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READING IN BOTH DIRECTIONS: A CRITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIC
METHOD OF FILM INTERPRETATION

by

Sandra Moffat

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation concentrates on the experiential, emotional, imaginative and social aspects of film spectator criticism. A method of viewing films is developed which seeks to analyze how viewers' social situatedness in relation to their imaginative and affective responses plays a role in their critical thinking about a given film. The main argument of this thesis is that this kind of strategy to interpreting films can uncover some of a viewer's investments in competing/conflicting filmic discourses and practices. These investments in turn may shed light on her or his life discourses and practices and be implicated in their resistance to social change. Rather than agreeing with the widely held premise that viewers' "experiences" are not very important sources of knowledge for analyzing a film, the thesis argues that a critical autobiographic film viewing method can provide media theorists, educators and spectators with a more sophisticated and productive strategy for understanding aspects of hegemony enacted or represented in films as well as in audience members' lives.

Drawing on my own filmic and life experiences, I attempt to critically uncover some of the ways in which my past and current social locations interact with my affective, critical and imaginative responses to specific films. This approach to film might be of particular interest to those who are frustrated with
current media theory and criticism focused on so-called rational or objective strategies of viewing film. In contrast, I stress the complex interplay of unconscious and conscious social desires that exist in spectators' responses and interpretations. Finally, then, I suggest a method of film viewing which works with and through social ambiguities and contradictions instead of trying to arrive at fixed, universal, or purely individualistic meanings or positions from which to see and assess films.
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PREFACE

For some time now I have observed the need for a method of reading films which helps spectators make sense of the vast array of competing/conflicting emotions, imaginative thoughts and criticisms that arise for them while interpreting female film characters. Most of the media theory I have come across tends to disregard whether and how women's different social locations, emotions and everyday lives interact with their responses to film and television. Alternatively, much of this media criticism frequently relies upon so-called rational modes of analyzing the cinematic portrayals of women's lives rather than seeing female film characters and female spectators as drawing upon competing discourses and practices based on unconscious and conscious social desires. There is notably little research which addresses how viewers use their own socially constructed "experiences" to interpret film characters.

Over the years I have tried to sort out, using the current methods of reading films, how to articulate my interpretations of various female film characters. In doing so I have become increasingly aware of the binaries which have prevented me from more fully understanding the complex investments I have in various characters' different social positions as well as my own. For example, I have been taught to perceive female film characters and myself as either victims or heroines. A dichotomous approach to film spectatorship such as this, has not made any room for the numerous unconscious and conscious contradictions I have experienced while engaging with and analyzing films about women's lives.

In an attempt to remedy this ongoing problem in film spectatorship, that is of perceiving contradictory/competing imaginative and emotional responses as
unworthy of scholarly attention, I develop in this dissertation a different kind of method of reading films that focuses on how viewers might use their own life stories to work with their affective, critical and imaginative responses. This method is best summed up by Jackie Stacey (1994):

Thus the processes here involve the negotiation of self and other, but also between self and imaginary self which temporarily merges with the fictionalized feminine subject to test out new possibilities. The recognition of a potential self in the fictionalized situation, based on some similarity between star and spectator, is operating simultaneously with a desire to maintain the difference between self and ideal (129).

In this thesis then I use my own "experiences" to develop strategies to negotiate these aspects of a social self in relation to various female film characters.

For the most part, I use media theories as well as sociological and autobiographical approaches in relation to five films to explore the victimization of women and the limited choices available to women. I also explore in this thesis how representations of women (characters and spectators such as myself) participate in colonialism, racism, heteronormativity and classism as well as contribute to the transformation of these oppressive social structures. Since female characters and viewers cannot be seen as just enacting only one discourse or one practice, it is vitally important that a complex interplay of categories is examined to better understand character representation and interpretation.

One of the key issues I examine in my thesis is how working simultaneously with socially located emotional, imaginative and critical dimensions of analyzing films can lead to an interpretive practice which takes into account why and how viewers sometimes resist using alternative discourses to read films. Instead of routinely ignoring many of the different
dimensions involved in film interpretation, an approach that often characterizes interpretive practices inside and outside of schooling (Buckingham, 1998), I demonstrate in this project how some of these dimensions might be made intelligible by looking more closely at how I have learned in socially patterned ways to see and assess various filmic representations.

By moving back and forth between how I have learned to represent my life experiences and the representations put forth in the films (with the assistance of many theorists from a variety of academic backgrounds), I have been able to uncover some of the ways in which I have invested in dominant modes of thinking and how I might work towards gradually changing some of those investments. Every time I take up a specific interpretation of a filmic discourse there are political implications. This is precisely why it is so important for me to try to see how each discourse has been constituted, both autobiographically within my own experience and publicly in the domain of popular representations, and how and why I tend in some situations to favor one particular discourse over another.

I suggest a method in the following text which works with the contradictions and competing discourses that are most likely at play in my interpretations of a given film instead of arriving at a final "truth". This is one of the reasons why this thesis poses many more questions than answers. I have tried to deal with the numerous contradictions that arise while analyzing a film rather than expecting to arrive a place where I have it all figured out. The goal of my method then is to pay strict attention to the clash of discourses involved in the spectating process in order to make the constructions of representations more apparent and therefore easier to deconstruct. I consider this one form of critical thinking which directly involves discussing my social/self perceptions in
relation to how I make and remake the figure of a particular cinematic character's social/self perceptions as these have been conceptualized in the film. Many discourses are involved in this process and I try to sort out how and why the characters and myselfs might be invested in particular discourses and not others.

I found that this method has enabled me to see more clearly how working in-between various binaries is more productive, because remaining fixed in one socially located category or another limits our ability to perceive the multilayeredness of any social positioning and its impact on our critical thinking. While interpreting a film I am constantly shifting back and forth and inbetween various textual projections as well as my own subjectivities so it is impossible for me to stay on one end of the spectrum or the other even though I frequently experience myselfs as very fixed in one position and repeatedly express this fixedness through the language available to me in my culture. This is the struggle.

So I strive to reconceive of my own social locations, emotions, learned interpretive strategies, everyday practices and imaginative thoughts as fluid. In this way I try to pay attention to the oscillations and the multi-directionality that arises in the spectating process in order to discuss precisely how the subversiveness is or could be operating in the film narrative, in my interpretations and in the social context in which this reading takes place. I emphasize in my thesis how the powerful white, male, middle class, heteronormative discourses that I grew up with can seriously limit how I understand some of the film characters' struggles as well as interfere with my own life negotiations, preventing me from working with alternative discourses. The goal of my method then is to keep moving through sexualities and
subjectivities, to push my critical thinking along in any way I can. Since I was trying to work with several layers of spectatorship at once as well as many different academic theories, I found this to be a very difficult process.

In terms of the pedagogical implications of my project I ask: how might the method of reading films that I suggest help media educators work with students who resist taking up and using alternative discourses? In order to address this question, Judith Williamson's (1981) article, "How Does Girl Number Twenty Understand Ideology?" usefully focuses attention on the problem of how students often resist arguments for social justice and the notion that their personal experiences are not entirely their own. Williamson states:

... the missing link, with all of them, [her students] between their own experience (which I agree is not necessarily enlightening on its own) and the more 'theoretical' ideas I was trying to teach, was an understanding of ideology. The idea of ideology as something we all participate in, underlies the first possibility of critical thought, because it shows that no ideas are 'given' or 'absolute'. ... The biggest mental breakthrough that's possible after infancy and the learning of language itself, is the understanding that one's language and thought are not immutable and natural, and if students leave college with this understanding it's the best thing education will have done for them (83).

Following Williamson then, I argue that it is not good enough just to tell students how they are supposed to perceive the media, they must gain an understanding of how their own lives are ideologically implicated in it, otherwise, various critiques will not necessarily be convincing to students, let alone persuade them that their interpretations, as Williamson says, "are not all their own" (85).

This is an important issue in media education especially since there are many problematic discourses operating in media texts in relation to students' and teachers' lives which need to be addressed. My dissertation argues that
critical thinking can be more productive if students and teachers examine the social formation of their own identities in relation to the media. Otherwise, if analyzing films is always about how other people interpret films, there will be very little opportunity for students and teachers to really examine *the ways they take up and have internalized* dominant modes of thinking. Basically then instead of urging students to invest in a metanarrative about media productions, it seems much more meaningful to encourage students to explore how they use the media by drawing upon their own communities and everyday lives.

Williamson makes a point which I find convincing:

... I would say that students learn best to 'see' the 'invisible', ideology, when it becomes in their own interest to - when they are actually caught in a contradiction, believing things which are directly hindering their own well-being or wishes, or which conflict with change in experience (85).

Williamson describes how some of her students can deconstruct media codes and conventions that stereotype women, but are still very much invested in discourses, which maintain that girls and women are unintelligent. She explains how students' identities inevitably become an issue in the classroom despite her best efforts not to depend on personal experience to teach cultural hegemony.

She argues that:

.. it is not enough to just analyze the media. Students can know the history of TV backwards and 'deconstruct' an entire TV programme but still think the people who watch it are stupid. Unless you can find any analogous situation in their own experience and make it problematic for them - they will never really grasp the ideological relation between 'text' and 'reader' (84).

I am not trying to say that the method I propose in the following pages, of
problematizing the social formation of my identities in relation to a given film, ensures that those who use this type of strategy will automatically entertain the notion that "no ideas are 'given' or 'absolute'". Nor does my method ensure that users will automatically take up alternative discourses or that they will feel or become empowered in the classroom or the culture at large.

However, what I am arguing for is the idea that if teachers' and students' affective, critical and imaginative responses to a film, are examined in written and oral assignments, it is more likely that they will arrive at a form of criticism that enables them to demonstrate how their desires around certain filmic discourses have been shaped, reinforced as well as called into question, in a given film as well as in the broader culture.

So I ask: where might a media education teacher go with using a critical autobiographical method in the classroom? Sue Turnbull's (1998) re-reading of Williamson's 1981 article, called "Dealing with Feeling: Why Girl Number Twenty Still Doesn't Answer" provides me with some ideas. Turnbull tells us that Girl Twenty would appear to be Astrid, who Williamson describes as "a good example of someone who could not learn about sexism 'analytically'" (89). Williamson states:

My worst problem is Astrid. She looks, actually, very like the blonde heroines of the comic strip, her self image is clearly bound to the things we seem to be attacking. She sits at the front of the class and says literally, nothing. She may file her nails, or just stare: I'm really worried about her. I offer to teach her with the other girls but she doesn't particularly want to (82).

Turnbull surmises: "For Williamson, Astrid represents the problem of what to do with personal knowledge in the classroom" (89).

Turnbull thus takes up Williamson's insights 18 years later because, from
her perspective, researching and teaching in classrooms across England, the
US and Australia, she has seen many Astrids who "figure as a trope of passive
resistance" (89). Turnbull asks important questions such as: "should we be
asking Astrid to lay herself and her life on the line in the media education
classroom? What is at risk in students revealing intimate details about
themselves and their media preferences in a social context and at an age when
other people's opinions may have considerable impact on, and consequences
for, their self esteem?" (101).

Turnbull's research involving "22 different Astrids (aged 16-17 from 11
different ethnic backgrounds)" (102) has revealed the importance of working
with students' contradictory responses to the media rather than relying on
universalistic criticisms. She offers an approach for teachers which might help
to include the Astrids by suggesting that students,

... create an image of themselves in the past, present and the
future using a variety of already existing or especially created
media forms. ... In other words, to devise an original articulation
of themselves in and through the media. This task could then lead
to the kinds of open-ended exploration of self and media which
characterize a progressive rather than a radical form of pedagogy:
a pedagogy which allows students to explore the contradictions in
their own experience of specific social contexts and the media,
rather than seeking a template of critical theory imported from
other times and other places (102).

Such a classroom exercise incorporates many of the theoretical questions I
raise in the following thesis about autobiography, film studies as well as feminist
and cultural criticism. Perhaps if students engage in these types of approaches,
they may feel that their media interpretations are worth taking a look at, instead
of just reiterating the "critical discourses favoured by academics and teachers"
(Turnbull, 1998; 95).
I am a case in point, because by exploring the socially patterned contradictions of my own experiences in relation to five films, I have learned a great deal more about media interpretive practices and ourselves than I would have if someone had told me precisely how I was supposed to make meanings from the films. I have found a space to speak about films which I did not have before embarking on this project. Rather than pressuring myself to get it right, to take up the metanarratives put forth by media experts, I now perceive myself as struggling with some very complex concepts in relation to how I assess a given film.

Perhaps I could have placed more of an emphasis in this thesis on how film texts operate. However, I chose to work with the notion that texts remake us and we remake them. We are never simply in the text or in ourselves: we are always somewhere inbetween. So in order to stay faithful to the goals of my research, I did not want to start with either the text or the readings of other feminist film theorists because then I probably would have been suppressed by some of those analyses, something I very much wanted to avoid. Instead, I wanted to see where my initial critical and affective responses would lead me. I wanted to investigate the "premises underlying my own film projections" (Turnbull, 1998). Hopefully I have ended up with something approximating the kind of "open-ended exploration of self and media" which Turnbull recommends by focusing on the dialogue I have with five films at particular historical moments.

The point of my dissertation then is to investigate a different way of analyzing films which looks more at how individuals assess a given film from their cultural positions rather than just a focus on how films and the broader culture position viewers. My critical autobiographic exploration has helped me
begin to transform some of my investments in oppressive discourses as well as expose how I still perpetuate some normative ways of thinking about filmic representations and my own responses.

A traditional spectator ethnography or textually based project frequently tries to conceal the author in an attempt to achieve greater objectivity while theorizing spectators' reactions to the media. In this way, many ethnographies do not reveal how the researcher/theorist is implicated in the arguments he/she puts forth. Ethnographies have a strong history of legitimization in the academy whereas an approach like mine, based on interrogating the author's personal/social investments in filmic discourses has not yet received the same degree of legitimacy.

I have learned from past experiences of analyzing films that if I had begun my project by concentrating on how the films set me up as a spectator then I might have gotten lost in the intricacies of this approach and its internalist focus. It means I end up struggling with the dominant notion that the text is much more powerful than my interpretations of it. So I agree with Sue Turnbull that what many of the girl number twenties in the world might require is more opportunities to speak about their own interests in the media and the opportunity to employ strategies that allow/enable them to critically articulate these interests rather than an emphasis on how they are being manipulated and controlled by the broader culture.

Similar to Turnbull, I recommend analyzing lived experiences in relation to the media, specifically the gaps between "desire and duty" and "thought and action" that she speaks of. In other words, it is imperative that students and teachers learn to see and work with the complex negotiations and contradictory positionings between their social/personal investments, the filmic text and the
culture at large, rather than always looking for the hidden meanings in the text. Otherwise their locally based interpretive practices will remain largely unexamined and delegitimized. In what follows then, I attempt to formulate a strategy for reading films which might help teachers and students place less of an emphasis on the "correct" media readings and more of an emphasis on readings which arise from their own social milieu.

A method of reading films which honours where I come from and how I got there has enabled me to gradually reformulate how I conceptualize my participation in normalizing dichotomies. There is in this approach an acknowledgment and an analysis that I am immersed in those dichotomies instead of somehow outside of them, looking in. What is important about my critical autobiographical study for the topic of film spectatorship and media education more generally (and beyond what might be interesting about me as an individual), is the development of a method which minimizes the universalizing and/or individualizing of viewers' responses. Alternatively, I suggest a sociological approach to reading films which involves recovering affective responses without either valorizing them or separating them from a spectator's social locations, histories and critical analyses.
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... I wanted to know why Mr. Cole seemed to identify with Rocky and why I did and what that meant in terms of the place of the film in the constitution of us as subjects. But to do this I had to use the idea of intertextuality, the assumption that meanings in the film meant something to the viewer because of other places in which those meanings were constituted in their lives (Walkerdine, 1997:54).

The focus of this dissertation is on the intertextualities Walkerdine writes about. I call these intertextualities critical autobiographical film analyses. A very important thematic of this project is that the explanations I give about myself as a "subject" in relation to a particular film are not necessarily the "truths" about my life; rather they are socially constructed interpretations of my life.

Linda Niemann (1998) expresses my current perceptions of autobiographical work:

... of course, the "I" of autobiography is a fictional construct with a literary genre of its own, complete with readers' expectations and desires. As the author of a memoir myself, I am often asked by readers, "How could you reveal so much of yourself?" When I was writing, I thought that was what I was doing, but now I do not identify with "myself" in the narrative. "Myself" became a literary persona, a character (19).

However, despite my emphasis in this thesis on seeing myself as fictional characters similar to the way that Niemann does, I still feel uneasy about discussing my life experiences in an academic environment.

Walkerdine (1997) articulates precisely my sentiments with regard to the politics of autobiographical research: "My self-disclosure was always meant to be a way of understanding subjectivity by taking myself as a subject and explaining my own formation, an act that I found terrifying" (58). I admire Walkerdine for admitting to her fears about her personal/social approach and
her honesty has helped me realize how important it is that film spectators, like myself, analyze the social formation of their film viewing desires in a scholarly project. In fact, Walkerdine's work has been instrumental to the design of my project which examines how my social locations operate in relation to my histories of formations of experience, power, imagination, emotions and critical thinking with regard to three feature films; *Little Man Tate* (1991), *The Piano* (1993) and *Margaret’s Museum* (1995). I also use a metanarrative approach to look at two films, *The Nasty Girl* (1990) and *An Angel at My Table* (1990) because these films raise issues that the other three films did not, such as staging the telling of a story as well as telling a story.

Similar to Walkerdine, the frameworks I analyze to investigate my critical autobiographical film analyses draw on a variety of interconnected academic discourses such as post-structuralist theories that address issues of identity, diversity and representation (Weedon, 1987; Butler, 1992); feminist theories which offer analyses of troubled pleasures and conflicting social locations (Ang, 1985; Brundson, 1991; McClintock, 1995); autobiographical approaches (Walkerdine, 1986, Kuhn, 1992; Stacey, 1994; Gilmore, 1994); theories which pose some important questions regarding psychoanalysis (Rose, 1986; Walkerdine, 1990; Davies, 1993); and film and television studies that debate methodological issues (Fiske, 1987; Collins, 1989, 1995; Hartley, 1994; Pribram, 1988; Stacey, 1994).

Although there is a growing feminist literature in film and television studies and a few studies of audiences and spectators (Bobo, 1988; Gamman, 1989; Stacey, 1994; Spigel, 1995), I found a paucity of studies with regard to whether or how women's different social locations and everyday lives interact with their responses to film and television. Also, many mass communication studies frequently assume that viewers are "passive dupes" who are
manipulated by the media (Hartley, 1994). As a result, spectators' analyses are often generalized among film and television theorists and critics alike. This has had serious implications for media education programs since diverse audience interpretations and contradictory viewing strategies involving experience, power, pleasure, imagination, criticism and emotions are routinely left out (Walkerdine, 1986; Stacey, 1993; Buckingham, 1993). Recent media research (Moss, 1993; Turnbull, 1993) and my master's thesis (Moffat, 1993) demonstrate that audience members are active participants in viewing; that people often express very surprising interpretations of what they see.

The goal of my doctoral research in education is to develop a critical autobiographical film viewing method which might encourage media theorists and educators to study the impact that their own as well as their participants' and their students' social locations and everyday lives have on media interpretations. In order to devise this method, I look closely at how I, as one female graduate student who is white, middle class, able-bodied and heterosexual has learned to perceive, make meanings and use forms of social fantasy in order to understand myself in relation to a film. I also look closely at the social consequences of my film interpretations. Except for Walkerdine, bell hooks and Annette Kuhn, media theorists and educators for the most part have not investigated the formations of their own subjectivities in relation to their film and television interpretations.

The autobiographical work Kuhn, Walkerdine and hooks have done in relation to their research (which will be discussed in more detail in the chapters to follow) is not just about improving research methodologies, it's also about how individuals are labeled, categorised, pathologised and denied access to various resources and media responses. This is not to say that every researcher should reveal and interrogate his/her histories each time he/she
embarks on a study, but researchers and participants must be acutely aware of the ways research studies are imagined from particular perspectives and how these perspectives impact on everyone involved and the construction of numerous discourses (McMahon, 1991; Martindale, 1992; Cotterill and Letherby, 1993). The purpose of my critical autobiographical research then is to help researchers, educators and audience members remain diligent about theorizing and re-evaluating their own investments in particular media interpretations. In this way, my work makes an important contribution to the literature on film and television spectatorship.

The issues I am exploring have increasing significance since the new technologies such as computer games, hypertext-based media, CD-ROMs, virtual reality and their connections with film and television require revisions in the way we understand media response, new literacies and the place of media interactivity in everyday lives (Green & Bigum, 1993), because previous media theories have tended to rely on so-called "rational" critiques to explain these interactions. Alternatively, I want to take into account spectators' fluctuating conscious and unconscious reactions to film and although different technologies and their forms and structuring of interaction will most likely produce different kinds of responses, these technologies often involve similar icons, scenarios and visual conventions (Collins, 1995) that are involved in films. How have I learned to discuss and criticize these cultural representations in and through my life experiences? I also question how reading cultural representations 'teaches' me/us to reinterpret life experiences which is a second purpose of my method.

Spectators employ many techniques to evaluate the media. They are engaged in "their own archivation of their cultural histories" (Collins, 1995; 218) as they watch film and television. Collin's (1995) use of the concept of
hyperconsciousness is very helpful here. He refers to the fact that films and television shows often contain ironic messages which speak to what viewers already know.

Within the exchange of the television message, we are dealing with, at the very least, a tertiary relationship, since the two initial levels of sign production are inserted within television's own peculiar discursivity that either brackets the entire message ironically (I know that you know that I know) or historically (that was then, this is now, even if both persist in the still being said of the medium's transmission) (Collins, 1989;271).

Film and television producers acknowledge that audience members' everyday lives interact with the media. But, what are the implications of this if, for example, white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual assumptions are repeatedly represented in films without disruption?

Obviously, criticism is required, but instead of just pitting critical thinking against so-called dominant or common sense modes of spectating, I would like to, as Collins suggests: "re-evaluate the way the average/critical viewer dichotomy has been constructed" (1989; 273). These are not the only spectating alternatives available; nonetheless, many viewers judge themselves harshly by the critical versus non-critical paradigm. Ien Ang's (1985) study on Dallas (which is discussed in more detail in the next section) found that viewers' responses to the television show indicated how important it was to them not to be viewed as completely taken in by the popular program. Therefore, in this dissertation I try to negotiate the pressures to be "correct" that Ang's participants were involved with by looking at what I already know about the media, my everyday life and how I learned to interpret the media rather than solely using a "critical" versus non-critical binary to evaluate my viewing practices.

I do this through an examination of the implications of remaining fixed in a critical versus non-critical binary. For example, this approach does not
encourage viewers to explore a language for theorizing their emotions and imaginative reactions to the films they see. Rather, it focuses on how spectators are persuaded to take up specific methods of analyzing film, such as constantly expressing what is supposedly "incorrect" in the text; otherwise they will be seen as 'average' audience members who are duped by media representations. I develop strategies to move away from this dichotomy by investigating how viewing has shaped my understanding and representations of life experiences instead of ignoring these viewing dimensions which is what is often expected of a "critical" viewer (Thomas, 1995).

Collins (1995) makes it clear that audience members are constantly recycling their viewing and life histories as they interact with the media. He points out that VCRs and computers make it easier for spectators to bring the past into the present. Also, Collins reminds us that "the successful merchandising of nostalgia" has significantly contributed to spectators' access to how their personal histories always intersect with social histories. For example, viewers' personal memories of their favorite television shows and films are shaped by a particular time in history that is reviewed for them in the merchandising of nostalgia. "Understanding the intricacies of aesthetic evaluation and historicization within the array of postmodern culture depends upon our ability to see the interconnectedness of recirculation, re-articulation, and reevaluation" (182) (Italics mine). I am intrigued by how I negotiate these processes and in this thesis, I analyze, by critically examining five films, how I have produced these types of interactions.

I focus on the negotiations I make with my social locations, imagination, affective responses and critical thoughts in relation to a film text. I am developing a film viewing method which points out how imaginations, affective responses and social locations can be directly related, seen as intertwined and
not separate spheres. Always keeping this in mind, I ask: how do I experience contradictions, tensions and ambivalent feelings about a film? Do I feel I should try to hide these types of responses? What discourses¹ are used by me to evaluate the films I have chosen to focus on? Which sites do these discourses come from? How are these discourses rearticulated, reevaluated and recirculated? How are my subjectivities formed? How have I "come to want what I want" (Walkerdine, 1990)?

Do I strive for a whole self? Do I perform what I have learned from viewing these films? Am I aware of the power relations that are involved in my film viewing? Do I take into account my own agency with regard to my film interpretations? How have I used my everyday lives, imagination, affective and critical responses to navigate my way through various film texts? How are these strategies socially constructed? In the following sections of this introduction, I examine several media theorists who have helped me arrive at these questions which I begin to answer in this thesis.

The main reason I have chosen to investigate my own viewing agency/practices is to explore how competing/conflicting social discourses and practices might operate consciously and unconsciously when a viewer watches/analyzes a film. This is an area of film criticism which has been seriously overlooked, because first, many scholars have been taught to avoid the messy business of "emotional response" and "personal lives" and, second, it is very difficult to study how spectators are invested consciously and unconsciously in particular ways of seeing filmic discourses. In order to work with these problems I have re-evaluated the ways I have been taught to see films from a so-called objective perspective and by reflecting upon my own film analyses, I recommend some strategies which might make affective, critical and imaginative responses to films more intelligible.
**Living with Film and Television**

Media researchers and theorists have conceptualized viewers' so-called "everyday responses" or "personal stories" in relation to films and television programs in different ways. Throughout this dissertation, I discuss some of this research. I begin my literature review with John Hartley (1992) who argues that the concept of "audience" must be continuously contested.

Audiences may be imagined empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the need of the imagining institution. In no case is the audience "real", or external to its discursive construction. There is no actual audience that lies beyond its production as a category, which is merely to say that audiences are only ever encountered *per se as representations* (105).

In light of this statement then, key questions for me are: How do viewers *represent* their own stories in response to films and television shows and how do researchers *represent* the viewers' stories? I want to make some of the "invisible fictions" visible (Hartley, 1992). "Storying is a social practice: narrative is a cultural construct" (Gilbert, 1992;22).

The constructions of spectators' stories in research accounts need to be continuously exposed in an attempt to understand how film and television responses are socially devised. One way to do this is to study the researchers' and interviewees' imaginations, affective responses, critical thoughts and social locations which are used to invent and reinvent the many stories that are told about films and television programs. As Len Ang (1985) points out: "life without imagination does not exist" (83).

Shaun Moore (1993) argues that audience ethnographers should frame their interpretive debates with terms such as 'creativity' and 'constraint' rather than human agency and social structure. He states:
Depending upon the complex intersections of class location with gendered, ethnic and generational subjectivities, it is argued that our access to both material and symbolic resources is inevitably constrained and patterned in certain ways (117).

Analyzing how audience members use "symbolic resources" in relation to their social locations in order to tell stories can provide many insights into what aspects of a film or television program are important to the viewers and why.

David Buckingham (1993) also discusses the benefits of looking at audience members' creative viewing strategies; however, he warns against seeing creativity and pleasure exclusively as something inherently positive, because this tends to lead to 'everyday life' stories being seen as "an unproblematic site of 'cultural production'" (205). Yet, Buckingham stresses the importance of taking into account what spectators already know about films and television shows instead of assuming that they lack the skills to perform social criticism.

I.len Ang (1985) sees spectators' viewing pleasures as important indicators of how they consciously and unconsciously invest in various discourses. She conducted an ethnography in the Netherlands regarding the television program Dallas. She put advertisements in the daily papers asking viewers to tell her what they thought of the program and she did a discourse analysis of the responses she received. Ang interprets the pleasures in her respondents' viewing experiences by focusing on how they take up the "ideology of mass culture" which she describes as the "negative image commonly given to so-called mass culture - especially in Europe" (94).

Ang's study examines closely how viewers use various ideologies, circulating inside and outside Dallas, to formulate their reactions to the program. She states: "The routes followed by people's imaginative strategies are formed during the course of their personal and subcultural histories and slowly rub
through, as it were, into their practical consciousness" (81). I would like to investigate these "routes". How did I get to my current media interpretations?

Ang found that it was the *Dallas*-lovers who had "the most complex and carefully negotiated relation both to the 'ideology of mass culture' and to the program" (112). These respondents went to great lengths in order to rationalize their pleasures. She asks: "But why do these *Dallas*-lovers feel the need to defend themselves against the ideology of mass culture?" (114). Ang argues that these viewers cannot step outside the prevalent ideology which denounces pleasure with regard to popular culture. Here is one viewer's reaction:

"You are right in saying that you often get these strange reactions. Such as 'So you like watching cheap mass entertainment, eh?'. Yes, I watch it and I'm not ashamed of it. But I do try to defend my motivation tooth and nail" (106).

The contradictions that Ang's participants experience are central to her analyses. She offers this explanation: "In short, these fans do not seem to be able to take up an effective ideological position - an identity - from which they can say in a positive way and independently of the ideology of mass culture: 'I like *Dallas* because ...'" (102). Ang's work is very insightful, because she structures her research so that it values the spectators' pleasures and deciphers how they strive for a unitary self, but seemingly do not achieve it. Their identities are continuously in process and they pick and choose (not necessarily freely) discourses which help them feel better about their responses to *Dallas*; a television show that is frequently dismissed as bad television.

In my project, I not only focus on my affective and critical responses, but I gain an understanding of how they were formed through the course of my viewing and life histories. Similar to Ang, I pay attention to the discourses that I negotiate, and, more specifically, I analyze how I see my own development as a
"critical spectator". David Buckingham's (1993) analyses provide an excellent starting point for my investigation into my viewing practices. He states:

In demonstrating our ability to distinguish between truly critical perspectives and those which are (by implication) merely uncritical, we are making a powerful claim for our own authority. And if we are critical, those who do not share our views are either merely ignorant and misguided or actively engaged in an attempt to obscure the truth (142).

In this way, Buckingham looks at the social functions of critical discourses about the media.

His work is particularly relevant to my research because he draws some correlations between the social locations of viewers and the ways they have learned to criticize the media, something I examine throughout my critical autobiographical film writings. He found that middle class children tended to be seen as "more critical or indeed more televisually literate than working class children" (145). Yet, the working class children were more likely "to stake out their own tastes and celebrate their own pleasures for the benefit of the group" (145). Buckingham discovered that: "The process of becoming critical is part of the way in which middle class children come to distinguish themselves from others, and thereby actively socialize themselves into class membership" (146).

Also, he found gender was a contributing factor to this scenario. Middle class girls more readily expressed their media pleasures whereas middle class boys "for whom the expression of pleasure appears much more risky and problematic, the exercise of critical judgment seems to offer the security of appearing to exercise absolute rational control" (146). Overall, Buckingham suggests that all discourses should be questioned in terms of their social functions and consequences.
My research begins with the assumption that I have already learned how to criticize the media in some way. How have I learned to do this? Why? Do I realize that the conceptual frameworks that I use should not be taken for granted? Have my critical methods changed over time? Are there one or two particular events in my life that have influenced my criticisms of a film and/or is it a complex interplay of many different factors? How have films which are most significant to me played a role in my understanding of the media? What are the "icons, scenarios and visual conventions" which are most important to my critical thought patterns? (Collins, 1995). How do these cultural representations make me feel? Why? In this thesis, I uncover how I might be withholding analyses of my emotional and imaginative reactions to the media in order to appear "critical".

One of the reasons audience members' responses have been frequently generalized and labeled passive is because their enjoyment of film and television has been repeatedly dismissed and/or considered inappropriate. How can the media be criticized without setting up certain requirements regarding what one is allowed to enjoy? Jim Collins (1995) discusses this problem in the following way:

The disqualification of fascination as an acceptable response to popular culture reveals a series of interconnected problems, particularly the inability to account for pleasure except in terms of negative category, that which the truly oppositional text will not allow, except in the form of a self-congratulatory detachment that is suitably distanced (112).

I explore the complexity of viewing practices. I do not want to become trapped in a binary opposition by only investigating my affective responses and as a result not taking into account my film and television critiques or the critiques that others have put forth. Nor do I want to imply that if I could only acknowledge my
viewing histories and autobiographical perspectives then I would produce better media analyses.

To avoid these assumptions, I problematize why I might fear using a variety of viewing dimensions to analyze a film. I look at how and why I invest in positions that seek to prove that spectators are manipulated and controlled by media images and as a result ignore and/or condemn viewers' use of their everyday lives to understand the media (Hartley, 1994). However, I do not intend to say that films never have a detrimental effect on women and girls. Rather, I argue throughout this dissertation that a lot of the media research tends to make too many easy assumptions about how viewers incorporate films into their lives and their lives into their film interpretations.

Ang’s research has had a tremendous influence on my work. She states:

I wanted in the first place to understand this pleasure, without having to pass judgment on whether Dallas is good or bad, from a political, social or aesthetic view. Quite the contrary; in my opinion it is important to emphasize how difficult it is to make such judgments - hence to try to formulate the terms for a progressive cultural politics - when pleasure is at stake. 'Any research is a sort of autobiography', as the anthropologist Georges Devereux once said. It is for others to judge whether the analyses and arguments presented here are also recognizable and convincing in a more general sense (12).

Throughout my formal and informal media education, I have felt a lot of pressure to label films and television shows as either "good" or "bad". My contradictory and ambivalent spectating experiences seem to disappear when I am forced into this "good" versus "bad" scenario. It is refreshing to hear Ang write about this dilemma.

Why have audience members’ everyday lives frequently been negated in media research? How does this negation relate to the fact that viewers' responses are often generalized in many studies on spectators? Which forms of
interacting with the media have been disregarded? (For example, viewing strategies which involve imagination, emotions, fantasy, desire, memory, experience and fear.) Why have such productive categories like these been so easily overlooked? How do these viewing dimensions interconnect with audience members' everyday lives?

**Meandering**

Post-structuralists use the concepts of subject, subjectivity and subject position in an attempt to understand how individuals are informed by a variety of conflicting and intersecting discourses. For example, social locations such as race, class, gender, age, ability, ethnicity and sexuality (Weedon, 1987) play a major role in spectators' film interpretations and post-structuralist theories provide me with a method for looking at this process. More specifically, feminist post-structuralists have theorized how individuals' subjectivities are formed by the complex positions they occupy in the world. Judith Butler (1992) proposes the following process which is most applicable to the critical autobiographical research I conduct throughout this dissertation. She states:

... it is clearly not the case that "I" preside over the positions that have constituted me, shuffling through them instrumentally, casting some aside, incorporating others, although some of my activity may take that form. The "I" who would select between them is always already constituted by them. The "I" is the transfer point of that replay, but it is simply not a strong enough claim to say that the "I" is situated; the "I," is constituted by these positions, and these "positions" are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as a viable "subject" (9).

Butler's account challenges theorists and researchers who try to fix the construction of the subject "as a pregiven or foundationalist premise" (9). Many
researchers who are often "preoccupied with determination" frequently try to explain their participants' stories in a one-dimensional manner (Radway, 1988:367). They do this by insisting upon the humanist concept that individuals have a "real" self that is unique and fixed; an authentic self which needs to be discovered or expressed. Also, according to this premise, this self is only capable of expressing a unitary perspective and consciousness.

Alternatively, post-structuralist frameworks propose that individuals 'possess' multiple social selves which often contradict one another (Foucault, 1982). Within these paradigms, a viewer would probably take up different subject positions as he/she watches any given film or television program and is likely to experience contradictions. Therefore, the identity formation of a respondent may be based on his/her investments in some subject positions and not others. By using post-structuralist analyses in this thesis that highlight contradictory responses and multiple selves, I want to locate some of the tensions and instabilities within my fluctuating identities. Otherwise, if I insist upon a fixed self, my constantly shifting subjectivities, which are constituted by various discourses and practices, will most likely remain unreported (Weedon, 1987) or I might read them as "false consciousness". Consequently I might be perceived or perceive myselfs as "poorly adjusted". This scenario often sets the stage for me, as a media theorist, to impose categories and definitions upon myselfs that may not reflect at all how I use film. Rather, I become trapped in a "critical" versus "non-critical" binary which I would like to counteract.

Examining my contradictory/conflicting stories is an extraordinarily complex process, because it involves my investments in various subject positions before, during and after the screening of the film. One way for me to explore these investments is to gain some understanding of why I am motivated to pursue my particular viewing desires and how these desires contradict and/or
coincide with the various discourses I encounter in my life (Ang, 1985) and "how they are used to contest the dominance of other cultural forms" (Radway, 1988:367). "The vehemence with which tastes are expressed suggests a marking out of self, though with terms of difference which are of course social" (Richards, 1993:41).

However, different tastes are frequently not acknowledged and problematized amongst audience members. "To what extent have conventional definitions of autobiography and biography prohibited us from understanding the implications of self representation and the representation of other people's stories? What is off-limits in autobiography and biography?" (Ashley, Gilmore & Peters, 1994:11). (words in italics mine). The tremendous emphasis that has been placed, within traditional forms of autobiography and biography, on describing lives which are linear, chronological and coherent without gaps, ruptures or unexplained elements, has probably had a direct impact on how individuals represent themselves and others in media studies, but much more research is needed to explore this further. Many individuals are afraid of revealing their contradictory experiences including their pleasures and pains, because they have been taught to appear as a unified self who is constantly in control of his/her past, present and future (Butler, 1992).

In Australia, Bronwyn Davies' research focuses on how some children learn to tell stories and to interpret the stories that others tell. Her research provides some clarification on why fantasies and unconscious processes are often ignored by audience study participants and researchers. Davies (1993) points out that:

Because fantasy is understood as somehow integral to childhood, children are not immediately introduced to the fact/fantasy dualism. Adults go to some lengths to acquaint children with the world of fantasy via stories and collude in persuading children to believe that which they themselves do not believe to be true. In
deep contradiction with this particular practice, however, we require of children's tellings of their own experience a sharp dividing line to be drawn between "real" and "pretend" that they then take up as an important way of categorizing their tellings. Real is legitimate and has force while pretend is dismissable and positively evil if it is not clearly marked "pretend" (68).

With this type of ideology permeating the process of storytelling, it is not surprising that viewers' imaginations and affective responses are frequently rationalized or intellectualized out of many research projects.

Furthermore, as Lynn Spigel (1995) points out, many adults do not want children to be exposed to the "realism" of the adult world yet many children desire "what is being forbidden" (282). Spigel states:

Now, cable television, VCRs, and Nintendo games offer youngsters alternative venues for pleasure, venues about which critics are more and more anxious. And, as in the 1950s, such anxieties revolve around the central problem of keeping childhood separate from adulthood (283).

I explore in this thesis how I have learned and invested in various discourses and how these investments relate to my current viewing practices. How have I negotiated the variety of discourses which have taught me how to interact with the media?

When children become adults they might be afraid of expressing their imaginations and fantasies, because these viewing dimensions are often considered "pretend" and not suitable for adults. The category of pleasure often gets lost in this constructed division between children and adults. Spigel suggests this:

The discourse of victimization that surrounds the child viewer might, in this sense, usefully be renamed and reinvestigated as a discourse of power through which adults express their own disenfranchisement from our nation's dominant mode of communication (283).
I argue that this discourse of victimization not only surrounds the child viewer but also the adult viewer who was once a child, resulting in the patronizing dismissal of spectators' ability to interact intelligently with the media and make their own informed choices about what is the most "appropriate" entertainment for them (Hartley, 1994). Therefore, I see the need to gain a better understanding of my viewing histories by examining closely in what ways I have been constructed as a passive viewer who is unable to engage in critical media analyses.

The concept of the "real" is very problematic; yet, unfortunately many stories inside and outside films and television programs are only judged by how "realistic" they are. Instead, researchers and spectators need to look at how films and television are socially constructed rather than getting stuck in a "real" versus "unreal" dichotomy. Psychoanalytic theories can be used to investigate the aspects of spectators' viewing experiences which are not considered rational or "realistic" (Rose, 1986), such as how they use their emotions and their imaginations in relation to their criticisms to arrive at a particular media response. "Like fiction, psychoanalysis calls into question the boundaries between the real and the unreal" (Davies, 1990:505).

Although I do not actually use psychoanalytic concepts to interpret my own experiences in relation to the films I have selected, I acknowledge and reference how these theories about unconscious/conscious processes might be helpful in understanding why spectators, like myself, often experience strong feelings about a film which are at odds with their criticisms. In this thesis I demonstrate how the contradictory/competing discourses and practices that I use to interpret a film continuously draw upon my unconscious. Yet, I have chosen not to conduct an in-depth exploration of how my unconscious actually
works, because this would be a larger and much more complex project than I am willing to undertake at this time.

However, I want to emphasize that the field of psychoanalysis, especially reconceptualized by feminists, enables media theorists to argue that the less tangible aspects of film spectatorship do in fact influence the more tangible responses viewers express. In other words, psychoanalysis gives theorists a language or a grammar to explain the less visible but yet very powerful dimensions of media interpretation (McKenna, 1996). Weedon makes an important point about how psychoanalysis is useful for understanding the post-structuralist notion of fluctuating subjectivities:

It is Kristeva's theory of the subject as unstable, in process and constituted in language which is of most interest to a feminist poststructuralism. This radical alternative to the humanist view of subjectivity, in which it is self-present, unified and in control, offers the possibility of understanding the contradictory nature of individuals and of their dispersal across a range of subject positions of which they are not the authors. Fundamental to this view of subjectivity is the concept of the unconscious which remains, perhaps, the most important contribution of psychoanalysis to understanding subjectivity (70).

Weedon makes a strong argument here against the widely held approach of dismissing contradictory/competing film responses as irrational and uninformative.

In addition to paying attention to the "real" versus "unreal" dichotomies in film spectatorship theories, Collin Mercer (1986) suggests interrogating the term "ideological". He asks: "Is it the 'form' of the film which is ideological, for example? Or is it the message? Or is it the nature of its reception by a given audience?" Mercer argues that the notion of "the ideological" cannot answer specific questions like these without assuming a generalized response across
different locations. He recommends breaking the general category down into more workable pieces.

For the analysis of pleasure, though, we would then have to ask what are the terms of this capture, how complete is the circle of subjection and 'imaginary unity'? How far do unconscious operations of the sort implied here simply coincide with the intentions of a dominant ideology or discursive formation, how far does 'ego' correspond to 'superego' and 'subject' (individual) with 'Subject' (the Other, Order, the Symbolic, Culture)? If we are concerned with the 'spirals' of pleasure and power rather than direct ideological capture, these questions - of the instability of preferred forms of identification, of points of resistance and negotiation - must be returned to the terrain of consent or, perhaps more appropriately, processes of consensualisation (57).

How do I begin to untangle the complexity of my consensual interactions with films? If my plan is to discuss the ways I have used my imagination, social locations, affective responses and critical thoughts to analyze a film then, maybe, I can begin to see the formation of my consensual negotiations. Perhaps I feel manipulated by various viewing discourses. Or maybe, I feel confident with how I analyze films. How did I arrive at such a place?

As Marian McMahon (1991) points out memory-work can uncover how much consensus comes to organize a person's life. Using this approach she was shocked at the extent to which she had conformed to the "compulsion to anticipate and meet the unspoken needs of anyone around her" (26). McMahon looked at "fragments of herself and compared them to different arrangements of fragments of her past" (26). She states:

With histories re-covered, always partially, always continually, I can question stories made by those who are socially entitled to create official versions of history - versions that erase, generalize or wrench us from the contexts that shape us and that we constantly struggle to reshape (34).
Similarly, in my project I am not looking at my histories in a linear way; rather, I note the gaps and ruptures in my viewing stories which probably indicate how I have agreed and/or not agreed to use official versions of how audience members are supposed to watch films.

**Learning About Contradictions**

Thus far, I have demonstrated some of the ways media researchers have analyzed their participants' contradictory and conflicting reactions to films and television programs. These are complex processes, but they need to be debated a lot more in film and television studies (Stacey, 1993). More research is needed in this area which develops innovative strategies to analyze the tensions and ruptures in spectators' representations of their lives in relation to popular culture. Currently, the learning needs of media students are not being met as well as they could be, because many teachers are not acknowledging the importance of the viewers' creative negotiations of their lives for their media interpretations.

Media education which takes as its goal the provision of politically correct interpretations ignores that what is offering [sic] may be just as oppressive as what went before. It also assumes that such critical readings will be better for students than their own, without understanding exactly how these are implicated in students' endeavours to negotiate often contradictory cultural and moral expectations encountered in their everyday life (Turnbull, 1993;164).

Media education must combine critical readings with the readings that individual students develop. However, students need to be encouraged and taught to deconstruct their own experiences as they watch the media, because their imaginations and their interpretations of their lives are embedded in numerous social discourses (Hall, 1990; Bazalgette, 1992; Moss, 1993).
In order to do this, teachers must examine and express how they themselves experience pleasurable and contradictory responses to the media to encourage students to develop their own responses to films and television programs as well (Turnbull, 1993). Judith Williamson (1981) states:

... teachers should never underestimate the 'oughtness' which surrounds them as a teacher even before they open their mouth. I can't bear it when kids want to please, and start spouting 'correct' ideas which don't really mean anything to them. Because this is what will happen if their own ideas, which already do mean something to them, aren't dealt with first (86).

She argues that students best understand how various discourses inform their viewing practices when "they are actually caught in a contradiction, believing things which are directly hindering their own well-being or wishes, or which conflict with a change in experience" (85). I use this method in my critical autobiographical film work to deconstruct how I arrive at my film interpretations.

Williamson found that many of her students assumed that they were not influenced by ideologies, but when they saw how their own pleasures and desires often conflicted with the so-called politically correct ideas put forth in classroom, they were able to see how they were positioned and positioned themselves in relation to various films and television programs. However, if the teacher does not allow space for these types of autobiographical and biographical analyses then students won't necessarily understand some of the complex relationships between the audience and the media, let alone how their own reactions to it are socially produced (Williamson, 1981).

Yet, teachers and students must discuss the limitations of just focusing on their personal experiences with the media. As Sherene Razack (1993) points out, there is a tendency towards uncritical storytelling which does not take into account "how we know". Looking at the social constructions of students' stories can only be achieved, she suggests, by recognizing students' multiple
positionings and how they are "played out at any one time in any one context" (69). In a media education classroom this would involve looking at teachers' and students' understanding of their different social locations, especially the development of them and how they interact with the various subject positions offered in the film or television narratives.

Lynn Spigel (1995) investigated why her undergraduate students most often constructed historical narratives about television and women that affirm the present by glossing over the complexity of the past. She asked them to write an essay based on the following questions:

1) What do you think women were like in the 1950s? What did they do on an average day? What did they hope for and dream about? What did they fear and worry about? What were their relationships with men and women like? 2) How do you know these things about women in the 1950s? (23)

Spigel found that even though she did not ask the women to compare the 1950s to the 1990s, their main way of thinking about the past was through comparison with the present. She also discovered that television was one her participants' primary sources for historical consciousness.

However, instead of assuming, as many media critics have done, that television has caused women to have a distorted sense of their own past, Spigel examined her essays closely and she found that her participants were very self-critical of the fact that so many of their memories came from television. They frequently spoke of the "inadequacy of their sources" and they repeatedly discussed the stereotypical aspects of the images they remembered. This finding indicates to me that Spigel's participants might have taken up a discourse which emphasizes the dangers of relying on television for knowledge production.
Yet, Spigel's respondents also relied heavily on television to argue their perspectives. They overlooked the contradictions in the lives of women in the 1950s and the 1990s "by disavowing their disbelief in television in order to legitimate the idea that women's lives have substantially improved since the 1950s". Paying attention to how participants use contradictory discourses to analyze television can uncover viewers' desires. The women in Spigel's study wanted to believe that women's lives have improved dramatically and this appears to be more important to them than their criticisms of television as a source of knowledge.

Charlotte Brundson (1991) notes from her own experiences of teaching courses on women and popular culture that it is very easy for teachers and students to become fixed on one category in order to analyze the text. She has found that unless the particular differing identities of the viewer/reader are constantly alluded to "gender can be asked to explain both too little and too much. Femininity, instead of being a difficult and contradictory psychic, historically ambivalent, becomes an explanatory factor" (373).

As an example of this problem, Brundson discusses how her students have taken up Janice Radway's (1984) research on how some women use romance novels in their lives. Radway's findings often initiate discussions on the "ordinary woman" or the "housewife". This usually involves analyzing "her likes and dislikes, her pleasures and fantasies" without trying to understand who this woman actually is. "In relation to the feminist academic this figure comes to occupy the role of a non-feminist 'other' whose abhorrent tastes have to be explained by the researcher in 'rational' - that is, feminist academic - terms" (Hallam and Marshment, 1995; 13).

To alleviate this problem, Brundson recommends that teachers and students acknowledge how they might share investments in romance fantasies.
instead of just focusing on how other women read romances. Otherwise, romance-reading and feminism tend to be put in opposition to one another. Brundson discusses Ang's analysis of Radway's research. Ang criticizes Radway for only theorizing the pleasures and fantasies of so-called non-feminist women. This approach tends to leave non-feminism and feminism in fixed positions, especially since Radway, who is a feminist and not a romance fan, states that her aim is to raise the consciousnesses of the romance reading women. Brundson also disagrees with Radway's approach and she points out that feminism must be seen in a much "more provisional, attentive, even ironic, sense of self - and other" (381). She believes that teachers must continuously draw attention to the constructions of feminist criticism rather than promoting a "recruitist pedagogy" which frequently sets up an "us" and "them" dichotomy.

Brundson's research brings to mind the following question: why are my emotional reactions to films still very intense despite the fact that my feminist learnings have made me acutely aware of plot and character "stereotypes"? This is a question I work with throughout this dissertation. One way of investigating this question is to understand how my life stories inform my film interpretations. I cannot separate out my affective investments from my critical analyses. Consequently, it is important to see how these affective investments shape my film criticism. How do I use my emotions in relation to my everyday experiences to refute and/or reinforce what I perceive in a film? What do I want to see? And, why? These are the kinds of questions that are the backbone of my thesis.

Finally, a quotation from Bronwyn Davies (1993) epitomizes the purpose of the film viewing method I develop in this thesis,

It is not enough then to simply expose children to feminist texts, nor is it enough to ask them to interpret those texts on the basis of
their experience, if we want them to be able to 'read against the
grain' or to grasp feminist storylines and use them to deconstruct
and call into question the sexist texts that make up so much of the
everyday world. They need as well to discover themselves in the
act of sense making, of importing their own knowledges into the
text (and of importing ideas and images from text into their lived
storylines) in order to examine the complex relations between
lived experience and text. They need to discover the ways in
which their category memberships (as male or female, as white or
black) lead them to interpret differently to be positioned differently
in the text. They need to discover the way in which the cultural
patterns constantly repeated in stories are taken up as their own,
becoming the thread with which life is woven and desire is shaped
(158).

When a viewer watches a film they do not leave their lived experiences outside
the movie theatre. So why do so many studies on readership/spectatorship
avoid "the complex relations between lived experience and text"? (Davies,

**Textual Practices and Social Identities**

Jim Collins (1995) makes an important suggestion on how media
researchers could devise their theoretical frameworks. He states:

... understanding the dynamics of cultural life involves more than
enumerating textual practices and social identities and
emphasizing the importance of difference in each case: it should
also try to account for difference in evaluative economies - some
originating within the marketplace, some within the academy, still
more shaped by family histories, sexual preference or
generational affiliations - which determine not just the value of
things, but the extent to which individuals feel empowered to pass
judgment on the stuff that forms the fabric of their daily existences,
as well as the stuff their dreams are made of (221).

Do I value my own opinions of the media? Do I try to hide some of my
interpretations, because I feel they are inappropriate or incorrect? If so, why
might this be the case? How does this phenomenon relate to my social locations?

As John Hartley (1994) points out viewers' interactions with the media have historical developments and this is frequently overlooked in many mass communication studies. He believes that media researchers should ask: "what would constitute 'best practice' in the realm of media readings?" (105). In other words, how have spectators been taught to use only one method to evaluate the media while disregarding the myriad of ways viewers incorporate film and television into their lives and vice versa? Hartley argues that spectators watch the media "more astutely than they are given credit for" (113). This relates to Collin's proposal that we pay more attention to the constructions and investments involved in audience members' media assessments.

Although I have focused mostly in this introduction on how spectators position themselves in relation to the media, I am also aware that films and television shows can position audience members in a variety of ways. To illuminate this point, Lynne Pearce (1995) gives the following example:

... horoscope features identify and privilege the different star-signs in turn. The effect of this, as Montgomery explains, is that any individual listener will be positioned differently at different times and that: 'It is quite common for an audience to be in a position of overhearing a recipient of a discourse that is being directly addressed to someone else' (Montgomery, 1986; 428) (167).

Therefore, viewers' histories of formations of experience, power, imagination, criticism and emotions are involved in a complex interplay with various texts. The difficulty lies in trying to describe and reflect upon these interwoven threads.
Pearce begins to decipher the interaction between the text and the reader using Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony" which in this context means many voices.

Realising that one text might privilege me, even if another did not, confirmed that the dialogue between text and reader was, after all, a 'real' relationship; that it was subject to the same laws of selection, rejection and reciprocity as our interpersonal relations. If I, as a reader, have to learn to live with the continual possibility of rejection, then I may also enjoy the possibility of preferment. Acknowledging that the relationship between the text and reader is inscribed by a volatile power dynamic in this way, permits desire even as it engenders fear (168).

I imagine many voices in my viewing and life histories which makes the analyses of them very difficult. However, in the following dissertation I deal more with teasing out the complications rather than working with generalizations which often ignore the differences among viewers as well as the contradictory/conflicting reactions each viewer, like myself, might express.

In Chapter Two, my exploration begins with how I use imagination to analyse the two female characters, Dede and Jane, in the film Little Man Tate (1991) which is about the conflicts between two women over how to raise a little boy who is represented as a genius. Although I perceive Dede and Jane to be portrayed in very stereotypical ways as well as rather innocent in their predicaments, my analyses do not remain limited to this detached level of viewing; rather I try to gain an understanding of the tremendous pain I experienced while watching their lives performed on the screen.

I examine closely how my imagination has been shaped by the traditional white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class message that women must choose between motherhood and a career and how, as a result, I invested in the conflict between Dede who I perceived as a "good mother" stereotype and Jane who I perceived as a "successful career woman" stereotype. By
reassessing how I have learned to evaluate female characters, I discuss how students, like myself, can be taught to uncover their affective investments in the filmic stories they are learning to criticize.

In Chapter Three I analyze how my different interpretations of *The Piano* (1993) are given varying degrees of legitimacy in the broader culture in which I live. I specifically look at how the film invites me to invest in colonial discourses which reinforce racist and heteronormative stereotypes and how I have learned as a white, middle class film spectator to disregard these investments through the use of denial, accusation and confession (Friedman, 1995). Therefore, in this analysis I discuss how women participate in colonialism instead of perceiving women as just victims of their social circumstances.

In Chapter Four I discuss the implications of my problematic identification with Margaret's resistance to motherhood in the film *Margaret's Museum* (1995). I investigate why and how this identification process is based on my suppressed fears of motherhood instead of on an analysis of the different social structures that Margaret and I grew up with. This leads me to a re-evaluation of how I have learned to participate in a critically distanced media viewing method which involves white, middle class "surveillance" of the other (Walkerdine, 1986).

In Chapter Five I move from my own autobiographical analyses to a more metanarrative approach which adds a different kind of layer to my method. Despite my emphasis in this chapter on the films instead of the films in relation to myselfes, I never lose sight of the importance of autobiographical criticism since I examine how the main character, Sonya, in *The Nasty Girl* (1990) and the main character, Janet, in *An Angel at My Table* (1990), use critical autobiography to transform their own lives (which can be seen as "autobiographic texts") as well as to contribute to a more general social change.
In Chapter Six I conclude with an overview of what I have learned from developing a critical autobiographic method. I compare and contrast critically distanced approaches with my method in order to demonstrate the advantages of a form of criticism which takes into account spectators' socially situated affective and imaginative responses. And finally, I discuss some of the difficulties that might arise while teachers and students in the classroom investigate their own emotional, imaginative and critical investments in various media texts.
Endnotes

1 Hunter's definition of the term discourse is helpful here:

Rather, social policy is formulated and organized by relations between available discourses. Clearly, to say this is to shift the usual meaning of the word "discourse", since it no longer means a representation of the real but rather refers to deployments of statements, perceptual technologies, regulated activities, institutional relations and so on. So it's not a case of having a nineteenth-century discourse on character analysis and then looking around for its determining economic-historical context as the mean of explaining it. To speak of the nineteenth-century discourse of character analysis is to speak of an ensemble of statements, techniques, institutions and forms of social relations (237).
Introduction

Picture this: I am in my local video store trying to choose a film to watch (to escape academic pressures) and I think to myself: How many female film characters can I find who are portrayed as intelligent and capable of pursuing intellectual work? As I scan the shelves filled with hundreds of films made in Hollywood in recent years, I can't find many that represent female film characters in this way. Sigourney Weaver in *Alien 3* (1992) is a possibility. Marisa Tomei in *My Cousin Vinny* (1992)? Susan Sarandon in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) or *Lorenzo's Oil* (1992)? Perhaps Demi Moore in *A Few Good Men* (1993)? These were the female characters that intrigued me, that related in varying degrees to my lived experiences.

Then I spotted the film that seemed to provide me with various representations of female intelligence, *Little Man Tate* (1991), directed by and starring Jodie Foster. I decided to take it home, watch it for a second time¹ and do an autobiographical² analysis of the two main female characters, Dede (Jodie Foster) and Jane (Dianne Wiest). The first time I saw this film was at the Toronto Film Festival in the fall of 1991. Jodie Foster spoke at the screening. I cried a lot while I watched *Little Man Tate* (something I don't do often while watching films) and after the screening I told a female friend that I was impressed with the movie without reflecting on why I cried so intensely. She liked it too and we talked about how much we enjoyed watching the two female characters.

It wasn't until I encountered Valerie Walkerdine's (1986) insights, a couple years after my first viewing of the film, that I began to realize what I was
crying about. In this chapter, I explore those tears by examining the complex interplay of desire and pain that I experienced while watching the film Little Man Tate. Walkerdine has made me aware of the importance of analyzing these affective responses in relation to what might be termed theoretical and deconstructive approaches. Within this framework "theory" as well as my investments in the work of theorizing are also re-examined.

Much later, when beginning to do the work for an analysis, I hired the video of Rocky II and watched it in the privacy of my office, where no one could see. And at that moment I recognized something that took me far beyond the pseudo-sophistication of condemning its macho sexism, its stereotyped portrayals. The film brought me up against such memories of pain and struggle and class that it made me cry. I cried with grief for what was lost and for the terrifying desire to be somewhere and someone else: the struggle to 'make it' (169).

This quotation from Video Replay: families, films and fantasy, has had a very powerful impact on my media research work. To begin with, Walkerdine has highlighted two types of analyses I might use to interpret films such as decoding stereotypes and closely examining my own affective reactions to these stereotypes.

However, as I pointed out in the introduction, the field of media interpretation is not just made up of these two types of analyses. Rather, it consists of a variety of ways to look at film interpretation. The dominant paradigms of how spectators supposedly perceive the media (such as text centred analyses) have been challenged by many media theorists who have conceptualized methods of studying viewers' "everyday responses" or "personal stories" in relation to film and television. Yet, very few researchers have investigated the social formation of their own identities in relation to films. Since I look at precisely how my interpretations of my life experiences are
intertwined with my film interpretations as well as the viewing discourses I have learned to use, my work makes an important difference.

Several questions that have emerged for me while conducting my critical autobiographical film work are: How can a film viewing method which includes a viewer's autobiographical insights, affective responses, imaginative thoughts and criticisms contribute to a feminist, anti-racist pedagogy? How are the discursive conditions, which have led many media educators and audience members to insist upon a text-centred approach to film viewing, perpetuated? How can my media research contribute to changing these discursive conditions so that viewers feel they can use their life stories (their differences) to interpret representations? How can I further demonstrate that solely relying on film "criticism" such as 'screen theory' often obscures the differences among film spectators?

As Roger Silverstone (1994) outlines:

The field of audience studies has been in tension, I suggest, because it has not really recognised these differences in audiences' positions in space and time, nor has it been able to incorporate the differences it has recognised into its methodologies (133).

As I proposed in the introduction, media education must combine critical readings with the readings that individual students develop. Teachers need to encourage students to imagine themselves in relation to the film characters that they watch. However, as I also mentioned earlier, students must also be taught to deconstruct these creative endeavours, because their imaginative thoughts about the media and their lives are embedded in social discourses and structures which may prevent them from pursuing their dreams or replicate oppressive social relations (Hall, 1990; Bazalgette, 1992; Moss, 1993; Turnbull,
In this dissertation, I suggest one way that students could be taught to use their life stories to interpret media representations.

Walkerdine's research points out that decoding stereotypes has been used extensively at the expense of viewers' autobiographical engagements with the films they watch. Instead of replicating this pattern, Walkerdine wisely suggests that: "The position produced for the reader or spectator is not identical with an actual reader constituted in multiple sites and positions" (171). In other words, there is not one interpretation of a stereotype/representation for all audience members to agree on. Consequently, Walkerdine challenges researchers, like myself, to examine their own engagements with the films they watch rather than just theorize how films are supposedly positioning spectators.

These arguments that Walkerdine has posed, have made me realize how much I have withheld emotionally while writing my film analyses. In this chapter, I begin to develop a method which takes into account my critical analyses of a film in relation to my emotional engagements. I call this method "critical autobiographical film viewing", because I investigate how my "experiences" (which includes my affective reactions, my white, heterosexual, middle class social locations and imaginative thoughts) have been socially constructed, particularly in relation to how I critically interpret a film narrative. The term "autobiography" without the critical component implies a personal narrative which is not necessarily examined politically by its author. I refuse to work with this approach in my dissertation.

Alternatively, Morwenna Griffiths (1995) helps me define my film viewing method:

'Critical autobiography' is needed to distinguish such writing from standard autobiography, because of the strength of the current cultural norms that 'autobiography' should be personal, confessional, individualistic, a-theoretical and non-political linear
narrative of a life. 'Critical autobiography' in contrast, makes use of individual experience, theory, and a process of reflection and re-thinking, which includes attention to politically situated perspectives. Autobiography as simple individual, personal, narrative is just a first stage, and of only limited use, for the purposes of gaining knowledge (70).

With the use of critical autobiographical analyses, theory is not used to explain or control experience, rather it seems that theory and experience directly influence and inform one another.

The form of 'critical autobiography' which Griffiths refers to, enables me to develop the main argument of my thesis. I begin to outline this argument in the following ways. Films (characters and narratives) are made up of signs, codes, discourses and practices (Fiske, 1987; Ang, 1996) and an audience member's life, like my own, is also made up of various signs, codes, discourses and practices except for the fact that I am a living human being and the film characters are portrayed by actors in a movie (Hunter, 1983). I ask: how are all these various discourses and practices, in the text and in the spectator's life, used by a viewer to form an interpretation of a film as well as a reformed interpretation of his/her life? In this dissertation, I begin to answer this complex question by looking closely at how I use my social locations, affective responses, critical analyses and imaginative thoughts to invest in particular signs, codes, discourses and practices in a film and in my life (Walkerdine, 1986).

The crux of this approach is examining how all these various discourses and practices compete with one another. In other words, I focus in on what ways a film and my life involve a hierarchy of discourses and interpretations. Why are certain kinds of interpretations at the forefront in my film analyses while others are barely visible, if at all? In this thesis, I analyze specific film scenes and how I can relate to them via my life experiences, but I also analyze a
semiotic process which involves various textual mechanisms and interpretive
levels. I am most interested in dissecting the social patterns or sets of practices
that occur in the text and in my life (Moore, 1993).

For example, even an identificatory reading of a character or characters
is an interesting fallacy because as I have just mentioned, stories and
characters are really just artifacts; signs and codes (Barthes, 1982). Also, Ian
Hunter's (1983) work on reading characters as well as James Donald's (1992)
theories demonstrate the construction of characters, too rather than an analysis
based on seeing characters as "real" or just like spectators.

In this thesis, I am not only focusing on myselfs and on the characters
and how I react to them, also my analyses operate on another level as well. In
critical terms, similar to Hunter, the film characters that I see, are really not
people, rather they are seams, textual constructions which I have learned to
perceive in socially patterned ways. How do I theorize, juxtapose and
interrogate this interaction between the constructions of myselfs and the
constructions in the film? Another place that takes up how stories stage values,
is in A. G. Greimas' semiotic rectangle which Fredric Jameson (1981) discusses
in his book The Political Unconscious and I look at this analysis later on in this
chapter. And finally, an essential argument for this dissertation is that all values
presented in a film and in a viewer's life must be placed in an historical context.

The tensions in peoples lives are not resolved. Films stage these
tensions for people in the audience, and spectators hook into the various
scenarios put forth in a film and I carefully examine the hooks that exist for me in
three different films. I am talking about the working out of these positions which
involves my imaginary resolutions of the various contradictions which arise in
each film and in my life. In Little Man Tate, traditional values about motherhood
and work tend to be reaffirmed; in The Piano, sexuality and gender issues are
somewhat problematized whereas colonial discourses seem to be quite static, while in Margaret's Museum class and gender issues are frequently disrupted.

Looking closely at how viewers might critically investigate their own life experiences in relation to a film has been virtually ignored in the field of feminist film criticism, with exception of the work by Kuhn, Walkerdine, hooks and Ang. Since this kind of approach is not supported by many social structures and viewing discourses, affective responses, critical thinking and imaginative thoughts in relation to one another have been neglected as important vehicles for viewers to include their everyday lives in their understanding of representations. Most feminist film theorists tend to hide their autobiographies and contradictory/conflicting impressions of films (let alone take a critical look at them), because they are trying to fit their analyses into one specific theoretical framework, often based on psychoanalytic constructs (Kaplan, 1983; Doane, 1987; Fischer, 1989; Flitterman-Lewis, 1990).

By taking this approach they often universalize their analyses and in turn, overlook the differences among women who watch films as well as the contradictory/conflicting reactions each woman might express with regard to the characters and the films' narratives (de Lauretis, 1988). Alternatively, some theorists, such as Walkerdine, have used psychoanalytic concepts to minimize the universal/individual binary by focusing on how individual viewers negotiate the complex relationships between the "psyche and the social". I discuss Walkerdine's work in order to make my "emotional" and unconscious responses to Little Man Tate, The Piano and Margaret's Museum more visible.

Firstly, in this chapter, I provide definitions for the various concepts I plan to use often, such as social locations, imagination, life experiences, affective and critical responses and I explain some of the consequences of these concepts. Secondly, I analyze how I have learned to interpret a film like Little
Man Tate. And alternatively, I demonstrate how using my critical autobiographical film viewing method has helped me uncover my critical, affective and imaginative investments in the female characters Dede and Jane in the film *Little Man Tate*.

The Parameters of My Methodology

Life Experiences

Linda Martin Alcoff and Laura Gray-Rosendale (1996) provide me with an important starting point on how to conceptualise "life experiences". They clarify, in their writings on survivor discourse, how the theory versus experience binary tends to operate in many research projects. To begin with, they point out that: "In any given context there may exist more than one discourse, although discourses will exist in hierarchical relations with one another" (202). Alcoff and Gray-Rosendale argue that a very dominant discourse which states that scientific "objectivity" is not only possible but essential, frequently overpowers another less powerful discourse which proposes that women can be theorists of their own experiences. They give the following example, "a mediator must be neutral and objective and must derive her authority not from 'personal experience' but from 'abstract knowledge'" (213). Alcoff and Gray-Rosendale elaborate upon this:

The first part of the binary-experience, feelings, emotional pain-provides the raw data needed to produce theory and knowledge. But these "subjective" entities will be obstacles to the production of theory unless they are made sharply subordinate to and are contained and controlled by the theory, knowledge, and "objective" assessments of the second half of the binary structure. The confessional constructs a notion of theory as necessarily other than, split from, and dominant over experience (214).
Understanding how binaries such as these are constructed and perpetuated is the first step to minimizing their control over women's experiences.

One way of actually defusing theory's dominance over experience is to emphasize that "experience" is constructed just as much as theory is constructed. "Experience" is frequently seen as "real" or "natural" and therefore not very useful for media analyses which are trying to uncover so-called oppressive ideological constructions. Also, it is important to point out that in much feminist work 'experience' is valourized 'above' theory - it's taken as self-evident and foundational; whereas in this thesis, I see 'experience' as in constant need of explanation. As Joan Scott (1992) states: "Experience is at once always already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political" (37). If I take Scott's approach to "experience" into account, I am making theory by continually evaluating how my life stories have been constructed for me and by me and how I use them to make political meanings from the films that I watch.

Social Locations

I refer to Anne McClintock's (1995) analyses of social locations for my methodology. She states:

... I argue that race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence in and through relation to each other - if in contradictory and conflictual ways (5).

Her focus on how social locations cannot be separated out from one another and how they constantly struggle and shift in people's lives is extremely important for my thesis. This type of analysis of social locations highlights the
fact that even though viewers' perceptions are influenced by their social locations they are not necessarily totally restricted by them. McClintock reiterates this point: "The boundaries of the self are permeable and constantly open to historical change" (317).

**Affective Responses**

This aspect of my method is essential because it is the most frequently overlooked area of film spectatorship which I find ironic since films can evoke such a vast array of feelings for audience members. It is important to be clear about the fact that emotions cannot be separated from social locations, critical thinking and imaginative thoughts, but at the same time I need to discuss their impact in order to draw attention to how influential they actually can be on film interpretations. Morwenna Griffiths (1995) is one of the few feminist theorists I have read who has actually defined the term emotions. She suggests this:

> Emotions are spontaneous and surprise the person who feels them. However they are not reflexes and can change as a result of new understandings. They can also be used. If people feeling similar things get together, they can work for political change, including for changes in how they feel. The process is a complex one because both the construction of an emotion and its political effect come about in language communities and political communities which are overlapping (107).

What is crucial about Griffith's definition of emotions for my method is the way she proposes that not only are emotions socially constructed but their expression also have political consequences.

Kate McKenna's (1996) work analyzes the political implications of emotions by examining the role they play in student/teacher interactions. She states: "Why I find psychoanalytic thinking/practice so intriguing is because it provides resources for understanding that what is consciously and initially
expressed may not be the full, 'real,' intended communication" (190). McKenna's research argues that "the emotional, unconscious and social subtexts" cannot be ignored in classroom interactions and she uses the psychoanalytic concepts of transference/counter transference to gain a better understanding of these frequently overlooked forms of communication.

In this thesis I reference psychoanalysis as an important tool especially as it relates to making affective film responses more intelligible. I am interested in how the unconscious works, but I do not conduct an extensive analysis of these invisible processes. However, I do recognize that the unconscious interrupts spectators' conscious intentions while interpreting a film and this has major implications for developing film criticism which contributes to social change.

Critical Analyses

My use of the term "critical" here includes David Buckingham's (1993) analyses of the assumptions that have been made about "the growth of critical consciousness". Buckingham states:

As Grossberg argues, critical researchers have often presented themselves as the vanguard of revolutionary politics, capable of exposing structures of power of which ordinary people are assumed to be unaware. Such assertions reflect a considerable degree of elitism; yet they may also represent an implicit denial of our own position within existing relationships of social power. Although claiming to speak on behalf of the oppressed, we continue to reserve the right to define their best interest in our own terms (142).

In this thesis, I take Buckingham's analyses seriously by using the term "critical" along with a discussion on how my life experiences have influenced my critical thoughts. As Robert Morgan (1995) points out: "... critical readings often fail to theorise the ground of their own possibility, the fact that criticism always comes
from some place, a discourse underwritten by a form of life" (54). Therefore, in this dissertation I make a concerted effort to position myselfs within the power relations that I am criticizing.

And finally, for this definition of critical analyses, I turn to Fiske (1987):

... how these ideological codes work to organize the other codes into producing a congruent and coherent set of meanings that constitute the common sense of a society. The process of making sense involves a constant movement up and down through the levels of the diagram, for sense can only be produced when "reality," representations, and ideology merge into a coherent, seemingly natural unity. Semiotic or cultural criticism deconstructs this unity and exposes its "naturalness" as a highly ideological construct (6).

Critical Imagination

Imagination can be defined in numerous ways. For the most part, I would like to use imagination in an autobiographical as well as a critical sense. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am interested in how a spectator imagines different selves in relation to a film text. This might involve fantasizing one's selves in different situations than one is currently in which would entail critically looking at how such a transformation could be achieved. However, I want to keep in mind len Ang's (1996) critique of Janice Radway's research. She states:

Radway comes to the conclusion that romance reading is a sort of 'imaginary solution' to real, structural problems and contradictions produced by patriarchy. (The real solution, one would guess, lies in the bounds of feminism.) All this amounts to a quite functionalist explanation of romance reading, one that is preoccupied with its effects rather than its mechanisms. Consequently, pleasure as such cannot possibly be taken seriously in this theoretical framework, because the whole explanatory movement is directed towards ideological function of pleasure (105).

This relates to Buckingham's suggestion that media researchers should be more open minded with regard to what "critical" viewing involves. For example,
pitting feminism against romantic pleasure seems counterproductive to me. Alternatively, I want to look at imagining as both agency and play.

John Fiske's (1987) Implicatory-extricatory Approach

Fiske has put forth a theory which provides me with a framework to closely examine the viewing dimensions I have just defined. Fiske describes 'implication-extrication' "as a double relationship with the text" (174). In other words, it immediately acknowledges that a viewer is negotiating textual and social discourses simultaneously. I call this process 'moving in and out of character'. During this process the spectator is dealing with persuasive textual mechanisms, but she/he is also dealing with her/his life experiences which are made up of her/his social locations, affective and critical responses as well as her/his imaginative thoughts.

Fiske explains:

A viewer implicates him- or herself with a character when that character is in a similar social situation or embodies similar values to the viewer, and when this implication offers the reward of pleasure. But it is always accompanied by the knowledge that implication is a willing act of the viewer and that extrication is instantly possible. Using the term "implication-extrication" foregrounds the viewer's activity and will: the choice of implicating oneself or not is an important source of the pleasure of implication: being induced by a text to make a fool of oneself can bring pleasure to few, if any (175).

Fiske's concepts encourage a discussion on spectator agency, because he immediately looks at how a viewer decides which viewing discourses and textual messages to take up and which ones to reject. He also points out how this decisionmaking process is tied to how a spectator represents herself to herself and to others.

Fiske elaborates further:
The simultaneous or sequential processes of implication and extrication are reading relations that activate the contradictions in a text and that never totally lose sight of its textuality. They allow space for the viewer to read character and incident as bearers of social value, and thus to negotiate readings that relate to his her social position (175).

There are contradictions (competing discourses and practices) in a film and in a spectator's life which the viewer negotiates in many different ways. Fiske's theory immediately acknowledges this and suggests a way of taking into account these contradictions by continually remaining aware of how "nomadic" texts and viewers actually are, as well as recognizing that some discourses are definitely more powerful than others and audience members are persuaded by the text and their lives to invest in these dominant discourses.

How Have I Learned to Analyze a Film?

Similar to Walkerdine, I have found that the circumstances in which I view a film influences my responses. For example, I would be less likely to cry in a public theatre than at home watching a video (Gray, 1992). It also depends upon who I am with. I am most emotionally expressive if I am watching a video alone at home (which is rare) (Walkerdine, 1986) and I am the least emotionally expressive if I am watching a film in a movie theatre with strangers. The other viewing scenarios fall at various points along this continuum. It was highly unusual for me to cry so much at the Toronto Film Festival screening of *Little Man Tate*, and thus I am fascinated by the large amount of pain this film has triggered for me.

Taking the viewing context into account is important, but the most crucial influences on my film spectatorship have been the rigidly defined approaches to
film viewing that I have learned. I have been taught while studying for my high school diploma and for my undergraduate degree to analyze films and other forms of media by focusing on the text (films) and on the analyses of the so-called experts: film reviewers and film theorists. I have not been encouraged to develop my own critical and emotional reactions to the media, let alone attempt to understand how my imagination and my unconscious might be playing an important role in my film analyses.

Jackie Stacey (1993) points out that most schools emphasize text-centred analyses. She makes it clear that she is "not opposed to textual analysis itself, but to the fact that its status as the taken-for-granted method of film studies has not been satisfactorily addressed" (273). Stacey asks:

Do students in films studies, for example, know that textual analysis is a chosen rather than an inevitable method? How often is audience research presented as a legitimate alternative? It seems to me that whilst production studies of authorship still find a place, if a marginal one, on the film studies agenda, audience studies continue to be a striking absence (Stacey;262).

As a student, I have spent a lot of time inside and outside schools searching for hidden meanings in the text while my personal/social interactions with film and television have not been explicitly analyzed.

I was not given the opportunity throughout my media education to explore how my life experiences interrelate with the film characters' experiences. Whenever I wrote or spoke about my emotional responses to a film in a school setting, it was considered interesting but not proper scholarship. It is not surprising then that Walkerdine's work on autobiographical film spectating has had such a profound affect on my media studies, because I desire legitimation of my personal/social responses. Furthermore, I would like
to develop a methodology which could help media education students explore their personal/social responses to films.

Len Ang's (1996) historical analyses of film and television viewing practices include a description of some of the most influential feminist discourses which I have used to interpret female representations. To begin with, she alludes to the work from Sue Sharpe (1976) and Gaye Tuchman (1978) who proposed that: "since mass-media images are full of traditionalist and outmoded sex-role stereotypes, they will inevitably socialize girls into becoming mothers and housewives, because 'girls in the television audience "model" their behavior on television women'" (111). This was precisely the type of spectating method I learned to use. For many years, I believed wholeheartedly that if film and television producers portrayed women in a more non-traditional manner, female spectators - including myself - would refuse to engage in traditional white, heteronormative, middle class, female activities. Subsequently, I have learned that film spectating involves many more social locations and it is much more multi-layered and conflictual.

For example, Ang points out that the later research which critiques Sharpe's and Tuchman's approach (among others) refers to much more "theoretically sophisticated forms of textual analysis" (111). These critiques stated that first, the meanings of mass-media images are not "clear-cut and straightforward" and second, girls and women do not "passively and indiscriminately absorb these messages and meanings as (wrong) lessons about 'real life'" (111). Ang notes that this research is crucial because it focuses more on how complicated the viewer/text interconnections are rather than assuming a linear relationship between the text and the viewer.

She discusses how these later studies,
...emphasize the ways in which media representations and narratives construct a multiplicity of sometimes contradicting cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity, which serve as subject positions that spectators might take up in order to enter into a meaningful relationship with the texts concerned, (See, e.g., Mulvey 1975 and 1990; Kuhn 1982; Modleski 1982; Coward 1984; de Lauretis 1984; 1988; Pribram 1988; and many others) (111).

Additionally, these theorists discuss the importance of competing interpretive discourses and practices which I did not learn about in school. Their approach honours a spectator's ability to critically examine the images she sees rather than be told precisely how a text is constructed and points to an unstable multiplicity in textual processes which cannot be overlooked.

However, Ang makes it clear that many feminist media theorists still rely on what she calls the "role/image approach". She looks at the theoretical and political problems with this method "which analyzes images of women in the media and in fiction by setting them against 'real' women" (92). In this way, Ang points out that the role/image approach "implies a rationalistic view between image and viewer (whereby it is assumed that the image is seen by the viewer as a more or less adequate model of reality)" (92). Furthermore, she argues that this viewing method "can only account for the popularity of soap opera among women as something irrational" (92). Therefore, this method is extremely problematic, because it devalues many women who have learned to use affective responses to analyze media representations and who, as a result, find pleasure in film and television programs which highlight characters' emotional struggles.

What is required at this point then is a discussion of the differences between realist and discursive approaches to viewing the media. Fiske (1987) provides an insightful description of a realist practice:
Realism proposes that a character represents a real person. The text provides us with accurate and adequate metonymic pointers to the characteristics of the person being portrayed: we, the viewers, then call upon our life experience of understanding real people (for social experience also gives us only metonymic pointers of what someone is "really" like) to fill out these characteristics in our imagination so that we make the character into a "real" person whom we "know" and who has a "life" outside the text (152).

At times I certainly use this approach in order to analyze a film character, and there is evidence of this descriptive strategy throughout this thesis. However, I usually do not use this practice of analysis by itself; rather, I sequentially or simultaneously perceive characters as well as myselfs, as made up of "a collection of discourses and practices" (Gilmore, 1994).

Fiske describes this process well: "The idea of character as a discursive, textual structure fits with the notion of the subject rather than the self. The subject is itself a social and discursive structure, which contains contradictions as our social experience contains them" (154). Fiske argues then that: "discursive readings emphasize the social, realistic readings the individual" (154). Engaging in both of these types of interpretations fits well with my critical autobiographic method which aims to work with the individual in relation to the social. The realism approach, as described by Fiske, can help viewers, like myself, begin to use their imaginations to incorporate their everyday lives into their film interpretations because they need to pretend that the characters are "real" people. However, there is not usually much critical thought involved in this realist viewing practice nor does it honour the intensity of the audience member's affective and critical investments in a character's portrayal. Whereas if the realist strategy is combined with the discursive approach it can help viewers engage with the characters on an emotional and fantasy level without losing sight of how these reactions are socially constructed.
For example, according to Ang, the role/image or realist approach fails to recognize the extent to which spectators become emotionally involved with the characters from specific political positions such as a gender, race, class and sexuality. She discusses the implications of this:

... we first of all need to acknowledge that these characters are not a mere set of images to be read referentially, but an ensemble of textual devices for engaging the viewer at the level of fantasy (Walkerdine 1983; see also Cowie 1984; Kaplan 1986). As a result, female fictional characters such as Sue Ellen Ewing (Dallas) or Christine Cagney (Cagney and Lacey) cannot be conceptualized as 'realistic' images of women, but must be approached as textual constructions of possible modes of femininity: as embodying versions of gendered subjectivity endowed with specific forms of psychical and emotional satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and specific ways of dealing with conflicts and dilemmas. In relation to this they do not function as role models but are symbolic realizations of feminine subject positions with which viewers can identify in fantasy (92). (Italics, mine).

Ang insists that fantasy must be seen as a "reality" itself instead of just a "mere illusion". She suggests that spectators often derive pleasure from their fantasies, because they can imagine positions for themselves which they might not be able to take up in everyday life. In summary then, Walkerdine and Ang have made me realize some of the reasons why I have learned to focus on deconstructing representations by comparing and contrasting them to women off the movie screen instead of also paying attention to how my social locations, affective responses and imaginative thoughts might play a role in my film interpretations.

However, despite the text-centred education that I have received, I have not stopped experiencing visceral reactions and imaginative thoughts in relation to the films I see. Rather, these viewing dimensions have not been respected, explored and analyzed in my media education as much as they
could have been which results in a limited discussion about the politics of representation. For example, in my master's thesis titled: *Moving In and Out of Character: A Feminist Exploration of Violent Female Film Characters*, I investigated female spectatorship by focusing on how women - including myself - understood the violent behaviors of female film characters. I found that the women I interviewed analyzed the films *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and *Single White Female* (1992) differently, and negotiated their viewing from their specific social locations. This research was based on how these female viewers negotiated the various "textual mechanisms" in the films. However, I did not conduct a thorough exploration of how they imagined themselves in relation to the female characters which might have taken into account Ang's fantasy viewing concept and Walkerdine's autobiographical methods.

As a result, it was difficult for me to include in my thesis the intertwining of each participant's personal/social reactions with the female characters' stories. I did not specifically investigate how the interviewees' emotional reactions might have furthered their comprehension and criticisms of the films (Walkerdine, 1990). There wasn't a method available that enabled me to analyze my affective viewing dimensions, let alone anyone else's. Therefore, it is crucial for me to situate my life experiences in relation to the discourses I am criticizing, to prevent making elitist assumptions about other people's lives (Buckingham, 1993). In this thesis, I focus on my own experiences, because the more work I do on the politics of experience and theory, the more uncomfortable I feel interpreting the experiences of others, especially when it comes to discussing how their lives are involved in their film viewing. Hence my decision not to do interviews for this dissertation, rather, I focus in on the social formation of my own identities in relation to three films as well as conduct a literature review of
film and television spectatorship. Also, I examine two films which use critical autobiography in their narratives to demonstrate how two women struggle with structural limitations.

My need for a critical autobiographical film viewing method intensified as I started to uncover my very strong affective reactions to particular films (with the help of Walkerdine's work) while writing papers for my doctoral courses. How could I problematize these emotional reactions, I asked myself, instead of perceiving them as somehow "authentic" and therefore unworthy of scholarly investigation? How have I arrived at these particular affective responses? How can film interpretation be researched and taught so as to emphasize the important role visceral responses (and not just these but resonant reactions generally) play in relation to critical responses in audience members' analyses?

In order to address questions like these, I require a method which can help me look more closely at my affective responses to film as important resources to learn about myselfs in relation to the world I live in. My visceral responses come from many different places, not just from a film. How can these multiple sources be acknowledged as important aspects of the spectator/text circuit? How can I discuss my life experiences in relation to film representations without getting stuck in a binary opposition of theory versus experience? To embark on these types of analyses I ask several questions throughout this thesis: What is "experience"? What is "theory"? How can these two elements be deciphered and used in combination, to develop an autobiographical film viewing method?
How Do I Want to Analyze a Film?

Kathleen McCormick (1994), an English Studies theorist, discusses the importance of looking at the reader's repertoire which she describes as a "complex network of discourses that have the potential to interact with each other as well as with the larger culture" (71). This is a very useful concept which includes interpretive regimes; an integral aspect of the reading formations McCormick discusses. I can apply this logic to film viewing. Similar to Walkerdine, McCormick notes:

... that there is no 'ideal' repertoire of the reader to match that of the text, but rather that repertoires are always overdetermined, and that while one may be able to specify the text's repertoire for a particular reading context or even a reading formation, one has to acknowledge that aspects of that repertoire will shift as reading contexts change (72).

McCormick also distinguishes between a reader's literary repertoire (for my purposes, filmic) and general repertoire. She points out that either or both of these repertoires or both can be in tension with the text. What appeals to me most about McCormick's analyses is that she lists and explains various interconnecting and conflicting discourses that are often used by readers rather than assuming that readers only use one or two types of discourse to understand a text. For instance, as I just discussed in the last section, I use realist and discursive analyses which conflict as well as interconnect. Also, these are not the only discourses I use to interpret a film.

McCormick asks questions about a text which I can use to interpret my visceral responses to film as well as continuously remain aware that I am using different discourses to analyze a film. "Why does this text disturb me so deeply? What ideological conditions helped to produce the text? Do I agree with what it wants me to do? Can I argue with it? Are the issues it raises ones I think are
important? Are the assumptions behind those issues ones I share?" (89).
Immediately, McCormick honours the reader's life experiences as well as the social formations of those experiences and of those of the text. Furthermore, she insists: "Rather than arguing that a particular reading is 'right' or 'correct' because it is 'in the text', however, from this perspective one might argue that one reading is 'better' than another because of its consequences, be they social, political and historical" (90). And, I would add, personal.

Walkerdine and Ang have helped me become acutely aware of the differences among female spectators, by continually arguing that each viewer's life experiences and fantasies in relation to film representations need to be explicitly analyzed. But what does the inclusion of fantasy and experience into film analyses mean? Are these viewing dimensions opposite to theory? How can I continually be aware of rigid dichotomies (theory versus experience; fantasy versus the "real") which are apparent in much of the work on film and television (Modleski, 1982; Walkerdine, 1986, 1993; Minh-ha, 1992; Ang, 1985, 1996; Turnbull, 1993; Moss, 1993)?

My stories might be very similar to those of other individuals, but how I negotiate them in relation to the films I watch is unique, because no one can have exactly the same feeling and the same criticism as me at the same time. How do the stories I tell myself harm as well as enable me and others? What stories do I want to be able to tell myself? How do I use films in order to write these different kinds of stories about myself? In other words, how can I use my self perceptions in relation to the film characters' self perceptions to demonstrate my critical autobiographical method to other spectators? For example, my social locations which involve many privileges and oppressions are hidden but that doesn't make them any less powerful (Hartley, 1992). What is not "seen" greatly influences our identities (Scott, 1992). There is a strand of
the less visible, everyday discursive work that is going on in my life of relating to film and I want to outline how this work operates in my film interpretations.

For this thesis then, I felt it was imperative for me to do some self-reflections in relation to films rather than just theorize the notion of female spectatorship. Basically, my use of the term "spectatorship" implies a focus on my socially constructed responses to film rather than a promotion of one or two perspectives devised by a film reviewer or a film theorist. Despite the fact that I have not discovered much autobiographical work done by female spectators of feature films (Walkerdine, 1986; hooks, 1992; Kuhn, 1995), I strongly believe it is a method which can significantly impact on how film representations are interpreted.

Annette Kuhn (1995) is one of the few film theorists who has questioned the extent to which film scholars have ignored viewers' life experiences. She argues this:

For experience is not infrequently played as the trump card of authenticity, the last word of personal truth, forestalling all further discussion, let alone analysis. Nevertheless, experience is undeniably a key category of everyday knowledge, structuring people's lives in important ways. So, just as I know perfectly well that the whole is a fiction and a lure, part of me also 'knows' that my experience - my memories, my feelings - are important because these things make me what I am, make me different from everyone else. Must they be consigned to a compartment separate from the part of me that thinks and analyzes? Can the idea of experience not be taken on board - if with a degree of caution - by cultural theory, rather than being simply evaded or worse, consigned to the domain of sentimentality and nostalgia? (28).

I feel that Kuhn's challenge is long overdue yet it is still extremely difficult to find film theorists who believe that experience is an important aspect of analyzing a film. One of the reasons I am writing this thesis is to try to convince media researchers and educators that we cannot afford to leave out spectators' lives;
otherwise we run the risk of ignoring the differences among individuals who are from a variety of social locations.

By returning to my critical and visceral reactions to the film Little Man Tate, I begin to develop a critical autobiographical film spectating method. A central component of this method is imagining my different selves in relation to how the female film characters have been imagined. Using this approach, I analyze how I imagine both my nurturing and my intellectual selves in relation to the mother versus career woman dichotomy I perceived in Little Man Tate. In this way, I come face-to-face with my desires and my fears with regard to a white, middle class, heteronormative, female story.

Stereotypically Speaking

Here I provide a brief summary of the film and it would be best if you (as a potential audience member) could see this film for yourself to fully appreciate the character analyses I am about to put forth as well as to develop your own perceptions of the film. Little Man Tate is the story of a little boy, Fred, who is represented as a genius. He lives with his mother (Dede) who works as a waitress. Fred is continuously frustrated with Dede, his school and his life in general, because he desires more intellectual challenge. Jane, who runs a school for gifted children, hears about Fred's exceptional abilities and asks him to come for an interview. Dede and Fred meet Jane, a rich, intellectual career woman. After the first interview, Dede is very suspicious of Jane's intentions for Fred. Eventually, Fred goes to the school and Jane and Dede argue over what is best for Fred as he takes turns living with each of them. In the end, taking into account his various experiences as an "intellectual child", Fred decides on his
own lifestyle. Jane and Dede begin to get along better and they all celebrate Fred's birthday in the last scene.

Overall, I think Dede's and Jane's characters are based on two different female stereotypes⁵; one which supposedly represents a white, working class mother and one which supposedly represents a white, upper class career woman. Class is an issue which is much more complex than the film suggests and in the next section of this chapter, I briefly discuss how acknowledging my own class background helps me evaluate some of the assumptions that are made about the characters' class positions. First, I describe what I mean by the stereotypical portrayals of Dede and Jane and then I analyze the reasons why these particular characters triggered a lot of pain for me (Walkerdine, 1986).

Dede is portrayed as a white, working class, single mother who is 'streetwise' and cares about her son. She is not able to do much when Fred wants more intellectual stimulation from his life and she is understandably threatened by Jane's desire to provide Fred with more educational opportunities than she can. Jane is portrayed as a white, upper class, single, childless career woman who sticks to a very specific plan in order to run her life. She shows very little emotion towards Fred - rather she sees him as a success case for her school and therefore a benefit for her career. Jane has had very little time for friendship and caring, because she is so busy working at her school and writing her books. She is represented as selfish and cold. In short, she possesses all the negative features typically attributed to women who put a high value on their own careers. Additionally, the film sets up a binary of street-wise versus school/book learned. The former is supposedly 'naturally' smart and the second is 'cultured' which leads to another binary of emotion versus reason.
I have learned from my formal and informal schooling to perceive Dede as a "good mother", although that is frequently contested in the film. However, Dede most often puts the needs of Fred before her own needs which is considered appropriate behavior for a "good mother". My education has also taught me to perceive Jane as a "successful career woman", because she has achieved financial and intellectual rewards through her hard work and the class privileges she was born into. Dede and Jane are pitted against one another in the film. A competition is set-up between them right from the beginning. The prize is Fred, his affection, his company and even love. We, as audience members, are encouraged to ask the question: which type of behavior will win? The fun, nurturing, loving Dede or the hardworking, organized, intellectual Jane? Like many films which stage the heart/head dichotomy, the narrative in *Little Man Tate* seduces me towards favoring only one of these polarities.

In this way, *Little Man Tate* proposes a traditional white, middle class, heteronormative dichotomy with no in-betweens, very few contradictions and a competition to find the best approach to life. The birthday party at the end is staged to be some kind of compromise or blending of the two types of women; an attempt, I think, to make their predicaments more complex, but it didn't work for me. The central message I received from the film was that Dede was a better woman than Jane, because she was able to give Fred the love that he needs. This message left me feeling that it is more important for women to be caring than to pursue intellectual work; a notion which perpetuates the traditional female roles of wife and mother that many women are expected to follow.

I understand how analyzing the typical gender, race, sexuality and class categories, repeatedly reproduced by Jane and Dede's characters, is informative, but in this thesis, I want to develop methods that encourage spectators to use their own experiences to enhance these media code-cracking
methods. I have been taught to deconstruct films by demonstrating how manipulative they are, rather than focusing on what I am learning from them. The media education experiences I described earlier, have instilled in me the notion that if I don't agree with the critically distanced analyses put forth by film theorists and film reviewers then I am not "getting it right". I have also been taught through my female socialization to react emotionally to sad stories, particularly by crying. When I watch a film, I often experience and participate in these contradictory discourses and practices.

For example, as an academic critic, I have learned to read a film like Little Man Tate as quite predictable, schematic and formularized, so when I viewed this film on home video for a second time, I felt inadequate crying so intensely again. I tried to hide my tears from my male partner who was watching the video with me. Not that he would criticize my crying, but he wasn't crying at all and that made me feel self conscious. What about gender and power? Are the expression of emotions themselves a disempowering act given the traditional white, middle class, heteronormative, male discourse which tends to dominate and favor emotional self-control? Although many women - including myself - have been taught something special - to engage with a story by expressing our emotions - we are also frequently taught to devalue this approach.

**Intertwining Stories**

The viewing methods I have learned in school have not helped me problematize my emotional reactions to films. As a result, I am left with a discourse which proposes that my affective responses are somehow "authentic" and/or limited and therefore unworthy of scholarly investigation. If my analyses of Dede and Jane had remained limited to a detached level of viewing which
focuses only on the film, I wouldn't have been able to gain an understanding of the tremendous pain I experienced while watching *Little Man Tate*. Therefore, I ask myself: how have I arrived at my particular affective responses? How can film interpretation be taught so as to emphasize the important role that visceral responses play in audience members' analyses?

Part of me wants to be like Dede, I want a child and I want to be a loving and a responsible mother and part of me wants to be like Jane, smart, financially independent and a published writer. I don't seem to fit in either of those categories as they are represented in the film, yet I am told repeatedly by the film's narrative that I can only have one or the other and I believed this powerful message as I watched the story unfold. It's an impossible choice, one that many women are made to confront and negotiate in relation to their particular social locations. As Patricia Hill Collins (1994) states:

> Existing feminist theories of motherhood have emerged in specific intellectual and political contexts. By assuming that social theory will be applicable regardless of social context, feminist scholars fail to realize that they themselves are rooted in specific locations and that the contexts in which they are located provide the thought-models of how they interpret the world. Their theories may appear to be universal and objective, but they actually are only partial perspectives reflecting the white middle-class context in which their creators live. Large segments of experience, those of women who are not white and middle class, have been excluded (Spelman, 1988). Feminist theories of motherhood thus cannot be seen as theories of motherhood generalizable to all women (72).

My white, middle class locations directly impact on how I see motherhood represented in *Little Man Tate* and therefore the contradictions which arise for me may be completely irrelevant to women whose lived experiences have different social origins.

The interaction I have had with the film *Little Man Tate* relates to Fredric Jameson's (1981) analysis of A. G. Greimas' semiotic rectangle. All these
values staged in the film must be understood in an historical context. Jameson states:

... for rule systems, those of prescriptions, taboos, non prescriptions, non taboos - far from designating the concrete kinship or legal systems of any specific and historical human community, on the contrary constitute the empty slots and logical possibilities necessarily obtaining in all of them, against which the content of a given social text is to be measured and sorted out. In this sense, the semantic or semiotic structures articulated in Greimas' scheme seem to map out what he takes to be the logical structure of reality itself, and stand as the fundamental categories of that reality, whatever its particular historical form... (46).

The party at the end of Little Man Tate tries to stage a simple resolution to the career versus motherhood debate which is presented in the film. In Jameson's terms, a viewer, like myself, could ask: what are the seams, the clusters of signs, the ideologimes, that are operating in this scene?

Jameson outlines how an audience member might work with this question:

Seen in this way, the semiotic rectangle becomes a vital instrument for exploring the semantic and ideological intricacies of the text - not so much because, as in Greimas' own work, it yields the objective possibilities according to which landscape and the physical elements, say, must necessarily be perceived, as rather because it maps the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and marks the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate (47).

By looking at my own histories in relation to the social construction of those histories, I am able to gain a better understanding of "the limits of specific ideological consciousness" which Jameson refers to above.

When I was thirteen years old, my father divorced my mother, because he wanted to live with another woman. My mother was forced to raise my sister and I on her own. She suddenly had to go out to work after being a housewife
and mother for most of her life, and due to her lack of work experience and the enormous lack of career opportunities for women at that time, she didn't earn much money from her secretarial job nor did she derive much satisfaction from it. My father is a successful physicist who has predominantly focused on his intellectual activities and only much later in his life has he begun to spend more time with his daughters. In some ways, the competing lifestyles represented by Dede and Jane partially replicate my experiences with my mother and father. A major difference is that Jane and Dede are both women.

My white, British mother is from a middle class background and my white, Danish father is from a working class background (See Steedman, 1986, Walkerdine, 1990). I benefited financially and emotionally from my father's career success, however, I am also critical of my father's single minded pursuit of his work sometimes at the expense of spending time with his wife and daughters. As a result, I refuse to fully invest in a "career only" discourse because I admire my mother for devoting her life to her children. However, I have also watched my mother live on a low income for long periods of time, take jobs she dislikes, be laid off several jobs and be forced to depend on my father's income. I have a very painful memory of my mother desperately saving from her low wages to buy a colour television set for my sister and I because my father had one and, as a result, we tended to stay at his house more frequently than hers.

It has been very important to my mother to be perceived as a "good mother" and for my father to be perceived as a "successful career man". Both my parents were good at what they did, but neither were able to venture too far into the other one's gender constructions. In other words, the social constructions of gender, class and race played a role in what activities they were able to pursue in their lives. Carolyn Steedman's (1991) book,
Landscape for a Good Woman. A Story of Two Lives, comes to mind. She proposes this:

Her presentation of herself as a good mother shows also with what creativity people may use the stuff of cultural and social stereotype, so that it becomes not a series of labels applied from outside a situation, but a set of metaphors ready for transformation by those who are its subjects (103).

So I ask myself: how much has the society in which I live, changed? Is the change strong enough to help me minimize some of the gender, class and race rigidities that I see my parents trapped in? How does the film Little Man Tate as a discursive practice or arrangement, answer this question?

Dede and Jane's conflict with one another only reinforces the lessons that I learned from my parents. I bring new insights to the portrayals of Dede and Jane via my life experiences but I still feel the oppressive elements of those stereotypes, despite my feminist imaginings. Witnessing the limitations of my parent's lives has been a crucial reason for me wanting to balance my emotions and my intellect, because my parents have not been able to do this very well and it has harmed each of them in different ways. A question that arises for me is: how do I recall and recreate the past in an attempt to discover and invent the self especially in relation to film representations (Kehily, 1995)?

This past that I want to uncover involves many histories; the institutional histories of audiences which includes how I have learned to view a film; the histories of how motherhood and work have been represented in films; my social-history and the histories of the characters, Dede and Jane that are put forth in the film's narrative. For the moment, I look at some historical film genre issues by quoting E. Ann Kaplan (1994) who states: "Genre should also be addressed, as it plays an important role in governing the shape that a narrative
will take in constraining what is ideologically included or excluded within a particular film" (258).

Kaplan conducts an historical analysis of films which look at motherhood and work. She states:

As is clear from this brief list, films have not responded to the statistics concerning work and motherhood, nor have they dealt seriously with role conflicts and practical issues that arise when mothers, especially single ones, work. It is difficult to find Hollywood films that address the fact that many mothers, especially single ones, simply have to work in order to support themselves and their children. It is also difficult to find films that focus on the fact that many women want to work, for a whole series of reasons, including wanting a degree of independence within a marriage, needing fulfillment through work, and needing the social adult community one can find in a workplace (261).

It is not surprising then that Little Man Tate does not provide me with a representation of a woman who manages to have a child as well as a career.

Kaplan summarizes her analyses in the following way:

It would have been interesting to have a heroine who was a full fledged career woman, who cared about her work as well as about her role as mother. We have yet see Hollywood address the conflict between work and parenting from the mother's point of view as was done for fathers in Kramer versus Kramer (1981) (262).

This discussion of films which look at motherhood and work creates an important context for my critical autobiographical analyses of Dede and Jane. The many film and television representations I have seen throughout my life of women who were forced to choose between a career or motherhood, have definitely impacted on my affective investments in Dede and Jane's conflict.

Furthermore, the numerous representations of motherhood I have been exposed to are mostly based on white, heteronormative, middle class experiences. As Patricia Hill Collins (1994) points out "... women of colour
have performed motherwork that challenges social constructions of work and family as separate spheres, of male and female gender roles as similarly dichotomized, and of the search for autonomy as the guiding human quest" (59). It takes a lot of privilege which many white, middle class women have (including myself), to be able to engage in a debate over whether or not having a child will negatively affect one's career. This is another reason why it so important to be specific about where a viewer's emotional/critical response comes from and the context in which it is lived out.

Jackie Stacey's (1994) research provides me with some ideas on how to teach film and how to deal with affective responses. She points out that feminist film criticism has predominantly analyzed the isolated psychic dynamics of the female spectator instead of examining the psycho-social formations of women's identifications with films. Stacey notes that feminist film criticism has begun to address the ways female spectators emotionally engage with film characters. She states:

In attempting to broaden the debate about cinematic spectatorship, E. Ann Kaplan discusses the importance of the emotional connection that identifying involves; this needs to be understood, she argues, as 'a socialized urge towards identifying' (Stacey, 1994:32 and Kaplan, 1989:198).

How does my personal response to Little Man Tate fit into this question of 'identification' and what are the implications of this for my analyses of media education programs? I want to identify with the female characters as Kaplan suggests, but it is not always possible for me to take up their situations in any simple/direct way.

Perhaps one of the reasons I cannot fit into either of the stereotypical categories that Dede and Jane represent, is because I was brought up in a
white, middle class family with many privileges, but my parents were from a
white, working class background. And the film characters are from white,
working and upper class backgrounds. As a result, the complex mesh of desire
and pain that I feel relates somehow to the stereotypical representations of
class in the film; yet, there is no class position for me to identify with which
honours my desire to have both a child and a career.

I do not want to co-opt Dede's working class position although I want a
child like she does, and I do not have the privileges that Jane has had in order
to quickly achieve a "successful" career. The pain I feel is partly based on the
way the film's narrative has severely restricted Dede and Jane's white,
gendered class positions so there is very little opportunity for either of them to
have what the other one has or for the spectator to see these values as
integratable. Consequently, there is no representation in Little Man Tate of a
woman who can have financial stability and a child without drastically
compromising motherhood or career. In other words, the film Little Man Tate
has structured life choices/chances in very specific ways.

According to Stacey then, I am identifying with Dede and Jane by
imagining myself in their positions. This identification involves an analysis of
how I am similar to and different from each of them. Stacey emphasizes that,
"Many forms of identification involve processes of transformation and production
of new identities, combining the spectator's existing identity with her desired
identity and her reading of the star's identity" (172). In this chapter, I focus
mostly on how I might achieve my "desired identities" by looking at my existing
identities in relation to my interpretations of the film Little Man Tate. I am
continually re-evaluating whether or not I can have a child and a career, and, as
a result, I am very vulnerable to scenarios which suggest that it is impossible for
me to achieve both. I am reinventing my life all the time and retelling it to
myself. As I watch the film I am involved in this process. I'm not sure if I or other spectators watch all films in this way or just certain ones. Perhaps because the motherhood/career debate stood out so much for me in *Little Man Tate*, it inspired me to attempt a reinvention of myself.

Dede and Jane's arguments were often played out when the two women were interacting with Fred without the other woman being present. Therefore, Jane and Dede did not have to be in the same scene in order for me to feel the competition between them.

Rather there are clusters of significant identifications that may combine, split, contradict or confirm each other in provisional orientations that will for the time being serve the purposes of a social 'I' (Hartley, 1992;23).

This is further evidence that the film characters and myself are made up competing discourses and practices. Which positions I take up in a film depends upon how I identify with a character which involves using my social locations, affective responses, imaginative thoughts and critical analyses.

I am aware of the fact that I am watching a movie, but that doesn't mean I don't use my imagination while the characters live on the screen.

'Thought', for example, is presented as transcending the social and material world, which operates as a circumscription rather than as a condition for consciousness or subjectivity. Although social change is acknowledged as the impulse behind 'desires', the invocation of their infinity places desire on the side of the imaginative and the limitless rather than within the 'circumscribed' world of the social (Marcus, 1987;77).

As Marcus has pointed out, I have learned that 'imagination' is entirely unconscious and therefore not easily assessed and/or changeable. Marcus enables me to re-think this paradigm and as a result I consciously investigate
how I use my imagination to interpret the discourses in the film. I have been taught to believe that I can't have a career and a child and this is part of my 'imagination' which interacts with the 'imagination' presented in *Little Man Tate*.

For example, it is not just the individual stereotypical categories of a white, working class mother and a white, upper class career woman that are affecting me when I watch *Little Man Tate*. I am aware of the harmful messages offered by those rigidly defined categories and I protect myself from them by imagining that there are many different ways for me to be a mother and/or a career woman.

My fear of having to choose between a career or motherhood is most pronounced with my strong investment in the stereotypical competition between Dede and Jane, because that battle rages within myself. This is a battle which is also very entrenched in my 'imagination'. At stake here is how I unconsciously reinforce within myself the traditional notions of women's careers and motherhood that I see in films, even though I am conscious of different approaches to life (Butler, 1990). Can I reconcile or resolve these two competing positions? If I am conscious of practising motherhood and work differently than what is presented in the film, why do these restrictive ideologies still have a hold on me?

Kate McKenna's (1996) use of Elizabeth Ellsworth's (1989) work helps to explain the difficulties I am having with comprehending the interactions between my unconscious and conscious selves. She states:

... what we are confronted with, in classrooms as elsewhere, is not only the fact that this historical moment unjust power relations between raced, classed and gendered students and teachers distort communication, but that these communications take place between subjects who are not coherent but "split between the conscious and unconscious and among multiple social positionings" (1989:316). While we may desire and need to perform dialogues in ways that enable us "to position and
reposition ourselves," it seems to me that we have not developed sufficient understandings of, and competencies in, the communicative capacities and relationships which would be required to make such dialogues possible (213).

What I derive from this analysis is that I need to acknowledge the different selves that are involved in my film analyses, but there is probably no fixed position that I can arrive at once and for all, because there are so many levels operating at once. Therefore, instead of trying to unify myself and master the many layers involved in film spectatorship, I need to work with the contradictions that arise as best I can, particularly by realizing that unconscious processes frequently contradict my conscious intentions.

This approach is emphasized by Bronwyn Davies' (1993) analyses of the terms "conscious" and "unconscious". She alerts me to how 'imagination' might relate to unconscious processes. She states:

I use the term unconscious to refer to all that we know except that which is conscious at any particular moment. As such it includes the Imaginary as well as later acquired verbal and perceptual knowledges. What we know consciously can slip into the unconscious and vice versa (115).

Becoming more conscious of how I use my imagination to analyze the discourses and practices that the film characters represent, enables me to become more aware of the ways I unconsciously engage with a film. Through this process I can accomplish a better understanding of how I use gender, class and racial stereotypes in my life. In other words, I must learn to re-imagine myself as a mother with a career instead of relying on traditional white, heteronormative, middle class notions of women's lives which have been consistently portrayed in Hollywood films (Kaplan, 1994).

Why do I repeatedly insist upon the notion that if I have a child, I won't have a successful career even though I rationally believe I can do both and I
have witnessed many women achieving both? My critical analyses, imaginative thoughts and visceral responses are interconnected in very complex ways and my unconscious and conscious processes, based on the past and present, and shaped by the social, play a major role in this contradictory configuration. Therefore, it is very important to allude to the fact that the social world (of jobs, housing, education etc.) while I was growing up was and still is structured so as to make it very hard for women to organize their lives around children as well as participate in the workforce.

**Imagining Fantasies**

The role/image method of interpreting film and television that I discussed earlier in this chapter ("which analyzes images of women in the media and in fiction by setting them against 'real' women" (Ang, 1996:92)), helps me explore my social self a little bit. For example, as a spectator, I am a "real" person negotiating discourses and practices and the film characters are fictional images; clusters of signs and codes. What I am suggesting here is that a version of self-exploration may be possible for this otherwise problematic model of viewing films.

When I use the role/image approach generally to analyze films, my imagination, unconscious processes and emotional involvement with the film characters is immediately discredited, because the role/image approach sets up a rational versus irrational dichotomy with no-inbetweens. Instead of dismissing what might be occurring unconsciously, emotionally and imaginatively in viewers' analyses, I suggest that psychoanalytic tools can be used to understand these so-called irrational spectating dimensions. Despite the fact that in this thesis, I do not work with psychoanalytic concepts at length, it is still
crucial for me to acknowledge and reference these concepts in my method because it gives credence to the influential role emotional and imaginative investments play in film interpretations.

Emotional involvement often involves how viewers imagine fantasies about themselves in relation to the storylines that they watch and as Walkerdine (1990) states: "... fantasy is the tool par excellence of psychoanalysis" (91). One of the reasons for the success of this tool is that, as I mentioned in the last section, a viewer's imagination and fantasy life seem to reveal more readily what might be happening in the unconscious. Ang makes a related point: she suggests that in fantasies, "there is no punishment for whatever identity one takes up" and therefore she proposes that fantasy and fiction are "the safe spaces of excess in the interstices of ordered social life where one has to keep oneself strategically under control" (95).

And most importantly for my methodological focus on how a viewer struggles with conflicting/competing discourses in her life and in her film analyses, I quote Jacqueline Rose (1983) in Walkerdine (1990):

What distinguishes psychoanalysis from sociological accounts of gender (hence for me to the fundamental impasse of Nancy Chodorow's work) is that whereas for the latter, the internalization of norms is assumed roughly to work, the basic premise and indeed the starting point of psychoanalysis is that it does not. The unconscious constantly reveals the 'failure' of identity. Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is every simply achieved. Nor does psychoanalysis see such 'failure' as a special-case inability or an individual deviancy from the norm (102).

According to this theorization of psychoanalysis then, it makes sense that there is no fixed position for a spectator to hold onto when he/she is interpreting a film in relation to her life.
Whereas most media theories (especially the role/image approach) rely on the notion that if students/viewers are given the "correct" positions or critiques either in the text itself and/or in the classroom then they will make the appropriate changes in their media interpretations as well as in their lives (Walkerdine, 1990). This line of thinking ignores how unconscious processes interrupt as well as confirm our conscious intentions. Psychoanalysis is a way of understanding how the unconscious works and therefore could further spectators' understandings of themselves in relation to the media.

Ang suggests that instead of disregarding and/or condemning female spectators' fantasies, researchers must look at the enjoyment such "imaginary subject positions" provide for women and analyze how these pleasures can be used to learn more about the politics of representation. For example, Ang reported that the soap opera viewers in her study on *Dallas*, found pleasure in playing with the boundary between the representation and the real (Ang, 1985). This is an extremely informative finding, because it breaks down the dichotomy of "reality" versus "representation" and instead it recognizes the intermingling of the two which has enormous implications for the role that spectators' lives play in their analyses of what they see.

Furthermore, as Walkerdine puts forth:

> It is no good resorting to a rationalist account which consists simply in changing images and attitudes. If new content, in whatever form, does not map on to the crucial issues around desire, then we should not be surprised if it fails as an intervention (104).

But, the question for me at this point is: what does a method look like which focuses on spectators' desires (Walkerdine, 1990) instead of solely depending upon the role/image approach?
Certainly, at this point in my methodological journey, I do not understand how my unconscious is operating, but at least I can admit that I am unable to see or know everything that is going on in my film analyses. Avery Gordon (1990) articulates this position:

We are already far away from the world of the social scientist, a world where the promise of science is precisely to ward off the mythological, the place where things stand gaping; a world where the unthought is violently expelled; a world where meaning is transparent within the words it speaks, and in which there is no promise of re-turning only the promise of a linear progression to a perfect analysis. At the most simple level, the unconscious points us towards that which cannot be seen but which effects powerfully, points us towards the markings of exclusions that are inscribed on our bodies and through our language, points us to the process by which a real story is effected and enacted (494).

And Gordon states later in her article that "the real story is always a negotiated interruption" (495). In other words, ambiguity is a necessary component of working through the meanings which are presented by female film characters. Basically then, if a realist/rationalist approach is used in combination with a discursive and a psychoanalytic analysis then the so-called "objectivity" that is supposed to occur while analyzing a film is called into question.

Furthermore, I perceive autobiographical/affective film viewing as very female gendered and this may be one of the reasons why it has not been given serious consideration in media studies. For instance, Christine Geraghty (1996) who has spoken with many female viewers from a variety of backgrounds, points out that one of the main reasons many women find soap operas pleasurable is because these programs "recognize and value the emotional work which women undertake in the personal sphere" (72). Geraghty expands upon this notion:
This is one of the central pleasures offered to women by soaps, a recognition not so much based on a realistic representation of women's everyday lives but on what it feels like to have so much invested in the personal sphere while men are unable to live up to or even be aware of its demands" (79).

Women may experience many social inequities from solely concentrating on the 'personal sphere'; for example, an over emphasis on taking care of others (McMahon, 1991) (child care and/or housework) could lead to a lack of satisfying and/or financially prosperous employment and/or feelings of powerlessness.

Many feminists have posed the following questions: how did the work of women become 'personal'? How did it become women's work? For several years, feminist research has focused on personal work and there has been a general consensus that personal sphere work is an important aspect of life, which tends to be taken for granted in the social systems that we are immersed in, as well as in the films and television programs that we see. It is not surprising then, that many women find pleasure in representations of women who take emotional work very seriously (Walkerdine, 1986; Kuhn, 1995; Geraghty, 1996).

Affective responses and critical analyses are not always mutually exclusive and neither are criticism and pleasure. Not only do I derive a lot of gratification from watching female characters openly discuss their emotional struggles, but I also enjoy critically examining a film or television program. Geraghty demonstrates in her research that many female spectators find delight in criticizing television characters' predicaments. Instead of pitting pleasure and criticism against one another, Geraghty's method looks at how spectators find pleasure in criticism. She states:
When the popular press asked their agony aunts whether Deirdre Barlow in *Coronation Street* should remain with her husband or leave him for her lover, they were making concrete (and using one of the sources chosen for support by women themselves) the conversations which were taking place in homes and workplaces all over the country. The weighing up of the financial situation, the needs of the child involved - all these factors had to be taken into account and the pleasures for the female viewer in rehearsing the decision-making process (of the characters) without the responsibility for its consequences should not be underestimated (72).

These female viewers used their own lived experiences to assess whether or not Deirdre should leave her husband. I also participate in this type of decision-making process whenever I watch films or televisions programs.

This is an important aspect of my critical autobiographical film viewing method: it's clear that the spectators are examining how the various discourses and practices that the characters take up impact on their own lives as well as the characters' lives. Again, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, the tensions in peoples' lives are not resolved; films and television programs often stage these tensions for people in the audience and they try to theorize in fantasy possible resolutions. This could be seen as a straight case of film and television seeking to meet people's need for fulfillment. However, it is important to remember that viewers bring their own set of issues to their media analyses which might not actually be directly represented in the films and television programs that they watch.

I enjoy not having to deal in my life with the consequences of the choices I imagine for the characters in a film. Whereas, in my everyday life I am constantly making difficult decisions with the pressure to "do the right thing"; sometimes the analyses I conduct on the characters' behalf help me understand how I might remedy some of the problems in my own life.
Due to my feminist education, I make judgments about female characters who come from a variety of social backgrounds and I analyze how they take up or do not take up traditional white, heteronormative, middle class female positions to solve their dilemmas. Ang elaborates on this further:

In fact, there is a fundamentally melodramatic edge to feminism too. After all, are not the suffering and frustration so eminently materialized in melodramatic heroines the basis for anger conveyed in feminism? And does not feminism stand for the overwhelming desire to transcend reality - which is bound to be a struggle, full of frustrations and moments of despair? (96).

It is not possible to remove myself entirely from the complex negotiations I make in my life, but it is possible to theorize in fantasy and remain aware of how this process actually contributes to my film interpretations. As I alluded to previously in this chapter, even when the characters choose traditional white, heteronormative, middle class, feminine routes, I use my feminist imagination to assess whether or not their strategies are successful for them and/or for me. This assessment includes my hopes for better social conditions for women and my desires for escape from the oppressive aspects of my life (Walkerdine, 1986; Ang, 1996). I usually manage to keep some critical distance despite my emotional involvement via fantasy. How are critiques often seen as distanced, while emotion is frequently seen as involved? How does this process of critiquing and responding affectively actually work for me?

Firstly, it is crucial that I do not foreground the affective since that sets up a problematic dichotomy of affective versus critical when, in fact, both the critical and emotional viewing dimensions are intertwined. I need to separate them out to acknowledge and unpack each of them, but I refuse to favor one over the other. Walkerdine states repeatedly in her work that the 'recovery' of emotions without privileging them is necessary, because if pain, loss and anger are
contained then it is much too easy to universalize and/or individualize spectators' film interpretations. She explains the consequences of relying solely upon critical viewing dimensions:

What this typically academic emphasis on rationality and intellectualization can overlook are the specific conditions of the formation of pleasures for particular groups at a given historical moment. Rather than seeing the pleasures of 'the masses' as perverse, perhaps we should acknowledge that it is the bourgeois 'will to truth' that is perverse in its desire for knowledge, certainty and mastery (201).

In response to such a powerful argument against trying to control viewers' fantasies and emotions, I develop a method which looks at how affective responses work in relation to critical and imaginative responses. I also discuss the political implications of such an approach.

This line of thinking relates to Geraghty's perspective which emphasizes the importance of not jumping to conclusions about whether or not a female character is "feminist". Such a judgment is very complicated: it is dependent upon the viewers' social locations which directly involve the types of viewing dimensions to which she has had access and/or been persuaded to use in order to analyze the characters. She states:

Married to men who emotionally abuse them, apparently irrational and sometimes devious, volatile, brittle and soft-hearted, Angie and Sue Ellen, it could be argued, represent gender stereotyping of a high degree. Yet it is also important that the audience is not only consistently presented with information and comment on what these women do but is also continually implicated in their actions by being drawn into their logic. The baffled assertion of commonsense in the face of women's emotions still permeates much of TV fiction as it did mainstream film genres like film noir. In soaps, such a lack of understanding is impossible for the male as well as the female viewer because we have been led through every step of the woman character's way (78).
I propose that films and television programs will offer varying degrees of insights on the characters' emotional states, but the extent to which spectators are "drawn into their logic" also involves how they use their imaginative thoughts, affective responses and their social locations. I am fascinated by how I imagine female characters. What is included and excluded in my imaginings? What are the implications of my imaginings? How much critique of women's oppressions are embodied in my imaginings? I explore these questions in the following analyses of Little Man Tate.

Ien Ang (1996) suggests that:

... sentimental and melancholic feelings of masochism and powerlessness, which are the core of the melodramatic imagination, are an implicit recognition, in their surrender to some power outside the subject, of the fact that one can never have everything under control all the time, and that consequently identity is not a question of free and conscious choice but always acquires its shape under circumstances not of one's own making. Identification with these feelings is connected with a basic, if not articulated, awareness of the weighty pressure of social reality on one's subjectivity, one's wishes, one's desires (95).

Ang continues with her defense of female spectators' pleasures by pointing out that some characters may offer women some space to "indulge" in their desires which might involve "a moment of giving up to the force of circumstances".

She makes it clear that:

... such moments, however fleeting, can be experienced as moments of peace, of truth, of redemption, moments in which the complexity of the task of being a woman is fully realized and accepted. In short, whilst indulgence in a melodramatic identity in real life will generally signify pathetic weakness and may have paralyzing effects, fantasy and fiction constitute a secure space in which one can be excessively melodramatic without suffering the consequences. No wonder melodrama is so often accompanied by tears (95).
She suggests that: "Whether the release of melodramatic feelings through fantasy or fiction has an empowering or paralyzing effect upon the subject is an open question and can probably not be answered without analyzing the context of fantasizing" (96). The "context of fantasizing" includes viewers' everyday experiences and social locations. Now I will look at the context in which I have used my imagination to analyze Little Man Tate.

Rewind and Playback

I watched the film for a third time on video to find out precisely where the painful moments began for me. During this screening, I focused on how I attempted to reduce my pain by imagining myself differently as well as making decisions about the characters' actions. Firstly, I want to outline more thoroughly what I mean by this process of imagining myself differently. For the purposes of this thesis, it involves notions of hope and healing through a social/self reflective process which involves constantly relating my individual stories to a social context. My method of doing this consists of stating which social discourse I am taking up and why and how this discourse competes and/or coincides with the filmic discourses I analyze. I also look at how I am unconsciously investing in particular discourses by examining how I imagine myself and the social implications of this imagining for myself and others.

How do I work with a term like "imagine" when I don't want it to be determined, yet I don't want it to be viewed as a romantic transcendent notion, either? If I realize that my imagination is not free (Hall, 1990), why do I believe that using my imagination can help me engage with alternative discourses and practices on motherhood and work instead of the restrictive ones that I am strongly urged to take up from the film? In other words, why do I react so
strongly to the limitations Dede and Jane face in the film when I can analyze/imagine them/myselfs in very different predicaments? In the following sections I work with these questions by initiating an investigation into how my unconscious sometimes overpowers my conscious thought patterns and why.

The pain starts when Dede takes Fred to his interview with Jane. While Fred is in Jane's office, Dede walks around the lavish building, looking at the decor and the classes for gifted children that are in progress. I could feel myself getting very tense as I watched through her point of view a world which she and I are not part of. It triggered my desires to have a challenging career as well as my fears and distrust of money and fame.

I experienced many conflicting emotions as I watched this scene. A. Selvin (1986) provides me with a description of the complexity of the viewing process, I think I was engaged in while viewing/analyzing *Little Man Tate*.

The viewer's voluntary and involuntary fantasies are more or less socially acceptable imaginings of how things could be different - and the shape of these imaginings depends upon the constantly changing intersections between the viewer's conscious and unconscious social and personal histories (62).

I am involved in a multi-layered interplay of my own subjectivities as well as the characters' subjectivities. I like Dede a lot, so I enjoyed participating in her perspective on the world, although it is not precisely mine: I am a full-time graduate student and Dede is a waitress. Yet, I have worked as a waitress and I have lived on very low budgets for a long time, so I partly understand how she might see the upper class world she has just temporarily entered and how she might feel living her life outside of it. I am also told by the dialogue, editing and camera angles, how she sees the wealth and attitudes that surround her in that
school. In this way, her observations inform her self perceptions and add to mine.

For example, as Dede views the surroundings, the editing allows the audience to move to scenes of Jane watching Fred demonstrate his exceptional abilities. I feel uncomfortable and Dede feels uncomfortable in the luxurious school, so when she and I see Fred playing a concerto with Jane by his side and praising him, the threats that this intellectual, so-called tasteful world poses seem very intrusive to me. Fred appears to be traveling very quickly from working class to middle/upper class social situations. He seems very comfortable because he can gain access to a world Dede both desires, envies and hates. I found Fred's sudden involvement with Jane's school very disturbing, because this is Dede's child, yet he might be taken away from her by Jane, because she, not Dede, seems to connect with Fred's exceptional abilities. This scene triggered my fears of pursuing intellectual work, because academia sometimes alienates me from my friends (Walkerdine, 1990). I wanted Fred and Dede to run out of that office as fast as possible. I was glad when Dede refused Jane's offer for Fred to attend the school. Unfortunately, this didn't last long and, as Dede and Jane's conflicts intensified, so did my pain.

The fact that Jane did not seem to understand why Dede distrusted Jane's offer of a trip and schooling for Fred, made me dislike her immediately. I thought Dede was very wise in questioning Jane's suggestions for her son, particularly since Dede knew very little about Jane's school. It appeared to me that Dede reacted in a very caring way to the situation, whereas Jane just wanted what was best for Fred intellectually. Suddenly I became aware that Jane was being set-up as the cold intellectual woman stereotype, but that didn't stop me from disliking her. It is these types of connections with the characters
which engage me with the story, not whether or not they are complex enough or non-traditional. Sometimes I feel too cold and too rational, especially when I'm trying to prove my intelligence; it is this calculating part of me that interacts with Jane, even though I dislike those behaviors in myself. I am conscious of the fact that these feelings I have about being smart are very gendered, but nonetheless, I still feel them and this indicates to me how deeply embedded in my unconscious these feelings are. Dede appeals to the parts of myself that I like more, the nurturing, feminine caring selves which are critical of mastery and control. These selves are directly related to my North American, heterosexual, white, middle class and female social locations.

When Dede decided to let Fred go with Jane on the "Odyssey of the Mind" tour, it was framed by the film's narrative that Dede put her own needs aside in order to do what she thought was best for Fred. Yet, this was a very difficult decision for Dede. I empathized with her. During this scene I perceived motherhood as very painful. These filmic moments validated for me the choice I made at age thirty-six not to have a child, because then I did not have to face the kind of difficulties Dede does in the film.

Various feminist discourses have supported me with the possibility of not having a child at all and immersing myself in my career. With this scene I played out that possibility in my imagination to escape from the distress Dede experienced and, in turn, the pain I felt watching her. Dede did not seem to have a fulfilling life without her child (nor with her child, ironically, because she is not able to satisfy his needs for a more intellectual environment) and these possibilities frighten me. Similarly, Jane has a rewarding career, but no child and this also frightens me. Both female film characters represent lives I don't want. However, I would like to live a combination of their lives. (And I do have this kind of life now, but I wrote this chapter before I became a mother; see
Chapter Four for more details). This was not an option in the film, but I try to imagine this set of circumstances. As I write this I look out my window and I see a woman who lives down the street from me walking with her three children. Does she have a job/career as well? Does she need or want a job/career? There are so many questions I would like to ask this woman who has just walked by.

Moving In and Out of Characters

I struggle with an image of myself as an intelligent, financially independent career woman with a child. I can't quite visualize how I would achieve this goal. What is preventing me from creating a female character who successfully manages the contradictions of motherhood and intellectual work? The pain I feel is my realization that my imagination is not ‘free’ (Hall, 1990). In other words, I have internalized many norms that I do not agree with, yet they continue to haunt me, nonetheless. So although I agree with Jacqueline Rose (1983) that the starting point of psychoanalysis is that the internalization of norms has not worked and “the unconscious constantly reveals the failure of identity”, the struggle with various identities makes me feel like I am in a fixed identity with very little opportunity for change.

For example, I have invested and reinvested in the discourse that it is not proper for me to pursue academic work. I have invested and reinvested in the notions that I must have a child to feel worthy and that I am not entitled to having a child and a career. I have brought all these thoughts and feelings to my viewings of Little Man Tate. While watching Dede and Jane, my imagination, filled with these contradictions, moves in and out of the female characters on the screen and I formulate some of my own characters which are versions of me.
This process is similar to John Fiske's (1987) implicatory/explicatory viewing theory which I outlined earlier in this chapter, because I, as an audience member, am negotiating textual and social discourses simultaneously.

The different characters I play out while I watch the film are fantasies similar to those in novels and films. These characters of mine are based on partial truths.

She "imagines" that she is indeed the type of subject which humanism proposes - rational, unified, the source rather than the effect of language. It is the imaginary quality of the individual's identification with a subject position which gives it so much psychological and emotional force (Weedon, 1987:31 quoted in Heald, 1991:138).

I struggle with many different discourses when I watch a film, yet, I want to feel "unified", so my characters move in to fill in the gaps (Heald, 1991). The female film characters I watch also move in and out of my imagination to help me create and recreate my subjectivities. I am oscillating between imagined and actual lives (Gillespie, 1995) which involve various discourses that are juxtaposed in numerous ways. I produce and I am produced by the numerous discourses I am immersed in. I am constantly changing, changing even as I write this thesis.

The following scene which I am about to describe also initiated some painful moments for me: Fred goes into Jane's study late at night while she is working on her book about Fred. He tells Jane he is having nightmares and she says: "Why don't you get a glass of water, turn the light on or listen to the radio?" Instead of following through on these suggestions, Fred phones Dede, but he can't get hold of her. A few scenes earlier, we, as the spectators, saw Dede comforting Fred after he had one of his nightmares. In the sterility of Jane's house, Fred realizes that he needs more than intellectual challenges in his life. Jane is portrayed once again as an unnurturing intellectual, incapable
of handling Fred's emotional needs. I felt uneasy with the way Jane was increasingly contrasted to Dede who was portrayed as very nurturing. The film's narrative repeatedly states that a feminine, nurturing woman cannot also be rational and intellectual.

As I watched this scene I could feel myself quickly evaluating whether or not I pay enough attention to how I am feeling when I pursue my studies. I could not visualize myself as being in touch with my emotions as much as I would like and I found this disturbing. Part of me could connect with Jane and part of me couldn't. I felt proud of Fred for being so insightful about Jane's pursuit of a career, to the point where she neglects the emotional aspects of her life and in turn, the emotional aspects of Fred's life as well.

When I moved in and out of the film characters of Jane and Fred, which involved deciding which discourses in the film and in my life I was going invest and disinvest in, (Fiske, 1987) I was no longer stuck in the stereotypical portrayal of Jane as a female intellectual who has had to forfeit her nurturing and caring selves to be an academic. Instead, I used my own experiences as well as Fred's to analyze this scene. If I hadn't reflected on this process, I probably wouldn't have understood why it was so painful for me to watch Jane realize she has emotional needs, too. I am striving to express my emotions as much as possible when I watch and analyze films. I want to attain some sort of balance between my intellectual selves and my nurturing selves so I don't become like my father, who I perceived as concentrating too much on his academic work or like my mother, who I perceived as concentrating too much on looking after other people's needs (Walkerdine, 1986; McMahon, 1991).

To understand this desire I have to escape the rigid social roles presented in my family life as well as in the various institutions I have lived through. I turn to Kate McKenna's (1996) research which argues that emotional
responses "provide resources for tracing the relational configurations
developed in the past, but precisely because they provide clues about the present" (289). She suggests:

... the power of particular discourses has also to do with the ways they have become (unconsciously) linked with particular relational configurations or social form(ation)s which are (unconsciously) evoked or deployed in subsequent interactions. And, as Mitchell insists, people structure their worlds by reproducing stereotyped relational configurations [/social form(ation)s] "not simply because they are familiar, but also because they are familial and preserve a sense of loyalty and connection. ... The maintenance of a coherent sense of self and the preservation of secure patterns of interaction are inextricably linked to securing connections with others" (1988:291). (294).

McKenna's analyses are about student/teacher interactions, but this could be also applied to spectator/film interactions. It is particularly related to my uncertainty and deep insecurities about managing a career as well as raising a child which constantly interrupt my intentions of doing both.

As Roger Silverstone (1994) points out, films can be advertisements for our own lives. A set of practices which relate to life practices - living a life and reconfiguring how one has perceived one's life and those around us. Silverstone states:

In this sense an enquiry into the audience should be an enquiry, not into a set of preconstituted individuals or rigidly defined social groups, but into a set of daily practices and discourses within which the complex act of watching television is placed alongside others, and through which that complex act is itself constituted (133).

In terms of the cinematic experience, he proposes that when we, as film spectators, watch a film, we see a whole life or lives, condensed into two to three hours.

Walkerdine adds to this analysis when she states that:
The alternative is not a populist defense of Hollywood, but a reassessment of what is involved in watching films. This becomes part of the experience of oppression, pain and desire. Watching a Hollywood movie is not simply an escape from drudgery into dreaming: it is a place of desperate dreaming, of hope for transformation (Walkerdine, 1986;196).

As I watched Jane realize that she has overlooked some crucial parts of her life, I was hoping I could achieve a better life for myself. This is one way I tried to deal with the pain I felt.

As Stuart Hall (1990) states: "We have to 'speak through' the ideologies which are active in our society and which provide us with the means of 'making sense' of social relations and our place in them" (9). As I write my interpretations of Little Man Tate in this chapter, I am not necessarily expressing unique ideas; rather, they are part of the "socially learned reading regimes" that I have derived from the media and elsewhere which I negotiate in relation to my own experiences (McCormick, 1994). Morley (1991) elaborates upon this point by discussing how the local acts as a ground filter for what sense gets made out of a media practice. And Silverstone argues that media practices are nested within everyday practices. These theories relate to Kathleen McCormick's (1994) work which alerts me to the importance of being vigilant about the fact that I am speaking from particular positions. She states:

> These theories operate regardless of whether I am sufficiently self-aware to acknowledge their influence on me. But my discourse will be regarded as theoretical only when I stop taking these influences for granted and begin to be reflective about them. (176).

McCormick gestures at unconscious processes as well when she says "these theories operate regardless of whether I am sufficiently self aware to acknowledge their influence on me". She argues for a thorough investigation of
the impact of the less visible or invisible discursive work which is involved in a reader's analyses of textual mechanisms. Again, psychoanalytic tools would be helpful here in understanding the intricacies of these less visible strands or unconscious processes.

I ask once more: why are my emotional reactions to films often very intense despite the fact that I am frequently aware of the plot and character stereotypes that I see? I "desire emotional connectedness" with the films I watch and my critiques of stereotypes cannot eliminate this desire, nor should this be the main goal of media research and education (Kaplan, 1989:196). However, I must look closely at my affective investments in traditional white, middle class, heteronormative female representations if I want to change the oppressive stories I tell myself about myself and others.

Taking into account these considerations, there was another scene in *Little Man Tate* during which I interwove my experiences with those of the characters. Jane visits Dede at her home and tells her that Fred wants to go to college for the summer. Dede says that they already have plans to stay at a motel with a swimming pool. Jane becomes angry and tells Dede that Fred won't be satisfied with a summer like that. Dede informs Jane that college would be too stressful for Fred. I could see both of their arguments, but rather than side with one character or the other, I started to imagine how I would handle this situation.

It was becoming obvious to me that Fred needed a lot of support emotionally as well as intellectually and Dede and Jane, partly due to their conflicts, did not seem to be giving him both. To deal with the pain I felt for Fred and ultimately for myself, because I need both kinds of support as well, I created a fantasy of myself as a mother who could understand the needs of a child like Fred. In this way, I was attempting to meet my own needs through the female
characters. I desperately want to be both nurturing and intellectual, so I was trying to learn as much as I could from Dede and Jane to reinvent myselfs.

I really respect Dede's protection of her son. She questions every suggestion Jane makes for Fred's life, like going to college. I also respect Jane's concern for Fred's feelings of alienation due to his exceptional abilities. However, I found Jane and Dede's conflict predictable, so I moved along with the story in my imagination.

By "viewing experience," I am not referring to personally emotional, voluntary, or idiosyncratic responses to the film as stimulus or message. Rather, I am referring to the viewer's experience of being addressed by the film in ways that invite her/him to take up particular kinds of physical, social, and ideological involvements in the unfolding of the film's story or discourse (Ellsworth, 1987).

I was invited to enter the discourses present in the lives of Dede and Jane, as Ellsworth suggests. She argues that films position the addressee whereas I argue that films not only position me, but that I also have some agency with regard to these positionings if I pay attention to my affective, critical and imaginative responses.

I perceived both Dede and Jane as intelligent women and the conflict between them seemed to challenge their intellectual abilities. I resented their conflict. I didn't accept the film's offer. I have attempted to change this situation by developing different ways that the narrative could have proceeded. Perhaps they could have become friends much earlier in the film, working together to help Fred, instead of just at the end. This type of narrative would have validated Dede and Jane's analyses of Fred's life and created less of a nurturant/intellectual battle between them and within myself as a viewer.
On the other hand, I certainly have learned a great deal, despite the stereotypical portrayals of Dede and Jane and that is precisely the point I am trying to make (Gray, 1992). If the narrative was more provocative with less stereotypical female characters, I probably would have developed other narratives to evaluate some traditional white, middle class, heteronormative female roles which I experience in this society, and, most likely, I would have interrelated them with the non-traditional characters presented to me. However, I can engage and learn just as much from films such as Little Man Tate which put forth restrictive class, race, sexuality and gender categories, if I pay attention to how I am feeling as well as thinking critically about those stereotypical portrayals. I live in a world that unfortunately often reinforces traditional roles. Therefore, coupled with my own experiences, analyzing predictable film narratives helps me question the social expectations I am confronted with daily. I argue that spectators' emotions, criticisms, imaginative thoughts and social locations can offer a variety of sources to draw upon so that they are not necessarily totally positioned by the films that they watch.

In the following sections I suggest, using my own affective and critical responses to Little Man Tate, what spectators might be able to do with their insights from the alternative viewing dimensions I have listed above. It is important to note that these insights are not necessarily always positive. For example, Walkerdine (1986,1990,1997) has written extensively about how complex readings which involve conscious and unconscious investments, can also bring pain, frustration as well as pleasure and hope.
Uncovering Affective Investments

The most painful scene for me in *Little Man Tate* is when Fred and Jane are getting ready to go on the talk show in which Fred is supposed to demonstrate how intelligent he is. I will outline a portion of Fred's dialogue from this scene, because it is important for understanding my analyses. Jane is doing up Fred's tie. They talk about his mid-term exam at college and the mathematical equation Fred should remember for the TV interview. Fred then initiates another dimension to the conversation: "How come you always ask me about school? How come you always talk like you are reading a book? Nobody ever comes over. How come you don't have any kids of your own? What's wrong with you?" Jane just stares at Fred without saying a word. She looks as if she is going to cry. Fred looks at Jane inquisitively. He is trying to understand why she has chosen the life she has.

While watching this scene, I had to confront one of my greatest fears, which is becoming a person who is obsessed with her career and has very little capacity to care about herself or others. Alternatively, I am trying to attain more balance in my life by allotting time for my career and for my emotional issues which does not necessarily mean having a child of my own. In some ways I would rather just analyze *Little Man Tate* in a more detached way, especially this last scene, because it was particularly painful for me. Yet, I would have learned a lot less about the social constructions of gender and class which operate in my life.

The point is: how do I make choices in my life? What are the conditions - social, material, discursive - that shape the choices available to us? Do I feel pressured to have children, because women are most often regulated to do so? Do I feel pressured to work all the time, because career women are often expected to work harder than men? The social context of these so-called
choices must be constantly recognized. Social inequities are being reproduced all the time in different ways and I need to be aware of the various techniques of power that influence my life decisions (Foucault, 1982). My imagination is filled with discourses that both enable and limit me, so it is crucial that I closely examine how I use my imagination to analyze film characters.

Jane didn't say anything when Fred asked her all those questions, but I imagined her responding with: "Well, Fred I have spent a lot of time working on my career. I was under a lot of pressure to do so and that's how my parents spent their time. I guess I learned this way of life from them. But I agree with you, I do not make enough time for friends and possibly a relationship. I have decided not to have children, but I still struggle with that choice. However, I am fortunate enough to be with you and the other children at the institute".

This type of dialogue would have portrayed Jane as more worthy of her intellectual pursuits, instead of someone who has made irreparable mistakes which reinforces the societal myth that if women pursue a challenging career they will have to forfeit their friends and family. Little Man Tate perpetuates the lonely female intellectual stereotype which has been in the media for a long time. I feel that the film's narrative didn't focus enough on Jane's emotional struggles to remind me that women deal with their careers in a variety of ways. Instead the narrative persuaded me to dislike Jane, because she doesn't really care about Fred's emotional needs. I wasn't fond of Jane, but I also resisted her predicament by creating a character of my own who manages her intellectual life differently.

How does Ang's theory that viewers' imaginings momentarily enable them to "escape from the force of circumstances" apply to the dialogue I invented for Jane? I imagined a female character who refuses to be categorized as emotionally inadequate just because she focuses mostly on her
career. During this process, I was able to criticize the discourse that labels career women in this way. I found this fantasy/critique pleasurable and it provided me with some escape, but as soon as I stopped imagining Jane differently, the pain returned, because my attempt at representational transformation made me realize (in everyday life, not to mention the unconscious forces at work as well), the extent to which many women - including myself - are not supported for single mindedly pursuing their careers. Instead women are most often pressured to focus on the caretaking of men and children as well as earn an income. This may be possible for some women who have the financial access to child care and domestic help, but for many women these "superwoman" expectations are very unreasonable and a health hazard.

Also, many women do not want to replicate the traditional white, male version of work which deems child care and emotional concerns as unimportant. Striking a balance between work and home is extremely difficult, especially when there are some powerful social structures and discourses which limit many women's ability to pursue this goal. Even though many women have careers, Hollywood films tend to portray women as somehow lacking if they focus predominantly on their work. But at least, imagining an alternative provides me with "hope for transformation" rather than just criticizing the lonely female intellectual stereotype which ignores my affective responses (Walkerdine, 1986).

At the end of *Little Man Tate*, the birthday party scene did not change the stereotypical ways Dede and Jane were portrayed: Jane was still represented as stiff, desperately trying to change and Dede by this time was represented as being in control of her son once again and therefore very happy. I imagined how I would have liked to have seen them change in this scene to compensate for the lack of transformation of their lives in the film. It would have been
interesting if they had learned a lot more from each other. Jane seemed to learn more from Dede than Dede did from Jane. This helped to create the central point of the film: loving and caring is more important than intellectual work, financial independence and fame for white women.

Jane can now develop her emotional life if she wants to. She has the economic base to support this personal change. Yet, Dede’s changes seem to depend a lot more on structural changes, not just her personal motivation as the narrative would have us believe. It looks like Fred will save his mother from poverty with his intelligence, a very stereotypical theme indeed. Wouldn’t it have been great if Dede went back to school or found a job that she liked? Or maybe Jane could have given Dede and Fred some money to help them transform their lives. Perhaps if there was a more equitable exchange of learning experiences and resources, the film would have been much more satisfying for me emotionally and politically.

Conclusion

Len Ang’s insights on fantasy, imagination and emotional engagement have enabled me to gain a more thorough comprehension of how spectators’ lives have been frequently excluded from their film and television interpretations. Valerie Walkerdine’s and Annette Kuhn’s analyses of their own affective investments in particular films and research/scholarly strategies, have challenged me to explore my own desires and pains in relation to the feminist media research I conduct. *Little Man Tate* has been an allegory of sorts for my personal/social narrative in that it has inspired me to access and stage an analysis of my feelings and criticisms about women’s careers and motherhood.
Writing this chapter has helped me to re-evaluate the ways I have been taught to watch films and, instead of developing yet another rigid method of viewing female characters using my affective responses in relation to my critical analyses, has sparked a lot of questions about the politics of representation. Thus far, I have demonstrated the many ways I use my own experiences and my contradictory/conflicting reactions to analyze female characters. This is a complex viewing process, but one which needs to be recognized much more in film/media studies (Stacey, 1993). My learning needs in school were not met as well as they could have been, because the media teachers who taught me, did not acknowledge the importance of the film viewers' social/self perceptions of themselves in relation to the characters' social/self perceptions.

And while I analyze the limitations of my media education, I also wonder if and how schools are conducive spaces for young people to engage in the kind of affective/critical viewing I recommend. In some ways it seems like the last place a young person would want to 'expose' their emotionality and for girls or women, their rationality. However, many media and English studies researchers have discovered that when students' are given the opportunity in the classroom to bring in their personal/social histories in relation to film, television and literature, they gain a better understanding of how interpretations are culturally, historically and socially located (Williamson, 1981; Brundson, 1991; Patterson, 1992; Davies, 1993; Buckingham, 1993; Moss, 1993; ; Turnbull, 1993; McCormick, 1994; Kelly, 1997). In this way critical autobiographical film and television analyses can prevent students from just learning the "correct" interpretations of the media and as a result encourage different social readings rather than universal and/or individual ones (Turnbull, 1993; Williamson; 1980; Green and Bigum, 1993).
In the next chapter, I continue to investigate this notion of deconstructing the viewer's as well as the character's use of discourses and practices, by using my critical autobiographical method to analyze another film, *The Piano*. This film problematizes the characters' social locations and self perceptions much more than *Little Man Tate* managed to do. Nevertheless, the representation of oppressive colonial relations warrants a serious critique. However, due to its more complicated narrative structure, *The Piano* is a film which gives me the opportunity to further my investigation into how my white, heteronormative, middle class, feminine social locations influence the types of interpretations I use to analyze textual mechanisms in a film.
Endnotes

1 Here I would like to comment on the fact that I decided to watch *Little Man Tate* for a second time. I have to be really intrigued with a film to watch it more than once. The second viewing is then a case of resonance for me - affect at some level.

2 Why did I conduct an autobiographical analysis of the film *Little Man Tate*? After studying Valerie Walkerdine's research, I realized that connections must be made between filmic representations and spectators' everyday lives otherwise valuable opportunities to gain a thorough understanding of the politics of representation will be lost. In this chapter then, I begin to articulate a critical autobiographical film viewing method which takes into account the social formations of audience members.

3 Following Buckingham's insights on the term critical is his analysis of how "emotional engagement" and "aesthetic pleasure" are often excluded from the critical viewer's repertoire. He states:

   The critical viewer remains unmoved, and can only recognize pleasure as a form of deception, a disguise under which the media perform their nasty ideological work. From this perspective, pleasure is something we have to own up to: it is dangerous and must be intellectualized away (Walkerdine, 1986)" (146).

I would like to avoid this type of perspective in my film analyses by continually attempting to recognize that the affective, critical and pleasurable aspects of film viewing are synthesized in spectators' reactions, but I also need to separate each of these viewing dimensions in order to discuss them in this thesis.

4 The courses that Dr. Kathleen Rockhill, Dr. Kari Dehli and Dr. Robert Morgan offer at the Ontario Institute of Education/University of Toronto have helped me gain legitimization of my personal/social writings in an academic environment.

5 "Firstly, stereotypes present interpretations of groups which conceal the 'real' cause of the group's attributes and confirm the legitimacy of the group's oppressed position. Secondly, stereotypes are selective descriptions of particularly significant or problematic areas and to that extent they are exaggerations" (Perkins;22 in Baehr & Gray, 1996).

6 'Screen theory' focuses on how the text constructs the spectator and within this paradigm psychoanalysis is frequently used to explain how a film acts on a generic audience member's 'imagination' (Kaplan, 1989). Consequently, 'Screen theory' tends to universalize spectators' viewing experiences because it does not focus on audience members' historical specificities (Stacey, 1994). In this chapter, I am proposing an approach which examines how spectators' histories and everyday lives "position" them and their imaginations in different ways in relation to the text (Foucault, 1982).
CHAPTER THREE
The Politics of Representing Experiences
and Film Interpretations: Silences, Voices,
The Piano (1993) and Myselfs

Introduction

The main purpose of this thesis then is to develop a critical autobiographical film viewing method which leads spectators to a greater awareness of how the structures of hegemony and hierarchy in the films they see relate to their own lives (Haug, 1987; Walkerdine, 1986; hooks, 1992; Kuhn, 1995). In this chapter I investigate how my life experiences can be used to analyze the main female character in The Piano (1993), Ada McGrath (played by Holly Hunter). I look closely at how the construction of Ada's relationship with Baines (played by Harvey Keitel) made me feel very angry and hurt. I also look closely at how and why these affective responses have a larger significance for a critical autobiographical film interpretation method. Deconstructing my critical and affective responses to The Piano's narrative enables me to further demonstrate how my life experiences, social locations, imagination and critical responses are an essential part of understanding the socio-political specifics of gender, class, sexuality, ability, ethnicity and race representations in a film.

This chapter is a meditation on different kinds of interpretations. Interpretations have varying degrees of status and they compete with one another for space in an audience member's repertoire of viewing practices. When I analyze a film, I am using social practices of interpretation which draw upon different discourses. With regard to The Piano, I try to outline how and why I am using particular interpretations in relation to the invited structures in the film. The discourses that I engage with could be called many names such as feminist, heterosexual, dominant, alternative, consensual, preferred, popular
etc. - a whole lot of terms. This thesis is very much about the relationships between these different kinds of interpretations. My anger towards Ada and Baines' love relationship gives me the opportunity to explore how I analyze a film which, in turn, helps me further develop my critical autobiographic film viewing method.

I begin with a brief summary of the film's narrative. *The Piano* is the story of Ada, a nineteenth-century Scotswoman who has not spoken for an unknown reason since she was six-years-old. The film begins with Ada and her child, Flora (played by Anna Paquin), traveling to New Zealand. Ada's father has arranged for her to marry a man there. It turns out that Ada's new husband, Stewart (played by Sam Neill), is not supportive of her need to play the piano. Stewart demonstrates this lack of encouragement by leaving her piano on the beach. Baines rescues the piano and later uses it to gain sexual favours from Ada. Eventually, he realizes that he can't buy her love, so he returns the piano to her. Ada then falls in love with him. In a general sense the rest of the film explores Ada's creative and sexual desires and how difficult it is for her to fulfill them.

As I alluded to in Chapter One, Valerie Walkerdine's theorizing has taught me how to use my affective responses to gain a more thorough understanding of my critical responses and vice versa. She states: "This means disrupting the common-sense split between 'fantasy' and 'reality'. Fantasy is invested in domestic relations just as much as it is in films ..." (192). For example, instead of just focusing on whether or not particular film portrayals reflect "reality", Walkerdine suggests I uncover my affective investments in the film narratives that I watch. She persuasively points out that I probably look at films in search of "fantasy-spaces as places for hope and for escape from oppression" (195).
Indeed, my feelings about a film often embody my dreams of who I want to be, what I would like to do and which traps in life I want to avoid. In the following sections, I examine how my desires for the future in relation to my memories of the past, directly influence how I analyze *The Piano*. Included in my histories are the ways in which I have used various viewing discourses and practices and the changes I would like to make in my media spectating practices. There have been two stages involved in this process: 1) examining how I initially learned to interpret films as discussed in Chapter One and 2) the gradual shifts I have made in my viewing practices by developing a method which seeks to include audience members' lives in their film interpretations.

Walkerdine argues that film representations "generate their meanings from the living out of historically specific relations" which each audience member possesses (198). According to this theory, then, filmic representations only "come alive" after a spectator has revealed his/her own reactions to them. In other words, filmic representations have many different meanings, depending on who is interpreting them and what kinds of interpretations they use and the relationships between those interpretations.

Textually based film viewing methods do not allow for a close examination of the complex interaction between a film and audience members from various social locations. The limitations of text-centred criticism has serious implications for viewers' analytical and material circumstances. Alternatively, Walkerdine complicates spectatorship by teasing out some its intricacies. She focuses on "how people make sense of what they watch and how this sense is incorporated into an existing fantasy structure" (192).

Walkerdine works with both a psychoanalytic approach and an ethnographic/social contexts approach. I predominantly use the social context aspect of Walkerdine's method (although I do make note of how my
unconscious may play a role in this process) to examine how I consciously negotiate gender, class, sexuality, ability, ethnicity and race relations in my everyday life as well as in Ada's life. Thus I seek to politicize lived experiences on and off the movie screen to enable me to take part in producing female representations.

Walkerdine is the first academic I have read who has included her own affective responses in her analyses of a film. The fact that I have been taught from various sites to analyze films without elaborating on my visceral responses, has made me wary of writing an academic thesis which involves making room for emotional engagements with film. I argue that if affective responses are not discussed, then it is likely that a viewer's subjective investments in the representations they are criticizing are not exposed. This could result in an inability to change the viewer's engagement with traditional discourses and practices that he/she was criticizing to begin with.

As I discussed in Chapter One, I repeatedly learned (implicitly and explicitly) from various sites such as schools and from reading film reviews and film criticism that my affective reactions to films would impede my intellectual work, so it is not surprising that I continually doubt the value of analyzing affective responses in relation to critical analyses. My so-called "critical" reaction to the narrative and the characters in The Piano involved a dismissal of the film as a predictable, "over-the-top", melodramatic story. If I had not been exposed to Walkerdine's approach and if my intense emotional reactions to The Piano had not overwhelmed me, I probably wouldn't even be writing about this film.

For weeks after my initial screening of The Piano, I felt a great deal of anger which eventually turned into pain. I was particularly angry with the scene in which Ada falls in love with Baines, very soon after he has demanded sexual
favours from her in exchange for her access to the piano. This sexual exploitation went on for approximately twenty minutes of film time. It seemed stereotypical to me that Ada would so quickly put aside the humiliating experiences she first had with Baines, just because he showed some kindness towards her. This isn't the first film in which a woman has 'fallen in love' with a man who has repeatedly objectified her.

Marsha Meskimmon (1996) theorizes this familiar heterosexist scenario:

... an instance of a woman accepting a masculine, colonial, heterosexual evaluation of female sexuality as her own sexual identity. This raises the questions both of the extent to which it is possible for women to define their own sexual identities completely outside masculine models and to what degree it is personally expedient for some women to be defined by these norms (112).

I do not think it is possible for me to define my own sexual identity completely outside heteronormative models. I am angry about this realization, because I have so deeply internalized these models and even though I am conscious of the restrictions, I am unconsciously and structurally shaped by them all the time.

Psychoanalysis is extremely useful for explaining how the unconscious continuously interrupts conscious feminist intentions. These types of explanations may not necessarily eliminate the impact of heteronormative models, but at least it is a place to start some productive theorizing. Elizabeth Grosz (1995) provides such an analysis:

If women do not lack in any ontological or biological sense (there is no lack in the real, as Lacan is fond of saying), men cannot be said to have. In this sense, patriarchy requires that female bodies and sexualities be socially produced a lack. This, in some social contexts is taken literally but also occurs at an imaginary and symbolic level, that is, at the level of the body's morphology and the body image. Psychoanalysis describes how this mutilated body image comes about, thus explaining the socially authorized social and sexual positions and behaviours appropriate to and
expected from women; but it is unable to explain how this occurs (not only because it is unable to see that its analyses find their context in patriarchal culture and not just neutral 'civilization', but above all, because it is unable to see that its own pronouncements and position are masculine) (194).

Grosz makes it clear "that the body is literally written on" and therefore, it is impossible to go beyond this signification; rather, feminists need to redevelop "the terms by which the body has been socially represented".

By expressing my angry affective response to the colonial, heteronormative norms presented in The Piano, I try to prevent myselves from being "implicated" by Ada's love for Baines. In fact, it helps me "extricate" myself from their relationship, and this results in my resorting to a critical reaction to male dominance, similar to the one Meskimmon proposes (Fiske, 1987). In other words, I fear being repeatedly subjected to a storyline which limits women's agency especially with regard to their/our sexuality. It is a social script which I have followed and in which I am implicated. I want to change the dialogue, the scenes and the actions. I made a conscious effort not to invest in this scenario which involves compulsory heterosexuality and colonialism, but there are still many layers to my investments which I cannot always access (and only theorize a little bit) - hence the anger.

After I had formulated what seemed to me to be a feminist, anti-racist response to The Piano, I decided not to think about the film again. I soon discovered that my "choice" in this matter was rather limited. Images from the film kept reappearing in my mind. These images intensified my anger towards Baines for sexually exploiting Ada and intensified my disappointment in what seemed to be Ada's desire and then later her conscious decision to 'love' Baines. And I ask: what is 'love' here? Is it more complex? Is it about desire - physical desire, as well as desire for attention, protection, recognition? The
initial scenes in the film are rather ambiguous which Gillett (1995) discusses as well:

The problem is how to read Ada's choice. Is it a choice which shores up or challenges the patriarchal economy? Is her desire hers, or is it corrupted? Can woman have desire, for a man? Can she have desir-ing, or so-called active desire? Does the narrative performance of heterosexuality doom woman to masochistic desire, to de Lauretis's 'desire to be desired'? (282).

I read Ada's so-called "choice" as co-opted by a powerful masculine, heterosexual, colonial discourse which she had very little opportunity to transform.

Deconstructing my affective responses to The Piano helps me work with the important questions Sue Gillett has raised, rather than denying the heterosexist construction of Ada's sexuality. Films about women's painful struggles with their sexuality and creativity are rare. Therefore, how I perceive the representations in The Piano takes on an even greater significance in my life. The feelings, as well as the critical thoughts which I have expressed about The Piano, have helped me uncover my investments in specific socio-political positions that seek to undermine my creative endeavors. However, full control or complete subordination are not the only options. Part of the difficulty with both the heteronormative script and the feminist critique of it is that they seem to only offer either/or options.

I find it more helpful to think/look for multiple and ambiguous readings. The struggles I have with my gender, sexual, class, ability, ethnic and racial identities are ongoing and complex so I need to explore The Piano further. It was Ada's silences which finally drew me back into the film, silences with which I am very familiar.
The Forest

Entangling trees, a web of branches, dense, playful and sinister. The presence of these trees in the film inspired me to express my emotional responses to the story of Ada. These trees seemed to absorb the intensity of the characters, so by the end of the film I imagined that these trees were expressing feelings of their own, just as I am. Suddenly it became impossible for me to see The Piano from an abstract, critically distanced perspective. Yet, after watching the film twice, I could barely whisper my feelings about Ada's experiences, and when I tried to, they came out all garbled and unclear. Like Ada I remained silent, as I often do, especially when I am with a lot of people.

Sometimes I am afraid to speak for fear that an emotional whirlwind will burst out of me and I won't be able to make sense and I will be labeled inadequate. The forest calmed me and unnerved me simultaneously. I loved it and I despised it. There seemed to be no in-between for me to settle into as I sat there in the dark theater, immersed in my own silences, watching Ada play her piano in any way she could. The obstacles she faced with regard to her creative work and her survival seemed insurmountable at times. There was danger entering the forest, I knew it, as soon as I saw those trees. And, as I write this, I also realize how this interpretation of Ada could be seen as a colonial trope: white, innocent woman in the jungle. There are many readings and many interpretations of those readings.

Writing disentangles the silences for me and it inspires the expression of my different selves. I find it much easier to write than to speak my feelings, because my harmful self images are not so overwhelming during the writing process. Why do my unflattering self representations appear to have more influence on my physical voice that comes from my throat and my body than on
my writing, which seemingly comes from my mind? I look at a photograph of myself in search of some ideas (Haug, 1987). My eyes gravitate towards the look in my eyes in the photography - the eyes that are also searching for someone who will compliment me and reassure me that I look and speak the part, a female character who will be rewarded like a movie star. However, this movie star has had very few opportunities to speak.

Ironically, it is only when I honour my visceral responses of anger and pain that my criticism of Ada's exploitation becomes stronger. I argue that the traditional white, middle class, heteronormative, feminine subjectivities that I have internalized, enable me to feel more at ease with my emotional responses to a film than my critical ones. As a result, they tend to initiate and guide my critical responses. My emotional engagement with a film seems to give me much more power to speak, whereas my voice waivers when I am conducting a critical review. In fact, silence is often what I opt for if I am forced to disregard my affective responses in order to appear "critical".

However, the discomfort I feel expressing my affective responses to The Piano reminds me that many women who have learned to express their emotions in relation to a film are silenced by traditional male discourses which demand only critical distance instead of working with affective responses and critical responses simultaneously. Similarly, many women of color who see films differently are often silenced by feminist discourses which fail to interrogate white women's dominance. For example, bell hooks (1992) writes about the silences of black female spectators.

When I asked a black woman in her twenties, an obsessive moviegoer, why she thought we had not written about black female spectatorship, she commented: "We are afraid to talk about ourselves as spectators because we have been so abused by 'the gaze'." An aspect of that abuse was the imposition of the assumption that black female looking relations were not important enough to theorize. Film theory as a critical "turf" in the United
States has been and continues to be influenced by and reflective of white racial domination (125).

I argue in this dissertation that most film viewing discourses and the film narratives themselves discourage the many different voices of women.

Leigh Gilmore (1994) states: "Indeed, the socially constructed silence of women suggests how highly endangered the autobiographical act can be" (51). So instead of just dismissing *The Piano*, I decided to explore my silences in relation to Ada's silences. I don't agree with many of her actions, but her silences spoke to me. I was very intrigued by the fact that Ada hadn't said a word since she was six years old. I perceived it as her refusal to speak rather than something that was forced on her by an illness or a traumatic event.

However, we don't know precisely why Ada stopped talking. "No one knows, not even me," says Ada at the beginning of the film. This is her voice as a child before her silences. It is a voice-over, not words coming from a child's mouth. Ada calls it her "mind's voice". She states: "Silence affects everyone in the end". I agree with this and I also believe that silence is not necessarily a dreadful circumstance, but I think it is important to investigate the various meanings of silences, just as it is important to investigate the various meanings of words. There usually isn't just one meaning for a word, a sentence, a piece of writing or the telling of a story. Silences can tell different stories, too! In other words, there are variations on silence as a signifier.

As Mimi Orner (1992) points out, voice has frequently been privileged over silence. For example, in many feminist theories, empowering the silenced to speak is highly regarded and I have invested a great deal in this discourse. Not being able to speak is considered a disability. Certainly, both in the present day and Ada's time period, a lack of voice could prevent a person from accessing various privileges. However, what I found so inspiring about Ada
was that she expressed a lot of strength through her vocal silences. She communicated with her hands, through signs, a different language. In the film only her daughter could understand these signs. Sometimes her daughter spoke for her mother. Maybe some people in the audience could understand Ada's sign language, too. Neither Stewart or Baines could understand her language. I perceived this as one way Ada was able to resist their misunderstandings of her creativity. However, it also led to further confusion regarding what she wanted, because Ada's lack of voice was often misinterpreted as a lack of strength, especially by Stewart.

Did Ada have "real" choices? Maybe I am imposing some present day circumstances on her nineteenth-century life. She might have been forced to remain silent to survive, so maybe it wasn't her choice to keep silent as I have imagined it to be. Silences can be very powerful, not just destructive, as I have most frequently believed. It is very difficult for me to unlearn my negative attitudes towards silences, especially my own. I like the way Magda Gere Lewis (1993) writes about silence as an option for women.

The discourse of silence is one salient feature of our engagement of the social world. Caught in the vacuum between the myths and the realities of what is possible for us, I wonder what private spaces might be found by those women for whom a desk caught in a pool of light is not a possibility (105).

Lewis is suggesting that silences can enable women to have some creative space which they may not otherwise possess. For instance, Ada may have used her silences in order to negotiate the restrictive roles of wife and mother that were imposed upon her. But since voice is most often privileged over silence, it is important that women are given the opportunity to speak and write about their experiences as well. I criticize the dominant ideologies, including a great deal of film criticism, which ignore the alternative readings offered by
women whose interpretations are influenced by their different social locations (hooks, 1992).

Leigh Gilmore's (1994) words are very applicable here. She states: "Indeed, even in the narrowest and most ambivalent sense, writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for" (40). As I stated in Chapter One, the term critical autobiography, which I use throughout this thesis, implies that I break my silences by expressing my film interpretations in relation to my own social histories.

Are our silences our own? Or do we share them with others, especially when our absent voices are noticed? What voices are we not hearing? Why are we not hearing them? And if we heard these voices, what would they say about The Piano? This brings me back to the idea that silences can have numerous meanings. Mimi Orner (1992) makes this very clear in her analysis of how individuals work with competing discourses in critical pedagogy classrooms.

Discourses on student voice are premised on the assumption of a fully conscious, fully speaking, "unique, fixed and coherent" self. These discourses, enmeshed in humanist presuppositions, ignore the shifting identities, unconscious processes, pleasures and desires not only of students, but of teachers, administrators and researchers as well (79).

Ada expressed herself in different ways, and this indicated to me her contradictions and her shifting identities. These fluid subjectivities were conveyed by the director Jane Campion's use of various filmmaking techniques.

For example, each time Ada communicated with another film character, different methods were used to help us understand her concerns. Ada's voice-overs were implemented only at the beginning of the film (her voice as a child) and at the end of the film (her voice as an adult). In some of the initial scenes
when Ada used sign language to communicate with her daughter, subtitles appeared on the screen to tell the audience what she was saying, because Flora understood her mother, but Flora didn't tell us. Sometimes Ada wrote down her words and handed them to a character to read. When she handed such a note to Baines, he couldn't read it, so Flora had to speak for her mother once again.

Daniel Moshenberg's (1996) discussion of the concept of "articulation" is very relevant to my arguments at this point. He states:

This method of reading as interventionary revision, this complication of a simple address into a differently related social event and meaning is what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call articulation. For Laclau and Mouffe, articulation is "any practice establishing a relation among elements that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (105). But what is articulatory practice (77)?

Moshenberg answers this question by quoting Lawrence Grossberg:

articulation is the construction of one set of relations out of another; it often involves delinking or disarticulating connections in order to link or rearticulate others. Articulation is a continuous struggle to reposition practices within a shifting field of forces, to redefine the possibilities of life by redefining the field of relations - the context - within which a practice is located (54) (78).

I perceive Ada as trying to "shift the field of forces" to redefine the possibilities in her life which happened to be very limited. In other words, the notion of articulating subjectivity involves making sense of one's own set of circumstances, mostly likely in attempt to change those circumstances.

Furthermore, Ada's different methods of telling us her thoughts interrupted my expectation that only Ada was responsible for her decision to 'love' Baines after he exploited her. I believe her desire for Baines was hers and at the same time not hers (Gillett, 1995). Who is Ada then? I often assume that the actions and words of people and characters are fixed by them rather
than fluctuating, due to their continuous interactions with their social conditions. Also, as Ian Hunter (1983) points out, characters are made up of various discourses, signs and codes, so it would be less likely for them to represent a fixed self, because the discourses often compete with one another. However, some films provide more space for a viewer to engage with these different discourses than others. For example, as I watched *The Piano*, I moved in and out of Ada's silences very easily. I would probably not have done this if 1) Ada did not communicate in different ways and 2) if I did not identify with Ada's struggle to have her own voice.

Fiske's (1987) explicatory/implicatory theory which I outlined briefly in Chapter One, works well here. According to his approach, by implicating myself in the text and extricating myself out of the text, I "activate the contradictions in a text" and these contradictions "allow space for (me) the viewer to read character and incident as bearers of social value, and thus to negotiate readings that relate to his or her (my) social position" (175). It is Ada's experiences with lack of voice that interconnected with my investments in feeling that I have the right as well as the opportunity to express myself creatively and intellectually. What is at stake here is how I represent myself in relation to Ada who has had limited choices, particularly in terms of her self expression.

By moving in and out of the discourses and practices Ada uses to communicate (as well as my own), I became acutely aware of how different languages (including the languages of silence and film) can be used to highlight the characters' social selves in relation to my own social selves. "It is an illusion to believe that we can ever be fully present in speaking, in writing, in image making because using language entails using signs that are 'half ours and half someone else's'" (Bakhtin, 1981:345 in Orner, 1992:80). This analysis
that Bakhtin puts forth became increasingly evident to me as I watched Ada express her different selves depending on who she was with: Stewart, Baines or Flora. Now I will return to my anger.

**The Mud**

What has been stabilized as "autobiography," however, is more accurately described as a collection of the discourses and practices individuals have used to represent themselves in relation to cultural modes of truth and identity production. The "subject of autobiography" emerges within these practices, although that subject is unevenly authorized by the varying modes of dominant ideology (Gilmore, 1994:41).

There were several different reasons why The Piano triggered a great deal of pain and anger for me. I will explore these reasons in each of the following sections. Repeatedly, I have been objectified by men. These experiences, of what I will call male violation, have hindered my progress as an artist and as an academic. When Baines used Ada's piano to gain sexual favours from her, I desperately wanted Ada to reject Baines so that she would not have to give up parts of herself in order to play her piano. My feminist education has contributed greatly to my desire not to allow men to disrespect me in any way, particularly in relation to my creative endeavours. I wanted my feminist philosophies on relationships and on creative processes to be verified in the film. I don't want to be taken advantage of ever again, and I want to feel more self assured with my creative pursuits.

When Ada seemed to participate in Baines' exploitation of her, I immediately detached myself from the film so that my pain would not intensify. I moved further into Ada's music (in this way she was not silent) as well as her
silences in order to escape the feelings I had about her "choice" to love Baines. Why couldn't I forgive Baines? He did seem to love Ada for her creativity and her resistances. This became apparent when Baines helped Ada retrieve her piano from the beach. Then why didn't he give the piano back to her? Why did he use it to humiliate her?

Many women I have talked with do not agree with my reading of the film's narrative that Ada was exploited by Baines. Instead, they felt that Baines was very respectful of Ada right from the start and that, despite the male domination that Ada lived with, she was able to reinscribe her sexuality. The evidence cited of this reinscription was Ada's ability to be sexually explicit, which was virtually impossible for women in the nineteenth-century. Although I disagree with this interpretation, it is not wrong just different. I perceived Ada as having very little agency, despite her participation in Baines' exploitation of her. Her options were severely restricted. I break the frame of realism here by continually making reference to how the characters, as well as myself, have been persuaded to use particular discourses and practices. Even though the characters are fictional and I am "real", we share a constructedness that needs to be continually recognized in order to dissect the numerous intersecting discourses; the intertextuality.

Keeping this in mind, I continue to express my anger and, in order to do this thoroughly, I need to pay attention to the different kinds of interpretations I am using and refusing while responding to the film. It seems to me that when I fantasize Ada into a "real" person I am least angry with her decision to love Baines, because I have temporarily put aside my awareness that she has actually been constructed as a traditional heterosexual female who is coerced into following oppressive social scripts. Fiske would say I have been implicated by the text. However, when I "extricate" myself from the text (Fiske, 1987), which
can happen simultaneously or sequentially, I become immediately aware of how Ada has been constructed. My anger towards her situation increases, since I am very critical of the anti-feminist romantic love ideologies she has been devised to take up. "In this approach character is seen as a textual device, constructed, like other textual devices, from discourse" (Fiske, 1987:153).

Consciously and unconsciously, I am struggling with competing/conflicting discourses from the film and from my life. Which ones do I want to take up and which ones do I want to discard? Which ones do I take up automatically through my unconscious desires and fantasies without even realising that I am selecting them? This is where psychoanalytic concepts are applicable, because they begin to outline how and why a viewer, like myself, arrives at conflicting feelings and thoughts about a film. Rational thinking does not explain everything and it often leads to frustration with theories about social change which do not result in transformed practices. By using psychoanalysis many feminists have tried to remedy this problem. For example, as Walkerdine states: "it is not a case of unitary identities, but a question of those practices which channel psychic conflicts and contradictions in particular ways" (103). Psychoanalysis can help to uncover this channeling process Walkerdine speaks about as well as "the resistance to identity which lies at the very heart of psychic life" (Rose 1983:9 in Walkerdine).

It is this "resistance to identity" which interrupts my intentions to remain critical of the stereotypes I see in films. Every time I try to take on a "feminist" or a "feminine" identity I react viscerally to this practice. This is precisely why it is so important for me to deconstruct the conflicting discourses that arise rather than pretend to be involved with only one side of a binary. Rose suggests:
Viewed this way, psychoanalysis is no longer best understood as an account of how women are fitted into place (even this, note, is the charitable reading of Freud). Instead, psychoanalysis becomes one of the few places in our culture where it is recognized as more than a fact of individual pathology that most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women, if, indeed, they do at all (9).

Rose touches upon the most problematic aspect of relying solely on critical thinking which is that spectators are supposed to take up just one political position at a time in order to argue their interpretation. However, as I have repeatedly demonstrated in this thesis, there are many positions functioning at once: some are visible and some are not. Psychoanalysis is a field of study which justifies the unseen.

I am not "free" to choose whatever I like, nor are my selections completely "determined". However, I have learned to invest in certain discourses to survive. It is these investments which I am trying to uncover. Grappling with discourses that have instilled in me that I am not good enough to pursue academic and creative work has been very difficult. This process epitomizes the struggles I experience with my voice. No one has had precisely my life experiences. How could they? My memories, which are an integral part of my interpretations of the film, have seeped into my consciousness as I reflect on Ada's story. I continue to look at how my experiences and my analyses are socially constructed, but I need much more than the tools of film criticism available at this time to make this venture politically viable. I require a method which takes into account rational modes of thinking about a film as well as the dimensions which are frequently considered less rational or unobservable. Just because these kinds of dimensions are less accessible doesn't mean that they do not exist. In fact, the frequent suppression of them could make them even more influential.
Learning to become a media theorist has given me some authority to speak about films, but it has also taken away my feeling of authority in my own voice, hence the silences and/or ambivalences. I need to uncover some of the stereotypes which I see in films, but I also need to investigate how I feel about them. By representing myself in my dissertation, I am accessing the power I have been frequently refused; speaking about my life experiences, social locations, affective responses and imaginative thoughts.

At least Ada could have demanded that Baines be more aware of how he originally treated her with regard to her piano playing and her sexuality. For example, I recently watched the film Camille (1990), based on the 'true' story of Camille Claudel's struggle as an artist in nineteenth-century France. In this film, Camille criticizes and rejects her lover and sculpture teacher, Auguste Rodin, because he humiliated her sexually and artistically.

Consequently, Rodin refuses to marry Camille. Instead of marriage she pursues her own art work. Unfortunately, her rejection of the artistic and sexual conventions of that time period leaves her without financial and emotional support for her sculpting and her well being. Due to these discriminatory circumstances, Camille is committed to an insane asylum by her brother. She spends the rest of her life in this institution. Despite her tragic life experiences, I felt very empowered by Camille's insights, protests and struggles, because she resists as best she can despite the social forces that mitigate against her (similar to Margaret in Margaret's Museum, see Chapter Four). In contrast, I felt undermined by Ada's love for Baines, even though Ada was faced with unfavourable social forces as well.

Why do I find the former film narrative more satisfying than the latter? Most likely because I am engaging in a fantasy about resisting heteronormativity in a more forceful way than Ada does. Camille's defences
against traditional white male manipulations and domination seem much more sophisticated to me even though the price she pays for her rebellion is extremely severe. The question: "how do women develop agency in their lives?" looms above me at all times. I desire film narratives which demonstrate that women have a lot of power to make social changes for themselves. This desire shapes how I interpret the construction of female film characters.

I don't believe that Baines understood Ada just as I don't believe Rodin understood Camille. My memories and experiences of men who have objectified me, have influenced my perceptions of whether or not Baines and Rodin were able to comprehend the restrictions on women's creative endeavours. I desperately wanted Baines to have a greater understanding of how he exploited Ada and how she was exploited by Stewart as well. I feared that these men would destroy her. These concerns were an integral part of how I interpreted the social fantasies in the film.

Struggling with my affective responses to Ada's love for Baines is an ongoing process. Also, the pain I felt from Ada's decision to love Baines is possibly derived from my identification with Ada's daughter, Flora, especially in the scene in which she sees Baines and her mother making love (Kuhn, 1992). The sense of betrayal that I perceived Flora to feel, triggered my memories of my father who fell in love with another woman during my parents' marriage. I did not actually see this happen, but I heard many stories about it and eventually my parents divorced because of it. Perhaps I did not want Ada and Baines to understand one another, because I didn't want Flora to be hurt by their relationship. Flora wanted her mother to stay with Stewart. As a child I wanted my parents to stay together. This could be one of the many reasons why I perceived Baines to be an inappropriate social/sexual partner for Ada.
Baines was not able to understand Ada's sign language or her writing and, at first, I interpreted this as his inability to comprehend her. However, there was one moment in the film during which I did believe Baines had some special insights into Ada's predicaments. It was when Stewart, after cutting off Ada's finger, came to see Baines and he wanted to know if Baines had ever heard Ada speak and Baines said no. At this moment it seemed to me that Baines had a great deal of respect for Ada's silences and her piano playing, whereas Stewart had no comprehension of Ada's need to express herself through her music.

Exploring some of my contradictory reactions towards Baines' and Ada's romance reminds me that I do not have to put forth one consistent interpretation of Ada's story. I need to constantly shift between meta-analyses and concrete analyses (descriptions) in order to achieve a greater understanding of the different kinds of interpretations I use and the relationships between them. An indication that I am always engaged in this process is the fact that I felt a range of emotions while watching and analyzing The Piano. Anger was the most intense feeling I had, but I was also pleased that Baines treated Ada with more respect than Stewart did. I laughed too, especially hearing Flora tell her stories about how her father and Ada first met. Not only have I been taught to develop a single interpretation of a film or a character, but I have also been taught to avoid feeling any conflicts about my viewpoints which seems hugely inappropriate to me considering how many different discourses there are in a film and in a viewer's life.

Reflecting on my media education has been a very powerful learning for me. Yet, I find it difficult to question the film viewing discourses I have invested in for many years, because I am so accustomed to remaining detached from my film interpretations. Also, as a graduate student, I have invested in being the
knower, rational and 'mastering knowledge' to obtain my degrees. As Leigh Gilmore (1994) proposes, the genre of autobiography itself frequently favours the telling of a fixed self rather than selves who enact, feel and tell different scenarios. Perhaps one of the reasons I have been so silenced when it comes to expressing my views about a film is because I have not had a method which could help me explain the range of emotions and criticisms that have frequently emerged for me after being immersed in fictional lives. And instead of appearing or sounding 'confused', I would not speak. Hence my strong identifications with Ada's silences and her different methods of creative self expression, particularly her music. No wonder I was so threatened by Baines who had the potential to destroy the very few modes of communication Ada had left. I was especially sensitive to this because I pictured myself in Ada's position.

As I watched Ada's story unfold on the screen I moved in and out of her character, I moved in and out of my own investments in the dominant ideologies about heterosexual relations, I moved in and out of different film viewing practices and I moved in and out of different emotional states. It is not surprising to me then that I have experienced a wide range of contradictions while watching The Piano. When I don't admit to and grapple with the competing discourses in the film and in turn, to the ways I have invested in these discourses, then they viciously fight in my unconscious and I feel torn apart, which leads to my feelings of illegitimacy as a speaking female spectator. A simple admission of these different discourses does not dissolve this fight; rather, changing which discourses and practices I use to interpret a film as well as my life involves complex negotiations with my conscious and unconscious selves. An analysis of this kind would also involve learning to use specific
psychoanalytic concepts and this is beyond the scope of this thesis, but certainly a worthy venture for further research in this area.

Continuing to investigate the unobservable aspects of film spectatorship leads to many more contradictions instead of a finite resolution which I do not think is possible, anyway. Yet, popular narratives continue to produce imaginary resolutions to actual lived contradictions. This point relates to A. G. Greimas' theories on semiotics which I discussed in Chapter Two. Films most often "map the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and mark the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate" (Jameson, 1981:47). It is the interconnections between these textual mechanisms and my own contradictions that I am dealing with when I watch a film.

**The White Piano Keys**

Frequently, I take my whiteness for granted and this is something I want to change. Therefore, I do not intend to remain silent on how I often see whiteness "normalized" in films. Lynda Dyson's (1995) discussion of how the representations of colonialism in *The Piano* are conveniently overlooked by many film reviewers, helps me begin a post colonial analyses. She states:

The critical acclaim surrounding the film constructed *The Piano* as a feminist exploration of nineteenth-century sexuality and tended to ignore the way in which 'race' is embedded in the text. Whilst the construction of gender and sexuality is obviously a central theme in *The Piano*, the film's representation of a colonial landscape must necessarily be considered within the context of the contemporary debates over national belonging in New Zealand - debates which have resonances within the wider field of post colonial theory (267).
In this section, I conduct a detailed examination of how my anger towards Baines and Ada is not only based on how Baines treated Ada like a prostitute and her participation in this treatment, but also on how Baines co-opted the Maori’s traditions in order to be more sexually appealing to Ada and Ada’s complicity in this co-optation.

Again, I refer to Dyson’s analyses of *The Piano*. She has pointed out that Ada’s desires for Baines could be partially traced to a powerful colonial discourse which categorizes "indigenous' cultures as primitive" and "white colonialists as progressive and civilized" (Dyson, 1995). Ada seeks out an escape from the sexually oppressive regimes that Stewart embodies.

Throughout the film the primitivist discourses which construct this opposition are expressed through the juxtaposition of the repression of the white characters against the 'authenticity' of the Maori. With their bold, sexualized chat, the Maori provide the textual echo for all that has been lost through 'civilization'. Baines bridges this nature/culture divide. His facial tattoos and his ability to speak Maori signify that he has 'gone native', while his 'self-fashioning' and attachments to the land construct him as a pakeha: a 'real New Zealander'. While never relinquishing his whiteness, he is able to arouse Ada’s passions because he is closer to nature than Stewart (271).

Baines' attempts to bridge the nature/culture dichotomy without acknowledging his own privileges seems very exploitive. Also, this makes Baines' exploitation of Ada and Ada's love for Baines even more alarming to me. Ada's desire for emotional engagement is exploited by Baines through his co-option of the Maori's traditions.

In terms of Greimas' semiotic triangle, Stewart and Baines represent different conceptual points which Ada has oscillated between until she finally decides to adopt Baines' point of view. Alternatively, I believe that the film should have constructed Baines and Ada in such a way so that they could have
investigated the oppressiveness of their own colonial cultural values, rather than relying on the silencing of the Maori people in order to achieve their so-called expression of love and sexuality. I quickly look for a way to process my anger and frustration with the constructions of race in the sexual relationship between Ada and Baines. I turn to an analysis of my own whiteness for some ideas.

To begin this investigation, I would like to discuss Susan Friedman's (1995) article "Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse", because it puts forth a theoretical framework which helps me critique the "white/other binary" evident in The Piano and in my critical autobiographical analyses of the film. Friedman believes that three scripts emerge when individuals are assessing race and ethnicity: narratives of denial, accusation, and confession. Scripts of denial she describes as: "I'm not a racist. I'm a feminist, so how could I be a racist? I'm oppressed, so how could I be an oppressor" (9). Scripts of accusation she interprets as: "You are a racist, I am not like you. You haven't confronted your racial privilege" (10) and scripts of confession, she writes, are: "I am racist. I'm so guilty that I can't do anything but think about how guilty I am. Feminism is a white middle class movement" (11).

Friedman proposes that these narratives frequently create and perpetuate the white/other binary. Alternatively, she argues for a fourth script, as a supplement to the first three scripts, which she calls: "relational positionality". She claims that this approach can subvert binary thinking. Friedman writes:

Most especially, binary narratives are too blunt an instrument to capture the liminality of contradictory subject positions or the fluid, nomadic, and migratory subjectivities of what I have elsewhere called the "new geography of identity". A feminist analysis of identity as it is constituted at the crossroads of different systems of stratification requires acknowledging how privilege and
oppression are often not absolute categories but, rather, shift in relation to different axes of power and powerlessness (7).

In order to utilize this analysis, Friedman examines June Jordan's (1985) work which "questions the use of race, class, and gender as automatic concepts of connection" (46). Jordan makes it clear that it is not necessarily "who you are, but what we can do for each other that will determine the connection" (47). Friedman makes a link with Jordan's work by discussing how she would break out of binary narratives by working closely with the intricacies of social locations instead of just seeing them as barriers between individuals.

If I apply these notions to my critical autobiographical film viewing, then I must look at how the film characters that I identify with might help me see my social locations as "flexible and nuanced categories of positionality that do not assume an always already constituted status of fixed power and powerlessness" (Friedman, 1995;38). Friedman emphasizes that a "narrative of desire for connection" must be acknowledged while watching and analyzing films, because it tends to minimize the use of binaries. In the following text, I discuss what this methodological approach might look like and how it might enable me to uncover my affective investments in the colonial representations in The Piano.

In order to explore this method, I would like to frame my critical autobiographical analyses of The Piano with Friedman's four scripts. The silences about whiteness and colonialism in The Piano and in the critical acclaim that surrounded the film need to be broken. Also, the feminist investments in the 'breaking the silence' narrative need to be explored further. For me this process of examining different interpretations and the power between them began with my visceral responses to Ada's love relationship with Baines. These affective reactions have guided my critical analyses in that I
perceived my feelings about their intimacy before I was able to criticize how their sexual encounters were constructed.

Here I briefly outline my analytical approach to the next few sections of this chapter. Initially, I did not analyze my whiteness in relation to my anger towards Ada and Baines' love affair. Secondly, my reaction embodied an accusation against the construction of the film, for encouraging a love relationship based on colonial oppressions; and thirdly, my film response took the form of a confession in which I discuss my complicity in the colonial discourses present in the film. Finally, I would like to add to all these responses by developing a "relational positionality" analysis of Ada based on a critical look at my social locations and my desires for a connection with her.

Denial

I have learned to use scripts of denial with regard to my race and racism from a very early age. Growing up as a white girl in Baltimore, Maryland in the early sixties, I was trained to believe that the colour of my skin was invisible. My mother told me much later in my life that she had been horrified by the racism in Baltimore at that time, but she never spoke of her own privileges as a white woman. I grew up believing that racism was something that affected others, something we did not participate in. Instead, we just observed it from a distance.

White people are trained not to see power inequities, while still benefiting from them. It is sometimes easier for white women to read ourselves into the victim/innocent scenario than the oppressor/guilty one even though white women occupy both simultaneously. In this instance, guilt becomes a safer response than taking responsibility for racial inequality. White women may be uniquely positioned to help each other see this and move beyond it (Thompson, 1996;106).
Denial of my white skin and the privileges it conferred on me was continually reinforced throughout my education. For example, in the late seventies and early eighties, during my Women's Studies undergraduate courses, gender took precedence over race, whereby I participated in the universalizing of women's experiences. I did not question the lack of anti-racist education in my classes, despite the fact that my mother had introduced anti-racist concepts to me before I began university. It has only been in the last six years of graduate school that I have seriously interrogated my racial, abilist, sexual and class privileges in relation to my gender oppressions and privileges. However, I often get caught in many power/powerlessness binaries, which is why Friedman's relational positionality theory is so appealing to me.

Her method enables me to see how working in-between various binaries, such as oppression versus privilege, is more productive, especially when I am trying to sort out the competing discourses presented in the film and in my life. Friedman's relational positionality approach directly relates to Fiske's implicatory/explicatory method in that I am moving in and out of various textual messages as well as my own subjectivities so it is impossible for me to remain fixed on one end of the spectrum or the other. Keeping this in mind, I strive to perceive my social locations as more fluid, particularly as they relate to my interpretations of The Piano which contains several limiting binaries such as the nature/culture divide.

Furthermore, how do I develop a film spectating method which is not based on scripts of racial denial? How can it incorporate my life experiences and memories of erasing my whiteness rather than ignoring this aspect of my autobiography? Ruth Frankenberg's insights on her whiteness are very informative for my queries:
I have been performing whiteness, and having whiteness performed upon me since - or actually before - the moment I was born. But the question is what does that mean? While the subjective meanings of my racial identity have changed considerably over time, the objective meanings of my being white have changed little or not at all from the moment of birth until now. Here, I mean to underscore the material bedrock of race and class structuring, which have served to anchor race privilege in my existence in the two countries in which I have lived. Coming to consciousness about one's racial identity and/or race privilege as white is not, then, by any means the same as transforming it. Racial positioning and self-naming are contextual and thus their transformation must always entail collective processes, ones that take place, so to speak, within history, rather than as individual journeys (4).

It is imperative that my critical autobiographical analyses are historically situated. For example, colonial structures which reward individual denial shape my affective, imaginative and critical responses to *The Piano*. The question becomes then: how can I continuously disrupt these frameworks? Frankenberg's analysis of her whiteness relates to Friedman's point that "the structural process of 'othering'" is obscured by scripts of denial which are predominantly used by those with racial privilege. However, Frankenberg adds to this insight, by arguing that "coming to consciousness" about one's whiteness, (in other words, moving out of the denial narrative), does not change the privileges that whiteness involves.

Yet, as Friedman discusses throughout her article, working in-between the white/other binary, which would entail acknowledging that part of one's power derives from whiteness, might help to transform some of the discourses that circulate about race relations. As Friedman proposes:

To move forward, the feminist agenda against racism requires not only an examination of power and privilege; it also requires interrogation of the cultural narratives about race that affect what we see, say, write, and do. As Masao Miyoshi writes, "Discourse and practice are interdependent. Practice follows discourse, while discourse is generated by practice" (1993, 726). Just as the
material effects of racism affect patterns of thought about race, so
the language of race matters and has material consequences (6).

In terms of my critical autobiographic film viewing then, this means naming the
racial and ethnic oppressions and privileges the characters might possess and
how these race relations interconnect with my own experiences of race and
ethnicity.

For example, if I deny that Ada and I have white skin, which is how my
analyses of my visceral responses began, then I am not acknowledging the
crucial differences between ourselves and the Maori women in the film,
especially in relation to how the white/other binary structures the film and my
viewing of it. On the one hand, there are the symbols, binary codes and
narrative structures which support the white/other dichotomy in the film and then
on the other hand, there are the interpretive schemes that I use to analyze the
film which might reinforce the white/other binary instead of unpack it.

Alternatively, the white skin that Ada and I possess has given us many
privileges and our female gender is implicated in many oppressions. Deborah
Ann Adele (1997) emphasizes the following:

White women share an oppression with Maori women, but they
are also imperialist exploiters who can check in and out of the
dominant culture as desired. *The Piano* has no moments of
interruption that allow a glimpse of this tension. I have heard
many people express the horror they felt when Stewart raised his
axe and chopped off Ada's finger, separating it from the rest of her
body. Yet there are more separations than this in the film. There
is the separation of mother and daughter, woman and woman,
race and race, people from their own land and customs -
separations at least as horrible as the physical separation of Ada's
finger. Because all the viewer is allowed to see is Ada's pain, this
one separation becomes singularly non-threatening and forms its
own closure. Like Ada, the viewer's choices remain limited (63).

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I believe it is the viewer's responsibility to disrupt the colonial structures that Adele speaks about. Spectators can do this in different ways depending upon their social locations and life experiences. However, I also agree with Adele when she states that: "the viewer's choices remain limited", because the "choices" posed by/in the film itself encourages its viewers to disregard the colonialism which permeates the storyline.

I argue for spectator agency by proposing a critical film autobiographic method, but it is important to pay attention to what this means at various levels. For example, I interpret the film on many different levels; as I watch the film, as I critically re-think the messages and as I act in the world. A critical autobiographic analysis of The Piano might look like this: the Maori women in the film did not have propriatorial access to their land in the same way that Ada did through Stewart. Ada eventually escapes from Stewart's obsession with conquering the Maori's property, by turning to Baines. But, she is still complicit in the colonial project, because Baines appropriated the Maori's lives as well.

However, unlike Stewart, Baines is never constructed as guilty of his complicity in the colonial landscape. The artificiality of Baines' Maori make-up and clothing in the film makes me question Baines' motives. Also, I interrogate my own involvement in the colonial oppressions in the film. Ada and I are white and as main character and viewer, we silence the Maori women in the film because the film's narrative structures fail to make the white female characters' privileges visible. For example, as Deborah Ann Adele writes, Ada's pain was a focus of the film; also, the white female characters were constructed in such a way that they were not implicated at all in the Maori women's oppressions. As a result of these textual constructions, it is up to spectators, like myself, to interrogate our own positions in relation to the Maori's women's struggles.
The consequences of denying these race relations in *The Piano* are serious because, as Friedman suggests, differences among women are then ignored. This leads to the perpetuation of hierarchical structures. Within this paradigm, I cannot be precise about the commonalties I might share with the characters nor the differences that separate me from the characters. Friedman argues that discovering some specific "shared ground" is crucial for acknowledging "the agency and subjectivity of the other" and thereby breaking out of the white/other binary. This approach makes me realize that scripts of denial not only involve ignoring my own racial privileges, but they also ignore the power and the oppressions of those who come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. This entails both the subordination as well as their own realities, traditions and forms of socializing. As a result, these forms of denial keep the white/other and the power/powerless dichotomies firmly in place.

**Accusation**

My anti-racist education has enabled me to see that my anger towards Baines' exploitation of Ada and her participation in this, is partially derived from the "exotic/progressive" stereotyping that is repeatedly reproduced throughout *The Piano*. One of example of this is how Baines is constructed as exotic because he has taken on the traditions of the Maori people. This is contrasted with Stewart who, supposedly, represents 'civilization' and progress, since he is purchasing and building upon the land which, in fact, belongs to the Maori people.

It is easy enough for me to criticize how the textual mechanisms in *The Piano* have not encouraged me to question the horrendous treatment of the Maori people by white settlers in New Zealand. It is much more complicated for me to discuss my affective investments in this colonial exploitation. Instead, the
tremendous anger that I feel towards Ada and Baines tends to manifest itself in the form of accusation towards the heteronormative construction of the film, since the characters are fictional images rather than live persons. As Friedman makes clear, scripts of accusation involve "refusals of similarity".

For example, I immediately separated myself from any connection with the stereotyping of Ada and Baines. This accusatory approach leaves out how I am involved in the colonial discourses that *The Piano* has put forth. Alternatively, if I want to develop an anti-racist film viewing method, I need to analyze some of the similarities that Ada and I share as white women, rather than just pretend that I can remain "critically distanced" from the very powerful colonial discourses that are operating in the film directions.

This realization brings me back once again to the central theme of this thesis which is: how do my affective responses play a role in my critical analyses? I argue for paying attention to how I *feel* and think about the discourses I am criticizing in *The Piano*, because this approach helps me uncover my investments in the white/other binary (Walkerdine, 1986). Denial and accusation are methods I have learned to use which potentially limit my exploration of how my own emotional, intellectual and critical investments influence one another and this predicament keeps me misconnected from women who are different from me and have less power (Friedman, 1995; Frankenberg, 1996).

As David Buckingham (1993) states:

The process of becoming critical is part of the way in which middle-class, *white* children come to distinguish themselves from others, and thereby actively socialize themselves into class, *race* membership. Yet a great deal may be lost - or at least disavowed - in this process. Critical discourses about the media often embody a form of intellectual cynicism, and a sense of superiority to other people (146) (My italics.).
In Chapter Four, I elaborate more on this argument along with a question Annette Kuhn (1995) asks: "How can film theory address itself to the emotions film evoke, to the ways in which these emotions enter into people's fictions of the past, their own past?" (27).

Confession

So, what about confession then? Is this a method which also hinders my comprehension of how the white/other binary operates in *The Piano* (1993)? The shame and pain I feel about my historical unacknowledgment of my whiteness as a privileged social location, are, as Friedman calls them: "expressions of guilt". Racial guilt prevents me from working directly with my social locations to interpret a film; in other words, I fail to see how my white skin fuels my denial of my privileged positions which contributes to the racial oppressions in the film and in my life.

Perhaps my confession script could be put to more productive use if I discuss the privileges that Ada and I have denied from our race, sexuality and class positions, instead of just perceiving ourselves as victims of male violence. Why are ethnicity and race so often ignored when it comes to analyzing representations of white women and how have I learned to participate in this process? Could it be, as Friedman suggests, that denial, accusation and confession limit, or worse, eliminate these kinds of ethnic and racial analyses by and about white women?

Alternatively, Dyson points out how "racial, sexual and class differences are inscribed on the female body in *The Piano*" (270). She states:

Ada, as a symbol of white bourgeois femininity, has access to a spiritual world denied the other female characters in the film. Her emotions are expressed through a powerful fusion between the musical score and the movement of the camera. A recurrent motif
in the film is the close-up of Ada's shimmering face, skin bleached out, eyes closed in rapture as she plays her piano. As she plays, the camera circles her, caressing the bared shoulders and delicate stem of neck; her vulnerable spine is exposed and elided with the whiteness of her bodice. While the eroticized image of Ada appears translucent, fragile and free from blemish, the Maori women are physically desexualized through their representation as lank-haired, toothless and devoid of the conventional markers of femininity (271).

This description of Ada in contrast to the description of the Maori women, highlights how Ada's whiteness has shaped her experiences and partly shapes mine, as one white female spectator. However, Dyson's discussion does not map out how the filmic moments that she analyzes enable her, as a spectator, to understand her investments in the colonial dimensions to the film. I argue that viewers must look closely at how their interpretations, which are ultimately based on their social locations and life experiences, might contribute further to the racial objectification of the Maori characters in the film.

Sue Gillett (1995) provides a paragraph on her emotional engagement with *The Piano* and she links these visceral reactions with her critiques of the film, but she fails to conduct a post colonial analysis.

*The Piano* affected me deeply. I was entranced, moved, dazed. I held my breath. I was reluctant to re-enter the everyday world after the film had finished. *The Piano* shook disturbed and inhabited me. I felt that my own dreams had taken form, been revealed. I dreamed of Ada the night after I saw the film. These were thick, heavy and exhilarating feelings. The problem with reading *The Piano* through the questions concerning rape or sexual harassment is that it then becomes extremely difficult to appreciate and articulate this powerful affective dimension of the film. The legal definitions of what constitutes rape continue to be an important part of feminist work. However, *The Piano* offers other readings than those based on a legalistic discourse. It is able to offer female spectators a kind of sympathetic engagement with and confirmation of their subjectivities along with an escape from the usual sorts of containment they receive in patriarchal cinema (286).
Gillett assumes that female spectators will receive a "confirmation of their subjectivities". Who is she referring to here? How might a Maori female spectator feel about Ada's sexual exploitation when it is highlighted at the expense of the Maori female characters' exploitations? Gillett ignores the differences among female spectators, because she does not acknowledge the white, colonial, heterosexual, middle class structures inherent in the film.

I admire Gillett for including some of her own visceral responses instead of just a "critically distanced" analysis, especially since this type of emotional inclusion is very rare in feminist film criticism and criticism in general. However, her autobiographical approach needs to be taken much further. Gillett's exclusion of race and ethnicity has alerted me to the tremendous need for a critical autobiographical method which explores how films as well as theories of spectatorship often perpetuate racist, colonial discourses by solely focusing on gender analyses.

**Relational Positionality**

In this section, I ask the question: how and when do I identify with Ada? Ian Hunter's (1983) argument for a displacement of simplistic identificatory readings helps me answer this question. He emphasizes that characters and objects in the film are made up of many different discourses, codes and signs which are often competing for space. Pluralizing identification allows for a multiple moving in and out of various discourses and practices in the film and brings to mind Fiske's explicatory/implicatory theory again.

And what are the implications of these types of identifications? How might these kinds of questions and analyses help me gain a better understanding of the differences and the similarities between myself, Ada and the Maori women in the film? How does power operate in my identifications
with a film character? How can I be more critical of "the use of race, class and gender as automatic concepts of connection", as June Jordan suggests, without ignoring the various hierarchies which always exist in any form of identification?

I turn once again to Jackie Stacey's (1994) analyses of the term "identifications" for some assistance. She states:

Thus the processes here involve the negotiation between self and other, but also between self and imaginary self which temporarily merges with the fictionalized feminine subject to test out new possibilities (129).

Four aspects of critical thinking emerge in Stacey's analysis. The missing terms in most criticism are the terms "other" and "imaginary self" and the usual terms employed in criticism are "the self" and "the fictionalized feminine subject". In this dissertation, I have begun to work with how I imagine myselfs in relation to the other as well as how these positions are constructed by the dominant discourses.

Who is the "other" Stacey refers to? Anyone other than myself? Ada? The Maori women? Ada's servants? What kinds of commonalities and/or differences lead me to identify more or less with a film character? For example, why am I more likely to identify with the women in The Piano than the men? Why then, are my identifications seemingly based more on gender than on class, ethnicity, race, sexuality or ability?

Stacey makes an extremely important point that: "... identifications do not merely involve processes based on similarity, but also involve the productive recognition of differences between femininities" (171). How are my identifications based on similarities different from my identifications based on differences? Stacey's insight that: "identification involves the production of desired identities, rather than simply the confirmation of existing ones" (172)
provides me with a usable conceptual framework. In this way, my imaginary selves are at work as I struggle with the different femininities in the film and in my life in attempt to obtain my desired identities.

Ada and I are similar because we have both been oppressed by men, (this relates to our existing identities) and we are different in that Ada strives to and/or is forced to find her creativity through her love relationship because during the nineteenth-century there was very little opportunity for women to do otherwise. Whereas, due to the historical time period I live in, I am able to be more independent of my love relationship in my quest for artistic expression (this relates to our desired identities). In other words, there is an historical tension at work in my viewing of Ada.

In fact, history works in at least three different ways during my analyses of the film; 1) as a felt distance, (for instance, it amplifies the differences between Ada and I since the social forces against us are quite different due to history); 2) as a metaphor (I see Ada representing women at many different historical periods); and 3) as a precursor to some of my interpretations (for example, Ada was very heroic in her courageous coping with the difficult historical time period for women that she was faced with). The pain and anger I felt about Ada's decision to love Baines, despite his poor treatment of her, was based more on our differences than on our similarities, although it was our similarity of male victimization which initiated my identification with Ada in the first place.

How is the colonial white/other binary implicated in my identifications with Ada? To work with this question, I return to the nature/culture divide which was introduced earlier in this section. I am seduced by Ada's need for Baines, who is represented as a more appropriate man for Ada than Stewart. However, I am also revolted by Baines' co-option of the Maori's tradition of sexual
openness in order to attract Ada. If I identify with Ada, I am trapped in this nature/culture binary which feels very uncomfortable to me, so I quickly separate myself from Ada by acknowledging our differences, but the nature/culture dichotomy still remains. This leads me to Friedman’s argument that the "desire for" and the "separation from others" which identification often involves, does not necessarily "resist and dissolve the fixities of the white/other binary" (17).

Alternatively, Friedman suggests the following:

Within a relational framework, identities shift with a changing context, dependent always upon the point of reference. Not essences or absolutes, identities are fluid sites that can be understood differently depending on the vantage point of their formation and function (17).

Characters and spectators have different and similar "points of reference" which are always changing. In terms of race, Ada and I share some connections; in terms of class, we share substantially less. In terms of historical time period, we have had very different types of opportunities to pursue our creative work, but we share some similar experiences of patriarchal structures.

So, how do I decenter whiteness in order to diffuse the women of colour/white women divide which is such a powerful discourse in *The Piano* and in my viewing of the film? Friedman suggests the notion of "partial commonalities" which might help to make the positionalities of Ada and myself much more nomadic. Whiteness could then become a more flexible category to work with rather than a commonality between us which is fixed and, in turn, fixes (given our colonial histories) those characters and audience members who come from different cultures other than our own. What this means in practice is that differences and similarities as well as misconnection and connections could be examined simultaneously instead of these polarities becoming pitted
against one another which often leads to tremendous conflict and misunderstandings, and significant social inequities.

During my first viewing/analysis of *The Piano*, when I did not honour my own social locations and spectating agency, I perceived the nature/culture divide in the film as overwhelming and unnegotiable (denial and accusation were the prevalent methods I used). During my second and third viewings/analyses, I managed to re-interpret and re-imagine (with the help of the various film analyses of *The Piano* which I have quoted in this chapter), the nature/culture divide in such a way that I can see how it prevents me from perceiving Ada, the Maori women and myself as both powerful and powerless.

For example, I have identified with Ada in very contradictory ways and the interwoven scripts of denial, accusation and confession which I originally employed, tended to "suppress an understanding of contradictory subject positions" (15), which exist for both Ada and myself. Ada has had many privileges from her white, heterosexual and wealthy background, but she has also been oppressed by patriarchal systems of domination. My white, heterosexual and middle class locations have given me a lot of power, but in many ways I have been undermined by male-dominated culture as well. Both Ada and I have experienced a temporary loss of voice due to our experiences of the social constructions of our female gender. However, Ada's experiences are also shaped by her perceived disability; the inability to physically speak. We are managing to heal some of the damage we have experienced from male domination and violation. I speak more and more through my writing and Ada increasingly communicated through her music. This is an important point with regard to my identifications with Ada, because as the film progressed, Ada gained a voice via her music and I can see that happening to myself as well as I write my way through this thesis journey.
My critical autobiographic responses to the representations in *The Piano* have kept the boundaries of my social locations in flux; whereas, if I had only used my critically distanced analyses, my insights about gender and race would probably have been much more static. Similarly Susan Hiller states: "My 'self' is a locus for thoughts, feelings, sensations but not an impermeable, corporeal boundary. I AM NOT A CONTAINER" (Meskimmon, 1996;100). And as Morwenna Griffiths (1995) remarks:

> Emotions are spontaneous and can surprise the person who feels them. However they are not reflexes and can change as a result of new understandings. They can also be used. If people feeling similar things and get together, they can work for political change, including for changes in how they feel. The process is a complex one because both the construction of an emotion and its political effect come about in language communities and political communities which are overlapping (107).

As long as I remember to situate my emotional reactions politically, then I can use them to further my film critiques. If I do not discuss how I have arrived at my particular affective responses in relation to my critiques, then I run the risk of being stereotyped as an over-emotional woman who has lost all ability to reason. For a woman in academe, like myself, this is a very dangerous proposition.

This is where psychoanalytic concepts would be very helpful, because they help to legitimize emotional responses since these types of responses contain unconscious processes that do have a tremendous impact on how viewers interpret a film. Psychoanalysis gives media theorists a grammar to analyse the less visible aspects of film reactions (McKenna, 1996). This approach may enable viewers to minimize the harsh judgments which often occur when spectators use viewing dimensions which are not only "critical". As David Buckingham (1993) has pointed out we must be constantly aware of the
social functions of media criticism and how some people have greater access to so-called important responses than others.

The categories of ethnicity, race, class, ability, sexuality and gender are important for acknowledging how hierarchies shape women's lives, but if the boundaries of these categories are not permeable and flexible as well as intricated, they become inadequate to explain how these different forms of power and powerlessness interconnect. "Articulating" (which I discussed much earlier in this chapter) is a necessary component of Friedman's "relational positionality" concept, because positions are always in flux. Continuous articulation enables a person to possibly redefine the parameters which she finds herself immersed within (Moshenberg, 1996).

No one comes from just one social location as Anne McClintock (1995) has made very clear. Friedman states: "Finally, these binary scripts dim to near invisibility any common ground that might exist between women who occupy opposing sites of 'white' and 'color'" (15). Therefore, one of the main goals of my critical autobiographic film spectating method is to break open these binary scripts, such as nature versus culture and white versus other which tend to structure many films as well as audience members' lives.

Diana Fuss's (1995) work on identification also suggests some important insights. She makes four crucial points: firstly, "subjectivity can be most concisely understood as the history of one's identifications" (34). My interpretation of this point is that when a viewer identifies with a character or scene, she brings with her a history of filmic identifications which play a role in her analyses of her identifications and it is much more productive if she were aware of at least some of these histories. This type of analysis would include a history of film viewing practices and autobiographical insights.
Secondly, "identification is an act of repetition and remembrance" (34). This observation relates to Fuss' first point in that the practice of identification is largely based on drawing upon our social histories: it is not, in other words, an act which can be isolated from other acts. Thirdly, "to the extent that identification is a desire to be like or as the other, to the extent, in other words, that identification is fundamentally a question of resemblance and replacement, metaphor provides the most direct entry point into the internal workings of a complex cultural and psychical process" (51). This definition of identification is particularly important for my thesis because I am dealing with film images that often function as metaphors. I develop a method to help audience members deconstruct these metaphors in such way as to learn more about how the text as well as themselves work with "complex cultural and psychical processes".

And finally, "... identification is never outside or prior to politics, that identification is always inscribed within a certain history; identification names not only the history of the subject but the subject in history" (165). This point relates to all the above analyses, because if identification is not shown to be derived from specific roots than it is virtually useless as a tool for understanding where a viewer comes from and how those histories impact on his/her interpretations.

In summary then, viewers' histories are necessary components of their film analyses. I want my critical autobiographical viewing method to include accounts of how the historical categories of class, ethnicity, race, gender, ability and sexuality operate in the characters and the viewers' lives, but I also want to work with how spectators' affective responses can be an integral part of these kinds of analyses, rather than just an additional component. If viewers intellectualize their positions in a detached way, without attempting to look at their historical investments in their positions and those of the film characters,
discursive changes are not possible. As Friedman argues, our different desires for connection, which most certainly involve our emotions, might help us refrain from "the urge to separate along racial and ethnic lines" (37).

However, Friedman also warns us that:

... discourses of relational positionality should not deflect attention and resources from the critically important archaeological and theoretical work being done to recover, reflect upon, and transmit the often lost or repressed narratives of peoples whose history and culture have been marginalized by the dominant culture (39).

In this dissertation, I am gradually exploring my own history and culture. In this way, I insist on a film viewing method which encourages spectators from all cultural positions to analyze a film in relation to their experiences of privilege and oppression.

The Ocean

Friedman's discussion of June Jordan's work is extremely important for the arguments I have just laid out. She quotes Jordan in her article: "It is not only who you are, in other words, but what we can do for each other that will determine the connection" (20). What can my identification with Ada do for me? And how do I relate to the Maori women in the film? These characters can help me learn about the discourses I use that undermine my voice and my creative abilities. I need to examine closely the positionality of myself, Ada and the Maori women.

It is not as if I have to feel stable and coherent in order to do my creative work, but I do have to feel as though my multiple voices are important and that somebody will listen to them, myself included. When I speak, I am able to hear my voice and my intonations. Silences are a place for me to gather my
thoughts. I fear that my relationships with men will always interfere with my creative endeavors. Not that I don't think that women shouldn't have relationships with men if they want to - it's just that I am very critical of the terms of those relationships. In the end, Ada was still able to play her piano, despite her relationship with Baines. She chose to continue with her life instead of drowning herself with her piano. Why then am I still angry about Baines' initial exploitations?

To begin with, films provide me with concrete/metaphorical social theories which I can negotiate in relation to my life experiences. Imagining alternative actions for the female film characters is one way for me to do this (Gilbert, 1992). Perhaps I could then walk into these imaginary versions of me to make the changes I desire. I like what Frigga Haug (1992) has to say about envisioning new ways of living life.

We could write stories about what we used to want for ourselves, the hopes, the ideas of a better world, which we as women had before we surrendered and agreed that the whole of life would be poured into a single, fated moment. If we could find out why and when our hopes for life were buried, only to return as the illusion of intimacy, then we could try to take our history into our own hands (73).

My stories and other women's stories about Ada's story need to be told. However, this hope for redemption through telling women's stories is in itself a very complicated desire - a fantasy which is probably offensive to some women. I have invested in the widely accepted feminist discourse that women must break their silences. However, this feminist discourse is based upon white, middle class, heterosexual privilege because for many women speaking out has dire consequences.
On the other hand, if stories from women who have had far less access to privilege aren't communicated, then too many similar stories will be repeated over and over again, which inevitably leads to mass-produced hegemonic fantasies for women (Modleski, 1982). This can be explained by the mass media/broadcast model which argues that certain ideological messages are presented in film and television programs at the expense of more alternative forms of thought (Fiske, 1987). We continuously need different stories to keep our imaginations interrupted; to interrupt the discourses in our lives which often appear so "natural" and are so easily taken for granted. Also, we need different stories to remind us how and why the ones we see so frequently have been constructed.

Stuart Hall (1990) describes the complexity of the media apparatuses:

If the media function in a systematically racist manner, it is not because they are run and organised exclusively by active racists: this is a category mistake. This would be equivalent to saying that you could change the character of the capitalist state by replacing its personnel. Whereas the media, like the state, have a structure, a set of practices which are not reducible to the individuals who staff them. What defines how the media function is the result of a set of complex, often contradictory, social relations; not the personal inclinations of its members. What is significant is not that they produce a racist ideology, from some single-minded and unified conception of the world, but that they are so powerfully constrained - 'spoken by' - a particular set of ideological discourses. The power of this discourse is its capacity to constrain a very great variety of individuals: racist, anti-racist, liberals, radicals, conservatives, anarchists, know-nothings and silent majoritarians (20).

Therefore, I cannot rely on textual mechanisms to interrupt dominant discourses. I need to first recognize how the film has been constructed and then recognize what might be missing from the collection of discourses and practices that have been presented to me.
Here is an example of this process. I imagine Ada recognizing how disrespectful Baines was in the beginning and how much he refused to acknowledge the colonial oppressions he was perpetuating. For the most part, *The Piano* failed to do this, so I need to interrupt the traditional white, middle class, male storylines which have been put forth.

However, at one point in the film I thought that Ada would realize how Baines was exploiting her. This occurred to me when Baines fell asleep with Flora at his side, knowing that Ada had her finger cut off by Stewart. I couldn't believe that Baines (despite Stewart's threats) didn't try to see her and comfort her or at least stay up all night worrying about her. The construction of the film's narrative encouraged me to question their relationship at this point in the film. I was already involved in this process, but this scene opened up more room for my anger. If I had had my finger cut off I would hope my lover would at least try to see if I was alright. The only reason I would create a male character who does not attempt a rescue or demonstrate immense concern, would be to show that he doesn't care. I imagine Ada realizing this lack of integrity in Baines and traveling on with her child, escaping from both men.

But having put forth the above analysis, I also realize that the narrative of care and protection is a very powerful feature of masculine dominance. Once again I am faced with competing discourses: although I would have liked it if Baines tried to see how Ada was doing, I also hesitate to reinforce traditional male paradigms which reinforce women's dependency on men. Working with different discourses and their practical implications is complex, but I would rather tease out my investments in particular discourses than arrive at a fixed interpretation of the film.

Throughout this dissertation I am struggling with internalized notions of coming up with the "right" interpretation, the "right" story. I have tried to adhere
to some of the stories that are derived from my emotional and intellectual reactions to the film rather than just so-called critically distanced analyses. My distanced viewings often uncover various stereotypes, but this type of analysis does not expose the emotional investments I have in the discourses and practices which tend to dominate my life. Momentarily, I want to trust the traditional narratives I am familiar with, such as "the single, fated moment" Frigga Haug discusses; the moment when I will meet the "prince" and I will no longer need my own creative and intellectual endeavours to be satisfied.

I remember this moment clearly as I watched the film. It was when Ada and Baines acknowledge their desire for one another. I have been taught to believe that this moment will solve all past and present problems for women. This moment is meant to wipe out Baines' recent exploitation of Ada and any future problems. I wanted to believe that this "single, fated moment" would do all that, but I couldn't and my anger took over. Though I no longer believe in the princess who searches only for marriage and children, this message still impacts on my life. It manifests itself in my feelings of inadequacy.

I felt tremendous alienation when the "single, fated moment" appeared in The Piano. I was lost. I scrambled for something to cling onto as I sat there with only my anger. This "single, fated moment" didn't work for me as I watched Ada. Certainly in my everyday life the "single, fated moment" has not worked, either. I don't regret falling in love with my current partner, but our relationship hasn't solved all my problems. I have replayed the pictures of our first meeting over and over again in my mind, as if I could derive solutions to all my struggles from it. Love has soothed my pain, but it can't make it disappear entirely as promised.

Giving into the "single fated" moment also represents for me a surrendering to white male power systems which exploit women to varying
degrees. She lived happily ever after, she lived happily ever after, she lived happily ever after with? I am tired of seeing the "single fated moment" held up to me as if it is supposed to work, or as if I'm the only one it hasn't worked for. How might my artistic and academic histories have been different if I wasn't continuously persuaded by a white, middle class, heteronormative narrative that marriage, children and housework are more important than my career? Would I be more confident with my work now?


Conclusion

Valerie Walkerdine (1990) asks: "how do we reassert the importance of the creation of subjectivity as active, even if the subject is caught at an intersection of discourses and practices?" (193). My anger towards the promises I received that a prince will rescue me is active. In this way, my critical selves can further my emotional reactions to this traditional story and vice versa. When my mind and body feel more connected then my voice and silences are more meaningful. My stories about Ada are contradictory and I desperately want to unify them. Why do I have this desire for unity? I consciously and unconsciously invest in perceiving myself as either a victim or a heroine. Yet,
this approach limits my contradictory feelings and thoughts and, as a result, it is far too simplistic.

However, my desire for unity continues. I want to either have the "single, fated moment" come true or I want to reject it entirely and tell the world that this is an evil lie. Instead I struggle endlessly in-between, trying to salvage bits and pieces of both discourses as I write about The Piano and my own life. In other words, I try to avoid using either/or approaches, but this is a very difficult process in a world which is filled with binary thinking. As Valerie Walkerdine states repeatedly, "socialization does not work" and I am pleased that this the case, since I might have more opportunities to break away from the endless dichotomies. Psychoanalysis is useful here, because it legitimizes the notion of working with multiple selves instead of rigid dichotomies. Jacqueline Rose (1983) discusses how an inability to actually unify the selves is very reasonable:

The unconscious constantly reveals the failure of identity. Because there is no continuity in of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved. Nor does psychoanalysis see such 'failure' as a special-case inability or an individual deviancy from the norm (9).

Nonetheless, I RESIST. I want socialization to work, so that I have something to hold onto, a position or a place to be "me" once and for all. But through this thesis journey, I have realized that THIS IS A LEARNED FANTASY WHICH IS HARMFUL TO MYSELF AND OTHERS.

Alternatively, I constantly question one discourse or another, only to find myself uncritically immersed in them over and over again. I discover new ones all the time, only because I see my investments in them, not because they are actually new.

I was originally too embarrassed to admit that the theories were not making my life fall in order, feeling like a failure, not smart enough, not a good enough feminist - unable in the end, as I'd
been told all along, to GET IT RIGHT. Time and time again I feel or was pushed into this sickeningly familiar parenchymatous space - speechless. Time and time again I found myself crawling out, faithfully, make solemn promises:

I will stop feeling
I will speak correctly
I will write coherently
I will think STRAIGHT

In realizing that the authority of the theory I was reading excluded me, I gradually came to realize that it couldn't heal what needed to be healed (McMahon, 1991:25).

I have increasingly found that the only way I can speak about the various discourses in The Piano which are continuously beckoning me to follow them, is to allow myself to feel my reactions to them as well as think about them. This has turned out to be more difficult than I could possibly have imagined, because I have learned to hide my feelings in order to participate properly in academe, the many jobs I have had and even in my relationships with friends, family and lovers. Hiding my feelings has become a skill which is seemingly invaluable for my survival. As a result, silence has also become a necessary skill for me (McMahon, 1991).

Learning to appreciate my silences as a place where I can feel has enabled me to put some of my emotional responses to The Piano into words. And, as a result, my words ironically seem more important to me since I embarked on this dissertation. I can say that The Piano makes me very angry. This could have been what the filmmaker, Jane Campion, wanted to achieve. I will never know for sure. Writing this chapter has enabled me to initiate a discussion on how my notions about colonialism, romance, creativity and silences have been socially constructed. Honouring my own feelings and thoughts about Ada's life is crucial for me to hear my voice. "My voice changed
the moment I started to situate historically the feeling of not being who I was told I should be and to analyse my efforts to be who I was not" (McMahon, 1991;27).

Ada's silences and her ongoing search for her creativity have inspired me to reassert my agency. My anger towards Baines was my point of resistance to the film. The pain that has arisen from this resistance has made me imagine ways I can strengthen my voices by better understanding where I am from and who I am becoming. Ada chose to go down into the sea with her piano for awhile. She longed for the "underwater underworld" of the piano in the deep, but she chose to resurface and survive, leaving her piano behind. I can survive as well by continually re-evaluating my investments in discourses that discourage me from pursuing my desires; desires which involve speaking and writing with confidence as well as making a theoretical contribution to feminist, anti-racist pedagogies.

In the following chapter, I analyze the ways I have been expected to interpret films without reflecting upon the interplay of social locations that is always present in such an interpretation. This form of learning has certainly not instilled confidence in me. Rather, this type of "voyeurism" or "surveillance" of those who hold less power than I do is arrogant and unethical (Walkerdine, 1986). Therefore, Chapter Four takes an exploration of these particular issues one step further which helps me develop a stronger sense of how my method can contribute to counteracting oppressive dominant discourses.
CHAPTER FOUR
Looking at "Subversive Repetitions" for my Daughter: Examining Margaret's Resistance to Becoming a Mother in the film Margaret's Museum (1995)

Introduction

So far in conducting an autobiographical analysis of a film, I have focused on a specific aspect of a main female character's life which has inspired me to reflect on my own life. In this chapter, I discuss the film Margaret's Museum (1995) by examining in what ways Margaret's resistance to motherhood, as well as her mother-daughter relationship, are particularly meaningful to me. As I have pointed out in previous chapters, my critical autobiographical film viewing method involves analyzing a female character (in this case Margaret), by unpacking how her social locations might inform the various discourses and practices that she uses to live her life (Hunter, 1983). Then I interconnect this character analysis to how my social locations inform the discourses and practices that I use in my life as well as in my film analyses. In other words, I examine the representation of myself as "a collection of discourses and practices" in relation to a film (Gilmore, 1994;41). Therefore, the essence of my method is joining up these two discursive approaches in order to re-evaluate my life and to continually develop a critical autobiographical film viewing method.

The important addition that Chapter Four makes to this method is investigating how the discursive parameters and situated social locations I use to analyze a film might perpetuate oppressive white, middle class, heterosexual spectatorship discourses and practices which emphasize the surveillance of the "other". At this point, Judith Butler's analyses of repetition help me with this exploration, because her conceptual frameworks seek to disrupt the dominant modes of analyzing culture.
Before I introduce the filmic and the autobiographical aspects of this chapter, I summarize the central components of the viewing method that I have arrived at so far. This summary helps explain why some of Butler's theoretical concepts are useful for the further development of an autobiographical spectating approach. To begin this overview, I reiterate several questions referred to in Chapter Two: How can a film viewing method which includes a viewer's autobiographical insights, affective responses, criticisms and imaginative thoughts contribute to a feminist, anti-racist pedagogy? How have the discursive conditions, which have led many media educators and audience members to insist upon a text-centred approach to film viewing, been perpetuated? How might my media research contribute to changing these discursive conditions so that viewers feel they can use their life stories (and thus their differences) to interpret representations? How can I demonstrate that solely relying on critically distanced film analyses (which Walkerdine refers to as the "project of intellectualization") frequently obscures how spectators are differently located?

In Chapter Two, I looked at how my imagination and desires "construct and reflect" the social structures I live with (Walters, 1992) by pointing out that even though I can criticize stereotypes, I still need to uncover my emotional, imaginative and unconscious investments in those stereotypes if I want to participate in transforming them. More specifically, Walkerdine's writings on affective responses have urged me to investigate my own affective engagements with film rather than pretend that they do not play an important role in my interpretations.

In Chapter Three, I continued with this discussion, in that I demonstrated how I might begin to transform my investments in racist and heterosexist discourses by examining some of the specific methods I have learned to use.
which tend to keep these discourses static: denial, accusation and confession (Friedman, 1995). Additionally, I experimented with Friedman's "relational positionality" approach.

In this chapter, I use Judith Butler's concept of repetition to confront some of the challenges and limits that my developing approach has encountered in Chapters Two and Three; challenges such as effectively analyzing the competing discourses and practices that have arisen from my various social locations as well as the films themselves; limits such as powerful dominant discourses which often shape how viewers arrive at their particular interpretations and therefore, need to be critically examined. By simultaneously discussing my affective and critical responses to the films Little Man Tate and The Piano, I realized how intricately intertwined affective and critical responses are as well as how they directly impact on one another; a dynamic which has been virtually ignored in the fields of feminist film criticism and media education.

The primary advantage of paying attention to both these aspects of film viewing is that I am able to demonstrate how my emotional and critical investments in the socio-political values, represented by a character's position, influence how I interpret the various discourses presented to me in a film. Furthermore, by including some criticisms of my social location and commentary on my autobiographical experience in relation to my viewing of a film character, I am able to see more clearly some of the implications of my film interpretations for social change. As a result, this chapter adds to my critical autobiographical film viewing method by focusing on the ways my class background in relation to my ethnicity and gender reinforce oppressive film spectating norms.

One problem which has consistently arisen throughout Chapters Two and Three is: I am not free to "choose" whatever discourses I want to invest in a film; on the other hand my "choice" of interpretive discourses is not completely
determined, either. So, how do I work within these parameters in order to explore both social influence and individual agency within my film interpretations? There are very few media theories which specifically focus on individual agency in relation to the social. Jim Collins (1989) explains:

In demonstrating that meaning production originates not in consciousness, but in discursive formations, idealist notions of self, knowledge and power were effectively exposed, and the Sartrean subject was, for the most part, laid to rest. But in the process the question of individual agency, specifically 'what is one to do after all?', was often laid to rest as well. The question has been bracketed or ignored primarily because agency has been made coterminous with collectivity, and the issue of individual response to the glut of signs produced by media saturated cultures remains largely unexamined (263).

To help fill this void in the field of media criticism, my methodology mostly focuses on a sociological analysis of emotions and investments instead of focusing on the issue of collective responses. I also look briefly at how psychoanalytic concepts can be used to gain a better understanding of affective and imaginative reactions to film, particularly as they relate to the term "resistance".

This chapter begins with a brief synopsis of the film, Margaret's Museum and my reactions to Margaret's story; then, I apply Judith Butler's (1990) concept of "subversive repetition" to my analyses of mother-daughter learning; finally, I discuss the problematic aspects of my spectator identifications with Margaret. Margaret's Museum (1995) was set and filmed in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. The story takes place in a 1940s mining community. Margaret (played by Helena Bonham Carter) falls in love with Neil Currie who refuses to work in the mines. As audience members, we follow Margaret's point of view as she struggles to survive a life which consists of poverty, unemployment and mining disasters. As one review puts it: "In many ways, this is a film about people
reaching the limits of what they can take and then finding release in madness or drink or tradition or embittered rage" (Roebuck, 1995:16).

Margaret's resistance to motherhood, particularly in relation to her own mother, has helped me analyze how I have learned to resist motherhood. I have decided to explore this topic, because for most of my adult years, I have avoided having children and now that I have a one year old daughter, who I love very much, I am shocked by the extent of this resistance. My mother, who died three weeks after my daughter was born, always insisted that I would find great pleasure in nurturing a child and in the following chapter, I discuss what prevented me from fully appreciating her words until now. Losing a mother and becoming a mother at once has intensified my need to understand why I have been afraid of motherhood for so long.

Margaret learned from her mother that having children leads to a life of misery, because her mother had very little opportunity to transform the class, heterosexual and gender restrictions which contributed to her poverty, the death of her son and her husband and eventually to her own bitterness. Even though Margaret agrees to marry an ex-miner, she refuses to have children with him for fear that, in order to support children, he will return to the dangerous mines where her brother and her father were killed. I have resisted motherhood as well, not so much for fear of losing loved ones, like Margaret (although that partially exists for me), but mostly for fear of losing my financial and emotional independence to the demands of motherhood. My fears have originated from witnessing my mother's struggles for independence as a housewife, a mother and eventually a single parent.

The issue of white, working class oppression is at the heart of the film Margaret's Museum and the cause of Margaret's resistance to motherhood. My resistance, on the other hand, seems to have more to do with my desire for
emancipation from the heterosexist, white, middle class norms which have perpetuated many women's dependency on men. This chapter then, is very much about the different social structures within which Margaret and I grew up and the ways these social structures have shaped our ideas about becoming mothers.

One of the questions I ask in this chapter is: how can daughters make social changes for themselves that seemed impossible for their mothers to make without blaming their mothers for the hardships both daughter and mother had to endure? (Caplan, 1989). Carolyn Steedman (1986), in the beginning of her book, *Landscape for a Good Woman. A Story of Two Lives*, writes about how resistance to motherhood is one way for women to avoid their mothers' hardships with patriarchal structures.

So the usefulness of the biographical and autobiographical core of this book lies in the challenge it may offer to much of our conventional understanding of childhood, working-class childhood, and little-girlhood. In particular, it challenges the tradition of cultural criticism in this country, which has celebrated a kind of psychological simplicity in the lives lived out in Hoggart's endless streets of little houses. It can help reverse a central question within feminism and psychoanalysis, about the reproduction of the desire to mother in little girls, and replace it with a consideration of women who, by refusing to mother, have refused to reproduce themselves or the circumstances of their exile (7).

Since I am a mother, and therefore more prone to reproducing the "circumstances of my exile", as Steedman puts it, I look at how my desires to refuse motherhood still linger, even though I am immersed in the daily practices of motherhood. It is important for me to uncover some of my affective and critical investments in Margaret's resistance to becoming a mother in order to re-evaluate the ways I have blamed my mother for not overcoming the various
social oppressions she grappled with in her life; social oppressions that I am very afraid of. By analyzing "mother blaming" in relation to the wide social under valuation of motherhood (Caplan, 1989), I examine how the complex issue of agency and hegemonic power has operated in my mother-daughter relationship. With this approach, I unravel some of the unrealistic expectations of my mother that I have held for many years, which have fueled my resistances to motherhood and, in turn, supported my problematic identifications with the film character Margaret.

Repetitions

The films Little Man Tate and The Piano did not disrupt gender, class, heterosexual and race norms as much as I would have liked them to. Nonetheless, I still learned a great deal about how to disrupt the dominant discourses in these films by carefully scrutinizing my affective and critical responses to the main female characters. I had a different spectating experience with Margaret's Museum, because I found this film to be less formulaic and more critical than the other two films. My feminist imagination was sparked immediately, because the film's narrative structures constantly provided a critique of the social context in which Margaret lived. This enabled me, and most likely, audience members in general, how the class, gender and heterosexual restrictions Margaret was faced with, informed her practices. Not surprisingly, I still had my own very intense affective and critical reactions to Margaret's story.

But, since Margaret's Museum was so class, ethnic and gender conscious, I do not need to initiate my film analyses with the pain and/or anger I felt towards the film's replication of structures of hierarchy and hegemony, which
is where my chapters on Little Man Tate and The Piano started. Instead, I begin with my identifications with Margaret's resistance to becoming a mother. In this way, I examine how my more critical self interacts with my visceral reactions to her so-called choices. One of Butler's definitions of agency is very relevant to my analysis and it runs as follows:

Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency...The critical task, is rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them (147).

Butler's concept of "subversive repetition" is useful for my film viewing method, because it suggests that I specify the discourses and practices that are replayed over and over again in the films and in my life. I examine how these discourses and practices might have also created a disruption of the repetitions I have specified; hence the contradictory/competing dimensions of my viewing process.

This methodological approach leads to the crux of my method which is paying attention to the contradictory or conflicting discourses that arise in the spectating process in order to discuss precisely how the subversiveness is or could be operating consciously and unconsciously. In this chapter, the emphasis is on examining how the white, middle class, heteronormative discourses that I grew up with can seriously limit how I understand Margaret's working class struggles and therefore prevent a subversive repetition from actually occurring.

For instance, the white, middle class, critically distanced approach to film viewing which I have been taught urges me to "establish a point of view outside of constructed identities". However, as Butler so wisely cautions, this would
divorce me from my own social locations, emotions, criticisms and experiences; it would in effect prevent me from subverting the repetition of oppressive social norms. So the question becomes: how do I develop subversive repetitions while "caught at an intersection of discourses and practices?" (Walkerdine, 1990;193). At first, I viewed Margaret's resistance to motherhood as a way she could entirely step out of the oppressions in which she was trapped. However, social change is much more complex than this.

If I apply Butler's theory to Margaret's situation, I can see how her resistance to motherhood was specifically derived from what she learned from her mother's oppressive experiences of having children. For example, Margaret's mother continuously states how she is disappointed in the way Margaret has rejected her and she blames the mining industry for her difficult relationship with her daughter. Furthermore, she tells Margaret that if she herself has a daughter, that child will end up rejecting Margaret as well, particularly if Margaret chooses to marry a miner. Margaret is not as free of her mother's life as she imagined she might be and as I imagined for her. In Butler's words, Margaret's resistance was enabled in part by the displacing of the constructions she grew up with. Keeping this in mind, I now perceive Margaret's resistance to becoming a mother as a "subversive repetition", because, as I will argue in the following sections, Margaret's resistances were similar to her mother's, but they also contained an important difference.

Butler looks at the ways social norms are repeated and what is involved in displacing these normative patterns.

The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age and ability norms that enable repetition itself (1990;148). [Words in italics, mine].
Below I examine how Margaret and I learned from our mothers to repeat oppressive social norms. The purpose here is to examine the contradictions which arise from the construction of the "norms that enable repetition itself". The purpose of this would be to understand how our particular resistances were formed, particularly the distinctions between my middle class life and Margaret's working class life.

Butler's notion of "subversive repetition" holds promise for me, since it encourages me to see how my various identities have been socially constructed. A question that immediately comes to mind is: how does Butler's theory do this? The answer is: urging me to take notice of the discourses and practices that I repeat in my film interpretations in contrast to the discourses and practices I use to shift, change and contradict the discourses that appear to remain the same. In this way, I become increasingly aware of the ways each discourse and practice is a construction rather than a naturally occurring phenomenon.

In relation to my identification with Margaret's resistance to motherhood, I specifically examine how my identities have been influenced by the notion that motherhood is not an important occupation. Also, the devaluation of motherhood informs the "gender practices" that I use to interpret films, particularly films which involve mothers and daughters. How do my identifications with Margaret fit into all of this? I identify with her resistance to motherhood, because I am afraid of motherhood. Why? Perhaps because I witnessed my mother's struggles with the devaluation of motherhood and I fear becoming a disrespected mother (Steedman, 1986).

Mothering was expected of my mother and it seemed to bring her joy as well as hardship. However, she never complained about the difficulties, because she believed that this was not an appropriate practice, this belief was
heavily reinforced among the white, middle class suburban women my mother interacted with. Also, mothering did not bring her economic and emotional security. She was dependent upon my father's income and when my parents divorced, it was very difficult for my mother to look after her children as well as support them financially. My identifications with Margaret then, are an attempt to subvert this possible repetition, to break away from my mother's predicament. Subsequent analysis of Margaret's Museum has made me realize that refusing to have children is not necessarily a method of freeing myselfs from my mother's struggles for independence, just as having a child does not necessarily lead to a replication of my mother's experiences.

Margaret was not able to avoid her mother's situation despite the fact that she resisted having children. It was her husband's desire for children which sent him back into the mines (the only source of income he had access to) and eventually to his death in a mining accident. In the end, Margaret's resistance to motherhood did not save her from losing her husband which is what she feared most. Margaret's life ended up replicating her mother's life in many ways, because the mining company, which dominated not only her family, but the region as well, killed many of its employees due to dangerous working conditions. The point is that Margaret did not live in isolation. Her resistances were not pure in the sense that they are derived from many different discursive sites (Ang, 1996).

A significant question for me is, how do individuals develop some agency in their lives when they are immersed in oppressive social systems? I look at a portion of Butler's definition of agency again. She suggests that "... 'agency,' is located within the possibility of a variation on repetition" (145). Keeping this in mind, I ask: how did my mother develop some agency when she was confronted with white, middle class norms of femininity of the 1950s and 1960s; a historical
period that for most white middle class women demanded that they give up their financial and emotional independence for motherhood? In other words, where and how could my mother find some variance from these oppressive norms when they were so prevalent? Moreover, how much variance do I actually have from these norms, even though I am told repeatedly by various feminist discourses that it is important for me to value motherhood as well as a career? Can I successfully translate this binary discourse into daily practices?

Now that I have a daughter, I frantically search for a way to create a different kind of motherhood than my mother experienced, without resisting motherhood altogether. AGENCY: I am writing my dissertation as quickly as possible while my daughter sleeps. Hopefully, I can find a job when I finish school. Can I achieve some sort of balance between child care and work? I might make enough money to pay for the necessities, but I fear that my other goals of writing and publishing will be cast aside indefinitely, while my partner's high tech multi-media career flourishes. These thoughts recall my father's career successes and my mother's devalued housework and child care. Despite the many years I have been involved in feminist activism, it remains to be seen how different I can be from this family pattern which is also systemic. I suppose what I am trying to uncover is how much variation on this pattern I can actualize from drawing upon feminist approaches to motherhood.

If spectator "identification is an act of repetition and remembrance" (Fuss, 1995:34) then I ask myself: what am I repeating and what am I remembering through my identification with the discourses and practices that Margaret's film character represents? I repeat and I remember the resentment I have felt on numerous occasions with regard to what I perceived to be my mother's lack of initiative for independence. Instead of blaming her for not changing, I need to recognize the social constraints she was bravely negotiating (Caplan, 1989).
remind myself that in her generation, there were fewer options for women than there are now. I am momentarily satisfied with this explanation. Then I continue to identify with Margaret's attempts to resist the gender, class and heterosexual restrictions that her mother was unable to counteract.

Diana Fuss (1995) looks at the relationship between desire and identification. She states:

The female spectator over identifies with her image on the screen, binding identification to desire to the point where identification operates for women as 'the desire to desire' - the desire to take on and to inhabit the desire of the other (7).

I desire Margaret's resistance to what is made to seem inevitable: her mother's oppressive predicament. And, I desire Margaret's desire not to have children. But, what are the ramifications of these desires of a female film character who has had far less opportunity to improve her life than I have had? In the following section, I explore my complicity in white middle class forms of voyeuristic film spectatorship (Walkerdine, 1986).

The Problem with Desiring Margaret's Desires

I analyze the concept of identification differently than many feminist film theorists and media researchers, who have discussed identification at length, but have not explored their own autobiographical analyses in relation to the term "identification". In this chapter, I continue to develop a film viewing method which strives to include spectators' histories within their film interpretations. I do not consider myself an "objective" viewer which is often an underlying premise of spectator and identificatory criticism. Walkerdine explains (1986):
Within film theory concepts from psychoanalysis do not seem to have been used to examine how specific films have been read in practice, nor how they produce their specific effects. Identification, for example, is often discussed in terms of the effectivity of representation as distorted perception - the viewer is accorded no status which pre-exists the film. Psychoanalysis is used, in the end, to explore the relations within a film rather than to explain the engagement with the film by viewers inserted in a multiplicity of sites for identification (168).

Psychoanalysis often overlooks the impact of the individual viewer's social histories on film interpretations, but this method of studying the unconscious is useful for acknowledging that spectators' unconscious processes are informed by powerful social structures and in turn frequently impede viewers' conscious intentions for social change. "... a major lesson from psychoanalysis is that there is no simple relation between the workings of fantasy and 'external reality'" (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin and Walkerdine, 1984).

Fuss (1995) explains this approach further:

Perhaps the most serious difficulty with designing a politics around identification is the fact that the unconscious plays a formative role in the production of identifications, and it is a formidable (not say impossible) a task for the political subject to exert any steady or lasting control over them. Given the capacity of identifications continually to evolve and change, to slip and shift under the weight of fantasy and ideology, the task of harnessing a complex and protean set of emotional ties for specific social ends cannot help but to pose intractable problems for politics. This is not to say, however, that identification has nothing to do with politics. For psychoanalysis, identification defines the very nature of the political bond (9).

By examining closely how my own identifications with Margaret actually work, I therefore "accord myself status which pre-exists the film", but I cannot necessarily control this status or the impact it might have on those I identify with including myselfs. However, what I hope to demonstrate in this section, is how dangerous autobiographical identifications with a film character can
sometimes be, especially if the spectator and the character come from different social locations which hold varying degrees of power. This is the case with, Margaret and I.

It is clear to me now that the conscious and unconscious influences from the different social locations Margaret and I interact with, need to be explored in detail. The privileges I have had from my white middle class childhood place me in a very different position than Margaret, who grew up with white, working class exploitations. Why then, do I identify with Margaret so strongly? There are many reasons for this identification, but for the moment I investigate the colonial-like dimensions of this act (McClintock, 1995).

Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey (1989) conducted an extensive reinterpretation of a study on mothers and daughters from working class and middle class backgrounds. They suggest:

While we are not saying that the fictions and fantasies about the colonized are the same as those about working class, we are saying that there are similar processes going on. What fantasies therefore exist of working-class women? Simultaneously as threat and desire? (39)

To work with Walkerdine's and Lucey's challenge, I look at how my imaginary selves play a central role in my identifications with a film character (Stacey, 1994). In this process, I re-evaluate how I have learned to "imagine" individuals who have less privilege than I do. What fantasies of working-class women am I conjuring up when I say I am like or want to be like Margaret? How might these fantasies be threats and how might they be desires?

I learned from my mother how to become "white" and "middle class". Walkerdine and Lucey discuss how class background often defines how mothers are expected to teach their daughters and this can become an integral aspect of mother-daughter learning:
Working class mothers have to be watched and prevented from being authoritarian, while bourgeois mothers have to nurture and promote rationality at all costs, especially since they and their children are to be the normal individuals who do the surveillance (42).

How much surveillance exists in my identifications with Margaret? And, in what ways have my viewing and life histories played a role in my interpretations of Margaret? In other words, how much of my identification with Margaret involves my desire to control her situation because I have learned to fear it? How can I unlearn this attitude?

One way to minimize some of my middle class surveillance of Margaret, is to analyze how my own social locations inform my interpretations of her. In this chapter, I look closely at my own oppressions and privileges in relation to Margaret, so that I do not perceive her character as "trapped in ideology" while I "have access to a higher truth" (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). This is easier said than done. A great deal of feminist film criticism tends to embrace a critically distanced approach which involves surveillance of representations of the "other" (Kaplan, 1983; Doane, 1987; Fischer, 1989; Flitterman-Lewis, 1990) and I have internalized this powerful discourse. Additionally, "surveillant" looking is the norm in media education classes and this needs to be re-evaluated if more ethical film viewing approaches are to be introduced.

Walkerdine (1986) analyzes how "surveillant" looking is the norm in most researchers' accounts of film viewers and, in order to counteract this form of looking, she recommends critical autobiographical work which could be used in the media education classroom. She suggests the following:

We might make our own history, but in conditions which are not of our choosing - that is, in relations of domination and subordination/subjectification. Derrida accuses Foucault of forgetting that the subject is to be put under erasure. But if we are
to produce a history of reading of *the present* and a political practice that is adequate to it, then we need to understand how surveillance functions, how power works, where the buck stops (198).

In this chapter, I am examining how my own "surveillance functions" and, as Walkerdine points out, this can only done if one is willing to uncover how one uses particular discourses and practices to form the so-called "truth" (which most schooling expects of us); a truth which may have dire consequences for certain groups and individuals.

I argue along with Walkerdine that the way identification is most frequently used involves "objectivity", which is also supposedly present in "surveillant" looking and that these processes replicate structures of hierarchy and hegemony. How can I analyze my identifications with Margaret in such a way so that I continuously work with the complex and often painful relationship between the psychic and the social instead of pretending it doesn't exist? (Walkerdine, 1997). Moreover, in Butler's words, how can I subvert the repetitive pedagogical norms which insist that film viewers do not need to examine their own investments in the narrative discourses that they criticize?

Margaret's character reminds me how difficult it is to bring about structural changes. The film *Margaret's Museum* specifically demonstrates how, from generation to generation, oppressive class, sexuality, race and gender norms are repeatedly inflicted upon individuals and in turn are inflicted upon themselves. I strongly identify with Margaret, because she strives for social change by courageously facing the problems she has grown up with instead of intellectualizing them and projecting them onto others which is the method I was taught.

In contrast to Margaret's mother, my mother did not tell me that I should avoid having children, because motherhood would limit me substantially.
Instead she told me repeatedly that I would probably regret my decision (which I have held for many years) not to have children. She never really discussed the day-to-day difficulties she experienced with child care, especially the part about sacrificing her independence for a child. But, rather than blaming my mother for not helping me gain a better understanding of the contradictions involved in motherhood, I focus on Paula Caplan's (1989) analyses of how the hard work of mothering is frequently not revealed in many white, middle class households:

Precisely because mothering is supposed to come naturally, few mothers tell their children how difficult it can be... in a culture in which mothering is generally undervalued, chances are slim that anyone outside mother is going to teach children how much effort and uncertainty are involved in the job. So both daughters and sons grow up thinking mothering is supposed to be easy (87).

My resistance to motherhood is partly derived from my resentment of this discourse which suggests that women are "naturally" suited for looking after children, so there is no reason for them to describe the difficulties they often encounter. I knew how hard my mother worked at child care, because I helped her raise my sister who is seven years younger than me. Yet, I was still expected to take my mother's skills for granted like everyone else around her seemed to do.

I am motivated to change my attitudes towards motherhood, but it is exploitive for me to co-opt Margaret's resistance to motherhood instead of reflecting upon the source of my own resistances. Selecting a surveillant form of identification manifests itself in my desire to control Margaret's situation. I do not want her to have children, because I perceive motherhood as limiting her ability to change her material conditions. When I analyze her choices in this critically distanced mode, I admire her for refusing to get pregnant. In a sense, I suppress my own desires for motherhood when it comes to my identifications.
with Margaret in order to adhere to my white, middle class education. This education has taught me to keep my visceral desires well hidden, especially when I am intellectualizing the predicaments of individuals who have less power than I do.

I fear the pain that Margaret might endure if her refusal to have children is only based on the inadequacy of her social conditions. However, instead of owning this pain for myself, I unconsciously and consciously project it onto Margaret, as I have learned to do. And then, I criticize her social circumstances, as if they have nothing to do with me, in an attempt to control her situation. Fuss (1995) explains how this process might work unconsciously:

Of course, read psychoanalytically, every identification involves a degree of symbolic violence, a measure of temporary mastery and possession. ... identification operates on one level as an endless process of violent negation, a process of killing off the other in fantasy in order to usurp the other's place, the place where the subject desires to be (9).

In this way, my desire for resistance is so strong that I do not take into account the harmful aspects of this method of resistance. Basically then, I need to find another strategy of resistance.

On the other hand, this projection has also enabled me to notice, acknowledge and analyze the differences and similarities between Margaret and I as well as my desires. This paradoxical situation alerts me once again to the importance of examining closely my contradictory and conflicting investments in the discourses and practices that are represented by a film character.

Walkerdine and Lucey outline their beliefs in a critical autobiographical approach which examines how our contradictory responses are formed:

We therefore think it is crucial to monitor and understand our formation and its effectivity in our research interactions and the
story we produce. If we do not engage with the psychic dimension and its inscription in the truths of regulative apparatuses themselves then our political engagement is a sham. It is so easy for us to believe we are telling the truth, producing an objective account, without looking to our own place, our own positionings (44).

I see several advantages of following Walkerdine and Lucey’s advice: firstly, it enables me to be more aware of the types of discourses I am using to analyze a film, whereas before I was selecting discourses without knowing that I risked perpetuating white, middle class "ways of seeing" (Berger, 1979). Secondly, I am able to acknowledge how I feel about the film representations that I watch in order to uncover my affective investments in a film character, situation or narrative; and, thirdly, I can gain a better understanding of how I, as a film spectator, participate in producing popular images which both "reflect and construct" various discourses (Walters, 1992).

**Imagining Change**

Valerie Walkerdine (1993) continuously criticizes the white, male, middle class viewing discourses which tend to emphasize rational and conscious interactions with popular culture at the expense of emotional and unconscious interactions. She argues that these so-called "objective" ways of viewing often pathologize individuals who apparently use film as an escape from their lives. However, as Walkerdine herself notes, the issue of "escapism" is a complex one, but nonetheless, she illuminates through her research that if viewers deviate from a critically distanced mode of viewing they are labeled inadequate. As I discussed in the last section, I too have learned to use only a critically distanced analysis in order to interpret a film and this heavily reinforced method
of media interpretation is an integral part of the "regulatory project of intellectualization" that Walkerdine re-evaluates.

A method of engagement which ignores audience members' "individual/social" imaginations, criticisms and affective responses and favours "surveillance" of the text and its audience, does not encourage me to criticize my own social locations in relation to the film characters' social locations as well as to the plots, scenes and narratives. This surveillant method of engagement positions me as the "neutral, objective film critic", a stance which is problematic and even unethical, because it fails to expose the social inequities that are inevitably present in the interaction between a viewer and a text. If these inequities are ignored then the film interpretations that result from this lack of exposure are politically and pedagogically limited at best.

A case-study which Walkerdine conducted in Britain to investigate how popular television and video inform the subjectivities of young, predominantly white working-class girls, has had a profound impact on the film viewing methods I use to analyze white, working class, female characters like Margaret. In order to demonstrate how Walkerdine's research has influenced my thinking about film spectatorship, I will outline her study in detail. To begin with, Walkerdine reminds us that historically mothers have frequently been held responsible for their children's development and education. She tells us about the classic study by Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince (1958) which advised families on how they should watch television. This study had a tremendous impact on audience research. It reported that middle class mothers should control their children's viewing; whereas in working class families, it was the broadcasters who had to take charge, because the mothers in these families were supposedly unwilling to supervise their children's viewing practices 'properly'.

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Families were categorized as either normal or pathological. Walkerdine states:

Any family which has defenses, fantasies or escapes is therefore 'badly adjusted to reality' and by implication, unhealthy. There is no place to consider conscious and unconscious processes, meanings and fantasies within this paradigm except in a model of ill-health (77).

Working class families were frequently labeled as pathological, according to the description above. Walkerdine uses post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theories to critique this assumption which has continued to haunt recent audience studies. She states: "I want to pay close attention to the complex relations between the fantasies of the participants and those in the televiusal text itself" (77). Walkerdine's research exposes the ways certain viewing discourses construct her participants' viewing strategies. This approach enables Walkerdine to examine closely how Eliana (a participant in her study on families and film), uses fantasy and escapism to comfort herself while living in an environment in which abuse and alcoholism exist.

Walkerdine entered the home of six-year old Eliana, who watched the video of the film Annie (1982). The Portas family, with whom Walkerdine interacts in her study, are not 'normal', according to the criteria set out by the mainstream social/psychological research on family viewing practices. Also, the social welfare agencies have labeled the Portas "extremely unhealthy" (78). Walkerdine notes that the only direct comment that Eliana makes about the film is that Mrs. Hannigan is not really drunk, she is drinking water instead. Rather than calling Eliana's remark about the film denial or unhealthy escapism, Walkerdine recognizes that Eliana finds pleasure and comfort in the film; firstly, because the video eventually enables her to discuss her mother's drinking with Walkerdine during an interview and with her family; and secondly, the video
offers Eliana hope for escape from her drunken mother to a family that doesn't have the same kinds of problems her family has.

Walkerdine argues that the Portas' discussion about the film and their lives reveals the regulation of working class family viewing, because the Portas are aware that they have been judged as unhealthy viewers and Eliana and Mrs. Portas continuously try to disprove this label that has been imposed upon them. The normal versus pathological theoretical framework, present in much of the audience research Walkerdine has reviewed, does not allow for observing and analyzing the complexity of the family's interactions with a film. She states:

It is even the case that what the Portas discuss is sex and violence, since there is certainly a lot in the household. Yet they discuss it not in an abstracted and rationalist way but in terms of the conflicts and pain in their lives (86).

In the end, Walkerdine has organized her study in order to demonstrate the different ways a family uses a film to understand their own lives, and concludes that the film "did not constitute their oppression itself, nor can any adjustments in the way in which they view change their circumstances" (87).

Walkerdine's study has made an important contribution to audience research, because it observes and analyzes many layers of a family's social viewing context. It does not just rely on vague notions of categories or gender, race and class to formulate how the Portas family views a film. Alternatively, Walkerdine shows precisely how the Portas use their experiences in the home, consciously and unconsciously, to interact with the stories in the film as well as the stories outside the home. Walkerdine continuously discusses how Eliana and Mrs. Portas are inscribed by and resist the various discourses which label them "pathological". Walkerdine's analyses fluctuate between the spectators' creative negotiations with the film and with the constraints they experience in
their lives. Most importantly, she refuses to ignore Eliana's pleasures, fantasies and desires or judge them as unhealthy; rather Walkerdine values them and sees them as crucial to understanding how Eliana's social locations and the discourses that inform those locations interact with her film viewing and her life.

Walkerdine's study is useful for my critical autobiographical film viewing method, because she reminds me of the importance of understanding the social consequences of each discourse and practice I use to analyze a film. She wisely points out that the most frequently used spectating discourses and practices (in research and theory) are based on a so-called abstract and rational line of thinking, which does not lend itself to an investigation of how the social locations of media researchers, viewers as well as characters inform their interpretive practices. In terms of the film *Margaret's Museum*, if I refuse to deconstruct the pain, conflict and unconscious dimensions at work in my identification with Margaret, then I run the risk of perceiving Margaret as "pathological". Therefore, in the following sections, I investigate how the different social locations that Margaret and I negotiate, impact on the "collection of discourses and practices" that represent our stories (Gilmore, 1994).

(Re)viewing

In order to grapple with the issues I raised in the previous sections, I rewatched the film *Margaret's Museum* on video in order to examine closely the mother-daughter and class discourses active in the film. The purpose of the following sections is to explore ways of interpreting a film character that are not based on ignoring the social function of the criticism involved. To scrutinize how I identify with Margaret's resistance to motherhood, I outline a series of scenes in the film in which I identified with Margaret's feelings about her mother.
I ask myself: how did the class formations that Margaret and I grew up with shape our resistances to motherhood? I don't think my identifications with Margaret arise only because of witnessing my mother's experiences with motherhood. Rather, the ways motherhood is represented and undervalued in our culture has significantly influenced the experiences/emotions that I perceived in Margaret.

My RESISTANCE to mothering has a social history which is deeply embedded in my unconscious and Steedman outlines this thoroughly:

Some women of the recent past have attempted not to reproduce themselves (even though some of them have been mothers); have refused to behave according to the official 'rules' of good mothering. The argument for this assertion rests on necessarily fragmentary evidence, on evidence that has not been reckoned within the central explanatory devices of our culture, particularly the devices of psychology and psychoanalysis. Fragmentary evidence cannot provide a coherent or unified psychological statement, but it can help begin to make a history. What statement is made has to remain within the realms of the social, because the social is the term in which it deals; refusal to reproduce oneself is a refusal to perpetrate what one is, that is, the way one understands oneself to be in the social world (84).

The discourses and practices that Margaret and I have used to resist motherhood have partially originated from the analysis Steedman provides. There are major portions of our lives we are not pleased with, so we do not want to reproduce them. However, our different social locations add another layer of understanding to Steedman's insights.

The scenes I am about to describe are meant to illuminate Margaret's resistance to her mother and how I work with the various discourses and practices that arise in their relationship. These particular episodes are in order of appearance, but they do not follow one another directly in the film. It would
be best if the reader of this dissertation sees the film itself, because these
dialogue outlines alone do not convey the full complexity of the relationships.

*Earlier in the film, Margaret's mother completely disapproves of Margaret's relationship with Neil. This disapproval is based on Neil's drinking habits, the fact that he was once a miner and that he doesn't have much money. In this scene, Margaret's mother plays solitaire with a look of disgust on her face because Margaret is getting ready for another date with Neil. Margaret is joyfully polishing a whiskey canister. She is in love and she is trying hard to ignore her mother's cynicism about her new relationship.*

Mrs. McNeil: Jack of clubs. He shows up and nothing is ever the same again cause the Queen is too young to know what she's doing. Another club. That's what comes from fooling around with the jack, a belly full of little clubs. Did you hear me missy?

In this scene, I identify with how Margaret tries to resist her mother; however, I also acknowledge that Margaret and I are resisting different kinds of advice. Margaret pretends to ignore her mother's warnings about becoming pregnant. I, on the other hand, in an attempt to lead a different life than my mother, pretended to ignore my mother's warnings about the loss I would feel if I never had a child.

In this next scene in the film I do not identify with Margaret's relationship with her mother:

Margaret: He makes me laugh.

Mrs. McNeil: He'll make you cry too.

Margaret: He's not like that.

Mrs. McNeil: Dig coal and make you cry. Then you'll have children to add to your suffering.

Margaret: Aren't you getting ahead of yourself.

Mrs. McNeil: That's how it starts.
Margaret: If it will make you happy, I'll have five sons and three daughters. I can hear them screaming in the bagpipes, waiting to be born.

Mrs McNeil: You'll loose two sons to the shoe factory in Boston and one to the pit. One will die from a falling stone and one will get shot in the face making a speech during a strike.

Margaret: What about the girls?

Mrs. McNeil: Yeah, one just like you turning her back on her mother. Other one will become a nun, you know why, so she can get away as far as she can from you.

Margaret goes inside. Her mother is left sitting on the doorstep, talking through the closed door. Inside the house, Neil and the uncle watch Margaret stand in pain as she listens to her mother's words.

I have never had an argument like this with my mother. The material privileges I grew up with helped to deflect the need for any analysis of how having children might negatively affect my financial situation, let alone my career aspirations. However, it is essential that I examine the class differences between Margaret and I, so when I do identify with her resistances, I am not minimizing the working class exploitation that Margaret lived with. A dialogue line in the film which epitomizes our differences is when Margaret's mother says: "Dig coal and make you cry. Then you'll have children to add to your suffering". This is something I never heard from my mother, because we did not live with this regional disparity.

Walkerdine and Lucey ask questions which are very relevant to my problematic identifications with Margaret:

How then is the world outside the home, the adult world of being a woman that girls must grow up to enter, represented by the mother? Is it presented to the daughters as knowable or frightening? What does it mean for each mother to watch her daughter growing up to be a woman like her? How does the mother see herself? (159)
Walkerdine and Lucey found that the answers to these questions were different for the working class and middle class mothers that they interviewed. For example, with regard to working class mothers the researchers found:

After all, these women are for the most part on low-paid part-time work, they have heavy domestic responsibilities and they live on little money in bad housing conditions (like Margaret's mother). The world is a frightening place, and one in which they have to learn to cope. The lessons they must teach their daughters are not pleasant and it is little wonder that some of them may want to shield their daughters from these facts of life. They communicate fear but rarely tell them what is frightening. They teach them how to cope and survive. But what is the latent content of these manifest meanings? That there are good and bad men in the world outside the safety of home and the mother? That the mother does not want her daughter to grow up and leave her? (161). {Words in italics, mine}.

With middle class mothers Walkerdine and Lucey discovered that:

Conversely, the middle class, sensitive mothers can be understood as dealing with their anxiety by intellectualizing it. They present to their daughters a world which is safe. Their mothers are indeed well-qualified women and yet they are at the bottom of the professional labour market. Those who work do so part-time and are exploited as teachers and so forth. .... They are expending all their energy in teaching them to intellectualize, as though that were a magic charm that could ward off the struggles they will inevitably have to face in adult life. When the working class girls leave home, they may become like their mothers or become distant from them by barriers of class. Whereas the middle class girls may strive either to be like their mothers or to be successful professionals as these women are unable to be. For both groups, then, separation is complex, difficult and different (162).

Indeed, I have learned to take up an "intellectual" discourse which emphasizes keeping a distance from any discussion about how my life would be affected by having a child.

In my white, middle class world, this discussion would not be focused on the labour exploitations which shaped my family life. Rather, the "intellectualising" of motherhood manifested itself in an avoidance of admitting
to the hard work involved in caring for a child as well as the consequences of staying out of the paid workforce in order to be a full-time mother. The lack of discussion in my mother-daughter relationship about these important feminist issues has contributed to my resistance to motherhood, without being fully conscious of this resistance. I am trying to be more conscious of these resistances without blaming my mother for the social forces she had to deal with and without projecting my fears of motherhood onto Margaret. Even though I have decided not to undertake a study of my unconscious processes as they relate to "resistance", I do need to acknowledge that psychoanalysis is an extremely important way of disrupting the spectating methods I have learned which involve disrespecting those who hold less power than I do.

My mother and I did not discuss the implications of her white, middle class, heterosexual teachings and, as a result, I have been very invested in these surveillant discourses. Instead of acknowledging and working with this problem, I have transferred my anxieties about motherhood onto Margaret. I have discovered that disregarding the origins of my own resistances to motherhood has resulted in an analysis of Margaret based on a white, middle class, fantasy; of trying to control the predicament of "others" without looking at how I might be complicit in their struggles. This realization helps me better understand Walkerdine's insights in "Video Replay" (1986):

We are each Other's Other - but not on equal terms. Our fantasy investment often seems to consist in believing that we can 'make them see' or that we can see or speak for them. If we do assume that, then we continue to dismiss fantasy and the Imaginary as snares and delusions. We fail to acknowledge how the insistent demand to see through ideology colludes in the process of intellectualizing bodily and other pleasures (195).
"The insistent demand to see through ideology" has been an integral aspect of my white middle class formations. My desire to transform this spectator discourse is directly related to my strong investment in the negotiation of contradictory/conflicting discursive positions. In order to do this, I firstly outline what those discursive positions are and, secondly, I discuss how they conflict with one another. When my viewing method fails to employ these strategies, important affective, imaginative and critical responses are blocked.

Subversive Repetitions

Keeping in mind Butler's notion that: "Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible" (147), I continue to critically examine how my analyses of Margaret have been constructed by my social history and by the film. The best way for me to do this is to unpack how my unexamined resistances to motherhood have actually perpetuated dominant white, male, middle class surveillance instead of disrupting it.

In Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze (1997), E. Ann Kaplan, gives an example of how dominant discourses can virtually take-over a spectator's viewing process.

Fanon notes that, when watching any American film he is nervous, dreading the moment when "he" will appear on screen in the guise of butler, doorman, janitor, driver, etc. Such images embarrass him because he feels a compulsion to adopt the white gaze at him - and therefore to identify with these images. Having made this identification he feels less than the whites present in the audience. Fanon's comments attracted my attention because of how they complicate theories of spectator identification with "like" on screen that film theorists have discussed in relation to white spectators by showing that cinematic identification changes with the context of
Kaplan's description of Fanon's spectating experience helps me become aware of the white, male, middle class gaze I use to identify with Margaret. While analyzing some of the discourses and practices that Margaret uses to negotiate her difficult life, I immediately evaluate how much control she has over her life.

For example, I assess whether or not she has made the right choices in order to escape the poverty in her family. Alternatively, if I were to use a feminist, anti-racist gaze, I would discuss the tremendous lack of access she has to social change and how she might be given more resources to help her out of her predicament. It is essential that I understand the learned processes that are involved in my spectatorship, because they are deeply rooted in my unconscious (Walkerdine; 1997; Ang, 1996; Fuss; 1995). Speaking about how my social locations influence my viewing desires and fantasies, as Fanon has done, is crucial.

In relation to my imaginary selves and my desires for change, I ask: in what ways do these viewing dynamics appropriate the character of Margaret's? And, in what ways do these viewing dimensions and identificatory dimensions subvert it? Of course, there is no simplistic answer to these questions, but I can deconstruct my imaginary relations and my desires with this character, rather than just accept them as a given. Again, Butler assists me here: "The rules that regulate and legitimate realness (shall we call them symbolic?) constitute the mechanism by which certain sanctioned fantasies, sanctioned imaginaries, are insidiously elevated as the parameters of realness" (130).

How has my spectatorship process been "elevated as the parameters of realness"? The majority of media education I have received has taught me to
completely ignore my autobiographical/affective responses by solely focusing on intellectual and rational interpretations of a film. It is not a coincidence that this critically distanced approach is complicit with the dominant mode of film interpretation: textual analysis. Changing these discursive film viewing conditions, which I have deeply internalized, is turning out to be more difficult than I possibly could have imagined. However, I do not want to engage in appropriating a film character who has less power than I do in order to develop my method.

Returning now to the film, I look at the discourses and practices that Margaret uses in her mother-daughter relationship. Then I compare and contrast them to the discourses and practices I have used in my mother-daughter relationship instead of pretending that my resistance to motherhood is also Margaret's. Margaret's mother made sure that Margaret did not miss seeing the nightmares that can result from living in a mining town, but instead of becoming bitter like her mother, Margaret "ambivalently embodies" her mother's struggles in an attempt to change them (Butler, 1993). On the one hand, when Margaret is with her mother, she most often refutes and ignores her mother's advice. For example, Margaret confronts her mother directly when she tells her that she would be foolish to have children, especially with a miner. On the other hand, when Margaret is away from her mother, she frequently quotes her mother directly and/or follows her mother's advice which is atypical offspring and parent behavior.

Later, in another scene, she tells Neil that she does not want children. They can't afford them since Neil wisely refuses to work in the hazardous mines. At this point in the film, Margaret has not married a miner nor has she gotten pregnant, so she has adhered to her mother's wishes. These contradictory
discourses and practices that Margaret engages in are revealing, because they point to the multi-layeredness of mother-daughter learning.

Over the years, I repeatedly told my mother that I was not going to have children and I confronted her on how child-centred her life has been. But, in the presence of friends and in some of my autobiographical work, I have admitted to strong desires for children - and now I have a one year old daughter. So my identifications with Margaret are partly based on how I am similar to her. I put forth one set of beliefs when I was with my mother and another set of beliefs when I was not with her. The difference is that when I use Margaret's character to reflect upon my own resistance to motherhood I am much more involved with denying my fluctuating positions in relation to my mother. In other words, I refuse to acknowledge how differently gender, class, heterosexuality and ethnicity intertwine in Margaret's life in contrast to mine.

The following scene exemplifies how gender, class and the mother-daughter relationship she is involved with impact on Margaret's resistance to motherhood.

Margaret wakes up one morning after Neil and her have had an argument because Margaret refuses to have children unless they can earn more money and she finds Neil sitting at the table with his mining gear on. Margaret leaves for her mother's house.

Margaret: My daughters aren't going to leave me because I'm not having daughters. I'm not going to have funerals either. I'll leave those to you. It looks like you have enough of them.

Mrs. O'Neil: What happened? He's not like the others. I can hear it in the pipes.

Margaret: Oh, look at you mother, all scrunched up in happiness, because I'm miserable. You don't think I know why you go to those funerals. You're like an old black buzzard waiting for widows to die so you can get your money.

Mrs. O'Neil: You're right. We feed off each other like buzzards. (Music comes up). That's what they've done to us.

Next day, from Margaret's point of view we see Neil coming home from working in the mines. Margaret goes to her mother's again.
Margaret: Son of a bitch is out drinking somewhere.

*It turns out that Margaret is wrong: Neil is waiting to talk with her, while Margaret’s mother looks on. Margaret seems like her mother at this point in the film and her mother seems more like Margaret.*

Margaret tries to be different than her mother, but she is also very much her mother’s daughter, because she adheres to many of the discourses and practices that her mother has repeatedly lived and advised. Margaret has understandably taken on her mother’s cynicism about men who work in the mines. We, as audience members, see the nature of this gender, class, ethnicity and heterosexual reproduction. This relates to Butler’s concept of repetition, because Margaret takes on her mother’s problems with only a slight variation, since those problems are so entrenched in the oppressive social systems they are both immersed in.

Again, Carolyn Steedman’s (1986) work on the reproduction of mothering is very helpful here, because she maintains that when women have children they are reproducing themselves and many women understandably refuse to do this given, the many oppressions they are faced with. The analysis I have given above seems to demonstrate that Margaret's mother has reproduced the class, ethnicity and gender discourses that she grew up with, since they are continuously manifested in Margaret's practices. According to Steedman's historical analyses of mothering, Margaret's refusal to become a mother could be seen as an attempt not to reproduce yet again the poverty both her and her mother have had to contend with.

The following point that Steedman makes might explain the constant resentment Margaret's mother expresses towards her.

But there is another drama of ambivalence that nineteenth-century working-class childhood reveals, which is the child's recognition that whilst she is wanted, she is also resented: that it is economic
and social circumstances that make a burden of out of her, that make her a difficult item of expenditure. The argument here is not that this ambivalence, nor the economic understanding that arises from it, are unique to working-class childhood, but rather that the circumstances of working-class life and household arrangements may make the knowledge more accessible to working-class children (particularly to girls) and make them more able to articulate this perception (90).

Perhaps Margaret never wants to transmit such resentment to a child and instead she tries to improve her material circumstances. Unfortunately, we never see her make the changes she desires. Rather, we witness Margaret cope with another mining tragedy in a socially unacceptable way.

After Margaret's brother and husband are killed in the mines, she takes an organ from each of their bodies (as well as from the body of her grandfather who also once worked in the mines) and places them in clear glass jars. Then she opens a museum in her house in order to display these jars to the public and calls it "Margaret's Museum: The Price of Coal". This extreme form of public protest that Margaret engages in is really just an extension of her mother's private protests. My white middle class, heterosexual lessons via my mother have taught me that I am supposedly protected from the horrors Margaret has encountered and reproduced so openly, but I know that this line of thinking is problematic. Nonetheless, I still crave access to the directness that Margaret has learned to use in order to resist the oppressive social systems which have led to her resistance to motherhood.

Many of the film viewing and mother-daughter discourses, entrenched in my original interpretations of a film like *Margaret's Museum*, partially undermine my ability to teach my daughter about subverting dominant discourses. On the other hand, continuously examining my own intellectual and emotional investments in these dominant discourses helps to expose my perspectives and interests; perspectives based on privileges and oppressions.
Margaret and I can be seen as constantly negotiating our resistances to motherhood rather than remaining fixed within them. However, our struggles are different due to our class backgrounds. Evidence of this is revealed in the types of contradictory discourses and practices that we engage in over time. Margaret explicitly taunts her mother with the desire for children, while I have hidden my desire for a child from my mother (to the point where I have frequently criticized her devotion to children). Of course, one way of looking at this is that we were both trying to do the opposite of what our mothers wanted us to do, but our different class positions play a major role in our perspectives as well.

Perhaps I am reflecting back to my mother the white middle class learning I received from her: that I must hide my visceral longings at all costs by focusing on the intellectualization of my desires. In contrast, Margaret reflects back to her mother the working class learning she received from her: to survive her poverty as best she can by refusing to hide the pain and anger which often results from having very little opportunity to make significant material changes. Margaret can be seen like her mother, too by the way she makes sharp remarks as well as pushing her mother away with a "you won't affect me attitude" - as her mother stoically models.

Margaret's Museum: Damaged Bodies are Revealed in Clear Glass Jars

I was shocked when Margaret removed various body parts from her dead loved ones. I also felt admiration for her ability to fight back instead of just remaining silent about the atrocities which were inflicted upon her and her family. I am not advocating the extreme measures that Margaret took to inform people what happened to her family; rather I perceive her desperation as a
result of the actions of a mining company and a government which simply did not care about the miners and their families (Walkerdine, 1997). Margaret felt she had no choice, but to expose, via her museum of body parts, the uncompromising circumstances she grew up with. And, in a macabre and ironic way, Margaret is inviting a white middle class surveillance of the nightmarish working class history which has ruined her life. However, in another twist to the story, her first museum visitor is too shocked to even look at what she has to reveal.

Given the politics of Margaret's situation, the extreme acts she performed were somewhat of a relief for me. I was shocked to find out what she had done, but my understanding of her need to do it as a form of public protest was so immediate.

*Margaret is keen to show her mother her new indoor toilet.*

*But when her mother sees it, she responds with more bitterness and insults. Every time Margaret becomes comfortable with the money that comes from the mines her mother tries to make her see the inappropriateness of these feelings. When Margaret is critical of the mines then her mother is less bitter towards her.*

*Margaret's mother goes to visit her sister.*

*The grandfather has died because he was not thumped on the back to help him breathe again. Margaret has the bodies of her brother and her husband brought to her mother's house. She slowly lifts the blankets off their faces. She sits and stares at them for awhile. She hears bagpipes as she looks at Neil. The bagpipes continue as she takes out their organs for her museum. Her face is covered in blood. The police arrive.*

*The door is locked. She won't let anyone in. Margaret comes out covered in blood and she gets in the police car.*

Margaret: Muddy River please.

Policeman: What?

Margaret: Take me to the nuthouse in Muddy River. That's where I'll end up anyways. Save everyone some time.

*Margaret sits in front of some doctors at Muddy River.*
Doctor: Your grandfather's lungs were missing. Did you take them? How did you know how to do that?

Margaret: Neil had a book on anatomy with lots of pictures although the lungs weren't all shriveled up and black like grandpas.

Doctor: Why did you want the lungs?

Margaret: To show the doctors.

Doctor: Which doctors?

Margaret: The doctors who said he couldn't get any compensation because he was fit to go to work.

*In the final scene of the film we see the cliff her house stands on from a distance and hear a female visitor scream. The film ends by returning to the first scene of the film in which Margaret watches her first museum visitors drive off. Then we see a sign which says: "Margaret's Museum starts today. The Price of Coal."

*Margaret sits in front of her house in her rocking chair as the sun sets.*

*Margaret's Museum* is about the price of coal as well as the price of a mother-daughter relationship. Margaret takes her mother's bitterness to an extreme by displaying her pain in a grotesquely theatrical way in her museum; whereas her mother acts out her pain predominantly in the presence of her daughter. In the end, Margaret's mother seems disappointed in her daughter's way of dealing with her tragedies, possibly because Margaret's methods were so outrageous and so different than Margaret's mother's own survival strategies. Yet, in another way, Margaret and her mother are the same, because the cynicism of the mother is extended to the limit by Margaret - and to a public versus private/familial level of protest. In a way, Margaret is very much like her mother and their final exchanges at the end of the film verify this: "I'll look after you" and a few minutes later she says: "pickle it". These statements indicate that they understand each other.
Therefore, it wasn't Margaret's resistance to motherhood that made her different from her mother, it was the way she displayed the horrors of living with working class exploitation. Instead of becoming as bitter as her mother on a day-to-day basis at home, she tells the world that coal was mined in their town at a very hefty price. However, it is important to constantly recognize that the only way that Margaret feels she can reveal the damaged bodies of her family, is in clear glass jars. Her form of resistance to the exploitations that her family endured epitomizes the unacceptable lack of resources for change Margaret had access to. The screams of the first museum visitor emphasize how extreme Margaret's methods of coping with her grief and her tremendous lack of agency actually were; yet, it certainly made me, as an audience member, witness the extent of the working class violence Margaret experienced. This is exemplified in the following scene:

*Two years after Neil's death, Margaret is released from the institute where she was sent because she had removed various internal organs from her husband, her brother and her grandfather.*

Mrs. O'Neil: They ruined your hair.

Margaret: Don't matter. Thanks for looking after the house.

Mrs. O'Neil: I couldn't very well stay in the other one could I.

Margaret: You don't have to leave, you can stay here and live with me if you like.

Mrs. O'Neil: I'm not feeling too good. I'll go to my sister's in Annagan.

Margaret: Moma, I'll look after you.

Mrs. O'Neil: You'll look after me. You'll look after me. What will you do if I drop dead in the night.

Margaret: If you dead you're dead.

Mrs. O'Neil: What would you do then cut off my tits?
Margaret: Mother, your tits don't mean a thing to me. Alright I suppose I wouldn't mind having one of your tits after all if it weren't for them we would have died of thirst before we got a chance to get killed. Do you have everything?

Mrs. O'Neil: If I left anything, pickle it. Keep it for a souvenir.

*Her mother leaves. Margaret is left alone. She plants flowers in her garden.*

*We then see the tops of the jars with the organs in them. Margaret makes labels for the jars.*

These final words Margaret spoke to her mother were contradictory, but very much grounded in the material elements of their lives. Her mother gave her life through her breast milk and life gave Margaret many experiences of death via the socio-political circumstances she was born into. I am sorry that Margaret and her mother had to endure such harsh predicaments and I find it difficult to witness their pain, but I envy the visceral and the metaphorical level of their mother-daughter relationship. However, I realize that this may be a middle class romantic fantasy of working class lives; that working class individuals are somehow more emotive, real and visceral.

This is an important realization, especially in light of my earlier discussion of Walkerdine and Lucey's work, because they emphasize that it is crucial to pay attention to how many middle class children have not been taught "the tools to cope with the fear and anxiety of oppression" (162). They argue that this can result in an intellectualization of these kinds of struggles rather than confronting them directly. Perhaps this is why I have conjured up fantasies of working class lives as more connected or as more "real". Instead of engaging in such patronising discourses, I must examine the differences between our lives rather than just projecting my desires for change onto Margaret and her mother. Otherwise the price of such of filmic identification becomes much too high.
Class differences are an important part of film spectatorship. Taking into account my white middle class locations helps me understand how my resistances to motherhood may actually perpetuate dominant white middle class surveillance. The main reason I was not able to perceive the exploitive aspects of my identifications with Margaret initially was because I had not understood my own socially located affective and intellectual investments in the complexities of Margaret's mother-daughter relationship.

Looking at my own emotional and critical engagement with the last mother-daughter scene in the film - specifically my pleasure in imagining Margaret's mother-daughter connection for myself - is certainly not easy for me, but at this point in my dissertation I could not do otherwise. Just a few years ago, I would have analyzed this film without discussing how I feel as well as think about their interaction. I would have hidden my visceral reactions and my imaginary thoughts for fear that I might appear unscholarly or too emotional, particularly with a scene which involves so much conflict and pain.

Walkerdine suggests at the end of Video Replay: family, films and fantasy, that affective response is suspect for academic analyses:

Popular pleasures produced in/under oppression can be contrasted with the more cerebral pleasures of discrimination or deconstruction. These ultimately derive from the scientific project of intellectualization, the Cognito, which culminates in the scientific management of populations, of pleasures, in other words, is linked not just to the desire to know but also to the project of controlling nature. This has had as its other and opposite a fear of the powers of the unknown, the animal, the unlawful, the insane, the masses, women, blacks. These 'others' became objects to be known and thus civilized and regulated. There exists among the bourgeoisie a terror of the pleasures of the flesh, of the body, of the animal passions seen to be burning darkly in sexuality and also in violent uprisings. No surprise then that the regulation of children's consumption of the modern media focuses so obsessively on sex and violence (196).
It's Margaret's fearlessness of exposing the damaged body parts of her husband, brother and grandfather that astounds me. And then again, this could be seen as yet another romantic stereotype of the heroic working class woman who, in the white middle class observer's gaze, seems to have only two subject positions available: victim or heroine. She has not adhered to white, male, heterosexualized, middle class norms which frequently demand passivity, silence and rationalizing pain at all costs. And where did she learn to resist so vehemently? From her mother.

My mother did not teach me to fight back; in fact, she taught me to subvert my opinions and "mind what I say" (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). My mother is not to blame for the way she taught me to behave, rather, I blame an entire social system (which she was immersed in) that coerced her into teaching her daughter how to be a "co-operative citizen". And one powerful agent here is "the scientific project of intellectualization" (Walkerdine, 1986). Once again, the victim versus agent (or heroine) dichotomy arises as I analyze my relationship with my mother. Rather than resorting to labeling my mother as one or the other, I perceive her as negotiating her way through some limiting social structures.

Conclusion

Finally, I reflect upon my new life as a mother. My daughter is so curious about the world around her. While breast feeding, changing diapers and holding her close to me, I have realized more than ever the importance of mothering. I also recognize how difficult it is to balance child care and paid work when I am immersed in a social system which often devalues women's work in general, and child care in particular. My need to completely divorce
myself from my mother's struggles has begun to dissipate since I have experienced some of the very difficulties she was faced with. Fortunately, I have had much more socially sanctioned support than my mother had to pursue a career as well as motherhood; however, it's still not enough to reduce the incredible struggle still ahead of me.

The issue of "subversive repetitions" then is extremely essential for my daughter, so that I can teach her about the class, race, sexuality and gender oppressions that are very much alive. I continue to work diligently on my feminine, heterosexual, white middle class locations in order to see how I have learned from my privileges to project my fears of being exploited as a mother onto female film characters such as Margaret. I have been so preoccupied with trying to control motherhood that I failed to acknowledge the extent to which I actually feared raising a child, particularly because of the ways it has been devalued.

Also, I have harshly criticized many mothers (including my own mother) for making motherhood the central focus of their lives. Instead of placing so much emphasis on resisting motherhood by devaluing it, I need to be continuously aware of how the social systems in which I live in Toronto, Canada often prevent mothers from balancing child care and work and/or being paid for looking after their own children (This is not necessarily the case in other cultures. See Rantaluih and Heiskanen, 1997). In this chapter, I have examined how the social-historical constructions of my mother-daughter relationship have impacted on my problematic identification with Margaret's resistance to motherhood. In many respects the character of Margaret forms a "subversive repetition" - and that's what I am saying about my critical autobiographical film viewing method as well: that it is important to be continuously aware of how and why one is identifying with a character or else
there is a serious risk of unconsciously and consciously replicating structures of
hierarchy and hegemony over and over again.

Suddenly, I am a mother instead of a daughter, but that does not mean
that my history with my mother has disappeared. In fact, quite the opposite has
occurred for me. I feel much more aware of the conflicts and the love that my
mother and I experienced together. By using a critical autobiographical method
of film engagement, I have been able to gain a better understanding of how my
resistances to motherhood originate from very different social structures than
Margaret's. Consequently, I feel much more prepared to teach my daughter
about social inequities and change.

In the next chapter, I use a different approach to add to my film viewing
method. Instead of focusing in on my life stories I look at how two female film
characters use critical autobiography to transform the social inequities they
have had to contend with on a daily basis. This particular film analysis gives me
an opportunity to understand how different types of self reflection are used by
those who come from varying social locations and life predicaments.
Endnotes

1 I find Joan Acker's (1997) definition of "gender practices" very useful for this chapter:

I think of the concept of "gender practices" as an intellectual tool useful in elucidating the processes through which social structure is reproduced. 'Practices' as used here, are ordinary things that people do as they go about their daily activities. Complexly coordinated practices constitute the structures within which we live. Many practices are 'gendered'. That is, they are consonant with assumptions about differences between women and men and often, in their repetition, contribute to the reproduction of those differences. The notion of gender practices, whether paid work or in other activities, has emerged in feminist social science as part of the effort to understand how women's relative (within class and racial divisions) subordination is so often recreated even as it is changing (Rantalaiho, Liisa and Tuula Heiskanen, 1997; ix).
... the choice of which categories to historicize is inevitably "political", necessarily tied to the historian's recognition of his/her stake in the production of knowledge. Experience is, in this approach, not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain. This kind of approach does not undercut politics by denying the existence of subjects, it instead interrogates the processes of their creation, and, in so doing, refigures history and the role of the historian, and opens new ways for thinking about change (Scott, 1992:38).

Introduction

I begin this chapter with these words from Joan Scott, because I want to discuss how two female film characters deal with different kinds of interpretations of their lives. In order to do this, I look at two films: The Nasty Girl (1990) and An Angel at My Table (1990). Both feature female protagonists who use critical autobiography to comprehend the social formation of their identities. I focus on how these characters decide which social-historical categories provide them with some agency. In this chapter, I move from using my own autobiographical analyses to interpret a film to a metanarrative approach. The primary advantage of this theoretical shift is that it enables me to further demonstrate how film characters are metaphors as well as clusters of different signs, codes and discourses (Hunter, 1983) which can be used to reflect upon a spectator's life as well as his/her method of interpreting film. As a result, the contents of this chapter provide an important contribution to my critical autobiographical approach. In other words, this whole thesis is a story about a method and the films I analyze are part of that method. The Nasty Girl and An Angel at My Table are extremely applicable to this method, because these films expose how particular kinds of knowledge are produced through the characters'
affective, imaginative and critical investments in various discourses and practices (Scott, 1992).

One of the most significant realizations I have had from writing this dissertation is recognizing the extent to which I use female film characters\(^1\) to learn new ways to interpret and use my experiences. In this chapter, I analyze how two female characters use autobiographical approaches to negotiate the various discourses and practices in their lives under conditions which are continuously shifting. These characters "have started to see discourse as visible and as powerfully constitutive of their lives" (Davies, 1993:164). And as Joan Scott points out: "the social and the personal are imbricated in one another and they are both historically variable" (35). The Nasty Girl and An Angel at my Table are films which work with and through this imbrication.

In Chapter Two, I focused on how I use my imagination in relation to my critical and affective responses to analyze film characters; in Chapter Three, I looked at the ethical implications of investing in particular viewing and filmic discourses. In Chapter Four, I discussed the politics of my identifications with a female character, situated in social locations that are different than mine. Chapter Five, then, focuses on two films which explicitly question issues of interpretation, history, autobiography and biography, thus adding a new dimension to my method.

An Angel at My Table (1990) is a film by Jane Campion which she directed a few years before she embarked on The Piano. The film's narrative is based on the biography of New Zealand writer, Janet Frame. The story is presented in a linear fashion, following Frame's life from her childhood in the early 1930s to her adult years in the 1950s. She leaves teachers college to become a writer and the next eight years of her life are defined by her depression which is erroneously labeled as schizophrenia. After many years in
and out of psychiatric wards as well as winning several awards for her writing, she writes an autobiographical account of how her life was hers and not hers.

*The Nasty Girl* (1990) features Lena Stolze and Monika Baumgartner and it is directed by Michael Verhoeven. The film is in German and I watched it with English subtitles. *The Nasty Girl* tells the story of Sonya who enters an essay writing contest called "My Town During the Third Reich". While researching for her essay, she learns that many of the people (including some of her family members) in Pzifling, her town, were not "resistors" to the Nazi regime; rather, they cooperated with the Nazis. After much difficulty gathering the information, Sonya finally discovers evidence of many of the townspeople's outright prejudice towards Jewish people and these findings alter her sense of herself, because she questions for the first time how histories are constructed and how she too is implicated in them.

A striking aspect of Sonya's critical autobiographical method is her decision not to give up her enormously important research, even though she is repeatedly threatened for revealing the horrifying aspects of Pzifling's history. Also, Sonya's investigations and her publications of her findings threaten her own identity in profound ways. Evidence of this phenomenon can be seen in her family relations, her marriage and her community connections. Basically then, the film shows how autobiographical research can alter life/biography in profound ways.

What I am most intrigued by in these films is how the film characters, Janet and Sonya, negotiate their lives through autobiography, despite the fact that this approach is not legitimated by their friends and communities. What can I learn from their negotiations under these circumstances? This thesis is about how I have been shaped by various discourses and practices and how films enable me to discover and discuss my investments in and resistance to some of
these discourses and practices. I strongly identify with Sonya and Janet, because they have refused to accept the social systems which they have developed and invested in; yet, their ability to resist is also complicated and limited.

Two reoccurring definitions employed throughout this thesis are: 1) characters are representations of "discourses, texts, practices and institutional relations which possess no common core" (Hunter, 1983;228) and 2) autobiography is "a collection of the discourses and practices individuals have used to represent themselves" (Gilmore, 1994;41). In this chapter, I draw out the interconnections between autobiographical analyses and character interpretations even further. I look at the discursive overlaps/analogues between films and lives and I work on juxtaposing and co-interrogating these overlaps. Paying attention to one's imaginative thoughts, critical thinking and affective responses in relation to lived social locations, is crucial for understanding the discourses and practices brought to bear in the act of spectating and in deconstructing the discourses and practices that a "character" represents. Therefore, analyzing competing/conflicting/contradicting discourses and practices is a key factor in the development of a critical autobiographical method such as mine.

The heart of what The Nasty Girl and An Angel at My Table offer is how two female film characters theorize the social formations of their identities through their writing and their research. My decision to analyze films which stage self/social reflection in this very self-conscious manner was based on my desire to demonstrate the extent to which film characters can help me gain a better comprehension of my life and my work. These particular films add an interesting dimension to my method, because it is rare for any film to address explicitly autobiographical research as well as questions of interpretation and
its consequences. Thus the unique approach of these films enables me to expose this dynamic; allowing it to be more fully explored than in the other chapters.

In a way The Nasty Girl and An Angel at my Table form a kind of template for my autobiographical film viewing method, because both films (in different ways) purposely use autobiographical methods as an integral part of their construction as well as demonstrate the importance of uncovering one's investments in particular socially located positions. These films also show how one might go about conducting this kind of analysis in order to re-negotiate the limitations one often encounters when personal/social change is the main aim. In other words, the very selection of The Nasty Girl and An Angel At My Table, has helped me introduce a set of issues and points of reference which operate as a framework in dialogue with my own autobiographical film interpretative approach.

To begin this chapter I want to review some of the arguments in Valerie Walkerdine's latest book: Daddy's Girl. Young Girls and Popular Culture (1997), because once again her conceptual frameworks provide me with some theories which I can use to theorize my own critical autobiographical film method. Specifically, I am interested in her insistence that researchers must gain a thorough understanding of individual psyches in relation to the social instead of just focusing on collectivity which often involves universalizing an individual's social locations. Walkerdine works with many psychoanalytic, psychological and sociological concepts to understand how the young girls in her research use competing discourses and practices to interpret various popular films, comics and songs. She also examines how learning from popular culture directly impacts on their lives.
The Ramifications of Methodologies

The story about my method is best told as an evolving, accumulative one, whereby each chapter adds another aspect to the mix. The argument that holds all these chapters together is that individual responses to film are important to understand social relations. Individual viewing response offers more than just categorizing viewers in groups or collectives. For example, Walkerdine states: "It is much easier to find the cultural markers of solidarity and resistance than to engage with the complex and often painful intersection of the psychic and the social" (14). In order to focus more on the intersection of the self and the social Walkerdine recommends that "... we should think more carefully about how to utilize our subjectivity as a feature of the research process" (59). And I use Walkerdine's words to ask a crucial question for my method: what does the "intersection of the psychic and the social" look like in practice?

Walkerdine argues in her book that working class viewers have been constructed as either duped by the media or resistant to it. In order to subvert this simplistic line of thinking, Walkerdine includes her own struggles with this oppressive dichotomy. She demonstrates how she was helped by many media portrayals of working-class girls and as a result refused to be labeled either "pathological" or "heroic". She gives numerous examples of how young working-class girls from a variety of ethnic backgrounds "... understand the conditions of their subjectification, how they become subjects and live, their subjectivity at both a social and psychic level" (p. 23) particularly in relation to fiction, film and television.

Walkerdine's methodological innovations become even more apparent when she examines girl movie stars and her own childhood. She does this by conducting an historical analysis of productions such as Annie, My Fair Lady, Gigi and several Shirley Temple films. Her main argument here is that the girl
characters featured in these works depict a method of survival for working-class girls which could help them get out of the "poverty, class exploitation and oppression" (p. 97) that they have grown up with. Walkerdine provides an example from her own life to further this analysis:

Without the possibility of those dreams higher education would have meant nothing to me at the age of fourteen. Contradictory as that message was, it cannot simply be condemned out of hand. It has to be understood in terms of the conditions of my subjectification and as resistance to the life that was accorded to my mother. Why would I want to be a housewife when I thought that I might become a princess? (p. 98).

Her overall approach (which also involves the use of psychoanalysis) is successful, because it brings to the forefront the competing discourses and practices that can operate in the text and in the young girls' interpretations of the media.

This method of understanding young girls and popular culture which focuses on contradictory psychic/social positionings (including the researcher's), is especially insightful for the final section of the book. It is at this point that Walkerdine looks at the eroticization of young girls in the media and how working-class girls in particular take up and perform these representations. Her research has uncovered two contradictory discourses: 1) many working-class girls sing and dance to pop songs in hopes of becoming famous and leaving their difficult lives and 2) "... their very selection takes away their childhood by introducing premature sexuality" (p. 162).

Instead of relying solely on just one of these discourses to understand the eroticization of little girls in popular culture, she works with both of them and she deconstructs the class differences inherent in these competing perspectives. She states: "I have been at great pains to point out that the two discourses therefore have socially different objects: the protection of the
innocent child of the bourgeoisie and the upward mobility of the working-class girl" (p.168). Consequently, Walkerdine urges us to take note of the many readings of popular culture that are available which hold a "place in apparatuses of social regulation" (p.189). And therefore, she warns, we need to be careful how we interpret each reading. In this way, Walkerdine provides a convincing argument for a methodology which includes a critical examination of the researcher's investments in particular positions as well as a detailed analysis of the psychic and social histories of interpretations.

Walkerdine's research continually raises the issue of seeing popular culture as an important aspect of people's lives and paying attention to how it is lived rather than perceiving popular culture as something which needs to be kept separate from people's everyday worlds. Walkerdine states: "How can we also understand the place of the popular in the lives of people who do not appear as romantic rebels or continually resisting audiences?" (1997;22). Taking popular culture seriously is a necessary component of my method as well, especially since I argue that spectators lives and media texts intersect in complex ways whether we like it or not.

Walkerdine continues her analyses with: "I am claiming therefore that subjectivity is produced at the intersection of a number of - often competing - discourses and practices, all of which position and designate the subject. How then does the subject live those positions, those practices?" (25). This question comes up repeatedly in my dissertation and I return to it in this chapter to deconstruct the film characters Janet and Sonya who, as I stated in the last section, are actually clusters of different signs, codes and discourses (Hunter, 1983). In terms of working class issues specifically, Walkerdine observes: "It seems to me that no one has actually examined how working class life has
been constituted, how it has been and is lived, how oppressed and exploited peoples survive, cope, hope, dream and die" (26).

In order to address this research problem she suggests the following:

... the problem lies not in taking aboard one's feelings, but in not taking them on board in a systematic way. I feel that in the Rocky analysis I was somewhat floundering in the dark, not clearly understanding what I was doing. I now believe that it is possible to develop a systematic methodology for the study of subjectivity and popular culture which incorporates these issues (57).

Walkerdine is referring here to the importance of tracing one's feelings to social patterns. In this chapter, I take up her challenges by using the films *The Nasty Girl* and *An Angel At My Table* as a methodological template in order to understand how the main female film characters' imaginations, criticisms and affective responses are connected up with their social locations. How systematic my critical autobiographical methodology is remains open to interpretation. Nonetheless, in the following pages I develop some guidelines for viewing films in relation to the self and the social.

Using life experiences to analyze a film more critically entails examining closely one's own history(s). Indeed, *The Nasty Girl* and *An Angel at My Table* are films which demonstrate how women can uncover and reinvent aspects of their histories, so that over time they shed new perspectives on their past, present and thus remake their futures. The female characters in these films did not specifically use film to help them develop theories of themselves and their societies; instead, they used writing and research.

However, their use of critical autobiography to understand their lives is helpful in outlining my own autobiographical film spectating method, because the characters Sonya and Janet provide me with two more fictional lives besides my own "fictional" life that I can reflect upon. Ultimately, I want to
encourage viewers to investigate their own histories in relation to the films they watch, so that there is a greater attention to the differences among audience members rather than a traditional universalization of their responses under the claim that there is an "objective" way to look at films and the viewers' lives (Walkerdine, 1997).

**Competing Discourses and "Contradictory Logic": The Crux of My Method**

Sue Turnbull (1993) is one of the few media theorists that I have read who discusses in great detail the "complex role" that the media plays in the lives of its viewers. Turnbull questions how critical thinking about the media is taught in most classrooms. She examines how many media education programs overlook students' personal/social investments in particular social positionings. She states:

To disparage romance reading in a society where heterosexual marriage based on sexual attraction and romantic love is still the norm and marked by certain kinds of social status, is to encourage disavowal of how media texts relate to lived experience. What I am advocating is a less certain way of proceeding. I suggest a rejection of essentialist readings and comfortable moral positions about the media since such positions are often based on a narrow and ethnocentric version of what is culturally preferable (166).

Turnbull urges media theorists to examine how the media is "appropriated by individual subjectivities", arguing that this approach is much more productive and informative than many media theorists have speculated upon so far. Basically, then, she looks closely at the "stake in the production of knowledge" that audience members have in their interactions with popular media (Scott, 1992).

Similarly, Alison Jones suggests,
that researchers take an interest in the processes through which girls 'correctly' position themselves in available discourses, including the sanctions against particular positionings and encouragement towards others, which vary considerably across - and within - class and race, cultural and discursive contexts (1993;162).

This type of research has been done by Turnbull who focuses on the different social investments of teenage girls in soap operas and how they creatively negotiate these investments. She conducted a year-long study in Australia of 22 girls aged 16-18, from 11 different ethnic backgrounds, whom she taught in a media education classroom.

Turnbull worked directly with their contradictory responses to the female representations that they watched, discovering how they "derived different kinds of pleasure and purpose from such readings" (164). She found, for example, that in contrast to their school and their families: "Only the media addressed the girls as they wanted to be addressed: as culturally different from their parents, as part of an Australian culture and as desiring sexual selves" (165). This observation can be interpreted in many ways. Some media researchers might analyze this finding as the girls' inability to develop alternative role models for themselves, because they are frequently given only dominant discourses to contend with. For example, the girls might feel compelled to conform to the dominant images of Australian-born women rather than to honour their own cultural backgrounds, destructive looks and behaviors. This conformity certainly puts harmful pressures on the girls.

Nonetheless, as Turnbull argues, it is better to work from their contradictory social investments rather than impose a "politically correct" interpretation upon them which will supposedly explain how they view media representations. As it turns out, (Turnbull took a close look at the girls' lives
over a long period of time) many of the girls in her study also imagined and discussed "different futures for themselves from those of their parents, especially their mothers. They wanted more independence, more money, better jobs, fewer children and more equal division of labour within their marriage" (164).

Turnbull immediately contends with the complexity of studying audience members' responses by carefully analyzing the creative negotiations that the girls develop over time. She tries to understand how and why the girls' pleasures, desires, affective reactions and imaginations are socially produced, rather than judging them as inadequate and/or dangerous. Len Ang (1985) points out that often a viewer derives pleasure from a television program or film, because she/he recognizes ideas that relate to her/his imaginative world, ideas which are always entrenched in social discourses (Hall, 1990).

Turnbull tries to look at what might exist in the girls' imaginative worlds by paying attention to the everyday experiences they are faced with and how these experiences interact with the media they watch. Her research initiates questions such as: what subject positions are available and rewarded in the viewers' lives, not just in the media? How do viewers imagine themselves in relation to the subject positions available to them through media portrayals? How can researchers deconstruct the "naturalness" of particular storylines without prescribing "correct" positions for viewers to occupy? (cf. Butler, 1990).

How can my method incorporate these concerns? In the sections that follow, I explore the representations of Janet and Sonya in order to learn how the autobiographical methods used in the films can inform my own method. In other words, how are the critical autobiographical discourses and practices represented by the characters Sonya and Janet negotiated to promote change?
How can I link the agency that Sonya and Janet's characters articulate to my film viewing approach?

**Fictional Living**

To take up Sue Turnbull's concerns I acknowledge that one of the most important aspects of my critical autobiographical film viewing method is the use of discourse analysis. In other words, the discourses and practices I use in my life to analyze films and how they interconnect or overlap with the discourses and practices represented by the various characters I have discussed in this thesis are my main concern. Looking at why and how I take up particular discourses and practices generally, helps me gain a better understanding of how my emotions, criticisms, imaginative thoughts and investments function in my film interpretations.

How do competing discourses and practices emerge in Janet's and Sonya's characterizations? How are they dealt with in the films? How are the characters invested more in some discourses and not in others? How do the discourses they invest in or do not invest in relate to their emotional states, their ability to think critically, their imaginations and their social locations?

First, I discuss how Janet in *An Angel at My Table* grapples with the competing discourses in her life as she tries to live with the label of schizophrenia which has been placed upon her. Then I examine Sonya in *The Nasty Girl* who also works with competing discourses as she fights to do her research on her town's role in The Third Reich. Later, I analyze how they use their emotions, critical thinking, imaginative thoughts and social locations to negotiate the discourses and practices which limit their ability to carry out their pursuits. I have selected several scenes from both films to illuminate how Janet
and Sonya theorize the social constructions of their lives, and then how they put this theorizing into practice.

The first scene in *An Angel at My Table* is about Janet's introduction to writing poetry. She was about ten years old. Janet's English teacher asks the class to write a poem. He has given them the first line to begin their poems with. At home, Janet's older sister insisted that Janet is writing the poem incorrectly, because she uses a word that apparently does not work. Janet pretended to change the word to please her sister but she actually leaves it in. Next day her poem is read in class and her teacher rewards her for her originality.

In this scene, Janet is faced with two competing discourses on how to write poetry and she chose to resist the discourse which, according to her sister, was the "the right way". This scene demonstrates the beginning of Janet's critical thinking. Janet thinks about her sister's poetry writing advice, decides not to follow it and as a result begins to develop her own voice as a writer.

The next scene exemplifies Janet's resistance towards a belief widely held in New Zealand in the 1940s: that the appropriate careers for unmarried women were primary school teaching, nursing or secretarial work. Janet's voice-over in this scene signifies her use of critical autobiography to understand the limited work opportunities available to her. While standing at the chalkboard after class one day she says to herself: "So this is how it was, face to face with the future, living apart from Isabelle (her sister), pretending that I was not alone and that teaching was what I had longed to do all my life". She realizes that she can no longer teach when her real desire is to write.

She puts this line of thinking into practice, because the following day she refuses to teach when a school inspector arrives to evaluate her progress. As a result, she is dismissed from her position. Janet has to give up her teaching scholarship, so she works in a cafeteria and continues with her university
courses in order to pursue her writing. Again, she resists a dominant discourse but I, as an audience member, learn from the next few scenes in the film that this time her resistance is not rewarded. Obviously then, resistance alone does not necessarily ensure change either for Janet's life or for society generally.

The implication of Janet's negotiation of dominant discourses for my critical film viewing method is that there are many different ways to work with the discourses that tend to completely define one's life. Alternatively, it makes sense to avoid an "essentialist reading" of a life situation or a film (Turnbull, 1993) and instead look at each discourse individually while paying attention to how it operates in relation to other discourses that might be similar and/or different. As the film progresses, Janet is gradually given access to a discourse that emphasizes that writing without teaching is not only socially acceptable, but possible. Yet, until this way of thinking becomes available to Janet, her resistances to the label of schizophrenia as well as teaching are not very productive; in fact, they are quite harmful to her well being.

Sonya, the main character in The Nasty Girl, goes through a similar process as Janet when she attempts to successfully negotiate the dominant discourses in her life. Sonya also reflects upon her "stake in the production of knowledge" (Scott, 1992) and I examine how "she lives the positions and the practices" she encounters in her research (Walkerdine, 1997). In other words, I discuss how she strategically negotiates her way through various discourses and practices by critically re-examining her social history.

Sonya begins the historical research about her town in a very innocent manner. The schooling she received about "history" did not give her any reason to believe that she would be shocked by what she would uncover. Sonya is told about an essay writing contest called: "My Town during the Third
Reich". Due to the fact that Sonya had already won an essay contest earlier in film she felt quite confident about winning this one.

Teacher: What will you write about?
Sonya: How the town resisted the Nazis. Especially the church. There's lots to write about.
Teacher: Very commendable.

Sonya's mother is very anxious about what her daughter will uncover in her research, so she says to her: "Just write about the positive things". Sonya agrees. At this point in the film, Sonya only sees one discourse that she is able to take up, so she is unperturbed by the task ahead of her. In her mind, it's just another essay writing contest, after all.

However, as soon as Sonya discovers a competing historical discourse, that the townspeople were not as necessarily resistant to the Nazis as she was led to believe, she is determined to find out more. Sonya's research process becomes very complicated, because the town officials give her limited access to church and newspaper archives. In particular, professor Juckenack who teaches history and has a lot of power over the town's historical records, prevents her from accessing certain information in the church archives. Eventually, Sonya discovers that father Shulte (who also holds a lot of authority in the town) and professor Juckenack were key figures in the town's lack of resistance to the Nazis.

As characters, Sonya and Janet are eventually exposed to different discourses besides the dominant ones in their societies. Janet's character had to deal with two dominant discourses: one discourse which tried to persuade her that she couldn't be a writer, because the writing profession is for "geniuses" only; and a second discourse, made up of psychoanalytic/psychiatric assumptions which interpreted Janet's depressions about not being able to pursue writing as schizophrenia.
In Sonya's story, the dominant discourse which she grew up with was that the people in her town resisted the Nazis, when in fact many of them had not. Both Janet and Sonya initially have strong investments in the dominant discourses of their respective societies. However, as the film narratives progresses, the "naturalness" of these dominant discourses is disrupted. They conduct this disruption mainly through their research and writing, which involves equally their imaginations, emotional responses, critical thinking and a re-examination of their social locations. They did not so much have a "correct" position to take up; rather they struggle with the dominant discourses in order to uncover an approach that works best for them in an effort to alter their circumstances. For example, both of these female film characters cannot afford to completely alienate themselves from their societies, so they fight for their rights as diplomatically as possible.

What is EXPERIENCE? "History of the Subject" and the "Subject in History" (Fuss, 1995)

Kathleen McCormick (1994), whose work I have discussed in an earlier chapter, asks questions about texts which relate to Janet and Sonya's approach to changing their lives through autobiographical writing and research as well as to my film viewing method:

Why does this text (in Janet and Sonya's case, the dominant discourses) disturb me so deeply? What ideological conditions helped to produce the text? Do I agree with what it wants me to do? Can I argue with it? Are the issues it raises ones I think are important? Are the assumptions behind those issues ones I share? (89). (My italics)
Immediately, McCormick honours the reader's life experiences as well as the social formations of those experiences and the social constructions of the text. Furthermore, she insists:

Rather than arguing that a particular reading is 'right' or 'correct' because it is 'in the text', however, from this perspective one might argue that one reading is 'better' than another because of its consequences, be they social, political and historical (90).

And I would add, individual.

I think that the questions that McCormick suggests readers ask about a text are extremely relevant to Janet's and Sonya's use of autobiography as well as to my autobiographical film viewing; firstly, she asks about a reader's affective responses to a text, then about the ideological conditions that structure a specific text and lastly how this "intertextuality" (which I define here as how textual discourses interconnect with reader's discourses) impacts on the reader's responses. In turn, I ask, as an extension of McCormick's method, how are all of the ideological conditions I have just outlined above integral to triggering a viewer's feelings? And, how are those feelings negotiated in relation to the different strands at play in the text and in life? What is the historical context for those feelings and ideological conditions? And then, how and why have audience members invested more in one discourse and less in another? Films can be used to help spectators examine closely the stories they tell themselves about their lives. The main aim here is to expose the constructions of viewers' stories as well as the stories in the film.

I insist that viewers can learn to use their "experiences" in such a way that their interpretations do not imply a singular "truth"; rather they indicate one way of understanding and interpreting how the social intersects with their psyches (Walkerdine, 1997). The purpose of my method is to help audience
members look at their own histories as social histories. *The Nasty Girl* and *An Angel at My Table* provide useful frameworks for this purpose. In a sense, both Sonya and Janet are historians who examine their individual histories in relation to their social histories. The most important aspect of these films from my perspective is specifically how these two characters gradually become more and more critical of the discourses which have dictated much of their lives. Their critical thinking in relation to their affective responses enables them to successfully negotiate their "stake in the production of knowledge" (Scott, 1992:38). In the following sections, I give examples of how they actually manage to transform themselves as well as their social circumstances.

Annette Kuhn also discusses the importance of social criticism and emotions, particularly in terms of how history is understood and interpreted. She looks at her own history in relation to the film *Mandy*, especially how the historical discourses in the film interconnect and overlap with the historical discourses that she has grown up with.

The film scholar does not thus give herself over to the child's demands, nor relinquish her analytic stance; rather, she sharpens and refines her perceptions, expands the frame of her competence. Such a process will immediately shift attention to Mandy's story. It forces me to look, in a particular way, at the specifics of the story's address; at how it speaks to the child in both the child and the adult. It also lets me look at questions of feeling and memory in the context of the ways in which the film both speaks and also draws me into, its historical moment. It even suggests some fresh ways of reading films and doing film theory (Kuhn, 1995:28). (Italics, mine).

The most significant portion of this quote for my method is: "It forces me to look, in a particular way, at both the specifics of the story's address; at how it speaks to the child in both the child and the adult". Kuhn focuses on the importance of paying attention to the historically-based emotions that films evoke. Yet, she
also insists upon maintaining a critical distance as well, so that the political implications of these historical analyses are not swept aside by nostalgic moments.

Kuhn continues with this line of thinking with specific reference to how a social-historical context functions in an autobiographical analysis of a film. She suggests that:

The little Annette also shows me, a child of Mandy's generation, how possibility and loss are written into the world my generation inherited; how they are written into our very expectations, as children coming to consciousness with the traces present all around us of a war we did not live through - traces in our physical surroundings, in our parents' talk, in so many aspects of our daily lives (Kuhn, 1995:38).

In Chapters Two, Three and Four I have illuminated how particular characters and scenes have had resonance for me, have acted as "traces", helping me to investigate my own social-histories. Except for Walkerdine and Kuhn, I haven't been able to find this kind of autobiographical film writing or analysis, so I have turned to the films *The Nasty Girl* and *An Angel at My Table* to guide the development of my own method.

In an *An Angel at my Table* Janet uses written critical autobiography to understand her recent attempted suicide. She examines the historical constructions of her depressions, especially the "traces" of history in 1940s New Zealand which we, as viewers, are introduced to by her family, friends and authority figures. However, Janet's autobiographical work ends up leading to life long suffering rather than enlightenment, since the social system she is immersed in labels her depression as schizophrenia; depression that seems to originate from being forced into work she does not like. The following scene takes place after she has quit teaching and she continues to take a university course. Her teacher, Mr. Forest, hands back her paper.
Mr. Forest: I really enjoyed your autobiography Janet. Janet smiles. She has a crush on Mr. Forest. Mr Forest: It's very natural. It's has a nice flow to it. The others were all so stiff and serious. You have a real talent for writing. Janet: I've had a story published in *The Listener*. Mr. Forest: So I'm not wrong then. She smiles again. Mr. Forest: You must have had difficulty swallowing all those aspirins. Janet is shocked that the conversation has switched so abruptly to her attempted suicide which was presumably discussed in her paper. Janet (nervously): No, I just drank them with water. It wasn't hard. They just went down.

Later at home, Janet is seen in her room repeating Mr. Forest's words to herself: "You have a real talent for writing". Quite suddenly, three men from the university turn up at Janet's home, suggesting that she needs a "rest" in hospital. Janet reluctantly agrees to stay in hospital for awhile, since she wants to please Mr. Forest. Much later on in her stay at the hospital, Janet realizes that she is in a psychiatric institution. It's not that Mr. Forest directly caused Janet's hospitalization; rather he drew upon a prevalent notion during this historical juncture that women who did not conform to so-called "normal" behavior had serious psychiatric problems. Janet's options were severely limited by this discourse.

After several months, Janet arrives home from the psychiatric ward with a piece of paper which states that she is a schizophrenic. Her sisters ask her what it is and they quickly look it up in the dictionary to learn more about it. The dictionary states: "A deterioration of the mind with no cure". This piece of knowledge perplexes Janet, but she has no support to question the diagnosis she has been given, so she accepts it. The power of the psychiatric institution is tremendous and Janet's stake in their production of knowledge about her has far reaching affects on her life, since she is given shock treatment. As a consequence, she moves in to and out of psychiatric wards for a long time.
Even though Janet learned to think critically at an early age, she was unable to translate this skill into practice when she most needed it. She cannot stop the life threatening label which is placed upon her. In other words, her ability to fight back is limited despite her incredible awareness that her individual choices are socially limited. Janet and many women in the psychiatric hospital have very little agency, because women who were not married or did not become teachers, nurses or secretaries are viewed as a "problem". Historically, of course, many women like Janet have suffered from depression, because of the restrictions placed upon them and these depressions are often constructed as a form of "madness".

Despite her strong connections with her family and friends there was no room for her to pursue her writing career without going to teachers college. No one seemed to understand that she didn't want to teach. Later on in her life, the major reason she used autobiographical writing was to sort out her horrendous experiences with the institution of psychiatry. Unfortunately, a great deal of Janet's life is spent in psychiatric wards before she obtains the necessary structural support to help her unravel the construction of "schizophrenia" that is imposed upon her. What is crucial here for my method is the fact that after many attempts to change her circumstances Janet eventually uses self-narrativizations to alter her life. In other words, it wasn't only that the historical time period she lived in gradually changed, it was also how she changed herself in relation to it.

How does Janet finally transform the social constructions which severely restrict her life? The last part of An Angel At My Table can be regarded as illuminating what Annette Kuhn speaks about, that "we construct our own histories through memory, even as we position ourselves within wider, more public histories" (38). In the end, Janet gains more control over her day-to-day
life precisely through autobiographical work. After being rejected for a job as a nurse due to her history of mental illness, the only job Janet is able to find is painting dolls in a basement. Her voice-over (used sparingly in the film) expresses her responses to her current predicament: "I felt that all the grief I had ever known was beginning to surface within me. Fear and despair for my life. I needed answers to the questions I still asked myself about my history". This is a pinnacle moment in the film for my method, because it is through Janet's vocalization of her need for an historical analysis that she begins to understand the extent to which she has been exploited by a system.

This theorization of Janet's social formation enables her to voluntarily enter another psychiatric hospital in an attempt to find out the "truth" about her depressions. She admits herself as a voluntary patient, because she is feeling suicidal. We see Janet walking down some stairs, very slowly coming into focus. She continues: "Finally, it was discovered that I had never suffered from schizophrenia. At first the truth seemed more terrifying than the lie". Janet's memory work begins when she sees a therapist who guides her through the process of rediscovering her identity without being labeled a "schizophrenic". The therapist suggests that she should write about the heart wrenching experiences she had in various psychiatric wards.

Janet fictionalizes her autobiographical stories into a novel which is published and reviewed very favourably. Her agent and the elite literary circles she finds herself within do not realize that she is writing about her own life. Ironically, Janet's autobiographical work on her experiences with "madness" must be disguised in order for her to be successful artistically. However, most importantly, she eventually gains a greater understanding of her past as well as literary success which enables her to lead a reasonably content life writing. In
the final scene of the film, we see her thoroughly enjoying the words she chooses to express her thoughts.

The stake Janet has had throughout her life in the production of knowledge is extremely high. If pre-existing narratives had existed which would allow her to refute the dominant discourses that shaped her life in horrific ways, she would probably have had the courage to take them up. But in terms of the label of "schizophrenia", there were no support systems in place at that time which offered her an alternative route to the one that was mapped out for her. Eventually, Janet's own autobiographizing in relation to the transforming social structures (via the caring people in her life), offered her new ways of seeing the world. In other words, by constantly moving back and forth between individual and social relations in her life, Janet was slowly able to shift the psychiatrised identity which almost destroyed her.

An Angel at My Table made me acutely aware of the relations between the individual (Janet) and the social (New Zealand during the 1940s, 50s and 60s) and how Janet was determined to write despite the social forces that worked against her. This film also reminds me of how complicated the issue of agency actually is and how frequently women are blamed for their desire to have a different life than the one prescribed for them. Often that blame is manufactured in extremely damaging ways. Janet, as a character, demonstrates how important it is to have a thorough understanding of the competing positions and practices in one's life; and how using autobiography critically is a key resource here (Walkerdine, 1997).

This point brings me back to Turnbull's argument which is that media portrayals (frequently seen as powerful social forces) are only part of the issue. How a viewer constructs his/her life in relation to the various media representations he/she lives with also depends heavily upon the investments
he/she has in the positions that are available at that moment in history. Kuhn's suggestion that spectators explore how their own histories are implicated in the public histories represented in films is essential for my method. The characterization of Janet has taught me how much difference a critical autobiographical/historical analysis can make in one's life, particularly in terms of lifting the self blame, humiliation, shame and feelings of inadequacy that are often found in the lives of people whose potential has been severely restricted by social forces.

Similarly, the characterization of Sonya in *The Nasty Girl* has given me some really important insights on how to explore the "traces" of history in films which shaped the restrictions in my life (Kuhn, 1992). As Sonya struggles to find out more about her town's history, images of state buildings, monuments and busy cityscapes appear as backdrops behind the powerful white German men who have been preventing her from researching their cover-ups. These images seem to keep the history alive, open to scrutiny and, most importantly, disrupted. The essay contest expires, time passes, Sonya gets married to her high school science teacher and she has two children. Martin, her husband, is relieved that the essay contest is over, but Sonya wants to continue with her research nonetheless, because it is still not clear to her precisely how Father Schulte and professor Juckenack co-operated with the Nazis. She needs evidence in order to accuse them of the crimes she is sure they have committed.

Sonya's voice-over (used throughout the film) describes how she thinks about her autobiographical research process, and the obstacles she faces:

I was happily married. Sarah and Rebecca (her daughters) brought me great joy. But I sometimes felt that I had failed. That I wasn't really there. The people of Pzifling were thinking she's given up her crazy ideas, thank God. She's devoting herself to being a wife and a mother. And I told myself: no, I'll start over. I told my husband Martin: "I'm going to study at the university."
began to study theology, German and history. My parents were pleased. They thought I planned to be a teacher. I wanted to pursue my topic. I figured, "if you don't want my essay, I'll write a book!"

In an interview with the several reporters, much later on in the film, Sonya continues to sort out why she is carrying on with her historical research despite the fact that the townspeople have rallied against her:


Sonya: No. My grandmother is my model. You have to know where things come from to know where they are going.

Soon after this statement to the media, Sonya is given unlimited access to the newspaper and church archives because professor Jukenack is frightened of the media exposure.

In a voice-over, Sonya analyzes her predicament:

I was actually afraid. I had to think of the children too. And also I'd like to grow old like my grandmother and have grandchildren so I could tell them how things were. I thought it's not worth it. My family life is being ruined. No more, I'll stop. But no, I won't give up. Not at all. And so I continued.

Sonya's contradictory pulls reveal a lot about how she continually reassesses the predicaments she finds herself in.

Sonya receives many doctorates from several European universities. Sonya's voice-over again: "Suddenly everyone was on my side and said what I did what was right. They claimed they always said so. A real happy ending". A sculpture is made of Sonya's head. She is at an award ceremony with her children. She unveils the sculpture of herself and in slow motion revolves around it as it is revealed. She says angrily:
No. I won't let you put my bust in your town hall. I'm a living person. I'm not falling for that trick because you're scared stiff. Afraid of what else I'll dig up. I won't be quiet that's just what they want. Don't you know that. I won't let you trick me. It's all a lot of shit. (Her children cry). You don't want to honor me. You want to shut me up. You're all assholes. (Someone in the crowd faints, someone else shouts: "You're right").

Sonya runs with her child to her favorite tree on top of a hill near the home in which she grew up. She says: "Dear tree, help me. Don't let them find me". The film ends.

What can I learn from Janet's and Sonya's methods of trying to reinscribe their social histories? What are the strengths and problems with their methods? Why did they start writing their own histories? What is the process by which I understand a film via my own histories? This is an important question for my thesis, because I have been re-evaluating throughout this dissertation how the discursive conditions in which I live and have lived influence my interpretations of film texts. How are my methods of interpretation similar and/or different from Janet's and Sonya's methods?

How Can Affective Responses Be Used to Disrupt Dominant Social-Historical Constructions?

Looking at film affectively can be one way of breaking the "naturalness" of particular narratives. For example, the purpose of my method is to encourage audience members to uncover their affective investments in the stories they are learning to criticize. Once again, I argue that viewers must utilize, draw upon and deconstruct their affective responses to films; otherwise, valuable opportunities to gain an understanding of how filmic representations are
interpreted and used by spectators will be lost. I look at how Sonya and Janet's emotional states were an important aspect of their critical thoughts. In other words, how did they use the affective responses they had to their own stories? How did this process help and/or hinder their understandings of their histories and why?

Janet's feelings about her teacher hindered her critical thinking. She believed everything he told her, because she was infatuated with him. Her emotions prevented her from seeing the hazards that were about to shape her life forever. As a result, the institution of psychiatry and of patriarchy (ie. heterosexualized romantic love ideologies) dominated her life. This horrendous situation that Janet finds herself in, is an example of how her affective responses to her situation hindered her ability to deconstruct an oppressive social history which constructs many women as "mad" if they don't become what is expected of them within a patriarchal society. She had no ability at all to remove herself from this uncritical state which is striking, since she is portrayed as a very intelligent and aware woman.

Yet, it is clear that the norms of femininity and heterosexuality of that era, which Janet is emotionally invested in, overpower her decision making at least initially which is perhaps the point of the film. Janet was involved in a long and always partially completed struggle. Marx's idea that people are making history, but always under determinate historical conditions is relevant here. Evidence of this notion in the film is that Janet received very little socially sanctioned support to fight the psychiatric labels that were placed upon her, yet she is still participating in the development of her own history.

Later on in the film, Janet's affective responses to her situation help her develop some criticism of what is happening to her. Her anger and sadness make her realize that "her mind was not deteriorating due to schizophrenia".

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Then her love for writing inadvertently enables her to leave the psychiatric institutions which almost entrap her for life, because her short stories win a prestigious award. This fortunate event made such an impression on the doctors, that she was able to avoid destructive treatments for schizophrenia such as brain surgery.

In terms of my method of film analysis, the structure and style of *An Angel at My Table* highlight the important role that affective responses play in social criticism. The discourses and practices that Janet’s character represents are put forth in such a way that I am able to see that her emotions are not separate from her criticisms, yet they directly influence the extent to which she resists or agrees to turning points in her life. Of course, as I have reiterated throughout this thesis, these affective responses are socially constructed along with how Janet critically examines a particular situation.

I argue that affective responses are crucial sources of knowledge, especially for understanding how characters and viewers resist or do not resist dominant ideologies. I have given some examples of this method from *An Angel at My Table* and now I turn to *The Nasty Girl* for some more evidence that this approach is useful for uncovering one’s investments in particular political positions.

Sonya’s shock at finding out that many of the citizens she grew up with did not resist the Nazis, as they had professed to do, hindered and helped her deconstruct her own social history. For instance, her open display of emotions about her research findings immediately alerted the perpetrators (particularly those who had a lot of power such as professor Juckenack) to the fact that she would expose their secrets. As a result, they quickly hid important documents that might otherwise have been readily available in the church archives. This
prevented Sonya from coming up with proof that many of the townspeople's did not resist the Nazis.

However, Sonya's intense emotional reactions to her work also propelled her forward in her quest to find out the "truth". She couldn't believe that some of the people she trusted all her life not only lied to her about her history but that they also lied to the world. Her emotional expressiveness about this discovery seemed to inspire her family and friends to help her as well as give her the strength to carry on despite the dangerous obstacles, such as bombs in her house and death threats to her children. Also, Sonya's German ethnicity is crucial to how she conducts her research on resistance to the Nazis and her middle class upbringing gives her the educational privileges she required to pursue historical research and writing.

Sonya and Janet are constructed by the dominant discourses that they desperately try to resist and equally by their own experiences which, due to their white female socialization, are often expressed through their emotions. I use their autobiographical techniques as an analogy for my own critical autobiographical approach by looking closely at how their emotions and their rationality seem to hold an equal place in their decision-making processes. They do not let their critical thoughts overpower their emotional reactions nor do they let their affective responses negate the criticism they have about the ways they have been treated. In fact, Sonya and Janet's characters increasingly represent, as the films progresses, a thought provoking strategy for moving in and out of various emotional and critical states.

Since the main aim of my film viewing method is to draw attention to the ways responses to films are constructed by the text and equally by the spectator's social history, inventing new ways to work with emotions in relation to criticism is paramount. Many feminist media analyses attempt to demonstrate

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how the text is responsible for how female viewers interpret the media which leads to an over emphasis on criticism and less emphasis on how spectators feel about a film. So the problem is: how to encourage analyses of lives and films simultaneously rather than just favoring the text? Spectators' histories and the histories presented in a film become interwoven and inseparable at times, but they must also be unraveled and discussed.

E. Graham McKinley (1997) found in her study of Beverly Hills 90210 that the young women were very influenced by the popular television show. She states:

I am not suggesting that these girls and young women brought no real-life experience to the show, or that the show dominated their view of their lives. What these viewers were doing, however, was attending to the show out of their own backgrounds, then cycling back to attend to their lives with added meanings from the show. Thus the experience of the show co-existed with real-life experiences, each adding meaning to the other (103).

Marie Gillespie (1995) says something similar in her book based on an ethnography of young Punjabi Londoners and their relationship with popular culture. She notes,

how broadcast talk and TV talk among audiences become articulated together in everyday communication. It will show how the content and even the forms of broadcast talk converge with everyday talk; how they are intertwined and interact in all sorts of ways, from the most simple and manifest level of borrowing vocabulary, idioms, expressions and manners of speech, to the integration of particular forms of speech such as soap gossip and everyday gossip; and further, how the forms of sociability represented in various TV genres encourage audiences to engage in critical and comparative reflection upon their own forms of social life. The approach adopted here, therefore, enables the links to be explored between mass and interpersonal communication (57).
Gillespie's analysis is very evident in McKinley's study because she found that the characters in the series are preoccupied with notions of being nice, pretty, passive and finding a man. And, subsequently, the female audience members that she interviewed, used these types of self narratives frequently in their "talk".

I ask, as Turnbull (1993) might in her research on young women from different ethnic backgrounds: Why did these female spectators of Beverly Hills 90210 have such strong investments in white, middle class norms of femininity? And, why did these women not look critically at their affective investments in these norms which could be potentially harmful not only to themselves, but others as well?

Similar to Turnbull, McKinley is one of the few media theorists I have found who incorporates the lives of her interviewees in her analyses of their television interpretations. However, as she suggests, media theorists still need to look much more closely at why their participants invest so strongly in dominant discourses. McKinley points out that these norms were rarely disrupted by the viewers and/or by the popular television show. Her main finding is that these spectators often failed to acknowledge that Beverly Hills 90210 is constructed, not to mention that the experiences of these spectators are constructed as well. To get at this social construction of text and experience I ask: why did McKinley's participants need to believe in the beauty myth and romantic love ideologies? What was at stake for them in such productions of knowledge?

I argue for a very detailed analyses of female spectators lives and why they take up some subject positions and not others. In Chapters Two, Three and Four, I revealed the complicated relationship between how I took up the fictional narratives in films to my own "real life" stories. I have used a film viewing method which outlines the conditions of reception; for example, how my access
to various sources of interpretive knowledge has been shaped by my social
locations and the life experiences I have had.

Questions I try to ask myself after watching a film might be useful in
attending to both an audience member's social history and the text: Did I
criticize the film first before examining my feelings about the film or did I have a
strong visceral reaction and then look at my critical thoughts? What might
enable viewers to critically explore their affective responses to films rather than
seeing them as simply "authentic" and/or unworthy of scholarly investigation?
This is a key question for which there is no easy answer, but it is important to try
to work with it as much as possible.

If Sonya and Janet's experiences with the stereotypical roles they were
expected to follow had been positive experiences, they might not have wanted
to change their circumstances. However, their experiences were extremely
negative and uncovering their affective investments in the discourses which
oppressed them became important means of transforming their lives. For
example, as soon as Sonya learned that many of the townspeople she grew up
with had not resisted the Nazis as much as they had told her, she had to re-
evaluate the extent to which she was invested in maintaining her silence about
this issue. This re-evaluation process was not linear or based solely on
rational/critical thinking. She experienced a vast array of emotions such as
anger, pain and sadness. Also, her decision-making processes were
complicated further by the death threats against herself as well as her family.
However, in the end Sonya researched, wrote and spoke extensively about the
atrocities that were committed in her town, regardless of the high price she had
to pay for this resistance.

Similarly, Janet had to uncover her affective investments in how she was
socially constructed as a schizophrenic. This was not an easy task for her,
because she had very little support for perceiving herself as a struggling artist rather than someone who was suffering from a very serious mental illness. She was so used to being ostracized that she didn't know how to participate in everyday life until her writing talents were discovered and gradually she was able to revise her investment in the label of schizophrenia. However, her resistances took a heavy toll on her as well, because she suffered a tremendous amount of depression until later in her life when she was able to pursue her writing career without condemnation.

Theorizing my own history by looking at the discursive conditions which shaped the critical and emotional stories I tell myself about myself became crucial in my writings about the film Little Man Tate, The Piano and Margaret's Museum. In Chapter Two, for example, when I discuss my fear of having to choose between a career or motherhood, I had to initially analyze my emotional investments in particular political positions before I was able to develop a critical understanding of my responses to the film. Through this process, I discovered that my fears of having to choose between motherhood and a career were most indicated by my strong investments in the stereotypical competition between Dede and Jane, because that battle rages within myself. I concluded that what was at stake here was how I unconsciously reinforced within myself traditional notions of women's careers and motherhood that I have seen in films and other forms of popular culture, even though I am conscious of different approaches to life.

The process involved in this discovery has many layers to it. Firstly, I had to acknowledge how painful it was for me to watch Dede and Jane argue about their approaches to life; secondly, I had to analyze how I arrived at my affective response; thirdly, I needed to examine the social discourses which helped to construct and perpetuate this response. Eventually, I was able to see how
much I had invested in these social discourses and then I had to critically look at them.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, I required alternative discourses such as the fact that women can have both children and careers. Then I needed to uncover why I couldn't invest more fully in this discourse emotionally and practically. This led to an analysis of my conscious and unconscious selves and even though it is impossible for me to fully study my unconscious (and I have decided that the use of psychoanalysis to investigate my unconscious further is beyond the scope of this study), at least I could admit that my unconscious was in dialogue with my consciousness and vice versa (Davies, 1993). This approach helped me recognize that my visceral reactions to films do play a crucial role in my interpretations of female film characters and my everyday life.

However, I have had a lot of training to think critically about the ideological structures in a film and how these structures might influence my interpretations of a film and of my life. What if a viewer is not skilled with the concept of stereotypes, for example, which seemed to be the case with the young women in McKinley's study? How can these kinds of viewers productively analyze their affective investments in stereotypes they watch if they are not critical of them in the first place? In this case, an understanding of what a culture's stereotypes are might be required. Questions which could be asked along these lines are: how do audience members learn to see stereotypes as "real"? In other words, what prevents them from seeing stereotypes as socially constructed portrayals? How do spectators learn to believe in them? How are stereotypes used in films? How do they structure viewers' perceptions? Stereotypes in a film often play a part in shaping the discourses and practices
that individuals use in their lives. Once we understand these processes we have already begun to deconstruct and disrupt dominant social forms.

The Intricacies of Stereotypes

Sonya and Janet were not portrayed stereotypically. One of the reasons for this is that *The Nasty Girl* and *An Angel at my Table* contain ideological structures which problematize how Sonya and Janet are continuously persuaded to take up stereotypical subject positions. These films elaborate upon how Sonya and Janet move in and out of traditional white, middle class, heteronormative female scenarios. For example, at first Sonya stayed safely within the subject positions that were expected of her; a good student who abided by the rules and dreamt of marriage, teaching and children. Then she became more politicized through her horrific discoveries. This was a turning point for Sonya and she refused to follow traditional white, middle class, heteronormative norms of femininity, because she had important research to pursue (as well as caring for her children). She fought to continue her research despite the fact that many of the townspeople vehemently opposed her project, firstly, because she exposed their lies, and secondly, because she was not satisfied with only caring for her family, i.e. with being a "wife" and "mother". Sonya thus fights for social justice both on a personal and on a social level. In this way, her social locations directly impact on the kinds of decisions she made about resisting the townspeople's cover-up.

Also, Janet initially tried to become a teacher and a woman who is willing to sacrifice herself for a man, but her unhappiness and dreadful experiences with these subject positions make her decide otherwise. Janet's working class background often prevented her from pursuing a writing as a career as well,
because she did not have the family or educational support to focus on something which did not bring immediate financial renumeration. However, she eventually refuses to follow traditional white, working class/middle class, heteronormative female norms which expected her to passively accept the label of schizophrenia, placed upon her by white men in positions of power. Sonya and Janet slowly reshape their oppressive predicaments. They fight back by recognizing the social origins of their negative experiences in stereotypical subject positions rather than perceiving and accepting the expected subject positions as "natural" ones.

T.E. Perkins (1996) analysis of stereotypes is helpful here:

Stereotypes short-circuit critical thinking; their effectiveness depends in part on our willingness to short-circuit. Our willingness derives from two things: firstly, it may simply make life easier, more convenient; the other is that information may be limited and our critical faculties may be underdeveloped, and effectively we may often have no other choice but to short-circuit. This is true of all of us sometimes. But the more limited our knowledge and training then the greater the area will be where short-circuiting is the only solution (22).

The crucial question at this point becomes: how can my method help viewers expand their "knowledge and training" so that they avoid this solution of short-circuiting? Although the steps Sonya and Janet took to transform their lives are not simple, I continue to examine their approaches. It is precisely the ways that they use their affective responses, critical thoughts, imaginations and an awareness of their social locations that I am most interested in. Sonya and Janet are able to disrupt the essentialism so often associated with gender, race, class and sexual subject positions.

Flis Henwood (1998) states: "... discourses are not merely people's assumptions, ideas and definitions expressed through language but also the practices, formations and subject positions which follow from these" (39).
central finding in her research relates directly to the crux of my method. Henwood reports the following:

Thus, with respect to equal opportunities for women in non-traditional fields, the discourse says both 'engineering is man's work' and 'women can be engineers too'. It is this contradiction which can help explain the limited nature of many equal opportunities initiatives, the confusion and the conflict experienced by many women studying in non-traditional subject areas and the reluctance of these women to discuss the problems they face (47).

It is particularly due to this "confusion and conflict" that it is necessary to combine affective responses, critical thoughts, imagination and social locations when analyzing a film in relation to one's life. Analyzing one of these elements in isolation is very limiting. For example, this might involve focusing solely on individuals' lack of criticism instead of examining other ways that they might interpret a discourse: emotionally and imaginatively in relation to their social locations.

Lorna Erwin's and Paula Maurutto's (1998) study on "Gender Deficits in Science Education" found that the young women they interviewed were extremely reluctant to explain their successes or failures in terms of structural constraints. In other words, their lack of social criticism was striking. Rather, they believed that "it is personal drive, ability, will-power and resourcefulness that shape experiences and determine outcomes". Yet, this does not explain why so many women from many different backgrounds do not choose sciences at all or drop out of science courses at an early stage in their programs. "Regardless of why these women left science, the overwhelming majority conceptualized this as personal failure" (65). Erwin and Maurotto found that their interviewees refused to historicize their situations. If they had done so, they would have realized the extent to which women have been discouraged in
many ways from pursuing scientific subjects and how this might have influenced their so-called "choices".

The authors of this research make it clear that women's individual explanations of success or failure in the sciences do not lend support to women who are discouraged from pursuing science careers, but would really like to have this type of career. Alternatively, Erwin and Maurotto conclude that:

To create possibilities for restructuring the relationship of women to science education, change must be developed with reference to the competing and contradictory realities and discourses that structure their lives, construct their subjective understandings and shape their practices (66).

This suggestion relates to my method in that I argue for an analysis of competing discourses which entails an examination of how viewers' imaginations, affective responses and social locations impact on how they hierarcharize discourses and eventually practice them in their lives.

The best method then of developing social historical criticism of a stereotype is to look at how a stereotype provides flawed discursive resources for a viewer's life (as well as the lives of others) and move from there, keeping in mind how a viewer's imagination, affective responses and social locations can prevent them from criticizing dominant discourses in the first place. My example again is how I have deeply internalized the notion that women must choose between a career and motherhood, even though I knew consciously that it is possible (with much difficulty, as I have recently discovered) to have both. When I recognized how I used my imagination, affective responses and social locations in relation to one another and in relation to competing discourses on motherhood and work, I learned a great deal about how my critical thinking actually operated.
Philip Cohen (1988) provides a theoretical explanation for my emphasis upon paying attention to the less visible dimensions of my media responses. He argues:

... that the rational basis of antiracist and feminist pedagogy is built upon the illusion that sentiments can be persuaded logically by merely replacing bad stereotypes with good ones. Yet the sources of stereotypes are not rational. Moreover, despite the fact that stereotypes work to freeze identities, there is still the potential to recuperate and redefine negative meanings. An excessive dependence on the power of positive role models cannot address this contradictory process' (Cohen, 1988; 28 in Britzman, 1992;154).

This is in line with Perkins who points out that frequently stereotypes involve a negative evaluation of a group or a person and we should pay attention to how and why stereotypes are developed in the first place, before we try to reinvent them.

I found that if I imagine, think and feel about how a film stereotype is negatively interfering with my self/social perceptions then I am more motivated to explore the social/historical origins of the stereotype. The decoding of stereotypes in media education classrooms is usually more about how others are erroneously depicted, and while this is important learning, it doesn't necessarily reach an audience member's investments in the stereotype which they are supposedly learning to criticize. This point brings me to the necessary task within my method of examining closely the viewers' and the characters' privileges and oppressions and how they impact on interpretations of a film.

In this chapter I have been focusing solely on the constructions of film characters in order to develop my autobiographical film viewing method further. I ask: how do Sonya and Janet connect their affective responses with their imaginations, critical thoughts and social locations in order to counteract the negative experiences they have with traditional subject positions? Sonya and
Janet's imaginations help them resist the dominant discourses which constantly threatened to limit them. Sonya's imagination is stylistically represented by the shift from colour to the black and white scenes of buildings, monuments and cityscapes which frequently appear behind her while she conducts her research. Also, her imagination is indicated when she walks out of the film's narrative temporarily (several times during the course of the film) to comment on her ongoing investigation.

Another scene in which Sonya's imagination comes alive is when she is dressed up like a grandmother - a grandmother she wants to be in the future. She speaks about the importance of creating changes for the next generation and at this point in the film she realizes that she must break the silences around the lack of Nazi resistance in her town or else she won't be able to respect herself or have her potential grandchildren respect her, either. These innovative breaks from the traditional film storyline enable me, as a viewer, to imagine change in Sonya's life before it actually occurs. I perceive these filmic techniques as embodying her ongoing quest for knowledge, her effort to disrupt how dominant historical knowledge is produced.

Janet displays her imagination in her writing. By fictionalizing her stories about her experiences in the psychiatric institutions, she was able to gradually re-imagine herself out of the schizophrenic label which was imposed upon her. In fact, she remakes her reality this way, she literally re-writes it. The voice-overs in the film provide a glimpse of how she transforms her autobiographical pieces. Although these excerpts are often very depressing, they also contain the seeds of hope in so far as she employs her imaginative reworking of reality.

There is one voice-over in particular (even though it is barely audible) which indicates a major shift in Janet's self/social reflective process. Firstly, we see Janet lying in bed depressed. Two people arrive from the publishers to
give her a copy of her first book of short stories. She holds it in disbelief. Later Janet sits alone in a dungeon-like room and she writes on the wall in a fit of rage. The only word we hear from the voice-over is "furious" and the other words she writes are muffled on the soundtrack. It is at this point that Janet begins to realize how she has been duped by the doctors. She also realizes that she is a writer and she no longer needs to feel so incompetent. However, the pain and anger she expresses in this scene are enormous. Despite the fact that her imagination has won her a published book, a prize for her short stories and the cancellation of her brain surgery, it is very evident how much healing and recovery work she still has to do.

My film viewing method then embodies a way of pointing out how imaginations, affective responses, social locations and critical thinking can be directly related, seen as intertwined and not separate spheres. These important parameters of interpretation are an essential part of critical thinking. I have found it extremely difficult to discuss imagination, emotional responses and social locations in relation to films, and I realize I am not proposing something easy and straightforward. Rather, similar to Walkerdine and Kuhn, I have found that simply decoding stereotypes is not enough. My emotional responses to films are still very intense despite the fact that I am extremely aware of the plot and character stereotypes that I see. Perkins also points out that stereotypes often present attributes as if they were "natural" and I argue that audience member's imaginations, affective responses and social locations are often seen as "natural" as well. To avoid these kinds of assumptions, media theorists need to unpack the interconnections between ideological film structures and viewers' interpretations, so that they can always be critically analyzed.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined my critical autobiographical film viewing method by reflexively drawing upon Janet and Sonya's investigations of their own social histories. Mostly, I have posed many questions about criticizing the discourses in films and lives. The main purpose of my method is to demonstrate how experiences, imaginative thoughts, social locations and affective and critical thoughts are recoverable and can be utilized in film interpretation. I also have tried to include a way of looking at how a film's ideological structures impact on a viewer's film interpretations as well.

Specifically, I have analyzed how stereotypes might be discussed in a different manner than that found in the media theory literature. For example, Turnbull's analysis of filmic interpretation has influenced the ways I look at stereotypes. She states: "I suggest a rejection of essentialist readings and comfortable moral positions about the media since such positions are often based on a narrow and ethnocentric version of what is culturally preferable" (166). Alternatively, my focus is on continuously inventing ways to point out the extent to which stereotypes and spectators' responses to them are socially constructed. Overall, I argue that including an analysis of viewers' emotions, imaginations and unconscious processes in a film interpretation, problematizes the exclusionary notion that there is one "objective", universal analysis of a film.
I continue to use Ian Hunter's (1983) article on "Reading Characters" to define the term character which is a major focus of this dissertation. His central argument is that the methods that audience members learn to read characters are historically variable and therefore it is helpful to see characters as made up of particular social discourses and practices. He states:

For me the problem is one of trying to describe the conditions of emergence of literary objects - in this instance, the object "character" - without reducing these conditions either to the subjectivities of artist and reader or to the action of an extrinsic socio-economic context (226).

This is a line of thinking I have applied to varying degrees in Chapters Two, Three and Four and now in this chapter, I attempt to further analyze this application by looking at the main characters in The Nasty Girl and An Angel At My Table.
CHAPTER SIX
A Method for Moving In and Out of Competing/Conflicting Discourses and Practices

Introduction

In this thesis I have argued that it is necessary to work simultaneously with the socially located emotional, imaginative and critical dimensions of analysing films instead of concentrating solely on a so-called critically distanced method. This approach to film spectatorship highlights the importance of working with and through the numerous competing/conflicting discourses and practices which inevitably arise as spectators draw upon their autobiographical experiences to interact with a film. Since I was not able to find a fully developed film method employing this approach, I have tried to create a number of critical autobiographical viewing strategies that might contribute to how viewers understand their competing film and life interpretations as well as the social implications of such interpretations. The main purpose of my viewing method then is to lead spectators to a greater awareness of how some of the structures of hegemony and hierarchy in the films they see relate to their own lives (Haug, 1987; Walkerdine, 1986; hooks, 1992; Kuhn, 1995).

Many mass communication theorists have been concerned with the media’s "effects" and "uses" to the point where they have attempted to prescribe how viewers should watch film and television (Cunningham, 1992; Katz, Liebes and Berko, 1994; Ang, 1996). Audience researchers for the most part have focused on how spectators collectively have criticized various media without looking at the specific ways everyday lives, emotions, imaginations and social locations are implicated in this process (Ang, 1989; Stacey, 1994). But as Walkerdine, Ang, Kuhn and others have shown, such supposedly critically distanced approaches to spectatorship are limited, because they fail to account
for how viewers negotiate textual patterns in relation to their socially located positions in the world. This restrictive approach to media spectatorship thus leaves out an enormous amount of information about how individuals from a variety of social backgrounds perceive and relate to dominant discourses within the media. It also typically results in either universalistic or individualistic notions of response.

At first, it was difficult for me to focus directly on my affective, imaginative and critical responses in relation to one another, because I have been taught inside and outside schools to use only the "critical" work of others, such as media theorists and critics, or the models provided by teachers in analyzing a film. Fortunately, Valerie Walkerdine's work provided some theoretical frameworks to critique the kind of media education I received and to develop new ways of conceptualizing film and television responses. With this research in view, I have been gradually able to politically situate some of my affective and imaginative reactions to film. One of the reasons these so-called irrational dimensions to film and television viewing have been dismissed is because researchers and educators have not had a language or a strategy to describe and analyze the many layers of interpretation that can emerge in a viewer's own experiential "way[s] of seeing" a film (Berger, 1979).

I also interpret this lack of attention to socially located affective and imaginative methods of interpretation as a way of achieving what Walkerdine calls a "will to truth", a "mastery of knowledge" that does not allow for any loose ends or uncertainties. Working with everyday experiences in relation to film, opens the spectator up to many unruly and unpredictable insights. Instead of trying to control them, however, it is worth exploring how and why we arrive at these particular forms of knowledge as well as the social implications of leaving them largely unexamined. Therefore, a critical autobiographical method
developed as a response to the paucity of theory on how to analyse one's life in relation to a film is not meant to be yet another rigid strategy for prescribing and monitoring spectators' and students' film interpretations. Rather I suggest that this method of film viewing can help spectators realize how integral their everyday experiences actually are to their interpretations of films. It is important to note that films are like waking dreams; ie. they are fantasmatic forms and such provoke/invite interpretation in relation to quotidian experience. Keeping this in mind then, my method also argues against approaches which would persuade viewers to see their lives as separate from popular culture instead of complexly intertwined with it.

The core of my critical autobiographical film viewing method involves analyzing a film character by unpacking how his/her stated or implied social locations are constructed by and within the film narrative, and in turn how these social locations inform the various discourses and practices that an actor projects on the screen (Hunter, 1983). Then I relate this character analysis to how my own social locations may inform the discourses and practices I use in my life as well as in my film analyses. In other words, I examine the representation of myself as "a collection of discourses and practices" in relation to filmic discourses and practices (Gilmore, 1994:41). The central component of my method therefore is juxtaposing and co-interrogating these discursive approaches in order to re-evaluate my life "as an autobiographic text", and to re-evaluate the hegemonies and hierarchies present in filmic representations. This approach involves shifting back and forth between many different sites which comprise the film viewing context.

Working simultaneously across competing/conflicting discourses and practices in a film and in a life is not an easy task, but I have argued throughout this thesis that it is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of some of
the multiple unconscious and conscious layers involved in film spectatorship. Refusing to acknowledge and discuss the many different socially located aspects of a film character's representation as well as a spectator's social positioning only leads to simplistic assumptions about how film/media criticism is developed, learned and carried out.

Basically, what is most often left out of critically distanced analysis of films is a detailed discussion about situated power. For example, there are a number of questions such approaches ignore: who has access to certain media responses and why? How do the specific implied histories of characters disable and/or enable them to speak about their feelings and critical thoughts? And how does a spectator's autobiographic history enable/disable their imaginative responses and criticisms in relation to a specific film and a represented life? A critical autobiographic approach works specifically with these kinds of questions, because it inevitably makes visible a clash of discourses.

**Situating Power**

How does an emphasis upon competing/conflicting discourses lead to insights on how power dynamics operate? In other words, how might this kind of approach reveal not only manifestly present discourses but also those that are excluded from a discursive practice in a film and in one's life? I have argued in this thesis that when spectators, like myself, make an effort to see how their investments in certain discourses on and off the movie screen curtail their desires as well as the desires of others then it often becomes more pronounced which discourses and practices hold a dominant position. Meanwhile other discourses may be given very little exposure in a film, or in a viewer's response,
or in their own cultural milieu (Barthes, 1982). Often a collision of discourses reminds us that social meanings and positions are not static and is activated by many different competing sources. Yet, a critical autobiographic approach can certainly make this process more explicit if it is not evident in the primary text or in one's experience.

For example, I found while writing this dissertation that a film I was focusing on, or an analysis of my affective investments in its filmic discourses were often not enough to disrupt the white, heteronormative, middle class discourses that I grew up with. Rather, it would frequently be another source such as an academic article, insights from professors and colleagues, or other films (such as *The Nasty Girl* or *An Angel At My Table* which stage storytelling itself instead of just telling a story), which might contribute to a more critical interpretation of the dominant modes circulating in a given film or in my life. While writing my interpretations of *The Piano*, my response of anger towards the film's narrative was my first clue that this film replicated structures of hierarchy and hegemony. However, in order to deepen my analysis of the colonial assumptions in the film, I needed to refer to several academic sources which moved my film criticism along. In this case, even though I have had anti-racist training, my privileges as a white, middle class woman prevented me from fully appreciating the extent to which *The Piano* minimized the experiences of women of colour.

Obviously, then, conducting a detailed analysis of a film, without solely relying on a critically distanced approach, has raised many multi-faceted issues for me. The most pronounced one is this: why are my emotional reactions to films still very intense despite the fact that my feminist, anti-racist learnings have made me acutely aware of plot and characters stereotypes? From a critical autobiographical perspective, it is clear that rational, critical thinking
approaches offer access to only one of many layers involved in a viewer's film interpretation. As Walkerdine and Kuhn insist, experiential levels involving unconscious, affective, and imaginative components have a tremendous influence on how the discourses and practices enacted by a film narrative or a character are perceived and taken up by a viewer.

One of the arguments I have made in this thesis is that socially located emotional, unconscious and imaginative responses grounded in viewer's everyday experiences are something we should spend more time analyzing, because they can make critical thinking more meaningful and productive. The main reason for this is that a critical autobiographical viewing practice urges spectators to see more clearly their own investments in specific political positions. Ideally these realizations will also involve seeking out other sources such as cultural criticism either in popular culture or academe which will enable the viewer to perceive how he/she is implicated in dominant paradigms. So-called "critical thinking" per se does not include examining how one is personally/socially involved with the discourses and practices presented in a specific film and is often based on a universalistic analysis of a film, one that may not apply at all to a specific spectator's history, thus glossing over the differences between various viewers. This globalized type of reading is extremely common in the fields of film criticism and media education.

To counteract this line of thinking, I have taken up the post-structuralist concept of multiple selves as well as the concept of examining how dominant discourses and less dominant ones compete for space in any representational practice (Weedon, 1987). These post-structuralist approaches to film spectatorship are more meaningful to me than insisting that a spectator is unitary or that a film narrative embodies just one regime of truth. By opening up the film viewing process in this way and placing mylselfs at the centre of this
research, I have explored one version of how this kind of process might work.

This has not been a straightforward process since I found it very difficult, given current critical practices, to discuss my experientially situated emotional and imaginative responses without somehow implying, on the one hand, that these viewing dimensions are completely separate from the proper concerns of criticism, and, on the other hand, that an approach which foregrounds the self, especially one's own identity, is somehow solipsistic and self-indulgent. The method I have developed to work with this problem requires paying attention to precisely how I use the discourses based in my everyday experiences to embrace, refute or reinforce what I perceived to be salient in a given film. I also question how and why I have arrived at these particular interpretive positions, as well as the social implications of these investments and desires.

What I discovered in using this approach is that I am constantly moving in and out of numerous critical, emotional and imaginative positions. In other words, I am always in flux, even though I have been taught, and have deeply internalized, that I must anchor myself in one place. Learning to unlearn this discourse has given me a lot of trouble. For the most part, however, I have tried to work flexibly with many competing/conflicting discourses and practices in order to understand a great deal more about my interactions with a film than by simply using an approach that requires fixating on any single discourse, practice, or interpretation.

I have found this method of carefully negotiating contradictory positions to be a more productive way of working through dominant or common sense modes of thinking about a film and my life; modes frequently based on dominant hierarchies and hegemonies. I do not want to imply here that I can simply get "beyond" these dominant forms, especially since they are so embedded in my unconscious as well as the social structures I am immersed in. Rather, I want to
express the large extent to which I can see my investments in dominant forms more clearly, so that it is easier for me to develop more practical forms of resistance to them. In this way, my critical thinking has become much more productive because social change seems a little more accessible to me than before. Perhaps this is one reason why I feel more confident about articulating and arguing my political positions; maybe others who try this method of film viewing will discover this benefit as well.

Secondly, working with contradictory positions, I am less likely to become stuck in the binary oppositions (such as victim versus heroine) which (when I began this thesis) I heavily relied on. What I now see instead is how some people have greater access to privileged discourses and practices than others (this includes both spectators and film characters), and that media analysts need to work with/through shifting and uneven positions of power and oppression rather than simply seeing individuals as stuck in only one position; for example, either the victim or the heroine role. This became most evident in Chapter Four when I slowly realized the extent to which I was involved in "surveillance" of the other (Walkerdine, 1986).

This brings me to the third reason for analyzing films by considering the contradictory positionings in autobiographic experience, in filmic responses, and in narrative discourses; it opens up room to reflect on the various viewing discourses one has learned and whether or not they are still meaningful, practical or productive. I began this project by criticizing text-centric analyses and the role/image approach. I now see how limited these modes of interpretation are, although they still hold an extremely powerful position in the field of film and media education and aesthetic criticism. However, if viewers undertake to grapple with competing/conflicting discourses and practices, they are more likely to see that a method which focuses on "intertextualities" (how a
viewer's life discourses intersect with specific textual discourses) reveals so much more about how hierarchies and hegemonies operate across both terrains rather than an approach that relies solely on the isolated text or on "reality/image" comparisons for its sense of interpretation (Walkerdine, 1997).

**Overlapping Discourses and Practices**

In this thesis I have suggested several ways of investigating contradictory/competing discourses and practices, ways which provide for a continuous examination of dominant viewing strategies that tend to rely heavily on enforcing so-called rational responses to the media. Alternatively, I have recommended probing how a viewer continuously struggles with his/her investments in various discourses found in numerous locales. This lack of attention to the extent to which spectators move in and out of identifications, back and forth, within and across many different discourses while interpreting their lives in relation to the media often leads to a misunderstanding of how and why many viewers are unwilling to give up their investments in racist, classist and heterosexist filmic discourses. Unfortunately, due to the embeddedness of discrimination in the social structures we negotiate everyday, rational analyses of our prejudicial practices does not entirely eliminate them. However, this is not to say that more productive methods of teaching criticism cannot be achieved.

I recommend analyzing our lived experiences (which in my case is an exploration of my autobiographical investments in white, middle class, heterosexual and female social locations) as much as possible in order to make visible some of the complex oscillations between a viewer's social/personal investments, the filmic text and the culture at large. This type of approach can
lead to a reformulation of how a viewer conceptualizes his/her participation in normalizing dichotomies, because at least there is an acknowledgment that he/she is immersed in these dichotomies instead of somehow outside of them, looking in.

Marie Gillespie's (1995) work on television and diasporic identity exemplifies how important it is to focus on "... how TV is... assimilated into the social formation and how that social formation is read back into the text" (Fiske in Gillespie; 60). Her research demonstrates how TV and lived ethnicity can virtually merge in a viewer's repertoire to form new identities. She discusses Fiske's analyses to explain her findings:

According to Fiske, whilst textual and social experience are different, the discursive repertoires and competences involved in making sense of each other, overlap and inform one another. He goes on to say that these discursive repertoires are also the ones that determine subjectivity: 'the subject is an inter-discursive potential. The relations between textual experience, social experience, and subjectivity are perhaps the most methodologically inaccessible; but theoretically and politically they are among the most important of all' (1989; 67).

Following Gillespie then, my method emphasizes fluidity between a given film and a specific viewer's life which always draws upon its particular social context. I argue for this approach, because otherwise filmic interpretations can become much too static, too simplistic; they are also less accessible or meaningful to individuals who do not benefit from white, male, heteronormative, middle class hierarchies.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the media education I have had instilled in me the notion that if I don't agree with the critically distanced analyses put forth by film theorists or film reviewers then I am not "getting it right". On the other hand, many women - including myself - have been taught to engage with a story by expressing our emotions. So many of us are simultaneously taught to
value and to devalue affective responses. Instead of pitting these two discourses and practices against one another it has increasingly made more sense to me to work with them simultaneously. I have tried to explore these contradictory optics by examining the issue of critical autobiographic interpretation in relation to five films, as well as probing what is at stake if we ignore the affective dimensions of film criticism.

By following either a text-centric or a role/image approach (both of which are usually involved in a critically distanced film analysis), there is very little understanding of how spectators' own social locations and everyday experiences influence how they invest in and take up specific ideological positions in a given film. Within this paradigm film responses are either universalized and/or individualized; both impulses dismiss the varying degrees of social access viewers have to film discourses and to life analyses.

For example, if I had not insisted that my emotional/critical response to the career versus motherhood debate in Little Man Tate was worthy of scholarly analysis then I would not have been able to uncover some of my white, middle class, heteronormative investments in maintaining motherhood and career as polar opposites. My current social location is central to this investment, as it is women from many different backgrounds who do not separate motherhood and work while nonetheless engaging in a battle between the two spheres. It is necessary then to understand the complex interplay of desire and pain that some women will experience while watching the dominant white, middle class, heteronormative portrayals of a mother and a career woman in a film like Little Man Tate; necessary, that is, if they are to rethink how motherhood and work are frequently positioned against each other in popular films and culture.

A focus on contradictory/competing discourses and practices can lead viewers into a deeper analysis of different femininities and masculinities in both
themselves and in the many different film characters they encounter. Again, deconstructing binaries which restrict social change brought me to the following question in Chapter Three where I critically examined my interpretations of *The Piano*: I asked: How is the colonial white/other binary implicated in my own identifications with Ada? To work with this issue I had to examine my contradictory investments in the nature/culture divide which structured the film.

The competing feelings of desire and pain in relation to my criticism of colonialism in the film helped me see that, by identifying with the discourses and practices Ada represented, I was also trapped in the nature/culture binary; in short, a form of cultural racism. Subsequently, I tried to separate myself from the character Ada by acknowledging our differences, but the nature/culture dichotomy still remained static and insistent. This led me to utilize Friedman's argument that the "desire for" and the "separation from others" which identification often involves, does not necessarily "resist and dissolve the fixities of the white/other binary" (17). Thus, I had to take my strategy of examining contradictory positionings further by carefully looking at how I have contributed to and participated in current forms of cultural racism and colonialism.

Friedman suggests the notion of "partial commonalities" which helped to make the positionalities of Ada and myself much more nomadic. Conflicted viewing critiques often lead to working with notions of partiality, whereas a critically distanced approach tends to focus on absolutes. What this means in practice is that with a critical autobiographical method differences and similarities as well as misconnections and alliances are examined simultaneously, instead of stereotypic polarities pitted against one another which often only leads to conflict, misunderstanding, and the repetition of identities and social inequities.
These theorizations on how to combine affective and critical responses in order to break open binary narrative structures are only the beginning of a different way of reading films. This approach acknowledges and works with the intersections of various subject positions and filmic discourses. It displaces normalizing film narratives with feminist anti-racist interpretations that require the examination of the spectator's own complex social locations to avoid perpetuating dominant white, middle class and heteronormative forms of viewing.

Finally, in Chapter Four, my attention to the contradictory discourses and practices in my life and in the filmic discourses of Margaret's Museum, led me to a greater understanding of how "surveillant" the role/image and text centred approaches actually are. My method cuts against these automatic interpolating and suturing practices by acknowledging and working with the spectator's social positions and his/her investments in those positions in order to make an exploration of the power dynamics involved in film spectatorship more accessible. For example, it was only through an investigation of how I perceived my own conflicting resistances to motherhood that I was able to see the ways I projected my own fears of motherhood onto Margaret instead of comprehending how our different class backgrounds (which intersected with our gender, sexuality and race) shaped the discourses and practices we initially had to work with.

A critically distanced film analysis would not have given me the opportunity to explore my problematic thoughts and feelings about Margaret's struggles with poverty. This is just one instance of how "the scientific project of intellectualization" (Walkerdine, 1986) can be subverted. In other words, I refuse any approach which ignores a viewer's critical autobiographical analyses. Rather than resorting to labeling myself or other female film
characters and spectators as in any one single and simplistic position or another, I now perceive all of us (albeit differently) as negotiating our way through very limited and limiting social structures. It is this kind of multi-layered, self reflective, complicated, nuanced and ambiguous social analysis that I urge media educators to take up.

One of the most important implications of using a critical autobiographic film method is that spectators may have the opportunity to explore their own cultural backgrounds and experiences in relation to a film and the culture at large instead of recycling oppressive dominant discourses and practices. Examining the intricacies of how one's life has been socially devised and how these constructions intersect with a film opens up so many more possibilities for social change. However, as I discuss in the last section of this thesis, untangling powerful structures of hegemony in the media and lives is a difficult and sometimes elusive endeavour.

Teaching For Surprise and Change

In conclusion, then, I will briefly look at the wider implications my critical autobiographic method of film interpretation might have for others (media users, critics, teachers of media education, etc). I am not going to provide a set of curriculum guidelines, but clearly there are some important pedagogical issues that arise from my approach. Media education theorists such as Gemma Moss (1993), David Buckingham (1993), Sue Turnbull (1993) and others have questioned the value of promoting purely universalistic and rationalist media responses in the classroom. Buckingham states:

As I have noted elsewhere (Buckingham, 1986, 1989), a great deal of media education is based on this rationalistic notion of
critical viewing. According to this perspective, the ideal viewer is the one who is never persuaded or fooled, who sees through the illusions the media provide - in effect, the viewer who is impervious to influence. Yet what is clearly missing from the experience of the critical viewer is the dimension of aesthetic pleasure and of emotional engagement with the media. The critical viewer remains unmoved, and can only recognise pleasure as a form of deception, a disguise under which the media perform their nasty ideological work. From this perspective, pleasure is something we have to own up to: it is dangerous and must be intellectualised away (Walkerdine, 1986). (142).

He argues for a more self-reflexive pedagogy which focuses on how spectators' different social and institutional histories inform their own responses to various media texts. Buckingham notes that "although students may be encouraged to reach their own conclusions, in practice there is very little opportunity to generate their own readings" in the classroom. "It is as if dangerous meanings and pleasures must be policed out of existence by rigourous, rational analysis" (147). My method also challenges this approach.

However, educators such as Deborah Britzman (1992) have used politicized autobiographic methods similar to mine in the classroom and they have encountered many difficulties (Kelly, 1997; Turnbull, 1993; Moss, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990). We, as media analysts, critics and educators, need to address some of the problems Britzman observed with her student teachers, particularly their attempts to uncover students' affective investments and social locations in relation to the media. I do not want to give the impression that if my method of interpreting film is used in the media education classroom, it will automatically help teachers and students dismantle dominant modes of thinking about media representations.

Rather, as Britzman argues, working with teachers' and students' personal/social investments can "unleash unpopular narratives" which may cause tremendous tensions and lead to unresolved analyses for all of those
involved. Therefore, in some cases, using critical autobiography in the classroom might reinforce structures of hierarchy and hegemony instead of disrupting them. Britzman found that when students were asked to use their own experiences to develop their responses to various written stories a great deal of preparation and self/social reflection was required on the part of the teachers. She suggests this:

... feminist pedagogy must come to terms with the fact that experience is neither transparent nor a guarantor of access to understanding. These student teachers did value the students' voices. The problem they faced, however, was what to do once the voice arrived and how to engage and extend these voices in dialogue (167).

One of the difficulties Britzman observed in her student teachers' method was their "implicit expectation that students use their "good" voices and interrupt Johnson and Mae's [characters in a story about racism] cycle of oppression" (Italics, mine;167).

Britzman notes that it wasn't "until the 'terrible' narrative' was read that these student teachers began to reevaluate the difficulties of feminist pedagogy" (168). "... the ['terrible']narrative returned students to the racist stereotypes [the student teacher] was trying to deconstruct" (Italics mine, 163). So the question I ask is: where can a teacher go with critical autobiographic work in the classroom if he/she encounters strong resistance to arguments for social justice? Can my method of reading films, which also seeks to interrupt "cycles of oppression", help teachers and students to deconstruct their own investments in hegemonic filmic discourses?

Teachers must remember that there are many layers involved in a film interpretation, including unconscious feelings and thoughts, and it is impossible to master all of these layers. However, it is equally important to recognize that
these layers derive from particular historical, institutional and social histories which need to be taken into account if we want to understand how we arrive at the meanings we do. Britzman suggests that "... to begin unraveling all that beckons us requires that we admit how we are implicated - or, how we take on, yet re-inflect - the intentions of others as if we were the author, not the bearer, of ideology" (Britzman in Kelly, 1997;132). Rather than trying to always control and rationalize teachers' and students' contradictory and often unpopular responses to the media, it is more productive to openly discuss how and why students and teachers have learned, in schooling and elsewhere, to invest emotionally, critically and imaginatively in these kinds of conservative and reactionary responses.

Ursula Kelly (1997) who has written about literacy, desire and pedagogy also alludes to the fact that so many pedagogies promote "the ongoing project of rationality, the severing of knowledge from the body and the unconscious" (Kelly, 1997;132), instead of recognizing that these are very powerful sources of knowledge which need to revealed and discussed. However, Kelly also discovered that working with affective investments and social locations in the classroom is not necessarily always a pedagogically rewarding experience. Rather, she realized that some students do not want to be involved with auto/biographical writing, possibly because they are not comfortable conducting auto/biographical work for their teacher. Kelly states: "Many may feel auto/biography is unimportant, a cultural imposition or an unhelpful exercise in narcissism. Such concerns arise out of an ambivalence about the impact of looking, especially if mutuality is absent from the pedagogical practice of auto/biography" (64). Feelings of lack of mutuality are common in teacher-student relations, especially given the powerful hierarchies in the school system. So in what ways can teachers work with this problem rather than totally
dismiss critical autobiographical analyses because they are often difficult to work with?

Perhaps if teachers discuss with their students Kelly's observation that,

Autobiography is unsettling work. Much more than 'getting personal' (Miller, 1991) or "getting there" (Schenke, 1991), it is unpacking the sedimented layers of subjectivity through difficult questions, uncertain procedures, and irresolute findings (62).

Also, similar to Britzman, Kelly recommends that in order to directly confront some of the problems that occur when using critical autobiography in the classroom, teachers need to examine their own investments in how and what they teach.

The question of what do students need to know? must be asked when students are the subjects of the question, that is, when, as a student, one asks, what is it I need to know about myself? and then, what desires have shaped this present knowing? As I have indicated in the previous section, for teachers - and students of teacher education - another question follows: How do I carry these desires into my relationships with students through my pedagogies? However, teachers continually invoke assumptions and decisions about what it is students need to know (63).

The kinds of questions that Kelly poses might provide students and teachers with a more thorough understanding of how they have "come to want what they want" (Walkerdine, 1990). Starting with this kind of framework could help to ease the tensions for students and teachers around not coming up with the "good" response, a quest which frequently jeopardizes an educational practice aiming to uncover and change discriminatory imaginative, affective and critical responses to various media texts (Britzman, 1992). It is important to note that Britzman's student teachers' efforts were not undermined by the unpopular narrative; as she states, "In some ways unpopular things mobilized their practices" (172).
Finally, Britzman argues for a pedagogy which expects and uses wisely the media responses that many teachers fear most. She states:

But once we admit the terrible underside, how might pedagogy address it? Can pedagogy decenter authoritative discourses without unleashing unpopular things? The answer is no. The social categories of race, class and sex are what Stuart Hall calls "combustible materials (Hall, 1981, p. 59). They incite so easily because everyone embodies these categories and through these categories identity, investments, and desires are made. Race, sex and class - already overburdened by social meanings - are the conceptual lenses through which people are recognized. Thus on the one hand, teachers must acknowledge "the strong emotional ideological commitments" (Hall, 1981, p. 58) everyone has to positions about race, class, and sex. On the other hand, if these commitments are to be made explicit, they must be understood beyond the discourse of human relations and individual attitudes. To undermine the obvious requires pedagogical practices that address how the obvious is historically constructed and how it is sustained through discursive practices (172).

Similar to Britzman and Kelly then, I have argued throughout this thesis the necessity of expressing media responses which might well be suppressed by the pedagogical expectation that we need to arrive at the "correct" answer.

Instead of pretending that we do not harbour any unpopular narratives, we must continue to strive for ways to look at how and why we conceptualize and use our histories, social locations, imaginations, criticisms and affective reactions in the way we do in order to arrive at our specific interpretations of a given media text. And equally importantly, we need to ask how and why we resist or do not even consider other kinds of interpretations active and abroad in our social world. Finally, more research is needed to develop curriculum guidelines which will help educators to work through the sorts of difficulties that arise when using critical autobiographic approaches in the media education classroom.
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