Life in the Pen

Subject Representation in Political Prisoner Auto/biography 1963-1983

Melissa Jane Dearey

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University of York
Department of Sociology
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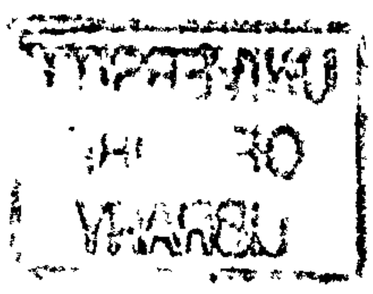

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Abstract:

This is a qualitative analysis of three "prison" auto/biographies published in English between 1963 and 1983, written by authors who considered themselves to be *political* prisoners, because of their racial, gender or religious identities. I argue that these political prisoner auto/biographies materialise in writing not out of the isolated, immaterial, bodiless imagination of the individual prisoner in solitary confinement, neither is their meaning as asocial or anti-social as their author's social status as rebels/deviants/outcasts might suggest. Rather, these auto/biographies emerge from a dual social resource, combining the embodied life experiences of an individual represented through the material activity of writing with the cultural stock of narratives that make up the modern canon of literature (aesthetic, sociological and historical). As a "resistance literature" (Millett, 1994; Harlow, 1987), these writings additionally shape the literary, historical and sociological canons, deeply influencing modern cultural narratives of identity, freedom and progress. I adapt techniques from auto/biography theory and intertextuality to examine both of these aspects of the prison auto/biographical text, first concentrating on how they disrupt formalist accounts of the events they record from either a literary or historiographical perspective; I then focus on the texts themselves, examining the intertextual, intersubjective and narratological construction to see how they are constructed to communicate a potent sense of social (be)longing. As this period is so closely linked to an episode of socio-cultural change achieved through identity politics, I concentrate on how these texts use the auto/biographical "I" to construct "alternate subject positions" (Touraine, 2001) stressing the prevailing social conditions of conflict or militancy in which these writers lived. I conclude that the tension exposed in these texts between auto/biography and theory is ultimately a fruitful means for the reflexive understanding of self-representation in modern societies.

To Paul

List of Illustrations

Preface

By way of a preface, I would briefly like to indulge in a bit of auto/biography myself, reflecting in this instance on the "biography" of this dissertation. Officially, it originated about four years ago, in response to an advertisement for a Sociology Ph.D. studentship in the area of "Culture and Cultural Change" at the University of York. According to this version, *Life in the Pen* boasts an authorized and above all public and linear chronology evidenced by the archival paper trail beginning, appropriately enough, with its original conception, i.e. that ad, followed in quick succession by an inventory of emails to prospective supervisors, completed funding applications, requests for university transcripts, submitted project proposals, requests for letters of reference culminating in that final letter of acceptance. This "biographical" history of the origin of my thesis is official, formal, bureaucratic, linear in its narrative chronology, authorised by the appropriately "trustworthy" sources and thus eminently verifiable; in other words, it isn't the product of my imagination, I didn't—and indeed I couldn't—"make it up". For many, it is this kind of recoverable truth which is at the heart of *real* auto/biography; its authenticity and legitimate place in the empirical world of "reality" hinges on the recovery and correlation of such external *facts*. Where these archival sources are unavailable or inconclusive—and only in these circumstances—then the regularity and consistency of my personal narrative version of events become the appropriate object of scrutiny. For this type of analysis, there are other "experts" in the discourses of the literary imagination who can be called upon to step into the critical breach and make the proper judgements if not on its veracity, then on its *value*.

As well-established ways of reading auto/biography, all of this is fine so far as it goes. The problem is that in this case, as in many, they don't really "go" very far—apart from the immediate concerns of people like my supervisor, examiners and staff in the Graduate Office, few people are likely to care much about these historical or critical readings. For most aficionados of auto/biography, what most readers really want is the *dirt*: the messy, personal, contradictory,

emotionally-fraught stories of self-testing, self-doubt and how-I-nearly-threw-in-the-towel at various junctures.

This is the starting point of a very different biography, an alternative narrative history which is much more personal in nature and more extended and loosely connected in its chronological sequencing and horizons. According to this version, the original conception of this thesis took place during an otherwise non-eventful hot summer in the San Francisco Bay Area when, at 14 years of age, I first took the decision to read autobiography in a new and "systematic" way. Believing it held some secret knowledge about how to get away from a life lived on an endless succession of featureless naval bases, I began to read the autobiographies of American presidents who served during my lifetime to see how they did it. Why I thought this was a good idea or why I chose this particular group of autobiographies, I honestly do not know. But some 25 years on, what I remember from this particular reading venture is two things: that there was something not quite right about Richard Nixon's lengthy denial of wrong-doing as an undergraduate student at Duke University (the details of which I had no understanding whatsoever), and that despite burning down the family garage at 16 years of age as a result of wrapping the engine of his old banger in a blanket to keep it warm overnight so it would start in the morning, Gerald Ford was a very decent man, if only because he was willing to tell such a story about himself in a culture which positively encourages the mythologisation of the presidential childhood. After spending the last three and a half years studying auto/biography intensively at York University, I now appreciate that what I intuitively grasped about this form of discourse is its special allure for the shamelessly self-serving as much as for the endearingly self-effacing. To paraphrase C. Wright Mills [1959] (1970), the most memorable and revealing auto/biographies are such as these, constructed on the margins.

Fast-forwarding some 20 years, this thesis's long period of gestation finally ended when at age 34, then a full time housewife and mother of three young children living in suburban Hull, I first read Betty Friedan's seminal study of the 1950s American housewife, *The Feminine Mystique*, experiencing for myself the fire bolt of recognising my own life writ large on the page. I was compelled to

ask myself, what had happened? How did the girl whose inner life so easily incorporated the lives of some of the most powerful men in the world end up having the kind of confined and frustrated existence linked to my mother's generation of women? And why were so many of the women around me having the same experiences of isolation and quiet desperation? What kinds of social forces were still operative in a way that made such a trite bored suburban housewife narrative still appear to be such inevitability for so many women? And why had I until then been so patently unaware of these intergenerational life stories which had previously addressed these same questions in order to break out of this trap? I decided to try to find out why and how, returning to the same precious materials which had brought me to face these questions in the first place: auto/biographies.

The arc that connects a group of 20th century American presidents to the life of a Hull suburban housewife has been uneven, to say the least. But that is another story. This thesis focuses on more high profile stories of how the lives of ordinary and yet also exceptional individuals so often end up being framed by the signal experiences of isolation and imprisonment. These narratives scrutinized in the following chapters tell their own stories of how a group of people writing in the 1960s and 1970s were able to make sense of their own irregular, contradictory, chaotic and poignant life histories during what has now come to be commonly regarded as exceptionally turbulent times. Through examining their life stories, I argue that we will be able to observe how some of the most famous if not infamous icons of the mid-20th century were forged auto/biographically. We will see how they used auto/biography to

- adapt an array of narrative, intertextual and self-representative strategies classically linked to the "great man of letters" of the Romantic period, in order to *write themselves* as similarly authentic and sincere individuals, thereby contesting their public depiction as abnormal, deviant and intrinsically untrustworthy
- recover a sense of agency, allowing them to re-cast their public personae as extraordinary, deviant or even criminal as the unintentional outcome of their very ordinariness within their own colonised societies; an

essentially political act in response to an oppressive and exclusionary social hierarchy of identities

- map the modern life narrative for the individual as "Other" from its origins in the expansive dreams of collective freedom and personal fulfilment framed by the authorized history of modernity to its reality in the life stories recovered from the crucible of modernity's many "prisons", a genre of modern lives defined by the seminal experiences of isolation, violence, conflict, annihilation and death
- use auto/biography to expose and politicize the experiences of personal, subjective and private life as the field for public debate
- create a transgressive linguistic and narrative space sufficient for an alternative and authentic culture of resistance

Together, these comprise the main themes and issues at the forefront of this study, focusing on the construction of the auto/biographical narrative in relation to the reflexive articulation of social discourses of freedom, subjectivity, representation and resistance telescoped through the individual/self.

By concentrating on the previously secret, hidden or shameful life narratives of writers who were or considered themselves to be "political prisoners", we can observe an alterative history of modernity emerging in and through these pages. Regardless of whether these writers were literally or metaphorically *incarcerated* as a consequence of their identification as female, black, Catholic, Jewish, lesbian, or whatever, what these writings show is the systematic patterning of exclusion and suffering of the "Other" from what Habermas (1989) labelled as the public sphere, a legitimate social lifeworld which is thoroughly bourgeois in its values and outlook. Such alternative life narratives reveal not only the intrinsic political inequalities of such bourgeois cultures of modern individualism in its predominantly public and ideologically acceptable forms (e.g. in the novel and in the auto/biographies of "worthy" men), they also demonstrate our collective cultural reliance upon such alternative, transgressive self-representations as a way of keeping such individualistic cultural forms relevant, meaningful and *alive*, that is, to sustain their creative (if not also

aesthetic) vigour and dynamism. To a large extent, this is achieved through these prison writers' articulation of what were previously the private, intimate and unspeakable experiences of isolation and interiority, rendering it meaningful and above all "speakable" in the realm of public discourse. Crucial to these articulations is the physical and emotional experiences of suffering and exclusion, in addition to their ethical and political repercussions, which will be detailed over the course of the following chapters.

1.0 Auto/biography matters

As many historians are now realising, the intimate connection between such political auto/biographies and the rise of social movements during the 1960s and 1970s is not coincidental. Rather, these personal stories are increasingly being acknowledged as integral to our understanding of the political histories of the various civil rights movements and the origins of the new identity politics in terms of how and why they emerged when and as they did, what the various kinds of activism (whether symbolic and/or violent) meant to the people living during these turbulent times, and what their legacies of these auto/biographies as the products of resistance cultures and the mechanisms of consciousness-raising are for contemporary cultural life.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a conspicuous connection between the new social movements—in this case, the women's movement, the Black Power movement, and the Fenian movement—and the prison auto/biographies written by so many of their members. As a part of the sub-genre of political prisoner auto/biography, these texts map the "journey" society had laid out for certain types of individuals who dared to actively contest the old heirarchies of identity, commonly from both without and within their designated social communities. What these life narratives share in common is a broad spectrum of subjectivity, graphically representing the personal experiences of isolation, confinement and physical and emotional suffering the locus of which was to be found in the various contemporary institutions of incarceration—in post-WWII capitalist modernity not so much represented by the "iron cages" of the workplace as famously described by Max Weber [1930] (1992), but rather those "cages" of the

homeplace, private and domestic spaces reserved for the "Other" and normally concealed from the public gaze.

The impact of the widespread public dissemination of these previously private or secret stories have given rise to questions about the legitimacy of hierarchical power structures based on dichotomous or exclusionary identity models of gender, "race", religion and sexuality. These public debates have in their turn fuelled a proliferation of auto/biographies, mostly written by women but also by other "political prisoners", for example disabled people like Nancy Mairs (1995) and Temple Grandin (1996) among others. Instead of reproducing the individualistic "triumph over tragedy" trope so familiar to disabled auto/biography, these auto/biographies testify to the cruelty, pain and curtailment of their own lives as well as those of so many others, and how this is caused by the systematic social organisation of the modern nation state in its relentless drive toward progress and perfection of the self. They highlight our culture's compulsion to recognise development and self-integration only in personal narratives marked by normatively linear progression and uniformity. This is more than an aesthetic standard, it exerts a negative social and material impact, revealing itself in the isolation and *de facto* incarceration of many people living on the margins. These considerations enhance the broader social significance of prisoner auto/biography.

2.0 Overview

In the chapters of Part I, I will explore some of the aspects of auto/biography in terms of how it came to be used by so many of these writers as a designated form for politicising identities and raising public consciousness about such systematic human suffering and oppression. In Chapter 1, I will review the literature on the origins of auto/biography, from its etymology as a sub-genre of history and biography to its classical expression as the privilege of the Romantic "great man" of letters in 19th century. Next I will focus on its status as the focal point of cultural and critical studies, whether as the key for interpreting modern cultures as it was generally regarded within the hermeneutic traditions of the 19th

and 20th centuries, or as the ultimate test case for the "scientific" theories of literary formalism during this same period.

From these considerations, I will move on to concentrate on auto/biography's disruptive and transgressive presence as the preferred literature of resistance among the socially "Other" in feminist and postcolonial critiques. In Chapter 2, I delve further in to how and why auto/biography achieved this status in resistance cultures, specifically through the creativity and relative freedom it afforded as a thoroughly democratic mode of writing due to the nature of the subject matter (i.e. the self), and its exposure of the actual plasticity of individual subjectivity, agency, narrative and authenticity. This realisation not only allowed for the public dissemination of particular stories of suffering, oppression and exploitation, it also opened the way for considerable changes to the practices of writing and life narrative story-telling themselves, emphasising the significance of physical embodiment and materiality the activity of writing as well as the non-linear and non-progressive chronologies of life narrative which are equally intrinsic to the history of modernity.

Using these themes as a springboard, in the case study chapters I seek to answer the following questions: How were such "prisoner" identities created, and why? How did these life narratives come to be written, and what was the motivation of the authors? Which auto/biographies provided the intertextual links for these life narratives? What kinds of texts did they choose, and how were these other lives used to construct and make sense of their own? And how do these intertextual, narratological and intersubjective links help us to understand modern culture of resistance, and the phenomenon of radical activism insofar as it involves the individual as a factor in the dialogic of social change?

These are the kinds of questions to which I seek to find some answers in this dissertation. The basic structure is in line with the conventional Ph.D. thesis, beginning with a literature review of the subject area, auto/biography, and then moving on to look at and justify the methodology used, i.e. narratology, intertextuality, intersubjectivity and other "area studies" methods adapted from women's studies, ethnic studies, and postcolonial studies. Next, I examine three

specific texts in the case study chapters, written by a serving political prisoner (Bobby Sands), a former political prisoner (Angela Davis) and a woman who writes *as if* she were a political prisoner (Betty Friedan). I analyse the various kinds of historical receptions these texts have had before looking in more detail at the narrative qualities of these particular texts.

Again, the main themes which emerge as significant over the course of these investigations are the discursive construction of freedom and liberation; the conventional dichotomies of exclusion and exclusivity versus the "felt experiences" of masculinity and femininity, "race" (troped as "black or white") and religious identity (e.g. within the Christian and Jewish traditions); and the material and embodied nature of prisoner life writing. I look at how each of these are manifest in the prisoner auto/biographies analysed in this text, emphasising how they change some of our most commonly held ideas about auto/biography, i.e. that it is highly discrete and individualistic; that it celebrates the socially sovereign authentic self; that it is always implicated in the capitalist ideologies of power; and that it is the distinctive product of Christian culture of self-examination. I conclude with some ideas on possible future directions for this type of research in social theory and for social scientific methodology.

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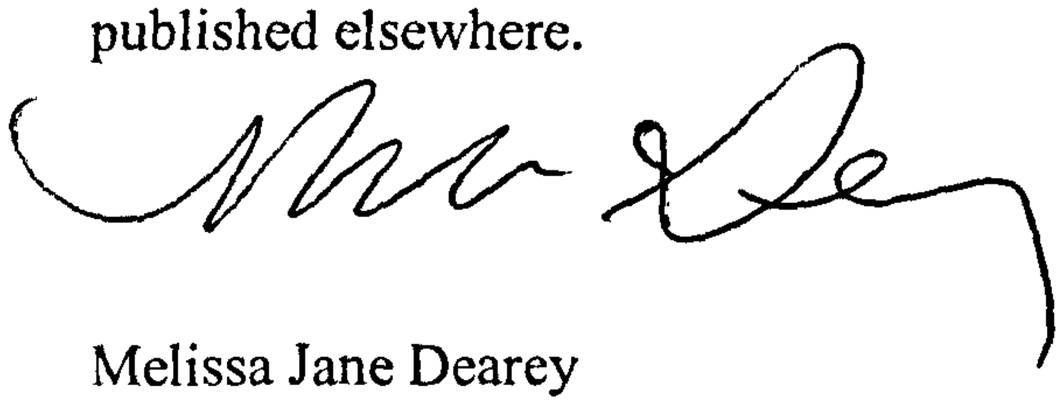
With gratitude to and in memory of Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Hans-Georg Gadamer whose lives and works have been and will continue to be hugely inspirational to me and who died during the period my registration for this degree. May they all rest in peace.

I would especially like to thank my husband Paul for his demonstrably infinite and frankly shocking reserves of love and support through what has been a very trying time to live with the author of this dissertation. Special thanks and love also go to my three young children Sam, Luke and Greta who made the process as noisy as it was necessary.

I should not end without expressing my eternal gratitude to Saint Augustine of Hippo and Our Blessed Lady for their ceaseless consolation and intercessory prayers.

Author's Declaration

This single volume represents my own work. These materials have not been published elsewhere.



Melissa Jane Dearey

Part I – Auto/biography: Toward a Sociological Theory and Methodology

Chapter 1 - The Rise of Auto/biography in the Human Sciences: A Critical and Historical Literature Review

1.0 *Introduction*

Among the major themes to emerge as key influences on the theories and practices of the contemporary human sciences, few have achieved the prominence and pervasiveness of auto/biography. Whether under the banner of auto/biographical, life narrative, personal lives, oral history or life history research, it seems that auto/biography as a data source and also increasingly as a research methodology in its own right is very much a part of the theoretical and methodological landscape. The steep rise in interest in auto/biography among social scientists over the last two decades has been as conspicuous as its various treatments have been diverse. In the wake of the "narrative turn" in social scientific thinking, the general acceptance of the importance of the individual in a "detraditionalised" social order, and the concentration on the linguistic and textual basis of social knowledge in which culture is interpreted as a collection of storied "performances", the convergence on auto/biography as a way into the contemporaneous world of the sovereign self is probably not so surprising. Even so, the evocation of such current thematic models like narrative, detraditionalisation and performativity should not make us think that our present fascination with the auto/biographical text is entirely new; as we will see, the presence and influence of auto/biography goes right back to the beginnings of the modern period, providing a framework for the conceptualisation of modernity itself as a new way of experiencing and interpreting the world.

This chapter is devoted to tracing the origins of auto/biography as a way of understanding the distinctive cultural life of modernity, from its beginnings in hermeneutics and structuralism in the 19th and early 20th centuries to its more recent development within the "area" studies, paying special attention to its

reflexive influence on identity politics and the social construction of gender and "race". This critical and historical literature review will provide the background for the next chapter which focuses more on the issues of methodology, and also give a historical and theoretical context for the case study chapters that comprise Part II of this dissertation.

By way of mapping auto/biography for social theory, in this chapter I trace auto/biography theory from its origins in the hermeneutic and cultural theory of Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Misch and Paul Ricoeur, looking at the kinds of issues and questions generated around the auto/biographical text from this hermeneutic and phenomenological standpoint; this comprises the whole of section 1. Next, in section 2, I turn to the problem of auto/biography for structuralism, concentrating on the work of the major literary theorists who engaged most fully with the auto/biographical text: Phillipe Lejeune and Tzvetan Todorov. In this section, I show how the inability of literary formalism and structuralism to sufficiently impose a disciplinary code on auto/biography as either literary or non-literary is eventually followed by a succession of alternative theoretical approaches, beginning with a critical reappraisal of auto/biography as a cultural paradigm of gender, as identified in section 3 by literary deconstructionists Paul de Man and Martin Danahay with the 19th century "great man of letters", and in the 20th century with feminist reconstructions of a distinctively female subject and an authentically *feminine écriture*, e.g. in the work of Christine Battersby, Nancy Chodorow, Mary G. Mason, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva outlined in section 4. Section 5 then recounts the post-colonial re-inscription of auto/biography as a "literature of resistance" to the dominant ideological paradigms of masculinity and individualism which were central to auto/biography's cultural prevalence and also to modernity's colonial project of progress and assimilation based on systematic exploitation and oppression, rearticulating the experience of "race", migration, diaspora and displacement from the point of view of the cultural "Other" in the work of thinkers such as Gayatri C. Spivak, Kenneth Mostern, Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. The final section of this chapter concludes with some general remarks on the evolution of auto/biography and auto/biography theory throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, emphasising its iconic cultural status as a signifier of freedom, progress and

authenticity in modernity and its alternative rendering as a discourse of disruption, rebellion and resistance. This notion of the continual re-conceptualisation of auto/biography throughout the modern period will be returned to in the final chapter of this thesis, taking into consideration the findings contained in the intervening case study chapters, in order to flesh out the thematic quality of auto/biographical writing as essentially social, material and embodied. This final chapter will resituate the ethical and moral imperative of the auto/biographical "I" in contemporary cultural life developed within hermeneutic cultural theory. We first turn to the current positioning of auto/biography within human sciences scholarship.

2.0 Auto/biography now

In the closing decades of the 20th century, academic research on auto/biography and auto/biography theory reached unprecedented levels of activity and production. In the last decade alone, a number of international academic journals entirely devoted to this topic have emerged onto the scene. No longer regarded as an eccentric or niche interest, no self-respecting university library would now be without its sizable collection of texts devoted to the subject of auto/biography. But despite this proliferation of scholarly attention and its penetration into virtually every area of the broader spectrum of human scientific research, critical awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of auto/biography as an analytic research tool across the academic disciplines remains low. This is epitomised in the effectively obligatory proviso contained in many recent studies that deploy a range of auto/biographical, life narrative, personal lives, or other such approaches in a methodical manner to advance knowledge in their own subject area, which typically goes something like this: autobiography is notoriously slippery and difficult, containing many misconceptions, contradictions, slippages and omissions, consequently, it is not to be trusted as a reliable source of data. However, in spite of this warning, many such studies commonly proceed without hesitation to treat such auto/biographical materials more or less straightforwardly "as read"; where any real attempts at systematic regulation or qualification is brought to bear, it is usually not in response to the limitations of the data *qua* auto/biography but rather the exercise of established

conceptual norms of the discipline in question, usually history, feminist theory, literary theory, psychoanalysis or any combination of these or other approaches.

Given the current climate of suspicion in the academy regarding statistical or other quantitative data, this must strike us as especially odd, as in practice it means that auto/biography is by contrast often interpreted with an astonishing naivety. But as the auto/biography theorist Kenneth Mostern (1999) rightly insists, just as it is mistaken for positivists to take too strong a view of the objective nature of "facts", neither is it correct from the subjectivist standpoint to assume that auto/biography likewise "speaks for itself". As a qualitative methodology, auto/biography requires just as much knowledge and critical awareness of its characteristic strengths and limitations as quantitative methodologies do. This level of analytical awareness is especially imperative in the case of auto/biography, given its complicity in the social construction of discourses of expertise and its foundational significance to some of the most hegemonic social and scientific discourses in modern thought (Shapin, 1994). This is the background against which this mapping of the conceptual landscape of auto/biography is undertaken, starting with the original treatment of the auto/biographical text in modern times.

3.0 The establishment of autobiography studies: Hermeneutics and Cultural theory

The first scholarly works dedicated specifically to autobiography appeared in the early 20th century with the pioneering historical and canonical studies of autobiography, most notably Georg Misch's *History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (1907) and Anna Robeson Burr's *Autobiography: A Critical and Comparative Study* (1909). It is important to remember that these early studies, though impressive in their scholarship were, however, not primarily concerned with critically examining autobiography as a literary form or genre, let alone as a methodological resource for the human sciences. The focus on autobiography as a legitimate area for literary criticism and analysis dates back only to the post-WWII period. Before then, as Estelle Jelinek (1980, 1986), one of the first feminist autobiography theorists has pointed out, autobiography was not

considered to be of interest other than in terms of the biographical data and other personal details it related about the authors as (normally) "great men" who were the objects of public curiosity.

The first major figure in critical autobiography studies was the cultural theorist Georges Gusdorf, whose seminal essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (1956) set the tone and strongly influenced later attempts to critically examine the history and substance of the genre. Gusdorf's writing on autobiography and his insistence on the specific cultural import of the "...conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" exerted a strong influence on the study of autobiography as a resource for human sciences research until the late 1970s, concentrating on the philosophical, psychological, literary and generally humanistic features of autobiographical discourse. Gusdorf drew and expanded on the work of Misch, especially his links to the hermeneutic perspectives of Wilhelm Dilthey. This connection to Dilthey and through him to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl in auto/biography studies is significant; the auto/biography scholar Michael Erben (1993) in fact sites it as the pivotal link between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher and the contemporary phenomenological hermeneutics of thinkers like Paul Ricoeur. These deep historical and philosophical inter-connections between auto/biography, phenomenology and hermeneutics not only helps explain the sustained concentration on auto/biography as a general concern for cultural theory; more to the point, it also helps illuminate the derivation of some of the most pressing theoretical and methodological issues for auto/biography studies today, e.g. the problems of synchronic and diachronic narrative structures in contemporary life writing (Erben, 1993; cf. Derrida, 1988); the challenge of synthesising themes in the philosophy of language, action theory, and narrative theory with the new concentration on emotion and embodiment in the ethics of subjectivity (Ricoeur, 1992; Cohen and Marsh et al, 2002); the localised construction of the self-representative subject within its contemporary socio-historical milieu (Gadamer, [1975] 1988; Judovitz, 1988; Horowitz, 1998); and the desire to recover lost histories by exploring mechanisms of repression and subjugation, concentrating specifically on the complicated commingling between cultural

institutions and versions of the autonomous self generated within these same power structures (Felluga, 2003) .

These main problematics for auto/biography studies manifested in the tension between the typically diachronic character of conventional auto/biographical narrative compared to the more synchronic narrative concentration on the details of everyday life in prisoner auto/biographies, the issue of physical and emotional suffering, gender, class, oppression and political resistance in prisoner life writing will form the main concerns of this thesis. Taking these aspects into consideration, the contribution of hermeneutics to the study of auto/biography cannot be overestimated, representing as it does a rich theoretical resource that has probably been up to now most effectively exploited by Cultural Studies and the area studies (e.g. women's studies, ethnic studies, and so on) than by the other "traditional" subject area disciplines, including sociology (Beer and Gane, 2004). It is no accident that the New Historicism owes a huge debt to the phenomenological line of hermeneutics as both Misch and Gusdorf were deeply influenced by Dilthey's original conception of historiography in which auto/biography was granted centrality "...as *the* key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural manifestation, and the very shape and essence of human culture itself (Olney, 1980: 8 [emphasis in original]). Hence the idea that these texts as cultural objects are the manifest expressions of individual authors who are able to exercise their agency as opposed to being merely symptoms of the working out of the macro-structural forces of history is central to this approach to the auto/biographical text that seeks out a "middle way" to resolve the structure/agency dichotomy. This positions auto/biography as perhaps *the* cultural paradigm mediating the conceptual space between society and the self, and one that moreover offers a way beyond the structure/action dichotomy in social theory. This focus on the auto/biographical processes of self-knowledge and the formation of identity models has significantly influenced work by theorists in the cultural and human sciences who read autobiographical texts as being in some sense emblematic of socio-historical processes, using them for example, to help explain the emergence and causal sequence of events leading to the phenomena leading to cultural change (Daniel, 1994). Hence the convergence of auto/biography

theory on issues of structure and agency, emotion, embodiment, narrative and socio-cultural change make it particularly relevant for sociology.

4.0 Etymology

The vibrant and now expansive feminist literature on autobiography initially concentrated on the etymology and origins of the form (e.g. in the important collection edited by Marlene Kadar (1992)). The first appearance of the root word of autobiography, *biography*, is recorded in the 1683 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as derived from the Greek *bios*, meaning "quick, vital" and *graphikos* meaning "capable of drawing or painting; of things, as if painted; of or for writing; suited for writing; able to describe; of style, graphic, lively; a subject for description". When the word *biography* was first coined, the emphasis was on the quickness of the biographical sketch in the author's effort to capture the vitality of the living subject at the moment his or her attention was drawn, as opposed to the creation of a laboured, meticulously researched, coherent narrative account of a whole "life". The intention then was to highlight the swiftness of biographical praxis as a way of militating against opportunities for the author's encroachment upon the subject by simply minimising the time allotted through received practices of composition.

After the 17th century, realism in the depiction of biographical sketches became increasingly of central importance, and so the establishment of the author's objectivity in relation to the subject became a paramount concern. This aspirational or putative objectivity was commonly achieved though a certain deportment or remoteness exhibited by the author toward *his* (as it usually was a male biographer) subject, which would transfer to the specific practices of autobiographical writing as described by M.H. Abrams in his early landmark definition of autobiography as a "...biography written by the subject about himself or herself, with a certain degree of objectivity" (Abrams, 1992: 4). As we have seen, objectivity in the production and analysis of autobiography in "malestream" literary theory has been a key concern.

The addition of "auto", from the Greek *autos*, "of or by oneself, independent", to "biography" first appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1809, to denote the introduction of a generic form comprising and obeying the laws necessary to "write one's self" (Kadar, 1992: 4). The objectivity or distantiation of the author would pose certain reflexive problems for both reader and writer in determining and interpreting the meaning of these texts, problems that are still of central concern to autobiography studies today.

Was such male dominance of autobiography remarked upon by Estelle Jelinek (1980, 1986) always the case? Prior to this comparatively rare consensus over the cultural relativity of autobiography, and indeed prior to the emergence of the terms "biography" and "autobiography" in English during the course of the 19th century, "life writing" was a commonly recognised phrase for what was a popular literary form (Kadar, 1992). It was a less exclusive genre than either biography or autobiography would become, more inclusive of personal and less objective kinds of writing. Whatever the order of causality, like auto/biography, life writing flourished, rising in a parallel trajectory to the technological, social and philosophical innovations that were themselves the legacies of Enlightenment social project influencing Romantic ideals governing the self which stressed the values of progress, autonomy, creativity, authenticity and the capacity to transform and perfect the self.

As a form of life writing that is historically specific to modernity, there is a strong tendency in auto/biography studies, for example in the work of the feminist standpoint sociologists like Liz Stanley (1993), to identify it as a thoroughly modern medium with strong socio-historical links to the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, and by extension to the socio-cultural systems of power and ideology dominant in 17th and 18th century Europe. While the connection of auto/biography to this particular socio-historical world view is well evidenced in the literature, there is nonetheless from this standpoint a tendency to disregard the embeddedness of auto/biography in pre-modern and less individualistic socio-cultural practices, such as those of confession, testimony and witness (e.g. in the auto/biographical narratives of former slaves). This aspect will be addressed in the course of the present study.

4.1 The search for a definition: the rise of Formalism

Thus far, we have recounted the philosophical origins of auto/biography in the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and how these movements have influenced contemporary issues in auto/biography from the perspective of philosophy, history, identity politics, and cultural theory. But before the re-emergence of these classically hermeneutic and phenomenological themes in contemporary autobiography studies following the linguistic turn, at the close of the 19th century, this line of thinking was interrupted by the effort to engage with the text in much more formalistic and abstract manner, influenced by the theorising of the American New Criticism and Russian Formalism.

These influences are most pronounced in the structuralism of literary theorists who took a direct interest in autobiography, notably Tvetan Todorov (1990) and Phillipe Lejeune. Briefly, their efforts to "discipline" autobiography as a literary type or genre were ultimately abortive, with the exception of the relatively basic identification of autobiography with the speech act which is at its core: speech or writing directed at telling the truth about oneself. Otherwise, the overwhelming consensus was that autobiography is indeed problematic, not least in the attempt to theorise, taxonomise or define it as a discrete and stable literary genre. As a type of literature or a kind of *discourse*, autobiography is notoriously pervasive and fluid. It is everywhere and saturates everything: every time some one tells the story of events from their own point of view as they have actually experienced them engages, in a broad sense, in autobiography (Lang, 1982). Autobiography is, according to its most simple and naïve definition, the narration by a real person of his or her own life story, when narrator and protagonist are one and the same, fulfilling identical narrative functions, as the Russian narratologist Vladimir Propp (1968) might say. However, the form such a narrative may possibly take—its temporal and subjective horizons, the presence or otherwise of underlying structure and continuity—can vary in ways so diverse as to exceed the number of individual lives led. The temptation is to extend autobiography's range from the

contiguous mimetic representation of "real life" documented in diaries, letters, memos, and so forth, to the highly fictionalised fantasy constructions of life-narrative simulacra displayed in symbols of consumer lifestyle *tableaux*, or celebrity autobiography (possibly the most popular form of "literature" in contemporary mass culture) is overwhelming.

4.1.1 The establishment of the "Autobiographical Pact"

Following the linguistic turn in the human sciences, apologists for autobiography from outside of the Hermeneutic or Cultural Studies traditions have persisted in their attempts to define it as a literary genre with the first person speech act at its core, albeit with considerable trepidation and obvious frustration. In the case of the most cited definition proposed by the French literary theorist Phillipe Lejeune [1973], autobiography is a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (193). However, even Lejeune himself remained dissatisfied with this definition, returning to the task and problem of definition again (1981) and again (1984). In concentrating on the conditions specific to the four elements of autobiography: (i) linguistic form (prose narrative), (ii) subject (individual life, personal history), (iii) author (named real person who is identified as the narrator), and (iv) narrator (also identified as the protagonist of the retrospectively narrated story), Lejeune's definition does achieve a certain degree of practical success in terms of isolating autobiography from its siblings biography, novels narrated in the first-person, autobiographical poems, diaries, memoirs, and essays of self-portraiture.

The main difficulty with such a sufficiently restrictive definition is that it cannot, in practice, be applied too prohibitively. As Lejeune was aware, autobiography is usually mainly narrative, but there are instances when the inclusion of dialogue or other speech acts are integral to the story; likewise, the narrative should be mainly retrospective, but it is normative practice in canonical autobiographical texts to include brief passages from diaries, letters, etc.; the subject should be mainly the life of the identified individual author, but

it is often entirely relevant to the story to include extended descriptions of historical events, other people, and so forth. The two crucial conditions for autobiography according to Lejeune are firstly, the establishment of the author/narrator/protagonist as a real historical person, and secondly the clear singular identification of the author/narrator/protagonist as a single individual. These crucial conditions he labels corporately as the "autobiographical contract" or perhaps more familiarly the "autobiographical pact" which must be established between the reader and writer for a work to be considered *genuine* autobiography (as opposed to the presence of a certain strand of self-referential semiopraxis detectable in virtually every written text).

In the wake of this failure to produce an adequate definition, what has become increasingly important in the literature on autobiography is the central presence of the self-representative text itself, either in the form of written document or inscribed symbol. Notwithstanding Lejeune's tireless attempts to precisely define autobiography as a genre in line with the scientific aspirations of structuralist/formalist literary theory, it is undeniable that autobiography's distinctiveness is predicated upon the intimate connection between the text and the presence of the narrator's signature that identifies the real, historical person with the text. The problem even with even this attenuated version of definition is, however, that the ostensibly contractual relationship between reader, writer and text is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to enforce or sanction in cases where it is exploited or breached. While obviously the resilience of this link between author and text poses substantial difficulties for the interpretation of the autobiographical text from the standpoint of literary criticism (de Man, 1984), the usage and meaning of *identity* used in this context represents an open invitation for exploring other methods of interpreting these texts particularly suitable for more historically located strategies of interpretation. Re-enter hermeneutics.

4.2 Back to hermeneutics

Here a hermeneutic approach to the text is invaluable with regard to these deeper cultural tensions underpinning auto/biography, particularly in the area of

identity problematics. The tension at the core of the self-narrative text, as the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992) explains, lies at the root of the problem of temporality, freedom and flux contained in the Latin roots of the word "identity", i.e. in the transformative *ipse* identity of "selfhood", and the permanence and stability consistent with the core notion of self in *idem* identity or "sameness". What is more, meaning in autobiographical language draws from two immediate sources: factual knowledge derived from the external empirical, historical world and the surplus knowledge of experience emanating from the internal, subjective, connotative language of the self.

This leads us to query what autobiographical selfhood—that is, the consolidation of subjectivity giving rise to autobiography, needing or desiring to express itself autobiographically—actually *is*, and how and why it emerges into the socio-cultural world by turns as the arrogant, penitent, or indulgent expressions of surfeited selfhood so commonly and immediately recognisable as autobiography. In other words, to put it very crudely, the reason why autobiography represents such a challenge to the objectification of formal definitions and taxonomies lies in its deeply reflexive inter-relationship to the lived experiences and cultural beliefs of its particular locations and historical contexts. Hence the task of analysing autobiography, such as it is, relies on the praxis of reading and interpretation, where the key factor is the interpretive process of readers bringing their own knowledges and experiences to the text in order to interpret the meaning of the work for themselves. This combined reader-oriented and historically-situated perspective has become a key principle of contemporary hermeneutic theory and research.

Structuralist critics tended to remain unmoved by such hermeneutic concerns over historically situated cultural expressions of self and identity. The scientificity of literary criticism beyond such culturally-relative determinations was still very much at stake as the result of the irreverent challenge presented by autobiography by its very undisciplined presence, and so the search for a definition continued throughout the 1980s. Eventually, in the 1990s and the wake of post-structuralism, formalist literary theorists, including Tzvetan Todorov himself (1990), acknowledged the ultimately unsuccessful efforts of

theorists such as Lejeune (1971, 1973, 1981, 1984) and Bruss (1976) to define autobiography in terms of the autobiographical pact or contract based on the legalistic identification of author, narrator and main protagonist as identical with the historical person referred to in the text.

Despite this failure to sufficiently discipline autobiography, the process has not been without its benefits for literary theory. For one thing, it has served the purpose of accentuating the supposed polarity between autobiography on one side of the critical divide and the *literary* genres on the other. In particular, the differentiation between autobiography and the novel has been regarded by many literary theorists as a most welcome outcome. Hence many structuralists have increasingly come to rely on the notion of the "autobiographical pact" as much for its utility in keeping autobiography *out* of the critical frame as to defend the universal applicability of structuralist methodologies. Genre now becomes the totem which marks the boundary separating the historical/referential discourses from the fictional genres by identifying the difference between (i) the implied speech act of *telling* and (ii) the further pragmatic property of *telling the truth*. Thus, epics, dramas and novels *tell*, that is the limit of their function. On the other hand, histories, chronicles, auto/biographies, it is supposed, *tell the truth*, that is to say, their function is to refer "outside" of the enclosed textual realm of storytelling (cf. Genette, [1991] 1993). Accordingly, autobiography displays widely distributed practices of reference and language which function in the text in such a way so as to place it outside of or beyond the purview of literature (Eakin, 1992); it therefore equates to a common, non-literary activity which can be said to be engaged in every time someone tells his or her own story to someone else in the real, social world.

And so we are back in the textual territory where the "speech act" reigns supreme, not as something to be domesticated or brought to heel by literary theory as a way of proving the mettle of structuralism, but rather as a practical way of excluding autobiographical texts from literary criticism. Such a dichotomous take on the autobiographical text which is so classically structuralist characteristically cuts both ways: while literary critics take a dim view of autobiography for its vulgarity as a quotidian speech act, autobiography

enthusiasts have been similarly suspicious about autobiographies written with blatant literary pretensions, taking the "storytelling" element of literature literally as evidence of mendacity on the part of the author. As we will see in the next sections, this tendency for autobiography theorists to resist the language of fiction has politically favoured a certain type of auto/biographer.

5.0 From What to Who: questioning the ethics of autobiography

The eminent autobiography theorist James Olney (1980) has emphasised the essentially commonsense nature of autobiography—everyone seems to know it when they see it, though precisely what everyone sees when they identify a text as autobiography is not entirely clear. Autobiography has been described variously as a normal and natural human activity (Olney, 1980), a cultural phenomenon identifiable throughout history (Gusdorf, 1956) or a common feature of modern western individualistic societies (Danahay, 1993; Daniel, 1994). As such, it is intrinsic to the modern disposition in the sense that it is simply a part of ordinary life, something we simply do. What is more, in some cases, it is seen as something we *ought* to do (Sturrock, 1993), bestowing on the single life a kind of ethical and political imperative upon the writer that works (or at least is intended do so) for the benefit of the person or more properly even for society as a whole. It is specifically these normative, ethical and political imperatives of autobiography as a social activity contingent on being an individual in modern societies that have attracted the attentions of those who, for various reasons, mistrust autobiography (e.g. Lowenthal and Adorno) or otherwise have reason to see it put squarely in its place (e.g. Paul de Man).

Here we immediately encounter one of the first of many paradoxical or aporetic features of the form. Autobiography's imperative as a discursive form is to be dispassionate, objective and reliable (that is, to tell the truth); this, however, is immediately undermined by its own singularity, and manifestly subjective and ethical qualities. According to the hermeneutic perspective, it displays a paradoxically tacit resistance to and complicity with a more or less uniform, homologous representation of the life as this is understood either as a cultural product or technology of self within a particular society at a specific time and

place. But, in the wake of the collapse of the structuralist project to formulate a "science of literature", theorists have increasingly taken a less benign view of such hegemonically situated or "normalising" discourses. Hence critical theorists, post-structuralists and many feminist critics have seized upon auto/biography as *the* crucible for an intensive strategy to expose the oppressive, exploitative and exclusionary cultural themes underpinning typically and distinctive modernist discourses.

By portraying the individual/self as somehow emerging from this mode of narrative discourse which (purportedly) disintegrates the public/private and individual/society boundaries of everyday life, autobiography exploits mimetic or representative language to the point of exhaustion by characterising the life as something which can be said or told and at the same time something which is by its very nature only partial and segmented, continually in the process of completion but also necessarily unfinished. While autobiography (in contrast to biography) can never tell its own conclusion and thus escapes totalisation, it also can never escape being partial in the sense of being both incomplete and biased, and therefore infringes on the disinterested, objective, representational language of mimesis that it has helped to institute as a primary rhetorical strategy for establishing credibility in modern societies (see Shapin, 1994). The question now is not about form as such in terms of settling once and for all on a formal definition or the identification of its textual mechanisms or internal structures—its whatness—but rather on its social and ethical impact, specifically focussing on *who* benefits from such self-representational and exploitative discourses.

5.1 The case against autobiography: Critical Theory

Not everyone is convinced of the honesty or benign influence of autobiography, whether on literature or on society. Self-narrative writings, specifically autobiography, are singled out by critical theorists like Leo Lowenthal (1989) and Theodor W. Adorno (1999a) in their writings on the sociology of literature as undermining or depleting "imaginative" literature's capacity to reveal—according to their own internally-derived "disinterested" status as aesthetic

objects—the social typologies of truth. Needless to say, this is not the truth of the speech act, but rather the dialectical exposure of the truth which cannot be positively articulated, the truth of art. "In such personal documents, however, rationalization and, particularly, self-justification often blur or distort the image of social reality. It is the artist who portrays what is more real than reality itself" (Lowenthal, [1957] 1970). Like Lowenthal, Adorno (1999a) advanced a similar evaluation of the artist's exclusive position in having both access to the truth about society and the sole remaining means by which to communicate that truth. For Critical Theory, the epistemological truths derived from self-evidence and representative of an objective social reality directly referenced in the text are not to be trusted, as they predicate and sustain the duplicitous values of capitalist modernity.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, even the most severe critics of autobiography in literary studies acknowledge that there are some examples of this form which do have literary or artistic merit and should be treated as objects of aesthetic production (e.g. de Man, 1979; Todorov, 1990) and, indeed Adorno himself would seem to have endorsed to some extent such a position by himself producing his own autobiography, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life*, first published in English in 1974. Written in a typically aphoristic style, Adorno uses the autobiographical format as much as an occasion to reflect on the meaning and experiences of his own past as that of society at large, ranging in scope from his ruminations on the meaning of broken love in his own life, "He who has loved and who betrays love does harm not only to the image of the past, but to the past itself" (Adorno, 1974: 166), to society's love affair with the automobile (Adorno, ibid: 139).

At the same time that these brief glimpses are afforded into Adorno's past and his inner life, they are attenuated by a wry perspective on the reification of the "life" rendered in such a populist form, as when he declares that "Life has become the ideology of its own absence" (ibid: 190), "The individual mirrors in his individuation the preordained social laws of exploitation, however mediated" (ibid: 148) or again "Not only is the self entwined in society; it owes society its existence in the most literal sense" (ibid: 154), and so on. Though he is not

completely beyond indulging in the odd playful moment, eliciting the rare dim ray of hope, e.g. "He who matures early lives in anticipation" (ibid: 161), the primacy of the aesthetic returns with absolute authority over any representational discourse especially those concerned with the self, as in the end "Art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth" (Adorno, 1974: 222).

Walter Benjamin, who was less outspoken than either Adorno or Lowenthal about the dubious provenance of autobiography, maximised his lack of opprobrium by writing two autobiographies, *One-Way Street* (1979) and *Berliner Kindheit um neuzehnhundert* (1992). If anything, Benjamin's autobiographical voice is even more dense, eclectic, aphoristic and narratively complex than that of Adorno, but then again, so is his evaluation of the current state of writing:

> But is it quite beyond doubt that the development of writing will not indefinitely be bound by the claims to power of a chaotic academic and commercial activity; rather, quantity is approaching the moment of a qualitative leap when writing, advancing ever more deeply into the graphic regions of its new eccentric figurativeness, will take sudden possession of an adequate factual content. (Benjamin, 1979: 68)

The question is, has such a qualitative leap into the graphic regions of newly eccentric figurativeness, as Benjamin puts it, taken place in autobiography? Will our case studies bear this out?

Although the critical theorists displayed a complex and at times contradictory, tongue-in-cheek and impenetrable take on autobiography, in its various forms their position by implication situates the "artist" as the main arbiter of value. Their concern with protecting the structures of aesthetic theory (especially in the cases of Lowenthal and Adorno) from the enervating influence of autobiography points to the primacy of the work of art guaranteed by the authenticity of the critically recognised artist/writer. Taking into consideration their own forays into autobiographical writing, what emerges is the identification of authentic or literary autobiography (not unlike the type recognised by the formalists) with what appears by default to be the "great man of letters" now identifiable as "artist", epitomised perhaps most starkly by Adorno and Benjamin themselves.

It could be that the Critical Theorists are perhaps complicating matters in their denouncement of autobiography on the one hand as a technology of the self with objectionable ideological functions while at the same time engaging in it themselves as "great male artists". Whether this is irony or deceit (or an irreverent mobilisation of both, aimed at autobiography's preoccupation with truth-telling) is a matter for debate. But as we will see in feminist and some post-structuralist criticism, the notion of authenticity and its normative interpellation by the "artist" who somehow is able to escape what are essentially ethical restrictions comes under severe scrutiny.

5.2 The case against autobiography II: Paul de Man

Among the post-structuralists, perhaps the most virulent polemic against autobiography has been the essay by Paul de Man "Autobiography as De-facement" (reprinted in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1984)), denouncing autobiography as merely a complex of rhetorical, auto-referential tropes that function more to obscure the self than to illuminate or expose its true nature. De Man's main target is that eponymous "great man of letters", William Wordsworth, exposing in his work the central tropes of violence, deprivation and disfigurement that emphasise the individual's collective identity by reproducing the exemplary and autonomous self of canonical male autobiography.

Such narrative structure can be observed in the autobiographical writings of the classical Romantics, notably those by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In his book *The Rhetorics of Romanticism* (1984), de Man defines the emplotment of the self as the central stabilising factor in the autobiographical narrative. These narratives are usually comprised of a series of events which are by turns shocking and trivial, associated with violence and sensory deprivation, typical of classic male romantic autobiography. Readers of Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem *The Prelude* [1805-6] (1971) will recognise the profusion of images expressing the full range of deprivation, from the most cataclysmic to the most mundane, always spectacularly resolved in the decisive and restorative moment of absolute self-knowledge through the autobiographical subject. These

powers literally at the fingertips of the male autobiographer are highly conservative of the present patriarchal social order, precluding the need to make real social change by resolving these images of suffering within the autobiographical text itself.

In their autobiographical writings, de Man emphasises how authors like Wordsworth moreover typically share a near obsession with various images of death prefigured in a series of "shocks and interruptions" (de Man, 1984: 74) of physical mutilation and deprivation. These appear in the images of maimed and bleeding bodies, and the proximity of the dead and dying (e.g. in *The Prelude* passages describing Wordsworth's encounters with blind beggars, dying children, drowned corpses, maimed bodies, etc).

Sensory deprivation also figures prominently in these texts, using the same images of blindness, deafness, loss of the sensations of touch, and the most key image of muteness (e.g. in the *Boy of Windander* episode). These images of muteness represent the ultimate danger and humiliation for the traditional male autobiographer, greater even than that of death itself: being unable to speak or have a voice. At the same time, muteness shows the conventional dimensions of autobiography, where the power of the autobiographical "I" is most potent and restorative. According to de Man (1984) these are all typical poetic images used to delineate the paradigm male autobiographical self, revealing dimensions that all of these texts have in common. Against muteness and death itself, autobiography is *the* antidote; the voice, and through it the self and the "life", are restored through the act of autobiographical writing. In this sense autobiography is, Paul de Man asserts, ultimately the paradigm discourse of self-restoration; accordingly, the realities of the social evils of power inequalities and human suffering are for "great men" strictly speaking made redundant. Not only are such "worthy" figures not compelled to strive to redress the systematic suffering of these unfortunates, they can furthermore use their suffering for their own personal benefit, projecting the power of their own social privilege and masculine agency upon their bodily disability and pain.

5.3 Autobiography and the masculine culture of individualism

The appearance of autobiography as a discrete discursive category has been heralded as a momentous historical event in Western intellectual history, signifying a seminal cultural shift seldom adequately recognised in (and even less so beyond) the cultural sciences (Danahay, 1993: 11). To this end, it has been argued that autobiography marks a key cultural moment in the formal emergence of a new model of subjectivity in the form of the 19th century autobiographical male subject, the occupant of a newly demarcated liminal space between individual and social reality.

In *A Community of One: Masculine Autobiography and Autonomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1993), the literary theorist Martin Danahay argues that autobiography as a literary form was itself a symptomatic response to the articulation of a new kind of subjective individualism, represented in the Romantic period by a set of monological principles founded on a negative ideological attitude toward certain ideals of communal life (11). Similarly, the philosopher, historian and biographer Stephen Gaukroger (1995) also identifies what he calls the "anti-altruistic" underpinning of subjective discourses and practices gaining prominence in the 17th century French society, fostered by Cartesian autobiographical writing.

This new constrained social ethos emerged in the wake of autobiographical subjectivity, a counter-reformation response to what was seen as the growing social influence of rampant radical individualism (as epitomised, for example, by the life and works of John Calvin). This desire to curtail radical individualism motivated Enlightenment thinkers like René Descartes to render the new science founded on hypothesis in the autobiographical framework in order to represent as a collective endeavour the task of scientific inquiry undertaken by great individual (male) scientists as "experts" (Shapin, 1994). This kind of discursive autobiographical framing of the new science provided a temporary replacement for religious communal life, functioning as a kind of social "glue" until science achieved its ultimate (social and philosophical) objectives of a totally unified and cohesive system of knowledge. Both Danahay and Gaukroger stress the fact that

this new social ethic inaugurated by modern autobiography is distinctly ego-centred if not downright egocentric, combining an innately individualistic model of sociality underpinned by a profoundly anti-altruistic outlook on society.

To appreciate the meaning of "anti-altruism" as it is used here—as opposed to the blatantly antisocial disposition of misanthropy—it is instructive to refer briefly to the definition of altruism adopted by the philosopher Thomas Nagel (1970). According to Nagel, "Altruism itself depends on a recognition of the reality of other persons, and on the equivalent capacity to regard oneself as merely one individual among many" (1970: 3). In contrast, the development of cultural individualism reflected in autobiography during the interim between the counter-reformation in 17th century France (Gaukroger, 1995) and the 19th century industrial revolution in Britain (Danahay, 1993) evidences this capacity to withhold such a recognition of the reality of other persons and to resist the need to recognise oneself as one among many, but rather to insist on one's own supremacy as the focal point for the many around the one. This is epitomised in Danahay's idiomatic description of the paradigm male autobiographical subject as embodying "a community of one" (1993), that is, the fullest possible identification of society with a certain kind of individual, one who is bourgeois, white and male. The resistance of this species of the autobiographical subject to the social collective in any other sense than as the first among equals is clearly detectable in the autobiographies of the many "worthy" men written during the nineteenth century in Britain, with figures such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas de Quincey, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, William Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Edmund Gosse, and John Stuart Mill being among the many exemplars of the type. These are men who used writing in general, and autobiographical writing in particular, to celebrate their "genius" as a consummate expression of the naturalness of their singular personalities and social superiority (DeNora, 1995; Battersby, 1989). The halo effect of the auto/biographical "I" helped ensure that their privileged social positions were reciprocally enhanced by the very act of reproducing their "lives", which were for some time generally received by an appreciative and ever more eager public market. The convergence in this type of autobiographical writing of the great male writer as "genius" with the patriarchal society of the 19th century and the

increased rationalisation of economic market forces exposes the deep cultural interconnections between autobiography, patriarchy and industrial capitalism. In this context, "genius" as the preserve of masculine subjectivity emerged as a hybrid invention of the exercise of political and/or economic power combined with a good marketing strategy. Hence the canonical 19th century masculine autobiographical subject represents a dual cultural phenomenon, maintaining its grip on the public imagination through the exercise of a kind of "intellectual imperialism" within an existing political and economic power structure suited to the needs of such a colonial social order (DeNora, 1995), and at the same time guaranteeing its ideological dominance within a patriarchal social framework through the systematic appropriation of the products of feminine intellect and creativity (Battersby, 1989).

In summary, this distinctively monadic representation of society manifested in the canonical male autobiographical "I" culminated in 19th century Britain, as much an expression of the political and economic forces of industrial capitalism as an anti-altruistic attitude of mind. In 17th century France and 19th century British society the autobiographical subject represents the fulfilled legacy of late Renaissance/early modern cultural transformations of the individual as a more or less fully disaggregated self, a paradigm social unit constituted on the theoretical model of political liberalism. This cultural expression of individualism was itself highly discriminate, filtering a derivative set of Romantic principles of uniqueness, originality and autonomy through a classical ideal of *mimesis* (imitation) as a way of pursuing individual perfection and universal truth. Danahay (1993) tracks how this ideal reaches its apotheosis in the autobiographical male subject of nineteenth century Victorian Britain, a figure who marks the "…nexus of political, social, and legal terms…linked by the word *individualism*" (1993: 12 [emphasis in original]). Thus, autobiography is embedded in a highly articulated image of the self suffused by the contiguous social, political, economic, aesthetic and historical values which were being invested in the individual at the time, promoting the unified social and personal interests of the figures of the great men of science and letters.

It is important to note, however, that cultural individualism emerging at this time in Western Europe was still very much in a developmental, albeit intensely expansive, phase. Of particular significance in these developments was the rise of autobiography as a schematic discourse to moderate what were regarded anxiously in some quarters (e.g. in the works of prominent counter-reformation thinkers like Pascal and Descartes) as potentially destructive social impulses resulting from ever more radical forms of individualism which implied a growing intolerance for the dignity of the individual and the continued viability of social cohesion. Despite the condemnatory attitude of many current social theorists regarding the totalising excesses and conservatism of Enlightenment political philosophy, as the feminist theorist Kate Millett (1994) stresses, we must be careful in our evaluation of these complex cultural phenomena. It is important to remember that what Enlightenment thinkers were primarily concerned with at the time was the promotion of the idea of tolerance in an increasingly diversified and expanding world as a preferred alternative to centuries of religious warfare, and that this is in itself not a bad thing. However, there is also no denying that the Enlightenment project is responsible for giving rise to an autobiographical canon that celebrates the egocentric, anti-altruistic "great" male subject associated with a romanticised ideal of the individual as the authentic, autonomous and sovereign self. Even now, the reading, writing and dissemination of autobiography cannot completely be exempted from this ideological socio-historical context as a primary resource of meaning. This means that the many misgivings about the dubious ideological pedigree of auto/biography (Stanley, 1992, 1993) are entirely legitimate, and similarly accounts for one of the most enduring questions for contemporary auto/biography scholars, i.e. how did auto/biography as a discourse so closely linked to the great masculine subject of the 19th century come to be regarded in the late 20th century as the favoured political discourse of the female subject?

6.0 The gendering of autobiographical writing: women and autobiography

There is a general consensus that the variously different kinds of texts which have been characterised as autobiography have displayed a distinct relativity, which noticeably changes from era to era (Gusdorf, 1956; Kadar, 1992).

Likewise, it is possible to trace the historical trajectory of the various forms of "subjective" writing—i.e. writing about the self or the private world of interiority as opposed to the "objective" public world of science—by the gendering of these different genres of writing. As Derrida (1988), among others, has indicated in his roundtable discussions on "otobiography", there is a strong historical and ideological correlation between gender and genre. In this section, I will very briefly summarise how this gendering of the female subject has taken place with respect to auto/biography as an emergent form of subjective writing in the modern period.

Epistolary writing in early modern Europe was very important for women and men alike, as it afforded an alternative mode of correspondence to the more controlled lines of communication managed by universities or the church. It was common for many of these correspondences to be published in newspapers or other periodicals, becoming the object of a thriving public coffeehouse culture (Gaukroger, 1995). Women were regular and enthusiastic participants in such correspondences (Bordo, 1999). In response to the widespread assumption that women's voices were non-existent in early modern writing, Ruth Perry (1999) cites the existence of a thriving sub-genre of writings by women throughout the Enlightenment, mostly in the form of private epistolary and some published correspondence between high profile intellectual men and women. Unfortunately, this flourishing of women's epistolary writing only lasted until the early decades of the 19th century, after which time changes to this type of writing recorded by Danahay (1993) were finally effected. However, prior to this, the advancement of the scholarly activity and subjectivity of women was enhanced by the new distinction between mind and body established by Cartesian philosophy in the early 17th century. Here the apparent sexual neutrality of intellectual inquiry was manifested in the new practices of epistolary writing in which women were able to forge often strong social/intellectual relationships with influential figures, usually men, sometimes in a public forum. However, in the longer term these intellectual relationships themselves became factors in engendering renewed social attitudes, in the first instance about the purported spiritual superiority of women. Eventually, this distinction between the essentially male and female qualities of mind had the

effect of concentrating the spiritual superiority of women and thus of marriage and the family, areas which were increasingly identified as her distinctive and "natural" preserve. The result was "...a claustrophobic notion of gentility and middle-class respectability" for women (Perry, 1999: 171), which eventually extended to their preferred modes of writing that allowed women to maintain their ties as socially respectable to the private domestic sphere of the household: usually letter and diary writing. While women were exploring in autobiographical and epistolary writing in the new climate of philosophical and scientific inquiry, their reified social status as spiritually superior creatures was forcing them deeper into the domestic realm of married and family life, cutting off their participation in public life and from intellectual discourse. Consequently, letter and diary writing became progressively identified with the more exclusively feminine subjectivities and private discourses during the 19th century (cf. Kadar, 1992), while masculine intellectual correspondence was reserved for the more public spheres of writing, such as the published personal and latterly academic journals.

From the 18th century onward, we continue to see the drawing of distinctions along gender lines in the changing definitions of auto/biography itself. As the feminist literary historian Marlene Kadar (1992) notes, in the 18th century the categories of biography and autobiography were understood to be generically identical; over time, this changed, with autobiography being grouped generically with diaries, letters and journals and categorised corporately as a sub-genre of biography. Later, in the 19th century, the establishment of the male autobiographical subject in the European social landscape led to the formal distinction of autobiography as a male preserve from the more feminised activities of diary, journal, and letter writing. This distinction was pivotal in establishing a broader ideological function for the genres of subjective writing judged according to the social status of the writer based primarily on the public certification of class and gender.

With some notable exceptions (e.g. the confessional writings of women religious and militant suffragettes published during the 18th and 19th centuries), women's autobiographical writing did not see such a flourishing until the post-

WWII era, with the appearance of books like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* [1963] (1992). Throughout the 1970s and 80s, early feminist literary criticism focused on the intersection of women's lives and writing, breaking free of previous canonical codes in order both to map a literary tradition as well as provide a basis for feminist scholarship (Smith and Watson, 1998: 6). This opening up of literary history by the challenging of dominant ideologies of writing and the falsely presumed invisibility or non-existence of women's writings (Ellman, 1968; Moers, 1976; Showalter, 1977) led eventually to the recovery of women's life writing previously dismissed as "attempts" at writing which were too "marginal", "irregular" or "failed" to warrant inclusion in the literary canon.

Smith and Watson (1998) argue that this breaking open of the phallocentric canon in combination with the exposure of the gendering of genres and the historical recovery of women's life writing have been highly consequential within and beyond the realm of literature. They have been influential in actuating the movement of inquiry away from the large-scale meta-narratives of social history to the concentration on everyday life and the identity practices of "ordinary" individual people, giving rise to a veritable revolution in social as well as literary theory. The question of the gendering of particular narratives in the wake of these events subsequent to the post-war period will re-emerge as an issue over the course of the case study chapters.

7.0 Postcolonialism: "race", diaspora, exploitation and the life journey

While it has been argued that changes to subjective/autobiographical forms of writing were linked to prevailing cultural models of the individual in terms of class and gender, others contend that discursive constructions of "race" have also exerted a significant influence on the culture and forms of life writing. As the writer and commentator on black auto/biography Kenneth Mostern (1999) observes, this view can be attributed to the growing disaffection among theorists in identity politics who throughout the 1980s were frustrated by the limitations of Marxian economic determinism and its vague and reductionist accounts of the individual and her experiences of socio-political life (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

This disaffection led to gradual move away from "determination" as a primary stratagem for modeling individual experiences of identity to the more agentive notion of "articulation", a transformation most identifiable with the work of Stuart Hall.

The significance of this shift in interpretive strategy for autobiography studies is difficult to overstate. This is attributable to Stuart Hall's influential work in race theory, specifically his attack on both structuralism and essentialism which can be broken down into four main constitutive elements: articulation, process, culture and fragmentation (Mostern, 1999: 6). The focus of these elements is on the "incompleteness" of identity as experienced by real, living individuals in context of their everyday lives in response to the "structural" influence of enforced migration, oppression and exploitation endemic to capitalism in general and colonialism in particular. These experiences are discernible in the reciprocal burden placed upon individuals who were compelled to live under these conditions to continually manage and negotiate a sense of their own identities. Thus the very idea of the postcolonial subject suggests an intimate imbrication of discursive positions and material locations, albeit one that does not form a coherent, unified identity nor a relationship with place which is ever unambiguously fixed, finished or complete (Anderson, 2001).

As postcolonial thought is centrally (though by no means exclusively) concerned with the nature and construction of "black" identities and the experience of slavery, the very notion of "place" assumes numerous dimensions and dislocated meanings, making the concept of hybridity central to the postcolonial exploration of the crossings, migration and diaspora generated by colonial capitalism. This is especially evident in the work of Paul Gilroy (1983), who argues that the cross-Atlantic displacement of black peoples has produced new diasporic cultures which have rendered the notion of the "purity" and also the "difference" of colonizing cultures nonsensical. Gilroy argues that what these migrations have produced among other things are new models of identity which are now dislocated from previously stable notions of ethnicity and nationhood, introducing aspects such as "creolisation" and other hybrid influences into the

"host" cultures. These hybrid influences are detectable in the various cultural products of "host" cultures, including auto/biography.

This presence can be seen in Stuart Hall's concentration on the language of *dispersal* in postcolonial representations of identity, where the inbuilt resistance to unity, fixity and essentialism does not rule out a position from which to speak. On the contrary, such discourses typically construct "...'arbitrary closures', points at which the infinite flux of differences is brought to a halt temporarily as a condition of speech. This moment of stasis is a kind of 'stake, a kind of wager. It says, 'I need to say something, something...just now' " (Hall in Anderson, 2001: 115). This introduction of the language of "stakes" and "wagers" as conditions of speech is reminiscent of Derrida's (1993) autobiographical exploration of his own identity as a French/African/Jew, as well as Lejeune's later musings on autobiography as a discursive "wager" on the part of the writer as opposed to a legalistic "pact" with the reader. For Hall, the recovery of these "arbitrary closings" by postcolonial writers as temporary platforms from which to speak are themselves the necessary fictions required to make identity and political positioning possible. While the significance of displacement and dispersal makes the symbolic language of the rootedness of identity in blood, nationality or soil less meaningful in postcolonial societies, the resulting narratives of contingency, fragmentation, conflict and exclusion characteristic of these types of autobiographies make the concept of the "life journey" as once understood as a kind of Cartesian travelogue through the subjective domain exceedingly problematic. The postcolonial revision of the life journey incorporates within it a comprehensive critique of the contingent discourses of freedom, tolerance, progress, fraternity and equality foundational to modernity. It is these aspects of the texts which will be of particular concern in the following chapters.

8.0 Conclusion

This assortment of theoretical responses indicates not only the distinctive presence of autobiography in modern culture and its commitment to the individual as a primary social constituent. In addition, the growing literature on auto/biography maps the ways in which it has influenced and been influenced

by writing practices in response to the social construction of identity politics and the polarisation of the public and private spheres of everyday life. What emerges is a kind of landscape of the modern subject rendered by the highly public celebration of the life of the great man of letters in the canonical autobiographies of the 19th century and its dissemination into the writings the more obscure, private and unorthodox life narratives of those such as prisoners, women, slaves and criminals. While the former reflects the social institution and expansion of the egocentric, anti-altruistic, normatively male subject as individual social unit, the latter reflects a more genuinely autobiographical ethos in their exposure of the real lives of other identity groups who make up modern social life; in contrast to the canonical examples, these texts are typically imbued with the rich textures of what were previously hidden, shameful or unremarked details private life.

From these observations and analyses it is apparent that autobiography and life writing more generally displays a cultural relativity and fluidity that changes along with political, historical and literary movements, whether or not it actually dictates these changes or is determined by them (or indeed if the direction of causality is unclear). From the range of theoretical perspectives, most literary critics of life writing in general and autobiography in particular would endorse this dialogical relativity as more or less axiomatic (Gusdorf, 1956; Bruss, 1976; Lejeune, 1971;Weintraub, 1978; Spengemann, 1980; McDonald in Derrida, 1985; Eagleton in Wolfreys, 1999; Stanley, 1992). The ultimately unsuccessful attempts by structuralist literary theorists to adequately define and thus to effectively discipline autobiography may have rendered it problematic or inoperative as a "scientific" methodology, but at the same time, its very cultural relatively and fluidity recommends it both as a core object for understanding and interpreting the highly individualistic culture of modernity from a hermeneutic perspective. In light of recent developments in feminist, postructuralist and postcolonial thought, the methodical working out of these implications with respect to the auto/biographical text takes on a new sense of urgency.

Chapter 2 – Methodology

1.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a general and for the most part chronological review of the literature on auto/biography from across the human sciences, mapping how it has been used as a way of engaging with the individualistic cultures of modernity from the Husserlian inspired hermeneutics of the 19th century to the diverse areas of cultural studies, literary criticism, feminism, post-colonialism in more recent times. Briefly, the main themes emerging from chapter 1 were that auto/biography represents a uniquely modern discursive form which is intrinsically undisciplined, frustratingly complex and often openly contradictory in both its formal qualities (such as they are) and also in its material articulations. As an object for analysis in its own right, auto/biography has been accorded a relatively high status among hermeneutics and the various area studies disciplines because of its representational value as a consummate expression of cultural life at any given time and place in modern society; this contrasts starkly to its comparatively low status among the structuralist or "scientific" disciplines, mainly due to auto/biography's overtly idiosyncratic nature and explicitly subjective bias.

As for sociology, the attitude to auto/biography is somewhat less clear. What can be viewed as the extraordinary presence of auto/biography in the canonical literature is challenged by its negligible standing as an acknowledged and reliable data source (Stanley, 1992; Denzin, 1989). We may infer that this is due at least in part to what we have encountered thus far as autobiography's innate refusal to behave itself and yield to the stable scientific frameworks and taxonomies of modern theory and analysis. As the search for these scientific frameworks and taxomonies have informed what Adorno (2000) names as a (if not *the*) primary desideratum of sociology throughout its brief history, this makes the situation for auto/biography as a recurrent theme or site for sociological inquiry difficult indeed. The continuation of sociology's apparent double standard with respect to the auto/biographical text has not been without its negative impact on social theory. By endorsing the view of auto/biography as

something fundamentally unsuited to the scientific objectives of sociology while at the same time being beholden to it as a presence in canonical literature, sociology's ambivalence on the question of the auto/biographical text seriously impedes its efforts to establish what it also claims to strive for with increasing intensity and fervour, i.e. a more comprehensively reflexive standpoint on its own values and methodologies.

These remarks set the stage for the overall aim of this dissertation, which is to further develop the use of auto/biographical materials and of auto/biography theory for the purposes of sociological research in a way that takes proper account of the scepticism of sociology on the one hand and the transgressiveness of auto/biography on the other. This chapter concentrates on how this difficult balancing act might be achieved. The method I have adapted combines a range of interdisciplinary techniques taken from cultural, literary, feminist, philosophical and social theory to further develop the understanding and methodical interpretation of auto/biography. What these methodologies have in common is their convergence on the categorical position of subjective/self-representative discourses throughout the modern period, specifically the experiences of subjectivity, individual consciousness, interiority, identity politics (portrayed through the tropes of "race", class, gender, religion, ethnicity), truth, reference, confession, transformation and the life narrative notionally constructed in the auto/biographical text. Admittedly, these are complex issues with long and intricate histories which cannot be adequately recounted here. However, what I will concentrate on is their development since the "narrative turn" in the social sciences over the past couple of decades (e.g. Andrews et al, 2000), mapping how the new perspective on the life narrative text has influenced social scientific thinking, and how this has mainly been affected through the strategic deployment by the individual writer of a constellation of auto/biographical symbols, rhetorics and tropes as a way of directing their interpretive meaning by the reader. Having focused on the interpretive analysis of three auto/biographical texts, the dissertation will conclude with a final chapter comparing and to some extent "triangulating" the findings from the three case studies.

Thus in this chapter the challenge of auto/biography in terms of both its usefulness for and also its disruptiveness to social theory will take centre stage. I will introduce this theme in section 2, by first acknowledging how pivotal and relatively unnoticed a presence auto/biography has been in the sociological literature since its inauguration and throughout its short history. This will be accompanied by a more detailed justification for the overall methodological strategy adopted in this study for what is essentially a part of the reflexive project of examining autobiographical/sociological texts, taking into account as much as possible current re-visionings of the significance of such self- and culturally representative texts as expressions of reflexive modernity, which seek to negotiate the multiple contradictions and partialities that characterise the modern social order and social theorising (e.g. Sandywell, 1996; Beck, Giddens, and Lash, 1994). These considerations have some bearing on my reasons (both ethical and methodological) for opting for a detailed analysis of a small sample of exemplary texts rather than the mapping of a large body of work, and hence in this section I also recount how this approach is already established in the field of sociological research, for example, in the area of discourse analysis and in the transdisciplinary methodology of intertextuality.

Section 3 will build on this reflexive, intertextual and genealogical narrative methodology by tracing its emanation from a predominantly feminist standpoint, specifically the feminist concern with and about autobiography throughout its history (see Olney, 1980). This re-focusing on the auto/biographical text facilitated by the feminist engagement with these kinds of subjective discourses will intensify the subsequent concentration on the confluence of gendered, class, racial and also religious identities on the construction of the autobiographical subject, with particular reference to how these work in such texts as examples of "resistance literature" (e.g. Harlow, 1987; Millett, 1994).

As a background to this, sections 4 and 5 will examine in more detail the dual modern principles of subjectivity and representation as developed through the study of auto/biography, paying particular attention to how these concepts have been critically developed by thinkers as diverse as Bernard Williams (2002), Dalia Judovitz (1988), Domna Stanton (1984), Kathy E. Ferguson (1993), and

Leigh Gilmore (1994). These sections contain theoretical reflections on the signal importance of subjectivity and representation, concepts which provide the dichotomous framework of the predominantly feminist critique of modernity, and that achieve their apotheosis in the autobiographical "I". I conclude by arguing that these deeper philosophical issues are crucial to understanding precisely what the "question" of autobiography is for sociology and social theory. These reflections will lead in section 6 to a more general consideration of a central issue formulated over the course of this and the previous chapter and will be a prominent concern in the subsequent chapters, that is, the sociological problem of the shaping of the auto/biographical "I" through a constellation of practices and techniques of writing based on gendered, class, racial, and religious identities, prefacing how these effect the audience reception and social agency of these texts. The case study chapters will illustrate these aspects of the auto/biographical text, and concluding remarks will be provided in chapter 6 where I will draw out the impact of gendered, class and religious identity on prisoner life writing, aspects of auto/biography which have received scant attention in the scholarly literature.

2.0 Auto/biography and sociology: an intimate social and life history

Its obvious links to the individual as opposed to the social has done little to temper the sharp rise in sociological interest in auto/biography over the last generation. From a certain perspective, this is perhaps not so remarkable as it might at first appear, especially in light of sociology's long and intimate history with the auto/biographical text. Even before C. Wright Mills' [1959] (1970) much cited location of the sociological imagination in the conceptual space between biography and history, auto/biography has maintained a notable and recurrent, if not quite celebrated, presence in the sociological literature. This presence goes all the way back to sociology's so called "classical" period, traceable from Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of the autobiographical works of writers such as Brendan Behan, T.E. Lawrence, George Orwell, Thomas Merton among others in his landmark *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* [1961] (1991) to the fascination with oral life histories in the Chicago School (e.g. Clifford Shaw's *The Jack*

Roller [1930] (1966)) and Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* [1918] (1984) to Max Weber's detailed qualitative analysis of *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* in his seminal *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1930] (1992) and even to Karl Marx's economic analysis in *Capital* [1867] of Daniel Defoe's fictionalised auto/biography of Alexander Selkirk in *Robinson Crusoe* [1719] (1985). As this brief but impressive list indicates, throughout sociology's history, auto/biographical texts have been influential in shaping some of its most distinguished and seminal works. As in the hermeneutic and cultural theory traditions, my contention is that this recurring presence of auto/biography in sociology's canon suggests that there is something intrinsically sociological about auto/biography.

At the same time, the embedding of auto/biography in the sociological canon has resulted in a tendency, especially noticeable in Anglophone sociology, to view this kind of discourse as relatively unproblematic, comprising simply another methodological resource in the form of a more or less straightforward data-set like any other (Stanley, 1992). But, as Kenneth Mostern (1999) has cautioned, such a simplistic outlook on auto/biography is extremely naïve, as auto/biographical texts do not "speak for themselves" but require a large degree of awareness of their rhetorical construction in order to be adequately interpreted (de Man, 1984). In recent years, this naivety has been countered by increasingly more sophisticated views of auto/biography and its potential for the purposes of sociological theorising, beginning for example in the 1980s with Robert K. Merton's (1988) reflections on the functional qualities of autobiography and also in the growing awareness of the social (de)constructedness of the subject in feminist social theory (e.g. Jelinek, 1980, 1986; Mason, 1980; Brée, 1986; Stanton, 1984; Spacks, 1988; Steedman, 1986; Felski, 1989a; Nussbaum, 1989).

Before turning to the feminist analyses of autobiography undertaken throughout the 1990s and beyond (e.g. Stanley, 1992, 1993; Gagnier, 1990, 1991; Gilmore, 1994; Heller, 1992; Marcus, 1994; Miller, 1994, [1985] 1995; Steedman, 1992, 1995; Swindells, 1995; Smith and Watson, 1998), considerable work has also been done in this area of research throughout the 1990s in other quarters. These include, for example, Anthony Giddens' appeal to such self-representative

discourses as a way of resolving the fundamental structure/action dichotomy within his general structuration theory (1990, 1991), focusing on the "plasticity" of self in late modernity and personal freedom of choice in the wake of "detraditionalisation" (Heelas, Lash et al, 1996). Others look at auto/biography from a different perspective, as exemplifying the semiotic "regimes of signification" which characterise the distinctive social realism foundational to contemporary social epistemology (Friedman and Lash et al, 1992). Still others suggest that such explicitly self-referential discourses offer a means for developing an unprecedentedly thorough-going and reflexive critique of social theory itself (e.g. Sandywell, 1996). While these lines of argument represent much more promising alternatives to what have in the past been generally dismissive or uncritical views of auto/biography, there is still considerable work to be done in this area. The sophistication of such responses to auto/biography by a range of sociologists over the last two decades represents a dynamic and fruitful engagement with these important and distinctively cultural texts. This in itself augurs well for the development of a more nuanced theoretical understanding of an increasingly individualistic modernity.

2.1 Autobiography and sociological methodology

Though these are generally positive signs, from a methodological standpoint, how is auto/biography's potential to be realised? Considering past engagements with the individual in the history of sociology, how should the systematic study of auto/biography be approached from the standpoint of social theory? To start with, the emergence and development of the social sciences—particularly at the height of the general theories of history and economics in the 19th century—came out of the general project to identify and explain the causal mechanisms of society; this was itself a part of the scientific response to the implicit limitations of individual knowledge and subjective experience. In hindsight, this attitude led to sociology being conspicuously neglectful of the role of the individual in society manifested in the real, historical, living person. In many ways this failure was later exacerbated by the perceived need to distance social theory from the individual following the disintegration of the historical meta-narrative. While this is understandable in the context of the historical period that saw the

rise of the nation-state, the conglomeration of the masses into the cities and the resulting establishment of sociology as a uniquely inclusive discipline through which to study the workings of society as essentially a collective, perhaps now is the time for sociology to own up to its limitations with respect being able to fully engage with the individual experience of modern social life (beyond the generic framework of role theory or the low-level theorising of phenomenological sociology and ethnomethodology).

Against this background, and given the intensity of concentration on the autobiographical text over the last generation from the area studies, what would a specifically sociological theory of auto/biography look like? Should it replicate what the literary theorist John Sturrock (1993) describes as the "punishing" project of theorising auto/biography developed within literary theory, comprising the reading of great numbers of autobiographies and the drawing of general conclusions about the "genre" from these examples, reproducing the inductive and hypothetical deductive methodology of modern science? Or should it look elsewhere for its thematic models?

Considering the flaws, contradictions and anachronisms enshrined in literary theory in respect of the auto/biographical text outlined in chapter 1, there are many good reasons for opting for an alternative approach, one of the best of which comes from literary theory itself. In the first instance, there is a substantial ethical conflict underlying the theoretical approach described by Sturrock (1993), whereby a consciousness of the intrinsic singularity and difference manifested in the autobiographical text diminishes "The theoretical need...to locate generic sameness in a kind of writing which aims at imposing difference" (3). Even literary theorists admit that this type of "scientific" methodological reading contrasts starkly to the "ordinary" reader's typical engagement with these texts. In practice, such indiscriminate and extensive reading of many autobiographies and the subsequent extrapolation of their meaning from this broad reading is not the norm; readers do not generally consume works written by authors they have never heard of in the interests of gaining a comprehensive knowledge of the form for its own sake, as a way of improving their knowledge either of the "genre" or as a way of enhancing their

reading experience. In fact, as Sturrock (1993) admits, not only is theoretical knowledge of this sort is unnecessary for the (ordinary) reading of autobiography, it may actually be detrimental to the understanding and interpretation of these texts, at least in the way in which the author intended. It is worth bearing in mind that this is a matter of some considerable significance, taking into account the potency of authorial intentionality to this form or writing. If this is the case, one wonders whether this type of reading should be the central focus of autobiography theory now, whether in the sociological or any other context. At the same time, however, as previously remarked, it is imperative that sociology retain some measure of critical distance with reference to both authorial intentionality and ordinary reading practices, as making such major concessions to these elemental aspects of the auto/biographical text so early on could seriously threaten sociology's capacity to recover a sufficiently objective or reflexive analytical position. It is important for sociologists who deal with these kinds of materials to try to strike a balance between this search for sufficiently critical distance and the commendable ethical motives underlying such a trusting approach which tries to recognise the credibility of auto/biography without erring on the side of naivety.

How to read auto/biography in order to theorise about it, how auto/biography changes in relation to its reception by its readers, how it has been read historically and the way this has instigated changes in its production and interpolation of the self are in themselves important sociological issues (Baumeister, 1986). While it is easy to sympathise with the theoretical perspective that eschews the methodical reading and analysis of autobiography associated with formalist/structuralist analysis for its positivistic connotations, at the same time, solving this methodological problem by going to the other extreme and jettisoning the intertextual reading of autobiography is also deeply counter-intuitive, not least because of the unwarranted political advantage it affords (some) authors by effectively endorsing the authenticity of their authorial position and derivative sovereign social status. Clearly, to recognise auto/biographers as absolutely and uniquely individual as they often claim would mean recognising a social category of discreteness which is wholly untenable, as it subverts sociology's broader conceptualisation of the individual as existing *in*

(if not also *of* and *for*) society. It is extremely difficult to see how such a concession could in the end possibly benefit the sociological study of the individual/self via its subjective representations. Such a position would moreover ignore the devastating polemics against auto/biography by literary critics—here I have in mind Paul de Man (1984) in particular—who severely castigate it for its rhetorical and tropological character, and the ways in which these serve the selfish and self-interested concerns of the socially privileged (elite white male) individual (a polemical position on auto/biography which is not without its own ironies, considering what we now think we know about de Man's biographical past in Nazi occupied Belgium (see Derrida, 1986)).

While it is probably the case that most "ordinary" readers of autobiography are not in possession of an encyclopaedic knowledge of the wider corpus of auto/biographical writing, nor acquainted with the details of its Demanian deconstruction, it is nevertheless very likely that they are fully *au fait* with the general construction of auto/biographical discourse, as its identification relies so strongly upon its commonsense character. Though as was shown in the previous chapter, auto/biography is extremely difficult to define, it can be easily identified, not just by a formal disclosure by the real, named author, but also from the presence of the major autobiographical tropes, notably the life as a journey, rags to riches, triumph over adversity, rebellion against the world, the path to fame and fortune, notoriety and infamy, and so forth, conveyed narratively through the various rites of passage, from infancy to childhood, followed in succession by education, adolescence, sexual awakening, productive adulthood, marriage, parenthood, old age and decline. These are all common and well known auto/biographical tropes.

Given the previously stated misgivings concerning overly positivistic readings of auto/biography as capturing the image of life as lived "out there" in the real world, this wealth of commonsense knowledge among the reading public concerning the rhetorical construction of autobiography must, to some degree, justify and allow for comparative intertextual reading and analysis of these texts. The question now is how and to what extent should intertextuality be used, i.e.

how many texts, to ensure methodological adequacy and allow for sufficiently authoritative theoretical conclusions to be drawn.

2.1.1 Small case studies and discourse analysis

This question leads into not unfamiliar methodological territory for sociology. As a focal point for social theorising over the last half century, sociology can boast a distinguished and sustained encounter with what can be broadly described as textual representations of self and everyday life (e.g. Goffman, [1961] 1972; Giddens, 1991; Sandywell, 1996, 2004). Such a long-standing tradition informing sociological method in this area is represented, among others, by the interactionist traditions of discourse and conversation analysis, which specifically recommend the closely detailed analysis of single cases, excerpts or texts (Wooffitt, 1992: 72), a method which will be adopted in this study.

For the specific purposes of analysing political prisoner auto/biography, this strand of sociology has the added advantage of drawing upon useful inferential links between the representation of unconventional, damaged or shameful identities and the indirect, implicit and high profile nature of description in these discourses in the absence of familiar narrative tropes. According to discourse analyst Jonathan Potter (1996) the reason people resort to description in these kinds of discourses and in these sorts of circumstances is that in a majority of unusual situations, the type of action required by the narrator is often of either a sensitive or difficult nature, so that the recovery of agency by individual speakers/writers through indirect or detailed descriptions offers certain advantages over more direct or conventional narrative methods. It is often the case that in such uncomfortable circumstances the straightforward use of more conventional narrative stratagems can result in a negative impact on the image or identity of the narrator, indicating to the reader/listener that the writer/speaker is either unaware of or otherwise unconcerned about the difficulty of his or her current situation; this impression itself can cause a negative impact on the writer/speaker to accrue. On the contrary, what we find in real interactional situations is that careful management of *what* is said and *how* it is formulated is required by those instigating the discourse in order to construct firstly an

adequate sense of self and secondly to recover a sense of agency sufficient to convey this under constrained or difficult circumstances; this can be observed in the cases of the political prisoner autobiographies examined in the next chapters, in which the writers strongly convey their eagerness to eschew being identified as criminal deviants, passive victims or complacent bystanders with respect to their own life histories. The main point to be stressed here is that descriptive discourse displays numerous qualities with respect to being implicit in the type of action orientation to which such prison auto/biographers aspire. From the discourse analysis perspective, these descriptions are strongly bound up with the creation of *action* in the text, almost to the point of being inseparable from it. The problematisation by prison auto/biographers of action or agency in self-representative discourse is a key focal point in this dissertation. As we will see in the following chapters, for many prison writers, this is accomplished *vis á vis* the re-construction of the self in autobiography as a form of active participation in social and cultural life which is directed at conscious cultural change in circumstances where access to the normal routes facilitating individual autonomy are systematically denied.

This perspective on auto/biography offers a number of clear advantages over the traditional structuralist sociological and historicist accounts that tend to portray the individual (on its rare appearance) as a non-participant in the social events going on around them, reducing their life narratives to simply by-products of events played out around them according to the macro forces of history or politics. So while, as has been acknowledged, a sociological analysis of auto/biography must resist the temptation to overly individualise or valorise auto/biography as either a mode of evidence or social agency, at the same time, as Durkheim himself recognised, it is nevertheless abhorrent for sociology to regard the individual as a simply the object of the macro forces shaping his or her life world (as in the case of Daniel Horowitz's historical deconstruction of Betty Friedan's life writings, the subject of Part II, Chapter 2).

While Potter (1996) stresses that "...descriptions are closely bound up with the idiosyncratic particulars of settings" (111) making generalisations problematic, nevertheless, to some extent observable common features among singular but

similar descriptive texts make some limited generalisations possible. This alternative position offered by discourse analysis highlights the necessity and legitimacy of focusing on a small number of individual texts or case studies, recognising the validity of highly descriptive idiosyncratic discourse for the purposes of sociological analysis while remaining open to the possibility of drawing qualified generalisations about such texts. Together, these principles constitute for sociology a viable take on the conceptual gap perceived to exist between the individual and the social as portrayed, for example, in cultural forms like auto/biography. In addition, discourse analysis offers the possibility of traversing the diachronic and synchronic dichotomy of Saussurean structural linguistics that is the focal point of much of literary studies and narratology; this represents a distinct advantage in dealing with auto/biographical texts in terms of resisting getting bogged down in the problems of subjectivism or memory in the technical usage of historical language that changes over a span of time (diachronic) or the use of language as a more or less complete system of representation at a given moment in time (synchronic) (Baldick, 1996).

While technical issues concerning problematics of synchronic and diachronic micro-usage of language in such discourses are marginalised, at the same time, as we will see, apertures are opened up with respect to exploring the impact of synchronic and diachronic aspects of everyday life on the macro narrative structures of auto/biography more generally. This is manifested, for example, in the concentration on the synchronic qualities of prisoner life writing where, from a normative "outsider" perspective, very little seems to happen and consequently everyday life is emptied of its normative (diachronic) narrative capacity (see Cohen and Taylor, 1990). On the contrary, as will be shown, prisoner writers are often compelled to depart from the conventional attachment to the life understood as a progressive and coherent diachronic history to focus more on the extended present as a richly synchronous resource for examining and representing the self. This enhanced concentration on synchronic narrative and descriptive writing represents an innovative and transformative influence on the comparatively static and predictable life narrative writing which is utterly reliant upon a contiguous and coherent narrative structure characterised by the diachronic movement of "progress". What is more, such challenging life

narrative texts disrupt stock modes of reading auto/biography, shifting the focus of the auto/biographical "I" from the sovereign individual to the communal or inter-personal and the detailed textures of everyday life.

Therefore it is beneficial to adapt the position on the text taken by discourse analysts who base their analysis of text(s) on a hierarchy and framework of description through which action orientation (agency) is rendered meaningful and explicable in terms of being an elemental component of everyday or ordinary social life, as opposed to being regarded as in some deeper sense antithetical to the diachronic history of the contiguous life and thus seen as simply occasional, trivial, extraordinary, idiosyncratic or anecdotal. But this does not necessarily relegate theory to the area of micro sociological investigation, as in the case of ethnomethodology; insofar as these other "idiosyncratic" aspects of the text can be rendered explicable, this is accomplished by reference to other macro-social structures or meta-historical forces, offering a more fruitful and dialogical approach with existing social scientific methodologies.

Perhaps ironically, from the discourse analysis point of view, we can begin to appreciate the indelibly sociological qualities of auto/biography as a form of unapologetically individual form of discourse embedded within and playing off of the socially encoded practices of self-representation. To use a common analogy often applied to the modern subject, discourse analysis attempts to map in a detailed manner the directions or individual discursive pathways out of which action orientation and individual agency emerges, rather than following other more generic or ethnomethodological treatment of the quotidian to achieve the same outcome, as for example in literary theory or conversation analysis. Again, this offers the possibility of drawing more abstract or general conclusions.

Given these considerations, it is my contention that in the case of sociological analysis of auto/biographical texts for the present purposes, such analyses of singular or small groups of texts (as opposed to large-scale typological studies undertaken in literary theory) is justified on similar theoretical grounds, where

neither universal generalisations nor situated ethnographies are strictly speaking are not the main aim. What is being sought is more of a middle-range theoretical and methodological approach to the auto/biographical text. This approach does not denigrate the individual life narrative, nor does it preclude our capacity to make at least limited conclusions or generalisations, making the recognition of genealogical interrelations and similarities among texts in the manner of what Wittgenstein referred to collectively as "family resemblances" possible. Here the utilisation of (some) locally applied literary taxonomies and terminologies (e.g. "genre", "canon", "corpus"), as well as intertextual and narratological references, are not out of place in the course of sociological analysis. Thus, a combination of close textual reading of a few auto/biographical texts in regard to certain rhetorical strategies form the basis of the methodology adopted in the following chapters.

3.0 Genealogy, Interpretivism and Feminist Methodology

While discourse analysis offers the advantage of having an established sociological pedigree as a middle-range theory, the combination of genealogical and interpretive methods to examine subjective and self-representative texts has similarly been adapted by feminist theory as a way of systematically approaching the text. In her book *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (1993), Kathy E. Ferguson returns these elements of discourse analysis back into the realm of meta-theory, with a particular view to challenge the meta-discourse of the normatively masculine subject of modern thought. In her interrogation of the masculinisation of the modern subject, she ponders at some length on the distinctly feminist value of such genealogical and interpretivist methodologies for engaging with philosophical/self-representational texts. More specifically, Ferguson is interested in exposing their reliance upon a certain epistemological link between the political and the individual with respect to meta-theoretical claims about "truth" and "reality" as the basis for their sense-making praxis. In other words, by doing what Marx did to Hegel and turning the intransigent "woman question" so prominent in 19th and 20th century social thought on its head, Ferguson's positing of the "man question" affects a similar u-turn on the epistemic foundations of phallocentric

rationality. But instead of taking her cue from the many feminist commentators who have attempted to construct epistemological challenges to the masculine subject by asking what a female subject might be like (e.g. Battersby, 1998; Irigaray, 1985; Stanton, 1984), Ferguson adopts a more "negative" dialectical approach, using various genealogical and interpretive devices to deconstruct, challenge and problematise a range of social, political and linguistic constellations of sexual/gender difference in modern thinking which have been crucial to essentialising the modern subject as male.

Concentrating mainly on the Hegelian subject, Ferguson revisits *The Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807] (1977), opening up the discordances and discontinuities within its field of discursive meaning by showing how the Hegelian ontology of discovery is predicated on a "hidden order" of reality apprehended through the exercise of human cognition, marshalling for its cause a distinctly masculinist "hermeneutics of doubt". Such a hermeneutics of doubt is modelled on the dual social ethos of suspicion and conflict, constituting a distinctively adversarial system for exposing the true and undistorted representation of the "real" phenomenal world, within which power hierarchies are ordered according to these same values. She argues that the potency of doubt within such "true" representations of social reality is a progressive discursive journey toward knowledge and freedom—encapsulated in the epithet "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (Ferguson, 1993: 10). But contained within this is a counter-ontology which also doubts the possibility of a discovered order of a phenomenological reality "out there" recoverable through doubt and conflict, i.e. one which is itself deeply suspicious of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Hence the irony is that phallocentric interpretation, by its commitment to render the "big picture", must defer to and in the final analysis even affirm the particularity of local and temporal sense-making practices represented by individual points of view. Consequently, such a perspective provides no secure foothold against uncertainty, apart from its tenuous hold on power by virtue of the sovereign individual who occupies a privileged position in the social hierarchy, epitomised by the great, white male (auto/biographical) subject. This, or rather he, provides the bedrock not only of certainty, but also of the modern cultural narratives of freedom and progress.

While Ferguson is interested in cataloguing the gendered practices surrounding the processes of subject formation in modern society and epistemology, she resists the temptation to essentialise the diverse aspects of genealogical and interpretive understanding by assigning them to either masculine or feminine versions of the subject, a gender alignment which is frequently operative in feminist theory, typically privileging women's modes of self-understanding as in some real sense more relational than the autonomous versions constructed by men (e.g. Hartsock, 1983; Gilligan, 1982). Instead, she makes good on her claim to recognise in "woman" a diverse and heterogeneous social category, within which other sense-making praxes—in particular differences emerging from specifically cultural and moreover *religious* influences—are often more potent constitutive factors than gender identity in the construction of ideological and also situated female subjectivities (Ferguson, 1993: 19). Subsequently, her methodology for investigating the vagaries of the epistemic and social ontologies with respect to the "man/woman question" continually returns to genealogical and interpretive resources to explore the ways in which self-representative language is used to reflect the "true reality" of the life world in non-fictional discourses, particularly in its ironic, metaphorical, and metonymic manifestations. Such a concentration on irony, parody, metaphor, and metonymy with respect to the construction of a specifically and alternatively gendered subject positions in prisoner autobiography will play a prominent role as a technique for analysing the texts in the following chapters, all the while paying particular attention to the influence of cultural and religious practices on these writers. Along with aspects of discourse analysis and intertextuality, this concentration on the gendered subject and metaphorical language makes up the third strand of our methodology.

4.0 Autobiography as object/source of feminist critique: Subjectivity

Given the vehemence of the many recent attacks on canonical male autobiography as the paradigmatic expression of capitalist modernity, there is no little irony in the extent of the recourse to the auto/biographical subject adopted by many of these same critics. As the eminent autobiography theorist

James Olney (1980) has noted, the appearance and incorporation of the various area studies in academia (e.g. women's studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, etc.) is due in no small part to the emergence of autobiography as a cultural and epistemological *tour de force*. In this context, auto/biography, particularly women's auto/biography, has been instrumental in exposing the phallocentric epistemological paradigms which have dominated life in the academy for centuries, providing a new perspective for other ways of organising the academic disciplines in recent times, as well as influencing the new formulation of problems for scholarly research. It is virtually impossible to overestimate the importance of the recovery and incorporation of these "other" auto/biographical voices to contemporary cultural life and its analysis. Academic disciplines like women's studies that have been disenfranchised in the past and struggled to find a core organising principle to anchor their distinctive character have found in autobiography a substantive focal point (Olney, 1980). Thus the concentration on the voice of witness or testimony contained in these texts regarded as first person, primary documentary resources have become of signal importance as can be observed in the feminist influence on the human sciences, for example, in the Standpoint theories of Liz Stanley and Donna Haraway.

As we have seen, it is clear that auto/biography has close and dubious links with dominant power regimes, conspicuously implicated in socio-historical processes of self-society figurations that determine and sustain hegemonic codes of civility and social constructions of knowledge and identity which are inscribed as normatively male. Hence the sociological tensions underlying auto/biography and auto/biographical practices have been put down to "...certain theoretical repositioning in political and social chronologies" (Miller, [1985] 1995: 194) in which subjective and identity narratives have been deployed to both determine and delimit access to the rhetorics and technologies of self-(re)presentation along ideologically determined lines. The intimate historical relationship between subjectivity and society indicates that the technologies and modes of self-representation associated with auto/biography have become increasingly politicised and challenged because of their ideological functions and ramifications (e.g. Foucault, 1988). These are clearly central concerns in the recent attention devoted to these issues in feminist scholarship, seeking as they

do to dismantle hegemonic auto/biographical praxes and reconstruct/reclaim the discourse on less dubious ideological ground (Anderson, 2001; Grosz, 1994; Miller, 1994; Egan, 1994, 1999; Heller, 1992; Steedman, 1986, 1992, 1995; and the Butler/Behabib debates on subjectivity and grammars of the self, 1992-1994).

Since the middle 20th century, the contestation of auto/biography's foundational "metaphysics of presence" (Sturrock, 1993) as a paradigm for modern epistemology has found its most systematic and trenchant critique in feminist theory. The chronology of feminist auto/biography theory shows how many of the issues and debates concerning auto/biography repeatedly return to and coalesce around the core notions of *subjectivity* and *representation*, paradigm concepts in modern epistemology that are central to the cultural and rhetorical stratagems of self-construction in the modern era. However, the widespread usage of these terms in areas as varied as philosophy, linguistics, psychology, literature and art—and even the attacks on them from postmodern and post-structuralist positions—gives a false impression that there is a consensus about their exact definitions and that their meanings are clear and well understood. But this is categorically not the case; not only do each of these disciplines use the concepts of subjectivity and representation differently, they also use these them to mean different things. According to cultural theorist Dalia Judovitz, by merely repeating in their critiques "...the contradictions of their original articulation" (Judovitz, 1988: xi), many of the criticisms levelled at these concepts, not least by post-modernists and post-structuralists, show their limited knowledge of the historical and philosophical meanings of subjectivity and representation, unwittingly reinforcing their original meaning rather than providing a substantive critique and thereby depleting their critical potential and the possibility to affect genuine criticism or real change.

The contradictions underpinning the meanings of subjectivity and representation are multiple and intrinsic, with subjectivity in particular displaying a profoundly dualistic character which is if anything intensified in its autobiographical expression. On the one hand, subjectivity is understood as pertaining to the *subject* and his or her particular perspective on the experiences of existence or

reality through feelings, belief and desires—a way of understanding often contrasted with the *objectivity* of other more collective, abstract or externally-derived types of knowledge. The term "subjective" in common parlance often refers to knowledge derived from personal, anecdotal feelings or opinions in contrast to the legitimate, consensual and ideologically homologous knowledge generated and sanctioned within recognised social belief systems, epitomised (in contrast to the "subjective" or personal standpoint) by the objective discursive framework of modern science.

The role of subjectivity in the acquisition of knowledge reflected in theories of epistemology, notably in continental philosophy and contemporary cognitive sciences, is similarly ambiguous. Since its first appearances in the work of Descartes, the concept of subjectivity has been used to refer in a philosophical sense generally to the realm of human experience, a "pure" type of knowledge accessed directly and distinctively from the first-person standpoint. It has been argued that, within this rationalist tradition, the true meaning of subjectivity is its function as the empty but malleable designator of the epistemic "conditions of possibility" (Judovitz, 1988: ix) represented by the formation of a ground-breaking social world offered up by the new science.

In the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, subjectivity usually designates the empirical subject, the opposite of an abstract, transcendental form, but rather a "real" subject whose content is actual, intentional, historical, personal and individual (Judovitz, 1988: ix). Providing both the foundation and frontier of modern thinking, much of the project of modern philosophy and science comprises a sustained effort to build upon this conceptualisation of the subject as an apparently unlimited (if also partial, in both senses of the word) resource of first-person knowledge. Here we begin to see the simultaneous convergence and divergence of modern epistemology invested in the new scientific paradigm on the one hand and the individual knowing subject on the other.

The history of modern thought shows how the dynamics of these conflicting and proliferating notions of subjectivity have often been obscured and conflated to provide a bridge from the individual "subject" to the realm of "objective"

knowledge, whether through arguments of ingenious deduction (Descartes), causal inference (Locke), transcendental argument (Kant), dialectical progression (Hegel), or phenomenological analysis (Husserl) (Solomon, 1995: 857). The novelty and availability of such (purportedly) unconstrained possibilities is fundamental to the Cartesian transcendental perspective on the world and the self, a perspective with its roots in the innovations to a constellation of ideals and practices constituting the cultural understanding of the individual, her world, and her access to certain types of experience and knowledge about either or both.

While this notion of "purity" and its foundation in the dualistic mind/body ontology has made Cartesian rationalism the subject of relentless criticism throughout the modern period, at the same time, its divergence from previous historical cultural practices (and even some later ones) has not been without its attractions as resource for self-exploration among early modern writers, particularly women (see Bordo et al, 1999a). In many respects, auto/biographical writing then and now has proven its potential to permeate the social barriers which have historically shored up substantive and systematic inequalities by relegating certain groups of people to stratified areas of social life by what it was deemed they could know about themselves and their world. In other words, at the same time that auto/biographical discourses helped shape and define these boundaries, its undisciplined nature also made it possible for socially excluded individuals to transgress these same ideological barriers. This tendency will be reflected in the auto/biographies examined in this study.

While clearly these are broader philosophical issues of a depth and complexity such as to make any but the most basic commentary impossible in the present context, it is crucial to remark their signal importance to the emergence of the auto/biographical "I" as an avatar of the modern subject and subsequently as a paradigmatic figure of knowing and telling in modern culture. The possibilities offered to women in particular by the emergence of the rational subject in Cartesian philosophical/autobiographical writing are of particular importance, as are the phallocentric ideological roots of auto/biographical discourse for the expression and subsequent normalisation of masculine subjectivity. Efforts at

the alternative conceptualisation of subjectivity in women's auto/biography are reviewed in the next section, focusing on its role in sustaining and interpreting the theories and practices of non-fictional/realistic discourses from the standpoint of feminist theory, i.e. investigating the possibilities auto/biography presents for recovering the female subject.

4.1 Autogynography, autobiographics: recovering the female subject

Let us now turn our attention more fully to women's auto/biographical writing and its interpolation from a feminist perspective, both as a standpoint for critiquing capitalist modernity, a literature of resistance and a resource for recovering a female subject and/or authorial voice.

Since the 1980s, the question of what has happened to the female subject over the course of auto/biography's history has dominated feminist auto/biography studies. In her seminal 1984 essay "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?", Domna Stanton began the process of inquiring into the possibility of recovering the female subject (whatever that may be) through auto/biographical writing. She begins by reiterating William C. Spengemann's (1980) assertion that auto/biography is at the very centre of modernist concerns (Stanton, 1984: 131), a general premise of auto/biography studies. Against this background, Stanton seeks to identify the traces of a specifically female signature in what she designates as *autogynography*, a distinctive form of life writing dedicated to the expression of women's subjectivity, in which the female subject is interpolated as an entity inscribed through and wholly situated within the text, in an analogous way to the canonical masculine genre.

Although Stanton approaches the problem convinced of the fundamental difference of the "felt experience" of gender in both women's lives and life writing, eventually she is forced to conclude with palpable disappointment that she can nonetheless find no *textual* evidence for this difference, not even in what she identifies as autogynographical discourse. In searching for the difference between *gynos* and *bios*, Stanton admits that the "...texture is ultimately determined by the way in which meaning can be signified in a

particular discursive context, an (ideo)logical boundary that always already confines the speaking subject" (Stanton, 1984: 135). Or, as the auto/biography theorist Kenneth Mostern (1999) has since put it, while women can and often do write the same things using the same language and tropes as men, they do it in a way in which the meaning is completely different. Precisely where this meaning is located is somewhere between the active engagement of reader, writer and text, but not, as Stanton finds, in the text alone.

The problem with this is that the active engagement manifested between reader-writer-text represented autogynographically in the capitalist cut-and-thrust of modern cultural life is extremely fragile and continually under threat. This is because the very potency of the notion of *bios* in auto*bio*graphy is sufficient to ensure the occlusion of *gynos* in auto*gyn*ography, whatever that might be, through its mode of speech for all but the most discerning readers and writers. This colonisation of the life (*bios*) by the ideological appropriation of the auto/biographical voice achieved by the masculinisation of the knowing and telling subject has been echoed and further documented by Susan Bordo et al (1999a). All agree that autogynographical writing and theoretical debate are continually pre-empted by auto/biography's phallocentric discursive structure, dominated as it is by concerns over truth/facticity, authenticity, integration of the self, regularity of the narrative, and the referential status of the name and autographical language (as we have seen, all central themes in conventional auto/biography theory detailed in chapter 1).

What accounts for these differences in attitudes, experiences, feelings and meanings concerning what is crucially important to autobiography, i.e. its fundamental conceptual and ideological links to a "pure" asexual subject, divided as they are on the grounds of gender? Stanton's failure to find the female signature in the autobiographical text gave rise to an important problem for feminism and literary studies in general: how to account for the discrepancy of the feelings in private experience of gender differences which are not apparent in the subjective testimony contained in the textual record (Eakin, 1992: 79), while at the same time resisting the temptation to explain these

differences reductively by recourse to the essentialist definition of "woman" as ontologically (if not also epistemologically) "Other".

Stanton's (1984) refusal to blame women writers or the corpus of women's life writing for the absence of the female in the autograph is reflected in the challenge she mounts to hegemonic ideals surrounding the autobiographical text. In order to reclaim a theoretical standpoint from which to address this problem, she re-focuses on the relation between gender and genre[1] (the same concerns, albeit from an alternative point of view, as the structuralists Todorov and Lejeune, and also Derrida (1988)) in order to expose the epistemological origins and structural linguistic implications of the dilemma. One explanation Stanton advances for the absence of a distinctively female subject in autobiography is the enforced adoption by women writers of patriarchal models or systems of self-representation which pervade the experiences and expression of female subject positions by "genetically encoding" any recognisable examples of the genre as in a deeper sense identical with conventional literature and its implied dominant (masculine) ideology of self-representation. In this effort, Stanton echoes Candace Lang's (1982) insistence on the deliberately commonsensical and ubiquitous nature of autobiography which is at once elementally and unassailably a masculine form of writing.

While undoubtedly these considerations cause substantial problems for theory, as we will see in the following chapters (particularly in chapter 4 examining the auto/biography of Betty Friedan), in practice women writers have shown astonishing inventiveness in their ability to use these same hegemonically masculine qualities of autobiographical discourse against it in the interests not just of expressing but also of radicalising the female subject. This inventiveness is in part what made the 1960s and 1970s a significant period for women's writing as a consciousness-raising exercise (Whelehan, 2005). Rather than castigating women writers for the apparent absence of the female autograph in the text, feminist critics have instead highlighted the constraints of critical practices of reading which were as yet unable to detect her presence. In the

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[1] Two words which, in French at least, are synonymous. This is also a central concern of Derrida in his deconstruction of autobiography and work on "otobiography" (1988).

meantime, by turning the tables on conventional auto/biography and using familiar auto/biographical tropes in different or alternative ways, women were able to at least begin the process of developing an authentic *écriture feminine*, thereby en*gendering* a new identity politics (Irigaray, 1985; Cixous, 1981; Kristeva, 1984; Wittig, 1992). With reference to the interdisciplinary methodology utilised in the case study chapters, the impact of autogynography and the search for the female subject broadens the scope of interpretation by its insistence on the embodied or "felt experience" behind the text. These visceral experiences of gender as are as elemental to auto/biography as any literary genre codes, being features of the text that drive the activity of writing as well as giving shape to the writing subject. Therefore, in each of the case studies, special attention will be paid toward recovering these embodied and felt experiences of gender in the process of analysis, seeking out both the masculine and feminine experiences of embodiment in the auto/biographical text.

4.2 Exposing the specular subject of masculine autobiography

From Stanton's concentration on the text itself, feminist literary critics have subsequently extended their analysis of auto/biography from the embodied and material figuration of writer and text to include the political and lately ethical dimensions of these texts. Similar to Stanton, feminist autobiography theorist Leigh Gilmore (1994) focuses her criticism on the phallocentric roots of autobiography, this time on the peculiarly specular systems of the language of self-representation and the false analogy of insight into a transparent world of interiority they convey. In the case of the self as author and its erratic (non-)presence and the (in)stability of narrative in life writing, the problem as she sees it centres on the manifestation of the author culminating in his [sic] infamous "death" along post-structuralist lines, and the ethical and political consequences of his disappearance from the text for reading and writing subjects alike.

Gilmore (1994) introduces a new awareness of the ethical issues arising in the course of the post-structuralist re-inscription of the appearing/disappearing author as a result of the peculiar specularity of the self produced in traditional

auto/biographical narratives of self-representation. She argues that the specular language of self-representation used in conventional autobiography gives a false impression of the public subject/self figuration, shifting the focus from the ubiquity of the normative (male) autobiographical subject to the immediacy of its discursive truth-claim. This immediacy is itself a rhetorical construct of the language of transparency that pervades both autobiographical and rationalist discourses, recovered from a purportedly unitary memory accessed via an inner vision or sight and then relayed through objectified representative language. Again the problem is that this type of language relies on a methodical form of self-representation which is ostensibly and supposedly transparent *and* mimetic, laying claim to a true, coherent and definitive image of reality under the aegis of "non-fictional" discourse, reconstructed publicly from an unproblematised private memory which is complicit with a narratively coherent and stable present. Such an internally derived attitude toward an isolated, discrete model of self endorses a psychological experience of certainty based on the "pure" knowledge of self-evidence that is considered (for some) to be socially beyond doubt, and is, as we have seen, the quintessence of modern epistemology and rhetoric (Carr, 1990; Gaukroger, 1995). For those who are less able to articulate their subjective experiences formulated via the life "journey" according to such an all-knowing, coherent and progressive narrative strategy, autobiography remains all but impossible.

Returning to developments in post-structuralist thinking, Gilmore (1994) argues that the techniques and stratagems of traditional male autobiography create a space in which the writing subject is supported by socially constructed discourses of truth and identity which not only guarantee the author's credibility but furthermore sanctions his exemption from the text and any ethical accountability that might have accrued to him as author. This is because the real purpose of these texts is the erection of a monolith, monument or epitaph to mark the historical presence of the author first and foremost (Gilmore, ibid: 90), not a revelation of the "true self" as it is in the world of everyday life (cf. Bakhtin, 1990), but rather a reified version of self these writers choose to leave behind. In autobiography, this is accomplished in the "death of the author", where his [sic] exculpation, disappearance or "death" is itself intended to

convey a potent didactic message in its own right to the reading public concerning the power, ingenuity and above all social privilege of the male author. He may appear, or disappear, in public life as often and to the extent that he so chooses. The manner of his departure via public and collective memory is as much a matter for his own agency as is his total discretion regarding his appearance in the present moment.

In contrast, for women writers, the language and metaphysics of (non-) presence remains the universal language of privation, not in the sense of establishing a memorial to the amazing dis/appearing author, but rather by precluding her access to and participation in constructed discourses of self-representation as they are consensually and socially construed. In other words, she is effectively "disappeared" as opposed to "disappearing" (in the post-structuralist death-of-the-author sense) for the simple reason that her authorial presence was never fully legitimised or recognisable in the first place. To cite a common metaphor used in many feminist critiques of canonical writing, she has historically been consigned to write in "disappearing ink" (O'Neill, 1998), an image that implies that the supposed absence of women's writing from the historical canon is not because women in the past did not write, but rather, because their writings have been erased or otherwise rendered invisible or judged unreadable and thus simply ignored or forgotten. Thus the specular post-structuralist language of "disappearing" has a dual effect: discharging male authors from their ethical responsibility for their writings while also occluding the writings of "others" through a vanishing act carried out through the maintenance of the phallocentric canon.

How do women and others get beyond this? As the socially sanctioned and predominantly male autobiographical discourses are situated within ideologically determined notions of "truth" and "identity" in the context of a hegemonic identity politics which excludes women, Gilmore suggests an alternative form of self-representative discourse she calls *autobiographics* (1994), delineating a linguistic space which acknowledges and opens up the boundaries traditionally separating fiction from non-fiction. In this context, Gilmore reiterates a dominant and recurring theme in autobiography studies in the form of the

continual re-evaluation of the socio-cultural relationship between fictional and non-fictional discourses (e.g. Todorov, 1981, 1990), a position which normally prioritises the dissolution of genre boundaries (if not of genre classification itself) as a first course of action, top of the agenda.

In the interests of facilitating greater possibilities for creativity on behalf of writers and readers, Gilmore (along with other notable feminist commentators in the field of autobiography studies, e.g. Rita Felski (1989a)) rejects any strict adherence to the interdictions of genre in favour of freer textual experimentation in the processes of self-representation in both form and content. She argues that this would have the benefit of allowing women to write self-representationally by enabling them to "*re*-member" and "*re*store" a sense of self previously denied to them by the sequestering self-narrative practices encapsulated in the dominance of transparent/mimetic/specular representational language. Such a liberation of life writing from the restrictive traditional genres and practices associated with conventional autobiography, Gilmore argues, would make the restorative project of *autobiographics* a real possibility (Gilmore, 1994: 90), as well as opening the way for an authentically feminist aesthetics (Felski, 1989a).

Others have argued that, ultimately, the prejudice against autobiography's "truth claim" fails to recognise the complexity of the kinds of "truth" it purports to reveal, what Suzanne Nalbantian (1997) calls the "truths of fiction" (61). These truths, she argues, are created through the artistic techniques of aesthetic autobiography through the construction of innovative methods of revealing, by concealing, the self. Such multifaceted and metamorphic forms of truth, she argues, go well beyond the construction of ideal typologies underlying the (linguistic) structures of social reality. Rather, these methods, properly understood, lie at the heart of all modern processes of creativity, emphasising the agency of the writer as artist as well as the social possibilities offered by autobiography as the "art" of self-invention (Eakin, 1992, 1999).

The strength of Nalbantian's thesis lies in its mediation between the text, author and the "real" social worlds of interiority and externality, opening up the linguistic structures of phenomenological inter-subjectivity beyond the pure and

abstract "ideal types" in the literary text. Unlike the post-structuralists, theorists like Nalbantian and Eakin, by emphasising the artistic qualities of autobiography, proclaim their unwillingness to sacrifice the author to the vortex of the text, for the simple reason that this is clearly not the way autobiography is read. Readers read autobiography differently from other kinds of texts, especially those works they take to be "fiction" (Eakin, 1992, 1999). Contrary to the critical theorists, for Nalbantian and Eakin the depiction of an exclusive and "pure" "truth" communicated only in abstract art forms is far too static to reflect the reality of everyday life and serve the purposes of human scientific research.

The idea of achieving a kind of restoration for "other" writers in the auto/biographical text through the loosening of the specular language of memory, subjectivity and representation is highly significant. From a methodological standpoint, as Gilmore and Felski recommend, a main way that this is to be achieved is by the breaking down the boundaries between the languages of truth and fiction. Once again, this turns the normative methods of interpreting the auto/biographical text on its head: in pointing out the ethical problems arising from phallogocentric practices of auto/biographical writing, Gilmore exposes the specular nature of representational non-fictional forms of canonical life writing. The transgression of the previously dubious practice of using overtly literary/fictional devices in auto/biography becomes in autobiographics an acceptable alternative practice, breaking through the language of truth to restore for those who have been denied it all along a viable subject position from which to write themselves.

5.0 Truth and reference in autobiography: Representation

Though the feminist and deconstructive critiques of the phallogocentric nature of auto/biographical writing in terms of its reification of subjectivity and representation have been among the most unrelenting in 20th century thought, fissures have also been noticed from more traditional academic quarters. These critics have begun to turn away from the more abstract philosophical debates on the issues of memory and language to concentrate on the social aspects of auto/biography, specifically the normalisation of the modern subject as male and

its reification in the autobiographical "I" as middle class or bourgeois, culminating in the appropriation of the language of representation, or "truth", to socially privileged males. This can be seen in the preponderance for conventional autobiographers to agonise over the effort of looking after one's reputation as a *gentlehomme* or *honnête homme*, an upstanding member of society. This concern with autobiography as the by-product of the masculine work of reputation management is endorsed and developed by the philosopher Bernard Williams' (2002) in his most recent book *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (2002). For example, in his interpretation of Rousseau's autobiographical *Confessions* [1781] (1953), Williams shows how the much vaunted problem of memory in autobiography is a relatively specious concern in view of its overriding social role, which is less about recovering the lost time of the past via memory as it is about setting out to rectify other peoples' erroneous judgements about who we really are (i.e. how we see ourselves) in the present. In other words, the function of autobiography is to convince and persuade people of the need to change *their* attitudes and perceptions of social reality because it has in some way led to their mistaken and unfair appraisal of the writer. Hence it is perhaps more than anything a social forum for the individual exercise of *power*.

Throughout the modern period, great male thinkers have turned again and again to autobiographical representations of the paradigmatic autonomous and authoritative self to ground concepts central to modern social life, including potent social narratives of individualism, equality as well as shared ideals authenticity and truth (Judovitz, 1988; Danahay, 1993; Gaukroger, 1995; Williams, 2002; Shapin 1994). Nevertheless, despite the centrality of autobiography to the social principles of cultural individualism and the meteoric rise of the individual in modern culture, autobiography's links to the management of social identity as a factor of everyday life which is continually at risk and/or under pressure means that its legitimacy as aesthetic object and/or historical document remains under constant scrutiny.

Williams (2002) describes how this gives rise to a central problem in representative (or realist, objective, non-fictional) discourses situated at the

cleavage between the two main currents of modern thought and culture. Firstly, as moderns we have an intense commitment to and interest in truthfulness as something that equally is obtainable from either the public (scientific or social) or private (personal or interior) realms. The intensity of this desire is matched by a pervasive suspiciousness, a fear which is typically expressed as "...a readiness against being fooled, an eagerness to see through appearances to the real structures and motives that lie behind them" (Williams, 2002: 1). While such scepticism dominates the social sciences, it is also identifiable in the natural sciences and humanities. Secondly, along with this demand for truthfulness and the modern reflex against being deceived, there are equally pervasive doubts about *truth* itself and whether or not such a thing really exists. Even if it does, there is the equally difficult question over what is its nature: is it subjective, relative, objective, and so on? In the modern mind, there is such a keen awareness of the difficulty of these questions that we even wonder if it's worth bothering about the truth, in favour of simply getting on with the activities of research and experimentation in the meantime without bothering too much about it. But in spite of this busyness in the activities of scholarly endeavour, the deferment of anxiety over truth is always short-lived. Williams argues that these two principles—the devotion to truthfulness and the intense suspicion toward the very idea of truth—are deeply inter-connected in modern psychic and social institutions. "The desire for truthfulness drives a process of criticism which weakens the assurance that there is any secure or unqualifiedly stateable truth" (Williams, 2002: 1). This drive underlies all our hopes and doubts about what we look for in the way of "truth", and perhaps goes some way to explaining why the truth we possess—about ourselves or the natural or social world—never seems to last. So, instead of attacking "truth" in the way that many feminist and deconstructionists do, Williams exposes how the truth as we know it is never quite good enough.

First in the firing line is the truth claim of history and the historical discourses, including autobiography. Repeatedly, we find that historical accounts that have purported to "tell the truth" often turn out to be essentially biased, either dictated by ideology at the social level, or simply the expression of blatant personal self-interest. But subsequent efforts to replace these versions with "the truth" are

nearly certain to eventually encounter the same objection. The question arises, then, of whether or not any historical account of the past can legitimately claim to be "true", that is, whether our ideals of objectivity can really be applied to any inquiries into the past. If our notion of truth cannot be applied to the experiences of the past, surely, according to Williams, it would be more truthful in the sense of being *honest* to stop pretending otherwise; the consequence of this line of thought is the well-trodden path, as we have seen, away from the notion of truth and into the battlefield of rhetoric, as recommended by the deconstructionists. However, Williams cautions against the hazards of pursuing such a deconstructive agenda in the human sciences: "It is remarkable how complacent some of the 'deconstructive' histories are about the status of the history they deploy themselves" (Williams, 2002: 2). Echoing Dalia Judovitz (1988), Williams is suggesting that post-structuralist or deconstructive arguments, by virtue of their wholesale rejection of modern notions such as subjectivity, representation and truth, can and often do unwittingly reproduce astonishingly naïve versions of what they purport to critique. With these thoughts in mind, let us consider some of the sociological responses to the status of the truth in autobiography.

6.0 Sociology's response

Certainly, subjectivity, representation and truth in autobiography have consistently posed problems for the dominant analytical models in human sciences research. The sociologist Norman Denzin (1989) was among the first to identify two general uses of the auto/biographical or "life history" research method in sociology, firstly advocating it for its aim to provide an "objective" account of a "life" at a particular time and place, revealed through the given subjective meanings of personal experience attached to these historical narratives. This method links "a life" with the particular overarching social structures and processes of social change operative at the time. Such an approach is commonly used to map new fields of sociological inquiry or to further support the findings of existing statistical or general quantitative studies. However, the main problem with this approach is the typically unreflexive theoretical and methodological treatment of the material. In her article "On

Auto/biography in Sociology" (1993), Liz Stanley is critical of sociological research where these "documents of life" are accepted as a relatively straightforward resource or "dataset" like any other, purporting to tell us something factual and generally applicable about "life out there" in the "real" world (Stanley, 1993: 41). Stanley argues that the problem with life history research, as exposure to these documents quickly reveals, is that the "life history" they relate is comprised of a number of "histories", many of them contradictory or in complex social competition with each other. Strictly speaking, all life histories are a form of historiography as well as autobiography, and as such they each represent particular written *versions* of the past and the self rather than objective historical "slices" of past life as it really was (Stanley, 1993).

The second and more recent approach identified by Denzin (1989) focuses prominently on the interpretive procedures utilised in auto/biographical research itself and the analysis of life-history production, following and developing the generic principles of reflexive sociology (Denzin, 1989; Stanley, 1992, 1993). The area of auto/biography as a form of life history methodology is characterised by the multiplicity and mutability of its truth claim and its ethnographic accessibility in terms of *who* is able to use the auto/biographical voice. Therefore auto/biography warrants sociological analysis not simply as a data resource, but as an object of inquiry in its own right. As we have seen, the scholarly concentration with respect to the question of *who* in the auto/biographical text has overwhelmingly been directed toward the experiences and construction of gender in the text; while other forms of social privilege, e.g. "race" and class have also featured in these critiques, they have been more or less adjuncts to the generally phallocentric nature of auto/biographical writing. The question of how such issues of "race" and class affect the auto/biographical "I" from alternative subject positions has received comparatively scant attention.

6.1 Autobiography and (middle) class identities

This brings us to a topic which has to some extent been obscured behind issues of gender and thus underdeveloped as a subject in its own right in the literature

on contemporary autobiography, i.e. the particular influence of class—particularly middle class identities—on autobiography. While there have been some excellent historical studies of working class autobiography in general (notably Burnett et al's (1984, 1987, 1989) three-volume annotated bibliography of working class autobiography covering the period from 1790 to 1945), as well as a number of specialist historical studies of working class women's autobiography (e.g. Swindells, 1985), with the exception of Mary Jean Corbett's *Representing Femininity: Middle Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies* (1992), comparatively little scholarship has been devoted to contemporary middle class autobiography in general, even less to those written by contemporary middle class women.

We may speculate as to why this is the case: for one thing, it seems that middle class identities as a discrete category in autobiography studies appears to have been incorporated generally into what was during the 18th and 19th centuries (the highpoint of traditional or canonical autobiography) the rather copious output of the bourgeoisie. While this identification of the bourgeoisie with the relatively homologous category of "middle class" was more or less justified in the 19th century, in more recent times the extent to which the general classifications "bourgeoisie" as/or "middle class" still apply to the myriad groups and various interests of those who inhabit the social terrain between the very privileged and severely under privileged in contemporary society is highly debatable (with the possible exception of those who take a Marxian perspective on these matters, stipulating that the diversity of class structures in capitalism reduces with the continued development of the means of production). The dominant theme in current sociological theory of the very idea of the "risk society" suggests that those we might today recognise or designate as "middle class" are far less likely to be as powerful, influential, or indeed secure as their bourgeois ancestors, even though their access to certain forms of social and cultural capital may be similar, if not the same.

With respect to mapping the output of autobiography by class, as Martin Danahay's (1993) study of the 19th century autobiographies of the bourgeoisie demonstrates, the identification of conventional autobiography (i.e. celebrating

the accomplishments and social autonomy of the sovereign individual) with the bourgeoisie during the 19th century has since become increasingly identifiable with writers who are either of the very wealthy and/or the social elite (see Sturrock, 1993). But, as Mary Evans (1998) points out, with the increase of autobiographical texts written by members of the working classes during the interwar years (specifically those written by WWI soldiers returning from the front) came a greater diversification of the form with respect to both reading and writing practices, winning for autobiography a broader popular appeal and hence greater market demand. The subsequent growth in the division of labour in the post-WWII years resulted in the remarkable increase in the production of autobiographies, by women in particular. This created an explosion of interest and demand for autobiographical writings by those in the academic community and beyond which are similarly explicable by a complex and reciprocal interplay of economic, political and aesthetic factors (Smith and Watson, 1998: 5) largely contingent on class. The dialogical impact of autobiography on contemporary modern culture in terms of its expression of more diverse class interests is reflected in the increasing access by so-called non-traditional groups into social institutions which were once the preserve of the middle and upper classes such as, for example, the higher education system. This in itself has stimulated an economic demand for and inclusion of texts that express more diverse and wide-ranging life experiences, issues and points of view than ever before. To this end, women's autobiographies and those written by people from a variety of classes, cultures, "races", ethnicities and sexualities reproduce empowering narratives of self-discovery and experiences of kinship in both the "literature of possibility" and also "literature of resistance" modes, mirroring and reinforcing the widespread experiences and broadened horizons of self and identity politics. While this demand for ever more diverse and innovative auto/biography informs the expansion of the social agency of the individual via autobiography in contemporary cultural life, these texts also reiterate the continuing potency of social structural/ideological factors like class, race, gender, religion, age, nationality and dis/ability on emergent models of self.

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the similarities among some of the more radical or revolutionary autobiographies written during a specific

historical period (in this case, in the 1960s and 1970s) is matched by the differences in how their social status qualitatively influences their individual autobiographical voices. Among these sociological aspects determining the shape and focal points of the texts examined in the following chapters are the categories of class, gender, religion and "race". Though all of these categories do not influence these autobiographies in the same ways, the similarities and differences, and also the relative plasticity of these categories with respect to how they structure and influence these writers' sense of social agency are extremely instructive, not least in the effort to more fully appreciate the hermeneutic potential of the autobiographical text for the purposes of social theorising. These aspects of the auto/biographical "I" will form the final element in the interdisciplinary methodology adopted in this dissertation, along with the previously investigated methodologies of discourse analysis, intertextuality, narratology, gender, and the specular languages of subjectivity, representation and "truth".

7.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that the emergence of auto/biography as a definitive cultural object (Dilthey, 1976; Daniel, 1994) marks the prioritisation of certain "natural" processes of subjectivity enshrined in the commonsense praxis governing agency and identity formation. These social practices have to do, for instance, with notions of the ostensible narrative unity of the life and the individual subject, the specular accessibility of the subject to itself, culturally specific religious/confessional practices of self-examination, the relative social status of the author, the parameters of authorial creativity, access to writing materials, time to write, and so on. Recognition of the potential malleability of these social norms in recent times has led to a distinct shift in focus from critiques that claim to substitute or replace autobiography with new and improved versions derived from less objectified, referential or socially sanctioned principles of subjectivity and/or representation to those that are reciprocally informed by the hitherto suppressed presence of a diversity of autobiographical voices and texts (Smith and Watson, 1998: 5). This is due largely to the influence on literary and social theory of feminist, post-colonial

and post-modern theoretical critiques. In other words, the theodicy of individual being which forms the societal basis of subjectivity—that is, the vindication of the epistemological subject in a world dominated by the moral evil and suffering it has largely brought about—is ultimately resolved in the feminist/post-colonial apologetics of diversity, transgression and inclusion.

In view of this, it is not surprising that autobiography is of special and intensive interest to feminist theory on account of the deeply challenging and often problematic nature of subjectivity and representation at its foundation. In fact, nowhere in autobiography studies have models of identity and issues of identity politics achieved the conceptual prominence as in the study of women's autobiography, especially in relation to developments in feminist epistemologies linking subjectivity to agency, ethics and aesthetics (cf. Stanley, 1992; Gilmore, 1994; McNay 2000; Battersby, 1998; Elam, 1994). From one perspective, this is due to the possibilities autobiography presents as a source of critique capable of destabilising the unified patriarchal social models of subjectivity, as well as its capacity to reconstitute the fractured and absent (female, disenfranchised male, child, aged, disabled, ethnic, etc.) models of self, establishing and disseminating alternative modes and technologies of subjectivity.

As we have seen, many feminist theorists are interested in autobiography as a possible site for the reformulation of subjectivity and resulting emancipatory theories of agency capable of eliding the ideological structures of power and domination historically linked to certain normative (masculine) ideals of the self (Battersby, 1998; McNay, 2000). The problem of central concern for feminism focuses on the possibility of expressing alternative forms of subjectivity and processes of subjectification/subjection in the pre-existing medium of autobiography, without reproducing its negative historical and ideological connotations.

The principle objection has been that in the past autobiography has tended toward androcentrism and the (re)generation of androcentric interpretive strategies at the expense of gynocentric models (Schweickart in Kadar, 1992: 4). In its ideological function, autobiography privileges forms of life writing that

prioritise and reproduce dominant versions of objective and truthful narrative structures, marginalising those narratives that display a lesser objectivity, coherence or regularity. It has also tended to valorise certain notions about what constitutes the personal or the unitary subject (P. Smith in Kadar, 1992: 5) in cultural archetypes of identity. Despite trenchant criticisms of Cartesian and Enlightenment influences on subjectivity and representation in discourses like autobiography, there is nonetheless a strong tendency in some strands of modern thought is to interpret autobiography in a quasi-Cartesian manner insofar as it remains a discrete "literature of possibility" and also a "literature of resistance", emphasising the possibilities for self-determination and emancipation in processes of identity construction. This accounts for much of the attraction toward autobiography from a range of theoretical perspectives, even in the shadow of autobiography's dubious ideological past (cf. Danahay, 1993). This means that, paradoxically, the major objection to and valorisation of autobiography stem from the same cultural resource, in the sense that both are essentially political though diametrically opposed in terms of the ideologies of individualism they seek to promote—universal, monolithic and univocal versus specific, multivocal, inclusive and diverse.

For feminism and beyond, the full ramifications of autobiographical discourse analysed according to the principles of social constructivism have not yet been sufficiently mapped or articulated. Nevertheless, the critical force of women's autobiography on the phallocentric canon predicated upon the rejection of masculinist rhetoric and its related ideologies of power have been generally welcomed as a representing a genuine opportunity for effecting possible social change. At the same it, the optimism surrounding the emergence of women's autobiographical writing and feminist autobiography theory introduces the problem of developing new rhetorics of subjectivity adequate to serve as templates for (women's) writing and identity-formation beyond the simplistic opposition of male/female dualisms (Brée, 1986; Bell, 1985). This accentuates the vexed problem of feminist rhetoric and the rhetorics of femininity in relation to the social categories of "woman" or "women" under the generic rubric of "women's writing" (Elam, 1994). Examples of how these aspects of

auto/biographical writing are negotiated in practice will be a central theme of the following chapters.

In the next three chapters of this dissertation, I closely examine the politically disruptive or militant qualities of these rhetorics in three autobiographical texts, using a dual analytical strategy examining (i) the reception of these texts in contemporary historiographies of militancy and resistance in the 1960s and 1970s, and (ii) the intertextual, intersubjective and narrative construction of the individual auto/biographical text linked to the women's movement (Friedan, [1963] 1992) and the Black Panther movement in the United States (Davis, [1974] 1990), and the republican movement in Northern Ireland (Sands, 1983). Over the course of these chapters, I concentrate on the construction of gendered, racial and religious identities in these prisoner life writings, showing how these auto/biographies call into question the various historiographies of identity politics during this era.

Part II – Case Studies

Chapter 3 – *One Day in My Life*: The Prison Autobiography of Bobby Sands

1.0 Introduction

Of the three prison auto/biographies analysed in this dissertation, Bobby Sands' *One Day in My Life* (1983) is remarkable in two important ways: firstly, it is the only one written from within prison, recalling the events more or less as they happened contemporaneously in "real time"; secondly, it is the most overtly literary in its mode of expression. In light of the commentaries reviewed in the previous chapters concerning the palpable sense of anxiety over auto/biography's "truth-telling" claim, these two features of this text are especially significant, heightening the tension in this text by pulling in opposite directions. As most prison writers are in actuality *ex*-prisoners, normally writing about their lives in prison long after release, problems inevitably arise over memory, which as we have seen is a major worry for many auto/biography theorists. But for Sands, the issue of memory is not so pressing, given that he is writing about events as they are actually taking place in the present moment.

But as also recounted in chapter 2, not everyone interested in auto/biography and its truth claim are overly concerned about the trustworthiness of memory. As Bernard Williams (2002) noted, the problem of memory in auto/biography is becoming increasingly distanced from what were previously abstract philosophical arguments over the temporal or linguistic proximity of the narrator to narrated events, giving way to a greater concentration on the *social* aspects of truth-telling in the auto/biographical context. This perspective foregrounds the normalisation of the modern subject as male and its reification in the autobiographical "I" as socially privileged and usually middle class, and his normal appropriation of the language of representation or "truth". Considering the contemporaneity of Sands' account of the events in which he found himself and the overall consensus that he was the object of the systematic violence and abuse he describes himself as suffering on a daily basis, my personal experience

of presenting research papers on his writings at conferences has shown that most people still consider this insufficient to lend him even the most basic level of credibility, even among the dubious confraternity of prisoner writers. This in itself suggests that Williams' understanding of the situation with respect to the social positioning of the auto/biographer, rather than technical aspects of truth or memory, is indeed accurate. At the same time, however, there is some basis for locating the conflict at the core of this prison autobiography to the tension between being perceived to be telling the truth but still being denied a socially sanctioned identity as credible.

So, in interpreting his prison auto/biography we may justifiably ask what social position is accorded to Bobby Sands? His iconic status in these islands at least as the archetypal terrorist/freedom fighter of his generation has transformed him into a figure who is at once vilified and glorified by those committed to keeping his memory alive, if only for their own current political purposes. In many ways, this is a stratagem rendered all the more effective by the denuding of his actual life history of its qualities as being in many respects that of a very ordinary young man who displayed an uncommon talent for obstinacy and for writing. The very name of Bobby Sands is enough to conjure deep feelings of fear, loathing, mistrust as much as veneration, nobility and martyrdom; the growing number of streets and monuments bearing his name in countries as diverse as the United States, Cuba, Spain and Iran attests to his sovereign status a symbol of militant rebellion in contemporary global politics.

What accounts for this hiatus between the real ordinary individual and the creation in the social imagination of the mythic, iconic figure? Was Bobby Sands complicit in this transformation from ordinary youth to terrorist/rebel icon, and if so, how? I think the answer to the latter question is certainly yes, though not by his actions as an active volunteer for the IRA, but rather as a serving prisoner, a prisoner identity constructed out of his considerable output of auto/biographical writings. In her lengthy investigations of the construction of the "Yorkshire Ripper" from the media biographies of the very ordinary Peter Sutcliffe, Liz Stanley (1985, 1992) attributes the emergence of the notorious

iconic figure mainly from the multiple auto/biographical voices and frameworks mobilised by and within the contemporary mass media.

In this chapter, I will similarly argue that Sands himself was at least partially responsible for his transformation from ordinary young man to international political icon, a transformation achieved not through his actions on the "outside" as a paramilitary operative but on the "inside" primarily through his innovative recovery of a prisoner auto/biographical voice. As already remarked, Sands' work is among the most literary of prisoner auto/biographies, not just of those examined in this study but also among those of the general oeuvre. As we have also seen in the previous chapters, it is the established practice among auto/biographers (whether or not they are prisoners) to refrain as much as possible from writing in a conspicuously literary style, as the proximity to what is normally the preserve of fiction places the "truth" at the core of the auto/biographical text immediately under suspicion. But as will become increasingly evident in this chapter, Sands as auto/biographer is less concerned with observing the conventions of established writing praxis than with using these practices in an innovative and active way to create a distinctively masculine—if not hyper-masculine—autobiographical "I" through a complex web of intertextual references to a range of other autobiographical texts. These texts include some of the most canonical and radical of prisoner life writing—from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), to the prison writings of Irish republican prisoners—in addition to some of the most canonical works of English literature such Wordsworth's autobiographical poems *The Prelude* [1805-6] (1971). By tracing these intertextual references, I will argue that Sands' re-construction of his own autobiographical "I" while in solitary confinement reveals as much about the construction of masculine British and Irish identities in the late 20th century as it does about the literary/mythological/historical canons and the nature of life writing itself in contemporary cultural life. This is demonstrated in the challenges posed by such prisoner life writings to the dominant diachronic and contiguous narratives of historicism; the materialistic and embodied nature of prisoner writing and its effect on aesthetic literary codes of writing; the meaning of writing itself as

signified (creative, literary, narrative) and signifier (black-and-white, letters, paper, pens) in a deeply conflicted social context; and finally the recovery of the masculine autobiographical "I" from the canon of English literature through the experiences of migration, colonisation in the life "journey" reflected in the violence, suffering and sensory deprivation on the bodies of "other" less powerful subjects.

2.0 Against historicism: from the diachronic contiguity of historical narrative to the synchronic narrative of imprisonment

First let us briefly establish what precisely is meant by contiguous narrative and what its links to autobiography and historiography are. In her book *The Auto/biographical I* (1992), sociologist Liz Stanley traces the confluence of contiguous narrative in autobiography and historiography from its origins in the genre theory of Tzvetan Todorov's structuralist poetics (1981, 1990). According to Todorov, narrative continuity is the representational form of narrative structured on a linear model, upon which an objective history of events is reconstructed through the recovery of statements of fact, archival records, personal testimony, and so forth, comprising a systematic process of writing founded on the authorial re-alignment of the material artefacts of historical events in order to reproduce them in narrative form. Consequently, contiguous narrative is highly conspicuous in autobiography and historiography by its rendition of personal or historical events as in some sense intrinsically "storied" or otherwise amenable to the activity of story-telling, tolerating few gaps or "holes" in the narrative, with one thing leading on to another in a continuous and temporally diachronic chain of events as if unfolding through the narrative in the mind of the reader as it was originally in time.

The main problem posed by contiguous narrative for prisoners is two-fold. For one thing, the rehearsal of the linear or rather official version of events to which they are at the centre as autobiographical subjects tends to place them in a passive if not uncompromisingly inert position. According to the contiguous or historical version of the events surrounding incarceration (recovered for example from court records, prison archives, newspaper reportage, etc), the presence of

the prisoner him or herself in the narrative is typically represented as a relatively inconsequential presence according to which the prisoner occupies an otherwise irrelevant role. This is because, from the perspective of contiguous narrative, prisoner versions of events tend to be either too irregular or contradictory to sustain a sense of narrative progression at all, a situation that is in all probability the result of the self-interestedness of the subjective point of view which is evidently not trustworthy in the first place because of the writer's deviant or criminal social status. This is this sort of circular reasoning that justifies the hegemony of official contiguous narrative over other less coherent narrative accounts, and, as Williams (2002) pointed out, exposes the social underpinning of such "aesthetic" narrative standards.

But just as we know from experience that contiguous narrative itself is not immune from irregularity, contradictions, gaps and slippages, neither are these "faults" to historical narrative without their own specific meanings. Because Bobby Sands wrote his autobiography while a serving prisoner[2] , this meant that it had to be written covertly, in discrete sections using a variety of alternative media (usually written on toilet paper using purloined pen refills or pencil stubs), which were then smuggled out of the prison by being secreted in Sands' own body (MacBride, 1983). This primarily accounts for the narrative structure of the text which is uneven and fragmented, but these material and embodied circumstances also makes the resulting unevenness an integral part of the auto/biographical narrative framework, necessitated as it is by his physical circumstances as a serving prisoner during this particular time in this specific place. The very damaging effects on narrative contiguity lend the text an intrinsic sense of authenticity with respect to the kinds of extreme suffering and deprivation detailed by the author.

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[2] Until 1999, UK law prohibited references to events, other persons or even oneself in prisoner writing during the term of their incarceration under the Prison Rules (part of the Prison Act of 1952). These restrictions on prisoner writing were only lifted subsequent to the enactment of the Human Rights Act (1998) and the duty to bring UK legislation into line with the First Protocol and Articles 2 to 12 and 14 to 18 of the European Convention on Human Rights. But of course, these legal provisions did not extend to Bobby Sands during the period of his incarceration in the 1970s, nor to his fellow prisoners.

At the same time however, this text does not represent the record of a fractured life and fragmented identity in the manner of postmodern conceptualisations of the self; on the contrary, Sands goes to great lengths in repeating his determination resist going with the "flow" of prison life, willing himself not to be "broken" by the inhuman system he is forced to endure. Hence the distinctive presence of narrative contiguity is still detectable in *One Day in My Life* (1983) as a personal memoir and, in its own right, as a unique historical record of contemporary political events at which Sands was to find himself at the centre, albeit not as an established chronicler of social repute. The remainder of this section investigates how Sands uses autobiography to rectify this social limitation by (re)constructing a sense of personal integrity and social agency through and beyond the parameters of conventional narrative contiguity as normally understood. Central to this task was the need to evidence and authenticate his own authorial point of view primarily through first-person testimony as a witness and subject of the extraordinary socio-political events that took place in the prisons of Northern Ireland during the 1970s and early 1980s.

Sands constructs this alternative contiguous narrative framework by referencing the details of his daily life in prison as a rich source of synchronic as opposed to diachronic narrative. This alternative narrative focuses on the details of everyday life which are otherwise regarded as too inconsequential, repetitive and banal to warrant inclusion in traditional contiguous historical narrative. It also allows him to form a much more direct intertextual and inter-subjective links between prisoners writing now and in the past as they have been so perceptibly expunged from the "historical" time and its official narrative record, thereby downplaying the significance of chronological historical time in favour of a less sequentially ordered experience of modern history.

In the following sections, we will see in more detail how the relative absence of diachronic narrative in prisoner life writing largely as a result of the "deadness" and absence of purpose of prison time (Cohen and Taylor, 1990) not only heightens the dramatic nature of the present moment, it forms the basis for an alternative narrative structure focused on the synchronic texture of prisoner life narrative. Hence Sands' personal "journey to nowhere" figures as a recurrent

theme in the book, affording him at once the opportunity to communicate a sense of the disruption of his life narrative as a continuous and progressive journey in the normative sense while also opening up an alternative discursive space to reflect on the sensual and visceral experience of his solitary confinement in the H-blocks structured by the regimented routines of the prison day. This concentration on synchronic narrative is further enhanced by his insistence on his identity as essentially communal, part of a collective group that exists both inside and outside of prison; this overtly intersubjective construction of the auto/biographical "I" is additionally augmented by his continual intertextual references to other important prisoner life narratives, in this work and throughout his corpus of auto/biographical writings (Sands, 2001) traceable to and in many ways recovered from the highly reputed prison life writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), and George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* (1971), among others. These intertextual references provide a counterpoint to the intrinsically communal construction of Sands' auto/biographical "I", lending the text a palpable sense of self-consciousness and self-presence.

To summarise briefly, what we see here is not a simple jettisoning of contiguous historical narrative, but rather its innovative use in the re-construction of a stigmatised autobiographical "I" which such normative official historical narratives were originally designed to silence. This innovation takes place in the shift from the diachronic to the synchronic narrative mode, as an alternative subject position to the official penological narratives of personal development, growth and progress toward a narrative resolution of reform or at least desistance from offending behaviour. Instead, Sands develops a more grounded and embodied narrative that seeks a more limited resolution through the portrayal of the everyday textures of the individual prison life.

2.0.1 One Day in My Life and One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

The intertextual link between *One Day in My Life* (1983) and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963) is obviously communicated in the title but also by the nature of Sands' character as protagonist who, like Solzhenitsyn's Shukov, is

interned for his treasonous inclinations rather than as a result of any specific criminal act. Also like Shukov, Sands' shaping of the autobiographical narrative is accomplished almost exclusively by reference to the ordinary and ephemeral details of everyday life in prison rather than to the objective historical "facts" of authoritative official records associated with contiguous narrative, which both writers refer to only rarely, sardonically and with contempt, if at all. By abjuring references to officially authenticated historical records, Sands' autobiographical prison writings do not partake of or rely upon either the authority or durability as an objective historical account or the historical resilience of narrative contiguity.

The absence of such references is extremely unusual in a prisoner auto/biography (see Franklin, 1978 and Chevigny, 1999), as the criminal act, legal processes, and resulting sentence are normally major factors in the identity construction and social status of the individual inmate within the social domain of prison, as well as being elemental to the normative sense-making praxis for ordinary readers on the "outside". Instead, Sands relies on the details of his everyday life in prison and those of the lives of other members of his community on the outside as an alternative narrative resource and authenticating strategy. This divergence from the more normative contiguous narrative is a hallmark of what literary critic Barbara Harlow calls "resistance literature" (1987), which usually rejects or simply ignores the narrative standards and values of an authoritarian regime in favour of narrative stratagems better suited to the experiences of oppression, exploitation and exclusion. This in part accounts for the fact that so much of prisoner life writing is typically descriptive rather than recognisably "narrative" in character, recording the mundane details of everyday routines on the "inside" that dominate life in prison as well as the experience of social life on the "outside" which is similarly dictated by what are considered to be dominant colonial regimes.

In *One Day in My Life*, Sands is even more radical in his rejection of official references than is the norm among prison writers, as there are no dates, no reference to official court evidence, the prison sentence, not even the offence for which he was interned. Instead, he goes to some lengths to demonstrate his total distain for these bureaucratic procedures and their material products of official

historical record: not only do they have no meaning for him or for the narrative (re)structuring of his autobiographical identity, he furthermore refuses to acknowledge their significance for what he conceives of as the "real" purpose of his incarceration and for the future possibilities of his personal redemption or release, as we will see. Narratologically speaking, for him the official "facts" are meaningless in the official contiguous narrative history of Northern Ireland, an ideological narrative construct which contrasts starkly to what he and others like him are compelled to actually live out in their everyday lives. Rather, it is in the process of re-reading this history and re-writing himself in it in a way that enables him to reclaim a sense of agency that is the priority; this is predicated on his ability to sustain his identity not as a criminal but as a political prisoner, a necessary requirement in order to subsequently figure as a main protagonist in an emerging alternative drama of contemporary politics and history, taking place in real time on the world stage. It is here that we can observe in action the "closing" of the gap between ordinary prisoner and public icon, a convergence that relies on a range of non-negotiable aspects of public and personal identity centered on the auto/biographical "I": personal agency, social credibility, historical knowledge, political will and the ability and opportunity to read and write.

With respect to agency, historical knowledge and political will, the task of setting these terms he reserves for himself as exemplar of republican nationalism in Northern Ireland, in his role as political prisoner and perhaps even more importantly in his active participation in these events as *writer*; this is a mode of social agency which he is able to mobilise from within the intertextual corpus of modern prisoner writing in combination with the extensive historical and mythical narratives of Irish nationalism, a recognised mode of resistance facilitated by the total isolation and the brutal repression of political dissent by the state (see Coogan, 1980).

On the issue of credibility, the American activist for prison reform and prison visitor Sister Helen Prejean points out that we on the "outside" are ideologically predisposed to disbelieve anything that prisoners say, if only because they

generate a torrent of useless, unwanted or "throwaway" stories generated from what equates in numerical terms to

> ...a small country of throwaway people...Who would look for eloquence from convicts? Or insight or depth of thought or honesty or the intimacy of self-revelation? Watch for the self-serving subtext. When your heart is moved, can you trust it? When you feel for the writers of these words, are you being had? Cynicism about convicts is in our bones. (Prejean, 1999: xi)

But prison writers do not necessarily have to be complicit in the "throwing away" of these life stories. While such proscribed materials and prohibited activities as the basis of autobiographical writing may have been deprived of any legitimacy from the official standpoint of contiguous or historical narrative, from the prisoner perspective they still represented a valuable resource in terms of their narrative and authorial potential. Like political prison writers around the world, Sands was aware that it was not in the remit of prison authorities to fully divest his personal experience and the details and experiences of his everyday life of their historical or narrative meaning, regardless of their correspondence or otherwise to the official record; this is another hallmark of prisoner writing as a form of resistance literature as it has emerged from prisons the world over throughout the 20th century (Harlow, 1987; Homberger, 2001).

In place of the objective official historical details, Sands makes use of other archival materials to construct an alternative if unofficial realistic narrative by, for example, referencing a letter from his mother (complete with the censored lines blacked out) (Sands, 1983: 37-38), a letter smuggled in from his sister (ibid: 97-98), and a photograph of protestors on the recent Coalisland to Dungannon March (ibid: 34). For conventional historians and auto/biographical chroniclers—legitimate authors whose purpose is the objective reconstruction of the narrative sequence of past events—such materials would be generally be regarded authentic archival records of past events, in spite of their correlation to first person accounts and the implied subjective bias. In the case of republican prisoners during this period, though, the ideological associations of their writings and other archival records diverges so substantially from the dominant official accounts that it is questionable how much legitimacy they are ever likely to be accorded in the official histories of these events, a situation that is likely to

remain so for the foreseeable future. Even for Sands and his fellow inmates in their present circumstances, the archival materials of their own lives in prison are contraband and any historical narrative or authorial identity based on them is likewise deprived of any social legitimacy or objectivity. So how is their potential for alternative historical narratives and subject positions realised in these autobiographical texts?

2.1 Prison writing: Letters

Prisoner writing doesn't just come from "inside", neither in the sense of emerging from a discrete interiorised imagination nor from within the physical confines of the prison building. As virtually all prisoner writing attests, the receipt of letters and other written materials from outside are always major events in prison life, as can be seen in the multiple references to letters in Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963). Correspondence from home which is strictly speaking no longer "home" for the prisoner is signified metonymically by the arrival of the *letter*, itself a momentous activity of writing and a significant event in prison life, sufficient to facilitate the continuation of existential and identity ties between the asocial domain of prison and "real" society on the outside. Such ties are necessary for prisoners to retain a durable sense of identity and self sufficiency to last throughout the period of incarceration until they can resume their lives on the outside; they also help maintain the link between these two social worlds of "inside" and "outside" through the capitalist structural framework of the prison "black" economy, as letters and parcels also form the main supply route for items such as sweets, tobacco and cigarettes and news that are essential to prison commerce (e.g. Solzhenitsyn, (1963): 19-20; Sands, 1983).

Thus in both the material and imaginative senses, letters and parcels are the focal point for considerable resourcefulness and creativity by their recipients. Stories of entrepreneurial acumen and astonishingly creative inventiveness that typifies the trade in and consumption of goods and information procured from letters and parcels in prison accounts for much of the distinctive vitality of prisoner writing; in this respect, *One Day in My Life* is no exception, evidenced by the story

Sands' tells of how over a dozen IRA prisoners in solitary confinement in the highest maximum security wing of the H-blocks were able to enjoy a party together, complete with cigarettes for all and live music, using nothing more than a button, a bit of towel fluff, a sheet of paper and a piece of string to share the contraband materials virtually under the noses of the prison warders (Sands, 1983: 94-106). This sense of the innate *jouissance* of life symbolised in the total abjection of certain groups of people from a patriarchal society is not only characteristic of even the most sombre prisoner life writing, it is fundamental to the story of western civilization itself (Kristeva, 1982), in both its literary and historical manifestations. In this regard, the *jouissance*, invention and creativity of prison writers represent a positive and even joyful influence on the wider cultural life of respectable society. According to the literary theorist H. Bruce Franklin (1978; Franklin et al, 1998) this is evident in the influence of such tales of invention and daring-do emerging from prisons on "great writers" throughout the modern period, an influence which has been crucial to the evolution of the picaresque novel as a modern literary genre.

2.1.1 Letters, writing and muteness

This episode of the party is the culmination of Sands' receipt of a letter from his sister which he recounts in some detail, but it also has a darker side, providing a glimpse into the significance and intense meaning linked to letters and parcels. This letter is smuggled in during a visit with his family, wrapped along with some tobacco and cigarette papers in a tiny parcel covered with cling film. Sands hides it in his mouth, successfully passing through a series of searches (concentrating mostly on the repeated and humiliating "mirror searches" of his anus) and checkpoints from visiting hut (lucky) number 7 back to his filthy solitary cell in the H blocks. In recounting this episode, Sands remarks several times that even he is surprised that the parcel remains undetected from the instant it is placed in his hand in the visiting hut until his eventual arrival through the various checkpoints back to his cell. In part, he recognises that this is an unintended but not unwelcome effect of having hollow cheeks as a result of his systematic starvation, and a "...long beard untamed and wild like a bramble bush" (Sands, 1983: 80) as a result of his refusal to wash as part of the protest

against the denial of political prisoner status under the then Thatcher government[3]. But in reality he suggests that the reason for this failure of detection is much more sinister.

Sands' muteness due to his mouth being full of contraband material goes unnoticed by the prison officials because they continue to communicate with him in the usual violent and abusive way which is predicated on the denial of his voice in Northern Irish society. This episode underscores the brute reality of Sands' situation: in a personal and political sense, he has no voice, not on the official level anyway, whether or not he can actually physically use it.

The concomitant fact that his voicelessness is actually due to his transference of written materials from outside into his new social domain on the "inside" using his mouth for an alternative communicative purpose adds further to the narrative tension between the authoritative contiguous history of the events surrounding his imprisonment and the his own autobiographical version. The contradiction of the *reality* of the situation (to which the guards and other prison officials are totally oblivious, despite the brutality and extensiveness of their control regime) is that he is unable to speak because his mouth is full of contraband or proscribed materials, obtained under his own auspices. In any case, while his silence is already enforced at the official level, why should he acknowledge or value the processes and products of official discourse over those of his own experience, and why shouldn't he exploit every communicative opportunity for his own ends?

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[3] This is a reference to the so-called "no wash" or "blanket protest", referred to more commonly in the media as the "dirty protest" which this group of IRA prisoners held in the H-blocks, including Bobby Sands, were currently waging, in an effort to compel the prison authorities to restore the "Special Category" status to IRA prisoners, recognising them officially as political prisoners or "prisoners of war" as opposed to "criminals". The Blanket Protest took the form of refusing to wear prison uniform, to engage in prison work, or to wash with the aim of regaining a number of pre-established rights, i.e. to wear their own clothes, refuse prison work, access to education, free association among the (segregated) prison population, and early remission. As an additional punishment, these prisoners were held in solitary confinement, naked, with only a foam rubber mattress on the floor and a blanket to cover themselves, denied the opportunity to "slop out", and so forced to rub their excreta on the cell walls rather than having to lie among it on the floor. For a more detailed and historical account of the Blanket Protest see Coogan (1980) and MacBride (1983). For a selection of pictorial images illustrating the conditions in the "Cages" of Long Kesh under special category rules prior to 1976 featuring Bobby Sands, as well as some other iconic images following the Hunger Strikes in 1981, see appendix A.

In this story, muteness cuts both ways. In the history of autobiography, muteness has a distinctive and prominent presence; as recounted in the literature review chapters, it has been the focal point of feminist research seeking the reason for the apparent silence of the female writing subject. In the canonical tradition of masculine autobiographical writing, muteness is perhaps the ultimate fear. Like William Wordsworth in his autobiographical poetry, Sands also emphasises sensory deprivation in general, using the same images of blindness (not being able to see what is happening outside of the cell; being temporarily blinded by the use of chemical disinfectants; being blinded by the whiteness of the snow reflected off the cell walls), deafness (noisy machines left on with the intention to drown out all other sounds), loss of the sensations of touch (as a result of pain and extreme cold), and the most key image he shares with Wordsworth (e.g. in the Boy of Windander episode), that of *muteness* (mentioned several times by Sands in the text, e.g. "I felt like vomiting and screaming, but I remained mute" (Sands, 1983: 27); "'Maybe that will help you find your tongue!' rasped one of [the guards]" (84); "I couldn't answer" (85); "I could not tell a soul" (65)). These images of muteness represent the ultimate danger and humiliation for the traditional male autobiographer, greater even than death itself: being unable to speak or to have a voice. At the same time, however, muteness shows the conventional dimensions of autobiography, where the power of the autobiographical "I" is most potent and restorative. Against muteness and death itself, autobiography is *the* antidote; the voice, and through it the self and the "life", are restored through the act of autobiographical writing. In this sense autobiography is, as Paul de Man (1984) asserts, ultimately the paradigm discourse of self-restoration. This shift in the narrative focus from historical events to sensory experience leads on to a more interiorised reverie on the nature of writing itself. It also provides the basis for more embodied forms of life narrative writing.

Sensory deprivation and death maintain a spectral presence throughout *One Day in My Life*. But it is through the immanence of death in the narrative that the autobiographer is able to assume a certain authoritative posture over "the life". Thus, when prisoner autobiographers like Malcolm X (1965) or Bobby Sands writes "I am a living corpse now" (1983: 54), what he is really doing is

conferring upon himself the power to declare his authority over his completed and now summarised "life" (Eakin, 1980). This image of the self in autobiography makes the transformation from life to death appear rhetorically continuous and metaphorically progressive, as a *road* "...interrupted, but not ended, by death" (de Man, 1984: 74). The dual effect is to trope life as a "journey" in which the self is depicted as a unified and coherent entity, and additionally to procure a kind of posthumous authority on the author—one that stretches even beyond the author's own death. Thus, as in the case of autobiographers like Wordsworth, Sands' construction of the auto/biographical "I" is predicated on his own narrative reconception of his immanent death: "They can do what they will with me but I will never bow to them or allow them to criminalize me...I am prepared to die first rather than succumb to their oppressive torture" (55); ultimately "Nothing really mattered except remaining unbroken" (118). The narrative is grounded in an appropriately coherent system of tropes where "life" is interpreted through "death", managed by the author who is now somehow outside of this entire linguistic system, in a sense the author of time, life and embodiment themselves.

For de Man, the overarching metaphor for this entire tropological system is that of the *sun in motion* (de Man, 1984), the symbolic "day", where the appearance of the sun is troped as "rising" or beginning, and its disappearance as "setting" until its expected reappearance. In the same way the "life" is troped as having a beginning and travelling in the direction of both its own mortality and ultimately its own self-restoration, through and beyond death. More than any other form, this type of writing is classically identified with the 19th century great man of letters (Danahay, 1993) and subsequently other male writers who are interested in assuming the same power over death facilitated by the special agency of life writing. This figuration of the auto/biographical "I" is intrinsically phallocentric, partaking of the availability of the "pure" self-knowledge of the specular self and the distinctively egocentric and anti-altruistic ethos of cultural individualism as developed throughout the modern period (Gaukroger, 1995).

Such intertextual and intersubjective references in Sands' life writings extend beyond the classic expression of the Romantic autobiographers to more

contemporary versions. These more recent links and their reflexive influence on the activity of auto/biographical writing itself will be examined in the next section.

2.2 From the white-on-white of erasure...

After Sands reads the letter from his sister, he memorises it and shreds it into tiny pieces, releasing them through the unglazed window of his cell "...watching it blow across the snow-covered yard until it disappeared along with the falling snow" (Sands, 1983: 98). His use of the white-on-white imagery in the auto/biographical context to describe this letter from his sister, and especially his linking of this to the natural phenomenon of falling snow can be read as an allusion to effacement and erasure, a kind of documentary "coverage", in both senses of the word, of a life—*his* life—in its contemporaneous autobiographical and imprisoned context. At the same time, the "white-on-white" image also reflects some of his anxiety over the thematic invisibility and future of his own identity as a writer and of the writings he produces.

The overriding sentiment, though, is that his is a life that remains under his own authorial control despite his physical expulsion from the diachronically rich contiguous temporality of the social life-world. Just as snow has a dual purpose in nature to preserve and to immobilise, he is aware the activity of writing has a dual function in that it similarly covers over as well as represents, blocking out the "real" life-world in the written word (objectified in the falling of a disassembled letter) as a kind of preservative or freezing process, one which by necessity ossifies and fixes the dynamic qualities of the "events" that normally comprise daily life. But whereas conventional autobiography typically invokes the static dichotomous conceptual framework of subjectivity as we have seen in the previous chapters by virtue of its exemption from the formalisms of literary genre and the hierarchical legitimacy of authorship, prisoner autobiography displays a subjectivity that is much more undisciplined and ambiguous, more amenable to the intersubjective transgression of contiguous narrative through the exploitation of the dichotomies of substitution and unapologetically transgressive narrative stratagems. So for example, while the social institution of prison is

purpose-built by the state to deprive prisoners of the multiple "freedoms" guaranteed by society by compelling them to live in a temporally static or frozen state (see Cohen & Taylor, 1990)—a kind of narrative vacuum with no purpose or progression—the massive and growing corpus of prisoner autobiography shows that it nonetheless represents a remarkable space for the construction of alternate subjectivities and life narrative routes (Morgan, 1999; Nellis, 2002).

As we have seen, the intensely synchronic character of autobiographical prison narrative offers a radically different perspective from which to construct a sense of individual identity, in contrast to the more conventional diachronic history of contiguous narrative. This in itself allows prisoner writers an escape from the relentless demands placed on those in ordinary society on the "outside" to devise and then follow a coherent, progressive and above all "storied" version of the life course. Contrary to some of the more optimistic versions of this type of individual control over the life narrative project, notably that proposed by Anthony Giddens (1992), the focal point is not the individual expression of freedom, plasticity, and choice. Such life narrative projects are incapable of rendering versions of self that seek from the beginning the kind of generic conformity of desire that progresses along a teleological trajectory toward narrative closure (see Kearney, 2002; Abbot, 2002). In contrast, the prisoner's *de facto* release from the burdens of "life course" management is not to be undervalued in terms of its influence on the prisoner auto/biographical "I" as something much less optimistic or conformist than these theoretical approaches would indicate.

2.2.1 Snow in <u>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</u>

Thus far we have seen how the white-on-white metaphor in these examples of prisoner writing has been used to convey a palpable sense of psychological anxiety over the potential invisibility/erasure/unwrittenness of the life story, and how this fear becomes magnified in the apparently interminable and narratively directionless landscape of prisoner subjectivity. But we have also seen that this same uncertainty offers a rare alternative to the reification of the life course in the hegemonically capitalist life narrative. These aspects of autobiographical

writing have thus far been explored through reference to sensory deprivation and the natural phenomenon of snow. As we have acknowledged, the presence of snow is not unique to Sands' prison autobiography, but is integral to one of his most important intertextual references, which will be examined in more detail in this section. Snow features prominently in Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, as does the white-on-white trope to emplot the prisoner experience of being through writing, invisibility and erasure, particularly for those who consider themselves political prisoners, whose acts of writings contest the very legitimacy of the state.

In the context of the Siberian soviet gulag during the winter months, the snow in Solzhenitsyn's fictional/literary autobiography essentially defines the landscape (as well as the soundscape) of camp life, fundamentally determining the variety of physical pain and suffering endured by the prisoners as a consequence of the intolerable cold. On the morning of the symbolic day in question, the protagonist Shukov feels generally unwell and visits the camp infirmary, though he already knows that it is extremely unlikely that he will be excused from work. When he arrives it is early in the morning and still dark inside, and the doctors are all still in bed. He at once describes in detail the corridor he steps into as spotlessly clean, painted entirely in white enamel and furnished completely with white furniture, so pristine in comparison to his filthy and wretched state that he hesitates to enter or even to step on the floor. There are no clocks or watches here, this is a timeless as well as colourless, odourless and barely visible environment. On duty is a young medical assistant seated in a white coat and cap who is writing at a white table. It is in the assistant's power to excuse only two men per day from work on the grounds of ill health and his quota has already been filled, the names of the men written on white paper and encased under the glass tabletop; unchangeable by even their own author. Shukov notices immediately that the young man, Vdovushkin, is not doing official work, but is writing poetry. In fact, as Shukov explains, Vdovushkin is not really a medical assistant at all but has been given this position by the camp doctor who has a special commitment to work as a form of therapy. "Vdovushkin had been a university student of literature, arrested while still in his second year. The doctor wanted him to write when in prison what he'd been given no opportunity

to write in freedom" (Solzhenitsyn, 1963: 22-23). For Vdovushkin, prison ironically offers the freedom and the opportunity to write where "normal" Russian society did not, though this freedom is granted in a disconsolately hermetic social environment in which it retains a peculiarly *unheimlich* relationship to "work" as a therapeutic endeavour.

Against these multiple white backgrounds, Shukov's dirty and unkempt appearance contrasts to the purity of the stark and featureless interior. He describes his encounter in the infirmary as one that confirms his outsider status in both spheres of camp life: i.e. the austere light of the sick-bay and the bleak darkness of the morning roll-call for work. This incident confirms for Shukov his existential status derived from his own relationship to writing: he declares that literature and writing are now beyond him, largely because he has acceded to official efforts to exempt himself from direct involvement with them. While he acknowledges that he has a home and a family on the outside, he recalls for the reader how he has expressly forbidden them to write to him or send him parcels of food and clothing because of the high emotional and material cost of maintaining this communicative link. As he has no one to correspond with and moreover because his position in the camp is also untenable, except insofar as he is able to solicit from the spoils of other inmates—he literally has no place and thus no life except in the most basic biological or parasitic sense. Though he feels ill, even his body refuses to cooperate in representing his inner mental condition, his temperature being not high enough to be excused from work but also high enough to give him the feeling of a "feverish chill" which is also not normal. Vdovushkin leaves the choice of whether or not to skip work up to Shukov, but both know that he is unlikely to be excused by one of the doctors and will therefore be punished by being put in the lock-up for missing a day's work. He leaves the spotless, timeless, colourless world of the infirmary where at least one prisoner is able to use writing for its therapeutic properties to return to the stinging cold of the outside, where he also does not belong and is unlikely to survive for much longer. By severing Shukov's ties to writing, Solzhenitsyn exposes his ejection not only from the human worlds of culture and society, but also from the natural world, and immanently from biological existence altogether.

We have already seen how the resemblance of the shreds of paper to snowflakes in Sands' autobiography represents an elegiac evocation of the natural world, while also being indicative of the impersonal and cruel nature of life in prison and in social life outside of the prison in Northern Ireland. This cruel and unnatural cycle is interrupted by the receipt of letters from his family which he likens to authentically natural if ephemeral phenomena, symbolised metonymically as snow. However, it is notable that Sands use of the snow allusion differs dramatically from that of Shukov for whom it marks an erasure from his place in the social world of either the prison camp or on the outside, and also the world of nature; in contrast, for Sands, there is no such capitulation.

In Sands' case, such episodes as these suggest that he sees himself first and foremost as a writer: not only are literature and writing not beyond his ken, they are essential to his sense of identity and social agency. Accordingly, the activity of writing, which he associates to the subjective realm of familial love and nature and also (as noted previously) with the phallocentric victory over death, is itself the antidote to official attempts at regulation and control facilitated by the hegemony of contiguous narrative. In his prison life, it is these aspects—filial and family relationships, love, nature, writing—which are elemental to social reality and carry real meaning, not the official records or authority of the state, nor the predominance of the "normal" life narrative.

In spite of having to shred his sister's letter and throw it out of the window, and despite not revealing its contents to the reader, its destruction is nevertheless incomplete. Sands describes how he records it in his memory and as an event within his own autobiography, thereby increasing the durability of both his and his sister's writings through the power of his own pen and the superior strength of his own authorial voice. Similar to Wordsworth's appropriation of his own sister's private writings, this is the act of a paradigmatically masculine author. This is evident in the absence of republican women prisoner writing during the same period (Harlow, 1992). The irony is, as we have seen, that Sands' is a voice that is itself born out of his resistance to his enforced silence, a voice which is regained through his innovative use of conventional masculine

autobiography applied within the alternative narrative framework of prison. Sands' enforced inability to speak but his alternative use of the corpus of English literature and of his own body[4] in order to write himself are revealing. This shows the distinctive inventiveness in establishing routes of communication, transportation and exchange which have always been utilised by prisoners to express themselves, to retain a sense of agency and identity, and to reinscribe narratives of freedom and desire within their own personal experiences, regardless of the official foreclosure of these routes by the powers of the state.

In *One Day in My Life*, the white-on-white metaphor emphasises how imposed silence in prison generates its own dynamic and dialectical meanings within an already oppressed/colonised social order. To put it crudely, the dichotomies that make up these discursive domain of incarceration cut both ways: in the event that imprisonment can impose a regime of silence and control it *can* also clear a discursive space for the exercise of a particular kind of social agency for individual inmates, providing they are willing to take the necessary physical and psychological risks. In the distinctive political rhetoric of Northern Ireland, the white-on-white trope of effacement is particularly potent, and can be interpreted analogously in terms of the familiar rhetorical "vacuum" of Irish politics that is typically understood as being seized upon and "filled" by paramilitary groups. How this is accomplished is in many ways dependent upon the author's disposition toward and understanding of the act of writing.

2.3 ...to the black-and-white of writing

Sands' use of the snow imagery to combine the multiple meanings of erasure/silence/invisibility/purity with the ethereal and cyclical image of nature is explored in another episode, this time in the summer, when he recounts the frightening and repulsive experience of waking up with thousands of maggots crawling all over his naked body, on his face and in his beard:

> I'll never forget that, I said to myself, reflecting on the morning I woke up and my blankets and mattress were a living mass of white maggots. They

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[4] His hands, mouth and potentially the other end of his and the other prisoners' alimentary canals—see Coogan (1980) for a former H-blocks prisoners description of smuggling in pens and paper in their rectums.

> were in my hair and beard and crawling upon my naked body. They were repulsive, and dare I say it, frightening at first. (Sands, 1983: 52)

But again, though this is a shocking and revolting experience, Sands is able to immediately re-assert his control of the situation through his autobiographical writing, even turning the narrative of the situation to their mutual advantage:

> But like everything else I had come to terms with them sharing my cell with me. At night I could hear them actually moving about the floor, disturbing little bits of paper, now and again causing a rustling noise as they headed in the direction of my mattress, where they would finally embed themselves and in the warmth harden into an egg-like cocoon before hatching into flies. (Sands, 1983: 52)

In other words, he provided the heat for incubating the larvae, while in their own way they provided him with the inspiration to write, in the first instance by disturbing bits of paper. Bearing in mind the prohibition on writing under the Prison Rules at that time, and the extreme punishment regime he was under while on the Blanket protest, it must strike us as a little surprising that among the excrement and rotten food on the floor, there were actually bits of paper. This in itself makes the mention of the rustling paper that much more significant as an instance of writerly invention.

Over the years of his incarceration, his eventual desensitisation to the maggots and his much remarked interest in ornithology (an obsession with birds which also forms a common trope in prisoner writing) lead him to identify an alternative purpose for them. As an expression of his agency in a rather extreme situation, this represents a rather conspicuous example, as the presence of the maggots as a particular nuisance is in itself intended by his captors to be as part of his "special" punishment. Once again this shows his determination to construct an alternate narrative direction and framework for the events comprising his prison life. In the following episode, he uses a kind of transliteration—i.e. the systematic representation or spelling of the text written of one alphabet using the corresponding letters of another (as coincidentally he does in the example of transliterating Russian text into English, evoking again the intertextual reference to Solzhenitsyn)—to translate the wriggling white maggots from their natural and punitive discursive contexts into one that focuses

primarily on the exploration of his agency as a writer and his construction of a particular altruistic type of autobiographical voice:

> But the maggots had another use, as I quickly discovered. I soon became so used to them that I would gather them up in my hands off the floor and from the rubbish piles in the corners. There would be thousands of them wriggling and sliding about. Having gathered them together between my palms, I would throw the white wriggling mass out of the window, scattering them over the jet-black tarmacadam yard and against the black background their white wriggling little forms were easily spotted. The wagtails came fluttering about in a frenzy, their quick little legs darting them from one maggot to the next, feasting upon what to them must have been a delicacy. Within two or three minutes the yard would have been cleared of every single maggot. (Sands, 1983: 52-53)

In this same episode, he describes how the white maggots which he doesn't throw out the window turn into an inescapable nuisance in the form of a mass of black flies that line the walls and ceiling and cling to his face and naked body day and night, describing them matter-of-factly as a "black cloud ascending in panic as I stirred...a pest and very annoying" (52). This other use Sands discovers for the maggots is revealing in terms of the plurality of possible meanings with which he perceives his current situation. Most strikingly, the black-on-white symbolism of the flies on the white walls and ceiling of his cell and on his pallid skin at once replaces the white-on-white metaphor of effacement, voicelessness and erasure with the allegorical presence of the written word. Prisoners often use the walls of their cells and any other materials to hand for the purposes of self-expression through writing. The construction of this alternative narrative recouping from the institutional punishment regime the means for his own individual agency hinges on the black-and-white metaphor for writing which, while it is insufficient to alleviate his suffering as a result of this annoying and disgusting pestilence, is nonetheless significant if only because it interrupts the course of the official narrative with respect to the intended objective of his incarceration. Here again, he is taking the initiative for determining the discourse of his "special category" punishment into his own hands and away from those who have been responsible for his internment.

However, while his recovery of a mode of agency through writing and the re-establishment of authorial control may to some degree disrupt the development

of the official or contiguous historical narrative of these events, at the same time it intensifies the underlying tension in this new narrative development. This can be seen in his reversal in the previous passage of the black-on-white image of writing to the white-on-black metaphor depicting the white maggots on the black tarmac, overturning the normative image of writing as stable and unambiguous, like black ink on a white page. The implied ambiguity of this symbolism can itself be read as a constitutive element of his alternative view of writing and of the world it portrays as seen in "black and white" terms. In this context, the protean meanings of black-and-white images are not only multiple and diverse, but also intrinsically uncontrollable; this includes of course the problematics of recording of events by putting them in writing, and also the complications involved in perceiving the world in extreme and unyielding moral terms (as in the cosmic Manichean struggle between good and evil troped as black and white) and by extension the polarising ideologies of racism or sectarianism. The reversal of the black-on-white image to the white-on-black also evokes challenges to the discourses of social realism, for instance in the form of the photographic image, the "negative" from which reproductions of the original images of reality are produced on paper.

With regard to the white-on-black metaphor as a representation of writing, it is also notable that his description of the maggots on the tarmac refers to their "wriggling", their inability to stay still, in contrast to the normal permanent image of written script. This conveys the strong impression that, despite his cast iron will and manly resolve to "win" in this present battle with the state authorities, nevertheless not even he is sure how these events will be recorded or interpreted historically for future generations, nor even what their true meaning in the current social context really is. Despite his apparent success in recovering a sense of agency from the power of writing and the normative permanence of the written word, unlike Shukov, Sands nonetheless remains anxious and uncertain as to how the events in which he finds himself at the centre will, in the end, be written in historical memory; neither is he entirely confident of the "writtenness" of his life story as an extension of Irish nationalism in the present moment (Coogan, 1980). But like Shukov, he reveals a deep if latent uncertainty about his capacity to personally survive the political events in which he is

embroiled long enough to find out. The limitations of his agency as an individual embodied human being and also as an individual writer are all too evident in the face of an institutional regime resolved to enforce its authority to the limit, even to the point of death.

But at the same time, there is also the possibility that his own personal resolve to resist this regime and to write about it and its potential to disrupt the contiguous narrative history of these events in Northern Ireland also affords an alternative view on the ambivalent nature of freedom and constraint in a supposedly civilized modern world. If this is the true nature of the "struggle for freedom" in developed modern societies, the brutality and chaotic nature of its narrative reality poses a strong challenge to the ideological rhetoric of freedom and liberty as the domain of patriotism and national pride.

In summary, thus far in this chapter we have examined Bobby Sands' prison autobiography in terms of its alternative narrative construction of the life history, firstly its challenges to and re-configuration of the conventional contiguous historical narrative. We have noted how these innovations by prison writers have been noted as signal influences on modern narrative, specifically on the picaresque narrative (Franklin, 1978). At the same time, we have also seen how Sands' innovation and originality as a prison life writer has been attenuated by the construction of a distinctively phallocentric auto/biographical voice; this was evidenced by his reliance on some of the canonical auto/biographical devices, such as the rhetoric of substitution and the language of sensory deprivation and death, to convey a potent self-image as essentially masculine, and how this echoes the egocentric and anti-altruistic social ethos.

From this concentration on the relation of *One Day in My Life* to historical and life narrative, we moved on to consider some of the intertextual dimensions of this text in terms of its use of metaphor and its specific relationship to other prison writings. By examining in detail his treatment of metaphors like letters, writing, maggots and snow, an image has emerged of a man who is in many ways *writing about writing*. This concentration on writing itself as an activity which is at once a means of survival—in a sense, writing for one's life—and a

way of putting one's own life experiences on record, Sands conveys a strong sense of his deep underlying anxiety concerning the meaning and substance of this whole enterprise. As a committed but also reluctant participant in this extraordinary and violent political struggle, Sands' autobiography shows how much he relies on his agency as an auto/biographer to see him through. In the next section, we will see how his concentration on the metaphor of the *pen* reinforces this commitment to life writing and correlative ambivalence to its eventual meaning, and how this is observable in the disintegration of narrative in this text.

3.0 Life in the Pen

The advantages gained by Sands as author by his use of some potent canonical intertextual references are still insufficient to stave off a deep sense of narrative tension. At times, even the most basic sense of consistency in the narrative is extremely difficult to maintain. We can see the strain showing in an episode describing the arrival of the letter from his mother, another key moment in this symbolic prison day. Sands' receipt of his mother's letter provides the context for a significant event in the story, especially with regard to the acute hopelessness and contradictory nature of his own personal situation and (in microcosm) that of Northern Irish society as a whole:

> I began my journey to nowhere again. As I turned by the window a key hit metal. A shiver swept through me as the lock shuddered and my door opened.
> 'A—' stood there clutching a couple of packets of tissues and some letters.
>
> 'I've a parcel for you,' he drawled in his hateful accent, staring at me, wearing his dominant 'I'm better than you' look.
>
> Some parcel, I thought. A couple of packets of Kleenex tissues.
>
> 'You're lucky; you are the only one who got a parcel today,' he said.
>
> Jesus! I felt like vomiting. This was 'A—', the psychologist at work. Reading me like a book, he said, 'Why don't you put on the prison clothes then you can have some privileges.'

I felt like telling him what to do with his stinking privileges and his parcel for that matter but the tissues would come in handy for standing on the cold floor.

Keep your head, Bobby, I told myself as he handed me a Parker pen to sign the large book for the parcel. He was loving it all: making it seem as if I was signing a million pound contract for three lousy packets of tissues. He had a letter for me as well. I'd spotted that long ago but he was waiting for me to ask him for it. I didn't. I ignored it. He replaced his expensive pen in his top pocket, grinned and made some comment about the smell of my unwashed body and the stinking evil stench of my cell. He turned to close the heavy steel cell door. 'Oh,' he said, 'I've a letter for you.' He handed it to me. I took it from him and cradled it like a new born child. (Sands, 1983: 35-36)

This is an especially revealing passage, firstly, because it represents a rare dialogue between Sands and a prison official, and an encounter which is all the rarer by not being dominated by physical violence or verbal abuse. Ironically, however, few events in the story bring out in him these heightened and conflicting emotions of fear and loathing but also desire and hope as those reflected in this episode. He belittles the significance and value of the parcel and letter, while at the same time clearly wanting them badly and considering them to be of great worth, as indeed they immediately prove to be, "...my prized possessions—a letter and three packets of tissues! I spread the tissues on the floor and stood on them. They felt like luxurious carpeting compared to the naked concrete" (Sands, 1983: 36). Not only will these same tissues will be described throughout the text alternatively as "badly needed tissues" (47-48), in the narrative itself they have an important meaning, providing as they do the very material resource upon which these stories are written (98). The significance of these kinds of materials and their heightened presence in the narrative is essential to what has been called the "toilet paper culture" of prison literature (Harlow, 1987).

3.1 Toilet paper culture

The ban on prisoners' writing about themselves or any other inmates while in prison serves to emphasise the meaning and significance of objects like toilet paper, tissues, pencils and pens, exaggerating the dualistic features of their

contextual meanings, whether in the service of personal care or aesthetic expression. On both material and narrative levels, the ban on prison writing has had a number of distinctive effects on the culture of prisoner writing and the canon of prison literature. Foremost among these is the establishment of a strongly collective sense of cultural identity. In Sands' case, all of the "blanket men" in the H-blocks were forced to share a communal pencil stub and pen refill used for writing the

> ...wee smuggled notes to worried wives, mothers and girl-friends; for the letters to the newspapers and the quickly scribbled notes to the H-Block Information Bureau telling of the beatings and horrors that took place every single day. I would have to wait my turn for the pen or pencil (Sands, 1983: 98).

Contrary to the image of the prisoner as criminal in the sense of being deeply selfish and anti-social, even in his role as a leader among the IRA prisoners, Sands records how he like the others dutifully waits his turn for the communal pencil or pen. This is typical of the kind of the stories prisoners tell about the strong adherence to rules when it comes to sharing materials for reading and writing (e.g. Erwin, 2003).

The notes Sands refers to were written on tissues or toilet paper, because this was all that was available. Toilet paper is virtually a universal presence in political writing by serving prisoners, whether in the prisons of Northern Ireland or in those of the "third world". According to the South African novelist and political prisoner Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Prison culture...is become toilet paper culture" (quoted in Harlow, 1987: 125). By this statement, Ngugi emphasises the intrinsically materialistic and collective autobiographical culture of prison from which the prisoner's identity as a writer is forged and his intellectual and creative freedom is reinforced. While for readers on the outside, such cultural idealisation of toilet paper may seem to be rather forced, even quixotic or affected, for the serving prisoner the personal relationship to writing as a disciplined activity with literary potential puts an altogether different slant on the situation; this shift in meaning extends to the materials to hand:

> Toilet-paper: when in the sixties I first read in Kwame Nkrumah's autobiography, *Ghana*, how he used to hoard toilet-paper in his cell at James Fort Prison to write on, I thought it was romantic and a little unreal

despite the photographic evidence reproduced in the book. Writing on toilet-paper?

Now, I know: paper, any paper, is about the most precious article for a political prisoner, more so for one like me, who was in political detention because of his writing. For the urge to write:

> Picking the jagged bits embedded in my mind,
> Partly to wrench some ease for my own mind,
> And partly that some world sometime may know
>
> is almost irresistible to a political prisoner. At Kamiti, virtually all the detainees are writers or composers...Now the same good old toilet-paper—which had been useful to Kwame Nkrumah in James Fort Prison, to Dennis Brutus on Robben Island, to Abdilatif Abdalla in G Block, Kamiti, and to countless other persons with similar urges—has enabled me to defy daily the intended detention of my mind. (from Ngugi's novel, *Detained*, quoted in Harlow, 1987: 125-126)

This emphasises not only the nature of writing as an essentially material and embodied experience, but also underscores its implicit inter-subjective dimensions as an act of imagination, by identifying with other prisoners and thereby contesting in a more amplified voice the cultural discourses of liberation and resistance. We may even go so far as to say that the litany of writers' names and prisons at the end of this passage is itself reminiscent of the perforated but interconnectedness of these writers, their respective prisons and their texts, physically separated yet effectively linked like the sheets of toilet paper on a roll. For prisoners who write in such circumstances, such materials help forge a special kind of identity and unity as a substantial basis for sometimes epic acts of individual resistance, lending them a kind of inherent nobility which is at once extremely difficult to credit by people on the "outside" while also being impossible to completely ignore or deny (Coogan, 1980). Perhaps this can be attributed to the often Herculean efforts prison writers expend in recovering a sense of identity and agency by re-consigning ordinary disposable or throwaway materials (e.g. walls, toilet paper, pencil stubs and so forth) for use in generating an alternative sense of self and collective purpose while simultaneously being a part of that refuse heap themselves (Prejean, 1999).

The collectivity, materiality and disposability of the prison autobiographical "I" represents an ironic response to the celebration of the autonomous "I" of

conventional autobiographical subjectivity on the one hand and the social vacuum of solitary confinement on the other. In this way, it also widens the concentric circle of what Saussure would have recognised as the synchronic linguistic system of prisoner discourse which is narratologically isolated from that of the rest of society, a system that transforms the walls, toilet paper and so forth into distinctive features of this new linguistic landscape. Barbara Harlow (1987) identifies this as the "power of writing" which is intrinsically political, where words and referents become much more highly charged within their intersubjective and material context which is otherwise determined by systematic deprivation. Thus the very activity of auto/biographical writing in prison transforms prison literature from the cultural (re)production of exclusion into the cultural product of resistance, which is a move from a *passive* role to an *active* stance. This cultural transformation through the writers' alternative use of prison as a synchronic linguistic system allows prisoners in many ways to elide the methodical surveillance, normalisation and examination of official historical writing that *makes* prisoners into the passive, isolated and uniform recipients of bureaucratic punishment regimes represented by the machine-like quality of modern discourses of deviance and punishment (Foucault, 1979). On the contrary, what prison literature of resistance across the world shows us is the almost universal effectiveness prison writers demonstrate in exploiting and subverting these same systems as the basis of their free expression. This is manifest in their virtual compulsion to write auto/biography, to seize power over their own lives and official history.

So, rather than, for example, interpreting the social function of prison walls to produce criminals by facilitating their enclosure, they can be viewed as providing canvases for unregulated expression through drawing or writing. Similarly, things like tissues and toilet paper which were intended for the "care of the self" shift from their functional role in personal daily hygiene to one which is much more broadly discursive in nature with respect to maintaining the self. These alternate explorations of prison life enhanced by the recalcitrant collectivity of prisoner identity marked by auto/biographical writing which "...seeks to alter the relationships of power which are maintained by coercive, authoritarian systems of state control and domination" (Harlow, 1987: 133). In

practice, the state has little power to foreclose this transference of function in respect of the materials it must provide to prisoners as a matter of basic human rights. Autobiography can provide prisoners with a cultural resource to resist being individual in the normative sense, and moreover to exercise a kind of agency and authenticity which are strictly speaking beyond the parameters of normal social life or the regimentation of social control. What is more, this ironic freedom enables them to experience prison as something other than a system which necessarily treats them as an indiscriminate mass lacking in individual or social agency.

Like so many prison writers, Sands describes in detail how he and his fellow prisoners share these kinds of disposable materials, including the tissues he receives from his mother (1983: 48-49). But the "toilet paper culture" of prisoner writing does not simply pose a challenge to the prison authorities constituted by the resourcefulness and determination of prisoners to express themselves and politicise their everyday experiences (Harlow, 1987). It also represents a challenge to readers, particularly the mainstream practices guiding the consumption of western literature that denigrates auto/biography in general and prisoner writing in particular as insufficiently imaginative or generically conventional enough to bear critical analysis. This is especially apparent in the affront to stock forms of reading posed by prison writers who present "used" toilet paper to readers and critics as objects for the received practices of criticism that seek out the abstractions of formalism as *the* crucible of literary excellence. Like the elite literature of modernism, the challenge presented by prison literature constitutes its shock force to stock methods of reading *and* writing, so that the acts of writing and reading prison literature require new aesthetic and canonical standards.

Admittedly, this poses a considerable critical task, but one which is fuelled above all by a very human desire for writers to manipulate language rather than the other way around (Wolfreys, 1999), as well as to recognise the ethical imperative of writing that results from the deprivation of sensory, political and affective bonds which society itself has imposed on the individual. Hence the act of writing converges on an objective which political prisoners hope will

furthermore result in a new aesthetics of liberation, conquering the old discourses of oppression and imperialism through which the same old literary texts and authority regimes are continually re-legitimated and reproduced (Harlow, 1987: 132). At the same time, however, it must be recognised that such a full-scale manipulation of language contains within it the dangers of reinventing the discourses of exploitation and oppression from which it originally sought to free itself. The "struggle for freedom" in both the aesthetic and penal environments is as physically and imaginatively demanding as it is ideologically precarious.

3.2 The pen as political instrument

Now, to move from the toilet paper upon which these stories were written to the pen as the writing instrument. Sands interprets the comparatively kind words and advice of the warder in the above cited passage to be even more repugnant to him than the usual strip searching, beatings, and insults both in form (in a rare reference to the Protestant accent) and content. Why was this? Consider for a moment the situation from the warder's point of view: the filthy condition of the "blanket men" and their overwhelming stench was remarked upon by virtually everyone who came into contact with them; even Sands himself admits as much. Under the circumstances, the fact that warder A— offers to share his "expensive Parker pen" with him must strike the reader as an exceptionally benevolent gesture on his part. Why does he do this, and why does elicit such strong reactions from Bobby Sands?

For a clue to answering these questions, we must understand the broader significance of prison and prisoner autobiography in the history of Irish republicanism in general and the IRA in particular. In his book *On the Blanket: The H-block Story* (1980), Irish journalist and historian Tim Pat Coogan analyses how the periodic hunger strikes and other prison protests, generally regarded as perturbing and somewhat mystifying from the outside, have epitomised Irish insurgency for centuries. This type of resistance has been a mainstay of IRA strategy in particular, with prison providing the backdrop for the continuous series of cause-and-effect conflicts between republican and a host of other

oppositional forces (e.g. the Catholic Church, the Dublin government, the various nationalist splinter paramilitary groups, loyalist paramilitaries and the British militia). "This war will be won in the prisons" was a favourite slogan of William McKee, the one time leader of the IRA in Belfast (McKee in Coogan, 1980: 14). For Coogan, this statement summarises the "ancient tradition of the physical force school of Irish nationalism" (1980: 14), shaping the prison history of the IRA stretching back to the 19th century and (by virtue of the lack of a lasting political solution in Northern Ireland) one which is still uniquely applicable to the situation in which Bobby Sands found himself in the H-Blocks during the 1970s and early 1980s.

This, according to Coogan, is where the IRA's peculiar indoctrination on the power of rebellion comes into its own, operating as it does on an extreme dialogic of infliction and endurance of appalling levels of violence. This was epitomised by IRA member and Sinn Féin Lord Mayor of Cork Terence McSwiney, who died on the 74th day of his hunger strike in Brixton Prison at the height of the Anglo-Irish War in 1920. In his inaugural speech as Lord Mayor, McSwiney declared that

> ...the contest on our side is not one of rivalry or vengeance but of *endurance*. It is not those who can inflict the most but *those that can suffer the most* who will conquer...It is conceivable that the army of occupation could stop us functioning for a time. Then it becomes simply a question of endurance. Those whose faith is strong will endure to the end in triumph. (McSwiney in Coogan, 1980: 15 [emphasis added])

McSwiney's non-violent if masochistic form of protest famously captured the imagination of the world at the time (including, notably, that of the young Mahatma Ghandi (Coogan, 1980) and Ho Chi Min (Gould, 2004)); more to the point it made an indelible impression on the IRA. Henceforth, young IRA volunteers would be schooled in the prison life writings of the men and women who suffered in this conspicuous way in Irish and British prisons, especially during the periods from 1916-21, during WWII, and in the period of the current campaign in which Bobby Sands figured beginning in 1969. This included instruction in their prison life writings such as those of the heroes of the Irish struggle for independence, particularly O'Donovan Rossa and Thomas Clarke. Hence young IRA volunteers like Bobby Sands were encouraged to "write

themselves" into the history and isolation of the worst kind of prisoner suffering through the lives of these legendary prisoners of Irish republican lore.

But it was not only their suffering, but the substantial risks these prisoners took to write about their experiences in prison that have provided a bedrock for militant Irish republicanism to this day. Over the years, these figures and their writings have generated a potent constellation of narrative and rhetorical tropes now commonly found in most if not all prisoner autobiography, comprising (as we have seen already) a remarkable record of prisoner ingenuity and inventiveness, a distinctively masculine tone of defiance, and strong feelings of comradeship and pride in suffering and endurance on a community's behalf.

These considerations help make sense of the particular power dynamics and subsequent narrative story-telling behind what is a tense scene in Bobby Sands' prison life, the receipt of his mother's letter. The multi-faceted meanings of the protean metaphor of the pen in prisoner autobiography are much in evidence in this passage. In the culture of modernity, the semiotic meanings of the "pen" as a sign and symbol are exceedingly rich and diverse, building on its disparate meanings as a devise for writing as well as slang for prison itself (i.e. the penitentiary). The language and culture of prison, like that of auto/biography itself, is deeply undisciplined, noted for its persistent tendency to "break out" into "normal" language and become a part of general slang. Then there are the root words and their associated semiotic meanings that link cultural conceptions of masculinity (as the signified) with the ideological signifiers of freedom, restraint, discipline, voice, speech, representation, icon, image, repentance, purpose, time, sacrifice, stainlessness, (re)birth, ending, reaping, and so forth expressed in the words as connected in etymology but diverse in meaning as "penitent", "penis", "penetrate", "penalty", "Pentecost"[5], "pendulum"[6], "pentimento"[7], even "penguin"[8].

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[5] Commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles following the Crucifixion of Christ, imparting on the frightened, confused and fragmenting group a sense of peace, consolation and mission in the wake of the death of their "departed" leader. The festival of Pentecost is distinguished by speaking in tongues (for the Protestant traditions) and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the bodies of the apostles represented by tongues of fire (the preferred image in Catholicism). Pentecost traditionally commemorates the purity of those baptised during the period of the Easter Vigil, symbolised by the wearing of white garments (in

The "pen" in this particular exchange between Sands and an especially hated prison guard is central to the meaning of the narrative on a number of levels. Most obvious is the oblique reference to the "pen" as penitentiary, as it is commonly known in prison argot, and its centrality to the figuration of the text. In the literal sense, the pen in question in this dialogue was an expensive Parker pen. Referring back to Coogan's (1996) comments on IRA strategy and the focused application of prisoner power by the endurance of great suffering recorded in prisoner life writing, it is no wonder the "pen" here is emphasised as a symbolic fount of power—this is essential to what Bobby Sands understands as his purpose as both a prisoner of war and as a soldier, a member of a collective with a dual individual objective, to take possession of the pen as writing instrument as well as "pen" as prison, i.e. preferred platform for political battle. As a metaphor for the violent struggle over power, this episode with the pen could explain the somewhat puzzling reason for the warder A—'s willingness to hand over his "very expensive" pen as well as Sands' reluctance to accept it. A—'s extreme and blatant sectarianism would suggest that to him and others like him it is worth incarcerating and "breaking" the will of these prisoners, no matter what the personal or social cost[9]. However, the cost in terms of human suffering, as many people from any position of the conflict could attest, has been on a scale difficult to imagine; this in itself could perhaps explain the conspicuous willingness of these two men on opposite sides of the conflict to

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contrast to the filthy brown blankets the naked Bobby Sands wore during his protest). Pentecost is also noteworthy for its links to the Jewish festival known in the Old Testament as "the feast of harvest of the firstfruits" (Exodus 23:16), "the feast of weeks" (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10: II Paralipomenon 8:13), the "day of firstfruits" (Numbers 28:26), and called by later Jews *'asereth* or *'asartha* (solemn assembly, and probably "closing festival", with Pentecost being the closing festival of the harvest and of the Paschal season), falling on the fiftieth day from "the next day after the sabbath" of the Passover (Leviticus 23:11) (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*). The deep cultural links to the enjoyment by later followers of the "first fruits" of the Pascal sacrifice as well as the Jewish reference to the end of the seasons (e.g the end of a repetitive natural and sacred cycle) are significant.

[6] A devise for measuring time, that swings from one extreme to the other.

[7] The reappearance in a painting of an underlying image that had been painted over (usually when the later painting becomes transparent with age), a potent metaphor in this case relating to previous Irish prison writers and heroes from Irish mythology and nationalist history.

[8] And why not? If for its black and white plumage alone. Even Sands manages to crack the occasional joke in his prison autobiography, humour being a well-known attribute of the Irish especially in hopeless or tragic circumstances.

[9] The personal cost for these prison warders was exceptionally high, as 19 of them (including the wife of a retired prison officer) were murdered by the IRA in the four years from April 1976 to January 1980 alone (Coogan, 1980), the period coinciding with the events recorded in this text.

take up, but then again to also surrender, this pen as a symbol of power (and by implication also suffering) in the Northern Irish struggle. In other words, given the amount and scale of human suffering involved in wielding this kind of power, who in their right mind would want to accept such a "pen"?

Though this episode is characteristically sardonic, referring to signing for his letter and tissues as like "signing a million pound contract", on a more serious note, the very expensive "pen" with/in which he writes his life will eventually turn into the same one with which he will sign his life away. Here the autobiographical act of writing is literally *pen*ultimate to his immanent suicide on hunger strike, the ultimate conclusion of the martyred life of the eponymous rebel hero of Irish myth, the end of a tragic life story cut short in the prime of a young man's life.

The exchange of the pen and the relatively civil conversation in this episode serves to emphasise the brutality and anomaly of this entire situation of social conflict. Throughout the narrative, we as readers (unaware of the historical context described by Coogan (1980)) wonder why Sands and his fellow protestors don't simply put on the prison uniform, do prison work and avoid a life of appalling suffering which would be by comparison to their protest actions a great improvement in living standards. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), Nelson Mandela describes his experience of a similar situation he encountered while incarcerated in Robben Island Prison, during which time he initially refused to wear the prison uniform because he considered it humiliating to him as political prisoner and as a grown man (the uniform consisted of short trousers, normally worn in South Africa only by boys). However, after several weeks in solitary confinement, Mandela changes his mind and decides to wear the uniform, as the personal cost to him in terms of sheer physical and psychological suffering was simply too high to justify his symbolic protest which in real terms was probably pointless in any case. In this respect, the reader empathises with him, and the passage in the book is particularly moving as a momentous event in Mandela's transformation from wanted terrorist to political prisoner to criminal inmate and eventually to statesman. The point is, despite making this concession to the prison regime, for Mandela as

autobiographer there is no real damage to his masculinity or any lasting loss of face. This single act of capitulation, though symbolically significant within the prison domain, renders Mandela's character all the more "ordinary" in the sense of being acceptable to readers in the wider public sphere.

In Bobby Sands' case, though he is careful not to refer openly to the IRA or otherwise give the impression of being a pawn of the IRA or a victim of British justice, by his refusal to make a similar and relatively small concession to the prison authorities as an act of self-preservation, in the end it is difficult to perceive him as anything else but as a sacrificial victim, as his suffering is simply not justifiable or morally feasible except as part of a broader militant strategy which requires, simply, that he resist, suffer and eventually die. This episode reveals how he is clearly expending a great deal of willpower to maintain this very extreme and uncompromising stance, with the strain showing as much in his extraordinary hatred of this particular warder who is offering him a way out of this painful and inhuman situation, as it does in the tension of the narrative.

In summary, then, the "pen" as a protean metaphor in *One Day in My Life* reveals the intimate connection between the pen as a source of life, in the sense that as a writing implement it opens the way for auto/biographical writing a possible survival strategy for self-preservation against the overwhelming force of the state focused on the individual; on the other hand, this same pen can also be completely co-opted within a totalising regime of human suffering within which it becomes simply another weapon of destruction, a device for signing away or striking through one's own life as an individual. Prison writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Mandela represent the former, while prison writers like Sands, Clarke, Rossa and even Solzhenitsyn represent the latter. In the next and final section, we will look in more detail at this representation of the life as a kind of living death in *One Day in My Life*.

4.0 The journey to nowhere: the prison life as a living death

If there is one all-encompassing theme in *One Day in My Life*, it must surely be the overwhelming presence of sensory deprivation, violence, suffering and death. In this final section I will concentrate on how such literary tropes or "poetic self-images" (Spengemann, 1980) are used by autobiographers to basically shape the textual representation of the self. Let us look first at some of the other tropes used prominently by Sands in his prison autobiography, the bodily tropes of deprivation and disfigurement, and how these differ from the temporal tropes linked to prison autobiography that emphasise the individual's collective identity, by reproducing the exemplary and autonomous individual self perhaps most recognisable in canonical male autobiography as outlined in chapter 2.

The overall narrative structure of *One Day in My Life* can be summarised as a series of sporadic and violent events in the context of the routine and highly regulated society of prison. These range from the extremes of vicious and nearly fatal beatings, to punishment by starvation and sensory deprivation, to the "catastrophe" of a cold soggy breakfast (Sands, 1983: 31). In contrast, throughout the narrative Sands' character as protagonist remains remarkably resolute and unchanged, despite the shocking nature of events; it is his stable identity as an individual that provides the anchor and continuity of the story.

A similar narrative structure can also be observed in the autobiographical writings of the classic romantics, such as those of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In his book *The Rhetorics of Romanticism* (1984), Paul de Man defines the emplotment of the self along these lines as forming the central stablising factor in the masculine autobiographical narrative. These narratives are usually comprised of a series of events which are by turns shocking and trivial, associated with violence and sensory deprivation, typical of classic Romantic male autobiography. De Man describes in detail, for example, how Wordsworth's lengthy autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1971) contains a profusion of images expressing the full range of deprivation, from the most cataclysmic to the most mundane, always spectacularly resolved in the decisive and restorative moment of absolute self-knowledge through the autobiographical subject. From a sociological perspective, these powers literally at the fingertips of the male autobiographer are highly conservative of the present patriarchal

social order, precluding the need to make real social change by resolving the shocking images of suffering within the autobiographical text/subject itself.

In both of their autobiographical writings, Wordsworth and Sands share a near obsession with various images of death prefigured in a series of "shocks and interruptions" (de Man, 1984: 74) of physical mutilation and deprivation. These appear in the images of maimed and bleeding bodies, and the proximity of the dead and dying (e.g. in *The Prelude* passages describing Wordsworth's encounters with blind beggars, dying children, drowned corpses, maimed bodies, etc), and in Sands' book the descriptions of other prisoners whose punishment beatings he witnesses. According to de Man (1984) these are characteristic symbolic images of the paradigm male autobiographical subject, revealing dimensions that all of these texts have in common. Similarly Sands' autobiography is filled with the "horror reports" (Sands, 1983: 107) of images of dead bodies and those mutilated by beatings and starvation: "I thought of my dead comrades again. My friends who had stood beside me one day and were dead the next. Boys and girls just like myself, born and raised in the nationalist ghettos of Belfast to be murdered by foreign soldiers and lecky sectarian thugs" (55); "Hundreds of naked, physically wrecked men had come alive" (107). The images of injured and maimed bodies include his own"...[M]y body felt like it was on fire, torn to ribbons on the rough concrete that had cut and hacked at my naked skin. My face was warm and wet from blood spurting from a gash on my head" (62); "I was a skeleton" (118), and so on.

Though somewhat exaggerated in the writings of Sands and Wordsworth, these are typical of the many images of deprivation and mutilation that prefigure death in canonical masculine autobiography, troping the life as a "journey to nowhere". Through the immanence of death in the narrative, the autobiographer is able to assume a certain authoritative posture over the "life". Thus, when Bobby Sands writes "I am a living corpse now" (54), like Malcolm X (1965), what he is really doing is conferring upon himself the power to declare his authority over his completed and now summarised "life" (Eakin, 1980). This marks a significant moment in Romantic life writing, where the authorial power over death forms an analogous response to the appropriation of childhood in the

Bildungsroman tradition of writing. This kind of dynamic portrayal of the self rendered in life writing as a mode of development and growth which is paradoxically obsessed with death is characteristic of the creative ethos driving Romantic forms of writing throughout the 19th century, a trend which is particularly evident in auto/biographical aesthetics (Høyrup, 2000).

This dynamism is manifest in a representative image of the self in Romantic autobiography, making the transformation from life to death appear metaphorically progressive, as a *road* "...interrupted, but not ended, by death" (de Man, 1984: 74). The dual effect is to trope life as a "journey" in which the self is depicted as a unified and coherent entity. From this position it is easy to procure a kind of posthumous authority on behalf of the living author—one that stretches even beyond the bounds of the individual's own death (thus anticipating the post-structuralist "death of the author" by nearly a century), but, instructively, not beyond the powers of his [sic] own agency. Thus, as in the case of Wordsworth, Sands' self-affirmation of his life is established in the face of his own immanent death; in Sands' case, given his low social status in comparison to writers like Wordsworth, the stakes are so high that this assumption of power even relies upon it: "They can do what they will with me but I will never bow to them or allow them to criminalize me...I am prepared to die first rather than succumb to their oppressive torture" (1983: 55); ultimately "Nothing really mattered except remaining unbroken" (118). The narrative is grounded in an appropriately coherent system of tropes where "life" is interpreted through "death", managed by the author who is now somehow "outside" of this entire system, in a sense the author of time and embodiment themselves. In this regard, Sands has less in common with prison writers (who normally observe the linguistic and narratological conventions of prison culture) than with the canonical autobiographers of the 19th century, who are able to stand outside of and control the discourses of power which are predominant in their own societies.

For de Man (1984), the overarching metaphor for this entire tropological system is that of the *sun in motion*, in other words, the "day", where the appearance of the sun is troped as "rising" or beginning, and its disappearance as "setting" until

its expected and inevitable reappearance. In the same way the "life" in such autobiographical texts is troped as having a beginning and travelling in the direction of both its own mortality and ultimately its own self-restoration, through and then beyond death. Hence the symbolism of movement and progress beyond the limitations of one's own individuality and mortality are encapsulated in the metaphorical construction of the life in a single symbolic day.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, what has been presented in this chapter is a narratological and intertextual analysis of the prison life writings of Bobby Sands. What these analyses have shown is that, far from being merely an anecdotal or idiosyncratic expression of extreme political views, *One Day in My Life* (1983) represents a treatise or meditation as much on the literature of resistance as of the nature of life writing and writing itself in contemporary society. This is evidenced in two important ways: firstly Sands' divergence from conventional contiguous narratives of historiography reveals an original and innovative auto/biographical voice. Heedless of customary practices of truth-telling, Sands writes his auto/biography is an overtly literary style, expressing his own truth on his own terms. This formulation of originality in literature is consistent with H. Bruce Franklin's (1978, 1998) location of innovations to established genres of writing throughout the modern period as responses to the influence of prisoner writing. Secondly, Sands' concentration on narratological and intertextual references to material objects like letters, (toilet) paper, pens, snow, maggots and flies, shows not only how the physical presence of these objects shape the prisoner life narrative but also emphasises the extent to which the activity of writing itself occurs as an essentially materialistic and embodied phenomenon, as well as a strategy for resistance and survival. Reflections on these objects as physical presences and psychic metaphors is enhanced by intertextual references to other notable prison texts such as Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963), Ngugi's *Detained* (1981) and Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994).

As an example of prisoner life writing, *One Day in My Life* corroborates and advances the thesis concerning the communal nature of the autobiographical "I" in the Romantic mode, i.e. as an essentially representative, masculine, egocentric figure who is obsessed with and empowered by the proximity of violence, sensory deprivation and death. As a paradigmatic example of canonically masculine autobiography, this text depicts the intrinsic ideological connection between dominant patriarchal social discourses based on a conflict-and-conquer rationality derivative of a Hegelian philosophy of right (Ferguson, 1993) and the preservation of radically dichotomised political order that maintains an intense and embedded culture of conflict. In this regard, the construction of the auto/biographical "I" representing some of the most reviled iconic figures of modern times are not so very different from some of the most celebrated eponymous idols of the past. It is by reproducing in the auto/biographical format the same masculinist politics of the modern nation state originating in Hegel's philosophy of right that the conflict-and-conquer dialogic of modern political discourse closes the gap between ordinary man and public icon. This is identifiable in the propensity for successful nationalist revolutions to result in the ousting and replacement of oppressive regimes with more or less identically oriented administrations, where the rhetoric of the "struggle for freedom" represents in reality simply a change in leadership rather than an observable shift from the past practices and the future promise of substantive social change. At the end of *One Day in My Life*, this leads the reader to wonder what the "day" referred to in the republican slogan *Tiocfaidh ár lá*, "our day will come", will mean in terms of the potential it offers of a change from the current state of conflict.

In *Writing and Difference* (2002), Derrida wrote "The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies" (353). I have argued that these discourses are highly culture specific (Gusdorf, 1956), so that when they are used by writers to describe themselves, they give valuable insights into the social reality and consciousness of the groups to which they belong. This is demonstrated by writers like Sands who are outside of the literary mainstream, and how they use tropes in especially innovative ways to "....develop a means of communication by adapting and creating arrangements

of signs suited to their capacities" (Melehy, 1997: 95). As in virtually all literary autobiography, this is done through a proliferation of images and metaphors that tend to be imitated, forming discernible patterns among writers with fundamentally similar intents. As we have seen, the tropes in *One Day in My Life* are mainly related to time, nature, material reality and the body. Typically, they are linked to sets of binary pairs or " dyads", as Saussure called them, communicating their meaning through a relational linguistic structure. For Sands, these centre on the images of the "natural" dyadic cycles of sleeping and waking; day and night; and life and death, all in the context of the extreme authoritarian regime of prison.

This analysis of the autobiographical tropes in the prison life writings of Bobby Sands reveals that there are two central linguistic structures underlying this text. The communal and "alternative" voice of the prison autobiographer is in competition with Sands' latent desire to identify himself as an exemplary individual like the autonomous male autobiographer in the traditional romantic mould. This can be seen in the patterns of two distinct types of autobiographical tropes associated with two very different groups of autobiographers: prisoners (who commonly use tropes of time to communicate a collective identity in order to disrupt dominant discourses of social reality) and Victorian gentlemen (who use tropes of deprivation and disfigurement to emphasise their unique and self-declared power as individuals in order to conserve the social discourses of patriarchy). Ironically, it is the deprivation on the scale that Bobby Sands records, leading to his immanent death, that confers on him the authority and legitimacy that he craves. By relying on the conventional phallogocentric tropes of deprivation/restoration to establish the authority of his own individual autobiographical voice, Sands is in danger of legitimising the very brutal penal regime that he wants to condemn, by making his emergence as an iconic individual figure seem either historically inevitable or in some other narrative sense "worth it".

But this is not what Bobby Sands communicates in his literary images of time in prison; for him, his autobiography represents a strong identification with his fellow inmates and with the wider republican community, based on his past and

present experiences of oppression. It is this aspect of the text that underscores the real social and literary significance of prisoner autobiography, their ability to challenge the unity of the "mainstream" version of reality represented in other more "legitimate" and generic forms of writing, where prison writers, and other "outsiders", use the autobiographical "I" to disrupt the normative or systematic relationship between word and object, subject and representation, and move syntax on into new possibilities of signification. Prison writers' capacity to achieve changes at the social level in many ways hinges on the construction of a novel but also convincing version of the autobiographical "I". In the final analysis, Sands' hyper-masculine version is simply too derivative of the conservative model which in any case he primarily seeks to supplant.

Chapter 4 - The Origins of the Women's Movement and the Life of Betty Friedan: Re-reading *The Feminine Mystique* as a Work of Women's Auto/biography

1.0 Introduction

1957 was a very significant year in the life of Betty Friedan. In her working life, she had by then effectively converted her previous employment as a trade union reporter into a successful career as a free-lance journalist, receiving regular commissions to write a range of factual articles and short fiction pieces for some of the most popular women's magazines of the time, including such archetypes of the genre as *Good Housekeeping* and *Redbook*. Considering her past involvement in radical trade union politics (now the subject of heated debate), this was no mean feat; she had done well to achieve this transformation in the wake of the red-baiting and the mass return of young American men to the labour force in the post-war period, both of which contributed to her losing her job as a trade union journalist in the first instance.

Perhaps even more significantly, this year marked a watershed in her personal life. Now a 36 years old mother of three young children and self-declared suburban housewife, this year saw the 10th anniversary and approximate mid-point of her marriage to then husband Carl; though the marriage was fraught, to outside observers, the Freidan's' life together in a beautiful old house she was kept busy "doing up" in suburban New York represented the idyllic image of 1950s American family life. Coincidentally, 1957 was also the 15th anniversary since her graduation from Smith College, the prestigious private liberal arts college for women in rural Massachusetts. It is widely recognised that Friedan blossomed during her undergraduate years at Smith, the combination of the excellence in teaching, her innate intellectual abilities and just as importantly her partial escape from the parochialism and anti-Semitism of life in her hometown of Peoria, Illinois. Yet despite the liberation of college life, she would spend these years struggling with the institutional dualities and personal hypocrisies of anti-Semitism in American culture (Friedan, 2000; Fermaglich, 2003).

As part of the 15th reunion celebrations, Friedan was now famously asked to conduct a survey of her former classmates to see how they had fared and what their lives had been like after leaving the privileged world of Smith for life as adult women in the "real world". Given that she and former her classmates had received their education during the difficult and anxious war years, the concurrence of their graduation with the emergence of an American society dominated by the optimism of post-war peace and prosperity rendered the overwhelming negativity of their responses to the survey a surprise to all. The main target of their unhappiness and disillusionment was what had been the dearest dream of most young women at the time: to marry well and have a financially secure and leisurely life looking after a brood of rosy cheeked children in a nice house in the suburbs. But somehow the idyllic dream of 1950s family life fell far short of the reality. What Friedan uncovered in her survey was the surprisingly high levels of discontent and misery among the young women of the post-war generation as they were now reaching their mid-30s. The responses of her fellow alumnae not only shocked her, they also echoed her own hidden feelings of disappointment and shame concerning the quality of her own personal life since leaving college. For the first time she found she was not alone in asking herself, Was this it? Is the relentless daily grind of washing dishes and changing sheets all there is to life? Is this what her Smith diploma was intended to prepare her for? Now she wondered how this could be: how could so many highly educated and socially privileged women be duped by the cherished ideology of female fulfilment in a life of total domesticity—the phenomenon that she would term "the feminine mystique"? And how could this ideal scenario have turned out to be such a nightmare for so many women, and their families?

From this time onward, the findings from her Smith College survey increasingly influenced both the subject and content of the articles Friedan wrote for the women's magazines. Consequently, her rejection rates from the same magazine editors who had previously commissioned her to write so many articles soared. Eventually, her previously steady stream of commissions would drop to virtually nil. In spite of the disinterest from the women's popular press, Friedan was nevertheless determined to explore the issues arising from the Smith alumnae

survey, a determination which led her to write her most famous work, *The Feminine Mystique* [1963] (1992).

Her determination paid off, and she would prove the women's magazine editors who insisted that American women did not want to dwell on the negativity of domestic life wrong. Within the first three months of its publication in 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* was a massive bestseller, eliciting previously unheard of levels of publicity for a book by a woman author writing about the lives of ordinary women, and spawning a vociferous and international debate on the quality of women's lives in the 20th century (Fermaglich, 2003). Though admittedly, as many commentators have pointed out, *The Feminine Mystique* may not have been the first book to raise such concerns, it certainly was the first to strike such a chord with its American (and international audience), placing the quality of women's lives at the top of the agenda in current events and public policy debates.

Taken together, all of these influences—Friedan's past employment as a trade union journalist, her work as a free-lance writer for women's magazines, her education in Psychology at Smith and later as a graduate student at Berkeley, her life as a suburban middle class wife and mother, her identity as a Jewish American and her experiences of anti-Semitism, and her resistance to stock forms of women's popular writing—conspired together to generate *The Feminine Mystique* [1963] (1992), a seminal text so often credited with inaugurating the women's movement. On a basic level, this is the general consensus among the great number of commentators on this famous text, far too many to list, over the 40 years since its first publication. However, the debate over the relative distribution of these "causes" in terms of the weight of their influence on *The Feminine Mystique* and its meaning in the wake of second wave feminism continues unabated. Over the years, much has been made in the critical literature of the significance of many aspects of the text, from the rhetorical construction of the "problem with no name" (Winkler, 1999; Bowlby, 1987), its overall narrative framework as a "feminist tract" (Bowlby, 1987) or "crime thriller" (Mitchell, 1973), to the difficulties of her interpersonal relationships with other women consequent to her fame as feminist icon

(Hennessee, 1999) and the overt presence in the text of Friedan's radicalism (Faludi, 1991; Horowitz, 1998), racism, elitism, liberalism (Horowitz, 1998), and humanism (Bowlby, 1987). These issues and more have dominated discussions in the academic and popular media concerning the meaning and interpretation of *The Feminine Mystique*. Consequently, the massive and vociferous critical response to this text has in many ways become very much a part of the text itself; it is now virtually impossible to read *The Feminine Mystique* without thinking of the various objections to it, most notably complaints about the biographical treatment of the social category of "women" as essentially white and middle class. In this respect, this text differs substantially from the other two examined in the previous and subsequent chapters, which in comparison have attracted significantly less critical attention. Therefore, my analysis of this text takes a broader perspective on the construction of the female auto/biographical subject to include the voices of other commentators who have taken such issue with Betty Friedan over her representation of her own life and the lives of the American women of her generation.

At the same time, the broad range and huge amount of these materials renders it impossible, in the limited space of this chapter, to analyse *The Feminine Mystique* as a whole. Neither do I claim to interpret it in a way that I would claim to be a final or definitive statement on this text. On the contrary, it is my belief that what is most interesting and enriching about *The Feminine Mystique* is its status as the occasion of so much reflexive introspection and critical debate among feminists, their self-declared "fellow travellers" and also their detractors. The question of what *The Feminine Mystique* is, how it should be interpreted and what its meaning is now for the daughters and granddaughters of the women's movement and beyond are to my mind all the more compelling because of the unfinished and on-going character of these debates.

In this chapter, I propose to address some of these issues from a standpoint which has so far not been adopted in the commentaries as a way of interpreting this text, i.e. reading it as a work of women's auto/biography, and using some of the interpretive strategies developed within auto/biography studies to revisit the debates, and perhaps recalibrate the revisionist exercises now being undertaken

concerning the origins of the women's movement which prominently feature *The Feminine Mystique*. In categorising this as a social scientific work of women's auto/biography, I am foregrounding Friedan's adopted strategy of telling her own life story and the story of other middle class American women like her through the use of social scientific research techniques, i.e. using the dominant psychological theories of Jewish thinkers Bruno Bettelheim and her teachers and mentors A.H. Maslow, Erik Erikson, Kurt Lewin as theoretical touchstones (Fermaglich, 2003) and her interviews with 80 or so women as biographical resource material.

The specific revisionist projects I have in mind are those which are very topical at the moment in the response to the historian Daniel Horowitz's unauthorised "biography" of Friedan by way of *The Feminine Mystique* itself, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (1998). Briefly, Horowitz's historical thesis controversially locates the origins of the women's movement in the radical anti-fascist, anti-McCarthyist and trade union politics of the interwar years in the United States. Central to his argument is the total dismantling of the claim made by Friedan herself and many other feminists that second wave feminism was substantially influenced by the individual and personalised experiences of suburban incarceration as felt by the disgruntled American middle class housewife of the 1950s generation. According to Horowitz, this construction of suburban captivity and the consciousness-raising to which it gave rise following the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* is the real myth at the heart of what he calls "modern feminism", the myth of the self-actualising individual as the motor for the feminist argument for social change.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will use a similar methodology to the one developed in the previous chapter, adapted this time to suit a social scientific, as opposed to a literary, auto/biography. The primary focus will be on examining a selection of narratological and intertextual tropes developed in *The Feminine Mystique* that provide a distinctively auto/biographical framework to this text, that is to say, leave the way open for the reader to engage with the female autograph or the "felt experience" of women's life writing (Stanton,

1984). I will try to show how Friedan adapts a range of important mid-20th century narratological and intertextual tropes—i.e. those of the suburban prisoner and the housewife as the victim of the "comfortable concentration camp"—to reconstruct an innovative representation of the auto/biographical subject in women's writing, sufficient to help inaugurate a significant period of social change. I argue that investigations of these tropes from this point of view illicit interesting and revealing comparative characteristics of auto/biographical writing constructed around notions of gender, class and religious identity before and after the WWII. They will also expose the importance of religious cultural life to contemporary life writing, specifically the influence of Jewish culture on auto/biography, a subject that has been woefully neglected in the area of auto/biography studies.

However, as in the first main section of the last chapter and the next, before entering into these narratological and intertextual analyses of the tropological texture of the *The Feminine Mystique*, I will spend some time examining the historical reception of *The Feminine Mystique* in contemporary scholarship, concentrating in particular on the seminal challenge posed by the New Historicism to Betty Freidan's auto/biography and its relationship to the early women's movement. Using the tools of auto/biographical research, I will show how auto/biography exposes some of the major faults which are still inherent in this approach as a way of making sense of the events of such politically significant periods of modern history.

2.0 Against the New Historicism: the life of Betty Friedan and the ideological origins of the women's movement

In his book *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (1998), the historian Daniel Horowitz develops his thesis linking the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s to the radical leftist American politics of the 1930s and 40s—specifically the organised antifascism, radicalism and labour union activism that were in their ascendancy in U.S. politics in the pre-McCarthy era—arguing that these constituted the same ideological forces from which the civil rights and anti-war

movements of the 60s and 70s would eventually emerge. Part of his main objective is to deflate what he considers to be the predominant myth at the heart of "modern feminism" that locates the origin of second wave feminism in the individual experiences of passivity, isolation and identity crisis of the predominantly white middle class housewife living in suburban captivity in the post-WWII America, a history of feminist activism which he claims is based on the fictions of "self-actualisation" epitomised in *The Feminine Mystique*.

His is an argument which has attracted a substantial amount of attention within the academic community, its significance reflected in Friedan's refusal early on in the biographical project to withdraw her cooperation and also to dissociate herself from it as spurious "deconstruction" in her memoir *Life So Far* (2000). But the resistance Horowitz encountered from Friedan concerning his interpretation of her own life history did nothing to dissuade him from writing what Edith A. Disler has called something other than a "...biography in the usual sense" (Disler, 2000: 874), one which relies almost entirely on the abstract narrative values of historical method. While even Horowitz's admirers decry the massive lacuna at the heart of the book created by the absence of Friedan's voice (Williams, 2001; Weir, 2000), nevertheless he is widely praised for his "nuanced account" of "first rate scholarship that reads like a complex mystery novel" according to which he "demolishes" the myths that surround Friedan's life (Weir, 2000: 134). Without a hint of irony, Weir concurs with Horowitz that a rare shortcoming of this "masterful work" is the insufficient input from Betty's ex-husband Carl Friedan, though precisely what the significance of his role was in the writing of *The Feminine Mystique* is left open to speculation. Such has been Friedan's opprobrium of the prominence accorded to books like Horowitz's and the later biography of her by Judith Hennessee (1999) that she felt she needed to set the record straight by writing her own autobiography, a task which she claims she otherwise did not feel the need to do (Lewis, 2001).

Briefly, the main thrust of his polemical argument is founded upon exposing the speciousness of such a personalisation of these events and the subsequent celebration of the individual by demonstrating that such a narrative does not solve the "puzzle" (a metaphor Horowitz applies liberally) of how and under

what historical conditions the re-emergence of post-war feminism took place. He claims that in fact the emergence of second wave feminism from the "self-actualising" activism of the American housewife doesn't even represent an authentic version of Betty Friedan's own autobiography, and what is more, it occludes her true identity as a writer as well as her main motivation for writing the book. Horowitz's argument is based on a dual strategy, firstly to refute Friedan's own version of her life story, the significance of her personal journey that led her to write *The Feminine Mystique* and its subsequent influence on the lives of millions of women, and then secondly to relocate the "real" life of Betty Friedan as a seasoned political activist very much in the tradition of radical interwar American politics to the "true" historical account that traces a more neatly coherent and logical trajectory from the anti-fascism of the 1930s to the radical identity politics of the 1960s. This recovered version, according to Horowitz, offers the advantage of "...a more connected sense of the history of American feminism" (Horowitz, 1998: 248) capable of withstanding the debilitating, contradictory and (he claims, in the case of Friedan) mendacious intrusion of the supreme, self-obsessed, white middle class self typically celebrated in (conventional) autobiography.

The main problem with such a historicist revision of the origins of post-war feminism and *inter alia* the course of one woman's life is that, in the first instance, it fails to explain the "personal is political" phenomenon as an organising principle of second wave feminism, i.e. why and how the realisation that what women were experiencing in their private lives was of crucial importance to an understanding of how life in the public realm of politics actually operates. On the contrary, Horowitz's deconstructive history stipulates that such personal identity politics are mere chimeras of the feminist imagination. However, the anti-McCarthyism and trade unionism of the interwar years does not explain this complex and influential social phenomenon, and one which is not only observable in the women's movement, but in other civil rights campaigns concerning the real life experiences of "race", disability and sexuality.

Secondly such a gloss on Friedan's auto/biography as basically a specious conveyor of myths on the grounds that the revised version conforms more fully to the requirements of an objectively contiguous historical narrative completely ignores the ideological nature of such a positivistic historiography according to which the "facts" of Friedan's life story are not only "out there" but are fully recoverable via the devices of social scientific methodology, e.g. through archival research into the biographical records of Friedan's *real* past. While clearly readers are acutely aware of the tendency for auto/biographers to tell their stories in a way that best suits their own personal interests and that they might be considerably liberal with their rendition of the truth, at the same time, to publicly "out" someone as basically a liar in their own and very personal version of their auto/biography seems distasteful at the least; in the case of a woman writing in such a revealing and personal way at a time when such an activity by respectable women simply wasn't the done thing, it is in some sense deeply unethical. By turning the tables on this kind of historical revisionism, what we can see is the controversial tendency of historiography to reflect the hegemonic cultural attitudes of their time based on the "objective" perspective of "legitimate" authoritative authors who are in the main socially well-connected white males. The purpose of historians to devote themselves to what they perceive as more accurate representations of the past, particularly for those who were previously disregarded as unnoteworthy—such as housewives—in the context of telling the *his*tory of feminism is deeply ironic, as it is in many respects antithetical to women's efforts during this period to recover a political voice through auto/biographical writing. Horowitz shows no sensitivity to the fact that *The Feminine Mystique* occasioned such an instance of women's life writing toward a kind of socially recognised legitimacy in the face of dominant "objective" history.

Horowitz begins by challenging the veracity of Friedan's autobiographical version of her life as that of a "common housewife". A central premise of his argument is his claim to expose what he argues is the factual inconsistency underpinning Friedan's autobiographical version of events even at the most basic level, insisting that she has to this day consistently lied about her employment history as a journalist for a labour union publication and also her Marxist

political past. Taking these in turn, let us recall how she describes herself in the opening chapter of *The Feminine Mystique*, "Sometimes I sensed the problem, not as a reporter, but as a suburban housewife, for during this time I was also bringing up my own three children in Rockland County, New York" (Friedan, [1963] 1992: 18). Horowitz's claim that his archival research into her past history has uncovered her true identity as a labour union journalist is somewhat undermined by her mention of this fact in this brief opening sentence; but rather than trying to deny or cover up the fact that she had been up to the time of writing *The Feminine Mystique* employed as a part-time journalist (and also an erstwhile free-lance writer for women's magazines, another fact that she mentions in the book), Friedan acknowledges that her understanding of the "problem" came not from her role as a reporter but rather from her own personal experience as a working wife and mother and those of the women around her.

By representing his research as a "discovery" revealing that in fact Friedan never was an "ordinary housewife" because she engaged in part time paid employment outside of the home, Horowitz fails on two counts. Firstly, working outside of the home on political or community projects and/or in paid employment has been the norm especially for middle class women in developed capitalist societies since the WWII; secondly women who engage in such work typically continued to identify themselves as "housewives" despite their involvement in such activities. These were the findings of Ann Oakley in her seminal study *Housewife* (1974), a work that argued that while 93 per cent of the women she interviewed described themselves housewives, 76 per cent of these engaged in paid employment outside of the home. This indicates that the dichotomy Horowitz sets out between the housewife role and other social roles open to women at that time (and in since) is overstated, as is its intractable influence on women's identities.

For many women who occupy the wife-mother role, dissociation from their identity as a "housewife" is much less straightforward than it might at first appear to be, even for educated and employed women like Betty Friedan. This is because in modern culture, housework is typically regarded not as a type of labour but rather as integral to the "feminine role" of women in society,

evidenced by the discursive construction of housework as "women's work", and the ideological reproduction of a sexual division of labour based on a "natural adjunct of femininity" (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982). Horowitz's forthright challenge to Friedan's self-described status as a suburban housewife makes no concessions to the ambivalent nature of this social role, nor to the socialisation of women more generally in their roles as mothers, workers, daughters, lovers and so forth and the complicit blurring of boundaries between the social function of these roles and the deeply emotional bonds of love and duty and their influence on women's identity. The ideological connection of the domestic role of the housewife with the socialisation of femininity may make the housewife role difficult to accept, but at the same time its intimate links to established norms of conjugal and mother love also makes it especially difficult for many women to reject (to say nothing of the negative consequences of rejecting this role for some women and their children at the hands of violent or abusive partners) (Jamieson, 2002). It is this contradiction at the core of women's lives which is the main concern of *The Feminine Mystique*. This double bind of the housewife role was a major obstacle to "women's liberation" which Friedan sought to address in this text, primarily by constructing a sense of collective identity for women through her own life narrative experiences as a housewife and thereby mobilising an awareness of the "problem that has no name" in order to facilitate widespread social change. In essence, it is the complexity of this role and its impact on real women's lives which means that Friedan was not lying when she described herself as an ordinary "suburban housewife", nor was she in denial as a result of her deep fear of being "outed" as a communist as Horowitz has suggested[10], nor deluded by the mythology of a feminism which didn't yet exist.

By simply ignoring these complex and ambivalent aspects of women's identity with respect to the housewife role as well as overlooking the flaws of historical method which were in many ways responsible for generating *The Feminine Mystique* and Friedan's later life writings, Horowitz entirely misses the point of *The Feminine Mystique*. His construction of a false dichotomy as representative

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[10] Horowitz claims to have seen Friedan's sizable FBI file which claims that she applied for membership to the American Communist Party but was refused because there were "too many intellectuals" in the Party already, but he does not acknowledge that such files are notoriously riddled with errors, rumour and innuendo.

of the exclusive and discrete nature of women's social roles simply doesn't reflect the reality of women's lives, and is thus inherently antithetical to the auto/biographical stories these women tell. The isolation of middle class women in the suburban household and their shared experiences of low self esteem, exploitation and social exclusion are central to the meaning of *The Feminine Mystique*, both as a representation of Betty Friedan's own life experiences as a woman in 1950s America and also in terms of the impact of her life writing as a factor (not necessarily *the* factor, as Horowitz implies) in mobilising a collective desire for change among the women of her generation. To deny this version of the text because it fails to meet certain criteria of contiguity and coherence required by historical narrative is to deny the inter-subjective experiences of being a woman in post-war society which was not an abstraction by its nature, being on the contrary (as portrayed by Friedan in the text) essentially conflicted, fragmentary, stagnant and painful.

In his zeal to reconstruct a sufficiently rigorous and comprehensive historiography of second wave feminism that also recognises the signal importance of *The Feminine Mystique*, Horowitz's refusal to allow for the primacy of these experiences for Friedan and her many readers demonstrates his determination to prioritise interpretations generated from abstract theory over the real, material, embodied experiences of women and also the paradigmatic experience of reading represented by the inter-subjective relationship between reader and text. In this regard, he fails to acknowledge not just the significance of the author in such auto/biographical narratives but also of the reader, who as the reader-response theorists stress, must be recognised as a decisive component of any meaningful analysis of the text. This is particularly important in relation to texts which become identified in the public imagination with significant social events or movements, where to paraphrase Michael Riffaterre "readers make the...event" (Riffaterre, 1978: 116). The feminist aphorism "It changed my life" indelibly linked to *The Feminine Mystique* and its massive popularity bears witness to such a widespread and deeply personal and auto/biographical experience of reading was fundamental in transforming the experience of reading into a social "event" and subsequently a social movement. These were not ideological afterthoughts, designed to protect and preserve a cherished version of

feminist mythical history, but were intrinsic to the contemporaneous (as well as later) reception of this text.

In arguing against any substantive auto/biographical reading of *The Feminine Mystique*, Horowitz overstates his case by claiming that "feminists" maintain that *The Feminine Mystique* comprises *the* origin of second wave feminism, a position which is a perversion of any reputable feminist opinion on the matter (an issue which is still very much a matter for debate). But here again, we see Horowitz arguing against a reductionist and over-worked dichotomy that, while it suits the demands of historicism, denies the intrinsic complexity of these same events which continue to be hugely influential in contemporary cultural life. Horowitz's occlusion of the inter-subjective relationship between writer, reader and text and his exaggeration of the dichotomy of macro-political forces versus the personal politics of "consciousness-raising" precludes the recognition of both factors as dialogically related in the re-emergence of the women's movement in the post-war period. In addition his thesis significantly diminishes the recognition of a broader spectrum of women's knowledge captured in writing through subjective imagination, embodied experience, and material realities recovered in auto/biographical reading and writing, which remains very much a part of the canon of feminist literature and moreover the feminist project itself.

In summary, the shortcomings in Horowitz's thesis are perhaps more indicative of the wider problems with the New Historicism than they are revealing of the origins of post-war feminism, the nature of women's auto/biographical writing or the question of *The Feminine Mystique*. The main advantage of Horowitz's argument for which he has received such critical praise is the victory it represents of historical method over the enervating and idiosyncratic presence of auto/biography. But his thesis that *The Feminine Mystique* represents the extension of a constellation of radical American politics going back to the interwar years is somewhat undermined by the notable absence in the text of references to any political theories of the kind; instead, where Friedan does make such theoretical connections, these relate to the psychological theories of Bruno Bettelheim, Erik Erikson, Karl Lewin and A.H. Maslow which were in their ascendancy throughout the 1960s, approaches which focussed on the

psychosocial phenomena of personality development, self-actualisation and human motivation. Indeed, one of the most damaging and principal criticisms directed at *The Feminine Mystique* virtually since its publication is the notable absence of attacks on structural social frameworks which allowed the systematic oppression and exploitation of women to happen in the first place. But in this regard, Friedan was unrepentant; as she wrote in the opening chapters of the book, she was convinced that the argumentative strategies of "abstractions" such as patriarchy and the like had lost their impact and become inert social forces for American women following the "successful" conclusion of first wave feminism and the extension of universal suffrage (Friedan, [1963] 1992: 72-75, 81-82). Taking these factors into consideration, it is difficult to see precisely how *The Feminine Mystique* could be argued to overtly signify or advance radical American political theories where such political references are so conspicuously lacking in the text, without of course adopting a drastically deconstructive position which is reliant on perceiving Friedan as a liar, living under the influence of psychological denial as a result of her fear of red baiting, or simply deluded by her own "mythology".

In the end, Horowitz's conspicuous neglect of the nature of the specific qualities of such a text in his critique, either as a work of women's auto/biography or even as an example of women's writing, leaves the question of how the "personal is political" identity politics of the women's movement in particular and the civil rights movements in general fit into and affected post-war radicalism woefully unanswered. This failure is redolent of the formalist/structuralist/New Criticism view of the auto/biographical text recounted in the literature review, which in its worst excesses uses the undisciplined and non-formalistic nature of auto/biography as a justification for concluding that these texts lack any particular literary/textual/generic qualities and hence do not warrant critical analysis. But as we have also seen in the previous chapter, when examined in detail, such texts pose significant and unique challenges for stock forms of reading, including expert criticism and abstract theoretical interpretation. Horowitz is too hasty in his determination to consign *The Feminine Mystique* as a piece of writing to a footnote of post-war history, a history of American political radicalism that he wants to tell within which this text simply does fit or

even make sense, except to regard it as basically a lie designed to cover up its author's real intent which is essential political/historical in nature. But if we are to believe such a macro historical account, the issue of Friedan's credibility is ultimately irrelevant, as according to such abstract historical readings, individuals figure only as passive witnesses to the external forces and events which conspire to narratively shape their life histories.

These faults are consistent with Frederic Jameson's (1988) criticism of the New Historicism for lacking a sufficiently rigorous theory of history, where history "just happens" without being able to explain why it happens in the way that it does or who is affected. Such a problem over theory with reference to a "social scientific" auto/biography like *The Feminine Mystique* is not dissimilar to the analogous problem encountered by structuralist literary theory with respect to literary auto/biographies like Bobby Sands' *One Day in My Life* (1983). There also is the problem of what Eve Sedgewick calls the "good dog/bad dog" approach of the New Historicism, according to which critics simply reproduce the acceptable political views of their collective groups or of their times, praising writers for their "liberal/radical" politics or chastising them for their "conservative/reactionary" views, instead of taking a more considered position and trying to understand how artists and writers have tried to engage with complicated social problems. Such a stance is easy to take on "terrorist" literature produced by writers like Bobby Sands; but also, as we have seen with the various and polarised feminist assessments of *The Feminine Mystique* (e.g. Hennessee (1999), Brownmiller (in Hennessee, 1999), Bowlby 1987; versus Faludi, 1991) this sort of political assessment has proven highly relevant to its critical reception, not least in its implicit links to the individual self.

These are the types of arguments that are characteristic of the historical interpolation of *The Feminine Mystique* in terms of its influence on the course of American post-war politics via the personal desperation of the imprisoned suburban housewife. Notwithstanding the heralding of these sorts of arguments as innovative and more or less definitive versions of history that go under the tag of New Historicism, as Jane Marcus (1981) remarks, they are really nothing new. This is illustrated by Maroula Joannou's (1995) outstanding appraisal of

similar historical revisionism in relation to the suffragette movement and the derogation of suffragette auto/biography in response to the abstract theoretical demands of historical method.

Having now dealt with these issues of the historical reception of *The Feminine Mystique*, let us turn to the text itself to see how the tropes of suburban imprisonment are intertextually constructed and how they function within the auto/biographical framework of this seminal text.

3.0 Prisoners of suburbia

When examining the auto/biographical rhetorics contained in canonical masculine and feminine life writing, we see that there is a kind of plasticity or transferability to the narrative and rhetorical strategies adopted by both male and female writers. This is conspicuously evident in the "suburban prisoner" trope, traceable in its various gendered constructions and reversals throughout the 20th century. In post-war America, Betty Friedan defined the housewife as the prisoner of suburbia, mainly due to her confinement to the private domestic sphere. However, in the interwar years, this same image was used by George Orwell in his novel of middle class life in Britain *Coming Up For Air* to describe the experience of being a man in the same middle class suburban surroundings. The question is, how does the British middle class male subject in the interwar period formulated by Orwell in *Coming Up For Air* come to be indelibly linked to the post-war middle class American housewife in *The Feminine Mystique*? What do these different gendered versions of the suburban prisoner say about contemporary auto/biographical writing, particularly women's auto/biography, and why are they so intimately linked to the contemporary social discourses of war?

3.1 Middle class life narrative, "toilet" culture and the social ritualisation of war

In *Coming Up for Air* [1930] (2000), Orwell depicts the incarceration of his eponymous middle class anti-hero, George "Fatty" Bowling. Bowling

articulates the new psychic vision of masculinity which is linked to an unspoken but shared knowledge about the reality of their social role of being a man, "...a kind of tame dairy cow for a lot of women and kids to chase up and down" (Orwell, *ibid*: 8). The middle class men who commute to work from the suburbs are an alienated, regulated, and uniform bunch, whose identities are signified by their clothing which are in turn signifiers of their jobs and income:

> I had no illusions about myself that morning. It was almost as if I could stand at a distance and watch myself coming down the road, with my fat red face and my false teeth and my vulgar clothes...The clothes I was wearing were practically the uniform of the tribe. Grey herringbone suit a bit the worse for wear, blue overcoat costing fifty shillings, bowler hat and no gloves. And I've got the look that's peculiar to people who sell things on commission, a kind of coarse brazen look. At my best moments, when I've got a new suit or when I'm smoking a cigar, I might pass for a bookie or a publican, and when things are very bad I might be touting vacuum cleaners, but at ordinary times you'd place me correctly. 'Five to ten quid a week', you'd say as soon as you saw me. Economically and socially I'm about at the average level of Ellesmere Road. (Orwell, ibid: 10)

This version of middle class masculinity is not just about personal alienation and economic exploitation, for Orwell, it is very much written against the historical backdrop of impending war; this sense of foreboding has a primary effect on the middle class male psyche:

> And this kind of prophetic feeling that keeps coming over me nowadays, the feeling that war's just round the corner and that war's the end of all things isn't peculiar to me. We've all got it, more or less. I suppose even among the people passing at that moment there must have been chaps who were seeing mental picture of the shellbursts and the mud...It was if I'd got X-rays in my eyes and could see the skeletons walking. (Orwell, [1939] 2000: 25-26)

Orwell portrays the experience of being a middle class white man living in suburbia as like being a prisoner, and indeed he describes the road Bowling lives on as

> Just like a prison with the cells all in a row. A line of semi-detached torture chambers where the poor little five-to-ten-pound-a-weekers quake and shiver, every one of them with the boss twisting his tail and the wife riding him like a nightmare and the kids sucking his blood like leeches. (Orwell, ibid: 10).

With the impending war, the future doesn't augur well for the middle class male residents of suburbia, and Orwell incorporates these fears into a radically alternative purpose for the ordinary domestic residence:

> I looked forward a few years. I saw this street as it'll be in five years' time, say, or three years' time (1941 they say it's booked for), after the fighting's started...I see it all. I see the posters and the food-queues, and the castor oil and the rubber truncheons and the machine-guns squirting out of bedroom windows. (Orwell, ibid: 26-27)

In many respects, *Coming Up For Air* can be viewed as the literary precedent for *The Feminine Mystique.* Throughout *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan employs similar narrative techniques to describe the present and predict the future lives of middle class white women in the suburban household, the differences being that she is focusing on the experiences of women as the eponymous prisoners of suburbia in the post-war as opposed to pre-war or inter-war period as Orwell did for middle class men. According to Friedan's version, the post-war historical context was instrumental to the social construction of the new myth of femininity compelling women to leave the public world of paid employment and return to the home. However, in contrast to Orwell's depiction of inter-war masculinity and the economic exploitation of men as acting the role of alienated cash-cows to their wives, bosses and children, destined to die in a war that will take place in their suburban streets and among their houses, the evacuation of middle class married women from the labour force was not a matter of economic necessity, but rather a ritualistic response to the socio-cultural crisis of war. In other wards, instead of being the result of economic necessity as it was for men in the interwar years, the "imprisonment" of American women in post-war suburbia was psychological in nature, depriving them of the symbolic language of identity, humanity or existence:

> It is urgent to understand how the very condition of being a housewife can create a sense of emptiness, non-existence, nothingness, in women. There are aspects of the housewife role that make it almost impossible for a woman of adult intelligence to retain a sense of human identity, the firm core of self or 'I' without which a human being, man or woman, is not truly alive. (Friedan, [1963] 1992: 264)

Friedan not only has in mind women here, but more specifically middle class women who are well-educated and thus "women of ability":

> For women of ability, in America today, I am convinced there is something about the housewife state itself that is dangerous. In a sense that is not as far-fetched as it sounds, the women who 'adjust' as housewives, who group up wanting to be 'just a housewife', are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps—and the millions more who refused to believe that the concentration camps existed. (Friedan, ibid: 264-5)

These educated "women of ability" were predominantly middle class and were expected to manifest their education and middle class status by staying at home, keeping house and looking after children. Unlike Orwell, Friedan's language is not spatial or specular; she does not describe women's experience of suburban imprisonment by reference to spatial uniformity, with houses being like cells in a row, nor does she define the experience of femininity and female identity primarily by reference codes of appearance or dress. Instead, for her the incarceration of millions of American women is more like being rounded up in a general geographical domain like a suburb which is something akin to being placed in a concentration camp, where the "punishment" consists of a systematic regime of "dehumanisation". Instead of being alienated as Orwell describes the men as being by the spatial and specular trappings of uniformity and the gradual demeaning effects of wage labour, Friedan characterises the alienation of American middle class women as inflicting damage directly onto their sense of humanity. By depriving women of a public presence and symbolic language of self, women were systematically denied not only a sense of existence, but a sense of personal development, the result being a kind of terminal non-person status troped as perpetual *childhood*. She describes this in the chapter entitled "Progressive Dehumanisation: The Comfortable Concentration Camp", going to some lengths to describe the deprivation of women in the suburban household as analogous to the punishment devised by the Nazis which interrupts the normal narrative of the life course in a way that makes it possible for other more malevolent external powers to assert themselves and assume total control:

> In the concentration camps the prisoners were forced to adopt childlike behaviour, forced to give up their individuality and merge themselves into

> an amorphous mass. Their capacity for self-determination, their ability to predict the future and to prepare for it, was systematically destroyed. It was a gradual process which occurred in virtually imperceptible stages—but at the end, with the destruction of adult self-respect, of an adult frame of reference, the dehumanizing process was complete. This was observed by Bruno Bettelheim, psychoanalyst and educational psychologist, when he was a prisoner at Dachau and Buchenwald in 1939. (Friedan, ibid: 265)

While this systematic deprivation of agency through the denial of autonomy and individuality at the root of the problem are similar sentiments to those described by Orwell with reference to his male characters, for women the systematic dehumanisation is taken a step further. The main difference is that the direction of the "punishment" is not toward the external or public worlds of appearance or work, but rather toward the inner space of self. As Friedan puts it, the core problem was not that women were literally being restricted to suburban "concentration camps" however "comfortable", but that "...they were caught in the prisons of their own minds" (Friedan, ibid: 265). It was the damage to women's sense of self and their own sense of agency, identity and ultimately their very existence that was the real culprit. What she then describes is an anticipation of the eponymous "Stepford wife":

> The comfortable concentration camp that American women have walked into, or have been talked into by others, is just such a reality, a frame of reference that denies woman's adult human identity. By adjusting to it, a woman stunts her intelligence to become childlike, turns away from individual identity to become an anonymous biological robot in a docile mass. And yet in the comfortable concentration camp as in the real one, something very strong in a woman resists the death of her self. (Friedan, ibid: 266-7)

While the creation of the kind of "robotic" masculinity described by Orwell during the interwar generation was systematically generated to satisfy economic objectives or for the purposes of warfare, these "robotic" women were created as a matter of psychological or emotional necessity as a way of re-establishing the period symbolic rebirth of the modern nation state. Either way, what is at work in both of these texts is a dramatic tension between the requirement for individuals to serve the state and the contrasting needs of individuals to effect their own self-actualisation within an increasingly individualistic culture.

There are a number of possible explanations for this. From the macro-theoretical ritual framework perspective, J.L. Horner (2000) puts this systematic need for women's emotional labour down to the predominantly masculine social discourse of war. The shift of focus from the social discourses of uncertainty and fear for the future of society and the nation state (as experienced by Fatty Bowling) that predominates in the build up to war is, in the post-war era, replaced by the opposite nationalist discourse and the need for rebirth and renewal (Horner, 2000). This new cultural framework has a disproportionate impact on the discursive construction of femininity, dramatically influencing the symbolic language relating to social conceptions of womanhood in the post-war context. As working class women were more or less able to continue in their paid employment much as they had before the war, middle class women in post-war America, by comparison, bore the brunt of these social changes, becoming in the auto/biographical viewpoint of Betty Friedan, the *real* victims of war by being made to live like prisoners-of-war in their own suburban homes, deprived of their ability to engage in and contribute to public life and to partake of the cultural life of individuality. This cultural shift in femininity was achieved primarily through what Friedan calls the "myth" of femininity encoded in the feminine mystique, the contention that women's total fulfilment lies in their caring roles as wives and mothers which are intrinsically selfless by definition. This demand for selflessness is qualitatively different from the alienation experienced by men in pre-war society described by Orwell.

A second explanatory resource for the emotional incarceration of women is more recent in origin, emanating from the micro-theoretical study of family life post-WWII of the last few decades. This has to do with dramatic intensification of emotional life and intimacy within the private nuclear family, idealised in the heterosexual companionate marriage with children model, and the resulting increase in the need for "emotional" work within the private domain. According to Lynn Jamieson (2002), this is the result of a complex constellation of social influences brought to bear on family life in recent times; these include the reciprocal identification of love with marriage and the social relegation of sex to the marital relationship introduced by the Victorians, combined with the new child-centredness of family life and the emphasis on consumerism where the

judgement of parental worth is based primarily on what they can provide materially for their children. The subsequent increase and intensification of emotional labour in the private domain mirrors the sophistication and demanding nature of economic labour in the public sphere, where individuals are under greater pressure than ever to attenuate the risks to their primary interpersonal relationships through the continual need for intimacy and disclosure (e.g. Jamieson, 1988; Beck and Beck-Gersheim, 1995; Sennett, 1999). Such "disclosing intimacy" (Jamieson, 1988) is based on the constant monitoring of interior feelings and the need to articulate and reveal these feelings to those with whom one shares close inter-relationships, and vice versa, and so on. The demand for such work is growing, being not only necessary between genders and across generations, but also increasingly across temporal and geographical boundaries (e.g. through new technologies such as email, mobile telephones and personal websites). In the immediate post-war period during which Friedan was writing, such emotion work was primarily if not wholly the domain of women, according to which the division of emotional labour in the private sphere was determined very much along gender lines. In more recent times, with the increased complexity of the division of labour in the public sphere since the war marked by the entry of women into ever more areas of public life, the resulting contestation of male hegemony in the segregated spheres of public/private life has sparked a consequent crisis in masculinity, marked by the need to become more personally involved in increasingly demanding "emotion work". These days, heretofore stable masculine social roles such as those of father, son, husband, (boy)friend, and "mate" are becoming more and more the object of considerable emotional labour, drawing men into what has in the past generally been regarded as a "feminine" and moreover "private", i.e. relegated and secondary, activity (see Bordo, 1999; Faludi, 1999). In light of new research in the field of family sociology and intimacy (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gersheim, 1995; Jamieson, 2002; Sennett, 1999), Friedan's controversial and uncompromising stance on the fundamentally dysfunctional impact of such intensity on the family—especially the damage caused to children as a result of the frustration of primary caregivers (normally women) catalogued in *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan [1963] 1992: 245-264)—was considerably ahead of its time.

What I wish to emphasise here is the influence of major historical events like war on the social representation of work and gender roles according to the narrative construction of the private or interior life, whether in fictional or auto/biographical writing. While Orwell and Friedan use similar narrative language to construct representative images of the ordinary middle class subject, the characterisation of these subjects does not take place in a hermetically-sealed interior imaginative space, not even for Friedan whose focus is on the inner lives of women. Rather, the individual understanding of everyday life perceived through the familiarity of the street where one lives, the function of one's home and family life and the quality of one's inner life is conditioned by broader social forces.

What these texts show is that this is seldom more evident than in the periods immediately before and after a period of severe social conflict like war, exposing the effects of the systematic divisions of labour operating in the normally separate domains of private and public life, and manifested in the disruption of normative discourses of gender. What we see happening between Friedan and Orwell is, first of all, a re-iteration of the signal importance of macro-structural influences of history *in combination with* people's personal auto/biographical experiences, phenomena which are intimately and dialogically related in the processes of making-sense of such seminal events. What the comparison of the "suburban prisoner" narrative used by both of these authors also shows is the intrinsic plasticity of such highly gendered narratives as part of the cultural response to such major social episodes, demonstrating how easily the normative narratives of gender can be swapped and traded between men and women over time in response to the disruptive forces of history and politics.

3.1.1 Writing like a man?

...Or simply changing the subject? In borrowing Orwell's "suburban prisoner" as used to depict the interwar experience of middle class masculinity, does this imply that Friedan writes about women's lives "like a man"? The answer to this question seems to shift between yes and no, depending upon where you stand in

relation to the various idealisations of women's writing. If you take the standpoint of *l'écriture féminine* advocated by the French post-structuralist feminists outlined in the literature review, notably Hélène Cixous (1981), and their insistence that women should write themselves from a position of *différence*, then Friedan is demonstrably not "writing like a woman", but rather like a man, rehashing a masculine narrative trope to write about women's life experiences. At the same time, however, as Cixous herself has shown throughout her subsequent work, the injunction for women to "transform their history" by "seizing the occasion to speak" is by no means a straightforward or simple task. Hence Cixous and Clement's (1975) response to this double-bind for women writers was to empower women to "steal the language of the father", using it in their own ways to communicate their own experience and reality. On this basis of this criterion, Friedan's would be admissible as an authentic work of *l'écriture feminine*, as she clearly "steals" the "suburban prisoner" trope from Orwell, using it to substantially re-write the life narrative of middle class suburban women from the standpoint of their own experience, evidenced by the distinctive interiority of her narrative and its concentration on the private sphere, compared to the exterior and public nature of Orwell's narrative.

In the process of telling their stories, Friedan and her interviewees make very liberal and sophisticated use of symbolic language as a basis for a new kind of writing for and about women which is not dominated by a potentially essentialising principle of negation or exclusivity from the male norm. As an author/social scientist/auto/biographer, Friedan employs the rhetoric of gender symbolism conventionally used to establish women's "difference" from men as one half of a classically unequal and exploitative capitalist social dyad, but with a twist. Precisely which side of the dyad these women occupy as the basis of their identity or at any given time in the course of everyday social life is less certain than it is normally supposed to be. Her treatment of the social construction of the binary masculine/feminine roles is much less fixed than writing founded on the kind of functional ideology that predominated in the social scientific consensus in 1950s America, which typically places women firmly on one side of the gendered divide and men on the other. In places, she borrows images from masculine (and sometimes even misogynistic) narratives to

describe her own life experiences as a housewife and the lives of the women she studied, as when for example she castigates women for "wearing the trousers" in the house, "really playing a very masculine role" (Friedan, ibid: 257), manipulating the imbalance of power through nagging or other types of irrational or neurotic behaviour. This proximity of the housewife role to a traditional masculine role of domestic tyrant is particularly observable in her re-definition of women not simply as the "prisoners" of middle class suburbia, and moreover as the victims/survivors of the suburbia as "the comfortable concentration camp" (Friedan, [1963] 1992: 245). This example of hyperbole applied to the comparatively mundane "suburban prisoner" trope serves a dual purpose: as well as emphasising the urgency of women's suffering, it also undermines the potentially essentialising exclusivity of the role of tyrant/victim to women. This represents a more sophisticated development of Orwell's comparatively more rigid application of the suburban prisoner trope.

By using auto/biographical rhetoric to methodically blur the distinction between the literal and figurative images of women, Friedan further blurs the distinction between the functional dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles in the dualistic marriage relationship. At the same time that this disrupts the discourses of women's identity based on more traditional (and anti-feminist) functionalism in the Parsonian tradition, it also causes problems for ideals of women's writing founded on a principle of women's *différénce*, consequently making this text of dubious value for many feminists.

To summarise, in this section we have seen how Friedan uses auto/biographical language in radical and innovative ways for the purposes of initiating widespread personal and social change, for example in the very act of writing from women's material and embodied experiences, by telling their stories, and by "stealing" the symbolic language usually associated with men. However, in some instances these stories are still embedded in distinctly misogynistic social narratives, "telling tales" about the real behaviour of some women while also glossing over similar accounts of men who also exploit their roles as dominant partner in the marriage relationship. In many ways, this ambivalence about the reality of women's identity in relation to their caring roles as housewives and mothers

accounts for why many revisions of the history of second wave feminism have such a difficult time dealing with *The Feminine Mystique*. "Language stealing", such as Cixous called for, is perhaps less straightforwardly pro-feminist or indeed anti-feminist as it might at first appear.

3.1.2 Intertextuality and intersubjectivity in interwar and post-war writing

These aspects of Friedan's interpolations of the prisoner trope for suburban housewives significantly complicates such feminist idealizations of women's writing. Rather than simply using auto/biographical representation as a repetition or mirror-image (to use the Lacanian terminology favoured by Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray) of the established masculine or phallogocentric form, the type of writing Friedan engages in emerges from a range of established forms of writing and narrative contexts, in some ways promoting the rhetorical interests of the particular worldviews with which they are traditionally associated, but in other ways using their own ideals of symbolic orthodoxy in innovative ways against them as a form of resistance and as a way of instigating social change. In this way, Friedan writes toward an alternative means of subjectivication in her role of auto/biographer as *bricoleur*, using the symbolic language and narrative tools to hand. According to Daniel Chandler (2003), this is consistent with Claude Lévi-Strauss's now classic conceptualization within cultural studies of the writer as *bricoleur*, who creates improvised structures by appropriating pre-existing materials that are ready-to-hand (Lévi-Strauss, 1974: 16-33, 35-6, 150n; cf. Lévi-Strauss, 1964 in Chandler, 2003). In this respect, Friedan's framing of the text through a conventionally masculine narrative form of writing as an act of resistance to the accepted myths about women is instructive, through it further complicates the task of analysis by adding additional layers of gendered intersubjectivity viewed through the kaleidoscope of intertextual reflections on self-representative language, which were themselves undergoing a process of dramatic change. In this regard, Lévi-Strauss's correlation of "mythical thought"—in this instance the myth of modern femininity—as the site of "a kind of bricolage" (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 17 in Chandler, 2003) emphasises how "it builds ideological castles out of the debris of what was once a social discourse" (ibid: 21n). This means that though such mythic discursive systems are

intrinsically restrictive, in this case to middle class married women, the creative use of them does not necessarily serve their ideological purpose of conserving the existing social order. Thus it is possible for the writer as *bricoleur* to work with signs in a way as to construct novel arrangements by adapting existing signifieds into new signifiers, thereby speaking "through the medium of things" from within a linguistic system dominated by myth and defined by "limited possibilities" (ibid: 20-21). The cultural products of this new bricolage disrupt mythical language by constructing "...a system of paradigms with the fragments of syntagmatic chains" (150), even as they appear to be re-establishing old myths in the current order of language; but this adherence to past mythologies is only apparently conservative or politically reactionary, as *The Feminine Mystique* is so often derided for being, as these new syntagmatic chains lead in turn to the birth of new syntagems.

The Feminine Mystique as a work of women's auto/biographical writing can be understood in similar terms as *bricolage*, an inherently innovative pursuit that continually develops new systematic approaches to self-representative language from existing systems of signification. Lévi-Strauss's location of artistic creation as in part a dialogue between the individual writer and pre-existing linguistic syntagems highlights the importance of the constructive materials which are "to hand", albeit linguistic materials normally implicated in dominant ideological discursive systems (e.g. gender, warfare, privacy, interiority and so on). In her innovative use of the masculine rhetoric of auto/biography, Friedan manipulates the practice of *bricolage* effectively for the purposes of portraying the unique experiences of women using the key transformational devices of reversal, substitution and transposition (De Certeau, 1984: 111-115; Nöth in Chandler, 2003). While this argument from the direction of narratology, intertextuality and the *bricolage* of writing may answer the severe criticisms of *The Feminine Mystique* by those who consider it politically reactionary and even as an apologetic for the social privilege of white middle class women, the other aspect of this narrative construction of the suburban prisoner—that of the concentration camp victim—is more than ever much more difficult to excuse.

4.0 Life in the "comfortable concentration camp": the roots of women's auto/biography is Jewish culture

From these general intertextual and narratological reflections on the "suburban prisoner" trope, in this final section I will focus in more detail on the construction of the "concentration camp victim" metaphor in *The Feminine Mystique* in terms of how it is used, what it means, how it got there and what this tells us about the sociological character of contemporary auto/biography. I will argue that this represents an important event in contemporary women's auto/biography, demonstrating how the new global medium of television affected auto/biographical writing, and how the predominance of the new mass culture strongly influenced the construction of the interior, and feminized, life. I will also argue that in this context *The Feminine Mystique* marks an auspicious moment in the reflexive understanding of auto/biographical discourse with respect to its historical and cultural origins, exposing the roots of the "writtenness" of the life not just or even primarily from its origins in the confessional/self-examining culture of the various Christian traditions, but is also fundamentally influenced by Jewish cultural life, particularly in its conceptualization of the meaning of human suffering and the material circumstances of the individual life course.

4.1 Narratives of "Progressive Dehumanization"

Approximately the first half of the chapter of *The Feminine Mystique* entitled "Progressive Dehumanization: The Comfortable Concentration Camp" is composed of a series of biographical vignettes, recounting the stories of Friedan's encounters with the many women she interviewed or happened across over the course of her investigations. But instead of being written as a collection of findings glossed from the qualitative interviews with the 80 or so women she describes in the introduction, this chapter reads more like a litany of her pocket biographies of these women, beginning with the most cryptic and brief:

> In an eastern suburb in 1960, I heard a high-school sophomore stop a psychiatrist who had just given an assembly talk and ask him for 'the name of that pill that you take to hypnotize yourself so you'll wake up knowing

everything you need for the test without studying'. (Friedan, [1963] 1992: 245)

That same winter two college girls on a train to New York during the middle of mid year exam week told me they were going to some parties to 'clear their minds' instead of studying for exams. (ibid: 245)

These brief appearances of characters she encountered sporadically, momentarily and by chance is gradually replaced by vignettes with more of a storied structure:

One young girl, first in high school and later in college, gave up all her serious interests and ambitions in order to be 'popular'. Married early, she played the role of the conventional housewife, in much the same way as she played the part of a popular college girl. I don't know at what point she lost track of what was real and what was façade, but when she became a mother, she would sometimes lie down on the floor and kick her feet in the kind of tantrum she was not able to handle in her three-year-old daughter. At the age of thirty-eight, she slashed her wrists in attempted suicide. (Friedan, [1963] 1992: 253)

Another extremely intelligent woman, who gave up a challenging career as a cancer researcher to become a housewife, suffered a severe depression just before her baby was born. After she recovered she was so 'close' to him that she had to stay with him at nursery school every morning for four months, or else he went into a violent frenzy of tears and tantrums. In first grade, he often vomited in the morning when he had to leave her. His violence on the playground approached danger to himself and others. When a neighbor took away from him a baseball bat with which he was about to hit a child on the head, his mother objected violently to the 'frustration' of her child. She went correctly through all the motions of motherhood in suburbia, except for this inability to deal firmly with her children, she seemed visibly less and less alive, less and less sure of her own worth. The day before she hung herself in the basement of her spotless split-level house, she took her three children for a checkup by the pediatrician, and made arrangements for her daughter's birthday party. (Friedan, ibid: 253)

These examples give a flavour of the type of such stories which are peppered throughout the book and concentrated over the course of this chapter. Of particular significance is how these typical and ordinary biographies of the middle class American housewives Friedan met over the years of her study so easily converge in narrative endings which are distinctively tragic and catastrophic in nature. These kinds of narratives consisting of a collection of brief and anonymous vignettes that have a characteristically short narrative structure which tracks the progression of ordinary characters from carrying out

the most mundane activities of everyday life into horrors of death and destruction are typical of the narratives of dehumanisation told by concentration camp survivors (Greenspan, 1998; Kearney, 2002). But it is not just the narrative form of these stories that is evocative of stories told by Holocaust or Shoah survivors. Obviously, the title of the chapter itself and much of the language referring to Nazism within it are used metaphorically by Friedan to evidence her claim that being a "housewife" in post-war American society is in actuality one of the most "dangerous" (Friedan, ibid: 265) occupations in the world.

What are we to make of this usage of the Shoah and Holocaust survivor narratives to describe the lives of wealthy middle class American housewives? This has been a prominent and recurrent question since the initial publication of *The Feminine Mystique*.

The first thing to note is that this adaptation of the Holocaust narrative to auto/biographical writing during the 1960s was not unique to Betty Friedan. While it was notable among women writers of the period (e.g. Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Angela Davis, Betty Friedan, Nelly Sachs), it was certainly not exclusive to them, as male writers as diverse as Paul Célan, Yevgeny Yevtushenko made liberal use of Holocaust imagery in their auto/biographical writings. In his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (1990), the Jewish and Cultural literary theorist James E. Young explores this rather odd but prevalent practice among western writers throughout the 1960s, who were almost exclusively white and middle class and whose works were deeply auto/biographical, many of whom (especially the women) were strictly-speaking "non-victims" of the Holocaust, and also non-Jews. So why did these writers, the women in particular go out of their way to write themselves as "Holocaust Jews"? And what does this say about the narrative legacy of the Holocaust in terms of its general influence on Western culture and its impact on the auto/biographical culture and women's writing in particular?

In his efforts to address at least some of these questions, Young (1990) focuses his remarks on how the images and survival narratives of the "Holocaust Jew" have been used by women in their auto/biographical writings, concentrating primarily on the life writings of one of the most notorious of the genre, Sylvia Plath. Young's choice of Plath is based on two principle factors: because she made the most extensive and liberal use of the Holocaust Jew metaphor, and also because as a non-victim of the Holocaust and a first generation German-American middle class from what is generally described as a classic white Protestant Anglo-Saxon background, she represents the kind of socially privileged person who was in many ways as far from the Holocaust experience as it was in practical terms possible to be. But nonetheless her auto/biographical work and even her greatest poetry is suffused with references to the Jewish experience of suffering, not simply the Holocaust, from her autobiographical pseudonym of "Esther" (the Old Testament heroine who kept her Jewishness secret until the moment when she became deliverer of the Jews) to her self-confessed preoccupation with the execution of the Rosenbergs in her auto/biographical novel *The Bell Jar* (1966). Even at this early stage in her writing career, Young (1990) identifies a close inter-relationship between Plath's obsession with the highly sensational case of the Rosenbergs which was played out in a very public way through the media during her early 20s and her subsequent preoccupation with writing her own autobiography using these same public images and narratives of obsessive paranoia, suffering and death. As Young sees it, these preoccupations which crossed the boundaries of public/private life were not coincidental, but intimately connected in the new phenomenon of auto/biographical writing:

> Though the Rosenbergs 'had nothing to do with her,' she couldn't get them out of her mind; and once they entered and then occupied her mental world, coming as the opening obsession of her 'autobiography,' they had everything to do with both her and her representations of herself. She was unable to 'know' or write herself without reference to the Rosenbergs. (Young, 1990: 119)

In other words, the corpus of Plath's work indicates how the intensity of narratives of Jewish suffering documented in the media during this time was being reflected in the escalation of the significance of what were up to then the

internal experiences of personal suffering which normally remained a private affair, the object of shame and something to be kept secret.

Over the course of the 1960s, in the wake of the Eichmann trials of 1961, what were regarded previously as unspeakable levels of human suffering became identified with the very public image of the Holocaust Jew as a highly visible and iconic figure; the potency of this image is responsible for what Young (1990) claims was its transference in public memory from an historical or religious event into a cultural archetype, a symbol of human suffering that became galvinised in the public imagination. Hence, what we see in the writings of non-Jewish women life Sylvia Plath are applications of the Holocaust Jew trope not as a direct or apposite commentary on the historical experiences of the Holocaust per se, but rather its evocation as a metaphor representing victimhood and suffering in general, a kind of symbolic "currency" for the transference of private, inner pain into an appropriate public narrative form (Young, 1990). At the same time, the effectiveness and ubiquity of this public trope and its total absorption into the private language of inner and previously "unspeakable" pain demonstrates the crucial role of the media in effecting this internalisation and its regeneration in an external narrative format in auto/biography, a phenomenon of public articulation of interiority and the pain of victimhood particularly evident in women's auto/biography. In other words, what such auto/biography does is allow for the necessary resolution of the tension between the historical and the private in an atmosphere which is significantly intensified by the saturated coverage of these historical events by the media through the often distressing personal stories associated with them.

4.2 Holocaust imagery in the auto/biographies of non-observant Jews

The exploration of women's internal and personal experiences of pain and suffering through the archetype of the Holocaust Jew as an independent, iconic and very much public image of suffering and annihilation was not limited to non-Jews. Its transformation in the public imagination from an historical event into a kind of abstraction facilitated through women's usage of it in their auto/biographical writing as "...a figure, an idea, in whose image she has

expressed another brutal reality: that of her own internal pain" (Young: 1990: 118) is perhaps ironically best exemplified in the auto/biographical writings, especially those by non-observant Jewish women like Friedan (Fermaglich, 2003). Friedan's uncompromising determination to write the experiences of concentration camp victims/survivors onto the lives on *all* women in *The Feminine Mystique* is clearly evident. Her motivation for this is complex, and something for which she has received considerable and strident criticism (e.g. Bowlby, 1987; Kearney, 2002; Miller, 1990), an issue which she didn't address in detail in her writings until many years later in her memoir *Life So Far* (2000) at which time she apologised unreservedly for the pain to Holocaust survivors she had caused.

Clearly, over the 40 years between the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* and her present day memoirs, dramatic changes have taken place with respect to the general perception and social acceptability of using such emotive and upsetting historical narratives to make a rhetorical point about the relative suffering of a groups of privileged people such as the middle class American housewife. Friedan has now responded to her many critics who have branded her as narcissistic, insensitive, sentimental and self-indulgent (hooks, 1984), careless (Horowitz, 1998) or simply acting in bad taste (Bowlby, 1987) by being suitably repentant about her use of Holocaust and Nazi imagery. However, Jewish scholars have continued to take an interest in the construction and reception of the "comfortable concentration camp" metaphor in *The Feminine Mystique* less in terms of Friedan's atonement for its political incorrectness at the turn of the century and more for what it tells us about the lives of non-observant Jews in the 1960s and 1970s and the possible influence this has had on contemporary feminism.

In her recent essay "'The Comfortable Concentration Camp': The Significance of Nazi Imagery in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*" (2003), Kirsten Fermaglich revisits these issues to try to unpick precisely what was going on at this time and how such a deeply offensive metaphor found its way into such a standard of women's life writing. She starts by accepting, along with Friedan (2000), that obviously the analogy is exaggerated and deeply flawed: in no way

is there any comparison between what went on in the concentration camps and the private experiences of American middle class housewives. And yet there is something "intellectually unsatisfying" about dismissing or disavowing this metaphor as merely inaccurate or sensational without probing further: "Friedan's analogy offers historians an important window into the impact of the Holocaust on American Jewish thinkers, as well as the impact of the Holocaust in larger American culture" (Fermaglich, 2003: 206). Specifically, Fermaglich argues that the comparison of the Nazi concentration camps to the 1960s American suburban home demonstrates that Jewish intellectuals were not only more aware of the massive devastation of the Holocaust than subsequent historians have given them credit for, but also that they were much more vocal about it and more forthright in their willingness to use Holocaust narratives and imagery to try to change American public opinion in ways which have been previously overlooked.

Fermaglich takes issue with the general opinion among Jewish historians reproduced in Greenspan (1998) and Young (1999) that there was a widespread reticence among Jews to openly talk about the Holocaust prior to the Six Day War in 1967, implicitly strengthening the link between post-Holocaust narratives of Jewish identity and support for the state of Israel. But texts like Friedan's and the others previously cited in this section call this reticence into question, thereby opening the way to examining the various interpretations of the Holocaust among Jewish and non-Jewish subjects. Of key significance to these pre-1967 treatments of Holocaust narratives and imagery is their usage not as a literal manifestation of Jewish identity or as part of a justification for Israeli militancy, but rather as "...means of expressing prevalent intellectual concerns with bureaucracy, alienation, and conformity and criticizing American society from a liberal perspective" (Fermaglich, ibid: 207). This concern with utilising life writing as a way of articulating the alienation, isolation and consequent suffering of people living in mid-20th century society is a key theme of this dissertation. For Fermaglich, these applications of what is now an inappropriate metaphor for the general experiences of alienation and human suffering demonstrates the particular qualities of Holocaust consciousness during an era of American history that was "..shaped by a spirit of social commitment and

cultural transgression" (ibid: 207). She meticulously recounts how Friedan's readers—both Jews and non-Jews—were at the time not offended by these references but were rather "...inspired and engaged by such uses of Nazi concentration camps, not repelled or insulted" (Fermaglich, ibid: 207). Along with James E. Young (1999), Fermaglich insists on the historical specificity of the symbolic language of Holocaust during the 1960s as a signal cultural archetype as "...appropriate and valuable symbols for exploring inhumanity on an American landscape" (Fermaglich, ibid: 207).

This perspective on the Holocaust contradicts recent sociological and theoretical models of Jewish identity which focus on the continued observance of ritual behaviour and the maintenance of social networks (see Fermaglich (2003) for a selection of this massive cultural literature). On the contrary, Fermaglich points to the perception of Jewishness as much more fluid in nature, less well-defined and unstable, in the process of continual construction and reconstruction in relation to the unfolding of history, power and culture. The fact that so many non-observant Jews like Friedan, in addition to non-Jews, used this imagery so freely indicates that this was a time of comparative liberation with respect to self-representative discourses, where notions of the ownership or transgression of narrative tropes were much less in evidence. These factors are not only significant with respect to better understanding the specificity of auto/biographical writing during this time, they also expose the limitations of dominant historical discourses which can sometimes make too much of the retrospective impact of political events (such as wars) upon identity narratives, using contemporaneous codes of civility and political correctness to cut off paths to alternative expressions of narrative experience in the past.

4.3 The effect of her Jewishness on Friedan's life and the women's movement

Over the years in her auto/biographical writings, Friedan has become increasingly more vocal and comfortable with and about the influence of her Jewishness on her identity as a writer and activist. It is in her memoir that Friedan recounts the many stories from her past that throw some light on her identification of her Jewishness not with observing the codes of Judaism or even

the practices of the Jewish religious community, but rather with her activism as a feminist. In the opening chapters, she describes her childhood in the proverbial small town America, Peoria, where the Friedan family's isolation as Jewish was constantly brought to bear. She recounts in particular her contempt for her mother's Jewish anti-Semitism—evocative of the self-hating Jew—in her futile efforts to further her own social ambitions, a contempt which she also expresses for herself and the other Jewish girls at Smith College who were also engaged in the same type of Jewish anti-Semitism. The turning point for her came during her freshman year at Smith in 1939, when the four Jewish upperclass girls in her house refused to sign a petition to agitate for young women Jewish refugees to be allowed to come to Smith in order to pass immigration controls, this in contrast to some of her Catholic and Protestant housemates. At the same time, she does not absolve herself of the stain of anti-Semitism while at Smith, recalling with shame how she did nothing to help integrate a girl who was less able to "pass" as a relatively unobstrusive Jew and who subsequently dropped out.

These experiences, along with others, eventually taught her to value her authenticity as a Jew, even if a non-observant one. Like other prominent Jewish women thinkers such as the French historian Rita Thalmann (2004), she regards her Jewishness as something which is not "religious" in the narrow sense of the word, but rather in the broader sense of celebrating Jewish cultural life as "...a more historical, sociological tradition than a religious one" (Thalmann, 2004: 66), an attitude shared by many contemporary Jewish women, including a significantly high number of Jewish women who were in the avant-garde of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As Thalmann insists (2004), this was no accident, but rather a convergence of the recurrent "Jewish question" with the "Woman question", now manifest in the post-Holocaust search for liberation from systematic oppression of the "Other" and its inevitable resolution in the social evil of genocide.

To summarise, women like Friedan "wrote themselves" through the Jewish experience of suffering in their auto/biographies because of the massive cultural influence taking place during the 1950s and 60s, including the rise of the new

media and a willingness to use narratives in a transgressive and openly experimental way in the search for freedom from alienation, oppression and systematic death. The saturation in the media of the details of the Rosenberg trials in the early 50s New York, the Eichmann trials in Jerusalem in 1961, and the Six Day War in 1967 all influenced the relatively fluid (re)construction of Jewish narratives of identity during this period. The media campaigns surrounding these events introduced into the public arena unprecedented levels of immediate and comprehensive global coverage, in the case of the Eichmann trials, recounting in gruesome detail some of the most intimate and distressing accounts of personal suffering ever heard, stories which were up to then deemed too "unspeakable" to be told either in public or private; similarly the televisual coverage of the Six Day War, like the coverage of the Vietnam War on American identity, would have a signal and lasting influence on post-war Jewish identities in terms of their implicit connection to the Israeli state. The impact of these Holocaust narratives on the public imagination in the interim years between 1961 and 1967 is almost impossible to quantify; however, one way in which their influence was immediately manifested was in the auto/biographical accounts of inner pain and suffering, particularly those written by women who previously had no language to articulate these experiences, women like Betty Friedan.

In the infamous chapter of *The Feminine Mystique* entitled "Progressive Dehumanization: The Comfortable Concentration Camp", Friedan uses the trope of the "Holocaust Jew" to rhetorically describe the lives of middle class suburban women, women who were neither incarcerated, victimised by these events, nor in many cases affected by them as Jews. Rather, she uses this trope as a "cultural archetype" (Young, 1990) to express in a public way the shared life experiences of American housewives as a kind of systematic inner suffering, lead to the progressive "genocide" (Friedan, [1963] 1992: 351) of American women. She does this firstly by writing her evidence in the form of successive vignettes, formulated as brief encounters with strangers unwittingly on the way toward catastrophe or even death, e.g. "I saw ['it', the problem with no name] in …a thirteen year old girl" (Friedan, ibid: 246), two students on a train (245), a young mother of three (26), and so on. These short anonymous biographical

vignettes echo the kind of stories told by Holocaust survivors during the Eichmann trials. In this regard, the structure and repetition of these kinds of stories is highly significant (Greenspan, 1998). The cumulative effect of commutating and allowing readers to gradually take in the meaning of such traumatic stories of suffering is discernible in the repeated telling of brief but similar and catastrophic narratives which is characteristic of Holocaust survivor narratives and *The Feminine Mystique*.

4.4 An atrocity, not a tragedy

I would like to make one final point about the construction of Holocaust survivor narratives as adapted by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, concerning the refusal of the *tragedy* format and the general construction of these life narratives as social *atrocity*. Greenspan's long-term study of the oral life histories of Holocaust survivors has led him to the following conclusions concerning these historical events and their narrative symbolism: firstly, *repetition* is an innate factor of these narratives, the necessity to tell and hear these stories many times over the entire life course. We see the same type of repetition of the same basic narrative of boredom, suffering and lack of identity throughout the auto/biographical excerpts Friedan threads throughout the book. Then, secondly, there is the vital connection between remembrance and the activity of telling and naming, so for many of these survivors being in a position to know (or not know), remember and recount the names and stories of victims is as important as a monumental act as being able to identify and name the perpetrators of these acts in a more juridical framework. Though Friedan does not include the names of her interviewees, she transfers the symbolic meaning of naming onto the events surrounding the feminine mystique itself and onto its many nameless victims in "the problem with no name". For many Jews, especially since the Holocaust, the trauma of namelessness and loss of a public language to describe or substantiate these horrific events is of paramount cultural significance. For many Holocaust survivors, this trauma is typically recounted through narrative structures with a recognisable plot, but the nature of this emplotment is rarely in the form of a tragedy, though the broader historical context tells of the tragic degradation and extermination of an entire people. Rather, Greenspan notes, the

survivor's insistence on telling the stories of the fate of single victims emphasises not the tragic helplessness of these figures but their acts of valour and resistance in the context of a social *atrocity*. Greenspan recalls the work of Lawrence Langer to recount the difference between narratives of tragedy and atrocity:

> Tragedy requires some controlled image of the number of dead—not the pits and heaps and ravines of bodies, dead and dying, that characterise atrocity. In tragedy, even terrible events are still within some version of acceptable human fate—which is exactly what atrocity's arbitrary 'wasting' of people aims to attack. In tragedy, victims are still identifiably living and human; not atrocity's doomed, defeated, or 'walking dead'. This is what allows us to feel sympathy for tragedy's victims, in contrast with the dread, disgust, or numbed malaise that atrocity evokes...Such stories not only allow retelling, they compel it. (Greenspan, 2003: 105-6)

It is this sense of atrocity rather than tragedy that Friedan evokes for the post-war American housewives. They are the numberless walking dead of suburbia; their "loss" was previously regarded as "tragic" and therefore socially acceptable; the loss of the contributions of these women to American society is "wasteful" of humanity. The language of loss and waste is central to *The Feminine Mystique* (Bowlby, 1987). These women are portrayed as "doomed" and without existence like the "walking dead". These stories of victimisation which would have previously evoked in the listener a feeling of dread, disgust or malaise are now, after the Eichmann trials, directed at a sense of righteous outrage through "consciousness-raising", in order to change the social factors that led women to this state. Hence, over the many gleaming coffee tables in spotless suburban households, their stories compel repeated retelling, evidenced by their propensity to seek out psychological analysis and counselling. By implication to their similarities to Holocaust survivor narratives, what their stories tell us is that what we are witnessing is a collective atrocity being carried out on the mass of middle class American women.

Friedan speaks of life in suburbia as a "concentration camp", using this image not as a way of illuminating or discussing the suffering of Jews during the Second World War, but rather as a metaphor for great inner suffering experienced on a large scale among American middle class housewives (Young,

1990). What this says about the narrative legacy of the Holocaust in terms of its general influence on western culture is that its impact is especially evident in the culture of auto/biography and in women's writing in particular. This is because, as we have seen, auto/biography affords a way to bridge the gap between public social atrocity and private inner pain. As we have also seen, it shows how comparatively liberal social concerns were about the literalness and truth-telling function of auto/biography, or about writers' transgressing on exclusive identity narratives like those of Holocaust to Jewish identity (Fermaglich, 2003). This is particularly manifest in the profusion in the 1960s and 1970s of women's and prisoners' (e.g. Célan, Sands, Solzhenitsyn, etc) auto/biography, portraying a historical era characterised by its efforts to search for the meaning of recent atrocious global events and to recover from these interiorised meditations alternative subject positions from which to seek liberation from systematic inhumanity and suffering.

5.0 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have commended a reading of Betty Friedan's seminal text *The Feminine Mystique* as a work of women's auto/biography. I have shown how such a reading firstly overcomes many of the aporetic and dogmatic readings of such texts adopted by the structuralist or historicist traditions exemplified by the New Historicism of Daniel Horowitz (1998). I have shown some of the shortcomings of such historical revisionism, particularly its overt tendency to pedantically use auto/biography's truth-claim against it in order to damage the credibility of these personal versions of historical events which do not fit into the hegemonic "malestream" macro-narratives. I related this analysis of *The Feminine Mystique* as a work of social scientific auto/biography to the similar problems brought to bear in the previous chapter on the literary prison autobiography of Bobby Sands with respect to the analogous disruption of contiguous historical narrative.

To advance this reading, I looked in detail at the narratological structures and intertextual references used by Friedan to construct her rhetorical version of the post-war American housewife alternatively as "suburban prisoner" and

"concentration camp" victim/survivor. I have drawn attention to the construction of the "suburban prisoner" trope as a way of manifesting in the public imagination the experience of middle class masculinity in George Orwell's novel *Coming Up for Air* [1930] (2000), mapping the discursive construction of this narrative during the interwar period as a particularly male experience of alienation based on economic social need and in anticipation of the great cost of war to young British men. I then compared this to the re-construction of the suburban prisoner trope as an expression of femininity and womanhood in the post-war context as described by Betty Friedan, specifically its subsequent function in the post-war years as a way of normalising the social discourse of renewal and rebirth of the nation state, and its symbolic re-inscription of femininity in the private realm of domestic family life.

In the closing sections of this chapter, I examined the hyperbole of the Holocaust survivor and concentration camp victim trope as an extension of the suburban prisoner metaphor, both in terms of how these narratives and symbols mirrored the intensification particularly of women's of pain and suffering in the public sphere as a result of the media coverage of the war "trials of the century" and warfare in the late 1950s and early to mid 1960s. In this context, I examined the ways in which women's auto/biographical writing developed as a way of internalising these narratives of atrocity and genocide as a means for re-introducing suffering from the secret and individualised private back into public life. This was then followed up with a more focused concentration on the responses to Friedan's usage of the concentration camp metaphor from the standpoint of Jewish scholarship. Though controversial, we found that there is recent evidence to suggest that perhaps it is worth taking a less politically correct or morally outraged stance on Friedan's application of Holocaust narratives and imagery in order to recover a more temporally located version of how Jewish identity narratives were constructed and re-constructed in the post-war context prior to their ideological cooptation into arguments over the legitimacy of Israeli military policy. While not excusing or ignoring the fallacious application of these Holocaust tropes, what such a localised reading of *The Feminine Mystique* reveals is the relative freedom and humanity of the search for justice and

equality which characterised the early women's movement, encapsulated in the need to tell and to hear these life stories over and over again.

Taken together these factors which coalesce in *The Feminine Mystique* furthermore demonstrate the central importance of Jewish experience and Jewish cultural life to modern auto/biography. This is not only because of the influence of the Holocaust, but goes much further to the unique notion of the "writtenness" of life in the Old Testament Biblical tradition, a tradition that foregrounds the unresolved and ineffable nature of human suffering in Jewish culture. This is in contrast to a strong propensity in Anglophone auto/biography theory to define modern auto/biographical writing as a derivation of the chiefly Protestant Christian traditions, such as proposed by Mary Evans (1998) in her transference of Weber's "Protestant Ethic" thesis to the purportedly radical individualistic culture of modern auto/biography. In contrast, what we have seen in Friedan's writings is a depiction of her own life and the lives of the women she encountered, which share a strongly collective narrative emplotment, a way of life systematically visited upon them by their "incarceration" in the "concentration camp" of the suburban household. Together, these represent innovations in auto/biographical writings techniques that are analogous to the literal and literary interpolation adopted by Bobby Sands, in so far as they allow writers to take existing auto/biographical tropes and use them as a means of constructing an alternate subject position which is capable of inaugurating major campaigns for social change.

Chapter 5 – *Soledad* Sister: Race, Class and Gender in the Autobiography of Angela Davis

1.0 Introduction

This is the last of the three case studies chapters analysing auto/biographies written by authors who consider themselves to be political prisoners during the 1960s and 1970s in the UK and the United States. As in the previous two cases, in this chapter I map out some of the patterns of subject construction and self-representation as developed in the Black activist Angela Davis's *An Autobiography* [1974] (1990). Initially the focus is on the reception of this text in some of the current historiographies of the civil rights and Black Power movements during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. This is followed in the second part of the chapter by a more concentrated focus on the life of Angela Davis and this text itself in terms of its narratological, intertextual and intersubjective construction as auto/biography. I argue that, as a work of political prisoner autobiography *An Autobiography* [1974] (1990) occupies a rather anomalous position in the context of both Black militant and Black women's auto/biography.

In the first instance, its relative absence from much of the historical literature on the civil rights-Black Power movements in itself presents a major dilemma for the theory and methodology of the New Historicism with respect to its new interest in auto/biography. Given Davis's high profile public image as an iconic Black woman revolutionary during the early 1970s, her strong contemporaneous presence in Black identity politics and the Black Power movement sits rather uncomfortably with her absence from the growing numbers of historiographical accounts of the time. What accounts for this discrepancy? Is it due to the subsequent unearthing by historians of previously unrecognised life narrative archival materials which were in actuality more influential than Davis's? Is it because of her iconic status as a public revolutionary? Or does it have to do with the construction of her alternate subject position as a revolutionary black woman in this text, something that makes her life writings intrinsically antithetical to the New Historicism? How does her autobiographical identity as a woman prison

writer from the educated, black middle class influence these later revisions/omissions of her work? And finally, what does her case tell us about the methodological and theoretical struggle between historiography and auto/biography? These are the questions which will be addressed in this chapter.

Thus far in the dissertation, the pattern that has begun to emerge is one that accentuates the mounting tension between two general classes of social phenomena: the long-standing battles between historiography and auto/biography on the one hand, and the social construction of the (masculine) conventional/canonical auto/biographical subject versus its (feminine?) radical/revolutionary counterpart on the other. This has manifest itself in the opposition that prison life writers have mounted to the contiguous, coherent and progressive narrative structures so favoured by modern historians and conventional auto/biographers, in addition to their willingness to transgress normative language of gendered, religious, class and racial identity—"stealing" the patriarchal language of canonical auto/biography—in order to frame themselves in radically alternative life narratives. These alternate subject representations are typically constructed in such a way as to be more amenable to the synchronic intensity, materiality and embodied nature of their personal experiences of prison life, thus offering readers a perspective on the otherwise hidden "otherness" of their suffering and oppression, which in itself functions as a means of survival and resistance.

The overall structure of this chapter will reflect the two main concerns with the auto/biographical text developed in the previous chapters, repeating this structure in order to test and to some extent also, in the next and final chapter, to triangulate the qualitative findings contained in the chapters of Part II, i.e. the problem of historicism and the challenges these auto/biographies pose to the construction of the writing subject through gender, class, religion and "race". In this final chapter of Part II, I analyse the prison autobiography of Angela Davis with special regard to the multiple impact of the normative identity narratives of gender, class, "race" and also sexuality on the individual prison life writer, and how these disrupt and reveal the felt experiences of suffering and injustice associated with auto/biographical narratives of racial oppression.

2.0 Against historicism?

The location of Angela Davis' autobiography within the broader spectrum of the history of the Black Power-civil rights movements is extremely fraught, not only due to the implicit ambiguities of auto/biography in general and hers in particular, but moreover because of the ongoing debates carried out in the competing historiographies of black identity politics during this period in post-war American history. Before discussing the position of Davis's autobiography in this historical continuum, let us first look at some of the latter dimensions of African American historicism and its gloss on the emergence of black militancy in the 1960s.

A brief review of the growing literature on this subject is very revealing: first, there is a growing tendency among historians to revise the chronology of both the civil rights and Black Power movements, with some tracing their beginnings not to the civil rights activism of the 1960s and 1970s, but rather locating them in earlier generations in the response to the rise of racist violence and the Ku Klux Klan in the post-war 1950s (Collier-Thomas and Franklin, 2001), the New Deal era of the 1930s and its focus on freedom and citizenship born from the crucible of reconstruction and resistance (Sullivan, 1996), or alternatively to the Black Nationalism of Marcus Garvey in the 1910s (Tyson, 1998). As we have seen in the previous chapters in the cases of both Sands and Friedan, historians' engagement with these auto/biographical materials often leads to a need to revisit and re-draw the chronological and ideological lines of demarcation, often because it is clear from surviving life writings that people at the time in question were more influenced by and cognisant of socio-political forces which were either different to or earlier than those which historians have up to now been willing to recognise. This is not to say that historians in the past have summarily ignored or refused to accede to auto/biographical records; clearly this is not the case. At the same time, however, where references to auto/biographies have appeared they have tended to be to the same small number of texts which over time become endowed with the veneer of credibility by virtue of their appearance in the extant historical literature.

But now, the claim among historians is that the picture that is beginning to emerge is one that allows a greater openness to "other" auto/biographies, those written by less well-known writers who have enjoyed lesser prominence, having had considerably less invested in writing themselves into the history of Black America through their self-portraits as leading or celebrated figures. As Timothy B. Tyson (1998) rightly points out, it is the over-concentration by historians on the high profile auto/biographies written by urban and northern black men in particular that have led to the chronology of the civil rights-Black Power movement that marks its starting date at around 1965 (coincidentally the date of the publication of Malcolm X's autobiography). This over-concentration means that rather than ignoring auto/biographies written by black people, historians have up to now perhaps been too naively influenced by too narrow a spectrum of these auto/biographical materials, evidenced for example by the uncritical acceptance of Malcolm's pronouncement that Marcus Garvey was somehow atypical and "years ahead of his time" rather than recognising that the kind of self-defence militancy advocated by Malcolm's global Afro-American Unity movement and later the Black Panther Movement for Self-Defence were well established in the early 20th century culture of Black resistance (Tyson, 1998: 544). Central to this recovery of the revised history and chronology are the auto/biographies of rural blacks and, above all, black women.

The problem of chronological revisionism is complicated by the divide between historians who define black civil rights activism as historically separate and distinct from Black Power militancy (e.g. Patton, 2004; Nasstrom, 2003) and those historians who alternatively locate these twin tendencies in post-war black identity politics to the same historical roots, wherever they may be located (e.g. Tyson, 1998; Collier-Thomas and Franklin, 2001). The interesting thing about both of these camps from the present perspective is that there is a notable increase among each in evidencing their respective claims by reference to the auto/biographical narratives of black people at the time. In many respects, this represents a shift in historical research and an auspicious moment for auto/biography. In comparison to the abstract or formalist literary/historical theories which dominated auto/biography studies in previous decades recounted

in the opening chapters of this dissertation, this apparent openness to the auto/biographical text broadly conceived is to be welcomed; at the same time, however, when we look closer, we can see that this receptiveness of history to auto/biography is anything but consistent or unconditional. For one thing, there is the question of the apparent divergence in the historical treatment of auto/biography along gender lines, with June O. Patton (2004) and Kathryn L. Nasstrom (2003), representing the axial concerns of women's /ethnic studies scholarship in this area, agitating for a more definitive and worked out historiography of the period into which to "read" black women's auto/biography. In contrast, African American historians like Timothy B. Tyson (1998), John Dittmer (1994) and Charles M. Payne (1995) are equally vocal in their determination to resist such generalised meta-readings, whether of black history or black auto/biography, instead insisting on more localised historiographies which recognise the specificity of black consciousness as it emerged within and according to the needs of particular local communities.

This ambiguity within African American historiography is in many ways itself a positive thing, if only because it makes the kind of critiques of historicism in opposition to auto/biography reviewed in the previous two chapters less of an issue in the context of African American history of the 1960s and 1970s. But when we take a closer look, we can see that even those like Tyson and Payne who ostensibly embrace auto/biography of all stripes are perhaps not as lacking in their normal attitude of suspicion as may at first appear to be the case. The treatment of such auto/biographical materials by these more liberal historians, while representing a welcome first step, is in actuality only that; in actuality, the supposed *rapprochement* between history and auto/biography may yet have a long way to go, as the example of Angela Davis's autobiography will attest.

2.1 Telling it like it is again (and again): the historical value of repetition and uniformity in auto/biography

So what is wrong with how these historians deal with the auto/biographical or life narratives produced by ordinary Black people? In this section, I will argue that the problem still lies in the way that these auto/biographies are interpreted, in particular the qualities they must exhibit in order to be chosen by historians to illustrate their theoretical arguments and how this practice still prioritises the methodologies of the New Historicism, notwithstanding its withdrawal from the strictures of meta-theory and the new responsiveness to the auto/biographical text. This can be illustrated by examining two historical theses, the first Timothy B. Tyson's "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power', and the Roots of the African-American Freedom Struggle" (1998) and the second Charles M. Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (1995).

Briefly, Tyson's thesis on the dual development of the civil rights and Black Power movements from the same cultural and historical "roots" is founded on his exposure of the similarities between the auto/biographical narratives told by black activists and leaders of both camps in their speeches and political rhetoric. Drawing on the seminal work of Payne (1995), Tyson develops a fascinating thesis arguing for the emergence of black activism not from the Black "celebrity culture" constructed in the white media of non-violent protest and exemplified by the charismatic leadership of figures like Martin Luther King, but rather from the more limited and low-level political agitation and advocacy of local black community leaders, such as the less well-known Robert F. Williams. Central to Tyson's thesis is that, rather than looking to nationally recognised charismatic leaders for inspiration in their everyday struggles for freedom, ordinary black people turned instead to local figures who acted as beacons in the freedom struggle in the midst of their own communities. This shift in focus from celebrity media culture to the practical resistance strategies of ordinary black people has significant knock-on consequences. Central to the de-bunking of the myth of the famous "great male" black leader in the white media is the parallel de-mythologising of the symbolic value of non-violent protest as the preferred

political model for black resistance. On the contrary, what Tyson finds in his study of the auto/biographical accounts of ordinary working class black people during the 1960s is a concentration on "self-defence" as the primary model of resistance, a strategy which was in practical terms much more feasible than symbolic non-resistance as a way of protecting black communities who faced the continual threat of real and extreme violence from organised white racists, especially for those black people who lived in the rural south. For them, the symbolic value of non-violent resistance to such present and extreme danger was simply not an option.

Taking self-defence as the dominant model of black resistance over the celebrity leadership and non-violent protest model, when one follows the historical trajectory from the militant Black Nationalism of Marcus Garvey in the 1910s through its development in community self-defence movements to the Black Panthers and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, of which Angela Davis was an organising member for the Los Angeles chapter) in the 1970s, what begins to emerge is a picture of Black American activism within which non-violent and racially integrated campaigns of resistance carried out though the media are the anomaly, compared to the more even historical trajectory of the militant and racially segregated movements organised within rural communities.

Tyson cites the editorial commentary in a local newspaper of Ida B. Wells in response to the triple lynching in Memphis in 1892, who publicly declared her determination "to sell my life as dearly as possible", stipulating for any would-be attackers that any violent assault upon her or her family would be met with an equally violent response, and urging other black people to do the same (Wells in Tyson, 1998: 545). Similar examples from the period abound. The emphatic points here are the predominance of militant "self defence", racial homogeny, low level and localised community activism and women in leadership roles which were characteristic of black resistance movements, and how the foundation of these elements in the everyday lives of working class Black people formed the basis for contemporary black activism.

The potency of Tyson's argument is considerably reliant upon his choice of historical figure to support his historiography of these events, the radical preacher Robert F. Williams. Tyson begins by arguing for the rectification of the previously unnoticed contribution of Williams with respect to his significance in the "freedom struggle" for black people in Mississippi during the 1960s and 1970s. For reasons of space, I will not be able to go into Williams' life or his work in detail, but instead will confine my remarks to the point I want to make about Tyson's usage of Williams' autobiography in his historiography. Central to Williams' utility is not only his pedigree as a black working class community activist, but moreover his notable habit throughout his life to repeat the same autobiographical story from his childhood in his speeches, writings and eventual autobiography. When aged 11, Williams witnessed the redoubtable figure of the then local policemen Jesse Alexander Helms, father of future U.S. Senator Jesse Helms, as he attacked, beat, and then physically dragged off to jail a black woman in the Main Street of his home town Monroe, North Carolina, in broad daylight and in open view of the boy and a assembly of onlookers, mostly black and white men. Understandably, these events had a massive impact on Williams, and he recalls how he was particularly distressed by the docility of the black men who witnessed these events but did nothing. Over the course of his career as a militant black radical, he would tell this same story many times, first at local community meetings and at churches and later in forums as distinguished as Malcolm X's celebrated Temple No. 7 in New York, on shared platforms with Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse Tung, and finally in his autobiography *While God Lay Sleeping* which he completed in 1996.

While Tyson is keen to celebrate the life of Williams as symbolic of the lives of black people throughout the small towns of the American south and of the struggle for freedom itself, Williams' example is particularly useful in the context of Tyson's historiography because of its rather curious uniformity and repetitiveness, the fact that he settles on one seminal story as shaping his life narrative, and that it doesn't seem to change over time and repeated tellings. For historians, as for holocaust narratologists (e.g. Young, 1990; Greenspan, 1998), such short sharp auto/biographical vignettes are especially significant, as their repetitive and comparatively stable character lends them a special affinity to

historical methodology, endowing them with a kind of credibility that is typically not found in ordinary auto/biography, which is comparatively much more idiosyncratic, anecdotal and plastic by nature, with the form and selection of such seminal life stories changing over time. That Tyson is able to found his new historiography on the life of this particular man is not coincidental; to some extent, the strange uniformity and homogeneity of Williams' life narrative makes it especially amenable to historical methodology as it requires little adjustment in order to accommodate such a peculiarly static autobiographical narrative. Hence, what we see here is not so much a reconciliation of history and auto/biography, but rather a choice of a particular auto/biography which approximates to existing historical epistemology, displaying the required features of stability and consistency which fit in with its prior and prioritised methods.

2.2 The auto/biographical chorus: from many voices one history

Let us now look at our second example. In his book *I've Got the Light of Freedom* (1995), the African American historian Charles M. Payne sets out his argument for the emergence of black activism from the everyday and working class interventions of black people from within their local communities. It is Payne who first argues against the commonly endorsed version of the civil rights-Black Power movements that characterises black peoples as looking to the white media for a nationally recognised leader for direction; not only was the leadership of ordinary black people not as portrayed in the mass media, neither were they typically male, ministers, nor well-educated. Rather, Payne finds that organizers in Mississippi and elsewhere in the most dangerous parts of the South were overwhelmingly working-class rural Blacks, and mostly women. Payne also found that Black churches, rather than being bastions of black activism as they are normally portrayed in the history of the civil rights struggle, were in fact relatively conservative forces, at best latecomers to the movement.

The evidence Payne uses for his thesis, similar to Tyson, prominently features auto/biographical materials from the time. However, unlike Tyson, instead of relying upon a single case (which is fortuitously uniform in its autobiographical

expression), Payne takes the more conventional route of drawing on a collection of many life narrative accounts recording more or less the same thing. While this method seems to widen the aperture for the admittance of auto/biography into historiography, in reality, the situation may not be quite as radical or innovative as it seems. For one thing, Payne adopts a method of reading auto/biography which is distinctively more history-friendly than receptive to ordinary ways of reading auto/biography. As recounted in Chapter 2, the literary theorist John Sturrock (1993) acknowledges that the systematic reading of many auto/biographies and the subsequent drawing of general conclusions about the genre by induction from individual examples merely reproduces the inductive and hypothetical deductive methodology of the "new science".

This mode of reading is in a sense deeply contrary to the "ordinary" experience of reading auto/biography, which is open to the purported uniqueness and singularity of the auto/biographical text—idiosyncrasies, contradictions, omissions, slippages and all. Such historiographies as those produced by Tyson and Payne, impressive and compelling as they are, still fall some way short of really engaging with the auto/biographical text. As we saw in Chapter 3, historians and other "legitimate" authors of repute have always been able to adapt auto/biography under the aegis of archival material, using it as representative cases to fit in with their broader historical accounts. In many ways, this is still the practice of historians who claim to adopt a radically new approach to the auto/biographical text. Instead of witnessing a convergence of auto/biography and history in the New Historicism, what is really going on is a slight of hand on the part of historians, cherry-picking auto/biographies that accord with the pre-established macro narratives of history. What this means is that the truly challenging, unstable, frustratingly idiosyncratic or irregular autobiographies of the time which have the potential to tell us something new or even shocking about the historical events of the time are conveniently left out of the equation for the simple reason that they do not fit or assist the overall narrative in its determination to "make sense" of these historical events. This predisposition to seek out above all regularity and conformity in the chosen auto/biographies thus overlooking some of the more awkward or disruptive texts which may challenge or openly contradict the narrative contiguity of the

particular historical thesis in question is particularly evident in the marginalisation of Angela Davis. For reasons which will be gone into in more detail over the remaining sections of this chapter, hers is an autobiography that represents much more of a challenge for historians, displaying neither the constancy of a single unifying life narrative structure nor the commonality of a universal or "normal" point of view.

Despite her high profile involvement in urban "northern" black politics as well as in the everyday racist politics of rural Alabama, her autobiography is left out of virtually all of these accounts, even those that focus on the contribution of black women's auto/biography in the civil rights-Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s, most notably Collier-Thomas and Franklin et al's *Sisters of the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (2001). In the next section, I will look in more detail at Davis's autobiography with a view to trying to explaining precisely why and how this state of affairs has come to exist, why Davis's autobiography has been so persistently left out of historical accounts of Black Power activism during the 1960s. Following the arguments set out in this section, I will argue that this is significantly due to the lack of uniformity, regularity and repetition in her autobiography, making it less useful for historians like Tyson and Payne than other auto/biographies which fit more comfortably into established historical methodologies.

3.0 Soledad Sister: the isolation of a black woman's auto/biography in the history of the Black Power movement

The absence of Angela Davis's *An Autobiography* [1974] (1990) from the new historiographies of the period are puzzling, to say the least. So are the lack of historians' attention to the autobiographies of other black women in the Black Panther leadership, notably Elaine Brown and Assata Shakur, not to mention other Black women militants who did not write autobiography but were nonetheless marginalised from the movement and its various histories, such as Gloria Richardson (see Harley in Collier-Thomas et al, 2001). The isolation of Davis's text in particular is reflected in the title I have chosen for this chapter the title and perhaps organising principle of "Soledad Sister", both because of its

intertextual allusion to George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* (1971), the prison autobiography of her contemporary in the Black Power movement and supposed paramour, as well as for its reference to the "sisters" as she calls them, her own term for her fellow women inmates and for other black women generally who are similarly if not so literally "imprisoned". This dual application of *soledad* to Davis evoking the intersubjective presence of the man whom she loved[11] and intertextual reference to his prison auto/biography, and to all "imprisoned" Black women is mirrored in the ambiguous meanings of the Spanish *soledad*.

Soledad Prison was the institution in San Jose, California where she, Jackson and his brother Jonathan were all incarcerated for various offences and at different times, so in the prison sense, it applies to all three of them as well as every other inmate held there. In its masculine form *soledad* translates into the English as "loneliness", an emotional or interior state of mind, while in the feminine case it means "isolation", more of an existential, ontological or social state of being. This difference is reflected in the titles of some of the other notable autobiographies produced by people linked to the Black Power movements, such as Bobby Seale's *A Lonely Rage* (1978) and Eldrigde Cleaver's *Soul on Fire* (1979) which evoke strong images of emotional pain in comparison to the more prosaic titles like Davis's *An Autobiography* [1974] (1990) and Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987). I suggest that this feminised image of *soledad* as the solitude of isolation in Angela Davis's prison life writing, even given her emphasis on her identification with other Black women, provides a particularly apt metaphor for her relative isolation from many of her contemporaries in the Black Power movement, as well as the exclusion of her life story from the history of the Black Power politics and its subsequent intertextual influence relative to other prisoner auto/biographies of the times written by men.

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[11] Care must be taken here with regard to the nature of her "loving" relationship, the word she uses in her autobiography, with Jackson; while her moving accounts of her brief and rare encounters with Jackson recounted in her autobiography clearly indicate that he was a significant figure in her life, at the same time, the centrality of their "relationship" to the prosecution case against her by the State of California problematises references to it. The California District Attorney's case linking her to the Oakland killings were argued to be the outcome of her "obsession" with Jackson. Her subsequent silence on their relationship, in addition to her "coming out" in the 1990s as a lesbian, makes her life narrative in this area even more complex.

For reasons of space, I will not be able to give a full interpretation of this text as a whole; instead I will focus on the aspects of this work that are relevant to certain themes that have been prominent in the previous two chapters and appear to be elemental to the construction of the politicised auto/biographical voice emerging from prison, i.e. the materiality of prisoner writing, the cultures of toileting and self care, the representation of altruism and collectivity in "ordinary" individual identity, and the influence of gender and class and "race" on the construction of the auto/biographical "I". As a complement to earlier concentration on masculine, feminine identity, the focal point in this chapter will be on Davis's attempt to represent her self textually through a reflexive figuration of self based primarily on her personal experience and social understanding of what it means to be a black woman. Against this cultural background, I will examine Davis's treatment of the auto/biographical symbolism of light and dark, black and white, femininity, and class—elements which are of particular relevance in black identity politics and prison writing throughout the 1960s and 1970s. I will pay particular attention to her interpretation of the metaphors of hands, maggots and toilets, as they occupy such a special place in prisoner life writing.

Before launching into this detailed investigation of the text, I will begin by making some short summary remarks on the life of Angela Davis, how and why her autobiography came to be written before focusing more intensively on the construction of her prison life writing.

3.1 Who is Angela Davis? A life defined by conflict

Though she is regarded by many in the United States as an internationally famous black political activist and intellectual, if my experience in the UK is anything to go by, the name of Angela Davis is relatively unknown in academic circles in the U.K. This is perhaps slightly surprising, as among the Black American activists of her generation (she has been active since the 1960s), her career has been among the most genuinely international of them all, evidenced by her tenure as an academic and international political campaigner on race and

socialism and lately sexuality throughout Europe, the Carribean Islands and the Americas.

Davis was born in 1944 into the black middle class in Birmingham, Alabama (her parents were both university graduates and employed as teachers), the main city in a state that epitomised the segregationist racism of the Jim Crow south. In spite of this and her early experiences of discrimination and racism, Davis was able to take advantage of an innovative educational programme devised by socialist and communist southern blacks in conjunction with liberal northern whites which allowed her to live and study in New York City at the Elizabeth Irwin High School. During this period she lived with a white Jewish family in a racially mixed neighbourhood in a New York borough and took advantage of a good middle class education (not unlike a similar arrangement pertaining to Malcolm Little (later Malcolm X) in Michigan as described in his 1965 autobiography). This opportunity led to a period of political awakening, and was followed by a scholarship to Brandeis University and subsequent intervals of undergraduate and post graduate study at the Sorbonne, and the Frankfurt School (under the tutelage of Adorno), finally concluding with the completion of her PhD at the University of California in San Diego under the supervision of the then exiled Herbert Marcuse. At the end of this, in her mid-twenties, Davis presented herself to the world as a fully fledged Marxist intellectual.

Interspersed with her education—or what can perhaps better described as the guiding force of her educational career—was her growing involvement in the burgeoning Black Power movement in California over the duration of her post-graduate studies. In her autobiography she describes this as a heady and exhilarating time during which the Black Panthers and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were being formed. As a result of her studies with Marcuse, she became increasingly convinced that Marxism provided the best way of redressing the racist politics of the American society, and eventually joined the American Communist Party as an official member. This political affiliation would bring her into serious conflict with both the Black Panthers and the SNCC leadership, not to mention the then Governor of California, Ronald Reagan. Once apprised of her membership of the Communist Party, Reagan and

the Regents of the University of California combined forces and took legal action to dismiss her from her newly gained post as lecturer in the philosophy department.

3.1.1 Violence and conflict in the university

As a Marxist intellectual, a "card carrying" communist and a Black woman, Davis's autobiography charts just how much of her time and energy was expended on the need to negotiate the more or less constant state of conflict that existed between her, the leadership of the Black Panthers and the SNCC and the University Regents, and all at the same time that she was struggling to finish her PhD thesis. The threats to her livelihood, her liberty and to her life were very real: she recounts in her autobiography how the article about her that appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner* publicising her membership of the communist party eventually led to the (unsuccessful) campaign to sack her from her job and prohibit her from ever being employed by a publicly funded institution in California again, as well as a string of death threats, police harassment and violent attacks on herself and her colleagues in the philosophy department. The media coverage went into overdrive, establishing her in the public imagination as a notorious celebrity icon, the face of the "public revolutionary":

> If the need for constant security made life unwieldy for me, it was only one facet of the larger problem of getting used to the fact that I had been transformed into a public figure overnight. I hated being the center of such excessive attention. The snooping, often parasitic news reporters jarred my nerves. And I loathed being stared as like a curiosity object. I had never aspired to be a 'public revolutionary'; my concept of my revolutionary vocation had been vastly different. Still, I had accepted the challenge which the state initiated and if that meant I had to become a public personality, then I would have to be that personality—despite my own discomfort. (Davis, [1974] (1990): 221)

These events brought about a real conflict in her personal life, particularly with respect to her individual career ambitions as a budding academic:

> As this whole affair was brewing, I realized that the personal goals I had set for myself were about to collide head-on with the political requirements of my life. Originally I had not intended to begin working that year. I had

> not yet completed my Ph.D. dissertation and wanted to get that out of the way before I went out job-seeking. Later I had decided to accept the position at UCLA because its light teaching load would leave me the time and flexibility I needed to finish writing the thesis. I wanted desperately to get that part of my academic life behind me. But now, I had been challenged. To accept that challenge meant that I would have to abandon the idea of receiving my degree before the end of that school year. (Davis, [1974] (1990): 217)

Here we see a pattern of conflict repeated throughout her life, as her radical political beliefs, personal and community ties bring her into direct and violent conflict with her personal ambitions as a typical middle class academic. While, as we have seen in section 2 of this chapter, it is the currently stated position for historians of this period to divert their attention way from the celebrated radical figures of the 1960s, is this really the reason why Davis has been overlooked thus far in recent historiography? Or does it have to do with something else, aspects of her biography which would similarly bring her into conflict with the Black Panthers: her status as a middle class public intellectual and a woman.

3.1.2 Violence and conflict with the Panthers and the SNCC: the making of a revolutionary

Virtually from the outset, Davis found herself at logger heads with the overtly sexist, authoritarian and hierarchical leadership of the various Black Power organisations in which she became involved throughout the 1960s. As a backdrop to these continual and often violent feuds, she recalls in her autobiography the reasons why she wanted so passionately to be involved in such collective activism and how her personal motivation for undertaking these kinds of political activities would guide the course of her personal development from communist radical to public revolutionary:

> For me revolution was never an interim 'thing-to-do' before settling down; it was no fashionable club with newly minted jargon, or new kind of social life—made thrilling by risk and confrontation, made glamorous by costume. Revolution is a serious thing, the most serious thing about a revolutionary's life. When one commits oneself to the struggle, it must be for a lifetime.

> As 1968 got under way I realized how much I needed to find a collective. Floating from activity to activity was no revolutionary anything. Individual activity—sporadic and disconnected—is not revolutionary work. Serious revolutionary work consists of persistent and methodical efforts through a collective of other revolutionaries to organize the masses for action. Since I had long considered myself a Marxist, the alternatives open to me were very limited. (Davis, [1974] (1990): 162)

This passage is revealing in its dual emphasis: in the first instance, there is the almost defensive stance she takes straight away, defending herself from the implied accusation that she was involved in revolutionary activity because of the "glamour" elements and aspects to do with "costume". This is indicative as much of her contribution to the "revolution" during 1960s Black identity politics acknowledged in print coalesces around her iconic physical image as black woman revolutionary, a young, tall, light-skinned beauty famously sporting a large Afro hairstyle. I will return to the issue of her iconic visual image later, but for the moment, suffice to say that here she sets out her case that this aspect of her transformation into a "revolutionary" was not only not of her doing, it was never something to which she in any way aspired.

Next there is her declaration that "revolutionary" activity is by its very nature *collective*, not individual, something which is moreover undertaken through organised *work* with other like-minded people. This represents something of a departure from her family background, where her previous descriptions of her childhood suggest that her parents and their friends, though interested in communism and socialism, were relatively low key in their expression of this interest in their lives, confining their political activism to a more or less personal set of principles or beliefs to guide their actions in everyday life, in much the same way that many lay people will mostly regard and live out their religious beliefs. In contrast, Angela was determined to take her expression of her political beliefs a step further, seeking out over the course of her early adult life a number of organisations within which to carry out her revolutionary work, not only the various Black Panther Parties, the SNCC and the American Communist Party, but also Che Lumumba, the Soledad Brothers Defence Committee, the National United Campaign to Free Angela Davis (NUCFAD), and other groups agitating for the rights of oppressed and exploited people.

Over the duration of her involvement with Black Power organisations, Davis would come repeatedly into conflict with the leadership, both as a result of the periodic internecine fighting among and within the various Black Power groups at the local, state and national level, and also as a result of their sexist and authoritarian organisational structures. There was the notable case of the battle for exclusive ownership of the name "Black Panther Party", where she found herself on the receiving end of the kind of "black-on-black" violence she originally joined the group to stop:

> One afternoon, when I was in the Black Congress Building, I caught the eye of a brother drinking a bottle of wine—something prohibited, as I recall, in the Congress building. I turned my eyes from him and began to walk down the corridor toward an office. As I passed him, he pulled a gun out of his pocket and, with lightning speed, grabbed me by the shoulder, pointed the piece toward my temple and pulled me into the nearest office.
>
> He wanted to talk, he said. His words were slurred and his breath clotted with wine. He wanted to talk about the Black Panther Party and his Black Panther Party for Self Defence. The wine bottle, the slurred words, the fact that he had a gun and I had nothing told me that if I didn't want my head blown off, I had better remain as tight-lipped as possible. So I listened.
>
> 'The Black Panther Party for Self Defence,' he screamed, 'demands that your motherfuckin' party get rid of the name the Black Panther Party. In fact, you better change it to the motherfuckin' Pink Pussycat Party. And if you haven't changed your name by next Friday, we are going to off you all'. (Davis, [1974] (1990): 164)

The mention of the "Pink Pussycat Party" was intentional, as the high profile involvement of women in the Los Angeles chapter was well known and regarded by the male leadership as something of a national scandal as well as a public insult to their masculinity. Davis describes how this put her and her mostly female co-workers in a very awkward position: either they did the organisational groundwork and spear-head the community initiatives undertaken by the L.A. chapter of the SNCC, or else this work simply wouldn't get done. This is typical of the "double bind" experienced by black women with regard to the intersection of "race" and gender, manifested in their marginalisation from racist organisational structures of the women's movement and the patriarchal organisational structures of black consciousness movements. The chronic

intensity of this problem is communicated strongly in her autobiography. She writes about how acutely aware she was of how her own position as a woman occupying, even of by default, what was essentially a leadership role within the black community aggravated the profound crisis in black masculinity:

> In organizing for this rally back in San Diego, I ran headlong into a situation which was to become a constant problem in my political life. I was criticized very heavily, especially by male members...for doing 'a man's job.' Women should not play leadership roles, they insisted. A woman was supposed to 'inspire' her man and educate his children. The irony of their complaint was that much of what I was doing had fallen to me by default. The arrangements for the publicity of the rally, for instance, had been in a man's hands, but because his work left much to be desired, I began to do it simply to make sure that it got done. It was also ironical that precisely those who criticized me most did the least to ensure the success of the rally.
>
> I became acquainted very early with the widespread presence of an unfortunate syndrome among some Black male activists—namely to confuse their political activity with an assertion of their maleness. They saw—and some continue to see—Black manhood as something separate from Black womanhood. These men view Black women as a threat to their attainment of manhood—especially those Black women who take initiative and work to become leaders in their own right. The constant harangue by the US men was that I needed to redirect my energies and use them to give my man strength and inspiration so that he might more effectively contribute his talents to the struggle for Black liberation. (Davis, ibid: 161)

It is evident from this passage that an intrinsic part of the crisis in "Black manhood" is the complementary crisis of "Black womanhood", converging on women's entrance into leadership roles. That this crisis in Black gender roles is brought to a head over the contested topic of personal "initiative" and "work" is also revealing, especially when compared to the contemporaneous battles over power being fought within the women's movement. Davis's lack of involvement with the women's movement because of its deep cultural links to the lives and interests of white middle class women contrasts ironically with the similarity of her concerns about the value of personal initiative and the importance of work within a Black Power organisation. Likewise, her heated debates with the BPP and SNCC leadership over the need as she saw it for Black activists to engage in "consciousness-raising" within black communities instead of using their resources to educate poor urban blacks in the skills they needed to get a job (the

male leadership's stated position) is also indicative of what was at the heart of these continual conflicts. What emerges is not only the obvious crisis in gender roles within the black community, but moreover difficulties over differences in the cultural values based on the issue of class.

Though clearly sexism was rife in the Black Power movement, especially in the early years, at the same time the intensity and constancy of the resistance Davis encountered in response to her conception of the nature of purpose of "revolution" cannot just be put down to the fact that she was a woman. This point can be supported by the comparative rise of Elaine Brown within the Oakland chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP); Brown joined the Oakland group at around the same time as Davis joined the chapter in L.A., coming to militant black politics from a similarly Marxist background. But Brown was somehow able to successfully use her influence to change many of the sexist attitudes within that organisation, and was eventually elected to the role of Party Chief in 1974. The similarities between Davis and Brown are as striking as their differences, perhaps none more so than the difference in their respective class origins: while Davis came from a rural middle class background, Brown was the daughter of a dress factory worker in urban Philadelphia.

The significance of Davis's identity as a member of the small but growing black middle class in post-war American society will emerge as major factor in the reception of this text as well as in Davis's construction of the autobiographical "I" over the remaining sections of this chapter. In this regard, her perceived "difference" from the majority of the "brothers" and also the "sisters" both within and outside of Black Power organisations is epitomised by her *soledad* role, showing distinct signs of isolation and difference from many of those around her. This is reflected in her recording of the seemingly continual conflicts that characterised her everyday life, emanating from the threatening and often abusive reactions to her from racist individuals and groups, the media, the police, prison staff and even her SNCC and BPP colleagues. Apart from her interaction with her family in Birmingham or with "ordinary" working class black people in Los Angeles which were occasional at best, Davis was only truly comfortable, accepted and at home either with a very small group of friends who

were also Black and Communist Party members or with her academic colleagues at UCLA.

3.2 The native intellectual

Davis's isolation in terms of her divergence from the majority position among the "brothers and sisters" is particularly manifest in her proclivity to intellectualise the task of the "struggle for liberation" combined with her strong personal belief in a typically American middle class work ethic and the potency of individual agency within a collective group characterised by the term "initiative", which she uses liberally in her autobiography. This kind of language and narrative structure concentrating on individual struggle and personal initiative contrasts starkly to her much more emphatic insistence on the dual social and economic impact of slavery and imprisonment on the racist oppression and exploitation of Black peoples in American society constructed on a more classically Marxian model which would come to epitomise her later work (Davis, 1982, 1984, 1998). These tendencies toward intellectualism and individual initiative were vestiges of her middle class upbringing, which would be at the core of the continual conflict operating between her and the BPP and SNCC leadership. Was her identity as a black intellectual educated within the white world of the middle classes—what Frantz Fanon called the phenomenon of the "native intellectual"—the cause of her isolation, or was it something else?

Let us look more closely (if briefly) at Fanon's concept of the "native intellectual" as part of his broader critique of colonialism. The derogatory term "native intellectual" refers to writers and thinkers within the colonised nation who have been educated within the oppressive ideological institutions of the colonised power. Consequently, the danger posed by the Western-educated native intellectual is their proclivity to identify more with the bourgeois middle class values of the colonising nation than with the nascent national interests of indigenous or oppressed peoples. This makes the role of the native intellectual in the formation of identity and national politics of resistance extremely complicated, as they are much more likely to regard aspects of the indigenous culture with which they are unfamiliar or don't understand as "barbarous" in the

same way as the dominant colonising culture. Similarly, the danger of according dominant positions of power to native intellectuals in revolutionary national structures is that they will simply re-inscribe the bourgeois cultural values of their oppressors on the new social order. Hence the intrinsic "Otherness" of indigenous culture is encapsulated in the *estrangement* or isolation of the native intellectual from the life of the majority indigenous population, as he or she identifies more with the colonising power than with the oppressed. This might account for Davis's isolation, as a promising young lecturer, from the wider Black nationalist community, evidenced in her capacity to identify socially and culturally with other Communist intellectuals and her academic colleagues who were mostly white and middle class.

3.3 Abjection

Given that the nature of her continual conflicts with the Black Power movements were not simply a matter of class culture but moreover of gender difference, there are other factors which could help further explain the isolation of a talented and committed woman like Angela Davis. In this regard, the qualitative nature of Davis's isolation is reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's notion of *abjection*, the result of her radical exclusion from the dominant symbolic order of meaning which is in this instance decidedly patriarchal—if not openly misogynistic—in character. In her articulation of the experience of abjection, Kristeva (1982) contrasts it to Lacan's notion of the "object of desire" as allowing the subject to organise and articulate her own individual desires within the symbolic order of meaning, thereby allowing the individual's own object aims to exist as essentially intersubjective and communal with others around her. In contrast, the "abject" is characterised by her radical exclusion from the symbolic order of meaning, and hence from the life of the community and the psychic experience of intersubjectivity.

Abjection draws the subject not toward greater integration in the community but rather "...toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982: 2), exposing the isolation of the writing subject in the breakdown of meaningful communication with others, and moreover through the loss of meaning in her use

of self-representative language. These aspects are detectable in the first instance by the patterning of intersubjective experience by conflict and in the second by the loss of meaning in the subject's own use of self-representative language, as when the narrative structure in life writing visibly breaks down. The roots of abjection are located neither in the phenomenal subject nor in the object, but at the place where people first entered the symbolic order of language, i.e. in archaic memory and in early childhood (Kristeva, 1982). Thus, Davis's situation with respect to the broader community of the Black Power movement and to her own isolation from the intersubjective language of self-representation are not strictly speaking her fault nor that of the BPP/SNCC leadership; rather, they are the outcome of two very different systematic entrances to the symbolic order of meaning emanating from divergent cultures of childhood and differences in the archaic memory of diverse communities.

Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory of abjection provides an interesting perspective on the origins of Davis's conflict with her community and her personal isolation, one which represents a counterpoint to the previous concentration on the inner emotional pain of loneliness, whether ascribed to the masculine meaning of *soledad* or to the experience of inner pain linked to the writings of middle class white women like Friedan and Plath as noted in the previous chapter. Beside her immediate family and a close circle of communist friends, Davis acknowledges that the only people who truly understood her situation and responded on her behalf were her fellow academics, who were mostly white, middle class men. Kristeva's theory is also useful in that it resists essentialising the abjection of the female subject with the inner experience of loneliness or emotional pain, while still acknowledging her discordant membership of a middle class "symbolic order" that at once set her at odds with both black and white communities.

What is, then, the solution to the problems of native intellectualism and abjection for a writer like Davis? For Kristeva (1982), the answer lies in *jouissance*, the kind of joy which alone allows the abject to exist, though painfully and violently, reflecting the archaic pre-objectal relationship experienced at the moment when one body emerges from another with violence and great pain. In writing, this joy is expressed as a form of perversion, making "sport" (16) out of morality,

religion and law. Consequently, the joyful abject makes the best of their ambiguous social status by "perverting language" (Kristeva, 1982: 16), taking advantage of it, getting around it, playing with it in terms of both style and content. As a means of confronting abjection, "One might thus say that with such a literature there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, and Morality and Immorality" (Kristeva, ibid: 16).

Likewise, Fanon recommends that the "native intellectual" become "...more directly involved in peoples' struggle against colonialism" by engaging much more *consciously* and *dynamically* into the cultural traditions from which she has heretofore found herself estranged (McLeod, 2000: 87). Above all, this means re-engaging with the past through the "...oral tradition—stories, epics and songs of the people" as a means of re-connecting in an authentic way with the present struggle for freedom (Fanon, 1967: 193). Far from reinforcing a fetishised attitude toward indigenous cultural life implicit in native intellectualism, this active and participatory concentration on stories and storytelling offers a way into traditional culture, making modification, reinterpretation and above all reform into genuine and real possibilities. "Hence *new*, *unusual forms of artistic expression* emerge in this phase that both contribute and bear witness to the dynamism of the people and their gathering energy for change" (McLeod, 2000: 87 [original emphasis]). Let us now turn in the remaining sections to this active attitude of engagement with narrative forms of auto/biographical storytelling and its foregrounding of the possibility for real change, and whether or not and to what extent this dynamic, transgressive or innovative presence is detectable in *An Autobiography*.

4.0 America's Most Wanted Woman

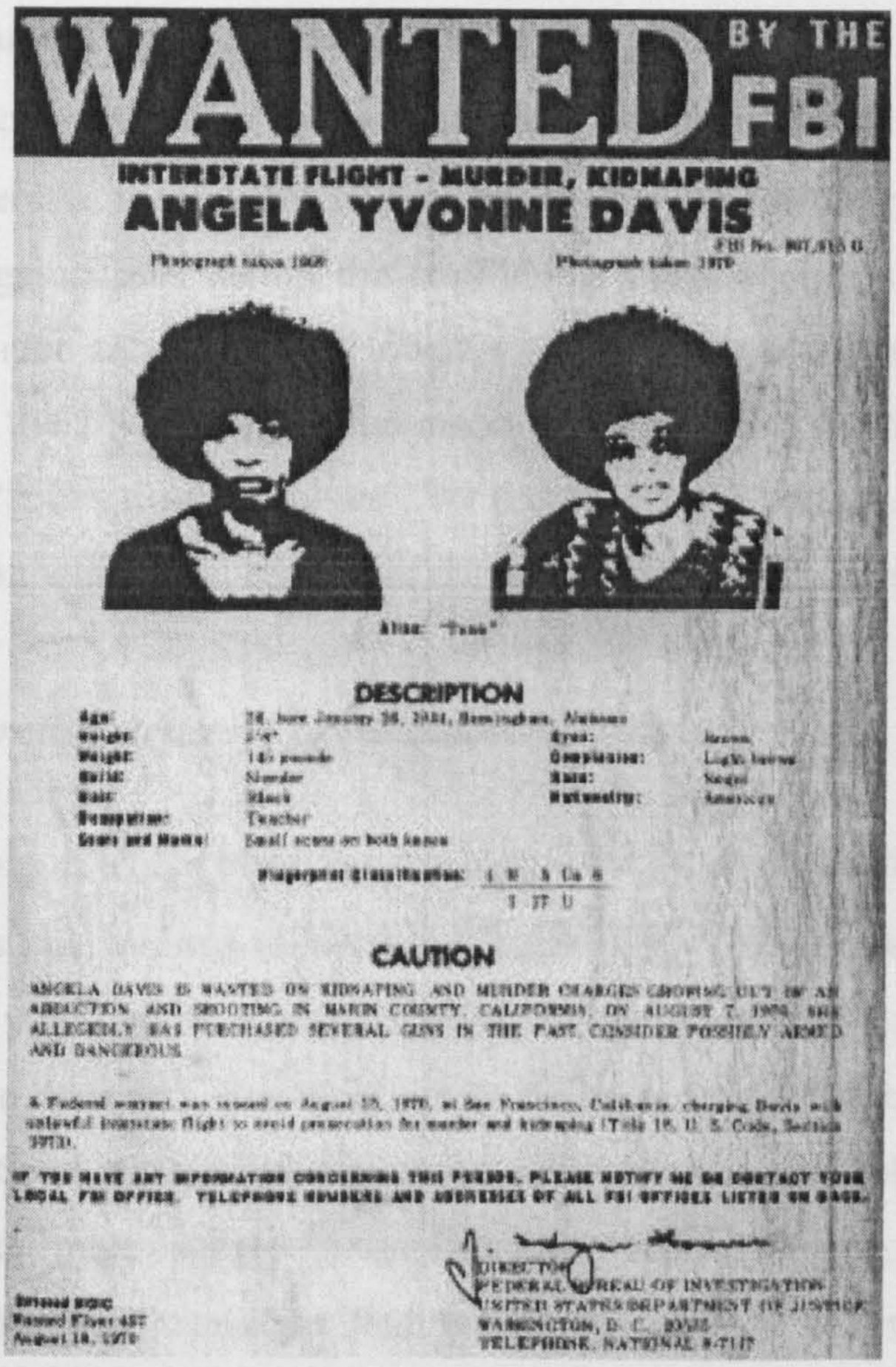
As the crisis among the different factions of the various Black Power movements increased, the level of tension and threats of violence rose accordingly. Instead of being able to resolve the situation through alterative modes of communication or by the transgressive play with language, Davis responds to the crisis in a

rather "normal" fashion with respect to the values of the community towards which she is abject: either surrender or fight. She recalls in her autobiography how she understood her choices in stark terms, "I could do one of two things—obey him or get my own protection. I chose the latter and, for a while, was fully armed at all times" (Davis, ibid: 164). Rather than surrender to the will of the black leadership or agitate for changes to the sexist and authoritarian culture, she responded very much in kind by purchasing a gun. It would be her ownership of this legally held gun which would lead to the course of events that would in turn result in the defining moment in her life, thrusting her into the public imagination and onto the world stage, as well as into prison.

On 7 August 1970, Davis's life changed dramatically when the 17-year old black youth Jonathan Jackson, the younger brother of the jailed author George Jackson, entered the public gallery of a courtroom in Marin County California where three other black prisoners on remand from San Quentin Prison were on trial. After a brief interval in the public gallery, Jonathan Jackson suddenly produced a handgun, ordering everyone in the courtroom to freeze. The details of events at this stage become confused, but what has remained undisputed is that Jackson was joined by the three defendants who then proceeded to take the presiding Judge, District Attorney, and several members of the jury hostage, leading them to a white van parked outside the courthouse. Who fired the first shot is again disputed, but a shootout ensued that ended with the wounding of one of the defendants, the D.A. and a juror, killing the judge, the two other defendants, and Jonathan Jackson himself. This episode has had an enduring influence on the black militancy in the United States throughout the 1970s, and beyond. As an elegy to his younger brother, it formed the basis for George Jackson's *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (1971) and *Blood In My Eye* (1972), a literary legacy that continues to be influential in black popular culture (e.g. the rapper Ja Rules' 2003 critically acclaimed album *Blood In My Eye*).

Through her prior involvement with the Soledad Brothers Defence Committee, Davis had become friendly with George Jackson's family, especially with his younger brother Jonathan. The gun Jonathan Jackson used was legally registered

in the name of then UCLA philosophy lecturer Angela Davis, a connection that led to her immediate identification as one of the FBI's ten "most wanted", the number one most wanted woman in America. As she claims that she didn't even know that Jonathan had her gun, let alone that she was involved in a chaotic and doomed hostage-taking plot, this episode thrust Davis without warning into the public spotlight. Her likeness was captured in the now iconic poster of her as *the* militant black woman (see figure 1 below). The poster features two photographs of her side by side, one with a rather doleful and impassive expression staring directly into the camera lens, the other by contrast confident, relaxed and self-assured, the image of cool in her aviator sunglasses and African print dashiki top. In both, she is exotically beautiful and proud, sporting the large "natural" or Afro hairstyle for which she has become widely known, a hairstyle pioneered by militant black women during the 60s as a way of politicising black female beauty by rejecting white beauty standards, none more so than straightened hair. The continuing potency of this iconic image of sixties black militancy and female beauty are significant, and will be returned to later.


WANTED BY THE FBI

INTERSTATE FLIGHT - MURDER, KIDNAPING

ANGELA YVONNE DAVIS

FBI No. 007,015 G

Photograph taken 1968 — Photograph taken 1970

Alias: "Tana"

DESCRIPTION

Age:	26, born January 26, 1944, Birmingham, Alabama		
Height:	5'4"	Eyes:	Brown
Weight:	140 pounds	Complexion:	Light brown
Build:	Slender	Race:	Negro
Hair:	Black	Nationality:	American
Occupation:	Teacher		
Scars and Marks:	Small scars on both knees		

Fingerprint classification: 1 M 5 Da 6 / 1 27 U

CAUTION

ANGELA DAVIS IS WANTED ON KIDNAPING AND MURDER CHARGES GROWING OUT OF AN ABDUCTION AND SHOOTING IN MARIN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, ON AUGUST 7, 1970. SHE ALLEGEDLY HAS PURCHASED SEVERAL GUNS IN THE PAST. CONSIDER POSSIBLY ARMED AND DANGEROUS.

A Federal warrant was issued on August 15, 1970, at San Francisco, California, charging Davis with unlawful interstate flight to avoid prosecution for murder and kidnaping (Title 18, U. S. Code, Section 1073).

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS PERSON, PLEASE NOTIFY ME OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FBI OFFICE. TELEPHONE NUMBERS AND ADDRESSES OF ALL FBI OFFICES LISTED ON BACK.

DIRECTOR
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535
TELEPHONE, NATIONAL 8-7117

Second Edition
Revised Flyer 487
August 18, 1970

figure 1- FBI poster featuring Angela Davis

This episode of the Marin siege led to her spending two frantic weeks on the run, eventually ending with her capture in a New York hotel, and incarceration at the Women's House of Detention in New York City prior to her extradition to California to face charges of murder, kidnap and conspiracy. These experiences of incarceration on remand in New York and California provide the motivation for and comprise opening chapters of Davis's auto/biography.

An Autobiography [1974] (1990) is remarkable not just for its emanation from this particular violent event at which she was not present and in which she apparently plays no (active) part. For Davis, the complexity of the autobiographical task is underscored by her need to negotiate a coherent sense of identity out of what are a number of apparently conflicting dichotomies. As someone who insists on her status as an "ordinary" black woman she also occupies the role of the most famous and "most wanted" woman in the country; as a feared communist and militant black activist she was also a well-mannered middle class young woman and a respected university lecturer. From this conflicting itinerary, the impact of the complexity of maintaining a coherent sense of self against and within the conflicting social matrices of race, class, politics and gender are obvious. However, as Kenneth Mostern (1999) points out, in spite of their rendering in the autobiographical format, these aspects of the text do not "speak for themselves", but require further analysis with regard to their construction within and outside of the text, and their subsequent meanings.

4.1 The narrative structure of the autobiography

An Autobiography [1974] (1990) begins with Davis's declaration in the Preface that she "...was not anxious to write this book" (ibid: xi) because first of all, considering her youth, to do so would appear to be exceedingly presumptuous or even hubristic on her part. Secondly, given the history of autobiography and the enduring strength of its implied discursive connection to and celebration of the exemplary white male subject (e.g. Danahay, 1993), writing such a book immediately casts her in a light that makes her appear to regard herself as

somehow different to those with whom she claims to identify most closely, notably other black women, as well as other black and oppressed peoples around the world.

Next, there is the implicit connection between auto/biography and middle class culture, a link which in the context of black identity politics aggravates already uncomfortable feelings about the perceived assimilation of black people into the hegemonic structure of white American cultural life. This anxiety is magnified by the intimate connection between auto/biography and the sovereign and autonomous notion of the self based on the cultural discourse of achievement and self-reliance, a cultural paradigm of the distinctively American meritocratic social order which for many non-white people raises many deep concerns. Chief among these is the implied need to map the "life journey" as one leading the individual out of poverty and oppression, with the implied interconnection of life writing and personal triumph as both essentially individualistic acts. According to this model of life writing, the meaning of the maxim "we shall overcome" becomes transformed from its goal in a collective discourse to one which is in reality achieved only anecdotally and on a person-by-person basis, achieved through a secret combination of hard work, personal character and luck. This means that, in practice, the individual black writer's recourse to autobiography brings with it the inexorable devolution into a mode of self-representation which requires the author's departure from her foundation in black communal and cultural life. In this respect, the "prize" of being allowed to articulate oneself publicly as an individual black person is paid for by the requisite assimilation into the individualistic, meritocratic and celebrity media culture of white America.

Davis seems to be implicitly aware of these hazards from the start, as she begins the book by resisting these connections between her autobiography and the dominant autobiographical culture as merely accidental. Nevertheless, this is an accident that she clearly feels requires an immediate and thorough explanation from her as to why she should be writing an autobiography at all in the first place when in actuality "the forces that have made my life what it is are the very same

forces that have shaped and misshaped the lives of millions of my people" (Davis, ibid: xi).

4.1.1 The importance of doing "being ordinary" for a black woman

The main stratagem she adopts to substantiate her "Blackness" is to stress the unexceptional quality of her identity as an "ordinary" Black woman, a strategy that we have encountered before in the auto/biographical writings of Betty Friedan and countless other women who insist on their status as "ordinary" housewives who typically resist representing themselves as in any sense exceptional or unusual in comparison to the category of women as more or less a kind of homogenous social group. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this ordinariness is commonly achieved by the manner in which women typically write, prominently featuring exhibitions of their less rigid ego boundaries compared to the normatively autonomous masculine subject, either writing themselves "relationally" or inter-subjectively through the biographies of those with whom they live or the communities with which they identify themselves (e.g. Chodorow, 1978), or alternatively writing themselves through or against a symbolic Other represented by paradigmatic male figures such as husband, God, or, in the case of Davis, (male) leader (Mason, 1980).

In sociological theory, ordinariness is perhaps most commonly associated with the ethnomethodological social interactionism of Harvey Sacks (1984), who describes it as a kind of rhetorical technique of everyday life—encapsulated in the phrase doing "being ordinary"— exemplified in his writings by the work of the noted autobiographical writer Natalie Sarraute as well as through the writings of other prisoners, including an account of "ordinary" life in a concentration camp by Micheline Maurel (1958). The connection Sacks makes in his famous article between the work of "doing 'being ordinary'" and women's autobiography in general and prison life writing in particular (including holocaust survivor narratives) is revealing.

Davis makes much of her eagerness to articulate the collective nature of her identity as a black woman and its seminal formulation according to the influence of the wider political forces upon her that she immediately qualifies as being already always and everywhere brought to bear on every other black woman in America and therefore, strictly speaking, beyond her personal control; what she has in mind here specifically is the institution of prison and the associated politics of racism. She continues this theme of the ordinariness and naturalness in spite of her comparatively rare personal identity as a notorious prisoner and a black woman revolutionary by arguing that her high profile involvement in communist and the Black Power movement represents a "natural and logical" response to these determining structural forces. While she acknowledges that the Marin County siege is the "one extraordinary event" (ibid: xi) of her life that is directly responsible for placing her in the role of political prisoner and subsequently prison auto/biographer, she reiterates that this event had nothing to do with her personally as an individual; understood in its proper political context, she contends, it could have happened to any black person. In her determination to "do being ordinary", Davis places herself in an awkward position as a (prison) autobiographer; even as she turns the autobiographical spotlight on herself, to use Liz Stanley's (1992) memorable phrase, she simultaneously tries to evade its relentless and myopic gaze.

At the same time, once she is apprehended and remanded in prison, her energies are for the most part concentrated on herself and the job at hand, i.e. saving herself from the California gas chamber. This is reflected throughout much of *An Autobiography* on the intensity of her involvement with the National United Campaign to Free Angela Davis (NUCFAD), establishing a tone of defiance directed primarily at self-preservation that contrasts starkly to the auto/biographies of "prisoners" like Sands and Friedan, which are less focused on the self. In comparison, her voice lacks much of their altruistic and collective dimensions. By forcing her into a situation where she must direct virtually all of her energies on the fight for her life as an individual and the resulting intensity of her own self-involvement in her personal campaign for freedom, the state authorities effectively imbue Davis's autobiographical "I" with a kind of instrumental and third-person objectivity which is excessively self-absorbed.

Ironically, this kind of prisoner autobiographical voice has more in common with some of the more self-obsessed prison auto/biographers of recent times, the likes of Jeffrey Archer and the Kray twins, though admittedly their auto/biographical voices are distinctively self-serving and manifested through a consciously distorted self-aggrandisement of their status as celebrities. However, this does set her apart from the auto/biographical voices of the "freedom fighters" we have encountered thus far; in addition her commitment to "do 'being ordinary'" precludes her entry into the perverse *jouissance* of transgressive play with language and indigenous storytelling (cf. Kristeva, 1982 and Fanon, 1967). In addition, the issue of Davis's celebrity status still pertains; as in the case of Bobby Sands, the closing of the hiatus between being an ordinary young person and a notorious public icon is affected in the public media and on the international political stage using auto/biography.

5.0 Light and dark: reading <u>An Autobiography</u> as an example of prisoner life writing

The recent resurgence of scholarly interest in the burgeoning field of American political auto/biography written by black men and women during the 1960s and 1970s has generated a consensus regarding the narratological primacy of the slave narrative as the main (and often the only) intertextual narrative structure linking these texts (e.g. Perkins, 2001; Deck, 2002). It could be that the lack of attention paid to Davis's auto/biography can be put down to the fairly minor presence of the slave narrative as an organising theme in this text. As has been remarked, though Davis makes occasional references to slavery in the text, this narrative trope does not provide anything like as overwhelming and worked-out a framing structure in *An Autobiography* as it does in her later work or in other contemporaneous autobiographies. Secondly, there is the general critical consensus (e.g. Deck, 2002) that, like other examples of black women's political autobiographies written during this period, Davis's autobiography lacks literary qualities, evidenced by the fact that "...one would be hard-pressed to find self-conscious metaphors of subjectivity or lyrical writing" (Deck, 2002: 506) in the text. However, what these views fail to take into consideration is its provenance as a work not just of black women's or militant autobiography, but of *prisoner*

autobiography. Compared to the other prisoner auto/biographies cited in this study, *An Autobiography* [1974] (1990) shares many similar narrative and rhetorical dimensions, e.g. including focusing on personal ordinariness (as has been shown), as well as the polarised language of light and dark, the diachronic barrenness of prisoner narrative and subjectivity, the bodily experiences of pain and sensory deprivation, the emphasis on toileting and the care of the self, and the uncanny and overly sanitised world of the prison environment.

Like Sands (1983), Solzhenitsyn (1963) and Friedan [1963] (1992), Davis makes much in the text of the polarised and extreme world of the prisoner, from the contrasting environments of prison as a world of "light and dark" (e.g. Davis, 1974: 284, 287) and also courtrooms (e.g. Davis, ibid: 286) which shift between being unbearably filthy and glaringly over-sanitised—neither of which is an environment suitable for human habitation. Echoing Bobby Sands (1983) repetition of the black and white trope, but perhaps even closer to Solzhenitsyn (1963) and Mandela (1994), Davis's images of light and dark likewise feature prominently as symbolic of the extremes of prison life as origins of the physical suffering of prisoners in this hostile and unnatural environment. Like Nelson Mandela's (1994) account of the pain of enduring the constant light from a single naked light bulb while being held for weeks in solitary confinement in Robben Island Prison, Davis records how "...my eyes burned from the bright fluorescent lights here" (ibid: 284). Just as the cold whiteness of the Siberian snow intensified by the clinical whiteness of the infirmary in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Solzhenitsyn, 1963) suggests the inhumane conditions of imprisonment and provide the backdrop for the severe and comparatively barren landscape of prisoner subjectivity, Davis describes being a defendant in the newly built courtroom in Marin County as a deeply ironic and unsettling experience, in many ways symbolic of the entirety of her struggle:

> Everything was modern and spotless in this courtroom. The lights, shining much brighter than daylight, accentuated the newness. In this neat, pretty room, I thought, men and women are sent to dirty cells, some to the death chamber just across the way at San Quentin. As I had learned from press accounts, the courtrooms—and the entire Marin County Civic Center—had been designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. For the courtrooms, he had used a motif of circles. In the one where my first court appearance took place, the

> ceiling had a large round panel with lights encircling it. The fixtures of the room were arranged to correspond with the circle above—the judge's bench, the jury box, and the tables for the prosecution and defense [sic]—were all strategically placed to form a circle. (Davis, ibid: 286-7)

The contrast of the light of the courtroom to natural daylight exaggerated by the spotlessness of the surroundings accentuates its antiseptic lifelessness and its sinister and *unheimlich* qualities, if not for those who work there like judges and lawyers, then certainly for those who are the objects of the court's work, i.e. the accused, who are like Shukov made to feel dirty and ashamed in this environment, the human equivalent of vermin or filth. The motif of the circles comes in for special comment: in this context it is intended to convey a preferred image epitomising the unique qualities of American justice, metaphorically integral, regular and coherent. But at the same time that circles are inclusive and all-embracing, from the standpoint of those who do not benefit from such benign inclusion they can exclude, victimise and denigrate, circumscribing those who are "in" in order to separate them from those who are "other". Similar Marxian interpolations of the "circle" metaphor as an organising social principle also feature prominently in Castell's reflections on the in-built inequalities of the "network society" (Castells, 1996).

Davis continues her description of the courtroom by recording how she later learns that these same disturbing qualities were fully intended, being the result of the social engineering of the famous American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, though their meaning from her point of view as a black woman defendant was somewhat different from the "fairytale" image of American justice he sought to endorse in his aspirational design:

> Later I discovered that in designing the courtrooms, Wright had had something very definite in mind. He wanted to depict the nature of justice in the United States. The participants in a trial, he believed, should not be seen as struggling against one another. On the contrary, judge, jury, prosecutor and defendant are holding hands around a circle in the common pursuit of justice.

As a Marxist intellectual, for Davis the image of the circle linked to the dialectic is virtually synonymous with conflict and struggle, the very opposite of what

Wright intended. This is a conflict model of these events which throughout this text and her life she is loathe to depart from in any meaningful way. Resistance for Davis, as indicated in this short passage, is to be always and everywhere understood as a "struggle" that pits oneself against a complete and opposing "Other", as in the conflict-and-conquer rationality of the Hegelian syllogism foundational to Marxist political philosophy (Ferguson, 1993). Here, as elsewhere throughout the text, Davis mocks the "hand-holding" integrationist politics of liberal white America as well as the corrupted black-AND-white triteness of the civil rights movement approach to the problem of racism. This kind of outright rejection of integration and assimilation by black people into the dominant white society underscored the general trend among militant Black Power groups to remain deeply opposed to the American nationalist discourses of meritocracy and individual achievement. This included what they saw as the endorsement and accommodation of this colonial ideology by the more moderate and inter-racial civil rights organisations which advocated religious, symbolic and non-violent resistance.

We have seen something of these competing historiographies in section 2 of this chapter. What is important to emphasise here is what the cultural theorist Carole Boyce Davies (1994) isolates as the paradigmatic representation of Black identity as defined within Black Power politics of the 1960s and 1970s, imagery that focuses on "Blackness" and represents black culture as a monolithic and tactical response to the "annihilating whiteness" (6) of American culture, giving rise to a cultural model of resistance which is above all equated with an ideal of the potency of Black masculinity. In agreeing with this, Maxine Craig (2002) underscores how this approach inexorably identifies blackness by its opposition to the dominant cultural values of white bourgeois society and the identification of black resistance with black masculinity. This essentialisation of blackness prepared the way for the white media to reify the qualities of black identity through mass cultural representations of black men, thereby linking indelibly in the public imagination with laziness, low achievement, social exclusion and poverty. Davis's refusal to challenge this model of racial conflict, especially in light of her previous castigation of black male militants for their laziness and ineptitude, means that she is once again severely restricted in her ability to write

from the point of view of an "authentic" (i.e. working class, passive, poor, urban) black woman.

To the fairy-tale story of white liberal politics and its reliance on cooperation and assimilation, Davis interprets her experience in the courthouse through an alternative children's story from her childhood:

> When I learned about Wright's hand-holding message, I thought about the game we used to play as children—"Ring around the rosie, Pocket full of posies...Ashes, Ashes...--and the way the game itself picked certain children to be 'out'. There was absolutely nothing I had in common with the men sitting around the courtroom circle. My comrades, my friends and I—we all saw these men as the manipulators of a judicial game that was rigged against me. We therefore had to continually strengthen the people's movement that was our only hope of beating the odds. Two days later, in fact, the National United Committee to Free Angela Davis (NUCFAD), led by my sister Fania and my comrade Franklin, held a Christmas day vigil outside the Civic Center. The walls of my windowless cell were far too thick for their chants to penetrate [in contrast to her cell in the Women's House of Detention in New York]. But I could feel them and I felt happy and strong because of them. (Davis, ibid: 287)

The "circle" as a symbol of justice and reconciliation is one she rejects utterly, not just because of its antipathy to a conflict model of social progress which she favours, but also because of its unequivocal connotations with the paradigmatic figure of the coherent, unified, sovereign (and normatively white) masculine autobiographical subject (de Man, 1984; Danahay, 1993). Her interpretation of her own subjectivity, though greatly complicated by her own political, class and gendered identities, is entirely depend on remaining "outside" of this "circle" which is represented in its purest form in the American penal and judicial system, institutions generated from the foundational political ideology of "race". Such a symbolic reading of race in opposition to the disdained social discourse of integration and inclusion means that the textual images of light and dark are infused with the distinctively dichotomous and antagonistic meanings reminiscent of Sands' sectarianism in his own prison life writings. In many respects, both writers frame their respective symbolic roles as "rebel" and "revolutionary" in the same menacing way that they are portrayed in the media, as recalcitrant and unrepentant "enemies of the state".

5.1 The dominant images of black women

Davis is aware of this tendency to conflate reified models of black masculinity with the very notion of political agency (Davis, 1974: 161). Throughout the autobiography, she expresses her exasperation at the sexism and misogyny endemic to the Black Panthers and the SNCC, as the reality behind the rhetoric of equality meant that—as in the private sphere of the household—in public life women were there to carry out the lions share of the work in running the offices and doing the grass-roots campaigning and community work, all the while supporting unquestioningly the men in the leadership roles. The men's insistence on retaining total control over the organisation and leadership of the Black Power movement mirrored the patriarchal hegemony of white society. What is more, the systematic discrimination against black women activists was amplified by the new emphasis on the overtly polarised sexualised/domesticated images of politically active black women, as evidenced in the many sexist images and cartoons reproduced in black power party publications. These images idealise black women as beautiful, voluptuous Amazonian revolutionaries sporting outsized, halo-like Afros and clad in mini-skirts (see figure 2 depicting Angela Davis below):

figure 2 – Cover of The Black Panther newspaper, 6 October 1972, vol. VIII, no. 12, announcing the acquittal of Angela Davis

or as fierce mother figures who cradle a baby in one arm and brandish a gun in the other (see figure 3). This is a common counter-example to the black woman revolutionary epitomised by the straight-haired, well groomed black woman who is a chaste and upright pillar of society, guardian of the moral well-being of her family and community.

figure 3 – from The Black Panther newspaper, vol. II, no. 2, 4 May 1968

The clear message that these images convey is that black women's political activism is acceptable when it is appropriately expressed as enhancing women's feminine roles as maternal carers or protectors (see figures 3 and 4) or otherwise as the more conventional object of the male gaze (e.g. figure 2).

figure 4 – from The Black Panther newspaper, vol. III, no. 1, 27 April 1969

The irony of such symbolic images of black womanhood, according to Maxine Leeds Craig (2002), is that in their fetishisation of blackness as "soul" they reproduce the exploitative white idealisation of black women—particularly those who are agitating against racism—as either selfless domestics or exotic, feral and sexually attractive. Other composite images (see figure 5) use parts of the female body to link femininity and womanhood with the systematic oppression of black men, as can be seen in this typical image produced by the Black Panther artist Emory Douglas which amalgamates the feminine attributes of breasts, public crying and the ubiquitous mini skirt, whose stars-and-stripes fig leaf drops to expose a fly-infested set of female genitalia with the iconic figure of the empowered and commanding white man—the policeman or "pig"—who is also attired in Uncle Sam's hat and the beard of Abraham "the Great Emancipator" Lincoln, the composite signifier of racial oppression:

figure 5 – from The Black Panther newspaper, vol. II, no. 2, 4 May 1968

As is particularly evident in this last example, the problem with these competing images of black women is that they are used by black leaders as the prime "symbolic material" (Craig, 2002: 129) from which re-articulations of what it means to be black and female in American society are made. As the chaste pillar of society and the glory of her race, black women represent an ever more convenient target for the deficiencies of her "race", characterised by increase in the moral decline and the socio-economic failure of black communities as a

whole. Even the visual images of Afro-wearing revolutionaries like Angela Davis served to underscore black women's perceived complicity in white idealisations of blackness and by extension their involvement in racial oppression. The high profile presence of women in this cultural discourse was throughout the 1960s and 1970s interpreted as a contaminating influence on black militant politics, an attitude that stressed the debilitating effect on black men of effeminacy, a danger that was brought home to them again and again by the very presence of black women.

Davis recalls how she and the two women who comprised the full-time staff of the Los Angeles office of the SNCC were personally and severely reprimanded for the presumptuousness not only of their involvement but also of their efficiency simply because they were women:

> Some of the brothers came around only for staff meetings (sometimes), and whenever we women were involved in something important, they began to talk about 'women taking over the organisation'—calling it a matriarchal coup d'état. All the myths about Black women surfaced. Bobbie, Rene and I were too domineering; we were trying to control everything, including the men—which meant by extension that we wanted to rob them of their manhood. By playing such a leading role in the organization, some of them insisted, we were aiding and abetting the enemy, who wanted to see Black men weak and unable to hold their own. This condemnation was especially bitter because we were one of the few organizations on the Black Liberation Front in Los Angeles, and probably in the country, where women did play a leading role. It was a period in which one of the unfortunate hallmarks of some nationalist groups was their determination to push women into the background. The brothers opposing us leaned heavily on the male supremacist trends which were winding their way through the movement, although I am sure that some of them were politically mature enough to understand the reactionary nature of these trends. After all, it had been a voice of the Johnson administration, Daniel Moynihan, who in 1966 had rekindled the theory of the slavery-induced Black matriarchate, maintaining that the dominant role of Black women within the family and, by extension, within the community was one of the central causes of the depressed state of the Black community. (Davis, [1974] (1990): 181-2)

This passage represents a more explicit example of her identification of the "brothers" with "the Man", represented in this instance by the especially reviled Johnson administration (mainly because of its involvement in the Viet Nam war and the inordinate burden that compulsory military service placed on young

black families by the widespread drafting into military service of young black men). Considering the vehemence of the anti-government rhetoric adopted by black militant groups during this period (see Foner, 1995), Davis's equation of the organisational and cultural structures of Black Power movements under male leadership with that of white male leaders is particularly damning.

However, as she is at pains to point out, like other black women the onus placed upon her as an individual woman to negotiate the intersection of race, politics, gender and even personal appearance within a doubly patriarchal culture in response to men's paranoia concerning the implied threat of matriarchy in the ranks. As a woman she and her "sisters", whether in living prison or in their communities, are severely constrained by the same sexist attitudes that cut across racial and political boundaries.

This castigation of the women by their "brothers" is exacerbated by the virtually identical battles and organisational conflicts black women faced within the women's movement, specifically the pressure placed upon them to keep their concerns as *black* women to themselves in the interests of advancing the dominant liberal aims of "women" as a homogenous social category as defined with the cultural discourses of second wave feminism. In both camps—the women's movement and the Black Power movement—while the work of black women activists was welcomed if not expected, the specificity of their concerns as *black* and also as *women* were only admissible insofar as they served the stratified interests and agendas of the particular group in question, agitating either for the rights of women or black people but not both at the same time.

This meant that for many black women who wanted to express their activism as part of an organised group, the choices were limited and stark: if they wished to be a part of the Black Power movement, they had to deny their interests as women; if they wanted to join the women's movement, they had to deny their identity as black; similarly, if they joined the disability rights movement, they had to downplay both their ethnicity and gender, and the same if they wanted to be in the lesbian movement, and so on. In this exclusionary environment, black women like Davis were allowed to address their concerns and develop their

identities as either black or women (or lesbian, communist, poor, disabled or older), but not more than one at the same time in the same place. Given Davis's class, race, gender, sexuality and political affiliations, access to the auto/biographical "I" was fraught indeed.

5.2 Searching for symbolic material: writing black womanhood in political prisoner autobiography

In addition to these difficulties of sexism, essentialism and a dichotomous Marxist model of resistance in the Black Power movement is the fact that, prior to the 1970s, autobiographies written by women political prisoners were notably rare. The absence of a canon of women's prison autobiography to draw upon was exacerbated by the opposition of militant black organisations to the colonial cultural products of white American society identified with the bourgeoisie, including auto/biography. The strong ideological link between autobiography and middle class culture and indeed white masculinity (Danahay, 1993, de Man, 1984) made its compatability as the basis for black identity politics in the 1960s and 1970s problematic. Taken together, all of these factors conspired to make Angela Davis's autobiography as a revolutionary black woman and political prisoner that much more difficult to write.

While in practice this did nothing to prevent the proliferation of auto/biography by noted black men militants such as Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, Malcolm X, David Hilliard, Eldridge Cleaver, or George Jackson, comparatively speaking, the indemnification from the (white) bourgeois connotations of the autobiographical "I" rarely extended to black women. This structural prejudice had a disproportionately strong impact upon black women, as the oppositional cultural framework of black identity politics during this era led to the cultural designator "middle class" gradually changing in meaning, changing from being synonymous with "white" to being increasingly identified with "effeminacy" (Craig, 2002: 130). This symbolic translation of the ideological critique of white bourgeois American society to femininity in general opened the way for militant black groups to inculcate an ever more masculinist and misogynistic internal culture, despite its adoption of Marxist rhetoric of sexual equality in the

revolutionary fight for freedom from oppression based on class difference. This made the task of writing autobiography very problematic indeed for black women, as they had to find the symbolic or cultural material from which to write themselves while at the same time needing to defend themselves from the accusations of being complicit with the cultural life of white America.

As we have seen, Davis was very much the product of the American middle classes, albeit from the black middle class. This is reflected not simply in her profession and social position as a "native intellectual", her expression of her leftist politics, her work ethic or her celebration of individual initiative, it is also detectable in her auto/biography. The autobiographies listed above linked to the Black Power movement are strikingly different in narrative structure, content and tone to Davis's.

Very briefly, they reproduce correspondingly defiant versions of militant black masculinity, epitomised for example in Bobby Seale's biographical description of the founder and leader of the Black Panther Party Huey P. Newton as "...the baddest motherfucker ever to set foot in history" and the naming of his baby son in Malcolm X's memory: "the nigger's name is Malik Nkrumah Stagolee Seale" (Seale, 1970: x, 17). This is typical of the writing style of these male figures: the police are "pigs", male enemies/comrades are "motherfuckers" or "niggers", women are "pussy" (e.g. Seale, 1970; Newton in Brown, 1992); internecine conflict is constant and violent, drugs are omnipresent and gun culture is rife. Even Elaine Brown, the one time leader of the Black Panthers, describes herself primarily as being "Huey's Queen" (Brown, 1992: viii). The influence of these texts is strongly felt in contemporary black mass street culture, particularly in fashion, hip hop music and gansta rap.

In contrast to these idioms, Davis rarely uses this type of expletive, except when quoting or citing her comrades. Neither does she admit to engaging in or being directly involved with any violent action; she is very deliberate in explaining her purchase of the gun is purely for self-defence. Unlike Sands, she makes few references to previous writers, with the exception of George Jackson. However,

a revealing predecessor for her construction of the auto/biographical "I" can be observed in a photograph for which she posed in the early 1970s:

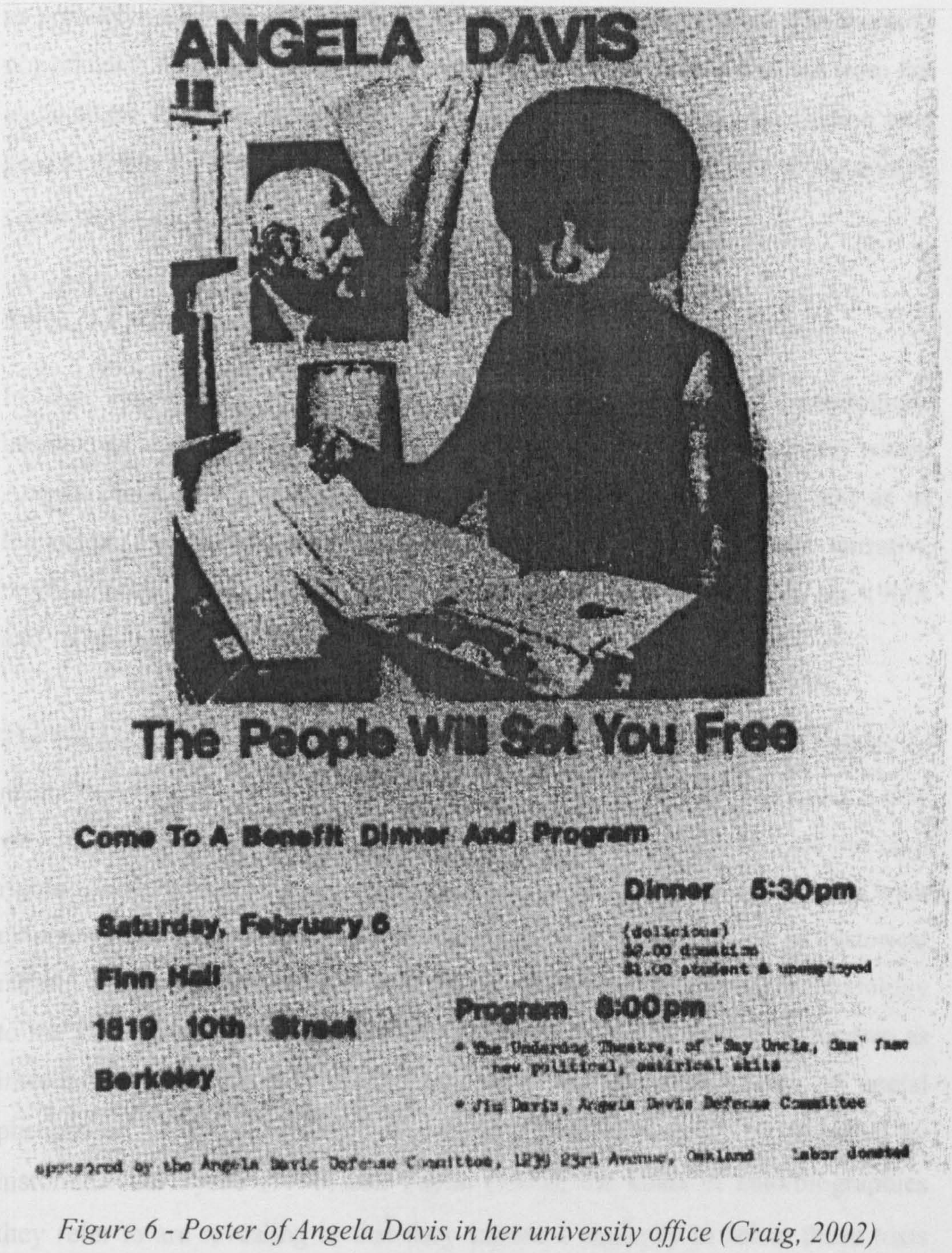


Figure 6 - Poster of Angela Davis in her university office (Craig, 2002)

This poster shows Davis posing in front of a picture of W.E.B. DuBois, the noted Black intellectual and author of *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940). Dubois's birth into a small white middle class town in New England, his subsequent studies at Harvard and entry into an international academic career, and his famous public conflict with the

more populist working class Black Nationalism of Marcus Garvey make Davis's identification with him especially significant. That Davis is pictured in her study or probably in her university office not raising her fist in the Black Power salute nor brandishing a gun but holding a book is also a significant departure from the usual Black Power iconography. The fact that this poster is an invitation to a benefit dinner on behalf of the Free Angela Davis Committee adds to the middle class overtones.

6.0 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined some of the historical, narratological, intertextual and intersubjective patterns of self-representation developed within Angela Davis's *An Autobiography* [1974], and the meaning of this text as an individual representation of the black female subject among other narrative representations (both visual and written) of black identity politics in the 1960s and 1970s.

The opening sections of the chapter presented a review of some examples of recent historiographies which purport to use auto/biographical materials in a new way in order to map the origins and historical narrative trajectory of the civil rights-Black Power movements in American society. Here I argued that what emerges from these compelling historiographies is a perpetuation of historical narratives that, rather than signalling the reconciliation of historical methodology to the auto/biographical text, further accentuates the tension between the two as inter-related but yet still distinct and even antagonistic classes of social phenomena. Notwithstanding the utilisation of auto/biographical materials by historians like Tyson (1998) and Payne (1995), the kinds of auto/biographies they refer to are revealing in that they expose a tendency to select those texts which otherwise support their historical theses, thereby reinforcing what is still basically a broadly historical narrative version of these events. By opting for a collective group of autobiographies which are generically similar and thus representative of a kind of corporate life narrative (as in the case of Payne) or alternatively selecting a single autobiographical subject who displays unusual qualities of regularity in his auto/biographical writings throughout his life course

(e.g. Tyson), such historiographies merely use auto/biography to illustrate the macro socio-political "forces" that constitute the revolutionary social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Other auto/biographies written during these same times and shaped by these same contemporaneous events which exhibit much more demanding idiosyncratic, anecdotal and even contradictory proclivities to even the most localised historiographies, such as Angela Davis's *An Autobiography*, tend to be notable by their absence (as remarked by Nasstrom, 2003 and Patton, 2004).

In the final analysis, these auto/biographies do not reflect the kind of narrative stability, uniformity or regularity valued by historians, in this case providing an exemplary portrait of the typical black woman leader as poor, uneducated, a public unknown whose activism was restricted to her local community. Clearly, as the example of Angela Davis shows, not all black women leaders nor their activism was of this type, and to be fair to Payne and Tyson they do not suggest as much. At the same time, however, by failing to take account of other auto/biographical accounts which relate alternative models of women's leadership and styles of political activism, such historiographies fail to provide an adequately convincing argument against the influence of celebrity culture, radical intellectualism and individualism so closely identifiable with American middle class culture of the time. What this indicates is that history has yet to come to grips with the truly complex and challenging nature of auto/biography sufficiently to allow those who were there and wrote about what it was like to enter into the historical dialogue, even if their versions differ significantly from the more coherent and orderly versions argued for by the experts.

Next, I turned to the life of Angela Davis in order to try to answer the question of how her exemption from current historical revisions of this era could be explained in light of Davis's importance and high public profile during the playing out of these events in Black identity politics. Upon closer inspection, I found that the answer to this question resided not just in the limitations of historical methodology but also in her life history in general and in her autobiography in particular. The obvious narrative tension at the core of this text is framed in the constriction, rigidity and conflict of Davis's autobiographical

voice. This is observable in the numerous and multiple difficulties Davis had in recovering a sense of individual agency adequate for the auto/biographical enterprise, as well as in the recorded difficulties she faced in finding a safe and viable "space" in which to write herself. As a woman, her leadership and activism within both the Black Panthers and the SNCC were regarded as a threat to a perceived ideal of power founded on a sexist if not blatantly misogynistic model of black masculinity; as a communist, her political activism from within the Black Power movement and also by the State of California, the FBI and the media was characterised by fear, danger and conflict; as a black woman, she felt excluded and oppressed by the predominantly white and middle class feminism of the women's movement; as a member of the black southern middle class, her individualistic cultural values expressed in her emphasis on individual initiative and a strong work ethic placed her at loggerheads with the dominant cultural values of the majority of poor and mostly urban black people; as an academic, her attempts to radicalise black people through education directed at consciousness-raising was viewed by the Black Power leadership as a wasted opportunity to increase black peoples' opportunities by concentrating on education for jobs. Her very physical image was appropriated by both the black and white mass media, transforming her identity through an unwanted and unsolicited celebrity which had the immediate effect of frustrating what she claims to have been her primary desire to work as part of a political collective. As an icon of militant black female beauty, her fetishised image was instrumental in reinforcing a dichotomous ideal of black femininity as either exotic and sexually feral or selflessly domestic. Even her role as a prisoner was not straightforward, as due to her education and notoriety, she was almost exclusively isolated from her "sisters". Finally, the criminal charges of conspiracy and murder levelled against her had little to do with her own volitional actions, apart from purchasing what was a legally held gun. These experiences stress her lack of agency regarding her own life narrative and her isolation within virtually all the communities of which she was a member, with the exception of the academic community. Thus on all these fronts—class, politics, "race", sexuality and gender—her room for manoeuvre as a radical, politically active, middle class, intellectual black woman during this period was very constricted, to put it mildly.

Keeping in mind Judith Butler's (1993) emphasis on the performativity of identity, and Fred Moten's (2003) theory that black identities and blackness itself can be defined as a set of cultural performances modelled on the improvisation of jazz music, given the multiplicity and severity of the social limitations placed upon her, it is perhaps not surprising that Davis's auto/biographical self-representation as a type of cultural performance of black womanhood is comparatively truncated and monolithic in its expression. This perhaps results from the fact that rather than being able to freely explore and express her self as a militant black woman activist in the solitude of prison, her access to the autobiographical "I" is constantly disrupted by what I will call the prismatic nature of the civil rights-Black Power, and women's movement politics of the 1960s and 1970s. As a woman who (a) refuses to conform to the dominant feminist agenda of the women's movement by jettisoning or downplaying her blackness, (b) contests the sexist agenda of the Black Power leadership by refusing to play the role of the deferential and heterosexually compliant female, and (c) resists the non-violent and integrationist politics of the civil rights movement by refusing to renounce her Marxist and militant politics, Davis's struggle on so many fronts leaves her with an autobiographical voice which is characterised by its essentially reactive, mechanistic and repetitive tone. Compared to prisoner auto/biographers like Sands and Friedan who are able to make substantial use of rich literary and narrative language recovered from their various cultural histories from which to construct highly innovative and distinctive autobiographical voices, Davis's lack of similar cultural resources and the subjective space to manoeuvre means that there is much less innovation or creativity in her writings. This could account for the lack of attention paid to this text and its lack of broader influence compared to the auto/biographical writings of others in the Black Power movement, and the contrast in light of her important role in the Black Power politics of the time.

All of these factors conspire to make this a difficult and challenging autobiography, as much to read as it must have been to write, and thus it is perhaps to be expected that the extent and multiplicity of these difficulties affects the task of analysis. The overwhelming impression I get from this

autobiography is Davis's almost heroic determination to write it, even if in the process of writing the social contradictions of her identity means that she is more or less forced to write herself into a proverbial corner. Perhaps this is the message of this text. Though in many ways this is stylistically the most well-written of the three autobiographies examined in this dissertation, at the same time, it is also the most sterile, i.e. displaying the least *jouissance* with respect to playing with and transgressing language, and transforming the conventional narratives of the life course. This has significant repercussions on the status and meaning of this text as a work of *resistance literature*, which is as we have seen by its nature a genre which is characterised by such transgression and deviance with respect to the language of subjectivity and self-representation.

Part III – Concluding Remarks and New Directions

Chapter 6 –Out of ink

1.0 Main questions and themes revisited

In this dissertation, I set out to explore and to further develop auto/biography firstly as a subject for sociological analysis in its own right and secondly as a social science methodology that can be used to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of cultural change in modern societies. As an overall strategy for achieving this aim, I set out a number of questions concerning the origins and motivations behind such "political prisoner" identities, such as how they were created in the auto/biographical text, and why? Which auto/biographies provided the intertextual and intersubjective resources for these life narratives, and what kinds of texts were these? How did these other life narratives function in the process of constructing and making sense of their own lives and those of others like them? And finally how do such intertextual, narratological and intersubjective links help us to understand modern cultures of resistance and the phenomenon of radical activism insofar as the individual features as a factor in the dialogic of social change?

To address these questions, I adopted a generally thematic approach, focussing on a number of metaphors, narratives and tropes common in prisoner life writing. These included material objects directly related to the act of writing of specific concern for prisoners, such as pens, letters, toilet paper, walls, the act of writing and the gestalt and cultural symbolism of printed script; intertextual references and intersubjective identifications with other writers and/or literary characters, (such as Bobby Sands' multiple allusions to Alexander Solzhenitsyn's political novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963) and the protagonist Shukov, Betty Friedan's adaptation of George Orwell's trope of the gendered subject as suburban prisoner in his interwar novel *Coming Up for Air* [1930] (2000), and Angela Davis's subtle identification with the black middle class intellectualism of the famous autobiographer and black activist

W.E.B. DuBois); and finally the narratological devices these writers use to illustrate the hitherto private or secret bodily and other "felt experiences" of the political prisoner life, (such as epitomised by Betty Friedan's adaptation of the Holocaust Jew and concentration camp tropes to describe the lives of middle class American housewives).

These writers' application of an array of such narrative, intertextual and self-representative strategies demonstrates the quality, ingenuity and imaginativeness of the political prison auto/biography during this period. As we have seen, many of these writers borrow from—or to paraphrase Cixous (1981), "steal"—the classical autobiographical language and tropes linked to the "great man of letters" of the Romantic period. I have argued that their main motivation for doing this was to be able to *write themselves* as similarly authentic and sincere individuals, thereby contesting their public depiction as abnormal, deviant and intrinsically untrustworthy. For auto/biographers living and writing in such constrained circumstances, this mode of writings affords them a valuable sense of *agency*, allowing them to re-cast their public personae as extraordinary, deviant or even criminal as something which is the unintentional outcome of their very ordinariness within their own colonised societies. By projecting themselves into the public realm through the lens of such an auspicious medium of modern individualistic cultural life, they were also able to tell these other stories about the nature and first-hand experiences of social exclusion, oppression and colonisation. In the process of changing the character and praxis of life narrative writing, they furthermore transformed auto/biographical performance into an essentially political act—making the "personal" into the "political" in a culturally and historically distinctive way.

By articulating such personal, inner and private experiences of suffering, isolation and confinement in their life narratives, these writers exposed the oppressive and exclusionary social hierarchy of modern identities, demonstrating how the fixed and dichotomous conventions of identity in contemporary culture is perhaps modernity's greatest *myth* (to use the terminology of Betty Friedan). By "stealing" the language of the "Father", these writers map the modern life narrative for the "Other" from its origins in the expansive dreams of collective

freedom and personal fulfilment framed by the authorized history of modernity to its reality in the life stories gathered from the crucible of modernity's many "prisons".

Updating sociology's so-called classical tradition, prison auto/biographers like Sands, Friedan and Davis show how the systematic exploitation and colonisation of late modern capitalist societies takes place not in only the industrial workplaces as understood in the capitalist 19th century, but moreover in the domestic and home spaces of the mid-20th century modernity. Their auto/biographies make suggestive links between the re-institutionalisation of everyday domestic/home life and prison as reflective of the wider crisis facing the modern nation state. In this regard, the state's power and highly-developed technologies of surveillance and control are ultimately ineffective and even counter-productive. For these prison writers, the occasion for auto/biographical story-telling endows them with an enhanced sense of agency, the opportunity to expose the lack of legitimacy of the state authority as evidenced, for example, in the excessive use of state power against defenceless individuals and oppressed peoples at home and abroad. As we have seen, these more generic social critiques filtered through the personal life story focus in particular on the destructive impact of dichotomous gender stereotypes and historical proximity of war. Using this auto/biographical framework, they construct a kind of quasi-meta socio-historical narrative of a modernity defined by the signal experiences of isolation, violence, conflict, annihilation and death. Partially influenced by the new media global reportage of previously unheard of and unspeakable narratives of personal suffering and survival, they use auto/biography to expose and politicize the experiences of personal, subjective and private pain as the preferred field for consciousness-raising and generating broader public debate. When located in such an atrocious and catastrophic socio-auto/biographical framework, the ironic presence of everyday objects and activities such as toiletries and private hygienic rituals normally associated with sanctuary and the care of the self become dislocated from their normative meanings in contemporary consumer culture. They become instead the means into public discourse and the very stuff of strategic survival.

Finally to the question of why did Sands, Friedan and Davis write the kinds of auto/biographies they did. To put it crudely, I think it is ultimately because they loved life and writing. For them, auto/biography offered as much a strategy for creative production as it did for individual survival. As these texts show, in their own way each of these writers perceive themselves to be battling against the spectre of death as a result of *who* they were, not what they had done. Politically and ideologically speaking, this was and indeed for these writers remains a deeply transgressive act. As the literary theorist Barbara Harlow (1987) indicates, such transgressions to subjective language and formalist narrative conventions (both historical and literary) not only open the way to alternative cultures of resistance, as H. Bruce Franklin (1978) also argues, they fundamentally transform the character of aesthetic literary codes. Historically, this has been traced from the influence of early modern prisoner life narrative to the episodic structuring of the picaresque novel (Bloom, 1996; Nellis, 2002). As I have argued over the course of the previous chapters, political prisoner life writing during the 1960s and 1970s has exerted a similar signal affect on the new concentration on non-linear, non-diachronous narratives of privacy and interiority, democratising the act of confessional story-telling and breaking free of conventional codes regarding how auto/biographical tropes are to be appropriately applied in the life narrative context. What they portray instead is the richly synchronic nature of life narrative, depicting in writing the characteristics of everyday life through the presentation of dailiness in which "nothing" is happening, thereby pushing the boundaries of contiguous life narrative. By stretching, denting and puncturing the established narratological boundaries, these auto/biographers transform the nature and practice of other subsequent forms of creative writing.

Having now recapped the main questions and themes of this dissertation and how they have been addressed in the previous chapters, let us now summarise how this has been achieved in each case study, before finally turning to the topic of possible new directions for this type of research.

2.0 Summary

In Chapter 1, I reviewed the critical historical literature on auto/biography, documenting its rise, fall and eventual restitution as an influential presence in the human sciences. From its zenith in the 19th century hermeneutic theories of Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Schliermacher, auto/biography enjoyed a prominent position as a key concept for interpreting modern culture. With the ascent of structuralism and the domination of methods of literary criticism such as Russian Formalism and the American New Criticism in the early to mid-20th century, the critical emphasis on the internally-generated world of the text necessitated an almost total disregard for the text's historical or biographical circumstances of origin, thereby leaving auto/biography as a critical idiom out in the cold. Once even the most sophisticated attempts at "disciplining" autobiography by literary structuralists like Tzvetan Todorov and Phillipe Lejeune had so consummately failed to render it amenable to the values and practices of the new "science of literature", the way was open for deconstructionists like Paul de Man to deliver the final blow to auto/biography, and (purportedly) to write its final epitaph.

Or so he thought. Notwithstanding this final act of "de-facement" (de Man, 1984), others have been less keen to consent to the "death" of the subject/author, particularly those who are interested in preserving auto/biography for the purposes of recovering the feminine, suffering, embodied, oppressed and/or post-colonial subject. This can be observed in the reappearance of hermeneutics in the 20th century, e.g. in the work of theorists such as Georg Gusdorf, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, whose works have rekindled interest in auto/biography as a site for cultural analysis, an interest which has also been increased in the wake of the so-called "narrative turn" in the human sciences (Andrews et al, 2000). In addition, with the appearance in the academy of the various "area studies" (e.g. women's studies, ethnic studies, American studies, French studies, Penal Studies, and so forth) has come the re-emergence of the auto/biographical text in its full and disruptive glory, significantly influencing current ways of thinking about and formulating appropriately relevant questions for academic research (Olney, 1980). In this context, auto/biography has not

only provided access to a hidden or previously ignored canon of literature, it has moreover opened the way for a future literature of *re*-storation, *re*-membering and *re*covery (Gilmore, 1994). This re-capturing of the past through autobiography as an as yet undisciplined presence in the academy—a literature of resistance—has been at the heart of recent interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary attempts to harness its distinctive qualities for the purposes of academic research. Thus from the shaping of the subject disciplines to the formation of research questions, as a creative, transgressive and cross-fertilising method for re-invigorating the research process, perhaps now we can begin to say with confidence that auto/biography is finally here to stay.

2.0 Findings/Implications

These considerations provided the basis of the two chapters of Part I. In the three chapters which comprised Part II, three separate texts were analysed in terms of their historical reception (or lack thereof) and also with respect to their intertextual, intersubjective and narratological structures, and what these individual life narratives formulated during a range of significant political events taking place throughout the 1960s and 1970s can tell us about current historical revisions of those times.

2.1 <u>One Day in My Life</u>: The prison autobiography of Bobby Sands

Of the three texts examined in this study, a search of one of the main academic databases (in this case EBSCOhost/Academic Search Premier) shows that this autobiography has received the least attention by the scholarly community. This is a great pity, as on closer inspection this text reveals a fresh perspective on the auto/biographical culture of militant political activism, the transformation of ordinary individuals into notorious public icons and the symbolic meaning of writing and imprisonment in modernity.

In order to "write himself" as an individual and as a figure in the history of Irish republicanism, Sands demonstrated considerable literary knowledge, agency and ingenuity as a writer. This was evidenced in his ability to transform and

manipulate the contiguous structure of historical narrative, diverging from the progressive, coherent meta-narratives of officialdom and the normative life course to render an alternative narrative structure and "subject position" (Touraine, 2001) more attuned to the synchronic experiences of colonial oppression, physical suffering and social isolation. Fundamental to this alternative mode of life writing is the signal presence of the *body* as a formative influence as well as the *materiality* of writing itself, stressing both the literal and figural significance of the writing body as well as everyday objects like walls, pens, toilet paper and letters.

This type of prisoner auto/biography foregrounds writing as a *material* and *embodied activity*, a mode of agency of sufficient potency to enable him as an individual to resist the full force of the power apparatus of the nation state fully focused on him. In this sense, it offers not simply a platform for resistance but also a strategy for survival; political prisoner writers like Sands can be said to be not just engaging in the quotidian activity of life writing but moreover "writing (for) their lives". This answers the question posed by many penologists in recent times (e.g. Morgan, 1999; Nellis, 2002) as to why so much autobiography is produced within our prisons. Put simply, it is because auto/biography provides the antidote to the systematic and "progressive dehumanisation" (Friedan, [1963] 1992) of individual identity placed under threat by the power of the state. Through its own intrinsic powers to *re*-store and *re*-member the self (Gilmore, 1994), autobiography provides a possible means of escape from the "total institutions" (Goffman, [1961] 1991) of modern society.

Through his intertextual references to works like Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1963) and the prison writings of previous Irish republican prisoners like O'Donovan Rossa and Thomas Clarke (see Coogan, 1980), Sands' ably evokes a compelling atmosphere depicting the stark interior landscape of prisoner subjectivity and its correlative external environment consisting of the first hand experiences of colonial oppression, physical suffering and sensory deprivation. So far as these aspects of the text are concerned, the ideological formulation of his life writings retains its internal logic as a more or less straightforward story of political imprisonment by a

colonising power. However, as with all auto/biography, this logic is not without its own specific set of contradictions, fissures and disruptions. In particular, it is in Sands' application of Wordsworthian autobiographical narrative tropes of violence, death and sensory deprivation telescoped into the symbolic "day" in the life that the tension in the life narrative really begins to surface. The symbolic contraction of the life course to a single day and the projection of the protean self as "traveller" onto the dead, disabled and violated bodies of a succession of others reveals the special agency of the great masculine autobiographer in its most canonical form (de Man, 1984).

Such intertextual, intersubjective and narratological references to a writer like Wordsworth not only exposes the distinctive masculinity of Sands' autobiographical voice, it moreover reveals his indebtedness as an author whose name is virtually synonymous to the Romantic tradition of canonical English literature. From a cultural studies standpoint, the meaning of this kind of direct allusion suggests the intrinsic *Britishness* of Bobby Sands' character as an autobiographer; this poses a considerable problem for the iconic function of his personal identity in recent narratives of Northern Irish identity which seek above all to portray "Irishness" and "Britishness" as in some sense mutually exclusive, as evidenced by the entrenched and polarised nature of the long historical conflict.

But as we have seen in chapter 3, a detailed examination of the intertextual, intersubjective and narratological construction of Sands' autobiography shows the speciousness of the multiple cultural dichotomies of masculine/feminine, violence/victimhood, inclusion/abjection, freedom/imprisonment, Irish/British and Catholic/Protestant which form the basis of sectarian militancy in Northern Ireland and beyond, through their constant dialogical interaction. This finding is consistent with what the cultural theorist Máiréad Nic Craith (2002, 2003) and the literary critic Garrett Olmstead (2001) argue concerning the homologous mythic and poetic roots of Anglo-Saxon and Irish canonical literature. The only genuine dichotomies to be found are in the various contested claims over ownership of the same cultural past. These considerations also evoke the postcolonial theories of Frantz Fanon (1967) and Homi K. Bhabha (1990, 1994)

who focus on the mimicry of the British subject by its colonised "Other". By being the same but not quite the same, such postcolonial texts expose the "*worrying threat of resemblance* between coloniser and colonised" (McLeod, 2000: 55 [original emphasis]). As Bhabha stresses, it is by exposing the multiple layers of the ambivalence of colonial identity that such anti-colonial impersonations function as a destabilising factor, and thereby constitute an authentic resistance literature.

These different readings adopted by Nic Craith (2002, 2003) and Olmstead (2001) on the one hand and Fanon (1967) and Bhabha (1990, 1994) on the other seem to lead in opposite directions: either the similarity between the canonical/colonial and resistance/postcolonial texts offers a way of resolving the implacable contests over ownership of shared cultural histories by recognising the mutuality of both cultures, or alternatively that the seeds of destruction are already sown in the colonial canon, waiting to be germinated by the postcolonial subject. But for present purposes, the significance of the intertextual, intersubjective and narratological references is in their similarities and in the possible hope of resolution, whether through rapprochement or exposure.

Given the exaggerated and ossified versions of such life histories as those of Bobby Sands in the contemporary media, we may ask if either of these opportunities for resolving the fractured identity politics in Northern Ireland encapsulated in Sands' prison autobiography is actually possible? As it is, the bridging of the "gap" between Bobby Sands the ordinary young man and Bobby Sands the iconic terrorist/freedom fighter in the mass media appears to be more or less complete, a dichotomised version of his life history which relies on the derogation of his life writings in favour of other less complex and more media-friendly images. In particular, the well-known visual images of Sands (see Appendix 1) have now become so pervasive that the space between signified and signifier has closed almost completely. The outcome of this has been that relatively few people read Bobby Sands' work, instead relying substantially upon the mass media and popular visual images of him as communicating the whole of his life story, or upon the ideological myths peddled by the various paramilitary factions. The irony is that these images protract the oppositional

and monolithic culture of violence and conflict, thereby inhibiting the search for freedom through peace and reconciliation by constantly reasserting entrenched and simplistic versions of the past, instead of focusing on similarities and mutually shared histories. In contrast, such writings as *One Day in My Life* (1983) tells a more complex and detailed story about the tragic loss of the life of an ordinary young man caught up in the centre of a bitter social conflict, exposing how perverse, destructive and ultimately futile such historical and life narratives actually are and how they must be resolved for future generations and for the common good.

2.2 The Origins of the Women's Movement and the Life of Betty Friedan: Re-reading The Feminine Mystique as a Work of Women's Auto/biography

Betty Friedan's seminal portrait of the middle class American housewife *The Feminine Mystique* [1963] (1992) is by far the best known book analysed in the case study chapters. Its renown is such that, in recent times, it is becoming less and less widely read in response to its rather over-rehearsed and damning depiction among many feminist commentators. That *The Feminine Mystique* runs rough shod over the ideal type of contemporary feminism which is above all sexually diverse, socially inclusive and conscious of racial difference is undeniable. Certainly I do not wish to excuse these aspects of this text or downplay their meaning. At the same time, however, the fact that we now know better about the significance of such issues is no reason to disregard or, even worse, try to exclude from the feminist canon such seminal texts which have a dubious or even objectionable foundation. As Diane Elam (1994) rightly points out, feminism is now under something of an ethical imperative not to turn its back on the life stories of such women who were at one time at the vanguard of the feminist struggle for freedom and equality for all women, however oblivious they were at the time to the limitations of their original visions of the future. Even if these women were socially and economically privileged, middle class, white and married and even if the idea of such a universal "struggle" reeks of the humanism of American political liberalism, their stories comprise an indelible part of the history of contemporary feminism all the same.

So what has the re-reading of post-war feminism as a collective life history of the middle class American housewife told us? Firstly it tells us that this is primarily what this text is—a collective life history. *The Feminine Mystique* is not a "crime thriller" (Bowlby, 1987; Mitchell, 1973), nor is it a manifest history of radical American politics (Horowitz, 1998), nor is it even a "feminist tract" (Bowlby, 1987) in the sense that we might understand that genre now. The reason why it is first and foremost none of these things is that each of them in its own way fails utterly as a way of making sense of this text in respect of the huge diversity and range of ideas, narratives and rhetorical structures which it comprises as a whole. As a disparate, unruly, erratic and sometimes even contradictory collection of overheard snippets, mini vignettes and morning coffee confessions, *The Feminine Mystique* reveals many of the textures and qualities of what it was like for many women who were living the feminine version of the American Dream during its supposed high point in the 1950s. As a text which captures something of the "felt experience" of confined female subjectivity and suffering bodily existence of women at a particular time and in a particular place, this accords very much with Domna Stanton's (1984) search for the female autograph in autogynography. As an example of *feminine écriture*, it tells its own story of the development of women's writing in post-war society.

The opening chapters of *The Feminine Mystique* concentrate on Friedan's encounter with other women in terms of their palpable unhappiness and its incongruity with the saccharine images of the lives of American women portrayed in popular women's writing of the day, specifically in women's magazines. She recalls her frustration in trying to explore this phenomenon between the reality and the myth of women's lives, how the commissioning editors for the journals she had up to then regularly written for (most of whom were also women) were unanimously unwilling to pursue this line of inquiry. Her response was a real DIY effort, an original take on the social scientific study refracted through her own life experiences as a working wife and mother of three young children in the suburban New York. That she touched a vein among the other women of her generation is evidenced by the massive international success of this book, selling in its millions within the first three months of publication

(Fermaglich, 2003). Many British women who read the book in 1965 when it was published in the UK have told me over and over about the excitement of that time, that even if what Friedan wrote did not reflect their own personal life experiences, it afforded them a welcome chance to discuss their life experiences openly and publicly with others perhaps for the first time.

Because this was such a unique text and such an early manifestation of what has subsequently come to be known as the feminist second wave, obvious feminist intertextual predecessors were rather thin on the ground. Indeed, Friedan goes into some detail to explain why she believed the literature and ideology of first wave feminism linked to the movement for universal suffrage were so out of step with women's lives in the post-war context. Instead, she used the materials to hand, taking her narratological, intersubjective and intertextual references from other sources, from more recent forms of writing and also from her own cultural past. One of the recent cultural references was a narrative trope which had been used by George Orwell to portray the collective life experiences of middle class men in the interwar years in his novel *Coming Up For Air* [1930] (2000), that of the "suburban prisoner". As the criminologist Mike Nellis (2002) has recognised, Orwell was significantly influenced by prisoner autobiography, a genre which was until the last 30 years dominated by middle class inmates. Consistent with Cixous's dictum for women writers who have heretofore been denied a *feminine écriture* to "steal the language of the father" (1981), Friedan purloined this trope and used it to describe the life experience of middle class in post-war America. This transgressive act allowed her to develop an authentic expression of female subjectivity, developing narrative strategies which lent themselves to a concentration on the mundane details of everyday life while at the same time demonstrating the effectiveness and plasticity of auto/biographical writing.

The second major trope Friedan used was more characteristically autobiographical in nature, taken from her own cultural life history and the history of modern society after the Second World War—that of the Holocaust survivor or the Holocaust Jew. Like other women writers of the time, Friedan used this trope to investigate the construction of women's interiority in

contemporary society, particularly the collective experience of intensive emotional suffering which had been up to then an individual, that is to say, a decidedly private and secret affair. Like these other writers, she has since been severely criticised for her use of this trope (e.g. Bowlby, 1987; hooks, 1984; Horowitz, 1998). While clearly there is no doubt that the suffering of the American housewife bears no relation to the suffering of Jewish people in the concentration camps, at the same time, as a cultural phenomenon this metaphorical use of the trope by so many writers (many of whom were women) in the early to mid 1960s is culturally significant. As commentators like James E. Young (1990) and Henry Greenspan (1998) have indicated, prior to the Eichmann trials in 1961, the shameful and hidden testimonies of survivors about the horrors of the concentration camps were considered far too painful for public exposure; when these stories finally started to be told, they had a dramatic impact on the public imagination.

For women like Betty Friedan, these stories opened the way for transforming what had up to then been the personalised experiences of private inner pain into a powerful public discourse which, similar to the exposure of Holocaust survivor narratives, demanded widespread social change. What is more, the relatively free and unhindered exploration of the Holocaust Jew trope by American women writers which took place during the years between the Eichmann trails in 1961 and the Six Day War in 1967—before the ossification of these narratives in orthodox versions of modern Jewish history linked to the survival policies of the Israeli state—gives us a valuable insight into the experience of alienation and suffering in the mid-20th century and the response to these experiences in resistance literature (Fermaglich, 2003). Briefly, what these writings show is a widespread lack of exclusivity concerning the appropriateness or otherwise of these metaphorical uses of the Holocaust survivor trope, in favour of a more general enthusiasm over the transgression of the normal usage of language in order to explore the personal meaning of such seminal historical events. As Fermaglich (2003) argues, this lack of external social constraint allowed writers like Friedan to explore their own subjectivity through survivor narratives while at the same time recording the unique culture of Jewish identity in post-war

American society, providing a rare insight into the distinctiveness of American Jewish culture during this period from that of European Jewry.

While clearly this is of interest to Jewish scholars, its significance is also more widespread. As Fermaglich (2003), Young (1990) and Thalmann (2004) agree, the experience of suffering, alienation, confinement and genocide experienced by Jews throughout their long history—culminating in the so-called "Jewish Question"—has had a crucial impact on other modern cultural discourses of the collective "struggle for freedom" throughout recorded history. Rita Thalmann is particularly ardent about the influence of Jewish cultural life upon the modern discourses of women's liberation, specifically the analogousness of the systematic implementation of oppression and suffering on social "Others" like women and Jews. This influence is uniquely manifested in cultural forms of writing like auto/biography, where the primacy of the text in Jewish culture expressed in the "writtenness" of life, reflecting the central religious principle invested in the text (e.g. in the *Torah* and the Covenant) as opposed to the revealed/embodied word (*logos*) of Christianity. This is traceable to the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk, whose prophesy intimately related the twin phenomena of social oppression and testimonial writing, and its hermeneutic significance for its own times:

> 'Oppression!' in your ear and you will not save? Why do you set injustice before me, why do you look on where there is tyranny? Outrage and violence, this is all I see, all is contention, and discord flourishes...Then Yahweh answered and said, "Write the vision down, inscribe it on tablets to be easily read, since this vision is for its own time only: eager for its own fulfilment, it does not deceive; if it comes slowly, wait, for come it will, without fail. (Habakkuk, 1:2-3, 2:2)

This notion of the "writtenness" of life and its signal importance in the eternal human desire for social justice is central to the modern conception of auto/biography as a resistance literature. In this regard, the hitherto under remarked influence of Jewish culture on contemporary auto/biography is fundamental and pervasive, calling into question the presumed consensus among many commentators on contemporary auto/biography (e.g. Evans, 1998) concerning its origins in Christian—and predominantly Protestant—cultures of confession and self-examination. As my analysis of *The Feminine Mystique*

shows, contemporary auto/biography, and through it contemporary feminism, have been significantly influenced by Jewish culture and the willingness of writers like Betty Friedan to transgress normative and stock forms of life writing as a way of exposing the suffering of the "Other" and a strategy for inaugurating widespread social change.

2.3 Soledad Sister: Race, Class and Gender in the auto/biography of Angela Davis

In Chapter 5, I focused again on a text which has been broadly overlooked within current revisions of the period in which it was rooted, i.e. the civil rights-American Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Even recent collections of essays devoted to the study of auto/biographical writings of black women's writing during these times, most notably Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin's edited collection *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, have astonishingly omitted Angela Davis's writings from their analyses. This is in addition to the absence of her autobiography from other recent historiographies which set out to accord a higher profile to black autobiography especially those written by women, e.g. Charles M. Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (1995) and Timothy B. Tyson's "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power', and the Roots of the African-American Freedom Struggle" (1998). Among the questions I set out to answer in this chapter was why this lack of critical attention to Angela Davis's autobiography has turned out to be the case, and what this says about current state of historical revisionism and black identity politics then and now.

The answers which emerged from closer examination of these various historiographies was that, simply put, Angela Davis's autobiography does not figure in these historical theses because it does not fit the methodological framework, stylistic attitude or general theoretical direction of these historical arguments. This is because Davis's autobiography does that thing that has made auto/biography the bane of the historian's and literary critic's existence virtually since its first appearance: it refuses to follow the rules and conform to

disciplinary requirements of meta-theory consistent with the demands of the human *sciences*.

How specifically has this text manifested such unruliness? Again, by doing what autobiographies so often do: telling it like it is, or was—by trying to make sense of what must have been perplexing and at times even frightening contemporaneous events from this particular individual's point of view. The problem is that the current fashion in historiography is to recover the history of the civil rights-Black Power movements through the recuperation of autobiographies written by "ordinary" black people, in practice taking this designation to mean those written by people who come from rural (preferably Southern), poor, working class and uneducated backgrounds (Payne, 1995; Tyson, 1998). The advantage offered by these types of texts is that they usually conform to the same general narrative structure, portraying a culture of Black resistance distinguishable by its local leadership organisation, attendance to the specific problems faced by the immediate community, the high profile involvement of women, and divergence from symbolic and non-violent resistance strategies associated with the cult of Black celebrity leadership represented in the white mass media. Autobiographies written by black people who match such a profile are useful as providing evidence for historiographies which seek to depict a resistance culture driven by local and moreover *practical* concerns regarding personal and community safety and the increase of employment levels for black people.

However, problems begin to arise with autobiographies which fail to meet most if not all of these criteria, especially when their divergence from the preferred narrative framework starts to bring in to question or even contradict the broader historical thesis. Such is the autobiography of Angela Davis.

Being a southern black woman from a rural background who scorned non-violent and symbolic protest and the leadership of famous figures like Martin Luther King, Davis ticks many of the boxes constructed by historians such as Payne (1995), Tyson (1998) and Dittmer (1994). However, as a member of the black middle class, a communist intellectual with what could be classified as

strongly feminist attitudes concerning women's fitness to assume public leadership roles, and herself a reluctant national celebrity icon and favourite of the white national press, the worth of Davis's life narrative to such historical theses becomes much less apparent. As an individual who refused to conform to so many of the social attitudes concerning the correct behaviour for black women during the time, the amenability of her life writings to historical meta-narratives which seek to recover the "real" story behind "normal" black resistance to racism in American society is significantly complicated.

This means that, despite the professed changes effected by the New Historicism regarding its improved attitude to autobiography, autobiographies like Davis's still tend to be disregarded by contemporary historians in their revisions of significant periods or events. The argument that by its closer proximity to local experiences such updated historiographies ameliorate the tendency to commit the same errors of the past meta-histories fails to convince, given historians' continued inclination to ignore the same texts which were also absent from these previous meta-histories. While this is a real indictment of the New Historicism, at the same time, perhaps all is not lost; the possibility is still open for historians like Payne and Tyson to include in their historiographies *other* texts like Davis's which complicate and disrupt the coherence and regularity of their historical narratives, thereby offering the reader a more textured and therefore more convincing, if also more complex, version of events.

Moving on to the intertextual and narratological construction of Davis's autobiography itself, we found on closer inspection that neither did this text offer much solace to the thesis I was in the process of developing in the previous two chapters concerning the transgression and innovation to auto/biographical language of political prisoner writers. Though her auto/biography is extremely well written and certainly not without its original and challenging aspects, at the same time, in her manifestation of the autobiographical "I", Davis displays a kind of classic middle class reserve consistent with the moderated and conservative (with a small "c") tones of the university lecturer.

While she showed herself to be very much in favour of rocking the boat in terms of her official political affiliations and her disruption of normal organisational management structures in the SNCC and the BPP, she was at the same time unwilling to pre-empt the forward trajectory of her academic career, notwithstanding the primacy of these other personal and political commitments. Davis's determination to "make good" in her academic career and as a public intellectual is reflected in her usage of language consistent with that of the "native intellectual" (Fanon, 1967). As Fanon stipulates, the "native intellectual" shows herself by her conformity to the values of the dominant "colonising" culture and also by her inability or refusal to depart from polite and conventional use of the coloniser's language. Similar to Kristeva (1982), the way out of this dilemma for the individual writer is offered by the transgressive and even perverse use of language, "stealing" the language of the coloniser or "father" (Cixous, 1981) and using it in disruptive and unconventional ways within one's own original and creative writings. Though Davis does not abstain utterly from doing this, in no way does she display the kind of ingenuity, transgression and invention of writers like Bobby Sands and Betty Friedan. Neither does Davis's life narrative share the kind of analogous improvisational structures of the cultural representations of black identity associated with jazz, as argued by Fred Moten (2003). This shows that, even within the sub-genre of political prisoner auto/biography as a "literature of resistance" there is considerable variability and divergence among these particular texts, a range which is manifest in their unique reception (or lack thereof) by readers and critics, and by their accommodation (or not) within historiographies of the times.

3.0 New Directions

As for new directions for future research in this area as a way of understanding cultures of resistance and the phenomenon of cultural change, the possibilities are numerous. Questions which have arisen over the course of this research that I would especially like to see pursued include the changing nature of prisoner writing in the 21st century and the construction of subjectivity and representation in the new global political context. Following on from the prison writings of Bobby Sands, and bearing in mind that he was interned under the terrorist

legislation by the Diplock Courts in Northern Ireland which suspended basic rights such as trial by jury, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the auto/biographical writings of prisoners currently being detained under new terrorist and mental health legislation in the U.S., Ireland and the U.K. Do the inmates currently held under emergency measures in places like Belmarsh Prison, Camp Delta, or in other secure accommodation (whether mental hospitals, asylum holding centres or possibly even under house arrest, evocative of Betty Friedan) consider themselves to be "political prisoners"? Do they write auto/biography? If so, why—do they make sense of it as a resistance and/or survival strategy? And what are their writings like? How are they narratively structured and what are their intertextual and cultural references? I think these kinds of questions are extremely relevant just now, especially in light of the attention penologist Mike Nellis (2002) has directed onto the relative scarcity of prison auto/biographies written by black and Asian inmates. Given that, according to government figures, an increasing proportion of the prisoner population is made up of black and Asian inmates, and in addition that the numbers of women and children being incarcerated is also on the rise, a quantitative study investigating the relative impact on prison auto/biography production would be of interest. Are these changes to the prisoner population reflected in a rise in auto/biographical writing by members of social groups who were previously under-represented, i.e. black and Asian men, women and children? And how are other less literal forms of incarceration such as the new experiences of social alienation in the wake of the Anti-social Behaviour Order being represented auto/biographically?

Similar questions concerning the cultural influence of religious identity would also be of interest. Are we seeing more Muslim inmates writing auto/biography? How are the Islamic traditions affecting the "genre" of (prisoner) auto/biographical writing? Do these changes mirror the kind of transgressive creativity with classically individualistic cultural discourse, e.g. as reflected in the life writings of auto/biographers like Betty Friedan? Or, like Angela Davis, are these writers hampered by the need to continually negotiate the basic restrictions of their racial, class, gendered and political identities in the auto/biographical context, thereby pre-empting the innovations they can make to

these ideologically dominant forms of writing? Are such texts written within a cultural/autobiographical framework aimed at social change, and if so how are these narratives constructed?

Additionally, a rich direction for future research is in the field of social movement studies. As McAdam et al (1996) have noted, the "macro" aspects of social movements in terms of historical-political forces and organisational structures driving them have been well catered for in scholarly research over the last generation. What is needed now is the "fleshing out" of social movements from what he categorises as their "cultural framing", i.e. how and why people become conscious, motivated and inspired to try to effect social change both on the individual level and as members of collective groups. This echoes Joannou's (1995) research on suffragette militancy, and her exposure of the lack of critical attention given to suffragette auto/biography by the majority of historians; while they can offer a range of theoretical arguments explaining the forces behind the movement for universal suffrage, these same historians summarily fail to answer a central question: why did many of these comfortable, respectable Victorian women give this all up to participate in what was so often such a violent and unpleasant enterprise? As has been shown over the course of this dissertation, both the "flesh" and the cultural and consciousness-raising roots of social movements for resistance and change are centrally important to the meaning of texts and social movements. Many explanatory aspects of such individual/collective phenomena are detectable in auto/biography, particularly those written by prisoners.

This introduces another line of inquiry which has yet to be sufficiently investigated, that is the analysis of auto/biography as a representation of the cult of the individual—what Durkheim termed *conscience particuliére*—and its role in the dialogical structuring of social change. The systematic application of Durkheimian social theory to auto/biography has yet to be undertaken. This represents a very fruitful line of inquiry not just for auto/biography studies but also for Durkheimian studies, as it has the potential to revise previously prescriptive interpretations of Durkheim which focus on his social functionalism at the expense of his other reflections on the nature of the individual in modern

societies and the dialogical character of social change (e.g. Jones, 2001; Gane et al, 1992; Pearce, 1989). This "radical" re-reading of Durkheim offers an interesting way of redressing this fault as well as re-assessing the cultural life of the individual and social change in the contemporary social context. It might also give new impetus to questions concerning the construction of gendered, ethnic and postcolonial identities in auto/biography, and the influence of aspects such as the division of labour, marriage, social conflict, punishment, deviance and anomie on the auto/biographical subject.

Appendix 1

Figure 7 - Bobby Sands pictured in the Cages of Long Kesh Prison in 1975 with Gerald Rooney and Tomboy Louden (The Bobby Sands Trust)

Figure 8 – Prisoners in Long Kesh Prison under Special Category rules (Sands in back row, second from the right) (The Bobby Sands Trust)

Figure 9 – Prisoners in Long Kesh Prison under Special Category rules (Sands far right) (The Bobby Sands Trust)

Figure 10 - Bobby Sands and fellow prisoners with Special Category status in Long Kesh Prison (The Bobby Sands Trust)

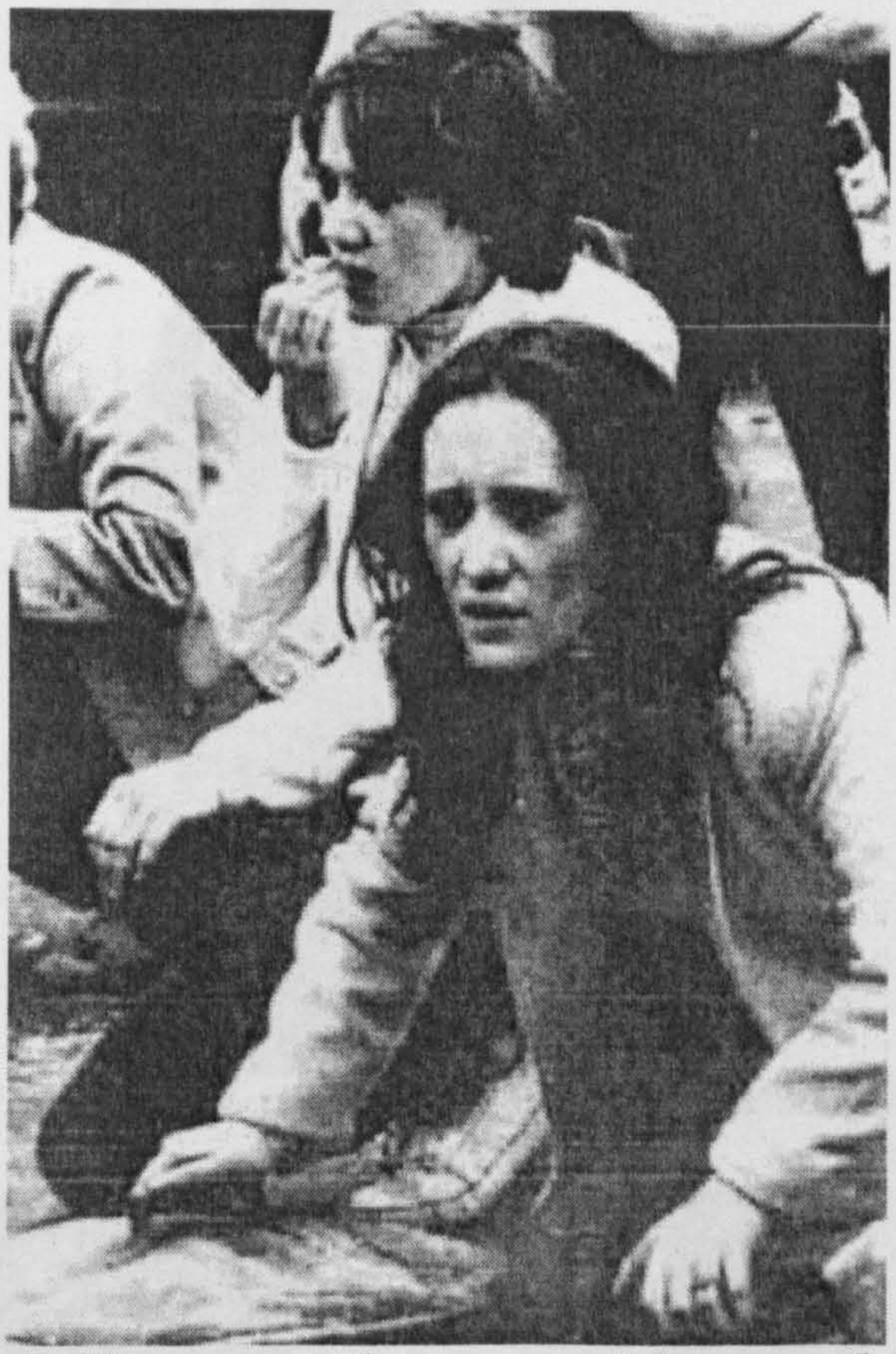


Figure 11 - Belfast women "banging out" the news of the death of a hunger striker. Typical of the images depicting women's suffering in Northern Ireland during the 1970s featured in the mass media and in Republican murals. (The Bobby Sands Trust)

Figure 12 - Children announcing the death of Hunger striker Micky Devine on August 20th, 1981 (The Bobby Sands Trust)

Figure 13 - A Blanket Protester (The Bobby Sands Trust)

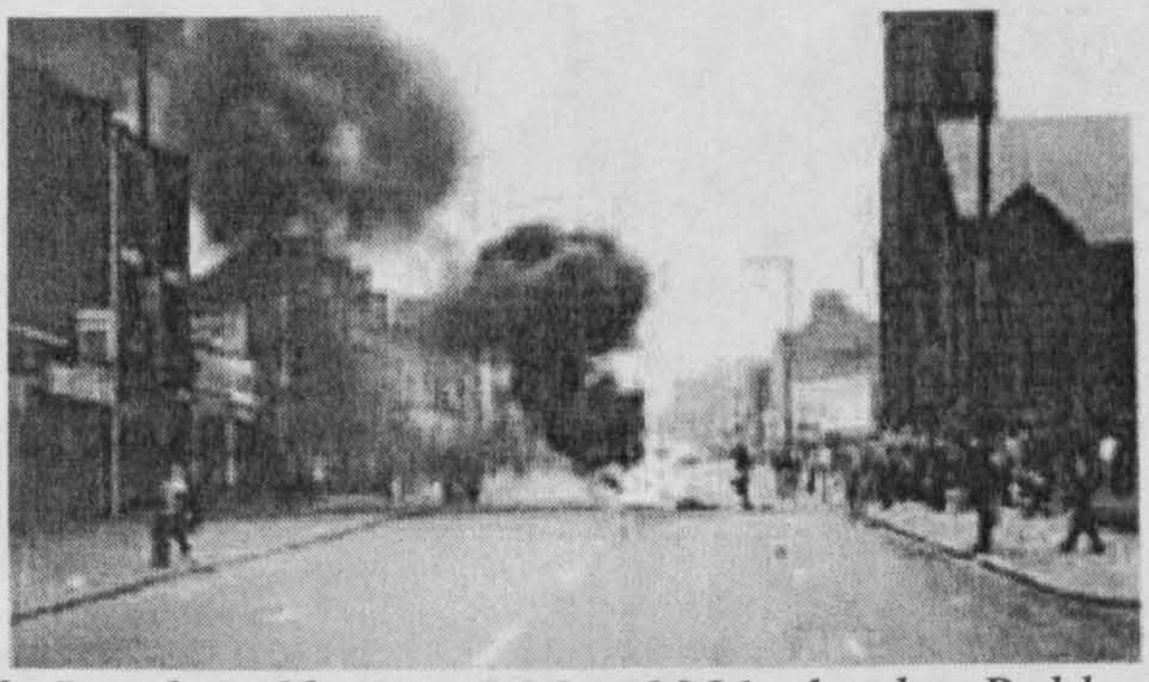


Figure 14 - Falls Road, Belfast on 5 May 1981, the day Bobby Sands died (The Bobby Sands Trust)

Figure 15 - Iconic image of Bobby Sands. (The CAIN Institute, University of Ulster)

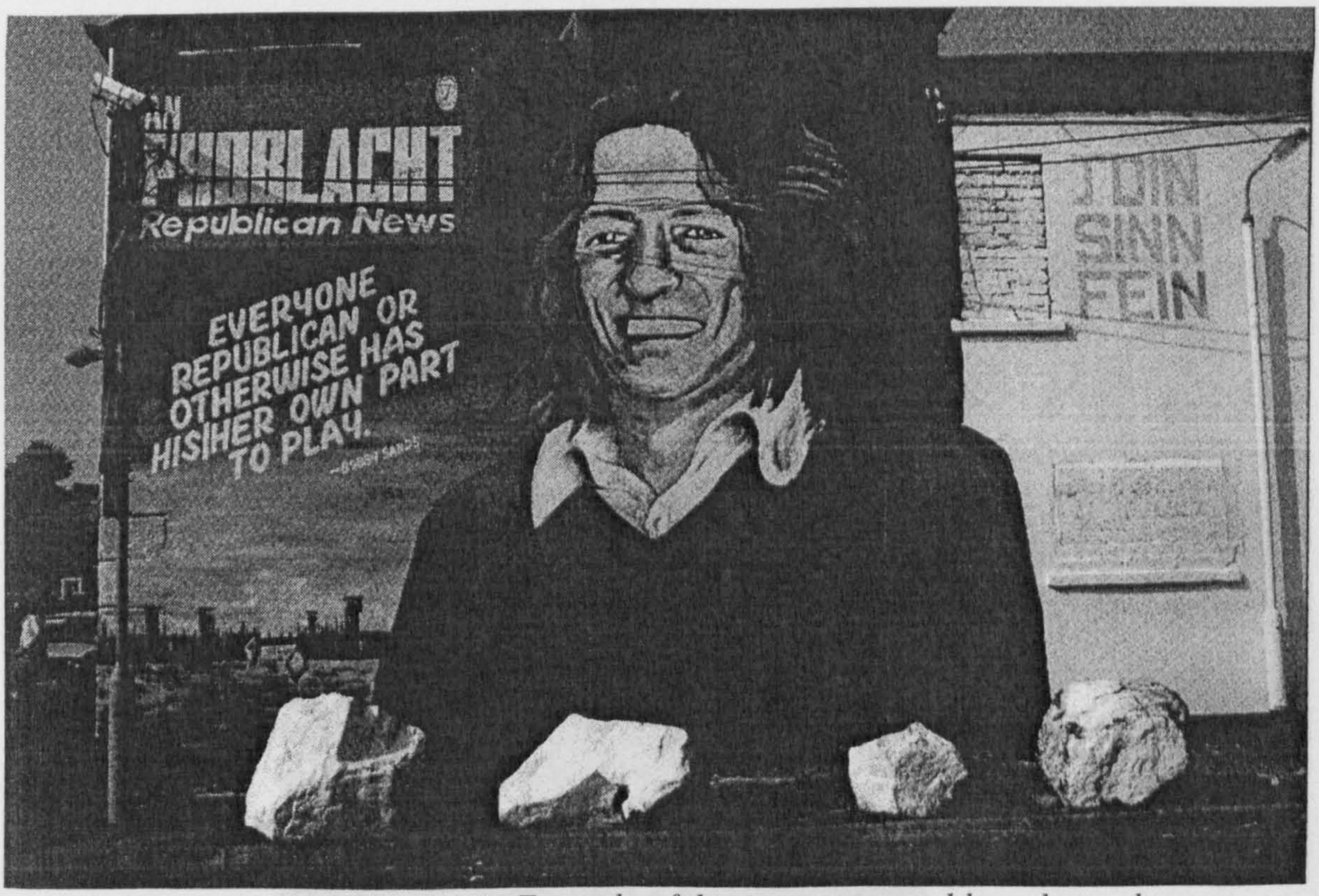


Figure 16 - Example of this image on a gable end mural (www.cmostia.org/immagini/ Bobby%20Sands.jpg [accessed 1903/05]

Figure 17 – Example of Bobby Sands' image on a gable end mural. http://www.russvitale.net/photos/DublinBelfast/bobby%20sands.jpg [accessed 19/03/05]

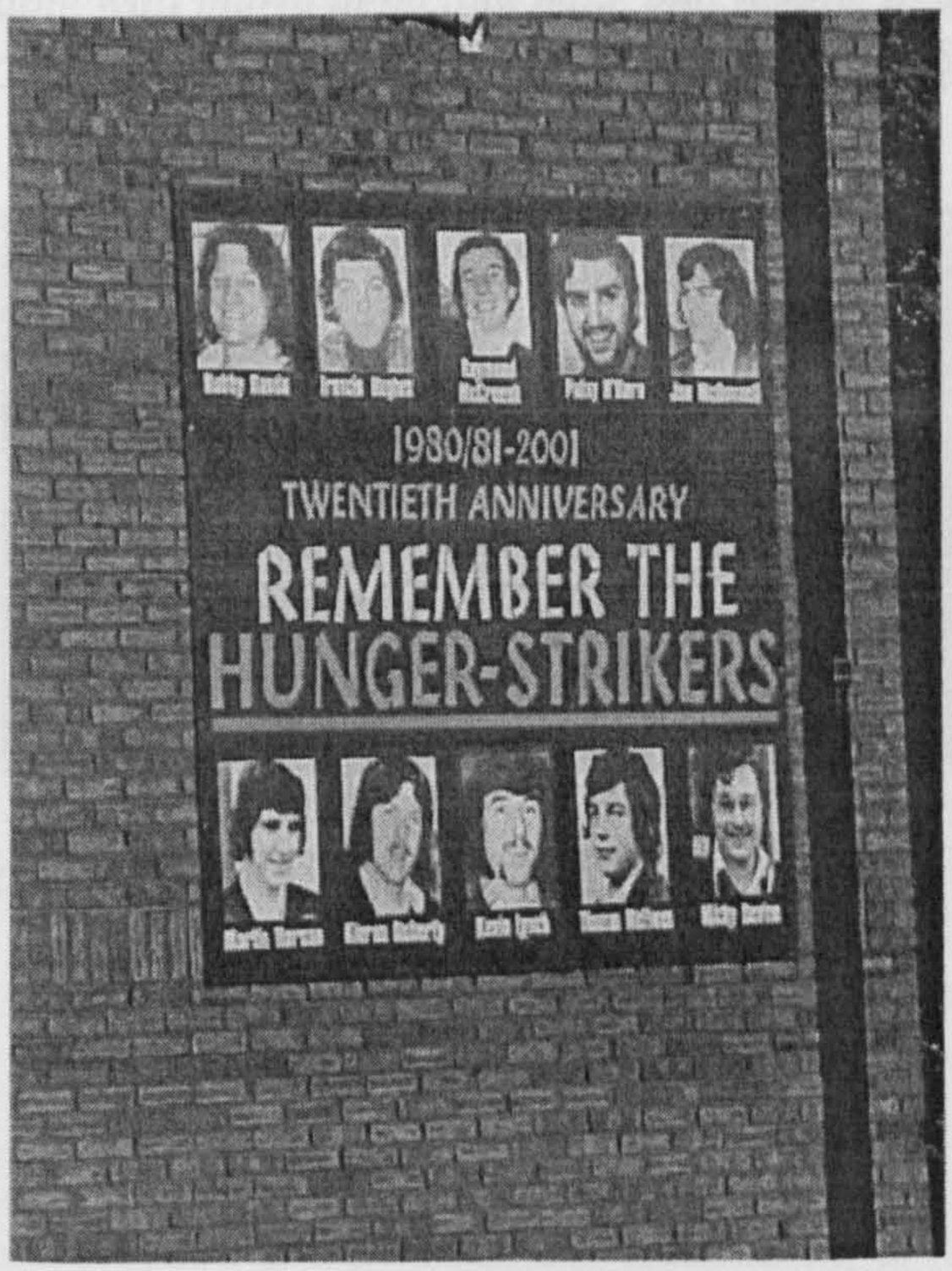


Figure 18 - Typical of the posters depicting IRA hunger strikers still seen in the 32 counties of Ireland

http://www.emory.edu/OXFORD/pierceprogram/Atlanta_Belfast/Remember_HungerStrikers_Mural.jpg [accessed 19/03/05]

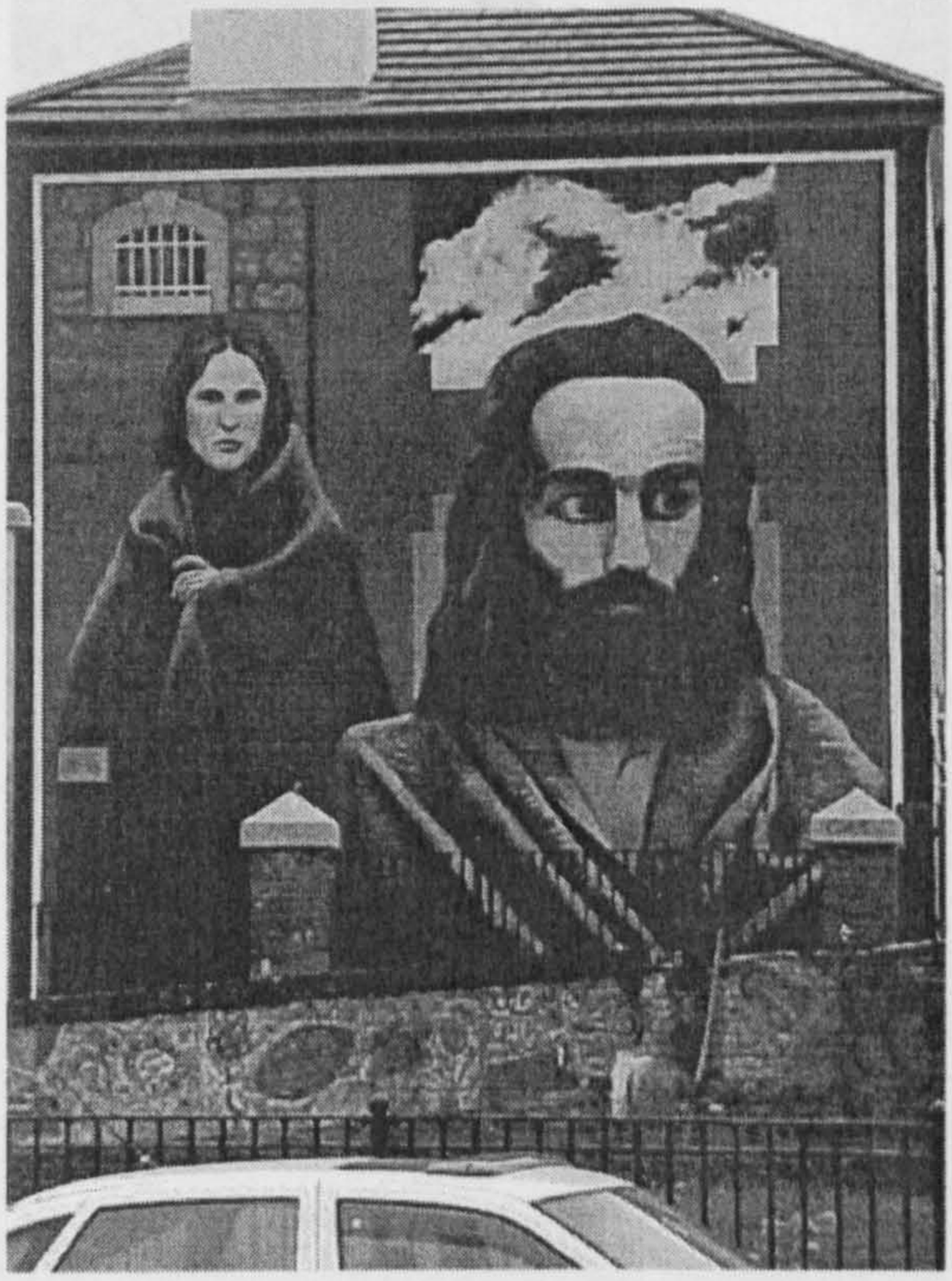


Figure 19 - Gable wall mural depicting male and female blanket protestors

http://www.emory.edu/OXFORD/pierceprogram/Derry_May25/BobbySands_one.jpg [accessed 19/03/05]

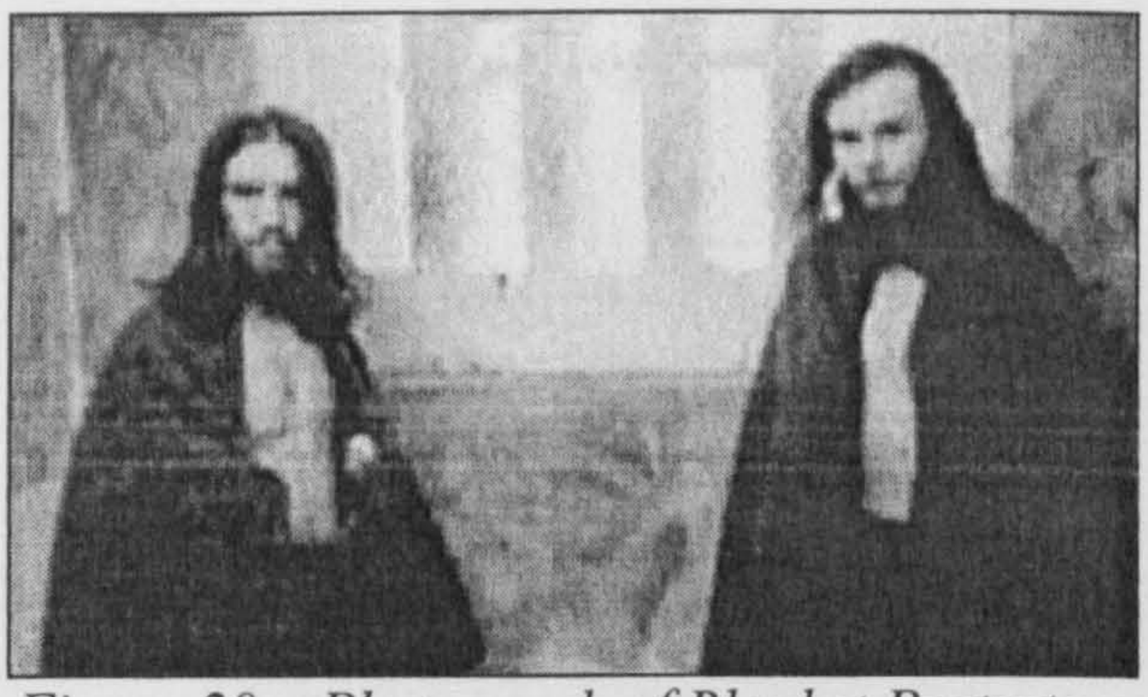


Figure 20 – Photograph of Blanket Protesters

http://home.no.net/gressli/skole/ira/Image16.jpg [accessed 19/03/05]

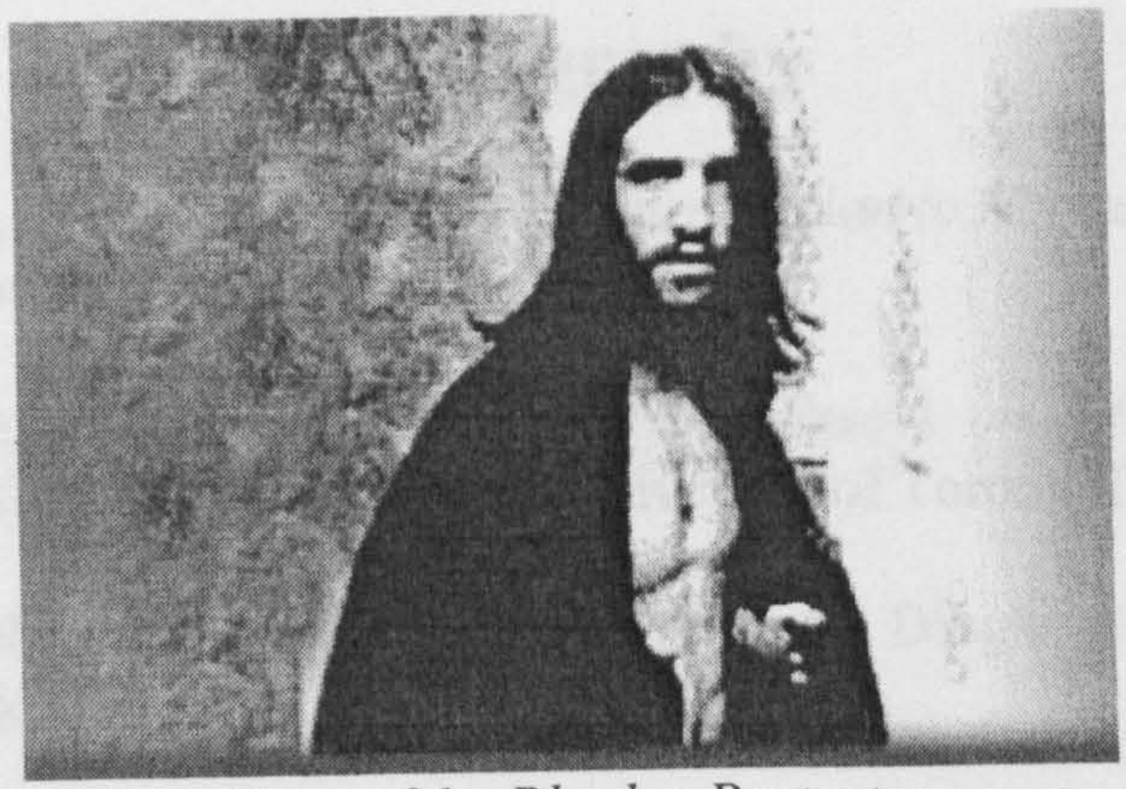


Figure 21 - Blanket Protester
http://home.student.uva.nl/piet.potter/Hoofdrolspelers/bobby/piet25.jpg

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