UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

**WORKING-CLASS WRITING AND AMERICANISATION DEBATES
IN BRITAIN AND AUSTRALIA: 1950 – 1965**

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CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

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Signature of Principal Supervisor   **Date**

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Signature of Associate Supervisor   **Date**

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Introduction

Writing, Theory and Society

'Work' is not a topic that much concerns contemporary novelists or fires the creative imagination. Today, writing about work is primarily done by investigative reporters like Elizabeth Wynhausen, whose *Dirt Cheap: Life at the Wrong End of the Job Market* (2005) is a striking – if rare – under-cover exposé of what 'economic reform' really means for menial Australian workers. There is certainly no literary equivalent now of the British and Australian novels, appearing in the 1950s and 1960s, preoccupied with the relationship between changing patterns of work and working-class experience: the lived transformations of traditional class and family ties; the impact of new consuming habits and popular cultural pursuits; the political situation of ordinary working people, and shifts in their attitudes and values. These British and Australian novels generally assumed that reorganisations of the working coal face or factory floor extended into the private sphere, informing or producing the stressful personal dramas played out in communities and at the kitchen sink.

This thesis argues that these novels were elements of a broader dialogue in the 50s and 60s: one in which work and working-class life were significant subjects, articulated in a range of complementary discourses that were interlocutory – economic and political analysis, sociology, nascent cultural theory, popular newspaper commentary and literature. Consequently, a main objective of this thesis is to reveal how these representational forms or disciplines converged in the period 1950–1965: to examine their common themes and interests, and their collective

responses to questions concerning working-class life. The thesis argues that all these forms or disciplines shared the view that the condition of the working classes, in both Britain and Australia, crucially mattered to the overall social architecture of the time. It also argues that they all regarded the presence of America, the era's pre-eminent global force, as central to such questions; and that America was complexly understood as an idealised political concept, a power-house of popular cultural production, and a very real engine of socio-economic change.

Dynamic shifts in British and Australian workers' economic, political and cultural lives in the 50s and 60s were both directly and indirectly influenced by American supremacy. This thesis argues, though, that while many aspects of cultural theory we are familiar with today were then embryonic and still unfolding from the scattered observations of intellectuals and commentators living through the period's changes, this did not mean there was a lack of sophistication in attempts to grasp the meanings of the social transformations taking place. On the contrary, where the process labelled 'Americanisation' was concerned, the fluid and developing nature of approaches to understanding cultural change at the time actually contributed to thinking about the phenomenon on a broad front.

An important manifestation of this was that it was more common to find the notion of intentions preserved in the period's assessments of America's complex interconnections with local cultures, classes and economies than is the case today. In the 50s and 60s, British and Australian writers entertained the possibility that there might actually be far deeper American influences at work in the everyday lives of workers – beyond or beneath the superstructural, popular-cultural attractions that have preoccupied recent critics. By the early 50s, a field of argument was established, involving questions of class, power, culture and economics: a field expressing the

common anxieties that consumerism and suburban living transformed working peoples' consciousness and sense of community, and that America was actively and intentionally promoted to working-class communities as the key model for social change and new arrangements of living.

In contrast to recent cultural critiques, which generally assess American influence in terms of popular culture, British and Australian debates in the 50s and 60s were moved by the common assumption that Americanisation had to be understood as a series of complex interrelationships between the cultural, the social *and* the economic. In both countries, the economic and social philosophies of John Maynard Keynes and Ernest Beveridge were crucial to the unwritten compacts between traditionally competing interests, forming the basis of the welfare-state capitalism developed after World War Two. The Right settled for Keynes-Beveridge inspired state intervention in economic management and a commitment to full employment; the Left accepted its role within the overall framework of capitalism. As central works by the architects of British and Australian post-war welfare states reveal – Keynes' *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money* (1935) and Beveridge's *Full Employment in a Free Society* (1944) – the endorsement of money-making and a healthy private economic sector was undisguised. Their aim was to ameliorate capitalism, not overthrow it. Both saw America's high levels of consumption as something to emulate, and their 'third way' economic management was designed to extend consumerism to a greater proportion of the population. Some redistribution of private income and state-based intervention to achieve higher levels of employment were necessary, but the overall aim was to stimulate consumption – particularly among the working class. In developing mechanisms to stabilise capital, Keynes and Beveridge crucially accepted the likelihood that America would remain

economically hegemonic, and their intention was to foster and work with that hegemony.

In recent decades, when cultural studies has engaged with the topic of Americanisation the idea of 'intention' has become almost anathema; and there is a reluctance to debate the concept in the economic, political and class terms of the 50s and 60s. One explanation for this narrowing of the Americanisation debate is the success of theory itself, from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. In the 50s and 60s, cultural theory was more obviously an 'organic' outgrowth of lived experience and a product of very public discussions about social change as it was unfolding. In the latter twentieth century, as poststructuralisms and postmodernisms cascaded, there was a sense that theory became almost disembodied: a discrete intellectual pursuit, disconnected from the society it claimed to describe or analyse.

In the theoretically dense atmosphere of the early 90s, Andrew Milner wrote that Raymond Williams was right to suggest that theory had a vital role to play in transforming society. Milner added, however, that to affirm this was to break decisively with postmodernist cultural forms and their variously structuralist, poststructuralist, post-marxist, and poststructuralist feminist theoretical limitations. Milner shared Williams' scepticism about the type of 'pseudo-radical' intellectual practice which could unproblematically accept the complete blurring of 'minority culture' and 'mass communications'. The older modernisms and minority institutions which once 'threatened to destabilise the certainties of bourgeois life' had become a new '"post-modernist" establishment' that accepted the deep structures of human inadequacy and transferred its deep structures into effectively popular cultural forms, in film, TV and fiction'. Thus, postmodernist intellectuals paradoxically looked for resistances to this culture in its own mass media artefacts (*Contemporary Cultural*

Theory 122-123). Critiques of power were displaced by celebrations of pleasure; fantasies of resistance and empowerment superseded the imperative to examine the productive capacities of culture industries. This theoretical turn to populism was blatantly impatient with the very idea of manipulation; and its imaginary public was endowed with endless aptitudes for decoding, appropriating and reworking anything consumer-capitalism produced (Jameson *Late Marxism* 142).

Dick Hebdige's *Hiding in the Light* (1988) and Philip and Roger Bell's *Americanization and Australia* (1998) usefully illustrated how this utopian impulse in cultural theory decisively shifted the direction of debates about Americanisation. Both texts showed how Americanisation had increasingly come to be viewed in terms of local resistances and the 'make over' of the products of America's culture industries. Even when the more intricate connections between culture, politics and economy *were* occasionally explored, the analysis of connection was diluted by the same assumptions about the relative harmlessness of American cultural influence and its easy local adaptation. This supplied the fundamental themes of Bell and Bell's *Americanization and Australia*.

Hebdige was a key player in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies research in the 70s. Birmingham School research attempted to fuse the intellectual traditions and socialist-humanist impulses of writers like Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and Richard Hoggart with the structuralist perspectives of Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser, and Antonio Gramsci's writings on hegemony. The Birmingham School approach, with its concentration on cultural practices as 'not merely the expression of lived experience but a "field of signification"', challenged Williams' idea of society as an indissoluble whole, founded on the single contradiction, capital and labour, which was 'linked by a series

of "correspondences"' to various cultural and political activities (Dworkin 50). The new Birmingham ethos, based on specificity and autonomous practice – difference rather than correspondence – led thinkers like Hebdige to focus on working-class youth subcultures as the precise embodiment of difference. From his early contributions on class and popular culture, such as 'The Meaning of Mod' in Birmingham's seminal work on British youth, *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), Hebdige's views on the subject evolved: by the 1980s, he considered the older maps, which looked at the popular as a 'knowable terrain crossed by class, race and gender' as less persuasive than 'the discourses of identity and desire offered by marketing and advertising practices'. Hebdige was convinced that the culturalist legacy had hamstrung cultural studies from taking seriously the role of 'disposable' culture and properly understanding its vocabulary of desire, aspiration and identity (Webster, 'Pessimism, Optimism, Pleasure' 566). It was logical, then, given the reach of American cultural apparatuses in the western world after WWII, that arguments for more positive understandings of popular culture involved looking again at assumptions about America's role in establishing the vocabulary of the popular from the 50s and 60s. Consequently, Hebdige's *Hiding in the Light* devoted a whole chapter, 'Towards a Cartography of Taste', to Americanisation.

This thesis argues that there are, indeed, compelling reasons to revisit Americanisation debates from the 50s and 60s, but with a very different emphasis. Rather than simply tracing the American sources of popular culture's vocabulary, it is important to reconsider the evidence that writers and commentators of the 50s and 60s were deeply ambivalent, sceptical or affrighted by the phenomenon labelled 'Americanisation'. This mind-set was cued by the reckoning that Americanisation was not a benign process, but motivated by a set of intentions which had potentially

harmful effects. In the 50s and 60s, notions of resistance, appropriation and localisation were certainly available, but they were not theoretical orthodoxy. Actually, they were flash-points for frequently heated arguments about class consciousness, social ferment, economic 'reform', communal change and cultural sovereignty. Ironically, the critical response to American populism in the 50s and 60s can be re-read as more sophisticated and far-reaching than it was in post-70s cultural studies. Before the 'dissociation of theoretical sensibility' in the 70s, when theory was steadily detached from a politics of experience, Americanisation debates involved questions of real power, economics, cultural domination and homogenisation, public order, and the fracturing of social contracts – not just fashion, style, attitude, desire and identity. Those Americanisation debates were simultaneous in Britain and Australia, conducted in the undissociated disciplines of sociology, politics, economics and cultural theory – disciplines which were all anchored in the concern with material experience as it was being lived. The manner in which literature interconnected with these other forms of thought in the period was remarkable: in both Britain and Australia, fiction about working-class life embodied and dramatised complex, critical positions on change and class consciousness.

British and Australian fiction in the 50s and 60s incorporated the same intellectual confusions about transformations in working-class life that appeared in sociology, cultural theory and politics. Given this, it is reasonable to ask why the emergence of that fiction in both countries has been little remarked upon. The answer to that question lies partly in old, but persistent, arguments about what constitutes 'working-class literature'; and the critical tendency, even where there is agreement on the existence of such a distinctive literary category, to analyse texts dealing with working-class issues inside strict national boundaries.

With a string of conservative electoral successes in Britain and Australia at the time, based largely on the promise of economic well-being, it is understandable that the production of so many British and Australian novels with working-class themes in the 50s and 60s has intrigued literary critics with an interest in novels about working-class life. Ingrid von Rosenberg, for example, has called it an 'amazing paradox'. By her count, at least fifty novels of working-class life were published in Britain between 1953 and 1964: a period matching almost exactly the duration of unbroken Conservative rule, 'today rather nostalgically called the years of "affluence"' (145). Periodising differently, Ian Syson makes a similar observation in the Australian context: 'if ever there was a golden age of Australian working-class writing it was between the end of World War II and 1970', when a significant number of writers 'wrote about work, workers and working life, often with the aid of first-hand experience' and 'out of sympathy with working-class people and their cultural, social, political and industrial organizations' ('Fired from the Canon' 78).

For Rosenberg, the appearance of this body of writing complicates the notion that the working class becomes a preoccupation only in times of crisis: 'the picture offered by the 50s and early 60s proves that obviously working-class literature can bloom just as well in times of relative prosperity' (145). Or was it, rather, that the 50s and 60s constituted a different kind of crisis for the working class? This thesis proposes that the period *did* precipitate a crisis in working-class life and consciousness; involving reactions to international, as well as national, cultural and political developments – and this proposition raises another question. If one accepts claims like those made by Rosenberg and Syson, if not of a 'golden age' then at least for a time in which intense interest in the condition of the working class permeated public discourse in Britain and Australia, why has there been little work comparing

the phenomenon as it occurred in both countries? It may be, as Ian Reid pointed out in his comparative study of Australian and New Zealand literature dealing with the Great Depression, that the process of cross-cultural measurement – of studying 'not only the general links between literature and society but also of the socio-literary patterns of two different countries side by side' – seems dauntingly complex and is thus seldom done.

But it *can* be done if 'two countries are included so that they can serve as mutual referents in a dialectical pattern', thus providing insights into the general nature of relations between literature and society while 'avoiding dangers that sometimes attend insulated criticism' (Reid x-xi). By avoiding chauvinistic and narrow demarcations, a comparative study might also identify, via the framing device of literature, the effects of supranational cultural, political and economic forces – like those originating in America – on two national communities in the same historical era. To compare British and Australian representations of the working class in this way, then, is not to insist on 'constants' or 'fixed lineaments', but rather to be guided by the 'simple instinct of curiosity' about what they revealed of broader 'developing tendencies within the working class' (Reid xi). Nevertheless, Reid's reference to insularity provides the strongest clue that it might be an institutional aspect of literary criticism itself – a sort of self-limiting effect – which must be circumvented by the researcher pursuing the sort of comparison this thesis attempts. Works dealing with working-class themes have been overwhelmingly considered in terms of their production in national cultural formations, and according to ideas about literary traditions. Consequently, there is a compulsion to rework already exhaustive debates: is there an authentic 'working-class literature'; are there not crucial cultural

differences between Britain and Australia and insurmountable barriers to comparative literary studies?

This thesis starts rather from the vicinity of Raymond Williams' observation that the simplest descriptive novel about working-class life already, 'by being written, is a significant and positive cultural intervention': noting how that comment applies to the marginal area of literary criticism interested in recuperating novels from the 50s and early 60s on the grounds that their detailed explorations of the daily lives of working people constituted important, differently-angled historical windows into the period ('Working Class, Proletarian' 111). What is proposed here is to add to existing critical interventions by employing a differently accented method; a way of examining a number of those 50s and 60s Australian and British texts about the working class 'supranationally' (to borrow Reid's term). The aim is to concentrate on a cluster of novels whose remarkably consistent themes and discourses about vast social changes in the face of post-war modernising influences were importantly connected to their reflections on a range of important underlying assumptions about Americanisation. It is therefore an approach less interested in the notion of a canon of Australian and British working-class literature; less concerned with replaying arguments about what actually constitutes working-class literature, authentic working-class voices, or valuing only those works that seemed to qualify as somehow self-representative of their class. Rather, the intention is to explore the way that all representations of the working class are, as Williams pointed out, cultural interventions – constructed accounts of a class not exclusively by writers within that class, but which nevertheless recognise the pivotal role of that class in capitalist society. Such an approach is thus less preoccupied with the question of whether these texts were by worker-writers, or writers from a distinctly working-class background,

or authors and cultural analysts outside the working class, than it is with identifying their common attempts to document the complexity of working peoples' local responses to global economic, political and cultural shifts.

In Australia, much academic research into writing about the working class in the 50s and 60s has focused almost exclusively on internal Communist Party arguments over cultural policy, and the subsequent effects of those arguments on Left-oriented authors. This focus is understandable, given the difficulties of Australian writers on the Left during the Cold War. But this focus also overlooks the point that authors and commentators within the Party's orbit, like the general community, were experiencing the impact of the arrival of American-styled management, supermarkets, rock music and other new forms of mass entertainment and media. Consequently, the critical emphasis on questions of authorial partisanship and party-political commitment has tended to avoid a discussion of the complex themes and diversity of views that even Communist-influenced fictional texts expressed about social and cultural changes in the period. Party dictations and doctrines about the portrayal of workers and working-class life were frequently ignored. Depictions of the position of workers in the new 'acquisitive society' were often confused and ambivalent, testifying that doctrinal boundaries were regularly transgressed in literary practice.

In Britain, critical appraisals of writing about the working class in the period have been similarly trapped within a set of formulaic approaches. British 'working-class writing' is strictly categorised: it belongs either to the mode of anti-establishment yet generally apolitical 'anger', or to the 'kitchen-sink' genre of novels and plays appealing to nostalgic ideas about the regional working classes. Again, conventional critical positions have tended to avoid the complex thematic layering in

the period's writing: the common literary linkage that asserted a vital connection between local changes in everyday life, the weakening of the British class structure, larger national political, economic and cultural transformations, and international pressures – meaning the particular influence of America.

In 'Working Class, Proletarian, Socialist: Problems in Some Welsh Novels', Raymond Williams noted the post-war persistence of writing that documented movements out of the working class (upward social mobility) or nostalgically pictured the working class as 'history', disconnected from present realities. Williams argued for an end to these representational restrictions, and for broadening the *writing* about working-class concerns from a Left or socialist perspective. He also implied much that could be usefully applied to *reading* representations of the working class. Williams suggested a generally socialist approach for examining the cultural, social and political milieux of the post-war period that might reveal the multiplicity of *contemporary* influences on working-class life; a critical practice exploring greater complexities and interrelationships in post-war 'working-class' texts:

> The purity of 'working-class fiction' refused, sometimes, for the exploration of class relations and class developments, and for that difficult contact, beyond local interactions, with what is truly systematic, the working class visibly *within* a system. Recognitions indeed of the working class still making itself, though now in diverse ways. Recognitions also of it being made, remade, deprived of its identity for a bargain. The risk here of proletarian pieties. Stick to the fact not the idea of a proletariat, and seek forms in which the changes can be shown and interpreted, rather than the received shapes

imposed. Changes within the class, but then also the contradictory class locations: not only intellectuals but technicians, some managers and administrators; these not only in their subjective traverse from working-class childhood to adult relocation or contradiction; also in their objective trajectory, towards contesting places in a contested system. (119)

This partly restated the analysis of culture Williams first proposed in *The Long Revolution* (1961): the study of relationships between 'elements in a whole way of life'. Yet it is an approach which still has considerable implications for a project like this thesis: a comparative literary and cultural study re-examining two Anglophone nations experiencing dramatic, parallel shifts in their workers' economic, political and cultural lives in the same period. The key word in Williamsite analysis is 'pattern': 'it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned' (*The Long Revolution* 46-47). And as this thesis argues, the characteristic 'patterns' of British and Australian post-war discourses on the working class were attributable in no small way to the direct and indirect results of American supremacy: in economy, politics and culture. Anglo-Australian discussions of the transformation of working-class life and consciousness were co-ordinated by the concept of 'Americanisation'.

It is difficult to establish exactly when the term 'Americanisation' was first used, but its conceptual mobilisation – the view of 'America' as an origin-point of

social upheavals in other parts of the world – has a substantial history. As Duncan Webster points out, 'America' was an important component of Matthew Arnold's 1869 critique *Culture and Anarchy* (*Looka Yonder!* 180): as a notional cause of the disruptions accompanying massification, urbanisation, industrialisation and consumerism. With the onset of the Cold War, Arnold's heirs revived his 'culture and society' arguments – applying them in anxious Anglo-Australian observations that Second World War strategic alliances with America had prepared the way for unprecedented American political, economic, and cultural penetration of national polities.

In the 50s and 60s, Britain's Americanisation debates generally formed a negative consensus: in Arnoldian terms, Americanisation was equated with 'levelling down'. As Dick Hebdige observes, this articulated a cultural conservatism extending across political lines: it was shared by writers as diverse as Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis and Richard Hoggart. These critics and commentators were united by concerns about the erosion of fundamental 'British' values and attitudes, and the 'levelling down' of moral and aesthetic standards: processes co-extensive with the arrival of consumer goods, 'either imported from America or designed and manufactured on "American Lines"' (*Hiding in the Light* 47). For Hebdige, Evelyn Waugh's death-bed list of contemptible things that reflected the immorality, subversiveness, or inauthenticity of American modernity, from plastic to jazz, was damning evidence of xenophobia amongst the era's high-cultural arbiters (*Hiding in the Light* 47). The same tendency was manifest in J.B. Priestley's idea of 'Admass'. In his coffee-table book *The English* (1973), Priestley was still defining 'Admass' in terms of an American 'scale' of doing things which corroded both minority high culture and working-class culture alike:

It is safe to say that while Englishness may reluctantly accept bigness, its monsters are never heartily welcomed. They look all right in America, itself so large, but seem altogether out of scale in England. Along with the demand for bigness goes a demand for severe efficiency often quite rational but not reasonable, therefore alien to Englishness. A further necessary demand, to feed the monster with higher and higher figures and larger and larger profits, is for enormous advertising campaigns and brigades of razor-keen salesmen. (241)

Like Waugh, Priestley responded to America in almost apocalyptic terms, identifying America as a fully automated society and *the* homogenising agent of destructive modernity (Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light* 52). In this view, everything from rock music (considered so morally offensive and 'inauthentic' by institutions like the BBC) to the shape of a motor car was contaminated when the adjective 'Americanised' was attached to it. Likewise, Richard Hoggart's frequent use of the term 'streamlined' in his 1957 analysis of the effects of popular culture on the working class, *The Uses of Literacy*, typified the shorthand developed by British writers for a critique of 'perfidious "American influence"' (Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light* 58).

From the late 60s, however, a growing number of commentators concluded that this culturalist legacy had hamstrung cultural studies from taking seriously the role of 'disposable' culture and properly understanding its vocabulary of desire, aspiration and identity (Webster, 'Pessimism, Optimism, Pleasure' 566). Thus, in later decades, 'Americanisation' has often been applied in a way that reverses the term's

older culturalist connotations. By the late 70s, Hebdige emerged as one of the most influential critics advocating an alternative anti-conservative definition of Americanisation. His key move was to advocate a totally new economy in which superstructure was paramount: 'an economy of consumption, of the signifier, of endless replacement, supercession, drift and play', which in turn required a new language of dissent (*Hiding in the Light* 71). And that new language was contained in the new range of material commodities that had been made available after WWII. Hebdige found little evidence that 'levelling down', the eradication of social and cultural differences imputed to American economic and cultural domination, had taken place 'at least in the form [older conservative critics] predicted' (*Hiding in the Light* 73) – homogenisation, the passive surrender of young working-class people to American-styled consumption. Rather, Americanisation provoked active appropriation: self-determined negotiations of local identity, the imposition of local meanings on foreign fashions and commodities (Webster, *Looka Yonder!* 185). The crucial argument here, becoming cultural studies orthodoxy by the late 80s, stressed the significance of 'style' and 'symbolic' resistance to the power of consumer capitalism. For Hebdige, the sheer plethora of available youth cultural options, refracted through a mythical America, offered a 'rich iconography, a set of symbols, objects and artefacts which can be assembled and re-assembled by different groups in a literally limitless number of combinations.' This meant that the homogenised youth style so deplored by cultural conservatives was not the 'dull reflex of a group of what Hoggart called "tamed and directionless helots" to a predigested set of norms and values' but, rather, 'an attempt at imposition and control' and a significant 'symbolic act' of self-assertion (74). Appropriation and symbolic resistance were acts that 'removed' working-class youth from traditional social emplacements.

In the Australian context, Philip and Roger Bell's edited essay collection *Americanization and Australia* (1998) is the acme of critical studies devoted exclusively to Americanisation debates. Bell and Bell's introductory remarks broadly concur with Hebdige: America's agency in global, homogenising change is limited and always 'glocalised'. As the Bells insist, 'the varied responses provoked by Americanisation, along with the different readings of America's cultural forms which characterised reception beyond its national borders, qualified arguments about the homogenising power of its culture […] as the arguments in this volume suggest, cultural interrelatedness, exchange and diversity, not Americanised uniformity, remain' (5). Thus, 'Americanisation' is indiscriminately used to 'label an array of factors seen as threatening to national(istic) identity, way of life or values'. Bell and Bell therefore took a positive view of theoretical developments which, since the 80s, had shifted discussions of American influence from the old 'culture and society' arguments connoting 'unilateral domination, cultural infiltration, and alarmist fears focused on the transforming power of the "centre over the periphery"', to 'metaphors of mediation, seduction, translation, negotiation and creolisation' (5-6).

Given such theoretical proclivities, the essays in *Americanisation and Australia* are almost unanimously optimistic about the American-Australian cultural dialogue, notwithstanding editorial claims that the collection looks at negative and destructive results as well. And just as Hebdige's arguments about symbolic resistance and adaptation over-determined Americanisation debates in superstructural terms, so Bell and Bell's 'hybridisation' and 'creolisation' approach seems unproblematic when it accounts for the Australian reception of American popular-cultural trends, texts and artefacts.

In contrast, this thesis prefers a very different application of the term 'Americanisation' – one which became almost disreputable under the theoretical reign of poststructuralisms and postmodernisms. This application is preferred because it pays attention to the complex relationship between America's 'soft power' (movies, television, music) and local acquiescence over time, in both Britain and Australia, to the 'hard power' of processes derived from American models: political and industrial relations methods, for example (Adams, 'Phillip Adams' 54). Consequently, this is why the thesis examines work, working-class life, political consciousness, consumer society, the organisation of leisure and youth cultures as elements of an interrelated field: a field mapped in the post-war period by the diverse forms and projections of American power. Indeed, the thesis explores this field of inter-relationships to test the proposition that it constitutes a hegemonic, imperial system.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said wrote that there is no way 'of apprehending the world from within American culture (with a whole history of exterminism and incorporation behind it) without also apprehending the imperial contest itself' (66). Said contended that this view was routinely circumvented or occluded in recent cultural and literary theory: 'to read most cultural deconstructionists, or Marxists, or new historicists is to read writers whose political horizon, whose historical location is within a society and culture deeply enmeshed in imperial domination' (66). Yet little notice had been taken of this imperial enclosure because of a false separation that features in contemporary analyses of cultural change. As Said reasoned, 'the problem of representation is deemed central, yet rarely is it put in its full political context, a context that is primarily imperial.' On one side, he wrote, there is 'an isolated cultural sphere, believed to be freely and unconditionally available to weightless theoretical speculation and investigation, and,

on the other, a debased political sphere, where the real struggle is supposed to occur.' The net effect of this was a mistaken acceptance that 'the two spheres are separated, whereas the two are not only connected but ultimately the same.' This is a 'radical falsification', whereby 'Culture is exonerated of any entanglements with power, representations are considered only as political images to be parsed and construed as so many grammars of exchange, and the divorce of the present from the past is assumed to be complete' (66-67).

If American expansionism has been principally economic, it has been crucially abetted and moves in step with cultural ideals and ideologies about America itself, manifested in a monotony of 'schemes, phrases, or theories produced by successive generations to justify the serious responsibilities of American global reach' (350). And when this battery of ideas and ideologies was trained on the rest of the world, the effects were not harmless. Said outlined how, particularly since the 1950s, 'a truly amazing conceptual arsenal – theories of economic phrases, social types, traditional societies, systems transfers, pacification, social mobilization, and so on – had been deployed throughout the world; universities and think tanks received huge government subsidies to pursue these ideas, many of which commanded the attention of strategic planners and policy experts in (or close to) the United States government' (351). In other words, this twinning of power and legitimacy – one in the world of direct domination, the other in the cultural sphere – was a characteristic of a classic imperial hegemony; specifically marked in the American century by 'the quantum leap in the reach of America's cultural authority' and expedited by 'the unprecedented growth in the apparatus for the diffusion and control of information' (352).

In 2002, Perry Anderson's major *New Left Review* editorial, 'Force and Consent', complimented the continuing validity and explanatory power of Said's

work – restating a number of *Culture and Imperialism*'s observations about the hegemonic functioning of America as superpower. Following Said, Anderson noted that post-war international capitalism, with American power at its centre, could never be conclusively imposed by brute force: it required a 'genuine capacity of persuasion – ideally, a form of leadership that can offer the most advanced model of production and culture of its day, as target of imitation for all others'. And this is the very definition of hegemony 'as a *general* unification of the field of capital' (21).

In this assessment, American direction (as opposed to domination) of the globe did not rest simply on ideological creed. As Anderson pointed out, the power of what Antonio Gramsci theorised as Fordism – the development of scientific management and the world's first assembly lines – lay in its technical and organisational innovations. By the 1920s, this model of production made America the richest society in existence, and it was accompanied by an eminently successful cultural model. American hegemony was fostered by a seductive 'imaginary': initially created for America itself, then projected onto the world via Hollywood and other culture industries (24). Said also recognised this intrinsic need in hegemonic powers for self-justifying narratives. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he mentioned V.G. Kiernan's observation that economic systems, like nations or religions, did not live by bread alone but by beliefs, visions and daydreams. In America's case, Said argued, the foundational American discourse of development and modernisation was also one of American exceptionalism (350-351); and it was Anderson's view too that the universality of Hollywood forms – a key aspect of American hegemony – derived from the originary task of exploiting exceptionalist myths. The language with which this was conveyed to the American public – simplified, repetitive, and stripped to the

most abstract, recursive common denominators – was then marketed internationally and with great success (24).

Anderson then moved to a crucial point that analysts concentrating on Americanisation as a primarily popular-superstructural phenomenon have signally missed: that the images of 'America' as model of production and culture cohered around 'the legal framework of production and culture alike; unencumbered property rights, untrammelled litigation, the invention of the corporation.' Anderson argued that this juridical system caused a 'disembedding [of] the market as far as possible from ties of custom, tradition or solidarity', and that 'American firms like American films' became 'exportable and reproducible across the world, in a way no other competitor could match' (25). While local economic, social and cultural paradigms still often looked – and in some ways remained – intact and different, Anderson argued that this merely disguised the real tendencies of an essentially unidirectional post-war transformation. After WWII, countries like Britain and Australia were simultaneously cajoled and coerced into deep structural adjustments along American lines: 'from labour-market flexibility, shareholder value and defined contributions to media conglomerates, workfare and reality TV, the drift has been away from traditional patterns towards the American standard' (26).

This is a deeper structural reading of 'Americanisation' than those emphasising relatively benign or positive processes of imitation, transfer, negotiation, hybridisation and resistance (Bell & Bell 12). And it clarifies the proposal of this thesis: that in post-war Britain and Australia, America was a dominant discursive presence in all fields, including literary fiction. The process called 'Americanisation' was a set of intersecting, related preoccupations with American influences that extended beyond economic and technological realities to encompass the myths of 'the

American way of life'. This thesis argues that the pervasive interest in 'Americanism', an integral part of both British and Australian daily life in the 50s and 60s, is a point of legitimation for a cross-national cultural analysis of the period. And as a reading of primary-source documents reveals, this material and discursive saturation is historically demonstrable.

Consequently, the opening chapter of this thesis – 'America as Reality and Perception' – begins by examining historical similarities between the economics and politics of welfare capitalism in post-war Britain and Australia. The chapter then considers how the major economic and philosophical assumptions underpinning Anglo-Australian welfare capitalism, formulated by John Maynard Keynes and Ernest Beveridge, acted as levers for the British and Australian integration into a globalising order dominated by the United States. In both countries, the state played a vital role in areas of acute concern to the working classes: employment conditions, wages, economic management. Under the cloak of the European Recovery Program (colloquially known as 'the Marshall Plan') in Britain, and via close contacts between Australian business 'think-tanks' and their American counterparts, the post-war period also realised a long-advocated dream of leading American tycoons: the advancement of American capitalism, the consolidation of Fordist industrial production and mass consumption in other countries by deliberate and concerted efforts, parcelled with the promotion of 'America' as 'a way of life'. The chapter argues that the cult of increased consumption, and the importance attached to economics in the 50s and 60s, merged with incessant talk of affluence, producing a myth of 'people's capitalism' and the utopian suggestion that class boundaries were evaporating. At the same time, the chapter discusses how the rise of working-class youth as a major consumer-cohort in Britain and Australia saw the promise of a new

social cohesion, achieved through American levels of consumption, confounded: challenged by the counter-myth of America as agent of social and moral degradation. The chapter concludes by examining a germinal 'moral panic' – the 'comics debates' – in Britain and Australia in the 50s: the template for subsequent public eruptions in Britain and Australia involving youth, class, morality and American cultural influences. The comics debates show the parallel development of Anglo-Australian anti-Americanism, the emergence of common fears about the corrosive effects of American popular culture, and how those broader fears were displaced onto working-class youth. 'American comics' was shorthand for the darker, destabilising forces of the new prosperity and doubts about 'never had it so good' sloganeering.

Chapter two, 'Myths of Affluence', moves on to discuss how a group of British and Australian novels depicting working-class life consistently challenged the era's 'we've never had it so good' rhetoric: in Britain, Jack Lindsay's *Betrayed Spring* (1953), Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) and Clancy Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock* (1960); in Australia, Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* (1959), Ralph de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos* (1964) and Mena Calthorpe's *The Dyehouse* (1964). These novels all contest dominant ideas and cant concerning post-war affluence and its capacity to erode class boundaries. This reasonably unified resistant trend is contextualised with reference to British and Australian post-war Keynesian compacts on welfare capitalism: a system that recognised the welfare state's major role in managing economies increasingly tilted towards an American-styled consumption model. The chapter evaluates the recurrent theme of an American ideology of consumption insinuating itself into Australian and British conceptions of 'the good life', using critical re-evaluations of Americanisation and post-war British and Australian politics and economic planning such as Anthony Carew's *Labour*

Under the Marshall Plan (1987), David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), Mark Rolfe's 'The Promise and Threat of America in Australian Politics' (1997) and Richard White's 'The Australian Way of Life' (1979). The chapter further asserts the common ground of these fictional texts and the era's 'minority' mass-press opinion pieces, which created controversy by pointing out that despite inarguable gains under welfare capitalism poverty persisted, full employment was often regionally unattainable, and welfare state bureaucracy was harsh. The novels in question can be read as rehearsals for discussions of the crisis of the welfare state which appeared in important sociological works like Richard Titmuss' 'Goals of Today's Welfare State'(1965) and Andre Gorz's 'Work and Consumption' (1965).

In short, the novels under discussion here suggest that post-war affluence, with 'America' as its guiding myth, was elusive and conditional for many British and Australian working people. The authors discussed in chapter two also brought attention to specific aspects of the ideology of affluence which have received surprisingly little attention since. Only recently, a small number of British and Australian socio-historical studies – like John Rule's 'Time, Affluence and Private Leisure: the British Working Class in the 1950s and 1960s' (2001) – have revisited issues canvassed in the period's fiction: mass media promotion of consuming habits; media inducements for wary working-class families to embrace debt and heavy hire-purchase commitments; the awareness that these attitudinal changes put pressures on traditional working-class values and allegiances.

Chapter three, 'Working-class Consciousness and Social Change', examines primary-source evidence that the introduction of American management practices and reduction of trades union power was a covert condition of American Marshall Plan aid in Britain, with effects that extended well into the 50s and 60s. Historical re-

evaluations of Australian industrial relations in the same period suggest that even without an equivalent Marshall-style agreement, exponential direct and subsidiary American investment in Australia following WWII guaranteed that the effects of post-war American 'productivity' and anti-union ideology were as keenly felt in Australian workplaces. The chapter brackets Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Margot Heinemann's *The Adventurers* (1960), Jack Lindsay's *Moment of Choice* (1955), Raymond Williams' *Second Generation* (1964) in Britain, and de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos*, Calthorpe's *Dyehouse* and Hewett's *Bobbin Up* in Australia: reading them as narratives commenting on the impact of resurgent Taylorism and the implementation of Americanised managerialism. The chapter emphasises a discursive contrast: the novels portrayed difficult changes on the factory floor; mainstream newspapers and business media propagandised the idea that international modernising influences resulted in more 'worker-friendly' management practices. The period's fiction suggests, either directly or obliquely, that the changes most detrimental to British and Australian workers resulted from organised industrial interference cued by American production-line models. Adding weight to this literary expression, revisionist histories of the Marshall Plan – Rhiannon Vickers' *Manipulating Hegemony* (2000), Michael J. Hogan's 'American Planners and the Search for a European Neocapitalism' (1985) – highlight the fact that the state and labour institutions colluded to disseminate American productivity ideology to workers from the late 1940s onwards. Furthermore, public documents like Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956) are evidence of the role American management and efficiency ideology played in a classic hegemonic battle for the 'hearts and minds' of workers in the post-war years. Crosland's gushing admiration for American capitalism and management in his prescription for British Labour's future reflected

the general discursive language in which the contest was conducted. It also indicated the acceptance of American free-market ideology in labour politics.

Williams' *Second Generation* and de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos* suggest that British and Australian managers in the 50s and 60s camouflaged their introduction of practices like 'piece work' and the 'speed up' by reverting to the language and psychological methods of 'humane management', adopted from American business schools. Thus, there is a comparison between the fictional account of this emergent working culture and American management manifestoes like Peter Drucker's *The Practice of Management* (1955); local journals endorsing American-styled management in the 50s and 60s; and the attitudes of managers and workers revealed in workplace sociologies such as Huw Beynon's 'Controlling the Line' (1977) – a study of a British Ford Motor Company plant in the early 60s.

The novels discussed routinely spotted the effects of 'scientific management' on old allegiances – especially when British and Australian workers realised that new arrangements like speed up, piece-work and overtime squeezed their union representatives between employer interests, workers' interests and self-interest. To situate fictional accounts of workers under duress, conflicting with employers and shop stewards alike, the chapter also references academic studies of the political implications of workplace change in the period: Michael Kidron's *Western Capitalism Since the War (*1968), Perry Anderson's 'The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action' (1977), Bob Connell and Terry Irving's *Class Structure in Australian History* (1980), Alex Carey's *Taking the Risk out of Democracy: Propaganda in the US and Australia* (1995), Peter Cochrane's 'Doing Time' (1998), Christopher Wright's 'From Shop Floor to Boardroom' (2000), Lawrence Black's 'Still at the Penny-Farthing Stage' (2000). These studies crucially suggest that the novels surveyed in this chapter

tapped into genuine, parallel anxieties in Britain and Australia in their time: about fragmentation, de-radicalisation, and a decline in mass political involvement among working people – anxieties appearing later in neo-Marxist polemics on working-class organisation under twentieth-century capitalism. The novels examined in this chapter, written *within* the tumult of modernising transformations, are layered with ambiguities and uncertainties. Their authors contributed to developments in the period's sociological and cultural theory, which increasingly saw disciplinary and artistic boundaries blurred: the hesitations they exhibit are symptomatic of the period's confusions about class identity and consciousness.

Chapters four and five pursue the view that literary works are cultural interventions: existing beside, or entwined with, other interventions in politics, economics, sociology and psychology to articulate the patterns, interrelationships and recurrent themes that might define an historical period. Consequently, chapters four and five concentrate on the period theme of generational change and conflict: an obsession of sociology, psychology, mass-media sensationalism, nascent cultural theory and literature in the 50s and 60s. These chapters read two British and two Australian novels about working-class youth – Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* (1960) and Sid Chaplin's *The Day of the Sardine* (1961), Christopher Koch's *The Boys in the Island* (1958) and Gavin Casey's *Amid the Plenty* (1962) – in the context of public discourses on 'the youth problem'. These 'literary' texts connect comprehensively with, are part of, public and academic concerns in the society that produced them: preoccupations that 'extended into sociological work on youth, where attention focused on teenage affluence and the corrupting influence of Americanisation, the sexual morality of youth and the quality of their state education' (Pickering & Robins 361-362). All four novels display troubled ambivalences: despite

the seductions of new modes of leisure and consumption, youngsters would inevitably adjust to consumerist ('Americanised') temptations in a way that was still consistent with traditional working-class solidarity and identity. However, in romanticising the possibility of working-class continuity, these novels revert to available stereotypes of the 50s and 60s youth as consumerist delinquent – and the opinion that Americanisation is primarily a form of moral and cultural decay and a threat to national character.

The final chapter, on working-class youth subcultures and debates concerning resistance and exploitation, reads three texts which apparently announce the empowerment of British and Australian youth in the period. American jazz and rock music are vital thematic reference points in all three novels: in Britain, Colin MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners* (1959); in Australia, Criena Rohan's *The Delinquents* (1962) and Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* (1965). All three represent a comparatively rare viewpoint in the late 50s and early 60s: a celebration of youth culture's potential liberations. But this combative break with the 'culture and society' mentality that sparked moral panics, and the open championship of rebellious working-class youth, is underwritten by contradictory impulses. There is a triumphal belief that youth subcultures offer new identities, less welded to class – a belief that scorned the policing of working-class youth and the enforcement of 'traditional' roles. But there is also a dark understanding of the relationship between youth and the culture industries which provide the raw material for subcultural styles. Despite their celebrations of youthful rebelliousness, MacInnes, Rohan and Mudrooroo share residual concerns about manipulation: a critical intelligence that artefacts or fashions appropriated by local working-class subcultures are ultimately produced by remote and callous culture industries, integrally tied to the complex hegemonic (or imperial) conduct of

American post-war capitalism. The implication of this, Alan Sinfield observes, is that the momentary self-importance of youthful rebellion has a limited ability to know the industrial-cultural forces which simultaneously cause and harness disaffection.

Sinfield maintains that the spectre of working-class youth abjuring customary social values was disturbing in the 50s and early 60s, but the 'danger' posed by youth subcultures – British Teddy Boys and Australian Bodgies – was illusory: 'their futile posturing and violence towards people no better off than themselves typifies the difficulty of perceiving, in welfare-capitalism, a constructive outlet for dissidence'. As young rebels, Teds and Bodgies were 'deploying a fantasy image of US cultural power against a home situation that offered them little' *(Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* 156). But the anomaly that icons and styles of working-class youth insurrection derived from the same structured political entity that limited and regulated youth's actual life – America – was troublingly evident and inscribed in the pages of *Absolute Beginners*, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling*. In this regard, the jubilant identification of post-war working-class youth subcultures as great ancestral sources of liberational 'identity politics' needs considerable adjustment. The appeals to appropriation or creolisation from Dick Hebdige and Philip and Roger Bell are not only questioned by critics like Sinfield: they are interrogated in literary documents of the 50s and 60s.

British and Australian writing about the working classes in the 50s and early 60s had a palpable sense that the period was a critical moment in the international extension of post-war capitalism in its predominantly American formations. The nexus of economics, politics, work, leisure, consuming habit, family life and class affiliation pivoted on the ubiquity of 'America' in British and Australian society in the period. This thesis surveys literary records of the time, averring that in novels

which are seldom read today there was an immense sophistication on theories of 'Americanisation'; an abiding suspicion that Anglo-Australian capitulation to American myths of classlessness and economic-cultural supremacy would irrevocably change national polities – and the life and consciousness of 'the people'.

Chapter 1

America as Reality and Perception

Historians re-examining the role of the United States in British and Australian 'recoveries' after WWII conclude that American influence extended beyond economic penetration: it involved ideological realignments and psychological shifts in national social fabrics. In the British context, Anthony Carew's *Labour Under the Marshall Plan* (1987) and David Ellwood's 'You Too Can Be Like Us: Selling The Marshall Plan' (1998) view the Marshall Plan as more than a post-war agreement for America to supply scarce basic resources. Carew and Ellwood argue that Marshall's core business was misrecognised: that the Plan's ostensible aims – the delivery of humanitarian aid, a bulwark against Communism – masked the central promotion of an 'American way of life'. Using Marshall documents and the comments of leading American players, they demonstrate that the motivation to establish America as apex of economic and social modernity in British and western European minds was surprisingly overt, if underappreciated at the time. As Ellwood puts it, Marshall aimed 'to get as close as possible to the people it was benefiting in order to channel attitudes, mentalities and expectations in the direction Americans understood, the direction of mass-consumption prosperity' (34).

Australian historians Richard White, Tim Rowse and Mark Rolfe trace a similar intensification in Australia throughout the 50s: the appeal to America as utopian consumer ideal. As in Britain, it suited Australian political rulers and that section of Australian capitalism aligning itself with the United States at the time to

graft an idea of the 'American way of life' onto local life-ways. Given the necessary role of working classes in accelerating post-war consumption, it was no coincidence that economic practices with particular working-class ramifications were integral to the public representation of 'America'. In Britain, Harry Hopkins identified hire purchase in the mid-late 50s as one of the most obvious signs that consumption ideology was gradually accepted among the working class; and he noted the important role that positive reports about American experiences with consumer credit played in mitigating British working-class resistance to the idea of household debt (318). The same hire purchase revolution occurred in post-war Australia, where business leaders cited the American example in newspaper and journal articles to encourage the working class to abandon inhibitions about time payment. Likewise, Australian women's magazines of the 50s ran numerous stories about 'big New York stores trading exclusively in household gadgets', igniting the hope that there would be greater local availability of 'small labour-saving devices for the Australian housewife' (White, 'The Australian Way of Life' 539).

Inducements for the working classes to embrace consumption ideology were framed by the intentions and international pressures which lay behind the very similar form of welfare capitalism adopted by Britain and Australia after WWII. In one of the primary sources of these almost identical post-war settlements – the work of John Maynard Keynes – there was no attempt to disguise either the importance of consumption itself, or the perceptions and social aspirations which were seen as key drivers of its potential success.

Robert Skidelsky describes the economist Keynes as a product of his Victorian Nonconformist religious background, whose comparatively narrow social sympathies were also derived from the related nineteenth-century 'self-help' ethic. If Keynes'

own family had pulled itself up by the bootstraps, the same should be expected of others provided that there were enough jobs to go round. Keynes' mature view of capitalism was informed by two ostensibly contradictory views from his past: Nonconformist chapel-going led him to view capital with moral distaste; from the 'self-help' vantage point, he regarded it as a system that could survive with improved management, social planning and the provision of incentives to personal improvement (Skidelsky, *Keynes* 5). In *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*, Keynes made clear his respect for 'valuable human activities which require the motive of money-making and the environment of private wealth-ownership for their full fruition'. At the same time, 'prudence' and 'wisdom' were necessary for limiting inequalities of income and wealth (374). In other words, 'Keynes did not object (or object strongly) to the existing social order on the ground that it unfairly or unjustly distributed life-chances' (Skidelsky, *Keynes* 44). And whilst he admired the passion and utopianism of socialism, he rejected it as an economic remedy for capitalism; believing that as capitalism was 'socialising' itself, public ownership of the means of production was unnecessary (Skidelsky, *Keynes* 46-47). In these terms, the concluding notes to *The General Theory* included a statement decidedly at odds with later myths about Keynes the state interventionist: 'no obvious case is made out for a system of State Socialism which would embrace most of the economic life of the community' (378). Furthermore, in a 1944 letter to F.A. Hayek, on the publication of Hayek's classic free-market tract *The Road to Serfdom*, Keynes found himself 'in agreement with virtually the whole of it'; quibbling only about the limited extent of planning necessary to make capitalism efficient (Keynes, *Activities 1940–1946* 385). Indeed, a key element of Keynes' economic outlook predicated the road to full employment on

bolstering capitalism through measures aimed at raising the average propensity to consume (Middleton 25).

The other prominent welfare-state architect, Ernest Beveridge, was committed like Keynes to mollifying capitalism – not overthrowing it. However, in *Full Employment in a Free Society* (1944) Beveridge recognised the future necessity of greater direct state intervention than Keynes had envisaged in *The General Theory*. Beveridge argued:

> On the view taken in this Report, full employment is in fact attainable while leaving the conduct of industry in the main to private enterprise, and the proposals made in the Report are based on this view. But if, contrary to this view, it should be shown by experience or by argument that abolition of private property in the means of production was necessary for full employment, this abolition would have to be undertaken. (23)

But Beveridge shared Keynes' assessment that consumption and employment were equally important sides of the same coin. Beveridge's *Full Employment* emphasised the role of microeconomic mechanisms and the scope for redistribution to increase the public propensity to consume – more apparently than the work of Keynes. Beveridge wrote that 'some redistribution of private incomes, increasing the propensity to consume should be part of a full employment policy' (186); and his *Full Employment* announced a genuine commitment to eliminate the 'giant evils of Squalor, Disease and Ignorance' witnessed during the Great Depression, recognising that in a market economy 'there are many essential services which individuals cannot get for

themselves'. Even if parents wanted the best for their children, Beveridge reasoned, 'they cannot individually secure nursery schools, play-grounds, hospitals, libraries; they cannot individually secure good housing in healthy surroundings' (186). At the same time, Beveridge exhibited the Victorian moralism evident in Keynes: he doubted whether the working class could be trusted to consume in a 'responsible' manner in an unregulated market: 'in a free market economy under pressure of salesmanship the negroes of the Southern United States of America have, to a large extent, obtained automobiles and radios and have not obtained good housing, sanitation and medical service' (186).

Notwithstanding the paternalism and moralism underlying this comment, it was significant that Beveridge turned to America for anecdotal evidence of how modern capitalism worked. This was an indicator of how strongly both Keynes and Beveridge believed that America would be *the* model for all national economies in the decades after the war, at least as far as patterns of consumption were concerned. Beveridge especially noted that while his plans in the first instance were for British reconstruction, the principles of his proposals for full employment were just as applicable to the enhancement – and adjustment – of America's capitalist economy. And Beveridge made it abundantly clear that Britain's production and consumption in the post-war years would more than ever be tied to what happened in the US: although, as his comments about the American south demonstrated, he was aware (and concerned) that unrestrained American-style consumer capitalism could not always be relied upon to provide life's basics (35).

On this basis, historians such as Arthur Marwick repeatedly argue that the emergence of the welfare state should be seen first and foremost as the product of a specific phase in capitalist development, precipitated by WWII. According to this

view, countries like Britain and Australia were locked into a new globalising order, in which America was the dominant economic presence by 1950. This meant that whatever national social and economic arrangements were adopted, they had to accommodate the fact of American hegemony ('The Labour Party and the Welfare State' 400). In Britain and Australia, therefore, all political parties after WWII were committed to some form of the welfare state, following Keynes's theory that this was the best means of stabilising capital. This desideratum was accepted so broadly that during Labour's term of office in Britain between 1945 and 1951, for example, the National Health Service Act of 1946 was the only major piece of welfare state legislation contested by the Conservatives (Marwick, 'The Labour Party and the Welfare State' 402). All other socio-economic legislation enjoyed multi-party support.

But social tensions generated by attempts to mediate between public and private interests emerged early in Britain. The mosaic of public services designed to lessen inequality quickly became what Marwick termed 'a crazy pavement'. Social security was 'a whole wilderness of qualification and requalification conditions and limits upon the length of time for which benefits would be paid', requiring an army of public servants to administer it. Housing policy was confused, advantaging the middle classes over the working classes because of its very principle of universality, while private insurance outside the state system was left unregulated – one of the most important reasons, according to Marwick, why the classless welfare state failed to materialise. Despite 'imposing chunks of [legislative and policy] masonry', the 'cement of social harmony and community spirit' promised by limited state intervention in the capitalist market was crumbling by the time Labour lost office in Britain in 1951 (Marwick, 'The Labour Party and the Welfare State' 401-402).

In Australia, too, Keynesianism had profound effects on public policy. By the end of WWII, the Federal Government explicitly accepted the need for economic control or management; a 1945 White Paper, *Full Employment in Australia*, symbolised this change in attitude (Whitwell 121). Herbert Cole Coombs, a chief contributor to Australian post-war planning, recalled how Prime Minister John Curtin returned from England in 1944 impressed by Beveridge's proposals on employment policy and their implications for Australia. So when Australia's own White Paper was tabled in parliament, it was hailed – like Beveridge's work – as the 'charter for a new social order' (Coombs 48; Macintyre 82). As in Britain, employment and residual social security were issues now taken seriously by all Australian political parties. Still, as Stuart Macintyre notes, despite a consensus that the horrors of the Great Depression must not be repeated there were conflicting interpretations of how a new social order should be constituted. The misgivings of the business community about potential levels and means of redistribution – flagged by socialist-minded advocates of the welfare state – filtered through to the Liberal Party. And while Liberals accepted the principle of protecting the needy, they were challenged to establish a balance between two considerations. Macintyre outlines their conundrum:

> If every citizen was left to fend for himself, then there would be
>
> intolerable extremes of comfort and despondency; but if the citizen
>
> was entitled to maintenance without personal effort, then all incentive
>
> would vanish. To combat the "dry rot" caused by citizens leaning on
>
> the state, the Liberals urged an insurance system rather than benefits
>
> from a tax-based National Welfare Fund; and to reward the prudent
>
> citizen and emphasise the principle of self-help, they wanted no

means test on benefits. But Menzies' dilemma was resolved by the government in a far more straightforward fashion, first by retaining a work test on benefits and second by pitching the level of benefits well below the level of wages. The efficacy of this modern continuation of the old nineteenth-century "less eligibility" principle was recognised by the Liberals when, upon assuming office in 1949, they failed to implement insurance or abolish the means test on social security. (86-87)

Consequently, by the 50s there were indications that the Keynes-Beveridge vision of government-guided economic control was compromised and in danger of collapse in Australia. The post-war settlement fell substantially short of original expectations, as it had in Britain, and was subject to limitations in the area of public policy. David Harvey is prominent among historians who argue that the reason for those limitations lay in the requirements of post-war capitalism itself. As Harvey explains, in all western countries after WWII the state assumed a variety of obligations; but these were geared principally to establish and enable stable conditions for mass production. The implications of this for working classes were both locally obvious and globally determined by a system of total economic arrangements:

Such policies were directed towards those areas of public investment – in sectors like transportation, public utilities, etc. – that were vital to the growth of both mass production and mass consumption, and which would guarantee relatively full employment. Governments likewise moved to provide a strong underpinning to the social wage

through expenditures covering social security, health care, education,
housing and the like. In addition, state power was deployed, either
directly or indirectly, to affect wage agreements and the rights of
workers in production. (135)

It is impossible, Harvey maintains, to underestimate the extent to which post-war
Fordist production and consumption – underwritten by welfare statism, Keynesian
economic management and control over wages – was an international affair. And the
special role of the state within the overall scheme of social regulation means that post-
war Fordism has to be seen 'less as a mere system of mass production and more as a
total way of life' (135).

That 'way of life' was consolidated and expanded in Britain from the late 40s:
initially via the Marshall Plan and, later, by direct American investment. The new
internationalism permitted 'surplus productive capacity in the United Sates to be
absorbed elsewhere, while the progress of Fordism internationally meant the
formation of global mass markets and the absorption of the mass of the world's
population, outside the communist world, into the global dynamics of a new kind of
capitalism'. Along with commodities, the new 'way of life' brought 'other activities
in its wake – banking, insurance, services, hotels, airports, and ultimately tourism'.
Harvey sees this as an uneven process: 'each state sought its own mode of
management of labour relations, monetary and fiscal policy, welfare and public
investment strategies, limited internally only by the state of class relations and
externally only by its hierarchical position in the world economy and by the fixed
exchange rate against the dollar'. But however uneven, this process was shaped and
secured under the 'hegemonic umbrella of the United States' financial and economic

power': the US acted as world banker, expecting in return that nation states would open commodity and capital markets to the power and penetration of large American corporations (137).

Post-war developments in Britain and Australia thus followed, in almost every respect, the directions that a number of prominent American business leaders had been advocating since the late 1930s. One of the most vocal, *Life* magazine's founder Henry Luce, believed that it should be the express intention of American capitalism in the latter twentieth century to 'establish dominance in the world' (qtd. in Swanberg, 180). Thus, Luce's *Life* editorial 'The American Century' (1941) demonstrates Harvey's point about the deliberate representation of American capitalism as an irresistible 'way of life':

> It is the manifest duty of this country to undertake to feed all the people of the world who as a result of this worldwide collapse of civilisation are hungry and destitute – all of them, that is, whom we can from time to time reach consistently with a very tough attitude toward all hostile governments. (qtd. in Swanberg, 181)

As W.A. Swanberg notes of this passage, the 'soft power' allusions make Luce's 'American Century' seem 'the 1941 version of Beveridge, singing the praises of an America so good and great that it must have no qualms about playing sahib' (181). But Luce was also frank about the economic motives behind the spread of American 'ideals', and his belief in the legitimacy of vigorous coercion when persuasion failed. It was a dream of almost messianic proportions:

> The vision of America as the principal guarantor of the freedom of
>
> the seas, the vision of America as the dynamic leader of world trade,
>
> has within it the possibility of such enormous human progress as to
>
> stagger the imagination. Let us not be staggered by it. Let us rise to
>
> its tremendous possibilities. Our thinking of world trade today is in
>
> ridiculously small terms. (qtd. in Swanberg 181)

An examination of developments in Australian capitalism in the late 40s and 50s demonstrates the ready embrace of Luce's vision, confirming arguments made by historians like Harvey about the pervasive American influence on national economies and domestic social policy-making. For example, the cracks in the traditional British-Australian relationship in the post-war period did not result from different stances on international issues taken by London or Canberra, and nor were they due to economic nationalism. Cracks appeared because of Australia's recognition of the vast increase in American power during the war, and the opinion that Australian capitalism could not survive independently of this power. Despite the misgivings of some Labor politicians that a restoration of the balance of payments might inevitably mean reduced domestic conditions – lower wages, longer working hours, slashed social security payments – Australia joined the International Monetary Fund in the late 40s; fearing that the nation would suffer ever poorer currency and trading balances with the US if it failed to do so (Beresford & Kerr 164). And by 1951, with the signing of the ANZUS treaty, there had been a decisive realignment of Australia to America, allowing the 'development of Australian manufacturing capital and the reorientation of trade flows and capital intake towards the increasingly powerful American economy' (Beresford & Kerr 166).

From 1946 to 1952, the US State Department encouraged Australia to sign a Treaty of Friendship. But many economic historians are convinced that while strategic Cold War defence matters were sometimes involved – and often publicly invoked – in this process, America's main aims in the Treaty were purely economic. As Bruce McFarlane observes:

> The aim of US diplomatic efforts in the economic field was to facilitate profitable US direct and portfolio investment in Australia, to rival British investment in Australia, to get a leverage on the course of manufacturing development, and to increase US trade at the expense of UK trade with Australia, for US trade with Australia would increase, and that of the UK decline, once "empire preference" and bilateral deals with the UK (which were to US disadvantage) were abolished under the treaty. It was expected that US corporations, freed from the threat of Australian taxation, land-tenure laws, restrictions on dividend repatriations to the USA, and exchange control, would enjoy a better "business climate". (32)

Involved in negotiating the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade for Australia in 1949, H.C. Coombs had little doubt that only limited national autonomy was possible when dealing with American economic interests. Consequently, when the 1949 GATT talks failed to deliver anything advantageous for the Australian Labor Party, the labour movement, and the country as a whole, Coombs wrote:

The attempt failed because no changes to the existing economic order could even be considered without United States support. The Charter was rejected […] not because it was unworkable, not because the Keynesian modifications of traditional economic theory which had shaped it were intellectually invalid, but simply because it did not meet the political requirements of the United States domestic scene. (104)

Meanwhile, in Britain, the Marshall Plan expanded American economic penetration during its official term of operation between 1948 and 1952. But Marshall was also responsible for a major ideological and perceptual shift in Britain. Anthony Carew described it as a psychological realignment taking place within the national economy of Britain, with particular implications for labour unions and, by extension, the entire British working class. According to Carew, the Marshall Plan was a major factor in destroying any pretence that the British Labour Party possessed and pursued a truly socialist agenda:

The planning priorities of enhanced production and reduced inflation – part of Labour's adaptation to the requirements of the Marshall programme – inevitably displaced socialist objectives on the government's agenda. Productivity took precedence over equality. High production and the turn away from egalitarianism as a priority went hand in hand with the acceptance of the need for reasonable levels of profitability in industry, which in turn relied on the motivation of self-interest. In these ways Labour's economic strategy

after 1947 marked the abandonment of any claim to be constructing a

new [socialist] economic order. (242)

David Ellwood – one of the few historians who focus intensively on the Marshall Plan – goes further, identifying a bigger ideological shift affected by Marshall's implementation. Ellwood's analysis notes the self-interested promotion of ideas about superior American attitudes to work (discussed by Carew), then highlights the broader and deliberate cultivation of a thirst for American levels of consumption in Marshall Plan rhetoric. In Ellwood's view, the Marshall period marked 'one of the most pragmatically creative phases of [America's] modern history'. What began as a suggestion by US Secretary of State, George Marshall, to jump-start Europe's post-war reconstruction, 'speedily evolved into a wide-ranging effort to modernise Europe's industries, markets, unions and economic control mechanisms'. The Plan was 'never just an abstract affair of economic numbers: loans, grants, investment, production, productivity etc., even if these were its key operating tools' (Ellwood 33-34). The potential to diminish local sovereignty was hidden in the American aid project; and close to the time, Harry Hopkins wrote in *The New Look* in 1963:

Now, through Britain's post-war years of trial came a steady flow of globe-girdling senators, often of phenomenal ignorance and inexperience, loudly demanding to know why Uncle Sam should go on pouring out his hard-earned dollars to underpin "Communism" and support in luxury the obviously work-shy British. These gentlemen firmly pronounced Britain dead and done with and on the whole appeared to consider the clearance salutary. (67)

In this regard, it was poignant and pertinent that the Marshall Plan was administrated by Paul Hoffman – a former car salesman. Entrenched European consuming habits were endlessly irritating to the dispensers of Marshall 'aid'; and as one American journalist revealed, there was a strong belief in Marshall circles that European workers required a corrective of their 'old habits' via a dose of American salesmanship geared to building up consumer expectations: 'the idea of persuading the low income consumer to feel the need for something he's never had, using advertising, and then to give it to him at a price he can afford, could be the Marshall Plan's biggest contribution' (qtd. in Ellwood 34). Chief administrator Paul Hoffman wrote in his memoirs that a central purpose of the Marshall Plan was *precisely* to associate an imagined America with the promise of things not yet delivered to Europeans: 'they learned that this is the land of full shelves and bulging shops, made possible by high productivity and good wages, and that its prosperity may be emulated elsewhere by those who will work towards it' (qtd. in Ellwood 34).

This indoctrination about the virtues of unrestrained consumption was not confined to Europe; and Mark Rolfe notices important connections between the political and social consequences of the Marshall Plan in Britain and what occurred in Australia in the same period. In 'The Promise and Threat of America in Australian Politics', Rolfe outlines how promises of full employment and social security in Australia after 1950 were gradually made dependent on notions of productivity and consumption: an association that built its authority and appeal on seductive visions of an American capitalist utopia (193).

This is an extension of Richard White's earlier thesis about a subtle realignment of the Australian national psyche in Australia, accomplished in the 40s. But where Rolfe looks for local autonomies and consent in this realignment process,

White argues strenuously – even pessimistically – that Americanisation involved the leaking of imported attitudes to production and consumption into Australian public policy. This was an ideological invasion with far-reaching consequences in the lived, everyday experience of ordinary Australians. According to White, a set of American economic and cultural influences (arriving well before World War II) intensified in the post-war period to such an extent that 'the American way of life' came to be seen as original and best. In mass media, an imagined 'America' was the most highly publicised way of life – the standard by which other western nations began to judge themselves – and Australians were familiarised with this publicity 'through wartime contact with American troops, and even more forcibly through popular entertainment'. Thus, when a standard was sought by which to measure the post-war 'Australian way of life', the American version was always-already available ('The Australian Way of Life' 539). In this connection, White notes that from the mid 40s the Victorian Institute of Public Affairs advocated that Australia adopt 'the American attitude of mind' and seek leaders who could bring the nation to 'a new way of life'. As evidence that this ideological realignment *did* happen as VIPA recommended, White points to a piece from the Institute's journal in 1964 which looked back with satisfaction on the changes that had occurred. According to VIPA's account, the 'Australian way of life' now involved the 'democratisation of the motor car with its side effects of road congestion, numerous, immaculate petrol stations and modern-architectured motels […] multiplication of modern, attractively designed factories […] houses comprehensively equipped with the labour-saving and entertainment-giving "gadgets"' ('The Australian Way of Life' 539).

By the mid 50s, this typical picture of the economic ship coming in had been repeatedly painted and widely accepted in Britain and Australia. As Peter Lewis puts

it, 'austerity and affluence were words with special significance in the 50s: the roaring of the American boom rang round the Western world where everyone in every hard-pressed country saw the new world as an Aladdin's cave of American goods, American entertainment and the American style of living' (10). To an extent, the start of the 50s *did* constitute a real (as well as symbolic) shift from austerity to affluence, with the 'gradual end of rationing and the appearance of more and more goods targeted at working-class consumers who had not previously been considered a market for them, but whose purchasing power was now becoming essential to capitalism's survival' (Partington 247). In Britain, Hopkins recalled that the suddenness of this decisive psychological shift produced the elated feeling that a revolution had taken place: 'from the austere but substantial foundation of Socialist Egalitarianism the gleaming structure of the People's Capitalism now rose bizarrely. Its core was provided by the rapid development of an "American-style" mass market – i.e. a mass market no longer confined to a comparatively narrow range of "cheap" articles, but covering a wide diversity of goods, prices, designs and qualities' (312). Here was a new 'social fact', entrenched by 1955. And although the social, economic and political repercussions of the new order would take some years to absorb, the contemporary inclination was to revel in the moment's elation:

> Newspapers, addressing advertisers, now ceased to conceal and
> began instead to boast of their working-class readership. "Who's
> buying the New Consumer Goods?" inquired the *Daily Herald* ("the
> acknowledged newspaper of the wage-earning class"), going on to
> offer "statistical proof" that "in the last five years or so the skilled
> and unskilled manual workers have emerged as the biggest spenders

on a whole range of goods traditionally regarded as "middle-class products". (Hopkins 312-313)

Raw consumer-statistics seemed to indicate a boom. In 1951, Britons owned 2.25 million cars and one million television sets; by 1964, there were over 8 million cars and 13 million TVs, double the number of private telephones, and inestimably more refrigerators and washing machines (Pinto-Duschinsky 55-56). These were potent insignias of the 'new affluence'. In addition, work choices were generally better: though patchy across the more deprived regions, Britain's employment prospects were vastly improved between 1951 and 1964. There were rises in pensions, and advances in health and education services.

But the figures were gloomy evidence, too, that the British 'revolution' of the 50s was, to borrow Harry Hopkins' phrase, 'according to Marks, not Marx': a bitter pun, recording the triumph of retail capitalism (epitomised by the Marks and Spencer department-store chain) over socialism. With a hint of resignation, British Labour's elder statesman Ernest Bevin told an American audience that 'half our trouble in England is that we suffer from a poverty of desire'; and in the 'Marksian' revolution of the 50s this form of poverty was eliminated 'from darkest Durham to the blackest Black Country […] millions were being poured out in redesigning shops and shopfronts to extend, Cinerama-like, shining new horizons of possessions before the stick-in-the-mud Englishman and his once dowdy wife: in five years there were more changes in the shopping scene than in the previous fifty' (Hopkins 315-316). Here was an appeal to the British public, and particularly the working class, as consumers; an appeal demanding a head-to-foot restyling of traditional life-ways. The idea of Peoples' Capitalism, Hopkins observed, uncannily and perversely mimicked (or

realised) the universalism and humanism of the Beveridge-Atlee revolution's socialist aspirations for social equality; and this was embodied in the chain-store, which 'finally burst from its dull chrysalis to emerge as the classless, efficient, decently functional, distributive model of the new age, a place where doctor's wife and docker's wife could, impartially and without fuss, avail themselves of the growing range and quality of mass-produced goods the new market made available' (314-315). In this image of doctors' and dockers' wives deliriously delivered dreams from the department-store shelf, 'America' was the silent yet ever-present historical power.

However, such rose-tinted views of market economy's successes, repeatedly affirmed in business reports and political speeches, disguised the nature of the social collision that occurred in Britain and Australia in the early 50s: the conflict of increased expectations of consumer choice and improved living standards with the austerity measures and bureaucratic mechanisms of the welfare state. In Britain and Australia 'the post-war debate about austerity, consumption, and living standards signified fundamental conflict' between labour parties and movements and the forces of conservatism (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 2). And in both countries, the compelling myth of classlessness that accompanied the new consumerism had important implications for Left politics throughout the 50s and 60s.

When political analysts D.E. Butler and Richard Rose surveyed the British Labour Party's electoral defeat in 1959, they struggled to understand the novel role of consumerism as a determinant of dramatically altered working-class voting patterns. They found it intriguing that of all the symbolic new durable consumer goods, TVs and vacuum cleaners were the only ones to have actually reached a majority of working-class homes by 1959. Crucially, even where new goods were not owned, there was a common expectation that they could be afforded and enjoyed in the

foreseeable future: an anticipation importantly cued by the advent of hire purchase. In their observations on the effects of heightened material expectations, Butler and Rose reiterated a core concern that had polarised sections of the Labour Party from the time it lost office in 1951. They highlighted the familiar point that consumer culture confounded traditional class identities and political allegiances:

The last ten years have eroded some of the traditional foundations of Labour strength. Social changes have been weakening traditional working-class political loyalties; simultaneously the middle classes have become more prosperous and more self-confident. Full employment and the welfare state have made the well-paid worker much less dependent on his trade union or on the Labour Party than before the war. At the bench a man may still be plainly working class, but in his new home, in his car, or out shopping, his social position may be more difficult to assess. He may well think of himself as a consumer first and only secondly as a worker. Wages of up to 30 pounds a week have taken a number of the skilled manual employees far away from pensioners and other members of the working class. A New Town resident could even tell an interviewer, "there aren't any poor now […] Just a few – in London". (15)

The Butler-Rose anatomy of Labour's defeat in the 1959 British General Election restated views expressed in Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* – a manifesto written in response to Labour's previous electoral failure, in 1955. Crosland suggested that the ameliorations of welfare capitalism's limited state interventions

repudiated Marxist theory to a considerable degree, almost making it redundant. According to Crosland, this pushed even Conservative governments leftwards in a way that blunted the worst excesses of business, and raised questions about whether state ownership was necessary for socialism at all (8). In fact, as Perry Anderson pointed out a few years later, the writings of Crosland and other Labour revisionists like Hugh Gaitskell flatly described British society as 'post-capitalist'. Thus, the programme Crosland offered to Labour in the late 50s proposed that 'for the first time in the history of the Labour Party, capitalist industry was formally legitimated as socially responsible and useful'. And this portended a real and deeper change: 'the subordination of the market to the State was to be superseded by the incorporation of the State into the market' ('The Left' 5).

Crosland's revisionist analysis insinuated something that many commentators came to agree upon: that 'the making over of the two great political parties in the course of a decade or so reflected both the patterns and strains of the process of adjustment in the nation at large' (Hopkins 375). The dilemma for socialists was that the 'smooth realignment of the Conservative Party was greatly enhanced by the graduation of Keynesianism into full economic orthodoxy'. If Labour's governmental propaganda had stressed 'social control and social purpose' during the Crippsian years (1947–50), then the 'Conservatives were able to inherit this accumulation of moral capital and have private enterprise too'. In short, there was a shift in national debate: 'Labour might have accused Conservatism of infatuation with restrictionism or monetary controls. Labour's opponents might taunt them, not now with being in receipt of Russian Gold, but with causing "distortion" in the economic mechanism' – but for all sides, the central debate was now an economists' debate (Hopkins 365).

In light of this new emphasis on economism, Crosland's *Future of Socialism* has been interpreted as either a pragmatic recognition of capitalism's durability or, from a socialist point of view, a capitulation to capital's excesses bordering on class treason. Indisputably, however, Crosland's manifesto responded to the Conservative government's successful integration of the ideology of individual acquisition with central aspects of Labour's welfare state programme; urging the labour movement to recognise mass consumption as the great class leveller, rather than the enemy of the working class. And more enthusiastically than most conservatives, Crosland endorsed America as *the* model for achieving social cohesion through consumption:

> Whereas the motor-car remained a remote symbol of wealth in Britain for forty years, it is hard to imagine any new article holding this position in America today for more than five; one has only to think of the spread of cars and refrigerators before the war, of TV sets and washing machines since the war, and no doubt of drying machines, electric dishwashers, garbage disposal units and air-conditioning plants in the next few years. (212)

Again, the belief was that American-styled patterns of consumption had the potential to end class conflict itself; and, significantly, that this went well beyond the actuality of consumerism. As an imagined capitalist utopia, the idea of 'America' provoked a revolution in consciousness:

> This trend has now gone a long way in the United States. Every visitor is struck not only by the lack of glaring objective contrasts

between the living standards of different social classes but also by the

general *consciousness* of equal living standards – the feeling that

everything is within reach, and nothing wholly unattainable. This is

one of the basic causes of the greater social equality, and the absence

of deep class feeling. (Crosland 215)

Opening up the field of middle-class luxuries was therefore expected to reorient the

British working-class mind-set. According to Crosland's positive version of this

'middle-classing process', the political implication for Labour was that 'it would be

ill-advised to continue making a largely proletarian class appeal when a majority of

the population is gradually attaining a middle-class standard of life, and distinct

symptoms even of a middle-class psychology' (216). And as Crosland's manifesto

asserted, these new habits of mind were crucially connected to a particular perception

of America as classless, consumerist ideal.

Heightened, American-inspired consumer expectations also arose in Australia

in the same period. The social tensions this created were intensified, unintentionally,

by the reforming and mildly socialist post-war government's promise of a new deal

for the working class – and, indeed, the middle-class anticipation of less government

regulation on free-enterprise culture. As a partial consequence of Australia's

continuing support for Britain's war-ravaged economy, Australians experienced the

same frustrating shortages of many consumer goods in the late 40s as Britons did: so

much so that a woman was prompted to write to Prime Minister Ben Chifley in 1948,

complaining about the unavailability of socks. The mildly absurd 'saga of the elusive

socks' was actually a portent of something deeply serious for Chifley's government. It

signified that the frustrations post-war consumers experienced buying humble,

everyday items under the rationing regime carried the same political implications for Labor in Australia as it did for British Labour (Day, *Chifley* 450). Before Australian Labor's electoral loss in 1949 (and British Labour followed suit in 1951) the Party was preoccupied largely with the unpredictability of capitalist economic cycles and the fear of a return of mass unemployment. As a result, Chifley was committed to a tight rein on the economy, particularly in the area of union wage claims. The Labor leader constantly exhorted Australians to work harder and exhibit patience until his promise of a golden age came true. But a last-minute recognition of souring public opinion about economic controls, which moved the Labor Government to end the rationing of meat and clothing, was too late to save it from defeat at the polls (Day, *Chifley* 468). In his biography of Chifley, David Day claims the Labor leader was caught between working-class demands for higher wages, better conditions and access to material benefits, and middle-class resentment of bureaucratic government controls and regulations (484). However, given the subsequent success of conservative governments in Australia and Britain in promoting the idea of a 'new affluence', it was more likely, particularly on the Left, that there was an inability to grasp the paradoxical situation of the working class as the 50s loomed: working people were seduced by the expectations generated by the rhetoric of acquisitiveness, but disappointed with the actual outcomes.

In both Britain and Australia, the 'affluence' message involved conservative governments (and a few fellow travellers from the other political side) in a campaign to exaggerate the actual benefits delivered by the post-war 'long boom'. In both countries, the populations were fed a steady ideological diet from the combined forces of Tory government and business: that there was a 'coherent attempt to maintain a social consensus'; that the government-business alliance was determined 'to "set the

people free" through greater liberalisation, lower taxation, and decontrol' – without dismantling either the popular welfare state or capitalist infrastructure (Morgan, *The People's Peace* 118-119). The message that a decontrolled and liberalised – Americanised – economy brought wealth redistribution and equality-through-consumption was tailored for working-class publics. This message was also designed to habituate the working classes to new forms of regulation in their everyday lives. In Australia, as in Britain, attempts by conservative governments and business to influence the shape and coordination of the national economy in the 50s were inextricably bound up with attempts to modify workers' attitudes to productivity and management. Just as the Marshall Plan in Britain established a trend for business people to trek to the United States, seeking new methods for managing labour relations, a similar tendency was apparent in Australia in the 50s and 60s – even without the facilitating economic-ideological framework of a Marshall Plan. By 1956, 700 American companies were connected to Australian business entities through licensing agreements; practically every edition of an Australian business journal in the 50s and 60s mentioned the long list of managers travelling to America for expert advice (Rolfe, 'The Promise and Threat of America' 196). And if America was a mecca of work-place modelling, it was also the model for attitudinal change. The post-war Anglo-Australian economic order, ushered in by associations with the US, was accompanied by a fundamental shift in working-class identity: America was the source of a 'general *consciousness*', as Crosland had predictively written, for the idea that the working-class individual could be reconceived as 'a consumer first and only secondly as a worker'.

The generally accepted perception that America was an inexhaustible cornucopia, a shopper's paradise of shining gadgetry, signalled nothing short of the

'modernisation of consciousness' in post-war Britain and Australia. In Malcolm Bradbury's still-valuable terms, this was seen as a deteriorative progression from the 'Gemeinschaft' model of community to 'Geselleschaft', a central transition of modernity, modernisation and 'modern consciousness': the traumatic progression from a society of restrained 'aspiration', regulated by 'work and religion, home and family' to a reorganised 'multiplicity of relationships', 'mobile and urbanized', with 'greater opportunities' for 'selfhood' but 'open to increased confusion and anxiety' (9-10). The specifically 'American' disruption this entailed was broadcast in Britain by Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*: in the classic passage on 'juke-box boys […] who spend their evening listening in harshly lighted milk-bars to the "nickelodeons"' surrounded by the 'nastiness of their modernistic knick-knacks'. They lived in a 'myth-world', Hoggart wrote, which they took to be an authentic if belated recreation of 'American life', pursuing a 'thin and pallid form of dissipation, a sort of spiritual dry-rot amid the odour of boiled milk' (247-48). In Australia, Ian Turner peremptorily regarded this social shift as an infantilisation: 'where Pan-Am goes, can Batman be far behind?' ('Retreat from Reason' 140). And according to Stanley Cohen, youth subcultures took their general posture and role models from the US: 'heroes of the fifties were cast in the very American mould of the brute and the hipster' (*Folk Devils and Moral Panics* 183).

In all cases, 'youth' was the imagined trouble-spot onto which anxieties about broader social disruptions and discontinuities were projected. The 'generation gap' was suddenly a cipher for social fractures and desertions of past solidarities; but 'generational' thinking elided more pervasive fears about community collapse into the 'youth problem'. In Britain and Australia, post-war capital's disturbances of traditional class and community allegiances were displaced onto youth, laying the

foundations for a prototypical 'moral panic'. As Stanley Cohen pointed out in his benchmark study of post-war youth, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, the 50s and 60s required a 'higher level of starting-off point' in its reaction to teenage experience: a considered response that recognised the 'ways in which the affluence and youth themes were used to conceptualise the social changes of the decade' as a whole (*Folk Devils and Moral Panics* 191). As Cohen argued, 'youth' was an available rhetorical substitute for 'trouble'.

The idea of lasting affluence was a fragile thing for an older generation still scarred by depression and war – for them, there was still the suspicion that the brash new American-dominated economic era represented merely the latest version of the same capitalism that had delivered previous miseries. In this new 'age of affluence', youth was increasingly criticised by its elders for outrageous wardrobes and delinquencies such as vandalism, but this was a form of displacement – what was resented equally, but less easily articulated, was the fact that youth had abandoned the parsimonious attitudes and general mistrust of free-market capitalism that its parent generation learned from hard experience. As Cohen explained, this obsession with rebellious youth symbolised the social fractures and pressures of post-war change:

> They touched the delicate and ambivalent nerves through which post-war social change was experienced. No one wanted depressions or austerity, but messages about 'never having it so good' were ambivalent in that some people were having it too good and too quickly. (*Folk Devils and Moral Panics* 192)

It was significant, furthermore, that socio-political commentators of all hues in the 50s and 60s recognised 'America' as the major underlying, contradictory source of youth's disturbance. The period's newspapers and journals are littered with contributions affirming Cohen's contention: that arguments about America as role model for delinquency and the remoulding of post-war youth – as a classless consuming cohort – are metonymic of a broader set of concerns about the threats that crass American commercial culture posed to national identities and values. In a stand-out 1956 *New Statesman and Nation* article, 'Kids' Country', William Salter warned:

> The first duty of an American is to be a consumer, and the more conspicuously he consumes the more conspicuously he does his duty. In the young, with their own set of mores, American business has discovered a whole new hinterland of consumption. One of the most interesting of the new developments in American journalism lies in the glossy magazines devoted to fashion and man-catching, aimed at the teenage girl – an expression which ought to be tautologous but which in the United States is not […] There seems to be a corollary to all this. I find a hint of it in a recent newspaper paragraph on the strains that afflict the American middle-aged male. There he sits in his office all day, gnawed by his ulcers, risking thrombosis, slaving away that his family may conspicuously consume. And when he gets home, picks up the paper or switches on the TV, what does he find? Cartoons, comic strips, soap-operas depicting the father of the family as an inefficient bumbler, bested and scored off the whole time by his wife and children. A sad picture. (206-08)

In Salter's view, cartoons and comics were not simply low-cultural detritus. They were expressions of a world adrift from traditions, where the hard-working, self-sacrificing authority-figure of the Pater Familias was mercilessly mocked; teenage girls were vampishly sexualised 'man-catchers', and the life of youth itself was transformed into a shady materialist 'hinterland'. For Salter, the perversity of Americanised consumption ideology was easily decipherable.

For many like-minded social commentators in Britain and Australia, new consuming habits were evidence of the culturally and morally damaging surrender of youth to myths and imaginings of America: an anxiety at the core of parallel, intense and prolonged debates in both countries. As the 50s began, the effect of radical economic and cultural shifts on families and youth was a heated topic in Britain and Australia alike. In 1953, Jane Clunies Ross wrote in *Australian Quarterly* that patterns of western family life, traditionally based on the idea of a 'protective sheath' of kin sharing a 'stabilising social and moral outlook', were now subject to a range of unprecedented, pernicious influences (27). Central to this sudden exposure of the modern family's frailty, Clunies Ross concluded, was the demand among youth for city life: 'high wages and the lure to youth of the gay noisy crowd, the easier "mod-cons"' (37).

Studies like the Australian Council for Educational Research's *The Adjustment of Youth: A Study of a Social Problem in the British, American, and Australian Communities* (1951) showed how widely accepted it was in the post-war environment that the 'problem' of youth adjustment and citizenship had an international dimension. *The Adjustment of Youth* pointed directly to similarities between the Australian and British experiences and added that Australia could learn a great deal from British attempts to 'manage' youth development (3). If the list of official pronouncements on

the 'youth problem' examined in Simon Stevenson's 'Some Social and Political Tides Affecting the Development of Juvenile Justice in Britain 1938–1964' was an accurate guide, then throughout the 50s and 60s British working-class youth was indeed targeted with a barrage of 'expert' opinions about how its leisure should be policed.

In Britain and Australia, concerns that teenagers – particularly working-class teenagers – were lurching into juvenile delinquency reached fever pitch in the 50s. As Jon Stratton explains in his study of Australian working-class subcultures, *The Young Ones* (1992), post-war youth culture followed similar evolutionary lines in Britain and Australia; and the roles of the state and media in the period's critical blitzes on the behaviour of working-class youth were the same in both countries (2). Law-abiding citizens in Britain and Australia routinely found signs of degeneration amongst youth and advocated a range of punitive measures: from the birch to National Service. Meanwhile, for those concerned with 'prevention', delinquency was commonly attributed to 'lack of discipline, high wages and youthful access to unsuitable comics, horror picture shows, and after 1956, rock and roll music' (Moore, 'Bodgies, Widgies and Moral Panics in Australia 1955–1959' 2).

Above all, the Anglo-Australian controversy about comics set the tone for how all future moral panics and anxieties about youth behaviour would unfold. Linking youth to discourses on class and Americanisation, the comics debates of the early-mid 50s were a rehearsal for the future, when publics wrestled with phenomena like rock' n' roll and scandalous subcultures: Teddy Boys in Britain, Bodgies in Australia. When the anti-comics campaign commenced in Britain and Australia, 'the issues were basically the same, as were the players, methods of handling the controversies, the solutions' (Lent 25).

The anti-comics crusade produced unlikely politico-moral alliances. At the Australian end, 'civil liberties groups and commercial interests combined to support comics against the Communist Party, Catholic Church, women's groups, and educators'. Some were 'caught in a double bind'. The Communist Party of Australia, for example, had difficulties determining a proper line on comics 'if it was to maintain its claim of representing the working classes'. And a major literary magazine, *Meanjin*, felt 'uncomfortable about the use of censorship but still called for control' of the comic book. The British Communist Party joined parents, teachers, and church groups to play a major role in the crusade against comic books (Lent 26). In both instances, the belief that comics and magazines harmed youth was pivotal: the debate swung from its initial, politically nuanced, arguments about American imperialism and the idea that comics reinforced Cold War prejudices and the repressiveness of McCarthyism to the more diffuse notion of a 'debased' American culture at work (Webster, *Looka Yonder!* 192).

Originally driven by worried parents, teachers, and moral crusaders – and fuelled by events like the notorious shootout between police and a 'comic reader' in 1951 – the British campaign culminated in ritual denunciations of comics and a general sense of anti-Americanism (Barker, 'Getting a Conviction' 70). But there was a subtle change of emphasis as the moral panic developed. Centrally involved in the anti-comics campaign from the start, Britain's National Union of Teachers was soon identified as a Communist Party front organisation. The Communist Party used the NUT and anti-comics campaigning as a proxy critique of American imperialism: a critique difficult to make in other public forums in the Cold War climate. The Party took the opportunity to connect comics and the 'creation of Korean war fever in America'. However, public exposure of the Party's interest in the anti-comics

campaign eventually caused such a level of disquiet amongst fellow travellers like the NUT that by 1954 the terms of reference dramatically changed. Suddenly, the problem was to protect 'children' from 'horror' (Barker, 'Getting a Conviction' 71-72).

Britain's anti-comics campaign was initially organised by broad, complex political debates about threats to British culture and society from Americanisation: the idea of moral and mental damage was marginal. Martin Barker argues that the early tone of the comics debate was set at the British Communist Party's 1951 Cultural Conference, where Sam Aaronovitch spoke explicitly about the relation of American cultural products like comics and plans for American economic and political domination: comics would ideologically bludgeon the world with the worst aspects of American society – McCarthyism, the repression of minorities, assaults on unionism. But Aaronovitch was shy of a full-frontal attack on America, distinguishing the 'real' culture of the American people (Emerson, Whitman, Theodore Dreiser, Paul Robeson) from its commercial other; embracing a 'completely homogenous view of British culture'; a line from 'Chaucer to Shakespeare, Milton, Fielding, Blake, Robert Burns, Shelley, Byron, Charles Dickens, William Morris, Thomas Hardy, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, George Bernard Shaw'. In other words, there was a British 'tradition' which, despite its class connotations, must be defended against threats from 'big business decadents'. As Barker observes, this was a bizarrely nationalistic response from Marxists who saw themselves in every other respect as part of an internationalist movement (*Haunt of Fears* 21); yet it signalled the tactical direction the comics debate would soon take.

In 1952, Britain's *Picture Post* published Peter Mauger's 'Should US "Comics" Be Banned'. A Communist teacher, Mauger exploited anti-American

feeling but avoided the issue of imperialism: he asked 'who can look at these comics and escape the conclusion that there is a connection between them and the increasing volume of juvenile delinquency?' (Sringhall 11) This departed from the Left's earlier approach, and Aaronovitch's enlistment of 'historians, philosophers, film-makers, writers – representatives from every area of thought and culture' to consider the matters of American economic, political and cultural imperialism. Aaronovitch had even snared sympathies from the inchoate anti-Americanism that manifested itself as English class-snobbery – the derision directed at 'gum-chewing and pasty-faced young working-class Americans who brought the comics over' (Barker, *Haunt of Fears* 26). In contrast, Mauger's approach importantly signalled the evacuation of politics from the debate. Instead of a political form of anti-Americanism, the argument was now about threats to children's minds – their natural instincts and education. The debate shifted from observable, testable claims about American economic and political domination to vaguely moral ones, so that comics were now 'morally objectionable and *horrible*' (Barker, *Haunt of Fears*, 26). In effect, while 'the problem was political (American imperialism)', the solution became 'totally apolitical (national decency and high values)' (Barker, *Haunt of Fears*, 30).

Comics debates were thus abandoned to the 'swelling chorus of "moral panic" amplified through the Press'; and by 1955, the British publication of New York psychiatrist Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent: The Influence of Comic Books on Today's Youth* gave the panic fresh impetus (Sringhall 12). Wertham 'led the American campaign against "crime comics" (as he always called them)'; and he 'repeatedly claimed to have strong evidence of a link from comics to crime' (Barker, *Haunt of Fears* 30).

Wertham's theories endured in Britain. In 1961, while T.R. Fyvel scoffed at the 1955 American Senate Sub-Committee's claim that comics offered 'short courses in murder, mayhem, robbery, rape, cannibalism, carnage, necrophilia, sex sadism, and virtually every other form of crime, bestiality and horror', he nevertheless conceded that 'there is some good evidence to think that to the disturbed, the delinquency-prone and suggestible child [comics] provide both stimulus and documentation for delinquency' (*The Insecure Offenders* 283). Others, such as the Home Office's Children's Department, were not so convinced. It initially resisted a draft bill banning comic books, judging that the draft drew on meagre evidence and overstated the function of horror comics as incitements to juvenile delinquency (which was declining in mid-50s Britain). But the Foreign Office deemed the Eisenhower Administration itself concerned that American horror comics were undermining US-British relations: so much so that the Commander of American Forces in England attempted to stop American PXs from bringing comics into the country (Sringhall 12). The opinion that comics traded in harmful sadism, crime, lust and monstrosity won the day: in 1955, the Harmful Publications Bill was passed in the House of Commons (Sringhall 12).

According to Martin Barker, Britain's comics panic was regrettable because the lapse into 'a certain kind of censorious moralism' established a pattern that persisted in later decades. By transmuting an essentially political question about American cultural, economic and political power into an apolitical concern for children, degradation, decency and standards, Britain's comics affair was metonymic of the narrowing and depoliticisation of all post-war cultural debates. But to Barker, the greatest tragedy revealed by the comics panic is the way many on the Left abandoned *critical thinking* in favour of vapid ideals of Englishness and moral standards. It is symptomatic, Barker writes, of the point that there might be no 'sure

grasp on a living Marxist theory' in the face of tidal-wave motions in post-war consumer society (*Haunt of Fears* 187).

In Australia in the early 50s, the panic over increasingly available cheap American comics and magazines created the same odd coalitions of religious organisations, trades unions, politicians and the press as were formed in Britain. By the mid-50s, most Australian states succumbed to pressure groups, passing legislation like the British Harmful Publications Bill that aimed to restrict comics containing sex and violence.

Richard White identifies the significant role the journal *Meanjin* played in reiterating arguments that prevailed in Britain: most notably, America stood for the negation of Anglo-Australian values, and there were definite links between American comics and juvenile delinquency ('Combating Cultural Aggression' 282). White argues that this led to glaring inconsistencies, as *Meanjin* editor Clem Christesen advocated censorship of comics but freedom of literary expression in relation to other kinds of writing ('Combating Cultural Aggression' 282). Perhaps, as Mark Finnane points out, White misrecognises Christesen's discussion of comics regulation as a blanket call for censorship (225); more likely, there was no discrepancy – Christesen's anti-comic stance was cued by a familiar Arnoldian distaste for Americanised mass culture. In a 1954 *Meanjin* editorial, 'The Law Grapples with Koka-Kola Kulture', Christesen made his case that comics were merely one of a host of American cultural products; low-brow forms guaranteed to sink standards, 'trash, in the form of periodicals and books, films, records, radio plays and features' originating 'almost exclusively from the United States of America […] debased forms of foreign culture' with the capacity to pervert and corrupt indigenous societies (154-155).

The same year, Norman Bartlett's *Meanjin* article 'Culture and Comics' refused to defer to a censorship based on loose definitions of 'harm'. Bartlett rejected the cause-effect logic that comics led children into delinquency, liberally asserting that 'the difficulties and dangers of banning what are loosely called "comics" are much greater than well-intentioned people sometimes think' (6). He hinted that the subversion of Australian taste resulted from American economic imperialism: 'we have the ridiculous situation in which, despite the dollar restrictions, an Australian can buy mountains of the cheapest and shoddiest American reading matter but has great difficulty in getting essential American text books, high-class American magazines or American books which analyse and criticise the damage done by cheap American literature to cultural and moral standards' (11). But within the space of the same article, and duplicating the direction the British debate had taken, Bartlett retreated from a blatantly political critique of American economic power to conclude that the real menace of comics was somehow their incipient modernity. Comics *really* represented the post-war period's lack of morality and spirituality: 'comic and sex books and the cinema – mostly cheap and nasty reflections of the prevailing spirit in modern literature – have rushed into this vacuum […] whereas, in the old days, cheap reading mostly reflected community values in an obvious, uncritical manner, the comics and sex books ignore community or any other values and exploit appetites, impulses and passions' (16). And with his Anglophone cultural nationalism on full display, Bartlett dismissed American 'glossies' as 'frankly pornographic' compared to the 'comparative harmlessness' and 'fundamental innocence' of 'England's famous strip-tease girl, Jane' (9).

Another *Meanjin* feature, Albert E. Kahn's 'Comics, TV and Your Child' (1954), revealed that Frederic Wertham's theory linking comics and juvenile violence

was as influential in Australia as it was in Britain. Kahn recognised the economic force behind comic production and its propaganda function: publishers defended comic books because they positively portrayed the 'American way of life'. But political considerations were soon subsumed by an anxiety mixing moral concerns with a sort of technological determinism: comics were merely the forerunner of a much more harmful medium – television. Ultimately, Kahn's theme was that the overall Cold War atmosphere of crime, corruption and cynicism was exploited by unscrupulous TV programmers and publishers who were unconcerned about the psychological and social damage that might be visited on youth. And again, the awareness of politico-economic realities was displaced by abstract moralising.

For Richard White and John Docker, the trajectory of Australian comics debates – like their British counterparts – was inevitably tied to Cold War tensions that made it difficult for anyone, let alone the Left, to mount an outright criticism of the American political and economic interests behind popular-cultural production. Aping the British Communist Party's cultural-policy strategy, Australian critics deployed a critique of Americanisation that distinguished between 'good' American literature and 'the "trash" that was the object of so much disgust' in the wider community. Even Communists sounded respectable as they morally railed against the 'breeding grounds of American crime' in comics (White, 'Combating Cultural Aggression' 283-284).

However, Docker has an ingenious reading of why sections of the Australian Left aligned themselves with moral panic arguments made by 'experts' like Frederic Wertham. Docker suspects that behind Wertham's sensational claims about violent comic imagery there is an implied critique of mass conditioning and regimentation: a critique closely allied to Frankfurt School mass society theory ('Culture, Society and

the Communist Party' 197). On the one hand, this could indicate a symbiotic relationship of theory and Left activism in the period: an authentic praxis. On the other, it might signal the duress on Left intellectuals caused by the shock-wave of post-war American popular culture: the imperceptible merging of Frankfurt School Marxism with the 'minority' high-cultural positions of T.S. Eliot or F.R. Leavis. Thus, Docker concludes, the problem for left-leaning and Communist critics who adopted Wertham's crude 'media effects' line was that they apparently sided with 'respectable' bourgeois society to comprehensively condemn working-class culture itself. Oppositions between 'good' and 'bad' culture inflected the attitudes of 50s Australian left cultural nationalists and the emerging New Left in Britain: both were seriously challenged by the willing participation of working classes in the new populism ('Culture, Society and the Communist Party' 203).

In a similar vein, Richard White argues that the comics debates and Americanisation were early indicators of an alienation of Left intellectuals from the working class, culminating in Australian cultural nationalism in the late 50s. This saw a number of cultural commentators either concerned with the development of a national 'high culture' and decrying culture-destroying, standard-lowering Americanisation – or altogether 'the barrage from America' in order to 'celebrate instead those aspects of the popular culture which still had something identifiably Australian about them'. The result, according to White, was that by the 60s the negative consensus about Americanisation amongst intellectuals disappeared ('Combating Cultural Aggression' 285).

In 'Censorship and the Child: Explaining the Comics Campaign', Mark Finnane questions Docker and White's concentration on left-wing cultural politics in debates on comics and the derangement of youth, arguing instead that the *Meanjin*

articles articulated concerns that were more than xenophobic anti-Americanism. Oddly, however, Finnane prefers Martin Barker's *Haunt of Fears* for its analysis of the comics phenomenon, because Barker's observations about the episode in Britain – that it represented a campaign not about the comics themselves but about a conception of society, youth and nation – was equally applicable in Australia (239). But like Docker and White, Barker was intrigued by the blanket demonisation of comics because the critics on both Right and Left were incapable of differentiating between publications justifying America's international behaviour (in the Korean War, for example) and others that pilloried or satirised America and its values (*Haunt of Fears* 192).

Above all, this critical confusion was symptomatic of a looming dilemma for British and Australian intellectuals with working-class sympathies in the 50s and 60s when it came to assessing the effects and perceptions of a range of new cultural influences – particularly those sourced from America. The controversy over comics was an early example of their difficulty in dealing with the prospect that the working class might be so 'sunk in consumerist complacency, beguiled by consumer goods and the mass entertainment' that it was either blunted as a potential radical force, or subject to the infantilising, community-destroying tendencies of an increasingly conformist society (Docker, 'Culture, Society and the Communist Party' 207).

Chapter 2

Myths of Affluence

Between 1950 and the early 60s, a cohort of British and Australian novels depicted the era's much-trumpeted affluence as elusive and conditional for many working people – narratively pivoting on the clash between continued austerity and the expectations aroused by governments and business interests keen to invoke America as *the* model for consumer-driven economy. These fictions shared the propensity of a growing number of sociological studies in the period, disputing claims that wealth redistribution and dramatically increased material benefits had been passed on to the working classes. An important unifying aspect of this particular group of novels was the focus on how affluence ideology pressured workers – effects largely overlooked by cultural historians since. The authors in question culled their own experience, and that of key informants, to understand how the desire to merely keep pace with the cult of post-war consumption required difficult, practical adjustments in working peoples' lives: taking any available overtime or plunging deeper into household debt. The fraught nexus between new work and domestic arrangements was repeatedly reflected in the ambivalence many characters in the era's fiction about working-class life displayed towards the 'long boom'.

The British fictional cohort included Jack Lindsay's *Betrayed Spring* (1953), Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), Clancy Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock* (1960) and Margot Heinemann's *The Adventurers* (1960); in Australia, the grouping was represented by Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* (1959), Ralph de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos* (1964) and Mena Calthorpe's *The Dyehouse* (1964). All blurred the discursive boundary between fiction and documentary:

routinely contradicting the era's dominant 'we've never had it so good' rhetoric, challenging the idea that post-war affluence had dismantled the class system.

These literary exposés of the dark side of affluence need to be read with reference to a range of international developments, impacting almost simultaneously on British and Australian domestic economies in the period. Added to the vital issue of American influence, there was the congruent version of Keynes-Beveridge welfare capitalism each country adopted for post-war recovery; the awareness of all political parties that the working-class was a site where the contradictions of consumer capital and the welfare state would be played out; the collapse of a mildly socialist post-war consensus; and Conservative hegemony, selectively maintaining elements of state regulation whilst deploying the rhetoric of affluence and consumer freedom.

Against the backdrop of this post-war turnaround – from the promise of socialism to apparent popular support for free-market capitalism – the novels examined in this chapter offered prognoses for the working-class future, flavoured with hope and pessimism. And in the late 50s and 60s, intellectuals from other disciplines began to produce social and political critiques questioning the adequacy of existing explanations for the direction post-war society had taken: studies sharing many concerns with fictional works that examined workers' new relationships with consumerism, popular culture, the state and the organised labour movement. Stuart Hall, a key British participant in such debates, outlined some of these common concerns in *New Left Review* in 1960:

> This case is tougher than it looks on paper. It has, behind it, the force
> of circumstances (post-war prosperity); beneath it, the support of
> serious intellectual analysis (the managerial revolution and Keynesian

economics): and before it, the lure of political office (the third Tory victory). What is more, it is firmly rooted – or appears to be – in contemporary "facts". In this sense, the analysis is certainly more alive to the realities of society today than the defence which the Left mustered in reply. The composition of the labour force *has* changed: there *are* "fewer farm-workers, more shop assistants, fewer miners, more engineers", and these facts are bound to have an effect upon the attitudes, aspirations and expectations of working people. The fact this change is so uneven through the country – the newer technological industries advancing, leaving the older factories as great gaping social and economic sores – simply masks and confuses this transformation. Mr. Gaitskell may be altogether wrong in his analysis of what working people *want* – of why, for example, they should always and by definition want a new car more than they want a better education for their children: but it does not help to assert that nothing is new under the sun. ('Crosland Territory' 3)

In Australia, Ian Turner wrote at the same time about the important effects that changes in class and economic relations in the 50s had on working-class thinking and values – and the way that celebrations of change disguised unresolved social inequalities. Slightly anticipating Hall's observations in Britain, Turner noted in *Overland* in 1959 that a recent survey of Australian workplaces was evidence that the shape of post-war economic and social change threatened the association of workers, their unions and their traditional political party:

While it has been possible for a few workers to make money in small or medium enterprises, and thus to liberate themselves from wage-labour, it is impossible for an outsider to rise to the levels of real power within the oligarchy […] Some workers denied the existence of social classes (5%), or considered themselves to be middle class (23%); if they had aspirations, it was towards the middle class that they looked. Most workers of course voted Labor; however, nearly 10% voted Liberal, while 18% appeared undecided – and half of all those surveyed thought that all politics was a racket […] only a few workers took an active part in their trade unions, while about half were sceptical or disapproving of the unions […] traditional egalitarianism has become, in our time, a passive acceptance rather than an active assertion; so long as the worker is allowed to feel that he is as good as the next man, the boss, then unequal distribution of power in society goes unchallenged. ('The Life of the Legend' 28)

Hall and Turner similarly articulated the long boom's clash of expectation and economic reality, and how dramatically it altered the way working people thought of themselves and their traditional institutions. This drama resulted from an unwritten post-war social contract: the Right accepted the welfare state, Keynesian economic management and the commitment to full employment as the basis of a peaceful compromise between capital and labour; the Left accepted a modified capitalism and its role within an American-dominated, western strategic sphere (Hall, 'The Toad in the Garden' 36). But the classless society promised by this 'settlement' had not arrived by the late 50s: 'behind the back of the Welfare Revolution, a revival of the

class system has silently taken place: and the more profitable it is to supply the *consumer* needs of the community, the more robust the owners, controllers and managers of the system will become, the sounder their social position, the more stable their personal prospects, the greater the gaps in income and privilege, the more divided the society' (Hall, 'Crosland Territory' 4).

This public intellectual disquiet informed the cohort of British and Australian fictions in the 50s and 60s: books portraying working-class existence with a realism reminiscent of 1930s socialist writing. The representative texts discussed here were underpinned by suspicions about the true nature of the 'new affluence', and were preoccupied with the inner logic and operations of welfare capitalism – how it *really* functioned. Jack Lindsay's *Betrayed Spring* and Ralph de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos* were both set on the cusp of the 50s, highlighting how early the consensus about a post-war 'settlement' was stressed in Britain and Australia.

Drawing on the unfolding disjuncture between the promise of social equity, worker's control and continued economic hardship, Lindsay's first 'British Way' novel saw the period as a betrayal. *Betrayed Spring* connected the experiences of four families – in London, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Tyneside – during the great austerity of late 40s. Its snapshots of the working-class, and their interactions with other classes, traced mounting frustrations in some sections of the working classes and their middle-class sympathisers: gross inequalities persisted, despite Labour Government promises. From the vantage point of 1953, when British Conservatives had been in office for two years, Lindsay's novel aimed to provide insights into the practical consequences that the economic arrangements of austerity had on working people, their attitudes and prospects.

Betrayed Spring employed a technique from Lindsay's previous historical novels – the reliance on historical documents – but crucially augmented it with the active co-operation of workers. David Smith notes that Lindsay 'discussed many of the incidents with workers while actually writing the book, and then later had relevant sections read by workers best in a position to assess their accuracy' (138). This inevitably ensured that *Betrayed Spring* had a strong 'point of view'; and Jeremy Hawthorne observes that Lindsay's Marxism also determined his committed stance: 'cultivating one's garden was no real alternative in a society and an age in which one was likely to find an American air-base equipped with nuclear weapons at the bottom of it'. But Lindsay's broad view of Cold War geopolitics should not be overstated, Hawthorne adds. The most impressive aspect of Lindsay's 'British Way' novels is that historical and informant techniques allow him to document changes in the circumstances of the working class in the late 40s and 50s, without the dogmas and neat solutions usually associated with writers on the Left – and particularly Communists. Thus, *Betrayed Spring* centrally assumes 'that people living through complex social (and personal) developments do not always (or perhaps do not usually) fully understand these processes (Hawthorne, 'Between the Slogans' 198).

Lindsay's approach to *Betrayed Spring* exhibits 'the novelist's impulse to get close to the reality of ordinary people's lives', so there is no room for the 'workerist fantasy which saw capitalism in terms of pure, uncorrupted workers oppressed by a purely evil ruling class' (Hawthorne, 'Between the Slogans' 201). *Betrayed Spring* is refreshingly unencumbered by the uncritical celebration of a working-class radicalism that inevitably comes from deprivation – a cliché often afflicting writers of Lindsay's political persuasion. Consequently, Lindsay convincingly captures a turbulent period in Britain: the time of homeless squatters, nationalisation of the pits, coal shortages

that closed factories, forced job losses (Smith, *Socialist Propaganda* 138). *Betrayed Spring* articulates anxieties which were still anathema to many socialists in the 50s and 60s: that fractures and divisions *within* the working class were an insidious effect of affluence ideology: that the collision of austerity desire, created by advance propaganda for an Americanised consumer-economy, prefigured the social upheavals generated by a system set to dominate the western world.

The London sections of *Betrayed Spring* centre on the Tremaine family's poor economic circumstances. Phyl Tremaine is an unemployed young woman whose political consciousness might have remained half-formed under different economic circumstances. At the novel's opening, as Phyl's friendships with a group of girls in the hospitality industry are developing, she is primarily dedicated to having a good time, because 'every one else seemed to think that way […] the newspapers, films, and all the rest of it' (47). Like many young Britons, she briefly romanticises the affluence projected in American styles and Hollywood films. Iinfluenced by her 'good-time' girlfriend Kath, Phyl thinks of Kath's friend Dave as epitomising what it is to be well-dressed in his striped flannels, belted jacket 'house-coat style', wide-brim American trilby and long side-burns. The shirt shop where Dave works is owned by a New York American, and 'everything in the window was ticketed: *Genuine American Style*, *Go Gay with Broadway*, or *The Latest in Los Angeles*'. Apart from lampooning his American employer's homosexuality, Dave totally embraces the perception of America as the model of modernity and progress: for Dave, 'America' means the *future*. When Phyl finally begins to question this extravagant promotion of all things American, Dave is stunned: 'the only styles he could think of were American. English clothes were just clothes; American clothes were style' (219), indicating the extent to which Dave is mentally immersed in an imaginary America.

While many of Phyl's young colleagues remain naïve about the implied meanings of American fashion styles and Hollywood films, Phyl herself is increasingly disturbed by the social gap she notices – between the affluent expectations raised by popular media and the economic realities she sees around her. In *Betrayed Spring's* opening passages, for instance, the Tremaines are evicted from their squat in a derelict London hotel – an episode that highlights the complicity of the government and landlords in the failure to provide decent post-war accommodation for the working class:

> 'It was a poor sort of a room', he persisted, 'but better'n what some
> have to put up with'.
> 'It was a stinking place', she interrupted vehemently; and only now,
> at this moment of giving up, did she seem to realise just how ugly
> and confined their old quarters had been. Even in its blasted
> condition, with its boards and sacking in most of the windows, with
> its thick dust and its bare rooms, with its cracked plaster and its
> damaged roofs, the hotel had been a new world, of breadth and
> dignity, full of adventurous possibilities. (13)

Unemployed like her plasterer father, Phyl Tremaine spends much of her time observing the union activities of women friends in the hospitality trade; discovering that even with a full-time job, many post-war workers lives remain unimproved:

> 'No chairs', Bette went on, 'just iron bedsteads and cracked mirror.
> All of us are on different shifts, so we wake one another up if we ever

do manage to drop off. Two poky bathrooms for forty girls, and a common-room up five flights of stone steps, used as a bicycle store'.

'Don't disillusion me', said Kath, chewing buttered toast more greedily than genteelly. 'The manager wants me to live in when there's a vacant bed..

'They like us under their thumbs', said Bette […] 'You come in, or you get sacked as soon as things slacken. Half my money goes on buns and tea. They took my ration-book, but I haven't had any butter or meat – unless you call those vienna-steaks and sausages meat because they smell so peculiar'. (41)

Lindsay sketches the physical and psychological discomforts low-income workers still experienced at the end of the 40s, conveying the feeling of betrayal among many traditional Labour supporters about the glacial – or stalled – pace of social renovation. In this connection, *Betrayed Spring*'s Tyneside sections focus on the lives of an ambitious trades union official, William Emery, and his wife Jean. These episodes feature a particularly revealing scene which embodies emergent working-class doubts about the success of the 'socialist' experiment, even among unionists who are 'rusted-on' Labour voters. On a shopping excursion, Jean Emery and her friends berate a middle-class interloper who criticises the Atlee Labour Government. At first, this looks like a mere a show of proletarian solidarity. However, it is significant that immediately prior to the incident, Jean and her working-class pals themselves bitterly condemn Atlee's administration over price increases in prices. The bourgeois woman's 'words weren't so very different from what the others were saying, but her tones were. They were the superior tones of the golf-and-bridge middle class; and the

queue at once reacted with resentment. Ready to criticise the Labour Government with all the strength of their lungs, they weren't going to hear this sort of superior person make capital out of their grudges' (122). The incident suggests complex, related views: that Labour's premature post-war economic deregulation visits hardship on its traditional base; that for all its faults, Labour is still (nostalgically) the party of the working class, and for them to abuse; and that older class conflicts have certainly not vanished. Principally, however, and like any number of episodes in *Betrayed Spring*, it voices the belief that the undelivered promise of redistributed wealth strained traditional working-class allegiances. And if Lindsay was correct, this strain was intensified by the unprecedented post-war fetishisation of consumer goods.

As the 50s began, working-class consumer desires extended beyond a longing for the end of rationing and scarce foodstuffs. Consumers now desired things promoted in the popular media which had not even appeared on the shop-shelf. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska's recent *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939–1955* is one of the few academic-historical studies to look at the political and ideological implications of consumer expectation in the period; and Zweiniger-Bargielowska's analysis of Mass Observation and other survey material confirms many of *Betrayed Spring*'s propositions about consumerism and the pressured post-war socialist 'consensus'. Zweiniger-Bargielowska finds that even before WWII was over, high levels of consumer desire were expressed in post-war buying plans: 'men primarily coveted […] a car, bicycle, radio, or camera, women longed for furnishings and other household goods as well as clothes and personal possessions' (67). So, despite post-war Labour's claims of full employment and welfare-state benefits, 'the continuation of controls on consumption alienated many, including some of the government's erstwhile supporters. Since the principle

justification for sacrifice – winning the war – no longer applied, the wartime political consensus on austerity was replaced by a fierce controversy about levels of consumption which was central to the party political battle during the post-war years' (Zweiniger-Bargielowska 98). And while disillusionment was rife among middle classes, symbolised by the complaining bourgeois shopper in *Betrayed Spring*, there was evidence of widespread working-class frustration with restrictions on personal consumption into the late 40s.

In Britain and Australia alike, the fragility of post-war optimism was a recurrent sub-theme in fictions of the 50s and early 60s examining working-class life. In Australia, Ralph de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos* stands out for its capacity to articulate an aspect of the period's social character that statistics or official histories did not fully capture: the difficult adjustments of political temperament and individual motivation, as workers' expectations for greater material bounties were quickly raised and rudely dampened.

Lindsay's *Betrayed Spring* was released close to the historical period it described; de Boissiere's novel was not published until 1964. Nevertheless, *No Saddles for Kangaroos* was no distant reminiscence. As Alan Gardiner notes, the author's clippings, notes on newspapers, journals and earlier versions of the final manuscript reveal that it had been a work in progress from the early 50s, the period in which it was set. And like Lindsay, de Boissiere sought 'authenticity, drawing on character sketches and transcribed conversations from actual working environments as well as other textual and journalistic sources ('Ralph de Boissiere and Communist Cultural Discourse' 211).

No Saddles for Kangaroos examines the lives of workers in a car factory in 1950-51 – 'immediately recognisable' as the majority American-owned 'General

Motors Holden factory […] established in Melbourne as a cornerstone of the post-war construction of Australia's economy' (Gardiner, 'Ralph de Boissiere and Communist Cultural Discourse' 211). The novel charts the experiences of production-line worker Jack Bromley, moving backwards chronologically from his death as a result of exhaustion and excessive overtime. Set at a time of growing tensions over Communism and the Cold War, *No Saddles* is concerned with workplace politics and the influence of Communists in Australian vehicle industry unions; and debates about these issues in the build-up to strike action are the book's main narrative momentum.

However, a closely related yet less appreciated aspect of de Boissiere's novel is the disappointment and confusion of working people in the face of incessant talk about an impending age of affluence – the period mood that Lindsay's *Betrayed Spring* taps. De Boissiere, too, recognises that affluence chatter was pervasive enough by the early 50s to seduce even workers whose memories of harder times should have made them more sceptical – like his protagonist Jack Bromley. Jack is wary when his son Mick plans to billet factory colleague and Communist Larry McMahon and his wife because they are broke and homeless, due to the post-war housing shortage. A conservative Catholic, Jack is reticent about billeting the Presbyterian, Communist Larry; but above all, Jack's blind acceptance of the proposition that working people are on the verge of a new era of previously unattainable economic security makes him suspect that Larry's choice to be a Communist must indicate serious personal failings – a flawed or deluded character, out of step with contemporary reality: 'Jack shook his head. "If a workin' man can't make ends meet with the wages he gets these days there's something wrong. Does he drink?"' (15-16)

Jack's optimism about the working-class future is shaped through a comparison of Great Depression memories with the rhetoric of post-war plenty: a kind

of simple wish fulfilment, requiring him to wilfully suppress lingering doubts that times of privation might return. In contrast, Jack's daughter Sally and her partner Reg Crosby have no Depression memory: they are almost 'purely' influenced by promises of a new Australian 'age of materialism'. Reg is an auto worker, like his father-in-law; but Reg aspires to managerial ranks, fantasising about how he 'might get sent to America for experience' in the process (18). Sally, on the other hand, is impressed by the lifestyles of the professional set she encounters through her secretarial work for a firm of architects. Accompanying Sally to a soirée organised by her employers, Reg admires Sally's social acuity but feels intimidated in this milieu – embarrassed when he notices that other men's clothes are not bought off the hook. Reg's materialist leanings are exposed at the party when he recognises Kevin Carlyon, an engineer from the section of Automakers Corporation Reg wants to join as part of his plan for occupational and social improvement. Reg ingratiates himself (41) and the move appears to pay: convinced he has taken a major step towards his dream of success, he is soon transferred to Carlyon's Experimental section at Autoworkers.

Working for a multinational car company, Reg responds enthusiastically to 'shrill announcements' of the economic boom – understandably, as media images at the time encouraged 'a cargo-cult worship of companies such as GMH as the source of a good life for all' (Gardiner, 'Ralph de Boissiere and Communist Cultural Discourse' 229). In his biography of de Boissiere, Gardiner points to the similarities on this point of *No Saddles for Kangaroos* and other period commentaries, such as Lance Loughrey's short story in a 1956 issue of *Overland*, 'The Price of a Car' ('Ralph de Boissiere and Communist Cultural Discourse' 229). Gardiner plausibly reads Loughrey's story as a similar parable about the potential for real pain once working peoples' deliberately inflated expectations in the early 50s were finally

brought to earth by a realisation of their actual economic circumstances. In Loughrey's yarn, railway worker Mervyn sacrifices everything to buy a new 'Holdmoor' car, then learns from rail-office insider Charley Cappit that looming cuts in overtime at the workshops and increases in third party insurance will force him to sell his cherished possession (11).

In *No Saddles*, Reg is likewise beguiled by 'you can have it all' propaganda, spruiked by advertisers for the auto-industry; but his wife Sally quietly concludes that she might have been misguided in her own uncritical acceptance of the consumerist ideology promoted by business, the media and Menzies Government:

> Sally knew all the makes and prices of refrigerators, stoves, baths, heaters, glazed tiles and bedroom suites. She knew to the very last half-inch the size of every room. She had estimated the costs of various types of floor coverings, weighed their merits, and carried in her mind's eye vivid alternative pictures of the appearance of her home. She had imagined the pleasure and envy it would evoke in some of her friends. And now she said sharply: "Oh, it's all a dream anyway! What does it matter?" (88)

In reality, she and Reg would have to build 'as her parents had done bit by bit over the years. She saw herself washing clothes by hand, going on hands and knees to scrub uncovered floors, harassed by debt and petty household cares, not one bit different from millions of penurious housewives, old before her time' (89). As Sally's prevarication indicates, even before the 50s was in full sway there were suspicions that the long boom's fruits might not be available for ordinary workers – or that they

might exact a harder, higher price than prevailing political rhetoric had led the working classes to believe. As Ron Tullipan wrote in a review of *No Saddles for Kangaroos* in 1962, novels of this type peered 'behind the veneer of Affluence', to consider the 'disquietude [of] those who face the daily grind all their lives' (30). Indeed, novels of this type pinpointed the 'social schizophrenia' working people could experience when their real circumstances were disjunct from consumerist hype; and novels of this type also seemed partly motivated by a need to deflate the false euphoria generated by the constant image-flow advertising the period's spectacular modernist gadgetry.

Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* were important explorations of the way the period's economic and social shifts were manifest in daily working existence in Britain and Australia respectively. And both books were distinguished by deep ambivalences. On one side, Sillitoe and Hewett understood how a young post-war working class could make favourable comparisons between its current circumstances and the paucity of its parent generation. On another, they recognised that the bombardment of working people with images of consumption and symbols of affluence falsified their consciousness and mystified them as to what their current circumstances actually *were* in a structured capitalist class system.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning works out from the premise that its central character, Arthur Seaton, basically accepts the 'new affluence' case and the individual agency it affords. Arthur rants against practically all politicians, most institutions and, paradoxically, the mass culture that is part and parcel of the affluence ethic to which he ostensibly subscribes. But between Arthur's tirades, and against the novel's general narrative current and many of its hero's opinions, Sillitoe reveals

extravagant misperceptions of working-class life-gains, suggesting that affluence ideology is a hollow myth.

Hewett's novel focuses on a group of more obviously politicised workers, repeating the point that their continuing economic difficulties contrast starkly with the idea that they live 'amid the plenty' of the long post-war boom. But *Bobbin Up* also depicts a number of workers on whom old solidarities have a tentative hold: characters who accept the advent of consumer capitalism, as Arthur Seaton does in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. In *Bobbin Up*, there is a dialogic narrative which countervails overtly romantic notions of 'natural' working-class radicalism – a side-story revealing the sacrifices some working people are prepared to make in order to feel that they, too, are participants and winners in the decade's economic miracle.

Hewett's complex depiction of working-class interactions with mass consumerism was a result of her lived experience: close observation, (including a year's work in a textile factory) and excursions, 'notebook in hand like a reporter, walking through the inner Sydney streets, checking on locations, copying down the words on advertising hoardings, and listening in to the conversations on trains and buses' (Hewett, 'Afterthoughts on *Bobbin Up*' vii). Although she approached it from a different direction than Sillitoe, Hewett nevertheless obliquely raised the question of whether working-class capitulation to consumer capital in the 50s was an alarming phenomenon: a subconscious indifference to persistent, structural inequalities. Some critics of the time intuited this discursive tendency in Hewett's novel; but it did not fit with preconceived notions of working-class and was often critically dismissed or ignored. For this reason, *Bobbin Up* was deemed by some of Hewett's comrades from the Communist-affiliated Realist Writers Group as 'politically incorrect'. Paul Mortier, for example, viewed Hewett's frank discussion of sexuality and her

propensity to show working peoples' attractions to new leisure pursuits and consumer goods as sensational and unrealistic – a bourgeois distraction from the 'real' story, meaning the activity of radically resistant workers ('Bobbin Up' 20). Ralph de Boissiere, too, figured that *Bobbin Up* shone 'too much light [on] a host of secondary considerations which only partly reveal the characters' ('On Socialist Realism' 124).

Whilst *Bobbin Up* had obvious political intentions, moderated by 'authentic' authorial observations about what actually happened in working-class communities under the intense pressure of consumerist ideology, Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was neither socialist-realism nor remotely interested in portraying a radical working-class organisation. Its protagonist, Arthur Seaton, was an uncompromising bourgeois individualist: he resembled the portrait Conservative (and many Labour) politicians in the 50s painted of the newly affluent young worker, 'affluence here referring to regular employment, adequate food and housing, and spare income for leisure' (Laing, *Representations of Working-class Life* 66).

Arthur is a machinist in a Nottingham bicycle factory, as his father had been; and though his economic circumstances are better than his father's, Arthur never dwells too much on the thought of upward social mobility. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is not in a tradition of novels about troubled class transcendence – Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, or the best known post-war example of the genre dealing with working lads exiting their class – John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957). In respect of the latter, however, there *is* an important convergence. Like *Room at the Top*, Sillitoe's text presses the idea that material improvements for the working class had occurred in the 50s. Yet unlike *Room at the Top*'s Joe Lampton, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s Arthur Seaton has no prospect of class mobility: he stays home, as if to say 'this is as good as

it gets, and for me that is not too bad'; but he is a seething psychological mixture of complacency, callous self-centeredness, willed optimism about the worker's lot in the 50s, and explosive anger that Britain's class structure remains unaltered.

This disturbed portrait of a man welded to his social spot was not immediately evident to critics at the time, because *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* seemed typical of the era's novels that 'appreciatively referred to the amelioration' – working-class 'progress' in the period – supposedly flowing from the long economic boom and fuller employment (Paul 52). As Stuart Laing observes, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* appears to embrace affluence ideology (*Representations of Working-class Life* 65), and Arthur Seaton applauds the culture of material improvement:

No more short-time like before the war, or getting the sack if you stood ten minutes in the lavatory reading your *Football Post* – if the gaffer got on to you now you could always tell him where to put the job and go somewhere else […] and about time too, you got fair wages if you worked your backbone to a string of conkers on piecework and there was a big canteen where you could get a hot dinner for two-bob. With the wages you got you could save up for a motor bike and get rid of all you'd saved. (21)

Inheriting his father's Great Depression memories, Arthur believes contemporary material improvements are just rewards for what previous working-class generations endured and went without:

He was glad to see the TV standing in a corner of the living room, a glossy panelled box looking, he thought, like something plundered from a space-ship. The old man was happy at last, anyway, and he deserved to be happy, after all the years before the war on the dole, five kids and the big miserying that went with no money and no way of getting any. And now he had a sit-down job at the factory, all the Woodbines he could smoke, money for a pint if he wanted one, though he didn't drink as a rule, a holiday somewhere, a jaunt on the firm's trip to Blackpool, and a television set to look into at home. The difference between before the war and after the war didn't bear thinking about. (20)

Sillitoe recognises that some young workers in the 50s judge their own 'progress' against an inter-war parent generation's deprivations – not against entrenched middle-class standards of consumer power or job security (Rule 223). So there is an odd simplicity in Arthur Seaton's view of economic change: a contradictory motion in his attitude that 'before the war didn't bear thinking about' and the 'anarchic anger that Arthur expressed elsewhere' (Bell, 'Arthur Seaton and the Machine' 152). Arthur abuses the political process:

Tek them blokes as spout on boxes outside the factory sometimes. I like to hear 'em talk about Russia, about farms and power stations they've got, because it's interestin', but when they say that when they get in government everybody's got to share and share alike, then that's another thing. I ain't a communist, I tell you. I like 'em though,

because they're different from these big fat Tory bastards in

parliament. And them Labour bleeders too. They rob our wage

packets every week with insurance and income tax and try to tell us

it's all for our own good. I know what I'd like to do with the

government. I'd like ter go round every factory in England with

books and books of little numbers and raffle off the 'Ouses of

Parliament. (28)

Moving in the opposite direction, Arthur adopts a 'get it while you can' attitude: 'with

the wages you got you could save up for a motor bike or even an old car, or you could

go on a ten-day binge and get rid of all you'd saved. Because it was no use saving

your money year after year' (21).

Arthur articulates the darkening shades of working-class hedonism, catalogued

by Richard Hoggart in his landmark contemporary study of working-class culture *The

Uses of Literacy*. Hoggart pondered whether one of the most insidious aspects of post-

war consumer capital was that its traduction of older working-class attitudes led to

new, profitable ends: 'can the idea of "'aving a good time while y'can" because life is

hard open the way to a soft mass-hedonism? Can the sense of the group be turned into

an arrogant and slick conformity?' (171). Peter Hitchcock notes this Hoggartian echo

in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Hitchcock discerns a relationship between

Hoggart's 'hedonism' and Arthur Seaton's political dilemma: a problem aligning the

fictional Arthur with real-life working-class youths of the late 50s, who had no right-

wing sympathies but equally disbelieved in the Left as purveyor of affluence and

social justice (*Working-class Fiction in Theory and Practice* 66). Hitchcock also

observes that the power of 50s and 60s fiction about the working class resides in the

awareness that 'much of the writing underlined the fact that affluence in the working class was relative and uneven' (*Working-Class Fiction* 34). In 1960, this unevenness prompted Sillitoe to write 'Both Sides of the Street':

> The street is open today, rarely narrow and tortuous, yet still bordered by room-warrens in which *people* live. All should have their writers, not only those who live in opulent mansions and mediocre villas but also those who inhabit black and dingy streets. These last, many of whom work in factories, are nearly always referred to as "the masses"; once the blind instrument of revolution, but now no longer so. They are being neutralised by the message of good living, on the supposition that they will stay content as long as enough earthly bread is being given out. It is also recognised that bread and circuses are not enough, but instead of the accompanying and necessary heavenly bread they are being given propaganda regarding the merits of the bread itself, and not about the dignity that goes with the eating of it. (73)

This was a more generous attitude to working life and eating the fruits of affluence than Sillitoe exhibited twenty years later, when he concluded that social mobility and economic security were matters of personal ambition: 'I believe that if you grow up in a very under-privileged house and you don't have an easy path to get university education […] you can make it if you really have the drive and if you're intelligent and if you want to' (Halperin 183). However, David Craig cautions that with Sillitoe it is best to exercise the Lawrencian dictum to 'never trust the artist' – 'trust the tale'

(104). In light of Craig's advice, Sillitoe's early fictional suppositions can be reread: his celebration of affluence rhetoric and fantasies of class mobility thinly overlaid a more genuine perception that structural social inequality persisted in post-war Britain.

A counter-voice whispers in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*: the novel speaks the persistence of inequality from its margins whilst the main narrative proclaims the arrival of 'good times'. Arthur Seaton's modest prosperity comes at a cost: as a single man living at home, his life is solitary and curtailed; and as Nigel Gray put it, 'fourteen quid can provide a lot of beer and fags, but it doesn't go far when you've a home to manage. Rent or mortgage, food and clothing for a wife and family, and there is little enough left for a good time' (108). Seaton boasts about his disposable income, but is stuck in a cramped family home in the 'black and dingy streets' that Sillitoe referred to in 'Both Sides of the Street'. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the street-scape is marked by the external ruin of the houses and a futuristic emblem of the new consumerism, bought on hire-purchase:

> You stepped out of the front door and found yourself on the pavement. Red-ochre had been blackened by soot, paint was faded and cracked, everything was a hundred years old […]
> 'What will they think of next?' Seaton said, after glancing upwards and seeing a television aerial hooked on to almost every chimney like a string of radar stations, each installed on the never never. (22)

Sillitoe's 'good times' narrative is dialogically confounded by pictures of neighbourhoods that largely miss the long boom's benefits (the crumbling amenity of working-class tenements) or the spectacle of the anomalous and conditional

appearance of 'new affluence' – shiny TV aerials, bought on credit, 'hooked on' sooty chimneys. This image of an encroaching mass culture precariously perched on the more solid, but crumbling, remnants of past life was a metaphor for the period's transformations; and Sillitoe was not the only writer of the time broadcasting mixed signals about working-class experience and economic change.

Clancy Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock* – another novel profiling a northern British working-class individualist – expresses divided opinions about the real extent and mythic pull of 'new affluence'. Written in the wake of Sillitoe's book, *Weekend in Dinlock* is narrated by a sympathetic American 'outsider' observer who becomes involved with a young Yorkshire miner and his community. Unlike Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton, *Weekend in Dinlock*'s miner-protagonist Davie is an artistic character who stays in the fold after abandoning a plan to escape the stultifications of mining-village life and move to cosmopolitan London. But *Weekend in Dinlock* shares one vital view with Sillitoe's work: the uneasiness it detects among many workers about 'bread and circuses' consumerism. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, this unease is often addressed in stern moralistic tones – when Arthur observes several women buying groceries on credit, for example, he is exasperated that 'they've all got TV's […] but they still get grub on tick' (55). In *Weekend in Dinlock*, Davie can likewise attribute the erosion of village values to the 'tombola, television and the motor car', yet he is far more ambivalent and less morally judgemental: mining villagers might moan about streets clogged with cars and a 'staggering amount of hire purchase', but they also agree that the 'never never' has improved and 'vastly affected the appearance of their homes' and freed young pit-men take holidays 'in style' (144).

However, these manifestations of Dinlock's affluence are superimpositions – like the television aerials in Sillitoe's book. When Sigal describes the Yorkshire

mining town where the novel is set, it is as rundown as Sillitoe's working-class Nottingham. Dinlock's typical tenement is a warren of small, unheated rooms and even the occasional washing machine or TV cannot disguise its primitive standards: 'A parlour only slightly larger (four paces long, two paces wide), an adjoining room for the television set and two beds for Davie's sisters, two bedrooms upstairs and indoor plumbing, the kitchen sink serving also that purpose; the furniture cheap and modernistic' (18). Even Dinlock's National Coal Board houses, enviously eyed by would-be tenants as the best in the village, are perhaps nothing more than the 'slums of the future': 'Not much different in aspect than the famed Council houses, squarish, cramped affairs with the ceilings already cracking, grey inside and out in all the various disheartening shades' (22).

This was hardly the ideal workers' accommodation which designer Reyner Banham described in a *New Statesman* article, 'Coronation Street, Hoggartsborough' (1962): a title suggesting the discursive convergence of popular culture, working-class aspiration and Richard Hoggart's critical view of social change in the period. Banham's article celebrated a heartening change of attitude among British architects:

Streets, by the end of the Fifties, had become the focus of the argument, and the younger architects were thinking hard about them (though not in regular sociologists' terminology) as the place where both architecture and community life began, and Peter Smithson's public pronouncements began to abound in diagrams showing patterns of association in typically working-class streets, backed up by quotations from *Family and Kinship in East London*. The aim became the creation of a kind of urban architecture that would bring

people together, not force them apart into what Killen calls 'subtopian semi-detachment'. Of course, such ideas were very difficult to sell to housing committees whose semi-detached prejudices had been reinforced by two generations of astute and sustained propaganda from the Town and Country Planning Association. (200)

But the housing revolution Banham envisaged, marrying technical services, social function and aesthetics, was only trialled in a few select experimental projects in the early 60s. Generally, working-class accommodation still consisted of untended streets, sterile estates or aging terraces.

Dinlock's rundown appearance thus prompts *Weekend in Dinlock*'s American narrator to describe his first visit in Conradian terms: 'what had I expected; this isn't darkest Africa. Or is it?'; and the narrator's white New York duffle coat marks him out against the griminess, as if he were a colonial official arriving in a newly discovered territory: 'the colour seemed to dazzle them; it is clean, without dirt or greyness, hence, I must have just come from another world, where you did not breathe coal dust and the chill winds off the Yorkshire moors which seem more a frigid gas than a breath of air' (16). As an American and an outsider, Sigal viewed northern working-class towns less romantically than some 'home-grown' sociologists who documented the era's working-class landscape. In Brian Jackson's studies of northern working-class communities conducted between 1958 and 1968, for example, there is a generously poetic description of industrial Huddersfield. Initially, Huddersfield appears as a 'star-shaped cluster of grimy Methodist chapels, warehouses, factories' and 'slender black chimneys'; but viewed at dusk from the escarpment above, Jackson

adds that 'when the chains of yellow lights light up in active succession, like compass lines along the valley roads – at that moment, the canal reflections, the intense blackness of the chapels and chimneys gave the town an unforgettable and unexpected Gothic beauty' (20).

Doris Lessing, living with *Weekend in Dinlock's* author at the time, remembered that Sigal's portrayal of the Yorkshire working-class village caused irrational hostility (ironically, among London's political Left rather than the villagers who were Sigal's models), mainly because Sigal was an American and a metropolitan interloper into provincial life (Lessing 235; Rex 42-45). However, Sigal did not have to be a born and raised local (like Sillitoe) to understand correctly that economic fortunes were unevenly distributed in 50s Britain. The 'new affluence' was indeed merely superimposed on an ailing regional infrastructure – as Barbara Castle noted in a letter to *New Statesman* in the wake of Harold Macmillan's 1959 election victory:

> We know, too, that prosperity, even for the prosperous, is finding its outlet in the wrong priorities. Mr. Macmillan has boasted that the TV set is the badge of prosperity. In the back streets of Blackburn the TV aerials are there all right; what we lack are thousands of decent houses to put under them. Fifteen years after the war the town is still largely a blight area and the Tories' only contribution to this problem has been to put up the rents of houses that no amount of patchwork repairs can turn into decent homes; to cut the local council's housing programme from 300 to 200 houses per year and to put a council house out of reach of the poorer families by raising the interest rates.
> (497)

In 1962, Alexander McLeod reported to the same journal that there had been few improvements in working-class neighbourhoods on the Mersey:

> I unfortunately live in the Merseyside area. The busiest places are not the Stock Exchanges, but the Labour Exchanges, and there have never been less that 20,000 out of work since the end of the war […] We also have on Merseyside the worst slums and housing problem in the country – apart from the Gorbals and the Edinburgh 'closes'. The house in which I am compelled to live was built over 80 years ago, and consists of two up and two down the front door opening on to the street, no hot water system, no bathroom, and with the lavatory in the backyard – most uncomfortable on a winter's morning, I can assure you! In fact it makes the hovels of *Coronation Street* seem like Kensington. (368)

These British sociological and literary registrations of the period's tensions – between affluence ideology and continuing structural inequality – also emerged in Australian writing: in Dorothy Hewett's ostensibly quite different novel, *Bobbin Up*, for instance. Hewett's text consists of a series of snapshots of women textile factory workers in inner-city Sydney in the late 50s; and although *Bobbin Up* is propelled by the story of union activists Nell Weber and her husband, radical pamphleteering and industrial action, this is not really a *central* narrative. Rather, the Webers' story is one of a number of mini-plots involving a range of working-class women. Hewett's use of many narrative strands, developing contrapuntal themes, importantly indicates her

preparedness to survey the breadth of working-class experience (including issues like social aspiration and the quest for consumer comforts), and this saves the novel from the crudities of Zhdanovite polemic about working-class radicalisation and action.

Mirroring Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, many of *Bobbin Up*'s Australian working women characters accept long boom rhetoric and desire some of the consumer spoils. *Bobbin Up*'s Jeanie, for example, shares Arthur's sentiment that if the 50s working class snaps up 'creature comforts' then this 'get it while you can' mentality is somehow linked to class memories of Depression privation and parental sacrifice. Consequently, this means that Jeanie (like Arthur) considers the politics of her parents' generation irrelevant to new times – or an irritant, as her mother criticises Jeanie's materialistic aspiration to own a home. Unlike Jeanie's generation, her Communist mother Peggy sees the dream of home ownership as a dangerous delusion: preventing young working people from recognising that they are being set up for economic failure, mortgaged to capital.

Housing is a point of generational conflict for Jeanie, precisely because private ownership had been so heavily promoted by business, advertisers and the government of the day as tantalisingly possible in long-boom Australia (Knight, '*Bobbin Up* and the Working-Class Novel' 217). But the sacrifices required to get onto the home ownership ladder's bottom rung are great: Jeanie faces the indignity of being reported to Welfare for taking her children on a tram every morning at half-past five so she can start a shift at the mill at seven o'clock: 'All she wanted was to work till she and Alec saved up enough to get the deposit on their house […] that beautiful dream house on the little block of land out in Blacktown, that one with the pink and black bathroom, real tiles and the kitchen with the stainless steel sink, and the new baby in the frilled bassinet on the front porch' (182). Jeanie's older colleague, Lil, also fantasises about a

dream home of her own, but her aspirations are implicitly mocked by the window-view from her miserable lodgings:

> Lil was glad she had the top room. There she only had to cope with the rain, downstairs the tenants struggled with an insidious creeping fungus that furred the walls, and rotted the floor boards. The house had been built without a damp course on an old swamp. The legacy of a sharp, musty stench filled the rooms from top to bottom, sent the kids to bed with bronchitis and pleurisy half the winter.
>
> Upstairs Lil had a view. Across the crooked slate and corrugated iron roofs of Waterloo and Redfern the Housing Commission flats stood like a dream of luxury amidst the green lawns. The sunlight slanted golden against their solid brick walls, a rainbow of mist from the water sprinklers circled them with enchantment. (67)

To British and Australian writers, then, the desire for a decent home – and the empowering dream of private ownership – was pivotal to post-war myths of affluence. And the 'enchantment' of home ownership went beyond the basic concept a roof over one's head: a home must be adorned with the conspicuous symbols of modernity; televisions, gadgets, white goods. Thus, home ownership dreams drove demand for consumer durables, advertised to raise working-class expectations of economic advancement and to ideologically vanish memories of Depression and austerity. Harry Hopkins observed that in Britain the 'production indices' of consumer durables 'were the subject of almost daily anxious comment by economists charting the national future':

The social and psychological effects promised to be no less far-reaching. Here was a complex of goods, 'contemporary', smart, complicated and/or substantial, costing tens of pounds rather than shillings, which not only provided the nucleus of a new style of life but – especially when fitted into the new house they seemed to demand – had the power to turn millions of people, with remarkable speed into 'property owners'. (309-310)

The insidious, persuasive appeal of consumer goods that Hopkins remarked in Britain was equally apparent in Australia during the 50s; the same improved advertising and marketing methods were aimed at an Australian working class that was eyed, like its British counterpart, as a major market. Consumerism's seductions are captured perfectly in a scene in *Bobbin Up*, where pregnant Beth and her partner Len go 'window-shopping'. As Hewett portrays it, Beth's 'mooning over' items like the glass-enthroned latest model Holden is not harmless escapism but, once again, a mockery of working-class desire. The spectacular display of consumer goods heightens the couple's expectations, then dashes them with a reminder that for the working poor the fantasy is beyond reach:

Oxford Street lapped them round with promises, lured them with impossible dreams […] the whirl of lights, the purr of cars, the distant, velvety roar of the city, haloed with gold. Pressed close together they ambled dreamily through the summer night, eating bananas bought from a street stall, dropping the peel in the gutter as they went.

> Streamlined refrigerators, laminex kitchen suites, deluxe washing
>
> machines, double beds in polished maple, TV sets […] a Hollywood
>
> Fairytale […] carpet your home from wall to wall and trade in your
>
> furniture, no deposit and easy terms. (23)

In 1956, a report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* noted the disappointments awaiting low-income earners that would result from the ideological tilt towards considering housing as primarily a private undertaking: 'it is unlikely that any substantial portion of these people could avail themselves of loans through lending authorities to build their own homes' ('Shortage of Homes' 11). Consequently, the 1961 Australian Commonwealth census revealed over 45,000 people living 'permanently' in occupied huts and sheds (Greig 39); and though it is largely forgotten today, this housing crisis meant emergency measures had to be put into place in the 50s and 60s in Australia. Subsidies were granted to build sleep-outs for married couples financially forced to live with parents; wartime service barracks were converted; roughly partitioned army huts became the first homes for many newly-weds (Powell 57). For those who did build their own homes, this often meant years of primitive living: 'a tub with a chip heater in a corrugated-iron shed served as bathroom and laundry, outdoors a 40-gallon drum on bricks with a fire beneath, had a copper fitted inside it for boiling the clothes (Powell 69). As *these* historical snapshots of working-class life revealed, the common prediction that the post-war boom facilitated the process of 'middle-classing' was absurdly overblown.

However, between the mid 50s and the mid 60s, British and Australian 'public intellectuals' produced influential defences of suburbia and the emphasis on the private home, promoting the idea that this was the key post-war site where class

distinctions were being levelled. Some were ambiguous: Charles Curran's series on Britain's 'new estates' for *Spectator* (1956) bemoaned elitist attacks on the working-class embrace of new suburban consuming habits whilst revealing an almost sneering, underlying distaste for its 'mass' character. In Curran's view, one of the ingredients of Tory electoral successes in Britain since 1950 was that the New Estate had become a classless zone, neither proletarian nor bourgeois: 'it has turned its back on the first, but it does not wish to assimilate to the second. Any attempt to address it as though it belonged to either will fail. One reason for the near collapse of Socialist propaganda to the New Estate since 1950 is that it is still pitched in proletarian keys' ('The Politics of the New Estate' 209). Curran argued that Left elites, particularly, had not come to terms with a socially homogenising effect: working classes now occupied a place that was one of 'mass-production comfort, made easy by hire-purchase'. The focal point of the home, and the symbols of conspicuous expenditure, were now the tiled fireplace and the wireless set rather than the piano. And on the New Estate, the word 'book' meant a 'periodical such as *Reveille* or *Woman's Own*' rather than a hard-cover borrowed from a library ('The New Estate in Great Britain' 73). If this implied vulgarity or ignorance among the working class, Curran was nevertheless convinced this would disappear as workers adapted to their new economic security. Applying Arnoldian principles of 'culture', 'discernment' and 'taste' to this latest phase of working-class history was less important, Curran thought, than ensuring that workers learned to enjoy a healthy dose of privatisation:

> First I would put the expansion of the property-owning impulse – by
> enlarging the idea of material possessions, by encouraging
> investment, most of all by promoting house purchase. The

dismantling of the rent-subsidy structure can be carried out only if it
is linked with proposals for selling the houses of the occupants.
Unless he is in acute poverty, the State-aided tenant is a social
offence. Reality will break into the New Estate as soon as the cost of
the home becomes the first charge on the family income ('The New
Estate in Great Britain'. (74)

The same year, social changes within the working class were the subject of essays in
Encounter, printed under the banner 'This New England'. Wayland Young's 'Return
to Wigan Pier' was ambivalent, as Curran's 'New Estate' had been, but with a
different inflection: Young seized on a quote from the women's column of the *Wigan
Observer*, where a woman had fantasised about shopping for Grace Kelly's wedding
present as though it was the embodiment of the socialist revolution: 'Id settle for the
two thousand pound kitchen I saw at a kitchen exhibition in a London store' (10).
Evading the Arnoldian concerns about cultural deterioration that lurked in Curran's
critique, Young maintained an optimistic tone about what the new consumerism
meant for working classes: 'the "tele" may not be alive, but there's no denying it has
more *human* interest than a dog' (11). But this up-beat mood was contradicted by
Young's graphic account, in the same article, of conditions in a Wigan foundry and
the dangerous exertions faced by industrial workers to fund their consuming passions:

'What can go wrong?' I ask.
'Ee', he says, 'anything can. I've had cranes on fire, the roof on fire,
blowthroughs, getaways… '
'Getaways?'

'Like if air gets caught under the iron and it all comes up again at

you. Then it covers the floor, doesn't it? Then you run for it.' (7)

Young also identified another shortcoming of the 'welfare state revolution': the

limited capacity for council estates to fix working-class overcrowding in northern

towns like Wigan, and the uniform dilapidation of many houses in such areas, only

'diversified now by those spindly exotics, TV aerials' (6). Yet again, the period image

of mass modernity – emblematised by the 'exotic' TV aerial – was drawn as merely

perched on an older, disrepaired culture.

In 'The Stones of Harlow', T.R. Fyvel seemed less equivocal, and more

sombre, than Young about the effects of mass working-class participation in the cult

of affluence. Fyvel pointedly attributed the 'monotonous look of the new suburbia and

the mechanical content of the new popular culture' to a totalising system so insidious

that it made old 'socialist versus conservative' divides redundant: 'the creed of

American capitalism, that every American *shall* become a consumer of homes, cars,

TV sets, and the rest, and the British Socialist ideal that every citizen *shall* enjoy a fair

share of the national income, lead to not dissimilar ends' (15). However, while Fyvel

understood (and deplored) the negative effects of this latest version of mass society on

working-class culture, he too pragmatically accepted that a majority of the working

class felt empowered, improved and gratified by the phenomenon:

Acquisitions like the council house, refrigerator, and television, the

little car and the cheap fashion magazine, the first tour abroad and the

new secondary modern schools have opened the way to a wider,

varied life previously out of reach – and they *like* it! Whether it leads

to Subtopia or not, the rush to mass participation is thus irresistible.
The only way to effect the evolution of Subtopia lies through
acceptance of this social revolution. (16)

When several equally influential post-war defences of suburbia emerged in Australia a
few years later, their framing debates were instantly familiar to anyone who had
followed the dialogue in Britain. A section of Tim Rowse's *Australian Liberalism and
National Character* (1978), devoted to the emergence of a number of influential social
commentators in the 60s who Rowse terms 'The New Critics', pays particular
attention to the assumptions about class, consumerism, home and suburb that infused
the work of Donald Horne and Craig McGregor.

Published in 1964, Horne's *The Lucky Country* displayed the same
ambivalences about the 'massification' of life in the 50s which permeated slightly
earlier British analyses. As Rowse notes, even while Horne defended Australia's
suburban character and its capacity to chip away class difference there was a
detectable distaste for the underpinnings of this common way of life (*Australian
Liberalism and National Character* 207). In this passage from *The Lucky Country*, for
example, there is a note of sarcasm in Horne's description of a nation that valorizes
the hedonism of shopping:

For several generations most of its men have been catching the 8.2,
and messing about with their houses and gardens at the weekends.
Australians have been getting used to the conformities of living in
suburban streets longer than most people: mass secular education
arrived in Australia before other countries; Australia was one of the

first nations to find part of the meaning in life in the purchase of

consumer goods. (29)

Craig McGregor's 1966 overview of social developments in the previous decade, *Profile of Australia*, likewise associated consumer-driven suburban existence with a process of class-flattening. Yet unlike Horne's assessment, McGregor's impressions of suburbia were conveyed in a language of exhilaration and admiration:

There is a zestfulness about much suburban life which is apparent in a thousand particulars, from the sense of bustle and good humour in the thriving suburban shopping centres to the stomps, sports cars, surfboards and juke-boxes which help enliven the life of the younger suburbanites. The pubs crammed with drinkers, station waggon loaded with kids and camping gear, suburban church halls reverberating to howling electric guitars, barbecues in a thousand backyards. (125-126)

But the era's British and Australian endorsements of a consumption-culture centred on the private home were afflicted with a common problem. Not in their response to the sneers at conformist suburbia by critical 'elites'. After all, the distinction between elites and suburbanites was artificial anyway: as that notable post-60s defender of Australian suburbia, Hugh Stretton, wrote, 'you don't have to be a mindless conformist to choose suburban life […] most of the best poets and painters and inventors and protestors choose it too' (21). The real problem was that Rowse's 'new critics' assumed that communities experienced a life so abundant that 'class' was no

longer a meaningful sociological or political category. 'New critical' commentaries thus ventriloquised the affluence rhetoric that was mercilessly and misleadingly deployed throughout the 50s and early 60s by conservative politicians: Macmillan in Britain, Menzies in Australia. Rowse's observations on the problematic weaknesses of new social critique in the Australian context are particularly acute; and his comments about McGregor and Horne also apply to Britons like Curran, Young and Fyvel. The problem with these 'new critical' social appraisals, argues Rowse, is that they are anchored in the 'embourgeoisement argument' – the idea that 'we are all middle class now'. Consequently, this kind of social analysis assumes that universal, declassed prosperity is achieved effortlessly; an approach that conceptually sequesters domesticity and private leisure time from the working life that finances them, so the 'vitality' described by observers like Horne in Australia or Curran in Britain promotes the picture of 'an undifferentiated suburbia, composed of individual households standing free of class relations' (Rowse, 'Heaven and a Hills Hoist' 9-10). Rowse maintains that this separation of the 'private' world of consumption from larger social processes – work and politics – overlooks how troubled the working-class path to modest affluence actually was in the 50s and 60s. Low-income earners made considerable sacrifices to participate in the post-war consumerist miracle; so, Rowse argues, 'the "ideal home" could still be a gilded cage' ('Heaven and a Hills Hoist' 11).

By the late 60s, 'affluent society' revisionists John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler were arguing that post-war capitalism had come to be seen as fairly and tolerably distributing wealth 'through a more or less silent process of transformation from within' (*Class in a Capitalist Society* 31). But in Westergaard and Resler's opinion, the measurement of this was scant and exaggerated: it was a thesis 'borne less by evidence and explicit argument than by faith' (*Class in a Capitalist Society*

33). The thesis was also questioned by the novels surveyed in this chapter: fictions increasingly backed by sociologies of a very different stamp from those peddling impressions of bright new estates crammed with white goods and gadgetry.

By the early 60s, an emerging band of British sociologists bluntly asserted that the post-war welfare state had not significantly redistributed income or wealth in favour of poorer classes; and that the principle of universality promised by the welfare state never delivered equal social outcomes (Gorz 360). On the contrary, some argued, throughout the 50s and 60s health services, aged care, family allowances, housing and education were most effectively accessed by higher income groups (Titmuss 357-358) – and this line of social sciences investigation ultimately led to the 'rediscovery' of poverty in the late 50s and early 60s. But as Westergaard and Resler cautioned, this tendency to single out 'the poor' for sociological attention in a variety of special circumstances – old age, sickness, single parenthood, unemployment – pushed the image of working-class people below an arbitrary poverty line and 'only dimly lit the wider structure of inequality' that left workers exposed to penury and exploitation (*Class in a Capitalist Society* 19).

Examining government surveys of economic trends, Robin Blackburn was surprised to find that in 1953–54 nearly four million Britons lived no better than the average family on National Assistance; preliminary results for 1960 showed this number almost doubled. It was obvious to Blackburn that if any redistribution had occurred, it was not between but *within* classes (139); and a report by the National Board of Prices and Incomes in 1971, revealing that the distribution of earnings remained more or less the same as in 1886, confirmed that deprivation persisted in the years after WWII (Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light* 69).

In this context, then, exactly how was the working class so fully integrated into post-war consumer capitalism that many of its members identified as strongly with affluence rhetoric as the well-heeled middle-classes? One answer, perhaps, is that free-marketeers better understood the activation of working-class desires than Left champions of the proletariat. It was said that in the late 50s, Lord Poole, one of Prime Minister Macmillan's most astute party managers would 'drive on a Saturday from his country home to nearby Watford' to observe the 'changing moods of the suburb by watching people shopping in the new supermarkets. Enjoying the opportunities they had never had before, absorbed in the rickety world of hire-purchase, intent on becoming owners of a television or cut-price (imported) washing machine' (Pinto-Duschinsky 77). Apocryphal or not, the anecdote captures the point.

In the late 50s, Raymond Williams commented on the growing recognition that post-war consumerism had altered working-class self-perception: 'there's this whole question of a rising standard of living, and its effects on working-class social ideas. With more goods available, steadier employment, and so on, you can reasonably set your sights on a more furnished life […] the working class can become middle class, as they get their washing machines and things like that. I think myself that what the *Economist* calls "deproletarianisation" is very complicated' (Hoggart & Williams, 'Working-Class Attitudes' 28). Regardless of whether post-war prosperity was evenly distributed, workers' imagined their lives as historically remapped by consumerism, and this had a deeper effect on their psychology and behaviour: even where goods were not owned 'there was an expectation of enjoying them in the foreseeable future' (Butler & Rose 13).

In his recent revaluation of the pressures such expectations exerted on working people in post-war Britain ('Time, Affluence and Private Leisure'), historian John

Rule draws specific attention to two crucially related aspects of changing working-class life in the period: hire purchase and overtime. Rule argues that in subsequent decades, the free-market maintenance of myths of the 50s and 60s as unprecedentedly affluent ignores the long boom's real economic foundations and working-class sacrifices made in the name of prosperity (228). In the 50s and 60s, however, the impact of such sacrifices *did* concern writers and social observers who were still in touch with the working-class quotidian.

In the 50s, working-class taboos on debt were transgressed with vast economic, social and ultimately political consequences: 'If the basic fuel of the boom was supplied by full employment' and 'its accelerator pushed down by Admass', Hopkins remarked from the vantage point of 1963, then 'the flywheel, sustaining and building up the revs, was hire purchase' (317). In *The New Look*, Hopkins recalled a leading British exponent of hire-purchase happily telling his stockholders in 1958 that 'the whole nation has taken to buying nearly everything on the instalment plan', and that in the preceding five years total instalment credit had doubled to the extent that hire purchase would soon be Britain's second banking system (318). When British restrictions on hire purchase were removed in 1958, there was a debt explosion': four in five British families hire-purchased one thousand million pounds worth of goods by 1960 (Lewis 30); an inspector for the National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children, interviewed by Hunter Davies in the 60s, claimed that hire purchase had become a greater family crisis for those on low incomes than alcohol (76).

The same dramatic growth in hire-purchase finance hit Australia in the period and raw statistics indicate this represented a major social change (Louis 82). As Stella Lees and June Senyard explain in *The 1950s: How Australia Became a Modern Society*, 'although hire purchase was never given much public applause by the

financial world or welcomed by government, it was nevertheless the grease for the wheels of consumerism; to the extent that in 1959, 260 million pounds of new hire purchase was advanced to Australians to buy the mass-produced goods being manufactured by American firms in Australia' (66). But some did applaud, pointing to America as the successful model for integrating working people into the new consumer economy through debt. In 1964, a survey of the previous decade in the *Victorian Institute of Public Affairs Review* noted with satisfaction that inhibitions about debt were gradually whittled away:

> Before the war and even after the War many people were reluctant to enter into heavy debts for a home, a car or even a refrigerator because their employment and incomes were not secure. All this has changed in the modern full employment economy where there is virtually a job for everyone. The habit of buying widely on terms has not harmed the American economy and it is hard to see the general run of Australians getting into serious trouble with their debts. ('Consumer Spending Surveyed' 85)

In reality, many on low-wage earners were paralysed by debt; and instead of enjoying their leisure they needed to work extra hours to carry the financial burden. These related sacrifices were such a fact of post-war life that even fiction about the working class by writers with Socialist Realist proclivities suggested that revolutionised working-class attitudes to debt and consumption would not fit within literary dogma – the working class seemed so willing to participate in the hire-purchase racket. In Britain, Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock* and Margot Heinemann's *The Adventurers*, and

Hewett's *Bobbin Up* and Mena Calthorpe's *The Dyehouse* in Australia, were literary explorations of the nexus of time pressures and debt that many workers experienced in the 50s as the price for greater participation in the consumer economy.

Ingrid von Rosenberg remarks that apart from Jack Lindsay, Margot Heinemann was one of the few British novelists in the 50s and 60s writing about working-class life from a socialist viewpoint (150), echoing Marilyn Evans' point in one of the rare reviews of Heinemann's *Adventurers* in 1961: this was a novel of strong political involvement (63). *The Adventurers* follows Welsh scholarship boy Dan Owen, from his mining village to the world of 50s British Labour and union politics, tracing turns in his friendship with miner Tommy Rhys Evans. This involves Dan's apparently progressive class transcendence, and also his rising belief that his profession as a journalist covering labour matters requires pragmatism bordering on amorality. In part, pragmatism leads Dan to betray Lewis Connor, a left-wing union leader respected in Dan's native mining district. Dan engineers a television show that will hatchet Connor (Heinemann 259-260).

The novel's portrayal of organised labour's brutal Realpolitik – and the flimsiness of working-class solidarity – are atypical of a writer with Heinemann's Communist Party associations; as are the passages where militant, die-hard unionists make considerable personal concessions so their families might share the bountiful 'age of affluence' ideal. The theme of class self-sacrifice makes sections of *The Adventurers* that return to Abergoch particularly poignant: the village is a heartland where the book's main interest resides. As Marilyn Evans understood, here Heinemann inspects the relationship of lived experience, post-war social change and 'big-picture' politics ('The Adventurers' 63). And by showing the contrasting and continuing pains of ordinary working people, struggling to claim a legitimate share of

post-war prosperity, *The Adventurers* demonstrates how readily apparatchiks with proletarian roots – like Dan – are seduced by success and class mobility, and induced to forget the sacrifices of their peers.

As a London-based professional, Dan removes himself from the grime and hardship of his pit-village; but Dan's childhood friend and unionist, Tommy Evans, is unbowed in his faith in working-class traditions, learned from his mentor Idris Owen: 'a good male voice party in a village, like at Treorchy now, or a good football team, that's worth as much as a pound a week'. Tommy is, nevertheless, only partly joking when he declares that he can have it all: 'wages and the football team too […] a nice car, a telly, a washing machine and four weeks' free holiday to Monte Carlo' (167). Tommy and his wife Olwen do have a washing machine and TV: base-line trappings of affluence, bought by Tommy's overtime down pit. Olwen knows wives who expect husbands 'to slog their guts out, double shifts and weekends' to support more outrageous consuming habits (240-241). However, Tommy's television tells another story: a familiar scenario of working-class torment. The prized consumer durable symbolises, simultaneously, the working-class dream of affluence and the nightmare of traditional class identities disintegrating: Tommy watches television in 'violent and powerless rage' as his union hero, Lewis Connor, is discredited by his old friend Dan's duplicity (Heinemann 259). Again, working-class identity in a changing capitalist order is both realised and mocked by the new consumerism. Workers are in hock, working overtime to pay for status-symbols that demean them.

Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock* offers similar observations about the relationship of working-class improvements to the time-debt pressures that buy them. As Stuart Laing observes, Sigal recognised the march of consumerism into his semi-fictional Dinlock village, but remained convinced that 'organic' working-class attitudes in

counties like Yorkshire would not be displaced as a result (*Representations of Working-class Life* 51). Consequently, *Weekend in Dinlock*'s American narrator regards television as a wholly benign distraction from working life's hardships: 'if I had to live in Dinlock I would worship at the desire to get a set. Telly is the road *out*' (20). The narrator suspects that Dinlock's public will stare down televisual consumerism: Dinlock is 'a hardier organism than the rootless communities' of America (53).

But there is something indefinably modern and insecure in Dinlock: the coal industry declines and 'live for today mentality' grips the town. This mind-set is indexed to cars, hire purchase and 'holidays in style' – 'reasonable' desires, although they comprehensively demand a miners' weekly wage-packet and prefigure a precarious fiscal future (Sigal 144). *Weekend*'s narrator concludes:

> Opinion is divided about whether many miners are saving more money. Davie and Johnny say definitely yes, but Bolton says this is for things like the all-important yearly holiday, for which every miner, almost literally, lives. It doesn't take long to discover that more miners than ever are taking holidays away from home and even – mark the *even* – abroad. There are few signs of nest-eggs being stored away for the future. (143)

Even so, the novel posits the unlikelihood that Dinlock's workers will ever possess creature comforts and labour-saving devices the middle class take for granted. When Davie complains that his wife Loretta 'abased herself' before 'household appliances', *Weekend*'s narrator imagines a cottage crammed with modernist gadgetry. He finds a

half-size washing machine, dryer and television, amid a clutter of tawdry furniture (18). Loretta's 'abasement' performs a role the working class has always played – 'making do'. This contravenes and complicates Sigal's idealism that Dinlock's traditional working-class organicism will heroically resist consumerism; and it disturbingly suggests that myths of working-class 'endurance' in the period were based upon nothing other than a functional adaptation to capital's historically-flexible forms. In Sigal's Dinlock and Heinemann's Abergoch, appliance culture provokes the desire but dims the performance of working-class lives, creating the vicious debt-overtime cycle.

John Rule identifies an historical amnesia in recent studies of the 50s and 60s: as consumers, young working-class people were wedded to 'the imperative of overtime through debt – debt of a kind quite different from that needed for everyday existence by the previous generation' (231). As overtime 'became institutionalised in the prospering manufacturing centres […] playing an important part in the quality of working-class lives', this situation was 'not simply the common perception of a "greedy" workforce grabbing as much as it could, using its powerful trade unions to negotiate shorter hours so that more premium paid overtime could be worked.' More overtime was done 'to bring up low wages' (228) – proof, Rule concludes, that the 'golden age' of shorter hours passed many post-war workers by (239). Humphrey McQueen writes about the same impositions on Australian workplaces in the period: and where Rule argues that historical insights about the time-debt nexus appear prominently in 50s British fiction (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*), McQueen notes the Australian awareness 'embedded in the novels of working life that authors wrote as participant-observers.' In 'Making Capital Tick', McQueen nominates Hewett's *Bobbin Up* and Calthorpe's *The Dyehouse* as novels highlighting the time-

money pressures in post-war Australia: 'despite the adoption of a forty-hour week, long-service leave, four weeks annual leave and flexi-time', both books anatomise the everyday choices workers make between cash, time and physical endurance (97).

Like *Bobbin Up*, Calthorpe's *Dyehouse* is grounded in authorial observations of blue and white-collar workplaces. *The Dyehouse* is set in the Southern Textiles factory: a mid-late 50s business undergoing technological and managerial renovations. Calthorpe recounted her first-hand knowledge of what corporate renovation entailed, as *The Dyehouse* was partly written on income derived from factory office-work: 'for a while I had a position much like Miss Merton, who appears in that novel. I wouldn't say that the actual things happened, but almost anyone who has ever worked in a dyehouse recognises it as typical' (Giuffré 28). *Dyehouse* shares *Bobbin Up*'s literary strategy: inter-weaving working-class vignettes, situating workers in their crucially interconnected homes and workplaces. The ambitious manager Renshaw and leading hand Hughie Marshall (who suicides in a dyeing vat after being sacked) are essential to the novel's theme of management as exploitative and sociopathic. But other significant characters – John Thompson and Barney Monahan – are from the factory floor, and their interwoven stories explore the tensions between low-paid workers' related domestic and workplace lives: a feature that marks Calthorpe's novel as a substantial analysis of working-class psychology in the 50s.

Hughie Marshall's years as a leading hand furnish him with a home in semi-industrial Macdonaldtown's 'better' precinct – an imagined move into the lower middle class (16). But despite his self-image, Marshall remains blue-collar, working extended hours: every morning he opens up the shop and 'woke long before dawn', when 'the milk cart went clattering down the street and the early trains were just

beginning to run' (15). John Thompson has no delusions of class mobility in proletarian Granville. In his parallel working life, Thompson prepares for the long trip from Granville: 'the alarm burred in the dark morning. It was only a little after five, but he had a long trip to the Dyehouse and there would be trouble if there was no steam up before seven twenty' (17). Barney Monahan, too, battles just to get to work: 'A man was lucky to find a seat even on the early morning trains and more often than not he stood hanging onto the back of a seat, lifting his feet, resting them, bracing himself for the journey' (35). Above all, Barney epitomises the novel's concern with the mental, physical and economic sacrifices that low income earners make in their pursuit of the affluence myth – a suburban dream, 'the best that he could afford':

> The house was remote from the Dyehouse. Barney had bought the
> land – rough, isolated and scrubby, on the edge of a sweeping reserve
> near where the train came round the loop from Sutherland. It was
> cheap, but it took every penny of his carefully hoarded money to pay
> for it. There was nothing left over for luxuries, and he and Esther had
> started in a tent bought second-hand in Oxford Street. (35)

Gradually, Barney feels that the aspiration to home-ownership is a 'menace', sapping his 'strength, his leisure and his youth'. Barney's domestic idyll becomes drudgery, and *The Dyehouse* depicts his experience in the terms suggested by Tim Rowse: the 'ideal home' is 'a gilded cage'. Or in Barney's case an ungilded cage – his home is semi-dilapidated and unfinished, a dream symbolically unrealised. By day, there is 'sweating in the Dyehouse. Pulling the cloth through the winches, packing down the hydro, loading the vats' (35):

Then the rush for the train home; racing through the light summer evenings, or the dark, sullen landscape of winter. The walk from the station. Five, ten, twenty minutes. The last excruciating minutes! And then there was the menacing little house, demanding more paint; pipes to be fixed, cupboards not quite finished, electricity not yet connected. (35-36)

This is reminiscent of *Bobbin Up*: workers on treadmills; an endless cycle of dreams, debt and debilitation. *Bobbin Up*'s textile worker Jessie Packer ignores the discomfort of varicose veins and high blood pressure, slaving to fund her slice of 'suburban paradise' in southern Sydney: 'How wonderful it was to turn into your own street, to hear the lawnmower whirring, the gentle rustle of the sprinkler on the hydrangeas' (78-79). Her paradise is defined by appliance culture, lawnmowers and sprinklers; and the myth is so powerful that illness does not stop Jessie sweating over the bobbins. And like Barney in *The Dyehouse*, Jessie is exhausted by her own aspirations: after work, she lies 'spreadeagled in the shadow, safe, relaxed at last in her working man's castle […] When Bert came out, carrying the tray carefully, with a white doily under the cake plate, she was fast asleep, slipped down in her chair, swollen legs sprawled across the verandah, mouth open, grey hair poking through the wicker work' (79).

Jessie's predicament is symptomatic of other characters in *Bobbin Up*, who work long overtime hours to stay afloat: 'At the end of the week, enough money in two pay envelopes to pay the instalment on the fridge or the house or the second-hand car, or buy some more cups […] Never quite out of debt, never quite catching up' (185). In this connection, Hewett's novel reflected national trends. In 1953, a Ford Company poll disclosed that car workers averaged 'eight and a quarter hours per week

in overtime' (Lees & Senyard 45); a 1960 report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* showed one third of Australian factory workers averaging seven and a half hours overtime a week, compelled by the desires provoked by myths of affluence ('Labour is Commanding Higher Premiums' 10). Yet as Humphrey McQueen argues, statistics do nothing to convey the human costs of this: the documentary dimension of graphic fictions like *Bobbin Up* and *The Dyehouse* did so admirably.

In the 50s, overtime was the common way to supplement a working-class income – a need driven by the 'vast debts' incurred by workers 'committing themselves to home ownership when their assets were relatively low' (Bonney & Wilson 235). Even the glossy *Home Beautiful* – a showcase for affluence mythology – could not completely avoid the issue of working-class sacrifice: in the story of railwayman Gordon Follan and his wife, for example, who went without 'all except our immediate necessities' for sixteen years to build a 'modest home'. The Follans were typical of many for whom 'the acquisition of car, goods, telephone and television remained luxuries well out of reach' in the 50s (Lees and Senyard 47).

In this regard, novels like *Bobbin Up* and *The Dyehouse* – and their British counterparts – had an impressive sociological plausibility. They exposed the time-work pressures experienced by workers as they were integrated into the consumer economy; they sensed deep ambivalences about what post-war social change actually meant for Anglo-Australian working classes in the workplace and home; they dented the period's popular illusions and myths of affluence; they understood the often inordinate personal sacrifices required of working people to fulfil consumerist dreams.

They also importantly foretold how imported American-style management practices, refinements in industrial production, would transform workers' lives. If working-class affluence was largely mythic in the 50s and early-mid 60s, adjustments

to the traditional organisation of workplaces would have a concrete impact on lived experience and class consciousness – as many British and Australian writers and social commentators on working-class affairs solemnly recognised.

Chapter 3

Working-class Consciousness and Social Change

From the early 50s, Phil Cohen argues, western working classes were gradually encircled by two dominant imperatives: spectacular consumption and ruthlessly efficient production. The first involved a transgression of taboos on personal debt and capitulation to regular overtime work; the second was seen as possible only by rapid automation, the reduction of union and worker bargaining power, and rationalised shop-floor 'reform'. In this way, Cohen reasons, workers were sold the idea that the 'artificial paradise of consumer society' crucially depended on their acceptance of workplace changes associated with new (American) managerial philosophies (82). Consequently, there was a deliberate effort to adjust the hostile or archaic attitudes of British and Australian working classes to consumption, productivity and management.

In 1968, Michael Kidron's *Western Capitalism Since the War* posited that the 50s and 60s were moments in capital's development when workers felt a new set of needs that trades union 'machinery' could no longer satisfy: 'least of all machinery increasingly mortgaged to official economic policy' (145). The publishers lauded Kidron's book as a fresh theoretical challenge for economists and politicians, but its core analysis of affluence mythology, the ideology of 'classlessness', and capital's drastic circumscription of labour's ability to organise had been anticipated in fiction. 'Amid the plenty' of the 50s and 60s, a number of British and Australian writers had grappled with the ways that consumer capital changed working-class consciousness

and workers' perceptions of their social position, and how traditional labour movement loyalties became increasingly unappealing to the 'new' worker.

Jack Lindsay's *Moment of Choice* (1955) and Raymond Williams' *Second Generation* (1964) joined Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Heinemann's *The Adventurers*, de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos,* Hewett's *Bobbin Up* and Calthorpe's *The Dyehouse* to report on the cynicism infiltrating relations between workers and their union representatives – and the possible demise of labour's collective identity and power. Since the late 70s, cultural theory has generally dismissed the proposition that post-war capital disempowered the working class, destroyed its agency or damaged its consciousness. In contrast, the documentary-realist novels in question here *were* prepared to countenance the prospect that developments in international post-war capitalism were translated into local workplaces in the 50s and 60s as specific practices; and that these practices produced subtle shifts in working-class consciousness and self-determination. Commonly, these texts introduce workers who are wary of, or apathetic to, organised political activity, and unionists fighting defensive, self-interested actions – characters existing within the frame of acutely, minutely observed working environments. Consequently, it is difficult to discount their arguments about working-class agency and consciousness as patronising or unduly pessimistic.

Frederick Jameson's landmark essay 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' theorised postmodernism as a 'break', periodised to the late 50s and 60s, ushering in a 'kind of aesthetic populism' – a culture Andrew Milner describes as a 'whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers' Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood Film' (Milner, *Contemporary Cultural Theory* 107). Jameson's Marxist roots ensured

that he also recognised this 'break' as a specific movement in capitalism, a transition to its 'purest form' ('Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' 78). And as Jameson acknowledged a debt to orthodox Marxist analysts – like Ernest Mandel – his view of postmodernity as the 'internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world' can also be glossed as a reading of the 50s–60s 'break' period as a time of heightened class conflict rather than evaporating class differences ('Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' 78).

Some critics consider Jameson's accent on 'aesthetic populism' as an evasion of class analysis and the issue of 'hard power'. Andrew Milner, for example, thought that political sociologists who influenced Jameson – Mandel and Michael Kidron – already established that post-war western economies were built not only on selling commodities via a new aesthetic, but by fear: the coercive politics of the nuclear arms race that reached deeply into ordinary peoples' lives (*Contemporary Cultural Theory* 109). Furthermore, Milner observed that Jameson's key essay was curiously devoid of direct references to class: a result of its concentration on the cultural and ideological roles of artists, architects and Hollywood. Earlier, however, Mandel and Kidron had explained the impact of international post-war capitalism on *all* workers – clearly articulating, too, how post-war consumption ideology affected the organisation of labour.

Jameson assessed this post-war internationalisation as 'massively facilitated by the brief American imperium that endured' in the decades after WWII; a distinctive interpretation of postmodernism maintaining the viability of 'grand narratives'. A particular virtue of Jameson's analysis was precisely the reminder that no matter how post-war capitalism appeared or was 'bricolaged' nationally or locally,

it remained a totalising system. This reading of internationalising post-war forces suggests a way of understanding developments in Anglo-Australian literature in the 50s and 60s, where authors struggled to articulate the nature of the momentous changes happening around them. It suggests the basis of a common conceptual fund: an explanation why readings of British or Australian literary works from the 50s and 60s reveal identical themes: workers' lives rephrased as consumerism; workers subjected to new physical practices and psychological pressures on the factory floor ; the preoccupation with working-class consciousness, the tensions between workers and their traditional labour institutions – themes shadowed and structured by the global signifier 'America'.

All these concerns circulate in Raymond Williams' novel *Second Generation*. Williams' intellectual work advanced (and often catalysed) debates in literary criticism and theory, film and television studies and Left politics. In 1979, a series of interviews Williams did for *New Left Review* was published as *Politics and Letters*: the best overview of his works to that point and an insightful autobiography. The interviews showed that Williams was no cloistered Cambridge don who lost touch with his proletarian roots, though his formidable education meant some degree of estrangement from his Welsh working-class origins. More significantly, it was obvious that Williams actively worked to maintain an awareness of changes in working-class life and thought. As Stephen Woodhams notes, education was actually the thread, through Williams' involvement with the Workers' Education Association in the 50s, that sustained his relationships with the working class and its political representatives – the British Labour Party and Communists (165). *Politics and Letters* consistently reaffirmed that Williams' academic career did not diminish his interest in

working-class heritage; and as for 'the ruling class', Williams averred he knew it 'only by reading about it' (289).

Given this, it is surprising Williams' fiction, invariably involving working-class experience, has been commented upon so little: as if there were an unspoken compact that Williams was a cultural mandarin who 'slummed it' in his novels. As Woodhams notes in his study of the intellectual careers of Williams and Edward Thompson, *History in the Making*, Stuart Hall significantly – and first – referred to Williams as 'engaged' in a conjoined activity of living-thinking which makes full socialism possible: no mere cerebral enterprise. Still, 'working through the idea of socialism' as Hall described it, writing so closely from the lived experience of working people, goes uncredited in appraisals of Williams' fiction (182). There are a few exceptions. Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* and Stuart Laing's *Representations of Working-class Life 1957–1964* mention Williams' *Border Country* and *Second Generation* amongst the resurgence of post-war 'working-class' novels: but both treat Williams' novels cursorily beside *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *Weekend in Dinlock*.

The value of *Second Generation*'s examination of the subject of work in the late 50s and early 60s was oddly downplayed by Williams himself. As he explained in *Politics and Letters*, the novel's university sections were designed to explore oppositions between intellectualism and workplace politics (286); though this structural emphasis downgrades other parts of the book documenting material practices in blue-collar workplaces. Vital passages in *Second Generation* show the affects of new management dictates on the factory floor – and they show Williams practising what he preached: 'the simplest descriptive novel about working-class life

already, by being written, being a significant and positive cultural intervention' (Williams, 'Working-class, Proletarian, Socialist' 111).

Throughout his career, Williams commented in journals and books about practical aspects of contemporary working life. Just after *Second Generation*'s publication, for example, he wrote the essay 'The Meanings of Work': part of an ethnographic collection titled *Work: Twenty Personal Accounts*, emphasising the importance of listening to worker accounts of their experiences, in order to understand human work in its complexities:

> That is why I am glad that the arrangement of the essays in this book does not follow conventional lines; that it is very different men and women, taking their turn to talk from their own experience outwards. I don't mean this, and I don't see how anybody who has read the essays could mean, that radical questions about class differences, in different kinds of job, don't arise. They jump at one, consciously and sometimes unconsciously, from these often vivid pages (283).

In *Second Generation*, Williams recreated the vivid word-pictures of working life he admired in personal recollection, to convey a sense of the broader social changes affecting working people. He explained in *Politics and Letters*:

> More than any other novel I've written, *Second Generation* was based on direct observation. In that respect it is an impressionistic account, which I wouldn't say however seems wrong when I look back. But I hoped that by taking something as basic as the division

between intellectual life and manual life, coexisting within one city, I

could at least show the real theatre in which these confusions were

occurring (288).

Set in a Midlands car factory in the early 60s, *Second Generation* centrally features

Harold Owen and his wife Kate: economic refugees from rural Wales in the 30s,

relocating for employment in the developing automotive industry and to secure an

education for their children, Beth and Peter. The novel has several narrative strands.

One focusses on young Peter Owen's struggles: the discrepancy between his working-

class background, his postgraduate sociological studies, and the mind-set of his

academic mentors. Peter chases 'the connection between work and living', but his

supervisor remains a 'respected enemy' whose academic interests disguise

condescension to the working class (252).

Another narrative strand canvasses matriarch Kate Owen's pre-marital past

and on-going quest for a distinct female identity. As a teacher's daughter and

scholarship student, Kate is destined for a professional future. Her father's death

condemns her to downward social mobility: a job in the local Co-op office, marriage

to would-be union rep and car-plant worker Harold (37). After moving to the

midlands, Kate is intellectually nourished by political activism and the company of

Labour apparatchik and academic, Arthur Dean. Kate's identity struggles converge

with those of her son, Peter, when both question the relevance of their esoteric

political, social and academic pursuits to ordinary working-class life. Kate's work

through Labour Party committees and Peter's research and arguments with his thesis

supervisor seem marginal and out of touch compared to the industrial battles fought

on the floor of Harold's car factory.

Two important early scenes in *Second Generation* dramatise this contrast between intellectual and manual worlds. In the first, Peter visits his thesis supervisor, Robert Lane. Peter is uneasy about Lane's cavalier middle-class attitudes to social inequity, and the opulent kitchen in Lane's red brick villa intensifies Peter's anxieties. Lane's academic specialism is studying the working class, but the kitchen seems to symbolise Lane's political quietude towards serious politics and the conditions of working-class life:

> It was like a gleaming workshop, with the quiet hum of machinery: the throb of the refrigerator, the deeper and harsher beat of the oil central heating. Against the white enamel of the fitted sink and the electric mixer the blue of the curtains and chairs and the long plastic table was clear and bright (73).

Presenting the kitchen as a 'workshop' of humming 'machinery' is ironic, if not perverse; and Lane almost apologises for its ostentatious modernity – 'a bit of a showpiece, I'm afraid'. Significantly, Lane then justifies the kitchen: it was bought with the proceeds from a profitable year of teaching in America (73).

The following chapter is set in a very different 'humming workshop'. Here, Williams conveys a concrete sense of the American-influenced industrial processes which lay behind the production of shiny American-style goods: commodities the middle and upper classes take for granted, with no thought of how they are made or who makes them. Robert Lane understands the speed-up of British manufacturing on American lines: the Taylorist and Fordist methods that transformed post-war British industry. But he knows them only as abstract principles, in the context of his

sociological research. In contrast, Harold Owen faces these new industrial processes daily as physical and psychological realities:

> In the dark bay, the raw grey shells that were being made into cars were lifted and set into lines. Climbing the steep stairs, Harold watched the latest body being lowered by the short, black arms of the mobile crane. There was a long streak of heat along its lower left side, and this caught the dusty light as it was set gently down. He overtook it and walked on under the high bulk of the dipper. Earlier bodies were already in position there, on the powerful rods that would lift and move forward, turning the bodies like animals on spits, lowering them into the first bath and then heaving them up towards the sprays, where they went out of sight. Beyond the sprays was the great oven, where the heat came down as a vibration as he waked quickly beneath it. The newly sprayed bodies were dried by this heat, without any pause in their long slow turning, and then they emerged above the turntable, at the junction with the next line. (86)

Harold appreciates the efficiency of modern manufacturing, but also observes the changes it requires in both the way men work and how they think about work: 'The advantages of the dipper were immense, yet the trouble it had caused in the complicated re-negotiation of the piece rates, was clearer in his mind than its extraordinary technical mastery.' In turn, this process of adjustment provokes a feeling of alienation: 'A problem of this kind was necessarily impersonal, like the machinery itself. The intricate technical process had to be translated into relationships

which the piece-rates would define […] there were no real precedents, either for the process or the relationships.' Ultimately, the new technology and its Taylorist-Fordist principles refashion the working man's identity and experience: 'The machinery defined its working team, but to express their values, to interlock them with those of others defined by other machinery, was a close, difficult negotiation' (86).

Despite management's claims that this new industrial order is 'worker friendly', everything on Harold's assembly line is dictated by time. As a shop steward, Harold is aware that the instrumentality of managerialist intervention operates behind public-relations spiels about 'worker development'. In his industry, like others in the 50s and 60s, work is increasingly determined by 'time and motion' men – or, as Harold's colleagues call them, 'egg-timers' (88). Under the egg-timers' supervision, production-lines are subjected to the 'speed-up'; a practice which particularly disadvantages older workers and subjects them to considerable pressures:

> Dick stood with a length of moulding hanging from his neck. He was easy and confident, for he could always just beat the two-minute schedule. Like most of the men on this line he was young. Very few older men could stand this speeded-up pace, and even the younger men worked on it for much shorter periods than elsewhere. The money was good, while you could stand the speed (88).

The procedures Williams described in *Second Generation* quickly became the industrial norm across the western world: Americanised workplace modernisation, driven by interventionist management practices. This transnational transformation was thematic meat for fictions about the working-class, so the striking similarities in

passages depicting the 'speed-up' in Williams' *Second Generation* and Ralph de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos* is readily explained. Both authors looked behind the 'humane' or 'scientific' management' rhetoric that accompanied workplace 'reform', exploring how workers' actually experienced the modernising industrial regime.

No Saddles for Kangaroos was published the same year as *Second Generation*, 1964, and also depicts the automotive industry, but its temporal setting is the early 50s as opposed to *Second Generation*'s late-50s early-60s time-frame. But these different time-scales suggest continuities: the American manufacturing and management methods which hit British and Australian workplaces after WWII were both standardised and constantly refined throughout the 50s. Like the workers in *Second Generation*, the factory hands in *No Saddles* are aware that 'methods engineering' is managerial jargon for the dreaded 'speed-up' – though de Boissiere locates this awareness in the early 50s. Doing this, he is not tampering with history: rather, he implies that this is an historically continuous process. In *No Saddles*, union militant Larry McMahon recognises that the speed-up on the post-war assembly line is merely the latest refinement of a system. 'New managerialism' is the contemporary site of the historic exploitation of labour by capital (Lees & Senyard 50).

From its opening passages, *No Saddles* pictures workers as physical extensions of the assembly line. In terms identical to *Second Generation*, the workers in *No Saddles* are captives of the line's speedy, repetitive operations and impersonal logic:

> Above them hung a confusion of wires […] the lights like brazen
> eyes looked down. And other, human eyes watched the men's hands
> too, the old veined hands with the missing fingers and the smooth

young hands that were careless still; watched while seeming not to watch, gauged while seeming not to notice […] So inured was Jack to the roar of machines in Plant Five that he noticed it no longer. Besides, there wasn't time […] Least of all the hundreds of men in Plant Five could he afford one careless moment: he was fifty-six and looked older (1).

As in *Second Generation*, *No Saddles* affirms that the dangerously time-pressured modern assembly line is no place for old men. And in literary comradeship with Williams, de Boissiere emphasises the workplace culture of surveillance, alienation, and ceaseless activity demanded by the ideology of streamlined production. In *No Saddles*, the quasi-religious faith in Americanised industrial practices is embodied in Automakers Corporation's engineer Kevin Carlyon, who 'had recently attended a two weeks' night school on leadership. Automakers frequently conducted schools of this nature.' Kevin epitomises the blind belief in 'the latest developments in the techniques of management and supervision to come out of Harvard University [...] about typing people and getting them to think clearly'; and he is 'eager to put his knowledge into practice in order to raise the level of efficiency of the work in his own department. He particularly wanted to "cut down on waste" and "win maximum cooperation"' (187).

Two strikes are central to the narrative structure of *No Saddles*. Both are sparked by a spate of industrial accidents, caused by management's attempts to wring extra productivity from the workers – particularly the vulnerable, under-performing older ones. Italian migrant worker Alfredo battles to process baskets of pinions; the next batch arrives, and he tiredly misjudges the situation: 'The heavy stack refused to budge. He knew he ought to pull it from below, but by now he hated pinions, his

weariness and the overtime had made him perverse and irritable, and he did the wrong thing […] The stacks rolled.' The result is crippling: 'Before he could withdraw his foot the top basket crashed down upon it', and Jack Bromley attends the accident as 'blood was pulsing' from Alfredo's crushed instep (251). The company is rationalising, sacking workers, forcing the remainder into extra hours and faster operations, and aged Jack Bromley then pays the ultimate price for the car industry's 'crushing overtime and the speed-up' (261). Jack keeps his job 'only because he now operated two machines' (254); but Jack's old-fashioned pride in his work proves fatal, as he tries vainly to cope with the speed-up's physical pressures (Gardiner, 'Ralph de Boissiere and Communist Cultural Discourse' 215). Exhausted and distracted after extra shifts, Jack wrestles with his machines, 'turns the handle, bringing the emery wheel into contact with the part. Part and wheel are spinning at high speeds, each is a blur.' Suddenly the spinning 'wheel makes unexpected and violent contact. A shower of sparks dazzles him', but Jack is slow to respond: 'Before he can rectify his mistake a sledgehammer hits him between the eyes and hurls him backwards. The steering sector is embedded in his forehead' (8).

America emerges as the source of workplace trouble. Communist leading hand Charlie McMahon accuses the company's Americanised speed-up as responsible for Jack's horrible death, but an unapologetic management concedes nothing. 'We don't accept your terminology "speed-up"', personnel officer Stewart Turner tells him: 'The speed of the line is not excessive. You're not working as fast as they do in America, you know' (125-126). The company officially refuses blame, odiously comparing Australian and American production standards: 'Whatever was the cause of Mr. Bromley's death it wasn't speed-up. We time the jobs here but we time them for your protection. In America, they work much faster than you do. I've seen them almost

running' (268). But Charlie McMahon has always known that the jargon of 'humane scientific management' masks a lust for efficiency and profit:

> 'The speed-up merchants set the pace by the fast workers, and those who drop behind have to go […] Some months ago you may remember how the time and motion man had a go at our section. The company made nine and a half million net last year. It all went to the Yanks. We sweated for them and can't even get a tea-break!' (121)

In the 50s and 60s, management strategies imposing impersonal time and motion regimes and squeezing maximum productivity from workers were applied beyond the production-line floor. As Mena Calthorpe's *The Dyehouse* reveals, new practices also applied in the factory office.

Set in 1956 in the Southern Textiles plant, *Dyehouse* depicts an Australian company advised by international consultants ('every week some un-smiling V.I.P. from England or America would appear') on how to modernise its management along time and motion lines to achieve machine-like efficiency: a company that would be all 'precision of action, smooth integration of parts' (14). Union militant Oliver Henery is ordered to smarten up his men to impress visiting American consultants, and replies: 'These bastards aren't interested in how we look […] What interests them is how the money looks' (207). Like Charlie McMahon in *No Saddles*, Oliver recognises what the cant of 'humane management' and 'flawless production' means. But Company Secretary Cuthbert worships the foreign 'human relations' experts and their creed – a faith that 'all human enterprise must flow at last into the accountant's net' (12) – and completely shares their dedication to Taylorism and robotic economic organisation:

He sat for a moment staring into space. He thought of a machine he

had seen once. A smooth, grey machine in a large engineering works.

It had fascinated him. Precision of action, smooth integration of parts.

A company could be like that machine. A company *should* be like

that machine. *This* company would be like that machine (14).

The Dyehouse shows this machine cult in the factory office, governing the regimented

lives of those who do paper-work. In pictures of secretary Miss Thompson, for

example, the novel indeed suggests that the transformation of worker into machine is

finally accomplished:

Tuck that initial listing under the Bulldog Clip, and now over to the

Dissection machine.

Miss Thompson tried the machine, then cleared it.

O.K., Three pounds, fifteen shillings and seven pence into A, Two

pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence into F, Nine and six into Tax,

three and six into Miscellaneous. Damn, what is it? Packing charge.

Miss Thompson's fingers flew over the keys. Clang, clang, clang,

clang. (13)

Peter Cochrane has calculated that by 1959 Australia had 1,000 'work study

engineers'. But the methods engineer and his equipment were frequently regarded

with suspicion by trade unionists. In the American-owned car plants, in particular, the

'horrors of the "time and motion" regime' created serious tensions. At the General

Motors Holden plant in Melbourne in the early 60s, 'an assembly-line worker was

allowed eighty seconds to attach a fuel pump, fuel lines, carburettor and oil filter to an engine and was expected to repeat this forty times an hour, or 360 times a day. The time allowed by the "experts" for non-productive purposes was twenty-four minutes in the eight hours' ('Doing Time' 184).

Workers and wary unionists had to be sold, or sold to, this oppressive Taylorism; and to minimise its conflicts and tensions, capital sought to drive a wedge between workers and their traditional union representatives. The recruitment of union officials into a compact with management, redefining them as instruments of workplace regulation, was deemed necessary to the attitudinal changes required in worker perceptions of new managerial and production-line practices: the manufacture of a consciousness, no less, that had its historical origins in post-war American plans for international labour.

Thus, in de Boissiere's *No Saddles for Kangaroos*, Automakers' chief personnel officer, Stewart Turner, epitomises this branch of American-led post-war industrial 'reform'. Four years at Melbourne University prepare Stewart for the diplomatic service. But personnel management is better paid, and the smooth negotiating methods he learns for a career in international relations can be profitably applied to industry. He specialises in union negotiations in manufacturing, routinely blurring the lines between diplomacy and duplicity with ' ostentatious energy […] fulfilling the general manager's wishes'; and his character is marked by 'the unfailing good-humour in which he cloaked all the irritations attendant upon trying to please both the boss and the workers' (125). He stitches up a covert deal with the unions as a crowning achievement:

He had played an important role in drawing up an agreement with

officials of the V.B.U., the union covering the great majority of the

men in Automakers Corporation: a secret agreement that, in exchange

for a no-strike clause, the company would compel all unskilled

workers to join the union (125).

Automakers strikes deals with union executives who, with modest inducements, are persuaded to accept the speed up and minimise shop-floor discontent. The company also borrows another tactic from American management colleges: weakening grass-roots union organisation by psychological profiling. Middle-manager Kevin Carlyon, for example, is hugely impressed with lectures by eminent Harvard professors who 'conducted experiments in specially designed rooms on the reaction of personality to leadership'. Carlyon soon learns to single out workers who are deemed most susceptible to management's productivity ideology: 'one of the first things, he had learned, was to "determine the fields in which employees might be encouraged to contribute their ideas"' (187) – promoting them to supervisory roles, breaking down class loyalties and placing them in a different relation to management.

In the 50s and 60s, psychology-based, 'scientific management' chiselled away at British and Australian workers' attitudes to productivity and their bosses – by conscious design. Sourced from America, scientific management and profiling could be seen as a form of cynical, intentional 'Big Brotherism'; and in this regard Alan Sinfield recuperates a lost reading of George Orwell's *1984* – regarding it as a commentary on totalising developments in international corporate capitalism (*Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* 99). Sinfield places the novel beside Orwell's other commentaries in the late 40s to suggest that the author of *1984*

discerned that the post-war promotion of American-style capitalism's virtues and bounties for workers might have alarmingly repressive consequences for human consciousness itself (*Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* 100). And the working-class surrender to capital was a key objective – not a mere fringe benefit – of American economic hegemony after WWII.

In 1941, *Life* magazine's founder Henry Luce wrote an editorial to project a frank vision: that the world war would provide the opportunity for America to spread American 'ideals' and enact its historic, exceptionalist destiny: 'We must accept whole-heartedly our duty […] as the most powerful and vital nation in the world […] to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit' (Swanberg 181). Luce's American Century would be the golden age of 'General Motors, Standard Oil, Pan-Am', and his vision was vindicated when American foreign policy and strategy closely followed his prescription during the Cold War (Swanberg 183). As if to confirm Orwellian fears, in 1951 Luce's *Fortune* magazine again spelled out (traducing Leon Trotsky's words) the international nature of the 'permanent revolution' that American consumer capitalism represented:

> Inherent in this revolution is a proposition, which we call the American Proposition for the reason that it is to be found most succinctly stated in the writings and speeches of the founders of this country. But in the eyes of those founders it was not merely a proposition for Americans; it was universal: a proposition for mankind, signalizing not merely an American revolution but a human revolution.

The universal relevance of the American Proposition has been asserted again and again by American leaders; and so has its corollary, that America itself – that 'grand scheme and design in Providence', as John Adams called it – has a mission to present the Proposition to the rest of the world ('The American Proposition' 68).

This was not the grandiose dreaming of a corporate mandarin: it was a philosophical blueprint for an economic system that had tangible consequences for working people in countries like Britain and Australia after WWII, as well as America itself. The way the dream was realised through facets of public policy has only been fully appreciated by historians in the last two decades. In Britain, the Marshall Plan was central, as Michael J. Hogan bluntly puts it:

> Through the Marshall Plan, American leaders sought to recast Europe in the image of American neocapitalism. They envisaged a Western European system in which class conflict would give way to corporative collaboration, economic self-sufficiency to economic interdependence, international rivalry to rapprochement and cooperation, and arbitrary national controls to the integrating powers of supranational authorities and natural market forces. One line of their policy aimed at liberalising trade and making currencies convertible, another at forging national and transnational networks of private cooperation and public-private power sharing, and a third at building central institutions of coordination and control (45).

To displace class conflict with corporative collaboration, the Marshall Plan crucially needed to enlist organised labour into its operations. In addition to countering Communism, this would persuade European workers to forego deep-seated union loyalties and traditional working habits in favour of the 'productivity stress' typical of American industry. American unions were encouraged to exchange ideas on industrial organization and productivity with European labour; between 1948 and 1951 vast sums were spent to send American productivity 'experts' abroad and to fund European labour and management exchanges to the United States. Hogan's research reveals that this impacted more directly into workplaces than has previously been understood:

> A group of British steel founders heard American labour officials lecture on how cooperation between management and labour had resulted in greater productivity and rising standards of living for workers in the United States. Still other groups toured farms and industry facilities, learned about the cooperative links between the American government and private economic groups, and received instruction in American labour-training techniques, American methods for arbitrating labour-management disputes, and what Hoffman called the American miracle of mass production (63).

Hogan looks behind conventional positive evaluations of American interventions, such as the Marshall Plan in Britain, to find other intentions. Rhiannon Vickers terms this approach 'neo-Gramscian' because it examines the related processes of coercion and consent in the Marshall Plan: aid programmes was not merely benevolent but also

an offensive action, designed to shape the post-war world and open markets for American exports. Vickers observes that America's stake in Britain was greatly enlarged throughout the 50s: American interests dovetailed with British Labour Party attempts to capture union leaders' support in modernising industrial relations and trades union opinion (1).

In the 50s, influential Labour Party figures like Anthony Crosland greeted social change and proclaimed that workers were now 'rescued from the horrors of the industrial revolution and the depression by wise consensual political management'. Subsequently, Crosland's idea of modern socialism pivoted on affluence ideology and the decline of class distinctions, and the American vision of social equality delivered by enlightened management (Sinfield, *Literature Politics and Culture* 253). Almost every page of Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956) hailed American efficiency and management theory:

> The talk, and part of it at least is genuine, is now of the social responsibilities of industry – to workers, consumers, the locality, retiring employees, disabled workers, and in America, where business benefactions are on a gigantic scale, to universities, research foundations, and even symphony orchestras. Aggressive individualism is giving way to a suave and sophisticated sociability: the defiant cry of the 'public be damned' to the well-staffed public relations department: the self-made autocratic tycoon to the arts graduate and the scientist: the invisible hand, in Mr.Riesman's phrase, to the glad hand. Private industry is at last becoming humanised (18).

The technical managerialism advocated by American's business elite originated in the settlement of economic conflict in the United States in the 40s. With the New Deal Anthony Carew writes, unresolved class tensions were 'channelled into a general quest for productivity and economic growth'; political issues were re-imagined as problems of output; class conflict was replaced by 'national consensus on the need for growth', and 'after the war this approach, which had served so well domestically, was deployed by the United States in the international arena' (44). And as Crosland's enthusiasm showed, the approach was embraced abroad.

In Britain, there were other key enthusiasts for the cult of productivity. Jack Cooper, Chairman of the General and Manufacturing Workers Union, returned from Harvard University in the early 50s to announce that his union would change its archaic attitudes and launch an educational initiative on scientific management (Carew 204). Labourites like Crosland and union leaders shared the vision of American management models as a panacea for class discord:

> Workers who rose to management posts were not condemned as class
> traitors; trade union leaders were not thought to be in danger of
> contamination if they showed an interest in conspicuous
> consumption; the unions were not deemed guilty of treachery if they
> cooperated with management to boost sales or raise productivity […]
> or sent their officials to Harvard for training (Carew 248).

The dust jacket of a 1969 reprint of Peter Drucker's *The Practice of Management* (1955) proclaimed the status which American business and management theorists attained worldwide in the 50s, claiming that Drucker's work had been 'a vital

contribution to our understanding of the factors making for business efficiency and economic welfare'. In fact, Drucker had questioned the efficacy of scientific management, with its emphasis on mechanical operations such as the automobile assembly line. Drucker had advocated a 'humane management':

> The job must always challenge the worker. Nothing is more contrary to the nature of the human resource than the common attempt to find the 'average work load' for the 'average worker'. This whole idea is based on a disproven psychology which equated learning speed with learning ability. It is also based on the belief that the individual worker is the more productive the less control he has, the less he participates – and that is a complete misunderstanding of the human resource (261).

In 1951, Luce's *Fortune* had similarly argued for an industrial order that afforded worker participation and satisfaction:

> Modern management exhibits a sense of responsibility to its employees not only to prevent or anticipate the demands of labour unions but for the simple, obvious, and honest reason that a satisfied, loyal group of employees is at least as much a capital asset as a modern plant or a vital piece of machinery. A few enlightened managers […] have been taking such an attitude for years. It is now twenty-five years since General Electric, under Owen Young, introduced employee stock-buying plans and the idea of a 'cultural'

rather than a 'living' wage ('The Transformation of American Capitalism' 79).

In the fine print, however, Drucker and *Fortune* were really worried that an agressive Taylorism would lessen productivity and profits. Nevertheless, even Drucker had to concede that the American industrial engineers sent abroad after WWII had been so successful that the world believed that scientific management in its 'time and motion' form was the essence of America's industrial achievement (275). By the 60s, though, many social commentators disputed whether any degree of worker control had actually materialised from Drucker-style 'humane management'.

Raymond Williams was one, who stated unambiguously that worker control was a fiction and new ways of organising work merely disguised old power relations:

Thus an authoritarian structure – what is euphemistically called the chain of command – is imposed on areas of work which are supposed to be and in fact often are socially owned and subject to democratic decision. Because nowadays people usually resent authoritarian methods there is, of course, a constant attempt to disguise this reality. There is talk of human relations in industry but these, characteristically, are the human relations that are possible – information, politeness, outings, sports fields, office parties, speeches – after the decisive human relations of who decides what is to be done and how, have been settled and built in. It is even called, in the trade, man-management, which means, quite frankly, keeping people

happy while they are working for you ('The Meanings of Work' 293-

294).

But the new 'man-managers' – 'tame, mild-mannered, public spirited' – were still 'the servants (the well-paid, well-cushioned servants) of the system'; and profit set the system's targets and kept its wheels turning (Hall, 'Crosland Territory' 3). To become competitive in the post-war international free market, larger British companies either hired American management consultants or emulated American methods. And subsequent changes on the shop floor had particularly dramatic effects for some older, family-owned British enterprises (Cheffins 91).

One was Raleigh, the bicycle manufacturer that features in Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. As Allen Penner remarks, this was the real-life Nottingham business where Sillitoe and his father worked in the 40s (17). Raleigh was a classic case of the long-established, family-owned firm built on the notion of local loyalty – still in evidence when Sillitoe was there. However, the rigours of the international market during the 50s pressured the company to expand and change its management practices.

In their study of Raleigh between 1945 and 1960, Roger Lloyd-Jones and Mark Eason describe the corporate culture at Raleigh as 'fertile ground' for the 'human relations' approach in the mid-50s. Education, internal training and promotion would, the company believed, modernise it while maintaining a family spirit compatible with 'humane management' (101). Soon strained by falling profits, the company's calls for more 'efficiency' led to factory-floor practices which were quite different from the team-building exercises idealised by American management theorists like Drucker. In this light, the 'fictional' bicycle factory in Sillitoe's

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning is quintessentially modernised: management barely makes even token gestures of industrial 'politeness'; 'human relations' rhetoric prevails, and a 'piece work' system is in place. The struggle between workers and management is no longer played out through mass union action: the piece work system can only be subverted or resisted by small, individual insurrections – the historic conflict of labour and capital becomes a 'game'. And under piece work's surveillance regime, management is ever able to pounce on workers who transgress in the slightest way (Gindin 16).

In his complex analysis of post-war American capitalism, *The End of Ideology*, a work veering between celebration and critique, Daniel Bell gave a comprehensive description of the role of piece work in manufacturing in the 50s and 60s. Though Bell is no enemy of capital, his book contains a chapter of almost orthodox Marxist critical tendencies, describing how piece work constituted a particularly exploitative aspect of industrial modernity:

> Piecework is often referred to as 'day work' or to a flat payment of an hourly rate. On day work, an operator had only the pause at lunch time to break up the meaningless flow of time, like sand in an hourglass. On piecework, by racing the clock, one can mark time in intervals; a worker then has an hour-by-hour series of completions to mark his position in terms of the larger frame of the day's work. By 'making out' early, one achieves a victory over the despised time-study man; and the greater the ease, the more vaunted the victory. By 'making out' early, one flaunts one's freedom, too, in the face of the foreman (233).

This is, exactly, the working world of piece work depicted in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. For historian John Rule, who has recently looked afresh at work practices in Britain in the 50s and 60s and fictional accounts of them, the most important aspect of Sillitoe's depiction of piece work was its regimentation: despite the 'game' to subvert it, the piece work system 'fixed the contours' of a worker's 'day, his week, and his year' (224). Thus, Arthur Seaton describes the piece work 'game' in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*:

> At a piecework rate of four-and-six a hundred you could make your money if you knocked-up fourteen hundred a day – possible without grabbing too much – and if you went all out for a thousand in the morning you could dawdle through the afternoon and lark about with the women and talk to your mates now and again […] the rate-checker sometimes came and watched you work, so that if he saw you knock up a hundred in less than an hour Robboe would come and tell you one fine morning that your rate had been dropped by sixpence or a bob. So that when you felt the shadow of the rate-checker breathing down your neck you knew what to do if you had any brains at all: make every move more complicated, though not slow because that was cutting your own throat, and do everything deliberately yet with a crafty show of speed (24-25).

Piece-rate was a mainstay of Britain's automotive industry by the late 50s, cushioning firms like the British Motor Company against production losses: 'the basic principle of "no work, no pay" meant that workers, rather than the company, bore the cost of

"idle time" or "shut outs"'(Bowden, Foreman-Peck, Richardson 64). At the same time, Huw Beynon discovered in a study of a British Ford Motor Company plant in the 60s, modern management doctrines convinced company executives that they no longer exploited or coerced workers. As a Ford manager told him:

> No: I may be naïve over this but I can't see that at all. Management don't set difficult work standards. All we want is maximum use of the plant; we can do this a number of ways – overtime, shift working [for] the plant to produce *the number of cars that we know it can produce* – we're simply asking for *good continuous effort*. And it's here that we need a good working relationship between the foreman and the shop steward in order to achieve these standards […] unions have taken the wrong turning over this. They seem to think that increased efficiency means that we are asking the men to sweat blood. We're not doing this at all. We aim to set standards that can reasonably be met ('Controlling the Line' 242).

To some workers, this 'managese' was totally transparent: surveillance and the clock meant that they did, indeed, 'sweat blood'. As Dennis Johnson recalled in 'Factory Time', an account of his work experiences in the 50s and early 60s:

> Factories may differ, but those working in them are all suffering from the same industrial malaise. We are all second fiddles to machines […] As automation increases productivity it also provides management with an excuse to cut down on labour. At first the

workers object to a reduction in their numbers, but nearly always they eventually acquiesce (13-14).

In the 50s and 60s, management theory played an important part in breaking down worker resistances to processes like automation; and the view that management theory might effect a change in working-class consciousness was not confined to industrial analysts on the Left such as Harry Braverman. Daniel Bell's conservative mass-society critique, *The End of Ideology*, looked at the development of 'human relations' in the 50s as a particularly American vogue in which 'the methods have shifted, and the older modes of overt coercion are now replaced by psychological persuasion':

> The tough brutal foreman, raucously giving orders, gives way to the mellowed voice of the 'human-relations oriented' supervisor. The worker doubtless regards this change as an improvement, and his sense of constraint is correspondingly assuaged. In industrial relations, as in large areas of American society, accommodation of a sort has replaced conflict. The second point is that these human-relations approaches become a substitute for thinking about the work process itself (244).

To avoid workplace conflict, Drucker's *The Practice of Management* recommended that 'even the lowliest human job should have some planning', giving workers a sense of 'improvement' (290). In similar terms, Braverman pointed out, 'did Adam Smith once recommend education for the people in order to prevent their complete deterioration under the division of labour'; but only, as Marx sarcastically added,

'prudently and in homeopathic doses' (39). Regardless of the language used by management gurus, Braverman wrote, the same objectives remained: 'cutting costs, improving "efficiency", raising productivity' (38). To achieve these goals, and control the labour process, refinements of the 'scientific management' ethos developed in the United States between the world wars was vital; and after 1945, that ethos and its 'reformist' workplace practices were imported into Britain and Australia.

Just as there had been a concerted attempt to change British attitudes about labour relations and productivity, starting with the Marshall Plan, post-war Australian managements resolved a single and unifying objective in the field. Peter Cochrane describes it as the 'complete control of the labour process and the total dispossession of labour's autonomy, mental and manual, at the point of production' ('Company Time' 54).

In 1964, Horne's *The Lucky Country* blasted the managerial dinosaurs of yore: 'the kind of man in his fifties or early sixties who is now on top', who did not understand the 'increasing range of possibilities of the technological age and the new shape of business problems'. Horne argued that Australia's alarming shortage of capable managers was a hangover from the old 'spirit of practicalism'; though a rapidly growing interest in management courses foreshadowed a new class of techno-managers (147-148). The proximity of Horne's copious comments on managerialism to revisionist British Labour – tracts like Crosland's *Future of Socialism* – has never been critically observed: perhaps because Horne was on the Right, as editor of *Quadrant*; but more likely because *The Lucky Country* is usually read within a nationalist paradigm. *The Guardian Report on the Labour Party Conference 1963* revealed British Labour politicians using the same language as Horne: in his major conference speech, 'Labour and the Scientific Revolution', Harold Wilson warned

Party Luddites that automation was unstoppable, and railed against the 'old boy' networks that dominated British business as Horne did in Australia (20). Horne's views were likewise formed by the international trend to emulate American enterprise and 'scientific management'.

In 1950, Walter D. Scott was the first Australian to make a study of the combination of public opinion monitoring and corrective 'economic education' employed by US business, and to propose that Australian business followed suit. Scott wrote widely about how propaganda relating to the supremacy of American business and labour relations styles should be the 'order of the day' for combating Communism. Meanwhile, mimicking the executive exchanges expedited by the Marshall Plan in Britain, the secretary of Australia's oldest business proselytising organisation – the Institute of Public Affairs – was sent to the US in 1955 to study business economics and worker education programmes. His report 'attempted to convey some idea of the "vast sums" spent on the American operation and its enormous scale', and it enthused that 'General Motors produced more booklets as part of its "economic education" program for employees than it produced automobiles' (Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy* 109-110).

Mark Rolfe notes that every late 40s or 50s issue of *Manufacturing and Management* and *Australasian Manufacturer* reveals the 'great trek' of Australian business people to America, seeking experts and new industrial techniques. Rolfe also notes prolific reports – like that of an American technical mission to Australia in 1957 – that crow about the debt owed to American methods by 'Australian vehicle, engineering, white-goods, television and appliance industries' that were ' at the centre of the growing Fordist web' ('The Promise and Threat of America' 196). American managerialism and the jargon of 'human relations' penetrated and altered workplaces

and the working mind-set. Covering the 1965 Melbourne 'International Congress on Human Relations', by Prime Minister Robert Menzies, *Communist Review*'s Tom Wright observed that the dominant topic in industrial relations by the mid-60s was still 'scientific management' and its relationship with employees ('Automation and Human Relations' 178).

But according to Alex Carey, management rhetoric had always been propaganda: terms 'like "democracy" and "participation" outside the firm or factory had a primarily public relations, image-making purpose' – though the illusion of worker improvement and '"participation" in low-level decisions' might be usefully employed to 'weaken the loyalty of workers to unions' ('Social Science, Propaganda and Democracy' 68-69). The new rhetoric of management and 'human relations' left established power relations intact.

Australia had a history of business resistance to consultation with workers about workplace organisation, so Australian industry was ripe for a scientific management culture that simplified, regimented and dictated work practice from above. This system could also offset the training costs required to bring poorly skilled sections of the population into the work force after WWII: regimes like piece work meant simplification and immediate profitability (Cochrane, 'Doing Time'182-183).

In 1950, prominent Australian management consultant Walter Scott brought the American celebrity Harold Maynard to train local clients. Maynard was the developer of Methods-Time-Measurement: a practice by which, provided with a library of predetermined rates for a range of basic motions, an industrial engineer could estimate the time it should take for a worker to perform routine tasks. Throughout the 50s and 60s, consultants like W.D. Scott and Company applied this technique and other refined Taylorisms to coal mines, hospitals, breweries, transport

departments, financial and insurance offices (Wright, 'From Shop Floor to Boardroom' 93). As Braverman notes, an influential manual compiled for The Systems and Procedures Association of America in the late 1950s (input from the General Electric Company and Stanford University) outlined clerical standards defined by time and motion values: measurements, the last second, for tasks like opening and closing filing-cabinet draws, getting up or sitting down in chairs (321). Rationalisation in the office as well as the factory, was specialised and 'automated' (Wright Mills 209). In an important overview of Australia's post-war industrial relations for *Labour History* in 1985, Peter Cochrane concluded that fractures within the labour movement itself in the 50s (partly over Communism) prepared the ground for the spread of managerialism and 'human relations'. On the shop floor, this meant that the selection of foremen was subjected to greater scrutiny: their role was recast as mediator for management, not worker representative; and other 'constituents on the shop floor – method, machinery and morale – had all been recast in the mind's eye of industrial leaders' ('Company Time' 67-68). And as the changing selection and identity of the foreman suggested, shifts in working consciousness were actively tended through altered work practices.

Even those who saw through the nonsense that workers were being 'middle classed' pondered whether there had been such a reshaping of working-class consciousness (Dworkin 41). In Britain, Raymond Williams observed that most on the Left did not understand the structural implications of change in post-war Britain, or that 'a socialism of production' was needed – not meagre redistributionism – to 'resolve the problems of work itself'; 'nationalisation of mines or railways hadn't altered the working relationships or position of the workers inside the nationalised industries' which were 'a quite unchanged and deeply undemocratic state machine'.

Miners or railwaymen quickly discovered that 'they were no more "our mines" or "our railways" than before' (*Politics and Letters* 368). Furthermore, Williams detected an 'interlock between the Anglo-American political alliance' and the 'pattern of possible social-economic priorities at home' (*Politics and Letters* 367): a narrowed field of policy debate in which the terms were set by international capital. Cochrane's work on post-war Australian industrial relations suggested the same disgruntlement Williams identified in Britain: a Labor Party in crisis, confusion among union officials and the Left as to who or what they now represented.

This mood was evident in British and Australian fictions of the 50s, which detected fissures in working-class consciousness: and even today, the detachment and resignation among workers they documented has seldom been critically recognised in its intensity. These are not texts that depict wholesale desertions from unions or workers voting conservative en mass: they generally portray a working-class culture resilient enough to survive post-war capitalism. But they *did* routinely portray doubts and shaken commitments to older forms of labour organisation, as workers were encircled by Phil Cohen's two dominant imperatives: spectacular consumption and ruthlessly efficient production.

In the British context, Heinemann's *Adventurers* partly traces working-class dissatisfaction in the 50s and 60s to the machinations and philosophical changes within labour institutions. Significantly, her novel notes the adoption of American managerial and pro-business attitudes by aspiring Labour politicians and union representatives. The main character, Dan Owen, progresses from Abergoch miner's son to London industrial journalist between the late 40s and the late 50s. Dan is the classic 'scholarship boy', whose Cambridge studies are possible because the university's fictional Kier Hardie College is financially backed by the Trades Union

Congress. At college, Dan's subtle ideological moulding proceeds under the tutelage of right-wing Labour Party and union apparatchiks.

Murdoch, the new TUC representative on the Kier Hardie board, epitomises the era's Crosland-style labour revisionism: he regards the college's major role as a recruiting house for those like Dan, who, will advance 'new Labour' ideas via 'research and technical jobs at Transport House and elsewhere in the unions' (49; 115). But the college's funding-base quietly alters, with a donation from the mysterious American Waddy Foundation. The ideological strings attached to the bequest are not only different from those of the labour movement, but potentially stronger. Waddy's American representative, Corinth, advocates that the college should have 'more vocational lectures, on management and on comparative trade unionism, including the running of unions in the United States'. The Foundation, Corinth explains, is particularly interested in projects centred on human relations:

> 'We consider psychology as important as technology. We are […]
> financing right now a project centred on the psychological attitude
> manifested towards foremen over a wide field of industry. We have
> also initiated projects at a more practical level […] exchanges
> between high-ranking executives in a firm and in the appropriate
> trade union organising that firm's employees. You might describe it
> as the scientific study of the other fellow's point of view.' (84)

Whilst this is couched in the deliberately neutral language of techno-management, Corinth's pitch for his organisation's involvement in the British working man's college also tellingly lapses into Cold War rhetoric:

'All we're concerned with is to help the unity of the free world to

spread the faith in freedom that will enable us to roll back the evil

menace of Communism in every land. We are fighting it in America,

as your great Labour movement is fighting it here. But to succeed we

need new ideas, men trained in twentieth-century thinking.' (88)

Board regular Jack Rugg expresses misgivings about the Americanisation of a British

labour institution, but financial inducements prove persuasive enough for the board to

disregard concerns about outside interference and accept the Waddy Foundation's

offer. An aside by Corinth, however, reveals how well founded suspicions about

American interventionist intentions are:

'I wasn't rattled by those Commies at the end, if that's what's on

your mind. One gets to expect it in Europe. Personally, I like to see

them forced up above-ground, though you British may prefer to

operate it some more complicated way.' (89)

Dan Owen is thus educated in an institution which deliberately blurs the lines between

management and labour philosophies, satisfying the ideological leanings of its

American business backer and the special relationship the Waddy Foundation has

cultivated with the British labour movement. Consequently, Dan starts his journalistic

career as an industrial correspondent for a magazine with a similarly market-oriented

philosophy. Paid for largely by advertisements, *Skills* is aimed at works managers. But

its particular feature is 'the appeal to "both sides of industry", its articles by trade

union leaders and letters headed: "From the Workshop Floor"' (116). Although

preferring not to call it propaganda, Dan's editor makes it clear that the magazine is designed to promote an idea of industrial harmony that is conveniently tailored to the era's business interests and 'scientific management': 'neutral' pieces, 'stories that aren't out to sell anything in particular but people might conceivably want to read them' (116).

The character of Richard Adams contrasts with Dan, following a reverse trajectory. A Cambridge Communist, Adams jumps at a teaching job in Portheinion because the place perfectly represents industrial Britain: 'the junction of three mining valleys, and the students will all be miners, I should think – or miners' sons' (204). The different shape of these two characters' lives is an important pivot around which *The Adventurers* explores feelings of disenfranchisement, and lack of agency, in working-class communities. What surprises and depresses Richard Adams most, as he involves himself in local labour politics, is that the commitment he had romantically expected is so tenuous. He begins to understand that this is a consequence of the local perception that decisions that affect ordinary working people are increasingly made in far-off social circles, where working-class expatriates like Dan Owen now move as easily among businessmen as they did among labour representatives. In working-class villages this manifests itself as a form of resignation, if not outright apathy: 'between elections any politics there might be in Portheinion were trade union politics, and active union members, even if they held a Party card, saw no need to come to any more meetings' (206).

On this point, Heinemann's *Adventurers* caught the strikingly similar malaise from an earlier novel about post-war labour organisation, Jack Lindsay's *Moment of Choice*. Published in 1955, *Moment of Choice* is the third in Lindsay's 'British Way' trilogy, featuring a number of characters who appear in the first, *Betrayed Spring*: Kit

Swinton, the son of a Yorkshire textile mill owner with mild socialist proclivities; Jill Wethers, the former school teacher turned textile worker and Communist union organiser. The novel centres largely on the personal relationship between Kit and Jane Dacres, (like Kit, the child of a mill owner), and the emotional (and personal-political) travails which ensue as her embrace of the Communist-inspired peace movement affronts Kit's gradualist Fabian sensitivities. But a significant backdrop, against which most of *Moment of Choice*'s characters are situated, is grass-roots labour organisation. Time and again, the novel evokes the difficulties of active participation and the generally dilapidated state of local Labour and union politics in the early 50s.

Like Heinemann's *Adventurers*, numerous passages in *Moment of Choice* relating to Kit Swinton's Yorkshire Labour Party activities depict local branches that are financially and emotionally destitute, and interminable meetings in lousy surroundings:

> The old building with its flat façade of blackened stone housed a number of organisations like the Mechanics' Institute; but its main function was to hold the Labour Club, which took up the whole ground floor and part of the first, with its bar, its low-lit billiard tables, its bleak domino-corner and its creaking dais with rail and piano for concert items. The Labour Party had its room on the second floor; but as the room was at last in the throes of a long-delayed redecoration – one of the boards had given way under the secretary's stamp – the branch committee was meeting in the room of a textile trade union (123).

Lawrence Black's recent historical work on British socialist branch politics in the 50s confirms that this picture was not over-fictionalised. Black notes that as early as 1950, a Mass Observation survey revealed an equally depressing view of the state of Labour Party branches even around London: 'East Ham North Labour headquarters "above an empty shop" had "broken stairs, bare floors". Islington East and Kensington North were "shabby", the meeting room of the latter "messy" and "absolutely minus furniture"' ('Still at the Penny-Farthing Stage' 205). A column in *Labour Organiser* in 1955 put it succinctly: there was a 'limit to voluntary endurance and discomfort', and 'given the choice of a dull business routine in a draughty schoolroom or a strictly furnished co-op hall, of course people would prefer to stay at home and watch the "telly"' ('Still at the Penny-Farthing Stage' 204). More importantly, a Party memo from Richard Crossman in 1951 encapsulated a deeper concern. Crossman lamented that branch meetings were increasingly influenced not only by Communists but also a range of opinionated cranks ('Still at the Penny-Farthing Stage' 206). Throughout *Moment of Choice*, Lindsay caricatures this motley minority who seek to represent working-class interests:

> A few moments later Donelly came in, with a razor-cut on his long upper lip and his stuck-out ears red with the cold night air; a taciturn grizzled electrician, Clegg, who represented the ETU; and Sandy, jovial as ever, bristling at the sight of Donnelly. Then Mrs. Flooks of the Co-op Guild, smelling of peppermint and the milk of kindness, as round as a barrel; Miss Scottle looking as neat as if (in Mrs. Flooks' words) she'd ironed her dress after she'd put it on, regardless of

blisters; and two more right wingers, Catholic-Actionists and councillors like Donelly. (125)

British Labour Party membership peaked in 1953; but worker political participation remained essentially a matter of involvement in unions – and there, the dominant voice was executive, not rank-and-file (Looker 36). And the problems of organising had become even greater in an era when affluence ideology and the distractions of popular culture were so strongly taking hold. Like Lindsay's *Moment of Choice*, Heinemann's *Adventurers* took up the theme. Exasperated Communist organiser Richard Adams concedes it is hard to counter the lure of popular culture with lectures on theoretical Marxism: 'Tommy Rhys […] would often miss for a club night, or if his wife wanted to go to the pictures […] Richard understood it well enough' – the impossible task of persuading 'miners, when they got home after a hard shift underground, to clean up and smarten themselves and trudge down the hill again to discuss the nature of capitalist exploitation' (207). And in *The Adventurers*, Heinemann attributes this malaise, or apathy, to a grander disillusion with traditional labour organisation: it is common, Richard admits, to hear workers say 'the union's on the management's side now, its no good to us' (235).

This suspicion of post-war labour organisation also features strongly in Sigal's *Weekend in Dinlock*. The novel was a vehicle for Sigal's impressions of contemporary working-class attitudes. His narrator, the London-based American, is taken aback by the scepticism among Dinlock's miners about whether the 'socialist' promise of coal's nationalisation has delivered worker control, as Williams said in the *Politics and Letters* interviews. *Weekend in Dinlock* surmises:

British coal mines may be nationalised, they may be 'public property', but as far as the miners are concerned the bosses are still the bosses, NCB or no. The men would never go back to the old way, when the big mines were privately owned, but the hope of the early days of nationalisation is shot dead in its tracks, vanished, to be replaced by a militant, if unevenly loyal cynicism (22).

Moreover, like Lindsay's *Moment of Choice* and Heinemann's *Adventurers*, *Weekend in Dinlock* suggests that creeping working-class scepticism is related equally to government policy and the intentions of union executives. The book's ethnographer-narrator hears Davie: 'a miner' speaking out 'bitterly of the NCB and of the top National Union of Mineworkers leaders who, he says, side with the NCB. Slowly I am to discover he is speaking for all the miners in his anger and disillusionment' (22-23). In this climate, it seems impossible to rein in or equalise capital, especially when unionists are comprehensively corrupted, and the 'whispering campaigns' about Dinlock's leading union official Bolton focalises the crisis: '"Don't get me wrong", says Davie, "Bolton is lahk a father to me. But his tendencies worry me. They seem to be goin' in two different directions. For one thing, he lahks too much to be on first-name terms with the pit manager and such people"'. The narrator adds:

It will be up to Bolton, as chairman of the committee to rule. For all sorts of reasons, having to do with union politics and impending elections for the branch executive and therefore the all-important assignment of status in the village, a great deal is riding on Bolton's

ruling […] But Bolton is a politician and not above wanting to see

which way the wind will blow. (126)

Sigal's inspiration for *Weekend in Dinlock* came partly from his friendship with miner-novelist Len Doherty, author of *A Miner's Sons* (1955), and then spending a couple of weekends in Doherty's mining village (Lessing 234). Doherty's narrative remarked that the nationalisation of coal under the National Coal Board did nothing to reduce the power of mine owners and cynicism about the bribery of unionists; and a taped discussion John Rex made for *New Left Review* in 1960, with members of the village that was *Weekend in Dinlock*'s model, underlined the book's acute local accuracies: 'how does this come about? Well, mainly because of the system of conciliation and consultation […] the Union man finds himself on speaking terms, on Christian name terms, with the manager. It's Tom, Jack, Bill, Jim and Harry in consultation. The same person, then, is expected to go round the other side of the table', to lobby for his workers (44). Scepticism about party or union politics was written even larger in Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. As James Gindin writes, Sillitoe's characters support no politician or party: 'Labour leaders' are treated as 'the equivalent of big-business magnates or Tory politicians' (19). Sillitoe probes the ruling-class mind-set too, suggesting how working-class resignation is dictated by consumption ideology – 'Blokes with suits and bowler hats will say: "These chaps have got their television sets, enough to live on, council houses, beer, and pools – some have even got cars. We've made them happy. What's wrong?"' (177) But the weariness is local and personal. Arthur Seaton's street still automatically votes Labour, but this is a forlorn protest 'born of parents who had waited for government of the people and against the bosses': a hope dashed by post-

war settlements that only 'nibbled at social inequality and broke their hearts and their belief in political change' (Gray 122).

In the earlier 50s, Jack Lindsay detected this resignation, or apathy, in workers' perceptions of their diminishing power. In *Moment of Choice*, textile union organiser Jill Wethers is constantly threatened with dismissal by hostile managers who seize on complaints about her work. But this is not the most depressing aspect of Jill's career as union activist. She is frustrated by the working-class predilection for, or distraction by, popular culture: 'Jill saw Bella powdering her nose and asked herself how she could hope to organise the shed with such flighty wenches who thought only of the evening's dance-hall, the cinema, the latest plugged hit-song' (74).

There are distinctive parallels between *Moment of Choice* and Hewett's *Bobbin Up*. One of *Bobbin Up*'s main players is a woman unionist in a mill, and Hewett uses the character to say something about the mixed attitudes of Australian workers on post-war industrial organisation. Like her British counterparts, Hewett describes workers in a political 'no man's land' – where older solidarities might not hold, and a new mix of employer expectation and the distractions of popular culture and consumerism seemed to pose complex choices. Closely matching Jill Wethers' Yorkshire experience in *Moment of Choice*, *Bobbin Up*'s Nell Weber's Australian workplace is disabled by anti-union sentiment. Foreman Dick asks '"What's goin' on here. Why aren't you back at your machine Nell?"'; Nell replies '"Because I'm collectin' for the union. When are you goin' to join Dick?" Dick's rejoinder is telling: '"Haven't been financial for two years Nell. Don't intend to be neither. I work too hard for all me wages to hand it over to those bludgers. Why don't yous wake up to yourselves?" (187) Miserably, antipathy to the union also comes from Nell's

machinist colleagues: '"How about your dues Shirl?"', but Shirl bristles: '"What I wanta know is what's this lousy union ever done for me?"' (186)

Bobbin Up is populated with characters caught between the imperatives of conspicuous consumption and the regimes of overtime and speed up, 'even though it's killin' them' – '"They got TV sets and houses and hospital bills and Christ knows what else to pay off. One poor bugger fell asleep on the shit'ouse seat last night and slept till mornin'. The day shift foreman found him there and give him the bullet"' (124). These pressures fracture class allegiances, as workers abandon the idea of solidarity and fraternise with management to pursue self-serving ends. Maisie, for example, wants 'a residential in King's Cross' and to run her own business, and ignores 'the few lousy benefits' the workers 'managed to wring from the mill owner's tight-sewn pockets' . For her, comradeship is an impediment to 'getting ahead', and the other women find it 'impossible to forgive her'. Because Maisie consorts with superiors 'they hated her for having a word in the ear of the leading hand, and arranging for the machines to be speeded up, hated her for jumping up the tallies they were expected to make, hated her for ignoring their hard-earned tea breaks' (111). The union is compromised by its new compact with management, and when a crisis over working conditions looms activist Nell Weber knows how it will play out: 'the mill manager and the Union officials would have got their heads together […] Whatever they did would be in line with the policy of the textile industry and the Employer's Federation' (126). Nell recognises that this is a radically restructured world of work, where traditional labour institutions themselves block meaningful unified action:

> They'd send out that slimy little organiser, Creek, to front up for
>
> them. She could see them clicking their well-oiled machine into

motion, briefing little Creek in the ugly, coffee-coloured room in the

Trades Hall. The Trades Hall! Oh! What crimes are committed in thy

name behind the anonymity of those drab, coffee-coloured walls.

(126)

Perry Anderson considers this situation as a pervasive problem in the post-war, industrialised West. In the 50s, the paradox of unionism was exposed: unions increasingly acted as 'the fire extinguishers of the revolution' and performed a dual role, 'shackling their members to the system and bringing limited benefits to them' ('The Limits and Possibilities if Trade Union Action' 346). The rank and file took the bait; eschewing bigger campaigns, preferring localised bargaining for modest wage claims. In 1956, Leslie Corina wrote to *The New Statesman* that this 'whole canvas' resembled 'James Burnham's portrait of "managerial society"': real politics preoccupied the few, while 'the masses could continue on their rather sensual course, unperturbed provided their material wishes were largely granted'. The danger, said Corina, was 'a permanency of apathy' (45). By the 60s, Michael Kidron observed, working-class solidarity was ailing: the moral authority of unions was declining, and workers seemed apathetic to 'big-picture' class politics. As the decade progressed, it 'would be even harder to show a successful attempt at improving the relative position of low-paid workers as a whole' (71). Antonio Gramsci had discerned this dilemma as structural. In the historical development of unionism, he theorised, when a union reached a critical membership and centralised its power it became 'divorced from the masses it had regimented', removing itself from the 'eddies and currents of fickle whims and foolish ambitions that were to be expected in the excitable broad masses'. (*A Gramsci Reader* 93). Like Marx and Lenin, Gramsci was emphatic about the

structural limitations of unions: they were 'dialectically both an opposition to capitalism and a component of it'. By their nature, they were tied to capitalism – 'able to bargain within society, but not transform it' (Anderson, 'The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action' 334).

In *Politics and Letters*, Williams argued that changes in the industrial landscape of 50s Britain ensured that patterns of class struggle now had as much in common with American trade unionism as with the past of the British labour movement. By this, he meant that 'a kind of militant particularism' emerged, 'resembling in form the struggles of an organised working class in the classical sense' but corralled by the 'capitalist market system – a process of bargaining which lacked any wider political dimension' (125). Working-class consciousness survived, in the sense that unions were visible and active and the electoral loyalty of two-thirds of the working class still went to the Labour Party. But it was problematic, Anderson observed, that the other third voted Conservative and was overwhelmingly non-unionised – though not significantly different from the Labour-voting group in any other social demographic measure ('The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action' 344).

D.W. Rawson wrote in similar terms about changing views amongst the working class in Australia. By the 60s, Rawson observed, much of the traditional structure of the labour movement was intact, and most unionists were still likely to vote for Labour candidates. 'But a large and possibly increasing proportion' voted for the Liberal and Country Parties, while 'most unionists were either less likely to approve of their unions' affiliations with the ALP, or not care at all' (84).

For neo-Marxist Herbert Marcuse, concessions that capital made to labour via the mechanism of the welfare state, and changes in the composition of work (like

automation and piece work) explained why the new pressures experienced by workers in the 50s and 60s did not lead to political radicalisation. Marcuse also envisaged that the growth of white-collar jobs in the period might induce union consciousness among clerical workers but, again, 'hardly their radicalisation' (*One Dimensional Man* 45).

The expansion in white-collar and technical work that Marcuse noted in the United States was replicated in western countries after WWII: and this represented the further subdivision or stratification of work and the idea of 'working-classness'. In Australia, a study of workplace change between 1947 and 1966 by Brian Carey confirmed that the most rapid growth rates were in professional and technical occupations (25); and in Marcuse's vein, Bob Connell and Terry Irving concluded that the formation of a range of new white-collar unions in Australia hardly represented a 'triumph of working-class solidarity', since they 'notably did not join the Australian Council of Trade Unions' (*Class Structure in Australian History* 301). Noting the multiplying strata of work, Connell and Irving's found an 'increasing economic and domestic fragmentation of the working class and an increasing cultural strength of conservatism' that was 'hardly propitious for labour politics' (*Class Structure in Australian History* 303).

This segmentation of working life in late capitalist society preoccupied sociologist Michael Mann. Perry Anderson sees Mann's *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class* as one of the more coherent explorations of the subject of working-class identity and industrial behaviour, posing serious challenges for 'end-of-ideology theorists and Marxists alike' (Anderson, *English Questions* 213). In his study, Mann examined the Marxist assumption that workers would make the 'connection' between work and family life and their industrial and political activity, as the alienations and exploitations of work spilled over into their private time – that

is, class consciousness would develop (19). In the post-war period, the opposite seemed true: leisure appeared to compensate for work's alienations, suggesting that class relations in contemporary capitalism were of a particularly unstable nature and that there were several segmentations – 'between work and non-work, between industrial and political action, between the economic and social aspects of industrial action itself' (20). This instability, Mann argued, was at odds with any theory that predicted the dialectical development of working-class consciousness as a revolutionary force. According to Mann, the post-war situation re-imagined the institutionalised politics and industrial relations of contemporary western capitalism in 'fairly rosy colours' – and confounded the concept of alienation (10).

The slow death of 'alienation' strongly underpinned other sociologies that Mann's book had drawn upon: notably, John Goldthorpe's important study of workers at the Vauxhall car plant in Luton in the early 60s, *The Affluent Worker*. Goldthorpe concluded that among the British workers he studied there was 'no systematic relationship to be found between the degree to which their work might be considered as objectively "alienating" and, say, the strength of their attachment to their jobs' (181). In Goldthorpe's estimation, modern Britons regarded work as a means to extrinsic ends: 'rather than an overriding concern with consumption standards reflecting alienation in work, it could be claimed that precisely such a concern constituted the motivation for these men to take, and to retain, work of a particularly unrewarding kind which offered high pay in compensation for its inherent deprivations' (182). Moreover, Goldthorpe questioned the validity of the view that working-class desires for 'decent, comfortable houses, for labour-saving devices, and even for such leisure goods as television sets and cars' manifested the force of 'false' needs and a false consciousness, 'superimposed upon the individual by particular

social interests in his repression' (184). Satisfaction and self-realisation were no longer sought in work: they were found in leisure and the experience of popular culture, and workplace alienation seemed a dead letter.

But as Mann jibed, paraphrasing W.W. Daniel's like-minded attack on *The Affluent Worker*, Goldthorpe described a process that operated like 'local anaesthetic'; workers could 'see the wound but feel no pain' (27). Mann argued that there *were* many 'unmistakable signs of conscious deprivation' in workers that could only be termed 'alienation'. And he pointed to several studies revealing the range of psychological defence mechanisms workers developed to cope with the realities of exploitation – rationalisation, projection, day-dreaming, apathy, fatalism (29). All these were expressions of a new, post-war working-class compliance with authority – a somewhat fatalistic, 'populist' worker consciousness, found in industrial-capitalist democracies like the United States, Britain and Australia. As Mann perceived, when workers reverted to fatalist populism and its hackneyed adages ('the rich have always exploited the poor') they articulated a kind of insidious passivity or disgruntlement – not the self-aware depths of a Marxist alienation that would spark class action – and buttressed a political-economic system in which 'the conception of an *alternative* was lacking' (30-31). Finally, Mann thought this was the absolutely key contradiction in late capitalism: those who were most alienated and most desperate were also the least confident of, or indifferent to, their ability to change their lives. Moving to this conclusion, Mann made a compelling case that material changes in work practice and working-class consciousness had an intimately welded history.

In the late 60s, Michael Kidron was cautiously optimistic that the extraordinary pressures of workplace 'reform' in – like piece work and the speed up in car factories, depicted in Williams' *Second Generation* and de Boissiere's *No*

Saddles for Kangaroos – would eventually trigger shop-floor militancy and demands for worker control (145). But in 1960, roughly at the time he was drafting *Second Generation*, Williams conversed with Richard Hoggart in *New Left Review*, visiting many of the questions about working-class agency that appear in the novel. For Williams, the links between consumer society and what happened in the workplace and at the polling booth were inescapable: 'We have to ask whether this pressure to "unify" us isn't just a kind of low-level processing. They want to breed out difference, so that we become more predictable and more manageable consumers and citizens, united in fact around nothing very much, and the form of the unity conceals the basic inhumanities […] in education, in work.' And the ruthless reform of work, its new stratifications and pressures, created a system hostile to human fulfilment: 'much more impersonal, yet it passes itself off as a natural order.' And like Michael Mann, Williams concluded that the 'unifications', or uniformities, of working life pervaded the broad social consciousness: 'It's built in so deep that you have to look for it in the whole culture, not just in politics or economics ('Working Class Attitudes' 29).

Some twenty years later, in *Towards 2000*, Williams' 'politics of hope' remained tinged with this sense of doubt that coloured his academic and lesser-known fictional writings: a doubt fuelled even more by what Williams saw as an accelerated assault on the very idea of a common working-class interest since the 50s. *Towards 2000* revisited issues that had appeared in *Second Generation* – and, indeed, many other novels of working life in post-war Britain and Australia. While the working class had not conveniently disappeared, it was possible that working-class identity, solidarity, and the conscious sense of communal class values had been increasingly compromised from the 50s onward. Writing of the powers of unionism as a cement of working-class activism and collective identity, Williams thought it 'cannot be taken

for granted that such links are there by the mere fact that it is a trade-union action'; and he noted the steady containment of unionism as 'part of the mechanism of a modern capitalist society. Even most modern capitalists want only to regulate it, and to steer it away from more dangerous ideas like direct action or changing the social order'. Williams then moved to a consideration of 'the triumph of *capitalist* thinking'; the revolution in the head that set the oppressed against each other: 'the rich and the employers, and their agents and friends, believe and say that we are all only interested in selfish advantage. But the most shattering fact in our culture is that a *majority* believe and say this, including […] many of the bargaining employed […] less organised workers, the unemployed and the really poor (*Towards 2000* 164-165).This passage immediately recalls the 'industrial' fictions of the 50s and 60s that foreground the period's class fractures and interpersonal stresses among workers – suspicion, jealousy, competitiveness; fictions that probe British and Australian working life, revealing how labour, socialist and union movements so dramatically lost touch with a working class pressured by those two imperatives that coiled around the experience of work: Phil Cohen's spectacular consumption and ruthlessly efficient production.

Cohen also contributed to another significant debate on social change and working-class consciousness in the 50s and 60s. Through his Birmingham School connections, he conceptualised how anxieties about transformed class identity and consumerism in the period were projected onto working-class youth; how, in Richard Hoggart's terms, the spectacle of youth surrounded by nasty modernistic knick-knacks, living an imaginary American Dream, came to emblematise the fissures and pressures that afflicted working-class life as a whole.

Chapter 4

Pop, Teds and Working-class Lads Who Stayed Home

Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* (1960) and Sid Chaplin's *The Day of the Sardine* (1961) plumb deep ambivalences about class consciousness: troubles that exist beneath their authors' superficial optimism on social change, class continuity and allegiance in the post-war period. Both novels focus on British youth, and their commonality is the theme of disturbance: their central characters exhibit contradictory behaviours, a mental crisis, in relation to 'traditional' and 'transforming' working-class values. And *A Kind of Loving* and *Day of the Sardine* have another significance: they typify the way that post-war British fiction on working-class themes participated in debates on the period's upheavals.

In his study of the portrayal of youth in post-war British working-class fiction, *Fire in Our Hearts* (1982), Ronald Paul noted that the new prominence of working-class youth in the period's literature was melded with wider preoccupations: shifts in the consciousness, assertiveness and awareness of 'youth' and the working classes as a whole (49). In this context, fiction centred on the young working classes wrestled with a 'problem' of national sociological import. Stuart Laing goes further, suggesting the period witnessed such a significant blurring of the fields of social science and literature that by the 60s 'the "novelistic" quality of social exploration and some sociological writing was on a par with the "sociological" qualities of working-class fiction in their mutual transgression of dominant categories' (*Representations of Working-class Life* 57). This sense of discursive 'borderlessness' characterised the

work of intellectuals associated with Britain's Birmingham-based Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the late 60s – a group which, like a number of fiction writers in the 50s and 60s, grappled with new ways of understanding post-war youth culture and its social functions. Crucially, the Birmingham School's methodology relied on reports of working-class life and youth that were documented in the 50s and early 60s.

The Birmingham School's best-known essays on youth and class, *Resistance Through Rituals* (1975), rested on the common criticism that up to that point Right and Left theorists shared the same logic in their analyses of post-war working-class youth's behaviour. As Paul Corrigan and Simon Frith pointed out in 'The Politics of Youth Culture', earlier work on the subject was unified by the notion of ideological incorporation – the idea that a passive working class now had values reflecting a profound acceptance of bourgeois culture (231). For many Birmingham scholars, however, interpreting the everyday experience of the working-class teenager as 'the total (and totally successful) manipulation of a potential proletariat into the very model of the capitalist consumer' was a mistake. They felt assumptions had been made about youth that mirrored more general ones about working-class culture as a whole; and that these assumptions overlooked the particular institutional contexts in which bourgeois ideology was confronted and negotiated (232).

Two strands of argument emerged as Birmingham scholars turned to the class dimensions of an analysis of youth culture. One was represented by Phil Cohen's para-Freudian explanation of how working-class youth subcultures functioned at an ideological and 'imaginary' level, resolving a range of tensions and contradictions in working-class families that arose from fragmentations and pressures exerted on the entire class in the post-war years. According to this model, youth subcultures were a

form of social compromise or resolution of two contradictory needs: on the one hand, independence and difference from a parent generation; on the other, the desire to remain connected to it. Cohen surmised that the 50s ushered in specific contradictions 'between traditional working-class Puritanism and the new hedonism of consumption; at an economic level, between a future as part of the socially mobile elite or as part of the new lumpen proletariat'. Mods, parkas, skinheads and crombies thus came to represent, in their different ways, attempts to 'retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent culture, and to combine these with elements selected from other class fractions, symbolising one or the other of the options confronting it' ('Sub-cultural Conflict and Working-class Community' 83).

The other prominent line of Birmingham thought relied heavily on the Gramscian notion of counter-hegemony: the idea that working-class culture always 'won space' from a dominant order. This strand of inquiry recognised that 'negotiation, resistance and struggle: the relations between a subordinate and a dominant culture, wherever they fall within this spectrum, were always intensively active, always oppositional'. The working class therefore always brought a 'repertoire of strategies and responses – ways of coping as well as resisting' to this 'theatre of struggle' (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts 44). This theoretical position questioned, or rejected, the familiar culturalist proposition that the working classes, and youth in particular, were 'corrupted' by their interactions with post-war consumer society. However, there was agreement that 'the agencies of pop culture (record companies and teenage magazine and clothes shops and so on) *exploit* young people (hardly a surprising aspect of capitalism)' (Corrigan & Frith 237). The question was the *extent* to which the 'agencies of pop' manipulated them.

For Birmingham scholars like Corrigan and Frith, the conventional Left characterisation of teenagers as passive consumers, buying, playing and acting as commerce dictated, did not accord with images of the 'exuberant, proud, belligerent, *solid* kids' who followed the music scene and went to concerts (237). Instead, Corrigan and Frith proposed that a reading of youth culture's political implications and actions had to be anchored in an understanding of working-class culture as a totality. This meant re-focussing social analyses on youth culture's 'working classness', moving away from the concept of the 'generation gap' – a concept which exaggerated the differences between youth culture and its class contexts, ignoring youth's social continuities and connectedness (236). Corrigan and Frith's Birmingham colleagues, John Clarke and Stuart Hall, pursued the argument. They observed that young workers might join groupings distinguished by dress, style or value, such as Teddy Boys or Mods; they might walk, talk and look different; but it was important to remember that they 'belonged to the same families, went to the same schools, worked at the same jobs, lived down the same "mean streets"' as their peers and parents ('Subcultures, Cultures and Class' 14).

Nevertheless, the promoters of this Birmingham School approach equivocated over what it explained about real power relations. They could be optimistic that working-class youth appropriated and 'made over' the products of consumer capitalism, but it required a considerable leap of faith to believe that adopting styles of dress or music were genuinely political resistances to the corporate capital that produced them. Corrigan and Frith clung to a carnivalesque vision of youth's exuberance, but tempered it with a vital concession. 'Even if youth culture is not political in the sense of being part of a class-conscious struggle for state power,' they

wrote, 'it nevertheless *does provide* a necessary pre-condition of such a struggle.' But this utopian dreaming was quickly qualified:

> Given the structural powerlessness of working-class kids and given the amount of state pressure they have to absorb, we can only marvel at the fun and the strength of the culture that supports their survival as any sort of group at all. If the final question is how to build on that culture, how to organise it, transform resistance into rebellion, then it is the question which takes us out of the youth culture and into the analysis of working-class politics generally (238).

A number of fictions about the young working-class in the 50s and 60s had already anticipated and pursued this Birmingham School approach, measuring the distinctive experience of youth against its location in the larger structures of working-class life. Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* and Chaplin's *Day of the Sardine* traced youth's subcultural flirtations as a means of illuminating internal contradictions within the working class as a social formation. However, both novels left the important and conflicted issue of how solidly young people remained connected to their parent working class unresolved. There was something slightly forced or 'manufactured' in the optimism of their portraits of working-class youth; a strained mood, prefiguring the wish-fulfilment in Birmingham School assessments of youth culture like *Resistance Through Rituals* – the earnest search for a proletarian agency that had withstood the tide of post-war consumer capital. Literature and sociology shared the view, or hope, that youth would adjust to new modes of leisure and consumption in ways consistent with a tradition of working-class solidarity and resistance. The class

consciousness of youth themed work in sociology and fiction but produced no firm conclusions; leading Ronald Paul to assert that there was no identifiable political commitment in post-war British fiction about working-class youth (55). But Paul's point appealed to 'politics' narrowly as the openly-declared partisanship of an author or party membership: not the more subtle thinking that exposed myths of affluence, delineated work practices and the ways they might alter workers' identities, or worried about traditional class allegiances – a broad yet highly politicised literary register.

As Birmingham intellectuals formulated their analysis of how working-class youth fitted into contemporary capitalist society, they took optimistic leads from new political sociologies such as John Westergaard's *Class in a Capitalist Society*. Yet Westergaard had argued that the rise of the 'aspirational' worker weakened labour's unity. The fact that there were significant defections to Conservatism even among manual workers, Westergaard concluded, reflected the 'well-marked divisions of consciousness, organisation and everyday culture' that had occurred 'in parallel with the cleavages made by inequality of wealth, power and opportunity' in the post-war years. Stuart Hall, for example, took heart from Westergaard's guess that continuing social inequality and the frustration of working-class aspirations might be the impetus for youthful challenges to the order of capital; but Hall could only do so by overlooking Westergaard's alternative prognosis – that young workers' frustrations might 'trigger no more than individualised resentment and resignation; or fragmented disorder directed against irrationally chosen targets' (380). As the Birmingham School began publishing its mature work in the early 70s, it was clear that Westergaard's latter speculation was the right one: youth was indeed disquiet, but also disorganised and fractionalised.

Ronald Paul remained adamant that British writing about the working class in the post-war period seldom featured class solidarity as a central preoccupation. Paul rightly noted that novels of class escape such as John Braine's *Room at the Top* enjoyed critical prominence: possibly because they belonged to a well-worn genre, with notable authorial forebears like Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence. The class escape novel often depicted what Paul described as the 'apolitical, consumerist attitudes and dreams' and individualist aspirations of working-class protagonists 'out to enjoy the things that money could buy' (56) – yet he failed to consider that this very picture implied an attitude about the makeup and future of the working class that could be properly described as a subtle and sophisticated political awareness, gleaned from the close observation of working-class communities. The literature of working life occupied an important niche in period debates, tracing the processes of historic change occurring underneath the avalanche of new American-originated consumer goods, leisure and entertainment which inundated countries like Britain and Australia during the 50s and early 60s. It voiced uncertainties about young working peoples' class consciousness and, paradoxically, presented politics in its absence: the self-serving character of the would-be class escapee was an implicit comment on the exhaustion of class solidarity ideals. The political message was plain: working-class culture broke down as youngsters aspired to better paid jobs and adopted more materialistic, individualist middle-class values.

Paul also recognised the novels that refused the class escape theme. In Barstow's *Kind of Loving* and Chaplin's *Day of the Sardine*, for example, young workers may have fleetingly fantasised about the material benefits of middle-class life, but no geographical shifts or class transcendences resulted. And there was a political import, too, in these texts which dealt with working-class youngsters who

'stayed at home'. Confusions over class identity, culture and traditional political loyalties were central in these novels about young characters remaining in or returning to their working-class communities. Moreover, the 'closed community' novel was often more perplexing than the novel of class escape in its sense of working-class futures. In the 'stay at home' story, the young characters were psychologically complex: they were highly individualistic, as Paul observed, but nevertheless clung on to the communalist attitudes of their parents.

Barstow's *A Kind of Loving* highlights these quandaries. It follows the working and social lives of Vic Brown, a twenty-one year old draftsman with a Yorkshire engineering company. Vic and his siblings are among those working-class youngsters who, by the late 50s, had benefited from expanded educational opportunities under the welfare state. Vic's younger brother, Jim, 'fancied bein' a doctor', while his sister, a teacher by virtue of the scholarship system, marries an English master at a southern Grammar School (24).

Vic's white-collar job is mercifully cleaner than his father's colliery work; but Vic's workplace, with its endless rows of draftsmen's desks and cubicles, still has the unmistakable qualities of a factory. Furthermore, limited chances for promotion mean that Vic's chosen occupation is nearly as 'dead-end' as an old-style blue-collar job. In fact, later in the novel Vic's low wages as a draftsman astound music store owner Mr Van Huyten when he offeres to make Vic his permanent sales assistant: 'I've never known just how well or how badly draughtsmen were paid. I've always thought they should be paid a reasonable wage considering the skills and training involved' (150). Despite Vic's suspicion that he might find himself stuck in the same job 'year after year' at Dawson Whittaker & Sons, he seems to accept this as a natural state of affairs: 'I quite like both the office and the work. I don't like either as much as I did

the first two or three years I was here but I haven't got to the stage where I can't stand it any more so I don't mind' (44).

In many respects Vic Brown appears comfortable within his class and shows little enthusiasm for upward mobility. Outwardly, he is also at ease having a few pints for the first time with his father and old colliery mates, enjoying their talk about local labour history. But whether Vic shares or feels their values in any depth is difficult to assess: 'I listen to them natter on. From coal-getting and economics they get on to politics. They're both Labour, of course, so they've nothing much to argue about there' (119). And rarely, if ever, do Vic and his father discuss such things at home: 'come to think of it, we don't talk much at all except to say where's the boot polish and pass the salt' (117).

As Stuart Laing observed, this comfort in the quotidian informed Barstow's writing principle for the creation of *Kind of Loving*'s narrator Vic. It is certainly the case that the novel's narrative tone is set by the sense that life is nothing more than monotony, and daily life 'just happened' in the 'aggregate of the infinite separate events' which composed it (*Representations of Working-class Life* 75). Following Vic's thoughts as he prepares for a meeting with girlfriend Ingrid, for example, Vic takes as much pleasure from cleaning his shoes as he does from the rendezvous itself: 'I like to poke into the waxy polish and spread it all over the shoes and go at them like mad with the brush and watch the shine break through and deepen' (47). At the same time, this world of mundane detail is increasingly disturbed by Vic's growing awareness of alternative life choices and cultural possibilities that he glimpses in conversations with his intellectual brother-in-law David and his mentor, music store proprietor Van Huyten.

Vic is not so firmly anchored in the ordinariness of working life that he is immune to at least fleeting thoughts of a change: about the advantages that accrue from appearing to belonged to a more materially advantaged class. When his interest in Ingrid Rothwell first develops, she represents something better than the 'tarts' in the *Chérie* magazine that Vic's friend Willy Lomas loans him: Ingrid is 'cleanliness and purity'. Yet this sublimation of sexual desire into notions of wholesomeness is really a displaced yearning for middle-class respectability (30). For all Vic's apparent comfort within his class, he is concerned that Ingrid might dismiss him for someone who has a more affluent look, provoking Vic's occasional fantasies about greater ambition and material success:

A black Super Snipe slides up to the kerb and I step back smartish as it throws water up out of the gutter. I look after this car and watch it stop to let a bloke out. Then I watch it pull away and pick up speed with exhaust smoke curling in the tail lights. Now if *I* had a car […] Dames go for bods with cars. It's only natural. And having a car would give you confidence, a sort of air, like. I imagine myself behind the wheel of a snappy little two-seater convertible – no need for anything big and swanky – rolling up to the kerb where Ingrid's waiting and enjoying the look on her face. (49)

This passage suggests that the 'stay at home' story is problematised by elements of the 'class escape' narrative, and it has a direct parallel to John Braine's *Room at the Top*. Also set in Yorkshire, *Room at the Top* features a scene that reveals the driving forces of protagonist Joe Lampton's calculated pursuit of middle-class success. Unlike

Vic, Joe Lampton flees working-class Dufton for better career chances in middle-class Warley. But like Vic, Joe has a moment of visceral recognition in which he makes the connections between sexuality, the automobile and 'mobility' in all its variants. Looking out from a café window, Joe enviously observes:

> The ownership of the Aston-Martin automatically placed the young man in a social class far above mine; but that ownership was simply a question of money. The girl, with her even suntan and her fair hair cut short in a style too simple to be anything else but expensive, was as far beyond my reach as the car. But her ownership, too, was simply a question of money, of the price of the diamond ring on her left hand. This seems all too obvious; but it was the kind of truth which until that moment I'd only grasped theoretically. (28)

Despite setbacks, Joe Lampton's desire for material success in undiminished. When things go wrong, Joe reverts to nostalgic memories of his parents' cosy, predictable working-class life – but this is momentary, and he never repudiates the ruthlessly materialistic and individualistic middle-class culture that he wants to inhabit.

In contrast, *Kind of Loving*'s 'stay at home' Vic has a studied contempt for the philistine middle-class attitudes of Ingrid Rothwell and her mother. Vic is angered by the way his mother-in-law and wife display an air of social superiority, when their only 'cultural' activity is watching the sorts of television programmes that Vic considers low-brow 'trash'. Vic is a complex cultural contradiction: on the one hand, he happily shares 'dirty' jokes in the masculine atmosphere of his workplace; on the other, he privately rails against the vacuity of mass popular culture and develops

'high-brow' musical and literary tastes. Vic is impressed by his scholarly brother-in-law's passion for literature, and leafing through David's copy of Joyce's *Ulysses*, with its overt sexual references and mystifying lack of punctuation, he has the revelatory feeling that his real education is just beginning (93). But bourgeois Ingrid does not understand Vic's aspiration for cultural improvement:

> Good heavens, no, she says, she can't read books. She gets three magazines a week and can hardly get through them for watching telly. 'Telly'. I don't like the word somehow. It always reminds me of fat ignorant pigs of people swilling stout and cackling like hens at the sort of jokes they put on them seaside postcards; all about fat bellies and chamber pots and that sort of thing. You know. So I just go on holding the book and say nothing. There's something just in the *feel* of a book, I always think; something solid that's here to stay. (100-101)

The chasm deepens when Vic moves in with Ingrid and her parents. Ingrid and her mother are interested only in whether 'Criss Cross Quiz [is] better than Double Your Money, or Take Your Pick better than both'. Significantly, Vic's anger about his mother-in-law's addiction to American-style game shows is one of the few occasions that briefly raise the temperature of his usually tepid political convictions: 'you don't need telling she's Conservative. What else could she be but real true blue and never a good word for the Labour Party and the trade unions' (208).

However, domestic tensions do not lead Vic to abandon his growing cultural interests. As Vic's appreciation of classical music develops under Van Huyten's

tutelage, he finally accepts a position as his sales assistant. While Van Huyten's high-cultural leanings are undisguised, Vic is astounded to discover at an alcohol-fuelled engineering works staff party that his enigmatic draftsman colleague, Conroy, can belt out a rock tune with the band hired for the occasion. And like Vic's mentor, Van Huyten, Conroy is versed in quality books and music:

> Good music and good books – real heavyweight stuff that you think
> only horrible types like Rawly and old stagers like Mr. Van Huyten
> are interested in. You sort of never associate that sort of thing with a
> liking for beer and dirty stories. Least, I never have until now. The
> long and short of it is, Conroy's a Highbrow. (136)

Conroy is reluctant to be a taste-making role model for Vic. Indeed, he advises that it is best to beware the cultural snob and poseur – advice that Vic can readily apply to others, though not necessarily to his own critical pretensions:

> If you like Dostoevsky and lousy Beethoven – all right. I reckon
> you're getting summat you won't get out of *Peg's Paper* and last
> week's Top Ten. But there's no call to go about letting everybody
> know what a fine cultured bod you are and thinking everybody else
> are peasants. (136)

In *A Kind of Loving*, Barstow thus cautiously explores one of the period's cultural debates: how the working class might negotiate the terrain between high and low culture. As Sinfield notes, this preoccupied many intellectuals in the 50s and 60s –

and particularly, but by no means exclusively, those associated with the New Left – and writers of fiction. Problematically, however, even intellectuals and writers from a working-class background were to some extent estranged from their class origins by virtue of their education and occupation.

As a coalminer's son, like his hero Vic Brown, Barstow belonged in that category (Paul 67). Merely being a writer, Sinfield suggested, meant that Barstow's assumptions about what was happening to the working classes were formed at a distance: from a critical perspective not available to those involved in the daily grind of the office or factory. Whether or not *A Kind of Loving*'s narrator Vic, or characters like Conroy, were mouthpieces for the author's opinions in any absolute sense, it is clear that their embrace of the Canon and the classics is a reaction to the impact of American popular culture. And in this regard, Vic's attitudes align with the negative intellectual assessments of mass populism that were so visible in Britain in the 50s.

In *Hiding in the Light*, Dick Hebdige observed that from 1950 to 1962 there was an intensified response to mass cultural influences – particularly American ones – which had been common since the 30s. In the 50s, Hebdige wrote, 'highly ideologically charged connotational codes' were more than ever invoked and set in motion by the mere mention of words like 'America', 'comics' or 'rock and roll'. Importantly, these reactions were common to groups and individuals as apparently unrelated as 'the British Modern Design establishment, BBC staff members, *Picture Post* and music paper journalists, critical sociologists, "independent" cultural critics like Orwell and Hoggart, a Frankfurt-trained Marxist like Herbert Marcuse', and even an 'obsessive isolationist like Evelyn Waugh' (70-71). The evidence was almost anywhere in the public domain in the period: and Derek Monsey's 1950 *Picture Post* article 'Can't We Do Better Than This', for example, was one of the decade's earliest

piece's expressing alarm about American horror films. Featuring a series of infra-red photos taken at London cinemas, capturing children's reactions to horror movies, the captions and accompanying text were emphatic:

> We need a classification of 'suitable for children' based on a careful psychological *and* aesthetic understanding of what *is* suitable. But until we get it, we should at least demand that cheap, horrifying films that have the nightmare effect on boys and girls shown in the pictures on these pages should not be given at children's matinees. There should be *some* limit to the amount of harm parents *and* film exhibitors are prepared to do to the minds of our next generation. (277)

Monsey's article was typical of the era's media coverage of the new, imported forms of post-war mass culture; reinforcing a general sense of public alarm. New forms of the popular culture were not only viewed as consciously structured and designed to 'dumb' young minds – they were also seen as ripping the social fabric, making kids lawless:

> The reaction is intense, so long as there is shooting, chasing, something positive and preferably active going on. It slackens immediately the pace drops. Love scenes leave them cold and generally chuckling or whistling hilariously. And poor (though short) love scenes, poor dialogue, scenes in cabins and sheriff's offices, all in broad 'cow-boy' Americanese, split up the action. Finally there is

generally a serial. This, in the conventional serial technique, begins with the hero or heroine on the spot where they were left last week, gets them out of it (or off it?) and leaves them on a different spot at the end. Then they roar out of the cinema while The King is being played, and give hell to the policemen on duty in the street outside (275).

A decade later, when Brian Groombridge assembled a selection of the ideas and opinions expressed at the 1960 National Teacher's Union conference in 1960 – on the theme of 'Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility' – notions of corruption, moral harm and intellectual diminishment persisted as a central feature of mass culture debates. Richard Hoggart set the tone for the conference's proceedings, though he was absent due to his attendance at the *Lady Chatterley* obscenity trial. Despite the presence of media, advertising and marketing representatives, the loudest voices at the NTU conference were those of concerned educationists aligned with Hoggarts's anxieties about the effects of popular culture, particularly on working-class youth. As Martin Barker has observed, pop artist Richard Hamilton made the *only* speech at the NTU conference in defence of the values and pleasures of popular culture and paid the price – 'his was the only contribution not to be included in the Penguin book published from the proceedings of the conference' ('Getting a Conviction' 80). Education bureaucrats like Jack Longland made the conference's majority case:

Worse, the whole clanging and ubiquitous machinery of mass communications in newspaper, film, advertisement and much of broadcasting chants the same message of wealth without earning it,

success without deserving it, pie in the sky some day soon. The mirage of miraculous affluence flickers in front of our young customers' eyes, the reward not of work but of the lucky flutter on the pools […] The day-school child continually has to jump within a space of hours from Abraham Lincoln to Roy Rogers, from exercises in critical discrimination to advertisement hoardings which, if they preach anything, preach that there is no such thing; from the Sermon on the Mount to Cross Bencher in the 'Sunday Express'; from the study and imitation of greatness to the complacency of Richard Hoggart's little man who, in the popular press, in advertisements or on the telly – those moronic quizzes – is made to feel big because everything is scaled down to his measure; so that in the end 'we are encouraging a sense not of the dignity of each person but of a new aristocracy, the monstrous regiment of the most flat-faced.' (8)

In Barstow's *Kind of Loving*, critiques like this resonated in the mind and behaviour of its protagonist: Vic exhibits the predispositions of conservative educationists in his assessment of the dilemmas that mass culture present for working-class youth. Vic is equally critical of his young working-class peers for their immersion in popular forms of music and fashion and the cultural vacuousness and social pretensions of the middle-class Rothwells. And like so many cultural commentators in the 50s and 60s, Vic believes standard-lowering artificiality he detects in television shows and pop music can largely be traced to America.

General disdain for the direction of popular entertainment is an important thematic concern in *A Kind of Loving* , and music is a particular focus for Vic's

feelings about America's influence on that mistaken direction. Vic's unease is noticeable from the novel's opening chapter: hoping for a rendezvous with Ingrid at the Gala Rooms, one of the town's more conservative dance venues, he finds the Gala invaded by an unfamiliar clientele. On the surface, this account is detached, 'matter of fact' – almost journalistic. Yet Vic's censorious attitude is apparent between the lines:

> I work my way through and edge across the corner of the floor, nearly getting bowled over by a couple prancing about in a kind of private war-dance. The bloke's wearing a bottle-green corduroy jacket, a yellow check shirt without a tie, and black pants with what look like fourteen-inch bottoms. This bint he's doing his stuff with is a real case, all eyebrows and lipstick with a white complexion that makes her look like death warmed up, and two at the front under her black sweater that stick out like chapel hat-pegs, brassiered till it must be agony, and nearly taking this bloke's eye out the way he's doubled up and breathing all over her chest. They don't like jiving and rock 'n' roll and whatnot at the Gala Rooms and they have notices up saying so. Sure enough, while I'm still there, the M.C. comes up and taps the cove on the shoulder and says something to him. They both give him a killing look and switch to a straightforward quickstep, Gala Rooms' style (34).

This strongly echoes the moral panic surrounding rock music and its Teddy Boy followers in the 50s: the insinuations that there is something unsavoury, sexually loose and amorphously dangerous in it. After all, it had only been in 1955 that an

otherwise unmemorable American film called *Blackboard Jungle* seemed to start a movement on the strength of one song: 'Rock Around the Clock'. On its first appearance in the British charts, the song sent Teds dancing in the aisles (Gould 124); when a film titled *Rock Around the Clock* was shown in 1956, cinema seats were slashed to ribbons and many English towns subsequently banned it, fearing violence (Bicât 324).

In 1955, an indignant John Betjeman recounted in *The Spectator* how an evening at the cinema had been disrupted by rowdy youths. It was a sign of the times that Betjeman had no compunction in identifying the culprits immediately by the label newspapers increasingly used to describe almost any disruptive youngster:

> When they arrived, a row of Teddy Boys and their girls (average age about fifteen) were occupying their seats. They said to them, 'get along now, move off', in an authoritative way, and the whole lot darted off terror-struck, like minnows from a man's shadow. Two old ladies who were sitting near said how glad they were someone had had the courage to shift the Teddy Boys away. I mention this incident because I have known similar happenings in other cinemas. Toughs, or pseudo-toughs, will buy a cheap seat and occupy an expensive one, and neither usherette nor patron will have the courage to tell them to go away. (182)

Betjeman's piece, with its 'something should de done' tone, was a classic example of how the Ted had come to 'stalk like some atavistic monster through much of the otherwise prosaic newspaper reporting of the 50s' (Rock & Cohen 289).

The Teddy Boy had originated in South London around 1953. His outfit – Edwardian suit, thick crepe 'creepers' with patent leather uppers, and 'Tony Curtis' blow-waved hairdo – functioned as a badge of what Harry Hopkins called 'a half-formed, inarticulate radicalism'. The Teds took on these sartorial trappings of the upper classes to 'thumb the nose' and affirm that the lower orders could be as arrogant as those from the 'born to rule' class North of the Thames (428). There was much speculation about the reasons for the Ted's emergence: sociological explanations (the breakdown of the working-class family as a strong social unit), psychological theories (latent aggression resulting from the war, sparking an outbreak of sociopathic criminality) (Melly 34). It *was* true that in the early 50s some Teds were violent, fought one another and harassed passers by; but high-profile media coverage ensured the 'folk devil' Teddy Boy triggered the same sort of blanket anxiety about youth that was apparent during the comics debate. From specific instances of violence, it was not long before the impression was extrapolated that all working-class adolescents constituted a problem group – though demographically, adolescents were not affluent enough to adopt the glossy new teenage image, and were neither delinquent nor in conflict with their elders (Rock & Cohen 288).

The Teds were a small youth minority, though media reports inflated the phenomenon to suggest that they were ubiquitous (Melly 34); and Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* revealed how this demonising effect applied to a succession of expressive styles among predominantly working-class youth in the post-war decades. In sensational language, misleading headlines and the journalistic distortion of actual events, this 'over-reporting' functioned to both generate and rely upon a form of moral panic that constructed a menace that the public was then exhorted to fear. By the late 50s, when Teds were conclusively identified as a serious

threat to public safety, the Teds had become a submerged minority in London: those called Teds in provincial areas, because of their aggression and rowdiness, were often a loose youth aggregation motivated by nothing more cohesive than 'tenuous territorial loyalty' (Rock & Cohen 308). By that time, however, the folk devil Teds were further associated more broadly with another major cultural phenomenon amongst British youth – the arrival of rock-'n'-roll; and denunciations of rock-'n'-roll were intimately bound to 'habitual notions of the popular, the lower classes' and, above all, America (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 154).

A perception of 'America' shimmered in the background of *A Kind of Loving*, structuring narrator Vic's opinions of the popular – Ted-style jiving in the ballroom, television, music. One key passage in particular pressed home the depth of Vic's feelings on import culture. Eyeing young customers in a coffee lounge, Vic is suddenly overcome by an excessive sense of British pride:

> Fairly full, it being a wet night, and there's all sorts of people in, mostly young 'uns passing the time on and flirting with one another, like that crowd in the middle with the lasses with hedgerow haircuts and jeans and the lads in jeans as well, some of them, and striped sweatshirts under their jackets. One of them has a leather jacket and a crewcut. He looks as though he's walked out of an American picture. It's all Yankeeland these days. If it does well in America it takes here, like rock n roll for instance. Me, I want to look English because I reckon it's the finest country in the world, bar none. Not that it's heaven for everybody, I suppose. There's an old keff sitting on his own down there by the wall and I wonder what he thinks to it. (163)

In this complex moment, it appears that Vic's anti-popular tastes are part of an hegemonic process: he acquiesces to higher ideals – like Englishness. Anti-Americanism's 'other' is vigorous cultural nationalism: and though working-class Vic recognises that economic inequality and vagrancy still scar his society, he is consoled that these problems are at least 'English'. His faith in high culture in general becomes the celebration of an intrinsically superior, 'real' British culture – regardless of how it might oppress the lowly who inhabit it.

Even the 'old keff', the beggar, fits the idea of a romanticised, 'authentic' Britain better than the youngsters with their imported fashions and music. In Vic's opinion there is unquestionable honesty in the classical music that Van Huyten has introduced him to. Its sophisticated structures and melodic qualities signify an integrity that squares with Vic's preferences for tradition, cultural solidity and continuity. By contrast, the new Americanised popular forms are not only amateur but obviously fraudulent to anyone who is not a 'cultural dope':

> 'There's bags of tunes in Tchaikovsky,' I say. 'You can't get away
> from 'em…' I stop. Be damned if I'm going to defend myself for
> liking something that's worth something instead of the latest boy
> wonder from Clacknecuddenthistle who gets on television because he
> happens to have a check shirt and a guitar and a lot of bloody cheek.
> (164)

However, while Vic bemoans popular Americanised entertainments, there was little indication that he locates this aversion in a wider political view. Vic's reaction to the British embrace of pop culture is more emotional than intellectual. He seems

incapable of taking the next step: to consider, for example, whether 'not looking English' is actually symptomatic of a new individualistic attitude in youngsters, fracturing commitments to the sorts of collective activities – like participation in trades unions – that formerly characterised the British working class. And, symptomatically, Vic's nebulous notions about lowered standards and the corruption of intrinsic English values were the precise terms in which both sides of the political spectrum were still debating youth's interactions with new forms of commodities, mass media, leisure and entertainment when Barstow completed *A Kind of Loving* at the end of the 50s.

Bryan R. Wilson's essay 'Teenagers', in a 1959 edition of *The Twentieth Century*, typified the conceptual constraints within which youth behaviour was discussed at the time. Wilson identified economic change as a factor that distanced many working-class youngsters from their parents. Though often unskilled and 'dead end', the new jobs provided the young with better incomes, undermined the attraction of life-long employment and the prestige once accorded to the seasoned older worker. And with personal investment in the job diminishing, the cash nexus had become crucial. Wilson evaluated this in distinctly Marxist terms: it was the latest form of alienation, involving a breakdown of both work and family organisation.

By Wilson's reckoning, working-class youth now developed its values outside of work and the home, and was increasingly captive to an entertainment industry that re-emphasised the separation of work from home – and re-organised young working-class leisure on generational lines (38-39). But Wilson's analysis of the structural relationship between modern consumer capitalism, leisure industries and industrial consciousness among the young, was gradually diluted. He recognised big business' intentions, its use of propaganda and spectacle, and its tendency to manipulate by

promoting an ideology of 'success'; noting especially the abundant late-50s stories of entertainers who emerged from the obscurity of an 'ordinary background', advancing to success through musical talent rather than education – a celebrity narrative that also underlined the limitations and frustrations of working-class teenage life as most lived it (41). For all that, however, and picking up a refrain familiar from the comics debate earlier in the decade, Wilson ornamented these structural arguments with the worn assertion that the 'problems' of British youth were as much to do with moral decline, aesthetic breakdown and the threat of American cultural models to British values.

Finally, consumer capitalism's greatest crime was its stimulation of a taste for the crass and vulgar that 'destroyed the finer sentiments and the appreciation of the well-wrought and subtle' (41). This was an intellectual displacement: the attraction of youth to Americanised forms of popular culture was not a problem of capital's operations but, rather, a failure to cultivate 'proper' taste in Britain's youngsters:

> Mass media make no effort to discriminate, or to guide taste. The demand for a mass market is rationalised into a phoney democratic ideology of taste, which denies the positive value of education. Consumer demand implies that jazz, bebop, rock-'n'-roll are as worthy and legitimate as the educated and cultured. Mass agencies, even the BBC, have surrendered their educational mission (42).

According to Sinfield, commentators like Wilson could not understand that working-class youth subcultures were partly spawned in reaction to the very institutions of 'culture': institutions that were instrumentalities of the post-war welfare-capitalist state, like the comprehensive school and the BBC (*Literature, Politics and Culture*

157). Nevertheless, the 'educationist' approach' in social commentaries like Wilson's and the 1960 National Teacher's Union conference prevailed in public discussions about youth and culture in the late 50s and early 60s.

The educationist approach privileged arguments about cultural authenticity which also surfaced in fictions like Barstow's *Kind of Loving*. In that novel, Vic Brown's passion for classical music was a symbolic touchstone: a cultural rock that withstood modernity's rising tide. But for some real-life critics of commercial culture, jazz, folk music and the latter's offshoot – skiffle – could also be viewed positively because they were supposedly spontaneous and composed *by* the people rather than for them (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 157). As Harry Hopkins recounted, even correspondents to the conservative *Times* in the late 50s defended skiffle on the grounds that it was a continuation of the great art of the British music hall. It seem of no consequence that skiffle's regional culture was imported across the Atlantic and performed in the 'simulated accent of aboriginal Kentucky' (434).

Skiffle had little to say to working-class groups like the Teds. George Melly (and, later, Sinfield) argued that revivalist forms of music, from skiffle to trad jazz, were essentially forms of middle-class and lower-middle-class expression and dissent. With skiffle, its devotees were safely distanced from the frequently dangerous lives led by the black American musicians such as Huddie Leadbetter – 'Leadbelly' – who provided its sources (30). Skiffle and trad jazz were 'safe', unlike rock-'n'-roll which saw the odd cinema demolished by its devotees. Musical revivalism was culturally conservative, even when it became associated with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, union militancy and the Communist Party in the late 50s: anxieties attached to the idea that working-class youths were seduced by American rock-'n'-roll sprang from nostalgia and an ideology of Englishness, as *A Kind of Loving* revealed:

not from a political analysis of the relationship between consumerism, mass media, and their effects on class consciousness in working-class youths (McKay, 'Anti-Americanism, Youth and Popular Culture').

At its worst, musical revivalism entailed 'cultural nazism'. Britain's folk music revival of the late 50s and early 60s, for example, scorned that favourite working-class instrument – the piano – as bourgeois (Pickering & Robins, *Every Day Culture: Popular Song*). Ewan MacColl, singer, song-writer and political activist with communist proclivities, was the most influential figure in the British folk scene in the 50s. MacColl's hostility to commercialism was so intense that his insistence that singers should sing only the music of their native regions was policed in clubs and pubs (Porter, 186).

This Old Left anti-modernism was shared by commentators who considered themselves politically non-partisan. Philip Larkin, for example, remembered how he found the 'slightly-unreal archaism' of the trad jazz revival of the late 50s, and skiffle's 'high nasal Glasgow-American version of some incident from transatlantic railway history' at least admirable for its earnestness (18). But by the late 60s, Larkin had not altered his original opinion that little of value in jazz had appeared in the period after WWII. Even worse, jazz in the 50s was evidence of a broader American cultural malaise:

> It helps us neither to enjoy nor endure. It will divert us as long as we
> are prepared to be mystified or outraged, but maintains its hold only
> by being more mystifying and more outrageous: it has no lasting
> power. Hence the compulsion on every modernist to wade deeper into
> violence and obscenity: hence the succession of Parker by Rollins

and Coltrane […] In a way, it's a relief: if jazz records are to be one

long screech, if painting is to be a blank canvas, if a play is to be two

hours of sexual intercourse performed *coram populo*, then let's get it

over, the sooner the better, in the hope that human values will then be

free to reassert themselves. (28)

The same sentiment informed Arnold Wesker's comment in 1958 that 'there is nothing wrong with rock-'n'-roll; there is only something wrong with it every day'. The socialist playwright was pondering the relationship between the working class and new popular cultural forms. But Wesker's defensiveness – his apology for sounding like a 'high-class snob' in advocating that a special effort be made to supply cultural materials which could counter mass media's mediocrity – added to the impression that there *was* something wrong with rock music ('Let Battle Commence' 102).

Wesker's opinion summed up the Left's troubled understanding of where working-class youth was fitted into the post-war cultural landscape. And as Raymond Williams observed in the mid 60s, it might have helped to start 'actually looking at British working-class life, rather than at the stereotypes'. Williams concluded that writers and critics who were especially tied to the old bureaucracies of socialism did not 'get it' – to them 'the sound of the young in Britain, so terrifying to all who have accepted the routines' was difficult to grasp in political terms ('The British Left' 23).

On this point, Williams was in agreement with observations made a few years earlier by 'youth-novelist' Colin MacInnes, whose 'Socialist Impresarios' had been prompted by frustration that the paternalism and debates about 'authenticity' that were so evident in Larkin's music essays and historian Eric Hobsbawm's forays into jazz

criticism under the name of Francis Newton: 'if Mr. Newton esteemed all pop music is rubbish – I do wish he'd say so, and frankly declare he finds the taste of millions of his fellow creatures corrupted and deplorable' (872). MacInnes unashamedly believed that pop music was a form of creativity and youthful resistance to the dominant ideas of an older generation, and was therefore neutral about commercial entrepreneurs who promoted it and their motives – if the kids could use it, that was valid (872). So his anger at the Left's distaste for what actually interested young Britons applied equally to conservative, establishment commentators on youth:

> My own meagre contribution is to suggest that socialists who like the arts (repeat, *like* them, not feel they ought to be fitted somehow into the jig-saw puzzle of a socialist society) should reflect on the indispensable nature of the impresario temperament, try to dissociate the essence of this activity from the usual commercial connotations, and imagine ways in which the impresario and artist work together cooperatively in any socialist society. Also to suggest that without some sympathy for commercial pop arts and their addicts, neither can be altered for the better, and that a shocked retreat from the imperfections of pop art into archaic folk art 'revivals' can be a form of self-indulgence […] the pop phenomenon cannot be isolated from others in our society; nor its improvement happen without social change in spheres vaster than its own. Perhaps in an ideal community, we would have no need of Billie Holiday to sing our woes to us. But that day is far off, and in the meantime we must find how to free popular emotion alike from financial exploitation as from

domination by any authoritarian saints who, without knowing or

liking our fellow-countrymen, may want to tell them what they ought

to feel (873).

In *A Kind of Loving*, Vic Brown simply cannot think in these terms: he cannot

conceive of a youth culture as creative or resistant. And Vic's off-handed comments

about youth, echoing an older generation's orthodoxies, tend to conceal the important

fact that Vic is twenty-one. His criticism of youth's mindless absorption of popular

culture is directed at his immediate peers. As Vic's experience in Van Huyten's music

store indicates, he is dramatically out of step with other working-class youngsters:

> So I begin to go through these records stacked in boxes behind the
>
> counter. There's all the latest pop stuff here for the fans: Frankie
>
> Vaughan, Tommy Steele and Elvis. And they'll be swarming all over
>
> the place this afternoon, buying loads of stuff and taking it home to
>
> play with the repeat on till both them and the neighbours are sick to
>
> death of it. Then they'll come back next week for some more. Every
>
> week-end they're here, buying records by big names who've been
>
> going for years and blokes you won't be able to remember eighteen
>
> months from now. (61)

But if Vic privately believes that his young peers' attraction to commercial fakery is

tasteless and weak-minded, he does not, as MacInnes put it, 'tell them what they

ought to feel': crucially, Vic's job is 'telling them what they should buy'. According

to Vic's own logic, he becomes an actor in a consumer culture which he knows is

grounded in exploitation and the erosion of aesthetic standards. Vic enthusiastically reorganises Van Huyten's store-displays to encourage bigger and more efficient sales of the music that he personally finds soul-destroying. It is a scandalous contradiction: proofing himself against the aesthetic degradations of mass culture, he rationalises his co-operation with it and inflicts it on his neighbours for profit – showing that for all his virtuous staying at home in the working-class fold, community and class solidarities are meaningless to him.

Ironically, 'stay at home' Vic's working-class refusal of upwardly-mobile aspirations is perverse. At first, he might appear to be one of the 'self-selected' young working class people that Richard Hoggart discussed in *The Uses of Literacy*. These exceptional individuals, Hoggart wrote, were atypical of working-class people in their efforts to educate themselves (14). But Barstow paints his protagonist as unexceptional in so many other ways, and Vic comes to resemble Hoggart's more common, complacent 'fellows who inhabit the narrower working-class landscape without much apparent strain' (14). This is the conundrum embodied in Vic: despite his intellectual self-fashioning, ultimately he seems to have no substantial beliefs – beyond occasional outbursts of English pride and a grudging respect for his parent's working-class honesty. Stuart Laing notes this, commenting that Vic's closing remarks are dangling and infuriating (*Representations of Working-Class Life* 76): 'now I reckon I have a lot of things weighed up. All this has taught me, about life and everything, I mean. And the way I see it is this – the secret of it all is there is no secret, and no God and no heaven and no hell. And if you say well what is life about I'll say it's about life, and that's all' (254).

However, there is an alternative way to gloss the novel's closing existential mood. Vic's limitations and resignation indicate the capacity of post-war consumer

capital to entrap: to lock even those with an animus towards it into a culture of exploitation, transaction and unequal exchange.

In 1962, Stan Barstow began a long friendship with Newcastle-based Sid Chaplin. Chaplin also personally knew John Braine and Len Doherty, but Barstow was his principal influence. In a 1984 interview, Chaplin explained that he had always attempted to portray class change as Barstow did: with cool objectivity, ferreting out contradictions and exposing gaps, rather than indulging in agitprop. It was an attitude that Chaplin felt united a number of northerners writing about the working class. (Pickering & Robins, 'The Making of a Working-class Writer' 149). But Barstow's *Kind of Loving* cast a specific shadow on Chaplin's *The Day of the Sardine*: a novel that also featured a protagonist who remained in the geographical precincts of his childhood working-class community while experiencing the dramatic social changes of the 50s.

In contrast to Barstow's Vic, Chaplin's hero Arthur Haggerston neither comes from a stable family nor has a grammar-school education. *Day of the Sardine* follows Arthur's experiences of living with his mother and her lover Harry, his serial 'dead end' jobs, and his youthful revolt in a local Teddy Boy gang – and the latter most differentiates *Day of the Sardine* from *Kind of Loving*. In Chaplin's novel the youthful protagonist is subculturally steeped in the styles of American music, speech and clothing so derided by Barstow's Vic. But the two books have similarities: in each, the main character displays none of the ruthless ambition evident in 'class escape' narratives like *Room at the Top*; both characters negotiate their discontent – albeit by different trajectories – but have complex, ambivalent feelings about their eventual reconciliation to working-class community. And in both cases, there is a powerful

suggestion that the price of working-class youth's disoriented accommodations with post-war consumer society is shattered faith and the erosion of old class solidarities.

Chaplin's *Day of the Sardine* recounts public discourses and concerns about youth in the 50s and 60s more sharply than *Kind of Loving*. Arthur Haggerston's position in his class is defined, for example, in 'educationalist' terms: as Pickering and Robins put it, Arthur is a 'rebel without a curriculum', his tastes, energy and intelligence 'stunted rather than nurtured' ('Between Class and Determinism' 362). Consigned to the 'B' stream, Arthur's educational situation resembles a criminal finishing school:

> Most of the teachers didn't count; in fact, few of them ever stayed long enough to make their mark – the Jungle Boys took care of that. They'd come bouncing in full of psychology, science and rich ideas and leave leaning on two sticks. I've seen big tough-looking characters break down and cry. Being rejects, we acted like rejects, and it was only the hand of tough cynical old Rattler that kept us down below the point of riot. (52)

For the section of the working class to which Arthur belongs, the education system is essentially designed to condition students to accept that their most favourable lot will be a string of menial, meaningless jobs:

> I shudder at the thought of fifteen to seventeen and the slow torture of six dead-end jobs. Dead-end is right. Everybody down there, heaving coal, running errands, carrying meat, watching a machine, walking

about or sitting on his backside, matterless what, is either dead or
dying. Don't be killed by the odd one or two exceptions that kick the
slats out of a foreman or grin and bear it, because they're just the
same underneath: rejects found wanting, defeated before they start.
Education is a sieve as well as a lift. (28)

By the 60s, social observers like T.R. Fyvel discerned that vocational fulfilment was still out of reach for large numbers of working-class youngsters, and that 'the complaint of "boredom" at work and out of work was more widely prevalent among working-class youth than those in the middle class' (Fyvel, *The Insecure Offenders* 213-214). But this recognition of work's 'alienation' was by no means a Marxist acknowledgement that capitalism had failed or that structural alterations were required to reposition and satisfy working-class youth. Rather, the perception that 'dead-end' jobs might contribute to juvenile delinquency merely bolstered the exasperated 'something should be done' school of thought on youth affairs. This was the shadowy side of the so-called youth revolution in the 50s and 60s: the establishment resolution that youth's behaviour had to be policed by professional or 'expert' opinion – by the 'Jungle Boy' psychologists Arthur Haggerston encountered at school in *Day of the Sardine*.

Between 1949 and 1953, there was a torrent of official British reports on delinquency and the Home Office waged a loosely-organised 'campaign' aimed at the 'public conscience of parents'. Early-50s responses to the campaign ranged from calls for punishment, including a re-introduction of the birch, to plans for detention centres and increased police powers. But if the clamour for disciplined policing was stentorian nationally, it was often recognised at a local level that milder reformist

measures were best: the police, courts and remand homes could be relieved of onerous duties with an appearance in court: 'by far the largest number of those appearing were "let off" by being absolutely discharged, bound over or fined' (Stevenson 78).

This highlighted considerable confusions: exactly what was the 'youth problem'? It was a question inscribed in the Ministry of Education's 1958 report, *The Youth Service in England and Wales* – in a section titled 'The World of Young People'. The Ministry's committee valiantly tried to keep its own counsel, whilst still reflecting expert opinion – from psychology, sociology and criminology – that claimed special insights into the behaviour of youth. Acknowledging an increase in delinquency at the end of the 50s, the report nevertheless avoided the sensationalism so rife in the media. Rather, its tendency was to look for an underlying socio-pathology that affected 'normal' developmental processes:

> Here we would emphasise only that indictable offences are committed by only a small proportion of young people […] At this point we would stress chiefly the need to consider not only the particular offences committed by particular teenagers, but the extent to which these offences may be an index of tensions affecting all young people, even though most meet those tensions without recourse to indictable offences (32).

The Youth Service in England and Wales moved on to entertain the possibility that a modern consumer society itself, and new work practices, contributed to youth's unsettlement. Displaying a more nuanced understanding than the generality of public debate at the time, the report puzzled over an impasse: British youth could discover

freedoms of expression in consumption and experience its own alienation and exploitation at the same time:

> Much of the outside world constantly tries to persuade them to believe this or think that, to try this or laugh at that. Yet the realities of their daily work, the small sense of status this gives them, often makes them feel (whatever the friendly public voices say) that at the bottom the outside world regards them as indistinguishable units, a mass. (33)

However, *The Youth Service in England and Wales* maintained its equilibrium, accenting the theme of harmonious continuity. In the course of their 'natural' development, adolescents would want to 'get out of the house': but home was always '*there* as a warm entity' and unchanging reality. Changes in the recreational attitudes, styles and behaviour of Britain's youngsters required a rational perspective. If they seemed 'readier to desert, in their free time, an environment which seemed "corny" and "square"', the committee concluded:

> We do not think the assumption that married life is right and desirable has yet been generally undermined. The nature of many current temptations might well have caused more young people to try to extend their period of prosperous irresponsibility for as long as possible. Yet early marriages are now commonplace; and however strange the behaviour of young people […] in general the marriages themselves seem much like those of other generations (32).

Thus, the ostensible new character of adolescence did not redefine its function as an organised transition into adulthood and citizenship. Nevertheless, this pathway could not be taken for granted. Social trends that threatened to derail the orderly movement of youth to adult family life – relentless attempts to 'sell them soap, records, drink etc' – needed the antidote of 'management'; and bodies like 'the Youth Service, in co-operation with parents, other branches of the educational' would be vital in helping 'young people to develop […] to meet the challenge of a changing world' (34).

T.R. Fyvel's *The Insecure Offenders* commended *The Youth Service in England and Wales* for its interventionism, agreeing with its basic recommendation that 'the outlook of the country's teenagers should be shaped much more directly through the conscious endeavours of the community, and not merely left to the combined persuasions of the advertisers, the press, and the "pop" record industry' (323). For Fyvel, the working class was particularly susceptible, as 'the majority of working-class boys and girls left school hardly educated at fifteen, to proceed at once into a pseudo-adult life of earning and spending, the majority without membership of any leisure-time organisation' (322-323). A staunch believer in the notion that working-class 'embourgeoisement' was indeed being led by material improvements, Fyvel thought this should be accompanied by an equivalent cultural advance. As a result, his Arnoldian idea of working-class youth's managed development advocated the teaching of discernment and 'guidance' into an active sense of national purpose: something 'which can be called a national way of life' (324); and the state education system was to be the key site for this managerial intervention.

But as Chaplin's *Day of the Sardine* attested, the utopian future when 'lads and lasses' in depressed working-class areas curled up in their leisure time with a literary classic was far off. Nor did they flock to activities provided by the Youth

Service: the first thought was to get any job, and money to live for the moment. In *Day of the Sardine*, Arthur's mother cannot tolerate his demand for financial independence or his younger generation's financial profligacy: 'so's you can splash your money on your fancy monkey suits and keep up wi' your low friends, that's your idea' (112).

Parental concern about youth's financial freedoms, and irresponsibilities, encode bubbling generational tensions in *Day of the Sardine* – the familiar 'too much, too quickly' argument. This is intensified by the older working-class perception that there is something indecent and harmful, about the sudden exposure of the young to a new and highly commercialised, Americanised mass culture. Chaplin reiterates British discussions from the 50s, importantly noting that suppositions of working-class youth's affluence are allied to the requirement that youth must be socially managed.

Mark Abram's *Teenage Consumer Spending in 1959* played a significant, popularising role in proclaiming the idea that the post-war, working-class British teenager was primarily a consumer. The study identified consuming habits (of drink, tobacco, clothes, records, gramophones) as emblems of transforming teenage identity:

> By and large, then, one can generalise by saying that the quite large amount of money at the disposal of Britain's average teenager is spent mainly on dress and on goods which form the nexus of teenage gregariousness outside the home. In other words, this is distinctive teenage spending for distinctive teenage ends in a distinctive teenage world. (5)

Abram's work gained considerable political imprimatur, and the Ministry of Education's *Youth Service in England and Wales* drew on it heavily. That report, notwithstanding its caution about the social consequences flowing from the 'narrowness of the choices actually made by most young people', also concluded that 'the post-war improvement in the standard of living among *all* age groups, and especially in the working classes, has meant that more money is generally available for uncommitted spending' (24-25) – and though this was a potentially disruptive development in youth, it could be managed.

Predictably, advertisers and marketers trumpeted the freedom of youth in the post-war consumer economy, but only a handful of public intellectuals was prepared to do so with any enthusiasm. Colin MacInnes was one. Like Abrams, MacInnes had no doubt that the basis of the new, liberational classlessness was money; and that the 'new wealth' should be welcomed, not feared:

> Today, youth has money, and teenagers have become a power. In their struggle to impose their wills upon the adult world, young men and women have always been blessed with energy but never, until now, with wealth. After handing a pound or two over to Mum, they are left with more 'spending money' than most of their elders, crushed by adult obligations. They are a social group whose tastes are studied with respect. (*England, Half English* 11)

For MacInnes, working-class spending power, and adopted American and Continental styles, spelled deproletarianisation and a breathtaking internationalism. Countering nationalist arguments, MacInnes hoped that the youth phenomenon's consuming

practice was 'rather a minor (and pleasant) part of an international upheaval which is changing, behind the lock-jawed deadlocks of the politically mighty, all forms of social intercourse, the world's boundaries, thought, art, everything' (*England, Half English* 157). As MacInnes fantasised, the proof was 'that the working-class girls and boys are incomparably smarter than the others – and this *is* accurate, and no exaggeration':

> Compare the publics in Oxford Street and Bond Street of now and of however far your memory goes back, and the present superiority of Oxford Street is startling. You will observe there – as in any proletarian district of the capital – the lavish, colourful eruption of gay stores selling 'separates' to the girls, and the sharp schmutter to the kids: shining, enticing shops like candy-floss. But the transformation of the working class to power and relative affluence means that these styles (except, possibly, for the now archaic Ted style) are no longer 'working-class' in the old sense at all. The belted corduroy and choker, though still found in older men (and in Giles cartoons), or the seemly but hideous 'Sunday best' of blue serge and female flowered 'frocks' or 'coats and skirts' have now given way to a style which is really classless: 'informal-formal', and far too smart and elegant to be called proletarian in any of its pre-1950 meanings (*England, Half English* 153).

MacInnes' reputation as 'ear to the ground' documentarist did not guarantee accurate descriptions of changing, young working-class lives. From his metropolitan-

cosmopolitan London base, MacInnes assumed that youth's capabilities to think and behave in new and diverse ways were more globally available than they actually were. He did not hear provincial voices: the working class lad who 'grew up with the first early-morning bike ride, carrying a new canvas kit-bag over the handlebars, to the job that someone up the street had spoken to the foreman for; the sandwiches and the flask that Mam had got up to make for you; the testing and mockery of the older men […] coming home exhausted, covered in grease, or wood shavings, and being asked how you got on'; or the girl whose job was 'never meant to be more than filling in time' until she inherited her mother's box of cutlery and tablecloths that bore 'the weight of a predestination' (Blackwell & Seabrook 91).

As a provincial north-Englander – native of a region where the post-war long boom is still a dream – *Day of the Sardine*'s Arthur Haggerston is predestined for sawdust, grease and exhaustion. Consequently, Arthur's attraction to the Teddy Boy gang, with its American vernacular and mannerisms adopted from movies, is a symbolic move beyond this predetermined horizon. On a personal scale, the gang affords him a way of reacting to generational conflict within his family – to his mother's ossified views of youth, money, freedom and 'too much too soon'. On a larger social scale, the gang represents a compensation for the narrow confines of everyday working-class life. As Phil Cohen explained in his studies of working-class subcultures, groups like the Teds acted to resolve problems in their lived experience at an imaginary level, playing them out in their adopted styles (87).

Arthur exhibits a tendency to cope with his actual circumstances by fantasising. At the age of thirteen, he sees 'new suits and maybe a Jaguar gleaming on the horizon' in his future (22); but this fantasy belongs to another class, and is quickly supplanted by a different sort of imaginary. Arthur turns to another fantasy which is,

at once, more remote and more easily had: America becomes his reference point, and listening to music, watching films and mimicking American style costs next to nothing. His childhood initiation into America's symbolic order is American Forces Radio broadcasts; by the time he starts work and joins the Ted gang, Arthur is versed in the vernacular of American movies. The movies are rich in a language that Arthur adapts to delineate his own situations, as an exchange with his construction-work supervisor shows: 'I went over. Sprogget was surrounding the doorway and Uncle George was sitting behind the table like the President of the United States when the Blob from Outer Space has just polished off New York and is due to roll over the White house any minute now' (135). When Arthur describes his gang leader Nosey, his lapse into screen parlance seems like 'second nature': 'see him standing there in that old picture-frame, watching me walking through the smoky blue dusk, calm and easy like a cool western gunman' (84).

James Gindin had detected a trend amongst a number of post-war British novelists: the proclivity for 'aping the dialogue of Humphrey Bogart' and devising 'faces and roles' which relied 'heavily on grade-C Hollywood westerns and detective stories' (109). Taking Gindin's cue, Ronald Paul noted how this particularly operated in Chaplin's *Day of the Sardine*, arguing that clichéd Americanisms and hyperbole pervade and shape the style of Chaplin's novel entirely. In Paul's view, Chaplin shows a kind of cultural 'second nature', with no sense of parody, in creating characters which are a curious mix of American tough-guy and British working-class hero images (65). And indeed, the novel's language is often borrowed from the 'hard-boiled' American detective fiction of Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett:

Dopey was running around and in between characters like a dog out of the dog-house, but not making any wisecracks. And there was nothing more said about Mick Kelly's sister although you can depend upon it that everybody was busy speculating. I mean, it was obvious that the main reason Dopey got the grand slam was for his crack about the bird. Birds are nerve-work and the biggest breakers of gangs, because the lads around here don't recruit them. Saw a picture once about a gang in the U.S. and it looked to me as if the gang was nothing but a mobile giraffe party – one long neck en-route or static. (126)

In passages like these, there is a sheer and knowing delight in Chaplin's ventriloquism of Americanisms: a parodic insouciance, which defies Paul's view that Chaplin uses this language register unconsciously – as if he had merely absorbed it by a process of cultural osmosis. And in respect of American music, Chaplin's knowledge of his subject is that of the aficionado – not the naïve follower of a current fashion.

Gathering at gang headquarters, Arthur and his mates listen to records on an old wind-up gramophone, but their tastes are surprising: not the Teddy Boy favourites like Elvis, Little Richard or local variants like Tommy Steele. They love the music of revivalism: 'the old Dixieland characters such as for instance Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton, the Mills Brothers, and what have you. We went for the good old jazz' (121). It becomes apparent later in the novel that Arthur possesses a critic's knowledge of jazz: 'When Harry and the Old Lady were kids I reckon brass still had a glitter, since all jazz had to be exported from New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, etc. and there were now home-growns like Humphrey and Chris Barber or

even local groups – of which there were seven or eight' (170). Here, *Day of the Sardine* again knowingly shows its cultural astuteness. The essentially anti-pop music jazz revivalism, George Melly observed, hinged on an important variant of pastoral nostalgia: the belief that music of the 20s and 30s was the voice of a 'then' which was superior and preferable to 'now'. And in class terms, the adherents of trad jazz were predominantly middle and upper. As Melly put it, trad jazz was regarded as eccentric, as opposed to the outright 'scandalous' rock-'n'-roll (26). In many ways, jazz, was the acceptable sound of American culture: the 'rock-'n'-roll of the younger intelligentsia', which 'appealed to those who were cut off from the Teds by class and educational aspirations, but drawn nonetheless towards youth culture and were uneasy with the roles officially available' to youth (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 160). This shows Chaplin's iconoclasm in *Day of the Sardine*: his readiness to disturb 'the stereotypes provided for political analysis', as Raymond Williams recommended, and to hear 'the sound of the young in Britain'.

Significantly, too, a number of the British jazz revivalists that *Day of the Sardine*'s Arthur admires marched in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the late 50s (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 262). As Perry Anderson noted, the CND was mobilised by a middle-class moral conscience rather than a coherent politics ('The Left in the Fifties' 10-11); its protest was as much about the nebulous feeling of modernity's impersonality and the individual's social impotence as it was about the hydrogen bomb. The CND had working-class supporters, but as Anderson further noted the essentially apolitical character of this affiliation was an indicator of the desertion of working classes from their traditional political organisations. Thus, in *Day of the Sardine*, Arthur's admiration of jazzers with CND connections signifies the vagaries of his political outlook – more akin to vague middle-class dissidence than

working-class socialism. This, in turn, shows how Chaplin codes the text with layers of meaning, making his protagonist a complex amalgam of dissonant cultural forces.

Arthur's Uncle George is a mainstream Labour Party bureaucrat, who reviles 'rebel' Labourites who support the cause of nuclear disarmament – an issue removed from the Party's traditional concerns with class and industry (44). Arthur prods and teases Uncle George, and believes that petty-corrupt officials like his uncle are 'pious bastards' who 'spouted social security and all the rest' but could afford to 'sniff at the problem-kids' because they never associated their corruption with what went on 'in the back streets' (216). Here, Chaplin again encodes Arthur's character with an opinion that signifies the youthful working-class abandonment of politics (Anderson, 'The Left in the Fifties' 10-11); a disjunction between what Arthur sees and knows and what he subsequently believes and does.

A similar disjuncture afflicts Arthur's involvement with his Ted gang, which comes to a crisis when Nosey's brother is charged with murder. Arthur accompanies Nosey in a violent 'squaring up' with a gang rival: an event which leads to a police inquiry and causes Arthur to skip town for a time. Arthur is keen on Dorothy, a girl he meets in bizarre circumstances at an American-based gospel church. In Arthur's absence Nosey has a sexual liaison with Dorothy and turns to the church: Arthur's reward for remaining true to his gang leader is to be left without the girl or Nosey's friendship – Nosey chooses God and Dorothy's congregation over his former mates. This reveals a youthful rootlessness and an individualistic ethos; an outlook that belies the notion that the subcultural gang, bonded by its clothing styles and mannerisms, is a viable substitute for older class and family collectivities. In the end, it is significant that the advice which resonates most strongly with Arthur is encapsulated by his step-

father Harry's analogy to Norwegian sardines at spawning time: 'don't be a sardine [...] navigate yourself' (22).

Day of the Sardine exposes the folly of assuming too much about the resistant capacities of working-class subcultures. Adopting the swagger of American movie stars, fetishising American music and styles, might provide an expressive space for youngsters like Arthur Haggerston. But this alternative culture and its objects are both materially and mentally attached to the system of bourgeois, individualist capital that maintains structural inequalities, condemning Arthur and his peers to a life of 'dead-end' jobs, rootless anomie and conflicted loyalties. As Arthur intuits:

> All they give you is a decko at the TV or pictures. And meantime you're supposed to be making a living on a dead-end site under a pack of phonies like Uncle George and Sam Sprogget, or other characters that think they're doing well for themselves by bearing down on the lambs and the sheep. It makes you sick […] It's a dirty rotten trap. (192)

Subcultures may have been a strategic means for working-class youth to negotiate a new form of collective existence. But as John Clarke and Stuart Hall observed, subcultural attempts to resolve existential problems at this fundamentally symbolic level were obstructed by bigger structural concerns, and fated:

> There is no 'sub-cultural solution' to working-class youth unemployment, educational disadvantage, compulsory miseducation, dead-end jobs, the routinisation and specialisation of labour, low pay

and the loss of skills. Sub-cultural strategies cannot match, meet or answer the structuring dimensions emerging in this period for the class as a whole. (47)

Day of the Sardine's protagonist Arthur takes a different symbolic route out of his situation than *Kind of Loving*'s Vic: subculture, not high culture. But both characters articulate a confused reply to the destabilising question of where British working-class values stand in relation to post-war consumerist ideology. Though both protagonists 'stay home', they imaginatively search for something more 'authentic' than home: Vic's canonical tastes in music and literature, Arthur's enthusiasms for American popular-cultural forms that embody a peoples' utopia – a 'then' that is better than 'now'. And importantly, in both cases, there is no reconciliation between the protagonist and the narrower, traditionalist working-class values and environment of a parent generation. *Day of the Sardine* and *Kind of Loving* record deep class fractures: the 'stark existential imperatives' that appear when old habits and conventions of working-class community no longer fit or function (Pickering & Robins, 'Between Determinism and Disruption' 368) – a deracinated individualism, that leaves Arthur and Vic less fortified and able than their parents, less capable of representing their class in its resistances to capital and change. As Arthur indicates at *Day of the Sardine*'s close, he physically lives in his working-class community but is critically estranged from its old solidarities:

I watch the sardines moving along the little conveyor; a silver stream from the sea bound for the place where they're shuffled tail to head and head to tail and slid into the boxes. There I go. Stiff and straight

and swimming in the gravy, but that's no consolation when the lid's
clamped down […] Smart boy, pretty boy, home boy, I say to myself:
Where are you going? It's no use asking Mum and Harry, living in a
cosy world of their own. (286)

Chapter 5

Young Australian Workers and Bodgie Temptations

In *The Young Ones* (1992), Jon Stratton established 'to the extent that post-war youth culture had evolved in England in a similar way to Australia', the same arguments about the roles of mass media and consumerism in changing youth sensibility appeared (2). According to Stratton, the rise of the British Teddy Boys had to be understood in terms of the new found affluence of working-class youth in the post-war period and the arrival of American popular culture. This also pertained to the subculture of Bodgies in Australia, where the mystique of America was attached to the objects they appropriated in displays of conspicuous and pleasurable consumption (Stratton, 'Bodgies and Widgies' 19). In the 50s and 60s, Australian youth became the focal subject of debates about how the nation would adjust to changing social conditions in the post-war period.

A number of Australian novels about working-class life centrally featured the era's discourses on youth; portraying youthful characters whose engagement with the challenges of post-war, consumer-driven capitalism made them seem like vagrants within their own communities, but who ultimately remained in or returned to the working-class fold. Often, this reconciliation was unconvincing or ambiguous: an implicit comment on the period's growing uncertainties about whether youngsters from the working class would continue to identify with each other in class terms, as their parents had. This quandary marked several Australian novels at the time, and Christopher Koch's *The Boys in the Island* (1958) and Gavin Casey's *Amid the Plenty* (1962) are representative. Both novels replayed concerns that surfaced in Britain: both

authors attempted to fathom how young working-class people were negotiating the wave of Americanised, post-war modes of consumption, entertainment and leisure. Koch and Casey were entangled in familiar arguments: discussions about the potentially corrupting influence of popular culture, the harmful effects of affluence, and how these issues were embedded in public discourses on the 'youth problem'.

Koch's *Boys in the Island* deals broadly with the emergence of 'youth' as a specific category in the 50s, then throws a particular light on how the reaction of Australian working-class youths to 'popular' aspects of post-war modernity stimulated public debates about slippages in moral standards and social development. As Terry Irving points out, narratives such as *Boys in the Island* linked the 'fetish of modernity and its North American source' with the idea that the 'problem' of youth was a problem of citizenship. It was a common social view at the time, Irving writes, that the adolescent path to citizenship was strewn with the distractions of modernity; articulating a fear that young people were subject to new cultural influences that overpowered their dedication to family or work and fractured their traditional solidarities to community and class (14). The initial reviews of Koch's novel reveal that the book was, indeed, largely judged in terms of the ideas about 'adjustment' which dominated public discussions on youth since the early 50s. John Barnes, for example, thought that *Boys in the Island* 'caught the adolescent's feeling of waiting for something to happen, of being on the brink of a momentous revelation about life' (105); in contrast, Charles Higham saw the book's central character as a case of 'innocence lost': perverted by the deviant influence of the louts who inhabit the modern Australian city (112). In this regard, the critical reaction to *Boys in the Island* shows how depictions of Australia's emergent youth culture provoked the strong impulse to develop an understanding of it – an impulse often motivated by the

assumption that youth ultimately had to be controlled (Irving 15). And once again, 'America' was a paradoxical presence in discussions of young Australia's changing consciousness: America was seen as the major influence on youth's attitudes and actions and the prime source of 'expert' opinion on how the 'youth problem' should be addressed.

As in Britain, Australian calls for the regulation of youth in the 50s were triggered by the greater visibility of working-class youth and the spread of consumerism and mass culture. And like their British counterparts, many youthful Australian workers had not quite experienced the affluence that supposedly flowed from the decade's prosperous economic conditions. As Jon Stratton wrote, 'by 1952–53 you might not have been able to conceive of unemployment but it was becoming increasingly clear that many of the jobs which the young people were being offered led very little distance from the new assembly lines of cars, fridges and cookers which formed the basis of Australia's industrialisation' (*The Young Ones* 8). The expansion of Australia's industrial base and service sector did open some new employment fields for youth, but much of this was unskilled work and 'despite "occupational mobility" between generations, there was still a general correlation between family background and occupation'. In reality, it was still difficult for young people to find the 'right' job; and despite 'full employment' in the 50s 'the presence of large numbers of young people in relatively well-paid but unskilled and often boring jobs was increasingly a matter of concern for many associated with government and voluntary agencies' (Irving 8). By the mid 50s, young Australia's boredom with work, disaffection with society in general, embrace of mass culture, conspicuous leisure and self-assertiveness occasioned a public debate and calls for 'expert' guidance.

An Australian Council for Educational Research study in 1951 – *The Adjustment of Youth: A Study of a Social Problem in the British, American, and Australian Communities* – was one of the earliest contributions to the debate. As its title and introduction made clear, the study believed that the youth 'problem' had an international dimension: 'the problems of youth are common to all modern communities'. On the one hand, the study was unashamedly Anglophile in seeking answers to the problem of family equilibrium in the face of so many new distractions for the young:

> The more mature culture of the United Kingdom provides a firm base for stepping forth courageously in new directions and certainly for achieving all sorts of effective collaboration between different agencies and levels of authority. It seems obvious that apart from history, and apart from sentiment, Australia should keep in the closest touch with social development in the United Kingdom. (3)

On the other hand, the study noted the 'fundamental' relation to America that marked Australian modernisation. It then recommended American models to assist the Australian investigation of psycho-social adjustments amongst the young:

> Australia has a great deal to learn from the United States. As we shall show later there are some directions in which her development is more closely related to our own than is anything to be observed in the United Kingdom. American influence on Australian social development has been extensive if not fundamental. There are for

example various forms of special training for those who deal with

aspects of the problem of social adjustment which are more highly

developed in the United States than anywhere in the world. (3)

In youth affairs, America was seen as both villain and redeemer. America produced all the things that threatened to damage youth's development – 'the extension of leisure, and the prevalence of cheap and commercialised entertainment'. Yet America also offered 'scientific' approaches to youth management, providing 'constructive and healthy outlets for youthful minds and bodies' (4). According to the authors of *Adjustment of Youth*, mass commercial culture threatened the authority of traditional social institutions: the prospect 'not merely of dividing a nation but of dividing communities against themselves' – nothing short of a 'crisis facing civilisation'. Published in 1951, *Adjustment of Youth* understandably had a somewhat different focus on youth from British reports like *The Youth Service in England and Wales* at the end of the 50s; in 1951, the impacts of post-war consumerism and popular culture were yet to be fully felt. But it was nevertheless significant that many of *Adjustment of Youth*'s final proposals were not dissimilar. Like the later British document, *Adjustment of Youth* concluded that youth needed a firm anchorage in the shared ethos of national identity: a respect for the 'Australian temperament' and a 'guided' path to citizenship, facilitated by managerial interventions from government, youth groups and the education system. As both reports indicated, the decade's obsession with moulding youth appeared early and endured in remarkably consistent terms of reference (248-251).

A later Australian study, W. F. Connell's, *Growing Up in an Australian City* (1957), also favoured ideas of adjustment and education over arguments for the

policing or disciplining of 'widespread' delinquency. Using survey techniques borrowed from American sociology, Connell's study asked Sydney youths questions about such habits as their reading and radio-listening, in order to draw conclusions about their interactions with popular culture. For Connell, the similarity of responses across demographically different suburbs was proof not only that there was an identifiable, common youth culture, but also that it was one in which class played no real part. But there *was* a 'resistant' trend: young people resisted more serious subjects like politics, religion or education, whether in newspapers or radio broadcasts, preferring what Connell deemed light entertainment. Although top-40 radio programming in Australia was only beginning when Connell's surveys were conducted, it was already clear that a niche market was arising among teenagers, fostered by the repetitive play of a few key records from the three American music industry giants – Columbia, Festival and RCA. Connell regretted this intellectual regression, and thought that it could be countered by management and the teaching of discernment: 'teenagers should either turn off the radio and read a good book, or tune into a good drama, preferably an English classic' (Less & Senyard 127).

However, as Terry Irving notes, the most important result of Connell's study was that it conclusively dissolved social differences into age-related questions. Connell considered that the category of 'youth' was primarily designed for the 'socialisation of future citizens: a means of learning appropriate roles'. In this kind of analysis, (which, Irving points out, owed a great deal to the structural functionalism of American sociologist Talcott Parsons), 'interests' ceased to be structural, becoming instead personal and subject to change in the process of growing up. This analysis fit neatly with the generational dynamics of the decade in countries like Australia and Britain (Irving 12). And though Connell rejected sensationalist ideas of widespread

delinquency, his recommendations on education insisted that formal schooling was, principally, a means to prepare youth for a future adult role in an individualist, competitive, capitalist and masculinist world:

> In the first place, among the lessons which the school imparts, a prominent place might be given to the kind of knowledge and skill which is of special value to the adolescent in making a material success of his life. A satisfying command of the fundamental knowledge, or of a basic skill, which is of importance in his future career provides a measure of security, materially and mentally, and aids him in his task of achieving emotional stability. The adolescent has to learn to live to himself in a degree of independence unknown to his younger brother or sister. He is in the process of forming an attitude to the world around him that is to be characteristic of him as he enters adult life, and in this process he must learn to depend more on his own resources, built up as he faces the various tasks and experiences of this period, and less upon mere status. (208)

Yet as Koch's *Boys in the Island* suggested, the education system might have patently failed to inspire young Australians. The characters depicted in Koch's story about Australian post-war youth development exhibit an unstable and rootless individuality – an individualism contrasting with the guided competitiveness which educators like Connell envisaged. *Boys in the Island*'s young protagonist, Francis Cullen, dabbles in the semi-delinquency that Connell had been at pains to play down; and Francis and his partners largely take their behavioural cues from the American or American-

influenced movies and radio shows that Connell advised the youth of Australia to disregard.

Boys in the Island begins in the 40s in Tasmania. Francis Cullen's family has arrived in the mostly working-class outer Hobart suburb of Gooree, as a result of his parents' unexplained downward mobility: a decline in fortunes that began during the Depression and was hastened by WWII – Francis' grandfather was a successful lawyer, his father is a clerk at a local factory. Francis rejects his mother's reticence about the effects of mixing with a different social class ('they come from bad homes. I don't want you swearing'), and then celebrates his relocation from private school to the state school system as a final graduation into the proletarian world: 'he would be one of them in the last, unknown streets where the town ended' (16). But the romance of working-class authenticity fades as Francis gradually comes to the same awareness as other working-class sons and daughters, caught in the country's employment backwaters, about the 'dead end' future that awaits them. Francis loses interest in formal education; he dreams of escape to imagined 'vistas', and school provides a venue for new subcultural associations:

> He was an inoffensive yet very unsatisfactory boy in the eyes of the
> teachers, seeming to have no interest in anything that mattered, his
> attention to his work spasmodic and fleeting, coming only when
> something momentarily roused his interest. In school, he sat at his
> desk furtively drawing in the back covers of his exercise-books, or
> reading the wrong text-book, or gazing into some vista in his mind
> remote from the classroom. So he failed in nearly all subjects. In the

playground, he slouched about with his friends as shiftless as himself,

known as the Louts. (27)

As the 50s looms, Francis joins his high-school colleague (and later quasi-Bodgie) Lewie Mathews, in a search for inspiration and pleasure – and school cannot satisfy it: the source of joy and youthful meaning comes from the radio and movie theatre. American music plays as a ubiquitous soundtrack to their lives: on their first under-aged drinking expeditions to a pub with a jazz band whose 'spectacled clarinettist looked like Benny Goodman', Francis can almost believe they are 'no longer in Hobart; they were in New Orleans' (36-37). Even when Francis's relationship with a girl named Heather takes him to the countryside, people on remote farms are listening to 'cornfed radio DJs' playing exclusively American-inspired country music (Higham 112). While the Greendale Hop Carnival is set under 'pale green English trees', the Carnival's voice was 'the American hillbilly music Greendale and all the country areas had made their own […] Kitty Wells, adored like a favourite sister become famous, sang to them what love was about, while the fiddles mocked underneath' (43). There is a corny aspect, Francis admits, to these people 'playing gaudy Western guitars' and 'singing and yodelling like the Hanks and Buddies of their dreams'. Nevertheless, there is a romantic strain in the stories spun by these American, or Americanised, crooners behind the 'glowing modern radio dial' (50).

Country music conveys something of the 'on the road' variety of American escape fantasy; but movies provide Francis and his pal Lewie with the other important link to that cultural imaginary – the movies signify the 'glamour of all that was modern and of now' (38). Images of the city – any big city – are conflated in their

minds with the individualist freedoms that American culture and technology seem to represent on the cinema screen:

> They liked the latest cars, and sleek new buildings (the white sweep of concrete and glass in cities they had never seen), and American swing, and the films they went to on Saturday nights. They liked the wild life of hotels and the race track, forbidden them by the school […] They dreamed up the world they would enter beyond school, and it was compounded of many things, but nothing old; it was all of today, shining like chromium, like headlights stabbing the dark. The ride and climb of Benny Goodman's clarinet, from that hidden world behind the radio dial, was to them, at sixteen, the voice of an incredible city in their minds, those vistas they glimpsed, America – far, on the Saturday night films: a symphony of tingling lights in illimitable darkness, and each one on the point of a life of unimaginable excitements, vicious and gay and marvellous. (38)

In the early 50s, Francis moves to Melbourne to reconnect with his high-school acquaintances, Lewie and Jake. Here, however, Francis is unsettled by an early premonition that the free-wheeling existence, which a diet of Hollywood images had helped build up in his mind, is no more attainable in the big city than it is at home. The three share a 'shabby, high-ceilinged, 19th century room' in St. Kilda, which maintains its 'thick brown gloom, its prostitute mournfulness' even in broad daylight (108). Francis finds work in a biscuit warehouse, while the other two take similar 'dead-end' jobs. Before long, Francis is introduced to 'The Game' – the semi-criminal

gang life that Lewie, Jake and their mates lead in concert with their mundane jobs. The gang's drunken carousing and the sociopathic attitudes of its mentor, the lascivious Keeva, appear to identify the members as second generation Bodgies – precisely the term an appalled Charles Higham applied in his review of Koch's novel in 1959 (112). At first, Francis feels that this subculture is the exact alternative to 'straight' adulthood he has long imagined: there is something modern and exciting about the semi-criminality of the gang lads. Like the myriad 'outsider' characters Francis has seen in American movies, the lads seem to hold 'the premonition of activities, illicit and enormously tantalizing, which he would rather have cut off his hand than have missed' (117). However, by the time Keeva and the lads move on to viciously rolling drunks, the Game has lost its attraction for Francis. Around the same time, Francis encounters a mentally disturbed former school-chum, Shane Noonan, shortly before Shane commits suicide. In this meeting, Shane delivers a sermon about maturity and the 'correct' path to adult fulfilment – advice which, despite its sanctimony and Shane's mental state, profoundly affects Francis:

> 'I've woken up', Shane said, 'and I think you have too, if you'll admit it. Or do you *like* life like this: the streets, the boarding-house room smelling of piss, the wretched jobs? Is this what you came to find, Francis? […] I've started on the road to being a failure like you and your criminal friends. But I've seen through it – I'm going back to University and my career.' (128)

The 'tipping point' for Francis comes at the novel's end, after an accident in which George – a race-track tout and drinking acquaintance – is killed due to Lewie's

reckless driving. Yet, as Terry Irving has observed, there is a slightly manufactured quality about Francis's epiphany and the conclusion to *The Boys in the Island* more generally: a thematic enforcement that is traceable in no small way to the era's influential discourses about youth, education, social guidance and management, and the view of 'youth' as transitional developmental stage. Suffering minor injuries in the crash, Francis returns to his Tasmanian home, realising that the subcultural life of the Game is a fake:

> It was over, and no more a game, because George had been killed and because Keeva (Lewie told him in a letter) was getting engaged to a fairly prosperous small business man none of them knew, and whom she had apparently been stringing along for some time[…] They were growing up. It was what Shane had seen, before any of them (150).

Francis's realisation that he must take responsibility for his own life echoes the emphasis on individualism in many of the period's discussions about citizenship. Yet class considerations were not entirely absent. As John Barnes commented, Francis' parents seem to inhabit a frontier or borderland of class consciousness, and this is an odd dimension of *Boys in the Island* (105). It is no coincidence, then, that Francis' family is not from working-class origins – no matter what its current social location might be. As Irving points out, while the ambiguously classed Francis is capable of suddenly abandoning a low-life subculture, his proletarian acquaintances are either killed off or apparently destined to remain 'immature and, in the final analysis, unsuccessful citizens' (14). By contrast, the advice that galvanises Francis comes from upper-middle-class Shane Noonan's rant about repudiating bohemian lifestyles.

On the one hand, then, *Boys in the Island* peddles the notion that the life associated with ideas of freedom, derived from American-styled consumer fads and Hollywood films, must be outgrown in the difficult process of personal development. On the other hand, the novel is encoded with a supposition common in Australia and abroad in the 50s and 60s: that working-class youngsters were particularly susceptible to the corrupting influences of mass culture and Americanised lifeways. If working-class youth was not strictly regulated, it would not achieve 'responsible' adulthood – a sociological and psychological orthodoxy, writ large in the fates of proletarian characters in Koch's novel: a fate escaped by the uncertainly classed protagonist, Francis. Like his British fictional counterparts in *Kind of Loving* and *Day of the Sardine*, Francis is physically and emotionally accommodated 'at home'.

The period's public discourses on youth also ran strongly in Gavin Casey's *Amid the Plenty*. Casey's novel dealt with Australian youth and generational change against a more clearly defined family and class background than Koch's *Boys in the Island*. But like Koch's book, *Amid the Plenty* betrayed a level of anxiety about the possibility that young people now constituted a group with a new and distinctive culture, and a concern that many aspects of that culture were derived largely from mass media, entertainment and leisure industries – and were socially harmful.

Amid the Plenty's strong sub-theme of generational conflict and its commentary on contemporary youth culture have received surprisingly little critical attention. A glance at reviews of *Amid the Plenty*, and Casey's responses to them in 1962, reveal that from the start the novel had been evaluated for its engagement with the issues of unemployment and economic hardship. That critical emphasis was certainly understandable, given that it was as difficult in Australia as it was in Britain in the late 50s and early 60s to challenge 'we've never had it so good', rhetoric

purveyed so effectively by reigning conservative politicians and the mainstream media. Yet this was precisely what *Amid the Plenty* did – and what early critics found distinguished the book.

Amid the Plenty's central character, Jack Mayhew, loses his job as a skilled labourer with a refrigeration engineering company that he has worked for since the war: the firm runs into financial difficulties due to technological changes, and its competitors take better advantage of developments in advertising and hire purchase to corner the market. The novel tracks tensions within the family over Jack's lost income and Enid Mayhew's desires for the latest domestic gadgetry – to be bought courtesy of the same hire purchase schemes that had helped send her husband's former employers to the wall. *Amid the Plenty* thus exposes the myth of plenty, tapping into a knowledge that survived among some workers even during the 'decade of affluence' – that permanent employment for the lowest paid worker in a capitalist society is never guaranteed. But it also asks searching questions about working-class solidarity and class mobility. During his financial crisis, Jack is forced to accept the assistance of individuals whose values do not match his own – like his ruthlessly ambitious, better-connected and upwardly mobile brother-in-law, young Tom Dinsdale. On these matters, Casey's social commentary was sufficiently against the grain in Menzies' Australia to stir critical disbelief that anyone resembling *Amid the Plenty*'s Jack could find themselves in such circumstances – except by choice. Thelma Forshaw, for example, was disturbed that Casey was not only out of touch with economic reality, but 'un-Australian' as well: 'does Mr Casey really believe his characters to be representative of the true Australian when they roister away the nest-egg, then turn with a snarl on the possibly not-so-attractive character who finds himself protected by his prudence from the blasts of ill-fortune' ('Less Than Plenty').

Yet if Casey could be iconoclastic and confronting on the issue of affluence, he fell into a discursive rut on the subject of youth. Oddly, the other significant but critical line of social inquiry in *Amid the Plenty* – on youth culture – involved a quite different impulse. On youth, Casey's tendency was not to defy orthodoxy, as he had done in addressing affluence ideology, but to reproduce a number of the period's dominant discourses and stereotypes.

Amid the Plenty's important sub-plot involving Lenny Mayhew's experiences with a Bodgie gang, for example, centres on the commonly held view that an increasingly distinctive youth culture threatened 'traditional' working-class values. Any attempt to explain young peoples' defections from their parent culture in class terms – as an ideological effect of consumer culture's impact on the working class as a whole – were negated in the final analysis by the author's recourse to prevailing ideas about youth: ideas that had informed British fiction in the period. And just as they had in Britain, discourses fanning public anxieties in Australia about what was happening with youth – sourced from psychology, sociology or criminology – commonly aligned generational conflict with the general syndrome of moral and aesthetic decay.

From *Amid the Plenty*'s opening chapter, Casey introduces the proposition that a gap between working-class youths and their parents opened in the 50s, resulting from new levels of personal freedom and disposable income. For example, with memories of her own economically-deprived childhood still vivid, Enid Mayhew is annoyed that her clothes-conscious daughter Freda puts 'all her money on her back' (9). For the elder Mayhews, their children's casual attitude to money compounds the generalised anxiety that their parental influence has slipped away, loosened by modernity. Jack looks at his children, feeling outpaced by change: 'you never knew

where they went, let alone what they did. It was just anywhere, whenever they felt like it, unaccompanied and unsupervised on their scooters and in their little cars, free of their elders and following their own courses. It was a more dangerous world for the young than it had been, and Jack was sometimes apprehensive' (25).

The Mayhews' eldest son, Ted, appears least affected by the changes pressuring youth. With his sport at weekends, an apprenticeship and night classes at Technical School, Ted is 'solemn and stodgy' in his younger brother Lenny's eyes: destined to be a replica of their father (34). In contrast, everything about the working-class home crowds in on the youngest son, Lenny. Like many working-class families in post-war Britain and Australia, the Mayhews pin great hopes for their children on formal education, and in this young Lenny is the best prospect, coping easily with schoolwork. But home life oppresses Lenny, and the family's lack of money leads him to aspire to a job, money and immediate independence:

> There was no peace or pleasure at home for Len any more, and he spent as little time as he could there. Where else to go would have been no problem if he had had a pocket full of dosh and no rules about bedtime. There were shows and diversions in the city for those who could afford them, but they were seldom within reach of a teenager, still a schoolboy, whose Dad was out of work and who seemed to himself to be distrusted and despised by everybody. (35)

According to behavioural and attitudinal standards in the period's dominant professional discourses about youth, Lenny fits the profile of a youth on the point of rebellion – a classic illustration of the adolescent 'problem'. True to type, Lenny is

soon frequenting The Place, a hangout characterised by the American styling of its clientele: a 'queer, crazy madhouse that was almost repulsive to him at first, but with a growing fascination' (35). Casey subsequently portrays Lenny's drift into a youth subculture and his alienation from family: a stereotypical picture, derived from the intense Anglo-Australian debates in the 50s and 60s about youth development and the particular – pernicious – influence of America.

Dorothy Hewett once observed that Gavin Casey's earthy proletarian background made him impatient with intellectual humbug, although Casey had all the prerequisites for being tagged an intellectual himself. After all, as Hewett admitted, on one of the first occasions she saw Casey he was speaking at a series of university lectures in Perth ('The Man Whose Name Was Casey' 11). And as a fellow traveller with the largely Communist Realist Writer's Group, a collection of intellectuals who endlessly debated cultural matters, Casey was well acquainted with arguments about youth and its position in contemporary consumer society. Thus, it was surprising how many of the period's *dominant* ideas about youth Casey reproduced in *Amid the Plenty*; and reading Lenny's account of his fascination with 'this bodgie business' shows how his character is riddled with the sorts of 'symptoms' described regularly in professional diagnoses of the youth 'problem' in the 50s and early 60s:

It grew on you, like the music the cool cats played and listened to. It gave you somewhere where you belonged, a place where there weren't parents and teachers and other grown-ups telling you what to do all the time, taking no notice at all of any thoughts or ideas you might have, or if they did laughing and making fun of you. Even if you were only a kid, hanging on the outside edges, the people at The

> Place acknowledged you as somebody, understood how you felt
>
> about some things, recognised the rights the old squares wouldn't
>
> grant you. (38)

Lenny bears all the hallmarks of disaffected youth that social commentators had warned against since the early 50s: Lenny's fictitious attempts to find solace in a Bodgie gang were perfectly consistent with society's potential, 'real-life' failure to manage working-class youth into adulthood.

Based on long observation and research, A.E. Manning's *The Bodgie* (1958) was the outstanding work on the subject of Australian youth and the effort to understand its psychology. In an era of unquestioned faith in science and experts, Manning's 'calm pronouncements and apparently scientific analyses' were representative of the sorts of opinions about youth that eventually, because of their more 'reasoned' and 'professional' tone, became more appealing to the public than 'emotive cries for castration' (Braithwaite & Barker 37). Manning provided a list of causes for youthful 'maladjustment' – from broken homes and lack of parental supervision to the dearth of modernity's moral and spiritual training. Given Manning's background as an academic psychologist, his remedy for the ills of youth predictably hinged upon guidance and therapy. This would ideally occur through an expanded range of community organisations, supervision ('a potential sinner will take many risks while he thinks no one is looking'), and a total 'social drive' that included censorship: 'undesirable films and literature should be banished […] it could be urged that there should be youth cinemas, youth theatres, parks solely for the young, and that children should be taught to live their lives, in the present, and not be forced to follow a pattern a neurotic Society forces on them'. Most important, however, was the

role of the 'expert': 'qualified psychologists should be available free for at least all people under 21 years of age and all children should be encouraged to seek their aid privately without regard to parents or teachers' (86).

These professional tones and opinions had a powerful public appeal, and popular community pressure to heed them had a political impact – as substantial in Australia as it was in Britain. In Queensland, for example, public opinion generated a parliamentary inquiry into youth in 1957 – an inquiry that closely shared many of the concerns of the contemporaneous *Youth Service in England and Wales*. Interestingly enough, a glance at the record of Queensland parliamentary debates at the time reveals that (like the authors) of the British report, some Australian politicians recognised that delinquency had been overblown by the media. But there was an equally strong belief in the Queensland parliament that the lack of a moral and spiritual core behind the era's positive material advances and modernisations must be addressed through supervision by a coalition of 'experts' and government and non-government bodies: 'parents with problems should be given guidance on raising their children successfully and guiding them along the right lines and in turn the youth themselves could approach the group when they were found, in many cases, by police officers, to be in need of guidance by experts' (335).

And as the comics campaign prefigured, from the early 50s the obsession that youth should be directly guided away from the socially destructive aspects of post-war consumer modernity produced politically strange alliances. In the Cold War climate, the Australian Communist Party's Eureka Youth League was usually not considered a legitimate organisation like the Boy Scouts, YMCA or National Fitness Council – admittedly, the EYL's major aim had been to maintain working-class consciousness among the young by teaching the history of industrial struggle and

asserting youth's right to a decent wage. But as Harry Stein wrote in *Communist Review* in 1954, the EYL also believed that 'the right to study under proper conditions, for professional, cultural and sports training are rights common to the majority of our youth' (276). Stein's idea of the 'educational management' of youth would not have been out of place in most government-sponsored reports on the youth 'problem' at the time. At the end of the 50s, it remained part of the cultural policy of the Australian Communist Party that youth, via groups like the Eureka Youth League, be guided away from 'all these vices-become-virtues' in post-war capitalist society: the erosion of moral values which 'are daily lauded and extolled as the admirable, the ideal, by all forms and methods of bourgeois propaganda – press, radio, TV, comic strip, art, literature' (Olive 234).

As Harry Stein also observed in 1954, it was not the Communists but Sir John Chandler – a founder of the Liberal Party in Queensland – who 'opened a financial appeal for a Brisbane youth organisation by saying that it was necessary to support this organisation because of the danger of a foreign ideology influencing the youth' (276). Stein implied that there were considerable points of agreement between traditional political adversaries about the impending derailment of youth from its 'normal' track to responsible citizenship; and this was an index of how the debate about youth gradually turned away from a basis in political and class analysis and became a chat between strange bedfellows on the need for morality, standards and cultural nationalism. With some legitimacy, then, Stein could claim that he represented strong popular sentiment when he identified America as the source of the most corrosive influences on Australian youth. 'There are not less than 60 million comics a year being read by young people in Australia', he thundered, and in '1951,

92 American comics, the type being read by our young people, were analysed.' The findings of this content analysis were predictably alarming:

> They measured up to 216 major crimes, 86 sadistic acts, 309 minor crimes, 287 instances of anti-social behaviour, 186 instances of vulgar behaviour, 522 physical assaults and the technique of 14 murderers […] Millions of American murder and sex books are being read by more and more young people Some have begun to appear under class desks and be read by some apprentices during tech. classes in Sydney (276).

Gavin Casey seemed to subscribe to this well-worn position – that there was something morally pernicious about American comic books – and the refusal of class analysis that this disapprobation implied. The period's background debates, and the movement from class to morality, hummed in the pages of Casey's *Amid the Plenty* – often resulting in episodes marred by incredible triteness. In one of them, the symbolism of a display of 'true-love magazines and comic books' collapsing on Lenny and his Bodgie colleagues as they break into a corner shop could not be more obvious. In their craven retreat the comics 'fluttered down around the ears of the demoralised cats like bats swooping out of the upper darkness' (134). The incident is of a number which prompted Lees and Senyard to complain that Casey's clumsy attempts at describing youth subculture reveal the author an unsympathetic 'square' (137). More importantly, what Casey really failed to do was effectively prosecute a deeper and more political argument about consumer culture and mass entertainment:

post-war consumer capital's operations, its impact on young peoples' consciousness, its redefinitions of their position in what he knew to be a class society.

Like many British and Australian authors of the era who resolved to remain optimistic about the survival of a strong working-class culture, Casey's impulse in *Amid the Plenty* was to emphasise that youth could be reconciled with its class despite powerful subcultural distractions. But here, too, he was diverted into the simplified concepts pertaining to standards and character – simplistic desiderata that had united a range of politically disparate critics of post-war consumer culture, in both Britain and Australia, throughout the 50s. Casey replayed populist arguments on the guidance and supervision of youth, typified in the psycho-diagnosis of Lenny's behaviour by his brother-in-law Peter and shopkeeper Mr Jackson: Lenny becomes a Bodgie because his vivid imagination and cleverness has no 'proper' outlet. Lenny and his peers have 'too much time on their hands', and there is 'not enough work to keep 'em out of trouble' (138). Casey's portrayal of Lenny's milk-bar world articulates the lineaments of the classic that surrounded rock music, English Teds and Australian Bodgies – a panic underpinned by the Hoggartian linkage of Americanisation, complete 'aesthetic breakdown' and a slide in moral standards.

In its pictures of the Bodgie hangout, The Place, *Amid the Plenty* slips into Americanised 'lingo' reminiscent of Chaplin's *Day of the Sardine*. The names of *Amid the Plenty's* gang members – The Prince, Knuckles, Mechanical Sam, Blockbuster – echo American models: the sound of B-grade film, early TV shows, teen magazines and tabloid reports of American teen culture is unmistakable. The sound is pronounced in the characters' stereotypically jiving, 'hipster' speech:

'Then hang around, Hound', Knuckles said, kindly. 'We'll let you

know, when we go.'

'An' hold back from the envelope', Blockbuster told him, concluding

that he worked. 'Tell the squares in the nest they take out union

money or group insurance or something. Get a garment or so with a

bit of glow. Don't be drab, Dab, be bright and light.' (37)

If this contains an element of parody, a gentle mockery of the gang's affectations, it is

quickly undercut. Lenny's Bodgie acquaintances are also portrayed as permanently on

the edge of violence:

Nobody ever showed a flick-knife or a cosh or a piece of heavy,

sharp-edged bike-chain, but these things were there, snug in the

pockets of the jeans of the real cool cats. You watched your step, or

something might happen to you on the way home […] There was a

character called Flatty, walking around on his heels with his jaw

sagging, and his plump red tongue unwilling to stay in his mouth. He

was supposed to have got that way when The Prince and Knuckles

did him over for some sort of rebellion against the ethics of The

Place. Blockbuster was said to have ironed his old man with a length

of chain, when he had come out after the old boy had told the

Children's Court he could do nothing with his son. (36)

As this passage clearly announces, aggression and violence is intrinsic to the new

American-imported forms of modernity; a modernity which creates an atmosphere of

recklessness in local youth subcultures: 'The Place was a milk bar with moods, and they were moods into which a lonely and discontented young cat could fit himself easily' (35). While the 'electric machines whizzed, mixing the medicine', the American music emanating from the milk-bar's juke-box completes the subversion: 'shrieking or thumping out primitive rhythms, nerve-racking at first but becoming strangely soothing like a dull, not-very-hurtful toothache one probes with the tongue and misses when it goes away'(35-37).

The sentiments here paralleled the public discussions which, in both Britain and Australia at the time, accentuated the spectre of cultural pollution and attacks on national values: discussions that blamed the encroachment of American culture for the transformed behaviour of local youth. And the language of *Amid the Plenty*'s milk-bar scenes almost reads as if it were cribbed from the profusion of commentaries about working-class youth subcultures that appeared in daily newspapers during the late 50s and early 60s.

The Sydney Morning Herald, for example, devoted the second page of one of its editions in 1958 to Malcolm Muggeridge's 'An Evening with the Bodgies of Melbourne': an account of the British intellectual's excursion into the nether world of Melbourne's working-class youth. There was an element of 'cultural cringe' here: the assumption that a visiting intellectual might explain the phenomenon of Australia's working-class youth with more authority than a local. But it transpired that there was little in Muggeridge's article that had not been repeatedly said in home-grown assessments, and this was an important point. Muggeridge's piece confirmed how closely Australian anxieties about new cultural products and the youthful subcultures using them replicated the British experience. The same preoccupation with the cultural influence of America was evident in Muggeridge's comments about fashion

styles ('their clothing is lurid and basically American') and music ('the insistent Negro rhythm got going'). Furthermore, Muggeridge saw the same vulnerability among young working-class Australians to those aspects of American culture which encouraged the violence, promiscuity and general immorality that produced Britain's Teds:

> There was no one present over 19, and most were 15 or 16 – a motley, runtish, spiritually undernourished sort of gathering, lubricated by soft drinks and animated by an American-transmitted jungle beat. The tang of adolescent sex was in the air, or rather of carnal knowledge – perhaps of carnal ignorance, perhaps just hysteria. Who knows? These are the waifs of a materialist society, proletarian Outsiders, surrealists of the gutter. They exist everywhere in more or less the same form […] I have seen those long jackets and padded shoulders and ferret faces in Tottenham Court Road, Third Avenue, Montparnasse, The Kurfuerstendamm. This is a world-wide phenomenon. ('Evening with the Bodgies' 2)

Given the plethora of articles like this in the period, it is remarkable that so few cultural historians have noted a vital theme. As Muggeridge's mention of 'waifs' and 'proletarian Outsiders' indicated, the general youth 'problem' was elided into the 'problem' of 'working-classness'.

Like Britain's Teds, the second generation of Australian Bodgies in the mid 50s (distinct from the lower-middle-class, first-generation Bodgies of the late 40s) constituted 'a working-class youth culture whose members, whilst celebrating their

access to a range of new consumer goods, nevertheless had to resolve their recognition that other goods were beyond their purchasing capacities'. Just as there had certainly been violence among the Teds in Britain, shop-lifting and low-level aggression disruption violence were also articulations of a stultified class position for Australia's Bodgies (Stratton, 'Bodgies and Widgies 21). The Australian media dutifully pounced on such aberrant activities: trumpeting the cyclonic arrival of juvenile delinquency, deploring the standard-lowering influence of American culture, and duly honing in on rock music as the eye of the storm. So, when the film *Rock Around the Clock* premiered in Sydney in 1956, *The Sydney Morning Herald*'s front-page account of opening night focussed on the air of insurrection:

> gaudily-dressed Bodgies and Widgies who comprised the audience:
> enthusiastic rock 'n rollers drowned most of the non-musical parts of
> the film in a storm of whistling, screaming and abuse […] five burly
> ushers especially hired for the occasion raced up and down between
> the aisles threatening to throw out the worst noise makers. ('A
> Frenzied First Night').

In obvious addition, there were reports of rock music's overt sexuality. In league with fears of violence, the sexual alarm rung by rock music branded followers of the new style as dangerous and decadent:

> At rock 'n roll concerts and dances the musicians usually lie on the
> floor with their instruments, writhing and moving in a suggestive
> manner until the audience is in an uproar, and Elvis Presley has made

a fortune by adopting the pelvic gyrations of women strip-teasers.

(*The Sydney Morning Herald*, '"Rock 'n Roll": What It Was' 2)

Before Jon Stratton's work, little critical attention was paid to the demonisation of Australian working-class youngsters for their 'foreign' tastes, and how this mirrored the British experience. Stratton's salient observation, however, pertained to the more difficult but more pertinent questions of the structural position of the working class as a whole, and the relationship that young members of that class had with their parent group in post-war consumer society. These questions, Stratton suggested, frequently lost in the British debates, were likewise elided in Australia by the displacing view of an indigenous working-class culture polluted by alien influences.

A piece in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1956, titled 'Bodgie Cliques Break with Old Australian Habits', indicated of how this view gained its explanatory power. Reporting on research into the Bodgie phenomenon by the Anthropology Department at Sydney University, the article started with an unusually coherent historical account of the emergence of second-generation Bodgies. The academic report the article referred to, like most of its kind at the time, was saturated with fashionable adolescent development theory. But it hinted more clearly than most at Bodgie subculture's class dimensions, and the frustration that arose when young workers saw limited long-term prospects for substantial economic advancement in an age of supposed 'full employment'. Yet in common with many British commentaries on the subject, this Australian report also had less to say about how working-class immersion in the new consumer culture might alter the political awareness of proletarian Australian youth, or its willingness to maintain links with traditional labour institutions and a parent class. Just as 'little England' was a subtext in many British attempts to understand

how aspects of Americanisation influenced working-class youth, Sydney University's Anthropology Department grounded its concerns about Bodgies and their American tastes in an imagined, 'authentic' Australian working-class culture. This was notwithstanding the report's recognition that when it came to gender relations at least, some recent changes in working-class behaviour might be viewed in a more positive light: 'They definitely have broken with our gambling traditions, especially horse-racing, while they have tended to keep away from hotels. Many cliques have broken down the conventional Australian dichotomy of the sexes, as well as having broken with conventional sexual morality' (2). There was no such concession in Muggeridge's 'An Evening with the Bodgies of Melbourne':

> In accordance with the American Declaration of Independence, they pursue happiness, and have the means to do so. If they are famished, it is spiritually; if they are deprived, the deprivation is within themselves rather than in their material circumstances […] It is no good asking them to become Boy Scouts. They will Be Prepared all right, but with a bicycle chain' ('Evening with the Bodgies 2).

As Stratton noted, Muggeridge associated '*foreign* cultural practices with the general behaviour of *local* kids'; and, consequently, 'working-class kids so classified would be distanced twice-over – firstly they would not be *adults* and, secondly, they would not be Australian' (*The Young Ones* 95). Beyond the most basic recognition of how American consumerism was articulated through a distinctive teenage culture, propped up by new styles and artefacts, there was no effort to 'distinguish general economic shifts from the specifically American props': throughout the 50s, youthful

consumerism was simply read as the encroachment of mass American cultural forces on local traditions (*The Young Ones* 95).

Authenticity and identity were keys to this reading, as the 'rapid change in the face of popular culture after the war and the access of the broad mass of the people to these forms disturbed conservative and radical critics alike'(Smith, 'Making Folk Music' 482). As in Britain, rock music's working-class following in Australia refreshed the arguments about popular culture and the working class that had been raised by the import of American comics and magazines. One reaction was a surge of cultural nationalist musical sentiment from the Left, and Australia's own brand of folk revivalism was epitomised by John Manifold's 'Who Wrote the Ballads' – a manifesto advancing some of the period's more extreme ideas about folk culture and its opposite, the commercial. For Manifold, the attraction of the urban working-class to rock music was a contribution to its own cultural destruction:

> Under capitalist working-conditions, the old social basis of folksong was almost completely destroyed; and the industrial working class has tended to subsist (except in times of revolutionary crisis) on a 'commodity culture', a sort of pig-swill churned out by capitalist enterprises for working-class consumption. (11)

For John Docker, Manifold's cultural priorities represented the hypocrisy, however unwitting, of many claiming strong working-class sympathies. As Docker wrote, Manifold's attitudes were not unlike Ewan MacColl's 'folk Nazism' in Britain; suspicious even of folk revivals like *Reedy River*, skiffle bands or the professional singer who used musical instruments or venues not known in 'authentic' folk music

('Culture, Society and the Communist Party' 194). The simplistic idea that the 'poison gas' of commodity culture was tranquillising the proletariat, Docker argued, was an 'alienation from – even dislike of and contempt for – the very class that is to remake history' ('Culture, Society and the Communist Party' 195). But as Graeme Smith has pointed out, it is difficult to share completely Docker's counter-argument: that urban popular culture becomes distinctively working-class culture merely by use. There is, however, justice in the Docker case that radical nationalists in Australia, like many on the Left in Britain, often found themselves on the same terrain as conservatives in the 50s and 60s: unable to understand the arrival of the post-war popular in terms apart from the 'corruption and alien influences on the one hand, and a pure national tradition on the other' ('Making Folk Music' 482).

Even those who did assay a political critique of consumer society often lapsed into anti-modernist anxieties. In Australia, Ian Turner expressed the fear in his mid-60s essay 'The Retreat from Reason' that the 'decades of affluence' after WWII had seen a corresponding collapse of critical thinking and interest in politics. But in a move reminiscent of Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*, Turner's complex examination of how consumer capitalism operated at the ideological level to dampen political inquiry lost traction when it came to consider the appeal of commercially produced popular culture. Turner's worries about technology, aesthetic and even moral breakdown, and his assertion that the fascination with pop was the denial of the claims of reason, hinted at the 'bright shiny things' section in Hoggart's book. American abstract expressionist art was without the emotion that great art once had, while Hollywood films were now merely brilliant technical gimmickry. But it was the pop music of the early 60s that Turner particularly singled out for its lack of a 'tradition':

The blues were a philosophy […] The techniques of scholarship were brought to bear on jazz history, sociology, discography – but who but Brian Epstein would want a discography of the Beatles? And at the most elementary physical level, the gut-tearing sexuality of Bessie Smith is streets of experience removed from mindless lyrics of the Beatles. The reach towards the heights and depths of emotion, the search for perfection, and the need to know how and why all this was happening give way to self-immolation in the pre-adult, asexual dream world of 'I love you, I love you, I love you'. The walking transistor is only one short step removed from Ray Bradbury's fifteen-year-old nightmare (in *Fahrenheit 451*) of the transistorised receiver small enough to fit into the ear, but large enough to block out the rest of the world. (139)

This illustrates how easily an otherwise prescient anatomist of capital could be seduced by moral panic and cultural elitism – and confounded by youth. It also highlights the difficulties raised in the period by Australia's transition to popular mass-media society, and how Left intellectuals like Turner discerned political implications in youth culture's embrace of the 'society of the spectacle'.

In Casey's *Amid the Plenty*, these intellectual dilemmas are heavily marked in the novel's reconciliation between its young rebel Lenny and his working-class family; and this reconciliation hinges on banal oppositions and stereotypes. Lenny rejects the Bodgie mob after his brother-in-law Peter Forsyth has single-handedly thwarted an attempted burglary. Peter keeps Lenny's role in the affair from the family,

enforcing a contrast between the Bodgies' immorality and Peter's splendidly Australian pluck and courage. Lenny is disillusioned, but led back to social reality:

> How could he admire The Prince any more, when he had seen him muck up everything, and then run like a rat? How could he think of Knuckles as a big man, when Knuckles had been belted by Peter, and had his tail kicked, and run as fast as any, and then lied and boasted, the way he had? (137)

Lenny's Bodgie acquaintances, with their American dress, music and language, prove to be both untrue to communal working-class values and 'un-Australian': Peter embodies 'proper' Australian attitudes. Peter is the face of solid, if conservative, working-class values: Jack Mayhew views him as 'one of his own kind, with whom he could become good mates […] a decent sort, one who stood up to his responsibilities' (82); and Peter is the one sets Lenny straight about the shallowness of Bodgie subculture:

> After the showdown with Peter, Lenny lost interest in The Place and the cool cats who hung around there. And as well as starting to adjust his ideas about them, he began to look at Peter himself rather differently. He wasn't a bad bloke at all, quite the opposite of that phony bastard, Knucks. (137)

Lenny changes under Peter's tutelage; and the Bodgie's transformation is completed when his new role-model secures him a job at Jackson's store:

He got a new, austere, business-like haircut, and gave up borrowing
his brother's colourful sweater. Instead of the long loop of bodgie
key-chain, he now wore a battery of ballpoint pens in his breast
pocket, as was becoming for a business man. He dropped the jargon
of The Place in favour of the old-fashioned English language, and the
young man he had hated most suddenly became his model and the
object of his boyish worship. He knew, of course, that Peter, his
brother-in-law, was not one of the great brains of the age, was
basically less intelligent than himself or even Ted. But he was
magnificent, all the same, a man of courage and common sense,
active and useful in the world, whose conduct and attitudes were in
every way worthy of emulation. (140)

But what Australian values does Lenny admire in Peter? Lenny's delusion that he is
now almost a trainee manager provides a clue, as does his sister's ambitions. Lenny's
sister, Freda, has social aspirations and is frequently dissatisfied that her husband
Peter settles for his lot as a fitter, working for wages. She is subsequently pleased to
learn of Peter's private plan for a partnership with his wealthy factory-owning uncle
Frank; an outcome that will alleviate Peter's hard slog and improve her own status:
'She had not, until then, known that Peter had "expectations", and now she was
delighted. It more than levelled up the score between him and the white-collar boy
friends her pals at the office flaunted. It made him more wonderful than ever' (62). In
admiring Peter, Lenny is won over by values more germane to the lower-middle-class
business ethic than traditional working-class life. As Tom Dinsdale observes, the

Mayhew family might finally be awakening to the competitive new economic order: 'marketing' itself 'the way a business man has to every day' (213).

Lenny eschews the Bodgie subculture for its shallowness, 'lazy' consumerism and 'fake' camaraderie, but his alternative identification with Peter and the small-business ethic will undoubtedly diminish traditional working-class forms of resistance or struggle in him – and, perhaps, not deliver the contentment his father finds in a good day's work. After a long period of unemployment, patriarch Jack Mayhew secures a modestly paid storemen's job and stoically recommits himself to 'more years of patient work and small enjoyments, for a lifelong effort of a working animal, effort so uncomplaining and ready to accept things that often, to many people, it seemed to slow down the wheels that ran the world' (214). In the end, however, Jack Mayhew's pride that blue-collar workers like him labour to prevent the world economy's 'wheels from stopping altogether' reads like an archaic, tragic false consciousness (214).

This foregrounds fractures that trouble *Amid the Plenty*. The cracks come from Casey's determination to describe Lenny's youthful revolt by the opposition of 'authentic' working-class culture and debased mass culture – the exhausted paradigm that argues that young workers 'either successfully defended their traditional cultural autonomy or that they succumbed to the consumerism of the bourgeoisie' (Cross 264). Despite his political sympathies – and possible authorial intentions – Casey tells a more complex story in *Amid the Plenty*. The prodigal son Lenny hardly returns to a working-class fold: in his altered consciousness, different class aspirations are activated. The personification of class solidarity, his father, is blinded by old-fashioned pride in his work to the fact that the system will not cease to oppress him – no matter how he adapts to it. And the value-system of commercial culture – the

system that is at the source of Lenny's teenage disturbance – eventually becomes the sustaining fantasy for the reformed Bodgie, his sister Freda and his role-model Peter. Indeed, Lenny's situation is further complicated. The real problem confronting Lenny is not his derogation into 'harmful' forms of Americanised consumption and leisure, but the difficulties a working-class lad from a family with a low and intermittent income faces in an Americanised capitalist consumer society. And though Lenny leaves the Bodgies, rejecting their sub cultural iconography, in terms of class position and economic prospect he probably still has more in common with them than the brother-in-law he idolises.

In this regard, *Amid the Plenty*'s recourse to dichotomies is testimony to Boris Frankel's point. It is hard to identify an autonomous working-class culture that is not in itself part of a mass-produced capitalist culture, and the attempt to find such a 'pure' class entity is doomed to reductionism: 'the moment that one tries to relate history "from below" to the practices of political-economic institutions "from above", one either lapses into the rhetoric of Left or Right populism' (77).

Nick Bentley has observed that accounts of youth culture in the 50s and early 60s, particularly from New Left intellectuals and left-leaning novelists, provided an 'alternative textual space for the representation of sub-cultural identity', often at odds with trends in sociology and nascent cultural studies (81). But texts like *Boys in the Island* or *Amid the Plenty* suggest another critical perspective: they demonstrate how a Hoggartian line of 'thinking about identity' (in its British and Australian variants) persisted in the period's fictions of working-class experience. Emphasising cultural decay and moral harm, did Britain's Stan Barstow and Sid Chaplin or Australia's Christopher Koch and Gavin Casey diverge from or advance the view of post-war youth's transformations that Hoggart proposed in *Uses of Literacy*? Or did they

conform to the same critical practice: implicitly judging accounts of teenage life as they 'encountered them in the real world of the 50s' against autobiographical and anecdotal accounts of working-class life in the 30s and 40s, reverting to class nostalgia? (Bentley 70)

Many novelistic accounts of working-class youth in the 50s and 60s shared Hoggart's key concern: a culture created by commercial capital, aimed at vulnerable youth, was exploitative and inimical to class and generational agency. This resulted in a crisis of confidence. As Nick Bentley framed it, there was deep uncertainty as to whether cultural critics should 'apportion blame for rejecting older working-class culture to the youthful individuals themselves, or to the appealing superficiality of an Americanised culture to which these groups were mistakenly attracted' (69).

To ask if youth was 'politically, socially and culturally apathetic, stimulated only on a surface level by shallow consumer products that were designed to appeal to their limited powers of critical judgement' was a legitimate question. But orthodox sociologies, criminologies, psychologies and fictions on the working-class 'youth problem' relied on a simple nostrum: that 'transgressive and heterogeneous behaviour' presented 'a threat to the morals and codes of a homogeneous society'. And it was telling that 'attempts to authenticate their procedures' – by the sociologist, psychiatrist or novelist – never allayed intellectual uncertainties about what youth might express or accomplish beneath the superficial dress, music and lifestyle of the milk bar (Bentley 80).

Chapter 6

Working-class Youth Subcultures: Resistance and Exploitation

Novels written from beneath the shiny surface of youth styles – reports from underground, stamped with 'insider' authority – betrayed intellectual uncertainties of a different order. Often they hinged on an intriguing paradox: Colin MacInnes's *Absolute Beginners* (1959) in Britain, Criena Rohan's *The Delinquents* (1962) and Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* (1965) in Australia all eagerly accepted that youth subcultures were the source of new identities, less welded to traditional class alignments; but they also contained some of the darkest interpretations of the relationship between youth and the culture industries which provided the raw material for subcultural styles. Their radical depiction of youth's energy and popular culture's allure was undercut by troubled equivocations, or doubts, that youth could creatively use mass popular culture to resist or undermine the power of the dominant capitalist order that produced it.

These three novels were not just ambivalent about the advent of the teenager: they did not simply repeat the pattern of post-war books on youth that expressed Hoggartian uncertainties regarding cultural change and adolescence. Rather, they embodied the widening and opening of British and Australian debates on mass and popular culture. This openness derived from the period's 'cultural loop', where changes in media and technology ensured that commentary by those 'living the changes' had an immediate feed-back into discussions of change itself. And a significant, yet overlooked, aspect of this fluid discursive climate was that it generated

so many of the theoretical benchmarks about the workings of popular culture which later became scripture. British and Australian cultural commentary – and fiction – of the late 50s and early 60s articulated concepts which were academic commonplaces by the mid 80s: resistance, rewriting and appropriation were there in embryo.

At the same time, concerns that mass culture was inherently manipulative were taken seriously enough to generate new approaches to that old complaint as well. In fact, many local engagements with exploitation had parallels in European theoretical approaches – especially those of the Frankfurt School, which began to reach British and Australian intellectual circles in the period.

As Nick Bentley observed in 'The Young Ones: A Reassessment of the British New Left's Representations of 1950s Youth Subcultures', the extent to which the loose, but predominantly Marxist, aggregation of cultural analysts in the late 50s prefigured later theoretical directions has been ignored. A rich, diverse and often conflicted field of cultural analysis emerged; indicating that there was not the neat, and commonly assumed, linear theoretical trajectory from Williams and Hoggart, through semiotic readings of subcultures in the 70s, to the postmodernism of the 90s (66). Importantly, Bentley related this theoretical diversity to the similarly conflicted social observation in the period's fiction: theory and fiction fed each other, struggling to interpret the potentialities and problems of youth and establishing an ambiguous yet foresighted critical template that is still available today (65).

Absolute Beginners, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling* share the striking ability to hold conflicted theoretical concepts in a single textual field. They contain a duality (or ambivalence, or contradiction) towards notions of domination, manipulation, pleasure, resistance and empowerment: a deep complexity that subsequent fiction and subcultural theory flattened. It is particularly striking that

Absolute Beginners, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling* celebrate mass culture's liberating possibilities, portraying British and Australian youths 'making over' the products of Americanised culture industries to forge local identities, but also exhibit narrative cracks from which older concerns about manipulation leak out.

Frederic Jameson has observed that from the late 50s and early 60s, technological advance produced a new media-oriented culture: an historical and cultural break, he argues, that demanded a theory of contemporary mass culture anchored in 'populism'. As a consequence of mass cultural production's apparent success, this populist thinking expresses 'increasing impatience with theories of manipulation, in which a passive public submits to forms of commodification and commercially produced culture whose self-identification it endorses and interiorises as "distraction" or "entertainment"' (*Late Marxism* 141). A utopian impulse displaces concerns about exploitation or manipulation, Jameson wrote: an impulse detectable in New Left theories of the type associated with Herbert Marcuse in the 60s, postulating that commodification and the consuming desires awakened by late capitalism would eventually, and paradoxically, generate resistance to capitalism. The impulse was also evident in postmodernism's later suggestions that the elimination of borders between high and low culture by technological perfection ushered in an age of universal depoliticisation (*Late Marxism* 142). Jameson contends that at the end of the twentieth century, utopian theories of mass culture were so 'complete and virtually hegemonic' that a corrective theory of manipulation was needed: one accounting for the real transformations wrought by post-war capital (*Late Marxism* 143).

Surprisingly, in the late 50s and early 60s – the moment Jameson nominates as the 'break' – emergent populist utopian impulses still ran beside the sort of critical corrective that Jameson sees as gradually extinguished in the decades after. This

duality informed the writing of a few academic cultural analysts in Australia and Britain, and it marked fictions about working-class youth subcultures. In *Absolute Beginners*, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling* there is euphoria for new popular cultural forms and their functions as rallying points for an overdue youth rebellion. But this euphoria is undercut by residual doubts that the liberating possibilities promised by youth culture might be an illusion: merely another disguise for the operations of monopoly capitalism.

Under the late twentieth-century theoretical hegemony Jameson describes, it was difficult to question the orthodoxy that culture industries were essentially harmless. In the 50s and 60s, however, novels like MacInness' *Absolute Beginners* and Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* could still chew gum and walk at the same time. As Nick Bentley argued, *Absolute Beginners* – Britain's Book of the Year in 1959 and a runaway best-seller – was one of the era's most important texts because it offered an 'unstable and ambivalent reading of youth that reflects a contradictory response of anxiety and attraction towards the new teenage phenomenon':

> On the one hand, the novel records the potential of youth to subvert
> dominant power structures and cultural beliefs, while on the other, it
> records the appropriation and commodification of youth and its
> reliance on the economic frameworks of consumerism (76).

A first-hand observer of street life, MacInnes frequented London's jazz clubs and coffee bars, making friendships with youngsters which informed the characterisations in *Absolute Beginners* (Gould 127). According to biographer Tony Gould, MacInnes was distinguished from his literary peers: despite being more than twice the age of the

youths portrayed in *Absolute Beginners*, he was acutely aware of the social upheavals they lived. Nevertheless, the novel's view of teenagers involved contradictions on matters of class. As Gould wrote, MacInnes was convinced that 'teenagers were the "new classless class"; England's two nations were no longer the rich and poor, or even the upper and lower classes – Marx and all that was old hat, passé – but teenagers and adults (tax payers)' (127). Yet his friend Terry Taylor later revealed that despite MacInnes' family connections with the leisure class (his mother was the socialite Angela Thirkell), a genuine interest in the working class underpinned MacInnes's identification with subcultural youth: 'when the Hippies emerged, he wasn't impressed. Perhaps it was all too middle class, mystical, and shone with what he may have considered was too much artificial light. The tougher, darker, working-class white/ black hipster of the 50s/ early 60s had already claimed his empathy' (Sinfield, *Literature Politics and Culture* 169; Gould 115).

MacInnes laboured the point in his journal and newspaper writings that teenagers represented a new international class; but this obscures an important, critically less recognised dimension of *Absolute Beginners*. The novel teems with characters whose socio-economic backgrounds are working class; and like the working-class narratives of the time, it explicitly scrutinises the possibility that people from such backgrounds are seduced by culture industries – thus failing to grasp the structures of the system that produces their diminished circumstances. Although this class analysis leaks through narrative cracks, the opening pages of *Absolute Beginners* seem designed to convince readers that if there is any political outlook embodied in the book's youthful characters, it is an individualist one – a politics of identity, established according to fashion, style and musical preference rather than class, occupation or income.

The central character-narrator of *Absolute Beginners* is a late teenage photographer, known only by the sardonic moniker Blitz Baby – a reference to the time and circumstance of his birth. Photography is a convenient narrative device, allowing the protagonist the social mobility and flexibility required by MacInnes' roving analysis of youth culture. And it gives a rough plot design: the book reads at times as a gallery of snapshots of the styles, fashions, music and mores of London youth subcultures in the late 50s. The novel introduces a series of youthful figures who share Blitz Baby's slum habitat: West Indian immigrants; teenagers like the Wizard, a hustler whose appetite for quick money leads to pimping; The Misery Kid and Dean Swift, whose subcultural identities are forged completely by their competing musical interests; and his former girlfriend, Suze, whose promiscuity is barely above prostitution. At the same time, via the hero's (sometimes pornographic) photographic engagements, the book introduces adult entities in business, media and politics, whose interests intersect with youth and inevitably raise questions about exploitation.

MacInnes often stated his belief that by the late 50s, with whole industries geared to their needs, teenagers called the tune in up-keeping their new economic status; and he was not alone in emphasising the part consumption played in the way youth behaved and thought of itself. But he differed from most social commentators in his convictions that teenagers were more mature for their age than previous generations, and that just as they were classless they 'scorned national boundaries and were, in effect, an international movement' (Gould 127). MacInnes also believed that the integrity, vitality and creativity of youth came from its social animus; and the teen hero of *Absolute Beginners*, paradoxically, is part of a community because he is an outsider:

> To have a job like mine means that I don't belong to the great
> community of the mugs; the vast majority of squares who are
> exploited […] being a mug or a non-mug is a thing that splits
> humanity up into two sections absolutely. It's nothing to do with age
> or sex or class or colour – either you're born a mug or born a non-
> mug, and me, I sincerely trust I'm born the latter (17).

This sense of self, grounded in refusal, implies a rejection of traditional social and political affiliations. The notion that youth has disengaged from mainstream political processes is firmly established in the teen hero's first exchange with Mickey Pondoroso, an American diplomat who he meets on a photo assignment. Mickey P's interest in British politics is both irritating and irrelevant to Blitz Baby: 'whoever is working out my destinies, you can be sure it's not those parliamentary numbers' (25). In fact, it was the teen's estimation that even the nuclear threat is of little interest to anyone in the world under twenty. The only thing which united young people anywhere now is knowing what it means to be young: 'believe me, Mr Pondoroso, youth is international, just like old age is' (26). And this new generation is so radically new that Blitz Baby's half-brother Vernon, only a few years older, has an entirely different cultural vocabulary:

> The trouble with Vernon, really, as I've said, is that he's one of the
> last of the generations that grew up before teenagers existed: in fact,
> he never seems to have been an absolute beginner at any time at all.
> Even today […] there are some like him […] kids of the right age

> […] that I wouldn't describe as teenagers: I mean not kiddos who dig
>
> the teenage *thing*, or are it. But in poor Vernon's era, the sad slob,
>
> there just weren't *any*: can you believe it? Not any authentic
>
> teenagers at all. (36)

Blitz Baby's brother is particularly piqued by the new teenage wardrobe, and the fact that his clothes disgust Vernon is Blitz Baby's generational badge of honour:

> I had on precisely my full teenage drag that would enrage him – the
>
> grey pointed alligator casuals, the pink neon pair of ankle crêpe
>
> nylon-stretch, my Cambridge blue glove-fit jeans, a vertical-striped
>
> happy shirt revealing my lucky neck-charm on its chain, and the
>
> Roman-cut short-arse jacket just referred to […] not to mention my
>
> wrist identity jewel, and my Spartan warrior hair-do. (32)

In contrast to Vernon's continuities with his parent's world, most obvious in Vern's clothing, Blitz Baby and his acquaintances are defined by a variety of coexisting styles. In *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes 'fell over himself' to picture them in loving detail, conveying how the hero's attitude to the world is formed largely by his acceptance of stylistic plurality. And commitment to style signifies the refusal of traditional interests in party politics, the royal family or the Cold War (Sinfield, *Literature Politics and Culture* 169).

Blitz Baby's friends Dean Swift and the Misery Kid are also distinguished by their individual fashions, affected mannerisms, and dedication to different styles of jazz. Dean is 'a sharp modern creation'; the Kid 'just a skiffle survival, with horrible

leanings to the trad thing' (62). Knowing the contemporary scene, Blitz Baby can discriminate them at once, 'just like you could a soldier or sailor, with their separate uniforms'. The Misery Kid has 'long, brushless hair, white stiff-starched collar (rather grubby), striped shirt, tie of all one colour […] short jacket but an old one […] very, very tight, tight, trousers with wide stripe, no sox, short *boots*'. Dean is the modernist version – 'college-boy smooth crop hair with burned-in parting, neat white Italian round-collared shirt, short Roman jacket *very* tailored…pointed-toed shoes, and a white mac lying folded by his side, compared with Misery's sausage-rolled umbrella' (62). Although Blitz Baby's childhood acquaintance Ed the Ted abandons his full Teddy Boy uniform of velvet-lined frock-coat, bootlace tie and four-inch solid corridor-creepers, he too is still identifiable with that anachronistic group ('they've all moved out of London to the suburbs') by his 'insanitary hair-do, creamy curls falling all over his one-inch forehead, and his drainpipes that last saw the inside of a cleaners in the Attlee era' (42-43). It is crucial that *Absolute Beginners*' central character sees no need to choose between styles: attributing an innate democracy and classlessness to this subcultural brew, in stark contrast to the 'straight-jacketed' conventional world of work and politics.

Music, however, is the real basis of Blitz Baby's commitment to democratised humanity. Music transcends older class divides, affirming youthful cultural democracy in action (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 169). But there is one significant fixed point in this stylistic fluidity: the musical reference points in *Absolute Beginners* are almost exclusively American. Blitz Baby's musical heroes include Billie Holiday, The Modern Jazz Quartet, and Charlie Parker. And in the latter half of the novel, when strife brews in London between racist white youths and young West Indian immigrants, Blitz Baby's attendance at a jazz concert where a multi-

racial band backed visiting American singer Maria Bethlehem – (a pseudonym for Ella Fitzgerald, since she was 'second to a great like Lady Day', and 'the world's best female jazz singer that there is') – is a metaphoric dream of racial accord (162-163). This exemplifies the utopian promises of American cultural forms; and for MacInnes' principal teenager, jazz is superior social glue to the conventional class-cement of work, neighbourhood, trades unions and party politics:

> The great thing about the jazz world, and all the kids that enter into it, is that no one, not a soul, cares what your class is, or what your race is, or what your income, or if you're a boy, or girl, or bent, or versatile, or what you are – so long as you dig the scene and can behave yourself, and have left all that crap behind you, too, when you come in the jazz club door […] in the jazz world, you meet all kinds of cats, on absolutely equal terms, who can clue you up in all kinds of directions, in culture directions, in sexual directions, and in racial directions […] almost anywhere, really, you want to go to learn. (61)

But *Absolute Beginners* always undercuts this utopianism with counterbalancing doubts about whether a youthful revolt that pivots on the consumption of imported cultural product can translate into an organised movement. The book is shaded with aimlessness and frustration. Blitz Baby believes that 'youth has power, a kind of divine power straight from mother nature. All the old tax-payers know of this' and it moves them to Freudian fury at youth: 'the poor old sordids recollect their own glorious teenage days' and 'they are so jealous of us'. But he remains unconvinced that the consciousness of youth is raised enough to capitalise on its putative power:

'As for the boys and girls, the dear young absolute beginners, I sometimes feel that if they only knew this fact, this very simple fact, namely how powerful they are, then they could rise up and enslave the old tax-payers, the whole damn lot of them' (14). There is a nagging suspicion that any self-styled leader of youth subculture realises the improbability of this, and 'that makes him so sour, like a general with lost troops he can't lead into battle' (14). As MacInnes implied, it was difficult to see a youth revolution based on subcultural spectacle practically proceeding in Britain. This lends poignancy to Blitz Baby's effusive recognition that 'Frankie S.' – Frank Sinatra – 'was, in his way, the very first teenager' (52). In the end, the godfather of the teenage movement was simply a great avatar of America's culture industry.

Nevertheless, by the late 50s, the notoriety attracted by flamboyant subcultures and styles at least made it seem like there *was* a self-sufficient international youth movement. In Australia, this found literary expression in fictions about working-class youth that closely echoed a theme of *Absolute Beginners*: subculture 'cut you free from other allegiances'. It was also testimony to the power and international reach of American cultural influences that when this literary theme was taken up at roughly the same time in Australia, it was parcelled with the idea that imported American music and its associated styles were such key ingredients of youth identity, and to absorb it was a legitimate alternative education.

In his afterword to a revised edition of Criena Rohan's *The Delinquents*, Barret Reid observed that the background of imported American music, rock 'n' roll, was a crucial part of its portrayal of youthful rebellion. And while Australia's Bodgies and Widgies did not replicate exactly any subcultural types MacInnes described in late 50s London, they nevertheless performed the same function in *The Delinquents* – promoting the vision of youth culture as a phenomenon separate from other worlds.

Like the teen hero in *Absolute Beginners*, the central characters in Rohan's novel experience family life as stultifying, and traditional paths to adulthood as thoroughly odious. In Australia, as in Britain, the excitement surrounding post-war popular culture – particularly those American forms pushing the idea of teen rebellion – was instrumental in exposing youth to the idea that adult institutions (marriage, work, politics) were a set of apparatuses dominating youth on the grounds of an adult jealousy: the fact that youth was young.

The Delinquents follows teenage lovers Lola Lovett and Brownie Hansen, as they elope from rural Bundaberg in the late 50s. This primal rebellion against adult control sets the tone for a story woven around Lola's rough handling by a succession of authority figures, all intent on thwarting her independence. Separated from Brownie and surviving a back-yard abortion obtained at her mother's insistence, Lola migrates to live among the runaways, drunks, working poor and prostitutes in the low-rent inner suburbs of Sydney and Brisbane. A series of often brutal encounters with welfare services ensues, before the reunited teens set up house with a like-minded Bodgie couple.

Like MacInness' 'absolute beginners', teenage Lola and Brownie do not 'belong with the mugs'. They are disinclined to suppress youthful energy and sexuality, and the notion of 'fitting in' with the staid institutions maintained by adults is anathema:

> Do the social workers and clergymen, well meaning though they be,
> really think youth clubs, organized sport, fretwork classes are of any
> use? Come now! Lola had no faith in the Boy Scouts, the young
> Liberal Movement, choir practice, the Junior Chamber of Commerce,

cold showers […] or these healthy outside interests they're always

talking about. (18)

Her mother imagines Lola transcending her modest background; having a career and

marrying perhaps a 'lawyer, a bank manager – a man who wore a public school tie'

(19); but Lola despises these social fantasises and aspirations. Her mother talks of the

day she will be a nurse, private secretary or doctor's receptionist: Lola dreams she

will be a dancer or travel in a carnival (19). These dreams are unrealised, but Lola is

drawn to a subculture of an equally spectacular type, where the dancing is uninhibited.

Detained for twelve months in the Jacaranda Flats Girls' Corrective School for

vagrancy, Lola longs for the freedom that rock music represents – a self-possession

defying the controlling social workers:

> The vocational guidance officer had asked her would she like to take
>
> up dressmaking, or a commercial course, or nursing or hair dressing
>
> or weaving. Lola had said she wanted to learn the guitar and the
>
> vocational guidance officer had given her a long spiel about how she
>
> should try to break away from the rock and roll crowd, and Lola had
>
> not listened. (84)

When Brownie and Lola are reunited in Brisbane's West End, they establish ties with

Bodgie fellow-travellers Lyle and Mavis: ties bound round a common 'outsider'

image. That image is built on adopted American music and fashion styles: the

immediate interface for teen outsiders in sub-tropical Brisbane in *The Delinquents* and

London slum-dwellers in *Absolute Beginners*.

Press reports at the time showed that urban, working-class Australian youngsters adopted American styles with the same gusto as their British contemporaries; and there was keen Australian interest in British developments among commentators whose cultural 'domino theory' made them anxious that Australian youth believed that style and attitude *really did* separate, or alienate, it from mainstream adult society. In 1957, two articles by a British correspondent for Brisbane's *Courier Mail*, titled 'The Troubled World of Youth', drew on the moral panic surrounding rock music and Teddy Boys in Britain to warn of the outcomes if the same subcultural identification became widespread in Australia. It was a 'black picture' in which decent young people might be driven from their native land by a sense of despair – but 'The Troubled World of Youth' also reminded Brisbanites that there was a solidly respectable 'youth' who the headlines forgot:

> They are pale, these young [Teddy Boy] East End Londoners, from lack of sunshine, lack of fresh air [….] This is a black picture. But, of course, only a section of London's youth are Teddy Boys. In this huge city you probably would find as many young people who love Beethoven as love Rock 'n' Roll. Many of these serious minded young people, coming to London from provincial homes, live in tiny, rented rooms, cooking meals over gas rings, perched near their beds, pushing pennies and shilling pieces into meters to get a little heating for hot water. They work hard, study hard, and save hard, except for tickets, maybe two or three nights weekly, to West End plays, ballets and musical recitals. It is these gentle, friendly young Londoners who seem to worry most about their nation's future, who ponder the rights

and wrongs of migrating to new, energetic lands. A young man who

wanted to marry and then take his bride to Australia, told me: 'It

sounds unpatriotic, but this country is finished. We reached our

natural limits many years ago. From now on we go down hill.' (2)

The Delinquents' Bodgie couple, Lyle and Mavis, are British migrants, but motivated

by a different temper and aspiration to the young man in 'Troubled World of Youth'.

Mavis migrates to escape a neglectful widowed mother and a guaranteed future as a

factory hand. Lyle's move is an escape from his family's semi-poverty in Newcastle

(115-116). Lyle and Mavis know that Britain is not going 'down hill' because of

cultural or moral decay: economic hardship and the blockage of youth's desires and

opportunities is the cause. In Australia, however, the couple finds familiar forces at

work.

Australia's 'dislike of migrants' – their labelling as outsiders – encourages

Lyle and Mavis to defiantly intensify their 'deviance' and inhabit an exaggerated

territory of marginalization (116). They experience the same stultifying conformity in

Australia as in Britain – an anti-youth society; and they react by adopting the dress

codes and mannerisms of Australia's most notorious young outsiders of the 50s and

early 60s, the Bodgies and Widgies. *The Delinquents* describes Lyle's response to

public disgust: 'no stimulation except the stimulation of disapproval – the locals

looking with intolerant amusement at his pegged trousers and duck-tail haircut. Well,

at least that was something. He went out and bought a black shirt and a motor bike'

(117). As with the London teens in *Absolute Beginners*, though, camaraderie among

The Delinquents' outcasts often means little more than sharing a night-spot and music.

The coffee at Dan's was terrible, but they 'liked the colour scheme of blue and

yellow, the juke box jumping out of its rhythmic de-celebration', the 'company of their own kind' (152). And while the milk bar is largely the Australian substitute for London coffee bars, the 'American strains of *Rock Around the Clock*, *St. Louis Blues, My Baby Rocks Me with a Steady Roll*, *My Boy Flat Top* etc.' are the soundtrack in both (117-118).

In every respect, this is a milieu depicted in the only other Australian novel in the period comparable for the quality of its 'insider' depictions of youth sub-cultural life, Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling*. And Mudroroo's book also extols a 'utopian sub-cultural discourse', working against the codes of dominant society from the margins, symbolised by American musical and cultural forms (Bentley 78). Strikingly, too, *Wild Cat Falling* recalls the famous 'Juke-Box Boys' section in Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*, but from the other side:

> I look through the window of the lighted milk-bar and the familiar surroundings glow a 'Welcome Home' to me. This joint is the meeting place of the bodgie-widgie mob. Here they all are – the anti-socials, the misfits, the delinks, in a common defiance of the squares. The juke-box, a mass of metal, lights and glass, commands the room, squat god worshipped and fed by footloose youth to fill their empty world with the drug-delusion of romance. It flashes me a sarcastic grin and blares a Rock 'n' Roll hullo. I'm back and the gang crowds round – the boys in peacock-gaudy long coats and narrow pants, the girls casual in dowdy-dark jeans and sloppy sweaters. (55)

Descriptive similarities between *Wild Cat Falling* and *The Delinquents* are unsurprising. As Mary Durack revealed in a foreword to *Wild Cat Falling*, Mudrooroo met Criena Rohan after moving to Melbourne from Perth at the start of the 60s, and regarded her as a mentor (xxiv). Furthermore, in an interview with Uli Beier (under his birth name of Colin Johnson), Mudrooroo confirmed that the beatniks he mixed with in Melbourne included Criena Rohan's father Leo Cash (70). Mudrooroo's account of Australian youth subculture, with its sometimes journalistic style and characterisations drawn from life, had the 'authenticity' and intimacy with young 'outsiders' that both MacInness and Rohan achieved by digging into their own experiences. And that experience was drenched with imported style: as Mudrooroo wrote to Mary Durack around 1960, 'unfortunately…I feel very detached from what they call "The Australian Way of Life". Australianisms seem false and meaningless to me – "fair dinkum" they do, but I "dig" the beatnik jargon. It comes naturally' (xxii).

Through a series of flashbacks, *Wild Cat Falling* charts the alienation of its unnamed central character, beginning with his earliest encounters with the juvenile justice system as a youngster in a fringe Aboriginal community, through jail and his involvement with a Bodgie group. It is a tale of multiple marginalisations: of Aboriginal youth, the youthful offender, and Bodgie youth. *Wild Cat Falling*'s critical heritage is complicated by troubling questions: whether it is the first Australian Aboriginal novel, if Mudrooroo's claim to Aboriginality is legitimate. Recently, Maureen Clarke's 'Mudrooroo: Crafty Impostor or Rebel with a Cause?' (2004) revisited these debates, usefully suggesting that it might be more productive to concentrate on the writing itself – on the fact that Mudrooroo told a 'great yarn' about rebellious youth, which along the way also made a significant contribution to Australian literature, and to the development of a genre of Aboriginal writing (109).

Furthermore, and notwithstanding *Wild Cat Falling*'s unmistakable message about Aboriginal injustice, Greg Hughes correctly asserts the novel's debt to existentialist influences – Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Albert Camus' *The Outsider*, Beats like Jack Kerouac – rather than to an 'Aboriginal' aesthetic (119). And as Stephen Muecke points out, snapshots of the subcultures of the late 50s and early 60s, the language and style of the milk-bar Bodgie, distinguishes *Wild Cat Falling* from any Australian novel except Rohan's *Delinquents* (xi).

A letter from Mudrooroo at the time he was writing his first novel revealed how much the existential weariness of the central character in *Wild Cat Falling* was an explicit reflection of the author's own feelings of alienation:

Can't stand the middle class, the workers, or the Beatniks any more. Went to a working-class party and drank and nothing else. Was flung out of a lower middle-class party for sneering. Went to a Beatnik party and drank a bit and talked, which was somewhat better […] I have now taken up learning the guitar, the first really new interest I have had in ages. (Durack, 'Foreword' xxiv)

This letter seems to the abandonment of class as a meaningful experiential category. Yet if older conceptions of class seemed passé to Mudrooroo, Rohan and MacInnes, there was an abiding contradiction in *Wild Cat Falling*, *The Delinquents* and *Absolute Beginners* alike: while their heroes claimed youth subculture made them an 'anti-class', their working-class origins were continually stressed.

While the complications cannot be ignored in *Wild Cat Falling*, 'working-class' is an apt descriptor for the central character's community: the locals are mostly

seasonal workers who 'picked apples, dug spuds and odd-jobbed at harvest and shearing time', his mother's lover is a white wood-cutter earning just a 'decent enough crust' to supplement his mother's deserted wife's pension (9-10). And the prison experiences of *Wild Cat's* delinquent youth show rigidities of social class enforced behind bars: 'screws the contemptible masters, tough cons the bosses next in line, stool pigeons the outcasts. The rest a formless mass, neither big nor small, only there' (5).

In *The Delinquents*, Brownie Hansen's estranged father is a railway fettler, while his mother's latest lover is a pest exterminator (7-11). Lola Lovell's cash-strapped mother works as drink-waitress in a South Brisbane hotel to pay for her daughter's abortion (44). Brownie had become a merchant seaman, an option still not uncommon in the 50s for working-class lads with otherwise limited prospects, while Lola occasionally works as a shop assistant. Brownie and Lola's Bodgie friends, Lyle and Mavis, are from similar working-class backgrounds in Britain – Mavis's mother a factory hand, Lyle forced to work when he reached school-leaving age (115). Irrespective of any intended irony, only someone like Mavis, with a background among the working poor, could be so oddly over-enthusiastic about Lyle's 'fabulous new job in the Cold Storage' (133).

MacInness's 'absolute beginner', Blitz Baby, rejects his brother Vernon's jibe that his dubious occupation and Mod dress codes and lifestyle are a rejection of the working classes that he and Vern sprung from. For Blitz Baby, class was just no longer relevant: 'I do not reject the working classes, and I do *not* belong to the upper classes, for one and the simple reason, namely, that neither of them interest me in the slightest, never have done, never will do' (38). He escapes a household where his father and brother lay about, supported by his mother taking in boarders. Yet the

young Mod is proud of his economically depressed 'London Napoli' slum suburb, with its 'huge houses too tall for their width cut up into twenty flatlets, and front facades that it never pays any one to paint, and broken milk bottles *everywhere* scattering the cracked asphalt roads like snow, and cars parked in the streets looking as if they're stolen or abandoned' (47). For all his talk of classlessness, Blitz Baby invokes it at key moments: for example, he tries to convince his former girlfriend not to marry the effete businessman Henley on the basis of Suzette's working-class affinities. The teen hero makes a clear class distinction when Henley claims that he, too, is really working class because his father was a butler: '"A butler", I told him, "is *not* working class. No disrespect to your old Dad, but he's a flunkey"' (90). The roll call of Blitz Baby's slum acquaintances reveals that they *are* workers, though not always conventionally so: Suzette works in a fashion house; the Fabulous Hoplite is a former 'male whore's male maid' who now acts as a contact for gossip columnists; Jill serves behind the counter of a nightclub.

In *Absolute Beginners*, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling* remain socialised as working-class in a structured class society – though actual descriptions of work are scant. It is as if subcultural youth really lives through the spectacles of the popular – music, movies, fashion; and as if the spectacular forms of pop culture can be quarantined from 'culture' as 'a whole', and economic, 'way of life'. This highlights an important question in all three novels: to what extent did the main characters, and their new patterns of consumption and adopted style, represent resistance and a challenge to the dominant structures of class and capital? In *Absolute Beginners* this 'disruption' (as Sinfield terms it) leads MacInnes to anticipate the 'fallacy of classlessness'; but this anticipation is not an open admission and involves MacInnes in suppressions and distortions. *Absolute Beginners*' teen hero fraternises

with diverse and extraordinary people in the hip scene, for example: though MacInnes knew first-hand that genuinely working-class youth had little or no access to hipster circles (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 170). In this regard, the novel presumes that if youth listens to rock music or jazz, 'dressed snappily and stayed cool', it need not obey the traditional dictations of working-class identity.

The problem with this presumption, Sinfield argues, is that subculture represents a response to class – not an alternative to it (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 170). Sinfield reasons that the resistances associated with youth subcultures should be reconceptualised as 'ways of coping' – ways of retaining 'a degree of collective identity and individual self-esteem' in response to the frustration felt by people at the wrong end of prevailing relations of production. From this perspective, subcultural resistances seem not only less coherent but also illusory (*Literature, Politics and Culture* 153). Sinfield issues a timely reminder, too, that production has always been one of the keys to understanding popular culture; and in this regard *Absolute Beginners*, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling* exhibit narrative cracks through which the spectres of production and the culture industries emerge.

The cultural commodities and styles adopted by youth in *Absolute Beginners*, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling*, formative of subcultural identities, are all commercially sourced and promoted – as products are in the capitalist mode of production. As youth subcultures developed in the 50s and early 60s, commercial and media involvement in them became more integral and blatant in western countries (Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture* 177). Consequently, and with some subtlety, *Absolute Beginners*, *The Delinquents* and *Wild Cat Falling* recognised the dilemma that youth subcultures were an aspect of the way consumption *and*

production were structurally interrelated and organised. The three novels were not simple-minded fantasies of resistance and utopianism: they could celebrate youth's adoption of imported culture as a means of expression which overrode old class considerations, but they sounded a dissonant chord about the persistence of power and control.

The vigour with which MacInnes pushed notions of adaptability and the capacity for finding personal liberations in mass culture made his reputation as a cultural commentator – in the media and amongst British intellectuals. And indeed, as Bentley notes, MacInnes' focus on subcultural style and his belief that it signified a radical aesthetic was close to Dick Hebdige's later readings of the radical potential of youth, seen through the prism of postmodernism (77). In *Hiding in the Light*, Hebdige discerned that the changes in tastes and patterns of consumption in the 50s and 60s in Britain were particularly associated with working-class and youth 'intrusion into the sphere of "conspicuous consumption"', and that this intrusion crucially centred on objects, environments and styles either imported from America or styled on American models. But Hebdige proceeded to argue that 'there was little evidence to suggest that the eradication of social and cultural differences imputed to these developments by a generation of cultural critics had taken place at least in the form they predicted'. Rather:

> American popular culture – Hollywood films, advertising images,
> packaging, clothes and music – offers a rich iconography, a set of
> symbols, objects and artefacts which can be assembled and re-
> assembled by different groups in a literally limitless number of
> combinations. And the meaning of each selection is transformed as

individual objects – jeans, rock records, Tony Curtis hair styles, bobby socks etc., – are taken out of their original historical and cultural contexts and juxtaposed against other signs from other sources […] An attempt at imposition and control, as a symbolic act of self-removal – a step away from a society which could offer little more than the knowledge that 'the fix is in and all that work does is to keep you afloat at the place you were born into.' (73-74)

In the final chapter of *Consuming Passions*, Judith Williamson provided a precise account of how the Hebdige line on popular culture developed – and what it overlooked. Williamson noted the manner in which long-standing concerns about the pernicious effects of popular culture and consumption were given new life by the social transformations of the 50s; and how these fears were gradually jettisoned to accommodate a set of ideas about the politics of consumption that, by the mid 80s, represented orthodoxy:

Ever since Richard Hoggart's attempt to grapple with the 'consumerization' of the working class in *The Uses of Literacy*, the politics of consumption have been on the agenda for the left in some form or another […] but as a progressive trend – for example in studies of fashion and sub-cultural activities where commodities or styles can be 'subverted' into rebellious statements. The extreme form of this is found in the academic idea of 'postmodernism' where, because no meanings are fixed and anything can be used to mean

anything else, one can claim as radical almost anything provided it is

taken out of its original context. (229)

But the original context of any *product*, Williamson pointed out, is *production*. Theory increasingly forgot the fact that people who bought things capitalist consumer society offered also made them; and if there was one feature shared by Hoggart, 'whose argument was limited to the sphere of leisure and domestic culture, and the cultural studies post-punk stylists, whose concern is with the meanings of consumerism alone', Williamson wrote, it was silence on the relationship of production and consumption. Indeed, 'Marx chose to commence his great study of the capitalist system with – the commodity; not because of its economic role alone, but because of what it *means*'. Williamson lamented that even Left theory collaborated in the idea that the 'conscious, chosen meaning in most people's lives comes much more from what they consume than what they produce [….] all the things that we buy involve decisions and the exercise of our own judgement, choice, "taste"' (229-230). As a result, the Left found struggles over meaning in street style more riveting than a consideration of who controlled production, and 'it is precisely the *illusion* of autonomy which makes consumerism such an effective diversion from the lack of other kinds of power in people's lives […] the realm of the "superstructure" is, for consumers and Marxists alike, a much more fun place to be' (233).

These developments in consumption theory were prefigured by Colin MacInnes in the late 50s. In a 1958 essay, 'The Pied Piper from Bermondsey', MacInnes explained the creation of home-grown British pop stars like Tommy Steele. Issues like the production of music as commerce and mimicry of America were sidelined as MacInnes celebrated the play of creative consumption. He briefly

acknowledged that 'American musical idioms, potently diffused by the cinema, radio, the gramophone and now TV, have swamped our own ditties with the help, above all, of the shared language of the lyrics', but he clung to the belief that local savvy would indigenise the product:

> The most admired singers in this style, very naturally, have been Americans; and the recent change has come about because English singers have mastered the American idiom so completely that an artist like Lonnie Donnegan, for instance, is as big a success in America as he is here. Even the skiffle singers – a thoroughly English phenomenon – use mostly transatlantic ballads. The battle for a place among the top twenty has been won by British singers at the cost of splitting their personalities and becoming bi-lingual: speaking American at the recording session, and English in the pub around the corner afterwards. (*England*, *Half English* 14)

And prefiguring the 'irony' often associated with postmodern theories of pleasure in consumption, MacInnes concluded that teen fans of this new, hybrid musical culture were *not* Americanised by it – they were self-conscious, resistant, and had agency: 'the kids have transformed this influence into something of their own […] in a way that suggests, subtly, that they're almost *amused* by what has influenced them' (56).

The conundrum of Americanisation and popular culture punctuated MacInnes's fiction as well. Mirroring the ambivalence that MacInnes' essays admitted, the teen hero of *Absolute Beginners*' defines his stance on American cultural influences in convoluted arguments:

I want English kids to be English kids, not West Ken Yanks and

bogus imitation Americans [but] that doesn't mean I'm anti the whole

thing [...] I'm starting up an anti-anti-American movement, because I

just despise the hatred and jealousy of Yanks there is around, and I

think it's a pure sign of defeat and weakness. (52)

MacInnes was not alone at the time in romantically connecting the explosion of youth 'reworking' American popular music with class emancipation. Even Richard Hoggart, so often identified as the arch pessimist on Americanised mass culture, conceded in an interview with John Corner in the early 90s that he had been optimistic (if briefly) that early 60s British incarnations of basically American music had the potential to be the basis for a new 'peoples' music' (143). Writing in 1965, Kenneth Allsop also noted that the manner with which working-class youth had taken to making as well as consuming pop music represented the British working class breaking its subservient shackles of subservience – as if a horde of tough, slightly hostile types reminiscent of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*' Arthur Seaton had suddenly infiltrated the entertainment industry. There were no staggering structural changes in the business, Allsop admitted, but the narrative of 'the plumber's mate who bought himself an electric guitar' and ended up famous was powerful enough to disguise that fact. Like MacInnes, Allsop saw the new generational energy released through mass culture in terms of its class levelling possibilities: 'it would be too much to say that there is a fusion, but the 18-year-old who has breezed in and taken over Britain's pop entertainment has abandoned, if not his class, the old limitations of class' (34).

However, just as American influences behind much of the so-called youth revolution were truly international in reach, British defences of mass popular culture

were replicated to varying degrees in all western countries by the late 50s and early 60s, including Australia. And as in Britain, there were early glimpses of a view which would also become common in Australian cultural studies later: that American influences could be 'made over', appropriated and 'Australianised' in a creative and even resistant way.

In 1960, Max Harris's article about youth and pop culture, 'Cat's Own World', rolled out arguments that later congealed in cultural studies. Harris opined that Dr Leonie Kramer's criticism of one of Australia's first popular music television shows, 'Six O'Clock Rock', was typical in its 'tight-lipped and implacable hostility' of the period's unsympathetic insight into teenage mores (10). The influence of rock'n'roll was not to be feared, wrote Harris, if its intrinsic potential for transmutation was recognised. The bastard origins of rock and skiffle in American country music and blues meant they were cultural forms which lent themselves to local adaptation; as an example, Harris lauded the skiffle influence in his namesake Rolf's send-up of '"Bulletin" bush-whackery' in "Tie Me Kangaroo"' (11).

Craig McGregor suggested the same in the 60s: 'since the history of Australian culture is the history of a series of derivations; what is more important is what use has been made of the borrowings'. McGregor knew that most pop music, in particular, was imported from America or Britain, and that Australians were largely consumers of that form rather than creators (*Profile of Australia* 146). Yet he remained certain that resistance to American dominance in commercial, mass-produced, popular culture was expressed through adaptation, modification and the 'amusement' MacInnes noted in Britain: 'beneath the slick, American-style surface of cigarette ads, breakfast cereals, quiz shows, Westerns, trade-ins, and car "barganzas" a rich and sardonic popular consciousness still operates' (*Profile of Australia* 148).

Forty years later, McGregor still maintained that although American cultural forms were so truly *international* they could be readily and creatively localised: the issue was really that of 'make-over' rather than 'take-over' ('Growing up Uncool' 95).

In Britain, in writers like MacInnes, and in the work of Australian critics such as Harris and McGregor, much of subsequent cultural studies theories of the popular, resistance and liberation was articulated in the late 50s and early 60s. And the period's views on local agency and cultural 'make over' had a long after-life: in Britain, Hebdige's work on Americanisation and cultural hybridisation in the 80s revived them; in Australia, Philip and Roger Bell's *Americanization and Australia* appeared in the late 90s, adding little to the line. To the Bells, 'what is labelled "American" is also contextually cross-cultural/international and embedded in global cultural movements', and Americanisation was correctly conceptualised as 'creolisation': like 'linguistic infiltration' it 'does not so much replace or displace the local lexicon as supplement it and change its elements' (10-11).

Back in the 60s, however, McGregor's *Profile of Australia* had touched on the other side of this idealism, inadvertently tapping a weakness in the 'resistance through style' argument. The book identified a range of products – cigarettes, breakfast cereals, quiz shows, Westerns, cars – unwittingly suggesting that Americanisation might well mean Australia's inculcation into a particular economic system and its modes of consumption: a process enacted by industries which commodified 'culture' as a major currency. In the late 50s and early 60s, even the enthusiasts of 'revolt through style', such as McGregor, could not completely evade the possibility that irrespective of localisation, Americanisation was centrally tied to a process in which 'culture' was increasingly redefined and implicated in the targeted production and distribution of a range of consumer items, and he had named them. This showed how

thinking on mass culture was on the cusp in the late 50s and early 60s: reservations about the consumer boom were not yet submerged by theories of 'struggle in style', and writers and critics in the period could at least allude to the basic economic point that 'style' was produced by an industrial system.

In the 50s and 60s, observations of the connection between cultural form and economy slipped obliquely into Australian and British academic and journalistic cultural commentary: into writings that in other respects portrayed Americanisation as a superficial or superstructural phenomenon, a harmless provision of cultural materials ready for local 'make over'. This 'sideways' critique also haunted fictions depicting working-class youth's interactions with mass culture in liberationist terms.

In Rohan's *Delinquents*, for example, the positive portrayal of youth's 'revolt into style' is precisely disrupted by the issue of consumption. Teenage runaway Lola is detained by welfare services and placed in the care of its most notorious disciplinarian, Aunt Westbury. Westbury measures the progress and success of her youthful charges by their middle-class aspirations and hunger for the latest household consumer goods: frumpy Isobel is paraded as one of Westbury's triumphs because 'now she has her own home and everything a woman could desire, electric stove and wall to wall carpets, and her husband has his own carrying business' (90). For young would-be Widgie Lola, Aunt Westbury's carping about Isobel's materialism provokes a naïve mass society critique – a sarcastic commentary on life dominated by dreams of consumption:

We can't all go on the streets as you so quaintly put it, and you've got

your nice kitchen to make up for it. You know the nice kitchen with

the rubber-backed lino and the electric stove with the thermostat and

the mixmaster, the thousand-unit fridge, which makes such beaut ice-cream, the Hoover and the washing-machine and the built-in laminex-covered wireless so that you can listen to your serials in the morning and everything. (97-98)

Lola, Brownie, Lyle and Mavis' rented digs – weather-board Queensland equivalents of the London slum tenements occupied by *Absolute Beginners*' young rebels – are far from the gadget-rich Australian suburban dream home: where Bodgies and Widgies live, intermittent water supplies and lack of sewerage are the norm (133). But the Bodgies and Widgies *are* consumers: their meagre disposable incomes buy the emblems of style. The record player and music collection that blasts the neighbourhood are obtained on hire purchase – like a suburbanite's mixmaster (114); Lyle's motor-bike is an impulse buy, inspired by the image of Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. And when the couples step out to Dan's, a notorious Bodgie hangout raided regularly by the police, they crave Coca-Cola, burgers and American music on the juke-box. On a night out, 'the look' must be just right: Lola and Mavis in gala attire, 'scene stealers in any Bodgie's book' with 'spreading skirts and high-heeled scuffs […] tight velvet slacks with pegged cuffs' (152-153). Next morning, however, Lyle returns to the 'square' world and job in the cold storage depot; Brownie goes to work as deckhand on a Brisbane River barge. If the novel privileges glittering descriptions of subcultural leisure over detailed accounts of work, it does not erase the issue of work altogether. Indeed, *The Delinquents* reluctantly acknowledges the connectedness of leisure and work: ultimately, the accoutrements of subcultural styles are consumer commodities paid for by working-class labour. For all their outrageous self-display, *The Delinquents*' main characters are not so far from their staid working-class peers:

they are workers and consumers. This is a significant fracture in Rohan's narrative of teen rebellion; a crack in the myth of youth's capacity to oppose a dominant socio-economic order.

Wild Cat Falling was caustic on this point. Writing the book, Mudrooroo was immersed in the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre, Camus, Beckett and the American Beats: a passion reflected in the novel's narrative flavour, unmotivated characters and specific incidents (Beier 71). Marking time as he waits to meet a bohemian university crew, the protagonist randomly opens *Waiting for Godot* in the university bookshop – finding that it instantly speaks to his own life; in a key episode at the end of *Wild Cat*, clearly indebted to Camus' *The Outsider*, he shoots a policeman. Above all, however, existentialism affords Mudrooroo a position to comment on the structure of the social world that produces callous indifference (Muecke x).

In *Wild Cat Falling*, the central character's first impression of the middle-class university crowd is that it is vastly different from his working-class Bodgie milieu: jazz, classical music, men with beards, dark-rimmed spectacles and corduroys, girls with casual slacks and jumpers (69). They endlessly talk about life rather than living it, and *Wild Cat's* Bodgie protagonist scorns their cerebral vacuity. He plays the trickster, parodying and punctuating their aesthetic pretension. Looking at a painting on a coffee shop wall, he knows how to sucker their attention – 'This art jargon is a pushover':

> I hadn't registered it before, except to note it was called for some reason 'Man in Revolt of Exile'. I can't see any man, only a revolting mess of hectic semi-circles and triangles, but I have been listening enough now to get a line on this art jazz.

'It seems to hit something in me', I say. 'There's a certain

mood of – well, melancholy, going off into utter, black despair.'

They all stop talking and give me the floor. (76)

This excursion into middle-class bohemia yields a crucial insight. As *Wild Cat*'s hero stares at the hard-edged stories of working-class youth, crime and police harassment in the sauce-stained pages of the newspaper, the distinctive styles of subcultures dissolve: the vacuousness of the university trendies is no more an alternative to real oppression than the emptiness of Bodgie anomie: 'I wonder whether I still consider myself a member of this bodgie mob any more. They are a pack of morons. Clueless, mindless idiots'. He finds the phoniness of the milk-bar Bodgies increasingly intolerable, concluding finally that they are cultural dopes: 'make-believe-they-are-alive kids moving like zombies to the juke-box will' (97). 'Style' is a con; a fraud perpetrated on working-class youth by the delusional hope of a revolution that can be traced to America and Hollywood – to movies projecting 'the glorious fakery of blown-up life from the United States of Utopia' (80).

According to Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg, a legacy of the existentialism filtered through American Beat generation writing was nihilistic rejection of all social connections: 'the Beat Man cannot take because he has nothing to give' . Feldman and Gartenberg saw this Beat posture replayed in British writing about working-class experiences in the late 50s: in the work of authors grouped (if wrongly) under the 'Angry Young Man' rubric – dispossessed, disconnected figures who forged 'their identities in the smithy of the here and now' (9). The same ethos appears in *Wild Cat Falling*: its sense of rejection seems total, it equally debunks the self-importance of subcultures and the mediocrity of mainstream society. But

Feldman and Gartenberg also argued that the Beats were beguiled by essentially bourgeois fantasies of a subcultural carnival which was nihilistic and apolitical; whereas the distinctly *working-class* alienation of British (and, arguably, Australian) writers meant that they were highly political (9-10). Thus, writers like Mudrooroo or MacInnes had a greater capacity for social critique: they could shine a cold light on Beat-like celebrations of subculture's carnival, questioning whether the adoption of spectacular styles was in any way resistant.

In *Wild Cat Falling*, Mudrooroo fashioned an 'unstable and ambivalent reading of youth' from international influences; contradictory trends that undercut pictures of the American-inspired carnival of youth with darker observations on the commodification of 'youth' and its reliance on the economic frameworks of consumerism (Bentley 76).

This alertness to the double movement in international youth culture's situation shadowed MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners*. Like Mudrooroo, MacInnes countenanced the possibility that teenagers 'organizing their underground of joy' against a 'society blighted by blankets of negative respectability and of dogmatic domesticity' had no effective means of speaking back to real power. Indeed, MacInnes conceded in 1958, one might 'see in the teenage neutralism and indifference to politics, and self-sufficiency, and instinct for enjoyment – in short, in their kind of happy mindlessness – the raw material for crypto-fascism of the worst kind' (*England, Half English* 59). For this reason, Tony Gould concluded, MacInnes found it difficult to write about Teddy Boys – in *Absolute Beginners* 'Ed the Ted' appears as a violent anachronism – because the Teds represented this fascist tendency: a politics of vicious, unreasoned reaction, not liberation (128). In this regard,

MacInnes saw British youth's attraction to Beat-like nihilism and hedonism as aimless – not an affirmation of counter-values but a belief in nothing.

In the academic sphere, Stuart Hall grappled with the possibility that working-class adolescents in the 50s fashioned an expressive language of their own, from forms like popular music or film, to fill a vacuum – a lack of commitment to anything else. Whilst Hall recognised that subculture and style were not necessarily political, and that politics was no substitute for life as it was lived in the street or café, he called for a meaningful unification:

> Even if the vitality and radicalism of youth *could* be caught up in some great political movement, young people would still want to sing and dance […] skiffle and jazz are not *substitutes* for politics; they are legitimate forms of creative expression in themselves. Life is living together, making one's own friends and learning the guitar. The point is that there should not be an unbridgeable gap between those who play skiffle and those who talk politics. The two should not be, as they are today, opposed, but complementary. ('Politics of Adolescence' 3-4)

But what if the universal function – and intention – of culture industries was *precisely* to segregate the two; infantilising and politically paralysing youth in the present, ensuring that a future generation of working-class activists did not 'grow up'? The young Australian Bodgies in *The Delinquents* embody the problem: in the final analysis, the milk-bar lifestyle is no solution to life at the low end of the economic scale. The Bodgies are oddly disconnected: from meaningful work or any political

activity that might improve their lot. They exist in a narcissistic cycle, labouring to fund their directionless leisure, spending everything they earn on the commodities that define their style. Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat* is more explicit, implying that the 'zombie-like' indifference of late-50s Australian sub-cultural youth might be deliberately, commercially induced: concealing the reality that established structures of social power are unchanged. MacInnes confronts this flip side of the youth revolution head-on in *Absolute Beginners*, with a kind of theoretical schizophrenia: youth is 'international' and a 'new class', but in danger of being manipulated by the culture industries. One moment, MacInnes's novel exhibits the populist, utopian tendencies which later characterised postmodernism; the next, it offers a critique of mass-culture industries closely aligned to Frankfurt School thinking.

There is a much-cited passage in *Absolute Beginners* which has been critically praised for its breathless sense of youth's radical potential in the late 50s. It is a portrayal of youth transformed, mentally and physically:

> The disc shops with those lovely sleeves set in their windows, the most original thing to come out in our lifetime, and the kids inside them purchasing guitars, or spending fortunes on the songs of the Top Twenty. The shirt-stores and bra-stores with ciné-star photos in the window, selling all the exclusive teenage drag […] hair-style saloons where they inflict the blow-wave torture on the kids for hours on end. The cosmetic shops – to make girls of seventeen, fifteen even thirteen, look like pale rinsed-out sophisticates. Scooters and bubble-cars driven madly down the roads by kids who, a few years ago, were pushing toy ones on the pavement. And everywhere you go the

narrow coffee bars and darkened cellars with the kids packed tight,

just whispering, like bees inside the hive waiting for a glorious queen

bee to appear. (65)

For all this key passage says about spectacle and style, it is shaded by doubts. Its inventory of consumer goods stresses the essentially commercial character of the youth carnival; its depiction of the teenager's physical 'make over' as 'blow-wave torture' suggests the idea of style itself as coercion; the transformation of girls into 'sophisticates' is a form of de-authentication; and the 'kids packed tight like bees' are nothing more than drones. The passage is haunted by the proposition that youth is victim of a consumerist conspiracy, and the immediately following comments by Blitz Baby's friend – the sage Dean Swift – underlines the point.

'I tell you', he said, pulling his US-striped and rear-buckled cap down

over his eyes, 'I tell you something. These teenagers are ceasing to be

rational, thinking, human beings, and turning into mindless

butterflies. And they're turning into butterflies all of the same size

and colour, that have to flutter around exactly the same flowers, on

exactly the same gardens. Yes!' he exclaimed at a group of kiddos

coming clicking, cracking prattling by, 'you're nothing but a bunch

of butterflies!' […] the Kidettes took no notice of the Dean whatever,

because just at that moment […] there! In his hand-styled car with his

initials in its number, there sped by the newest of the teenage singing

raves […] And the kids waved, and the young Pied Piper waved his

free hand back, and every one for a few seconds was latched on to the

glory. (66)

In this moment, when 'the Dean' tries to alert the 'kiddos' to their conformism and

exploitation and they turn away – distracted by a passing pop star – there is a clear

comment on the idea that youth subculture represents any fundamental challenge to

power, or even an interest in resistance. As Bentley has noted, *Absolute Beginners*

broods on the likelihood that any youthful threat to the period's dominant *economic*

ideologies will fail precisely because the instruments of teenage revolution are

produced by capital itself. And this, Bentley writes, grudgingly recognises

capitalism's hegemonic power to dilute radicalism by commodification and

incorporation (77). As Blitz Baby's teen compatriot the Wizard observes, the teenage

party is a 'two-way twist'. The new power to consume is a 'savage splendour' and

freedom for youths who had been socially straight-jacketed in the past; but as Wizard

knows, this is the illusion of a freedom always-already curtailed – 'Exploitation of the

kiddos […] the newspapers and telly got hold of this teenage fable and prostituted it

as conscripts seem to do to everything they touch' (12).

In the drinking clubs and socialite gatherings that Blitz Baby frequents, he

meets these 'conscripts' – mass culture's apparatchiks – whose job is to manage and

manipulate the teen 'revolution'. The Australian television personality Call-me-

Cobber – 'the culture courtier of all time' – is an example. Call-me-Cobber sees

himself as an anthropologist, studying youth attitudes and styles but with cynical

ends: 'it's my aim, my mission, and my achievement to bring quality culture material

to the pop culture masses' (68-69). Characters like Call-me-Cobber measure the mood

on the street; hip advertising executives and artist and repertoire agencies sniff the

breeze to create the next 'big thing'. Zesty-Boy Sift, one of Blitz Baby's young working-class mates made good, quickly recognises that the real money was not in singing in bars and clubs himself but in organising the way the 'Strides Vandals, Limply Leslies, Rape Hungers and Soft-Sox Granites' are created and promoted:

> So far, so bad, because nobody was interested in Zesty-Boy's creative efforts – particularly the way *he* marketed them – until one of the teenage yodellers who'd hit the big time remembered Zesty, and sold the whole idea of him (and of his songs) to his Personal Manager, and his A. & R. man, and his Publicity Consultant, and his Agency Booker, and I don't know who else, and behold! Zesty-Boy threw away his own guitar and saved his voice for gargling and normal speech, and started writing for the top canaries, and made piles – I mean literally piles – of coin from his sheet, and disc, and radio, and telly, and even filmic royalties. It was a real rags-to-riches fable: one moment Z-B Sift was picking up pennies among the dog ends and spittle with a grateful grimace, the next he was installed in this same Knightsbridge area with a female secretary and a City accountant added to his list of adult staff. (104-106)

In this parable of grasping, upward mobility, MacInnes shows genuine street-level creativity reshaped by market demand – and the breakage of class and generational ties. Z-B Sift has almost become, in the Wizard's words, one of 'elderly sordids' who 'bribe the teenage nightingales to wax' (12). The parable also shows how youth's

experience, its liberational dreams, is comprehensively surrounded and structured by culture industries making 'piles of coin'.

In 1958, MacInnes met philosopher Richard Wollheim; when *Absolute Beginners* was published in 1959, Wollheim shrewdly remarked that this 'dandified' book, almost aristocratic in its celebration of the 'cult of coolness', was destabilised by the author's self-cancelling views. As Tony Gould writes, Wollheim understood immediately that the novel demonstrated the political paralysis of youth and the persistence of class structures, and this was grounded in the unshaken operations of capital. In *Absolute Beginners*, Wollheim saw 'revolt through style' as another form of conformity; and the supposed 'power' of young people was 'as easily assimilated as their culture was commercialised' (144). Harry Hopkins' survey of the teen phenomenon in *The New Look* also visited MacInnes' ambivalences about what happened during the 50s and early 60s, when business tapped into the idea of generational change: 'commercial interests seized their opportunity, building up the vogue, harnessing it to propel their teenage protégés to wealth and stardom. But though teenagers responded to the gimmicks, it remained something of a question who was using who', Hopkins generously wrote. He saw youth as a 'knowing Admass-nurtured generation', which might actually be canny enough to manipulate the would-be manipulators – but even so, the issue of whether 'in this age of "mass culture" and canned music, a new popular art was about to be born' remained unresolved (433-34). In these terms, writers in the period like MacInnes, Wollheim and Hopkins were acutely aware of capital's incorporative and adaptive dynamisms.

As Thomas Frank points out in *The Conquest of Cool*, an analysis of the relation of youth styles and American business culture in the late 50s and 60s, later cultural studies forgot what Marx and his heirs understood: that capitalism is dynamic,

'an order of endless flux and change' (19). Resorting to simplistic binaries – 'square' versus 'hip', 'power bloc' versus 'the people' – ignores the fact that capital thrives on the 'doctrine of liberation and continual transgression'. From the mid 50s, Frank argues, American business underwent its own cultural revolution, 'as far-reaching in its own way as the revolutions in manners, music, art, and taste taking place elsewhere'. Taking the menswear and advertising industries as examples, Frank notes that well before its enormous involvement with music, mid-50s American business tapped into consumerist desires driven by young peoples' disgust with mass society itself. When corporate America looked at the Beats, rock 'n' rollers, or the later Hippies, it saw their symbolic and musical languages, their endless cycles of rebellion and transgression, as a means by which 'two of late capitalism's great problems could be met: obsolescence found a new and more convincing language, and citizens could symbolically solve the contradiction between their role as consumers and their role as producers' (31). This business idea intuitively recognised that youth rebellion could be directed and harnessed to capital: revolutionism and 'freedom' could become a projection of 'free-market' ideology. And the project of making 'revolution' a central tenet of an accelerated post-war capitalism was the exact process described by Frankfurt School thinkers, who had been preoccupied with the overlap between culture and industrial capital since the 30s.

MacInnes' and Hopkins' observations on youth in the 50s and 60s – a generation apparently unconcerned that its cherished artefacts and styles were delivered by an 'industry' – are close to those on culture industries and mass deception in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis, modern monopoly capitalism no longer sought to conceal the status of movies, radio and popular music as *business* – not art. And

this frankness was founded on a broader logic and appeal: the belief that 'culture', like any product, was most efficiently delivered to a modern mass society by industrial organisation and technology – that industry *alone* could meet the consumer's desire for novelty and newness. Thus, as Fredric Jameson usefully notes, Adorno and Horkheimer's 'Culture Industry' is too often misread: it is not so much a theory of culture as 'the theory of an *industry*, of a branch of the interlocking monopolies of late capitalism that makes money out of what used to be called culture' (*Late Marxism* 144). After fleeing Nazi Germany, Adorno and Horkheimer found America to be an equally 'totalitarian' social model modernity: a society that totally commercialised everyday life. And Adorno and Horkheimer's application of classic Marxist concepts, such as commodity fetishism, explored the ways in which changes in social consciousness were affected by the penetration of market relationships into everyday life (Callinicos 151).

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, a vital component of capital's aim to wed everyday cultural aspirations to the wheels of modern industry was to activate myths of success which captivated consumers – meaning workers – 'even more strongly than the successful themselves' (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 133-134). They envisaged this in the image of the typist-cum-starlet who dreams of Hollywood's silver screen: 'Those discovered by talent scouts and then publicised on a vast scale by the studio are ideal types of the new dependent average'; and 'the starlet is meant to symbolise the typist' inasmuch as the typist can vicariously experience but never achieve celebrity (*Dialect of Enlightenment* 145). But the net result of the empowering dream is political and existential passivity, an acceptance of life as 'luck' over agency. The starlet is not self-made: she is chosen by the talent scout in a process of 'arbitrary selection', and the fortune of the 'lucky person' implicitly symbolises

'the powerlessness of all' others (146). The culture industry is market-managed, its outcomes corporately determined, by apparatchiks like the talent scout or impresario – types referred to in *Absolute Beginners* as 'conscripts'.

By the late 50s, the highly motivated success myth that Adorno and Horkheimer located in Hollywood was significantly transferred to the pop music industry in America itself, Britain and Australia. Adorno and Horkheimer's 'industrial' analysis had focussed largely on Hollywood, but they surveyed popular music as well – exposing limits in their theoretical model which have been greatly criticised. Yet Bernard Gendron remarks that the Frankfurt pair's analytic combination of semiotics and political economy raised pertinent questions about the emergence of popular music as an industry, and how the hard sell of pop music affected the relation of youth to post-war society (35). In *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes produced a culture industry analysis that conformed almost exactly to Frankfurt prescriptions. The novel's questioning of youthful agency encompassed the activated success myth: the 'rags to riches' story of Zesty-Boy Sift. Fortunately chosen and remodelled by culture industry apparatchiks, Zesty himself goes on to 'discover' and help other 'lucky' lads from 'Dagenham and Hoxton and wherever' to make the transition to stardom (105). As MacInnes makes plain, this has nothing to do with native talent. In operates within a highly-organised system – of Personal Managers, A&R men, Publicity Consultants – which selects and refines its raw materials and tailors its productions to the marketplace: a market which does not so much respond to but define the tastes of youth as a consumer cohort. And this form of collective consumerist identity was a more potent way of 'belonging' than traditional class formations offered.

Late in his American sojourn, Adorno had come to understand this form of consumer solidarity via the work of mass-society critic David Riesman and the concept of the 'other-directed' person (Witkin 17). Riesman's 'outer-directed' person was symptomatic of the role of consumerism in undermining individuality: he theorised patterns of consumption as guided by a controlling mechanism based upon an individual's increasing sensitivity to the signals given off by others in the marketplace. Both adults and children were subject to it, and Riesman's 1961 study *The Lonely Crowd* called the new collective economic identity it produced the 'consumer's union of the peer group': so pervasive by the early 60s that 'the future occupation of all moppets was to be skilled consumers' (79). And Riesman's image of young people whose personal radar was trained to respond to peer consuming habits also suggested 'industrial' conformity and powerlessness: like Adorno, Riesman regarded capital's exploitative reach as the pursuit of both profit and political quietism. And like Adorno and Horkheimer's work, Riesman's theorisations of the 'outer-directed person' and the 'consumer union' cast doubts on any dream that a phenomenon such as rock music left mid-late 50s youth free of manipulation, or empowered to recontextualise industry-produced texts in rituals and practices of its own devising.

In *Absolute Beginners*, MacInnes also recognised that the teenager in 'his/her inchoate form' might not be a free agent but, rather, the 'consumer dream made flesh': 'not only a harbinger but a "consumer trainee"' (Savage 138). Teenagers in the period, and particularly those from the working class who had a disposable income for probably the first time, were caught in an unparalleled drive on the part of capital to find new markets and products – a drive which had the effect of drawing previously marginal subcultures into capital's totalising web. A comment by American market

researcher Eugene Gilbert, in 1958, enforced the point: 'to some extent the teenage market – and in fact, the very notion of the teenager – [was] created by the businessmen who exploit it'. So, irrespective of arguments about the measurable effectiveness of marketing to the teen audience, the culture industry's *intentions* were unmistakeable (Savage 139); and Gilbert had visited Britain in 1956 to assess its readiness for youth marketing.

Jon Savage observes that because of cultural differences between America and Britain, rock music initially posed challenges in terms of how it should be packaged for the British market. MacInnes's *Absolute Beginners* certainly depicts a music industry that is not yet mainstream, as in the US: the British scene exists on the fringes of the main entertainment nexus, variety and show business. And in Savage's opinion, British pop was distinguished by a homosexual sensibility: where 'imitations of Presley's sexual leer were […] projected in a diluted camp version onto working-class boys rendered passive for mass consumption', and English rockers 'took on the passivity of the adored subject even more dramatically than their American counterparts' (151). Savage maintains that this camp posture is depicted with great accuracy in *Absolute Beginners*, making the novel journalistic; and that MacInnes intuited that British pop was always less about music and more a matter of packaging, glitz and style.

But this highly-packaged British musical variant was, nevertheless, a continuation of the post-war industrial-cultural process for which America supplied the template. In *One for the Money* Dave Harker reminds that Elvis Presley was the prime example of a performer quickly accommodated by the entertainment industry: 'when Sam Phillips of Sun Records was offered $35,000 for Presley's contract by RCA–Victor, he was glad to take the cash and Presley was delighted with his $5000.

In the traditional manner of commodity-production, 'once the small-time capitalist had road-tested the product the major company bought the machine tools' (56). Thus, Harker saw the degeneration of an 'authentic', repackaged Presley in America and the construction of Tommy Steele in Britain as part of the same syndrome. However, the apparent differences between a sexualised Elvis and a campy Tommy Steele testified to the similar fact that the culture industry viewed youth as a market that could be infinitely resupplied and replenished.

A new breed of opportunist culture industry apparatchik thus appeared in Britain in the late 50s, typified by John Kennedy – the fabricator of working-class boy Tommy Steele into pop star. And indeed, 'the assumption that any entrepreneur, however proletarian in origin, could understand the culture of late 1950s youth still indicated the manipulative way in which capitalist leisure industry felt it was able to operate' (Harker 74). As Blitz Baby explains to the Outer-Space Kid in *Absolute Beginners*: 'all these things – like telly witch-doctors, and advertsing pimps, and show business pop song pirates – they despise us – dig? – they sell us cut-price sequins when we think we're getting diamonds' (78); and as ever, American popular culture was the model for this new 'society of spin'.

Perry Anderson's 'Force and Consent' – a comprehensive recent overview of the expansion of American economic, political and cultural power since WWII – compellingly argues that in the post-war years the world had been forced to listen to two voices of a 'distinctively American internationalism'. Economic supremacy meant that 'America could figure in a world-wide imaginary as the vanishing point of modernity; in the eyes of millions of people overseas, the form of life that traced an ideal shape of their own future'. Through Hollywood, America offered a cultural mirror to the world. Filmic languages were developed in America to provide a

national narrative for immigrants, disconnected from their historical roots: but the drama, simplifications and repetitions of American screen-mythology had such an appealing abstraction that it translated across national boundaries to conquer the world ('Force and Consent' 24). The coercive side to this was a 'juridical system disembedding the market as far as possible from ties of custom, tradition or solidarity, whose very abstraction from them later proved – American firms like American films – was exportable and reproducible across the world, in a way that no other competitor could quite match' ('Force and Consent' 25). Thus, what Anderson describes is a form of imperialism: conducted by all the means with which peoples who had experienced European colonisation were long familiar.

In Colin MacInnes' fiction, the close parallels between old imperialisms and new consumerism have not been fully grasped by critics. Some view the concluding section of MacInnes' *Absolute Beginners*, for example, where the teen hero is involved in the Notting Hill race riots of 1958, as simply a device to add narrative momentum to an otherwise listless teen 'coming of age' story. But MacInnes' previous novel, *City of Spades* (1957), deals exclusively with African and West Indian immigrants to Britain in the 50s. The central character is Montgomery Pew, a Welfare Officer whose dealings with the immigrant community's troubles provoke deep personal sympathies and an identification which leads to his sacking. MacInnes' real-life 'negro period', as he referred to it, involved sexual relationships with young black men; but as *City of Spades* illustrates, he also had an intimate understanding of colonialism as 'new arrivals' experienced it (Gould 100). In a short piece for *Twentieth Century* in 1956, a sampler for *City of Spades*, MacInnes wrote that he had learned from young black immigrants was that it was an innate function of

colonialism to generate dreams that fuelled immigration to the colonial parent in the 50s and 60s – dreams indistinguishable from those of capitalist modernity:

> The world has broken suddenly into Africa and the Caribbean, and Africans and West Indians are determined to break out into the world. Locked in the heat of a cinema at Ibadan or Kingston, watching a gleaming newsreel of Europe or America, they find it intolerable to be confined – cut off from the modern centres of creation, wealth and power. (*England*, *Half English* 20)

The economic motives for young Africans or West Indians coming to Britain to 'spend their *Wanderjahre*' were obvious; and so, too, was the prejudice they encountered from Britain's unspoken 'colour bar' (*England, Half English* 20). However, as MacInnes incisively observed, immigrants were locally accepted when they modernised their attitudes to consumer culture: after all, colonialism fetishised consumerism to sell itself. Consequently, fashion and style became a language of assimilation; and the comfortable-squalid interiors of African and West Indian digs were adorned with radiograms, sharp clothes, and snapshots of celebrities like Lena Horne and Sugar Ray Robinson (*England, Half English* 28). But in scenarios like this, and in *Absolute Beginners*, Sinfield detects MacInnes' tacit admission that there is 'no miraculously free space' in capitalist society and no 'pure moment of sub-cultural formation'; contingent cultures are entangled with the powers that oppress them, pressured to fit in (Sinfield, *Literature Politics and Culture* 178).

In *Absolute Beginners*, then, the black presence and race tensions consciously construct parallels between the young, white, working-class 'absolute beginners' and

the naïve yet 'knowing' African characters like Johnny Fortune or Karl Marx Bo in *City of Spades*. In both instances, individuals are seduced by an economically and culturally imperial system; and MacInnes deploys the black post-colonial experience as a metaphor for the darker side of mass consumer culture's wider relationship with its underclass others. Whether working-class or immigrant, the structural position of lower orders is unimproved in a capitalist class system based upon a 'colonising' ideology. In his more florid moments, MacInnes imagined that youth culture would prepare the way for young working-class hustlers and junkies to join hands with 'Hooray Henries' and upper-class debutantes (136). He would finally dismiss the 60s as the moment when the youth revolution he envisaged in the 50s came to nothing.

In *Absolute Beginners*, however, MacInnes did glimpse a solution to youth's predicament: its false consciousness and its yearning for 'resources of hope'. There is an extraordinary passage in the book – surprisingly unnoticed by literary critics – in which teen photographer-hero Blitz Baby attends a television forum. His hustler neighbour the Fabulous Hoplite debates members of the Establishment on the contemporary 'youth problem'; and the occasion directly reveals how MacInnes' overt celebration of the popular, with its democratising and declassing potentialities, is actually anchored in residual high-culturalism. The passage is tinged with Arnoldian and Leavisite ideals: a broad, 'well-rounded' education will improve the critical faculties of young working-class girls and boys; and there is a nod to the Left's post-war belief in working-class advancement through education – manifest in the post-war period in Britain's Workers' Education Associations and its Australian counterparts, the WEA and Victorian Council for Advanced Education (Brown 180).

For the lead-character of *Absolute Beginners*, Blitz Baby, education means street-wisdom; 'experts and professors' cannot 'get it', their distance from 'jazz,

teenagers or juvenile delinquency' makes their language and opinion on youth 'utterly unreal'. But watching the television forum, the teen hero begins to suspect that 'all that art and culture' *might* provide some critical insight into what the intentions and designs of culture industry apparatchiks, impresarios and manipulators of youth really portend. Blitz Baby concludes, and concedes:

> It's all very well sneering at universities, and students with those awful scarves and flat-heeled shoes, but really and truly, it would be wonderful to have a bit of kosher education: I mean, to know what's up there in the sky: just up above you, like the blue over the umbrella, and find out whatever's phoney about our culture, and anything in it that might be glorious and real. But for that, you have to be caught young and study, and it's a hard task, believe me, to try to find the truth about it on your Pat Malone, because so many are anxious to mislead you, and you don't know exactly where to turn. (143)

A passage with this flavour, a sense of rapprochement and motivated intellectual self-fashioning, was unthinkable in Australian texts on youth anomie in the period: Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* and Rohan's *Delinquents*. Mudrooroo and Rohan depicted juvenile 'cool' in more extreme, existential terms than MacInnes: their youthful outsiders were superficially connected by style, but essentially alone and struggling against a mainstream world that declared total war on them. MacInnes clung to straws of connectedness, the shifting ground of hope that somewhere, sometime, somehow, youth would be grounded in a meaningful collective effort directed to transformative social action. But MacInnes' fiction is darkly ambivalent

about this utopian future; his belief that the 'classlessness' of the popular will alter existing power structures is always offset by the view that if the Left did not 'get' popular culture, at least promoters – even if they were exploiters – understood youth's hunger for enjoyment and a jolly good time (Gould 170).

Conclusion:

Back to the American Future

On a number of occasions, Australia's current Prime Minister John Howard has claimed that the 1949 General Election galvanised him into an awareness of politics. Howard was especially excited by the 1949 campaign as Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies had vowed to end petrol rationing: a symbolic act against state regulation and post-war austerity – and a bonanza for the free-market and Howard's garage-owner father. This political epiphany came very early: born in 1939, Howard was only ten years old when Menzies fought the election. But this moment of 'political' awakening might have been connected to a general social outlook: tied to the desire for 'affluence' that so many ordinary Australians experienced, and were promised, in the post-war years. And in this period, America was the model for affluence, aspiration, and dreams of a freedom that would be economically delivered.

Howard's embrace of the free market was expedited in the 50s, as he grew and was indeed politically shaped by American influences. In her fine, underrated study *God Under Howard*, Marion Maddox observes that analysts of Howard's outlook like Judith Brett frequently attribute his conservatism – and even his 'special relationship' with American president George Bush – to his Methodist religious upbringing in the 50s. But Maddox rejects the accepted idea that Howard's world view was derived from and legitimated by religion. Maddox convincingly shows that the Methodist Church in the 50s was progressive and reformist – highly attuned to issues of social justice – and she then turns to interviews with Howard's brother, Bob. Bob Howard explains that Methodism left little mark on his family and his brother's mind-set. The

family did not follow the social scripture of the church or its magazine, *The Methodist*:

> What we read was the *Reader's Digest* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. I remember the *Saturday Evening Post* arriving, every second Tuesday, a smorgasbord of American consumer goods. It went on for years – log-cabin-to-the-White House, kids selling lollies on the roadside – that sort of influence was more important to us than the church in shaping our family's values. (21)

The pages of *Saturday Evening Post*, with its 'Norman Rockwell cover paintings', broadcast a celebration of 'post-war prosperity' (Maddox 21): and the images of entrepreneurial children selling sweets by the roadside and the myth of political empowerment, 'log cabin to White House', were intertwined. This, Maddox concludes, 'offers an answer' to the question of Howard's real, American derived theology: the worship of a free market which 'has taken on divine qualities' and is 'beyond complete human control or prediction' whilst it 'sabotages family and community life and strangles democratic safeguards, such as government-sponsored welfare' (25).

Five decades on, it must seem to Prime Minister Howard that a recalcitrant nation is finally catching up with his appreciation of America's manifold virtues. As *Sydney Morning Herald* reporters Louise Dodson and Peter Hartcher wrote in 2004, Howard thinks that the story of class envy has been superseded by the comprehensive induction of youth into capital's dreams:

The attitude to enterprise in Australia had changed, the Prime
Minister said. 'The old story […] you see a bloke driving by in a
Rolls-Royce in America, you say, "I'll have one of those one day".
But sometimes the old Australian attitude resents the fact that
somebody else has got it […] I think that's changing quite a lot with
younger people. Younger people now are more aspirational […]
There's a very important change that's come over our society. Young
people now are very disdainful of trade unions. They think they
belong to a bygone era.' (1)

Today, the vision of a classless, aspirational American-inspired market society that
Howard articulates here is shared by politicians of all party persuasions. In the 50s, as
Howard came to political consciousness, it was a matter of heated debate. As this
thesis has argued, literature and social commentary in the two decades after WWII
reveal a diversity of opinion and intellectual confusion in regard to American cultural,
political and economic power. In the post-war period, there was a greater anxiety that
merely retaining local accents and inflections would be small consolation if the
structures governing British and Australian working-class existence insidiously took
on the most important characteristics of their American counterparts. Yet America's
myths of classlessness and economic and cultural indomitableness have indeed
become deeply accepted fifty years later, particularly among the working class, in
exactly the manner that writers and cultural pundits in the 50s and 60s feared they
might. Now, the sense of inevitability about American free-market thinking – the
commonly held notion that there is no alternative to ruthless job competition, extreme
individualism and acquisitiveness – also accounts for the almost complete

disappearance in recent decades of work as a major theme in literary fiction. Yet as this thesis demonstrates, in the 50s an 60s there was a body of Anglo-Australian 'working-class' writing – fiction, sociology, nascent cultural theory – that registered the era's changes; and 'America' shimmered in that coherent literary-theoretical corpus as both idea and intent. The immediate post-war decades problematised the idea of America; the perception of America was perhaps more ambiguous than it is today, and that ambiguity persisted into the late twentieth century. As Graeme Turner summed it up in 1993, in *Making It National*:

> Worldwide, America stands for the best and worst capitalism can offer: the ultimate fantasy of capitalism's power to deliver on your desires (Disneyland, I guess), and the ultimate nightmare of competitive individualism out of control […] a mythologised America is routinely deployed in media constructions of utopian *and* dystopian futures for Australia, projecting either the 'gleaming promise of modernity or the barbarism of an economically driven consumerism'. (98-99)

In the early twenty-first century, the 'barbarism' of consumer society seems far less an issue than it was when Turner wrote this a mere decade ago – and certainly less controversial than it was in the 50s and 60s. If anything, the critique of consumerism seems more difficult today – as the disproportionate political and media response to playwright David Williamson's article 'Cruise Ship Australia' demonstrated. And this curious affair also revealed how the linkage of 'affluence' and 'America' is conceptually enforced in contemporary Australia.

Published in *The Bulletin* in late 2005, Williamson's 'Cruise Ship Australia' drew the instant ire of Australia's conservative opinion columnists and generated a flood of mostly hostile letters to editors across the country. The essay was scathing about the way incessant talk of unending prosperity had created a psychological and social climate in suburban Australia, where consumption was the touchstone of everything. It was a social reality brought into even starker focus when Williamson and his wife took a holiday cruise:

> The ship was packed to the gunwales with John Howard's beloved 'aspirational Australians'. The dinner conversation made this plain. They aspired to all manner of things: to holidays like this, to new cars, to kitchen refits, to renovations, to private education for their children, and to practically anything made of plastic, wood or steel. (42)

Williamson continued by noting that the right-wing commentariat continually peddles the view that 'all wisdom' resides 'in aspirational Australia' (43); but aspirational Australia's tastes were on display aboard the cruise ship: 'like Australia at large, no Australian song was ever played, no Australian movie ever shown, the trivia quizzes were about American movie stars and we were offered Stetsons and boot-scooting. The only thing Australian about aspirational Australia seems to be their accents' (42-43). Leaping to the defence of aspirational Australia, in *The Sunday Mail*, Andrew Bolt's 'Squalid Line of Contempt' honed in on Williamson's anti-Americanism; in a column for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Seasick Green on the Good Ship Australia', Gerard Henderson likened Williamson's critique to Robin Gollan's comments on

contemporary Australian society earlier in the year – an analysis Henderson dismissed as primarily a 'rant' condemning the Australian-American alliance. But a long editorial in *The Australian*, headlined 'Titanic Conceit', stood out; condemning the way Williamson had apparently belittled the 'aspirations of ordinary people to advance their families' material circumstances', then asserting that Williamson articulated key obsessions of the contemporary Left. According to *The Australian*, Williamson's ridicule of aspirational Australia was 'driven principally by anti-Americanism, which had become '*the* default position for the Australian intelligentsia'. Thus, the true nature of *The Australian's* complaint with Williamson became clear: his critique of changes in Australian suburban consciousness, particularly among working-class 'aspirationals', was not only an attack on the Australian 'way of life' but the American one as well, and the editorial revealed its own default position – 'we are all American now'.

The most surprising thing about the 'Cruise Ship Australia' affair was its discursive familiarity. A field of arguments involving class, power, culture and economics unfolded which were reminiscent of British and Australian debates in the 50s and early 60s: that consumerism and suburban living had significantly changed working peoples' consciousness and ideas of community; that 'culture' itself was commodified; that the state and private corporate interests *intentionally* promoted processes and practices which pressured suburban working people into consumer conformity; that for better or worse, America was *the* model for social change.

In the 50s and 60s, dramatic shifts in Australian and British workers' economic, political and cultural lives were both directly and indirectly influenced by American supremacy in all those areas. As this thesis has argued, many aspects of contemporary cultural theory were there in embryo, gestating in the work of

intellectuals and commentators living through the period's changes – and there was an impressive sophistication in early attempts to grasp the meanings of the social transformations taking place. In terms of the concept of Americanisation, the fluid and developing understanding of American effects on society and culture at the time also unfolded in literature: in writing that engaged with the issues of America's complex interconnections with local cultures, classes and economies. Writing on work and working-class was particularly important here; what actually happens on the job and how work experiences overflow into domestic life were vital themes. And the age's writing about the working class experience, in Britain and Australia, was concerned with the international extension of post-war capitalism in its predominantly American formations – articulating a general intuition that Americanisation had to be understood in its cultural, social *and* economic dimensions.

Today, widespread admiration for American methods of organising social and economic life has in fact surpassed the mythic embrace of America's positivities in the 50s and 60s. In Britain, Tony Blair's New Labour shares the Australian Liberal belief that American neo-liberal economics is not only unavoidable but correct; and in both countries, the sense of a 'special relationship' with America has never been stronger. Fifty years after the Gaitskellite pioneers of American-tending British Labour, Blair's government has again looked to America for major policy inspiration. In 2002, Robin Ramsay observed that practically every senior minister and advisor in the Blair government had either studied or worked in the Unites States (71-72). A key outcome of this infatuation is that America is viewed as *the* model for a radical re-evaluation, and rejection, of the post-war consensus that 'the state could, and had an obligation to, manage the economy to create full employment for its citizens'. Like the Australian Labor and Liberal parties in the same period, British Labour followed

Thatcherite Conservatives in accepting the logic of arguments advanced since the 70s, emanating predominantly from American economic think tanks, that all the state should realistically be expected to manage was the creation of low-inflation economic stability with some 'fiddling around the edges: education, training, infrastructure'. Everything else would be determined by 'the dynamic nature of capitalism' (Ramsay 75).

With active encouragement from the state and business, the old idea of collective interests has been replaced by the notion that workers – and even the unemployed – should be reconceptualised as enterprising individuals who must constantly re-invent themselves to negotiate an ever-changing marketplace. Mimicking British Blairite language, the Howard government in Australia began referring to a new class of 'enterprise workers' in the late 90s – a '"new breed" of Australians united by "an attitude of mind"', who recognise that business success is paramount (Norington 13). In this new conceptualisation, a working class as it was described in so many novels of the 50s and early 60s – moderate income earners always struggling to make ends meet – has disappeared from the social landscape, ideologically wished out of existence.

But as Sean Scalmer recently observed, there was something familiar about this tagging of members of the fragmented lower-middle and working classes in Britain and Australia with terms like 'aspirational' or 'enterprising'. The ideologically and politically motivated identification of a diverse group of working people had been the subject of vigorous debate in the 50s. Scalmer points to Ian Turner's celebrated article 'The Life of the Legend', in which the Australian historian argued in the late 50s that post-war 'affluence' had come at the price of the almost totalitarian pressure which American-styled consumer capitalism exerted on the working class to conform;

and Scalmer notes that such observations had become sociological cliché by the 60s (7). Scalmer writes that unlike the 'forgotten people' of the Menzies era in Australia, or the workers of Macmillan's Britain during the 50s who were portrayed as the helpless victims of a false class war, 'aspirationals' in both Blair's Britain and Howard's Australia are now depicted as individuals empowered by market-choices (Scalmer 6). But what remains constant, Scalmer concludes, is that labels like 'aspirational' or 'enterprise worker' paradoxically affirm the persistence of class divisions – not their disappearance.

Scalmer rightly observes that class society did not end with consumer capitalism in the 50s and 60s, and is not likely to do so in the twenty-first century. However, his assertion that new conceptual tools are needed to explain how markers like 'affluence' or 'aspiration' obfuscate the facts of social inequality is debatable. Scalmer remains optimistic that working people enmeshed in the expectations and desires of consumer society still have agency and radical potentialities; yet the serious decline in union membership and power, and voting patterns in Britain and Australia that indicate extraordinary tolerance among working people for increasing privatisation and deregulation, suggests the contrary. As Scalmer writes, workers 'are not necessarily conservative or grasping' (8); but political and cultural analysts like Turner in the late 50s had feared that capitalism's post-war intensification was affecting the working-class deradicalisation which is evident now. And the comprehensive ideological invasion of working-class consciousness by capital's dreams has continued unabated.

Elizabeth Wynhausen's recent documentary *Dirt Cheap: Life at the Wrong End of the Job Market* (2005) traces this continuity. Wynhausen's book was 'inspired by the book *Nickle and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich's

account of her odyssey as a minimum-wage worker in the United States'; and Wynhausen aims for a similar view of working-class society from the street in Australia, and to gauge what she suspects is an accelerated Americanisation of Australian labour relations. Like Ehrenreich, Wynhausen concluded that the only way to write about the realities of working life for moderate or lowly paid Australians at the start of the twenty-first century was by taking jobs in hotels, factories, shops and nursing homes (2-3). What she observed was not unlike what Turner had sensed via his connections with the labour movement in the late 50s – that even workers on very low wages were prepared to make extraordinary sacrifices in order to feel a part of the 'prosperity boom':

> I didn't meet one employee washing dishes or mopping floors who went home to a wealthy spouse, but many of the older, married workers I met were managing to pay off mortgages on houses on the city's edge by scrimping and saving elsewhere. My friend from the egg factory owned a share of a business in her home town, and my friend from the Princess Hotel had put a deposit on a flat, after she and her husband, an invalid pensioner, had almost paid off their house. (235)

This passage could easily have come from any number of novels about working-class life in the 50s and 60s. So, too, could her ambition to tell a social story from the coal-face: 'I prefer to be in the thick of it, a perspective better suited to telling the other side of the story, like a glorified tale of the economy, furiously hyped as "the miracle

economy" even as it widened the gulf between winners and losers in a nation that once led the world in social mobility' (3)

Fifty years ago, when the catchcry was 'we've never had it so good', the appearance of a group of British and Australian novels exploring post-war working-class gains and losses was intimately linked to the anxieties Wynhausen's book still announces: about America as social model, consumption, popular culture, management, work practices and labour relations. The reward of rereading this body of minority literature is to find that its attention to such concerns has much to tell about how pivotal the 50s and early 60s were in the establishment of an American economic, cultural and political hegemony that persists today. Drawing on their own lives and key-informant experiences, authors of that time illuminated the 'American effect', manifest in affluence rhetoric; and they questioned whether propaganda about American-style consumption and the classless society papered over inequalities which persisted despite the provisions of Keynesian welfare-statism.

In the 50s and 60s, fiction of working-class documented a range of salient social disturbances: the sense of betrayal gripping sectors of the British and Australian working class, resulting from the collision of post-war austerity and consumerist desire; poverty, poor housing and the myths of class mobility and full employment; the impact of hire-purchase and debt on working practices like overtime; political apathy and erosion of trust in traditional working-class representatives and instutions; 'scientific, humane' management, the 'speed up' 'piece work' and 'time and motion'; new forms of leisure and popular culture, the emergence of subcultures and the consequent perception of the derangement of youth; and the indexation of all this to incessant evocations of America as the shining model of modernity.

It is impossible, Alan Sinfield observes, to look at cultural production and consumption in the post-war period without recognising the vast influence of the United States and the 'characteristic array of attitudes it manifested – deference, confrontation, strategic alliance'. Writing about the working classes in both Britain and Australia in the 50s and early 60s, this thesis maintains, was at the centre of attempts to culturally and politically evaluate how America was impacting on the post-war settlements at the time. But the overriding importance of critically recuperating this writing today, to paraphrase Sinfield, is that its enlightening aspirations and contradictions provide an indispensable basis for understanding the ways we live now (*Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* 3-4).

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