of older adults.

As the discussions in this chapter have shown, by organising the narratives of the people I interviewed in terms of strategies of mediation I am now imposing my own agenda onto the interviewees' testimonies. Inevitably, therefore, certain aspects of the narratives as well as alternative interpretative strategies will be highlighted at the expense of others. It is important to bear in mind, therefore, that what follows are only some ways of interpreting the interview material. For this reason, I draw your attention to the interview transcripts presented at appendix I and to the interview recordings which, to a certain extent, allow for the possibility of alternative interpretations and conclusions.

CHAPTER 4: SCREEN CONTENT AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

STRATEGIES OF MEDIATION

In the previous chapter I proposed that cinema-going be thought of as a strategy of mediation. In other words, that the rituals and practices associated with going to the pictures as well as the later process of constructing an oral narrative about cinema-going, allow people to explore and articulate diverse phenomenon from social relations and cultural politics to identity construction. While the word *strategy* satisfactorily describes the process of mediation that I want to explore, I would like to briefly mention the distinction between *strategies* and *tactics* made by historian and theoretician, Michel de Certeau, and the usefulness of both these terms to the following chapter.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau explores some of the ways that people work within imposed systems in order to make their own meanings and to sometimes subvert the intentions of hegemonic power. He distinguishes between *strategies* and *tactics* thus:

> I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serves as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc) can be managed. … By contrast with a strategy … a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus … The space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain organized by the law of a foreign power … It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a distinct, visible and objectifiable space. (35-37)

According to de Certeau, *strategies* are available to those with an identifiable sense and location of power whereas *tactics* are employed by ordinary individuals during the

course of their everyday life. Whereas strategies are forward-thinking plans made from a specific location that can be implemented to resist or filter the effects of hegemonic power, tactics are conceived at the time and place of consumption, in the space and during the operation of hegemonic power. They are, nonetheless, demonstrations of individual agency.

The following chapter looks as the ways cinema managers/exhibitors and audience members negotiated screen content within local cinema-going practices and into their everyday lives. Using de Certeau's model, the way cinema managers and exhibitors marketed and arranged this content for consumption can be seen as *strategic*, coming from a place of power that was located in their role as picture showman in Cec Clark's case and as a representative of the dominant local cinema chain, Wollongong Theatres in the case of Charlie Anderson. Charlie and Cec employed strategies of mediation in order to present screen content to their audiences in ways that they judged would be most acceptable or enjoyable to them in order to maximise profits. They therefore had a role in controlling the way in which local audiences accessed content, choosing how material was packaged on a program, when it was seen and in what context it was marketed. These strategies were significant in that they could mitigate or enhance the way screen content was received. They also contained the possibility of resistance in that managers and exhibitors could subvert or ignore the ways in which American and Australian production/distribution companies wanted their products to be marketed if they judged a different treatment of the content to be more appropriate for local audiences.

Cinema-goers, by contrast, interpreted and negotiated content in *tactical* ways, using certain screen content to furnish their fantasies or enhance their identities, discarding material that didn't "fit" within their personal or social meaning-making matrices. In this way some material was appreciated for being close to real life, some for providing a marked counterpoint to ordinary life, and some made significant through its relevance to specific anecdotes or personalities. If significance could not be attached to material, it was forgotten. The ways in which audiences attached their own meanings and significances to screen content were not always the same as those intended by the original producers and distributors.

The history of cinema has long been told as an imperialist discourse, where audiences are force-fed a diet of Hollywood movies and American cultural values and where resistance is seen only in the form of locally produced film texts. In this chapter, I first look at the construction of the discourse of national cinema within cinema studies and then examine it in the context of the oral history narratives of Illawarra exhibitors and audience members. Instead of finding evidence that audiences demanded locally produced films, or that they preferred Australian films to Hollywood fare, the narratives point to a more complicated pattern of reception whereby strategies and tactics were employed in order to mediate screen content from a variety of origins into local and personal contexts and meanings.

THE DISCOURSE OF NATIONAL CINEMA

If we understand "discourses" as, "socially produced groups of ideas or ways of thinking that can be tracked in individual texts or groups of texts, but that also demand to be located within wider historical and social structures and relations" (Turner *BCS* 30), then a central discourse for the study of cinema in Australia, and many other countries outside the USA, is that of national cinema. The discourse of national identity in cinema studies seemed to gain prominence in Australia in the 1980s after the revival of Australian film production that occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s. Not only were Australian films being produced and received with critical acclaim overseas, film theory was developing a broader conception of cinema with the rise of the historical approach to film studies (detailed in chapter 1) in which the film text started to be seen in the context of wider historical factors such as industry development. As Dermody and Jacka pointed out in 1987:

> This interest of ours … seems to be part of a fresh impetus in film scholarship, an impetus from film *history*, in which the cultural, the economic, and the technological are perceived as a fascinating complex of relations. It is a conjuncture in which the nature and moment of a society and the way it thinks about itself can be glimpsed. (11)

This argument stresses that film texts are examples of particular historical "moments" in which specific constructions of Australia and what it means to be Australian are articulated. It sees the film text as a national cultural signifier that is played out within

academia where scholars examine just what type of Australia certain films offer and debate the possibility of many different Australian identities. It is also articulated in the political arena where it is reflected in government policy. From the Whitlam government's protectionist measures in the 1970s to the 1994 *Creative Nation* policy statement from the Keating government, this discourse suggests that government should support the film industry because it provides Australians with images with which to think about themselves as well as presenting a public face of Australia to overseas audiences.

It is also a discourse promulgated by the media whereby newspapers, magazines and television reports frequently focus on Australian films and film stars that are successful overseas, particularly in America. The way the 2002 Academy Awards were reported in terms of this discourse is an example, with reports suggesting that success at the American awards ceremony confirms a sense of Australia's worth and appreciation in the world.[55]

Institutions such as academia, government and the media promote the discourse of Australian national cinema. Dermody and Jacka sum it up as follows:

> The whole set of ideas of an Australian national cinema draws on … the proposal that film is a crucial part of indigenous culture deserving support because of its contribution to the richness and self-reflexiveness of Australian experience and because, equally, it contributes to a large, exportable body of imagery, truths about Australia. It is claimed to be 'our best ambassador', always with the coda that 'trade follows film'. Australian narrative and imagery are seen as reflecting and developing a process of national identity, which is a process that may be proudly and advantageously projected overseas. An Australian film industry, it is argued, enables Australia to talk to itself, recognise itself, and engage the attention of the world in doing so. (17)

[55] For example: "Lights, Camera and Aussie Action Shines" *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 Jan. 2002; "Aussies Centre Stage among Oscar Nominees" *Newcastle Herald*, 13 Feb. 20/02; "Aussie Assault" *Newcastle Herald*, 21 Mar. 2002; "Hollywood falls for the rugged Australian push" *The Sunday Age*, 24 Mar. 2002.

Of course, within the discourse of national cinema there is room for much debate and contention. Dermody and Jacka question why the feature film is always used to signify the film industry over other types of screen content (15, 16) and writers such as Turner raise the notion that there are, in fact, a plurality of Australian identities on offer in specific films ("Australian Film" 187, 190). Another strand examines how a film comes to qualify as Australian, perhaps by virtue of specific traits or characteristics within a film's content that are identified as Australian; by the amount of Australian capital invested in a film; or by the number of Australian stars or Australian locations present (Hammett-Jamart). These internal debates problematise the possibility of quintessential Australian films and recognisable Australian identities but they leave the discourse of national cinema intact.

However, in the context of reception, Australian films have only ever represented a small proportion of the total screen content available to audiences. During the 1930s, for example, Australia produced around five feature films per year (Pike and Cooper 201-244) compared with 400 Hollywood features that were produced in each year of the same decade (Vasey 3). In fact, feature production in Australia fell from an average sixteen per year in the 1910s, to nine per year in the 1920s, five per year in the 1930s and just two per year in the 1940s to 1960s (Pike and Cooper). Despite a rise in production from the 1970s Australian productions still account for a small proportion of films screened. UNESCO figures for the period 1988-1998 point out that an average of eighteen locally produced films (about 7%) compete against 239 imported films (1995).[56] Given these figures, how appropriate is the discourse of national cinema to Illawarra audience members' narratives about cinema-going in the first half of the twentieth century?

I want to explore this question next, examining whether, and in what ways Australian films were remembered and received by Illawarra cinema-goers. I shall suggest that, although the discourse of national cinema features heavily in contemporary film studies, it is not a discourse common to audience members of the first half of the twentieth century for a variety of reasons, not least the scarcity of Australian films in local

[56] Source: http://www.unesco.org/culture/industries/cinema/html_eng/table7.shtml [15 Jun. 2002].

cinemas. Finding the discourse of national cinema lacking as a way of exploring this audience's interpretation of screen content, I shall then look at the strategies and tactics through which screen content was mediated; firstly by the cinema managers and exhibitors who marketed it for Australian audiences and then by the audience members themselves.

AUSTRALIAN SCREEN CONTENT AND LOCAL AUDIENCES

Many of the people I interviewed were hard pressed to remember the names of any specific films they saw, let alone Australian ones. Others typically recalled one or two Australian titles, most commonly *On Our Selection* (1932) and *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1941) but did not have a great deal to say about them. On three occasions, however, interviewees talked about Australian films in terms of national identity. Here, Gwen Baird, Mary Bain and Dot Jay remember:

> **NH:** Do you remember any Australian films?
> **GB**: Oh yes, but don't ask me to name them.
> **NH:** Did people used to like Australian films?
> **GB**: Everybody liked them. Because I mean, if you are a real Aussie, well you stick up for your own don't you? But there were some very good ones. More about out back - like on farms and things … We used to like the Australian ones when they first came out, cos they showed you the pictures of out back, you know, the real thing. So I did used to enjoy it. That was the only pleasure I had because I didn't go far. (interview 8 4)

> **MB**: *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933) – that's it! I can't think of the lass's name but the ad had her leaning on a [fence] as you can imagine by the "Squatter's Daughter" name … Everybody liked it. It was an Australian story, that's why, and everybody thought it was great. (interview 19 4)

> **NH**: Were people surprised to see an Australian movie?
> **DJ**: Well, yes, it was a big thing. Everybody went because it was an Australian picture. You know, our own pictures. Everybody would talk

> about it, "Did you see *On Our Selection* (1932)? Wasn't it good?" Dad and Dave and that – we thought it was great. It was a big thing the Australian pictures. They were good. (interview 16 8)

Gwen Baird could not give specific examples of Australian films but declared herself a fan of them nonetheless, not necessarily because the films were good but out of loyalty, "you stick up for your own". Similarly Dot Jay appreciated *On Our Selection* (1932) as "one of our own" and Mary Bain believed *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933) was popular with audiences because "it was an Australian story". The Australian-ness of a film was what made it popular with these respondents over and above plot, characters or technical merits.

For Gwen, Australian movies showed her parts of the country that she couldn't visit and gave her a sense of national identity through this shared experience of place. In the interview she identifies with an "Aussie" tradition and sees films as a way of broadening her perception of place and sense of nationalism. Many Australian-produced movies of the first half of the century chose to depict rural, bushland Australia as being the ideal and quintessential national environment. Diane Collins points out that the oppositions set up between the wholesome bush and the big bad city actually deflected opinion away from the problems of class and internal conflict and fostered a form of conservative nationalism ("Entertainment" 71). Certainly, the Australian films that were recalled by the people I interviewed were mainly those with a strong bush ethic that presented a particular view of a shared Australia which was inclusive and comfortable.[57]

Although only a small number of titles were released each year, the presence of an Australian movie was sufficient to generate large audiences as Charlie Anderson suggested:

[57] *On Our Selection* (1932), *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933), *When the Kellys Rode* (1934), *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1941), *The Overlanders* (1946).

> **NH**: So how often would you get an Australian film?
>
> **CA**: Rarely. But when you had them on you used to get good audiences. Like we had the original of Ned Kelly[58] and the dialogue went something like this: [in a stilted mechanical voice] "And-where-are-you-going-to-day?" "I-am going-to-Jer-il-der-ie-to-rob-a-bank"! And it packed it out! They were standing. The thing held 1145 and I'd say there'd be at least 3000 people there. (interview 22 6)

Similarly, as I have pointed out in chapter 1, when Charlie was able to invite Australian stars down to the premieres of their movies the visits attracted large crowds. This seems to confirm that Australian films were popular with local audiences. However the popularity seems less to do with the quality of a film than with factors such as loyalty to local content or curiosity about the different images of Australia on offer in the film.

This may have been due to the fact that while few Australian films were made after the formation of the combine in 1913 through to the 1950s, still fewer gained successful release overseas. Consequently there was not much opportunity, as there is today, to bask in the reflected glory of overseas film successes. The way Australian films were marketed also discouraged talk of their quality as, like Gwen, Mary and Dot, press reports concentrated on national loyalty and the rare thrill of seeing Australia on screen rather than on any film's particular merits (*Illawarra Mercury* 1 Jun. 1923 2; 3 Aug. 1928 13, 16). Clearly then, the idea of a quality national cinema was neither visible from the small number of films produced nor conceivable by the ways in which those films were offered to audiences through the press.

Despite relatively high local production figures in the 1910s, culminating in 52 narrative fiction films that were made in 1911 (Shirley and Adams 24), in the next four decades production fell sharply to the extent that many of the people I talked to did not think that an Australian film industry existed:

[58] Probably *When the Kellys Rode* (1934) as the original (*The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906)) was a silent picture.

JD: Well, they were mostly American pictures that came here. They weren't making them in Australia (interview 5 1)

RH: There [weren't] any Australian films, Nancy. The only sort they had were like Dad and Dave, *On Our Selection* (1932).
JH: What about that other chap, the Australian?
RH: Chips Rafferty. Oh Chips, he was good. *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1941) he was in. But other than a good movie we didn't bother going. (interview 12 13-14)

NH: Do you remember seeing any Australian serials or films?
SC: No. No, they weren't established by then - can't remember. (interview 10 4)

DJ: Oh American pictures, all American pictures. There weren't too many Australian pictures like there are now. Most of the names I've written down are American. You might see an English picture but that wasn't that often. It was all American … You just accepted it because I don't think there were as many actors and actresses in Australia then. They were all Americans. (interview 16 5)

The people quoted above suggested that the number of Australian films available to them were negligible. The production boom that occurred in Australia in the early years of the medium was soon forgotten as subsequent local audiences claimed that an Australian film industry had yet to be established. Audiences of this period, then, did not have a tradition of Australian national cinema to draw upon when they considered locally produced films.

Without a constructed tradition of national cinema to rely upon, responses to questions about national cinema are less secure. In Jack Hodgeson's response, above, he first denies Australian films were being produced and then qualifies this remark with, "The only sort they had were like Dad and Dave, *On Our Selection*" as if these type of films didn't really qualify as proper films. Ron Klower, projectionist at the Thirroul Kings in the 1930s-50s was also dismissive of the Australian films he screened:

> **RK**: Australian films when they first started were up the putty. But today they're very good. (interview 2 4)

It is interesting to note that Ron has picked up a recent popular discourse about the worthiness of contemporary Australian films as he makes the distinction between national cinema of then and now. However, neither Charlie, Jack or Ron buys into a discourse of national pride in Australian movies of the time. Indeed some of the people talked about Australian films as if they were something to be slightly embarrassed about. Similarly Australian stars of the period, with the exception of Chips Rafferty who seems to command unilateral support and loyalty, were recalled humorously because of the name changes they had to endure if they tried to make the transition to Hollywood. Arthur Parkinson remembers that Jocelyn Howarth, star of *The Squatter's Daughter* (1933), had to change her name when she went to America (interview 17 4). Similarly, Charlie and Jewel Anderson recall a visit from Ron Randell who was promoting his latest film *Smithy* (1946). They gleefully remember having to pronounce his name "Ron Ran-dell" as he had recently returned from Hollywood (interview 22 7).

National pride exists in newspaper reports about cinema but tends to be associated with the construction of cinemas or the acquisition of new cinematic technologies than about screen content itself (see chapter 1). It seems, therefore, that the discourse of national cinema is not foremost amongst the considerations of Illawarra audience members from the first half of the twentieth century.

This is not just because of the lack of an Australian film tradition or adequate government protectionist policies, however. I also think it is to do with a more complex set of loyalties and negotiations that surrounded national identity itself during this period. In chapter 1 I pointed out that the 1927 Royal Commission into the film industry recommended that 5% of screen content was to be produced locally but that the definition of local content included British Empire productions. One of the reasons behind this broad definition of local content was the relationship still perceived to be in operation between Australia and Britain. Indeed, during the period Australia joined two world wars through its loyalty to Britain and included amongst its population many first generation or second generation British migrants.

Jack and Rene Hodgeson, for example, both came to Australia from England and had family and friends in Britain during the Second World War. In their interview, they describe a friend who suffered the bombing raids in London and who later moved to Australia. Rene continues:

> **RH**: I just talked to her yesterday as a matter of fact – home from England – she went for another Grandson's wedding. They all want her to decide to live back there. But she's got a son and grandchildren [in Australia] and she's made this her home. She said, "I'm going to be a real Pommy-Oz". I said, "Why?" She said, "I'm going to get naturalised!" I said, "Oh, for crying out loud, you've been out here that long Pat!"
>
> When *we* went to get naturalised they said it didn't matter. They said, "You *are* Aussies". Well, I've been out here 75 years. I class myself as an Aussie now. Jack's been out here all those years. (interview 12 5)

Rene has a common sense view of national identity, feeling she belongs to both cultures and empathising with the struggle of the British people during the Second World War. Yet, at the same time, she is impatient with her friend's wish to get naturalised, seeing the length of time they have all been in Australia as proof enough of their Australianness. When her friend talks about becoming real "Pommy-Oz" Rene doesn't ask "What?" but "Why?" revealing that this hybrid identity was a recognisable one to members of her generation and that it need not be established by official citizenship of both countries.

This example shows that questions of national identity in the first half of the twentieth century were not straightforward. As John Tulloch has pointed out, the story of the Australian cinema industry is not just a struggle of Australian producers against the dominant Hollywood production and distribution companies but also the story of competing imperialisms and the relationship between Britain and Australia (40-1). In terms of national identity, therefore, Australia saw itself as a part of as well as distinct from the British Empire. These complex loyalties are highlighted in Illawarra audience members' narratives.

AUSTRALIAN AUDIENCES AND BRITISH SCREEN CONTENT

In the 1930s and 40s the proportion of British films released in Australia increased, approaching a quarter of imported screen product by 1949 (Shirley and Adams 134). During these decades, therefore, it was common for Australian audiences to see British films (as well as other British screen content such as newsreels and documentaries) on a regular basis. British films were popular with Australian audiences and seemed to hold different attractions to Hollywood products. Darryl Walker describes British films as "highly regarded" (interview 23 9) and Jewel Anderson named British actors and actresses as her favourites (interview 22 15). Arthur Parkinson further explains his preference for British films:

> **AP**: But there was a different atmosphere about the English, we seemed to, or I myself seemed to, relate better to the British. And I think they had a certain amount of humour, hidden humour that appealed to me anyway more than the American [films]. (interview 17 4)

Arthur aligns British films with Australian cultural values, in this case, humour. For some Australian audience members British cinema was considered closer to home. Significant numbers of people must have enjoyed British films for Charlie Anderson to set aside Thursday nights at the Whiteway as a British film night in the 1940s and 50s (interview 22 6). He claimed the screenings, usually a double bill of British features attracted not just local patrons but also people from all over the surrounding districts.

The relationship of the cinema audience to feelings of national identity is complex here. Hollywood products were widely enjoyed and the people I interviewed harboured no resentment that the majority of the screen content they saw came from the United States. However, at the same time British cinema was held up as being closer for social and cultural reasons to the Australian way of life.

At the beginning of every cinema program in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century the national anthem, "God save the King/Queen" was played and audience members were expected to stand up and join in the singing. Darryl Walker explains:

> **DW**: Another thing that was part of the program was that they always played "God Save the Queen" and everyone stood up for "God Save the Queen", which was the national anthem at the time. There was a little group of ladies that wouldn't stand up and they were ostracised. People used to look at them and say, "Look at those people, they don't stand up for 'God Save the Queen' isn't that terrible?" (interview 23 3)

Outside the cinema the affiliation with Britain was also represented in rituals and traditions such as the celebration of Empire Day each year. In 1934, Beatrice Tildesley, spokesperson for the National Council of Women and contributor to the *Australian Quarterly*, linked patriotism and the Empire to the appreciation of British films and warned against those of Hollywood origin:

> What moves opinion is that we are, in Australia, related by ties of blood and tradition to Great Britain. Though the eastern states in this Commonwealth are nearer in distance to America, and though, largely through the early monopoly exercised by American film interests and the still great predominance of Hollywood films that are released here, a steadily Americanising influence has been at work, British sentiment must bind us to our kinsfolk. (quoted in Bertrand 150)

During the Second World War allegiance was further reinforced in cinemas through the newsreels, which would tell audiences about allied victories. Darryl Walker again:

> **DW**: At that time we were having the newsreels and they were really excellent. I can still remember you know, you'd see the newsreels and they probably kept a lot of things from us, some of the worse things that were happening were kept from us at certain stages. But we did see a lot of graphic reporting, Damien Parer stuff and things like that. And it was quite amazing because every time there was a newsreel like that the whole theatre would generally applaud. It was sort of gee-ed up to be patriotic, "this is what our boys are doing"! (interview 23 2)

The newsreels bought tidings of Australian troops as well as reporting progress of Britain against Germany. According to Shirley and Adams, the treatment of war differed between the two newsreels screening in Australia despite the fact that both received largely the same footage from the Department of Information. The *Cinesound Review* presented the war as it related to Australian interests while *Movietone News* provided more of an international context focussing on Allied battles in the various theatres of war (166). National identity and Allied identity were both, therefore, available to cinema audiences. War bound Australia closer to the British and British screen culture and reporting were looked on with feelings akin to national identity.

However, at the same time, Britain was also "not us" and there were those who mocked people who liked British films as being snobs. Although Charlie Anderson's wife Jewel admits her favourite stars and films were from England, she also implies that the Whiteway's Thursday night audience for British film nights were snobs:

> **JA**: The people who watched the movies on the Thursday, the English movies, they were usually people, business people. They thought they were the hobnobs of the area and they enjoyed an English movie. And this one evening they had the English movie on and our operator, he put the wrong reel on. So then he picked up the reel he should have put on after that and he put that on. I thought, "Goodness, what's going on here?" He mixed up the reels and when the people came out they said, "What did you think of the movie?"
> "Wasn't it marvellous? A bit deep"!
> He'd messed it all up and I couldn't make head nor tail of it! No one could. But they thought it was "marvellous"! It was really funny. He'd put all the reels on in the wrong order and then tried to make up - the story was lost! (interview 22 17-18)

Jewel implicitly criticises the Thursday night audience for putting British pictures on a pedestal and conspiring to praise them even when they clearly did not make sense. Her husband Charlie, however, described the Thursday night sessions as mainly for women and explained that it was the women who enjoyed the British melodramas (6). Both Charlie and Jewel set themselves apart from the Thursday night audience along class

and gender lines, implying that although British screen culture generated large audiences, it didn't speak for all. Importantly, it did not speak for them.

Clearly, assessing the reception of screen products through nationalist allegiances and discourses is a tricky business. As evidenced above, British films appealed to some members of the Australian audience because they were seen to be closer to Australian life, and to others because they were thought to be of better cultural value. But those who felt British films were culturally superior to other screen products were gently mocked as snobs by others. Meanwhile, Australian films were well patronised when they appeared but were not a common enough feature on cinema programs to engender a significant discourse about a national cinema. Indeed, it is very difficult to make a fair assessment of screen preferences based on a film's country of production when screen content was so heavily dominated by Hollywood products.

I shall now go on to examine how cinema exhibitors and managers as well as audience members remembered Hollywood content and will suggest that the relevance of screen content to the experience of local people was often the key to the marketing strategies used by cinema managers and exhibitors as well as the tactic through which it was remembered.

MEDIATING HOLLYWOOD

Exhibitors/Managers

In chapter 1 I have already outlined the mechanisms that allowed American production/distribution companies to gain such a stranglehold on the Australian cinema industry. After the First World War, Hollywood films became more and more dominant across the cinema screens of the world and Australia was a prime example. Ruth Vasey has pointed out that although American cultural values were disseminated through screen product and subsequent supply and demand was assured for various American products through the movies, Hollywood screen content was produced and marketed with the international audience in mind. In *The World According to Hollywood 1918-1939*, Vasey lists many ways in which Hollywood films were made palatable to America's foreign markets. These included deleting language which might offend foreign censors (11); altering locations so as to make them fictional and therefore not offensive to any particular country (115); using stars with international appeal

including those of British, Australian and European origin that drew large audiences in the stars' respective home countries (Greta Garbo, Errol Flynn, David Niven, Marlene Dietrich) (164); and toning down content, in particular sex, violence and religious themes in order to make films widely acceptable (131-40). Consequently, as Vasey points out, American production/distribution companies already mediated American content so as to make it more acceptable to global audiences.

Nevertheless, a further layer of mediation was provided by Australian cinema managers and exhibitors who were charged with making the content that they received, which varied significantly in quality and star power, attractive to local audiences. This was achieved by marketing specific film stars or genres to audiences as well as by making the cinema-going experience such that audiences would come regularly to the pictures no matter what was showing. I will examine these strategies in relation to the interviews I co-produced with Cec Clark, a travelling picture showman in the 1920s and 30s and with Charlie Anderson, Manager of the Whiteway Theatre in Port Kembla from 1946-52.

When Cec Clark (interview 25) toured country New South Wales in the 1920s and 30s with his partner Matt Baumgarten, he took with him films and serials he had hired from the film exchanges in Sydney. Cec assured me that audience didn't mind what country their films came from as long as they contained action or drama (9). Consequently, the films Cec tried to procure for his audiences were, ideally, of these genres although he endeavoured to make each program contain something for everyone: drama, comedy, westerns, a serial and a newsreel in order to attract the biggest audience possible. To market each film Cec and his partner would spread the word around the guesthouses they were staying at and the pubs and restaurants where they ate their meals. They would also hire local children to dress up according to the theme of the main feature and to ring a handbell while shouting out details about the film.

Cec uses the example of *The Man They Couldn't Hang* (1921), an Australian film about a British man, John Lee, who was convicted of a murder he claimed he didn't commit. When it came time to hang Lee, the gallows wouldn't open, miraculously sparing Lee from his fate. This film has been described as a pious feature about God's mercy and forgiveness with cloyingly sentimental scenes (Pike and Cooper 147). However, Cec

decided not to publicise the religious or sentimental overtones of the picture, instead marketing it humorously and as a curiosity piece. A local boy would be paid to dress up as a convict and would parade round the town shouting, "Tonight, tonight, come along and see the movie, *The Man They Couldn't Hang*. Why couldn't they hang him? Come along tonight and find out" (9). Cec's strategies of mediation involved arousing the curiosity of prospective audience members about the main feature rather than providing an accurate digest of the film and ensuring enough variety within every program to satisfy most of the audience for some of the time.

As a theatre manager, Charlie Anderson (interview 22) had more marketing choices and strategies available to him than Cec, because the local cinema chain, Wollongong Theatres, could put a greater variety of screen product as well as related publicity material his way and because he was able to assess his audience over time and cater for particular client groups and to particular tastes.

Charlie Anderson, Manager of the Whiteway Theatre, Port Kembla 1946-52

Courtesy of Wollongong City Library *Illawarra Images*

While Charlie was restricted in terms of the screen content that he received by the block booking and blind buying arrangements that Wollongong Theatres was subjected to by American production/distribution companies, he maintains he could sometimes control *when* he received certain product amongst the various theatres under Wollongong Theatres' control. When possible he tried to secure American features after they had been released in Sydney so he could see how they went down with Sydney audiences and copy or change the ways they were marketed (16). Then, when Charlie received his

content allocation he divided it into several programs to cater for the sessions he ran in the evenings on Monday to Saturday and for Wednesday and Saturday matinees. While he tried to ensure all programs contained variety, he also grouped the programs around themes to appeal to certain segments of the cinema audience (5-6, 16).

On Saturday mornings he would compile a standard children's program consisting of a serial, cartoons and an action feature. On Saturday and Monday nights he showed the same adult program. As Saturday was the night that usually generated the highest attendances he tried to assure variety whilst also making sure there was a mixture of quality. Charlie pointed out that it was wise to spread out the pictures containing the most popular stars amongst the sessions so that each night had a star attraction. He also pointed out that people came on Saturday nights as a routine and would watch whatever was on so he was less concerned with the genre of the material he screened.

On Tuesday nights Charlie ran a B-grade feature, usually a western or a gangster movie which would attract fans of the genre, usually males. On Wednesday mornings Charlie ran a matinee session for the shift workers at the Port Kembla steelworks and so showed male-oriented films and serials and the occasional European language film. Wednesday nights were second in popularity to Saturdays so the program was another variety package. Then on Thursday nights Charlie showed the double bill of British movies which he claimed attracted a mainly female audience and his wife, Jewel, said attracted the "snobs" from out of town. Either way, it is easy to see how the content was split so as to encourage different sections of the local population to go to the Whiteway at particular times.

As well as conforming to these broad session rules, Charlie improvised depending on the success of a feature. If a film proved popular on a Saturday night he might show it for the next few nights in succession until he had to return the print. He remembers showing *Bambi* (1942) continuously from 9.30 in the morning until 12 midnight to cater for the high audience demand (7). While this wasn't company policy, Charlie's receipts earned him praise from Wollongong Theatres. Charlie even found an audience for religious films that were procured by the mainly Catholic Board of Wollongong Theatres by giving free tickets to the nuns and to the local clergy and running the film during the day so as to encourage religious schools to bring their pupils (14-15).

However, on some occasions a Saturday night flop might be cancelled for the Monday session and replaced with an alternative. This policy, Jewel explained, upset the local priest on one occasion:

> **JA:** There was a movie called *The Vatican.*[59] It was advertised for two nights and they had it on the first night and not many people turned up so they cancelled it the next night. But the local priest at the time, he went to see the movie [on the second night] – he was condemning the Whiteway Theatre for what they did – They advertised *The Vatican* that he went to see and what did he get? *Maisie Gets Her Man* (1942)! (16)

Charlie would ensure that his programs were advertised in the local papers and on radio and would change the lighting displays outside the theatre entrance with a change of main feature or season. His general rule was the more popular a film was the more coloured light globes he would use (although he stopped using red globes after finding out that they made women's make-up appear pallid) (12).

To help promote Hollywood films with local audiences Charlie secured large photographs of American film stars and hung them in the lobby. He changed the pictures with each new publicity intake from Hollywood so that audience members became familiar with the latest stars (12). The regular sessions for particular types of Hollywood movie, the melodrama or the gangster film also helped sell product sight unseen to audiences.

Charlie therefore endeavoured to manage the cinema-going experience so that audiences would come to the theatre regardless of what was on. He did this by grouping screen content whilst providing variety and by decorating the theatre with lighting, pictures and plants to the extent that he deemed it the most glamorous in the region. He also provided other incentives. At the Saturday children's matinee, for example, he gave out stickers each time a child went to a weekly serial and when children collected a certain number of stickers they could claim a prize of a toy to take home (3). Charlie endeavoured to secure the trust of parents that the staff at the

[59] Charlie is probably referring to the American production, *Holy Year at the Vatican* (1950).

Whiteway would look after the children at the matinees so that parents would feel free to leave them at the theatre and enjoy some spare time (9). He also decorated the theatre in the theme of particular festivals or seasons to arouse people's curiosity and hosted Anzac Day ceremonies and various competitions and contests so that people identified the Whiteway Theatre as a community space, central to the social life of the town (8).

To sum up, Charlie managed Hollywood content so that it fitted into an established cinema-going routine. Audience members knew that they could find the familiar stars from the foyer posters on the cinema screen and could see their favourite genres within particular sessions. However, he also ensured that Hollywood did not dominate the cinema-going experience, providing alternative spaces for British, Australian and European titles if they were available, and enmeshing Hollywood features in every program with Australian newsreels as well as cartoons, serials and documentaries. He endeavoured to make the local cinema experience as important as the content of any particular program thanks to strategies such as tailored sessions, personal service and glamorous decor.

Illawarra Audiences and American Screen Content

So what did Illawarra audiences make of Hollywood? What were their favourite genres and stars and how did they translate American screen content into their own experience? This section looks at the reception of Hollywood screen content by audience members in the Illawarra.

On Saturday night many of the people of the Illawarra would dress up to go to the pictures and for most people it would be the social event of the week. At the Whiteway Theatre, in Port Kembla, the program contained a significant amount of Hollywood content; often both feature films and the serial and sometimes more. Charlie explains how he believed Hollywood content influenced the audience:

> **CA**: It did. Because you could see that [when actresses] wore a specific type of dress, you could bet that within a week or two [local women] would have a similar one on or a similar style. And how the blokes

> talked and their actions that would be followed up ... how they used to open their coats up and … how they lit their cigarettes. (interview 22 9)
>
> **CA**: It would all depend on the person's physique who they took after. And you would hear blokes calling up, "Who do you think you look like, Clark Gable?" (interview 22 14)

The images on the silver screen exerted influence over the audience in that they affected public taste, style and even behaviour. As most of the screen content originated in Hollywood it is not surprising that a degree of American cultural imperialism ensued. Charlie usefully points out that this took subtle forms, affecting gestures as well as manners of speech and fashion. What is difficult to determine is the degree to which Hollywood actually affected people's lives and points of view. To explore this proposition it may be useful to understand which parts of Hollywood screen culture were more popular with Australian audiences and why.

By far the most commonly recalled genre to appear on cinema screens in the Illawarra was the Western. The majority of the people I interviewed remembered Western films and especially cowboy serials which is not surprising considering they would feature heavily at the Saturday matinees as well as on the evening programs so claiming both adults and children for their audience. Dot Jay explains the fascination of the Western at the matinees:

> **DJ**: There were a lot of cowboys – I can't remember what they were [called] ... Boys, they liked it – it was a matinee and it was exciting. You know, there'd be shooting and there'd be a scene where they'd go up on a mountain and they'd hide somewhere. The goodies or the baddies would come up and they couldn't find them and then it would be "Next week" ... There wasn't a nice story, it was all action. That's what the kids wanted then, especially in a serial because you'd be waiting for next week to come and see what happened. (interview 16 20)

Dot provides some explanation as to why the Westerns were popular. She points to the formulaic appeal of the genre including such elements as the chase, the shootout, and

the cliff-hanger. She also tacitly admits that the name of the film or serial didn't matter and that the plots weren't particularly fine either, as long as the formula kept expectations high and allowed the children in the matinees to get excited by the action and adventure.

It is interesting to note that early Australian cinema developed its own Western genre in the form of bushranging pictures which depicted the historical and fictional escapades of Australian bandit heroes (the most famous of whom was Ned Kelly who was the subject of several feature films). Despite their popularity (and maybe because of it), the New South Wales government banned locally made bushranging films in 1912 for a time, claiming they incited lawlessness (Collins "Entertainment" 74). It is easy to see how American-made Westerns appealed to Australian audiences who were fans of the bushranging sagas.

The Western was a mainstay of silent pictures and also managed the transition to talkies so it had time to build up a following amongst audiences. The Western offered easy polarities between good and bad and exhibited a frontier discourse, which must have appealed to Australian audiences, many of whom were recent migrants to the country and looking to make a new start for themselves. As I mentioned above, Australian audiences were also drawn to films depicting the bush, which, they believed, showed them the "real" country (interview 8 4). With local products few and far between it is easy to see how Australian audiences took up the Western as an alternative. Charlie offers further pragmatic explanations for the popularity of the Western:

> **CA**: Well they were cheap to make and the people liked the horses and of course they were all melodramas so they didn't need much talking. They were all ham actors! Except the horse! (interview 22 3)

Audience members further assimilated the Western by mediating the screen narratives into an Australian context. For example, Stan Chesher, when he was a boy, loved cowboy films and serials, his favourite being William S Hart (star of numerous Western pictures and serials of the 1920s and 30s). To emulate his hero, Stan would save the skins of rabbits that were being cooked at home, dry them out over a hoop of wire and then tie them to his trousers so he could pretend to be a cowboy (interview 10 1).

Similarly, Dot remembers using broomsticks as horses to play at being cowboys after the pictures (interview 16 20).

But it was not just the kids who emulated the Western pictures. Alan Jeffrey recalls one cowboy fan in the Port Kembla district who took his love of the genre to the extreme:

> **AJ**: We had one chap here, he lived at Primbee, a young bloke by the name of Bill Singer. If there was a cowboy picture on he'd ride his horse to the Whiteway Theatre and tie it up around the back. With his two guns he'd think he was the cowboy – whoever it was – he'd impersonate them! He even wore a cowboy suit to the pictures ... He was a funny man, Bill. We called him Tex - Tex Singer! (interview 24 3)[60]

These attempts to play at cowboys can be seen to have an alternative purpose, that of tying the Western to the Australian experience, translating it into a local context and therefore rooting this type of content in the local imagination. Another way this was done was by drawing parallels between the screen content and local events and personalities. For example, another cowboy fan, Jack Hodgeson, enjoyed a serial he remembers as *The Lone Ranger* (1938).[61] This serial soon became associated with a local womaniser, Bob Forster, who ran the Scarborough picture show, and the serial seems to have acquired an extra level of significance through the local reference:

> **JH**: I came to Scarborough in 1928 – They had a picture show there under a shop on the main highway ... Anyhow there was a chap called Bob Forster used to run it in those days and he used to be a villain as far as women and that goes. And anyway they had a serial it was called *The Lone Ranger*. In those days the serial would finish in the afternoon just

[60] The real-life cowboy impersonations of Bill Singer are echoed by the fictional character, The Te Whakinga Kid found in *Came a Hot Friday* by New Zealand author Ronald Hugh Morrieson.

[61] This would appear to be the 1938 serial *The Lone Ranger*. The Internet Movie Database states the "Part of the fun is that, unlike most films of the genre, the villain is well-known: the characters (and audience) have to figure out which of the five male leads is the masked Lone Ranger" (www.us.imdb.com /Title0030382 access date 2 Oct. 2002). The serial's release date also coincides with the period during which Mr Forster managed the Scarborough cinema (Parkinson 48).

> when something was going to happen ... and it would always finish up with, "Who is the Lone Ranger?" and everybody used to sing out "Bob Forster!" (interview 12 1)

While Hollywood marketed the cult of personality, the Hodgeson's recollections of cinema in the Illawarra suggest that they found their own local "stars" who featured in the social consumption of cinema. In the Hodgesons' memories, personalities such as Bob Forster seem to loom larger than the movie stars on the cinema screen.

Another example of linking the Western to local references comes from Jewel Anderson, who was an usherette at the Whiteway at the same time that her husband was the manager:

> **JA**: We had an assistant projectionist and I was on the door and he came out and said, "I'll show you how Tom Mix fires". And he wets me with a water gun. Then he said, "I'll show you how (one of the other cowboys at the time) fires" and he wet me again. Just as he was doing it Charlie walks up the stairs and he says, "Get up in that box or I'll show you how Charlie Anderson fires"! He really moved! (interview 22 17)

The above examples show how the Western was mediated into local contexts through play and through local associations and popular anecdotes. This also occurred with serials in general. The serial was a popular format with young audiences. Stan Chesher and Alan Jeffrey describe the atmosphere at the matinee and the types of serials available at the Whiteway Theatre:

> **SC**: On the Saturday afternoon you'd be going to see the *serials* … In those days it was Saturday afternoon and for one week that would be on our minds. To see [what happened to] the girl that was tied to the railway track. And the front seats, we couldn't get there quick enough in those days. The front seats – this is in our theatre at Port Kembla – serials were the mainstay of the Saturday afternoons and we'd get up there and the stalls – they wouldn't be two foot high. We'd be sitting

> there, heads up in the air, especially at the front. We'd been waiting all week for this, to see if the train ran over the girl. (interview 10 1)

> **AJ**: In those days we had *The Shadow* (1940), *Spiderman* – Victor Jory starred in most of them. He was in quite a few but I think his most famous one was *The Shadow*. He started off as a B grade actor, Victor Jory. He played in all the Saturday afternoon matinee serials. And – you wouldn't want to know – he won a part in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)! … Oh yes, you wouldn't miss it! They were really good days. Sometimes we'd come back on a Monday, school holidays and that kind of caper … We had another chap there called Buster Crabb. He played in the early *Flash Gordon* (1936, 38, 40), *Buck Rogers* (1940) movies. He was like Johnny Weismuller, a champion swimmer. He played mostly in *Flash Gordon* or *Speed Gordon*. They were really good days at the old Whiteway Theatre. They packed them in! Charlie will tell you, it was standing room only! Packed out. (interview 24 1)

Ron Klower compared the popularity of the serials with television soaps, "You didn't know what was going to happen next so it [kept] you coming back" (interview 2 2). This comparison is perceptive as it acknowledges that serials, like television soaps, share huge popularity with audiences, for their cliff-hangers but, at the same time, for the comfortable predictability of the genre.

The quotations from Stan and Alan, above, recount their love of serials from different perspectives. Stan tells of his eagerness to go back again and again to find out what happened to the girl on the railway tracks. He was engrossed in the stories and, although he knew they were not real, he engaged with the characters as if from inside the fictional storyline. Alan, in contrast, appreciated serials from the point of view of the stars, an exterior viewpoint that followed serial stars from one program to another and pointed out how the stars' careers eventually progressed. The high exposure these programs had with audiences led to the fame and familiarity of their stars. Actors like William S Hart, Victor Jory and Buster Crabb gained a large following, especially with the young, who imitated them and followed their progress into other serials and feature films.

Indeed, as well as the Western and serials in general, another popular way of remembering screen content was through popular characters and film stars. One of the ways in which screen characters and the stars that played them achieved permanence in people's memories was through nicknames and shared references. Charlie remembers common nicknames for stars of the screen, Tom Mix was, "Tom Mix and Cement – that was what they called his horse – Cement!" And Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck were combined into a conglomerate character, "Mickey the Duck" so that the audience was always right in guessing which cartoon character would appear next on screen interview 22 3).

Similarly, when *The Jazz Singer* (1928) first came to the Illawarra it was seen by many of the people I interviewed, but they remembered its title as *Sonny Boy*, a local variation on the title based on the character of Al Jolson. Although small, these subtle changes and variations in the reception and accommodation of US screen content mark the negotiation of film texts and stars into a local experience. When Dot Jay was asked to recall her favourite stars of the screen she had a list ready prepared. Most of the names she recalled were Hollywood stars. However, the way in which Dot recalled these stars was in an intimate fashion, as if they were people she knew socially:

> **DJ**: You had your own stars that you thought were lovely. Tyrone Power, I've got him down, and George Raft. I liked George Raft. I never liked Bette Davis, and yet she was one of the best actresses, I never liked her – I don't know why. Fred McMurray – I liked him, he was nice. Vivien Leigh – she was beautiful. Old Eddie Cantor, old Mae West – I've got her down. Greta Garbo, Gary Cooper – he was nice. Mary Pickford – but that's going way back. I don't know whether I ever saw any Mary Pickford pictures because she was a long time back before my day. Bob Hope, Bing Crosby – I saw all them. Lana Turner, Howard Keel, Jeanette McDonald, Nelson Eddy, Mitzi Gaynor, Ray Molan – he was nice. Frankie Sinatra, the Andrews Sisters, William Holden – he was nice. Dick Powell – he was nice. Shirley Temple.

> All the pictures and actors I've seen – I didn't go much on cowboys except when I was young – but I didn't like them when I got older. I saw Gene Autry, Tom Mix, Roy Rogers – I might have seen him and his horse. Buck Jones – I didn't see Buck. Gene Autry – he used to sing – I saw him. Charlie Chaplin – I don't think I saw – yes I did, I saw Charlie – and I saw all those others. Al Jolson would be singing ... (interview 16 8)

The long list of Dot's "own" stars illustrates the sheer amount of Hollywood product on Australian screens and also demonstrates how audience members adopted these stars into their conversations and talked about them with familiarity, even intimacy. Dot could have been talking about people in her neighbourhood in this manner, not the stars of the screen. I would argue that screen culture in these instances is absorbed through being made relevant to the local experience either by linking content or stars to local stories or events or from screen content speaking to that local experience. Arthur Parkinson talks about the latter in relation to Hollywood musicals:

> **AP**: [Nelson Eddy and Jeanette McDonald] were sort of household names and we related to them. Sometimes some of the songs that would be sung we'd find ourselves singing or whistling them when we were going about our work or were at home or on the way home – any time! So it was – it related to, say, our lifestyle. (interview 17 4)

Here, Arthur introduces another important factor about remembering screen content: the way it was able to insinuate itself into a person's everyday life. For Arthur, screen content was judged by its ability to take hold of his imagination and be assimilated in some way into his experience, whether it was through songs that remained with him after he had left the theatre or through themes and settings that related to his own life. In this way he makes a general distinction between Hollywood screen content and British cinema:

> **AP**: When we were going to the [pictures], when I was a teenager, most of the films were of an American origin. But later on, after we

> were married and so on the films became more sophisticated, the techniques improved. We used to like the English films. Mainly the difference between [them] and the American films was that [in the American films] everyone lived in grand homes. The houses were two storeys high and they had a staircase leading up to the top and the actresses would come down from either the bedroom or some particular room, and they were always different. Whereas, with the British films, they were a little bit more down to our own lifestyle. You know, smaller homes, probably single levels. (interview 17 4)

Arthur identifies Hollywood films as being "different" to his experience whereas British films are described as being "down to our own lifestyle". His image of Hollywood, the actress descending a grand staircase, is a recognisable symbol of Hollywood glamour and excess and highlights the differences between what Hollywood depicted on the screen and the material conditions of Australian life.

In her book about the reception of Hollywood cinema by British audiences, Jackie Stacey writes of audience members being attracted to the material pleasures of Hollywood on the screen. Stacey writes of the need for escapism, especially during the Second World War when the glamour of the screen contrasted so strongly with the material conditions of life in ration-bound Britain (99-105). For some of the people I interviewed, in particular the women, this was also the case. Dot Jay, for example, lists her favourite films as *Lost Horizon* (1937) and *The Razor's Edge* (1946), both films which deal with themes of escapism and the promise of a change of lifestyle and include depictions of foreign lands (interview 16 5). Thus Hollywood provided the material excesses and exotic sets into which one's imagination could escape, aided by the material comfort of the space within some of the larger theatres, where furnishings and decorations aimed to look and feel similar to those on the screen. The growing cinema attendances in Australia during the Second World War could also be seen to back up the notion that in times of hardship people need to escape from their surroundings: Hollywood content and the grand picture theatres providing the places to escape to.

However, for others, like Arthur and also a young Darryl Walker, the excesses that Hollywood presented could have the opposite effect, jarring with one's experiences and reinforcing the gulf between what is on the screen and one's lived experience:

> **DW**: I remember we did it pretty tough in that period [the 1940s]. Being the youngest in the family I ended up getting the scraps and I used to always remember my mouth watering at the movies when people would have a big feast or a feed, picking up chicken legs and chewing them. I'd never had a chicken leg. (interview 23 9)

Hollywood presented a lifestyle that was often unattainable to Australian audiences. Although this provided an opportunity for escapism for some, for others it highlighted the disparities between what was presented on screen and the social realities of everyday life.

In summary, the Illawarra cinema-goers I talked to remembered certain aspects of Hollywood cinema, in particular, Westerns and other serials, but also particular characters and stars. It seems that the Western and serials took hold because of a range of factors: their frequency on local cinema screens, their availability to young and adult audiences alike, the formulaic conventions of the genres, but also, importantly, the ability for the screen content to be mediated into a local context. Even stories about film stars were personalised with audience members adopting favourite stars and sometimes mimicking their styles. What is revealed through the narratives of Illawarra cinema-goers is the way in which Hollywood content is mediated into local situations and personal lives, rather than evidence of American cultural values taking hold of people's imaginations through the movies. Although Charlie observed audience members mimicking gestures and fashions from the movies, ideological imperialism was far less evident in the narratives where local and personal situations seemed to dictate both the subject matter recalled and the ways in which it is remembered.

Considering the amount of Hollywood content on Australian cinema screens, it is not surprising that the majority of people I interviewed talked about screen product exclusively in terms of Hollywood and that local audiences occasionally adopted expressions, fashions and styles from the content on their cinema screens (interview 22

9). However, although Hollywood movies displayed aspects of American society to Australian audiences, surprisingly few individual films and plot details were recalled by audience members.

Whereas it would once have been assumed that the viewing audience more or less absorbs screen content unquestioned, it is now accepted that audience members make complicated and sometimes contradictory readings of their own which differ because of their lived experiences and backgrounds (see chapter 2). As I discuss in the following chapter, the people I interviewed tended to remember cinema-going practices, routines and anecdotes rather than specific films and other screen content. What survives is not details of particular films and the way their dominant ideologies were interpreted but only what of these films or programs was significant to personal and local experience. Thus, the reception of screen content from Hollywood, and elsewhere, is mediated through the local experience of cinema-going and through individual subject positions, preferences, and perceptions. Indeed, it could be argued that, in order to take hold, the stories on the screen have to mutable texts that can speak to an audience through recognisable discourses and identifications.

National cinema was not a popular discourse with Illawarra audiences of the first half of the twentieth century. The people I interviewed did not organise their narratives by privileging locally produced films over Hollywood content. Instead screen content, no matter where it was produced, was remembered as long as it was significant to the lives and experiences of audience members.

Because national cinema was not a common discourse amongst audience members, it would be naïve to assume that exhibitors, managers and audience members deliberately subverted dominant Hollywood content by mediating it through national discourses. Rather, exhibitors and managers pragmatically managed their screen content to best appeal to local audiences and the way audiences made sense of and narrativised their viewing experiences. Therefore, while De Certeau uses strategies and tactics to describe acts of resistance to dominant hegemonies, they are not always conscious political acts. In terms of cinema exhibitors and audiences, their strategies and tactics were employed less in direct opposition to the imposition of American cultural

imperialism through screen content than as an attempt to make that screen content meaningful.

On the whole, screen content itself accounted for only a small proportion of a person's memories and stories about cinema-going. Instead the rituals and routines associated with going to the pictures and the personal stories and relationships that depended on the cinema-going experience took narrative priority. Therefore, if an Australian way of experiencing cinema is to be found, it is unlikely to be through a vicarious identification with a handful of locally produced feature films, but through the reception of screen product through local and personal discourses and through the shared experience of going to the pictures itself. It is the way audiences experience cinema in their particular cultural environment, therefore, that is more likely to engender an Australian mode of reception. It is this process of mediation through local and personal identifications that I want to examine in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 5: CINEMA AND LOCAL IDENTITY

This chapter examines the oral history narratives from the perspective of local identity: how cinema-going assisted Illawarra residents to develop a sense of community and to negotiate their own place within that community. I want to provide a brief overview of community life in the first half of the twentieth century in the Illawarra before going on to consider the different ways in which cinema-going encouraged a sense of community and allowed residents to make sense of each other in that context. In particular, this chapter posits that communities are "imagined" as much through cinema-going as through factors such as work, geography or social class.

ILLAWARRA COMMUNITIES IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the introduction I have discussed the inherent difficulties of defining a region. I have shown that the Illawarra is a region that is imagined in a variety of ways and marked out according to different borders depending on the purpose of the regional identification. A region defines itself through common interests and through differences with other regions but these points of comparison and distinction are often shifting and arbitrary in nature. Looking at communities within the Illawarra involves the same subjectivities.

A community is always "imagined" by its members and those outside of it and I will be exploring some of the ways in which local residents construct a sense of their community with the help of cinema-going later in this chapter. However, first I would like to highlight some of the factors that may have caused residents of the Illawarra to articulate a particularly strong sense of community in the first half of the twentieth century.

In terms of work, the towns and suburbs of the Illawarra were more self-contained in the first half of the twentieth century than they are today. While the city of Wollongong housed a number of industries and attracted people from elsewhere in the region through its employment opportunities, retail centre and leisure facilities, the smaller suburbs experienced less diversity. Usually reliant on one industry (for example, coal-mining in the northern suburbs, steel production in the Port Kembla area and agriculture

in southerly Kiama) and therefore consisting largely of people who had the same sort of lives and interests, the Illawarra suburbs seem to have developed a strong sense of their individual identities. Consequently people tended to work locally and socialised with the people they lived and worked with.

The people I interviewed often disclosed their father's occupation as well as their own or their spouse's. The most commonly cited occupation in the northern suburbs was mining which was often carried across generations: people whose fathers worked in the mine often went on to become miners themselves or to marry them (see interviews 3, 7, 12, 15). In the larger centres such as Wollongong, Port Kembla and Thirroul, people had fathers who were shopkeepers (see interviews 1, 4, 16, 25) while in the following generation, the men I interviewed found work in the steelworks. In most cases, however, the people I interviewed lived in the suburb where their parents worked. This is a very different situation to that which exists today with a high proportion of breadwinners commuting to Wollongong or Sydney for work and a higher degree of geographical mobility between generations.

The local nature of work, helped to shape tight-knit and distinctive communities. Len Richardson points to the "intense parochialism" that characterized many Illawarra suburbs, remarking that residents would identify themselves as being from a particular suburb, such as Bulli or Woonona, before being from the Wollongong or Illawarra region (xii). Darryl Walker also points to separate local identities within the Illawarra:

> **DW**: The people who I went to school with who lived in Wollongong did not socialise with the people who lived out of it … I never had any ambition to go into Wollongong because all the parties that were held, they had their own little groups. We were isolated. We had to get the train to school, 20 minutes on the train, so you didn't get caught up in the social situation, "Oh yeah, we'll meet you at the movies" – that came later …
> **NH**: When you were in Bulli was it mainly local people who were in the audience?
> **DW**: Mainly locals … basically they would have come from Woonona and Bulli. If you lived in Woonona you were better than Bulli and if you lived in Bulli you were better than Woonona. The beach fights we used to have! But

> local – most of the people who went to the Royal Theatre would have walked to it. (interview 23 10-11)

Charlie Anderson also recognised that the communities within the Illawarra had different characteristics and traditions that they were proud of. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Charlie used this knowledge to set film programs that would most appeal to different audiences. Here he talks about some of the differences between communities:

> **CA**: When you went around to different theatres there was a different culture, like going from one town to another. Oh and their taste used to alter too so a show that would do well up the coast, say, wouldn't do well here in Dapto or Port Kembla.
> **NH**: What was the difference in taste do you think?
> **CA**: Well, it's hard to say. I can't think of anything just at the moment but films that should have done well didn't
> **NH**: How much do you think was taste created by the way you marketed the shows? Or were there different sorts of audiences?
> **CA**: Well that's a hard one. It's a real curly one. Because if, for instance, you had something to do with sport. You see, up north it was soccer. And you could always tell, north of Wollongong it was soccer, south of Wollongong it was rugby league. And it's only in recent years that both are played in both places and that's similar in culture. See, up north they were mostly mining and down here there was the steelworks which had a different approach. Steelworks ER&S [Electrolyte Refining and Smelting Company] and MM [Metal Manufacturing Ltd], they had a different approach again and the only thing I'd say which was comparable [between the suburbs] would be the lifesaving clubs. But, apart from that, [like] sports, they had their little differences. (interview 22 13)

Charlie uses work and leisure to explain how the communities of the Illawarra differed in culture from one another and suggested that the differences affected film preferences. In the northern suburbs, not only were the smaller suburbs mining communities but they often included in their number recent immigrants who had worked in the coal mines in

Britain (interviews 12 and 15). This is one reason for the dominance of soccer in the north while the southern suburbs preferred rugby league. These differences between communities created outsiders, such as the young Darryl Walker who travelled away from his home suburb of Bulli to attend the Wollongong Grammar School. Travelling out of one's suburb was rare. As Olga Ferguson points out, "you married the boy across the street – you never went out of the town" (interview 3 3). As most children lived and went to school in the towns and suburbs where their parents worked, a strong sense of community identity developed as people were involved in a variety of relationships with the same families through work and leisure.

An important way in which a sense of community was constructed was through rivalry with other suburbs. Darryl Walker mentioned the Bulli/Woonona rivalry and the isolation that the pupils who went to school in Wollongong, but didn't live there, experienced. This rivalry was encouraged through sport and also through leisure, as I shall illustrate later in this chapter in regards to cinema. Darryl's assertion that local identity was produced through differences that were constructed between suburbs, such as sporting rivalries, supports Hall's contention that, "identities are constructed through not outside difference" (*Questions* 4).

Another contributing factor to a strong sense of community in Illawarra towns and suburbs was the hardship endured in the first half of the twentieth century. The First World War took 416,800 Australians away to fight (8½% of the population), 58,790 of whom did not return alive (14% of those who enlisted) (Bassett 14-15). Families were divided with women staying at home to look after their families. During this time the cost of living rose while wages declined making it increasingly hard to feed and look after one's family.

Bill Jardine's family lived in Helensburgh where his father was a mine deputy. In 1916 his father enlisted, despite being 42 years old, after pressure exerted by a recruitment march through the town.[62] With his father fighting in France, Bill recalls life for his mother as being very difficult:

[62] This is likely the march of the South Coast Waratahs that would have passed through Helensburgh in late 1915. The Waratah march was one of the more famous recruitment marches in Australia. It started in Nowra with 50 men and marched to Sydney with 119 recruits who joined up en route. The Waratahs

> **BJ**: The wages were about a bob a day that they used to get as soldiers and my mother used to have to do washing and things like that [to make ends meet]. There was my older brother, my older sister, my younger sister, myself and my mother. She had a tough time during the time that he was away. (interview 15 1)

During such hardship, many women were involved in community fundraising efforts for the soldiers overseas, knitting clothes, making up care packages and organising welcome home parades such as the "Back to Bulli and Woonona" parade (interview 4 2). In this respect people within communities came together to support each other and the war effort.

In the early 1930s the Depression had a profound effect on the region as its main industries, the steelworks and the mines, laid people off. "Humpy" camps were to be found in Port Kembla and in the Royal National Park where tents and constructed shacks were home to people who could not find work or afford established housing.

In the northern suburbs out of work miners would go rabbiting and picking blackberries to feed their families. They would sell and swap their catches with their neighbours. Coal mining was central to most residents' lives and also fostered a sense of community that was strengthened during the Depression. Olga Ferguson, Minnie Nichols, Ethel Simpson and the Hodgesons talk about the Depression in the lives of mining communities in their interviews (interviews 3, 4, 7, and 12). Here, Ethel Simpson captures the way the mining community of Bulli cooperated during this time:

> **ES**: Do I remember the Depression? We went through the Depression. Oh yes, it affected the town greatly. Len and the men of the mines, and myself and the miner's wives. Len used to go – Len and the other men – somebody would supply the truck, somebody would supply the tools and

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attended civic receptions in towns and suburbs along the way and sung recruitment songs while persuading local men to join up (Bassett 24; Hagan and Wells 130-1). Bill Jardine describes the way kids would learn the recruitment songs and sing them at home to their fathers, a highly persuasive tactic (interview 15 2).

> they would go away digging – digging all over Robertson or they'd go away to other parts. And they'd dig up all the vegetables and come back and then we'd clean them all and we'd make soup for all the miners, wives and children – for the miners' families. This big, huge, boiler down in Bulli, we'd do it in Bulli. All the ladies, the wives and everyone would come with their billy and get it full of soup and they'd get vegetables that were [left] over and them type of things …
>
> And all our neighbours, some would have chooks, some would have all sorts of things that they could exchange. We'd be up at four in the morning, Len and I, picking peas out of our garden to give all around. We'd have cabbages, beans – we had everything. And the lady over the road, she had chooks and she'd give us eggs … and that's how we managed … we'd all exchange. Oh we remember the Depression all right! (interview 7 3-4)

Swapping and sharing was common within communities during the Depression. Dions, the local bus company, would give a lift to people even if they could not pay their fare (interview 12 8) and shopkeepers, such as Dot Jay's father, would often forgo payment for groceries from families in need (interview 16 20). In the northern suburbs the co-operative stores, which were formed in the late 19th century in the region and continued until the 1960s, also featured strongly in community life with stores extending credit to the unemployed during the Depression (Hagan and Wells 93).[63]

The Second World War bought further hardship to the region, especially from the end of 1941 when Japan bombed Pearl Harbour and extended the war in Europe to the Pacific. Hagan and Wells point out that the combined factors of the mass call-up of men aged between eighteen and sixty and manpower regulations that cut back holidays and increased working hours for minors and steel-workers caused much distress in the

[63] The Woonona Industrial Cooperative Society was established in 1897 and had branches in Scarborough, Coledale, Thirroul, Balgownie, Wollongong and Port Kembla. It was most successful in the northern mining communities. People became members of the co-op by buying shares that then entitled them to a dividend that was paid in the form of a credit for purchases. The stores didn't sell alcohol, milk or meat but provided other food, included baked goods, as well as hardware, clothing, furniture, linen and even electrical goods. The co-op took orders from people's homes and delivered goods by horse and cart and later by motorbike. The demise of the co-op is said to have coincided with the growth of supermarkets in the 1960s (Hagan and Wells 93-4; interview 23 7).

region (139). The Manpower Directorate deemed coal mining and steel production protected industries during the Second World War and workers in these Illawarra industries were not permitted to enlist. With longer working days introduced, there were increased pressures on women with family responsibilities, which were compounded by shortages and rationing. Fuel, clothing, sugar, butter, meat and even beer was rationed (140) making the task of feeding and clothing one's family harder and harder. Single women were conscripted into jobs to support the war effort and to replace men who had enlisted. Dot Jay, for example, became a post-woman in the war and found companionship amongst her fellow female post-workers as well as a sense of worth from her employment (interview 16 12).

War and Depression greatly affected the lives of residents in the Illawarra but, again, seemed to function to bring communities closer, joining together to find work or to help the war effort and setting up local committees and organisations to provide support for the people in a town or suburb. During these decades, the hardships that were endured, combined with the fact that most people lived and worked in their home towns, seemed to create a strong sense of community. Many of the people I talked to insist that the sense of community was stronger in those times when residents had to "make their own fun" and banded together in order to help each other. This was particularly a feature of interviews with residents who grew up in the northern mining suburbs where trade unionism and the cooperative movement flourished (see interviews 3, 7, 12, 13).

Local identity, therefore, was a strong feature of life in the first half of the twentieth century. As I shall explain in the following section, it was further strengthened by leisure practices, the most popular of which with so many community members was cinema-going.

CINEMA-GOING AND LOCAL IDENTITY

Cinema-going played a significant role in contributing to the construction of community identity. As I have shown in chapter 1, going to the pictures quickly became popular with local audiences and within a decade of moving pictures being shown in the region, the first purpose built theatres began to appear in particular towns and suburbs. While picture showmen like Cec Clark were visitors to the region, most exhibitors and owners

were local people, known to residents. In this sense the local cinemas were owned by[64] and employed local people.

Unlike other leisure activities that appealed to certain sections of a given population, cinema-going was popular across the community: with men and women, with the young and old and with various social classes. Going to the pictures was an entertainment popular with women and children who weren't allowed to participate in other male-orientated popular activities such as boxing or drinking at the local pub (Collins "Entertainment" 69).[65] It was also an entertainment popular with the region's migrant populations, so much so that Mr Sandor Berenyi built up a mini travelling circuit by screening at the local migrant hostels in the 1950s (Parkinson 81, 95, 98, 100).[66] Charlie Anderson recalls a wide variety of clientele that included children, shift workers from the steelworks, local Aboriginal people,[67] migrants, sailors, soldiers and even the Duchess of Gloucester's ladies-in-waiting! (interview 22 4-5).

Cinema-going was not such an isolated experience as it is today when one enters in the dark, watches a movie and leaves. Instead there was a great deal of interaction going on prior to, during and after the program that took many forms. Socialising, gossiping, larrikin behaviour and the public involvement of local people, such as the manager, the projectionist and the pianist, in the process of showing the pictures made for a communal practice of cinema-going.

At the cinema, elements of the program also encouraged community participation. Some of the people I interviewed remember taking in part in community singing sessions. Music would be played and the words to the song would appear on the screen

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[64] Apart from the brief take over of the Wollongong Theatres cinema chain by the national, Union Theatres company in the early 1930s.

[65] Diane Collins points out that during the First World War the laws changed to stop the pubs opening past 6pm making the cinema one of the only places that stayed open into the evening ("More than just Entertainment" 69)

[66] Sandor Berenyi screened films at migrant hostels in Fairy Meadow, Cringila, Berkeley and Unanderra with great success. Bob Parkinson deems Mr Berenyi to be the last of the Illawarra's travelling showmen (Parkinson 81, 95, 98, 100).

[67] Charlie insisted that there was no segregation at the Whiteway during his time and that, like other sections of the audience, the local Aboriginal people would dress up and come to the pictures regularly (interview 22 5).

with a bouncing ball jumping from word to word to indicate when it should be sung. Darryl Walker remembers this communal karaoke:

> **DW**: Sometimes they had singing. "When the red-red-robin comes bob bob-bobbing along" – following the bouncing ball. And people *did* sing, they did. Sometimes when the movie stopped people would come out and lead community singing to keep [the audience] happy, that type of thing. (interview 23 7)

As well as community singing there were competitions for children at the matinees and, at the start of each program, the national anthem would be played, which everyone was expected to join in with. These elements of the program encouraged communal participation and social interaction.

I have already mentioned the hardships that Illawarra communities faced during two world wars and the Depression. During these times going to the pictures provided an experience that distracted people from (and sometimes reminded them of) the hardship of their lives and gave them a chance to come together to be entertained. Cinema-going, therefore, continued to be popular with local communities during these times. As Cec Clark notes:

> **CC**: During the Depression years [there were] hundreds and hundreds out of work, no job, no future, no money, no nothing [except] to be able to go along to the movies … and if they didn't have the money they came in for free of course. Every little town was despondent, no work, no future, bad news everywhere. So to be able to have the movies come along every other week, it gave them a bit of life. They thoroughly enjoyed it and we enjoyed meeting them. (interview 25 14-15)

Cec makes the point that the cinema was a much needed institution in the first half of the twentieth century. Although the number of people going to the pictures dropped in the Depression, many of the people I talked to still went regularly to the pictures, just not as many times each week. Charlie Anderson recalls that the Whiteway Theatre used to sound two sirens during and after the Depression. The first sounded when the

program was about to commence and the second occurred before the feature started. The purpose of this was to alert people in the local area to the start of a program or feature. Charlie remembers people walking in from the humpy camps outside Port Kembla to attend (interview 22 9).

During the Second World War, going to the pictures became even more popular with audience numbers rising (Collins *Hollywood* 198). The cinemas, though forced to black out their sparkling lights, still providing a place of warmth and conviviality where local communities could meet.

Diane Collins remarks on the way that cinemas challenged the dominance of the local church (as well as the local pub) as a central building in a suburb ("Entertainment" 69). Like the church, the cinema was usually a building of distinction and a place to congregate, not just for entertainment but also as a venue for community events. For example, the Crown Theatre in Wollongong put on baby competitions, concerts and plays as well as showing movies (interview 16 16); the Regal cinema in Dapto hosted Anzac Day ceremonies (interview 26 1[CR]); and the Coledale Empire held weekly dances which were run by the Cooperative Women's Guild (interview 12 3). The Port Kembla Whiteway was also a bustling community venue holding Spring Festival celebrations, Anzac and Empire Day commemorations, and other leisure events like fancy dress parties and beauty competitions (interview 22 7-8).

The presence of a cinema in a town or suburb meant that the local people did not have to travel outside of their settlement for entertainment. Cinemas therefore encouraged a sense of autonomy for small communities as well as directly improving the fortunes of local cafes and restaurants that benefited from cinema audiences seeking sustenance before, during and after the pictures. Charlie Anderson explains:

> **CA:** The Whiteway Theatre kept so many people in jobs. There was Marshall's, West's, Civic Cafe, The Black Cat and Bernado's. And after the show a lot of people would go there and in winter they'd have toasted sandwiches, coffee, what have you. In summer they'd have a cold drink. And they used to employ extra people for the interval and for after the show. Then of course there'd be the bus drivers … the lolly-boys. (interview 22 9)

A cinema, therefore, was heralded as a positive indicator of the fortunes of a town or suburb. To illustrate this in more detail it is interesting to look at the way cinema affected the fortunes of the town of Thirroul.

Cinema and Thirroul

Thirroul is a settlement in the northern suburbs of the Illawarra between Bulli and Austinmer. In the early years of the century it was in the middle of the thriving coal mining industry and it was also where the railway industry built a busy marshalling yard. The first two decades of the century witnessed Thirroul's growth as a popular tourist centre that boasted a surf beach and numerous guesthouses. Although this economic prosperity ensured that by 1922 Thirroul had become the largest town in the Illawarra after Wollongong and Port Kembla, the tourist trade was getting slightly weaker by the 1920s and it appeared that the town had passed its peak (J Davis 38).

However, in 1923 the Yardley brothers of Coledale constructed the Arcadia cinema in Thirroul and the *South Coast Times* used its opening to talk up the potential of the town, claiming the theatre

> is the most striking proof of the confidence in the prospects of Thirroul: It is big enough for a city, adds greatly to the appearance generally of the town, and suggests indeed that entertainment is the chief raison d'etre of Thirroul (15 Jun. 1923 18).

The Arcadia was Thirroul's first luxury cinema but it faced stiff competition when in 1925, Wollongong Theatres opened the New Kings Theatre just a few blocks up the street. The fact that both cinemas operated simultaneously for a year shows how popular cinema-going was in the town. However, in 1926 the owners of the Arcadia sold the theatre to Wollongong Theatres who soon converted it into a Palais de Danse. The Kings Theatre was then the main cinema venue in Thirroul and one of the flagship theatres of the Wollongong Theatres chain. When the talkies first arrived at the Kings the newspapers once again saw the occasion as an indicator of the rising status of Thirroul. The *Illawarra Mercury* reported:

> A traffic scene worthy of a city was all created by reason of Union Theatres Ltd. introducing to Thirroul "the talkies" ... Never previously has such a crowd assembled at Thirroul. The number of adults and children who gained admission totalling in the vicinity of 1500 and the luxurious Kings accommodated them comfortably ... It was a distinction for Thirroul that this famous picture [*The Rainbow Man* (1929)] should be presented by the Kings prior to being shown at any other community venue in Australia (27 Sep. 1929 14).

Once again Thirroul is favorably accredited with city status. By boasting that Thirroul has been presented with this talking picture before any other community venue the article implies that it is ahead of such places and is benefiting from the cultural capital of and technological advances happening in the major cities of Australia. The presence of a cinema, by its sheer size and as a focus for all sections of the community, served to emphasise the town's sense of its own importance at this time. Diane Collins indicates that cinemas gave suburbs (such as Thirroul) their autonomy in that the community no longer had to travel outside its borders to see a movie ("Entertainment" 79). This autonomy might prove the difference between being considered a town or a suburb. Here we can begin to see the connection that was being made in successive newspaper reports between cinema and regional identity.

Interviews with residents of Thirroul and nearby suburbs confirm that in the 1920s through until the 1950s Thirroul was seen as a self-sufficient community. Through their reminiscences about cinema Cecelia Jackson and May Klower reveal that the streets of Thirroul were often full of people when the evening picture was due to commence (interviews 1 and 2). Cecelia recalls the cars of cinema patrons frequently blocking the driveway of her family home in the centre of the town causing the cinema manager to flash the offending number plate onto the cinema screen so that the driver would come and move the car (interview 1 2). Those who lived further away, like Ethel Simpson, had to walk through the bush with a hurricane lamp to get to the pictures (interview 7 1) and still more were bussed in from the surrounding suburbs. One of these cinema-goers would have been Olga Ferguson who used to get the bus down from Scarborough when she was old enough to travel by herself (interview 3 2). Jack and Rene Hodgeson

and Jack D'arcy also used to travel south from Coledale and north from Woonona to see pictures at the Kings and the Arcadia theatres in Thirroul (interviews 12 9 and 5 1).

Ron Klower started out as a lolly boy at the Kings. When he was eighteen he assisted the projectionist and later, when he returned from the Second World War, he worked as the projectionist by night and the cleaner and bill-sticker for the theatre during the day. Altogether he worked at the Kings for twenty-five years. Ron and his wife, May, describe the effect the Kings Theatre had on the town in its heyday:

> **MK**: You had to book your seat at the theatre you know. The buses used to be there waiting for them to take them home after the show.
> **RK**: You wouldn't believe it.
> **MK**: That something like that could happen – to see it now
> **RK**: Fifteen hundred people it was set to hold. We [the projectionists] never showed as much as they do now, you know – four sessions – five sessions a day. We used to show Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Saturday night. School holidays we used to have ten o'clock sessions and so forth. But we never showed four and five sessions a day like they do now …
> **MK**: Buses used to come in from Stanwell Park.
> **RK**: Austinmer in the holiday - Christmas was a booming time (interview 2 3)

In the holiday brochures that advertised Thirroul in the first half of this century the cinema was always featured, showing the popularity of movie going at the time and also illustrating the emphasis that Thirroul placed on its cinemas. In *D. H. Lawrence in Thirroul*, Joseph Davis points out that one of the reasons why Austinmer succeeded as a popular tourist resort was because the Kings Theatre was on the northern side of Thirroul, within walking distance of Austinmer guesthouses (40). Thirroul would have lost lucrative guesthouse patronage purely because of the proximity of the theatre to its neighbouring suburb. Cecelia Jackson, talking about cinema audiences in Thirroul, noted that patrons were, "mainly locals, although there were a lot of tourists about with the guesthouses" (interview 1 1).

Although Thirroul was never to regain the prosperity that it enjoyed in the first two decades of the century, the Kings Theatre remained popular for a long time after its opening in 1925, making it the town's longest running and most successful cinema. Business declined in the 1960s and sessions were reduced. Eventually the Kings Theatre closed its doors in 1966 (Parkinson 63). Cecelia Jackson, Jack D'arcy and the Klowers recall no outcry when the Kings finally closed, all suggesting that it was to be expected with the growing popularity of television (interviews 1, 5 and 2). However, Ron Klower points out that the closure not only meant the end of his career in the cinema but also caused an impact on Thirroul in general:

> **RK**: [It] killed the town when they shut the theatre. You used to run across to the hotel or the shop next door and get a drink. It used to keep a lot of them shops alive - kept them going. The bottle shop used to be a confectionery shop when the pictures were open. (interview 2 7)

With the demise of Thirroul's last remaining cinema, the Kings, Ron Klower had to travel to Port Kembla to his next job at the steelworks, a move since repeated by many residents who now have to travel outside of Thirroul for both entertainment and employment. As the interviews with local residents show, after the close of the cinema, confidence in the suburb fell and descriptions of Thirroul today compare unfavourably with those of the town in its heyday.[68] Although the Kings disappeared, Thirroul's

[68] This loss of esteem is reflected in a 1977 article in the *Illawarra Mercury*, which decries the apathetic attitude of residents to Thirroul (26 Aug. 1977 11). The closure of the Excelsior coal mine in 1962 left little industry in the settlement. With most residents working outside Thirroul the settlement had become a satellite suburb of Wollongong, perhaps, these days, even of Sydney. As if to illustrate this loss of status the people of Thirroul now have to travel in to Wollongong, further south to Warrawong or up to the larger complexes of southern Sydney to go to the pictures, signalling the town's loss of autonomy and prestige. As Ron Klower complains: "What I don't like about the coast - about the north part here - everything is stacked down the other end in Wollongong and Warrawong. There's nothing up this way at all" (interview 2 3).

In the last decade there have been rumours that the Kings theatre in Thirroul might be reopened as a cinema. Perhaps this can be put down to the fact that more and more of Thirroul's residents have moved to the town from Sydney to enjoy the relative peace of the coast. House prices in the suburb have risen sharply so that many of the town's inhabitants could no longer afford to buy property there. The northern suburbs have changed demographically from a working class mining to a middle class professional base which has been further encouraged by the electrification of the train lines making Sydney only an hour's journey for commuters.

Perhaps it is the new wealth in the suburb that has encouraged rumours of the Kings reopening as a cinema. Although plans for a cinema are not lodged with the council at the time of writing, the rumours,

movie-watching public did not. They merely altered their film-watching habits, travelling to Wollongong or further south to go to the pictures. The cultural space that cinema had occupied was replaced, for many, by the space of the living room, television's arena.

However, during the first half of the twentieth century, suburban movie theatres performed the function of drawing the community together. They provided economic benefits to associated local businesses and boosted the confidence of the community in the self-sufficiency of their town or suburb. They also provided local residents with the opportunity to assess their fellow community members and to use the spaces within cinemas and the meanings associated with cinema-going to create distinctions between communities and within them. It is to such meaning-making strategies that I shall now turn.

Shared Meanings and Cinema-going

As I have shown in the above discussions of Thirroul, the presence of a cinema in a town or suburb was intimately connected to the way a community viewed itself. The *type* of cinema one had in one's suburb was also significant as comparisons between venues were frequently made. When comparing the cinemas of the northern suburbs of the Illawarra, the Kings Theatre in Thirroul was considered a far "better" venue than the smaller picture shows at Scarborough or Coledale, described by Ron Klower as "little dumps" (interview 2 9). Similarly, Cecelia Jackson made the distinction that the venue in Scarborough, "wasn't a theatre; it was a picture show" (interview 1 2). However, the Kings Theatre was small compared to the picture palaces of Wollongong, most notably the Wollongong Crown which many people regarded as the most grand and opulent in the region (interviews 22, 16, 23).

Occasionally people didn't share the same assessment of the local cinemas. When asked about the most beautiful theatres of the region, Charlie Anderson replied, "for

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which continue to resurface, indicate that Thirroul is once again exhibiting a growing self-confidence in its sense of place that is drawing entertainment and leisure providers back within its frontiers. It will be interesting to see whether the Kings Theatre can once again unite residents in a shared sense of community.

grandeur I'd say the Crown – for glamour I'd say the Whiteway" (interview 22 12). Whereas Ted Gamble recalls the Whiteway as "never anything outstanding. It was pretty grotty to be honest about it" (interview 20 2). Similarly, while Darryl Walker and Pam Bain fondly recall the Regent Theatre as a glamorous and popular venue in the 1950s (interviews 19 7 and 23 5), Dot Jay thought it "depressing" and dangerous for older patrons these days as the stairs are not well lit (interview 16 7). Comparisons, therefore, often have as much to do with personal experience and preferences than with objective distinctions such as the number of seats or quality of facilities.

The picture venues were, thus, the subject of tiered comparisons that affected the popularity of a town or suburb. Certain suburban centres, such as Thirroul, had cinemas that were bigger and more popular than the small picture shows of places like Scarborough and Coledale and so attracted larger audiences from surrounding suburbs. However, larger, grander and more prestigious than the Thirroul Kings were the cinemas of Wollongong City, which were, in turn, small fry compared to the glamorous theatres of Sydney.

Not only did the different types of cinemas affect the audiences they attracted because of the status they conferred on their patrons, but they were also used to mark rites of passage for local residents: theatres, attendance times and seating patterns changing as people grew older. Children would be sent to the Saturday matinees at the local cinema by their parents knowing that the staff would keep an eye on them (interview 22 9). As kids got older, those from the smaller suburbs would go to the pictures a little further away with their friends. Courting couples also preferred certain cinemas to others as well as particular spaces within those cinemas.[69] Sometimes couples went to the pictures on a weekly basis after they were married, but this particular rite of passage saw the end of movie-going for others. Cinema was remembered through distinct life periods: childhood, courtship and marriage. This enabled interviewees to use cinema as a motif that marked and connected the different parts of their lives.

[69] For example, Jack and Rene Hodgeson enjoyed going to the Coledale Empire where movies were screened above the heads of dancers. Courting couples would get privacy in the back row and could watch movies and fellow dancers if they were not too preoccupied (interview 12 2). Another example is given by Dot Jay who recalled being taken to the Crown Theatre and sitting in the circle, proud to be above all the people in peanut alley (interview 16 3).

For example, Olga Ferguson saw her transition from watching movies at her local Scarborough hall to being allowed to go down to the Kings Theatre in Thirroul as a sign of her independence. Her coming-of-age was intimately associated with the added glamour and social kudos of the change of venue to the Kings (interview 3 2). Similarly, Darryl Walker explained how, as a young child, he would go to the Bulli Royal Theatre and the Corrimal Princess (known as "Bertie's Bughouse"[70]). When he went to High School in Wollongong, however, he was allowed to go to the Wollongong cinemas and finally, when he was courting and had left school, he choose to attend the cinemas in Sydney (interview 23 10-11). Stan Chesher, who grew up in the southern steelworks suburb of Port Kembla, recalls the thrill of being allowed to go to the prestigious Crown Theatre at Wollongong to see his first talkie:

> **SC:** Oh yes, my first movie experience. We got the old bus from Port Kembla and me brother was there – he's dead now. And the first fillum I saw was "Sonny Boy" [*The Jazz Singer* (1927)]. I had to go to Wollongong anyhow, to the Crown Theatre I think it was then, to see the film. That was a great honour. I went out with my brother, went in and saw it. Must have been the first talkie I seen. Talkies in Wollongong. (interview 10 4)

Stan recalls this cinema visit as a great occasion because of the prestige awarded to a theatre that he didn't visit very often and because he was taken there by his brother whom he obviously admired. These examples highlight important factors associated with a rite of passage or change of status. Firstly one's cinema companions alter as the choice of cinema widens and one's social situation changes. Going with your parents is less exciting than going with an older sibling, going with friends and, eventually, going on a date. Secondly, the narratives highlight the importance of the journey away from one's home town to a larger suburb to see a movie. I would suggest the significance of a journey was greater in the first few decades of cinema than it is now as cinema-going was one of only a few reasons for travelling outside one's home town. The trip away

[70] "Bertie" is probably a reference to the owner of the Princess, Herbert Jones. Darryl Walker believes the bughouse was so named because the audience was packed into the cinema and swapping germs and bugs while they watched the screen (interview 23 6).

from home and into a larger arena was therefore powerfully symbolic of a change in status and/or age.

The politics of space *within* cinemas was determined according to social, financial and age-specific codes that the local community adhered to. These different cultural spaces within the larger theatres were given specific local names. For example, Betty Webb, Dot Jay and Pam Bain all refer to "peanut alley" as the cheaper seats at the bottom of a large cinema at the front, where kids would usually sit during the matinee (interviews 14 2, 16 3 and 19 6). Jack and Rene Hodgeson, however, call this space the "spit-and-hangovers" (interview 12 5-6). Both names easily conjure up the cheaper seats, strewn with leftover food and subject to mischievous attacks from those sitting at higher vantage points.

This area was regarded with mixed feelings by those I interviewed. On the one hand, Stan Chesher would always sit on the benches at the front of his cinema with his friends, their necks craned up to look at the screen (interview 10 1). Meanwhile, Ted Gamble's mother would pay extra for her son to sit in the upper seats away from the bad influences in peanut alley (interview 20 3).

There were also rites of passage that applied to these cultural spaces within cinemas. Once a person was courting and in early adulthood it was definitely more preferable to be seen in the upper seats of the big theatres. Rene Hodgeson was at pains to show other members of the community that she and Jack would never sit in the "spit-and-hangovers" when they were courting, despite having to save for a long time to afford the one and six for the more prestigious seats at the Kings Theatre (interview 12 5-6). Similarly, Dot delights in recalling her move "up" from peanut alley:

> **DJ**: As you got a bit older … you'd be dressed up and be walking upstairs going into the theatre, sitting in the [dress circle] and you'd look down and you'd see some and you'd say, "Oh, they're only down in peanut alley and here I am up here!" (interview 16 17-18)

The unwritten rules that governed where people sat in the larger cinemas and how they progressed from "picture shows" (or "little dumps" as Ron Klower called them) to the

grander theatres of nearby towns applied to children and adults alike. The spaces within cinemas played an important role in the way that audience members constituted their community. Particular spaces could indicate the age, class and financial status of the audience members sitting in them. In some of the smaller cinemas it was possible for audience members to see exactly who in the community was at the pictures and who wasn't. This was made easier by tendency for local people to sit in the same seats each week. Audience members could, therefore, survey their fellow community members, noting who sat next to whom and who was absent. Of course, not everyone was conscious of the politics of space in the cinemas and, like Arthur Parkinson, chose their seats to get the best view of the screen (interview 17 3). However, for many the cinema seats they chose were cultural markers of status and peer trends.

Charlie Anderson knew his regulars and noted their attendance at specific sessions. He describes how he surveyed the audience and sometimes witnessed extra-marital assignations:

> **CA**: We had nicknames for the various people who came – can't repeat any of them! And those that would come in late and they'd always sit with someone who'd been holding a seat for them who wasn't supposed to. One would leave before the other. But one thing – there were no tales told … The cleaning staff were excellent [at being discreet] and so were the projection staff. (interview 22 10)

As audience members, Jack and Rene Hodgeson could look around the Arcadia in Thirroul and see who was in attendance and who wasn't. Amongst the audience, they singled out "characters", such as the loner, Mrs Swan:

> **JH**: Funny thing about the pictures in those days. When you went to the pictures on a Saturday night everyone had their own seat.
> **RH**: The first theatre in Thirroul was the Arcadia. That's where I went to my matinees cos I lived in Thirroul [before moving to Coledale].
> **JH**: But you'd look around as you went in and you could tell who was who, "so and so's not here tonight!" There was a lady called Mrs Swan

from Coledale. She lived in the bush along Coledale station and she went to the pictures in Thirroul every night.

RH: Walked

JH: Walked from Coledale. And she sat in the same seat in Thirroul every night and to think she must have seen the same pictures every night! On her own.

RH: She never missed a one

JH: And she always took a bunch of flowers with her. I could never work out where she got the bunch of flowers from because she didn't have a garden! … She used to get into the pictures for nothing. She used to take this bunch of flowers.

RH: She was such a regular they couldn't have taken money from her every night. (interview 12 9-10)

Jack and Rene Hodgeson's recollections of cinema are closely bound up with local identities. The anecdotes they shared used cinema to exemplify the deeds of their fellow residents. Another personality, "Sherlock" Jones, is introduced through his ticket filching activities:

JH: Well it was the Depression and [Charlie Dyer, the proprietor of the Coledale Empire] was battling for quids. Anyway the tricks we used to come out with. See, we had no money. Nobody had any money in those days. There were two big doors at the front; they opened in, and perhaps you'd pay for one to go into the pictures – which would only be about thruppence or something - and just as the lights went out he would sneak up and pull the bolts on the double doors and we'd all scoot in. I was only about seventeen, eighteen then.

There was a chap in Coledale by the name of Sherlock Jones. I don't know what his first name was but he was "Sherlock". Anyhow he pinched a roll of tickets. The projection box was outside – you had to go up these steps and that's where they kept the tickets. And the ticket seller was in the middle, down the front. You walked up the side, gave him your ticket and got in. Anyhow Sherlock pinched the roll of tickets and we all got a ticket each.

> **RH:** It was the biggest show!
>
> **JH:** The biggest attendance ever! And we all got in and showed our ticket. Poor old Charlie thought he had a big house but there was no money!
>
> **RH:** Gee they were good times! (interview 12 2)

Through their anecdotes, the Hodgesons recreate a local experience of cinema that is not so much concerned with the programs and features that were on offer at the cinema as with the social network which it fostered. This is a strong organizing principle of many other accounts of cinema-going (see interviews 1, 8, 10, 16, 19, 20, 22, 24). In such anecdotes, individuals such as Mrs Swan and Sherlock Jones seem to loom larger than the movie stars on the cinema screen.

Mrs Swan and Sherlock Jones also represent particular ways of featuring fellow community members: as outsiders and insiders. Mrs Swan is viewed as an outsider, a person not known personally to the narrator but a figure in the community who was talked about. Similarly, Alan Jeffries talks about the cowboy-dressing Tex Singer (interview 24 3). In contrast, Sherlock Jones is an insider, a person known well by the community and identified as "one of us". This is indicated when the Hodgesons' talk about Jones' antics in the context of "the tricks *we* used to get up to" (my italics). Similarly, Charlie Anderson could survey his audience and distinguish between local Port Kembla people and Jewel between people like her and the "hobnobs of the area" (interview 22 17-18). Cinema-going, therefore, provided a way of distinguishing between "us" (people within one's community) and "them" (those outside of it): of constituting one's community and distinguishing amongst its members.

Different configurations of "us" and "them" were also narrativised through stories that conform to a discourse of larrikinism or acting-up. The period that the Hodgesons recall is the Depression when larrikin behaviour that challenged the capitalist system that was failing communities was admired and acknowledged as a necessity. As well as avoiding paying for their cinema tickets the Hodgesons also explained how local people would sometimes swipe cargo from the goods trains that passed through Coledale by jumping onto the trains as they slowed to go through cuttings and throwing the goods onto the railway banks (interview 12 4). Poaching rabbits, stealing chickens and "scrumping"

(stealing) apples were also accepted practices (14-15). When entire communities, such as the mining towns in the northern suburbs, were suffering hardship with many of their members out of work, the "us" of the community were united behind activities that bent the rules in order to provide for their members.

Larrikinism or acting-up was also seen as a uniting discourse for the young. Cinema-going offered a venue in which to stage minor acts of rebellion such as stealing tickets, sneaking into sessions, throwing Jaffas and generally misbehaving and testing the patience of theatre staff. For example, Ethel Simpson talks about "them that'd sing out at the start and go on crazy" in an indulgent tone (interview 7 3). Pam Bain recalls friends of hers being thrown out of the Dapto Regal for throwing Jaffas from the mezzanine floor onto the heads of people in peanut alley (interview 19 5-6). While Darryl Walker remembers not only Jaffas being thrown at the Bulli Royal Theatre but the wooden arms of the theatre seats which were unscrewed and skimmed down the aisles! (interview 23 3).

The cinema was a smaller, contained version of the community. It was a safe, yet public place where individuals challenged authority in minor ways, made reputations and starred in their own, much repeated dramas. It is not surprising that, when recalling cinema-going in their younger days, individuals remember their experiences through stories of rebellious behaviour and acting-up.

As well as larrikinism, there were other discourses that featured in narratives about cinema-going. In the next chapter I will talk about how cinema-going was remembered through tales of romance. Another commonly discussed aspect of the cinema experience was food. Food may have played such an important part in memories of cinema-going because during the Depression and the Second World War, certain foods were scarce and the cinema offered the opportunity for people to indulge in a treat. In the previous chapter I gave the example of Darryl Walker whose mouth watered when chicken legs and big feasts appeared in American movies. Here, he talks about other treats that occasionally came his way during the war:

> **DW**: I remember when Coca-Cola first came out because that came out with the Americans when they arrived here after 1942. Of course they

> were big with their Coke - we always loved having anything to do with American servicemen if ever they turned up in a town like Bulli or anywhere like that because they always had chocolate and lifesavers and things that we weren't getting on rations. (interview 23 4)

Food played an important part in childhood cinema visits and the snacks and treats were lovingly and intimately recalled by many of the people interviewed. Stan Chesher, for example, describes the pies that his brother used to buy at the paper shop opposite the pictures that he would share with his mate, giving him the crust off the top (interview 10 4). Darryl Walker also remembers the delicious hot pies claiming, "You could just get drunk on the smell of the pies, beautiful" (interview 23 3). Olga Ferguson recalls home-made ice cream being the interval speciality at the Scarborough local shop, and in the winter the ice-cream would be replaced by hot saveloys (interview 3 4). And Pam Bain remembers dashing up from the Savoy Theatre in Wollongong to Dales shop where she and her friends would see who could drink down a fresh fruit smoothie the fastest before running back to the pictures (interview 19 5).

But it was the sweets eaten during the pictures that were most frequently reminisced about. Olga Ferguson remembered "Silver Sammys" with film star profiles on the inside wrappers (interview 3 7) and Jill Gamble reeled off a list of her favourite lollies:

> **JG**: Oh, they used to have lovely lollies. They used to come round the theatre and I think you could get an ice-cream bucket for thruppence. And they used to have these long chocolate like rice bubble crackles but they had a different flavour didn't they? [to her husband], You'd get one that big for a penny and it would last. I can still taste it! And Curls and Bobbies … Curls were chocolate-coated creamy toffee and Bobbies were a dark chocolate with a white pepperminty-type top on it. (interview 20 3)

Jill's memory of the sweets she ate at the pictures is laced with nostalgia and indulgence. She says she can still taste the rice crackle sweets although her words cannot describe the flavour but can only provide approximate comparisons. Thus the

sense of taste is vividly recalled.[71] Going to the pictures permitted children and adults to indulge in lollies and treats. The shortages associated with the war and the Depression, and the shortage of money among working class families meant that the sweets enjoyed at the pictures were all the more appreciated. On occasion, rituals surrounding food developed. For example, it was common practice for a man taking a woman to the pictures to buy her a box of chocolates. However, it seems the women customarily ate just one or two and then saved the rest of the box to take home to their mothers. Dot Jay told me how she and her friend Ben talked about this tradition:

> **DJ**: And I was saying when I was talking to Ben, "When I first went to the pictures with Bert" (that's my husband). I said, "I can remember the first night, interval time. You know he rushed out came back with this box of chocolates, 'Winning Post'!"
> And Ben said, "I remember those days Dot."
> The girl would open the box of chocolates and she'd have one. Then I closed it up and took it home to mum.
> Ben said, "That's what all the girls did, take them home to mum!" (interview 16 3)

Of course the most famous food-related cinema ritual was that of rolling Jaffas down the aisles. This practice has been written into Australian film texts (Collins 51-2; cover illustration) and continuously re-emerges in the oral history narratives I co-produced. It has become a commonly available discourse that it is now synonymous with an Australian cinema experience. However, though most of the people I interviewed mentioned Jaffas, they recalled variations in their Jaffa-rolling behaviour! For example, Arthur Parkinson explained that Jaffas rolled by mistake when they were dropped by audience members (interview 17 5), whereas Darryl Walker is representative of those who associated rolling Jaffas down the aisle on purpose during a tense part of the movie (interview 23 3) and Pam (as I have mentioned previously) remembers them being thrown like missiles from the dress circle to the stalls (interview 19 6).

[71] The sense of smell is similarly vivid. For example, the smell of the Corrimal Princess Theatre is remembered by Darryl Walker (interview 23 6).

The example of Jaffa-rolling illustrates the fact that while there are common discourses surrounding the experience of cinema-going, such as larrikinism, romance narratives and food stories, there are also distinctions and different interpretations within these discourses. In this way, a "general public" discourse (the national association of cinema-going and Jaffa-rolling), intersects with a "particular public" experience (that of a local cinema audience) and, in turn, this "particular public" experience is interpreted in various ways by different audience members (particular and general publics are discussed in chapter 3). Staying with the example of food, Illawarra audiences consumed the same brands of sweets, etc., as other Australian cinema audiences, but also had particular local experiences of food such as the Scarborough shop's home-made ice-cream (interview 3 4), the fare from Dales shop in Wollongong (interview 19 5) or the unsurpassable pies from outside the Bulli Royal (interview 23 3). Similarly, the way in which food was used – bringing chocolates home to mum, acting-up in front of friends by throwing Jaffas from the balcony or being embarrassed about dropping them noisily on the floor – showed individual differences in commonly associated food rituals.

Another example of the differences between local practices and individual interpretations occurs in relation to the practice of teenage boys watching the movies from the back of the Scarborough cinema. Jack Hodgeson tells the tale of he and his friends sneaking in at the back of the cinema as the film started because it was most noteworthy to be lurking there (and also because they could make quick escape if they were without a ticket for the show!) (interview 12 2). However, N. B. Smith also recalls teenage boys lurking at the back of the picture show in Scarborough, only coming further into the building to sit down when the lights went out, but he interprets the act differently:

> **NBS**: We'd go to the pictures down at the local theatre in Scarborough down from the police station … Young chaps wouldn't go in and sit down when the lights were on but as soon as the lights went out they'd all troop in! The projectionist used to claim that the lights never shuttered [faltered][but] once or twice, I remember, the early films – they used to call them gazettes - the newsreels - [the reel] would snap; break off. They'd put the lights on and these young fellas, they'd get up and

> walk out. They didn't want the older people to see them. Everybody knew everybody – they weren't embarrassed but shy. (see appendix II)

Here the cultural space occupied by the teenage boys of Scarborough has different meanings for Jack Hodgeson and Mr Smith. There is no right or wrong answer; both men interpret the meaning of the boys' position in the cinema through their own experiences and personalities. Hence, where Jack Hodgeson sees rogues like his pal "Sherlock" dodging the ticket collector, Mr Smith sees confused and shy teenagers unwilling to let themselves be seen being part of the wider community. Incidences such as these illustrate how local practices are interpreted through individual personalities assigning particular interpretations to local cinema rituals.

* * *

The purpose of this chapter has been to show how prominently and in what ways local identity featured in narratives of cinema-going. The rich local culture of cinema-going in the Illawarra provided small communities with regular opportunities to come together at the pictures and, with their fellow audience members, to get an idea of who constituted their community and to negotiate their own place within it. For the most part, cinema-going in the Illawarra is a story of entertainment and working class communities. However, as I have shown, differences within these communities mark out a variety of social and economic hierarchies that are revealed through the practices of cinema-going. Seating and theatre preferences were just some of the ways residents negotiated their position within a community and moved in and out of various roles. Thus, cinema-going for children, teenagers and adults were different experiences, just as cinema-going in Thirroul differed from cinema-going in Scarborough, Wollongong or Sydney.

While I have shown, in this chapter, the importance of the local context to constructing memories of cinema-going, I have also suggested that interpretations of local cinema-going practices can differ from one person to the next. In the following chapter I take a closer look at the individual narratives and at the ways in which cinema tales are subordinated to personal narrative strategies and agendas.

CHAPTER 6: CINEMA AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

This chapter explores the negotiations over personal identity that have taken place through and alongside stories of cinema-going in the Illawarra. While the subject of cinema-going provided a way for individuals to recreate old selves through memories associated with this form of leisure activity, the oral history interview itself presented further opportunities to explore and review one's life experiences. As I have explained in chapter 3, the oral history interview does not merely look back on the past but is an active process of creation and negotiation that takes place in the present. As Alessandro Portelli explains, "oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they now think they did" (*Trastulli* 50). Hence oral testimonies are subjective and change each time an event is retold. The interview becomes an arena where alternative agendas are introduced and personal identities are examined through reflection and re-creation.

This is an important process for all storytellers but is particularly significant for older narrators. Through their stories, older people can use the interview situation to review a full life of experiences and to offer up various versions of themselves that can be set against traditional and stereotypical conceptions of "old people". The ways in which the people I interviewed interacted with discourses of ageing and talked about their own attitudes towards ageing are explored in the next chapter. Too often, the personal, creative and contemporary aspects of oral history have been overlooked by historians anxious to confine themselves strictly to their original subject matter. However, broadening the range of issues for consideration by looking outside the subject of cinema-going to the process of oral history making itself encourages further debate about the construction and interpretation of subjectivities and sits squarely within cultural studies' remit of examining meaning-making strategies. The second part of this chapter therefore, looks at how oral history allows for negotiations over identity to take place outside of the confines of the stated topic of cinema-going. To start with, however, I would like to briefly reflect on the relationship between oral history and identity.

THE THEME OF IDENTITY

The oral history narratives I have co-produced suggest that identity serves as an organising principle for the re-creation of memories. The last two chapters have examined cinema-going through notions of national and local identity. In this chapter I want to concentrate on the ways in which tales of cinema-going and oral history narratives in general have used personal identity as a way of organising and selecting anecdotes.

In accordance with writers on identity from a range of disciplines including cultural studies, psychology, sociology and history, I take the view that identity is a fluid, fragmented and contingent process (Hall *Questions* 4; Bruner 43; Sarup 28; de Certeau *Heterologies* 218). Our picture of our identity changes over time and is not confined to a single identity persona. Instead, we offer different identities as the situation or role demands.

Many researchers have drawn attention to the centrality of identity, to the way in which we select, retell and narrate our memories. After all, as Sarup suggests, when someone asks us who we are, we usually respond with a story (15). Anthony Giddens sees identity as the main project of human action (52) and Erving Goffman views the primary task of people in their social lives as being to create an acceptable social identity (in Gergen 78). Sarup sees identity as "a mediating concept … a convenient 'tool' through which to try and understand many aspects, personal, philosophical, political – of our lives" (28), and Alistair Thomson writes, "We compose our memories to make sense of or past and present lives" (8).

In an important sense, then, when we are asked to talk about a particular subject, the way we choose to tell a story serves to put forward particular versions of ourselves according to perceived desirable character traits and values. Telling a story to people is a selective, creative and individual process, but it is based on a perceived understanding that what we say falls within recognisable narrative conventions and will be likely to be accepted and not cause offence to the listener. This process bridges the divide between individual freedom and social determinism, as it contends that what we say is controlled by publicly available linguistic conventions and acceptable discourses, whilst maintaining narratives as highly individualised and creative.

The inter-relation of agency and control is explored in Alistair Thomson's work. As I have indicated in chapter 3, Thomson provides a useful framework for a discussion of memory, identity and oral narratives, pointing to the dual sense in which we "compose" our memories:

> In one sense we compose or construct memories using the public languages and meanings of our culture. In another sense we compose memories to help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives and identities, that gives us a feeling of composure. In practice these two processes are inseparable … (*Anzac Memories* 8)

The two senses of composure relate to public and private goals. Firstly, we compose memories using available public discourses and structures. In other words we select stories and present them in recognisable narrative forms and structures. Examples of these are examined later in this section. Importantly, Thomson suggests, the available structures and discourses for reconstructing memories at a particular time do not destroy experiences that make no acceptable public sense. Instead, he suggests, such unrecognised experiences may "linger in memory and find expression in another time or place or in less conscious outlets" (9). Thomson suggests that, as we acquire new experiences, our old ways of conceptualising and narrating stories are challenged, sometimes generating new public forms of articulation.

This is why popular memory theorists emphasise the importance of the present when dealing with recollections from the past, insisting that history should be concerned not just with the past but with the "past-present relationship" (Popular Memory Group 240). They are suggesting that people construct a particular version of themselves depending on the discursive resources available to them at given moments in time and, in particular, contexts. By comparing past and present experiences and our own stories and other people's, our identities are constantly changing. The process of composure that Thomson describes allows us to construct ourselves as coherent and consistent entities despite our life changes.

However, as Thomson points out, sometimes contradictions that arise within the stories we tell can surface as apparent narrative errors, jokes or silences. Alessandro Portelli's tale about the death of Luigi Trastulli points out that in order to make a narrative square with a particular version of oneself or with a particular ideological position, factual errors sometimes appear in stories and contradictory aspects of the story may be silenced (see chapter 3).

Thomson's analysis helps us to recognise that the process of narrating our memories is not as straightforward as the term, "oral history", would have us suppose. Our narratives are shaped by publicly acceptable narrative forms, structures and discourses that determine what it is appropriate to say and how we should say it. Narratives are selected and shaped to offer particular versions of our personal identity to particular listeners, versions which we expect our listeners to affirm. In this way narratives are inherently relational in that they depend on a shared sense of understanding.

In summary, oral history interviews are created within a complex matrix of meanings and agendas. As well as trying to ensure her narrative adheres to the topic of conversation, a narrator is also filtering and composing memories in order that she makes sense to the listener. Through selected anecdotes, the narrator also offers aspects of her own personality or certain views and values to the listener, whilst also trying to take into account the listener's agenda and registering cues in their listener's response in order to judge how well their story is being received and whether it needs modification. This complex process is important to bear in mind when considering seemingly straightforward narratives. I now want to look at the interviews I co-produced through the lens of personal identity, initially to consider how cinema-going enables people to reflect on themselves both as audience members in the past and as narrators in the present.

CINEMA-GOING AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

In many interviews, cinema-related anecdotes provided narrators with the opportunity to re-present themselves as young cinema-goers and to make connections between those selves that were narrated and the selves that were narrating; in other words to draw a connection between past and present identities. However, while these stories of cinema-

going explored personal identities they did so within publicly acceptable narrative structures and discourses.

Kenneth Gergen describes some types of publicly acceptable narrative structures that set certain limits on what we can say (70). One is the *valued endpoint*. It leads to stories being framed in particular ways, for example, "How I came to be X, achieve Y or believe Z" (72). Gergen and Bruner also point out that stories follow generic forms such as the heroic saga, the tragedy, the comedy and the romance narrative. I found that cinema-going narratives conformed to these conventions. For example, many of the people I interviewed found that their cinema memories encouraged them to muse on their romantic selves and tell romance stories, as cinema-going was a cultural activity that was associated with courting (see interviews 8, 12, 16, 17, 26). In recalling the different suitors that had taken her to the pictures, Gwen Baird is drawn to the romantic drama that unfolded between her and two suitors:

> **GB:** I liked movies like everyone does. When we were growing up we used to like the ones with a bit of romance in them. Tom used to take me. Anyway, I had a bust up with him for a while. Then another boy from Goulburn used to come to the shop and he said, "I'll take you to the pictures". And the funny thing is his name was Tom too! And I said "Oh well the old one hadn't made any advances" – so I went.
> One night at the shop the two of them met up. My old Tom said. "I'm taking her home".
> And the other one said, "No you're not. I've been taking her home for weeks"
> So Tom said, "Well, I'm taking her home!"
> And I said, "Well, I've got news for you! I'm not going home with either of you, I'm going to stay the night." My boss always has a spare bedroom and she said, "You can stay the night and it might stop their arguing".
> **NH**: How old were you then?
> **GB**: Oh, I wasn't twenty-one. I might have been nineteen. But the one from Goulburn, he was a nice chap – and so was poor old Tom – I went with him for five years and he was the one I married in the finish. But

> the other one, he still continued to write to me you know – yes he did. Oh we had good times and he wasn't afraid to spend a bit of money. We used to have the boys coming in [to the pictures] from next door in the shop – coming around selling lollies or boxes of chocolates. And he wasn't afraid to buy me a box of chocolates. (interview 8 3-4)

In this anecdote Gwen employs the narrative devices of the romance, building up a story from courting to confrontation and final resolution. She also throws in the notion of unrequited love with the rejected suitor continuing to write to her all the while taking care to tie her anecdote to the theme of cinema-going. In a similar vein, Charlie Anderson employs comedy when telling his tales about managing the Port Kembla Whiteway Theatre, complete with sight-gags, one-liners and stories that culminate in punch-lines (interview 22). Stan Chesher uses the thriller conventions of the serials themselves to talk about cinema-going when he was a young boy (interviews 10). Jack Hodgeson and Stan let memories of cinema take them back to when they were young boys going to the cinema with their friends and watching their favourite serials. When retelling stories from their youth, Stan, Jack, Charlie and Gwen have the chance to revisit former selves and try them on for size.

A common theme that ties Pam Bain's anecdotes together is that of personal embarrassment. She recalls going to the pictures with her mother and the rain causing her mother's crepe dress to shrink. She also recalls being thrown out of the Dapto Regal because her friends were throwing Jaffas from the Mezzanine to the ground floor seats and falling over in Wollongong on her way to the pictures:

> **PB**: You always dressed up for Saturday nights. High-heeled shoes – the whole works. I remember one Saturday night. We used to get off the bus outside Badrans in Wollongong. I stepped off the bus and tripped on the step. I was all done up to the nines with my flower on – you used to wear artificial flowers at that time on your shoulder. The flower was on my shoulder and everything and I tipped out of the bus and fell flat on my face in Crown Street. Everyone was standing around! And I broke the heel off my shoe so for the rest of the night I had no heel! (interview 19 6)

Minnie Nichols (interview 4) also talks about embarrassing moments in her anecdotes about cinema-going:

> **MN**: My mother used to go [to the pictures] at nighttime with an old friend that lived further up the street. I'll never forget one night she went and she was so excited she was hitting her friend on the knee and the lights came up and there was a man sitting there! [she had been hitting the wrong knee]
>
> **NH**: Who were your favourite movie stars of the time?
> **MN**: Oh Richard Arlen. I used to love him. I used to dream about him. Isn't it silly? Yes Richard Arlen – he was lovely. (interview 4 1)

And so does Jewel Anderson:

> **JA**: I can remember once though I went to work without my pants on! We had stockings but they were clip-ons with the old suspender belt – I did all that and I was running late. I was on the top of the stairs [of the cinema] and I said to my friend that was there, "Agnes, I've got no pants on!" And she said, "What?" And we went down and the girl that worked at the ticket box lived next door to the [theatre] - her father had the shop – so she went next door and got me a pair of her pants! (interview 22 18)

All the above examples illustrate how one's picture of oneself can determine which events are recalled and the manner in which they are related. For Gwen, cinema memories involve her romantic self being wooed against the backdrop of the pictures. She points out that two men argued over her and that the jilted one continued to write to her. Thus she recreates her younger self as an object of desire and romance and looks back in pride. Stan and Jack look to their boyhood and find identities that are full of mischief and wonder. The way their anecdotes are recalled suggests an affection and admiration for their younger selves. In contrast, Pam, Minnie and Jewel remember the embarrassing moments that happened at the cinema and their narrating selves laugh at their younger selves, Pam at the picture or her mother in her shrunken crepe dress and herself sprawled flat outside the pictures, Minnie at her mother hitting a strange man's

knee and at the “silly” crush she used to have on Richard Arlen and Jewel at forgetting her pants in her hurry to get to work.

The seven narrators above use cinema-going to construct particular versions or types of identities. While the stories are different, the ways in which they are told are standardised, constructed through publicly acceptable discourses. For example, we could see these examples as conforming to recognisable gender discourses. Jack, Stan and Charlie (interviews 10, 12 and 22 respectively) use humour in their narratives but it is most often used against others about particular events and circumstances. In contrast, Pam, Minnie and Jewel use humour that is directed against themselves (and, in Pam and Minnie’s interviews, their mothers). This is in line with linguistic studies of gender that have found that men usually talk about themselves in positive ways, concentrating on their exploits whereas women are more likely to talk about others and to talk about themselves within social contexts, in particular when they violate social norms and are scared or embarrassed (Johnstone 69).

Similarly, while Gwen’s narrative is self affirming, linking her narrating self to a popular and desirable past self, her identity is confirmed through the discourse of romance, and could be seen as a typically gendered response in that Gwen is positioned in her narrative as an object of desire that men fight over, in contrast with male interviewees’ tales of romance which are more concerned about the lengths they went to look after their dates or to pursue particular romantic endeavours (see interviews 20 4; 26 5 [CR]). These seek to bolster identity through deeds rather than through appearance and referred compliments.

In these examples we can see how cinema-going is used to conjure up specific past identities which interact with the present narrating self. In some instances the connection is made between the narrating self and past selves who were attractive, daring and amusing, thus inviting the interviewer and the projected audience to make these connections and see further than the person telling the story to the people they once were. In other instances the narrating self distances herself from her narrated self to hold up the narrated self for affectionate mockery. Here the narrator is inviting the interviewer/audience to join her in laughing at old embarrassing moments.

Oral narratives are therefore fundamentally relational, involving the conciliation of one's past and present selves and the negotiation between the stories one wants to tell and the stories one believes the interviewer wants to hear. Therefore, it is likely that my presence encouraged certain stories about past selves and not others. For example, funny stories are a safer bet when the participants in a narrative do not know each other very well or are not from the same background or age group. As a woman, I may have been told romance narratives because my narrators supposed these were the stories I would enjoy. Similarly, being a woman from a younger generation may have encouraged other male interviewees to show a sensitive side (see interviews 15, 17, 23). Without the benefit of further research with which to compare story-types and styles, these assumptions remain speculation. However, they serve to highlight the complex nature of oral history whereby the choice of anecdote, the way in which it is told, assumptions about the listener, and the perceived reflection on the narrator all influence the narrative content.

While cinema-going was a fairly safe topic of conversation for interviewees to tell funny stories and explore past selves, outside of the agreed topic of conversation lay other, more personal anecdotes which narrators would often be drawn to for different reasons. The next section examines how these other topics were negotiated into the cinema-going narratives and looks at the reasons the interviewees may have had for exploring some topics over others, as well as the ways in which different performance styles affected the content and delivery of the oral narratives.

ORAL HISTORY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

Why agree to be interviewed at all?

> [I]ssues relating to self-dramatisation and performance [may be] central to the invention of the particular self in the oral form and … remind us that [oral history] is not a written text but a form of acting; a fictional performance of self. (Hamilton "Inventing the Self"130)

In the above section I looked at how stories about cinema-going are told in particular ways according to generic forms and to specific identity projects. In writing about the "fictional performance of self", Paula Hamilton suggests researchers look further than

the topic of conversation, in this case cinema-going, to the reasons why narrators tell particular stories, specifically the role in which identity plays in oral history narratives.

Paula Hamilton draws attention to the processes of dramatisation and performance that go into individual reminiscences. She suggests that interviewers should consider the motivations of those they interview, asking how and why they agree to be interviewed in the first place and what they hope to gain from the process (131). In Hamilton's study about domestic service, as in Jackie Stacey's project on women's memories of 1950s Hollywood, respondents were advertised for in magazines and so volunteered themselves.

For my own research, volunteers were advertised for in a local senior citizens' journal and letters were subsequently received from people volunteering themselves or people they knew for interview. This attracted cinema-enthusiasts. However, I also appealed personally to residents in senior citizen centres and asked elderly residents with whom I worked for their cinema-going tales. In these cases motivations were slightly different coming, perhaps, not so much out of a love of cinema as from a willingness to share recollections in order to assist me with my project, to share their local knowledge or simply to have a bit of company in between visits from relatives or the routines of the hostel or senior citizen centre. As a result of this, some of the people I interviewed were not as enthused about the subject matter as Hamilton's or Stacey's volunteers. However, this often meant that these interviewees were more likely to digress, using their interview to introduce other subjects that were important to them.

Hamilton lists the motivations she believes led to her interview subjects agreeing to talk about their time in domestic service. She suggests some people wanted to resolve personal traumas and past experiences, that others had a desire for personal recognition, for their voice to be counted, and that a few were in the process of coming to terms with their lives before death (130).

While I think our reasons for talking are seldom as clear-cut and self-knowing as Hamilton suggests, the first two rationales are pertinent to this research and worth examining further. The third rationale, that of "getting one's house in order" before death, is more problematic and I suspect it may belong more to the interviewer than the

person interviewed. It is too similar to the old school oral historians who want to get to older oral sources before they die and the information is lost. It is in danger of being seen as paternalistic, of positioning the interviewer as a benevolent recorder, witnessing a narrative for posterity with the narrator as a fading and concluding voice. In short it plays into the stereotypes of ageing discussed in the next chapter and places undue emphasis on the interview as a final and definitive version of events.

In my experience, while narrators use their age to justify their point of view or to present stories that have had the benefit of a lifetime of retelling and refining, none seem to be giving definitive, end-of-life confessions. In fact the opposite is often true with narrators more intent on linking their narrating selves to younger, vibrant selves and in making connections with the interviewer's experiences. Many of the people I interviewed lamented getting old, but were not ready to kick their heels up and deliver the final versions of their lives. Their stories were still very much works in progress. Consequently I shall concentrate on Hamilton's first motivation for being interviewed, that of resolving trauma and claiming recognition for aspects of one's life and will look at how these motivations were apparent in the interviews I co-produced.

RESOLVING TRAUMA

The clearest example of the process of resolving trauma in the interviews I co-produced was provided by Mr Gordon[72] who had initially agreed to talk to me about his cinema-going experiences during the 1920s and 30s. However, after a cursory reference to a film not of that period, a mention of the pianist he remembers who used to accompany the silent pictures, and a few scattered references to the people who populated the memories of his youth, he settled down to tell the story which, it seems, he really wanted to come to terms with. During the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 his family was responsible for delivering milk to the community. While the epidemic was at its peak, his mother sent him out to deliver the milk while his older siblings stayed at home:

[72] Interviewee's name has been changed at his request.

> **Mr G**: There was a bubonic plague in 1918[73] … There was a farm on the way to Woonona railway station and I delivered [the] milk. And then came the Bubonic Plague. My father went and bought all the billy-cans and my mother used to [words undistinguishable]. I used to go to all the places. Nobody was out. Someone said, "Get away from here. You go to too many places".
>
> Many years later I remember my mother, later on in life. I said to her, "Why didn't you send the older ones down?" She said, "Well, the older ones had been with us longer. We wouldn't miss [you] as much". Do you think I resented that? No. (interview 6 1)

The tone of Mr Gordon's voice, the pauses in the narrative and the way the interview circled and then drew out this episode seem to suggest that he needed to talk about this traumatic incident and sought understanding for an act he had trouble coming to terms with. Although he said that he did not resent his mother for it, he still wanted to relate the incident despite the presence of the tape recorder. However, afterwards he asked that his name not be mentioned and said there was no need to "go making a song and dance about it". Consequently, Mr Gordon's name has been changed and, because of the sensitive nature of the story, permission to use the anecdote has been obtained from Mr Gordon's daughter, as Mr Gordon has now died.[74] This was the most extreme version of an alternative agenda (which might not have been intended at the start of the interview) taking over the original purpose of the exchange.

Another example of the oral history narrative functioning as an opportunity to relate traumatic incidents is found in Stan Chesher's interview. As a young boy, Stan recalls witnessing the returned soldiers parading through Port Kembla after the First World War and was struck by a woman who ran into the street calling for her son who had died in the war and was not among the returned men:

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[73] The Influenza Pandemic. See chapter 3 where Lucy Taksa's study about people misremembering the Influenza Pandemic as the Bubonic Plague is discussed.

[74] As Mr Gordon did not want his name mentioned in my research, the transcript is included at appendix I under the pseudonym. The interview recording has not been included in the collection as it identifies Mr Gordon's real name.

SC: One of the striking incidents when they came back from the war … they got the band out because they said that [the soldiers] were coming home. They came back and they started on the top of the hill and they marched down with the band out. They get to the top of the street and the band started playing. There was a woman at the other end of the street screaming. "Me son, me son, where is he?" See that woman she lived in a kind of a shed and that was their house. She was a widow and her son was away [at the war]. And she said "Where's me son?" It stuck in your mind straight away

NH: And her son was dead?

SC: No son. And they were all cheering everyone else coming back, giving them a pat on the back. And she couldn't understand that her boy wasn't there.

NH: That's so sad.

SC: It stuck in my mind. You think I wouldn't care but there must be something stuck there. It was so dramatic when she came out there. The horrors of war you know. They were all clapping and happy and she came out. (interview 10 2-3)

An example of attempting to resolve more recent trauma through narrative is illustrated in Gwen Baird's interview (interview 8). Gwen's recollections about cinema in Thirroul are interrupted several times when she is reminded of a more recent incident when she collapsed at her home and was found by her son and the local doctor. After this fall she had agreed to come and live at the hostel. The incident set in train a major life change for Gwen. Moving from her own home into hostel care would have also affected her sense of identity and purpose. It is, therefore, not surprising that the incident is repeatedly revisited.

Gwen told the story of the incident in almost the same way each time, repeating certain phrases such as her son's description of finding her collapsed, "Mum, your face was purple and so was your neck". Repeating what her son and her doctor had said about the collapse seemed to help Gwen come to terms with an event she doesn't remember first hand, but which was important enough to cause her to move out of her home into

nursing care (5). Once again the supposed subject of cinema is sublimated to the conversational and emotional needs of the interviewee.

These examples highlight the importance of letting interviewee's use the interview for their own needs as well as those of the interviewer. Alessandro Portelli echoes Hamilton's call for an understanding of subject motivation and explains, "it is in the interpersonal nature of fieldwork that the agenda of the interviewee be given equal time and respect with that of the interviewer" (Portelli *Trastulli* x).

PERSONAL RECOGNITION

Other than for reasons of wanting to help me with my research and passing the time in company, the motivation most common to the people I interviewed seemed to be that of gaining recognition for aspects of their lives. This took different forms ranging from recognition of younger selves, of the experiences they and their generation went through, to recognition of themselves as representatives of history or witty storytellers who had accumulated a lifetime of anecdotes.

The interviews provided people with the chance to recreate past versions of themselves. Minnie Nicholls, for example, enjoyed talking about her singing days as a member of her family's singing quartet:

> **MN**: My father was the tenor, my brother was the baritone, my sister had a glorious contralto voice and I was the soprano … We sang over 2BL one night. We all had to be there in evening dress and there wasn't a soul there but the announcer! We got six pounds. My father didn't have an evening suit so he hired one … I suppose I was about 18 when we went to Sydney but I've sung the length of the coast to people. I used to love to sing many good ballads in those days but I can't sing now. (interview 4 4)

Similarly, Pam Bain fondly recalls her mother, Mary, making her a fancy dress costume that won a prize:

PB: When we were at school there was always a fancy dress party every year and even when the new hall was built. And the best of the fancy dressed they used to go to a fancy dress party at the theatre. In the picture theatre.

MB: In the Regal – did they?

PB: It was there wasn't it? I remember I was Little Bo Peep and mum made [my costume].

MB: It was all paper

PB: It was all crepe paper. It was the most beautiful thing you had ever seen. It had a blue skirt gathered and it had a pink top and it was all ruched out like a bustle all around it and big puffed sleeves.

MB: And paper flowers.

PB: It had a piece down here and it was blue criss-crossed with pink and I had a pink had with a blue frill round it. Dad made a crook for me to carry and all over it were there pink paper roses.

MB: Paper roses I'd made.

PB: Anyway I won first prize (interview 19 10)

The highly visual evocations of themselves in their youth seem to bring a lot of comfort or pride to these narrators. Their remembered selves are fixed in a time of certainty and power where their talented or dressed-up selves are performing or parading in front of an audience, hence there are witnesses to their past achievements.

Hamilton likens the process of looking back over one's experiences and selecting specific examples to a kind of autobiography. Although mediated through the researcher or historian's agenda, the original reminiscences are still "self-conscious acts of expression" (130) which find focus in particular versions of younger selves or in an accumulation of knowledge that positions the narrator as a credible storyteller or a rare witness to a long past. An example of the latter is Alice Makin, who regarded herself as an expert on her local area by virtual of the number of years she had lived there. In her interview she boasts of her credibility as a piece of living history:

AM: I'm fourth generation here. I've got a son and a daughter still living down here. My son and daughter are fifth generation and my

> granddaughter is sixth generation … Three ladies have started the Dapto and District Heritage Society – they've only lived here twenty years! I was in the city before Good Friday and I was shopping in Coles and [one of the ladies from the heritage society] was there. I said, "How did your meeting go?"
> She said, "Oh, it was wonderful. I'll be able to tell you all about your ancestors and your heritage."
> I said, "Really? My convict ancestors that came here in 1792?"
> She said, "Oh"
> And I said, "Do you know where Killwomans Bridge is in the area?"
> "No"
> "Do you know where a bridge called Lilypilly Bridge is?"
> "No"
> "You know where the first Catholic school was in the area?"
> "No, we'll have to learn"
> I thought, boy, you'll have to learn! From Kembla Grange right round to the Macquarie River, I can name all the creeks and bridges … I just love talking about old things! (interview 18 3-4)

Here, Alice empowers herself against the women from the historical society by virtue of her longevity and the length of her residence in Dapto. Alice's information about cinema-going in Dapto was limited because of her infrequent visits to the pictures. Clearly her reasons for being interviewed involved asserting her heritage and her knowledge of the geography of the local region on tape rather than any real interest in the subject of cinema.

Another way of seeking recognition through an oral history interview was through presenting oneself as an accomplished storyteller. Stan Chesher and Cec Clark (interviews 10 and 25 respectively) were the most notable storytellers I interviewed because of their distinctive performative styles. Although the ability to tell evocative stories and link anecdotes is also apparent in the interviews of Charlie and Jewel Anderson (interview 22), Dot Jay (interview 16), Olga Ferguson (interview 3) and Jack and Rene Hodgeson (interview 12), it was Stan and Cec who seemed to set themselves up as entertainers and enjoyed the interview as a chance to perform.

Stan spoke as if performing to a larger audience. He paid particular attention to the tape recorder and played to it as well as to myself. Like a comedian, he peppered his responses with asides that were intended to draw the listener into a conspiracy with him. He did not need much prompting from me with questions about cinema and instead embarked on a picaresque narrative that went from one anecdote of Port Kembla life to the next.

Often so many stories and memories seemed to be going through Stan's mind that one tale would be interrupted by another, leading him into a bit of confusion. As well as telling me about going to the cinema when he was a boy, he also wanted to get in his favourite stories about life in Port Kembla. The fishing that was possible before the steelworks came; the riot that occurred when English sailors were in port; the parade for the returned soldiers at the end of World War One; all were significant events that Stan had in his repertoire and wanted to tell. Remarks such as "These are all true stories", "I could talk for quite a bit on fishing", "I'll get that story in", and "I've told this one many times", show how Stan has been converting his memories into stories over time and has cultivated a cache of tales about Port Kembla which he can be called upon to perform.

Stan's intention in this interview seemed to be that of positioning himself as a narrator of and a participant in history. This was emphasised when he boasted of his ancestors being directly descended from Henry Cable, the first convict to set foot in Australia as he carried Governor Philip ashore (4). Stan's "unbelievable but true" style seemed to ask for recognition for the times that he had witnessed and admiration for him as a spinner of tales. In this interview, cinema was just the warm-up routine for his main act.

Cec Clark also performed for the tape recorder and conjured up a narrative in which he starred in a variety of roles, from picture showman to devoted husband, form wartime hero to child entertainer. Cec was happy when retelling an anecdote and, consequently, questions that asked for more detail or for consideration of another aspect or topic unsettled him and he provided brief, distracted answers until back within the bounds of one of his set-piece stories. Cec illustrated his anecdotes with actions, voices and song.

For dramatic effect he retrieved a large handbell which he rang as he recalled the manner in which he used to drum up business for his travelling picture show.

Running through his narrative was his main theme of Cec as entertainer. Cec was a picture showman and also entertained audiences at the retirement village where he lived with songs and stories. As Cec explained, it was a career that started when he was young:

> **CC**: During the First World War – we were a bit ahead in the story - all the ladies of the district decided to set up a musical society to raise money for the Red Cross. So they roped Harry, my brother, and I into it. I'll show you [gets photo album out, shows a picture of Harry and Cec dressed as a nurse and soldier] Anyway we had to sing. They'd dress him up as a nurse and we'd walk on the stage. They had me dressed up as a soldier in puttees and a tunic: [sings]
>
> *I don't want to get well*
> *I don't want to get well*
> *I'm in love with this beautiful nurse*
> *Early every morning*
> *Night and noon*
> *The sweetest little girlie comes and feeds me with a spoon*
> *I don't want to get well*
> *I don't want to get well*
> *I'm glad they shot me on the firing line (fine)*
> *The doctor says I need some medication*
> *Oh oh oh I'm sure my heart is breakin'*
> *I don't want to get well*
> *I don't want to get well*
> *I'm in love with this beautiful nurse*
>
> They we'd have a bit of cuddle on the stage and walk off. Encore
> Then we'd go back on and I'd sing:
>
> *Naughty Naughty Naughty*
> *Can't you be good?*

He'd say:

I wish I could
The things you do just make me wild
Still you're daddy's angel child
If you keep on worrying me
I'm going to have to take you right across my knee
Because you're Naughty, Naughty oh so naughty
Just a naughty baby to me

They we'd go off and they'd hold up a big Australian flag behind me and I'd walk on with a bandage soaked in red ink on my forehead and a crutch. And the girls would go around the audience with bags and collect money. I'd sing:

Anzac Anzac long live that glorious name
Anzac Anzac that's where we made our fame
And when this war is over and peace again there'll be
I'll fight again to keep that name A N Z A C!

And so on! We used to have a lovely time! (interview 25 2-3)

Although Cec would not have been more than 10 years old at the time of the original performance, he is happy to conjure up his whole routine, singing the songs and miming the actions he and his brother performed on stage. His anecdotes are not only recalled, but also acted and sung with different voices and pauses for dramatic effect. Cec also photocopied pictures and articles about travelling showmen for me (see appendix II) and sent me a tape he had recorded himself which explained his cinema days as if to an audience. This tape is Cec in his own words, dispensing with the interviewer and talking directly to an imagined audience. Here Cec has complete control over his representation and his choice of material. He thus dispenses with the dilemmas of representation found in oral history interviews and makes his own claim on his past and how it is presented in the present.

Cec's main aim is to portray himself as consummate entertainer and showman. But his tale has an extra dimension because Cec has found a kind of stardom in his 90s through his cinema days. He has been interviewed by his local paper, by the television station Channel 9, and by academics interested in Australia cinema history. Through each interview comes more interest from researchers and the public. Cec has a scrapbook full of clippings and transcripts about his identity as a cinema pioneer. Here he performs a related anecdote:

> **CC**: I used to go to the Village cinemas and pay my way. The girl said, "You shouldn't be paying to see the movies. You should be on a free ticket."
> "What do you mean free ticket?"
> "Well, the Australian Cinema Pioneers"
> "I don't know anything about that"
> "Come in tomorrow and I'll get you an application form."
> So I made application and within four or five weeks I became a member. I had to go to Her Majesty's Arcade by the NSW Bowling Club in York Street. One of the girls came with me for company. We sat down for a lovely meal and the time came when Wendy (she was the president) said, "Members and guests, can I have your attention please? The time has arrived when we must introduce our newest member, Cec Clark. Cec's pictures and his story are a classic. He is a walking treasure. Come along Cec and receive your membership." (interview 25 12-13)

Cec fleshes out his story with dialogue as if he is recalling it word for word. He performs the anecdote and builds up his own inauguration into the Cinema Pioneers Hall of Fame. He is the star of his narrative and a consummate performer.

The performance styles of Cec and Stan explain why they were so willing to be interviewed. Each had honed his stories over many re-tellings and the oral history interview offered them the opportunity of reaching a new audience and of refining those stories once more. Together, the examples I've used above – Cec and Stan as storytellers, Alice as living history and Minnie and Pam evoking their younger,

appreciated selves – show some of the more obvious ways in which people use oral history to achieve self-recognition.

However, I would argue that this motivation lies, in part, behind so many oral narratives and everyday conversations, with protagonists using the subject matter on hand to gain recognition for certain values, actions or personality traits. While we may not decide to be interviewed in order to gain recognition for a particular version of ourselves or course of action we have taken, it becomes part of our conversational agenda. Consequently, amongst those interviewees who agreed to be interviewed in order to help me with my research or just to pass time in company, a by-product of such an exercise is the chance for us to put something of ourselves forward and communicate it to another party.

However, we are not always successful in these goals. The next section examines what happens when identities are not seamlessly communicated and the narrative breaks down.

When identity through narrative breaks down

As I argued in the opening section of this chapter, identities are not fixed and stable over time but are fluid and changing. As we learn and experience more, so our conception of ourselves changes. Moreover, we offer different identities and selves to different people depending on the situation. Identity is therefore a contingent process.

If this fluid, contingent conception of identity is to be believed, then at times the contradictions that are an inherent part of this process will become manifest in our communications. Narrative errors, inappropriate jokes and silences are some of the examples oral historians have given of the ways in which contradictions manifest themselves in oral narratives (Portelli ix; Passerini 67-8, Thomson 10). Luisi Passerini gives the example of Italian interviewees who have omitted all references to fascism from their inter-war memories because they do not fit with their conception of themselves as intolerant of fascist policies (67). While cinema-going is not so powerful or political a subject as to cause widespread silences over aspects of its history, in discursive terms I have shown how certain ways of talking about cinema-going

(American cultural imperialism) serve to silence alternative perspectives (audience enjoyment of Hollywood features) in particular arenas.

Cec Clark's account (interview 25) provides an example of the contradictory and sometimes ill-fitting nature of identity. Cec uses his stories to build up various identities, predominantly the picture showman and general entertainer, but also the army recruit, small businessman, department store worker and dedicated husband and family man. So central were Cec's personas to the narratives that he often recalled the nicknames by which he had been known by others, "The Picture Show Man", "The Cheery Postman" and "Uncle Cec". Referring to himself in the third person in this way reinforced the identities by which Cec wanted to be remembered.

However, such roles do not co-exist seamlessly and contradictions and discontinuities sometimes occur. In Cec's case the exact dates and details of his picture show days vary within and between interviews. In an interview with his local paper, Cec tells of starting up a travelling picture show on his own. Later, according to the interview, he was joined by his "good friend" Reg Parker as they set up a circuit in New South Wales (*The Northern Herald* 2 Apr. 1993 4-5). In his interview with Graham Shirley, Cec explains that it was Matt Baumgarten who introduced him to moving pictures when he used to screen movies in Cec's home town of Carcoar. When the Carcoar picture venture wasn't successful, Matt took to the road with Cec and toured with him through the 1930s (see appendix II). Meanwhile, at the end of *our* interview, Cec says that he only travelled with Matt for a few months and for even shorter period with Reg Parker, as they didn't get along (interview 25 16). These differences in chronology and the partnership details show that Cec's memory, like anyone's, is fallible. However, they also illustrate how a relatively small proportion of one's life can be made to fill the greater proportion of an oral history. Cec's avoidance of dates is a way of not having to deal with the short time he was on the road compared to the large amount of interest generated about this time of his life, as well as the associated fame and identity confirmation he has received from being "The Picture Show Man".

In fact Cec spent 25 years as an employee at the David Jones department store, co-owned a cake shop after the war and had also worked as a postman, as well as serving in Temora and in the Northern Territory in the Second World War. Compared to his other

jobs, Cec's time travelling New South Wales with the picture show was brief. However, the amount of recognition he now receives as a cinema pioneer makes it easy to see how a few months on the road expands to seem like decades. It is a good example of the way our narratives expand to fill expectations and many identity-confirming anecdotes.

Like Alistair Thomson's interview with serviceman Percy Bird (see chapter 2 for details), Cec's narrative exhibits signs of embattled identities. Percy was caught between the gendered machismo of wartime and his own candid and emotional feelings about his war service and had to resolve the conflicting identities of macho soldier and caring family man. Similarly, Cec was caught between his recent reincarnation as a premier picture showman (writ large by local papers and television reports) and the short amount of time the picture show business actually travelled for. He faced the conflicting identities of travelling showmen and entertainer and faithful, long-term department store employee. The disruptions in the narratives provide evidence that identity isn't seamless and fully formed but contradictory and multi-faceted. They also illustrate the interior self moving between subjectivities and creatively erasing or bridging contradictions or incidents that do not square with a desired narrative outcome.

Cec's narrative shows how dates are omitted to make a certain period of time seem longer than it was and that his identity as a travelling showman sometimes contradicted other identities put forward in his narrative. A different sort of example comes from Elsie Dabbs (interview 9), whose eagerness before the interview to tell me about her cinema-going experiences was compromised in the interview itself by the presence of the tape recorder and a fear of saying something factually incorrect on tape.

Elsie was concerned that her stories might be disputed. She volunteered herself for interview and seemed keen to talk about cinema-going in Sutherland. However, when it came to the interview itself, Elsie was more guarded than usual and pointedly drew back from revealing the names of people involved with her local cinema:

> **ED**: It was run by two spinster sisters but there was a man – he's a little bit older than me now – he was still alive last time I heard about him – he was that – oh I'd better not say who he was just in case that's not right.

> I'm not sure whether they were his aunties or his cousins … I know their names but I don't want to say in case somebody may be listening to that tape and think, "Oh that's wrong". (interview 9 1-2)

Like Cec, Elsie is aware of the presence of the tape recorder although it affects their responses in very different ways. Elsie feels self-conscious that her interview could be listened to by a stranger and therefore doesn't want to get anything wrong. She came to the conclusion that the interview was a matter of right and wrong answers rather than, as I tried to encourage, a place where she could relate her stories and recollections, accurate or not, to me. Although Elsie would be commended by empiricists for her commitment to accurate testimony, from my point of view the interview was restricted by Elsie's worry about facts and I felt I had lost the revelations, confessions and personal opinions that I may otherwise have been party to during a normal conversation.[75]

Cecelia Jackson, Jack D'arcy, Joyce Simpson and Betty Webb also seemed less communicative during their interviews than they were during our usual everyday conversations (interviews 1, 5, 11 and 14). These interviews were much more question and answer based than conversational and tended to be a lot shorter. This group of people answered my questions about their cinema experiences but did not provide any further elaboration of details and personal anecdotes. Although these interviews provided me with short facts, they did not communicate a sense of involvement and opinion that other interviews did. I do not think the reasons for this type of response were to do with personal style, as the individuals concerned were generally a lot more communicative and open. However, the formality with which the "interview" was viewed, which was backed up by the presence of the tape recorder, instilled a worry about getting things "right" and the concern about being judged by others, and I believe this was largely responsible for inhibiting their replies.

[75] Elsie had previously stopped me on my way home from work to let me know she would like to be interviewed about the cinema experience. On this occasion she was chatty and animated, very different to the wary responses she gave me in the actual interview. The presence of the tape recorder made a big difference to Elsie's style of performance.

This may also be another example of miscommunication in the interview process. These interviewees were reacting with short answers because that is perhaps what they felt was expected of them. Despite thinking I was trying to draw them out, they may well have just assumed that I wanted them to stick with short factual answers and to stay away from any further embellishment of their answers. As a researcher, I preferred those interviews which prompted the interviewees to reminisce at length about the past. Another interviewer may well get more satisfaction from the brief interview exchanges.

In summary, it is clear that oral history is a process whereby individuals can have a dialogue with events and experiences from the past and rework them in the context of the present for a variety of purposes relating to personal identity. Such narratives can help people resolve past troubles, explore different selves and consolidate preferred identities. They also enable narrators to put forward versions of themselves and their lives that may not have been assumed by others at first glance. Oral history is therefore far more complex than a mere regression to the past as it involves a series of negotiations between past and present, interviewer and interviewee and narrated and narrating selves.

Oral history has the advantage of catching people as they decide to relate certain identities over others. Through oral history we can see the active process of identity creation and negotiation taking place. The implications of this process, particularly with regard to the older narrator, are further developed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7: ORAL HISTORY AND STRATEGIC/POLITICAL IDENTITY

The theme I want to explore in this chapter is that of political or strategic identity: how older people are constructed by and in turn take-up certain age-related discourses in their narratives and how their personal articulations of elderliness interact with popular conceptions of ageing. This chapter, then, moves away from cinema-going but extends the general theme of identity that I have been exploring in national, and regional discussions of cinema and the personal and political negotiations over self-identity over time.

During this chapter I want to broadly outline some critical approaches to old age and distinguish between attitudes and theories that are constructed about old people and meanings and negotiations surrounding ageing that are made by older people themselves. I will draw attention to some of the discourses that are used to construct ageing, for example, medical, academic and sentimental or nostalgic discourses, in order to then explore how the older people I interviewed engaged or didn't engage with such discourses. I will also examine whether particular aspects of elderliness were employed to construct self-identities.

These issues have implications for both the methodology of oral history and cultural studies as a discipline. Oral histories, while using older people as sources, rarely attempt to consider how discourses about and experiences of ageing affect the construction of a narrative. Instead, older adults are sometimes seen as problematic sources, prone to nostalgia and sometimes confusion (Henige 46; Sawyer 7). In this chapter I'll look in more detail at how age becomes a contributing factor to the way in which people relate their stores and to the stories that are told. Recognising age-related factors within oral history is important in the first instance, because it shows how narratives are intimately associated with the social and temporal experiences of the narrator. Secondly, the narrative choices and strategies of older people need to be awarded complex analysis and respect in order to defeat simplistic and stereotypical

impressions of older narrators and reconstruct them as dynamic and active creators of meaning.

Cultural studies, while giving attention to experiences of class, race and gender, has largely ignored issues of ageing. This chapter considers the ways in which older adults are talked about and conceptualised and also how they are silenced. It raises awareness of the experiences of older people and asks that factors of ageing be given equal weight to those of class, race and gender in future studies.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF AGEING

> "there is a profound failure of meaning that currently surrounds the end of life"
>
> (Thomas R Cole in Featherstone and Wernick 46)

I first began thinking critically about ageing when I was researching oral history textbooks prior to commencing my interviews. Some textbooks and practitioners made statements about the problems associated with older interviewees, most commonly, that their memories were unreliable and needed to be substantiated by "factual" written evidence (Henige 46; Sawyer 7). As I have pointed out earlier, all narrators are unreliable to the extent that we tell a story a different way every time, get confused with dates and sequences of events and misremember or create our own versions. That these common practices should be laid only at the feet of older narrators seemed unfair and misleading. Furthermore, if older people are the unreliable ones then, by extension, there exists an assumption that younger narrators are wholly trustworthy and need not have their accounts scrutinised to the same degree. Therefore, such a distinction creates false assumptions about all narrators as well as discrediting older people.

Another accusation levelled at older interviewees appears in David Henige's book *Oral Historiography* and suggests that older narrators are in danger of seeing events "through that most notorious of prisms, the rose coloured glass" (46). He goes on to explain this theory in developmental terms, claiming that older people remember the "golden age" of their youth with unconcealed nostalgia as it represents a time of strength and vitality for them. Such an argument denies the possibility that individual narrators can critically interact with their narratives as they are talking, and also ignores individual differences in terms of life-course highs and achievements, insisting that nostalgic recreations of

memory are to be expected in older people. Again, this argument ignores other age-groupings and leaves the reader with the feeling that older people are problematic once more, despite their worthiness as oral history "specimens" from bygone eras. Both these examples, perceived unreliability and the "rose-coloured glass" effect, conform to two major discourses on ageing: the medical, age-as-decline discourse and the nostalgic discourse, both of which will be examined in more detail shortly.

My concerns about age stereotyping in some oral history texts led me to consider how age was treated across other academic disciplines.[76] In terms of discourses through which older people were studied and talked about, one of the most commonly used was that of age-as-decline, exhibited particularly through medical and biological associations. Not just in biology and medicine themselves, but in other disciplines such as psychology and linguistics, experimental studies have frequently been devised and executed to measure the declining performance of older people against younger people in a number of areas, including cognition, memory, intelligence and vocabulary.[77]

Although recent studies, in particular in fields such as psychology and linguistics, have questioned dominant discourses that equate older people automatically with deterioration, for example, in the areas of intelligence and linguistic performance, for the most part the older body is measured in terms of dysfunction and decline. So the small proportion of older people that receive nursing care or suffer from debilitation illnesses come to represent the whole of the population over 65. The discourse of age-as-decline affects the physical and psychological treatment of older people in medical institutions by medical practitioners but also by other institutions, for example government, and by the wider community. Consequently, despite studies that show that only 5% of the Australian population over 70 are in nursing homes or that only 4% of

[76] I set about this task by reviewing a number of undergraduate textbooks across various academic disciplines. For example: Psychology: *Psychology: The Human Science* (1978); *Introduction to Psychology 4th Edition* (1987); *Psychology: An Introduction* (1989); *Approaches to Psychology* (1997); Sociology: *Sociology* Popense (1977); *Sociology (3rd Edition)* Robertson (1987); *Sociology Today* (1992); *The New Sociology for Australians (3rd Edition)* (1994); Linguistics: *Aspects of Language (Third Edition)* 1981; *General Linguistics (Fourth Edition*) (1989*); Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication (Fourth Edition)* (1995); *Linguistics: An Introduction* (1999); *Essential Introductory Linguistics* (2000).

[77] See Coupland et al (3) for memory, language and recall experiments and Woodruff-Pak (335-336) for a review of intelligence testing.

the older population at any given time will be affected by senile dementia (Victorian Government Committee *Inquiry into Planning for Positive Ageing* xxvii), the public perception of old people and declining health disproportionately consigns them all physical and psychological problems.

This conflation of ageing and decline that receives credence in medical circles is further dispersed through the media, where older adults, under-represented in general, are then typecast as medical patients or victims of crime (Johnson quoted in Blaikie 96). A study of television, magazine and newspaper advertisements by Robinson (65-70) found that only 5 out of every 100 people in advertisements were aged 65 or over. Although the portrayal of older people in advertisements targeted at older people was generally positive, advertisements aimed at younger audiences were more likely to contain negative portrayals of older people, particularly as victims and hospital patients.

Gerbner, Morgan and Signorielli (quoted in Robinson 12) use the term "cultivation" to describe how the media can affect the way people view their social reality. According to cultivation theory, the more a person watches television the more likely they are to believe their social reality is reflected by what appears on the screen. This has important implications for frequent television viewers, such as the elderly. Researchers have confirmed that older people watch more television than any other age-group (Bell; Schick quoted in Robinson 12). Negative or non-existent portrayals of older people on television can lead to older people de-valuing their status in society and to other age-groups developing unrealistic stereotypes of older adults. It also leads to the situation whereby older people are scared of being victims of crime despite being the segment of the population least likely to be affected (Victorian Government Committee xxxv). In fact, a study by Midwinter in 1992 (quoted in Laslett 135) found that those aged 16-30 are six times more likely to be victims of crime than those aged 60 or over.

The effect that age-as-decline discourses have on the older population is that they are encouraged to see themselves and speak themselves through the language and representations of those discourses, seeing themselves as weak and therefore as victims. Older people often speak about their physicality and use discussions and comparisons of health and decline to interact with others. This discourse draws attention to the older

body and encourages surveillance both by old people themselves and by others in society to measure the older body in comparison to younger body types.

For the majority of older people who have not been victims of crime, are not "at death's door" and are in fact physically and mentally healthy and active, the stereotypes of older people do not seem at all appropriate. Little wonder, then, that older adults are not keen to identify themselves with other old people. In a survey conducted by Ward (117), the most common reasons for older people not identifying with older age-groups were: considering themselves active and busy (59.8%); being healthy (59.1%); and, having a positive state of mind (ie "you're only as old as you feel") (28.9%). Thanks to negative stereotyping, the more common factors of post-retirement life, relative good health, a busy lifestyle and positive state of mind, bizarrely confirm to people that they therefore are not like the rest of the "old people".

Another discourse that emerges through academic disciplines, in particular within sociology and gerontology, is that of separatism. Disengagement theory, from the conservative, functionalist school of sociology, asserts that people gradually detach themselves from society as they get older. The theory, conceived in the early 1960s, maintains that the process of disengagement is a natural one that is beneficial to society and to the elderly themselves (examined in Ward 86). Criticisms of this theory are manifold. It has been labelled ethnocentric in that it only deals with western society, and is criticised from a Marxist perspective for masking the process whereby capitalism sheds itself of an expensive section of the labour force. The theory also supposes that the elderly withdraw from society through their own choice and therefore disregards the process whereby society marginalises the aged (Ward 86). However, despite being conceived four decades ago, a cultural lag that seems to beset theories of ageing has ensured that the theory is still generating repercussions in current discourses.

Retirement policies, for example, have served to hive off sections of society over 60 or 65 and have created a division between the "old" and "not old" as well as between productive and non-productive groups. This is exacerbated by housing policies that encourage older people to reside in separate enclaves, such as retirement villages, hostel care units and nursing homes. Thus segregated living can be opted for from retirement until death, a significant period when we consider that it could last for thirty odd years.

Indeed, in the Illawarra region one of the largest companies is the Illawarra Retirement Trust (IRT), which specialises in all stages of post-retirement housing and boasts facilities in many Illawarra suburbs.[78] The company controls supervised housing developments in all parts of the Illawarra, catering for a variety of ages and care needs, from retirement villages to full nursing facilities. The IRT promotes the ease with which residents can move between villages, hostel care units and nursing homes as the need arises, a claim that residents perceive as being very much one way, towards the nursing home.

While fostering a sense of an individual community of older adults within the larger community, this segregation does nothing for intergenerational communication and socialising. Policy debates surrounding the ageing population also contribute to a culture of separation, as they construct the ageing population in economic and medical terms whereby the older population is a problem that must be borne by younger generations. Society then unnecessarily equates older people with being a burden that younger citizens must carry.

Academic disciplines are also revealing in what they do not say about old age. Sociology, psychology, and linguistics, for example, rarely deal with ageing as an issue worth separate scrutiny. Instead it is considered in the margin of other topics such as work, family, language differences, memory, pathologies, etc. As Andrew Blaikie, a sociologist interested in the intersection of historical theories of ageing with contemporary contemplations (particularly visual images) of old age, points out:

> There is still a reticence among sociologists to include ageing with the now conventional groupings of class, race, ethnicity and gender among the key organizing principles of social life. Gerontologists, meanwhile, tend to discuss old age, or ageing after retirement, rather than adopting a life-course perspective that acknowledges the implications of earlier experiences for later developments. As a consequence the academic

[78] The Illawarra Retirement Trust provides hostels, nursing homes, community services, day care packages and even a catering service and operates in Woonona, Towradgi, Wollongong, Kanahooka and Unanderra.

> discussion of age *in itself* is seen as marginal to a range of issues (gender differentiation, unemployment, equal opportunities) considered more pressing both culturally and as regards social policy. (18)

The marginalisation of ageing in academia is, I would suggest, symptomatic of the marginalisation of age as an issue and as an identity in society in general. Indeed, considering the proportion of people over 65, ageing as invisibility seems to be a prevailing discourse. Certainly, within cultural studies, there is a considerable silence surrounding representations of and by older people. Like oral history, cultural studies uses old people as sources in order to study their viewing experiences (Seiter) or their impressions of War (Thomson) but age has not been highlighted except for a call for more research, now two decades old, issued by the Popular Memory Group (244).

So what are the cultural imperatives that encourage so many discourses to ignore ageing or see it as symbolic of decline, disengagement or denial? After all, as Featherstone and Wernick have explained:

> Whilst the biological processes of ageing, old age, and death cannot in the last resort be avoided, the meanings which we give to these processes and the evaluations we make of people as they grow physically older are social constructions which reflect the beliefs and values found in a specific culture at a particular period in history. (30-31)

Although the process of ageing is inevitable, the ways we think about older people and ageing are conditioned by the discourses on ageing circulating in society at a given period in time. Foucault's critical studies into crime and punishment, madness and sexuality[79] have shown how conditions we take for granted are, in fact, contingent upon historically situated discourses. In the same way ageing is also constructed and constrained by particular discourses. In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault, by setting out

[79] *Discipline and Punish* (1977); *Madness and Civilisation* (1967); *The Use of Pleasure: Vol. 2 of The History of Sexuality* (1986)

the ways in which sexuality is constructed, also provides a useful model to be considered in regards to the social construction of ageing or old people:

> [Ageing] is constructed by:
>
> - the formation of sciences that refer to it - disciplines (savoirs);
> - systems of power that regulate its practice - open strategies rather than domination; and
> - forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognise themselves as subjects of this [ageing] (4) [substitution mine]

Using this model, it becomes easier to see the processes by which "ageing" or "old people" are constructed. For example, psychological, linguistic and medical disciplines may constitute ageing through measuring declining mental or physical faculties. Oral history, as I have indicated, sometimes treats older subjects as unreliable or overly nostalgic. Sociology or gerontology has, in the past, looked for ways of describing what was thought to be a "natural"' withdrawal of elderly people from public life. And some disciplines, for example cultural studies, do not even speak of old people or ageing as a subject and therefore constitute it as an absence or silence. Ageing as decline, withdrawal, unreliability, nostalgia and invisibility are just some of the discursive formations constituted by academic disciplines.

In turn the systems of power that regulate ageing and "old people" through open strategies rather than through domination can be seen in federal and state age-related policies. Housing policies that segregate elderly people in retirement communities, legal retirement ages which hive off a large group of people from productive labour, and welfare policies which means test older people and compel them to fill in numerous forms for pensions, winter fuel payments or even bus passes are examples of the regulation of ageing. Such systems coalesce with the ways in which the disciplines construct ageing so that the lack of older people in the workplace constitutes age as invisibility, the bureaucracy involved with age-related benefits and concessions constitutes age as segregation, separated from the section of the population who do not get free passes, or are not entitled to pensions.

Finally, it is important to consider the ways in which individuals recognise themselves as ageing subjects. A significant example of this is in the ageing body itself. The medical discourses that constitute ageing as decline and which measure older people's response times, pathologies, etc., against younger adults are drawing a distinction between the young and the older body. Meanwhile advertisements in the media to be rid of the signs of ageing or which promise to keep you looking, younger and healthier, as if the two are synonymous, focus attention on and mark the older body as somehow inferior and undesirable. Therefore older people easily recognise themselves as ageing subjects through the monitoring and surveillance of bodily changes, grey hairs, the appearance of lines, advancing years. Similarly, the way in which fashions and discourses change over time marks older people as "out of touch" or "behind the times". Therefore another way of recognising oneself as an ageing subject is through no longer feeling as if society speaks your views or concerns, that it has "moved on".

Blaikie concisely summarises these constituent parts of the construction of ageing and suggests that economic imperatives have coalesced with a variety of discourses to legitimise a specific set of associations about old age and dependency:

> Ageism needs locating. The reasons behind discrimination are frequently economic, but the capacity to maintain oppression is primarily psychological. Ageism is both institutionalized in the social structure – legally, medically, through welfare, education, and income policies - and internalized in the attitudes of individuals. In a capitalist society people are valued in economic terms, and, whilst young dependents - children - are regarded as potential assets, older people are not. It has been argued, therefore, that the structured dependency of 'the elderly' as a group, which developed with the emergence of retirement, has generated accompanying forms of legitimation: ideological supports have been provided through biological reductionism (rights denied because of disability, frailty or failing health), psychological explanations (dependency reflects childlike behaviour and status) and social justification (old people want to disengage from society). (17)

Blaikie sets out the ways in which various discourses can be seen to regulate ageing so as to serve the needs of particular political/economic imperatives. This follows a Foucauldian perspective that sees discourses as controlling the way people view and respond to the condition of ageing.

Foucault's later work, notably, *The Uses of Pleasure*, also introduces the possibility of individual agency. Here, Hall says that Foucault

> tacitly recognizes that it is not enough for the Law to summon, discipline and produce and regulate, but there must be a corresponding production of a response (and thus the capacity and apparatus of subjectivity) from the side of the subject (*Questions* 10).

So, in the *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault foreshadows a theoretical shift whereby "It seem[s] appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognises himself *qua* subject" (6). The emphasis now is on individual subjects and how they construct themselves through discourse rather than on the disciplining and regulating techniques of the Law. This distinction is crucial as it sets up the difference between the construction of ageing by agencies of power and the negotiation of these discourses by ageing subjects themselves.

Hall sets out the processes by which individuals take up various subjectivities and emphasises that there is always a "lack of fit" between available subjectivities and an individual's sense of self:

> I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us, or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct. (*Questions* 5-6)

What I would like to do now is to look at how older people use discourses of ageing in their narratives. I want to concentrate on two specific discourses that constitute ageing: that of the age-as-decline discourse and the discourse of nostalgia and to look at the way the people I interviewed used them to further their narratives and their construction of identity. What I am hoping to get at is "the mechanisms by which individual subjects identify (or do not identify) with the positions to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylise, produce and 'perform' these positions" (Hall *Questions* 13).

PERSPECTIVES ON AGEING

Age-as-Decline

As I have already suggested, one of the primary discourses affecting the social construction of ageing is the way in which older adults are seen in relation to illness and decline. Turner points out that one of the fundamental problems with ageing is the discrepancy between how a person feels inside, their internal sense of self and identity, and how they are seen and judged on the basis of their external appearance which is conceived as "other" to and different from the rest of the population (quoted in Featherstone and Wernick 258).

Yet this distinction is a culturally imposed one. The human body changes shape all through people's lives so that the very young, teenagers, middle aged people, any age group in fact, could all be recognised by broad body types and pathologies. But old age has become synonymous with the decaying body so much so that older people are generically referred to as "Geriatrics". Norman (quoted in Bond et al 308) points out how odd this actually is by suggesting how bizarre it would be to call children "paediatrics". It is a striking example of the conflation of age with corporeality.

The emphasis on the ageing body and on the health problems of older adults colours the way they are talked to and can talk back. It is such that some older adults feel they have to talk about their age within their narratives, a subject that is dealt with in different ways but is frequently present. Stan Chesher, for example, became comically defensive when dates and his age were even loosely referred to, at one stage joking that he was still a boy (interview 10 1). When did allude to his date of birth he joked, "Don't tell anyone else" (2).

Similarly, age was discussed in Jack and Rene Hodgesons' interview. The Hodgesons wondered at the people they had thought "old" when they were teenagers:

> **RH**: She wasn't very old but we thought of her as elderly because she dressed elderly … we just presumed she was old. And I suppose, when you're 20 and you see someone of 40 you think they're old … We used to say, "Old Walter Haguely" and when he died he was only 48. But to us he was old.
> **JH**: then the doctor that was there when Bronwyn was born, "Old Doctor Featherstone" – he was 50 when he died. (interview 12 10)

Older people are conditioned to talk in terms of their years, their physical status and health, cataloguing their illnesses and reporting on their well being.

This was illustrated by the people I interviewed about cinema-going. In some cases, health issues and physical abilities were introduced into the narratives by the interviewee, although this often occurred before or after the tape recorder was turned on. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Gwen Baird (interview 8) was troubled by a recent fall she had had which resulted in her being moved from her own home into hostel care units in Woonona where the interview took place.

> **GB**: When we got married we went down the town (Thirroul) to Cochrane Road. I wouldn't change the old place. I often feel a bit sad to think that the old house has gone now. I do really. Not that we had anything elaborate or anything but we had all we needed.
> But Dr Bunn said, "Gwen, the house is too big for you. You won't be able to keep it up".
> See, they found me on the floor. Frank found me. He wanted to know something and so he rang me at 5 o'clock in the morning and he couldn't understand why I didn't answer the phone. So he came out and found me on the floor and he said, "Mum, your face was purple and so was your neck".

> And he got in touch with Dr Bunn just a few houses down and – I don't know how they did it – they dressed me and got me in the ambulance - because Frank knew where my nighties and things were.
> Dr Bunn came out to the hospital. But I don't remember any of it – only that I got in the ambulance and I didn't know what I was doing. I said, "Where am I going?" and Dr Bunn said "Bulli Hospital".
> (interview 8 4-5)

Gwen describes her fall on numerous occasions and repeats the key phases spoken by her doctor and her son: her son describing her purple colour when she was found and her doctor telling her in a tone Gwen mimics as stern but fatherly that she would have to move from her home. It is important to bear in mind the significance of home for older people as a site of memories and of objects that provide markers of identity. This is particularly so for women currently over 60 who have often spent a significant amount of time in the home as wives, mothers and carers (Blaikie 200). Gwen's emphasis on this episode indicates its importance, because it resulted in her moving out of her family home and also because she lost consciousness during the fall and the event is therefore reconstructed using information she has had from her son and her doctor.

As a result of her fall Gwen's doctor and her son told her she had to move into the hostel care units at Woonona. Gwen was relatively powerless in this decision as her son and her doctor used the doctor's advice to persuade Gwen to move. In an important way the power of medical practitioners and medical terminology over the elderly is illustrated as this fall directly led to Gwen's loss of home and relative independence. In this part of her narrative Gwen is rendered powerless and speechless apart from her timid, "Where am I going?" Whilst not wanting to enter into a dispute about the need for Gwen to be living under nursing supervision (yet noting how these words are heavily laden with overtones of surveillance), the fact remains that as a result of her fall, and the doctor's "expert" opinion of the fall, Gwen went through major life change. It is not surprising that she is frequently drawn back to this event in her narrative.

It is not surprising that age-as-decline discourses feature more frequently in the first set of interviews, as the residents living in the units tend to be older than those I interviewed in their own homes and in senior citizen centres and their deteriorating

health was often the reason they decided to live in hostel accommodation. However, medical discourses are also likely to be far more common within institutions where the comparisons between one's own health and that of others is more readily visible and where the topic is frequently discussed between residents and other residents, residents and their families and residents and their staff. While undertaking the first set of interviews I worked as a carer at the retirement trust with Gwen and the other interviewees and so they were also used to discussing how they were feeling with me – in a sense, then, Gwen may have been reporting back to me as a nurse as well as telling me about cinema for my studies. Importantly, though, the discourse is encouraged by the climate of surveillance that is endemic to aged care, where comparisons are inevitable and reporting on oneself and one's health often makes up a significant proportion of one's conversations.

The example of Gwen's fall used above illustrates how this discourse intervened in our narrative of cinema-going. However, interviewees positioned themselves differently against the discourse; Gwen was anxious and repeated her story as if trying to come to terms with the fall and subsequent move to the hostel from her home. On the other hand Wyn Chadban (interview 13 2) and Cec Clark (interview 25 12), who was also interviewed in his hostel unit in Carlingford, assert control over their decision to move to retirement trust units, boasting about their continued mobility and good health and emphasising that they made their own, independent decision to move into managed care facilities.

A study by Coupland (quoted in Bond et al 308) looks at the way the elderly employ the subject of their health and physical status in their conversation and concludes that they do so because it is what is expected of them and because it is seen as a way of relating to other generations. This could also account for the deployment of such discourses by the people I interviewed. That older narrators may employ discourses strategically in order to connect with younger generations is a theory oral history interviewers should bear in mind when looking at narratives produced by older adults. My point is that, although certain discourses loom large in the construction of ageing, result in negative stereotyping of older people and easily summon older people to speak them, they are also deployed for a number of personal and strategic reasons that warrant investigation and analysis.

Nostalgia

"Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed" wrote Herb Caen in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (quoted in F Davis 35). This view of nostalgia edits out the bad times and re-present the past as a golden age never to be achieved again. It has been said to play into the hands of capitalism and conservatism (Hutcheon quoted in Battaglia 93). For, if Marxism relies on the premise that the proletariat will inevitably revolt against the inherent oppression of capitalism, it is confounded by nostalgia which insists that the past wasn't so bad or unfair after all, but was safe and good, and it is the future that we have to fear for its uncertainty. Thus the possibility of revolution is defeated and the status quo is preserved. Nostalgia has therefore been distrusted by the left as a tool of capitalism that works against any realisation of the inadequacies of the past.

The equating of nostalgia with old age can be seen across disciplines and in the media. As I mentioned earlier, Henige has warned oral historians to watch out for the "rose-coloured glass" effect (46) whereby older people see the times of their youth as a lost golden age. Moreover Blaikie has pointed out that older people are also used by society in general as markers of a bygone era. Blaikie gives the example of postcards and photographs of the British seaside that often feature older people as lost characters such as the "old salt", the "Scottish fishwife" or the "deck-chair man" (155). Indeed, Blaikie goes on to point out that the use of older people as nostalgic markers in turn encourages older people to adopt such markers themselves. To use the same example, British seaside communities by virtue of their nostalgic connotations with a romantic leisured past are seen as "safe-havens" by older citizens and are the places that more affluent pensioners move to after retirement (162). Nostalgia is a discourse that is expected from older subjects and this expectation can lead to a misapprehension that older people tend to be more backward-looking and conservative than the rest of society. In fact, research seems to indicate that our attitudes often remain with us through the life course rather than changing with old age. For example, older people tend to continue to vote for the parties they have when they were younger, meaning that the vote of older people may not always favour conservative forces (quoted in Blaikie 72).

The dangers of this discourse to images of ageing are apparent. Constructing older people as looking back nostalgically on their past to a time when things were safer,

better, etc., not only devalues what is being said about the past but also stops one having to take notice of anything older people say about the present. This leads to older people, when speaking in the present, being confined to the topic of the past. This is particularly resonant with me, as it describes the expectations I had of my interviewees when I first started interviewing people about cinema-going

I wanted to know what it was like to go to the pictures half a century ago and was initially frustrated when the people I interviewed strayed into the present, even to the extent that I turned off the cassette recorder surreptitiously when the interview strayed from cinema in the past to other musings about the present.[80] The interview with Ron and May Klower is such an example, where I wanted to hear memories of the past and expected nostalgic reminiscences, but was instead invited to share opinions and hear Ron's perspective on modern films (interview 2).

Like Portelli's interviewee who at first only sings the fascist nursery rhymes because he cannot tell what his interviewer wants (*Trastulli* 29-31), so those interviewed for this study tried to ascertain what was expected from them and give corresponding anecdotes. Ron tried to relate to me by talking about films we might both have seen. Instead of indulging this strategy, which may have led to an improved interview relationship and encouraged other stories about cinema-going, I hurriedly tried to persuade Ron back into the past. Similarly, other people I interviewed may have told me nostalgic tales about the past because they believed (correctly, at it turned out) that nostalgia was what was expected of them. I had asked them to tell me what it was like to go to the pictures in their youth and they recreated a nostalgic view of the period that was easier than venturing political or controversial anecdotes which I may have been hostile to. Consequently, nostalgia is a strategy of mediation for older people that is both a prudent and an expected response.

I hope I have begun to problematise the relationship between old age and the discourse of nostalgia. Although nostalgia is invoked by older people it is important to acknowledge that this comes to pass under the expectations of wider society and is

[80] To my shame, this is why five interviews from the first set I co-produced contain unnecessary breaks in the flow of conversation (interviews 4, 7, 8, 9 and 12).

further disseminated in the way society depicts old people through nostalgic filters (for example the way in which veterans of World War One and Two are reported in sentimental and affectionate ways in news bulletins). As a consequence of this process, nostalgia becomes a discourse used by older adults and, indeed, it is common to many of the interviews I co-produced with older Illawarra residents. Let us now look more closely at the way the people I interviewed used nostalgia in their narratives.

I found nostalgia was used to highlight the differences between the present and the past. Nostalgia was expressed through common sayings such as "the good old days" and shared references such as community loyalty and the ethic of "making do". Nostalgia was linked to common themes that emerged from the narratives. Firstly there was nostalgia for cinema itself. For example, Ethel Simpson mourned the fact that they didn't make cowboy films like they used to (interview 7 2) and Dot Jay claimed her favourite pictures has never been surpassed:

> **DJ**: There were two pictures that stuck in my mind – I don't care what you anyone says about *Titanic* (1997) and all them … two pictures stuck out in my mind: *Lost Horizon* (1937) and *The Razor's Edge* (1946). Gee they were beautiful pictures … They had lovely stories. I reckon the pictures in those days were much nicer, not so much violence and none of the swear words and none of the sex – they might go together in a room but we didn't see anything, not like today. They were better pictures and nicer stories. (interview 16 5)

Ron Klower also made several comments about the changes in cinema, noting that there weren't the sort of theatres or audiences there used to be, that it used to be so much cheaper to go to the movies, that you would see better stars and a more diverse program for your money, and that the cinemas in the Illawarra were now "all stacked in one heap" in the south rather than spread evenly throughout the district. Then Ron talked about the changes in cinema projection and admitted he no longer understood how things worked:

> **RK:** In them days we had two projectors for one cinema. One reel would last 20 minutes, then you took it out and ran another. It's not done

> like that now - the whole thing is on one big reel and it can even wind itself back out there…and they don't seem to have any breakdowns - that's another thing about these complexes - We used to have carbon arcs but now they don't even have carbon arcs do they? (interview 2 1-2)

In Ron's interview, nostalgia for the way things used to be seems to make up for the fact that he no longer understands how cinema, his industry, works. The complexity of the technological changes that have occurred is countered by his nostalgia that suggests mechanical changes alone cannot compete with the experience of cinema in his era.

What is clear from these examples is that nostalgia is not merely a retreat into an idealised past but is an active comparison between the past and the present. These narrators are not "living in the past" to use the cliché, they are using the nostalgically realised past to make comparisons with and assert themselves in the present. Although Ron doesn't understand how modern projection equipment works he can nevertheless assert, having knowledge of past eras, that his time in the industry was superior in terms of theatre styles and locally-based audiences. Similarly, Dot suggests the content of films was better.

There are no objective truths to these comparisons. It is not possible to say which era of cinema was really better, because it always comes down to one personal value judgements against another. However, what this type of nostalgia does is advance the self-image of the older narrators and to assert an idealised past that is better than the present in particular ways.

Debborah Battaglia, an anthropologist who studied the lives of Trobriand Islanders living in the city of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, is a researcher who disagrees with the passive and conservative view of nostalgia. She writes:

> Nostalgia may in fact be a vehicle of knowledge, rather than only a yearning for something lost. It may be *practiced* in diverse ways, where the issues for *users* become, on the one hand, the attachment of appropriate feelings towards their histories, products and capabilities,

> and on the other hand, their detachment from – and active resistance to – disempowering conditions of postcolonial life. (77)

Although Battaglia is writing about Trobrianders' nostalgic for their homeland in post-colonial Papua New Guinea, I would argue that there are strong parallels with the situation of older adults in contemporary Australian, indeed Western, society. Both are made to feel that the world they inhabit is no longer theirs; they are disempowered and marginalised within their societies. And both are distanced from a society where they felt more power and confidence, irrespective of the fact that the distancing is for the Trobrianders *geographical* and for older people, *temporal*.

The other important parallel between older adults and the Trobrianders is that of postcolonial identity. Both the Trobrianders and older people share a lack of power and a position of marginality. They are coping with life after colonisation of their "homeland", the Trobrianders having to work in a new country and older people having to wear the colonised identity of old age. Both are under surveillance for looking and behaving differently and are identified as what they are not: not Papua New Guinean and not young.

Battaglia redefines nostalgia and, instead of seeing it as a passive position, makes it active. She does this by the way she writes about nostalgia, using active associations, so that nostalgia is *practiced* by *users* as opposed to the way nostalgia is usually written about (eg people "lapsing into" nostalgia). Battaglia sees nostalgia as a discourse through which people can both come to "appropriate feelings" about their past and can temporarily detach from or resist the postcolonial present.

So let us consider how this applies to older adults. The people I interviewed employed nostalgia to particular themes. As I have mentioned, cinema was a topic through which Dot Jay and Ron Klower talked about nostalgia. They both used nostalgia to criticise aspects of cinema-going and, by extension, contemporary society. Ron's criticisms included the expense of cinema-going, the inconvenience of theatre locations and the bad language heard in movies. Dot also criticised the language and was unhappy about sex and violence in contemporary films. As well as reflecting on positive aspects of their past, these concerns importantly reflect on the difficulties associated with

advancing age and are therefore criticisms of living as an older person in the Illawarra in the present. To wit, it is hard to get to cinemas when they are not conveniently located in each suburb; it is expensive to engage in leisure activities on old age pensions, and; it is worrying that younger people talk and act differently from them (swearing, sex and violence exemplified at the movies).

These criticisms are expanded by other interviewees who employ nostalgia. For example, another topic introduced through nostalgia was community safety, the suggestion being that the local community was much safer and friendlier in the past than it is today. Wyn Chadban attested that in Woonona you could walk home at night on your own in safety. "There was nothing going on in those days", she said (interview 13 2). Jack and Rene Hodgeson also talk nostalgically about community safety:

> **JH:** Thing was nobody had any money. You could pop out and leave your door open.
> **RH**: We used to go to Sydney. We'd get there and say, "Oh, I forgot to close the back door!" It wouldn't matter.
> **JH**: I remember going to the railway station. We were going to Sydney and see [Rene's] auntie. We got to the railway and I'd forgotten my wallet. I didn't have any money to buy my ticket. But a lady we knew well – she belonged to the picture show – and I borrowed my train fare off her. And when we got back the wallet was still sitting there on the end of the bed and I'd left the door open! … You couldn't do that now.
> **RH**: Those days are long gone. It's such a shame (interview 12 3)

Again, the "truth" of the matter – was it safer then or now – does not exist as it rests on opinion and it is not the point of this exchange. The important point is that the nostalgia invoked to talk about community safety in the 1930s, when you could go out and leave your door open and not be burgled, serves to highlight a contrast between then and now. By nostalgically reminiscing about the past, Jack and Rene are actually criticising the present where they feel they couldn't go out and leave the door open, where their children wouldn't be safe to play in the dark and where people do not seem part of a warm and all-embracing community. It is understandable that people like Jack and Rene see the community spirit of the neighbourhood disappearing. The suburbs have

expanded, their old contact networks have disappeared and they are marginalised in a community they can no longer recognise by its faces. Furthermore, they see articles in the media about older people as victims of crime that reinforce the idea that today's society is not a safe place for the old.

In my opinion Battaglia's points about practical nostalgia are borne out. The people I interviewed employed the discourse of nostalgia that is expected of the old but they used it to highlight, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, the problems of living life as an older person in the present. So, while it may be true that, from a macro view nostalgia can get in the way of negative politicisation of the past, it also serves to facilitate a critique of the present by using the past to highlight the problems of the present, particularly to the extent that they reflect the problems of being old in contemporary society. This is very different from past critiques of nostalgia that assert it is a "deliberate evasion of the present" (Robertson quoted in Battaglia 110).

Secondly, on a micro, personal level I believe nostalgia helps older people to recreate positive versions of themselves and to guard against loss and changes in the present. In his book about the sociology of nostalgia Fred Davis suggests that nostalgia "creates as it conserves" (108). On a personal level Davis is suggesting that nostalgia helps individuals to cope with the present, "reassuring the now self that it is 'as it was then': deserving, qualified and fully capable of surmounting the fears and uncertainties that lie ahead" (39).

Battaglia concludes her essay by drawing attention to the fact that nostalgia is a discourse and, as such, is socially constructed and therefore contingent on the discursive practices that construct its meaning:

> Before we speak critically of nostalgia in blanket terms, we must recognize that negative or positive judgements about the appropriate use of nostalgia have the quality of aesthetic judgements, and as such inscribe political positions it is important to locate. To be trapped within a negative disembodied concept of nostalgia is to preclude appreciation of nostalgia as a vehicle for knowledge and experience with a culturally specific historicity and a wholly *contingent* aesthetic efficacy. (93)

The importance of this point cannot be overstated in that it recognises that discourses are mutable, and meanings complicated and diverse. This closer look at the way older people employ the discourses of decline (medical discourses) and nostalgia shows that although these discourses have been used to confine and restrict the image of old people to a certain set of expectations and stereotypes, older people can employ the same discourses without necessarily being overridden by them. Instead, it is possible for these discourses to be used to exemplify some of the difficulties associated with old age or to further an individual's creative identity project.

ALTERNATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF AGEING

So far I have looked at dominant discourses on ageing and how older people themselves interact with these discourses and use them to articulate their attitudes to ageing and to their own self-concepts.

I would like to finish this chapter with a different perspective on ageing and a look towards future relationships and to positive associations between age and identity. Sociologist Peter Laslett, who has written many books about the family, turned his attention to ageing and the societal treatment of old age in the 1970s. In 1989, he published *A Fresh Map of Life*, which he later revised in 1996, a book that set out to redefine the life course. According to Laslett, old conceptions of ageing are hackneyed and unproductive and relegate everyone over retirement age to the province of illness, infirmity and decline: society's burden. Instead of trying to work within existing definitions and discourses of ageing, he rejects them all as "inaccurate and obsolete" and argues for a redefinition of the life course that more adequately deals with the long period between retirement and death. He writes:

> First comes an era of dependence, socialisation, immaturity and education; second an era of independence, maturity and responsibility, of earning and saving; third an era of personal fulfilment; and fourth an era of final dependence, decrepitude and death. (5)
>
> The Third Age is not to be defined wholly by the calendar nor are its true limits to be reckoned by birthdays. A point in the personal age of an

> individual, a point personally chosen, rather than a marker fixed in the calendar of biological, or of social age has to be the occasion for the onset of the Third Age. The Third Age, moreover, is a collective circumstance as well as a personal affair. It can only be experienced by an individual in the company of nationwide society of those with the disposition, the freedom and the means to act in the appropriate manner. (99)

Laslett's bold move is to attempt to change language, in the hope of changing practices concerning the second half of people's lives. By changing the way we speak about ageing, he asserts, we also begin to change the way it is constructed. In Laslett's model, although ageing happens to us all, the concept of "ages", or eras, is specifically uncoupled from numbered years and instead associated with how a person is living their life. Furthermore, the Third Age of personal fulfilment is the aspired-to condition of life and is found, by most although not all people, after retiring from the workforce. Hence Laslett is doing two important things: dismantling the assumption that everyone over 60 is "old" and in decline and replacing it with a set of definitions which change the value of retirement years from the common view of age as decline and eventual death to a new conception of the Third Age as the zenith of personal development and fulfilment.

For the Third Age to be possible, Laslett posits, life expectancy has to be 70 or over and significant numbers of the population have to be aged over 60. Laslett points out that ever since the 1950s at least a quarter of the adult population in Britain (in fact Laslett specifies people 25 and older) have been aged 60 and over. However, he describes a "cultural lag" whereby the attitudes and assumptions about ageing that people held until the monumental surge in life expectancy from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century have not yet caught up with actual ageing demographics. These attitudes, Laslett argues, "still continue to distort our image of older people and get in the way of a realistic understanding" (10).

Laslett recommends that we change the way we speak about ageing and the way people think about life after retirement. He stresses that this type of change has to occur at all levels, including at the level of policy-making in government. He recommends that older people plan for their life after retirement and endeavour to seize the opportunities it should present. Although he stresses that fulfilment is very much a matter of

individual taste and imagination, he posits examples, such as attending the University of the Third Age, becoming skilled craftsmen and women, taking up voluntary work and travelling (256-266). Blaikie also presents an alternative view of older lifestyles as he describes the growing number of pensioners in the US who travel across the country nomadically in their RVs (recreational vehicles). He quotes a study by Counts and Counts who suggest the RV-ers have created their own subculture within the US (178-9). This is echoed in the Australian experience where more and more couples, post-retirement, are travelling around the country and beginning a new period of personal growth through travel and exploration.[81]

Blaikie takes up Laslett's definitions of the Third and Fourth Age and uses them consistently through his work. However, he writes of a cultural shift that needs to take place in order to recognise and make meaningful the period of time after retirement:

> It is not simply that, blinkered by an adherence to a view of society driven by work, we - both intellectual commentators and the general public - have difficulty in conceiving of a world oriented towards the consumption of leisure. Rather, the legacy of the enlightenment teaches us that the world must also be one motivated by positive moral imperatives, and we have difficulty in seeing leisure as anything but self-indulgence - that is, time spent not endeavouring to work for the betterment of society. A profound contradiction exists when we cannot conceive of a useful role either as producers, reproducers or wise elders - for a social group that will shortly be larger than any other. The once abrupt transition from work and adulthood to old age and decline no longer appears. A space has opened up which the term 'retirement' does not wholly elucidate (70).

As a consequence of the work ethic, Ekerdt suggests that retirees have adopted what he calls a "busy ethic", whereby the leisure time experienced in retirement is legitimated through references to a full and active schedule of events. This "busy" ethic "defends

[81] For example, on 11 Nov. 2001 I listened to the ABC radio program, *Australia All Over* and one of the people to ring in was a retired woman from Wollongong who was in Perth as part of a road trip she was undertaking with her husband. She mentioned the many other retired couples that were also out travelling round Australia that they had met on their trip and tried to convert into regular listeners of the program.

old people against of judgements of senescence, and gives definition to the retirement role" (quoted in Blaikie 175). This continuity of work and retirement was adopted by many of the people I talked to, although it was not usually the topic of recorded conversations and was put to me as I was arranging or leaving an interview. Cec Clark, however, employed the "busy ethic" within his narrative:

> **CC**: I retired in 1972 and thought, "what am I going to do?" I went to Parramatta RSL and told them I'd like to do social work. [We] used to go around twice a week to all the various nursing homes, took them cigarettes, fruit, whatever. I made application for two of the villages. This one came up first. So we put our home up for sale and after a few weeks sold it and this unit became vacant. It was ours! Been here ever since. 14 years but I've been 7 years alone. I do all my own laundry, ironing. I go to the hostel every day for a midday meal and an evening meal at night. (interview 25 12)

Additionally, Cec told me, he goes out to the movies every week with different "girls" from the hostel, goes to the Burwood RSL on a weekly basis, puts on entertainment shows for the residents in the units and gives interviews to the local paper, local and national television stations, film-makers, psychologists and cultural studies researchers like myself! Cec is proud of his lifestyle and makes the point in the above quotation that on retirement he went out and looked for something to "do". The use of the term "social work" instead of "voluntary work", whether accidental or not, also suggests a desire for the post-retirement work to be a legitimate career.

Cec is now occupied consistently by the cinema business once more, although not in a paid capacity. He receives free movie tickets as a cinema pioneer and goes to the pictures every week where he then rates each film he has seen. He attends functions held by the cinema pioneers and gives interviews about his days as a travelling picture showman. His stories have been honed and developed into a well-crafted repertoire. He is kept very busy indeed and has been for all of his 29 post-retirement years.

So are older people living according to Laslett's Third Age? Cec, for one, fulfils Laslett's charge. In fact, most of the people I talked to were crafting post-retirement lifestyles and identities for themselves. However, none of them referred to themselves

as if they were part of a Third Age or, indeed, as if they were part of a community of older people or people with the same life goals. Therefore, as yet, I can only perceive a qualified move towards Laslett's posited life course. Blaikie and other scholars are adopting the language of Laslett's life course and some aged care policies are also looking towards positive ageing based on these principles.[82] However, there has not been a major shift in public attitudes. Similarly, while individuals are certainly living post-retirement lives of fulfilment they are not defining themselves with other older people. Rather, they define against them. Furthermore, for some people I interviewed it was harder to achieve fulfilment than ever because of limited means or limited physical abilities.

Indeed, one of my criticisms of Laslett's model is that it does not adequately deal with the Fourth Age. Laslett calls the Fourth Age one of "final dependence, of decrepitude and death" thus conflating people dependent on others or with disease or disability with death. The model therefore moves the onset of the age-as-decline model to a later stage in life but does not combat the widely held but untrue assumption that those in the Fourth Age are merely awaiting death.

Although Laslett acknowledges that Third Age occupations and pursuits can still be achieved despite the onset of physical decline, he does not expand on this and, in fact, underlines the tenet that the Fourth Age should be avoided at all costs (195). The danger here is that, like contemporary discourses, it encourages fear of dependence and physical and mental decline which is unhelpful. In my experience, people who could no longer pursue lifestyles of their choosing because of physical or even psychological problems still received pleasure from conjuring up their past lives and creating their past selves for others.

Here the importance of reminiscence becomes clear. Strangely, it used to be thought that reminiscence in the elderly was a bad thing. Peter Coleman suggests that even in the 1960s reminiscing or "living in the past" was seen as a pathology that would lead to depression and psychology textbooks advised that it indicated a form of mental

[82] In his book Laslett points to the Australian Labor Government of 1992 adopting his life course perspective and positing policies that allow for greater Third Age fulfilment (ix)

deterioration. Reminiscence was discouraged and activities such as bingo and handicrafts were encouraged in aged care as a diversion from one's memories (9).

Reminiscence began to be thought of as positive after an American psychiatrist, Robert Butler, wrote an article about reminiscence and the life review in 1963 and suggested that, rather than cause depression, reminiscence actually helped alleviate it by allowing people to arrange their lives into some kind of order and to organise their experiences and memories in ways which suggested a continuity of their identity through the years. From Butler's writings has come the idea of reminiscence as therapy for the aged and it is now an accepted practice in aged care.

Barbara Myerhoff has written about life review projects she set up with the Jewish elderly citizens of Venice Beach, California. Myerhoff conducted life review classes with elderly residents where they talked about what it is like to be old, to be Jewish, to have lived in "the old country" and now to be living in America. She found that, as the sessions continued, individuals sought reassurance from their peers about dates and events and began to re-evaluate their past and sometimes come to new realisations about it. In Myerhoff's study it seems reappraisal and re-evaluation tended to occur over time and in discussions with one's peers.

From the few interviews I co-produced I was able to see how reminiscence benefited the people I talked with as well as enriching my own picture of life in the first half of the twentieth century. Although the project started off as a way of finding out more about cinema going in the Illawarra, I came away with far more. Not only did I learn about social and personal histories of cinema-going in the Illawarra but also insights into the nature of oral history and identity construction and into the problems and benefits of ageing.

Consequently, the importance of reminiscence to older narrators in the Third and Fourth ages, in fact to all narrators I would suggest, should not be underrated as it underpins the creation and active review of past experiences and present self-constructions. The underlying theme here is that, despite occurring through dominant discourses which privilege some ways of seeing above others, reminiscence through oral history emphasises the possibility of agency in the recreation of identity. Gubrium describes

self-construction as “an everyday practice based on three sets of resources: the locally shared, the biographical, and ‘meaningfully available material objects’” (quoted in Blaikie 200). This neatly describes the results of the oral history interviews I co-produced, whereby the topic of cinema was that which was locally shared through biographical stories and references and embodied in the use of available objects such as photos, scrapbooks and other personally significant props found in the homes of the people I talked to.

* * *

In this chapter I have tried to outline how discourses of ageing impact upon older narrators and their self-identity strategies. Although less germane to the goal of elucidating cultural and personal histories of cinema-going, it is nevertheless a vital consideration. After all, in other cultural studies it would be ludicrous to consider for example, women’s’ reading choices without considering issues of gender identification (Radway) or the discussions of *The Color Purple* by black women without examining questions of race (Bobo). Thus it is equally valid and important to consider the discourses of ageing narrated by older Australians. If it seems jarring, it is only because older adults consistently feature in research *without* subjective values of ageing figuring in discussions at all.

I acknowledge that isolating older adults as a group both divides them from other positions and simplifies the many differences between older people creating a false homogeneity. Such is the problem of essentialism. However, identifying the way in which discrimination is constructed through specific discourses can also lead to a sense of camaraderie and can facilitate the will to change perceptions. Therefore, it is necessary to deploy what Gayatri Spivak has termed a “strategic essentialism” (quoted in Landry and Maclean 214), which acknowledges that grouping subjects is problematic while recognising that such generalisations are sometimes necessary in order to illustrate how sectors of the community are being marginalised in our society.

In this way we can start to articulate what the Popular Memory Group calls “a politics of later life”:

> It is clear that the contribution of older people to a socialist and feminist popular memory involves such a political strategy. Our existing understandings are insignificant here, not least because 'age' seems yet another kind of relation to be compared with class, gender or race. But such a politics should certainly start from a proper analysis of the experience of older people today – the specific forms of oppression and cultural marginality – and from the assumption, very different from official or conventional wisdom, that their memories, sometimes actively rethought, may contribute to a politics of today in which they are, themselves, participant. (244)

We need to examine how older people are positioned by discourses, how they are spoken for and how they are permitted to be heard speaking back. In this chapter we have seen how certain discourses on ageing hold sway and influence how older people are thought about, spoken about and therefore treated and also how these discourses are taken up by older people themselves. In trying to reconcile the negative construction of ageing some older people disassociate themselves with other people their age that they deem "old", implying that the definitions do not apply to them.

Others use discourses of decline or sentiment but do so with qualifications that point to the negotiation of the generic discourse with personal experiences. For example, Gwen Baird, while lamenting the loss of her family home and the move to hostel care also uses stories of her youth to create a feisty and independent persona (interview 8). Similarly, Jack and Rene Hodgeson and Wyn Chadban (interviews 12 and 13) talk about community safety in the past but do so in order to assert the importance of certain values in the present and to favourably compare their own experiences with the present younger generation.

Cec Clark, on the other hand, largely ignores discourses on ageing (interview 25). Although 93 and occasionally ill he did not bring his health into the narrative, preferring instead to concentrate on his life as an entertainer both in the past and in the present. He also resisted nostalgia as his present is as enriching and fulfilling as his past. He talks of the hostel as if it were a holiday camp and takes a different "girl" from the hostel to the movies every week. Age is not a burden to Cec, he gets the bus or a taxi to attend social

gatherings and proudly assents to tape-recorded interviews, photographs and videos. In Foucault's terms, Cec receives assurance (from the people seeking to interview him and from the many and varied audience for his tales) that what he says is of importance. In Cec's case his identity as an entertainer is assured and he is given more attention as he ages, therefore he is less likely to be co-opted into mainstream ageing discourses.

I have shown how ageing discourses have a varying degree of influence over older people themselves. While they frame they way in which older people are thought of, they do not always guarantee how older people will use the discourses and indeed if they will use them. In this way, looking at the end point of discourse, the individual and his/her articulation of self provides the possibility of agency and of a reworking of ageist marginalising discourses. As Featherstone and Hepworth point out:

> If, therefore, the source of many of the disagreeable aspects of the experience of later life can be traced to a negative culture of ageing ... then it should be possible to reconstruct those attitudes and beliefs through the creation of a culture of positive aging and old age. (30-1)

Such a positive culture is achieved through adopting new ways of speaking about the latter half of life, as Laslett's life course perspective aims to do, and by encouraging the active participation of older adults within cultural and political arenas. Although a major cultural shift of this kind has not yet occurred, it will be interesting to see what happens as the baby-boom generation retires. For, if the previous few generations have been characterised in one sense by the work ethic, then the baby-boomers' "lifestyles, radicalism and reflexivity will doubtless conflict with the generational preferences of those before them" (Blaikie 202). If, as a 1992 *Newsweek* article pointed out, "Baby boomers, by sheer force of numbers, have always made their stage of life the hip stage to be in" (quoted in Blaikie 19), then a revolution in the way we think about older people may not be too far away.

CONCLUSION

> The critical promise of the ethnographic attitude resides in its potential to meet and keep our interpretations sensitive to concrete specificities, to the unexpected, to history; it is a commitment to submit ourselves to the possibility of, in Paul Willis' words, 'being surprised', of reaching knowledge not prefigured in our starting paradigm. (Ang *Living Room Wars* 90)

My starting paradigm consisted of an assumption that oral history interviews would enable me to find out about cinema-going in the Illawarra region in the first half of the twentieth century. An ethnographic approach to this cinema audience revealed details about the experience of movie-going that were not available, often not even asked, in books, newspaper reports, cinema journals or advertisements. Thus audience narratives have been instrumental in producing a cultural history of cinema-going in the region.

However, thanks to the grounded methodologies of ethnography, popular memory and discourse analysis which are all theories *and* practical methodologies that compel you to reformulate questions *as* you research, I was "surprised" by several issues not identified in my starting paradigm. One such "surprise" was the complex nature of oral history, which was revealed through co-producing and exploring oral history narratives. I learned that the interview process involved intricate negotiations and relations of power between interviewer and interviewee, between an interviewee's past and present conceptions of themselves and between what is said and how it is later represented by oral historians and academic discourses.

Secondly, the issue of representation in oral history led me to consider the problematic representation of older narrators in some oral history texts and the under-representation of older people in general within academic disciplines such as cultural studies. This, combined with the way in which the people I interviewed negotiated, accepted or ignored age-related discourses, convinced me of the need for further exploration into what the Popular Memory Group calls "a politics of later life" (244).

Finally, it turned out that my oral history research led me to conceive of cinema-going as a strategy of mediation whereby people negotiated different configurations of identity: national, local, personal and political. Cinema-going was the theme that linked the oral histories while identity was the project that connected cinema-going to other personal and social reminiscences.

I conclude this thesis by revisiting its major themes, reiterating my conclusions and making suggestions for future research.

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF CINEMA-GOING

This thesis has examined a cultural history of cinema-going in the Illawarra in the first half of the twentieth century through oral history narratives. It is *a* cultural history because, as I pointed out in the introduction, any cultural history is a mediated history which is constructed within a matrix of meaning-making strategies which include historical discourses; the interpretation, agenda and personal memories of interviewees; and, the interpretative framework and agenda of the researcher. Unlike written sources or individual feature film texts, oral narratives provide a more complete picture of cinema-going as a practice which was intimately embedded in the everyday lives of Illawarra residents.

Oral history allows audience members to comment on the total experience of going to the pictures, which is always more than just going to watch a feature film, particularly so in the first half of the twentieth century. The program of entertainment was complex and varied, audience participation was expected at certain points in the entertainment program and particular sessions attracted different sections of the local audience who identified with fellow audience members and defined themselves against those of different preferences.

Although screen content was predominantly produced in Hollywood, this did not stop local audiences from negotiating it into a local context. Certain characters and genres were adopted by Illawarra communities because they struck a chord with local concerns; became associated with local characters; or, became established in popular taste through entertainment rituals. An example of this is the way Westerns were adopted by Illawarra audiences and became central to local stories and reminiscences.

The Western genre was successful worldwide because of factors such as its formulaic structure and the sheer number of Western features and serials produced which made them a regular part of any screen program. The Westerns were familiar to Australian audiences in that they played out against landscapes which could have been those of the Australian bush and their storylines echoed the already popular genre of bushranging tales. They were taken up by sections of the community (eg kids and adult males) who eagerly awaited the next Western feature or serial episode. Cinema rituals, which developed in association with the Westerns, included stamping your feet during the chase scenes, playing at "Cowboys and Indians" at home and adopting the mannerisms and even clothing styles of your favourite cowboys (see chapter 4).

Consequently, one of the conclusions I draw from the fertile collection of oral sources is that, although production output in terms of Australian cinema content was low, what was in abundance was evidence of how all screen content was mediated through national and local reception practices and personal agendas (see chapters 4, 5 and 6). Indeed, the ability of screen content to be recalled seems to depend on it being mutable and able to become embedded in personal, local, or national stories or discourses.

Cinema-going made an important contribution to local leisure practices and to the local economy. A cinema in one's suburb could boost the fortunes as well as the perceived autonomy of a suburb. The cinema collected different sections of the community under its roof albeit at different session times and in different social spaces. It also provided secondary funds to local business such as newsagents, eateries and guesthouses (chapter 5). It has been enlightening to hear how cinema managers and picture showmen took advantage of local audience preferences and habits to put together successful and therefore financially viable programs and audience activities. The creativity of showmen like Cec Clark (interview 25) and managers like Charlie Anderson (interview 22) was such that they were able to cater to popular taste and, in Charlie's case, to the tastes of specific sub-groups within the cinema-going public.

As Charlie identified his different audiences based on geography, class or gender, so the popular memory approach, which insists on looking for patterns and power relationships across individual narratives, has enabled me to determine similar factors of

influence within cinema-going practices and stories. Who you go to the cinema with, which theatre you go to, which session you attend, where you sit, what you do at the interval: all these choices can be read to determine geographical, gendered, class and age-based hierarchies. Similarly, anecdotes concerning local characters and cinema hi-jinks illuminate local pecking orders and community relationships (see chapters 3, 4 and 5).

Cinema-going was a backdrop to the hardships of life during wartime and the Depression, it fostered people's love-lives, marked their rites of passage and facilitated their identity-building. The cultural history of cinema-going, therefore, is not just about how an entertainment was enjoyed in isolation, but how it was integrated into peoples' lives and times. This thesis, then, has detailed the movie experience for Illawarra audiences in the first half of this century and, crucially, set it within meaningful contexts.

Cinema studies and cultural studies are lacking a substantial body of work about cinema audiences. Whereas television audiences are questioned, interpreted and positioned in cultural studies, the cinema audience is largely absent. Within cinema studies, the film text still receives more attention than the cinema audience and reception still seems to be of secondary concern. Although cinema audiences are now being written about (Staiger, Stacey, Collins), none of this research involves oral history with audience members. Instead it deals with imaginary audiences created from text readings, the trade press, industry statistics, entertainment programs or, at best, questionnaires (Stacey). Consequently, there is a great lack of oral history research with cinema audiences in general yet alone Australian research. While this thesis contributes to a very small body of oral history work on cinema being carried out by researchers such as Annette Kuhn, Mark Jancovich (both forthcoming) and by cinema-studies students (Allen), far more research needs to carried out which will allow broader, less tentative conclusions to be made about local audiences, Australian audiences and cinema audiences in general, past and present.

From my own perspective I would like to be able to compare audience testimonies from region to region or from regional and metropolitan areas to elucidate similarities and differences. A national attempt to look at cinema audiences might be undertaken

through a large-scale national research project or the commission and comparison of further community, regional and metropolitan Australian cinema-going studies. This would clarify those patterns of reception that were local and those which were national; for example, whether patterns of speech, remembered screen content and seating and theatre preferences had regional or national similarities or differences.

Another useful comparison would be between cinema-going in the first half of the twentieth century and cinema-going today. The way we experience going to the pictures has changed. Cinemas are no longer located in every suburb but are often only found in city centres or on their industrial periphery, accessible by car but not always well served by public transport. This has an effect on who goes to the cinema now and what role the cinema has for the local community.

The cultural space within cinemas has also changed and, I would argue, is in the process of changing again. In the second half of the twentieth century standardisation and the rise of the multiplex meant that less attention to detail went into the internal spaces of cinemas. This matched a streamlining of the program that became centred around trailers and a feature rather than longer programs, containing two features, or a feature and a combination of animation, serials, shorts and newsreels, as well as an interval.

However, recently, in Sydney (Hoyts, Fox Studios) and now in the Illawarra (Shellharbour Greater Union), there has been a reintroduction of the concept of luxury cinema-going. New cinemas are being created and old ones refurbished to provide ultimate comfort for the viewer rather than maximum capacity of audience, which has included larger, more comfortable seats, increased leg room, couple-seats and, in some cases, a personal bar service. This mirrors the marketing of the picture palace and picture theatres in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which emphasised luxurious carpets and well-appointed lounges and balconies with views over the town (*South Coast Times* 15 Jun. 1923 18). It would be interesting to research audience opinions of cinema spaces to develop a cultural history of the marketing and meaning of such cultural spaces.

In short there is a great deal of research missing from the cultural history of cinema-going which warrants attention and exploration, allowing further conclusions about what cinema-going means to audience members and how it is practised.

ORAL HISTORY

This thesis has also offered a specific approach to the practice of oral history based on popular memory and the work of specific critical oral historians. It is an approach that acknowledges oral narratives as highly constructed texts rather than as windows into the past or unproblematic instances of giving voice to the voiceless. Like other forms of history-writing, oral history is partial, serving the agendas of both interviewee and interviewer and is inextricably bound up in the discourses of the time. Like history-writing in general oral history is also the product of negotiations between the past events and present retellings.

However, unlike much history-writing, oral history *can be* a method which opens itself up to scrutiny and to an unpicking of the history-writing process. We can, after all, return to the interview tape and compare it to the interviewer's written interpretation or to other accounts of past events and times. Therefore, oral histories can foreground the tension between past and present, between interviewer and interviewee and between official and personal versions of events. Oral history emphasises these contradictions apparent in the creation of history

Oral history also has the advantage, despite its inevitable textualisation and co-option to the interviewer's agenda, of involving participants in history in its re-creation. It is in this sense a co-production between the interviewee's remembered self and their narrating self and between the interviewee and the interviewer. Through individual oral history narratives, the researcher can attempt to draw conclusions and make generalisations about what it was like to, for example, go to the pictures in the Illawarra, whilst retaining personal anecdotes as illustrations and indications of the times.

As Tara Brabazon writes, "popular memories rebound in the liminal space between private reminiscence and national narrative" (online). Notions of "the audience" and the term "popular memory" correctly suggest that I have been looking beyond the individual to more collective experiences. The identification of common themes and

discourses serves to illustrate this process. Thus, in this thesis I have called into being a symbolic cinema audience of the Illawarra relating their experiences of cinema-going in the first half of the twentieth century.

There were reception practices articulated in the oral narratives that seemed common for most of the audience. Members of the cinema audience tended to go every week to their nearest suburban picture show and, for a treat, into town. They would attend regularly no matter what was showing. They would grow-up at the movies, graduating from Saturday matinees, where they sat at the front, to courting in town cinemas, preferably sitting in the upper circle, to more sporadic attendance once married. They loved Westerns and comedies and were not overly concerned where their movies were made, tending to sit in the same place at the movies at particular times and to know the local people sitting around them. They socialised at the interval – often leaving the theatre to grab their favourite food from various shops and eateries – and used the cinema buildings for other functions such as dances, fund-raisers and sometimes even soup kitchens.

These generalised patterns of behaviours also highlighted popular discourses that were used in the narratives such as larrikinism, local identity, and community spirit through hardship. The negotiation of these discourses sometimes challenges written histories. For example, written accounts highlighting the suffering and despondency of the Depression (Richardson) are countered by those oral histories suggesting that the worst times also brought out the best times where people shared their possessions, felt safe and familiar in their neighbourhood, and "made their own fun". In this thesis I have explored the various ways in which popular discourses intersected with personal and local ways of making sense of the times.

The oral histories also show how determining factors, such as age, class and gender were negotiated through cinema-going practices such as theatre, seating or content preferences. While a person's class, age and gender might determine where they sat, who they went with and what they did, their personality traits at the time and the way in which the narrator chooses to remember and recreate their younger selves also affected the ways in which cinema-going was recalled. In this respect, determining factors, such as class, gender and age, affect choices and preferences in relation to cultural practices

such as cinema-going but not to the exclusion of individual and personal factors. Consequently I find myself taking the middle ground in debates between agency and determination, the active audience member and the controlling influence of dominant ideologies reflected on at various points in this thesis, seeing both the expression of individual and creative interpretations of cinema-going alongside culturally determined influences on behaviour.

Another issue over which I remain unresolved is that of the Popular Memory Group's second stated definition of popular memory as a dimension of political practice (205). While I agree that the oral history interview should be a learning experience for the interviewer and the opportunity to rethink and consider for both the interviewer and the interviewee, I do not hold with the group's stated objective that oral history should lead to the interviewee's awakening to a socialist political interpretation of working class experience. This reformist agenda can be seen (Lummis 142) as patronising, an attempt to instil a particular political viewpoint on the interview subject, suggesting an evangelical attempt at conversion rather than an earnest attempt at learning from the interviewee. So is it possible to create a program of reform which is ethical and transformative and which incorporates both agency and advocacy? I believe that reform of oral history practices so as to make the interview more rigorously examined and explored is necessary and that, if both interviewer and interviewee learn from the experience and can transform the way they may previously thought about a subject, then a good result has been achieved.

The difficultly lies afterwards in publishing and promoting the oral histories in a way that does not lose the original essence of the interview and does not leave the narrative a one-sided interpretation constructed solely within the researcher's methodological framework. Ownership of the material and the process of interpretation by both parties and encouragement of interviewees to self-publish and to talk about their experiences within pedagogical environments are some ways of retailing interviewee power within the research process. To a lesser extent, making interviews available in their original format to the widest audience possible[83] and constructing research papers and theses

[83] Advances in technology mean that the original source, the interview itself, is now much more accessible to a wider audience. This means that people have the choice of accessing interpretations of oral history in the usual bibliographical way or engaging with the original interview through CD-Roms or

that address the interviewee amongst their imagined audience and which undertake rigorous attempts at self-reflection also go some way to effect more of a balance.

These strategies, of interviewee-led publications, of explorations of power relationships within research and teaching environments, and of rigorous self-reflection are encouraged by the popular memory approach to oral history. It is a dynamic and politically significant way of considering the oral history process and the resulting narratives.

I would like to see further oral history work carried out with cinema audiences in Australia and elsewhere which examines the ways in which the oral history narratives are constructed and interpreted. However, it is also crucial not to allow the unpicking of narratives to get in the way of the beauty of anecdotes and stories about oral history. During the course of this project, what has struck me is the way in which stories have been crafted and perfected to produce wonderful illustrations of what cinema-going means to individuals and communities. Olga Ferguson (interview 3 3) as a young girl holding up broken bits of celluloid to the sky outside the Scarborough cinema; Jack and Rene Hodgeson's description of Mrs Swann (interview 12 10) carrying her bunch of flowers into the pictures; Stan Chesher (interview 10 1) craning his neck in the front row to see his cowboy pictures; or Dot Jay and her siblings sitting on the dining room table watching pictures without the soundtrack through the open windows of her house and those of the Civic Theatre (interview 16 2): moments such as these are poignant in themselves but also reveal the way the cinema was experienced and cherished by audience members.

POLITICS OF OLD AGE

As well as drawing together a symbolic cinema audience from the various individual oral history narratives I have also used popular memory analysis to draw together impressions of ageing found in the oral history narratives. Although the topic of the

online archives. Although this has the advantage of keeping the researcher honest in that their interviews comment on the process of transcription and interpretation they have applied, it is also important to note that the oral history interview already misses out on the visual nuances and power relations which went on during the oral history interview itself. Therefore this is no substitute for carrying out further oral histories. The more people that are interviewed the wider the available interpretations are and the more likely to advance debate about the topics under discussion and the process of oral history itself.

interviews was cinema-going, each interview, to large or small degree, utilised the interviews to build on identity projects. For many people this involved negotiating with themselves as young cinema-goers (the narrated self) and the older adults speaking (the narrating self).

The Popular Memory Group draws attention to the importance of considering age when looking at oral history as it is an intrinsic factor to the construction of narratives. What I have explored in this thesis (see chapter 7) are the ways in which older people are constructed by and in turn take up certain age-related discourses in their narratives and how their personal articulations of elderliness interact with popular conceptions of ageing.

The narrators deal with the changes wrought on them by time and juxtapose their young selves onto their older narrating selves. Hence some narrators are at pains to point how beautiful, talented or fit they were once, as if painfully aware of the demerit points that an older body awards them in current discourses. Narrators also utilise the past present relationship to emphasise the values worth keeping from the past and the ways in which their values and themselves have changed.

As society places a negative value on ageing, older narrators find themselves justifying their lives in the present through their experiences in the past. They point out the things that were good about being young and being older and point out those benefits that are not available today. In this way they implicitly criticise present society. I have shown how this criticism is often dismissed as mere nostalgia, a case of living in the past and withdrawing from the present. However, in chapter 7 I argue that this is not the case and that nostalgia in its accepted form serves the dominant ideology in that it enables older people to be dismissed as out of touch and living in the past.

I have also pointed to a change in the conception of ageing which sees the post-retirement period as a time of increased leisure – a Third Age in which self-fulfilment is paramount. I point to the ways in which ageing can be seen positively as a condition to be aspired to instead of avoided and show how some of the people I interviewed exhibit stories of self-fulfilment and challenge in the present as well as or as a consequence of their experience in the past. My aim in this respect is to open up a space within oral

history and within cultural studies in general for the consideration of issues of ageing and identity.

The oral histories I co-produced with older residents of the Illawarra contain identity projects that necessarily reflect on people's age and their perceived status. Although many people interviewed in oral histories are post-retirement age, there has been little attempt to examine age-related discourses and issues that arise in the narratives. Therefore, a considerable amount of work is needed to place age on the agenda in cultural studies and throughout academia in general. It is time that mainstream texts started considering age as a defining characteristic such as gender, race, sexuality or class, which needs to be considered as a factor in the construction of self and meaning. Moreover, we need to change the way we look at older people's words, so that we do not confine them to their pasts but view them as active meaning makers and contributors to our view of the present and future.

THE THEME OF IDENTITY

If cinema-going was the topic of the oral history narratives I co-produced, then identity has been major discourse running through them. All narratives engaged with it at a national, local, and most often personal level. Most commonly the stories in an oral history narrative were arranged so that they drew out certain character traits and qualities which were intended to reflect on the speaker's personality, however, narratives also showed a strong preference for stories of community identity cohesion, while others drew on discourses of national identity particularly through stories of wartime and of the Depression.

In this thesis I have discussed different interpretations of self-identity and followed the post-modern conception of identity as fragmentary and constantly changing. I also take-up Foucault's theories of discourse which see identities as formed by dominant and historically situated discourses and rather than as a set of distinctive and individual traits inherently possessed by an individual from birth. However, whilst identity isn't stable and cohesive, the illusion of an unchanging and secure identity is still a goal and project we aspire to. Therefore, I have followed Giddens' interpretation of identity as "the self as reflexively understood by [a] person in terms of her or his biography" (53). Thus,

Giddens points out that self-identity is something that has to be "routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (52).

In this way, the oral histories I co-produced include provisions for the routine creation and sustenance of particular versions of identity. As shown in chapter 6, personal identity was very much a part of the narratives and was exemplified both in the way tales of cinema-going were told and also how personal agendas and identity traits were inveigled into the interviews. This is shown by the attempts to refer to character traits that are perceived as enduring and essential parts of the narrator's character, for example, Dot Jay (interview 16 2) claiming she has "*always* had a good memory" [emphasis mine].

However, as I have pointed out, this attempt at forging a cohesive self-identity is a project that is strived for but never fully achieved, as the self is inevitably subject to changing discourses over time. The changing and fragmentary nature of the self is evidenced by the contradictions of character that occasionally surface in the oral narratives.

For example, Cec Clark's many created personas which are designed for separate anecdotes, when taken as a whole, show up necessary contradictions between those identities, for example, between the lifelong creation of Cec as Picture Showman and the longer career he had working at David Jones (interview 25). The point is that we all have these contradictory roles and versions of ourselves and oral history is one of the ways in which these selves are created and explored and through which meaning-making processes can be illuminated. For Cec, the Picture Showman is the identity which rewards him the most as it has given him contemporary recognition and fame, even though he inhabited the identity for a very short period compared to his later career at David Jones. Cec's life history brings out many other identities, Cec as soldier, lover, businessman, entertainer, favourite uncle and retirement village member, and his narrative shows how we revive and "try on" identities and see which ones work best at a particular time and context.

The politics of self-identity are significant in that they shed light on the process by which people select some anecdotes over others or decide to re-tell a story in a

particular order or with particular emphasis. The importance of managing one's identity so as to appear cohesive and convincing to ourselves and others determines how a narrative progresses, modified in accordance with the reactions and comments of the interviewer. It is easy to see how some details about an event are omitted and others conflict with written sources when we consider the self-identity agenda involved in the process of oral history. In this sense memory is created as much as it is recalled.

Identity is therefore an essential consideration when examining oral history narratives as it explains the negotiation and renegotiation that goes on between the past and present, between the interviewer and interviewee and between personal and dominant versions of history.

* * *

This thesis has conceived of cinema-going as a strategy of mediation and has attempted to set out a cultural history of cinema-going through the use of critical oral history whilst paying attention to the conceptions of identity that are inscribed within the narratives, such as self-identity, local identity, national identity and political identity (ie ageing). It is a necessarily contradictory process, at once trying to set out a "history" whilst also acknowledging and trying to convey the irreducible uniqueness of the personal stories that create this history.

Consequently, the greatest challenge has been to retain the personal and creative nature of each narrative while also attempting to draw wider conclusions about cinema-going and about identity formation and exploration through oral history. Alessandro Portelli precisely describes this challenge:

> The dramatic distance and the indissoluble bond between "history" and personal experience, between the private unique and solitary spores of sorrow in houses, kitchens, and anguished memories and the historian's perception and reconstruction of broad, public historical events … The task and the theme of oral history – an art dealing with the individual in social and historical context – is to explore this distance and this bond, to search out the memories in the private enclosed space of houses and kitchens and –

> without violating that space, without cracking the uniqueness of each spore with an arrogant need to scrutinize, to know, and to classify – to connect them with "history" and in turn force history to listen to them. [*Battle* viii]

In oral history the researcher has to grapple with the personal and the general at the same time. This is the dilemma but also the achievement of the method which re-views history with the individual in the foreground as the site where meaning is negotiated.

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Appendix I: Numbered Interview Transcripts

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Appendix II: Additional Research Material

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Appendix III: Sample consent form, research information & ethic clearance

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Appendix IV: Sample Questions for Interviews