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Abstract

Costuming fictional working-class lives: Jimmy McGovern's *The Street* (2006-2009)

This thesis explores common contemporary understandings and representations of working-class lived experience, using British television industry practices involved in costuming fictional working-class lives as evidence. It specifically examines the costuming within Jimmy McGovern's hybrid drama series *The Street* (2006-2009, Granada).

Critical analysis of television costume has gained momentum since the mid-1990s (Baert, 1994; Church Gibson & Bruzzi, 2004; Lugli, 2007; Warner, 2014; Brownie, 2014; Boumaroun, 2018; Wolthuis, 2020; Mullholland, 2020) however, the focus thus far has not been on the connection between costuming and representations of social class. Emphasis broadly remains on specific production/s, the work of costume practitioners, or the relationship of 'fashion' to screen clothing. Additionally, work on television drama's effects on audiences does not pinpoint screen clothing as a driver of wider social, cultural, or political implications.

This research therefore adds to this emerging area of study to consider how the sartorial representation of the working class may affect mainstream societal understandings and responses to class experience. It suggests that the language of costume influences relationships to class position, despite or in spite of, the political intent of the production. The mixed methodology triangulates primary material from practitioner interviews, viewer focus groups and textual analysis of the extended case study that draws upon the industry experience and subject position of the researcher.

The aims are to explore the perceptions of working-class experience represented and to consider how the language of costume works to inhibit or successfully articulate the perceptions and/or the narrative intent of the production. By integrating theory and practice across disciplines, this research identifies that sartorial representations are limited since they are encumbered by genre-specific production practices compelled to employ a reductive visual language. As a result, the implicit meanings woven into the language of costume symbolize a presumed rejection and absence of class consciousness, which is

subsequently perpetuated as the norm. What is reflected are techniques of adaptation and/or resignation demanded by the class structure, for the benefit of the class structure.

Positionality Statement

In the early 2000s, I was employed as a costumier for the BBC. At that time, the costume store was a part of BBC Resources, the commercial arm of the corporation. The store was managed and run in much the same way as other costume houses that I had worked in over the years, such as Angels or Cosprop¹. It supplied costumes for all manner of productions, large and small, high- or low-brow, TV, film, theatre, or commercial, in-house, and independent productions. The strength of the BBC's costume collection, the busiest area, and the area that I ran, was the 'contemporary department', which covered clothing from the 1960s to the present day, with the most heavily used items drawn from the '90s onwards. Drawing together the material for the final stages of this research led me to reflect on an occasion when the costume designer Yves Barre asked my opinion of a costume he had pulled together from everyday items of contemporary clothing for the BBC production *Learners* (Hynes, 2007). I remember giving the selection of objects the most cursory of glances and asking, "who's feeling depressed?" He smiled, because the costume was for a scene where the character would be going through some form of emotional turmoil. This thesis is born in part from that moment, and many others like it. I began to draw together reflections from my industry experiences that were bound by uneasiness about the power of clothing to communicate in this way. How did it work, and what if what was being communicated was inaccurate – as I already believed – or dangerously manipulative?

My route into the profession was not a traditional one. As somebody from a working-class background who grew up in one of the most deprived London Boroughs, during Thatcher's 1980s, I had already begun to question the ethics and practices woven into costumed representations of people like me: people who were being pushed to the margins of visibility as a result of an ever-expanding neo-liberalism movement. My social, cultural, and political frustrations were compounded by my industry experiences and what I perceived as the inaccuracies of certain costume representations. A short time after the encounter outlined above, I was made redundant when the BBC's costume store was sold off as part of a restructuring process. I moved into academia, and began to absorb a

¹ <https://www.angels.co.uk/>
<https://www.cosprop.com/>

different language: one that allowed me to consider in a critical and theoretical way the types of visual material that I had helped to produce - material that was used to reinforce or extract value from perceptions of a pathologized class experience, whilst simultaneously attributing a negative moral value or worthlessness to those experiences. Finally, I was able to fully articulate how the frustration I had experienced had developed and evolved and to question its continued prevalence with regard to costuming the working class.

Introduction

This project examines the use of ordinary items of clothing as components of a screen costume within a hybrid television drama serial, where they become naturalized as clothing again (Baert, 1994) or, rather, clothing that is not obviously identified as ‘costume’ but appears to be ‘natural’ dress. It asks how the costumes are used, how they articulate the social and class politics of the time in which they are produced and what industry factors impact on the design process, and therefore, by extension, what is being communicated. The research is based on the hypothesis that representations of individual ordinary working-class sartorial style are often reductive and do not reflect the plurality of dressing practice within the contemporary UK working class, governed as they are by the authoritative and established language of television. It is suggested here that the reductive language and broad brushstrokes employed within clothed representations may have a negative impact on the class positioning of the audiences that view them.

The television drama serial selected as the sample for this research and explored throughout (but particularly within Chapter 2) is Jimmy McGovern’s *The Street* (Granada, 2006-2009). Jimmy McGovern is a prolific and acclaimed English left-wing screenwriter whose projects are predominantly centred on ordinary people within the UK, their experience of class living and their - sometimes extraordinary - stories. *The Street* is a hybrid TV drama, produced by Granada but aired on the BBC, which ran for eighteen episodes across three series from 2006-2009. Each episode is an independent narrative of events around a particular house on a particular street in Manchester.² There are moments of shared experience, but each story remains a complete and contained drama that can be viewed as an isolated ‘stand-alone’, or as part of the series. Production literature states that it delves into the lives of ordinary people at momentous points in their lives. *The Street* was selected as a direct result of the emphasis the production places on the lives of ‘ordinary’ people. The hybrid nature of the production, combining elements of one-off drama, a drama

² The city of Manchester has a long history and connection with the textile/fashion industry; it created the world’s first steam driven textile mill in 1781 and in the 19th century was known as the international centre of the cotton trade and textile industry. More recently brands such as JD Sports, Boohoo and Misguided have chosen Manchester for their headquarters. This history has no connection however to the narratives within or across the three series. See <https://mancunion.com/2015/03/10/cottonopolis-manchesters-fashionable-history/#:~:text=Manchester%20has%20always%20been%20stylish,it%20was%20coined%20'Cottonopolis',https://meanwhilecreative.co.uk/coworking-office-space/manchester/manchester-fashion-industry/> or <https://www.business-live.co.uk/retail-consumer/experts-reveal-manchester-become-hub-24497009>

serial and soap opera, makes it particularly relevant. Each of these aforementioned genres have links with the representation of a class-specific 'ordinary', which have been clearly established over the past sixty years with regard to television production, as further discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 1 conceptually situates costume before exploring the rationale behind the methodological approach, which is interdisciplinary and draws upon qualitative ethnographic work and the subject position of the researcher. Limited, focused fieldwork has been carried out to examine what meaning/s are or have been attached to the items of clothing used as costumes and how the identified meanings might bleed into wider understandings of class experiences. As Hughes and Sharrock argue, 'social life consists of collective "representations", which include the ways of thinking about and portraying both natural and social reality – and which are states of the 'conscious collective' (1997: 33). A further aim here is to examine the components of the collective representations in *The Street* and explore what structures within the production processes determine their form. The approach undertaken to further this aim is a combination of content and textual analysis, alongside the ethnographic work.

The research is interdisciplinary, as it draws upon theories that inform sociology, cultural studies, media and communication studies and fashion and critical theory. It applies historical and current critical thinking to the contemporaneity of the case study, employing concepts and ideas that are both in and out of fashion. The rationale for the critical framing is also explained in Chapter 1. The research offers a close reading of *The Street* with particular reference to series 1, episode 6 'Sean & Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006), series 2, episode 4 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007) and series 3, episode 1 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009). The fieldwork consists of a series of interviews with production staff; writer, director, actor, and two of the costume designers across the three series. The fieldwork also includes a series of focus groups that investigated and documented how the costumes are received and understood (Hall, 1973) by those viewing the text.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present an interconnected web of discussion through which key observations and conclusions have been made. These can be organized into four key areas: the prevalence and implications of the middle-class voice in the cultural production of television programming; the problem of a restrictive and inescapable language of television; the tension between subjectivity and subject made visible through costuming; and the

success and failure of the multi-layered address of television costuming - and finally, how costuming, such as that analysed here, can work against the narrative and political intent of the production, despite the expertise of the designer, and the collaboration and noble intention between them and the rest of the production team.

As John Berger famously wrote, 'seeing comes before words and seeing helps us establish our place in the world' (1972: 7). Understanding the visual is a personal process. Screen characters are not presented with explanatory notes, therefore understanding the visual embodiment of a character's identity via clothing must remain a conceptual process. As discussed in Chapter 4, the visual nature of costume, along with other elements of the image track such as *mise-en-scène*, lighting, setting and point-of-view (POV), is one of the first and most important ways in which screen drama communicates and connects with its audience. The screen (large or small) and the clothing viewed on it 'converge as an analogous representation system' (Baert, 1994: 357) that, when viewed, work as an identifier of sameness/difference for the viewer, and moreover provide a language that can be used to articulate the 'give and go' of acceptance or contestation with regard to the viewers own lived experience, as Beynon & Rowbotham write: '[v]isual imagery is important for thinking about how individuals situate themselves' (2001: 4).

Furthermore, Lennon & Davis write that it is impossible to look at or absorb something, such as a clothing item, without mentally identifying and categorizing it, and 'individuals tend to group objects into categories to reduce the complexity of the stimulus world' (1989: 439). As such, our perceptions are subject to individual engagement and understandings or fluency in the systems of classification and the languages used to express them. How we perceive, our fluency, according to Bourdieu (1996), is the product of history that is reproduced over and over via education, culture, and society. The version of history that is reproduced via the channels identified by Bourdieu is only one version and is not inclusive, but it is powerfully familiar due to its use in the media. So, each time we see a costume on screen, we identify it through the lens of our 'screen education' or what we have been 'taught' or exposed to through other screen images.

Visual culture is, as Crane (2000) has commented, more open to interpretation than other cultural forms due to the personal nature of perception. As Chapter 2 will explore, within the image track of television drama, where the viewer's instinct directs their gaze to focus on the top half of the actor's bodies (De Long, 1998), the images presented are

saturated with signs and become in turn, signs themselves (Kidwell & Steele, 1989). Baudrillard describes this process as the 'phases' of an image. The first phase is the reflection of reality; the next, an image that masks a reality; followed by an image with an absence of any reality; and then an image where the relation to reality has disappeared, with the concluding phase being that of a simulacrum, or the copy without an original (Baudrillard, 1994a). In this process, viewers are left to fill in the gaps (Lawler, 2005a) created through the journey from reflection to simulacrum, and situate themselves in acceptance or rejection of the images they see. The image that appears on the screen can be thought of as Baudrillard's 'preferred image', which is never quite close enough or able to move backwards into exact resemblance. If that were to happen, then, via the very nature of the image phases outlined by Baudrillard, the image would dissolve. What we are left with is a perpetual circuit of simulacrum that is recognized yet not experienced, accepted yet not recognized. This is true of how the working classes are costumed on the small screen and is evident in the focus groups undertaken for this research. What we view as costumed class realism is in fact a simulacrum of sartorial class experience, recognized by working-class viewers as a symbol of a class position that bears little relation to their own experience.

Chapter 2 focuses on *The Street* as the extended case study. It positions television drama and social realism within the context of generic conventions before examining the specificity of the language used within the medium to communicate through those conventions. Discussing the language of TV allows for critical engagement with stereotyping and the production of representations. The foundation to understanding stereotypes is recognising that they are a blunt tool that reduces a matrix of information to its simplest digit by eliminating detail, nuance, difference, and distinction. Once established, they 'fix' information, however limited in scope it may be. This information is then repeatedly applied to identities and groups and becomes used as a means to control, manage and 'inform'. As Lefebvre explains,

to reduce means not only to simplify, schematise, dogmatise and classify. It means also to arrest and fix, to change the total into the partial while yet laying claim to totality. (Lefebvre [1989] 2009: 28)

The focus of analysis in Chapter 2 is episode 6 of series 1, 'Sean & Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006) and the potency of what appear to be common clothing objects to communicate through the language of realism. This critique makes visible the tension between the proximity or distance of the production team and the viewers to the experiences represented. The chapter also considers the relationship between intent and creativity and how the give and go of this relationship might affect what makes it to the screen.

Within television production, very few of the senior decision-makers involved in commissioning and producing contemporary drama come from a working-class background. In fact, according to Carey, O'Brien and Gable, only a quarter do (2021)³. As a result, the conception of how the working class 'look' or more specifically, how the working class 'dress' remains mired in previously established reference points and stereotypes. As Beynon & Rowbotham comment, 'how images of the working class are conceived requires understanding the material factors affecting class in the wider society' (2001: 6). Clearly, if only a quarter of those that produce representations have experienced the material factors of the class they are representing, their understanding will be limited at best.

Of course, in some productions the purpose of costuming may not be to accurately reflect lived experience. In some genres of small screen dramatic entertainment, the audience will gain pleasure from looking at an image of something desirable, rather than something coded as recognisable or familiar, and there are certainly examples of contemporary small screen dramas that employ costume in a way that feeds consumer fantasies of identity (Benstock & Ferris, 1994), such as *Killing Eve* (2018-2021, dir. Damon Thomas et al.) or *Euphoria* (2019-2021, dir. Sam Levensen). *The Street*, however, occupies a different space regarding entertainment 'images', as it very much sits under the umbrella of social realism. Chapter 2 explores the positioning of *The Street* within this genre in more detail.

Graeme Turner (2010) states that, although clearly powerful, ideological and manipulative, there is no great, all-consuming conspiracy theory around television and its products, that they are not all produced as part of a great master plan to control and indoctrinate the masses. However, he also recognises that there are cultural effects to the commercial – and, as suggested here, creative – decisions that are made. Turner appears to

³ See also Deuze, 2013 'Media Work', or Randle, Forson and Calveley 2015 'Towards a Bourdieusian analysis of the social composition of the UK film and TV workforce'

offer a reasonable response to an extreme claim, but what if the claim itself is reframed? What if television, accepted and acknowledged as a tool of hegemony, allows for dominant ideas to remain unquestioned or unchallenged by producing what appears to be harmless familiarity, as suggested here through the broad strokes of the costumes employed? Clearly, there are productions that have openly challenged politics, legislation, or power systems and structures, such as *Cathy Come Home* (Loach, 1966), and *Common* (McGovern & Blair, 2014) but these are the exception rather than the rule. What if the products that form the rule to such exceptions are the most dangerous? These are the products whose symbolic function becomes lost in plain sight; where seemingly arbitrary items of dress are employed; where indoctrination through repetition can and does occur; and, ultimately, where resistance and, this thesis argues, class consciousness and political collectivism are managed.

However diverse ⁴the production of television drama may or may not be, the most common visual tool employed across its generic form is realism, which is in turn produced through specific generic conventions. Genre is both a tool and convention of screen discourse. As viewers, we know what to expect from the screen according to genre-specific classifications such as drama, reality, documentary, current affairs and so on. The expectations we hold about the conventions affect our understanding of the meanings articulated through the screen and how we receive and interpret those meanings. For example, we understand what to expect from a news bulletin, a comedy, a documentary and so on. The modes through which genres are produced create particular aesthetic modes that are recognisable, accepted, and able to communicate across time and space. What is actually communicated through the aesthetic modality, however, is often subject to conflict, depending on the distance or proximity of the viewer to the subject material. The distance or proximity will often find itself positioned across class boundaries where viewers recognise the gap that exists between representations of their lived experience and their actual lived experience, and either accept, adopt and perpetuate the aesthetic modality as their own (sometimes ironically), or resist and challenge it. As Gledhill & Williams note,

⁴ Representation has diversified on television in many ways since the period 2006-2009 when *The Street* was produced, in relation to gender, sexuality, and ethnicity including local, regional or national identity - see <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/apr/01/this-is-a-real-moment-netflix-series-cements-rise-of-welsh-language-drama>. However, it is argued here that in spite of progress such as this the representation of social class through costuming remains static.

Within genres the symbolic embodied representations circulate back to form social expectations and practices. As class identities shift and break free from the representations that sustained them the codes of verisimilitude are challenged. (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 235)

The connective thread of development or evolution between the conventions of Hollywood film and UK TV are explained in further detail in Chapter 2. Suffice it to say here that within classic Hollywood, cinematic drama and subsequently television drama, there is consensus around what a narrative was supposed to do and what could be achieved through the screen. The photographic nature of film forced cinema to emphasize the notion of 'realism' (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 270) as a narrative tool via the conventions of the classic realist text, as discussed in Chapter 2. The concept of 'realism', or cultural verisimilitude helps define what is produced and expected of screen fictions or representations (Gledhill & Williams 2000: 235). In classic Hollywood, for a film to be considered 'good' it must meet the expectations and standards of the audience through 'realistic' – not authentic, an important distinction – costuming (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 272). This has subsequently become the preferred aesthetic standard for television.

At first, the idea of realism worked in cooperation with differing genres. However, as the variety of onscreen representations expanded to include and embrace different sections of society - for example, as social realism developed as a genre - it became apparent that the realist conventions concerned with clothing were becoming corralled into producing 'truths' in relation to hierarchical social conventions, not the truth of how things really are (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 211), and a gulf opened up between realism and the real.

As genres such as melodrama evolved, moving further away from realist aesthetics with regard to the costuming, they managed to retain their stance as producers of realist narratives (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 232). This established a complex relationship between genres such as melodrama and later social realism, wherein each produced representations that employed the same visual tools and symbols. This mutual interchange eradicated the difference or distance between the two visual forms, thus rendering the codes, language and clothing used as meaningless. The costumes employed within *The Street* and more broadly across television drama that deals with representations of social class, it is argued here, can be viewed as a legacy of this interchange.

Within film theory, before the acknowledgement and acceptance of social realism, melodrama was often the vehicle used to discuss social issues. Melodrama is understood as a space where questions around life and lived experience are played out (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 234); the subject material of melodrama helps make things matter or take on meaning (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 234); melodrama produces, via spectacle and bodily eloquence, recognition in audiences of various class backgrounds and locations (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 230, 234, 235); and finally, melodrama uses heightened contrast to help the audience understand prevailing morality and ideologies (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 234, 240). Importantly though, as Gledhill and Williams note, melodrama was also the site where different experiences of class converge, such as the experience of those producing the melodrama and the experiences of those purportedly represented (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 230). The tension between the experience of class inherent within melodrama and, this thesis argues, *The Street*, produces an 'elastic' environment of signs (Bakhtin in Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 240) where all contents of meaning are absorbed in the dominant form of the medium (Baudrillard, 1994a) rendering the aesthetics of costuming as lacking 'active' meaning, whilst at the same time, the conventions of realism work to actively conceal the lack of meaning. The term 'active' meaning is used here to identify the meaning encoded within or produced by an object of clothing; this is different to the meaning produced as a result of the omission of objects of clothing or 'difference'. Chapters 3 and 4 go on to discuss the concept of difference in more detail in relation to class experience and sartorial expression.

For *The Street*, the costumes work within the aesthetic boundaries of the master code of costuming, where established clothing mythologies are invoked to produced maximum audience recognition and to communicate a particular ideology. At the same time, the costuming on *The Street* is a site of class conflict where the lived experiences of those represented and those representing are often (though not always) very different. As a result, it is suggested here that the costuming under examination can be thought of as 'melodramatic' as it sits at the impasse between systematic process, context and subjectivity. In the same way that the different costumes designed by Geoffrey Thomas for each and every scene in which Lana Turner featured in Douglas Sirk's 1959 melodramatic classic *Imitation of Life* are far removed from the reality of single parenthood in late 1950s America, so too are the short skirts, low tops and high boots of Christine Bottomley's

Yvonne in series 1 of *The Street*. Although each production may be labelled 'realism', they are in fact examples of perpetual simulacra, both the Hollywood movie synonymous with 'glamour' and the gritty British TV drama produced through a middle-class aesthetic lens reproducing class and gender stereotypes.

Chapter 3, 'Defying definition: the working class' explores the subject of social class in key areas that sit within the context of the 2000s in the UK, the time at which *The Street* was written and produced. The chapter will explain what structurally constituted the working class at that time, exploring shifting classifications that were subject to the increasing dominance of neo-liberal politics. The chapter then moves on to explore class through a more nuanced, much less tangible lens, discussing the experiential dimension of social class through emotional evaluations and elements of lived experience. The chapter then focuses on the material factors of class, the intersection with identity formation through dress, and how costumed representations of everyday dress and the bodies of the actors that inhabit them invoke the political use of symbolism as a form of boundary maintenance. The focus in this chapter is across three key episodes; series 1, episode 6 'Sean & Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006), series 2, episode 4 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007) and series 3, episode 1 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009).

Within everyday lived experience, communication via the management and manipulation of language, words, codes, or coded clothing is an essential part of being in the world (Lawler, 2005b; Connolly, 2017). When discussing soap opera, Marie Gillespie comments that 'everyday interpersonal communication is informed in significant ways by (their) soap viewing, not simply in its content, but also more significantly, in its form' (Gillespie in Brooker & Jermyn, 2003: 316). Taking into account the hybrid nature of *The Street*, which draws on the conventions of soap opera, the statement concerning the significance of content and form must also be applied here. Content and form are subject to infinite possibilities in everyday life, thereby enriching each communicative encounter. As Connolly comments, '[t]he more words and phrases we have to express the vast range of experience available, the richer our world will become' (2017: 233). The scope of possibility within everyday communication – verbal or sartorial – alluded to here creates a problem for producers of television, however, where it is assumed that meaning must be narrowed rather than expanded to maximize audience engagement. This works to ensure the need for a master code/s and subsequently pushes actual meaning to inhabit the space between the

text and the intent, whilst what remains visible is ambiguity or ambivalence (Breward, 1995; Baudrillard, 1994a) in the form of ideological stereotyping (Cannadine, 1998; Calefato, 2004; Copley, 1996) or the pathologizing or mythologising of identity.

Within these spaces, problematic sociological depictions of the working class as romantic rebel, vulnerable victim, dangerous deviant (Casey, 2010) or as sexually voracious consistently re-occur. As Stephanie Lawler has stated, representations such as this are marked by disapproval or disdain and the actions and appearance viewed within them are useful symbols to indicate ignorance, tastelessness and immorality (2008). Lawler challenges how the disgust that is manifested when ideas of good taste are violated is rarely unpacked or dealt with. The idea of pathologized identities and fashionable 'lacks' embodied in the costuming of classed characterisations is central to how this thesis explores the subjectivities and moral worth sewn into costumed representations.

What we are able to see on screen is determined by production decisions, informed by the visual conventions in any given period. The perception of what is on screen may vary from viewer to viewer. Hall's acceptance, negotiated and oppositional readings (Hall, 1973) are a useful way to conceptualize this, but what is on the screen remains the same. Costuming must be understood, therefore, as only able to communicate a very small slice of class experience, language or identity (Brooker & Jermyn, 2003). There is and will always be surplus communication left over after costume has communicated its particular meaning (Carter, 2012). Class understanding and positioning are expressed within this surplus through a dialogical struggle over clothing 'words' (Carter, 2012; Brooks, 2015; Morris, 1994) – the reductive representations are unable to employ clothing in the way it is employed throughout actual class experience. Due to the context of the medium and the constraints the language of television imposes, *The Street* cannot possibly hope to represent the diversity of sartorial expression that takes place within the surplus of class understanding, manifested through the dialogical struggle over particular items of dress. *The Street*, therefore, is forced to offer a reductive range of representations that often work against the intent of the narrative to produce ambivalence within the audience.

Our engagement with the visual and the awareness of our embodied selves as a visual communication tool is often in response to our recognition and/or resistance to the representational classificatory 'codes' we are able to see. The codes to which we have access, such as the codes that communicate working class sartorial engagement or style, are

repeated and reused so that they often appear in different ways across different platforms becoming prevalent across time and space (Baert, 1994; Hollander, 1993). They become a place in which audiences question relationships of proximity to and distance from screen characterizations. These relationships become complicated and muddled through a process of mis-recognition that produces identification of a self that is a simulacrum.

As explored in detail in Chapter 4, the clothes with which we adorn our bodies are understood as a series of interconnected clues or signs that lead the viewer or reader to an understanding of who we are, who we think we are, or who we want others to believe we are. We are complicit in producing an identity for others via material clues, the way we 'speak', the (sign) language of dress, and the relationship we have as individuals to items of clothing we wear. This production of identity cannot be disentangled from our class experiences and is reproduced by costume designers on behalf of fictional characters. The elaborate construction of our finished appearance referred to by Elizabeth Wilson (Wilson, 1998) is mined or sourced in the individual psyche and the resulting subjectivities are expressed creatively through the language of dress (Morris, 1994: 25) and move the subject or self into an 'object' ready to interact with or engage with others.

Within this process, each individual will form an understanding of and relationship to the self that is both distant (understanding the separate entity that is the self) and close (the experience of being the self). This can also be thought of as a 'consciousness', which is formed through the social world (Morris, 1994). In understanding and becoming aware of ourselves (in relation to others), we begin to see ourselves through the eyes of others that occupy similar and different social groupings. Self-awareness becomes self-consciousness, which often leads to class (or group) consciousness that may or may not be recognized or acknowledged. It is from this subject position that we produce our clothed identities. Costume designers are tasked with interpreting the consciousness of a fictional character created by a writer. They must create an external manifestation (clothing) of the fictional internal 'self' of a character. This must and can only happen through the lens of their own consciousness, which is separate and often very distinct from that of the character consciousness they are creating.

Specifically, class consciousness is understood as our distant self, situated, positioned or categorised in time and space and the relationship we have with this entity, which often defies the situation, position or category through lived experience. As Bakhtin

explains, '[t]his content of consciousness and psyche and the utterances where content is manifested are in every respect determined by socioeconomic factors' (in Morris, 1994: 45). This is true of all those tasked with creating characterisations and it is also understood by those that create characters as the reason that characters are written or created in the way they are. So, the characterisations are produced through a class consciousness and are expected to be a manifestation of another type of consciousness. This process can be thought of as self -> self/other -> other. Very clearly when one is produced through another or the other is produced through the self in this way – not as a way to understand the self – this produces tension and conflict.

Chapter 3 suggests a connection between how groups of people are thought of in society and subsequently represented, how they view themselves, and how those groups feel disconnected from what they view. This connection/disconnect is illustrated through the costuming that working-class characters wear on screen, which is distilled through the subject positions or subjectivities of those empowered by the creative processes involved. The clothing choices that become character costumes position, very sharply, predictable hegemonic working-class identities, regardless of the intent of the production. It is suggested here that one of two things occurs as a result of this: firstly, those hegemonic identities are assimilated by groups and individuals who identify with the experiences, or the implicit struggle portrayed and assume recognition or identification via consumption practices and thereby subsequently 'become' in visual or sartorial terms what they see – a visual or sartorial self-fulfilling prophecy; and secondly, the groups that are mis-represented suffer a 'disconnect' or alienation from screen identities meant to represent or portray characters and situations similar to their own and their lived experience, which results in apathy or ambivalence towards the representations on offer that allows for them to be reproduced over and over again. This was evident in FG5 and FG6.

Despite identifying *The Street* as an example of social realism and discussing the left-wing intention of the producers of the text, as discussed in Chapter 2, the construction of costumed representations of the working class still implicitly or explicitly articulate middle-class imaginings or expectations (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001), because the language of television in which those costumed representations become active is a middle-class language. Within the new classed formations in contemporary society (dealt with in Chapter 3), class is not as visible as it once was, but nevertheless, visual representations of the

working class continue to employ tired symbols as a communicative tool rather than creating new visual expressions of class that reflect the diversity of lived experience. The language of television, the constraining system of representations, has developed over time by those in control of media production and products – the middle classes.

At this point it is worth noting that to work through the ideas presented in Chapters 3 and 4, the thesis leans heavily upon the work of Henri Lefebvre. The use of a theorist such as Lefebvre throughout the thesis, whose work slips in and out of vogue and relevance, is related to the researcher's own class position and journey into academia and this is dealt with in Chapter 1. The *Critique of Everyday Life Vol 3: From Modernity to Modernism: Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life* (2005), first published in the early 1980s, provides an exploration of the 'everyday' and posits several ideas that can be applied directly to the articulation of the working class via screen costume. Lefebvre's overarching hypothesis of the everyday explores the notion of manipulation versus notions of choice that exist within the complex relationship between lived experience, daily life, and reality (2005). He describes the everyday as a site in which micro decisions and adaptations take place within the 'macro', thus resulting in a micro sociology or psychology (2005: 4). The point at which an individual decides on a course of action or resolves or adapts to a situation, or makes a clothing choice, is influenced by the social, local, and global or macro landscape of which they are a part. However, the decision, action, resolution, or conclusion often happens within arguably the most local or private space of the mind: the 'micro'. The result is then played out, often in a very subtle way, through bodily practice such as dress choice, thus becoming part of the macro once more.

It is suggested here that the adaptations Lefebvre discusses often occur as a result of the tension produced through sartorial class politics. This is understood as a site of ambiguity wherein a series of tensions and paradoxes are played out. Of particular relevance here are the tensions Lefebvre outlines between the fictitious versus the real, sameness versus difference and finally difference versus distinction. Lefebvre's 'distinction' has very clear attributes; it is an abstract principle of classification that is founded on the 'real' of what has been accomplished or historical experience. It is a means of separation; a way of stating 'I am not like you'. Distinctions can be detected via objects such as clothing and it is clear how this could be a useful theoretical tool to discuss representations of the working class.

Furthermore, Lefebvre's distinction positions its subject within a linear hierarchy via a system of classification that assumes objectivity, when in fact 'classifications intervene and modify objects' (2005: 114). To create is to classify by using the signs by which people distinguish themselves from one another. We create ourselves through our clothing identities and costume designers create costumed characterizations. This classification or ordering happens in relation to the one who is ordering,

thus we end up situating social groups exclusively by strata and layers, in a hierarchy acknowledged and sanctioned by ideology, taking little, if any account of the major vertical and horizontal division with which the society under consideration is shot through. (2005: 115)

Difference, on the other, hand is about connection rather than separation. Lefebvre states that differences derive from particularities that are biological realities: for example, a 'given' such as biological sex, ethnicity or size. Differences emerge as a result of the continued struggles when particularities confront each other. Differences are therefore created within the social world; they are not isolated but exist as part of a 'whole':

That differences exist means that there are superior and inferior types [...] Only inequality openly acknowledged and proclaimed confers meaning, value and concrete significance on differences. (2005: 118)

Difference, or the right to difference, belongs to the ideological heritage of the middle class, who seek to distinguish themselves from the working class (see also Lawler, 2005a): 'hence the cult for differences, the search for differences and distinctions in food, clothing, furniture, space – in short, everyday life' (Lefebvre, 2005: 120). So, for Lefebvre, this is both a system of hierarchy and the means to achieve it. Lefebvre's (2005, 2009) discussion of difference and distinction help identify how the familiar and acceptable is thus rendered invisible. While familiarity is actively contested through lived experience (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001), this contestation is distinct from that officially sanctioned or proposed as culture and/or knowledge and is often an aspect of the 'self' without acknowledgement or recognition. Therefore, a tension exists between the two 'selves' – the one experienced, and the one selected from what is available and subsequently consumed.

Resistance to distinctions and maintaining established hierarchies often occurs through the language of dress or dress used as a form of speech. Lefebvre writes that syntax, grammar and vocabulary are political acts; therefore, the syntax, grammar, and vocabulary of the language of clothing are also political (Lefebvre, 2009). The notion of 'swagger' (Mason, 2018), often ascribed to black urban youth, is a way of managing the boundaries of resistance – the knowing of what to wear, how to wear it and what not to wear within a particular context. This specific language of dress, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, is geographically specific and can be thought of as a clothing dialect or accent: the 'border zone between the self and the other' (Bakhtin in Morris, 1994: 5). Bakhtin states that 'in any dialogue some voices are louder (or govern more space) than others' (in Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 100). So, within the dialogue of costuming and the structures of the industry, discussed in Chapter 2, we become more familiar with some 'voices' than others. The result is 'a comforting iconography of sameness which bridges the space between the experience and representation of everyday life' (Forrest, 2017: 32). The limited iconography outlined by Forrest speaks to the development of ambivalence towards narratives that deal with the issues of class experience. Difference is often situated regionally within class politics, and yet difference is absent from the processes of costuming.

Chapter 4, 'Costuming the Working Class', moves the discussion beyond television drama and the backdrop of social class to look in detail at the processes involved in costuming in this context. This chapter explores the historical development of costume as a tool of communication and how/what audiences engage with or expect from the clothes they see on screen. It explains the ethos of manufacturing identities through dress and the processes undertaken to move a character from script to screen, paying particular attention to the subjectivities woven into that process. The chapter also examines how the established language of dress becomes more complex in productions that use contemporary items of clothing as costume. The non-verbal element of that language is analysed in relation to episode 4, 'Taxi' from series 2 and the transient character of Eddie McEvoy played by Timothy Spall. The analysis will pay particular and specific attention to the jeans and trousers Eddie wears, the way they fit the character's/actor's body and how the fit and use of these objects is used within the language of costume as an equivalence to non-verbal communication, specifically intonation. The chapter concludes by explicitly explaining how

the social politics of class intersect with and are played out through the costumes seen on screen.

As Brownie (2014) comments, in visual media costume is key to identifying character. Within the text under analysis here, the 'costume' is in fact everyday items of dress used as a disguise or mask for the characterisation, employed in such a way as to suggest a 'reality' or to erase the suggestion that a mask or disguise exists at all (Brownie, 2014). The reality suggested relies upon two key ideas understood by both the producers and consumers of the text: firstly, our clothing (or that of a character) and consumption choices are understood to speak of our inner selves, concealing or revealing aspects of who we are (Ash & Wilson, 1992). Secondly, clothing consumption choices are understood as part of a process of communication that relies on the viewer/reader being fluent enough in the language used to be able to decipher or decode (Bourdieu, 1996) the intended message.

Clothing is clearly not just a communicative tool, but when dress is used as a means of communication in this way there is always a surplus left over from the message (Carter, 2012). The surplus here is the site where working class bodies are made to mean, narratives around hygiene, excess, discipline: 'fecundity, displaying irresponsibility and a lack of care of the self' (Skeggs, 2004: 102). This is also the site where the costume of male characters such as Eddie, often interpreted as meaningless (Bruzzi, 1997), become meaningful by – as this thesis posits – illustrating a new grammar within the language of fashion (fit/body) and thereby costume, its relationship to identity and the implications of this within the discourse of social class (Brooks, 2015). Clearly the image of a character in costume – the image track – is only one aspect of discursive communication within screen images, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Gledhill & Williams, 2000). Due to the variable reference points and multiple discourses with which the image must intersect, it is challenging to label it as a meta-language. As such, the isolated image track cannot communicate the 'truth', but when it is placed within a particular context it does communicate a truth- (the image) becomes an utterance (Bakhtin in Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 98).

Television and television costuming is a human construct (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001) that has proved itself to be an extremely effective tool of communication. As a product of human construction, it is subject to subjective processes and ideological ambition or intent. Within academic writing on television, it is generally agreed that television operates as a link between the micro and macro of human existence (Caughie,

2000; Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Thornham & Purvis, 2005), where local narratives can acquire global reach and interiority is externalized in a visual format. What remains a site of contention is the binary of television as made and organized according to the needs of the culture it serves (Caughie, 2000) employing the fundamentally creative aspect of language (Hall, 1997) on the one hand, and television as a vehicle used to rank people and reflect social values rather than social reality (Thornham & Purvis, 2005) on the other.

The connective tissue between these two binaries is the use of language. For television costuming to be successful it must successfully connect to and communicate with its audience. Television costuming takes elements of our everyday perceptions of reality and creates a language from those elements (Caughie, 2000; Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001; Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Thornham & Purvis, 2005). Fiske & Hartley explain that television is rooted in language (2003), whilst Stuart Hall (1997) identified language as a signifying practice, and the language of television and subsequently television costuming is an ideal example of this. Television costumes use visual signs or coded images (Fiske & Hartley, 2003) to communicate or stand in for ideas, notions, and intent. The coded images employed are related to how we see reality but are not themselves reality. To be so, it is assumed, would be too individualized to facilitate understanding. If we consider each television program as an example of Bakhtin's 'utterance' (Morris, 1994) then we begin to see the constraints at work and can think more clearly about what implications those constraints might have:

each utterance is idiosyncratic and unique but each utterance contains elements identical with elements in other utterances of the given speech group [...] it is precisely these factors – the phonetic, grammatical, lexical factors that are identical and therefore normative for all utterances – that ensure the unity of a given language and its comprehension by all members of a given community. (Morris, 1994: 27)

Television costume can only work as a communication tool if audiences are able to comprehend what they see. What they see is not reality but a mediated version of it. Not only does each television program 'utterance' need to adhere to such linguistic constraints so too does each costume utterance. The sartorial diversity within individualized lived experience is understood as too distinct to be comprehended, so requires modification via subjective understandings for understanding to be achieved.

The system of language employed by television costume must therefore draw upon speech genres or rather, stable, or unchanging forms of expression in order to connect and create a dialogue with the audience. As such, the language of television costume is a ready-made speech community or system of language for any producer, as Bakhtin comments in Morris: 'any change within the system lies beyond the range of individual consciousness' (Morris, 1994: 27). An individual writer, director or costume designer is unable to challenge the established signifying practices at play. These discussions are further unpacked throughout Chapter 4. Although small screen texts can be understood as discursive in their use of language and the encoding and decoding of the signifying practices, to draw upon readymade speech practices in this way is, as Bakhtin outlines, to use and re-use particular elements of language. It is within the space of the re-use that the 'identical elements' required for communication and subsequent reductive representations of class experience and sartorial engagement become established. The extra textual verisimilitude of the screen (Forrest, 2017) works to enforce a particular de-coding (Eco, 1986; Hall, 1997) via familiar and dangerous representations.

As both Chapters 3 and 4 discuss, the intersecting factors of screen representations notwithstanding, if costume is to be understood as a meta-language, what must also be acknowledged is that the language of costume is subject to the same conventions and variations as linguistics: syntax, regional dialects (Cobley, 1996), accents, semantic codes and non-verbal communication tools. De Certeau (1984) claims that, within language, there is no gap between consumption and use, or rather our consumption of language matches how we use language. This thesis argues that marginalised groups in society are often given no alternative but to identify with misrepresentations of groups that are the 'closest' fit and that they subsequently begin to reproduce the language used within the representations; our consumption of particular visual imagery is inseparable from the language we use to understand that imagery. Such mediation of reality within both languages, television (Fiske & Hartley, 2003) and costuming is problematic due to the power relations embedded within the ebb and flow of political ideological motivations and mainstream media.

The constructed semantic codes within the language of costume are naturalised so that a level of equivalence remains feasible, and the practice of coding can remain concealed (Hall, 1997; Eco, 1986). Each code has its own unique meaning that alters or is altered by the codes that surround it. Just as identity is inconceivable outside of context

(Lawler, 2008), so too are the individual codes. For example, the meaning of a check or plaid shirt might refer to gay 'clones', militant politics, 'grunge kids' or Ivy League 'mods', depending on the specifics of the fabric and the context of its use, or how it connects or communicates with the other codes situated around it. The unstable and fluid nature of meaning constructed in this way points to the fact that 'visual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes- it cannot, of course, *be* the referent or concept it signifies' (Hall, 1973:5)- and that the actual meaning is found in the lags, gaps or spaces between codes (Caughie, 2000). The simplified equivalents produced by semantic codes are used to manage the language of costuming. As Hughes and Sharrock comment,

simplified and deliberately one-sided representations of social forms formatted as systems of meaning from a central value used to organise the disorderly real world. (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997: 134)

Lawler (2008:26) states that 'there is a relationship between the representations of lives and the lives themselves'. This is indeed true, but we must also consider that there is a relationship between the lives of representations and the lives or experiences of those that produce them. This does not only mean the 'time lags, fear, ignorance and deadlines that inform representations' from a practical or pragmatic position (Douglas in Skeggs, 2005: 97), but also refers to the subjective aspect in the creation and use of stereotypes, as Lennon and Davis comment: 'information is encoded in terms of relevance to the self' (1989: 444). The impact of subjective understandings in the creative process is dealt with in detail in Chapter 2 and revisited in Chapter 4.

The relationship between the self and other is inevitably reciprocal (Sartre, 1968); we rely on the other to see our physical form in space and time and become dependent on the other for this, but at the same time remain distrustful of the other as their evaluation takes place without full knowledge of the self. The give and go of this co-dependence are subject to power struggles (Morris, 1994: 153), particularly within the complex and layered process of a costume designer (self) creating the 'other' that is a fictional 'self'. There is a requirement of understanding that needs to take place in order to create an-other 'self' but there is a paradox here: we cannot see ourselves – our excess of seeing produces an aesthetic image of the 'other' (Morris, 1994) – we can see (or create a vision of) the 'other' but cannot possibly understand it in the way we understand ourselves. So, in creating 'an-

other' we can only really ever re-create the self in dialogue with the other. The understanding that does take place within this process is dialogical and becomes active by realizing 'meaning' through signs or semiotics (Morris, 1994). As explored in Chapters 3 and 4, signs only emerge in the process of interaction (Morris, 1994) and make visible the ideological chain that connects individual consciousness to individual consciousness (Morris, 1994: 52). However, as Bakhtin suggests, '[a] properly Marxist understanding needs to account at micro level for individual consciousness and at macro with the whole social area of meaning production in daily life' (in Morris, 1994: 48) so the potency of the sign moves from connecting the self to the other and 'becomes part of the unity of the verbally constituted consciousness' (Bakhtin in Morris, 1994: 52) – or part of wider, broader, deeper understandings and misunderstandings.

For the individual charged with producing a representation, the knowledge they employ in the production is therefore problematic. As explored throughout the thesis, the knowledge originates within the psyche or the inner mind of the creator but is informed by their social experiences. So, the representation of characters such as Yvonne, Sean, Eddie or Cath starts with the creative individuals' understanding or experience of people similar to the characters. Morris states that the inner psyche exists on the border zone of the inner and outer (Morris, 1994) or rather the mind and the social. The social or outer continually informs the inner self - the two cannot be untangled. The result of this connection is that the reality of the inner psyche can only be understood as a sign that signifies something else, something other, not as reality. If those tasked with creating the representation have limited understanding or experiences of people similar to those they are representing, the result becomes more generalized and leans heavily on former representations of similar 'types'. Morris comments that,

[o]nce understood and interpreted the psyche becomes explainable solely in terms of the social factors that shape the concrete life of the individual in the conditions of his social environment. (Morris, 1994: 56)

This implies that producers aren't able to produce something outside their own experience and understanding. How tenable can this really be in relation to television productions? The meaning that the producer attaches to the sign they choose to communicate with/by is evaluative as is the aesthetic vision they create. In order to engage with the process, the

producer needs to 'know' the value of what is being created. As a result, knowledge must be understood as relative, fluid and inevitably produced by the knower (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997).

Certain forms of knowledge are accepted as such by structures and systems and accrue value. They become understood as forms of 'expert' knowledge that thereafter reproduces self-understanding (Lawler, 2008) and uses this repetition as a form of governance. We can certainly see evidence of this in the research presented here. By integrating both theory and practice across cultural studies, fashion theory and the study of TV, this research identifies a tension whereby individual sartorial resistance within lived experience is erased through a specific process of representation that is encumbered by genre specific production practices that are compelled to employ a reductive visual language. As a result, the implicit meanings woven into the language of costume symbolize a presumed rejection and absence of class consciousness, which is subsequently perpetuated as the norm. In fact, what is reflected are techniques of adaptation and/or resignation demanded by the class structure for the benefit of the class structure.

Chapter 1 – Methodology: Subject position and approach.

1.1 Introduction

This research looks at how the hybrid television drama serial written by Jimmy McGovern, *The Street* (2006-2009, Granada), uses ordinary clothing as costume to represent the working class. It explores how the language of costume that is employed articulates the social politics of the 2000s, and examines how the costumes were influenced by specific creative practices and industry contexts. The research attempts to identify patterns of use regarding the items of clothing used, how particular items are used to produce representations, and the meanings the items and the representations hold for the costume designer, production team and the audiences that view them.

A combination of methods has been used, prior to exploring the combination employed **section 1.2** situates costume conceptually, looking at where we can understand costume to exist and what claims to 'truth' costuming might hold. Methodologically then, in the first instance, quantitative (content analysis, **section 1.5.1**) and qualitative (textual analysis, **section 1.5.2**) were employed across the eighteen episodes that constitute the three series. **Section 1.5** explains the practical and theoretical approach undertaken in the content and textual analysis. In conjunction with this, qualitative ethnographic research was conducted in the form of interviews with members of the team responsible for producing the drama. In addition, focus groups were organized to record responses to the costumes and wider contexts of the narrative. **Section 1.6** deals with the methodological considerations of interviewing and **section 1.7** discusses the focus groups.

The subject position of the researcher has produced further methodological reflection. This is the result of the combination of over ten years' industry experience in film and television costuming that encompasses the period (2006-2009) in which *The Street* was made. Although I did not work on this production, I have experience of working with Barbara Kidd, the costume designer from series 1. Further methodological reflection was required as a result of my self-identification as, and lived experience of being, working class. Both areas of experience are drawn upon significantly throughout the thesis, which

introduced the possibility of employing autoethnography as a further methodological choice. The decision not to employ this method and the parameters of the experiential dimension to the narrative are explored further in **section 1.4**.

The research borrows from oppositional philosophical viewpoints associated with cultural studies research into the social world: namely, Marxism versus culturalism, or the tension between structures of power and conflict and human agency, specifically here regarding dress choice, dressing practices and the contexts of their production as representations. In addition, the thesis suggests that the meaning of the clothing representations that are examined occupy both fixed or structuralist, and dynamic or post-structuralist, positions simultaneously, fixed within the language of television costuming, dynamic at the point of interpretation. The overarching premise of the thesis, which utilizes elements of each of the positions outlined, is that viewers of television drama will judge the characters they view within the narrative of the drama based, in part, on a negotiation between their own lived experience and the clothing that has been translated into familiar and repetitive costume tropes that they observe the characters wearing. These judgements can be in agreement with, or in opposition to, the intent of the narrative (Hall, 1973, 1997). In productions that have political motivations or positions, such as *The Street*, the costume tropes often remain unchanged, which can work to undermine the potency of the writing. This could be the result of practical production limitations or simply the requirement that the narrative must still work or make sense within generic conventions of mainstream populist media production. The tension produced from the oppositions outlined is discussed further in Chapters 2 and 4.

This research is indicative of the discussions and tensions still prevalent around research into the social world and the claims to knowledge that such research produces. These debates concern the constricting and/or rejected hierarchies of natural verses social science and 'quantitative' versus 'qualitative' approaches and their appropriate methodologies. For Martin Hammersley (1993), there remains a clear distinction between the established natural sciences, which hold claims to neutral or objective approaches that produce conventional reliability and validity criteria resulting from reproducible generalizations; these are often held in higher regard. In contrast, the social sciences, with emphasis on individualized and interpretive understandings, description as opposed to explanation and acknowledgement of subject position, is regarded as much more fluid and

therefore less stable, 'reliable' or valuable in a scientific sense. Repeating a research exercise in a social science context will more than likely produce different results and it is the difference that is valued. Or rather, what is viewed as richness and strength of material in one area is considered a weakness in another. As Jaffee remarks, 'in the natural sciences, trend following would be more important than in the social sciences' (2014: 8). This research gathers data from a range of individual interpretations, from a very small sample set against the scale of television costuming as the broader context. Differences displayed are considered the strength and value of this research. As such, they can situate authentic heterogeneity within the realm of mass media consumption and therefore question the necessity for the reductive visual language that is examined.

The fluid, heterogenic and interpretive nature of the 'social' world is understood within this research in a number of ways. The 'social' refers to the groups or structures involved in television production, the social aspects of television viewing, often in a domestic setting and often discussed at length within that setting and further wider social networks, and the social (that claims to be) represented within the drama. Each of these social contexts are subject to social class experience, systems, and structures that pre-exist the focus here but that provide the pre-condition for the 'social' of television production, viewing, and narrative to exist and function in the way that it does (see Chapter 3 for more on the structures, systems and experiences of social class represented within *The Street*).

The methods undertaken here work together to facilitate an examination of the roles of a particular set of individuals and the work they do to produce a television drama. They also explore group and individual sense-making practices (McKee, 2002) or responses to the drama. A re-reading of *The Street*, via textual and content analysis, is presented that helps to make the silent majorities heard (Baudrillard, 1994a), which exist at the margins of such a text, to discuss what might be absent from the representations and what those absences might mean.

As the close reading is produced by another individual (the researcher) with a particular and specific subject position, the combination of the individual viewpoints, roles and readings allow the research to explore and deconstruct the presuppositions and structures buried within the text, which is positioned as representing everyday activity through specific items of clothing. Textual and content analysis and ethnography in the form of interviews and focus groups are used to help confirm that the costuming practices within

The Street are not independent of politics, motive, or subjective understandings. The methods selected help constitute a critical paradigm to expose how the social structures present within and through class experience are shown in the typification present in television drama costuming, despite the narrative intent of the production. This serves to highlight a social and sartorial hierarchy whereby value and pathologies – not facts or truths – are used, through creative practice, to perpetuate the hegemonic communication of class experience. Further, the representations produced, and the realism experienced, understood, and demanded by the public produces a form of class alienation and is situated here as a product of the techniques of adaptation and or resignation (Chibber, 2022) inherent within contemporary class experience.

The research undertaken here crosses several disciplinary boundaries. Although the foundations of the discussion lie within the field of cultural studies, there are elements that draw upon theories and/or methods from fashion studies, sociology, film and television studies, linguistics, and politics. Each discipline with which the research intersects inevitably has its own stance and frames of reference (Kaiser, 1997), which have been acknowledged where possible throughout the thesis. The approach taken here has allowed space for the development of a methodological and theoretical engagement that demonstrates a mixture of cultural, social, political, and philosophical considerations whilst also making use of the particular and distinctive subject position of the researcher.

1.2 What is a costume?

Before discussing the specifics of costuming in *The Street*, this section will explore 'where' costumes exist and think about the notion of truth in relation to the final product ultimately suggesting that, broadly speaking, the costuming evidenced within *The Street* can in many ways be thought of as melodramatic. This is a way of making sense of the costume in filmic terms that encompasses the complexities and tensions at work in its creation, production, and consumption.

The response to costume is instinctive, individualized and conceptual. As Sally and Danielle articulate during FG1 when discussing the character of Yvonne, Sally comments that "Yvonne is very isolated [...] as soon as he (Sean) is back in her life, she wants to be invisible again with that bloody cardigan"; Danielle replies that Yvonne "is showing how frail she is, just sad clothing" (Appendix E1). Both women individually instinctively feel pity or fear on behalf of Yvonne and connect those emotive responses to objects of clothing. So, for most of us our response begins with a visual stimulus, for as Bruzzi claims, wearing is seeing (1997), which occurs within the abstract space of the mind and is linked to complex subjectivities and emotions that are the foundation blocks used in the construction of the self (Wollen, 1998), and the meanings embedded within processes of communication. This leaves costume somewhere on the border between explanation and understanding (Hammersley, 1993). The explanation evoked by the creators is essentialist in nature (Lawler, 2008), as Barbara Kidd comments:

once you know your characters and you know who is playing them, you can walk into a shop [...] and you will know what clothes that character would choose and that's not a bad way of working [...] I think that is the way you have to work because if you understand the character then you understand the choices that they would make for one reason or another. (Appendix F2)

The understanding of those that 'read' the creations draws from the symbolic language of dress read through subjective understandings and experience. As Carol confirms from FG5,

I like it when you see stuff from where you're from? You connect to that, and you say, you know, it's like the street that I live in. You see that kind of, you know, those kinds of people, you recognise some of them, you know, the young lads going out

and the community and you, you know, being close to your family and all of that kind of stuff. (Appendix E2)

Costume could therefore be understood as a manifestation of the difference between sociology and semiology that Barthes locates within the system of fashion (1985).

1.2.1 Where does costume exist?

Costume occupies an unusual and fluid space both conceptually and practically. It is both something and nothing; it exists and does not exist; it presents a material site on which the intangible is manifested. or rather a physical and familiar piece of clothing that is a manifestation of fiction. The purpose of clothing is, as Cook claims, to occupy the space between two realms: 'the threshold between the body and the outside world, between the private and the public' (1996: 43). So, costume marks the point where the body of both the character and actor and the lived context of the character interact with the outside world of the audience. As Lee Ingleby commented when discussing his preparation processes,

does he smoke, what are his interests, what is his relationship with his parents, are they alive? All these details are never mentioned in the script but they help you as the actor to put breath and colour into the mind of that character in order to make him or her believable, which is a huge help for when it comes to choosing the right wardrobe for that character. (Appendix F4)

Costume exists as items of cloth used on a body but also works as an imagined embodiment (Street, 2001), or rather, the materiality of the costume occupies the realm of physicality: it has a constructed physical existence and presence, whilst what the materiality produces, evokes, provokes, symbolizes or communicates is produced in the abstract and conceptual space of thought. To begin with this is within the mind of the designer. Barbara Kidd refers to her thought process on designing the costume for the taxi driver Eddie in series 1: 'they [taxi drivers] are very often a little bit overweight and they might drink a little too often, so of course all those things go into it. All of these things come into play when you are thinking about the character' (Appendix F2). However, how the audience understands, accepts or rejects the characters' identity expressed through the clothing seen on screen is determined by their own individual conceptual frames of reference, as articulated in the following quote from Kim in FG5: "I don't think a young lad like that would dress like that. Not going out to the clubs and bars, I've seen them types out, I've seen them getting, you know, on the lash" (Appendix E2). The constructed materiality of the costume is temporal: it exists in a moment of recorded time (on screen) and is experienced in a transient way by the viewer, often fleetingly, but it is not 'real', (Taylor, 2002) and has no 'meaning' or indeed existence outside the context of the narrative (Bruzzi, 1997). In fact, it ceases to be a costume at all

after the production has wrapped, becoming clothing again, to be sold, re-hired or disposed of. Therefore, it is open to question if it can be trusted (Cook, 1996), or relied upon at all.

Thus far within film and fashion studies the 'where' of costume's existence has been explored and explained in several ways. For Jackie Stacey, people engage with and respond to costume (thereby establishing its existence) as a means of either escapism, embodied aspiration, or identification. For this group, costume exists as a projected reality or as a way of understanding the self (Brooker & Jermyn, 2003). This can be seen in Danielle's words from FG1: "the sister (Kerry from 'Sean & Yvonne') had a long skirt on, though, didn't she, with sequins, the longer ones? I remember I used to wear all that" (Appendix E1). Similarly, Rob in FG5 noted that "I don't dress like that (like Ian or Gary from 'Taxi'), like either of them, neither do my boys" (Appendix E2). Kidwell and Steel discuss how costume can provoke 'desire' (1989), as in Steve's response during FG5 to a leather jacket seen in series 3 episode 1, 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009): "[t]hat was nice bit of leather in that jacket there. I wouldn't mind that myself" (Appendix E2). Gledhill & Williams speak to the relationship between the real and fantasy woven into costume (2000), in which costume exists in a space of emotive or psychological provocation. For example, Emma in FG4 spoke of how the costumes help position the powerful and upsetting narrative of domestic abuse: "[t]his is another, you know, setting another bad scene and sort of shining people in a light, that they've had to always deal with, the same old shit" (Appendix E1).

Nadoolman Landis (2003) explains that costume can only exist as a result of its role within productions, understood as a means by which objects of clothing are used to 'reveal' character or progress narrative whilst simultaneously 'concealing' or evoking the 'collapse' necessary within the realism of screen productions. This can be thought of as the curtain used to conceal the mechanics – cameras, lighting, effects, direction – of screen productions: '[b]efore an actor speaks, his wardrobe has already spoken for him; the clothes are the character and they must be an external representation of the characters interiority' (Nadoolman Landis in Boumaroun, 2018: 7). Barbara Brownie offers a similar analysis and explains how costume affords the possibility of a clever mask that gives the appearance of no mask at all (2014). Finally, David Blair refers to the character detail held within the clothing items: "[i]t's the superficial detail [but] obviously there is some profound information that goes into that" (Appendix F1). Costume is a visual tool saturated with meaning and purpose that 'loudly' communicates information and yet often remains at the

margins of audience perception. As Sandy Powell commented in Nadoolman Landis's 'Screencraft', '[i]f a contemporary film is designed well, you don't notice what they are wearing' (2003: 111). There is a danger, however, in the slippage between brilliant design that disappears and the saturation of a meaning – accurate or inaccurate – through repeated use that renders it invisible, as this research claims.

1.2.2 The 'truth' of costuming

Whilst the hegemonic principles employed avoid the small distinctions inherent within culture (Breward, 1995) the use of naturalism and/or realism (discussed at length in Chapter 2) employed within *The Street* makes visible the ethos of TV drama that is driven by complex characterization, where the inherent interior drama of human psychology meets external social conditions (Caughie, 2000). The chosen meanings generated through this meeting are made visible or produce a truth (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) in part through the clothes the characters wear. This is clear in the comment made by David Blair when discussing the costuming of Christine Bottomley as Yvonne in series 1, episode 6 'Sean and Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006): "I do remember talking about enslavement and emancipation and these two elements should be reflected in how they should be dressed" (Appendix F1). Yvonne is imprisoned within a relationship dominated by domestic abuse; the enslavement is dealt with implicitly through the violence she suffers at the hands of Sean and her emancipation from that relationship forms the dramatic conclusion to the narrative.

Given the arbitrary nature of the existence and the meaning of costume combined with the fluid and individualistic creative subjectivities at work in its production (discussed later), where does this leave the notion of 'truth' in relation to costuming and costumed representations? As Ashby & Higson (2000) ask, is it vain to pursue (or expect) any notion of costume authenticity? Small screen costuming is an embodied yet symbolic site where a consistent struggle for truth plays out through the tension between acceptance and resistance (Thornham & Pruvis, 2005; Pidduck, 2004). Where the truth of costuming is explored theoretically, often we find it as experienced by the researcher and the particular relationship they have with the costuming under examination. For example, Justin Smith explores costume design as a space where different spheres of activity not explored here (such as style, consumption and the emotional currents of a particular moment in time) converge to communicate a cultural paradox. Thus, the costuming he is exploring (Withnail's

coat) lends itself to a very particular truth in this context (Smith, 2005), that may or may not be relevant in others.

Laura Mulvey referred to the quest for, or articulation of, truth as the obsession of society (Mulvey, 1989) but in line with the discussions above, we can only acknowledge here that the truth of the costuming within *The Street* is the truth as the writer, director, designer, and actor agree to see it. We can only surely identify whose truth is being portrayed here (Kawamaura, 2011). To claim anything other than that would be a moral claim (McKee, 1992) that combines our own unique perceptions and pre-conceptions of a verisimilitude (Ashby & Higson, 2000). Baudrillard states that, 'in any entirety the objective allows for a circular type of truth where the object itself is excluded' (1994a: 32). This circularity can be understood here as the relationship between the language of clothing (explored throughout chapter 4) and the language of TV (Chapter 2) and the axioms this relationship produces. These hegemonic systems create a paradox whereby existing within their circularity can actively reduce the probability of the intended message reaching its destination and being understood according to its intended meaning. Therefore, the 'truth' of the costuming within *The Street* can only be understood in relation to the context of its production and consumption. It cannot be considered as any other type of truth.

1.3 Why a qualitative ethnographic approach?

It is appropriate that a significant element of the primary data collected here is described as ethnographic. The overarching hypothesis works to establish how items of everyday dress used as television costuming within *The Street* are used and understood by key groups of people (television production crews and television viewers, as well as the researcher), so the rationale for ethnographic engagement with the groups identified is clear.

The research is qualitative, as the purpose was to examine a limited sample of UK television output to facilitate manageable engagement with the cast, crew and viewers in a meaningful way within the limits and scope of this project. *The Street* premiered on UK television on 13th April 2006.⁵ It sat alongside comparable television drama such as *Waterloo Road* (2006-present, BBC), *Casualty* (1986-present, BBC), *New Street Law* (2006-2007, BBC), *Silent Witness* (1996-present, BBC), *Coronation Street* (1960-present, Granada), *Blue Murder* (2003-2009, ITV) and *Where the Heart Is* (1997-2006, ITV). It would have been impossible to produce a quantitative piece of research that attempted to analyse all UK television drama that aired across the 2000s, as is clear from the very small sample listed above. It was necessary therefore to limit the scope of this work to the discussion of one example and provide a qualitative reading. *The Street* was selected in part because the publicity material claimed it represented the lives of ordinary people (Stubbs, 2011), and because the creator and main writer, Jimmy McGovern, is a critically acclaimed left-wing producer of mainstream television drama (Dowell, 2009). A presumption was therefore made about the intent of the production and the narratives and situations of the characters represented. McGovern, his work, and the specifics of *The Street* are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Silverman states that not only does qualitative research offer a deeper picture than quantitative studies (2001), but that one of the particular strengths of qualitative research is ‘to study phenomena which are [...] unavailable elsewhere’ (2001: 43). He goes on to claim that the value of qualitative data can include ‘flexibility, the opportunity to study subjects in their natural contexts, and the possibility of studying processes as well as outcomes, or meanings as well as causes’ (2001:349). The interpretive nature of this work (analysing key objects of the costuming, such as the leather jacket worn by the character Tom from

⁵ See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0472984/releaseinfo/?ref=tt_gl_sm accessed 14 March 2023

'Smoke' in series 3, or the red top worn by the character Cath in series 2's 'Taxi' (see Chapter 3) lends itself to the notion of flexibility. In addition, to focus on interviews with the production team in combination with textual and content analysis and focus groups, offers the possibility of presenting causes and meanings as outlined by Silverman. As previously explained, two of Silverman's four major strands of qualitative data collection (textual analysis, and interviews /focus groups) will be undertaken here (Silverman, 2001: 18). The purpose is to seek what are claimed as objective facts alongside subjective perceptions (Silverman, 2001: 4). This will facilitate the triangulation whereby one method does not mutually exclude the other two (Silverman, 2001: 4).

Often research into screen costuming, which, up until the mid-1990s, focused overwhelmingly on film costuming, will centre on one particular aspect of the costume or clothing. For example, the psychoanalytical theory often employed throughout film theory to explore texts (in this instance a particular screen costume is understood as a text), as a repository of cultural anxiety and repression (Thornham & Purvis, 2005) will not seek out specific production knowledge. This form of research marginalizes, obscures or ignores alternative aspects or important factors of a costume's use; these might be as arbitrary as budget considerations, the availability (or not) of particular items, the production timescale, the wider art direction of the production, the choice of film stock or the actor's personal requirements or requests. The specific design of this research will thus establish a 'deeper picture' afforded via quantitative research methods (Silverman, 2001: 25), that can explore the processes alongside the resulting representations, through (for example) discussing the practice of costuming with the designers Barbara Kidd and Teresa Rhymer, alongside interviews with the main director across the three series, David Blair, the actor Lee Ingleby, and the writer Roy Boulter.

The consensus model of ethnographic research employed by Atkinson and Hammersley (1998: 248) in the late 1990s remains relevant. They suggest that ethnographic research usually involves four key features. The first is the strong emphasis on the exploration of a particular social phenomenon, rather than starting out with a particular hypothesis which is then tested against it. With regard to this research, the social phenomenon under investigation is the nature of ordinary dressing and its meaning as represented within television drama costuming. 'Ordinary dress' here differs from other areas of costume design because it requires a specific set of industry practices, broadly

identified as a detailed understanding of character ‘types’ within a contemporary context; negotiating the transition of objects from clothing to costume for both crew and cast; and the logistical complexities of budgeting via ‘shopping’, hiring or making, whilst maintaining continuity across the shooting schedule. As Richard La Motte succinctly comments, the practice requires ‘psychology, timing and ego’ (La Motte, 2001: xxi). It also differs significantly from fashion costuming (Warner, 2014) where there is a tension between the notion of character and the concept of fashion clothing used as a form of visual display. These differences are discussed in Chapter 4.

The second aspect of ethnography which is relevant here is the tendency to work with data that has not been coded at the point of collection in terms of a closed set of analytical categories. The interview and focus group data collected here was eventually coded, but at the point of analysis with the identification of particular themes. The data is unstructured in that it is gathered from a triangulation of sources. These sources will have individual methods of data organization and categorization, but the overall emphasis will be on the combination of methods. Thus, the data remained unstable until a thematic concept emerged from it. For example, during the focus groups the emphasis the participants placed on their own dress practices and clothing choices and how these compared to or contrasted with the items seen on screen was not identified as a significant consideration in the planning stage. However, each of the focus groups spent a portion of time discussing this and it became clear that the participants’ proximity to the experiences of the characters was a key factor in how they felt about the costumes that were worn and the meanings associated with them. This area of discussion was extracted from the data (see section 4.7 ‘Class and the Politics of Costume’ where emotive responses to and experiences of financial hardship and domestic violence framed the participants’ readings of the screen costumes).

The third aspect of Atkinson and Hammersley’s suggested model is the investigation of a small number of case studies, perhaps just one in detail. This thesis does just that. As previously discussed, limiting the case study to one example of a drama series was an informed decision to facilitate the combination of visual and ethnographic methods. The final feature of the model is that it requires analysis of data that involves explicit interpretations of the meanings and functions of human actions in the form of verbal descriptions and explanations. The data gathered here is defined as hermeneutical as it will be analysed in relation to explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of the

human action of dressing and how that action is described, explained, and understood. In the first instance the description is provided by the interpretative action of the costume designer as they interpret a written character within the script into a clothed characterization. The explanation belongs to the embodiment of that characterization via the work of the actor and the filming of the narrative. Understanding is assumed throughout the process of description and explanation and occurs again in a different format when the drama is viewed. The final costume will implicitly articulate a series of descriptions, explanations and understandings that relate to the representation of particular sections of society, the broadcasting industry that creates the representations, and the economic, cultural and social structures that underpin that industry.

As Muggleton commented in Brooker's 'Audience Studies Reader' (2002), within ethnography it is important to combine textual analysis with other research methods, so that the reader and the researcher are represented within the research findings. Grey (2016) suggested more recently that momentum had declined for this form of combined representation within research and that the space has been filled with an overemphasis on fan cultures, where criticisms and critiques of the texts are marginalized in favour of analysing potent ways of engaging via the 'fan'. Here, the focus returns to the combination of ethnography and textual analysis outlined by Muggleton. In addition, and with particular reference to research into screen costuming, Helen Warner (2014) stated that television studies use of ethnographic approaches would prove a useful foundation for the examination of costume and its audience. Although this thesis does not claim audience studies research as a key driver, Warner's call for an ethnographic approach to costume research can be mapped onto the methodological design here. The methods this research employs sit at a point where television studies and the theory of dress converge, with a focus on understanding practitioners' engagement with a specific process and the audience's response to the practitioners' work. Therefore, Warner's application of television studies' use of ethnography to the study of costume is assimilated here. In addition, the use of textual analysis is a key feature; the observations and conclusions drawn will offer a unique perspective formulated through a distinctive combination of industry experience and the social identity and class experience of the researcher. The specificity of the particular subject position of the researcher and how this has influenced the development and design of this research is discussed in the following section.

1.4 Subject position and positioning the subject

This is a theory-based PhD but is informed by both my social class position and lived experiences and extensive television/film costume industry experience that covers the period 1994-2008. My industry background and subjective understanding of my own class and creative identity are visible throughout this research, adding a further layer of epistemological and theoretical complexity (Sartre, 1968).

To be clear, the primary methods of data collection used here are interviews with industry practitioners, focus groups, textual and content analysis. Autoethnography was considered as an additional method, but it was not adopted, despite the unapologetic subjective nature of analysis and the inclusion of personal reflections. For Adams, Ellis and Jones (2017) there are a number of characteristics that define work as auto-ethnographic: that the work fills gaps in existing research; that it is able to offer alternative accounts of phenomena sometimes in opposition to accounts previously accepted; that it provides insider knowledge of cultural experience not captured via other research methods; and that it clearly articulates how the researcher is implicated within the research. Each of the characteristics listed could apply here. Within the research on television costuming there remains a gap around the documentation of production practices and the intersection with considerations of social class. My industry and class experience or insider knowledge has allowed me to offer an alternative account and the direct ownership of that knowledge and experiences clearly implicates me as the researcher throughout.

However, the adoption of an auto-ethnographic approach loses traction when we consider the extended case study that forms the basis of the analytical work presented here. Although I have previously worked with Barbara Kidd, I do not use any field notes or documentation from my work at that time, neither do I reflect on the specifics of my work or the working practices on those productions within the thesis. I have not worked with either Theresa Rhymer or John Krausa, the costume designers from series 2 and 3 respectively and therefore, there would be no raw data or material to draw upon. In addition, although working within the costume industry during the period that *The Street* was produced and aired, I did not work on that production. Manning and Adam's definition of auto-ethnography is useful at this point:

it is a method that blends the purposes, techniques, and theories of social research—primarily ethnography—with the purposes, techniques, and theories associated with genres of life writing, especially autobiography, memoir, and personal essay. (2015: 189)

The autobiographical or life writing elements presented here are limited to framing the explanation of how and why the research question or hypothesis developed. The limited life writing clearly situates the author, and suggests the possibility of a relevant, authentic, and knowledgeable critique, but my own creative practice or work experience is not analysed. It could be argued that the work here has one foot in two of the orientations of autoethnography identified by Manning and Adams:⁶ critical, and interpretive humanistic (2017). To reiterate, it is not my work or my experiences that are being analysed or critiqued. Rather, the experiences I have had both professionally and personally are used as a ‘key’, to which not everyone has access, to ‘unlock’ possible explanations and understandings of the practices and experiences of the participants.

The explanation of why auto-ethnography was rejected as a ‘method’, whilst retrospective accounts informed the design of the research and personal experience informs the analysis presented, speaks to the contested field of autoethnography. As Denshire writes,

The introspective and subjective performances that are, to a greater or lesser extent, inevitable parts of the auto-ethnographic act still raise questions about the value of each auto-ethnographic account and which accounts are to be published and counted as research. (2014: 832)

What is presented here is not an auto-ethnographic account, but subjective interpretation informed by the specificity of particular professional and personal experience that has value for research on the representation of social class through costume practice.

Within research into the social world as social actors, we both read and are written by the texts with which we engage (Williams & May, 1996). As a result, it is problematic and indeed unnecessary to disentangle subjective understandings of both subject and the

⁶ Manning and Adams suggest that, due to the focus on description and analysis of culture, either the interpretive humanistic approach or the critical autoethnographic approach are most appropriate. The former applies theories to ‘thick’ descriptions of personal experience, the latter uses personal experiences to make visible issues with power, inequality, and oppression (Manning & Adams, 2015: 192, 193).

researcher in the process of research. Hodkinson also suggests that the subject position the researcher occupies and the bias that this position may or may not elicit can be seen to achieve maximum depth of analysis and a quality of understanding facilitated by access to and understanding of the particular groups being examined (Hodkinson, 2002). Hammersley comments that, with reference to ethnography, the closer the proximity of researcher to the subjects, the better the research produced (Hammersley, 1993).

The purpose of focusing on the subject position of the researcher at length here is to provide a prelude to further discussions throughout the thesis on what is believed by many creative practitioners to be the collapse of subjectivity into objectivity (Sartre, 1968) – or when subjectively informed creations are produced via, at best, a presumed objectivity, and at worst a denial of subjectivity. The give and go of the subjective/objective relationship affects the position from which the representations are produced, the analysis presented by the researcher and the participation of the research subjects. For example, the way in which the director David Blair conceptualizes social class experience and ways of dressing differed from that of the costume designer, Teresa Rhymer, in series 2 (Chapter 2). Equally, focus group participants presented different ‘readings’ when different groups viewed the same episode.

The use of Sartre here, and Baudrillard (amongst others) elsewhere, is a further example of how my class experience and educational capital have impacted this research. I did not grow up in a household that had books by French cultural or political theorists, or any critical theory in fact. My journey into academia is not via a traditional route. Therefore, I came to the ideas of these writers late. They had already passed through numerous cycles of relevance and fashionability. Interestingly in 2007, at the time when the second series of *The Street* was being produced and aired, the relevance of Sartre’s ideas was being re-examined once again (Swartz and Zolberg, 2007). Themes such as Marxism, (symbolic) violence, subjectivity and existentialism are still useful and relevant particularly when discussing the production of meaning (within representations) and the experiences of anguish, despair and alienation felt by those in the precariat class or low class/status positions within contemporary society.

The key here in employing the ideas of twentieth-century thinkers in a twenty-first-century context is to recognize the usefulness of some ideas and the redundancy of others

whilst acknowledging the value of 're-setting' interpretations through a different lens. As Douglas Kellner explains,

Deploying any given theory in an imaginative way can yield novel and important insights. But reducing cultural studies to one theoretical problematic or transcoding cultural studies into the language of a specific theory, can itself be highly destructive of the broader project. (2009: 5).

This research employs the ideas of a variety of both fashionable and currently unfashionable critical thinkers that cross disciplinary boundaries. The choice of concepts is the result of an informed and considered selection. While this may well be evidence of a belated engagement, it is of no less value as a result. As Diane Raey remarked,

the working-class university student manages the difficulties of reconciling a working class background with the middle class environment of the university where one class culture is seen to have less value than another. (2017: 102)

To this we can add that the middle-class environment of the university will privilege particular discourses or ideas within a hidden curriculum that is subject to the ebb and flow of fashionable trends in critical analysis, and that working-class students may well be unaware of the hidden curriculum and arrive via an alternative route. However, that route is of equal value for the very reason that it offers an alternative starting point and a different journey towards the final interpretation presented.

My own class position and experiences were made visible and felt viscerally from the start of my costuming career.⁷ As a costumier, I would agonize over the right item of

⁷ Before assuming the position of 'critical insider' is important to outline my position (Hodkinson, 2002: 4). I identify as a working-class woman. I was born and raised in Dagenham, which is a strange London borough that acts as a conduit between the East End and Essex. My parents (a 'fruit and veg man' and semi-professional footballer father and my dental nurse mother) moved to the borough from the 'real' East End over fifty years ago and have never quite felt at home. My grandmothers and their siblings were employed in non-normative female roles such as the rag and bone trade as well as being professional card players, bare-knuckle fighters, and money-lenders. My grandfathers worked in traditional working-class laboring roles, such as dock work in the East End docks. In a break with my predecessors, and unusually for someone with my background, I went to art school as a mature student, after the more predictable career paths offered to me as a state-educated working-class teenager, who had reached maturity during Thatcher's dominance of the political landscape in the 1980s, proved unsatisfactory. I began working in costume for film and TV in the early '90s and stopped working within the industry in 2008 after the sale of the BBC costume store, as described earlier. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7321453.stm>

clothing to best articulate character. This was driven by the fact that I had never fully identified with any of the class representations I had seen on screen. They never seemed to reflect my own experience or the experiences or ideals of those around me: '[w]e need to feel we can be included and that comes from the experience of seeing ourselves included' (Connolly, 2017: 64). I felt that people like me were not represented accurately on screen, particularly when it came to engagement with fashion, style, and dress.

It was important for me as a practitioner to understand the system of representation of which I was a part and to know how it worked, in order to do my job well. The insecurity I felt about the representations I was being asked to produce was twofold: I felt insecure and at times (to my shame) ashamed about my own background and therefore was happy to become complicit in re-creating class clothing in the way I was instructed; and I felt insecure in my position and role within the industry, surrounded as I was by designers, producers, and directors that did not come from the same class background as me or the characters they were employed to costume. This situation highlighted uncomfortable issues around (class) consciousness and selfhood. I was being asked to re-make a class I did not recognize, over and over, by what Skeggs describes as, 'the cultural values embodied in personhood' (2005: 966). Those values were institutionally established and understood as 'lacking' in some way, lacking 'good' taste, lacking an understanding of 'fashionable' dress, and lacking appropriate ways to clothe gendered bodies.

It is inevitable, therefore, that, saturated in working-class experiences, significations and professional practices as a costume designer and costumier will create a particular consciousness, which will in turn inform the design of this research and the interpretations presented. This includes the interpretations of the Manchester-based representations examined through the lens of London experiences and understanding; the interpretation of the responses generated by the viewers in the focus groups who were gleaned from around the country; and the interpretations of the choices made by those involved in the production, again from diverse locations: David Blair is Scottish, Teresa Rhymer is from Wales, Barbara Kidd is from London. As Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody state, 'most qualitative research is infused with realism or claims to authenticity - adding the researcher's voice fills absences that difference might produce, constructing a more complete or 'real' ethnographic picture' (2001: 85). The claims to realism and authenticity

within this research are in the production and intention of the representations from *The Street* and in the researcher's analysis of them.

There are three examples from my industry experiences that are relevant here. The first speaks to one of the core arguments of this research: that costume representations are often reductive and that the production of such representations makes visible misunderstandings and questionable perceptions about how the working classes engage with 'fashion' and choose to dress.⁸ The second example is anecdotal and seemed to justify the indecision I had experienced earlier.⁹ The representations seen on screen were more about designer choice than an articulation of individual choice. Exploring the subjective interplay of the creative departments in television production is another important element of this research as this speaks to the tension between an authorial voice, realist conventions the power relations woven into the production of representations (see Chapters 2 and 4).

⁸ I was asked to find a white T-shirt for a character identified in the script as a 'white working-class male'. From my own subjective position, I recognized that 'the public display of private ideas of subjectivity is where class relations are played out' (Skeggs, 2005: 975). The public display here was to be represented in the choice of clothing. I agonized over the correct T-shirt because I had multiple experiences of the variety embedded within the description 'white working-class male'. I procrastinated, considering weight of cotton, fit, finishing, branding and wear-and-tear, as each seemed to be material evidence of Skeggs's 'private ideas of subjectivity'. I needed more information if I were to distinguish the particular type of 'white working-class male' being represented. Where did he work, what music did he listen to, what did he read, did he care for his clothes, what was he trying to be or to communicate? As Sartre states, 'the most fundamental characteristic of man is consciousness, the ability to go beyond his situation, he is not the same as it but he lives in relation to it' (1968: xix). Sartre articulates the fluid choices human beings make constantly, both in conjunction with and in opposition to the social, cultural, economic and political position in which they find themselves. All of us (including white working-class men) exercise this consciousness on a daily basis. The situation or system these men are so conveniently defined by is represented by wearing a white T-shirt as opposed to a shirt and tie. However, they go beyond the situation (if not the system) by making conscious decisions around fabric, fit and finish. I was reprimanded for my tardiness and told that any old T-shirt would do.

⁹ The costume designer Tom Rand was recounting a research trip he had taken as part of the team for a production set in a sub-Saharan village. He had been present when a charity had delivered a consignment of clothing to the village in which they were stationed, by unceremoniously dumping a pile of used clothing. He had witnessed the local people picking over the clothing and making active 'choices' about what to select that went beyond considerations around necessity and moved into the sphere of taste and ideals. Such choice has been invoked throughout history. Brooks quotes Adam Smith from 1776 as follows: 'the old clothes which another bestows on him he exchanges for other old clothes which suit him better' (in Brooks, 2015: 77). If people, in what we assume to be a desperate situation requiring charitable assistance, were making active choices around sartorial style and taste manifestation, I felt justified in my deliberation over the 'white working-class male' T-shirt. Deliberating between a Fruit of the Loom mid-weight cotton Brando-inspired white T-Shirt, or a more fitted style with Lycra and bound edges, seemed perfectly reasonable (in fact, essential) for an authentic representation. For me, both were feasible, along with many others, because in my own lived experience, I had not encountered either class or gender in such a limited way.

In the third example, I was asked by a costume designer to ‘pull’ a rail of costumes for a fitting.¹⁰ The ‘common sense’ position understood by those who hold the power in terms of the visuals in the production drew on pathologies associated with the intersections of daily life, class and (in this instance) criminality. However, as Lefebvre states, daily life can and should be understood in several ways, including a fluid site of ambiguity, a language and a ‘tool’ where ‘truths’ are created and the dominated are manipulated (Lefebvre, 2005). The tired and reductive (yet dangerous) approach to representation articulates how such understandings can become tools with which to oppress, marginalize, and eventually normalize, promoting what Chibber (2022) describes as acceptance and resignation from working-class audiences. Misrepresentations or alternative understandings such as this and the processes in creating them are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Eventually I learnt that these anomalies didn’t matter for the purpose of the job. I understood the language of class clothing employed in the language of television and knew how to reproduce it for different contexts (see Appendix H), but they did matter to me personally. The shame I had previously felt about my class background was replaced by

¹⁰ To ‘pull’ a rail of costumes means to search through the racks of clothing housed in the costume stores (Angels claims to have over 8 miles of costume racks. See <https://www.angels.co.uk/>). This was across several floors of industrial warehousing, and the aim was to generate a limited and edited selection in line with what is required for the production. The requirements will be around character in the first instance, a form of identity ‘typing’, and the context of the narrative in the second instance – how many days does the story cover, does the character have an extensive wardrobe or wear the same items continuously, do we ever see the character outside, do they go to any special events (they might need a particular outfit for a wedding or court appearance), and so on. From this edited selection, the wardrobe for each character will be fitted, developed, and decided upon.

The production was set in East London gangland, and the actor to be fitted was playing the wife of a high-ranking criminal. In the script, her character was described as interested in and well-informed about fashion, so I did what I thought was a good job based on my costume knowledge and my own experience of women such as the one described. I pulled items from more exclusive retailers and some designer pieces and constructed a rail that communicated that the character knew about contemporary fashion, style and accepted or mainstream concepts of ‘taste’. The costume designer agreed, but the actress and the director had a different vision for the character: something much more brash, tight-fitting, exposing, and that demonstrated what is understood as monied ‘bad taste’. What was eventually selected wasn’t an articulation of the character’s identity but an articulation of the joint or combined understanding of the actress and the director’s concept of a particular ‘type’ of person, informed by their own distance from that ‘type’ of person (or rather their own lived experience). So, the eventual costumes selected can only ever be described, as Hughes and Sharrock have it, as ‘explanations that originate in the social lives of the participants’ (1997: 179). That is, the eventual costume choice can only ever come from the conceptions within the mind of the participant – the designer, director, or actor; they cannot be viewed as anything more than that. My interpretation of the final costume selections was that it was an amalgamation of brash stereotypes associated with the fecund body of the working-class woman (Walkerdine et al., 2001). It was an articulation of unruly bodies or bodies without control that are often associated with working-class femininity. Such associations are of course imposed upon groups of women who might not see themselves that way at all. As Lawler remarks, there seemed to be ‘an emphasis of identity as trouble or in trouble’ (2008:2).

frustration and anger at the misrepresentations continually reproduced. At once, the negotiation between distance and proximity is clearly articulated – proximity is lived experience, distance is knowledge without power to initiate change. These broad brushstrokes erased the diversity within lived experiences and the possibility of an acknowledged individualism. Instead, they revealed a pervasive dominance inherent within this aspect of communication. I understood why this was seen as a necessary part of the practice and the language of television, since ‘directors are constrained by the conventions of the medium’ (Fiske & Hartley 2003: 44). Costume is above all else a communicative medium; it requires a common language to be understood within the conventions of television – but what are the repercussions of the constraints of this medium and who benefits from them?

Understanding class experience forces a philosophical discussion of how those experiences have impacted this methodology in very specific ways. The first is in the relationship between class consciousness and interpretation. Sartre states that,

Class consciousness is not the simple lived contradiction which objectively characterizes the class considered; it is that contradiction already surpassed by praxis and thereby preserved and denied all at once. But is it precisely this revealing negativity, this distance within immediate proximity which simultaneously constitutes consciousness of the object and non-thetic self-consciousness. (1968:33)

Class consciousness is elusive and not necessarily a pre-requisite of class experience. The contradiction here is embodied within understanding specific human experience whilst at the same time being confined by that experience. It is having knowledge and yet lacking the power or position to use the knowledge in a specific way to change the situation in which one finds oneself, but rather living with the reality of knowing and understanding one’s position. This position creates a negative essence (Bourdieu, 2003), revealed here as held within the absent space of my consensual and continued reproductions of reductive representations, the examples of the ‘misrepresentation’ of class specific sartorial style in television drama, and discussions around class and experience gathered from focus groups.

The second way my own experiences have impacted the methodology outlines subjective interpretations and analysis of the items of dress singled out for analysis as part of the thesis. The ‘real’ of my lived experience has dissolved into and exists within my

subjective understandings. The idea of a subjective position is linked to both selfhood and class consciousness, as the former is informed or populated by the latter. Skeggs, Thumin and Wood (2008) write that selfhood relies on and is resourced by mediated symbolic forms and that there has been very little research based on this idea. The mediated form here is the material production of clothing naturalized as costume. The standards that govern explanations of a character through the clothing they wear originate in the social life of participants. The standards at play in this context originate in the social life of those involved in the production and my interpretation of their work originates in my lived experience. So, the explanation of character presented via a particular choice of costume originates in the social life of the costume designer (amongst others), their class experiences, position and understanding. The readings of the focus group participants originate from the individual experiences of the participants and the social implications of the group setting. Finally, as discussed at length here, my analysis and interpretation of the costuming analysed originates in my own social, cultural, and creative life and experiences.

1.5 Textual and content analysis as method

1.5.1 Content analysis

Content analysis has been used as a research methodology within media studies since the middle of the last century (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). Morley's 'household centred methodology' of the 1980s (Gauntlett, 1999: 5) has evolved into a robust means to collect and classify data in a 'reliable' way and provide the means by which to test prior theoretical concerns (Hammersley, 1993: 17). Fiske and Hartley state quite clearly that, with regard to research concerned with the media, and with television specifically, content analysis should always be the starting point, for researchers to identify what is actually on the screen: '[t]he starting point for any study of television must be with what is actually there on the screen. This is what content analysis is concerned to establish' (2003: 10). Once this information has been gathered and quantified (what they refer to as the manifest content), the latent or hidden content can become fully visible.

The surface detail focus is selected via subjective concerns or motivations but should be gathered in an objective fashion and the results should demonstrate a criterion of reliability and validity, in that the same exercise should be able to be repeated by another

researcher without a change to the findings (Elo et al., 2014). The categories selected should not be flexible and the collection method needs to be defined as general, systematic and quantitative: '[c]ontent analysis should be: objective (be able to be repeated by other researchers), systematic, general (findings must have theoretical relevance), quantitative, concerned with manifest content and surface meaning' (Hammersley, 1993: 40). It is a useful tool to 'analyse data within a specific context in view of the meanings someone – a group or a culture – attributes to them' (Krippendorff, 1989: 403).

Television drama as a medium of mass communication requires that an appropriate sample should be identified that can test the hypothesis of the thesis and allow the researcher to draw generalisations and thus findings about the wider context from where the sample is drawn (White & Marsh, 2006). For the purpose of this research, non-probability sampling was employed, isolating eighteen episodes of Jimmy McGovern's *The Street* (2006-2009, Granada) that aired in the UK across three separate series from 2006-2009 within the wider sample of television drama. McGovern self-identifies as a chronicler of English working-class life and has a perceived 'authenticity' that has evolved from his own experiences and position within the 'everyday' (Forrest, 2017: 29-30). As Hammersley states, the goal for sampling is that it allows for a conceptual richness driven by grounded theoretical concerns (1993: 25). Here, *The Street* was selected via a systematic process in line with the key theoretical concepts that underpin the hypothesis: to identify contemporary dramatic productions that situate the narrative in the 'everyday' and that deal with the experience of social class. Forrest states that *The Street* is a 'site of class representation with focus on the evocation of ordinariness' (2017: 29). Since the mid-1950s, drama content has focused predominantly on urban settings (Head, 1954); this again made the sampling of *The Street* particularly useful in this context, as working-class experience is more often than not positioned within an urban context. Therefore, the position of McGovern within the field of television writing and the narrative focus on the urban 'everyday' of *The Street* made for an appropriate and rich sample.

This research also carried out a negative sampling process. *The Street* is identified throughout the thesis as a 'hybrid' television drama (Forrest, 2017) referencing the boundaries that it crosses: one-off drama, soap opera and drama series. Using negative case study analysis allowed for a possible challenge to the initial assumptions and it was also used as a means of constant comparative analysis (Hammersley, 1993: 26; McKee, 2002).

This research used an episode of the drama series *Blue Murder: Make Believe* (Menhaj Huda, 2006) also screened in 2006 and two episodes of the soap opera *Coronation Street* (episode 6331: Dyddgen-Jones; episode 6334: O'Mara) from 2006 as the negative case studies. The data from both samples was gathered in accordance with the same categories as those used for *The Street*. The results can be seen in Appendix I and will be referred to where appropriate throughout the rest of thesis.

There is a smaller sub-sample of texts or particular episodes that were explored in more interpretative detail via close reading or textual analysis; this smaller group is 'representative' as any of the eighteen episodes across the three series had the same chance of being selected (Kawamaura, 2011). Here, *The Street* is understood as a 'case study' from which operational and functional information about the communities of both practice and viewing have been systematically gathered (Kawamaura, 2011). The purpose of identifying the sample as a case study is to clarify that this sample and its patterns, nuance and hidden elements (Kawamaura, 2011) are part of a wider story that draws on established theoretical questions: how is class experience represented, how does the language of costume articulate the social politics of the working class from the 2000s, and how was the practice of costuming influenced by industry factors?

The data gathered through the content analysis undertaken here can be found in Appendix I. A coding system was used throughout the viewing to identify objects of clothing. This system draws upon the abbreviations and categorisations used within industry practice to identify objects. The content analysis was a useful tool to lead into the more detailed and interpretive textual analysis and is integrated throughout discussions on the data collected from the interviews and focus groups. The number of key characters (that is, a character upon which the narrative progression relies) in each episode was recorded. This number ranges from two (series 1, episode 2 'Stan'; series 3, episode 5 'Past Life') to five (series 1, episode 4 'Football'; series 3, episode 3 'Scar'). Also recorded was the number of story days each episode contained. Again, the range here was quite broad from two (series 3, episode 1 'Smoke') to nineteen (series 3, episode 5 'Past Life'). Within these two basic axes, the number of clothing items seen on each character was recorded, with detailed lists of the clothing items. Costumes were also quantified in terms of the number of different 'outfits' or 'looks' each character was seen to wear across the different story days. Clothing items were grouped together under categories such as 'jeans' or 'smart trousers', and the totals

listed and ordered according to dominant gender conventions. There was a total of 45 different clothing types seen across the three series, with the highest frequency falling to 'T-shirts' (encompassing crew neck, v-neck and button-neck), with a total of 78 for male characters and 92 for female characters.

The data collection also helped focus the theoretical discussions. For example, in Chapter 2, the use of stereotyping is critically analysed. Discussions focus on the tropes used when costuming classed characters; therefore, it is imperative to know the frequency with which certain items appear on screen. Chapter 3 looks at the repetitive use of particular materials and accessories in communicating class position. The data gathered, which lists in detail the objects or items worn by each character, was drawn on here to identify patterns of use across all three series. Chapters 3 and 4 analyse the communicative nature of the clothing worn as costume and look in detail at the bodies seen wearing these costumes. The type of bodies seen, and the use of exposed flesh, is explored in detail, drawing on the detailed list of objects. This section also looks at the representations of pathologies associated with the working class, particularly management or mis-management of the body and hygiene. Again, the repetitive nature of some of the costume detailed in the content analysis cross referenced with the number of story days within an episode contributes to this discussion, as it makes clear when the same outfits are worn two or three days in a row (See series 1, episode 6 'Sean & Yvonne') or when a character fails to change after doing something that might dirty their clothing (see series 1 episode 1 'The accident'). Finally, Chapter 4 looks at the concepts of difference and distinction and explores these alongside the idea of sameness. The positioning of difference through materials and styles draws on the data gathered through content analysis. The lack of diversity within the characterised 'identities' is made visible by the detailed lists of clothing items across age, situation, interests and narrative, throughout all three series, and is considered a significant finding.

Throughout the content analysis the emphasis was on quantifying the identified codes (Kvale, 1996: 104) using naturalistic generalisations between the episodes and across the three series (McKee, 2002). In the next section, the emphasis shifts to interpreting the data, associations and relationships between the variables derived from the sample (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997: 64) through a method of textual analysis.

1.5.2 Textual Analysis

The following section will position textual analysis as a method and situate the mechanics of the process undertaken for this thesis. The term 'text' is a complex one. Christine Gledhill explains that it moved into general use following the fashion in academia during the 1970s for both semiotics and formalism. It is used here to describe a product of social practices: a television drama. The product is constructed through a particular experience and becomes something 'other', that is interpreted and consumed (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 219). Because of the processes required to create the product/text, it becomes an object in its own right, or an observation – not an explanation or report of an independent reality (Hammersley, 1993: 39; Williams & May, 1996: 170).

Textual analysis is most effective in conjunction with other methods (Warner, 2014). As Williams & May state, it is important to 'explore presuppositions buried in the texts produced in everyday activity' (1996: 169). Texts are repositories of meaning and can offer insight into the power mechanisms that often remain invisible within lived experience (Hammersley, 1993: 39). The analysis of texts and their subsequent deconstruction uncovers what is understood as 'held' within the text and positions how the text communicates with other texts in the social world (Williams & May, 1996: 16). It offers the opportunity to 'understand' often problematic and deeply obscure meanings (Johnson, 1979) by unpicking the inner workings at the point of creation and exploring the result in the context of the outer world of social context (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001). For this research, the inner workings at the point of creation are explored. I argue that the meaning 'held' within the text is elusive and often misunderstood, or understood in different ways by all parties involved in its production and consumption. Meaning often exists in the frameworks beyond the text, and this is particularly true of costume articulated as fashion (Baudrillard, 1994a).

Textual analysis can, however, preserve a distance between the researcher and the text. Very few of the authors whose work focuses on textual analysis (Brownie, 2014; Bruzzi, 1997; Street, 2001; Church Gibson, 2004; Cook, 1996; Gaines & Hertzog, 1990; Piddock, 2004; Warner, 2012, 2013, 2014) have experience as industry practitioners and so their subject position and resulting critiques reflect this. This again emphasizes the importance and unique approach of this work in acknowledging and actively drawing on the researcher's industry background and reflections. The textual analysis undertaken here acknowledges three key components involved in the process, or three levels of

understanding. The first is understanding the context in which the text has been produced. A text exists and is created in relation to the texts that preceded it, and those preceding texts will inform and restrict subsequent interpretations and understandings; 'a text always bears the mark of past historical engagements this limits its de-contextualization' (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001:98). Alongside the positioning of a text within a historical narrative, there are two further ways in which first-level understanding is made possible. The first is recognising the nature of a text or an item of clothing. When it enters into social and cultural circuits of exchange, 'meaning is produced or realised only in the specific utterance of a communication event that is in a precise historical actualisation of time and space' (Morris, 1994: 5). Here *The Street* can be understood in the broadest sense as a text but also as an 'utterance' within the language of television drama; equally, each costume can be read as a text, whilst individual items can be thought of as utterances.

The second way understanding is made possible is by assigning a particular significance to the nature of the text, as it has been identified. The assigned significance becomes active in different ways within different sites of exchange: '[e]very utterance is the product of the interaction between speakers and the product of the broader context of the whole complex social situation in which the utterance emerges' (Morris, 1994: 41). The reference points for both the nature and the site of exchange are also subject to historical narratives and these also need to be factored into the critical discourse produced. This moves away from the context of creation and toward the problematic concept of 'reading' a text. As Hirschkop & Shepherd comment; 'the activity of reading is dialogical between reader and text – this relationship has a past as well as a present' (2003:98). We can understand this relationship as the unconscious process whereby we read and are written by the texts we engage with (Williams & May, 1996) or rather, our response to a text – our reading of it – is informed by our own subject position and our subsequent analysis is created or driven by that response. A 'symptomatic' reading must also employ the established theoretical structure to illustrate that; what is absent features as prominently as that which is present, thus critically engaging with the implicit and making it explicit (Hammersley, 1993). Of course, it is acknowledged that this analysis is only one reading informed by one very specific subject position, whilst the text itself exists in a fluid site of negotiation (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 77) and what is seen as visible or considered as absent will change according to the reading. Readings that are produced via multiple circuits

change, or as Piddock comments, 'the text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever shifting grids of interpretation' (2004:12). However, it is worth referring back to the subject position of the researcher outlined above, which allows for this thesis to be particularly well-placed to uncover the implicit meanings embedded within the text.

The third level of understanding explored here recognises the problematic notion of 'meaning'. As Hirschkop & Shepherd comment, 'texts only mean when they are read, what they 'mean' depends on the shared values of those reading' (2003: 96). Meaning, understanding and the text rely on each other and cannot be separated. Understanding facilitates meaning occurring and the text produces understanding. However, textual features – for example, genre or stereotyping – can make some meanings more accessible to the reader than others (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 169). Management of those textual features can manipulate understanding and is where the authority of the creator becomes powerful in the production of meaning; again, Hirschkop & Shepherd explain: '[a]uthority is sinister. Against dialogical production of meaning are forces that seek to restrain or restrict the range of inter-textual relations and move towards one meaning' (2003: 100). The analysis undertaken here seeks to expose the manipulation involved in the production of meaning; this does not necessarily refer to those involved in the production of the drama but refers to the hegemonic manipulation of media structures. That is, the textual analysis embedded throughout the thesis aims to identify what is communicated or held within the text that is Jimmy McGovern's *The Street*. It will do so by considering contextual information alongside meaning that becomes apparent through a specific reading and understanding of the text. Understanding has occurred through knowledge of, and fluency in, the specific language that is employed to communicate: the language of dress.

1.6 Interviews as method

Ethnographic interviews generally take place between a researcher and selected participants in an informal setting. The purpose is for the researcher to gather first-hand accounts of experiences, practices, and understandings of a particular social, professional, or personal context. Kawamaura defined the ethnographic interview as a ‘conversation with the purpose of gathering specific information about a specific topic [...] [that is] effective for gathering answers to certain types of research questions and addressing certain types of assumptions’ (2011:72). The definition is suitable here as the interviews gathered specific information about the production of *The Street*, examining what assumptions are made about individuals (characters) as a result of the clothing (costumes) they were seen to wear.

Kvale takes the idea a step further, claiming that ‘the research interview is where knowledge is constructed in an interaction between interviewer and interviewee’ (1996:1), so although Kvale states that ‘[q]ualitative research interviews attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view’ (1996: xvii), a better description might be that the interviewer and interviewee work together through the process of questioning and discussion to construct meaning from a set of circumstances around an identified topic. With regard to interviews within media studies, Meyer wrote in 2008 that research into television and film was moving away from ethnographic work with audiences such as that produced by Morley and Silverstone (2002) and returning to the practices involved in both film and television production. Bruun commented that ‘[i]n media production studies the qualitative research interview is frequently used as a tool in the generation of data, and thus in building the analytical object’ (in Paterson et al., 2016: 131). For a ‘move away’ to become a frequent occurrence signals an important shift in how this method is used.

Within the sub-genre of research into television costuming there continues to be a slow but consistent emergence of work that draws together theory and practice via an ethnographic approach. For example, Justin Smith interviewed the costume designer Andrea Galer in 2005 to discuss her designs for Withnail’s coat from the 1987 film *Withnail & I* (Robinson, 1987). The researcher has similarly published material based on an interview with the costume designer James Keast (Betts, 2017). Deborah Nadoolman Landis provides an example of a practitioner who has moved away from industry to reflect theoretically on her own and her contemporaries’ creative practice/s (2003, 2008, 2012, 2010, 2018).

Further, in 2018 Barbieri and Pantouvaki spoke to the permeable relationship between theory and practice. They discuss costume designers who are producing academic research (Trencheva, 2018; Østergaard, 2018), engaging with practitioners of costume using Smith's model and examples of practice-based research and scholarship into costume that crosses disciplinary boundaries into a number of different fields.

One of the most recent and notable examples of research that combines theory and practice and uses interviews in a similar way to the work presented here is textile designer Urs. A. Georg Dierker's 2019 article on the undershirts worn by the character John McCain in *Die Hard* (1988, dir. McTiernan). Dierker looks at a specific object of costume from the perspective of the maker, designer, actor, curator, and spectator. A further example is Toylan's 2013 PhD thesis 'Reading *The League of Gentlemen*: studying the creation process of a comedy horror series' that uses textual analysis alongside interviews with the costume designer and the producers and commissioners of the television show. This research is distinct from both examples mentioned, in that neither Dierker or Toylan classify themselves as costume practitioners. To interview across the different roles within one drama, generate material via audience focus groups *and* produce textual analysis from the specific subject position of a practitioner, can offer a layered complexity or additional dimension to research into television costume practice and reception.

Interviews are clearly therefore a useful tool for this research as they can help articulate the bridge between the individual, self-contained, conceptual schemes formed through internal personal histories, autobiographies and experiences and what is eventually expressed through the production and/or the costume design (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997). That is, the costumes seen on the actors or characters are an articulation of the different ways the individuals within the production team understand the reality of the different contexts – narrative, setting and industrial. As such, interviews are a helpful instrument with which to ask people to reflect and comment on the choices they make as a result of ideas they hold or held about human nature and in this context, clothing, style or dressing practices and the costuming of drama. Hughes and Sharrock write that,

the job of empirical research is to discover patterns of relationships between rules, motives, situations, social relationships and behaviour and form them into regularities bringing them under a theory that explains them. (1997: 107)

This research looks at interview material and the text and situates the patterns of relationships involved in creating clothed representations. This leads to an exploration of whether those patterns produce, re-produce or reinforce ‘collective states of understanding’ (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997) from both practitioners and audiences.

The interview participants were selected in order to generate a broad picture of the overall production processes and how they interlink. To begin with, the costume designers from series 1 and 2, Barbara Kidd and Teresa Rhymer, were interviewed. As mentioned, I had worked with Barbara before. Teresa Rhymer was initially undecided about discussing her experiences on the production. She was concerned that the discussion might focus too much on the sometimes-difficult working relationship she had experienced on set. When it was explained that the focus would be on her methods and practices prior to filming or set work, she agreed to an online interview. The costume designer from series 3 was John Krausa. Initially email contact was made with John and he seemed open to interview; however, after the pandemic when the research threads were gathered together again, he did not respond to further emails. His agent was contacted, and a request was sent through them, and Barbara Kidd was approached again to ascertain if she had additional contact details for him but to no avail – his name has also been removed from the IMDB crew list.¹¹

Over the eighteen episodes there were two directors: David Blair who directed ten of the episodes, and Terry McDonough who directed the remaining eight. David Blair was interviewed at length in May 2018. Initial contact was made with McDonough pre-pandemic and he confirmed he would be available for interview, but after the pandemic he did not respond to communication. There were thirteen writers across the episodes, some working independently, some working in conjunction with Jimmy McGovern. Several attempts were made to arrange an interview with Jimmy McGovern, but he declined all requests and therefore access to McGovern comes via recorded interview material, predominantly from the BBC archives but also through populist media outlets such as YouTube (transcripts can be found in Appendix F6). The research was designed at an early stage to concentrate on three episodes in finer detail, one from each series. The three episodes selected were ‘Sean & Yvonne’ from series 1, ‘Taxi’ from series 2, and ‘Smoke’ from series 3. Arthur Ellison, the writer of the series 1 episode, is sadly deceased. Roy Boulter is the writer of series 2, and he

¹¹ See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0472984/releaseinfo/?ref=tt_gl_sm accessed 14 March 2023

was interviewed remotely in January 2020. Jimmy McGovern wrote 'Smoke', and as already explained, he was not available for interview.

In addition, the actor Lee Ingleby who played the character 'Sean' in series 1, episode 6, was interviewed in February 2020. Contact was made with the actor Christine Bottomley who played 'Yvonne' in the same episode and although informal conversations took place, no interview date was set prior to the pandemic, and again, after the pandemic she ceased to respond. Requests for interviews or to pose questions via email were sent to the agents of all the writers and key actors from the focus episodes. From the majority, there was no response at all. The agents for Ger Ryan, Gina McKee and Timothy Spall responded to say the requests had been kindly declined. Clearly it is disappointing not to have material from key members of the production to draw upon, particularly McGovern and Krausa, and the impact of the global pandemic on this research is palpable here. However, the material from the recorded media interviews and from the extended interviews with the costume designers from series 1 and 2 in collaboration with the extended interview with David Blair and the supporting interview with Ingleby and Boulter have produced a wealth of material that has been woven together with the close reading of the text and the material generated through the focus groups.

Before the interviews took place, participants were sent information (Appendix B) about the purpose of the research, which outlined exactly what was required. If participants were selected or volunteered, they were asked to sign an appropriate consent form (Appendix C; completed consent forms are not included in the appendices here in order to adhere to GDPR, but stored on the university One Drive and are available upon request). The questions asked were semi-structured, and the atmosphere informal. Some of the interviews took place by email; Teresa Rhymer was interviewed online; and I met with Barbara Kidd at the university, and David Blair in a Soho postproduction facility. For the longer interviews, there was an element of conversation generated through connections. With Barbara Kidd it was the connection of previous work experience, for David Blair the connection was through a mutual friend and colleague, the costume designer James Keast, and for Theresa Rhymer the connection was through shared experiences of costume work. As a result of these connections there was no obvious power dynamic between interviewer and participants (Kvale, 1996). Each participant was asked how they came to be involved with the production as a form of control question, to facilitate the validity that interviews

depend upon (Kvale, 1996; Hughes and Sharrock, 1997). Questioning then fractured into the specifics of the role held by the individual. Throughout, the thematic focal points of social class, representation and constraints of the medium framed the discussion.

The interview materials were transcribed by the researcher. Initially this was a laborious process of listening and re-listening to the audio recording and transcribing it word for word: what Kvale describes as ‘translation from one narrative mode to another’ (1996: 93). With later interviews and the secondary media interviews, a transcription app was employed. The document it produced was then checked through in detail and cross-referenced to the recordings to check the accuracy. The themes that were identified were subsequently interpreted at a deeper critical level in conjunction with the content and textual analysis, and the material produced through the focus groups and woven into the explorations within the following three chapters of the thesis.

As with all research methods, there are methodological constraints or issues to acknowledge. Kawamaura describes these as strengths and weaknesses (2011). Each method employed here operates within a set of assumptions (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997) and for the interviews undertaken, the assumptions that need to be considered are around the concept of meaning, the reliability of memory, access to the activity complex of costuming and the power relationships embedded within the production process and aesthetic formations. To look at meaning is to consider a metaphysical problem that explores whether one thing might say something or stand in for something else (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). To ask for opinions concerned with meaning is to ask the participants what they believe to be true (Williams & May, 1996) and is therefore ethically fraught. Clothing is used within *The Street* to articulate meaning in several ways that are explored at length in Chapter 4. Meaning, it is suggested, is active and shifts within contrasting and often conflicting contexts, the context of the research interview, the context of the researcher’s interpretation of the texts, the production narrative, creative and practical considerations, and the viewer’s exposure to lived equivalence that allows sense-making to occur. Each of these contexts produces a very different subject position through which the meaning is understood. Memory is a mutable conceptual site that draws upon circumstances from which the participant has become detached and therefore its reliability must be tempered by complementary ‘memories’ and additional supporting or reinforcing methodologies. Haripriya wrote in 2020 that memory is a form of meaning-making and that ‘the semantic

field of memory is spread over a spectrum of thoughts/actions' (2020: 71). We can see the relevance of that spectrum here where participants were asked to draw upon memories relating to creative practices, communications with colleagues and logistical minutiae recalling details from over a decade ago in some cases. The social reality, according to Hughes and Sharrock, is the context, space, or site from which the research is gathered – in this case, television costuming. To fully understand the actions as described during the interview the interviewer needs to have a sophisticated understanding of the 'activity complex' and the language used within it (1997: 137, 155). The distance between the researcher and the activity complex is therefore a factor when planning a meaningful sequence of questions for an ethnographic interview, as the questions may well limit or expand the possible answers (McKee, 2002). There is a layered power dynamic central to the process of television production and television costuming. Beynon and Rowbotham comment that the final decisions about the content, focus and purpose of television are centralized (2001), as confirmed by the interview with David Blair. This has implications for the experiences and recollections discussed by the crew in the interviews. Equally, the historical and relational aesthetic perception of the director will take precedence over that of other crew members (Bourdieu, 1996), as it is the director's vision that the crew are working to articulate. There is a presumed hierarchy regarding the cultural competences embedded in the production of aesthetics – we understand or believe that those in the highest position of aesthetic control must 'know' how to produce the best version of the required visuals. This is relevant here as the power the director has to make theirs the loudest voice will inevitably influence the experiences and engagement of other crew members.

Despite the drawbacks and limitations that need to be considered, interviewing within the context of this research still has value as it allows the research to expand discussions about meaning, specifically the meaning of costuming (Baudrillard, 1994a, 1998; Dyer, 1979). Who produces and/or controls the meaning? Do the meanings produced have authenticity, power, or consequence? As Brouillette remarks, when 'creativity and capital merge into various types of symbolic content' (2009: 146) what consequences are there? The interview material also facilitates discussions about the production of the representations of social class, again looking at the power dynamics and subjectivities within the production. As Skeggs states, 'the ability to be reflexive via the experience of others is a

privilege, a position of mobility and power' (2005: 129). The interview material opened up discussions on how the resulting representations have become a problematic site from which viewers construct their knowledge of the world and the class relations within it. Finally, the material generated enabled discussions around particular production roles, the conflicts, and collaborative efforts of all those involved within the context of television drama that are, as Fiske and Hartley comment, 'constrained by the conventions of the media' (2003: 52). The material allowed the research to consider what the impact might be of the material conditions of creativity examined here (Caughie, 2000). The remaining chapters return to each of these discussion points.

1.7 Focus group as method

According to Kidd & Parshall, focus groups evolved as a research method in the late 1930s or early 1940s, and are either highly valued or roundly dismissed as lacking any value by researchers across different disciplines (2000). They were originally used to document morale amongst soldiers during the second world war. Their use evolved after the conflict and they were subsequently used by urban planners and market researchers. When media and sociological research began to intersect, focus groups were initially employed to explore the effects that elements of television or film viewing had on audiences (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995), not necessarily on how audiences engaged with practices of meaning-making in relation to the texts viewed. Robert Allen reflected in the early 1990s that using focus groups to understand meaning-making practices was a relatively new research development at the time. He claimed that, 'in 1983 Philip Corrigan declared the history of film audiences to be still almost completely undeveloped, even unconsidered' (1990: 349). Film and television audiences have been, and still are, thought of very differently within media studies (Caughie, 2000). The TV viewer was/is understood as an easily distracted multitasker, watching television in a disjointed, non-linear way between and around other activities that engulf the domestic space where the majority of viewing takes place. Researchers used focus groups in response to this general understanding, subsequently compounded by the development of streaming platforms where viewers can now watch, stream, pause, fast-forward, rewind and become distracted whilst in-transit as well as in the domestic setting.

For the six focus groups in this research, the format consisted of an hour-long viewing of an episode, followed by an hour-long discussion. The viewing was uninterrupted and in a fixed location, either in person pre-pandemic (Groups 1, 2 & 3; Appendices E1, E2 & E3) or online post-pandemic (Groups 4,5 & 6; see Appendices E1, E2 & E3). Participants had a short break between viewing and discussion. Discussion was more open before the pandemic, and much less afterwards (see transcripts in Appendix E).

Focus groups were selected to gather data on audience responses to costumed characterisations. Kitzinger comments that the method works well for getting participants to explore the views that they hold with other participants (1994, 1995). This was desirable in this context as the research wanted to establish common patterns of use *and* reception. Common patterns of use were identified via content analysis and analysed through textual analysis. Common understandings of the language of costuming, via the public discussion in the group (McKee, 2002), were established through the same naturally occurring process in each session. To interpret the costume codes, participants processed the costumes viewed in negotiation with individual and personal understandings of clothing/costume codes before sharing the newly formed interpretive 'sub-codes' within the group. This process was discussed in Umberto Eco's 1986 *Faith in Fakes*. He states that,

a code is shared by the source and the addressee. A code is an established system of probabilities, and only on the basis of the code can we decide whether the elements of the message are intentional (desired by the source) or the result of Noise. (138)

The participants were all from working-class backgrounds. The class identity of the participants was important, as the purpose was to gather working-class responses to the clothed representations of working-class characters. The sample was a combination of non-probability and snowball sampling (Kim et al., 2018) which evolved through personal and professional connections. Focus Group 1 (FG1) were a London-based group of school mums from a local primary school in one of London's most impoverished boroughs, Barking and Dagenham. All but one of the women were full-time mums. Focus Group 2 (FG2) was a mixed gender group employed in various capacities, from headteacher to classroom assistant at the same primary school. Focus Group 3 (FG3) were all male volunteers from an East London Sunday League football team.

The intention with groups 4, 5, and 6 was to format them in the same manner as groups 1, 2 & 3 – one all-female group, one mixed group and one all-male group, and for the participants to watch the same episodes as the earlier groups. I also intended these participants to be from the north of England. This was a challenge, particularly as this phase of the research coincided with the pandemic. Eventually participants were identified through friends and colleagues with connections and families in the north of England. In the first instance, the second all-female group were suggested by a colleague and were a group of friends from Sheffield who attended the same dance group. The all-male group were part of an arts-based self-help group in Liverpool and the mixed group were volunteers from an on-line Manchester-based local community information-sharing group. The purpose was to try to ensure the participants represented the phenomena under investigation as closely as possible (Krippendorf, 1989; Kawamura, 2011). Variables were seen in job roles, age, location, and previous exposure to the work of Jimmy McGovern. All focus group participants are referred to here by first names. Some participants requested the use of an alias as and these were employed when requested.

Discussions were framed around screenshots from the episode the participants had viewed (Appendix G). FG1 and FG4 were shown series 1, episode 6 'Sean & Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006); FG2 and FG5 series 2, episode 4, 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007); and FG3 and FG6 series 3, episode 1, 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009). The screenshots provided a starting point for discussions and allowed for a focus on particular elements of the costuming, and were also a good tool to reinvigorate conversations that were lagging, or to refocus participants. The conversations were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Every effort was made to make the transcripts as accurate as possible. Laughter and body language or intonation, sighs and so on were also recorded within the transcript. After the content of the sessions were transcribed, they were coded thematically to draw together similar themes or ideas.

The positive attributes of focus groups as a research method placed them as particularly relevant for this research. They are a useful space in which to give a voice to the disempowered where dominant social values and important issues that directly concern them can be discussed by the participants (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Egalitarian discussion is a site where several often-conflicting accounts are given equal space and, as Williams and May state, 'one explanation is as good as the other and there are many truths shared' (1996: 36). The discussions can occur through different forms of

communication such as banter, anecdotal evidence and jokes that employ the participants own familiar language systems (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995; Kawamaura, 2011). This was particularly evident in Group 3. It is expected that each participant will bring something different to the text discussed and yet in the sessions undertaken for this research, collaborative readings (Brooker, 2002) that openly and successfully drew on each participants intertextuality (Allen, 1990) were common.

The groups were quite small, each having three participants. The ideal number identified by Kitzinger is between four and eight (1994, 1995). This was not seen as particularly detrimental especially with the online groups, as it facilitated engaged and comfortable discussion and made managing the group dynamics much simpler. Group hierarchies were easily identified; coercion between participants was very visible when it occurred, and it was easy to differentiate between individual and group consensus. The purpose and richness of research such as this is to allow revealing agreements and disagreements to develop (Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Kawamaura, 2011; Kitzinger, 1994, 1995). Interpretations and consensus often emerged from the space between the text and individual experience, as Williams and May confirm: '[u]nderstanding emerges from a gap that exists between where people are located in history and the possibilities that are made available to them' (1996:65). The tension between individual experience and the cultural location of the text generated agreement in relation to causal connections (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997), specifically questioning the background of the creative team behind the production whilst also allowing space for criticality.

The participants as viewers trusted in the conventions of realism within the drama, knowing this was not a documentary or 'real' life in any way (Corner, 1992). However, due to their experiences, class positions and the context, settings, and narrative of the drama, participants continued to define and redefine themselves in relation to the 'inaccurate' representations (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001) they saw on the screen (Brooker, 2002). In parallel with this level of empiricism, or knowledge formed through experience (Kawamaura, 2011; Hammersley, 1993), was an understanding of the necessity to adopt the position of a model reader in order to access and communicate through the shared codes employed in costuming. This is evidence of Eco's (1986) unlimited but focused interpretations that are a product of research into popular culture that looks at both the text and how the text is used (see also Brooker, 2002). There are issues with focus groups as

a research method. They are not natural settings in which television drama is usually viewed, so meanings may have changed according to this context (Berger, 1972; Caughie, 2000; Kitzinger, 1994, 1995) and the behavioural rules of the setting (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997, Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Perspectives may also change during the course of the discussion (Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Kitzinger, 1994, 1995) as group relationships and hierarchies develop establishing norms that may well silence individual voices – this was mitigated within this research due to the small number of participants within each of the groups (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995). Changes of perspective may also occur as a direct result of the tension between, in the first instance, the cultural resources and experiences that the participants bring to the group. These are products of individual histories, education and experience of social class (Bourdieu, 1994; Skeggs, 2005). Being motivated by embarrassment, shame and empathy (or conversely arrogance, entitlement or indifference) will alter participants' engagement with the text and the group. The second point of tension is that participants will naturally belong to several different reader groups simultaneously, which might encourage them, in the setting of the focus group, to choose a position that aligns them with other group members or with what they think the researcher wants to hear (Payne & Grew, 2005; Brooker, 2002; Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Kawamura, 2011; Hughes & Sharrock, 1997). In addition, although a clear necessity exists (that is, if you want to know how audiences interpret texts, you have to ask them), the very act of asking will limit responses as one question will automatically exclude others (McKee, 2002). Equally, asking detailed questions of participants about how they view and what they see takes them further away from the everyday practices of viewing and seeing as sense-making (McKee, 2002). This may result in them responding in a false negative or false positive way, as McKee explains: 'just because people say they think a certain thing when you ask them doesn't mean this is what it means to them in everyday life' (2002: 84).

The issues highlighted here reinforce the complex theoretical and methodological problems associated with the study of audiences (Allen, 1990; Hammersley, 1993) which is why the use of focus groups alone as a research method is problematic (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). They are best deployed in a limited way in combination with other complementary methods, as here (Kitzinger, 1994, 1995). The material they produce must be investigated like any other text, with an understanding that social power is not evenly distributed and therefore privilege must be acknowledged in relation to interpretations, and the space

occupied within the structure must be acknowledged in relation to perceptions (McKee, 2002; Williams & May, 1996). Despite these limitations, the material generated by the focus groups for this research has reinforced four key areas for analysis: how do people bring themselves to what they view; what do they do with what they see; how is meaning produced; and what happens to meaning once it has been produced and accessed?

In the first of the key areas, the group work established how the audiences sampled, understood or engaged with specific social facts connected to class experience, such as domestic violence, criminality, and morality. The group work also helped explore how different classificatory systems are used for different ways of viewing (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997) and how perceptions and pre-conceptions combine (Ashby & Higson, 2000) to expose the difference between, as Hughes and Sharrock state, 'our descriptions of reality and reality as it is described' (1997:165) or in this case, the gap between the intent of the creative production team and the language of television costuming. The second area identified for analysis here was what audiences do with what they see. Seeing is itself a political act and what we choose to look at and/or see is connected to our own experiences and positionality. A large part of the data gathered spoke to how audiences need to project their identities, or aspects of their identities onto the characters they see (Gundell & Castelli, 2006; Eco, 1986; De Long, 1998; Caughie, 2000); there is evidence of a desire to relate to, or resist, characters, at the point where appearance and meaning coincide – through recognisable dress tropes (Berger, 1972; Finkelstein, 1999). The third aspect of the data that produced material for analysis is meaning production in relation to costuming: how meaning occurs through a series of sense impressions and a system of language and is either used or ignored through a process of negotiation and struggle (Hall, 1973, 1997; Eco, 1986) unique to each individual. Of equal importance is that meaning is dependent on what is absent as well as what is present (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997) within a text and that the absences produce an invisible language that audiences understand in relation to a process of consensual or resigned class positioning. Finally, the data generated through the focus groups allowed for an exploration of what happens to meaning once it is produced; how it moves through different circuits; and how it is reproduced and maintained, creating patterns that become reference points that in turn produce repeated observation (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997)

1.8 Summary

This research sits at the intersection of several central and disputed methodological concepts. For example, it could be argued that the approach outlined owes much to foundationalism, whereby ‘true knowledge must rest upon a set of firm, unquestionable indisputable truths from which our beliefs may be logically deduced’ (Hughes & Sharrock, 1990: 7) – in this instance, the ‘truth’ that we dress according to who we are, and the ‘truth’ held within the ethos of costume design that costume communicates character.

However, at odds with this stance is the objective, which seeks to explain *how* costume communication works within the televisual form, as a transaction between several people or entities: those involved in the production of screen costume (writer, director, actor, costume designer) and the viewer. To attempt to comprehend and articulate such difficult, obscure, and often invisible means of communication means that rigid boundaries that are appropriate for validating statistical generalizations cannot be appropriate in this instance. Clearly, such a complex system of communication cannot be generalized by a foundationalist approach. The debates outlined throughout this chapter have had significant influence on the methodological design and approach to research undertaken here and this can be identified via a set of complex philosophical considerations.

To begin with, it is acknowledged and accepted that subjective experience requires critical interpretation throughout the project. As this chapter has explained, for concepts that exist in the mind as well as those experienced in reality, a hermeneutic approach is required to explore individual ways to explain, translate or interpret a perceived reality. Due to individual perspectives being central, the interpretive analysis must refer to the plurality of ways in which reality can be represented whilst at the same time seeking to understand, in a post-structuralist way, why representations are the way they are (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997: 242). As Bakhtin commented, ‘individual consciousness cannot be used to explain anything, on the contrary it is in need of explanation itself’ (in Morris, 1994: 11) and distance to/from the clothed representations of the production team, the focus groups participants and the researcher has been acknowledged and therefore managed in a productive way. Values and subject positions have been made explicit and holistically woven throughout the thesis, which has allowed for a challenge to the concepts of both the knower and the known (Hammersley, 1993: 16).

Secondly, unpacking the concept of meaning remains central. Meaning is social in the same way that the framework that contains meaning (language) is social. Both are products of our own consciousness and experience and become active only when they enter into a broader context. The construction of meaning within lived experience is multi-layered and sits at the intersection between the subjective and the interactive. Here the context within which meaning becomes active is layered, beginning with the self (subject position of researcher), but incorporating the production team/product (*The Street*) and those asked to view the text (focus groups). Equally, it is important to acknowledge epistemological concerns that deal with concepts that exist around language systems and their use. This is relevant here as the ethnographic aspect of the primary research gathered is communicative – It occurs via discussions that are contextualized through specific discourses, such as the industry discourse around the use of costume (interviews) and the discourses that exist around television viewing and reception (focus groups).

Such a fluid construction of what is understood as meaning has inevitable consequences to knowledge claims. This is relevant here in two ways: the claim to accurate representations produced through knowledge by costume designers and production practitioners; and the interpretive judgements based on knowledge claims by viewers of the production and the researcher analysing both the production and the responses of the interviewees and focus group participants. Here, knowledge is understood as a collection of facts or experiences that have been individually observed. However, as alluded to previously, observation is not a neutral activity; it is enacted as a combination of cognitive and social experience (Hammersley, 1993). To offer a position with regard to ‘knowledge’ will enable us to explore how we might come to ‘know’ others in the context of this research. Here, those ‘others’ are characters that require costuming, or rather the dramatic characterisations that rely upon the process of audience recognition and identification. ‘Others’ here might also refer to the industry practitioners and their particular approaches and the ‘others’ who constitute the focus group participants. It is important to acknowledge and explore the difficulties of identifying ‘knowledge’ in each of these contexts: how the subjects ‘know’, how they articulate what they believe they ‘know’ and how the researcher interprets this knowledge via their own ways of knowing.

This research also seeks to identify and make visible whose claim to knowledge is given preference within a space where multiple claims exist in tension with one another. As such, this is evidence of the costume *process*, not evidence of costume knowledge or truth. As a result of the considerations outlined above, this research appears to occupy a middle ground between the ‘hypodermic needle’ and ‘guerrilla warfare’ that David Morley suggested in ‘Unanswered Questions in Audience Research’ (2006). Here, the hypodermic needle is the costume used and the guerrilla warfare is the way audiences respond to it, and either accept or resist the representations embodied by it. Therefore, certain aspects of this work can be generalized or predicted; there are certain tropes that exist across costuming practices in the representation of certain perceived characteristics or ‘pathologies’. This might imply a structure or system that underpins this creative process and suggests that the influence of positivism is not lost. However, the guerrilla warfare of audience response is much more relative and demonstrates the difficulty for social science in ‘comprehending difficult or obscure communications’ (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997: 20).

Chapter 2 – *The Street*: the limiting language of TV, misrepresentations, and problematic class ‘realisms’.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by explaining the context and detail of McGovern’s *The Street* as an example of a contemporary rendering of social realist television drama, in **section 2.2**. **Section 2.3** will explore the specific generic understandings of television drama, looking at its position within post-war British culture and the tension inherent within the genre between its ‘flow’ or movement and the stable nature of its internal discourses. The section then moves on to explore the tropes and function of the social realist sub-genre of drama and considers the contemporary relevance of the tropes and categorization offered by Raymond Williams during the 1970s (Williams, 1977) in relation to *The Street*. In **section 2.4**, television’s communicative capacity is examined in relation to the language of television and the reliance on the concept of realism within visual communication. Drawing on Hall’s (1997) explanation of language as a signifying practice, this section looks to map each stage of the communicative process and suggests that television drama can be understood as a form of interactive speech based on unequal power relations, rather than a form of writing or a text to be passively consumed or ‘read’. **Section 2.5** focuses specifically on the use of stereotypes and representations as a language tool used in the production of the representations seen in *The Street*. It explores the complex and powerful nature of the representations and how they have been employed within *The Street* to position and explain a character’s social place and perceived value. **Section 2.6** will draw upon the primary empirical research gathered to discuss the convergence of intent and industry or creative restrictions in the production of *The Street*. **Section 2.7** will again draw upon the primary research undertaken to explore the tension between practitioner and the audience’s lived experience and their perceptions and expectations of fictional depictions. The chapter concludes with **section 2.8** that offers a summary of the points made.

The overall focus of the thesis remains the critique of clothed representations of the working class within Jimmy McGovern's *The Street*. Clearly it is important to contextualize the means by which the representations meet with their intended audience. Whilst the thesis does briefly situate the role, context and structures of television, it is not intended to provide extensive discussions of the practice of television or to present a detailed account of television theory as an academic area of study. Equally, although the chapter draws upon viewer focus groups, audience theory, audience studies and/or spectatorship are purposely dealt with sparingly here.

Television is understood in several important ways that are at times in conflict with each other. To begin with, television occupies a significant place in daily life for much of the UK population and the relationship between the populace and TV has evolved significantly since broadcasts began using the BBC's London transmitter in the latter part of the 1920s.¹² According to parliamentary research a hundred years later in 2020,¹³ over 95% or 27 million households owned a TV set, whilst earlier research in 2011 from TV Licensing¹⁴ recorded that the British population had multiple sets in their homes and watched on average four hours per day from different locations around the house, including kitchens during mealtimes and bedrooms prior to sleeping. Since the licensing report was published, access to television and television programming has diversified exponentially. Television can now

¹² Broadcasts began using the BBC's London transmitter as early as 1929 with the first television drama, Pirandello's *The Man With A Flower in his Mouth* airing in 1930. Regional transmitters spread across the UK throughout the 1940s and 1950s and by the time of Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953 it is estimated that there were three million television sets in homes around the UK. At this point a television was still viewed as a luxury item and out of reach for the majority of the population, but by 1960 three-quarters of the population either owned or rented a set. The first Director General of the BBC, Sir John Reith (1889-1971), was in post from 1927-1938. Reith is synonymous with establishing the remit of the BBC (to educate, inform and entertain) and this remains a powerful tenet of the establishment to this day. Commercial television emerged in the form of ITV and was introduced in London in the mid-1950s (Caughie, 2000; Fiske & Hartley, 2003). Alongside educating, informing and entertaining came the need to deliver viewers to advertisers via content that could not avoid becoming subject to the laws of profit (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005; Bourdieu, 2003). The fluid connections between TV broadcasters and their audiences broke free of the reductive; educate/influence, public service/commercial binary and developed over time to encompass a diverse conceptual stable of 'purpose', for example, escapism or identification (see Stacey in Brooker & Jermyn, 2003), or celebration and (re)assurance (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/anniversaries/august/first-experimental-bbc-tv-programme/#:~:text=The%20first%20experimental%20television%20programme,the%20medium%20had%20a%20future>

¹³ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8101/>

¹⁴ <https://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/about/media-centre/news/report-reveals-latest-uk-tv-watching-trends-NEWS35>

be accessed outside the home, in transit. Viewing patterns have changed: watching television has become less of a group or family activity/ 'event', and more of an individualized and constant relationship with visual media that constitutes an important element of the interlinking web of technological engagement. It is used by many as a constant companion throughout daily life and as such has become further woven into the fabric of our existence.

Television's position as a daily conduit to the broad population makes its reach and therefore its potential influence equal at least to the power of other forms of visual media. As Turner writes, '[t]hrough this representation of the performance of everyday life, and through its patterns of scheduling and access, television reasserts its embeddedness in everyday life' (2010: 57). The concept of the 'everyday' is important here, as the reductive representations are seen as an important component of the 'embeddedness'. It is suggested that this limits understanding of and engagement with class politics and positioning.

Despite the broad reach television has, its products have become inevitably circumscribed, inhibited as they are by the conventions of the medium, such as the use of recording mechanisms, or cameras (Dave, 2006). Paul Dave uses Patrick Keiller's (2002) writing to explain screen space as 'very narrow compared with experience of actual three-dimensional space' and as such there is always a process of 'imaginary extension' from the screen (Dave, 2006: 128) that is required by the viewer. My research suggests that, because of the 'narrow space' of the screen, it can only 'show' limited possibilities, particularly in relation to clothing, and as such it will inevitably exclude difference or distinctions. As a result of such exclusions what becomes lost is, as Casey comments, a 'fair and realistic picture of everyday processes and practices of "being" working class' (2010: 226). What is made visible are the production teams' subjective understandings of social class as a system, structure, and experience and more specifically how the system, structure, and experiences dress themselves.

Over time, as audiences engage in the process of imaginary extension, they absorb 'the other' by consuming the only possibilities presented to them as the 'self', scrabbling for recognition or identification amongst the 'scraps' available. As Gledhill & Williams state 'the mass nature of TV implies a different way of living in the social and cultural space of the present; not an ethic of self-formation through public participation, but distraction, diffusion, anonymity' (2000: 118). The absorption of such distractions and diffusions, it is

argued, can have serious consequences for class politics and collective action, as it results in a misunderstanding of, or ambivalence towards, class position and the micro and macro-oppressions faced within the everyday experiences of the precariat class.¹⁵ This is the toxic conclave between consent and resignation that Chibber (2022) refers to and that is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3.

The limited possibilities of the narrow lens of screen space are presented through a complex and layered process of communication which is dealt with in section 2.4 ('The language of television') below. In the first layer, the message of the drama is distilled through the subjective understandings of those responsible for its production. In this research, this refers to writers Jimmy McGovern and Roy Boulter, the director David Blair and the costume designers Barbara Kidd and Theresa Rhymer. Further layers are added as the message moves through the structures that inform both the language of costuming and the language of television which require competent intersectional fluency. The complexities of creative subjectivity are further discussed, along with the language of costuming, in Chapter 4.

From the powerful position it occupies within the everyday, television has inevitably become culturally, socially, and politically significant. As Thornham & Purvis state, television 'is so much a part of our everyday experience, so universally available, that it is this fact and its cultural significance which has tended to dominate discussions of the medium' (2005: 1). As with all sites of power, it is subject to struggle and conflict over the power it holds. This struggle plays out symbolically across different aesthetic forms (drama, documentary, news and so on) and the content of the meaning embedded within the product. As Turner comments, 'if they occupy the centre for symbolic production, then the kinds of reality they offer as forms of identity within their programming must have a powerful social and cultural impact' (2010: 26). A large proportion of the power held by television and what helps to position it as culturally central is the predominant use of one particular aesthetic form (Lay, 2002; Murphy, 2001; Thornham & Purvis, 2005), or rather its use of realism and/or naturalism or realist/naturalist conventions. In short, what we view, regardless of the format, looks so familiar that the boundaries between the real and fictitious become increasingly more difficult to mark or hold on to. As Chris Haylett commented, 'enough of

¹⁵ For a full definition of the precariat class see Guy Standing's work, for example <https://journals.openedition.org/rccsar/585>

the ‘right sort’ of evidence then meaning, status, and effect of representation can be ‘known’”(in Munt, 2000:73). The danger exists where an abstract concept such as meaning moves into the realms of accepted ‘concrete’ knowledge. As Lefebvre states, ‘the abstract-concrete and the fictitious-real, in their ambiguity and duality, extend from simple products to major incarnations of positive knowledge, possessions and power’ (2005: 163). Television costuming is a crucial element of the format analysed here (social realist drama), and can produce and reinforce inequalities and exclusion, marginalizing the lived experience of the social class it claims to represent.

The final way in which television needs to be understood in relation to the central themes of this thesis is in its relationship to the everyday or ordinary domestic sphere, and inevitable alignments with discourses around social class. While the power and reach of television has always been recognized, until relatively recently it was often devalued because of its domestic positioning (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). Television and its products were rarely viewed as art forms in the same way as cinema was, and the creative practitioners that work in television were more often than not viewed differently, with less gravitas than those working within film (La Motte, 2001; Musgrove, 2003). This has started to shift in recent years with television productions that have cinematic scope, design and direction such as HBO’s *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019).

The connection to the domestic everyday has allowed more ‘ordinary’ working class voices to become a part of television (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005; Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Turner, 2010). Fisk & Hartley even claim that the ‘[o]rdinary are now writing as well as watching’ (2003: xxi). Although this may be true of Jimmy McGovern and many of the team of writers on *The Street*, as he comments during an interview recorded for Bafta, ‘[w]hat we got on *The Street* particularly was, well we trawled for writers, and we trawled for stories’ (Appendix F6). However, this remains the exception rather than the rule. Industry figures¹⁶ challenge the claim made by Fiske and Hartley. As recently as 2021, Screenskills identified that only a quarter of screen workers are from working-class backgrounds. Turner (2010) more astutely claims that the ordinary voices prolific on television appear through the ‘reality TV’ format, not necessarily through the voices of writers, producers, and directors.

¹⁶ <https://www.screenskills.com/news/new-research-shows-only-quarter-of-screen-workers-are-from-working-class-backgrounds/>

With the introduction of smart devices and streaming platforms, the negative associations of television viewing have become contested. Investment and production values have increased and developed, and subsequently the production and the viewing of television has grown in stature. It is understood by those that engage with it as a visual and reliable provision of lived experience, of both the 'self' and of the 'other', and a means through which to access an acceptable version of a constructed 'reality' (Hebdige, 1979). For Baudrillard, however, the real that is seen on screen was – and as argued here, still is – a model without any actual reality, one that produces a 'fabricated peep-hole into the 'real' world' (1994a: 9). There is a more detailed discussion of realism later in this chapter, but it is important to note here that, as Gledhill & Williams state, without the concept and form of realism – the established tool employed within the language of television – TV would not exist in the way it does today (2000). Clearly therefore, the use of realism as a concept must also be integral to the way television costuming works.

Such sweeping generalizations notwithstanding, television has been studied¹⁷ and understood across disciplines such as cultural studies, sociology and film/TV studies as a

¹⁷ Television studies emerged during the 1970s and 1980s (Brundstone, 2008) and is situated as a disciplinary hybrid drawing on cultural studies, film studies, literary criticism, and the social sciences amongst others, to map the significance of the form and how it is received, read or understood. The discipline is still considered to be emerging (Brundstone, 2008) and work on television costuming is still working to gain acknowledgement and traction (Warner, 2013). Much of the work that draws upon the social sciences looks to explain how society works by examining and understanding television (McKee, 1992). This work owes much to the Frankfurt School of Marxist thought, seeking to explore the concepts of mass alienation and control suggested above. A large body of work subsequently developed that explores ownership and control of the media (Eco, 1986), how the medium is used to reinforce ideological constructs (Caughie, 2000; Thornham & Purvis, 2005) and how ideas of dominance can be reduced to the notion of difference (Gledhill and Williams, 2000). Often the study of television has dealt with the notion of lacks: in value and meaning, artistic competence or cultural worth (Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Bourdieu, 1996). The 'mass-ness' of television consumption falls under the umbrella of studies in 'mass' culture, which is often dealt with within the social sciences and frequently looks to establish the role of television within society and the effects it may have on its audience. As Eco claims, 'mass-ness' requires a constant correction of perspective (1986) and, one might argue, a clear statement of positionality before an attempt at an objective discussion ensues. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and there is a clear divide on the work produced on television between scholars that appreciate and engage with the material they are unpacking (such as Ang's (2013) work on *Dallas*, soap opera and melodrama; D'Acci's (1988, 1994) work on *Cagney and Lacey*; Bruzzi & Church Gibson's essay on *Sex and the City* (2005); and David Forrest's (2017) work on McGovern's *The Street* and those that use television as a tool to explain societal issues (such as Murray's work on TV violence (2009); Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong's 2014 examination of *Benefits Street*; or Ekelund, Brage, Froberg & Harro's 2006 publication on the link between sedentary viewing and youth obesity. The ethnographic turn within research and the postmodern notion that 'mass' culture was declining produced a slew of work that focused on individual and group engagement with and reading of particular texts or ways of viewing, as outlined by David Gauntlett (1999). In the 1990s, work began critically analyse the aesthetics of television (Warner, 2012, 2013, 2014), not just the effects it may have on audiences. This work has only recently begun to explore the clothing or costume viewed on the small screen and the work on ordinary clothing employed as costume on television is very scarce.

powerful but blunt tool, used to occupy, distract, manage, and control mainstream society. This thesis argues that an important tool in maintaining that control, and one that has not received equitable attention within academia, is the 'ordinary' costuming of the characters seen on screen (see Chapter 4, 'Costuming the working class').

2.2 The Street (Granada, 2006-2009)

The Street is a series of interconnected one-off television dramas or self-contained plays that can be seen as examples of contemporary social realism. They are secular, political and have a contemporary setting that explores fictional working-class lived experiences (Williams, 1977). It has won awards both domestically and internationally¹⁸ and is labelled as a hybrid drama serial (Forrest, 2017), as it sits at the intersection of a set of one-off dramas, a drama serial and soap opera. Forrest describes the production as a 'site of class representation with focus on the evocation of ordinariness' (, 2017: 29). Each series consisted of six episodes, each a stand-alone, self-contained narrative focusing on the different residents of Rock Street, Higher Broughton in Salford, Manchester. The work is understood as a 'flexi-narrative' (Forrest, 2017) that rotates protagonists, switching writers and directors. As the writer Roy Boulter commented, '[e]ach episode is a self-contained story but they all link and Jimmy had overall creative control. We have very similar political ideas, so I guess that's why it worked' (Appendix F5). The result was described by Mark Lawson¹⁹ in *The Guardian* in 2010 as having created 'challenging contemporary morality plays that sit within the top fifty television dramas of all time'. Contemporary critical acclaim both at home and abroad discussed McGovern's story telling prowess and ingenuity, the masterful camerawork and editing, and the sublime acting (Bennett, 2006), with some concluding that the second series produces '[d]eath, drama and, ultimately, poetry – *The Street* was something close to perfection' (Banks-Smith, 2007:1).

Despite character and writer rotation, there are characters that appear in more than one episode as a device to link the ensemble as a community. For those characters that appear frequently and are used as a vehicle of connection, there is always an episode dedicated to their own story and subsequent appearances are often transient. The character of Eddie McEvoy played by Timothy Spall is the main example of this. He is used to

¹⁸ British TV Academy and Royal Television Society best drama award 2007/2008, and the 2007 and 2010 Emmy for both best Television Drama and Actor (Jim Broadbent and Bob Hoskins respectively).

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/jan/12/50-best-tv-dramas-41-50>

connect the separate stories and appears as a thread throughout the three series. It was Eddie's character that drew Spall to the role:

I'm always obviously interested immediately in the character because [...] if it's not interesting, it's very difficult to make a whole thing interesting. Is the character interesting? (Appendix F7)

McGovern's name sits atop the title as a very clear statement. Interviews with other members of the production team such as David Blair, Roy Boulter and Barbara Kidd all make reference to having previously worked with McGovern and therefore having knowledge of his agenda, stature and skill. Barbara Kidd explains what drew her to the project:

Well, it was written by Jimmy McGovern, so of course because of his work prior to that, it was interesting to me before I even opened it [the script]. Because I know he is political and that he writes well and all of those things. (Appendix F2)

For Teresa Rhymer, the costume designer on the second series, the opportunity to work on the project knowing the reputation that McGovern garners was one to embrace: "I was delighted because it, you know, what a great drama series to work on" (Appendix F3). McGovern referred to *The Street* during the *Front Row* in 2007 as 'intelligent, sophisticated, challenging, confrontational: all the things that drama should be' (Appendix F6).

Forrest (2017) states that McGovern's name immediately suggests a mediated and politically driven form of working-class reality that acts as a mark of authenticity, or rather, the everyday is used here as a means to authenticate (Murphy, 2001). McGovern uses his identity as a working-class writer to lend a political voice to the ordinary and everyday experiences of working-class residents of Manchester, allowing him to express a sense of drama through contextual detail (Forrest, 2017) large and small, and to explore the oppressions, forms of resistance and moral dilemmas the residents face. He comments, during an interview with the Guardian journalist Vanessa Thorpe in 2010, that,

class still informs everything. And personally, to me it is still a problem. I have met a lot of people in my life, but there are still lots of situations in which I am ill at ease because I am working class.

Lefebvre's conceptualization of creative production is useful here. He explains that the way creativity is produced has four dimensions: global, lived, private and urban (Merrifield, 2006). *The Street* and McGovern's creativity can be said to occupy all four simultaneously: lived experience, both public and private situated in a specific urban environment, consumed in multiple contexts across geographic space and time. However, the result of incorporating all four dimensions is that the visual 'language' that is used to articulate McGovern's words, specifically the costuming, is constrained by the medium of television and has become over-simplified, portraying class experience via the lens of a particular geographical specificity whilst simultaneously levelling out the experience sartorially so that it can be consumed on a global scale (Hallam in Ashby & Higson, 2000).

The everyday space that acts as the setting to the drama is intended to produce a symbolic relationship with the viewers' own experiences (Caughie, 2000). This is expressed successfully through the location filming and is clear in the focus group data gathered here. For example, Danielle from Group 1 (FG1) commented "these areas, they look quite deprived, I mean I know they say we live in a deprived area but that looks much worse, quite a hard area to live in" (Appendix E1). This research argues that the legitimacy of the symbiosis alluded to becomes questionable when expressed via the costume design. As previously mentioned, television drama has been a component of broadcast television since its inception.²⁰ McGovern's work is a legacy of the congruence of British social realism and the new wave of thinking, production techniques and values within television production during the 1960s and 1970s that were manifested through mainstream examples such as the BBC's *Play for Today* (1970-1984) format. In interview, David Blair commented that *The Street* was such a great opportunity and that Jimmy used to say, "I treat them as one hour plays for today" (Appendix F1).

²⁰ In the early days of broadcasting, television occupied an uneasy position as a 'live' version of entertainment, sitting somewhere between film and theatre and the outputs reflected this. There were obviously technological and financial limitations imposed on early television productions such as limited or often non-existent editing options, a lack of camera mobility or a lack of technological infrastructure to support location filming (Caughie, 2000). These resulted in a reliance on static studio-based filming, which captured drama as though recording a stage play. This methodology evolved over time as technology advanced. In response to wider social and cultural changes - and in line with developments in film - a 'new wave' of content developed in the mid-twentieth century that encompassed what John Caughie has identified as 'the poetry of the ordinary' (Caughie, 2000: 66).

These examples solidified UK drama productions' links to the notion of quality, alongside broadcasters such as the BBC's public service remit. This effectively blurred the boundaries between education and entertainment and produced representations that were often unquestioned and have subsequently produced templates of authenticity that are used and reused as convenient shorthand within the language of television – particularly in relation to dress or costume. *The Street*, as Forrest claims, is a 'drama hybrid' (2017), which relies heavily on the intersection between incident and character, rather than slowly unfolding narratives (Caughie, 2000), and therefore more emphasis is placed on immediate and visible detail (both bodily detail and costume detail) in the same way as film. In interview, Roy Boulter explained that,

Dress is more of an issue in film than it is on TV, as film is more visual in a way, whilst TV is about building narrative so it's about the look of pieces. You may only have one shot to communicate information in a film but on TV character can build more gradually, so feature film costume is more important or potent as a shorthand. (Appendix F5)

The contained one-hour narratives of *The Street* that deal with different characters in each episode must also rely on immediate and visible details and the associated required shorthand in communication. Across the three series, 76 T-shirts are worn. This number does not include T-shirts with button necks and collars, scoop-neck T-shirts or v-neck T-shirts, which account for another 70 items of clothing (Appendix I). T-shirts of all styles and jeans are the most popular items of dress for male characters. In 1964, writing about occupational roles as portrayed on television, De Fleur commented that the lower-class roles were shown as eccentric, slovenly or ugly whilst middle-class roles were seen as intelligent, well dressed and attractive. Not much seems to have changed. I am not suggesting that the writers, directors, or designers want to communicate this reductive idea, but this is the visual language that is established and works and therefore this is the visual language that is used to communicate the message within the writing.

2.3 TV genre and social realism

2.3.1 What is television drama?

As already stated, UK TV drama developed from public service broadcasting; from a position of informing as well as (or in spite of being) entertaining (Caughie, 2000) and became central to output in the post-war period. It remains so to this day, despite the ascendancy of reality television. The legacy of the public service remit, although challenged and modified at times, still has an important influence, and is connected to the idea of 'quality' within television discourse. The influence extends to production practices and techniques, budgets, scheduling and, importantly for the purposes of this research, the subjectivities embedded within the genre, who the expected viewer is assumed to be, and how that viewer accepts a 'reality', 'truth' or 'authenticity' to be inherent or 'held' within the production *because* of the way it is produced and how it looks (Caughie, 2000). For those involved in *The Street*, the centralized legacy and assumptions about audiences is problematic and affects what can and is produced. For example, David Blair commented that,

it's disgraceful that we are happy to take license fees off all these people and then make nothing that represents them. I think these representations have been squeezed and squeezed and I think deliberately, I think there is – particularly in Scotland and Northern Ireland and Wales – there is no depiction of working-class people there at all. (Appendix F1)

Thorpe reported McGovern commenting that 'too many television executives think they are better than the average television viewer and as a result they try to give them the dramas they think they will want. So, you get this regurgitation of the same sort of thing' (Thorpe, 2010). Producers of television drama continue to routinely employ an established set of conventions and methods that it is assumed are expected and wanted by the audience, but are instead an expression of what producers prescribe that audiences need.

Drama will be a depiction of a series of dramatic events and is often scripted (although this is not always the case), relying heavily on dialogue to move the action forward. The format will follow dramatic conventions employed through text and the stage as well as screen examples and will broadly include points of exposition, rising action, a climax, falling action and a conclusion, although the order in which these occur can be subject to change. This format allows for the development of conflict, atmosphere and

themes which are expressed through plot developments and characterization. The most common and popular form of television drama contains multiple plotlines and characters with interconnected narrative strands that sit beneath an overarching narrative arc. Having said that, some dramas deliberately create a claustrophobic setting and engage with only one or two characters, such as *Roger and Val Have Just Got In* (Dawn French, 2020). Further examples of the use of limited characters often occur as one-off episodes of longer-running serial dramas or soap operas where the audience is already familiar with the characters, such as the Den and Angie Watts two-handed episode of *Eastenders* in 1986, or Vinny and Mandy Dingle's two-hander episode for *Emmerdale* in June 2020. *The Street* also employed the claustrophobic tension created by focusing on one or two characters for the majority of episode 6 in series 2, 'The Promise' (McGovern, 2007), which explores what might happen when a mother encounters the man who murdered her son when both were children. The majority of the eighteen episodes, however, have between four and six key characters that frame the narrative (Appendix I). TV drama continues to be a site of tension based around the stories and myths inherent in contemporary culture that are offered as entertainment (Tulloch in Thornham & Purvis, 2005) and is recognised as usually character-driven. The complexities of the characters portrayed are the key to success within the genre and this is made visible, in part, through the clothing the characters are seen to wear and the bodies that inhabit the clothes or costumes. (Caughie, 2000).

Television is saturated with meaning (Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Gledhill & Williams, 2000; Caughie, 2000; Thornham & Purvis, 2005) indicating its potent communicative function and relationship with the audience. It is within these meaning-making practices that an important tension is played out. In order for drama such as *The Street* to be consumed and valued by the audience, plausible narrative and verisimilitude are required (Corner, 1992). Both the story and the look must draw in some way on existing beliefs, experiences (Caughie, 2000; Fiske & Hartley, 2003) and understandings to be accepted. For example, Bill from FG2 comments,

I've lived in a street like that, for a long time. And you do get somebody who has the bay fronted house who think they are better than those with the flat fronted house. People aspire to get a better second-hand car than you have. People do try to reinforce their differences amongst their peers. (Appendix E2)

Pre-existing beliefs have themselves been created or mediated through visual media and have responded to social and cultural developments over time, to maintain a connection to the audience and the potency of the medium's internal discourses. That is, the production needs to look and feel familiar and 'real' to audiences for consumption to continue and for the framework or network of symbols, structures and conventions to continue to be meaningful. Danielle comments, "it was exactly like what I was wearing, denim skirts, big belts and the eyeshadow – I couldn't stop laughing, 'cause I remember wearing those jean skirts and the belts myself" (Appendix E1).

The images must give the impression, therefore, of constant flow, change, or response to the actual 'everyday' and the complex realities held within it (Caughie, 2000). The clothes cannot look 'dated' unless this is a requirement of the script or a nuance of character. However, I argue that, within the constant flow and change of 'fashions', there exists a standardized, formulaic and static language employed within costuming that helps to maintain ideologies of hierarchies within society. This is where the tension between movement or flow and paralysis is played out, and where negative and powerfully dangerous representations can be found. These representations are then absorbed once more as 'real' and used as reference points for future productions, perpetuating the myths and preconceptions embedded within. As Jo commented in FG4,

I quite like the T-shirt [...] that's [...] constricting a character, you know, they have sort of an Oasis-style Manchester thing going on, and she might have loved him once and he might once have been charming in that vein. (Appendix E1).

Mythologies such as what 'danger' looks like (or dresses), how particular genders behave (and dress) and, importantly for this thesis, what place, position or power in society individuals and groups dressed in particular ways should/can hold or demand. The costumes in *The Street* are working alongside and yet, it is argued, at odds with, the narrative in the communication of class position and place. The character Stan played by Jim Broadbent in series 1, episode 2 (McGovern, 2006) tries to contest the labour structure and system of which he is a part. However, his clothing, particularly the cardigan he wears in conjunction with a tan overall coat, positions him quite clearly as a part of that system. Equally, the narratives around Eddie, played by Timothy Spall, and Charlie, played by Vincent Regan challenge what might be stereotypical presumptions around working-class masculinity as

they encompass tenderness and care, but again their reductive costuming does not offer such contestation. Both characters are seen repeatedly in generic casual clothing and sportswear with the ubiquitous T-shirts and jeans a predominant feature. There is a more detailed discussion of the costuming specifics in Chapter 4 'Costuming the working class'.

2.3.2 Generic conventions of television drama

Considerations of TV drama inevitably led to the notion of genre and its potency as a communicative tool. Viewers' engagement with particular generic forms is based on a cognitive process in that 'we select phenomena on the basis of a learned classificatory system' (Williams and May, 1996: 17). Popular genres such as drama help viewers understand what they are watching; they provide comfort and reassure viewers, helping them to navigate the social world (Thornham and Purvis, 2005) by employing recognised conventions and bringing a range of discourses (Brooker & Jermyn, 2003) into a familiar and often domestic setting. Caughie (2000) is not alone in commenting that drama is both ideological and political, and deals with society and culture often on a subconscious level (see also Head, 1954, Thornham & Purvis, 2005, De Fleur, 1964, Fiske & Hartley, 2003). As Adrian commented in FG2, "I associated it with the North because you see streets like that in the north, but I don't know whether it was or not" (Appendix E2). *The Street* conveyed a sense of place to the viewer here by using a familiar visual register of a location that the viewer then organised into his own internal classificatory system. We can presume that the same process occurs with categorisations of social class and how costumes are perceived: associations are made about class position and the way characters are dressed, based on what is being conveyed through a familiar language, and not necessarily because whoever is perceiving the costume has lived experience of similar class positions or forms of dress.

Drama is understood as a familiar, everyday communication of narrative and myth, but this is problematic in a number of ways. To begin with, the conventions of the genre communicate an assumption of realism, reality, or 'truth'. Often, it is made to *look* 'real,' in part by addressing viewers in their everydayness (Bell & Hollows, 2005: 37) and in part via the costume. Bradley commented in (FG3) that he was "worried about Bob" (referring to Paddy played by Bob Hoskins in 'Smoke', series 3 episode 1 (McGovern, 2009), because "he reminds me of grandad" (Appendix E3). This articulates the blurring of character and actor, reality and fiction. When distortions such as this are taking place and familiar tropes are

being used and reused, audiences learn to accept them as real and cease to question what they are presented with. They also apply the same blanket acceptance to ideas, narratives, suggestions that they have less personal experience of, as Martin commented in FG6: “I follow the story” (Appendix E3).

Gledhill & Williams state that, ‘generic verisimilitude defines what is expected of a particular kind of fictional world’ (2000: 235) – in essence, we know what we are going to get. This convention is assumed to ‘fix’ an affinity with the audience. The idea of fixing meaning automatically discounts varied ways to read and understand a text for some, thus the communication here appears to rely on a ridged structural use of the language employed – the language of clothes and the language of the everyday. However, readings of verisimilitude can be contested, as Rob commented in FG5:

Well, the people of Salford are always [...] misrepresented, aren’t we, in the in the media it’s always you know, this is a problem place, this is crime, this is this, that and the other. And they never get it right. (Appendix E2)

Furthermore, the fixed communication (quite often rejected in the way Rob rejects the representations of Salford) is produced through an authored point of view. It is a systematic construction, as Turner states, to author (2010). David Blair comments on this when reflecting on the words of the writer Dennis Potter:

I remember Dennis Potter saying, “people at high level say that people don’t know what they want, they want what they know”. And we are creating that agenda for them. Nobody watched soaps in the ’50s, why? Because there weren’t any of them, so you give them more and more and now suddenly that has become your working-class drama or your working-class reality, which is of course bullshit. (Appendix F1)

The authoring of drama is not purely for entertainment purposes: it must convey an idea of realness. As Gledhill and Williams state, drama has both heteroglossia and dialogism built into its form, ‘to maintain credibility with changing audiences by connecting with signifiers of contemporary verisimilitude’ (2000: 238). So, the multiple and overlapping voices at play in the production of drama work to position a version of the ‘real’ that will be recognizable to audiences. By its very nature, drama expresses more than one viewpoint: the creation of dramatic conflict or tension requires the expression of the differing viewpoints of key

characters. Additionally, and importantly, drama also expresses the viewpoints of the creative producers, the writers, directors, actors, and designers, as well as reflecting the dominant views of the society and culture of which it forms a part. The regulation of differing viewpoints, expression, discourses, language, and communication, who has the power of the final say in creative production or who has access or means to 'create' in the first place, is a powerful and often invisible way of maintaining hierarchies and boundaries in favour of those in more privileged positions. As Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody state, 'regulation discourses and practices and unconscious processes are central to understanding how class functions and is lived today' (2001: 212).

The generic convention of drama can therefore be understood as the first point of hegemonic coercion where lived experience meets the conventions of a visual genre. The generic conventions of television drama encourage the audience to adopt a particular position whereby everything appears 'natural' or 'obvious' and as such a false consciousness is produced, obscuring the constructed nature of the of the product. This is desirable for those working on the production. Kim comments in FG5 that "[h]alf the time I think they wear their own clothes, that has to be easier, I don't know. I mean, maybe they don't" (Appendix E2). This is evidence of how pervasive the naturalisation of costume and character can be. Interestingly, this is considered a positive response to the costuming by Theresa Rhymer, who says, "I think my greatest success was somebody saying to me, 'but I thought that was their own clothes. I thought that was a real person' [...] not realising it's a costume" (Appendix F3). The audience are also fed information sequentially, creating the impression that meaning is discovered or uncovered en route by them, as opposed to the meaning being predetermined. The fictions produced through the generic conventions of drama then move into and through culture and society, and evolve as a meaningful and inherent part of the culture for which it was constructed as entertainment.

2.3.3 Social realist drama

Social realism or social realist drama is a sub-genre of drama, understood as an expression of realist conventions within a particular type of social experience. Social realism has been a feature of film and television in the UK since the 1930s. It became a major mode of British expression during the 1950s and 1960s, moving away from the documentary format and embracing dramatic conventions (Lay, 2002; Lacey, 2014; Dave, 2011; Forrest, 2013).

Subsequently, television has played a central and important role in the history and development of social realism (Lay, 2002; Lacey, 2014; Dave, 2011; Forrest, 2013). In a 1977 lecture, Raymond Williams identified four key features of social realism in response to the development of and engagement with the genre in both film and television over the preceding decades. He recognized the movement to social extension, highlighting a shift in the types of stories and characters that were being portrayed within drama, which allowed for stories of ordinary, everyday lived experience. The characters were often drawn from the working classes. A more recent shift reflects a further change or parallel strand in relation to questions of hierarchy, position, and privilege. This has been discussed by Mike Savage, who explains that cultural and social lenses are looking up at those in higher hierarchical positions rather than down at those below, as a means to understand society's problems: 'this reversing of the telescope to look at the rich rather than the poor as the overwhelming social problem is of great pertinence' (2021: 7). This is certainly reflected in examples such as HBO's *Succession* (2018-2023) or in *The White Lotus* (White, 2021).

Secondly, Williams identified the trope of situating the action in the present to illustrate contemporary social issues, fears or experiences (1977). Clearly there have been historical dramas that deal with social issues and could be considered as social realism, but a historical setting and a contemporary audience's distance from the narratives and experiences portrayed seems to exclude historical productions from inclusion in the genre. The third of Williams's characteristics is that the action of the drama will be secular and not driven by religious beliefs or understandings; and the fourth is that there will be a political motivation and viewpoint made visible through the dramatic content. McGovern's work challenges Williams here, as it is informed by both religious morality and political motivation, as can be shown in the following comment made by McGovern to Mark Lawson:

I was born Catholic, you know, grew up Catholic, trade unionist, supposed to be socialist. And yet, if that's the case, I'm a very, very bad Christian. A very, very bad Catholic, a very, very bad trade unionist, a very bad socialist. I'm greedy and selfish. You know all those awful things. And yet I espouse these causes, you know, and that's, that's what fascinates me, you know. (Appendix F6)

In addition to these four key tropes, later authors have added that the prevalence and popularity of social realism on television in particular, from one-off dramas or plays to feature length films, drama series and soap operas, has been used as a means to identify and explore social concerns (Caughie, 2000; Fiske & Hartley, 2003) and that, importantly, the concerns identified are often expressed through linking characters to a particular place or location (Lay, 2002) – as McGovern does with *The Street*. In addition, authors such as Samantha Lay (2002) have developed William's trope of secularity and suggested that social realism's existential remit allows it to combine the conventions of realism with non-realist devices, so in essence, exploring the futility and absurdity of human life, or a meaningless and godless existence, in a way that looks as if it could be occurring next door. For example, in episode 2, series 1 'Stan' (McGovern, 2006), an elderly resident of the street, begins to unpick the meaning of life after he is forced to retire.

William's lecture and the tropes it identified are still useful today, however. He cautioned of the dangers of packaging ordinary and everyday experiences, suggesting that the visual realization of social realism was in danger of producing entertainment akin to Victorian slum fiction. Williams asked whether this type of programming was for the working class to view, or whether it was a way to display the working class for others to view. *The Street* may be doing both, as Carol commented in FG5:

I like it when you see stuff from where you're from. You connect to that, and you say [...] it's like the street that I live in. You see [...] those kinds of people, you recognise some of them, you know, the young lads going out and the community and you, you know, being close to your family and all of that kind of stuff. (Appendix E2)

However, what Carol is watching is the product of a form of class voyeurism that took place under the banner of research for the production. Barbara Kidd, David Blair and Theresa Rhymer all refer to scouting trips where they would observe 'the locals' in their natural habitat. Barbara Kidd comments,

a good costume designer will take note of people anyway, sitting on the bus, you know, wherever. So yes, you sort of immerse yourself or try to immerse yourself a little bit in the society. For example, we filmed in pubs and I certainly went to the different pubs beforehand and talked to the people that would be in the film because they used local people quite a lot. (Appendix F2)

We can certainly see the warning Williams gave gaining further traction today against the backdrop of shifting understandings and experiences of social class, whereby the traditional working classes have lost ground to the perception of a contemporary 'underclass': 'television exploits the competitive fragmentation with class' (Fiske & Hartley, 2003: 78). This is evident in programming such as the Channel 4 reality show *Benefits Street* (2014), the Channel 4 comedy drama *Shameless* (Abbott, 2004-2014) or more recently the joint BBC/HBO production '*Rain Dogs*' (Carraway, 2023). Realist conventions within social realism, specifically those concerned with costuming, have, over time, eroded productive, active, or resistant class consciousness as the viewers sink into sartorial ambivalence, failing to recognize themselves in the clothed experiences of class represented on screen.

2.4 The language of television

To project a version of the real in social realist drama television must, as Hall explains, utilize a visual discourse that translates the 3D into something 2D (Hall, 1973). The 2D image works when it employs existing beliefs and perceptions (Fiske & Hartley, 2003), which in a contemporary context have themselves been subject to multiple visual mediations through historical time and space. The result of the distillation process from 3D to 2D is a product of those mediations and therefore cannot actually be that which it purports to be (Hall, 1973). Rather, the beliefs and perceptions exist within and through the use of language/s (Fiske & Hartley, 2003), in this case, the language of television. This language communicates through a complex process of symbolic exchange that takes two overlapping routes: the narrative or plot, and the images that are constructed to work alongside it (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005). This symbolic exchange produces a discourse of knowledge accessed and employed by those that produce and consume the texts, which relies on the repetitive use of familiar codes or symbols (Caughie, 2000; Morley, 2006). The resulting images are manifestations of the tension between the subjective and the objective that is a factor in camera-based visual culture (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Caughie, 2000), as David Blair commented when

discussing the 'types' of character that appeared in *The Street*: "rightly or wrongly I think [...] I understand them" (Appendix F1). He believes, therefore, that his knowledge and understanding of particular characterizations is 'right'.

Despite their identity as 2D products, the images cannot be thought of as static. In order to produce meaning the images must continually flow, more often than not, in a sequential nature (Morley 2006; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). This contributes to the notion of 'now-ness' or the 'immediacy effect' (Caughie, 2000) that in turn suggests contemporaneity and 'realness' and erases the constructed nature of the product. The danger here is that broad brushstrokes are required to keep everything moving, to keep the language alive and relevant. The result is a partial picture (Thornham & Purvis, 2005) of a constructed reality, which is accessed by the masses and is often seen, as Gledhill and Williams explain, 'as a conduit to social concerns' (2000: 239): a concentrated snapshot of social issues or problems. Actually, television is allowing for or encouraging both the familiar and unfamiliar, the self and the other, to be labelled and placed within a hierarchy (Thornham & Purvis, 2005; Fiske & Hartley, 2003). This in turn creates and maintains social concerns, rather than acting as a means to access or illuminate them. For example, in *The Street's*, episode 4, series 3 'The Hero' (Lloyd, 2009), the character Duffy, played by Steve Marsh, has to allow his friend Kieran, played by Joseph Mawie, to take the credit for rescuing a child from a housefire, lest the disability benefit Duffy has been claiming be questioned.

As already mentioned, the shared language that television drama uses to communicate with its audience works by providing signals via two main routes, the plot and the images created (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001). There are issues with both; however, the focus here is on the issues presented when interpreting the costumed images used within television drama. Signals are used to inform the shared language of television, and these are both complex and simplistic. The multiple meanings (Caughie, 2000; Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Thornham & Purvis, 2005) they produce can be tricky to identify and yet simultaneously very clear. This is because they employ both first and second levels of signification (Fiske & Hartley, 2003) – denotation and connotation. So, for example, the use of a hooded sweatshirt within a contemporary urban drama will denote casual sports clothing used for warmth but could connote a whole range of additional positive and negative interpretations. Within *The Street*, denim denotes casual clothing, the connotation here

being that the working-class characters that are represented have no need or interest in dressing in anything other than casual clothing. The content analysis data presented here identifies denim, T-shirts and knitwear as the most used items of costuming, substantiating this point. In addition, the use of casual clothing was picked up during FG3 with Brad commenting that '[t]hey were all dressed the same, though, in casual stuff, even the coach and Barry [played by Timothy Spall in BBC/ITV's *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* from 1983], the daughters and the son, everyone' (Appendix E3).

Both levels of signification (but particularly the connotative) are subject to such wide interpretations because they are individually and collectively heteroglotic, or subjectively mediated through a number of different forms of speech or ways of speaking (Bakhtin in Morris, 1994) employed by both the producers and consumers of the text. Thus, they move beyond a double articulation or double-voiced discourse to become multi-accented (Morris, 1994; Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001). As Blair comments regarding the production of the text,

it's important that there is a through-line of contact between the production designer and the costume designer and that's quite often not [...] a triangle, DOP, costume designer and so on. They have to work in unison. (Appendix F1)

Teresa Rhymer comments on a struggle to be heard in these multi-accented discussions:

production design and locations do have a lot, have a lot of weight. You know that people think where something is set is much more important than what people are wearing and what they look like. (Appendix F3)

Within the focus groups, references are continually made to the connections particular items have with external reference points. For example, in FG3 Brad comments "that looks like something Brad Pitt would have worn in *Snatch*" (a Guy Ritchie film from 2000) (Appendix E3). In FG1 Sally remarks "it's like an old West Ham, back in the day T-shirt, but it ain't got a badge" (Appendix E1). When a physical object such as a piece of clothing becomes converted into a sign, it works as a manifestation of the consciousness of the creator (Morris, 1994; Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001). It is a coded metaphor employed to signify a meaning (Hall, 1973, 1997; Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Gledhill & Williams, 2000; Thornham & Purvis, 2005) that has been subjectively formulated within and through a system of recognizable codes. The sign communicates successfully and becomes powerful

because the codes it employs are linked to established truth claims (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) that have been employed repetitively over time and assimilated into collective consciousness, so the construction behind them is rendered invisible and the codes appear not to have been constructed at all (Hall, 1997; Fiske & Hartley, 2003). Theresa Rhymer refers to this in her costuming of Gina McKee's character for series 2, episode 4 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007): "she shopped in Next, which to that type of woman was a more aspirational store rather than shopping in Primark, you know" (Appendix F3).

There is also a third level of understanding that recognises the problematic notion of 'meaning'. As Hirschkop comments, 'texts only mean when they are read, what they 'mean' depends on the shared values of those reading' (Hirschkop, 2003: 96). Meaning, understanding and the text rely on each other and cannot be separated. Understanding facilitates meaning occurring and the text produces understanding; however, textual features – for example genre or stereotyping – can make some meanings more accessible to the reader than others (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 169). Management of those textual features can manipulate understanding and this is where the authority of the creator becomes powerful in the production of meaning. Again, Hirschkop explains: '[a]uthority is sinister. Against dialogical production of meaning are forces that seek to restrain or restrict the range of inter-textual relations and move towards one meaning' (2003: 100). The analysis undertaken here seeks to expose the manipulation involved in the production of meaning. This does not necessarily refer to those involved in the production of the drama, but manipulation is characterised as ideological.

The language of the visual text operates within the tension between written language and spoken language. That is, interacting with costume is both asynchronous and synchronous. We read the text as static (written) within established systems and frameworks that help us extract meaning but when 'reading' costume we also draw upon nonverbal forms of communicating (Morris, 1994). It is often within the non-verbal that the second layer of signification, the connotative, is constructed. As Fiske & Hartley comment, the codes that structure TV are like those of speech, not writing (Fiske & Hartley, 2003) and are therefore subject to interpretation. A discussion of how intonation can be mapped onto the language of dress using the character of Eddie can be found in Chapter 4.

There is a fine line between the messages and ideas that work as suggestions and those that do not. Nonverbal clues are often the tools employed to push a message over

that fine line (Gladwell, 2000). As Hebdige comments, '[w]hat is not said is as important as what is said' (Hebdige, 1979: 21). Although we understand mass communication as producing a variety of interpretations (Eco, 1992), the interpretations are governed by boundaries. So, some interpretations are pushed forward to become more familiar and legitimized than others.

The struggle over the meaning held within texts and how it is accessed by those that engage with the text has been well documented. Institutionalized preferred readings compete with other ways of seeing. Hall employed Voloshinov's ideas of 'multi-accentuality' (in Wood, 2006) to develop his now familiar model, which outlines three positions of decoding; accepted, negotiated, and contested. Today we understand that maps of meaning are not closed spaces (Hall, 1997; Eco, 1999; Caughie, 2000; Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Thornham & Purvis, 2005; Gledhill & Williams, 2000), but meaningful in a fluid way, constantly evolving in response to changing contexts, who is decoding, and the degree of understanding or competence the decoders hold.

As a result, we now understand there to be at least two types of model reader. On the one hand is the concept of the intertextual reader (DeLong, 1998; Gledhill & Williams, 2000) engaging with an intertextual text (Sturken & Cartright, 2001; Turner, 2010; Mckee, 2002; Thornham & Purvis, 2005) and forming interpretations, contesting what is presented when space allows, based on personal understandings and cultural competencies (Eco, 1992; Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Hall, 1997; Lay, 2002; Wood, 2006). Emma's comments from FG4 are an example of this:

there are certain things that sort of always seem to crop up when these stories are aired, and they're around type of the women, there's always children, there's always alcohol, [...] smoking, that there are certain things, boxes that need to be checked in order for audiences to understand what's going on. But I think there are also certain things missing, aren't there? (Appendix E1)

On the other hand, the ideas around the second model reader continue to draw upon the effects of mass communication where viewers trust what is being portrayed (Corner, 1992; Brooker & Jermyn, 2003; Gauntlett, 1999) and decode without giving a thought to the process of decoding they are engaging with (Sturken & Cartright, 2001), the relentlessly repetitive images eventually understood as a convincing reality (Fiske & Hartley, 2003;

Gauntlett, 1999). An example of this can be found in the comment made by Canadian national Mina in FG2: “I thought ‘totally British’ just even by the clothes and how they dress. Never even mind the structure of the homes – just the clothes themselves’ (Appendix E2).

Whilst Gledhill & Williams argue that spectatorship is politically ambivalent (2000), this thesis argues that how ordinary costuming is used within the language of television is part of the dismantling of political identity formation and engagement, reinforcing political ambivalence, inhibiting the development of class consciousness and collective action. As Mina comments in FG2, “it was a stereotypical middle-class family, whether you are lower middle class or aspiring upper middle class – it felt standardised for me and that’s why it was relatable” (Appendix E2). Standardisation here is preferable to something that may promote a political discussion. David Blair remarks,

I mean, [we] don't really care about any of you so why should we sit and watch you on a wide screen telly, without actually considering, well, that’s what actually drives people in council houses to watch things like *The Only Way is Essex* or such crap.
(Appendix F1)

He is referring to centralised production processes that he believes work towards eliminating the political working class from visual media and directing working class viewers instead towards reality TV.

Guy, Green & Banham claim that audience approval validates the choices made by screen practitioners (2001); however, we might ask how much agency is a part of the approval process, particularly when the majority of roles within television production are held by creatives whose lived experience is not that of the representations they create. It seems more reasonable to accept, as Guy, Green & Banham state, that who is going to be viewing the text is a determining factor in the productions choices that are made (2001). If the consumer will be drawn from the 48%²¹ of the UK population that identify as working class, then the choices made will reinforce reductive stereotypes of the working class to maintain order (Baudrillard, 1994a; Piepe & Emerson, 1975). This is particularly true, I argue, in relation to the costuming of class. Further, the dominant forms of screen language are

²¹ See recent government research on attitudes in the UK to social mobility
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-barometer-2021/social-mobility-barometer-public-attitudes-to-social-mobility-in-the-uk>

not uncontested (Hall, 1997), nor do they sanction or validate the choices made. Audiences recognize misrepresentations as they continue to engage. For example, in FG5 Rob comments, “[t]he stereotypes of people from this area are always wrong. They are workshy, criminals or football hooligans with no brain’ (Appendix E2).

Clearly, recognition has become disconnected or separated from the political tools required to act. None of the focus group participants identified themselves as political activists or actively engaged in politics but they all implicitly discussed how political decisions affected them in their day-to-day lives. So, audiences do not see versions of their ‘clothed’ selves on screen, but rather tired and stereotypical representations of characters thought to be ‘like’ them. The language of screen costuming is understood (and often contested) by audiences but its connection to wider institutionalized forms of oppression has yet to be fully acknowledged.

2.4.1 Realism

One of the most potent elements of screen language is the concept of realism. Realism is a form of direct address (McCabe in Gledhill & Williams, 2000), a tool within the practice of signification that helps facilitate the language of television. The term as used here encompasses the idea of costume realism. The origins of screen realism are subject to debate.²² This work is not concerned with film theory’s practical explanations of realism such as the resolution of the image or its ‘recessiveness’²³ (whether a wrinkle or scratch on the screen disrupts the viewing), but rather looks to very briefly explore realism in two ways: conceptually with the idea of the ‘collapse’ whereby the audience sees an image and commits to what they are seeing, forgetting or disregarding how it has been constructed; and as the mechanical reproduction of a reality that exposes the audience to something ‘outside’ the screen such as social marginalization or injustice.

²² Cinematic or screen realism is rooted in broader realist movements across art, literature and philosophy. Its origin is open to debate, Williams claimed realism comes from the oral history modes of the bourgeois dramas of the eighteenth century (1977) whilst McCabe, (1974), Lay (2002), and Fiske & Hartley (2003) have all claimed that is linked to literary production and emerged as a dominant form of Western representation in the nineteenth century. The consensus is that realism is heterogeneous (Caughie, 2000; Gledhill & Williams, 2000; Murphy, 2001), difficult to define (Ashby & Higson, 2000; Lay, 2002; Williams, 1977) and as such is often rendered as devoid of meaning (Corner, 1992) and movable (Hall, 1997; Hunt, 1999; Sturken & Cartright, 2001). Some go so far as to claim it is no longer viable (Bromley in Munt, 2000).

²³ Marks on the surface of the camera lens either deliberately or unintentionally disrupt the collapse when viewing. See Benovsky (2017).

Screen realism works to naturalize the way we apprehend the world (Fiske & Hartley, 2003) and acts as a mediating filter to real experience (Forrest, 2017; Gledhill & Williams, 2000; Thornham & Purvis, 2005). It is claimed that television could not exist without realism (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) and as such television is only understood as 'good' television when it is believed to be a peep-hole into the real (Baudrillard, 1994a). Realism erases the structures of storytelling that can disrupt or become a barrier to audiences' full submission to the narrative (Forrest, 2017). Its purpose is storytelling and it does this through a specific articulation of the language of the real (Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Hall, 1997) that employs signs distilled through a creative or artistic process, a seamless connection between things that form reality and realism (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001; Hall, 1997; Morris, 1994). The visual story or product is an artifice, a simulation, produced through established ideas, employing a narrative that exists as a meta language (Fiske & Hartley, 2003; Gledhill & Williams, 2000; McCabe, 1974) to describe, reflect, interpret, create or speak for or on the behalf of something else – the real (Baudrillard, 1994a).

When we say television drama is realistic what is meant is, as Thornham & Purvis state, a combination of photo realism and verisimilitude (2005). Verisimilitude here refers to the believability of the look, characters and events within a narrative, what the dominant ideas of 'truth' are. Verisimilitude needs to be constructed and a sense of realism established in order for the audience to suspend their disbelief. The concept of reality and creating a version of it for mass consumption is clearly problematic for a number of reasons (Baudrillard, 1994a). To begin with, there is a logical argument that the 'real' cannot be reduced to thought (Sartre, 1968), to totalise in this way can erase the very essence of the real. Second, ideology must presuppose any articulation of the real – what is created from an ideological perspective (Caughie, 2000; Eco, 1986, 1992; Lawler, 2005b, 2008). In addition, Colin McCabe's 1970s texts explore the idea that the classic realist text (to which screen realism is often linked) cannot deal with the contradictory nature of the real. In short, reality is too diverse and therefore a single message is required and repeated over and over again (McCabe, 1974). Furthermore Gauntlett, Lay & Murphy (2001) agree that relationships between the real and an imagined real are subject to social circumstance, time and space – realism looks different for different people in different settings. A contemporary version of realism including costume realism looks quite different to one produced five, ten, twenty or fifty years ago. Such factors result in television 'cooling'

meaning or being quite specific about how it controls meaning through the use of realism: 'nothing resembles the control and telecommand headquarters of the nuclear power station more than TV studios' (Baudrillard, 1994a: 53).

The marginalised or oppressed, the working class, very often the raw material used to expose social issues or concerns on screen, often struggle with the verisimilitude presented to them and labelled as realism (Gledhill & Williams, 2000). As Emma from FG4 comments, "setting another bad scene and sort of shining people in a light that they've had to always deal with the same old shit" (Appendix E1). Realism, including costume realism, within UK television production is predominantly produced by middle-class practitioners and expresses middle-class views, not for the working classes but about them or on behalf of them (Williams, 1977; Baudrillard, 1994a; Fiske & Hartley, 2003). As Roy Boulter commented,

Class struggle is badly explored on screen and depictions of the working class are particularly bad. Television is an upper- and middle-class industry so this affects the portrayal of the working class. (Appendix F5)

This has consequences for how people see their place in the world (McKee, 2002; Hall, 1997). As Nathan Conolly comments, 'we need to feel we can be included and that comes from the experience of seeing ourselves included' (2017: 64). Caughie claims that to dramatize the working class would actually upset and challenge realist conventions (2000). This thesis argues that is particularly apparent when dealing with how and why the working classes dress as they do versus how working-class characters are costumed.

2.5 Stereotypes and representations

The following section draws upon analysis of Series 1 of Jimmy McGovern's *The Street* paying particular attention to episode 6 'Sean & Yvonne' alongside analysis of the two characters that form a thread across all three series, Eddie and Margie McEvoy. Episode 6 of series 1, directed by David Blair, has two central characters, Sean and Yvonne, played by Lee Ingleby and Christine Bottomley respectively. The narrative is situated around their volatile and violent marriage and charts Sean's loss of control alongside Yvonne's spiralling despair and suffering. The episode also features Yvonne's sister Kerry (Joanne Froggatt) and her boyfriend Alex (Matt Bardock) who 'come up' from London to help Yvonne try to escape her situation. Yvonne's mum Mary (Ruth McCabe) also features, and it is her untimely death which is the catalyst for the violent end to the episode. Sean is murdered by Kerry and the body disposed of in the newly excavated grave awaiting the burial of Mary.

Both Eddie and Margie appear fleetingly in this episode, Eddie takes Sean to court in his taxi and the pair hold a conversation throughout the journey. Margie is more peripheral, seen in longshot observing the drama as it unfolds, but is used as an anchoring symbol of stability, a lasting and constant point of understanding and help for Yvonne. The episode prior to this in the series, 'Asylum', features Yvonne and Eddie interacting much more when Yvonne becomes friends with the asylum seeker Ojo (Jamiu Adebisi), whom Eddie is helping. The repercussions of the friendship are dealt with violently by Sean in a fluid and overlapping narrative across the two episodes.

The number of key characters that are the focus here is in line with the data gathered via content analysis (Appendix I). The average number of key characters across the three series is four per episode. The episode runs across thirteen story days and Sean appears in twelve clothing items, and thirteen for Yvonne. They each appear in ten different outfits that use various combinations of these items. There are other episodes in this series that run the same or similar number of story days (episode 1 'The Accident', thirteen story days; and episode 2 'Stan' fourteen story days). Yvonne's sister Kerry wears considerably more items of clothing, despite featuring less and therefore requiring fewer outfits.

The focus of the analysis here is the stereotypical use of particular materials or accessories, how practices of dressing are class based within the text and finally how a reductive idea around the concepts of taste and style are associated with reductive ideas

around the working class and class experience. Sean and Yvonne are very familiar constructs that have appeared across several examples and different genres within film and television that re-present the everyday life of the working class. For example, from film *Poor Cow* (Loach, 1967), *Nil by Mouth* (Oldman, 1997) and more contemporary productions such as *Kingsmen: The Secret Service* (Vaughn, 2014). Domestic violence has been explored by ‘comedy’ dramas such as *Shameless* (Abbott & Wells, 2004-2011), crime dramas such as *Vera* (Losey, 2016) and almost all soap operas. The two main characters occupy familiar positions: the loutish, violent, controlling petty criminal and his long-suffering, powerless partner. Identity narratives such as these ‘do not stand alone but refer to and draw on wider cultural narratives’ (Lawler, 2008: 25) whereby working-class men are seen as emotionally and intellectually redundant and incapable of rational/reasonable thought or behaviour; and working-class women are seen as weak, feckless and complicit in their own position. This has been a familiar narrative across history. Rotha wrote in 1936 that ‘almost every portrayal of working-class people in the story film is either as creatures of fun, Cockney types or rustic half-wit. Or as dishonest rogues, tramps and pick pockets’ (1936: 174). Not much has changed.

The specifics of the costumes the characters wear are used to communicate these familiar tropes and inform the audience who these characters are. Sean has a limited range of clothing items and is seen frequently wearing the same red short-sleeved T-shirt with Adidas-style stripes on the sleeve. The costume designer for series 1, Barbara Kidd, spoke at length about the selection of the T-shirt:

[a]t that time, it was sort of the beginning of the Nike business and the logos and things and I did want that to be in there but of course we are not allowed to use logos etc. etc. Shops like Primark were beginning to make and sell clothes that reflected that sport ethic but much much cheaper, without the logos and perhaps with two stripes rather than three. So, the characters who were wanting to be part of the Nike tribe would have chosen to purchase T-shirts from Primark or the market that looked like that, because it was part of the whole movement, the whole street thing. That’s why we put Sean in the T-shirt with the stripes and there are other people in the series that are wearing a similar sort of thing. (Appendix F2)

The use of this T-shirt, a simple object in and of itself, clearly articulates particular traits of masculinity to the viewer. To begin with, the T-shirt has a ‘retro’ feel to it, referencing late ’70s and early ’80s Mod culture, football terrace culture, and the indie music scene and club

cultures of the 1990s. As the text was produced in the mid-2000s, the T-shirt also pays homage to the 'Madchester' scene of the 1990s and the iconography and class experiences of bands such as Oasis. As Emma from FG4 comments,

that whole kind of Liam Gallagher thing is a symbol, isn't it, a particular type of masculinity and that T-shirt kind of places him, that character there straightaway for people, doesn't it? (Appendix E1)

This is corroborated by the actor who played the role of Sean, Lee Ingleby, who commented, that he "had an air of '90s Manchester about him, I liked the idea that he was a part of the 'Madchester' scene as a teenager, liked his drugs and music and never really outgrew it, and that ran into his 20s and 30s" (Appendix F4).

Each of these comments situates a particular kind of stereotypical masculinity: hedonistic, brutish, unapologetic, confrontational, and most significantly, working-class. The references lead the viewer through the assumed rites of passage many working-class boys and men traverse, which include wrangling with formations of class consciousness, making this character appear familiar and thereby more tolerated. The T-shirt is used here to confirm the familiar character stereotype that is being communicated. As Barrett writes, 'TV shows are rife with stereotypical images which serve to reinforce negative perception' (in Connolly, 2017: 160). Identities evolve through memories, experience, interpretation and through engagement with narratives such as these (Lawler, 2008). As DeFleur commented almost sixty years ago, 'television may not be required to reflect reality faithfully, but stereotypes, atypicality and entertaining distortions may have subtle effects' (1964: 72). The characterisation of Sean produces a particular discourse whereby this 'type' of working-class masculinity is viewed as normative, acceptable and very much part of working-class identities and a product of a specific classed lived experience. Domestic abuse affects²⁴ one in four women and one in six men in the UK and Wales and is experienced across social, sexual and ethnic boundaries regardless of income or education, but this is not what is being articulated here. The dangerous repetition of stereotypes such as this has ultimately bled into and created inaccurate common understandings, reflected in the comment from Danielle in FG1: "wherever you find poverty this will happen more, so if these parts of the

²⁴ <https://www.lwa.org.uk>

country have more people with nothing, there will be more of it” (Appendix E1). Domestic abuse is being positioned specifically within an impoverished and socially marginalised context, as a familiar side effect to working-class lived experience, without really interrogating the context or the complexities of the issue. As Jo from FG4 states,

it’s a patriarchy problem, isn’t it, rather than a class problem? You know, suicides are higher amongst working-class men, and it’s the kind of self-violence and, you know, my working-class experiences are riddled with male violence because there’s just pressures, financial pressures on life. (Appendix E1)

The stereotyping of domestic violence perpetrators and victims is an inevitability due to the ‘types’ or the pathology imposed upon the people that exist within this class category. The red T-shirt Sean wears is a tool that reinforces the familiarity of the encoded meaning and makes such positioning possible.

Any form of representation, including stereotypes, becomes a vehicle that communicates the creators ‘feelings, mood, dispositions and attitudes toward the propositional content of the message and the communicative context’ (Besnier, 1990: 419) at the point of creation. Clothing stereotypes can therefore be viewed as tangible manifestations of particular intentionality. The choice of jacket that Yvonne is seen to wear – cropped, tight and with battered fake sheepskin collars and cuffs – is intended to articulate something about her sense of self, her position in society and how she is complicit in her own situation. The fact that she has two very similar jackets that she wears across episodes 5 and 6 of series 1 reinforces the meaning embedded within the object. The costume designer does not recall the specific detail of the jacket, so there is no information on where it was sourced, but she does recall how it articulated fashionable trends of the time: “it is a throwback to the 70’s but at the time, that is what was in the shops’ (Appendix F2).

Once a stereotype moves from the mind of the creator into public discourse, it becomes accepted and those that reproduce it are seen as employing expert knowledge or understanding. Of course, as Savage claims, ‘Expertise is not a neutral tool – it too is bound up with the very construction of class categories and the symbolic violence done in its name’ (2015: 62). We can see evidence of this repetitive nature and use of stereotypes in the character of Yvonne. The repetitive use of particular items of dress is evidenced through the content analysis (see Chapter 4). In public, she wears short skirts, high heels and low

necklines. Coupled with the fact she invariably has two or three children with her (one in a pram), this communicates normative and conservative understandings of uneducated, unmarried young mothers that have become very visible in public and political discourse.

Specialised knowledge, such as that of a costume designer, provides justification for a social hierarchy (Sartre, 1968). It uses pre-established 'good' reasons for knowing to reproduce the knowledge over and over again. This creates a paradigm whereby rules are established, and 'good' practice identified. As Hughes and Sharrock comment, the paradigms created 'involve shared symbols, metaphysical commitments and values, as well as a criterion of judgement and worth of work done' (Hughes & Sharrock, 1997:81). In this way, costume designers in collaboration with a director and actor become cultural specialists or intermediaries and act 'to turn the intellectual gaze into a form of knowledge and competence for one's own enhancement which is precisely how cosmopolitanism as a disposition is generated' (Skeggs, 2005: 158). Such a position is powerful and can work to either resist or conform to the social hierarchies that govern society.

Such practices or behaviours cannot be divorced from motive or reason and when they move into accepted representations, they claim a 'truth'. Within mass media, intentionality is not necessarily a response to creativity or invention, but often has as much to do with perfected technical execution that can be repeated over and over again (Eco, 1986: 146). There is currently a limit to the range of what is being shared or communicated through stereotypes (Sherringham, 2009) regardless of the good or bad 'intention' of producers. Histories of the subjective and the political subjectivities that are inherent within the histories of representations and the production of stereotypes (Caughie, 2000) continue to inform contemporary media texts and can be seen quite clearly through the characters of Sean and Yvonne in *The Street*.

In addition to the stereotypes already discussed, there is evidence of the use of regional stereotyping employed in episode 1 of series 3, 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009). The character Paddy (Bob Hoskins) does not have a regional accent, and so we assume he has moved to the region from elsewhere in the country, most likely London. This was picked up by the focus group participants. We see regional differences maintained despite the context of global markets and globalisation prevalent when the drama was produced in 2006. Within the language of television, it seems almost impossible to remove regional differences in dress as they act as a useful way to articulate class identity (Hallam in Ashby & Higson,

2000). As Connolly comments, '[h]aving a working-class identity cannot be separated from belonging to a working-class locality. Local neighbourhoods become a force of identity formation' (2017: 94). Paddy is not local; therefore, his costumed identity must communicate difference and it does so by employing tailored garments in a specific way (see Chapter 4 for further detail). Within *The Street*, the familiar tropes of the supposed sophistication and cosmopolitanism of London are positioned in opposition to less fashionable or knowing 'regional' styles (Crane, 2000; Davis, 1992) that exist regardless of, or in spite of, the wider choices offered through the global fashion conglomerates that operate across all geographical spaces in contemporary society (Bruzzi, 1997; Carter, 2012). This is picked up by Jamie in FG6, when he comments scathingly,

I want to ask why Bob Hoskins, someone from London, is even in it. He's running a club in Manchester. Why do they have to have people from London when it's set in Manchester? It doesn't explain why they are there. What are we supposed to think – that someone not from the area needs to come in and sort things? (Appendix E3)

As Savage comments, '[r]ecently classifications of class and space have become more loaded, the educated dominant media metropolis of London has more power in defining the deficiencies of other locations' (2015: 262). The tropes outlined are not restricted to this episode: we see them very clearly played out in the distinction between the costuming of Yvonne and her more cosmopolitan sister Kerry in episode 6 of series 1, 'Sean & Yvonne'.

Stuart Hall defined representation as the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning: 'representation through language is therefore central to the process by which meaning is produced' (1997: 1). Hall's definition establishes a way for us to understand the pivotal position representations occupy as the thread that connects the language of television and costuming and the meanings both languages produce. Hall's work remains relevant here despite recent work on representation²⁵ and, as Yousman comments in his review of Charlotte Brunson's *Stuart Hall: Writings on Media: Histories of the Present* (2022), '[w]hile this is from a piece from 1972, would anyone be blamed for thinking it might

²⁵ See Orgad (2014), D'Acu (2004), Cloarec, Haigron & Letort (2016), Leistyna (2009) and Jacobsson & Stiernstedt (2018).

have been written on the morning of 7th January 2021[?]' (2022: 402), referring to the storming of the Capitol building by Trump supporters.

Language, of course, only becomes meaningful when enacted by two or more individuals. Therefore, the conceptual representations each individual holds in the mind must be reconfigured as signs in order for them to be exchanged within a shared language system and become communicative. Hall also states that 'language is a signifying practice' (1997:5). What he is clarifying here is not only the process of signification – of reconfiguring the concept into a sign – but also that this is a subjective process subject to power relations that exist as part of an established hierarchy maintained through culture and society. As such we can begin to understand the complicated machinations at play in constructing representations, particularly when the purpose of the construction is to represent 'reality' (Hall, 1997; see also Hill in Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001), often one not experienced by those creating the constructions. Hall further identifies three stages to the process of representation: reflective, intentional and constructionist (1997). In the first approach, signs employed in the signifying practice are understood to reflect actual meaning; the second, intentional approach suggests we impose meaning through the signs we employ, so the sign will mean exactly what was intended. Hall dismissed this approach, explaining that there was also the probability of negotiated and oppositional readings of a text; and in the final approach - the constructionist approach - the symbolic process of representation is pushed further by drawing on the work of Saussure and recognizing that there is no inherent connection between a sign and an object. The sign only begins to 'mean' anything when it becomes organized into a system or hierarchy.

Clothed or clothing representations (on the screen) work in exactly the same way. Items of clothing work as signs within a system of hierarchy, or paradigm. They communicate encoded meaning to the audience and the audience decodes the meaning depending on the accepted/negotiated or oppositional position of the 'reader'. As such, embodied television representations play an important role in formatting positive and negative, oppressive, or empowering responses to and attitudes about the world (Gledhill & Williams, 2000). Such formations actively contribute to our culturally constructed identities and our understandings of our place in the world (Hall, 1997). As Tony commented in FG3, "it would have been easier to discuss it if it was down in a London pub rather than Manchester because you don't know how Manchester pubs operate" (Appendix E3).

There are key problematics identified here within clothed representations. The first is the preoccupation with a fabricated 'typical', which leads directly to the second problem wherein, as a direct result of television's competence in concealing the fabricated nature of the typical or 'everyday', confusion between 'the real' and what is represented has developed. Mass communication, of which *The Street* is a component, relies upon a limited, tired and well-worn set of stereotypical representations to communicate meaning and retain its powerful hegemonic position. As Graeme Turner commented, 'the media organizes representations in support of its own interests' (2010: 24). To reverse paraphrase Sartre's idea, this controlled communication begins with ideology, the state and civil society and ends with the material representation of immediate life (1968), or rather the ideas that the systems of society rely upon to retain positions of control and privilege inform the materiality of representations. As a result, 'meaning', and I would argue, costumed meaning in particular, is in class terms being managed in such a way that sections of society are without meaningful representation of their experiences, as David Blair and Roy Boulter have commented. This is its own form of oppression (Thornham & Purvis, 2005) or as Baudrillard states: 'the silent majority is an imaginary referent, but they do exist; however, their representation is no longer possible' (Baudrillard, 1994b: 20).

What is produced is often understood as a form of constructed equivalence or a direct representation of reality (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). The use of realism as a visual tool reinforces a situation whereby representations and 'the real' have become confused, or as Gledhill & Williams state, 'the hypothesis of postmodernism is that representational products of consumer culture (film & TV) are now indistinguishable from our lived reality' (2000: 100). The presumed 'realness' makes them very powerful, and this is clearly an issue if we think about representations as being subject to regimes of power (Hall, 1997). Representations and the meaning they convey, although subject to some changes, are often interpreted over and over again in much the same way (Baudrillard, 1994a) as they become established and familiar. As such, all we can really see within them is the subjective position of those that create them. As Sartre comments, 'a subjective drama is a play of appearances that hides nothing [...] by reducing appearance to truth which defines the reducer's subjective concept of reality, he has only defined himself' (1968: 46, 49).

Gledhill and Williams comment that class plays a part in hegemonic control of culture and therefore class systems, structures, and politics will also play a significant role in

the production of representations (2001). Sartre cautions us against explaining the 'real' with insufficient collectives (1968); however, despite left-wing intent (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001) and often significant levels of intricate personal negotiation (Wood, 2006) for both the producers and consumers of a text, what is exposed within clothed representations of the ordinary continues to reflect society's obsessions around social class (Lay, 2002). These obsessions are often made visible and meaningful in moments that have nothing to do with the plot (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) but everything to do with the way the characters look, specifically the way they are dressed. It is hard to quantify how much viewers absorb or learn from representations but as Sturken & Cartwright have commented, there is a pressing need to look at the machinations of how images guide viewer responses and how viewers respond to representations. (2001).

2.6 Intent versus creative restrictions

In the contemporary context, television is understood as creating a plurality of messages from which individual viewers compose their own individualistic responses (Eco, 1986). Despite the fracturing of the purpose of TV over time, there are elements integral to television as a form of visual culture that have remained consistent. The areas of consistency can be split broadly into three categories. The first is the understanding that TV continues to be made and organized according to the needs of the culture it serves (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). This can be contested through arguments around the structure of the TV industry, access to forms of production and incomplete forms of representation. The second point is that, despite more diversity and sophistication in forms of both production and consumption, it continues to reflect and respond to conventional and conservative values established and identified by Head as early as 1954. The third point, of particular importance for this thesis, is that, despite the temporal immediacy of the majority of the output, whereby it is understood as having a 'living' role within the fabric of everyday life, [b]roadcast TV is marked by a sense of now-ness' (Thornham & Purvis, 2005: 6). The format of television remains, with few exceptions, standardized (Thornham & Purvis, 2005) with regard to narrative flow, the reliance on realism and design aesthetics. Specifically, the costuming always looks the same.

The consistent elements outlined above that form the spine of much theoretical writing on television can each be contested here if we consider the tension between intent and creative restrictions that were made visible via the empirical research conducted for this thesis. Jimmy McGovern (through the secondary material gathered), and David Blair and Roy Boulter (in the primary research) speak to the way in which the working classes have been represented within mainstream media. McGovern comments, '[f]rom the 1980s there was a non-stop assault on the white working class of this country. A whole swathe of the working class was ignored and treated with contempt' (Appendix F6). Boulter stated,

Class struggle is badly explored in film and depictions of the working class are particularly bad. Television is an upper- and middle-class industry so this affects the portrayal of the working class. The result is that depictions of the working class are through the lens of the upper and middle classes and are often patronizing and/or depressing. You see the same tropes and generalizations around manual labour and feckless behaviours on screen and very often the working class are laughed at, not laughed with. (Appendix F5)

The narrow lens through which class was represented is a socially authored conceptual tool of dominance but also a practical tool of logistics and economics (Brouillette, 2009). There are a limited range of voices heard, as Teresa Rhymer commented:

I felt so out of place because everyone else was different, there was even a Lady someone or other. And you know, people had titles. People at the BBC were people who'd been to the Slade Institute. They were people who were [...] upper middle-class completely. There wasn't anyone who was working class, at all. (Appendix F3)

The danger of this is, as Skeggs comments, that occupying positions of authority within social structures does not necessarily guarantee knowledge, ethics or authenticity: '[b]eing positioned by structural relations does not necessarily give access to ways of knowing' (2004: 127). Therefore, the emphasis was and remains on the misinformed production of reductive or simplistic codes that it is assumed would appeal to and be understood by the largest possible market. As Fiske and Hartley state, '[t]he more conventional and constraining the code – the more popular and less 'highbrow' the work' (2003:43), the more capital it is assumed to generate.

The narrow codes of class representation have a long history, as Beynon & Rowbotham note: 'the music hall stereotypes were still to be found in British film and, of

course, as television develops, were to be passed on for some time afterwards' (2001: 53). DeFleur argued in the middle of the last century that progress was being shown in the process of minimizing ethnic or religious stereotypes. Latterly, we can add that progress in relation to gender identities, and sexuality is also visible. However, class stereotypes remain. The 'truths' produced by the media within this context are an exercise of power (Lawler, 2008). As David Blair comments, "it's disgraceful that we are happy to take license fees off all these people and then make nothing that represents them" (Appendix F1). This context became the connective tissue that galvanized McGovern, Boulter, and Blair and framed their intent to create the narratives that form *The Street*, challenging the first and second of the assumptions outlined above that claims that TV continues to be made and organized according to the needs of the culture it serves (Fiske & Hartley, 2003), and that it continues to be governed by conventional and conservative values.

McGovern's reputation allowed the narrative to explore and challenge the structures and experiences of working-class lives, but the industry of television production worked to impose further restrictions on other members of the creative team, specifically the costume team. The first of these restrictions that the interviewees discuss is casting. Casting is subject to budget and time constraints that impact the costume designer's ability to fully achieve the creative vision agreed upon with the director. Theresa Rhymer refers to this:

so you could see someone, you have them for half an hour, and then they're in the next day in that costume. You've shopped for them and then nothing works because they're a particular colouring [...] they haven't said to you "these colours don't suit me." (Appendix F3)

Very often actors will be cast in a role at a very late stage, sometimes the day before they are due to be on set filming (an issue referred to by both Theresa Rhymer and Barbara Kidd (Appendices F2 & F3)). This is due to the availability of the actor, but also the fact that once an actor has been contracted by the production, they immediately begin to receive their salaries. Therefore, producers tend to delay the contract signing as late as possible to avoid paying the actor for longer than necessary. Clearly, when an actor is cast at a very late stage, this impacts the costume designer's ability to source, fit and design the costumes. Barbara Kidd comments on the casting of Ger Ryan, who plays Margie across all three series. Her creative decision was dictated by what shops would be open:

she was cast really late and in fact I must have seen her the night before she worked for a costume fitting. Then the following morning, the shop that opened first in Manchester was Marks and Spencer's so I was leaning on the door of Marks and Spencer's when it opened, which I think was 8.30 or 8am – for some reason they did an early opening, so I went in and looked around Marks and Spencer's and found a coat that she would wear and took it to the location that morning and she wore it. So it can be very close. (Appendix F2)

Creative restrictions also come into focus when the voice of the producer or the person in control of the finances of the production rises in volume. For example, the motivations behind casting decisions may be at odds with the intent of the writer or the director. David Blair remarks that, "it's very very difficult, all these people above me are interested in celebrities and stars and stuff and I'm not interested in that, I'm interested in getting the right people" (Appendix F1). In addition, much later in the process both Teresa Rhymer and Barbara Kidd refer to the involvement of producers in creative decision-making. Kidd commented that "one of the producers wasn't great but one just avoided him really [...] they all have something to say" (Appendix F2). Rhymer's experience was more direct:

on *The Street* it was one of the first times that I've been told [by a producer] that a particular actor who was a very attractive man, that I wasn't making enough of that in his clothes, [they said] "can't we put him in, he's got beautiful blue eyes, put him in something blue to make his eyes come out more." (Appendix F3)

The standardised aesthetic of television mentioned earlier is another arena where tensions between creative intent and industry restrictions play out. Clearly the dominant language of television remains the use of realism, as discussed earlier. The tension here is where geographical ideas about how realism is articulated are contested, or rather when a regional construction of realism has been produced by practitioners not from the region. The interviewees refer to the London-centric context of television production and how this can have negative consequences for the construction of realism, and subsequently costumed representations, in two key ways. The first, highlighted by David Blair, is that often the setting for drama will be London or a generic region to avoid the specificity of regional identities. He states, "I can't imagine you will ever get a working-class serial set in Glasgow, it would be diluted beyond belief for that to happen" (Appendix F1). Theresa Rhymer substantiates this, referring specifically to costume design:

when I became a designer, a London-centric idea influenced people's design of Northerners. It wasn't just a class thing, it became a regional thing and it upset me, and it upset people up here really quite a lot you know, we were the regions, which was seen as something lesser. So, you had that double whammy of being working class and not from London. (Appendix F3)

On *The Street* the give and go of regionality was a key consideration, as the intent of the writer and director was positioned within a system that has been centralised (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001) which inevitably leads to conflicts around output (Caughie, 2000). Roy Boulter commented that originally the drama was to be set in Liverpool, but it was changed to be the 'generic North' and then specifically Manchester (Appendix F5). Liverpool was discounted as a location because some of the narratives within the episodes might have been perceived as problematic by the residents of the city, who had suffered damaging media representations, particularly after the Hillsborough disaster of 1989. The tension embedded within this historical context is visible in comments from the focus groups. For example, Jamie from FG6, where the participants were from Liverpool, comments on Bob Hoskins's character that,

he thought he was better than them. He felt that he was better than everyone else in there. That makes sense, lot of people from down south think they are better. (Appendix E3)

Rob from FG5, which was Salford-based, said,

Well, the people of Salford are always, we're always misrepresented aren't we? In in the media it's always, you know, this is a problem place, this is crime, this is this, that and the other. And they never get it right. (Appendix E2)

Finally, Claire from FG4 stated, referring to the episode 'Sean & Yvonne', that "there's quite a lot of back and forth about London and like them and us" (Appendix E1). The tensions between creativity, production restrictions and geography can nullify the richness of the writing. As Forrest comments, 'such totalising constructions of regional and social identity risk overwhelming the nuance of space-specific narrative as imagined north defines itself against imagined south' (2017: 40). Here, the writing was able to withstand this conflict in ways that the costumed representations were not: they moved from regional to a limited

range of reductive class and gender specific constructions. As Eco has remarked, 'a country belongs to those who control communication' (1986: 135). When dramatic communication is controlled in this way, through the systems and structures of the medium, the producers and the standardization of form, the constructed nature of the representations employed becomes more visibly potent.

2.7 Proximity and distance

In addition to understanding television as a site of power structures and struggles, it is important to consider the notion of agency thought to be held by the viewer as a result of the recent explosion of viewing platforms and means of engaging with television. Television is still a site where creative practitioners and producers can engage with an actual audience (Caughie, 2000) in a different but equally 'immediate' way to the theatre. However, producers can no longer rely on a 'captive' audience as in previous eras. Television is subject to the concept of movement and 'flow', now more than ever. This could refer to the way productions are screened and the way they are viewed, which as mentioned is no longer necessarily static. Furthermore, television is now understood as servicing a plural audience with plural messages (Eco, 1986; Gauntlet, 1999; Thornham & Purvis, 2005).

To address the need for plurality, it is claimed that the types of drama and the representations within them have also diversified (Thornham & Purvis, 2005; Turner, 2010). This has resulted in the potency of a production becoming diluted; it is questionable if one particular production would generate a response or call to action such as that produced by *Cathy Come Home* in 1966 or McGovern's *Common* in 2014. Although Netflix began streaming in 2007, its current popularity renders the potency of *Common* as a historical fable. It appears that the breadth of choice available has been confused with the idea of diversity. There are indeed hundreds of channels, and many streaming platforms audiences can access, but each still adheres to familiar conventions of form and function. There may be a myriad of choice but in an industry subject to capitalist competition the choices are all very similar, as Bourdieu explains:

[f]ar from promoting diversity, competition breeds homogeneity. The pursuit of audience ratings, leads producers to look for omnibus productions that can be

consumed by audiences of all backgrounds in all countries because they are weakly differentiated and differentiating. (2003: 68)

As a result, as Anne Hollander claimed in 1993, everything looks the same. Lefebvre's ideas of difference and particularity offer a space to counter the concept of similarity suggested through the creative departments of the production and address the tension between the 'self' as experienced and a self' seen and recreated as part of the process of representation. For Lefebvre, particularities are defined by nature: they are biological such as sex, ethnicity, age and so on, whereas differences are social or rather differences occur through social relations or conflicts. Differences emerge as particularities are hierarchised, but the ability to categorise and order particularities requires certain knowledge, access (to the means of television production) and an understanding of conflictual relations, as Lefebvre states:

theses on differences cannot be separated from theoretical conceptions of the relation between particularities and differences, and the transition from the former to the latter [...] unlike particularity difference is not isolated: it takes its place in a whole [...] particularities do not purely and simply disappear. [They become] modified and transformed in the course of confrontations, they are integrated into differences, which cannot be deemed exclusively cultural. (2005: 111)

This research suggests that we can apply this idea to the way that class dressing is experienced versus the way it is represented, even in a social realist drama with a left-wing political positionality such as *The Street*. If we think of the particularities of the experience of class not as 'natural' in the same way as explained by Lefebvre, but rather as 'natural' because they are intrinsic to our sense of self, and if we also think of the way those particularities are dressed as subject to modification via the process of social hierarchization, then we can begin to understand the homogeneous form of 'difference' – or distance from middle-class forms of dressing – we are presented with in small screen costuming. We can also begin to understand the power relations embedded in producing and maintaining a lumpen 'difference' that is very separate from middle class sartorial accomplishments, such as individuality and a sense of style. The only episode across the eighteen analysed that contained a character that displayed a 'different' way of dressing is 'The Promise' (series 2, episode 6). In this episode the character of Kirstie Blackwell (Robyn Addison) must be marked out as different to support the different way she responds to the

odd loner Paul (Toby Kebbell). Her considered (non-working-class) reaction to Paul must therefore sit alongside a visibly considered sartorial identity – to communicate a more cerebral, progressive (middle-class) existence. Here, for the most part, sartorial expression within lived experience is subject to a reinterpretation of the language of difference, one that is flattened out and reframed, as this is mistakenly thought of as a requirement for local, national, and global understanding and consumption of visual text.

The connection between representations and lived experience is both tenuous and established. Tenuous because the characterisations discussed here can easily be understood as atypical within lived class experience. As Rob comments in FG5, “I don’t dress like that, like either of them, neither do my boys” (Appendix E2). Equally Mina from FG2 questions the clothes worn to the nightclub in ‘Taxi’, the episode she viewed: “I don’t know [...] something I thought was interesting was how they dressed when they went to the nightclub. At home it would be far more chic” (Appendix E2). Established because such characterizations are typical within constructed representations of the working class, as Kim identified in FG5: “a lot of it is nothing to do how we really are” (Appendix E2). However, the language used to express who these characters are is well-worn and understood by those ‘speaking’. More importantly, it is understood as misrepresentative by those being spoken about, who must themselves make daily choices whether to communicate within the narrow visual syntax available to and expected of them, or to offer resistance or contestation in the wider historical moment (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001).

2.8 Summary

This chapter has discussed the context within which the clothing representations analysed here are viewed – television drama. It is suggested that, as a result of the structures within its form, the television screen can only ever show, will only ever show, limited possibilities. By extension this means that the screen can only ever show limited forms of dress and class experience. This leads to the second assertion that, if we accept that individualism is infinitely plural, then the limited possibilities shown on screen reduce the possibility of individuals identifying with what they see. This in turn forces viewers to ‘settle’ for what they see and reach a compromise of identification – perhaps recognizing some elements of themselves in screen characters, but remaining unconvinced as they acknowledge the

limitations of these representations. I argue that such a lack of visibility reinforces class alienation by erasing understandings of, and engagement with, shared experiences. This in turn has a damaging effect on group activism and consciousness.

This chapter also explored the complex and layered process of communication that limited screen possibilities are communicated through, including the limiting language of costume as a layer within the limiting language of television. The first layer of communication operates through the subjective understandings of the creative practitioners involved. The subjective understandings must then operate within the shared, structured languages of dress and television to be successful. The chapter was broken down into several sections to present the assertions mentioned above. **Section 2.2** explores the specifics of the hybrid drama serial that is the subject of the research undertaken here, Jimmy McGovern's *The Street*, which is identified as an example of contemporary social realism. **Section 2.3** expands the focus and looks at the genre of television drama before further focusing on social realist drama on British television. **Section 2.4** moves on to think more about the language of television and how the fluency and reach of the language relies upon the use of two very distinct tools: the use of visual realism, and representations as signifiers of systems, structures, and hierarchies. **Section 2.5** looks at tools of visual language, stereotypes and representations and explores how the specifics of character are portrayed via these tools through the language of dress. In **section 2.6**, the empirical data gathered has been employed to explore the tension between the creative intent of the practitioners and the restrictions of the form, looking specifically at casting, production timeframes and resistance to regional distinctions. The final section (**2.7**) explores the distance and proximity between viewer, producer and text and suggests that the reductive nature of the representations viewed generates an informed ambivalence on behalf of the viewer.

The thesis now moves on to explore the working class and its resistance to a fixed definition. It will examine the connections between the materials of costuming and morality, look at common understandings and perceptions and examine the politics woven into the language of costume that represents the working class.

Chapter 3 – Defying definition & resisting representation: the working class

3.1 Introduction

This chapter challenges the paradigm of costumed representations of the working class in the hybrid UK TV drama *The Street*. **Section 3.2** will explore the structure of the UK class system. It will briefly discuss the history and development of the current system and examine transient understandings of different categorisations against the complex ecosystem of experiences. **Section 3.3** explores the semiotic nature of clothing and how different, sometimes individualistic systems of value can exist and resist dominant ideas of taste and value. This section will examine the repercussions of this for designers charged with producing costumed representations that will successfully integrate into the language of television. **Section 3.4** provides a close reading of both ‘Sean & Yvonne’ (Ellison, 2006), series 1, episode 6, and ‘Smoke’ (McGovern, 2009), series 3, episode 1, to examine examples of the material symbolism woven into costumed representations. It will examine the use of particular fabrics to communicate moral value and how accessories can be read to articulate adherence to dominant value systems. **Section 3.5** discusses experiential understanding of class and how these relate to structural relationships. It suggests that class experience played out through dress and clothing is diverse and complex and may or may not adhere to or challenge structural understandings. As such, it questions the viability of producing authentic or accurate clothed representations. **Section 3.6** examines the politics of the classed body through a close reading of episode 4, series 2 ‘Taxi’ (Boulter, 2007) suggesting that established pathologies of working-class masculinities and femininities are laid bare via the characters of Cath, Ian and Gary. **Section 3.7** discusses what is actually represented within the space where authenticity and accuracy are absent. This section highlights the problems inherent within clothed representations of the working class. The final section offers a summary of the discussion, building upon the premise that class experiences and understandings are too diverse and complex to be successfully represented. Therefore, a reductive version is considered a necessity if they are to communicate within the language of television, as explored in Chapter 2.

Lawler wrote that social class is an absent presence in UK society (2008). It is true that the concept of class is situated at a point of tension, as an absent presence for both the personal and the political. In a personal sense, consciousness of social class positioning and the politics behind that position may or may not be individually active, resisted, or accepted (Chibber, 2022) but everyday experiences continue to be subject to the relations of social class. Politically, the subject of social class in the UK has become foregrounded again recently with the political soundbites concerning 'levelling up'.²⁶ This is after a period in which class was the lost identity of identity politics (Munt, 2000); when discussions around gender and ethnicity were prioritised (Benyon & Rowbotham, 2001); and intersections were not yet fully acknowledged or articulated. So politically, social class appears to be present in current debates, but neo-liberal politics and the pervasive dominance of, and drive for, capital, continue to push actual consideration of class relations to the margins, intensifying the inequalities articulated through the class system.²⁷

Despite the fact that in many structural ways, class inequality is quite straightforward, the hierarchy exists and we understand that it exists, it continues to be a provocative concept (Kaplan, 2004) because of its experiential mutability. Class is experienced through complex individual trajectories (Johnson, 1979; Benyon & Rowbotham, 2001) that remain in a constant, often lifelong, state of transition (Benyon & Rowbotham, 2001) or process of becoming. Therefore, its provocative nature derives from the fact that the experience of class is continually breaking free from the structures used to control and define the concept, as Lawler comments, 'class identity itself is a social and collective process and not, as Western traditions would have it, a unique and individual possession' (2008: 2). As such, social class in the UK continues to defy definition and perpetuate confusion over classed identities (Casey, 2010). To counter this instability, class structures maintain prevailing assumptions (Benyon & Rowbotham, 2001) about identities as they have been previously fixed and class relationships continue to foster the obsession for what might conceal or reveal class identity or position (Ashby & Higson, 2000). Such mutability and confusion will inevitably have consequences for the production of class-specific fiction, particularly in relation to the language of dress employed in *The Street*. The result, it is argued, is a tendency to reduce and flatten out the surface level meaning, which in turn

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

²⁷ <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc4909.doc.htm>

exposes a deeper level of meaning, whereby reductive understandings of the sartorial capital and practices of the working classes become pathologized and used as a tool in the attribution of negative value and the punitive individualised responsibility that is a foundational principle of neoliberalism.²⁸

In 2005/2006 when the first series of *The Street* was screened in the UK, Jimmy McGovern had just completed the final episode of *Cracker* (1994-2006, Granada) within which he had explored, through characters such as Robert Carlyle's Albie ('To be Somebody', parts 1 & 2, episodes 1 & 2, series 2, 1994, McGovern), what might happen as a result of the marginalisation of the white working-class masculinity that he had witnessed in the preceding decades. He notes, in the BAFTA Screenwriters' lecture series, that

there was this massive attack upon the British working class, but it was especially violent against the white working-class male. The intellectual left saw them as fascists and bigots and the intellectual right just attack them anyway, you know, and I saw this happening. (Appendix F6)

McGovern's work is clearly influenced by class experiences and the conflicts within. *The Street* gave him the opportunity to explore the issues relevant to those experiences and conflicts that were becoming visible during the mid-2000s. He commented to Mark Lawson in a 2009 interview that *The Street* was 'intelligent, sophisticated, challenging, confrontational, all the things that drama should be [...] It comes into your room, and it is a bit heavy but there is something early doors that makes you stick with it' (Appendix F6).

The mid-2000s was the time of the extended Labour government with Tony Blair entrenched as Prime Minister, a government built on a Labour Party that had embraced and advanced the neo-liberal purpose of the Thatcher/Reagan years and hot-housed inequality so that 'the distribution of both income and wealth, after 60 years of decline, rose rapidly in this era, due to the smashing of trade unions, tax reductions, rising rents, privatisation and deregulation' (Monbiot, 2016;1, see also Harvey, 2007; Raey, 2008; Jenkins, 2007). This is a period in which the Northern Ireland peace process started to unravel²⁹ and the last operational deep coal mine in the UK, the Ellington Colliery in Northumberland, was

²⁸ For a definition of neoliberalism see Thorsen & Lie (2006), Gilbert (2013) and Dean (2014)..

²⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/07/how-did-the-good-friday-agreement-come-about-and-why-is-it-so-significant>

closed.³⁰ The last vestiges of the UK car industry disappeared as MG Rover³¹ fell into receivership with a loss of 6,000 jobs; anti-capitalist riots³² were dotted across the country and the London tube bombings took place.³³ These issues were dealt with in different ways across popular culture. For example, the working-class band Arctic Monkeys were writing to critical acclaim about bored young men with no money (*'I bet you look good on the dancefloor'*, Turner, 2004), Shane Meadows was presenting a retrospective of British class experience in *This is England*, whilst middle-class Matt Lucas and David Walliams were touring with the grotesque yet popular *Little Britain* caricatures of class in characters such as Vicky Pollard.

During 2004, 2005 and 2006, the years when *The Street* was in development, several acts were passed that mopped up the everyday by-products of ever-expanding neo-liberal inequality, such as the Mental Capacity Act (2005),³⁴ the Asylum and Immigration Acts (2004, 2006),³⁵ the Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006),³⁶ the Domestic Violence, Crime & Victims Act (2004),³⁷ the Housing Act (2004)³⁸ and the Violent Crime Reduction Act (2006).³⁹ Episodes of *The Street* deal directly or indirectly with the issues to which this legislation responds. For example, series 1, episode 2 'Stan' (McGovern, 2006) deals with forced retirement and mental health; 'Asylum' (Quirk, 2006) series 1, episode 5, centres on the friendship between Timothy Spall's character Eddie McEvoy and a non-English speaking, homeless asylum seeker. When referring to the everyday issues arising for the working class within this maelstrom, McGovern discusses the push and pull of ethical actions versus limited economic capital: 'you know, we all know what to do, and we all know what the right thing to do is, but often it's far too expensive' (Mersey Wave Podcast Appendix F6).

The relationships of social class were torturous across 2006-2009 when *The Street* was either being screened or in production, and are particularly difficult to pin down (Skeggs, 2004, 2005) in relation to clothing and costuming or engagement with fashion,

³⁰ <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/26593/closure-of-ellington-colliery-northumberland>

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2005/apr/10/politics.motoring>

³² <https://www.reuters.com/article/g20-protests-death-idUKL166736420090401>

³³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33253598>

³⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/9/contents>

³⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/19/contents>,

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/13/contents>

³⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/1/contents>

³⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/28/contents>

³⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/34/contents>

³⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/38/contents>

style, clothing and dress. Clothing choice and costuming work as good examples of Chibber's bridge between materialist class theory and the cultural turn in class discourse. That is, cultural forms or clothing choices which are ultimately determined by economics are still saturated with cultural meaning both political and personal. As Chibber states,

what a materialist class theory claims is not that culture is absent in economic activity but that its content adjusts to accommodate the economic [...] Actors inserted into wage labour or capital ownership positions seek to reproduce themselves as best they can. In this they mobilise their views and valuations of their situation [...]. They are always steeped in culture [...]. Material reproduction and meaning construction are two dimensions of the same activity. (2022: 43-44)

The 'give and go' of economics informing or responding to cultural forms can be mapped onto individual clothing choice and choices that are made on behalf of fictional characters or individuals by costume designers.

This chapter explains, through the language of costume - the language of 'lacks' - what the ideas about class presented within *The Street* might be, in order to fully consider what appears to be the ambiguous and peculiar relationship UK TV drama has to social class (Lawler, 2005b, 2008; Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001) and costume representations. Class inequality continues to divide us. It is, Diane Raey states, 'etched onto our culture and our psyche' (2005: 911) and either does terrible damage or completely stops things happening for certain groups of people (Ashby & Higson, 2001). Its power is held within what Savage (2021) describes as its 'normalness', this can also be understood as a pervasive power that is lost in plain sight. It is suggested here that, to challenge the very normalness that Savage refers to within the language of costume, the charged backdrop of McGovern's writing will provoke a reassessment of how reductive sartorial statements reproduce negative narratives and work to reinforce inequality. As Savage wrote in 2021, 'truly bringing out the challenge of inequality requires us to disrupt conventional paradigms by provoking a revolutionary reassessment of our overarching assumptions' (2021: 2-3).

3.2 Class structure

The current class structure in the UK developed as a result of a 'perfect storm' created by the end of feudalism and the development of the mercantile class across the Middle Ages. The struggle against the medieval version of class alienation and for acknowledgement of the value of labour began with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and continued across the centuries against the evolving backdrop of trade and commerce. Eventually the Industrial Revolution brought society's divisions into sharper focus, inspiring nineteenth-century theorists such as Marx to produce his theories of class as a hierarchical system of social and exploitative relations (Marx & Engels, [1848] 1967). In the most simplistic terms, Marx suggested society was divided into two: on one side of the divide were those who owned the means of production, on the other those who had to sell their labour to survive. He believed the divide created a continuing conflict that would ultimately lead to a workers' revolution. Marx's divisions are produced through material factors as he believed economics to be the base of everything. Weber's interpretivism, however, suggested a more diversified system without an emphasis on revolutionary action (see Brennan, 2020). Both sets of ideas dominated critical class discourse across the latter part of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and still have relevance today.

Within the UK, society came to be understood or organised into a basic three-tier class system consisting of an upper class of royalty, the aristocracy or those with inherited private wealth, privilege and/or titles; the middle class of wealthy merchants, bankers, politicians or professionals; and the lower labouring class (Cannadine, 1998). Selina Todd writes that in the early part of the twentieth century the majority of the population understood their position as a member of the labouring or working class but would describe themselves as 'ordinary' (2015). The global military conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century forced movement within the established system of hierarchy in the UK. The introduction of the Welfare State by the post-war democratic socialist government of the late 1940s, alongside changes to the system of education, opened a fissure in the established order to reduce precarity and allow room for aspiration and the affluent worker. Todd claims that by the end of the 1950s, being working-class was seen as 'fashionable' (2015). A more accurate summary might be that working-class life was becoming more visible and consumed through forms of popular culture, literature, theatre, film, music,

television, and, of course, fashion and clothing. This had promoted a shift in representations where the working classes began to be represented as less one-dimensional (Dave, 2006), although, as discussed in Chapter 4, small screen costuming continued to employ the established and rigid realist tropes employed within film productions.

The mid-point of the twentieth century therefore produced an uneasy relationship between visibility, value, experience, and mobility and provided the context for Richard Hoggart's influential 'Uses of Literacy', on mobility and class relationships. He subsequently commented in his 1989 introduction to George Orwell's 1936 *Road to Wigan Pier* that distinctions ascribed to class do not disappear but rather adapt to express themselves in different ways, which remains an astute observation over three decades later. In the late 1970s, class systems were reconfigured once more. Under Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, the social collectivism of the post-war period was dismantled in favour of clawing individualism (Casey, 2010; Todd, 2015; Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001). In the pursuit of capital, aspiration became a stick with which to beat the working class until they believed the working class-ness of their identity was no longer important, powerful or relevant (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001). Each of these developments had implications for how the working class chose or were able to dress and attribute meaning and symbolic resonance to the items of dress they chose. Not so much changed, however, in the clothed screen representations of social class.

In the contemporary context (which I deem to include 2006-2009), the neo-liberal foundations established through the preceding decades became entrenched and understanding of class structures and identities shifted again to account for this. Chris Haylett writes that the reconstruction of class identities is due to the reconstruction of nation (2001:351). This idea can be applied to contemporary class structures and the evolution and expansion of what has become identified as the 'precariat class' (Standing, 2013). Class remains an unstable, constantly shifting concept (Payne & Grew; 2005, Davis, 2006) for the reasons outlined above. Therefore multiple, diverse, and complex identities (Cannadine, 1998) continue to occupy the structural categorisations. Precarious work transcends the boundaries of employment that were once tools for these structural classifications. The role of university lecturer, for example, that once would have quite easily been positioned as a middle-class role, cannot be so easily understood today. Precarious structures of work within this field compel some to take on two or three supporting roles

and others to claim benefits from the state to compensate for the insecurity of their waged labour. As such, both Lawler's and Payne's comments that class is both less and more visible now, or an absent presence, takes on further traction. It is less visible due to the subtle boundaries that frame a UK population struggling towards a precarious centre, whilst it remains starkly visible for those that are dealing with the sharp end of poverty and for the 1%⁴⁰ of the world population that continues to control the world's financial wealth.

Mike Savage's class survey⁴¹ of 2015 identified seven different social classes (Savage, 2015; Connolly, 2017; Munt, 2000) that immediately renders as redundant the three-tier system outlined by Cannadine (1998). Within this new hierarchy where mobility is mythologised but rarely achieved (Morley 2009; Tyler & Bennett, 2010; Anderson, 1964), class is now defined not only by income but also less tangible, more symbolic concepts such as mutable social and cultural capital (Partington, 2014; Bourdieu, 1996; Savage, 2015). Savage discussed this in relation to the give and go between those that occupy a higher position within the structure with less economic capital and those that have high economic capital but low/moderate cultural capital. The newly identified structure notes that there are different working-class groups (Collins, 2004). At the lower end of the hierarchy these groups are interchangeable with the idea of an underclass (Todd, 2015) and at the upper end of the hierarchy, the boundary with the middle class is more crucial than ever (Savage, 2015), particularly in relation to changing consumer culture – or the purchasing of clothing (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005). Woodin argues that there is no such thing as the 'ordinary' working class as the working class has never been a homogenous set or group (2005), and therefore the way they dress would be equally heterogenous. Within the 'fuzzy middle' of experience, the categories express the conflicts around the maintenance of class boundaries where certain forms and practices are legitimised and others are not (Savage, 2015). Sartre refers to these as latent conflicts (1968) and they very often play out on bodies and through dress choice and practice, as Skeggs argues: '[w]hen bodies with different symbolic values enter the same space, the readings are made through the potential for exchange' (2004:

⁴⁰ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-bag-nearly-twice-much-wealth-rest-world-put-together-over-past-two-years#:~:text=The%20richest%201%20percent%20grabbed,a%20new%20Oxfam%20report%20today.>

⁴¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-bag-nearly-twice-much-wealth-rest-world-put-together-over-past-two-years#:~:text=The%20richest%201%20percent%20grabbed,a%20new%20Oxfam%20report%20today.>

166). It is clear therefore that costuming acts as a site where a charged potency of meaning in relation to how class is experienced, categorised and understood is played out or exchanged.

In a shift from Todd's description of the early part of the twentieth century above, Partington claimed fairly recently that most people would now describe themselves as middle-class (Partington, 2014). The middle class that Partington identifies seeks on the one hand to distinguish themselves from working-class backwardness (Haylett, 2001; Casey, 2010) and on the other to claim 'ordinariness' as a means to resist negatively perceived privilege (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005). How people understand themselves in relation to class, how aware they are of their place in the system, how much they know of the way the system works, how it affects them or how developed (or not) their class consciousness is (Cannadine, 1998; Savage, 2015) will affect the clothing choices they make and should also affect the way fictional characters from different social classes are costumed. This is the central critical context that frames this research into the costumes employed within *The Street*.

The 'simplicity' of the class structure mentioned in the introduction to this chapter is premised on a simply-formatted hierarchy: people are positioned at different points, some higher, some lower. The existence of the structure and how it is organised is straightforward. The complex element is in identifying the boundaries of the categorisations, or identifying who is positioned where. As the categorisations are informed by economic and social and cultural capital, so too are the inequalities (Lawler, 2008). In the struggle for respect and value that takes place within the hierarchy, a struggle that is based on positions of unequal power (Todd, 2015), moral value is assigned through an uneven law of development (Skeggs, 2004, 2005; Lefebvre, 2005). This creates a situation whereby, as subjects within the hierarchy, our moral worth becomes subjected to the rules and norms of the structure and each of us creates subjects 'other' to us through our understandings of the structure, the way it works and where we want to be within it (Skeggs, 2005; Lawler, 2008). This will also inform how people choose to dress and again should also affect the way fictional characters are costumed, as explored here.

Baudrillard describes class as a muddled notion that is a means of control (1994a). The 'control' Baudrillard refers to is hegemonic and uses forms of communication to ensure dominance of the positional battleground (Anderson, 1964) within the class structure. Class

is produced through the conflict and, as Skeggs remarks, 'is made by those that are in power' (2004: 3; see also Burstyn, 1983). The structure of the class system essentialises individual moral worth and value to hide the unevenly apportioned power at its heart, a power that seeks to suppress, manage and control the privileges of positioning for the benefit of those in privileged positions (Skeggs, 2004; Merrifield, 2006; Williams & May, 1996). As such it will always influence clothed characterisations through the production of hegemonic representations. This is evident through this research, despite the political motivations and intentions of the writer and production team.

3.3 Symbolic language of class

In Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody's 2001 'Growing Up Girl: Psychological Exploration of Gender and Class' the authors state that class functions in a contemporary context via regulatorily discourses (2001). Regulation within clothing, fashion, dress, and style is predominantly expressed through the contested and symbolic concept of taste. Taste itself is not a new or contemporary notion; as Anderson claims, the UK is characterised by class differences in both accent and dress that over historical time have become institutionalised (1964, Skeggs, 2004) and which play out through the notion of taste. Stripe's book on the life of the working-class playwright Andrea Dunbar perfectly encapsulates this, describing Dunbar's hospitality towards the Royal Court theatre producer who had travelled north to meet with her: "Do you have coffee by any chance?", he asked. "Mellow Birds, will that do?" He winced' (Stripe, 2017: 136).

Material culture such as clothing works as both a means of expression (Dant, 1999) and as a tool to classify, as Bourdieu outlined. His claims around the notion of taste are particularly relevant in relation to working class experience, politics, and expression. Bourdieu famously commented that we expose ourselves to classification by offering up our personal taste in items such as clothing and that: 'taste is the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others' (1996: 56). Here, the notion of taste is what allows the classification of a particular 'identity' to remain fixed in its structural position. Taste preferences, it is claimed by Bourdieu, are the product of education and social origin. So what is being classified in Bourdieu's model is the taste values of the classifiers, informed by education and social

origin, not necessarily the values of the subject of classification. This is visible in the work of costume designers, who are presenting an embodied classification produced through their own personally informed understandings and is evidenced here in the critique of the subjectivities visible within the costuming of *The Street*.

Taste as a concept is subject to control, managed through relationships of power and comes into effect when limited or limiting choice is no longer a determining factor. The emergence of the wealthy middle class across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is an example of this. In more recent history the disappearance of the language of class identified by Kaplan (2004) coincides with the explosion of consumer culture and the supposed further 'democratization' of fashion articulated through a combination of fast fashion production and the predominance of streetwear over haute couture in defining trends. This is the contemporary context in which it becomes increasingly difficult to use consumption choices as a tool of categorization and the symbolic power of taste becomes more potent. Thus, narratives of a negative essence, decline, or a lack of fashion wherewithal becomes the unwritten rule of taste (Ashby & Higson, 2000; Lawler, 2005b, 2008; Connolly, 2017).

This backdrop means that the consumption choices we make remain heavily loaded with semiotic value in communicating a version of the 'self' (Bruzzi, 1997; Brooks, 2015; Crane, 2000; Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001) as Bourdieu suggested, but this is no longer as straightforward or linear as first implied. Taste does classify: for those who choose to adhere to the indices of acceptable or legitimized taste, these are the classifications often imposed upon others, and not necessarily accepted or acknowledged. Not all adhere to the same value system which informs dominant classification (Casey, 2010). Transgression or resistance to classification and an imposed identity can and does occur, but only certain elements of transgressive dress choices and practices are read, understood, accepted, and legitimized as such. What does or does not move into the transgressive narrative is also managed and subject to control. For example, the hooded sweatshirt: some examples are understood to challenge, empower or subvert⁴², whilst others pin the wearer down to a negative pathology.⁴³ Within the complexity of contemporary class experience and fashioned identities, contemporary clothing is often used to communicate a 'reclaimed' or ironic ownership of the situated self where the politics of fashion consumption, the body,

⁴² See the work of Gosha Rubchinskiy for example <https://www.grailed.com/designers/gosha-rubchinskiy>

⁴³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2008/mar/03/hoodie.comment>

and class experience collide (Charlesworth, 2000; Boulton & Jerrard, 2000). Within the resulting milieu of subtle individualized expression, where collectivization is rejected, thereby destabilizing traditional 'clothing' hierarchies (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005; Carter, 2012), the concept of difference gains traction; national, regional, local difference becomes more important and more visible (Ashby & Higson, 2000). This is clear in FG1, where Sally comments, "where she is from Manchester and the sister is from London, they look different." In FG4, Emily remarks "there's quite a lot of back and forth about London and like them and us" (Appendices E1 & E2). Here blanket classifications become more powerfully imposed and are simultaneously experienced as less meaningful for those they are imposed upon. In situations such as this, the classifications communicate more about the person classifying than they do about the identity subject to classification.

The experience of class in the UK has often had fragmentation imposed upon it, with emphasis placed on difference or localisation, then used as a tool to divide and create disparate groups and avoid a common understanding of experiences that may collectively challenge the dominant political hierarchical structure. As Todd comments when referring to sociological studies of the 1950s,

By focusing on single neighbourhoods and the relationships between people in a single street the researchers of the '50s implied that working class life took place in hermetically sealed neighbourhoods that were entirely shaped by the virtues or otherwise of those who lived there. They neglected the reality that was the reciprocal childcare, loans and companionship that were provoked by poverty. They missed what really made people working class – a lack of power. (2015: 176)

Place, space and region are used within *The Street* to signify class position, communicated through specifics of materiality. Savage claims that we associate particular places with certain class stereotypes (2015); northern cloth caps, for example. The director David Blair spoke to the issue of location: "I do tend to go through the location because the location can tell you a lot" (Appendix F1). In this instance the location is directly linked to the class position of the characters within the narrative.

Understanding and employing such geographical tags of exclusion (Skeggs, 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey, Melody, 2001) reinforces spatial pathologies and the notion of difference. We see clear evidence of this in Paddy's tailored wool waistcoat (worn by Bob Hoskins in 'Smoke', episode 1, series 3, and explored below). This garment was derided by

Jamie in FG6: “he was wearing some stupid smart-looking thing, like he works in an office or something” (Appendix E3). Further evidence is woven into Kerry’s cotton handkerchief hem skirt (series 1, episode 6 ‘Sean & Yvonne’). These items sit in direct opposition to Tom’s leather jacket (also explored below) and Yvonne’s short denim skirt from series 1. As Walkerdine et al. comment, ‘[c]lass is something located spatially, in the house, the neighbourhood and on the body’ (2001: 37). However, our continued understanding of these differences is bound by perception, not geography (Goffman, 1990) and reinforced via fixed and predictable representations that play out in part on the body through clothed representations. Within lived experience the pluralism of fashion discourses plays out across regional boundaries and are of course much more nuanced and individualistic than screen representations suggest. As Kim commented in FG5 in reference to the dressing practices she had witnessed in Manchester, “People really take their clothes seriously here. [They] put a lot of effort and sometimes a lot of money into what they're wearing” (Appendix E2).

Social class geography is much more complex than the north/south divide, and the city of Manchester is itself ‘a city of contradictions, world changing yet distrustful of outsiders, proud yet understated’ (Connolly, 2017: 190). The symbolic capital clothing communicates is accrued, employed, and traded or exchanged (Baudrillard, 1994a) within a complex network of understanding that pushes through boundaries of difference and exclusion. Rather than ‘place’ being employed to keep people in their ‘place’ (Fox in Connolly, 2017: 196), Caughie argues that there is always an audience (often international), for precise observation within drama (2000) and, I would add, within costuming, however localised the narrative might be. Successful examples of this are Danny Boyle’s *Trainspotting* (1996) and Ken Loach’s *Sweet Sixteen* (2002). Gledhill & Williams suggest that ‘[g]rand narratives have given way to local and micro histories and heightened interest in social and cultural history of the practice of everyday life (2000: 301). Here, within the creativity of narrative, the global and the local can coexist and are understood through the experiences of the characterisations. However, this thesis suggests that, when clothing representations are produced, the different and often nuanced ‘dialects’ of clothing choice within the language of dress are either misunderstood or ignored in favour of ‘difference’, used as a tool to categorise, which makes visible spatial hierarchies held within the perceptions of lived experience that practitioners are asked to recreate. Here we can look at the ideas of De Certeau, Lawler and Skeggs to discuss the meaning embedded in the presented

‘sameness’ evidenced in certain elements of the costuming on *The Street*; see, for example, the number of denim items and t-shirts identified through the content analysis (Appendix I).

Generally speaking, the West continues to promote the idea of individuality for a number of political, social and cultural agendas, as Lawler states: ‘there is a theoretical and rhetorical commitment to individuality in the west, we are autonomous and this is how it should be’ (2008: 47). Such individuality is theorised as prevalent within everyday experiences and formed through a complex distillation of plural influences, experiences, and contexts (De Certeau, 1984). However, a disconnect occurs when attempts are made to hold, define, represent or articulate the singularity of experience. Sartre claims that ‘the singularity of existence is kept outside of total knowledge – in no way can it be thought – it must be lived’ (1968: 176). Within lived experience the performance of individuality is restricted to certain groups – not the working class – and as a result representations reflect this reductive notion. Savage claims that,

It is rarely considered that working-class people, especially the poor working class, the precariat, can know or understand themselves or their situation or that they can articulate their understandings, perceptions, or feelings. (2015: 335).

Skeggs and De Certeau have written about the daily struggle in accessing and performing ‘choice’ which is an entitlement to which not all groups have equal access. To ‘own’ or ‘propertise’ the self (Skeggs, 2004) in this way creates visibility by creating an identity that is recognisable and given a value and predictably renders other identities as invisible or ‘lacking’ rather than ‘owning’ a ‘self. The negative space of this particular lived experience is, for Skeggs, where class relations are played out. Clothing is used in the everyday as a communicative and symbolic tool and is never neutrally positioned within this negative space but rather works to reinforce or resist imposed classifications. Within classed clothing representations, however, often those without visibility or a visible identity are subject to the politics of entitlement and therefore are unable to make political claims about the self. For DeCerteau, the definition of a strategy is something that is produced within a system and is used to produce and impose, and we can certainly apply this idea to the production of clothed representations. Conversely a ‘tactic’ can be used to manipulate and divert: ‘the ability to manoeuvre within different conditions in which initial capital is committed’ (De Certeau, 1984: 53). Individualised clothing practice is a tactical practice that occurs on a

spectrum that encompasses choice and access in degrees, and often, within marginalised groups, the tactics become guerrilla tactics as the nuanced choice of a piece of clothing or an accessory is positioned to actively resist imposed subject positions. However, such guerrilla tactics (DeCerteau, 1984) or acts of contestation (Lefebvre, 2009) are rarely represented in everyday dress when it is on screen: broader, wider meanings are used to retain order and control of the communication. The merging of similarity – the assimilation of similarity (DeCerteau, 1984) – is replacing the messages held within the medium of clothing practice. For television representations, DeCerteau's notion of 'substitutability' is directly applicable: a thing (or item of clothing) is always replaceable by another because of the affinity of each within the totality of representation, similarities as opposed to differences are produced to give things meaning. The jeans and T-shirts employed throughout *The Street* are interchangeable because we expect to see them on working-class characters, in the same way we expect the barmaid to wear a low-cut top, the morally ambivalent to wear leather and the morally 'superior' to wear smarter forms of dress.

The discourse of choice produced through difference and acknowledged within the ordinary (Bell, Hollows & Steward, 2005), alongside the rejection or subversion of managed fashion boundaries precipitates the creation of further boundaries that are imposed to ensure the continuance of middle-class distance from working class experience. Along with the symbolic concept of taste, exclusivity as opposed to commonality is employed to perpetuate mythologies around value. Here, we are thinking about both fashion knowledge or fashion capital and how the possession of these concepts allows one to recognize, consume and wear what is considered important, rare, or exclusive. If something is understood as rare, uncommon, or difficult to obtain, it is understood as having value (Eco, 1992). If an object is commonly available and widely used, such as a white T-shirt or a pair of jeans, it is (mis)understood as lacking distinction, as Eco comments: 'the more esoteric a form of knowledge can be shown to be, the more greatly it is prized' (1992: 9). The idea of exclusivity must remain in place for boundaries around the judgement of taste to be maintained. We can see evidence of this within *The Street* in the use of the gold/silver chain worn by Lee Ingleby's character Sean in series 1 episode 6, discussed in section 3.4 and referred to by Emily in FG4: "men in chains, that was, you know, I would say a pretty working-class look" (Appendix E2). The repetitive use of denim is a further indication of this (Appendix I), as is the comment by Barbara Kidd, the costume designer from series 1:

“[t]hat’s why we put Sean in the T-shirt with the stripes and there are other people in the series that are wearing a similar sort of thing [...] he is of a tribe’ (Appendix F2).

As a result, ‘ordinary’ dress that is often employed as a tool of resistance is still predominantly misunderstood as means by which groups are identified as lacking status or distinction (Casey, 2010). This inevitably makes the communication of identity via ordinary dress inherently problematic and forces the costuming of ordinary characters to be drawn via the broad strokes of sameness, commonality, and repetition. If classification of identity communicates more about those classifying than the classified, then we can begin to understand costume representations as communicating more about those that produce them and the context in which they are produced than they do about the character identities they are intended to communicate.

3.4 Materiality of class

At the heart of fashion, and subsequently its ability to successfully (or not) communicate something about identity, regardless of class position, is an ambiguity. This has been discussed by Elizabeth Wilson where she draws attention to the pluralism of postmodern dressing practice and the distillation of styles available in a contemporary context and how the practice of dressing exists at the border zone between the social and the self, (1998). Here, dress separates individuals and draws them together, expresses the inner self through disguise and outward appearance:

we may view the fashionable dress of the western world as one means whereby an always fragmentary self is glued together into the semblance of a unified identity [...] Fashion speaks a tension between the crowd and the individual (Wilson, 2003: 11-12).

The border zone referred to is a contested one: conflict is present in how people identify and classify themselves and others, and how others identify and classify, particularly in relation to social class positioning. As Bourdieu wrote, ‘[a] whole lifestyle can be read off the style it adopts in furnishing or clothing [...] social relations objectified in familiar objects’ (1996: 77), suggesting that economic and practical considerations fix and limit the choices that might be available to those who exist in the lower classes in society, rendering them fairly easy to recognize, ‘read’ and position in relation to a traditional class structure.

In a contemporary context this idea is less convincing, as the boundaries of clothing use have become more blurred towards the middle of the hierarchical structure and transgressive uses of fashion appear across all aspects of society. As a result, the concept of fashion capital has evolved from understanding what the right thing to wear is to include an understanding of what is the wrong thing but how to wear it in the right way – not just in terms of communicating who we are, who we want to be or what we might be interested in but also, for those fluent in the language used, as a means to communicate our concept of fashion capital in relation to the experiences we have had. This evolution is seen across all sections of society and is very often aligned to our situated or class-conscious selves and the value systems adhered to. It is here, in attempting to ‘read’ and reproduce a situated self in relation to boundaries of cultural mobility (Casey, 2010) that identity is very often ‘read’ through fashion/clothing choice and understood, and reproduced from a position outside the readers’, producers’ and reproducers’ lived experience using value systems that draw upon legitimized fashion ‘know-how’. This is very often the space where the classifiers classify themselves once more.

Chapter 2 explored how stereotypes have developed as a tool of representation, how they are used to ‘communicate’ and fix information about the working class and how the subjectivity of those tasked with producing the stereotype needs to be considered by researchers. This section will look at the specific details of the stereotypes employed within *The Street* – what is used within the stereotype to communicate and what is being communicated about social class. The focus will be on the use of particular fabrics, the use of accessories, the choices that communicate judgements of taste or style and the portrayal of dressing practices. Clothing is inevitably used to quickly position a stereotype: it is an instant visual set of directions that lead those viewing to an intended meaning. In Chapter 4, the ethos of costume design is explained, an ethos that employs an essentialist understanding of identity (Lawler, 2008) whereby the meaning that the object of clothing is seen to hold is desired above the object itself. Such meaning has been established and reinforced over time and has become something we take for granted, so that the objects of clothing are ‘no longer commodities or even signs – media messages not to inform or communicate but test and verify the code’ (Baudrillard, 1994a: 75). The meaning has shifted from the object to the spaces where the idea or recognition of the object exists. This is what Adrian from FG2 means when referring to the character of Ian Hanley - he states “he looked

essentially a wrong 'un, and yet he did help the taxi driver' (Appendix E2). The specific areas looked at in this section are: the use of denim, gold accessories, repetitive use of objects and the practice of 'dressing up' to go to informal social events. What is being communicated within these stereotypical formations fall broadly into two categories: judgements around taste and style, and pathological understandings of class experience.

Across all three series of *The Street* 65 items of clothing made from denim are used by the 63 characters, highlighted within the content analysis (Appendix I). This includes jeans, denim jackets and denim skirts. The characters Sean and Yvonne (series 1, episode 6) wear denim in almost all the scenes in which they appear: trousers for him and mini skirts/trousers for her. Yvonne's sister is also seen in denim. Margie and Eddie McEvoy, the key transient characters across all three series, wear denim: trousers for him and maxi skirts/trousers for her. In fact, there is not an episode across the whole three series where denim does not make an appearance. Interestingly, the prevalence of this object of clothing was not referenced in any of the focus groups. Members did comment on individual items of denim but not on its pervasive use, which may be evidence that television or visual culture has become saturated with denim so much so that its use has become an unquestioned symbol in the language of dress.

Denim has a long history associated with industrial workwear and although the use of denim has now moved into more plural areas of fashion consumption, the fabric is still symbolic of industrial labour and informality. As Lawler (2005b) remarks, certain types of clothing indicate something and this can be applied to certain types of fabric. Denim represents accessibility and commonality: each, any, or all of the characters portrayed through the series could own a piece of denim. The fabric is used as a signifier that reproduces our common experiences and thus produces the appearance of reality. This signifier in combination with the signified – which has been determined by culture – creates a sign (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). The sign of commonality or common use or non-exclusivity is communicated through the fabric.

Everyday practices of clothing consumption often defy conceptual categorisation or understanding but can almost always be understood - or rather the motivation for an unusual or out-of-place dress choice may remain elusive, but the fact that the object is unusual or out of place is almost always recognised. As Sartre states, '[a] personal project cannot be defined by concepts but as a human project it is always comprehensible' (1968:

170). The understanding that occurs draws on the simplicity of what is presented – the fabric – and moves it into the realm of signification. What is being made visible through the use of a common fabric or object such as a pair of jeans is the barrier characters such as Sean and Yvonne face to middle-class individuality, exclusivity and the respectability and status this produces and confirms (Eco, 1986, 1992). Positioning Sean and Yvonne in the realm of common consumption practices in this way is reductive and predictable and draws upon Bourdieu's now dated idea of 'reading' someone via their choice of clothing or display of possessions, as mentioned above. Conventional ideas such as this, which are disguised as natural or realistic (Fiske & Hartley, 2003), do not acknowledge that the working-class consumer of clothing engages in the complex psychic processes involved in consumption choices in the same way as other consumer groups. As Eco comments, '[o]ur relationship with mass produced goods has changed, differences have been reduced or erased but along with the differences temporal relationships have been distorted' (1986: 147). The choices open to us as clothing consumers often become more meaningful and considered when we have fewer options, but as McKay comments, 'certain fabrics are seen as vulgar and have moral weight attached to them' (in Connolly, 2017:185) and therefore work as a way of mapping status. Denim or jeans are available to us all and therefore cannot articulate status and so could be viewed as meaningless. However, if they are seen on every type of characterisation in every possible situation, their over-use or commonality articulates a meaning that is the barrier to 'difference' that middle-class identities require. Brooks states that 'wearing jeans is a way not to make a decision, in terms of everyday ordinariness – they are an act of conformity' (2015: 12). So, the overuse of the fabric articulates the perception that the group of people represented are unable (due to lack of appropriate knowledge or resources) or unwilling to make an active decision about the clothing they wear.

For the character of Sean, the use of jeans appears much more reasonable. The choices available to male consumers – although constantly evolving – are more limiting in terms of fabrics, finishes and styling, so jeans are a popular choice. Having said that, tailored trousers, combat trousers, chinos, or sportswear are all options – why is it assumed the unemployed violent, petty criminal will always wear jeans? Is this what is recognised in Brad's comment from FG3? He said, "if you want to be a rebel, tuck your vest in your jeans and put a leather jacket on" (Appendix E3). Yvonne, as a female consumer, has a much wider choice of clothing available to her and yet she still wears a pair of jeans. Does

everyone own a pair of jeans and wear them this frequently? I'm not convinced. Other key items in her wardrobe are also made of denim, including a noticeably short skirt she wears across a number of story days. So, the fabric and the object work together to fix her identity for the viewer and act as a metaphor for her class position. She may be able to resist wearing jeans (or some of her social position) some of the time but ultimately, she will never fully escape her situation (even if she chooses a skirt and not a pair of jeans, she still cannot escape the denim). This suggests a refusal to acknowledge that '[w]orking-class people thus operate within their own set of cultural signifiers of taste and respectability and are not victims in the sense that they can and do challenge middle class dominance and critique of their lifestyles' (Casey, 2010: 232) where denim is either seen or worn in a number of different ways, or, as is often the case, not worn at all.

Another material used within *The Street* to fix class position is gold, as jewellery, particularly gold necklaces and more specifically the gold/silver chain worn by Sean. Sean is not the only male character seen to wear a gold necklace; other young male characters in episodes across the first two series (series 1, episode 4, series 2, episodes 3 & 4.) also wear them. Its over-use as a symbol of working-class masculinity was referred to in FG4, as quoted above. Quite recently the use of the gold chain in working-class male characterisations has prompted much discussion as a result of the BBC Drama adaptation of Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2020).⁴⁴ Within this contemporary production, the lead male character, who is positioned very deliberately as working-class in opposition to the middle-class lead female character, has become synonymous with the object; the chain even has its own social media account.⁴⁵ Lawler has commented that class inequality is maintained through the use of symbols and representations and that values of taste are used to make class rather than being indicative of class (2005b). There is a particular type of value (or rather lack of) attached to an item such as this: it is seen as a marker of bad taste. For viewers of *Normal People*, if this lack of taste had not been recognised in the item itself, the idea was reinforced through discussions online which referred to Rooney's book, where the item was identified as 'Argos chic'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJgodxCrY7y/?hl=en-gb>

⁴⁵ <https://www.instagram.com/connellschain/?hl=en>

⁴⁶ <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2020/5/12/21255037/chain-necklaces-thirst-normal-people>

One of the central premises of this research is how clothing helps to narrate identity. ‘Monstrous’ representations of characters such as Sean and the negative value associated with his accessories is a way for class distance to be managed and maintained. Such representations are central to theories of disgust and are used as boundary-markers (Skeggs, 2005). Represented identities such as this have become fixed and enter into circulation as common understandings (that is how a phrase such as ‘Argos chic’ can work). This is a dangerous mechanism as the qualities we ascribe to objects are often grafted onto the people that wear them (Brooks, 2015: 184). So, because Sean’s necklace is lacking in value, so is Sean. When such shorthand or prompts are used again and again, they become the only prompts that can be used (Lennon & Davis, 1989). For every male character in the series who is seen to wear similar jewellery, the same ‘monstrous’ judgement is applied despite the differences in character motivations and narratives. As always, there is a balance of power when commodities are used in this way and within a contemporary context items such as the gold necklace have also become a useful cultural resource to be plundered (Skeggs, 2004) and fetishised by the sanctioned gatekeepers of taste and value.⁴⁷

The two examples above share another common factor used to articulate class position within *The Street*: repetition. Within the language of TV explored in Chapter 2, repetition and subsequently familiarity are key. Fiske & Hartley (2003) state that more use perpetuates more recognition, so the more denim or gold necklaces are used to position class or certain forms of classed and gendered identities, the more they become understood as a ‘reality’. As Walkerdine et al. write, ‘[n]egative discourses executed and popularised by the media begin to be seen as an objective reality, eventually becoming regimes of truth’ (2001: 189). The causal generalisations (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997) that occur after repeated observations are dangerous: ‘some signs are dedicated to their recurrence as signs, not to the real, these are not harmless’ (Baudrillard, 1994a:21). Forrest writes that *The Street* ‘reproduces a familiar and recurring set of iconographies which are not radical’ (2017: 41): they are not visually radical, but symbolically dangerous. The danger lies in how information is levelled out or rendered vague within this process – a process seen as necessary so that wider audiences are able to identify with what they see on screen (Goffman, 1990; Morris, 1994). Some are restricted through repetition within a fixed

⁴⁷ <https://www.vogue.co.uk/fashion/gallery/chain-necklaces-connell-normal-people>

position, while others are able to self-invent through discourses of choice and variability. As Skeggs writes, '[t]his is how cultural capital works in people's lives: cultures of classification and hierarchy proliferate and thereby can be used to create and reproduce elitism and stigma' (2004: 350). In 'Growing Up Girl', it is explained that, '[w]orking class subjects rarely conform to the fantasies projected onto them' (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody: 2001: 17) as Rob confirms in FG5 when commenting on representations, "they never get it right" (Appendix E2). To articulate that which is obscured or that which exists within the empty spaces or gaps of lived experience unfortunately seems to be in direct conflict with the ethos and ideologies of television production.

This section of the chapter explores episode 1 of series 3, 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009), directed by David Blair. Blair commented that it is based loosely on the western *High Noon* (1952, Zinnemann) (Appendix F1). It tells the story of the conflict that occurs when Paddy (Bob Hoskins) bars Callum Miller (Robert Emms) from his pub. Miller's violent father Tom (Liam Cunningham) threatens Paddy if the bar is not lifted. Paddy tries and fails to gather support from the other locals to stand up to Miller and eventually must stand alone and face the consequences of his principled actions. The costumes subject to close reading here are worn by Paddy and Tom, and also their respective wives, Lizzie (Frances Barber) and Jane (Elizabeth Berrington). The analysis will focus on the materiality of the items worn and explore dynamics of money, morality and region in relation to materials and representations of the working class.

The events that unfold in the episode occur across two story days. As such the characters are seen in a limited amount of costume. Paddy is seen in two key outfits: on day one he wears a green shirt that has a button collar with a pin-striped, wool, tailored waistcoat, and a blue silk-wash anorak with dark trousers. On day two, he wears a blue shirt with a different tailored wool waistcoat, with a Prince of Wales check. In contrast to Paddy, Tom wears a black leather jacket with black striped shirt and black smart trousers on day one, and another black leather jacket with a black button-neck polo shirt and jeans on day two. The use of the particular fabrics outlined here (wool and leather and the differing textures) along with differing approaches to tailored clothing in Paddy and Tom's costumes is significant.

Morality or the principle of a binary that separates right from wrong or good from bad is identified by Marcus Free as a recurrent and significant theme throughout the three

separate series of *The Street* (in Forrest, 2017: 36). The melodramatic modality employed here very visibly positions the good and the bad and leaves the viewer in no doubt which characters fall into which category; it does this via the violence employed by Tom but via the clothing the two men wear. As Gledhill & Williams write, '[m]elodramatic modality produces moral identities in the clash of opposites and is committed to binaries which bring the 'others' of official ideologies into visibility' (2000: 240). The moral binaries referred to here involve appearances (Goffman, 1990) that draw upon established aesthetic conventions around taste and quality, with the inevitable lack or rejection of established taste and associated quality aligned with a lack of moral worth: lacking taste is akin to lacking morals (Lawler, 2005a, 2008). Put simply, wool tweed is understood to have more embedded 'quality' and tasteful use than leather – particularly when established weaves such as the Prince of Wales check are employed. The texture of the wool tweed, the softness of the fabric and the way it absorbs light help establish Paddy as the 'softer', more thoughtful, considered man, a man who will stand true to his beliefs and the decision he has made. The way the raw materials are harvested to make wool textiles speaks to regeneration and maintaining a purpose or existence and therefore is considered a more sensitive, thoughtful and sustainable act. In contrast, the fluid, light reflective, smooth texture of the leather coat suggests a harshness and impenetrable nature. Clearly, for there to be a leather product, at least one animal has died. Of course, there is the obvious division between the tailored garment and the more casual garment and how these align with notions of respectability – leather is often seen as the material of deviance whether teenage, sexual or criminal, as Jamie comments in FG6 when describing Tom Miller, "[h]is clobber suited him. They always put the crim in leather" (Appendix E3).

Also implied is a commentary on the notion of value or worth. The way the leather jacket looks and moves, it appears to be of good quality leather and would have been somewhat expensive to purchase. The tailored waistcoat is less 'showy' but holds a different form of currency in relation to value: heritage, craftsmanship and subtle attention to detail. Bourdieu's ideas of capital are usefully employed here: both objects 'hold' different or distinct forms of capital that offer a challenging intersection between monetary value and moral value, so financial capital and symbolic capital play out in the give and go between the objects themselves. My father owns an expensive leather jacket very similar to the one worn by Tom. It is used as his 'funeral' coat, and he feels within the world he inhabits that it

communicates appropriate levels of reverence and respect. My sixteen-year-old daughter, his granddaughter, is constantly asking to borrow the jacket: she wants to wear it to communicate her anemoia for the 1990s indie music scene. This demonstrates clearly the ambiguity of clothing objects in contrast to the fixed symbolism of objects of clothing used within the language of costume on television.

The space that exists between the moral worth of Paddy and Tom is established through the choices and style of clothing the characters wear. Both men dress well, in an understated way, and there is clearly a demonstration of cleanliness, care and detail in the clothes both characters wear. The under stated style, quality, fit and condition of their clothing masks or deflects from the accusation of excessive attention to appearance that has been identified by Skeggs as understood by some groups to indicate low moral value (2004:3). However, the same characteristics (style, quality, fit and condition) also work to destabilise traditional moral boundary recognition and as such could make viewers unsure which identity is more of a threat (Skeggs, 2004: 166). Therefore, fabric and texture have been used as a means to execute a 'choice' and as such reposition the binary of good/bad within the context of a fluid and interpretive moral authority. Violence aside, it could be suggested that Tom is protecting his son from social exclusion. The dichotomy of wool and leather actively works to restore the boundary between good/bad.

The costuming and the bodies of Paddy's wife Lizzie (Frances Barber) and Tom's wife Jane (Elizabeth Berrington) are set more explicitly in opposition. Lizzie supports the stance taken by her husband and yet is pragmatic about the consequences or implications for him, their business, and their family. We first see her in the opening scenes of the episode working behind the bar with her husband in the pub. Her dialogue is limited throughout the episode but her constant presence and reassuring or reproachful looks act as the site wherein Paddy is forced to consider his actions. She is costumed in a very stereotypical manner: on day one she wears a dark purple, tight pencil skirt made from a fabric that catches the light and has some sheen to it, with a low-cut knitted gold/bronze lamé top. When the couple return home after the incident, she puts on a cream, tightly-belted trench-coat. These items employ well-worn tropes of the 'barmaid' that are evidenced throughout visual media, especially in the UK. The statement being made is that the body and clothed presentation of the 'maid' behind the bar must act as a further enticement to the alcohol on offer and must provide some form of objectified visual pleasure to the customers. The

following day, she wears a green knit, puff-sleeve, low-cut top, over another printed, low-cut top with a different pencil skirt. This type of costuming is recognisable and often expected by the viewer and those tasked with the creation of characters, and as a result often remains unchallenged. In the negative sample of content analysis, within the episodes of *Coronation Street* that were analysed (Appendix I) the character Shelly Unwin (Sally Lyndsey), who is also a barmaid, wears very similar clothing that fits her body in a very similar way. In the episode from 12th July, 2006 she wears an olive, silky, loose-neck blouse before changing specifically for a daytime shift at work into a pink, low-cut top with lace and sequin trim. As Klepp comments, 'when clothes are used in accordance with conventions and norms, they are not noticed – difference attracts attention' (2005: 324).

Here the key term is difference, or more specifically, the distinctions between the clothing of Lizzie and the clothing of Jane, where discourse around the tension between distinction and proximity are played out (the tension between proximity and distance has been explored previously in Chapter 2 and will feature again in Chapter 4). When we first see Jane, the colours she wears are in direct contrast to those of Lizzie. Jane wears softer, more earthy matt tones such as dark maroon and caramel. The stylistic elements to her clothing also sit in stark opposition to that of Lizzie, if we compare the neckline and fit of the two coats the women wear, for example. As mentioned, Lizzie wears an open-necked, tightly-belted cream cotton mac, whereas Jane is seen in a much less fitted caramel colour, a soft wool coat with a high funnel collar. In the second story day, Jane is in a soft blue/lilac fine-knit, light-absorbing top and another funnel neck coat, this one made of soft sheepskin. Brad commented in FG3 that, "Bob's wife looks like she is married to a gangster, her hair and everything, you could have swapped them". This difference in these costumes may be evidence of trying to reverse costume tropes or might articulate the women's moral stance in line with the men's costuming. Paddy's wife is keen for him to give in to the bully, whilst Tom's wife leaves him after he attacks Paddy: one behaves honourably and the other does not. To articulate this, one has to dress like a stereotype of a brash barmaid and the other in a more subtly refined or sophisticated version of femininity. One of these versions of womanhood is more frequently assigned to the working class than the other.

The outfits the women wear mark them as different from each other and their husbands but also suggest similarities within and between the two couples, embedded within ideas of taste, money and morality. The idea of difference is explained by Lefebvre

and discussed earlier, as the result of the continuous fragmentations that occur within the everyday. The fluid nature of difference is often understood as ambivalent (Hall, 1997) due to the complexities of contemporary society: it is a space where the 'self' is created and re-created, through common practices such as consumption and lifestyle choices (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005; Bourdieu, 1996). Such choices are undertaken in different ways by different groups, underpinned by our understandings of the right to difference (Merryfield, 2006). Paddy and Tom, Lizzie and Jane, we are to suppose, would actively choose different types of dress, styles, colours and their right to make such choices is unquestioned.

The subtle machinations that are at play behind the creation of actual 'lived' difference reduces the space between beings and/or identities and therefore establishes a conceptual proximity to others rather than maintaining distance (Lawler, 2005b, 2008). Such proximity is seen as problematic and is understood by the bourgeoisie as a symbolic threat (Skeggs, 2004), therefore the subtleties of positioning are actively levelled out by a recurrence of imagery that reduces the distance between, and in some instances replaces altogether, the real and the representation of the real, thus leaving behind a reductive form of static essentialism (Baudrillard, 1994a; Eco, 1992). As Skeggs remarks, '[r]ecognition of difference is harder to maintain in the contemporary as boundaries are more permeable than in the past' (2004: 97). This reductive, essentialised form is circulated to become socially recognised, accepted, and given value as meaningful: '[t]o have entitlement is to be part of a system of exchange in which difference is materialised by culture through authorisation by cultural intermediaries and this institutional practices' (2004: 153).

Clearly some differences are allowed to continue, operating in relation to one another but remaining distant from those who want to maintain boundaries of existence. This type of difference (the difference between Paddy's anorak and Tom's leather jacket or Lizzie's mac and Jane's wool coat) are often fought over within the arena of value. Regardless of how such squabbles play out, those pitted against each other are inevitably ordered into a hierarchy not of their making, where some have value attributed to them and others do not. Lefebvre's explanations of both difference and distinction are relevant here in a number of ways. As discussed, he claims that difference is about the relations that exist between things, whilst distinctions are about distance or separations: difference is universal whilst distinction is particular (2005). Paddy and Tom are different from each other, but both are distinct from the bourgeoisie. The same can be said of Lizzie and Jane. Tom and

Jane are different, morally, ethically, emotionally: the couple as a unit are different from the unit of Lizzie and Paddy. Each of these subtle shifts and changes operate within the spaces left vacant by the selection processes embedded within the production of representations.

To fully understand the concept of difference is to understand the 'whole', but it could be argued that this is not possible within human nature or creative practice. Difference can only be understood in relation to a subject position that creates meaningful selections based on a 'difference' understood through the lens of distinction. Such meaningful selections produce a surplus of meaning that makes visible the distinctions at play within the articulation of difference. As Lefebvre comments,

those who distinguish (classes) according to a criteria of distinction always risk ordering social groups in relation to themselves – thus we end up situating social groups exclusively by strata and layers in a hierarchy acknowledged and sanctioned by ideology taking little, if any account of the major vertical and horizontal divisions with which society is shot through. (2005: 115)

Distinctions are formulated and maintained as a result of flattening the differences inherent throughout lived experience. When difference is distilled in this way the consequences are far-reaching. The absent space occupied by difference is filled instead by standardisation (Brooks, 2015) or the 'ideal' where all aspects of meaning are absorbed into the dominant form of the medium, as Baudrillard argues: 'reabsorption of the distance or gap leaves a space for 'ideal' or critical projection' (1994a: 122).

Those tasked with populating the absent space rely on their own cosmopolitanism, individualisation, and reflexivity which, as Skeggs has described, are positions that can only be inhabited as a result of positions of privilege, to create a product via a process of selections and exclusions. Skeggs states, '[e]xclusion from and access to objects, people and practices to propertise are central to both the formation of the possessive individual and the exclusion of others from self-formation' (2004: 175). The homogenising powers at play here enforce themselves via forms of rationality (Merryfield, 2006) and become established within circuits of general exchange. So, we expect Lizzie to wear tight, low-cut, shiny clothing (a women defined by her job); Tom to wear black leather (danger); Jane (who is hesitant about Tom's behaviour) less revealing clothing than Lizzie; and Paddy's clothing must contain elements of stoic traditional conservatism for his moral stance to make sense.

3.5 Experience of class

Social class, as described by Ashby & Higson, is a 'totalising social process that shapes and limits social relations under capitalism' (2000:349). It is experienced in a number of different ways, not only through the rigidity of the process or the established structure, and is still experienced as an 'issue' for many (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001). The experience of class is individual, emotive, and based on personal feeling (Todd, 2015). It is shot through with the hidden injuries or implosive violence (Sennett & Cobb, 1973; Baudrillard, 1994a) of shame, (Raey, 2005, Sayer, 2005) and self-doubt (Connolly, 2017). As Haylett writes, '[f]requently these positions are marked by silences that speak of disappointment, embarrassment, abandonment' (2001: 353). Savage discusses Kuhn's comment that '[c]lass lives beneath clothes, under skin, in your reflexes, psyche' (2015:375) and as such the essential truth of class is not the structure that defines its categorisations but the experience of it (Charlesworth, 2000).

The experience of class is diverse, expressed (and dressed) in multiple ways (Woodin, 2005; Connolly, 2017) and subject to specific social environments (Sartre, 1968), each of which demonstrates a lived practice adapted to deal with difficult conditions. The ambivalence often attributed to the working class, especially since the 1980s, exists in tandem with experiential awareness of the implicit and explicit restrictions to class position (Payne & Grew, 2005; Chibber, 2022). As such class consciousness is preserved and denied at the same time (Sartre, 1968). Skeggs writes that 'living class is different from class consciousness, is very much part of how class is made' (2004: 173). That is, the perceived ambivalence of the working classes that find themselves detached from the very politics that position them within the structure and creates the hierarchy or environment that makes them who they are (Lawler, 2008).

Contestation by stealth described in this way appears through the making of the self from the tools available and is expressed via a continuously evolving identity expressed through everyday behaviour such as dressing practice (Sartre, 1968; Casey, 2010). As Casey writes, '[t]he working class through their everyday discourse and consumption seek to distinguish themselves from middle-class identities' (2010: 232). This may well occur through a sartorial whisper or refusal to use the language of dress to speak at all. This creates the political every day of class experience (Dave, 2006) where class identities that

are not legitimised (Sayer, 2005), are resisted by a refusal to accept meaning (Baudrillard, 1994a). Silence within the regulated language of dress works to collapse the meaning of clothing signifiers and acts as a form of contestation.

As the discourses around class have moved from the politics of distribution to the politics of representation (Byrne, 2005), issues that identify perceived problems with social life or particular practices of class living – such as dressing up to go out – are dealt with ideologically and become the site where class is hunted (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 216). Within this context we need to consider what is not being represented; in this instance, diversity of practice. Byrne states that there is agency in the mundane (2005) and this can be understood as clothing that mediates between the self and the social which can and does articulate challenge and resistance. As Baudrillard states, ‘masses challenge via characteristics most deprived of meaning’ (1994a: 69). This challenge or resistance comes in the form of contestation, which as Lefebvre explains, is ‘a refusal to be integrated with full awareness of what integration entails with respect to humiliation and disassociation’ (2009 [1969]: 67). This form of ‘clothing’ contestation confronts established ‘common’ understandings and changes accepted meanings; it ‘disturbs the representational discourse that is meta language’ (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 173). Lefebvre, writing at the turbulent end of the 1960s, identified ‘the street’ as the space where spontaneity is expressed. His ‘street’ is figurative: it implies everyday existence and is the space where individual consciousness begins to develop and evolve to live alongside and beyond an individual situation. Put simply, not every working-class person will consider a local working man’s club worth ‘dressing up’ for and not all working-class people would choose to visit a working man’s club as a social space. As Steve remarks in FG6, “do you go drinking with your old fella, in the same place with your mates, or your kid? I don’t” (Appendix E3).

Identification of meaning rests with the individual and as such ‘there is always ‘leakiness’ to culture and society – unforeseen circumstances buried within the everyday, imminent moments of prospective subversion’ (Merryfield, 2006: 26). The language of television presumes individuality such as this cannot be used as a communicative tool for an individual act. Sartre states that, as individuals, we,

project ourselves towards the possible to escape the contradictions of our existence, we reveal who we are and enter another realm of contradictions thus at the same time that we surpass our class, our class identity is made manifest. (1968: 101).

This is true of those who consume and those who produce representations, so by costuming working-class characters using symbolic tools such as those outlined above, costume designers and their collaborators surpass their own class identity but at the same time mark quite clearly that very identity.

This conflictual presence is lost in plain sight as the real coincides with models of simulation (Baudrillard, 1994a). Representation relies on the flawed principle of equivalence between a sign and its 'real' counterpart. Baudrillard explains that the simulation begins when the value of the sign is negated; thus, narrow perspectives based on the merest of resemblance allows meaning to become distorted, the real to be lost and simulation to replace it (1994a). The surplus of meaning that is a key component of contestation threatens to ruin this system of equivalence and must therefore be avoided. As a result, understanding is formed and regurgitated through forms of simulation: '[t]he middle class comes to know its 'inner city other' through an imposed system of repeatable substitutions (crime stats, tabloids, TV)' (Skeggs, 2004: 183). This situation will continue while there remains a disparity between those who are behind the camera and those who are represented in front of it. As Tom Sherry, Head of BBC Drama North, commented in 2021,

[i]n my experience of whether there is enough diversity in representation, [the answer] is honestly no but possibly it's easy to be sidetracked on where you look for that diversity and I think we should always be challenging ourselves to find the voice that isn't represented and all too often I think that boils down to simple things, you know, class. (Appendix F6)

Thus far this section has outlined how particular materials (denim, wool, leather and gold) have been used symbolically to articulate particular class positions. The following section will discuss the practices of dressing that are used to communicate the same message, more specifically the practice of 'dressing up'. Throughout the three series of *The Street*, particular social spaces are used in juxtaposition to the interiority of the home. These spaces are, predictably, the local social or working man's club and the pub. By choosing spaces such as these in favour of a cafe, coffee shop or wine bar, the class specifics and associated drinking

cultures of the representations are fixed. The assumptions are that the working class choose to socialise with the people they live alongside; they do not travel to socialise, or engage with a particular 'interest' such as music, art, theatre and so on. They are happy and impoverished enough (economically) to enjoy and desire cheap alcohol, and impoverished enough culturally to enjoy and desire simplistic, non-individualistic forms of entertainment.

Two of the three episodes under close reading ('Sean & Yvonne' and 'Smoke') use these spaces as sites where the narrative progresses and characterisations are developed. The third episode this section explored in detail, 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007), series 2, episode 4, uses a broader definition of drinking culture (one which includes the nightclub) as a crucial story driver. It is interesting how the characters choose to dress for these spaces, practices that imply that the spaces entered are seen as 'special' enough for a change of clothing to occur. Yvonne is often seen in the working man's club. She invariably changes to go 'out' to the club. The viewer sees her in short skirts and high heels in longshot, or delicate or 'skimpy' camisole-style vest tops, and shrugs or bolero cardigans in half-shots. Her hair has been attended to and she is often in make-up, which may conceal the bruising she has on her face as a result of Sean's violence towards her. She is often without Sean in these spaces, communicating the 'safety' of a social space in juxtaposition to the constant danger of her home. Yvonne is not the only character that changes clothing in this way to go to the club. In series 1 we see both male and female characters engaging in the same practice in episodes 1, 3, 5 and 6; in series 2, episodes 3 and 4; and in the final series in episodes 1 and 3.

Collins has commented on inaccurate working-class representations from (George Bernard) Shaw to (Mike) Leigh (2004), claiming that the representations under discussion fall into the same category for two main reasons. The first is the understanding or misunderstanding of working men's club cultures. The broad assumptions are that these are one of the few social sites the working class engage with and attending activities within them is seen as something 'special' or a treat from the mundanity of everyday life and therefore requires a different type of dress. Jamie from FG6 questions the dressing practises within the drama for the social moments that occur in these spaces and compares them to his own experiences. He comments, "[d]epends what kind of place; not in the places I go" (Appendix E3).

The second is more a deliberate reconfiguration rather than an inaccuracy and concerns how Yvonne is costumed in these spaces; the problematics of both of these broad brush-strokes is that actual everyday and mutable performance of class remains invisible (Casey, 2010; Byrne, 2005). The social space on display here is presented concurrently as very familiar to those viewed within it but as something 'other' to those who have not frequented such spaces. In the same way 'slum fiction' was not written for those living in slums (Collins, 2004), the way working men's clubs are represented is not for the benefit of those that frequent them. As Skeggs writes, 'obsession with 'otherness' enables otherness, therefore representations of the working class condense a whole range of anxieties enabling anxiety to be expressed, known and become governable' (2004: 181). The middle-class anxieties expressed here are concerned with maintaining difference and markers of taste in behaviour, clothing, and social experiences. The act of dressing up for such spaces, particularly for Yvonne, articulate the perceived lack embedded in working class lived or clothed experience. The assumption is that Yvonne would view the everyday clothes she wears as lacking (fashion), shameful or inappropriate and therefore changes so as not to be judged and/or to gain appreciation from her peers. Sayer claims that the working class avoid the shame that accompanies the strong commonality in the understanding of their 'lack' via oppositional values (Sayer, 2005). So, the 'lack' of a better or other place to socialise is opposed or resisted through 'over-dressing'. The contrast with and therefore difference between this practice of dressing and more middle-class ideas prevalent with fashion media of a smooth transition from day into evening via the 'right' choice of clothing objects could not be starker.

This has resulted in 'a 'real' that is truer than the true, too real to be true (Baudrillard, 1994b: 84). This is clearly problematic as the creation of stereotypical representations is a selective and morally loaded process of exclusion (Savage, 2015), in which we 'attribute value to different people, practices, objects and classifications thereby enhancing or limiting the potential for exchange' (Skeggs, 2004: 96). This goes beyond what representations are and begins to explain what they do. Haylett too considers the notion of 'dumping' the (white) working class and removing the opportunity of authentic representations, specifically 'spaces where cultural dignity and political significance can be forged' (2001: 354). The second important element of this process is the response of certain groups within society to the situation outlined. The balance that exists within shared

meanings between what is erased and what remains is recognised and becomes meaningful for those who find themselves missing from representations (Baudrillard, 1994b). The perception of what is (or the experience of being) 'absent' and the relationship between that perception and the structures governing lived experience is where class experience, consciousness and position can be properly understood (Cannadine, 1998). This is what ultimately informs viewers' responses and/or resistance to dramatic portrayals of working-class experience. The social-cultural repercussions of this play out through the bodies and clothing choices for dramatic characterisations. They play out via unquestioning acceptance, reinforcing and reproducing the simulacra created in their name: '[e]conomic colonisation creates the 'lonely crowd', a uniformed mass person slavishly following the tyranny of the majority' (Lefebvre in Merryfield, 2006: 24). Or it plays out via resistance, whereby the meaning of the 'silent majority' becomes 'not a silence that refuses to speak but rather one that refuses to be spoken for' (Baudrillard, 1994b: 22), rendering representation meaningless. As Rob commented in FG5 when discussing the male characters from 'Taxi', "I don't dress like [...] either of them, neither do my boys" (Appendix E2).

3.6 Body politics

This section revisits the ideas around language that were explored in Chapter 2 and will be explored further in Chapter 4, and applies them to classed and gendered bodies and the clothes they wear. The body is explored here in distinct ways: the power and presence of physicality, the levels of flesh on display and the implications around hygiene. It will also further develop the discussion of the 'self' and subject position in relation to the characterisations and the producers of the text. It does this via a close reading of 'Taxi', (Boulter, 2007), episode 4 of series 2. It is the story of two cousins involved in a violent altercation with a taxi driver after a night out. Ian (Matt Smith) is not involved in the violence and stays to help the injured man. His cousin Gary (Kieran Bew), who has inflicted the violence, runs from the scene. As more people arrive, it is assumed Ian is responsible and he is subsequently arrested. This analysis focuses on the bodies of the cousins and the boys' mothers: Jan (Gina McKee), Gary's mother, and Cath (Lorraine Ashbourne). The episode also features the recurring character of Eddie McEvoy (Timothy Spall) as he is an employee of the same taxi firm as the injured driver.

This episode is very clearly a morality tale of taking responsibility for our actions and family politics. This tale plays out on the bodies of the main characters involved. The two young men, Gary and Ian, inhabit very different physical sites. Ian is skinny, awkward, and ungainly whilst Gary is powerful, assured and physically developed. The casting of these particular actors and the way they inhabit and manipulate their own bodies whilst playing the roles establishes the differences mentioned above. As Teresa Rhymer commented,

the young Matt Smith, who had very strong ideas about his character, whereas the other actor, the other young man, he was quite new, he is quite new to acting and he basically just said whatever you put me in, I'll just wear it. (Appendix F3)

At the beginning of the episode, the viewer is led to believe that Gary is the more successful of the two, ambitious and single-minded and about to enter the Royal Navy, whilst Ian's physique and the way his body moves and is managed reinforces the idea of him as feckless and lacking drive or focus. He was described by Carol in FG5 as "very scruffy all the time, looked like he could do with a good wash" (Appendix E2).

The two women that are sisters and mothers to the boys also inhabit diametrically opposed physiques. Jan has a slight frame which she holds in a reserved or repressed manner, particularly around the shoulders. She exists in a social space of perceived mobility; her husband has a job which requires him to wear a 'formal' shirt throughout the episode – we never see him in casual clothing. They also have 'savings' which they make available to Cath and her family. The implication or impression is of a respectable working-class existence. This is identified by Bill in FG2: "[y]ou could tell that she spent a lot more money on the clothes she was wearing in comparison with her sisters, and she certainly appeared to be more aspirational" (Appendix E2).

Ian Hanley (Matt Smith) is used in *The Street* as an oppositional foil and moral compass to the aggressive ambition of his cousin Gary Parr (Kieran Bew). In order for this opposition to be read as authentic, he must appear submissive and lazy or feckless and this must be reflected in the actor's body and clothing. In the first scene of the episode discussed here, the young men are attending the family birthday celebration before they go out into the city centre for a night of drinking and clubbing. This research explores what the two men are wearing in this scene and how the T-shirt Ian wears, and the shirt Gary wears draw on established and reductive tropes to mark 'working class bodies as socially defunct

or deficient' (Haylett, 2001:359). Ian wears a long-sleeved mid-blue v-neck T-shirt with black neck-trim and jeans. There isn't anything particularly interesting or unique about the items he wears and this, in relation to the shirt his cousin wears, is the point. It is not only the items themselves that position Ian so clearly as working-class, but also the way they are worn; the way they fit the actor's body, the way the actor uses his body and the way the actor's body is managed in terms of hairstyle and make-up. As Teresa Rhymer noted,

Matt's character was a bit more shuffling, how he carried his body. That was quite important to him, how he, and actually you see him doing that in the crown, how the walk and his shoes were really important to him, how they felt on his feet, how that made him walk. That was something we had, you know, quite a long discussion about and what, how that was going to make him feel. (Appendix F3).

Ian looks dishevelled throughout the episode, even before his life begins to unravel. He wears clothing that does not fit properly and that has a patina that suggests overuse and misuse. The patina of the items he is seen to wear is relevant in relation to notions of hygiene connected to working-class bodies. Historically, soap was taxed and therefore considered a luxury item. This, alongside the working classes' role as physical labourers in 'dirty' industrial environments established working-class bodies as somehow physically less clean than their middle-class counterparts. This lack of cleanliness became grafted onto behaviours and moral ideals. As Skeggs states, '[h]ygiene was a key classification in this and is still prevalent today' (2004: 3,4). As Carol confirms when referring to the character of Ian in FG5, "the other one didn't look clean, shifty, all over the place" (Appendix E2).

As stated, Ian wears a very casual, unremarkable T-shirt on a night out. The use of this object is communicating that either he is not invested in the convention of such a social event; that he misinterprets the conventions; that he has limited options available to him; or that his understanding of acceptable taste levels for such an occasion is limited. The way the object fits his body, particularly the long sleeves, both infantilizes him and is suggestive of a man not aware, comfortable, confident, or assured of his own frame or sophisticated enough to adorn it in the most effective way. Ian makes visible here the costume designers' and actors' understanding of what clothes a character in Ian's social position might have and how he might choose to wear them. More importantly, the costume designer is also communicating their own understanding of the exchange value embedded in how the

clothes are worn and conceptualized in relation to other items of clothing (Skeggs, 2004: 136, 141). This example of clothing characterization could be read as a manifestation of the recurrent denial of the variables inherent within the resource-based nature of the working-class self (Skeggs, 2004: 134) and a re-conformation of how classed bodies and the inequalities embodied within them are reinforced.

The choice, fit, and patina of Ian's clothing act to indicate how the authors (costume designer + actor) position the character as 'other' – the active and passive roles in this exchange have become somewhat blurred – the characterization is attempting to communicate the 'self' of the character but is actually communicating how the self of the costume designer positions themselves in relation to the 'other' of the character. As Bakhtin states, '[t]o understand another person's utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it, to find the proper place for it in the corresponding context' (in Morris, 1994: 36). Limited understanding of lived experience outside one's own inevitably limits the tools we have available to communicate: '[t]he theory of passive understanding precludes any possibility of engaging the most fundamental and crucial features of meaning in language' (Bakhtin in Morris, 1994: 35). We need to recognize and understand the language with which we communicate. Our inner speech can only become active as outer speech within an established framework of sign and meaning. Bakhtin suggests that '[t]he ruling class attempt to drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occur with the sign' (in Morris, 1994: 55) – the ideological sign is something external that is internalized and is revealed again when we communicate. Here, the object and the way it is used is an external expression of the inner speech of the designer and it lays bare the chosen language of communication and the possible breach between those represented and those creating the representations.

For the opening scene of the episode, Gary is seen wearing a white/soft pink patterned, fitted, long-sleeved formal shirt. The shirt plays a key function within the narrative so there was clearly much thought taken in its selection. During the violent ending to the evening, the shirt becomes stained with the blood of Gary's victim. When he flees the scene and returns home, he tries to remove the blood. He fails and disposes of the shirt in a plastic bag in a neighbour's bin. Also of significance is that he finds a replacement shirt to put on before his mother comes down the stairs, after his aunt knocks on the front door. The replacement shirt is the same style, but has a soft brown rather than pink pattern. His

mother notices the change and searches for the original shirt, as her suspicions about his behaviour increase.

As already established, class discourses are mapped onto bodies where two types of recognition occur: the recognition of particular bodies as lacking and the misrecognition of legitimized bodies (Skeggs, 2004: 169). The narrative here deals quite clearly with the misrecognition of Gary's legitimized body. Gary appears to be the more aspirational character for the viewer, but as the narrative unfolds the viewer realizes appearances can be deceptive. The difference in the bodies and clothing of the characters/actors is deliberate and was picked up on by FG2. Mina comments, "[s]o physically you see differences straight away. It's a complete reflection of the families themselves – does that make sense?" (Appendix E2). The bodies act as ironic benchmarks for the morality tale at the heart of the narrative. As Skeggs comments, '[w]hen bodies with different symbolic values enter the same space the readings are made through the potential for exchange' (2004: 166). I suggest that two things are happening in the clothed character of Gary. The first is the questioning of the traditional or historic heroic imagery of working-class men (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001) through reinforcing the contemporary misconception of the thuggish nature of classed masculinity; this happens through the gendering of his behaviour and of the choice of clothing the character wears. The second is the suggestion that inner 'speech' where dialogue with the 'other' finds expression is the product of ideological value – of the social. This obviously has implications for the production of characterizations.

Carver suggests that '[g]ender should be used to discuss power issues as these are mapped onto bodies' (2004: 9). Gary's body is strong, powerful, and well managed. It is a body made for physical activity and is a contemporary incarnation of the heroic industrial labourer. The work the body intends to perform will happen within the Navy, where it will actively produce an income outside the home as well as reproducing the class position of the lower-level troops or 'cannon fodder'. Gary is therefore a key example of the gendered active producer of social class (Engels in Carver, 2004: 218). He uses his body to inflict a horrifying level of violence onto the cab driver. Here, his gendered emotional control and management is questioned (Besnier, 1990) within the male/female binary, but fixed in relation to class position. Working class men and women are identified more with emotion than rational thought. Gary's explosive violence is an example of this lack of rationality or cerebral consideration; his temperamental response to the situation moves him away from

the dignified suffering of the 'heroic' working class into the feminized realm of unchecked expression. His body allows him at once to be objectified, marginalized, and devalued simultaneously. His narrative would not have been communicated as successfully if his body had been any less fixed as fit for the purpose.

How the body is clothed adds another layer of communication and meaning. Wearing the shirt described above demonstrates a self-awareness of his bodily appeal. His body is used as a communicative tool. The shirt is fitted, with a centre-back tuck and the fabric has a soft pink floral print, which suggests a certain level of sexual and gendered confidence is required to wear it. Of course, what it also suggests within the specific context of menswear and masculinity is the perceived deviance inherent within male clothing and grooming engagement. To question masculinity in this way whilst reinforcing negative class stereotypes acts as a double address or layered critique that uses dangerous and simplistic signs (Finkelstein, 1999) within a familiar and well-worn context to maintain the boundaries of class identification and experience. As explored in the previous section, the self is created in relation to the other via bodies. Superficially, the body of Gary is the body of the hero; however, his heroic nature dissolves as a result of the choice of shirt he wears. Such disintegration becomes indistinguishable from the author as subject (Morris 1994: 158), or rather it becomes indistinguishable from the choices made by the costume designer.

Cath Hanley (Lorraine Ashbourne) is a woman struggling to work and bring up three older children whilst her husband is in prison, awaiting sentencing for drugs offences. The analysis undertaken here focuses on two particular scenes where the costumes of Cath and her sister Jan can be compared. The first scene opens the episode: the family are gathered in Cath's house for a birthday. They are also awaiting a phone call from her husband from prison. The main character relationships are clearly established with the two sisters forming the dominant positions in the family group. It is here where we first learn about Jan's son's impending move to join the Navy. Cath wears a turquoise broderie anglaise bustier style T-shirt top, sleeveless with narrow shoulder straps and lacing or tie detail at the front. The emphasis is on the top half of her body with most of the narrative filmed in half-shot. Throughout the episode and of particular interest in the two scenes subject to close reading here, the amount of flesh Cath displays is significantly higher and in contrast to her sister Jan. As Carol comments in FG5, "[d]idn't she (Cath) have some kind of summery top on or something on when they were at the beginning? The other one (Jan) looked a lot smarter.

Had nicer things on. Nicer clothes. Seem to have anyway” (Appendix E2). This is intentional: flesh is signified in culture (Charlesworth, 2000) and the exposure of it acts in conjunction with other forms of bodily symbolism such as weight, posture, movement, hygiene and adornment, to identify and communicate the ‘value’ society holds for particular bodies and their positions in society: ‘bodies, their appearance, their baring and their adornment are central to encoding the poor’ (Savage, 2015: 336).

The inevitable assumption is that the bodies of the ‘poor’ look, dress and behave (show more flesh) in a different way to the middle class or bourgeoisie. Further, such looks are also seen as a signpost, identifying ways of thinking, and behaving understood in an essentialist way by the bourgeoisie to be inescapable from class categorizations: ‘certain ways of dressing and speaking and certain habits indicate not only a despised class position but also an underlying pathology’ (Savage, 2015: 336). These ‘disgusting subjects’ (Lawler, 2005a, 2005b, 2008) are marked by the flesh they show as ‘different’ or separate to what is acceptable and desirable. The difference is culturally recognizable and used to fix and restrict some forms of social movement (Gledhill & Williams, 2000; Skeggs, 2004). The costume of Cath works in this way, to position her as the brash, brassy wife of the criminal. This makes the ‘essentialist’ characteristics or pathology recognizable, and fixes her position in the systems within which she operates: the criminal justice system, the street where she lives and her position within the hierarchy of the family. IT also attributes a moral, economic, aesthetic and institutionalized value (Skeggs, 2004). Rob articulated this succinctly in FG5: “[s]o, one was a bit more tarty-looking” (Appendix E2).

The bustier that Cath wears (a T-shirt version of a bustier and not an actual bustier) fixes her position because of the colour, the fabric and the amount of flesh exposed. Interestingly, the costume designer and actor thought the exposed flesh communicated more about Cath’s vulnerability, both social and economic. As Rhymer recalls,

Lorraine had a very strong idea of how she wanted to look anyway, and we developed together how we quite liked her showing a lot of flesh even though she wasn't a young woman, she's not conventionally attractive. With Lorraine, I wanted to show more flesh. I wanted to feel that, with a husband away, that kind of longing, that nakedness that she has, that rawness through that showing flesh, you know, something very basic like that, and everything was quite, was very fitted and Lorraine is a size 6. She's very, very thin and everything being really fitted made her look more vulnerable. (Appendix F3)

The bold choice of turquoise and its associations with the expressive and emotive aspects of the psyche links very clearly to ideas of what constitutes the overtly or overflowing feminine, which is key when exploring the construction of classed femininities. The mise-en-scène makes this object, and by association its wearer, stand out in a gregarious and unapologetic manner. The fabric choice of broderie anglaise acts as a nostalgic or 'dated' metaphor for budgeted ostentation – the fabric was used widely in the 1960s, '70s and '80s as a relatively cheap trim to enhance a garment, and thus lacks the heritage, craftsmanship and implied value of lace. The design is very form-fitting, low-cut, sleeveless and with the suggestion of underwear, positioning Cath very clearly as confident and sexually assured or voracious and is a useful reference point, an amalgamation of the wife and 'busty blonde' female working-class characters that Beynon and Rowbotham identify as prevalent prior to 1980s (2001) even though this production is from 2007. The fracture between the intention of the actor/designer and the way the costumes were read by the researcher and the focus groups participants speaks to Hall's notion of oppositional and negotiated reading (1997).

This body is being used here as a form of symbolic communication and acts as a site where middle-class fears and fantasies are played out whilst boundaries that contain negative value or bad taste are maintained (Skeggs, 2004, 2005). This type of 'authentic' working-class female body, despised and yet objectified, is subject to the rapid flow of signs and representations inherent in the contemporary. Perceived authenticity is used here to reinforce a negative representation very clearly: who is this type of women authentic for or to? The give and go of pathologizing to criticize is common practice within class positioning and politics. Tyler and Bennett offer an example when discussing working-class women who are assumed to be both overly fertile and 'bad mothers' (2010). The narrative of *The Street* contests this claim: Cath has raised a son who is loyal and responsible, and yet the visual signifiers of which costume is key continue to reinforce the negative pathologizing.

In contrast to Cath's wardrobe, the costumes worn by her sister Jan are subtle and understated. In the first scene mentioned above, Jan wears a soft lilac/grey fine-knit top with delicate puff sleeves and a scoop neck. She wears a camisole top with lace trim underneath, with the lace visible at the neckline. She too is shot from the waist up in the scene. The colour, fabric and design of this top sits in direct opposition to that of her sister, as Gledhill & Williams comment: '[m]elodrama articulates the social as aesthetic questions

and vice versa' (2000:238). The aspiration of Jan is very clearly articulated in the aesthetic and is recalled by Rhymer: 'Gina's character potentially is more aspirational, more complex, she is more interested in the finer things of life' (Appendix F3). The cool shades imply composure and restraint, the fine-knit suggests a delicacy or sophistication, and the use of lace (as opposed to broderie anglaise) implies a level of taste and sophistication that Cath does not possess. The lace at the neckline reduces the amount of flesh shown, maintaining a modest femininity not usually associated with constructions of working-class women.

Of course, the characters' reasons for their behaviour and appearance are made clear through the narrative but such reasons are only the beginning of an explanation (Williams & May, 1996: 54) whose end point rests with the preconceptions and misconceptions of those involved in the production processes and those viewing the text. Each character is marked as 'other'; to each other, to middle class femininity and to dominant ideas around taste and value. This is felt through actual lived class experience:

[t]he painful recognition of 'otherness' marked on the body, felt by working class women, a feeling of less or lacking that had to be managed and either concealed or revealed. This demonstrates that working class subjects know exactly how they are positioned. (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001: 42)

For this to work, her appearance must differ significantly from that of her sister and this difference reinforces and fixes both women's position within stereotypical formations and wider ideological assumptions that those within the working class are always striving to move away from their lived experiences and means of expression to something understood within middle-class culture as 'better'.

Cath appears to have a more voluminous frame, both literally and conceptually, which inhabits space in a much more expressive or possibly aggressive way, despite Rhymer recalling her small frame. Cath exists in a world very different from and yet connected to that of her sisters. Cath's husband is in prison for drug offences and it is made very clear in the mise-en-scène and dialogue that the 'brash' accoutrements she is surrounded by are the product of criminality and are offered up for judgement accordingly. The way the two sisters are costumed must reference their difference and communicate familiar tropes for their oppositional behaviour through the narrative to resonate. As Adrian from FG2 comments, "if you had just been looking at them as physical characters without also following the

storyline, of the two you would have guessed that the other mum would have done it” (Appendix E2). He is referring to the betrayal, duplicity and perversion of justice undertaken by Jan; Adrian was expecting that type of behaviour from a character dressed like Cath, thus reinforcing the hegemonic power the costumes wield.

So, the body, or rather the clothed body, acts as a means to communicate ideas around class experience to those expected to identify or distance themselves from what they see. The embodied melodramatic form of each character discussed here is related to ideologies that pervade class, gender, and dress (Klepp & Storm-Mathusen, 2005: 324). These bodies exist within a value system not of their own making where some are viewed as having value and some as valueless. The way that imposed value such as this is ‘read’ or understood can be contested through dress (Skeggs, 2004: 14) but this is difficult when it is central to the power systems that exist between groups in society and those seen as valueless do not have access to or control of the value system by which they are judged.

3.7 A class problem – TV representation

As Selina Todd remarked, ‘Labour’s first Prime Minister stated in 1924 “the true separation in society is the moral and economic line of division between the producer and the non-producer, between those who possess without serving and those who serve (without possessing)”’ (Todd, 2015: 15). Todd and Ramsay MacDonald are discussing in general terms the access to the means of production. It is argued here that the same sentiment can be grafted more specifically onto the ‘production’ of representations, specifically clothed representations. As established here and in Chapters 2 and 4, there is a separation both moral and economic between those who possess the means to represent and those who are represented. The moral separation that renders much of the experience of class invisible (Burstyn, 1983), particularly ways of dressing, articulates the range of anxieties (Skeggs, 2004) connected to the maintenance, regulation, or discipline of class boundaries. The discourse of class produced therefore makes visible the form of capitalism on show and the drive for that form to remain unchallenged (Dave, 2006; Williams & May, 1996).

As Casey comments, the everyday is where class lives (2010) and as such the everyday bodies seen in television drama are central to representations of the working class being read and understood as authentic (Skeggs, 2004). Within histories of the working

class, the poor are often associated with the body (Lawler, 2008; Skeggs, 2004; Todd, 2015) and not the mind (for example, the fetishising of the physicality of the industrial labourer where heroic masculinity is often tortured by its own class consciousness versus the cerebral work the middle classes supposedly engage in; or the unruly body of working-class women versus the 'respectable' body of the middle-class female). Over time, representations of the working class on screen have shifted. Contemporary representations often retain residual elements of the ideas suggested above but as the handy symbols of what it is to be working-class have become less clear (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001), the representations move towards something equally problematic, where consumption practices languish against a backdrop of decay and insignificance (Connolly, 2017). Working-class identities are still presented as in trouble, where access to the heightened difference of the non-troubled (middle-class) identity (Lawler, 2008) is denied (Casey, 2010). Rather, the imposed working class-ness of clothing choice and dressing practices are reduced, fixed, and curated (Lefebvre, 2005) and subsequently forced upon representations.

The ordinariness on display in *The Street* offers a benign space in which to employ class stereotypes, as Bell, Hollows & Stewart state: 'ordinariness is always subjectively positioned by the social variables of class, gender 'race' and sexuality. Lifestyles never float free of class' (2005: 115). Beynon & Rowbotham commented that; 'images of the working class within mass media are put there by the middle class [...] that is why the working class so often come over as clichés, as stereotypes, not as rounded and unique human beings' (2001: 80). This suggests that the representations with which we are all familiar, that are hidden within their ordinariness, have been constructed through a very particular lens for a specific purpose. The ordinariness or mundanity of false and damaging representations (Connolly, 2017) affects by stealth actual class relations, as Turner comments: '[m]edia representations affect fundamental aspect of everyday life and can be all the more pervasive because they are also so mundane' (2010:169). That is, it is not that classed representations are absent from our screens but rather that they are limited, which has resulted in a slippage that confuses and conflates representations and reality. The class representations we see are old, not fluid or diverse enough to articulate contemporary lived experience. The power relations at work in managing the identities that are presented to us produce and deny value and ideas around the 'norm' framing identity as 'ought' rather than 'is' (Lawler, 2008: 21). Sally Hibben has written that the management of classed identities

discussed here just happens on screen; it has moved into common understandings and therefore is often not discussed (in Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001).

In spaces where different strains of symbolic communication cross over, such as class politics and television drama, Skeggs explains that a powerful compression of information occurs which inevitably creates gaps at the margins: 'when the different symbolic sites of representation coincide, such as political and popular, producing information and entertainment that generate the same representations and the same value allocation, a powerful symbolic condensation may occur' (2004:111). How the 'condensed' ideas are manifested on the costumed bodies charged with communicating said ideas very clearly exposes the gaps and literally 'embodies' how value is attributed (or not) to particular groups and individuals. Such 'forced readings' that result from costumed bodies used in this way perpetuate the maintenance of boundaries (Skeggs, 2004) within the 'real' and representations. The readings are forced as the information they are drawn from is a tightly edited version of what is possible, available, or experienced. To reiterate, those involved in the creation process can only understand another 'self' in relation to their own sense of self. So, the 'pathology' that underpins each representation is actually a patchwork of understandings and judgements of the 'other' (the characterisation) understood in relation to the self or selves of the creator or creators and their own experiences. Sartre explains this: '[o]ur comprehension of the 'other' is never contemplative - it is a moment of our praxis' (1968: 156). Put more simply, there is a danger of misrepresentation when working-class screen characters are produced through middle-class subjectivities.

The missing, nuanced, reflective account of everyday experience (Casey, 2010) reflects the fact that 'ordinary' no longer applies to just the working or middle class (Byrne, 2005) but encompasses a whole range of experience and clothing consumption decisions that crisscross, where '[c]onspicuous consumption is not restricted to those who follow the latest fashion' (Brooks, 2015: 82). Sartorial knowledge and engagement are multi-faceted and it is inaccurate to represent communities or groups of people looking and dressing in the same way based on tired sociological categorizations. Cannadine writes that, '[w]e ought to be looking at the ways in which social description becomes politicized' (1998:168). We must acknowledge that the descriptions we have at present of the working class have them as a unified group possessed of one set of ideas (Connolly, 2017: 7). It is claimed that *The Street* produces a 'recognizable evocation of continuing everyday life' (Forrest, 2017:

31). It certainly presents a range of voices and experiences through the content and narratives, but the costuming actively works against the range presented. Everyday practice or lived experience produces subversive modes of appropriation (Sherringham, 2009) and uses clothing that is simply not visible here. Lefebvre explains that spaces of representation are the spaces of images and the symbolic use of objects (in Merryfield, 2006), the pre-selection of which creates a voice which 'speaks' of or for others. Not until more varied (working class) voices are active within the production of representations will there be real understanding or language of the ordinary. As Gledhill & Williams comment '[i]f the model of melodrama aims to render everyday life morally legible it must acknowledge the contested and changing signs of cultural verisimilitude, bringing invisible voices into play' (2000: 236)

Finally, the costumes and bodies referred to here exist within a space that can be understood as both abstract and concrete. The costumed bodies employ commodities (or items of clothing) in exchange for meaning. Lefebvre states that commodities belong to abstraction and that 'the fact that there is a commodity-world must be recognised and accepted. In its way this world tends toward a sort of nothingness through the abstraction of exchange' (2005: 56). An object or a commodity is employed as the result of a choice or decision made by an individual; it then moves into multiple networks of communication as a sign and becomes an abstraction once more. The abstract world of the commodity is, however, often generalised to the point of nothingness by the concrete systems that govern the multiple networks of communication or what Bakhtin terms 'abstract objectivism' or a fixed system of communicating where 'language is a stable normative closed system of signs with self-contained laws irrespective of individual consciousness or creativity' (in Morris, 1994: 25). As a result of this transition into generality the actual 'words' or objects of clothing no longer 'speak' or are heard; rather, they impart concepts drawn from ideology such as good/bad, true/false or pleasant/unpleasant (Morris, 1994: 33).

3.8 Summary

This chapter presents what at first appears to be a simple argument: that costume representations of the working class within *The Street* cannot convey the sartorial diversity of the lived experience of social class, constrained as they are by the language of television. An extended introduction presents the social and cultural contextual backdrop to 2006-2009, the period within which *The Street* was written and produced, and explores the implications of the neoliberal setting that influenced the production. **Section 3.2** presents a brief historical development of class structure within the UK. It looks at shifting means of categorisation and suggests that the mutability of class experiences renders the structures of class as at once constraining and uncontrollable. In **section 3.3** the use of symbolic means of management and control of class relations is explored through the semiotics of clothing within the rigid language of television. Materiality is explored in **section 3.4** through a close reading of episode 6 of series 1, 'Sean & Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006) and episode 1 of series 3, 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009). Materiality refers here to particular fabrics or accessories used to position and communicate the experience of class. The experiential dimension of social class is unpacked further in **section 3.5** where the intangible products of class experience such as shame or insecurity are investigated. This section then discusses how dressing to 'go out' is represented within *The Street*. In **section 3.6** the politics of the classed body are examined through a further close reading of episode 4, series 2, 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007). The bodies of the characters Ian, Gary, Cath and Jan are explored as repositories of meaning in relation to class relationships. The final section summarises the sorts of problems associated with representations of the working class on TV in a cultural and historical period when visible signifiers of class are disappearing. It suggests the familiar Trojan horse of mundanity contains the means of management and control that renders the working class as less-than or lacking value. The lacks expressed through the representations are played out on the individual bodies of fictional characters and subsequently grafted onto whole groups of people. What the audiences see is a damaging, reductive register of their own sartorial experiences, one that erases the idea of sartorial resistance or contestation but that the majority are ambivalent towards. To accept or resign themselves to representations of people like them in this way confirms Chibber's hypothesis of unavoidable adaptations within class structures that reinforce the structures' very existence (2022).

Chapter 4 – Costuming the working class.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter offers extended explanations of what costume is, how it works and what processes are used in constructing costumed characterizations. In so doing, it will explore the tension that exists between the meaning and the meaninglessness of costume. The chapter draws upon the work of film theorists, fashion theorists, linguists, cultural theorists, and sociologists, alongside empirical data gathered from members of *The Street's* production crew and personal recollections of industry developments, to offer a multi-disciplinary account of the conceptual and practical spaces that screen costume occupies.

The chapter begins with a brief explanation of the historical development of costuming across film and TV. **Section 4.2** offers a more pragmatic exploration of how the ethos of costume design relies upon the fluid and transient notion of 'identity'. Identities are distilled into screen characterizations through the use of visual tools and symbols embedded within selected clothing items, which are then required to sit comfortably within the broader image track of the production. **Section 4.3** provides a practical explanation of the processes that are undertaken to mobilize costumes from script to screen. The section concludes by examining the subjective and collaborative nature of screen productions, exploring how costume is positioned as one of a patchwork of distinct yet connected creative processes that must seamlessly interlink, enabling viewers to suspend belief and invest in the narrative and characters displayed on screen. In **section 4.4** the focus moves to the specific problems, restrictions, and challenges of costuming, which employs contemporary, everyday items of clothing repurposed as screen costume. This requires articulating a clothing accent specific to the geographical space that is the setting of the drama, in this case Salford. Such accents might be hard to distinguish for some, barely distinguishable within the 'babble' of discourses that constitute the language of dress, but to others the accent will be distinct and have personal and often emotive connections. **Section 4.5** explains how costume works on the body in relation to the notion of semiotics, and how linguistic conventions both verbal and non-verbal can be employed and mapped onto the language of costume or clothing and the body of the actor. In addition, this section

examines the concept of meaning in relation to language and dress by exploring how viewers and practitioners position themselves in relation to the 'other' of the character portrayal. It suggests that the language of costuming is so inhibited by the language and structures of television – discussed in Chapter 2 – that it can be rendered without meaning. In **section 4.6** the clothed representations associated with the working class are examined, and an explanation of how they are politicized through management and boundary formation is offered. The chapter ends with **section 4.7**, which summarizes the key points.

The use of items of clothing as tools to aid narrative and communicate information about screen characterizations has a long history. In the early years of silent film and throughout the development of the burgeoning Hollywood system there were no screen credits for costume design or designers. Around 1915, Clare West's work for D.W. Griffith was instrumental in shifting the title of the role she performed from 'Head of Wardrobe' to 'Studio Designer', a turning point in the development of what would become Hollywood studio costume departments (Benstock & Ferris, 1994; Desser & Epstein, 2000). These departments grew in importance from the 1920s onwards as film budgets expanded, in part in recognition of the fact that costume was a key ingredient in the success of the 'The Industry of Desire' (Gledhill, 1991; Bruzzi & Church Gibson, 2000). Each studio had its own acclaimed costume designer with their own signature style at its head, who oversaw Fordist production methods encompassing great swathes of craftspeople. This reflected the film production, distribution, and consumption methods of the time (Gaines & Hertzog, 1990).

Costume during this period was a space where designers were given freedom to create or design 'extravagance', facilitated by the convergence of new forms of visual expression and the aesthetic identities of an influx of creative personnel from around the world, flocking to the burgeoning industry in Hollywood in the pre-, inter- and post-war periods. In addition, the development of the 'costume industry' reflected the potential for a crossover of costume into marketable fashion design and consumption (Gaines & Hertzog, 1990; Bruzzi, 1997; Bruzzi & Church Gibson, 2000) at a time when consumer culture was becoming increasingly relevant both economically and culturally.

Simultaneously, the developments in Hollywood can be viewed as a reaction to, or move away from, the more 'realistic' model of costuming that was emerging throughout European cinema. The approaches of American costume designers at this time had high production values that produced either visually engaging extravagant spectacle or

understated yet ‘accomplished’ sartorial statements, both of which sat comfortably within an established and lucrative ‘star system’ that benefitted from the aspiration and identification narratives prevalent in popular film of the time, but which also flattened out the meaning encoded in the designs, thereby rendering many of the costumes viewed as visually engaging but essentially ‘meaningless’.

When Hollywood was reconfigured in the 1960s the decline of the big studios and the star system upon which they were built resulted in vast costume departments, their designers and production teams becoming dispersed or disbanded altogether (Benstock & Ferris, 1994; Turim, 1984). However, the legacy of the binary (understated vs. spectacular) remained and influenced the newly emerging domestic engagement with moving images – television. The familiarity of these looks transitioned seamlessly from cinema to television audiences, but masked the broad strokes employed within their creation. As society progressed and evolved these broad strokes became a very limited shorthand that was often unable to successfully articulate the diversity inherent within contemporary society, again rendering many screen costumes devoid of meaning, or, more dangerously, misrepresenting or stereotyping certain groups. The claim made here regarding the costuming within *The Street* is that it reflects the legacy of meaninglessness outlined above, constrained as it is by the rigidly established and inflexible language of television.

Currently costume ‘houses’, or vast warehouses full of costumes that are a legacy of the studio design departments, still exist in America and Europe but⁴⁸ they are now independently owned and not aligned to, or owned by, production companies. They house collections of clothes that can be hired and reused or refashioned by freelance costume designers, time and time again. Some do⁴⁹ retain costume workshops whereby commissions are produced but equally much of this type of skilled work is outsourced to freelancers. On rare occasions, if it is financially viable and budgets allow, film or television production companies will set up and fully staff temporary costume departments and⁵⁰ workshops, as part of the production set. These will then be disbanded when the production is completed.

⁴⁸ <https://www.angels.co.uk/angels-cornejo/>
<https://www.theacme.com/directory/union-costume-shops>

⁴⁹ <https://www.angels.co.uk/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.lovemoney.com/galleries/53103/the-unreal-cost-of-making-game-of-thrones?page=20>

The trajectory outlined above was mirrored across the development of the small screen but inevitably, on a smaller scale, at least until very recently, with the current renaissance of small screen entertainment facilitated by the shift in distribution platforms and streaming options. For example, Netflix currently produces work from all genres that can challenge the budgets, production techniques, and values of comparable film vehicles.⁵¹

In line with the development of film production, television productions initially asked actors to use their own clothing (this still happens with supporting artists, as discussed below). This evolved slowly into the introduction of costume designers or independent theatrical costumiers sourcing and supplying costumes for the actors. Eventually costume departments and costume stores developed in the bigger television production companies such as the BBC or Thames TV and Granada, each with multiple production facilities and costume collections dotted around the UK (Jackson, 2022). All were able to provide television productions with an 'in-house' costume designer as well as large-scale costume hire and production facilities reminiscent of the costume departments under the Hollywood studio system.

This system endured beyond the decline of the Hollywood studio costume departments. In fact, the decline and restructuring of film production and consumption occurred in parallel with the growth and expansion of television production across the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Eventually however, in line with conservative and neoliberal economics of decentralization, the larger television production companies were eventually themselves restructured⁵² and broken down into smaller, independently owned subsidiaries. One by one, they closed their costume departments, selling off the costumes to the few remaining independent costume hire houses. One of the last examples of this was the sale of the BBC Resources costume store in London (which had already absorbed the departments based in Birmingham and Manchester) to Angels costumiers in 2008.⁵³ At this

⁵¹ For example *'House of Cards'* (2013) ran at \$5 million per episode whilst *'Stranger Things'*, was \$12 million per episode and *'The Crown'* allegedly cost \$13 million per episode <https://screenrant.com/most-expensive-netflix-original-series-how-much-they-cost/>

⁵² <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/dec/19/bbc.television>
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/aug/15/bbc.television>

⁵³ <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/feb/14/bbc.television1>
<https://www.screendaily.com/bbc-costume-collection-sold-to-angels-the-costumiers/4038134.article>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7321453.stm>

point, the BBC no longer employed 'in house' designers – ex BBC designers were already being re-employed by the BBC on a freelance basis – and the sale of its costume collection drew the final line under centralised full employment for designers and costumiers alike, who were now almost exclusively hired as freelancers by a myriad of independent production companies on a project-by-project basis. This context impacted the diversity of work produced, production budgets and what was desired and or achievable in terms of costume design, reflected through this chapter.

4.2 Manufacturing identities

As human beings, we create/perform/manage an individual identity in part through the clothing we wear. This idea underpins the ethos of costume design and is understood by both those who produce and consume costumes (for example Calefato, 2004; Entwistle, 2000; Crane, 2000; De Long, 1998). Moreover, this process needs to be replicated and reproduced by a costume designer on behalf of a screen character (Nadoolman Landis, 2010, 2012). The role of a costume designer is therefore to 'stand in' for the 'self' of the written character by selecting clothing, which, with the actor's performance, communicates the character's identity to the audience. As Theresa Rhymer comments, "the interpretation of the script with the actor with actors was really, really important to me, and that was how we formulated the idea for character from the script" (Appendix F3).

The concept of identity, what constitutes identity, and how dress is an integral part of identity formation is one of the foremost discussion areas within fashion theory (Bruzzi, 1997; Breward, 1995; Brooks, 2015; Cook, 1996; Calefato, 2004). Several problematic areas relevant to this thesis have been identified in relation to this concept, which in one way or another explore the conscious (or not) clothing choices of the individual (Carter, 2003), or rather the tension that exists between individual agency and the structures we exist within our relation to our clothing choices. Agency regarding clothing choice is not experienced equally by all, for multiple and diverse reasons, and therefore the communication of an 'identity' can and often is, compromised or customized in some way. Claire speaks to this in FG4: "working-class kids, even though they won't have as much money, still will have branded clothing; they just will have less of it" (Appendix E1).

Sociological writers such as Skeggs, 2004, 2005, Lawler, 2008, Tyler, 2010, or Casey 2010 have suggested the concept of individual identity or individuality is a political one, particularly in relation to class formations and experiences. Identity formation is understood here as a social process, not a possession that can be claimed or owned. Importantly, the process is managed such that not all are able to access, control or challenge it, rendering what is or can be thought of as 'identity' as inherently compromised. Skeggs argues that the self-constructed identity that leads to individuality or the propertising of the self (2004) exists in the realm of the middle class whilst the working class often have identities or 'pathologies' imposed upon them by others (Lawler, 2005a; Skeggs, 2004; Lefebvre, 2005):

the working class did not write themselves; they told the story as was proscribed and were themselves transcribed. So access to the self is limited by the means and techniques of telling and knowing. (Skeggs, 2004: 124)

This idea can certainly be applied to the costuming of working-class characters on *The Street*: the characters' identities have been imposed, through a production process that reflects established and familiar understandings of working-class dress practices articulated through the language of television. David Blair explains the processes involved:

it is ordinary people but you have to take that to the nth degree of course. You have to consider what they might earn, consider how many people live in the household, consider how that finance is dispersed, all those things and then work out what they should be wearing. (Appendix F1)

More broadly, the imposing of an identity suggests that costuming representing those without the tools to manage, access or challenge the systems of identity formation should reflect the ambivalence or resistance at work (Chibber, 2022), but rarely does.

When the concept of identity is understood as not always communicable or able to equally reflect the variations and gradients of individualities, the fixing of identity that occurs when temporal representations are created becomes further problematized. Identity 'fixing' was explored in relation to gender by Judith Butler, who examined how tension is produced when (gendered) identities become 'fixed', thereby prohibiting or deterring the development or evolution of new identities (1999). This idea can be mapped onto screen costuming, in that when fixed, established or familiar identities transition into the accepted language of costume (and society), they become repeatedly used as reliable or authentic reference points by future designers. Such mythologizing actively prohibits new, fluid, or diverse identities emerging as representations, perpetuating the tired repetition of recognizable character tropes within costuming. Tony commented on this in FG3 when discussing the costume of Tom (Liam Cunningham) in episode 1, series 3 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009): "the bully, the gangster, he looked like a criminal, like Kane Dingle [a character from *Emmerdale*]. You knew he was going to be the thug" (Appendix E3). The idea of prohibiting the development of new identities gains traction when we consider the diversification of class identification in the contemporary context (discussed in Chapter 3).

In addition, the unstable or unreliable nature of identity that necessitates the practice of 'fixing' required within the language of TV has been further examined in relation to what is considered 'authentic' by exploring ideas around performed, transient or improvised identities (Guy, Green & Banim, 2001; Dave, 2006). The tension in this instance exists between what is 'given' and what we 'give off' (Goffman, 1990) at a particular moment, or rather how self-aware we are in relation to our external 'selves' and how accomplished others can be in reading, identifying, or recognizing 'selves' outside their own experience. Boulton & Jerrard refer to this process as 'unconscious selfing', which takes place in a space where imitation, difference or ambivalence might be communicated or recognized: 'fashion interaction lends expression to the unconscious experience of self, both internally as part of a 'selfing' process and externally by creating an identity to present to others' (2000: 301). This process relies upon a shared and equitable level of understanding and fluency in the particular language of dress in use, of both the 'speaker' articulating who they are, and the 'listener' who receives the information.

Finally, there has also been discussion around the concept of identity and how it is in fact a media construct (Turner, 2010) or marketing tool (Bruzzi, 1997) informed by capitalist consumption drivers and that as such, it has become complicit in the creation of a series of simulacrum (Dave, 2006) or fabricated identities. Personality 'types' are developed, used, and re-used to sell products to those who 'identify' as one of the 'types' employed. In the same way that labelling has been recognized by educational sociologists as creating a detrimental self-fulfilling prophecy (Hargreaves, 1975; Waterhouse, 1974), eventually consumers evolve to accept and identify with the products they see and understand as being 'for them', losing the 'self' and becoming more of the 'type' they have been presented with. This has created a situation in which consumers are purchasing for, and as an expression of, an identity not of their own making. This idea can also be mapped onto screen costuming. Viewers may identify small aspects of themselves in the characters on screen, or what they experience, or it will be inferred via context and narrative that the character is 'like them'; subsequently, they begin to adopt the clothing traits that occupy the space of repeated representations. For those tasked with communicating through representations, such repetition is thought to be a communicative necessity for audience recognition to take place and is therefore privileged over diversity or difference, thereby maintaining the simulacrum. However, for television, 'where a significant part of the

pleasure seems to lie in repetition, recognition and familiarity, the assignment of value to difference presents particular problems' (Caughie, 2000: 30).

It seems inevitable, therefore, that the tension produced as a result of such fluidity, instability or transience must render it impossible to capture in fleeting moments, via the few clothing objects that appear within the frame of the small screen, particularly if we think of *The Street* and the limitations of its one-hour format. Inevitably, there will be 'missing' information at the margins of representations. It is within this absent space that something else is being captured and communicated (as discussed in Chapter 3).

4.3 Process and subjective creation

This section begins by exploring the practice or processes of costuming in a pragmatic, practical way, before moving on to the notion of creative subjectivity. Broadly speaking, the discourse of screen costume is part of the overall discourse of the screen, large or small (Calefato, 2004). As discussed, costuming is a visual tool for the creation, construction, and identification of character or a fictional 'identity' (Brownie, 2014; Calefato, 2004; Brooker & Jermyn, 2003). David Blair phrases this as "you want an actor to become a character via the clothes [...] the clothes should belong utterly to the character' (Appendix F1).

Costume also acts as a tool in the development of narrative across fictional time and space, for example if clothing becomes worn or damaged as part of narrative progression or if the narrative moves across different periods of historical time. Costuming is also used in relation to character development, perhaps to display a character's evolution, a change in situation or mood, as demonstrated in Danielle's comment on the character of Yvonne: "her character got a lot stronger, and she wore brighter clothes" (Appendix E1). It performs a key supporting role (Warner, 2014), alongside narrative and additional elements of the mise-en-scène such as location, props, setting, lighting, and music, providing an intertextual (Pidduck, 2004) entry point for the producers of the text to engage the viewer and (attempt to) communicate intended meaning. This is what David Blair is referring to when he comments,

when you get the costume designer and you are looking at the house (location) and you are actually saying, that floor is gonna stay, the walls will be brought down a little bit in colour, you are actually presenting all these options. (Appendix F1)

The intended meaning is not necessarily communicated through a clear allegiance with what the characters say – the dialogue – but how the characters look (Caughie, 2000).

Costume inevitably reflects evolution in codes of dress both historical and in a contemporary setting with reference to changing ‘fashions’ (Breward, 1995). This can be explicit, if the production has a historical setting, or implicit if the setting is contemporary. Importantly, regardless of the temporal parameters of the production, the costuming often reflects contemporary ideas about the subject material and aesthetics at the time of the production (Cartmell and Whelehan, 1999). For example, Jane Austen’s *Pride & Prejudice* has been adapted for both the large and small screen many times. Within most adaptations, the production is set in the early part of the nineteenth century, but the aesthetics and focus or mood of the productions vary dramatically depending on the date of the production, the conventions at play at the time and the intent of the production in relation to those conventions. The basic ethos of costuming is to serve the narrative so that the audience are able to collude in the ‘collapse’ of realism (see Chapter 2) and look through the actor to the character beyond (Brownie, 2014). Theresa Rhymer refers to her successes here:

my greatest success was somebody saying to me, “but I thought that was their own clothes. I thought that was a real person” or not realising it’s a costume and it’s something that you spend a lot of time [on]. (Appendix F3)

Costume theorists have written extensively about when and how this process is or can be interrupted or disrupted: via inappropriate costuming (Benstock & Ferris, 1994), unrealistic costuming (Bruzzi, 1997), costume that distracts (Gaines & Herzog, 1990), is excessive (Moseley, 2005) or does not serve the narrative (Jeffers MacDonald, 2010).

There are exceptions, such as *Sex & The City* (1998-2022, Darren Star) where the costuming is seen as the fifth key character (Bruzzi & Church-Gibson, 2004), but for the vast majority of television productions, the complex process of costuming remains unacknowledged by the viewer. The costumes must be rendered ‘invisible’ or become lost in plain sight (Nadoolman Landis, 2003) for the collapse to be a success.; this was certainly how I worked when creating costumes. Costumes must simultaneously meet with audience expectations (Calefato, 2004) and relate to what they already know (De Long, 1998) whilst

also delivering new information via an established (and problematic) system of re-use and recognition (Fisk & Hartley, 2003; Gauntlett & Hill, 1999) that relies upon established representations that can and do reinforce or fix reductive stereotypes.

Viewers have been trained to recognize key elements of clothing or costumed communication, even if this falls outside our own realms of experience. This may be something very obvious such as military or civil uniform, or more subtle. For example, the idea that danger or successful criminality will be well-dressed, often in an extravagant manner (Bruzzi, 1997) or wearing black. We see examples of this from Bela Logosi's *Dracula* (1931, dir. Todd Browning, David Freund) through Robert De Niro's Al Capone in *The Untouchables* (1987, dir. Brian De Palma) and Hayden Christensen/David Prowse's Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* series (1977, 2005 George Lucas) to Tom Millar in *The Street* (episode 1 of series 3, 'Smoke'). There is evidence of audience recognition of this trope in the focus groups, when Jamie comments on Tom Millar's black leather jacket in FG6, "[t]hey always put the crim in leather" (Appendix E3).

Recognizable signifiers such as these were employed extensively throughout the development of classic Hollywood and thus continue to be employed throughout small screen costuming where representations are naturalized through familiarity and acceptable difference (Caughie, 2000; Baert, 1994) in a very conscious way to ensure the economic longevity of the industry. As Caughie states,

a particular balance of repetition and difference which allowed enough repetition to guarantee that the experience that the audience got was what it had paid to see [...] and enough difference to guarantee that you would get it this time as you had never got it before. (2000: 126).

This industrial approach to costume communication was grafted onto small screen production methods and is still visible today, so that productions such as *The Street* occupy the same 'costume space' as classic Hollywood. Despite television's reach and public service remit, the costumed elements of contemporary television drama situated in the context of working-class experience often continue to be rendered 'meaningless' as they draw on systems of visual representation that do not reflect the diversity inherent within contemporary working class lived experience (as discussed in Chapter 3).

4.3.1 What do costume practitioners do?

Broadly speaking the methods used for costuming within contemporary drama share an approach across both cinema and TV (Ashby& Higson, 2000). Barbara Kidd outlines the beginnings of the costume process:

obviously, one will talk to the director, hopefully that is one of the first things you do, producers sometimes get involved but hopefully not, you talk to the production designer because the production designer always starts much earlier than the costume designer. (Appendix F2)

After producing a detailed script breakdown and meeting the heads of various on-set creative departments such as lighting, set design, sound and cinematography, a 'wardrobe' of clothing items is gathered for each key character. The items required can be bought, made, or hired. Final selections are identified ideally (though not always) after a series of fittings with the actor and in consultation with the director where decisions around fit, and patina are made and actioned. Barbara Kidd outlines this as follows:

I would perhaps meet the actor at the costumiers, we try some different things on, things that work, things that don't work and from that we learn the beginning of the direction that one is going to take. You take photographs, although that is much more of a recent thing, and then let the director see the photographs, which I hate. (Appendix F2)

Each item selected through this process will form part of a costume assigned to a scene, story day or event and will be subject to detailed labelling regarding its use. The label will identify the scene and whether the shot is a longshot or closeup and will often contain an image of the costume being worn and how it has been accessorized or styled for continuity purposes. Alongside the individual costumes for the key artists, a 'running wardrobe' of stock items will be collated; these may be bought or hired or may be part of the designers own 'store' of costumes, and will be used to dress the supporting artists. Theresa Rhymer explains the uses of her own personal stock of items:

I have quite a substantial stock that's my own stock, stuff that's, you know, even basics like thermals, belts, bras. You'd be amazed how many people never wear the right size bra or any bra at all. (Appendix F3)

Barbara Kidd also comments on how she has accumulated her own 'stock':

I keep a stock of modern clothes that I've accumulated, things like jeans. Strangely my most useful garments have been men's overalls, that I have swapped or something. What I do is I see someone working in a garage and I go up to them and say, "if I buy you some new overalls can I have yours?" and so I have about six or 8 of these things and they have travelled the world with me. (Appendix F2)

Any specific uniforms required by the narrative for scenes in a hospital, for example (such as series 1, episode 1 '*The Accident*' (McGovern, 2006) or the postal worker uniforms for series 2, episode 5 '*The Letter*' (Nutter, 2007)) also need to be sourced. The costume designer will also keep a store of practical clothing items for use on set but off camera, such as warm coats for the artists to wear when they are waiting to shoot outside. The final 'looks' are produced through an ethos whereby, for the vast majority of productions, the priority is the articulation of, and a commitment to, the identity of the 'character'. As Lee Ingleby confirms, "[c]ostume can be transformative on [the] basis of character" (Appendix F4). The creative costume 'work' undertaken is rendered invisible, as already discussed, and good costume design is understood by most designers as costume design that is lost in plain sight (Nadoolman Landis, 2003, Warner, 2014 Brownie, 2014).

However, clearly this is not always what is required; sometimes 'excessive' costume is requested to add to the visual spectacle, such as Netflix's *Sex Education* (Nunn, 2019), the BBC's *Killing Eve* (Waller-Bridge, 2018-2022) or HBO's *Euphoria* (Levinson, 2019). Additionally, costume designers such as Sandy Powell are often employed as much for their recognizable design style as for their commitment to characterization.⁵⁴ Powell is a celebrity in her own right, so her design style is often employed to add a layer of value to a production, although this can sometimes work against the narrative and/or the construction of realism. How the costume looks evolve depends on the type of production, who is producing the project, who is directing, who the costume designer is and how much money is in the costume budget (Musgrave, 2003; Warner, 2014). Costume departments and designers have been and continue to be undervalued and underfunded and this is

⁵⁴ <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/fashion-news/a42772701/costume-designer-sandy-powell-bafta-fellowship/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/costume-and-culture/2022/apr/13/va-acquires-sandy-powell-autograph-suit-signed-by-stars>

particularly prevalent when designing with contemporary clothing, which is often rejected as design. Both large and small costume budgets present their own unique set of challenges to costuming that employs contemporary clothing, such as that in *The Street*.⁵⁵ Within this context, costume is produced and able to communicate information about character and narrative because it occupies the site where a series of complex and connected yet distinct actions converge. The creative actions begin when key members of the production crew, including the costume department, meet and begin to distil the babble of voices at play until they successfully agree how they will articulate the singular vision of the director. David Blair stresses the importance of this: “it’s important that there is a through-line of contact between the production designer and the costume designer. I mean a trio or a triangle: DOP, costume designer and so on. They have to work in unison” (Appendix F1). The director’s vision is inevitably produced within changing contexts (Cook, 1996): economic, social, cultural, or political. These are the contexts of both the production and the wider contexts the production sits within. The contexts of the production refer to the intention of the piece (never neutral): is it purely entertaining, challenging, or both? According to Barbara Kidd the context of productions has shifted recently:

I’m not saying that things with a political message don’t happen now, but things are very different. It is odd how things have become so sanitised and more, not careful, I can’t explain. But social realism isn’t heard of now, whereas several years ago it was important. (Appendix F2)

This context also covers the budget, which will provide very clear boundaries for what is marked out as important and considered achievable. Finally, what platform will the production be accessed through - a streaming platform or traditional broadcast media channels? Will it be aired pre- or post-watershed? What viewing certificate will be allocated? What film stock will be used (this will affect pattern and texture choices)? And so on. Lee Ingleby comments that, “[s]ome costumes might need a camera test to make sure it looks good on camera. Certain patterns can strobe or look odd on some lenses, or if the lighting changes the appearance” (Appendix F4).

⁵⁵ The American Costume Designers Guild is still actively seeking pay equality for costume practitioners and departments (#nakedwithoutus) whilst high-profile designers such as the 2022 Oscar winner Jenny Bevan use their public platform to continue to highlight the inequality (Chun, 2022).

The wider contexts are indicative of the political, social, and cultural concerns of the period in which the text is produced. Texts produced at moments of change or praxis very often exhibit a responsive shift in form (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001) despite the overall stability of the identity of TV drama (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) discussed in Chapter 2. Examples might include the handheld camera work of *NYPD Blue* (1993, dir. Gregory Hoblit) that commented on the complexity and bureaucracy of early '90s American policing and reflected the troubled individuals tasked with reducing crime in this context. We might also consider the direct address of *Fleabag* (2016, dir. Tom Kirkby) that speaks to feminist debates of the era around ownership of the interior and flawed sense of self. Finally, there is excessive, or over 'stylization' such as seen in *Peaky Blinders* (2013, dir. Otto Bathurst, Tom Harper) that can be seen as a reflection of contemporary cultures focusing on superficially prescribed appearances and consumption practices. Not all these examples relate explicitly to costume practices but there is no doubt that the change in style and address will affect the approach to costume. The informal camerawork in *NYPD Blue* would not have worked with smart, pressed clothing, for example, whilst the gender politics evident through the address employed on '*Fleabag*' would not have held its resonance if Waller-Bridge's costumes had been more obviously sexual or revealing.

Once a single vision and intention is identified and agreed upon, members of the production departments are tasked with researching the subject material to produce the respective visual elements that must eventually align and integrate seamlessly into the overall discourse of the image track (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) outlined by the director. For shooting to commence and the agreed upon singular vision to materialize, locations will be scouted, costumes will be designed and fitted, and sets will be built and furnished. For productions with a historical setting, Amy Sargeant discusses how designers can 'consult museum collections, portraits, inventories, sumptuary regulations, catalogues and journals as well as secondary scholarship' (in Ashby & Higson, 2000: 311). However, productions set in the contemporary everyday require a different set of skills. The contemporary world is complex and multi-faceted, occupied by the transient and unstable notion of identity - particularly class identity as discussed in Chapter 3. Reproducing the contemporary in the form of costuming requires equal parts technical clothing knowledge, logistical adaptability, an understanding of cultural and social history, and psychological or analytic skills, as La Motte comments, 'areas that had to do more with psychology, timing, and ego than with

costumes' (2001: xxi). Both Barbara Kidd and Teresa Rhymer discussed their research methods on *The Street*. It is worth here quoting Kidd's explanation at length:

I try to spend some time in whatever area we are filming in. On this I did go round with David (Blair) and the production designer [...] and looked at locations. So, we went around and I did see quite a few of the locations we were going to be filming in. I hope a good costume designer will take note of people anyway, sitting on the bus, you know, wherever. So yes, you sort of immerse yourself or try to immerse yourself a little bit in the society. For example, we filmed in pubs and I certainly went to the different pubs beforehand and talked to the people that would be in the film because they used local people quite a lot. (Appendix F2)

The research scouting trips were undertaken in working men's clubs and pubs to observe the activities, actions, and dress of people who lived and worked in the area of Manchester being represented in the drama, to recreate the 'identities' of similar characters in the script. The costume designer from series 2, Theresa Rhymer, also commented that she spent a lot of time sitting in cafés observing locals as research (Appendix F3). This thesis argues that the research trips to the working man's club produced a narrow snapshot of the everyday or lived experience of a small sample or group of individuals who frequent working men's clubs in Manchester and therefore the production team would only ever have been able to represent *some* of the dress of those who *use* working men's clubs. Speaking to the subjective creation involved (dealt with in more detail below), Rhymer's version of the research which occurred in cafés – we can presume a more salubrious setting than a working man's club – was not really accepted as authentic. Rather, the notion of a sense of 'cosmopolitanism' could or would not be afforded to the residents of the narratives as, it is argued here, that would work against the established language of television realism explored in Chapter 2.

The method of research outlined above de-contextualizes the lived experience of those who were observed and omits those that live in the same location but do not frequent local social spaces – the working man's club, for example. The practice and implications of this form of class/dress voyeurism is where perception or observation collides with pre-conception (Ashby & Higson, 2000) or a combination of knowledge, experience and understanding. A key argument here is that the ideas produced from a collision such as this form the basis of a particular subject 'expertise' (Lawler, 2005a) that is attributed to the

producers of the text and then subsequently used as a reference point for further projects, so all future projects based in the north of England may well refer to the assumed pervasive practice of attending working men's clubs as social entertainment and dress characters inhabiting this space in the same way as the small sample researched and used in *The Street*.

Ascribed non-neutral expertise such as this is often held by those without direct lived experience of what is being represented and can be conceptualized as an example of De Certeau's 'logic of practice' (1984). Here, the collision of perception and pre-conception is presented through the illusion of creativity and objective choice. The creative illusion exists and operates within a structure that organizes discontinuities through employing implicit principles and explicit rules. Here, the implicit principles might be the themes of the production, the beliefs of the designer/director or the way working class dress practices are reproduced and understood within the language of TV drama; and explicit rules refer to the practicalities of television production such as budget or reliance on the evocation of realism. The combination of rules and principles expressed via the intersection of perception and preconception produces an assumed reality communicated through the language of television representation, which is seen or 'read' as the interpretation of the real: 'a constructed model (the structure) (moves) to an assumed reality, and from the latter to an interpretation of *observed* facts' (De Certeau, 1984: 58). That is, costumed representations produced through subjective creative practices are understood as accurate depictions.

Expertise that is generated through comparable lived experience and expressed through authentic perception without pre-conception may or may not be accepted or acknowledged across the collaborative process and as a result can be missing from the resulting singular vision. Again, there is evidence of this occurring with series 2 of *The Street* when Theresa Rhymer became costume designer. Rhymer identifies quite vehemently as working class herself ("I'm from a working-class background. I'm from the docks of South Wales" Appendix F3) and had carried out a different kind of research for the project, as mentioned above. This inevitably produced different ideas about the characters than those of the director. David Blair speaks to this when he comments,

I think strangely enough on *The Street* we had a bit of an issue because Barbara did not do the second series and I only came in for two [episodes] that year because I was doing something else, and I was a bit disappointed [...] not particularly my episodes because I had control over that [...] but I was really disappointed in, say, for

instance, Timothy Spall suddenly wearing a shirt and tie, having gone through this whole process of having trackies. (Appendix F1)

Differing opinions such as this speak directly to the mutable notion of costume authenticity or 'truth' discussed earlier. Here, Blair and Rhymer are each bringing their own understandings to the clothed characterizations and as such are only defining themselves through the process.

Once research has been undertaken, the ideas it produces are then further distilled through multiple meanings and possibilities generated through the production process, wherein some features of the text are given more meaning and visibility (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) than others. As Rhymer comments, "production design and locations do have a lot [...] of weight [...] where something is set seems to be much more important than what people are wearing and what they look like" (Appendix F3). When decisions about what appears in the final frame or edit are made, what is omitted becomes as important as what is included, and what is represented via small costume detailing often evolves to mean more than the real it represents (Hall, 1997; Gladwell, 2000; Nadoolman Landis, 2003; Savage, 2015). The final decisions produce a meaning that collides with the 'knowledge/s' held by contemporary audiences and the subsequent two-sided act of communication therefore takes on even more importance (Caughie, 2000).

Once initial ideas and designs have been produced, the costume designer works with the actors. Through a further process of collaboration, consultation, and numerous fittings, character wardrobes are constructed, and outfits are assigned to key moments within the narrative. Ingleby refers to his own process:

[c]haracter development starts there. Doing the research and the background story helps with that, discussing with the director and costume and make up designers is very important to get an 'outside eye'. And with all that you can come to the right choice of costume to get across the true character. (Appendix F4)

The clothing items chosen as costume must work with (or intentionally against) the body of the actor (see Chapter 3 for discussion of how particular bodies have been (and still are) pathologized within the discourses around the working class, focusing on the character of Ian Hanley).

An analysis here of key scenes within episode 4 of series 2 *'Taxi'* (Boulter, 2007) will build on the discussion in Chapter 3 to further examine the embodied costumes of fictional sisters Cath Hanley and Jan Parr. The intention is to explore the relationship between the intent of the costume design – driven by the director/actor/costume designer collaboration highlighted above, and audience interpretations. The scene explored here is set in the local working men's club that features so heavily and is a special 'bon voyage' celebration for the family to mark the point where Jan's son Gary is leaving to join the Navy. In this scene, Cath wears a tight, red, jersey, low-cut, cross-front top that reveals a black bra underneath, with a tight black pencil skirt. This combination suggests a sexualized femininity that is evident through the costuming and the way the clothes fit the body of the actor. The colour, fit and stylistic detail of the clothing communicates excess, danger and a 'loose' morality; this is intentionally ironic as it is Jan who lies and deceives her family and the law and is complicit in her nephew being blamed for the violent attack for which her own son is responsible. This is assumed to be a challenge by the writers and production teams to the stereotypes and misconceptions around classed femininities, but it actually reinforces these misconceptions by using such familiar tropes in the first place.

Cath's very visible and sexualized femininity is class-based. The evident aesthetic labour of how she appears at the event makes visible the labour of appearance (Skeggs, 2004). Attention to the external (as opposed to developing the mind) is a criticism both placed on and expected of women and suggests deviance and a lack of management and control of the body. As Skeggs comments that '[t]hose who represent the limit to the use of space and experience are always read through classifications systems based on visibility, clothes, body (shape, size, walk) and language' (2004: 162). The limit alluded to here is the working-class woman's body, at the limit or breaching the limit of its productivity, sexuality, or availability, and also at the physical limit of the clothes it inhabits, literally bursting forth through seams, fabric and design. As before, Theresa Rhymer comments that,

Lorraine had a very strong idea of how she wanted to look anyway, and we developed together how we quite liked her showing a lot of flesh even though she wasn't a young woman [and] she's not conventionally attractive. (Appendix F3)

The positive collaboration between Rhymer and Lorraine Ashbourne is clear in this comment, and therefore the construction of Cath's costume can be understood as an

assimilation of both women's subjective positioning. Rhymer goes on to say that "everything was quite, was very fitted and Lorraine is a size 6. She's very, very thin and everything being really fitted made her look more vulnerable" (Appendix F3). The interpretation of the tightness of Cath's clothing presented above does not refer to vulnerability but rather speaks to an overt form of sexuality.

Adrian from FG2 refers to the expectations he had about the way the two women would behave in the aftermath of the attack, based on the presumptions he made as a result of the way the two women are dressed. He says, "[i]f you had just been looking at them as physical characters without also following the storyline, of the two you would have guessed that the other mum would have done it" (Appendix E2). Rob from FG5 comments in reference to Cath, "one was a bit more tarty-looking" (Appendix E2). Clearly there is a disconnect here between the intent of the actor/designer, despite the research, preparation and consideration and the viewer interpretations. This might suggest that the presumed expertise of those involved in the production may be subject to question or that the creative licence taken by the performers loses something in translation. Rhymer comments that. "I think a lot of actors feel they can use it as a springboard to project something about a character that's come from a different place for them" (Appendix F3). It might also suggest that the interpretations of those that viewed the text are not only imbued with their own subjective understanding but also provide evidence of the pervasive form of hegemonic communication in relation to the intersection of class and gender. Have we as interpreters interpreted the character of Cath in this way because this is how the language of TV has trained us to read bodies like hers? If so, is this an example of the pervasive nature of the language of TV and its ability to disrupt the intention of creative production.

The body of the actress Gina McKee (Jan) and the way she holds and moves her frame act in contrast to that of Lorraine Ashbourne (Cath). Jan's body is concealed and restrained through rounded shoulders and a slightly hunched frame. Within Gledhill & Williams's exploration of melodrama, the use of the body to articulate social representativeness is key (2000: 238). Teresa Rhymer comments that,

Gina's character potentially is more aspirational, more complex, she is more interested in the finer things of life. Really, you know, she shopped in Next, which to that type of woman was a more aspirational store rather than shopping in Primark,

you know. We went to Next, and we bought a lot of the clothes there and how they fitted her and not showing as much flesh. (Appendix F3)

This form of costuming and management of the body is no accident. The costuming here slips easily into the hegemonic conventions and as such the intention of the designer/actor and the audience are aligned. It is used to convey the aspiration Jan has to move away from her class position and female bodies seen as typical of that position, through the career development of her son. She is marked as very clearly different from Cath: '[b]odies, gestures, looks and voice perform affective scenarios in which aesthetic involves moral and social drama' (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 238). As Bill commented in FG2, "[y]ou could tell that she spent a lot more money on the clothes she was wearing in comparison with her sisters and she certainly appeared to be more aspirational" (Appendix E2).

Of course, as the narrative unfolds, and Jan is revealed as mercenary and heartless in her determination to have her nephew take the blame for her son's violent actions, the visual difference evolves into a moral difference. The visual signifiers of the clothes she wears must make her possible transition from working-class to lower-middle-class a believable possibility for the viewers. This leaves less room for different ideas about what she would look like – meaning becomes flattened. The system of dress (Kawamura, 2011) at work here that uses items of everyday clothing as costume on the bodies of actors can be expressed through Lefebvre's explanation of the fictitious/real, evidenced in contemporary costuming whereby costume is naturalised as clothing (Baert, 1994). Lefebvre states,

the fictitious-real in its ambiguity and duality, extend from simple products to major incarnations of positive knowledge, possessions and power, from humble babbling brain activity, to the empire of signs and the information with which this empire ends. (2005: 163)

The costumes produced through this tension are the product of plural collaborative 'moments' (Lefebvre, 2005) that exist in a particular space and time for a particular purpose. These moments have the potential to disrupt hegemonic principles, but they rarely do. They are more often created moments that exist as examples of a privileged partial reality (Merryfield, 2006). Here the hand of the creator/s produces a moment where the interior drama of human psychology meets external social conditions (Caughie, 2000). The resulting fiction becomes a form of positive knowledge when worn on the actor's body and is then

intentionally rendered invisible once more as the clothing employed becomes absorbed into the system of language and signs employed in the creation of costuming. The clothing eventually selected exists on a border zone of interiority: the actor, the costume designer and the character portrayed. In many instances the former is chosen because of its relationship or similarity to the latter, but this is not always the case. The actor/character body is the vehicle of communication for the character 'identity' and the clothing that is employed as costume is used to provide the necessary clues to the character identity (and narrative). Costume clues only begin to become fully meaningful when on the body.

Often, the communication outlined above is compromised when the border between character and actor becomes blurred. Actors are often employed because they (or others) identify them with the sort of character they are portraying: when the assimilation of actor into character occurs like this, the self/character distinction can become problematic and this has repercussions for the designer charged with costuming. In the process of clothing and re-clothing or creating/recreating the self/character (Brownie, 2014) an actor may be averse to compromising their 'screen brand' or future work by wearing items of clothing they do not 'like', do not feel comfortable in, or that display their body in a negative light. As Kidd comments, "some actors or actresses [...] want to look slim" (Appendix F2). In addition, as mentioned, sometimes costume items are 'shopped' for or created with one eye on the economic potential or life of the object after the production wraps. This might be the actor wanting to keep an item; or a designer recognizing its potential for future use and therefore adding it to their own working collections; or it may well be sold on to costume houses. In such instances the visual conventions of clothing (Hollander, 1993) lose traction and the concept of costume authenticity is further compromised (Cartmell & Whelehan, 1999; Cook, 1996; La Motte, 2001; Murphy, 2001; Wilson, 2003).

Finally, there are also occasions when very practical issues impact on the costuming of productions. These might be as stark as budget restrictions, the availability (or not) of items to buy or hire, or the restrictions imposed when an item needs to be made and reproduced for a specific purpose (e.g. in multiples that are of differing condition to reflect an impact on the garment of some sort, such as if a shirt is torn in a fight and the fight scene is being filmed before the pre-fight action; multiples of size for actors, their stand ins and stunt doubles). Ingleby refers here to these points: "[i]n most contemporary productions

and as was in this case the clothes are usually bought from the high street stores. Multiple copies are purchased in case they get damaged, or a stunt double may need a set” (Appendix F4). The final clothed characterizations viewed on the body of an actor on screen will therefore always be problematic. They emerge through creative collaboration, become infused with contextual information, are informed by the problematic research process, adjusted to work on a particular body and adapted in response to practical necessity. To limit the number of possibilities such factors will produce, production teams have adopted a system whereby they use and re-use recurrent tropes and draw upon previous encounters (Partington, 2014) to ‘essentialize’ notions of character and personality (Johnson, 1979). Every new characterization comes to mean something only in response to the characterizations that have preceded it – this is how costume works. Thus, clothed, embodied characterizations often communicate by employing stereotypes that are produced through character/body shorthand or ‘typing’ (Murphy, 2001). The result is often manufactured vagueness that is understood as a requirement for maximum communicative reach (Goffman, 1990). This approach produces an ‘invocation of resemblance but at the same time the disappearance of objects in their representation’ (Baudrillard, 1994a: 45), where each new version of a character simulacrum is built on the foundations of previous character simulacra, which are themselves based on limited facts and produced through complex processes. This further erases the distinction between signified and signifier or form and content where costumes become separated from the nature of their production. The consequence is that the ‘real’ of a character’s clothed identity becomes the hyper-real (Baudrillard, 1998). The space for different interpretations has become very narrow to ensure successful communication of controlled meaning. We can certainly see evidence of that in the production of *The Street* in the tension between the costumes in series 1 and 2. Costume ‘works’ by maintaining the hyper-real and reducing the possibilities for interpretation by managing entrenched and limited perceptions of audience expectations, fantasies, and knowledge (Benstock & Ferris, 1994). It is suggested here that, despite the motivations and intentions of all the production crew interviewed for this research, including the costume designers, the limited range of clothing worn by the characters in *The Street*, which is ultimately determined by the language of television, compromised the range of sartorial diversity that could be presented in the working-class characterizations.

4.3.2 Subjective Creation

Here, I explore how subjectivity is woven into the creative process, and how creative subjectivities must inevitably influence meaning-production. The creative subjectivities under examination are often owned by those who are members of the creative classes, a classification that does not often intersect with those being represented. Kidd comments,

now there is this thing again where working class actors are not coming through the system again because they can't afford to. And that is my whole beef with Mike Leigh, because of course, he has middle-class actors pretending to be working class. (Appendix F2)

The consequence is the creation of accepted and hegemonic practices of representation that frequently remain unchallenged. Such practices often openly exclude, despite the intention of the creative practitioners. What is therefore being questioned here is whether subjective creative processes can ever be objective (Kawamaura, 2011) and what the consequences of these limitations might be. As John Berger (1972) famously commented, what we see and what we 'know' are two very different things. Suffice it to say here that how we see is affected by our own knowledge-creating experiences, the systems in which we choose to 'believe' and situate those experiences and ultimately, the 'knowledge' they produce. Further, as Efrat Tseelon states, what we understand our knowledge to be does not 'originate inside the private space of the person, but [is] created by the language in which [it] is couched, and [is] therefore [a] shared meaning, part of a public and collective reality' (2001: 440). We can therefore only talk about and name what we know within the languages we understand and have access to. It is suggested, then, that we can only 'truly' reproduce or represent that which we have knowledge or experience of. This is of course untenable in relation to the production of screen representations. Equally, directors, writers and actors often want to produce something 'more' than a straightforward re-presentation, something that encompasses their own creative responses to a situation or character portrayal or offers a space for audience interpretation, as already mentioned. The difficulty occurs when creative subjectivities are understood as 'truth' and the representations they produce become grafted onto the everyday and pathologized, generating an accepted and problematic discourse that has wider social and cultural implications for those that find

themselves mis-represented, such as victims (and perpetrators) of domestic abuse, as discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to *The Street* episode 6 of series 1, 'Sean & Yvonne'.

It is important to recognize, acknowledge, and challenge where appropriate, the aesthetic discourse the production team and the costume designer have employed. Representations are powerful cultural signifiers after all, not purely creative outputs. The identity, position and autobiography or background of the production team and the costume designer produces an aesthetic discourse (Warner, 2014; Caughie, 2000; Gaines & Hertzog, 1990; Kawamaura, 2011), creating a subject position (Hall, 1997; Hammersley, 1993) from which the stories or characters are produced, created or 'poached' and made to 'mean' (DeCerteau, 1984; Gledhill & Williams, 2000; Sherringham, 2009) via visual communication with the audience. If, as Kawamaura explains, only a very small portion of reality can ever be observed at any one time (2011), then what has been observed by producers and what they choose to present for others to observe becomes very powerful. In addition, if the perception required to create representations is rarely self-reflexive (Gledhill & Williams, 2000) then the creative significance and value given to the representations unavoidably becomes the site of a cross-cultural struggle over the subjectivity of creation (Pidduck, 2004). It is suggested here that the non-neutral 'expertise' (Lawler, 2005b; Savage, 2015) of the creative practitioners, which often claims to employ the detached clarity (Charlesworth, 2000) of objectivity, produces products that must inevitably, can only, must only, be read through the lens of those producing the text, throwing into question the very systems of communication on which screen costuming is based.

What, though, of creativity, and the right to creative practice in the production of representations? Brouillette (2009) outlines two broad categories of creative labour that are useful here. On the one hand, she draws upon the ideas of Richard Florida's 'creative class' who are born innovators, naturally pre-disposed to change or improve that which already exists. On the other hand, Brouillette refers to the autonomists who suggest that creative expression produced through a resistant subjectivity is a source of liberation from capitalism. This research suggests that the case study of *The Street* occupies both realms simultaneously via both the intent and the final product. The writers and directors of *The Street* might possibly see themselves in this category, as David Blair's comment on his and McGovern's collaboration on the BBC production *Common* (2014) suggests:

we did a thing called *Common* about the joint enterprise doctrine and it was discussed in Parliament, it was discussed in the House of Lords about how unjust this law is. I'm not saying every drama has to do that but there should be scope for some to be like that. (Appendix F1)

The practitioners here were drawn from a 'creative class' whereby their intent was to produce representations of ordinary lives that improved upon what was already available for consumption. The main writer and director are known for their shared political stance, which often positions them in opposition to capitalist systems; therefore, they can be understood as exhibiting 'resistant subjectivities'.

Interestingly, for Brouillette, real creativity 'cannot survive the transformation into 'product' or 'object', it cannot be accessed by others outside a singular moment of its own expression interpreted as its own purpose' (2009: 145). So, the creativity embedded within writing, directing, acting, and costuming for the small screen inevitably shifts from the singular moment of creativity at the point of inception to something different in the final product. The intention of writers, directors and costume designers on the production was to celebrate the extraordinary lives and stories of the characters, whilst simultaneously highlighting and challenging the situations and systems those characters found themselves living in, thus attempting to change or challenge a creative subjectivity that questions social hierarchies and capitalist systems and structures. However, the intentions outlined were distilled through the point where the subjectivities of the creators, the language of clothing and the language of television converge, and it is here that the creative moment of a resistant subjectivity loses the traction held within the singular moments of expression and becomes a cultural product that must sit within a hegemonic discourse.

Brouillette further claims that to author something is to 'distort or deflect the social imaginary that is produced in the forms of life' (2009: 145). It would appear therefore that the work of creation or authoring (writing, directing), or costuming cannot be divorced from the subjectivities that produce it, nor should it be expected to be. Creativity is located in the individual and reflects all aspects of culture the individual consumes prior to creating: it cannot be any other way. Despite creative intentions, those inflections, subjectivities and influences must be reconfigured through the language used to communicate, in this case the cross-section between the language of clothes and the language of television. The choices made by the creatives referred to are in response to the inner speech of subjective

experience and the 'reported' speech of society, selected, agreed upon and crystallized into a language (Morris, 1994). Bakhtin comments that '[a] word in the mouth of a particular person is product of the living interaction of social forces' (in Morris, 1994: 58). The 'word' here is an item of clothing and it is used within the social force that is the language of costume or clothing. Bakhtin also claims that it is impossible for subjective experience or inner speech to survive alone within space of the objective or outer speech as there needs to be an element of agreement in order for communication to work: '[i]n each speech act subjective experience perishes in the objective fact of the enunciated word utterance' (in Morris, 1994). This suggests that the language of costume design is in part a subjective understanding of the 'other' in relation to the self and in part the use of a 'best fit' sign that needs to be understood within a common language. Neither of these are avoidable but equally neither can be viewed as neutral: there is a pervasive danger here and this needs to be acknowledged. As Winson comments, '[s]o much goes unsaid about working class life that it's easy for prejudice to fill the silences or gaps' (in Connolly, 2017: 132).

The character clothing is conceived here as both abstract and concrete as it draws upon both lived experience and perception. As Bakhtin comments, '[t]he absolute lived and the abstract conceived are two instances in one world, the same reality, two instances within one world' (in Morris, 1994: 134). The relationship between lived spaces and those conceived in the mind is not stable. Within the abstract space of creativity, ideologies are created and maintained via the repeated dialogue between the space and its user. As a result, the abstract space of creativity presupposes acceptance through consistent repetition: '[w]ithin abstract space are subtle ideological and political machinations which maintain a perpetual dialogue between its spaces and its users' prompting compliance. The quasi-legal authority of abstract space imposes reciprocity and commonality of use' (Merryfield, 2006: 112). To conceive within the creative space and create abstract representations in this way must inevitably limit the scope of what can be articulated to that which has been a product of the perception of those tasked with creating.

The resulting representations are embodied in the author-work-audience relationship, which is itself socially authored. Despite the intent of those behind *The Street* – a challenging portrayal of the complexities, struggles and tragedies of everyday life – the creativity essential to produce the work must come face to face with the language in which

the work will be framed as it transitions from creative expression to a cultural product that subsequently becomes a part of the systems of capital that inform its creation.

4.4 Costuming the contemporary in Salford

Salford is a city, or a collection of small towns or districts in the county of Greater Manchester, just west of the Manchester city centre and around 200 miles from London. The city has a long history tied to the Industrial Revolution, encompassing coal-mining and heavy engineering, and, importantly, the textile industry, which still plays a role in the city's economy today. It was historically viewed as more deprived, rougher, and grimmer than Manchester, but recent investment has addressed this in many areas. Its districts hold distinct identities, as do the residents, who embody a sense of belonging and a historicized identity of working-class industrialism and resistance to the dominance of Manchester.

This section focuses on the practical implications of costuming the contemporary, specifically residents of contemporary Salford. How does using familiar everyday dress in the creation of a costume problematize the construction of identity, adding substantive layers of logistical, conceptual, and creative complexity when the identity is connected to a specific geographical space? The problematic nature of creating costumes in this context is evident in David Blair's comment that, "people perceive costume designing as invariably period drama and ignore largely the work that has to go into contemporary drama and I would argue in fact that it is a more difficult job to do" (Appendix F1). Across the development of costume practice, the influence of 'fashion' has shifted in and out of focus. In the early years of film production, actors were asked to bring along their own clothes, which were then subsequently refashioned as the 'wardrobe' of their characters. This inevitably blurred the boundary between actor and character that continued throughout the development of Hollywood, into the modern era and still presents particular problematics when there is a contemporary setting for a screen production in which the worlds of 'fashion', 'clothing' and 'costume' must co-exist and often collide.

During the 1930s, established male actors such as Cary Grant or Fred Astaire exerted tight control over the custom-tailored wardrobes that they were provided for almost all productions. These belonged as much to the actor as they did to the characters (Eyman, 2021; Buscombe, 2013; Ollson, 2019; Cohen, 2012; Drake-Boyt, 2002). Established female

stars, on the other hand, would invoke the already established relationships they had with fashion houses, and clothing for the character they were portraying would be supplied by the fashion house (see for, example Audrey Hepburn's relationship with Givenchy).⁵⁶ For the most part, the tension between the different creative practices of designing fashion (often the result of a singular vision) where the consumer is in the wings, and designing costumes for screen (the product of a collaborative vision) where 'character' is front and centre, has ultimately re-established the distinction between the two areas, with few notable exceptions. Today the involvement of fashion designers is present but less visible, aligned tightly to brand-building. Fashion houses might supply a selection of products for costume designers or the actors to choose from. Costume designers often decline the product-placement-by-stealth of particular fashion brands as they do not align with the characterizations they are asked to create. This can lead to tension between the financial concerns of the producers and the creative statement of the costume designer (Harrington, 2004). In rare instances such as Darren Aronofski's *Black Swan* (2010), the parameters of costume/fashion design ownership and the purpose and narrative impact of particular pieces of clothing produced through the costume/fashion designer dichotomy can still be treacherous (Laneri, 2011). In the main, however, there remain examples where such visible collaborations between costume and fashion designers are much less poisonous; for example, director Lee Daniels' *The United States v Billie Holliday* (2021) where the input from Prada was offset by significant sartorial visual moments designed by the costume designer Paolo Nieddu (Gonsalves, 2021).

One of the most significant issues with costuming the contemporary, therefore, is ownership of a 'design' that is implicitly 'produced' by many (brands, costume designers, actors and so on) and belongs to several different 'reader' groups, for several different reasons (Brooker & Jermyn, 2003). For many, both in and outside the industry, there is a common feeling that contemporary screen representations are not 'designed' at all (Ashby

⁵⁶ This evolved in some instances into fashion designers providing whole wardrobes for films (Bruzzi, 1997), examples of which include Dior (*Stagefright*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1950), Chanel (*Last Year in Marienbad*, dir. Alain Resnais, 1961), Yves St Laurent (*Belle De Jour*, dir. Luis Bunuel, 1975), Karl Lagerfeld (*Mistress*, dir. Barbet Schroeder, 1975), Giorgio Armani (*American Gigolo*, dir. Paul Schrader, 1980), Jean Paul Gaultier (*The Fifth Element*, dir. Luc Besson, 1997), Raf Simons (*I Am Love*, dir. Luca Guadagnino, 2009) and Tom Ford (*James Bond: Spectre*, dir. Sam Mendes, 2015).

& Higson, 2000), and that working with contemporary clothing as costume has more in common with 'styling' than 'design'. Theresa Rhymer referred to this when reflecting on how costume practitioners and departments in contemporary productions are viewed:

they think we can just go to a shop and buy it. But the set has to be designed. So [...] it's the idea that there isn't so much of a design element within the clothing as there is within the set. I think that's just general lack of understanding [...] even production designers don't often understand our process. (Appendix F3)

The inherent difficulty of contemporary costuming is that the work of moving a contemporary character from page to screen is not seen as a creative practice (Warner, 2012, 2014). Rather, in the consumerist context where this work is produced, where items of clothing are consumed at an exponential rate, where brand identity is so recognizable and objects of everyday dress so familiar, interchangeable, or taken for granted (Brownie, 2014), and used in such diverse ways, the connections between the actors' clothes and the characters' clothes, and between the characters' clothes and the audiences' clothes, have become compromised (Church Gibson, 2004). Thus, it remains difficult to separate actor from character and actor/character from our sense of self. As quoted earlier, Brad in FG3 articulates this: "I was paying more attention to what was going on around. Yeah, I was worried about Bob [Hoskins] ' cos he reminds me of grandad" (Appendix E3).

Our responses to the clothing become driven by our proximity or exposure to the style of dress used, which often forces costume designers and productions to rely on tired, dated and recurring stereotypes to secure the communication of meaning, as Gledhill and Williams comment: '[m]oments that appear to have nothing to do with story or plot are moments where the contemporaneity will be meaningful to those who share the same imagery, memories or cultural references' (2000:125). In a world and creative practice saturated with visual symbolism, boundaries are maintained (Savage, 2015) through the give and go of sameness and difference. Since the introduction of stories, myths, legend and narratives, the use of characterizations, condensed representations or stereotypes has been used to communicate information (Cannadine, 1998). Often the selection process undertaken entails the reduction of information, so that it becomes communicable, is ideological, or as Baudrillard states, 'offers simplified equivalence [not signifiers] of formally distinctive signs' (1994a: 89). Baudrillard is referring here to the flattening out or 'implosion'

of meaning by media producers. This would certainly be something both the Manchester- and Liverpool-based focus groups identified in relation to the geographical setting. For example, Rob from FG5 commented that “[t]he stereotypes of people from this area are always wrong. They are workshy, criminals or football hooligans with no brain”, whilst Jamie from FG6 asked more aggressively, “I want to ask why Bob Hoskins, someone from London, is even in it. He's running a club in Manchester. Why do they have to have people from London when it's set in Manchester?” (Appendices E2 & E3). Baudrillard claims the ‘social’ has imploded within the ‘mass’, the micro within the macro and meaning into the ‘sign’ rendering meaning, meaningless (1994a: 81). This is what Sartre calls an ‘analytic regressive moment’ (1968: 140). This thesis asserts that mass culture has not destroyed or consumed the social or erased class-specific cultures (Ashby & Higson, 2000) linked to geographical space; these still exist in and through lived experience. Rather, a more selective and repetitive approach to the representation of a homogenized whole has developed wherein the same form is ‘always more decoded, decentered [and] envelops our real and imaginary’ (Baudrillard, 1994a: 141).

Rarely do we encounter another human being dressed in exactly the same way as us; therefore, the ‘sameness’ preferred within clothing representations exists as an oppressive shroud, ‘enveloping’ the ‘real’. For costume that employs contemporary, ordinary dress, the implosion of meaning within media productions is reductive in nature and masks the differences displayed and experienced across different regional spaces within the everyday, whilst revealing what is thought about those that inhabit and experience the everyday within those spaces. This thesis argues that *The Street* fails to present the audience with the differences present in the everyday of the Salford working class, not necessarily because those that produced the work thought of the Salford working class in a derogatory fashion, but because they were governed by a combination of their own subjective ideas, the language of television and the language of costume.

4.5 Fit and flesh: body language

This chapter has thus far explained what costume is, the processes undertaken as part of the process of costuming, the importance of acknowledging subjectivities within that process and the added layer of complexity when tying costumed characterizations to geographical space and time. It will now explore costume communication in more detail as a language that is often comprised of more than one accent, dialect, or 'voice', or a multi-layered or multiple address. This section will also explore non-verbal aspects of the language of dress and how these play out on the bodies of the actors, focusing on the character of Eddie McEvoy, played by the actor Timothy Spall across all three series.

Within the linguistic milieu of accent, dialect or address, the chosen method that allows costumes to 'work' successfully is semiotics (Kawamaura, 2011; McKee, 2002; Merrifield, 2006; Saucier, 2011; Carter, 2012; Thornham & Purvis, 2005; Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001; Barthes, 1985). Renée Baert comments that clothing is never neutral but cultural and partakes of preexisting sets of meaning and conventions (1994). To understand the semiotic dimension of the language of clothing and therefore costuming requires knowledge of or access to the systems of meaning, structures, and social conventions at play in the use of clothing semiotics. The results of the decisions made to costume a character work to communicate meaning by employing semiotics that draw upon an already established set of codes (Baudrillard, 1998). The established codes cover two areas identified by Brooks: function and symbolism (2015). The functional element can be conceptualized as pragmatic, so a coat is worn for an exterior shot, particular sportswear for the depiction of particular sporting activities or a specific uniform to communicate specific jobs or professions. The symbolic element is much more complex and nuanced. It works through a process of interpretation (both in creation and reception) that operates within predictable limits (McKee, 2002). Importantly for this thesis, it employs shared codes (Hall, 1997; Eco, 1992) to maintain thresholds of sufficient meaning (Davis, 1992) that can be understood or read within a collective consciousness (Maffessoli, 1996), thereby transforming a 3D object into a 2D 'truth' (Hall, 1997; Merrifield, 2006). A crude example might be distressed clothing for those 'without' economic resources, privilege or position, and desirable clothing for those 'with' economic resources, privilege and position. The objects under scrutiny here, items of ordinary or everyday dress, are examples of mundane

consumption choices where the semiotic meanings have become more blurred and fluid because of shifting patterns of class experience and consumption practices as explored in Chapter 3. As a result, sign value has become even more desirable and meaningful than use value (Barthes, 1985; Baudrillard, 1998) in 'giving off' (Bell, Hollows & Stewart, 2005) information about characterizations.

4.5.1 The language of clothes

The communicative nature of the language of dress exists within each item of clothing (or utterance) and becomes active only when a meaning is generated through a communicative event, or when an utterance (or object of clothing) is placed within a context (of an outfit, a production, an event, on a body) and generates a response. For example, the low-cut red top worn by Cath analysed earlier becomes active only when we see how it is worn, by whom and in what context. Further examples from *The Street* might be the red T-shirt worn by Lee Ingleby as 'Sean' in episode 6, series 1 'Sean & Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006) or the Prince of Wales check waistcoat worn by Bob Hoskins as Paddy in series 3, episode 1, 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009). Secondly, each utterance (or object of clothing) is imbued with all previous utterances (Bakhtin in Morris, 1994). We understand the meaning of a white T-shirt because of the way white T-shirts have been used in the past; the same is true of the red top worn by Cath, the red t-shirt worn by Sean and the waistcoat worn by Paddy. Lastly, each utterance is produced (or when discussing clothing, chosen) in the space where human consciousness meets the 'other', as Bakhtin comments:

[l]anguage exists on creative boundary or boarder zone between human consciousnesses – between a self and other. It is this responsive integration between speakers, between self and other that constitutes the capacity of language to produce new meaning. (Bakhtin in Morris, 1994: 5)

Therefore, the subjective way in which the language of dress is employed and the meeting of perception and pre-conception discussed above becomes visible through the deployment of particular signs and symbols that are generated through the space where our individual experiences, interactions and understandings of 'being' converge.

As a result of these factors the language of dress is not indifferent, but riddled with political, social, and moral evaluations (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001) that are key to

maintaining power structures and inequalities (Besnier, 1990; Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001). Bakhtin states, '[a]ll meaning has an evaluative element and is therefore inevitably social and ideological' (in Morris, 1994: 12). This context produces a language and meaning of dress that is both hegemonic, in that the language operates within a structural consensus, and dialogic, in that the language is subject to individualistic linguistic practices (accent, dialect) informed by lived experience and often manifested as contestation. As such, the evaluative nature and use of the language of dress operates in two directions, both supporting hegemony and challenging it. Creating new understandings and interpretations within the everyday language that reflect individualistic experiences of fashion and class consciousness and challenges hegemonic structures allows infinite dialects to interact simultaneously. As Bakhtin wrote, 'it is more complex than one way direction. 'Word is a two-sided act'; each and every word expresses the 'one' [speaker] in relation to the 'other' [listener]' (in Morris, 1994: 13). The language of costume cannot reproduce this complexity. It fixes the speakers side of the two-sided act into a familiar structure; it removes the complexity identified by Bakhtin in favour of a more formal structure employed by costume designers to communicate their subjective manifestations of recognizable character tropes.

The language of costume activates such character tropes by 'encoding' objects of clothing; the codes used within the process of encoding employ signs to communicate meaning. In western linguistics the term 'word' refers to the smallest sequence or unit of sound that can be used in isolation to communicate meaning. Within the language of dress or costume we can graft this idea onto single items or objects of clothing, the white T-shirt, for example. Each word or object can provide meaning in isolation or can offer a myriad of meanings when employed within a particular syntax. For example, the word 'rose' provides meaning in isolation (a flowering plant), but when used within a sequence of other words, depending on the sequence employed, the meaning can change; 'I received a single red rose' or 'a ceiling rose caste in plaster'. The same is true of clothing 'words': a white T-shirt in isolation can mean 'casual undershirt' but within the syntax of a complete outfit: historically rebellious teenager (with jeans and Harrington jacket) or respectful mourning item (with printed epitaph in urban youth culture).

4.5.2 Clothing signs

Codes are the tools used within linguistics to connect a word to a sign and what the sign symbolizes. Codes operate within a particular context and are often less structured within speech than writing (Fisk & Hartley, 2003). The more formal language of writing can be understood here as the structure of costuming, whilst the less formal patterns of speech can be understood as everyday dress. Clothing is often referred to as a 'vestimentary code' (Barthes, 1985; Davies, 1992), a code that has developed over time and space to employ established and rigid signs to fix boundaries. The vestimentary code of which costume is a part is understood as employing clothes as units of meaning operating within the rules of a collective understanding that facilitates the 'reading' of the code (Carter, 2012). This is often true but there is also the practice of code switching or linguistic insecurity (Connolly, 2017) in relation to practices of dressing (switching languages or accents) whereby codes are reworked, resisted, or reframed to communicate alternative meanings than those that exist within the parameters of the structures underpinning collective understanding. This is often the space where individualized clothing identities are played out. Eddie's costuming in series 2 is useful here. Teresa Rhymer remarked that,

I'm a designer that doesn't like to show like that it's grim 'up north'. I like to show colour. People in the north do wear more colour than people in London. You know, people get dressed up to go out, people don't go straight out from work. They come home and get changed. (Appendix F3)

In episode 2, series 2, 'Old Flame' (Lynch, 2007) Rhymer dresses Spall in a smart, well-fitting suit and tie when he goes to a charity event to try and impress an old school friend who it appears has achieved more than Eddie, and who it transpires is married to Eddie's first love, Pat. On the surface, there is a clear rationale for the choices made by Rhymer; she is articulating a dressing practice that is familiar in the everyday. It is argued here, however, that reworking of clothing codes witnessed throughout everyday practice is beyond the scope of costuming, which it is assumed must continue to adhere to fixed codes in order for audience understanding to take place, which is why the director David Blair responded to Rhymer's designs in the way he did. As a result, damaging patterns of repetition and misrepresentations frequently occur.

Codes employ signs as symbols to do communicative work for them. A sign is the product of the relationship between the signifier and the signified (Barthes, 1985). For example, as mentioned, the red rose is often employed as a sign: the signifier is the red flowering plant, the signified could be romance, passion, regional identities or political allegiances depending on the context of use. The language of dress is also a system of signs (Calefato, 2004) in which clothing objects are made to mean (Dant, 1999) and employed in such a way that allows people to communicate who they are, who they think they are, or who they want others to think they are (Davis, 1992). Over time codes are distilled (Calefato, 2004) and form a metonymy (Fisk & Hartley, 2003) whereby explanation or difference are superseded by sufficiently consistent meanings creating low semanticity or under coding (Davis, 1992). Again, we can think about this in relation to the language of clothing objects such as the suit which has become a metonymy for business or professionalism or the T-shirt worn by Sean that is a metonymy for subcultural youth groups.

Saussure claimed that the mental concept exists prior to the object (as sign) whilst Lacan argues the reverse, that the object creates a mental concept (Cobley, 1996). For the purpose of this thesis, Bakhtin's concept of the moment of collision between individuals, as the site where signs come to mean is the most appropriate and accurate. He comments, '[s]igns as carriers of meaning come into being on 'inter individual territory': their existence presupposes socially communicating beings (in Morris, 1994: 12). This site is neither individual or social but rather borders the two and makes visible the collision between signs and ideologies where accent and dialect within the language of dress intersect and struggle to gain control over evaluation and meaning; the white T-shirt in its many incarnations and uses is a good example of this. As Bakhtin writes,

[e]very sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation. The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs, they equate with one another. Wherever a sign is present, ideology is present too – everything ideological possesses a semiotic value. (in Morris, 1994: 51).

Where the language of clothing and the use of coded signs as symbols become even further confused is when consumption practices are foregrounded. This occurs through costuming the contemporary. Within the language of dress, consumption is often the first stage in the

process of coded communication (Bourdieu, 1996; Breward, 1995). The metalanguage of costume also engages in consumption but often the costume designer will be consuming on behalf of a character and directed by the creative subjectivities of the production team, or the logistics of the shoot. This adds to the complexity of what is being communicated through clothing signs when employed as an element of costuming. The result is an almost impenetrable situation whereby any or all consumer goods can become a sign with constantly changing status as purpose or use is being refashioned (Dant, 1999; Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001). In addition, if the uses of language are individualized, generated through affect (Besnier, 1990) and expressed via the plurality of accents and dialects within the contemporary (Davis, 1992; Crane, 2000; Tseelson, 2001), whilst signs are being employed metaphorically, symbolically or allegorically (Murphy, 2001) or as a recurrence of their own reference points (Baudrillard, 1998), then it must surely be impossible to determine any meaning at all within costuming the contemporary.

Within such a fluid and transient milieu, concepts that assist in facilitating and fixing (as discussed earlier) the encoding of meaning through signs are context and nonverbal elements of communication such as intonation. Context can offer tools to fix or indeed change meaning through register, speaker, and text (Cobley, 1996), or rather who is doing the communicating and through what medium. For the established language of dress/costume, this might refer to scene or set-up, character and address or genre. Every item of clothing employed within costuming, every clothing 'word' is made visible as the result of a sequence of choices driven by the intention of the producers; as Bakhtin comments, '[e]very word smells of context – all words (or items of dress) are inhabited by intention' (in Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 94). Intention then drives forward every utterance, which is ultimately produced through the collision that occurs between the interaction and the context of the interaction, or as Bakhtin writes, '[e]very utterance is the product of the interaction between speakers and the product of the broader context of the whole complex social situation in which the utterance emerges (in Morris, 1994: 41).

Additional nonverbal layers of communication such as intonation are powerful enough that they can override other signs, but they too rely on contextualization for interpretation to take place (Besnier, 1990). Intonation, which is heavily saturated with emotion and yet at the same time ephemeral, is where intent and evaluation are made clear. As Bakhtin writes,

In actuality we never say or hear 'words', we say and hear what is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant. words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behaviour or ideology. (in Morris, 1994: 33).

Intonation is where the ideas about true/false, good/bad, important/unimportant, pleasant/unpleasant are communicated. It is argued here that the concept of intonation can be reinterpreted through how clothes fit the actor. The way the costumes are carefully 'fitted' to the actor's bodies, to enhance, conceal, reveal, showcase, or deride, acts as the powerful nonverbal layer of communication that seals the ideological intent and fixes or clarifies meaning within the maelstrom of this complex communication.

I now discuss this idea in relation to the character of Eddie McEvoy (Timothy Spall). Eddie is the centre of attention in three episodes: 'Asylum' (Quirk, 2006) in series 1, 'Old Flame' (Lynch, 2007) in series 2 and 'Loss of Control' (McGovern & Lynch, 2009) in series 3. The character is transient as he appears in most of the episodes across all three series. Throughout the three series Eddie is seen wearing thirty different pieces of clothing (Appendix I). These items follow an obvious theme of casual wear: jeans, polo tops, plaid shirts, sweatshirts, fleeces and anoraks. There is one episode 'Old Flame' where Eddie's wardrobe differs and his clothing becomes more formal and sophisticated, as discussed above. For the purposes of this analysis the focus will fall on the casual items, the way they fit the actor and what the combination of items and fit make visible within the language systems employed.

Eddie is often seen in light-wash jeans. They fit poorly at the waist and in length: he is often seen adjusting the waistband or pulling the jeans into position after sitting. Whilst standing, the jeans are seen to hang low and dishevelled from the character's bottom. The jeans are also too long, mostly seen in combination with generic blue/white trainers: the jeans are always bunched at the ankle, with the trouser break creating an excess of material, adding to the unkempt and slovenly appearance. The dialogism at play within the socially distinct speech of these costume choices demonstrates the co-existence within one utterance (or object of clothing) of more than one distinct voice: the voices of the 'character' (a fiction), the actor, the costume designer, the writer, and the director. As Bakhtin states, 'in the relation between distinct 'voices' in a narrative text each takes shape and is reaction to the ideology of the other' (in Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 3), or rather what we hear (or see) results from a babble of voices, each of which is subject to its own

ideological engagement with the 'other' but not necessarily subject to an equitable lived experience. Lived experience (specifically, working-class lived experience) produces a dense web of linguistic (clothing) practices: access to the management, maintenance, and misrepresentation of this public vernacular by those with access to power and processes determines social values and maintains inequality (Bakhtin in Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 1). The jeans themselves are used as a familiar communicative tool, and the way they fit, or don't fit lifts the level of communication to reinforce commonplace understandings around the working class and adhere to the restrictions imposed by the language of television.

The utterance that is understood from Eddie's jeans is subject to context in the same way that linguistic utterances rely on context for understanding. Low 'bumster' jeans can be understood in a different way within the context of a prison environment, McQueen's creativity, or 'hipster' style. It is the clothing objects placed around the jeans, the narrative context and the non-verbal communication embedded within their use, that articulates both the intention of the costume design and the value associated with character 'types' such as this. The language of costume used here articulates value, situation, person, voice, and point of view (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 18), not of the character as assumed within the ethos of costume design but of those charged with the production of the character. Within lived experience, the possibilities of combinatory factors using these elements is endless: '[e]verything means, is understood as part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others' (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 176). Within costume design, the elements are identified very clearly at the moment of utterance, which is the chosen clothing elements of costume.

Our understanding of the world occurs through the language we use to express what we know: 'there is no experience of the world outside language, there is nowhere else to view the world from so the question of relativity does not arise' (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997: 136). Therefore, the only understanding expected in relation to Eddie occurs through the language of dress/costume and similar characters to whom we or the production team have been exposed. We understand the character because of what he wears and because other characters like him have worn similar objects. Jeans, and polo-neck T-shirts are two of the most pervasive items used within the costuming of the show (51 and 38 items respectively). Eddie's clothes and the way he wears them also reinforce an established trope

of a lack of sartorial interest/style/knowledge attributed to the older, male northern labouring body.

Secondly, of equal importance is what is not being said but taken for granted (Williams & May, 1996: 66). The producers of the text take for granted that the consumers of the text will understand the character as intended. There is no need to explain or refer to the use or fit of Eddie's clothing; it is accepted without question. His wife never comments on the fit of his trousers, for example. Viewers understand it equally for what it is and for what it is not, because the language of costume exists within a framework of rules or structures. These are the tools used in the 'first reading' supplied by the designer. The second reading (of those that consume the text), like speech, is interpretive (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001) and leads to different forms of understanding and engagement as outlined by Stuart Hall (1973, 1997).

Next, we understand that new meaning is constantly produced through what Hall outlines as negotiated and oppositional readings. Each piece of clothing (such as Eddie's jeans) produces a uniqueness of 'sound' within the language of clothing and as such they are subject to both depth and generality of meaning (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 11). We can use Bakhtin's ideas around great and small time to explore this (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001). Great and small time are both autobiographical and historical- they have a history of use but also a specificity to individuals. Eddie's jeans are used because, within the historical development of screen costuming, jeans have been associated with workwear and labour and the working classes. They are autobiographical in two distinct ways: in terms of the character's fictional autobiography or back story and in terms of the autobiographical subjectivism of the costume designer who understands that the use of the jeans will communicate what is necessary to the viewer because the jeans already exist within a familiar language system. The jeans sit at the midpoint between Voloshinov's idea of 'abstract objectivism' and 'individualistic subjectivism'; or rather the midpoint between the language system and the individual creativity inherent within language. Importantly, it must be acknowledged that this refers to the designers' creativity, not the creativity within the character's psyche (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 11), which, as this thesis suggests, cannot ever be fully developed in line with lived experience.

In addition to the complex nature of encoding the language of dress, the decoding of the signs embedded in the clothing is equally convoluted and subject to contextual

variables. A visual language such as the language of dress exists as other languages do, in the collective (Cobley, 1996). Whilst readers (or viewers) may be able to engage, resist or create their own meanings during the process of decoding (Hall, 1997; Brooker & Jermyn, 2003), ultimately for the communication to be successful, some understanding of the master code is required (Bourdieu, 1994), as Bakhtin comments: '[the r]eader fills the blank spaces in the text to have it make meaning but must be mindful of "ultimate meaning" of text – intent and subjection (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 93).

Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev (in Morris, 1994) write that each word (or each piece of clothing) is the site of dialogical class interaction and, as a result, a site where class struggle plays out. A tussle occurs over each object that reflects the relations of production as well as political and social structures and where all parties involved intend to reaccentuate a word (or piece of clothing) with their own meaning (Morris, 1994: 12). The jeans Eddie wears are involved in such a struggle. The object itself contains at least two different orientated speech acts simultaneously: they are a multiple voiced discourse (Morris, 1994: 13): practical workwear, popular casual clothing, subcultural style trope, gender-neutral design and so on. As a result of this, a further tool of communication is required to fix the intended meaning. Within linguistics this extra layer of meaning would occur via non-verbal communication tools such as intonation. The same is true within the language of dress and it is the way the jeans fit the body of the character/actor that acts as an equivalence for intonation in this instance.

If, as Lefebvre claims, syntax, grammar and vocabulary are political acts (2005) then it would follow that to play with the fall and rise of the voice within the language of dress must also be political. Therefore, each and every item of clothing employed as costume must have a political dimension to its use which is compounded through the way the clothing is fitted to the body of the actor. We understand that items of clothing hold no meaning outside the meaning that has been imposed upon them. Within the language of dress or costume, the fall and rise of the voice is communicated in the baggy, ill-fitting and over-long jeans; the meaning intended here is to reinforce restrictive and repressive ideas about the working class, their engagement with clothing and working-class (clothed) bodies. Value judgements are often nonverbal and as Bakhtin claims, intonation is where value judgements occur (in Morris, 1994). Intonation is the glue that binds the speaker and the listener, and it can override all other sign systems to offer the backdrop to a 'shared'

understanding. The understanding is shared but not necessarily agreed upon, as the complexity of lived experience cannot be reflected within limited language systems such as the language of screen costuming, or the language of television as discussed in Chapter 2. As Baudrillard comments, '[c]omplex 'enunciations of meaning or style cannot be translated into each other' (1994a: 87).

Intonation, although difficult to interpret without context is, as Besnier remarks, a locus for effect. Its affective function refers to several experiences and categories at once and as such it acts to mediate class relations (Besnier, 1990). It communicates the assumed qualities embedded within the articulated words (or clothing objects) and reinforces the effects of the reductive language which has been normalized within screen clothing. This is how the direct message of costuming and the unconscious message of those charged with costuming are connected. Intonation emphasizes the difference between the aesthetic and the cognitive, or rather the difference between the rules of the language and space where value and intention merge (Morris, 1994). The jeans that Eddie wears across all three series of *The Street* are used as an act of conformity within everyday ordinariness; the transitional use of denim throughout history has almost rendered them meaningless (Brooks, 2015: 12) which is why the nonverbal communication tool of 'fit' has been employed to reposition the item within discourses around class.

4.5.3 Embodied meaning

In order for meaning to be produced, the costume, item of clothing or characterization must first be 'perceived'. Bourdieu explains aesthetic perception as historical, differential, and relational (1996), so individual perceptions of clothing occur from unique perspectives that encompass a historical or autobiographical narrative, a contemporary contextual setting or set of relative experiences and an individual manifestation of the tension between sameness and difference. However, Bourdieu goes on to suggest that perception cannot progress to meaning without access to some form of cultural competency. Very early on in *Distinction*, he suggests that, 'a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded' (1996: 2) or rather, that a specific cultural competence is required to unlock the meaning held within the aesthetic of costumed characterizations. This suggests an inherent conflict in relation to a hierarchical system of aesthetic interpretations generated through perception and

presumably aligned to the accepted purpose or intent of the creative practitioners and the context of the creative output, versus the perception of those seen as lacking the required competencies. This might, broadly speaking, hold some truth; for example, those outside military life or experience may not recognize the significance of specific insignia or those from remote regions of the globe with limited access to media might not perceive nuanced difference in the dress of Western or Eurocentric subcultural allegiances. However, such broad strokes aligned to accepted and hierarchical conventions that exclude, omit any acknowledgement of the relationship at play between agency and meaning (Crane, 2000) for all those who engage with visual media. Meaning isn't owned, but produced by both the producers and the consumers of a text (Hall, 1973, 1997; Partington, 2014). Despite attempts to the contrary it is not fixed but fluid and is too elusive to be 'pinned down' when generated through individualized engagement (Hollander, 1993).

For Baudrillard, meaning is ultimately, 'an inconsequential accident' (1994a: 11). For him the quest to produce and communicate meaning is both political and cultural, and, I suggest, controlling. The priority within culture is to produce, re-produce and communicate meaning (Baudrillard, 1994a). As a result, meaning is everywhere: we are saturated by the production and communication of meaning and therefore the demand or quest for the sanctioned or agreed-upon meaning that is produced through cultural products has declined and the system of equivalence on which it functions is compromised. In its place, individuals generate individualized meaning that often occupies space outside or alongside the meaning that is sanctioned. What the oversupply of sanctioned or agreed upon meaning has produced is a meaningless surplus that continues to be communicated through a sanctioned or agreed upon subject, language or representation (Baudrillard, 1994a). Where, as Baudrillard asks, does this state of meaning leave us? The answer appears to be, for those who sit outside what is agreed upon or sanctioned, in a perpetual state of strategic resistance or 'a refusal of meaning and of the word' (Baudrillard, 1994a: 108). What does this mean for small screen costuming? Throughout this research, it appears that such strategic resistance is at play in increasingly complex layers across all forms of meaning-making within the production and consumption of costumed characterizations, rendering the 'meaning' produced as both meaningful and meaningless; meaningful because of what is being repeatedly communicated or omitted and sanctioned, and meaningless because perceptions and interpretations are so individualized that they inevitably sit in a position of

ambivalence or opposition. Therefore, both the existence and meaning of costume remain arbitrary in nature and can only be understood as the product of a subjective intervention.

4.6 Class and the politics of costume

The human body, the body of an actor in a role, is a material thing embodied within a specific time and place (Morris, 1994: 2,18) and is a problematic site of conflict (Hirschkop & Shepherd, 2001: 152), as has explored throughout this chapter. It is understood as the outward manifestation of an inner mental state. As Hughes and Sharrock comment, 'all statements about mental states could be further categorised into a set of statements referring to overt bodily signs. So outward bodily displays can be used as an index of inner mental states' (1997: 48). In this instance, the assumed understanding is that we are viewing the inner mental state of the 'character' via the bodily signs. This thesis suggests that what we are actually viewing are the mental states of the actors, directors and, of specific relevance here, the costume designers. Mental states evolve from experience and are situated: they produce a subject position. If, as Hughes and Sharrock suggest, ideology is a fact of consciousness and the external body the realisation of that consciousness or understanding (1997), then the characters, their bodies, and their clothes are realisations or understandings of the ideologies held by the producers of the text and the medium and society within which the text appears and is expected to work. The costume the actors wear therefore cannot be neutral. When dealing with representations positioned within the discourse on social class, or more specifically working-class discourse, such as *The Street*, the outward manifestation of the producer's subject position (the costume) becomes political.

The ideologies that produce subject positions, as suggested here, are powerful and pervasive and in many cases are hidden in plain sight. They have over time created a shared understanding within the bourgeoisie, who are the owners of this particular means of production, that reproduces ideas of what the working classes are like (Lawler, 2008). This has evolved into a common vernacular expressed through the language of television of which costume is a part. What have become familiar and accepted as categories of class costuming as seen on TV are, as Skeggs says, 'not just classification of social position but an amalgam of features of a culture read onto bodies as personal disposition – which are

generated through systems of interpretation' (2005: 3). The interpretations are limited by language and fix particular attributes to particular bodies and the costumes they wear.

The political dimension of costume outlined above can be explored through a return to the analysis of the 'bon voyage' scene from series 2, episode 4 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007), focusing here on the character of Jan (Gina McKee). Jan is again dressed in a very different manner to that of her sister: she wears a black-and-white sleeveless printed cotton top with a square neckline, empire seam detail and a voluminous lower half to the bodice. Over this, she wears a black, finely-crocheted bolero or shrug with irregular sequin trim, and dark jeans. Theresa Rhymer explains that McKee had quite a lot of involvement in the development of her costume: "Gina McKee [...] wanted to come shopping with me and had quite a strong idea of how the character would look" (Appendix F3). So already we can see the notion of the costume evolving through at least four different political subject positions: writer, director, designer, actor. That is, the final product wasn't the result of a lone voice, but shared understandings that made sense within the language of use.

This outfit is purposely in complete contrast to that of Cath: it sits happily between a lack of care and feminine excess, each of which are understood to imply negative morality (Bourdieu in Skeggs, 2005: 142). This outfit suggests an effortless, informed version of style. The clothes are looser, the print and use of black-and-white suggests sophistication, the bolero/shrug conceals excess flesh, and the jeans are much less threatening or overtly sexual than Cath's black pencil skirt. Rhymer explains that,

Gina's character potentially is more aspirational, more complex, she is more interested in the finer things of life. Really. You know, she shopped in Next, which to that type of woman was a more aspirational store rather than shopping in Primark, you know. We went to Next, and we bought a lot of the clothes there and [thought about] how they fitted her and not showing as much flesh. (Appendix F3)

Rhymer's language is interesting here: she proposes that aspiration adds complexity to character, suggesting those that do not display aspiration can be thought of in a more reductive way. She also talks of the "type" of woman Jan is: a woman who aspires to class mobility. This was clearly a driver in the design of the costume and is manifested through the items selected, which work in direct contrast to the costuming of Cath, very clearly drawing a boundary between working-class reductivism and middle-class progression. This

was the intention, and the intention worked as evident in the focus groups. In FG2, Bill describes Jan as “clean and tidy”, whilst Adrian comments “she took greater pride in what she wore, didn’t she?” (Appendix E2). Kim in FG5 speaks more explicitly about the differences between the women: “I didn't think they looked like sisters to begin with, I don't think. I mean, I've got a sister. We don't dress the same. But you can see we’re sisters” (Appendix E2). In addition, the focus group participants are able to identify the embodied aspiration in the character of Jan. In FG2, Bill comments,

You could tell that she spent a lot more money on the clothes she was wearing in comparison with her sister’s [clothes] and she certainly appeared to be more aspirational, a lot of choice had been made about those things to project an image. (Appendix E2)

Adrian from FG2 adds, “she had higher aspirations and even though her son turned out to be the real ‘wrong-un’ she looked smarter but simple, nothing extravagant, nice cardigan.” Carol from FG5 states succinctly “I suppose she [Jan] thinks she's better than the other one [Cath]” (Appendix E2).

As explored in Chapter 3, class is not just produced economically but performed, experienced, felt, marked, and written on bodies (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001; Skeggs, 2005), as it is on/through the characters of Cath and Jan. What these writers have commented on is how the regulation of the feminine body (in this instance, how it is dressed) works very differently on middle- and working-class bodies. Cath’s body and clothing are marked as working-class because of the bold colours, the choice of fabrics, and the way the costumes are tight and exposing. Conversely Jan’s body and clothing are marked as heading toward middle-class respectability because she wears muted colours, textured fabrics and because her clothes are less revealing and more loosely fitted. Here, both bodies are subject to forms of regulation experienced within class politics, regulation that is played out on bodies within and throughout lived experience. Cath’s is regulated within a narrow and prescriptive view of working-class femininity and Jan’s must operate within the confines of middle-class respectability if she is to make the transition, she so desires. What is being communicated here, in an agreed dialogue between the producers of the text and the viewers, is a closely managed division between social classes. This is informed by experiences that have been mediated themselves through similar texts and will

produce a further text, *The Street*, that subsequently entered the circuit of cultural understanding. Costume employed in this way is therefore crucial in maintaining those politicized divisions and perpetuating the regulations that are experienced as a result. The agreed communication works to nullify meaning, an example of one of the challenges (and successes) of capitalism identified by Chibber whereby, 'the cultural and social facts about modern society conspired to fasten the working class to the system, and thereby mute or even overturn, the antagonism between the classes' (2022: 81).

4.7 Summary

This chapter builds on the arguments presented in Chapter 2 (television's limitations) and Chapter 3 (reductive class understandings) and has presented an extended definition of the term costume, looking specifically at costuming that employs contemporary clothing.

Section 4.2 discussed the management of image construction, and the creation and manipulation of identity formations through practices of dressing was explored. **Section 4.3** looked closely at costume practice and the processes involved in costuming. It examined the collaborative nature of costume design, which is produced within specific contexts and subjectivities. This was followed by **section 4.4** with an examination of the problematics of employing contemporary or everyday items of dress as costume in relation to geographical space. **Section 4.5** explored the language of dress and its use of codes, symbols, signifiers, and semiotics alongside an application of non-verbal elements of communication to the language of dress in the form of intonation. This section applied these linguistic concepts to examples from *The Street* considering ideas around the fit of the costume and the display of flesh. The final section of the chapter, **section 4.6**, draws upon the tensions exhibited through the sameness verses difference dichotomy with regard to the characters of Cath and Jan and how this dichotomy speaks to the politics of costuming.

Conclusions

This thesis asked three questions: how was costume used to represent the working class in Jimmy McGovern's *The Street* (Granada, 2006-2009)? How does the language of the costuming used within the hybrid drama articulate the social politics of the working classes in the UK during the 2000s? And how was the costuming influenced by industry-imposed conventions or issues? The aim was to explore perceptions of contemporary working-class experiences and to look at how the perceptions and experiences are represented through small screen costuming. The initial hypothesis evolved in response to the tension between my own class position and a career within television costuming that spanned over a decade, and that highlighted the specific problematics within the process of representing the UK working classes. The hypothesis suggested that one of the reasons for contemporary class alienation or (the presumed) ambivalence towards class experiences and politics may be the cumulative effect of reductive sartorial representations of the working class.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, triangulating primary material from practitioner interviews, audience focus groups and content and textual analysis of the extended case study with cross-disciplinary theory from cultural studies, fashion scholarship, the study of television, costume theory, and linguistics and with the industry experience and subject position of the researcher. The extended case study comprised eighteen episodes of *The Street*, and particular episodes were isolated for detailed analysis: episode 6, series 1, 'Sean & Yvonne' (Ellison, 2006), episode 4, series 2, 'Taxi' (Boulter, 2007) and episode 1, series 3 'Smoke' (McGovern, 2009).

The thesis is split into four main chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the design of the methodology. It explains and critiques the qualitative ethnographic approach undertaken and interrogates the impact of the specificity of my own subject position. It offers a detailed rationale for the process and pragmatics of the content and textual analysis, the interviews, and the focus groups. The chapter explores how the nature of the research is positioned at the intersection of complex and disputed methodological concepts that require a level of philosophical consideration to validate the overall design. The research considers the plurality of subjectivities at work in screen costuming. Despite the foregrounding of individual perspectives, via the interviews, focus groups and by acknowledging my own

subject position so explicitly, the plurality of reality is recognized as a way to critique why representations are the way they are. The methodology also considers the philosophical tensions around the central concept of meaning: how it is formed socially and culturally, articulated through variegated language systems; how it often works to mask a complex and layered construction; and how meaning collides with hierarchical claims to knowledge via the language systems employed within TV drama production and the language of dress.

The remaining three chapters provided a matrix from which the central conclusions of this research have been drawn. Chapter 2 explores the context of the case study, television drama, specifically social realist drama. By examining the structure, form, and language of television it is suggested that the medium can only ever screen limited possibilities, including limited examples of dress. The reduced palate of sartorial expression compromises viewers' own identification with screen characters. It is argued that, rather than providing the broadest brush stroke as a means for all individualities to experience some level of identification, limited representations work to reinforce class alienation. Chapter 3 examines definitions, perceptions, and understandings of the working class in the UK during the period covered by the production. It presents the premise that the sartorial representations within *The Street* cannot possibly represent the diversity within class experience when employing the restrictive language of television. Beyond this relatively simplistic claim, the symbolic means by which class experiences are positioned within a visual hierarchy, such as the use of distinct materials or accessories, dressing practice and the use of particular bodies, are unpacked as the remaining sites where the working class are articulated as less-than or lacking. This, it is claimed, compounds class ambivalence and alienation. Chapter 4 offers an extended definition and explanation of costuming as a creative and subjective practice. It explores the symbolic means by which clothing communicates and extends the symbolic boundaries to encompass the 'fit' of a costume as a form of clothing intonation. It suggests the politics of costume are made visible through fit, the use of exposed flesh and the sameness/difference dichotomy.

The conclusions that arise from these overlapping discussions can be split into four main categories, each of which will be dealt with separately below: (i) the prevalence of television as a site for middle class cultural production; (ii) the malignant and omnipotent constructed language of television; (iii) the tension between subjectivity and subject position made visible through the production of costume knowledge; and finally (iv) how

the politics woven into the language of costume within *The Street* works via stealth *against* the political intent of the production or the creative practitioners. In addition it is suggested that the practice of co-design must become embedded within courses that teach costume design and interpretation in order to redress the issues outlined throughout the thesis.

The first of the conclusions identified through this research is not a new discovery: it is the continued prevalence of the middle-class voice within television.⁵⁷ In particular, the image track of television drama is created for the most part through a middle-class or more privileged gaze. What this means is that final costume decisions are invariably made by practitioners whose class position and experiences are 'other' than the class position and experiences of the characters for whom they create a clothed identity. Beynon and Rowbotham identified this when they commented that social imagery is symbolic and not expressive (2001). This situation has, over time, created several powerful and damaging narratives, the first of which is the narrative of misrepresentation that has evolved into the realm of perceived reality. That is, the repetitive use of misrepresentations (Collins, 2004) transcends the real and has evolved into sufficient shared understanding within the middle class about the working class (Baudrillard, 1994a; Lawler, 2008). The intellectually creative gaze required to design costumes continues to recreate misrepresentations, shifting them into a form of knowledge or expertise (Skeggs, 2004). Ashby and Higson have commented that the middle class watch the working class on screen without any meaningful recognition (2000). I claim that there is also a disconnect between working-class audiences and texts that fictionalize working-class lives. This was evident through FG5 and FG6, and the interviews undertaken with David Blair and Theresa Rhymer, and it is claimed that this has an impact on the broader social implications of unacknowledged class identity.

The second questionable narrative around middle-class dominance of television production is visible in how the working class are 'seen' to be. This is problematic in two important ways. Firstly, a tendency toward a form of class voyeurism in the research process and creation of costumed identities as discussed by Barbara Kidd below:

I hope a good costume designer will take note of people anyway, sitting on the bus, you know wherever. So yes, you sort of immerse yourself or try to immerse yourself a little bit in the society. For example, we filmed in pubs and I certainly went to the

⁵⁷ <https://es.britsoc.co.uk/prospects-for-working-class-creatives-no-better-or-worse-today-than-in-1960s-says-research/>

different pubs beforehand and talked to the people that would be in the film because they used local people quite a lot. (Appendix F2)

Kidd decontextualizes the diversity of experience and raises questions around subjective perceptions. The working class are viewed here as 'other': interesting anomalies to be prodded and observed. It is therefore little wonder that this form of 'poverty porn' (Skeggs, 2004, 2005) often manifests as a form of spectacle on TV (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001). The second damaging way the working class are seen via the middle-class lens produces narratives around the necessity for escape (Casey, 2010), whereby a presumed dystopia of working-class experience is continually foregrounded. This will inevitably have negative repercussions for those who occupy the site from which escape is presented as desirable and negates positive elements of working-class existence, such as community, shared experience, empathy, humour and support.

What these misrepresentations and damaging narratives do is maintain or fix the notion of class identity in costumed representations. This fixing also bleeds out into wider society, prohibiting comprehensive understanding of class experiences. They do not allow space to develop representations of the fluid or diverse identities and experiences of class that exist in the everyday. What remains are shreds of familiarity and repetitive details that prohibit 'meaningful' meaning within the costuming. Instead, the empty symbols employed within the language of dress are instantly recognized in an ambivalent way by the audience. This was seen in the earlier discussion of particular fabrics such as denim, Tom Millar's 'dangerous' leather jacket and Sean's gold 'Argos Chic' chain, for example. Of course, questioning or challenging misrepresentations requires access to the tools of production (Burstyn, 1983), access that the working class simply does not have when it comes to television production. In place of access, the working class have others speaking for them, as Skeggs articulates: 'the working class [do] not write themselves' (2004: 124). This form of ventriloquism is clearly ethically problematic when understandings move away from fictional representations and are ascribed to reality or the real.

The second conclusion reached here, which in some ways connects to the first, concerns the reductive and constrained language of television. Beynon and Rowbotham state that television restricts the way that class is represented (2001). As such, what is produced are rigid views and repeated observations of similar things (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997). Baudrillard claims that the working class only exist at the point where they are

depicted by the middle class (1994a) within the preferred images of whatever the medium offers. The preferred image he identifies exists, he claims, in a circular economy of recognition without experience. We recognize class as presented through the language of television in the same way we recognize the difference between a news bulletin and a game show, even when what is presented bears little or no relationship to our own class experiences: we are still able to understand what is being communicated, what we are being told. Recognition like this works because it is articulated through a fabricated typical or language with which we are familiar, so much so that the familiarity is now taken for granted (Brownie, 2014). So, as mentioned earlier, each time we see a costume on screen we identify it through the lens of our 'screen education' or what we have been 'taught' or exposed to through other screen images. As such, the constraints the language of television imposed on *The Street* (explored at length in Chapter 2) make it impossible to represent the actual range of plural clothed identities that inhabit the ordinary working-class lives it attempted to depict. Rather, a restricted selection is consented to and offered. It is here we can begin to understand the power compressed within the form or language of television. The compression of possibility adds to the significance of what is not said through the language. Often it is here that we can see class prejudice (Connolly, 2017), confusion between what is real and what is represented, as misunderstandings of class are laid bare.

A further conclusion is that subject position cannot be negated when considering the production of cultural products such as small screen costuming. In fact, subject position must be claimed or owned by the producers of the cultural products and those researching them for commentary to be valued as meaningful. As previously mentioned, my own subject position was an important factor in the design and development of this research: it was used as a key to unlock access to possible meanings that may not have been available to researchers without the same class position or industry experience. Examples from my own industry experiences were used to explain core arguments concerning reductive costume representations and how these make visible misunderstandings and questionable perceptions about how the working classes choose to engage with and express themselves through dress. As explained in Chapter 1, the 'real' of my lived experience has dissolved into and exists within my subjective understandings. The idea of a subjective position is linked to both selfhood and class consciousness as the former is informed or populated by the latter. Skeggs, Thumin and Wood write that selfhood relies on and is resourced by mediated

symbolic forms and that there has been very little research based on this idea (2008). The mediated form here is the material production of clothing naturalized as costume. The standards that govern explanations (of a character through the clothing they wear) originate in the social life of participants. The standards at play in this context originate in the social life of those involved in the production and my interpretation of their work originates in my lived experience. So, the explanation of character presented via a particular choice of costume originates in the social life of the costume designer (amongst others), their class experiences, position and understanding. The readings provided by the focus group participants originate from the individual experiences of the participants and the social implications of the group setting. Finally, as discussed earlier, my analysis and interpretation of the costuming analysed originates in my own social, cultural, and creative life and experiences. This is substantiated through the textual analysis, which occupies a different space to work produced by researchers without industry experience (Brownie, 2014; Bruzzi, 1997; Street, 2001; Church Gibson, 2004; Cook, 1996; Gaines & Hertzog, 1990; Piddock, 2004; Warner, 2012, 2013, 2014). As mentioned, this emphasizes the importance of the unique approach undertaken here in acknowledging and actively drawing on the researcher's industry background and reflections. Only when such subject position is openly acknowledged in this way will the gaps that exist within our patchworks of understanding become visible. The need to fill those gaps and extend the range of voices we hear in research and cultural production is pressing if social justice is to be achieved. It seems arbitrary to suggest that this may begin with something as causal as the everyday clothing worn by small screen dramatic characterizations but this thesis claims this is exactly the kind of site where true representation is required and if achieved may create a meaningful shift in the way working-class experience is understood and responded to within society.

The research claims, therefore, that subject positions are made visible in a number of ways via small screen costuming. The first is in the production of class identities. Sartre comments that the singularity of existence cannot be thought but it must be lived (1968); this thesis claims that the working classes occupy a site of conflict whereby on the one hand they are not afforded the singularity of existence (particularly in screen costuming) and on the other, group cohesion, movement, identity and ultimately protest, have been eroded by the all-consuming neoliberal agenda. Working class representations are therefore both

myths and mythologized (Thornham & Purvis). As quoted earlier Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody comment that,

The production of subjects and the way they live their subjectification involved constant invitation to consume, invent and choose and yet class is written over every choice from house to dress from accent to appearance. (2001: 53).

Because consumption practices of the working classes are (mis)understood in this way, what is produced when others attempt to reproduce those consumption choices is in fact a manifestation of the creator's subjectivity. Due to the predominance of the middle-class voices in this form of cultural production, the subjectivity often originates in a site very different than the one being represented. In fact, the lower down the social economic scale the representations are positioned, the more likely the concentration gradient of others speaking for a group to which they do not belong will increase (Connolly, 2017). It is suggested, then, that to contort surface level meaning by producing inaccurate and empty sartorial representations of class identity exposes the subject positions of those producing the work. The danger here is that reductive understandings of the sartorial capital and expression of the working classes are applied to non-fiction versions of class. So, the truth of costuming that is in fact a subjective truth, moves into the realm of positive knowledge and is used as a tool in the further management and maintenance of negative value and the categorization of individuals.

In order to understand how this situation is perpetuated, the theory produced by the French Marxist cultural philosopher Henri Lefebvre has been central throughout the thesis, in particular his articulation of the tension between sameness and difference and imitation and difference and ultimately difference and distinction. The use of Lefebvre has been rationalized as a product of my own class position and late development of educational capital but is no less potent or relevant as a result. The thesis has discussed how the right to difference is not held by all (Merrifield, 2006). To be seen as different attracts attention (Klepp & Storm-Mattheusen, 2005), and attention produces a form of visibility that is not always desired if boundary maintenance is to be preserved. As such the reductive language of television mentioned earlier has, over time, produced a gradual bombardment of the same information where difference, visibility and thereby contestation has been levelled out (Eco, 1986, 1992). As a result, 'ordinary' dress that is often employed as a tool of resistance

in the everyday remains misunderstood as means by which groups are identified as lacking status or distinction (Casey, 2010), and is absent from most costumed manifestations of working-class characters. The communication of identity via ordinary dress is inherently problematic and is squeezed through a constrained language of television, forcing the costuming of ordinary characters to be drawn via the broad strokes of sameness, commonality, and repetition. Brooker & Jermyn comment that social difference is essential to challenge dominant ideologies (2003) which is perhaps the key reason why the plurality and diversity of social difference has been removed from costumed screen representations.

Systematic reduction of identity difference creates a form of class/costume alienation, as was clear throughout the focus groups, particularly FG5 and FG6. As suggested earlier, the groups that are mis-represented suffer a 'disconnect' or alienation from screen identities meant to represent or portray people like them and situations like those they may have experienced; and this disconnect results in an apathy or ambivalence towards the representations on offer, which allows them to be reproduced over and over. Paul Dave suggests that the reductive narrative of screen representations of social class (very often with the working class represented as a problematic underclass) actively omits the silent majority of class experience (Dave, 2006). When a community is underrepresented in this way viewers look for the next best option (Gledhill and Williams, 2000), and this process produces ambivalence.

What middle-class subjective representations also fail to acknowledge is the competence of the working-class viewer to see difference whilst also making connections to shared experiences or concerns. This is an active site or boundary between concepts of middle-class progression and working-class reductivism. Viewers *are* able to recognize shared experiences even when the image track expresses difference, as shown by the focus groups. In fact, Lawler argues that we can only begin to fully understand ourselves in relation to others (2008). Despite this, within *The Street* regional stereotypes are prevalent: for example, Sean's pigeons, where his commitment to the birds and tenderness toward them is at odds with his age, interests, and brutalism, or indeed the setting and type of terraced housing that provides the backdrop, which is employed to immediately convey space and place (Forrest, 2017). As discussed, Caughie argues that there is always an audience (often international) for precise observation within drama (2000), and, it is argued here within costuming, however localized the narrative might be. As mentioned in in

Chapters 2 and 4, when clothing representations are produced, the different and often nuanced 'dialects' of clothing choice within the language of dress are either misunderstood or ignored in favour of categorizations that make visible spatial hierarchies held within the perceptions of lived experience. The danger is, as Skeggs comments, that reductive representations allow for the misrecognition of others (2004). Trusting the viewer to manage the balance between difference and sameness would prevent such misrecognition.

A further conclusion is that the communicative nature of costuming is multi-layered. The first layer of meaning is straightforward and familiar and refers to recognizable identifying factors such as wearing a suit suggesting smartness, whilst a tracksuit suggests the reverse. It is within the first layer of meaning that simplistic manifestation of class dressing is at play. We can see this in the overuse of denim or casual clothing through the three series. The second layer of meaning requires a controlled interpretivism. An example of this is the use of a cream/grey longline cardigan for the character of Yvonne. At the design stage the cardigan was used to represent oppression and entrapment; David Blair talks of Yvonne being enslaved and the cardigan's shape and style acts a symbol of this. The costume designer refers to its use by the character as a comforter and protector against the harshness of her existence. These cues were picked up by both focus groups that viewed that episode: there is mention of her always wearing it, how the colour symbolizes her experiences and how the character uses it to make herself invisible. It seems, therefore, that this is an example of successful costuming: first- and second-layer meaning is passed from the producers to the viewers. However, there are further layers of meaning embedded within the costumes that are not picked up upon in the same way. As they lack identification, their presence becomes more dangerous. One of the layers acts through stealth by employing nonverbal cues within the language of dress. The way that the costumes are fitted to the bodies of the actors, often deliberately ill-fitting, is used to enhance, conceal, reveal, showcase, or deride, and acts as the powerful nonverbal layer of communication that seals the ideological intent and clarifies meaning. It is argued therefore that fit can be understood as a form of intonation, reinforcing the meaning the actual items of clothing convey. This idea is particularly marked on the character of Eddie McEvoy (see Chapter 4).

Beyond the layer of clothing intonation sits what Skeggs refers to as euphemistic transference (2004), or rather costume that speaks to broader concerns about class

relations. The broader, wider layer of reductive meanings discussed throughout this research are recognized, as evidenced through the focus groups where participants comment on how producers get things wrong, but an understanding of the wider consequences of this was not found. For example, participants commented on individual items of denim but not on its pervasive use. This shows that television or visual culture has become saturated with denim so that its use has become an unquestioned symbol in the language of dress. There was no discussion or reflexive remarks around how the costumes viewed produced a sense of ambivalence in the participants, nor of what the hegemonic power of the items of dress might be. If this research were to be extended, it is here that the design would benefit from modification. Whilst the focus groups undertaken here focused on eliciting discussion around the costuming it did not push for a more political debate or steer the discussion into the wider consequences of the representations. Clearly discussions of this nature were a possibility as the anger projected during FG4 and FG5 suggested. This can be seen in this comment by Rob from FG4 quoted earlier,

Well, the people of Salford are always, we're always misrepresented aren't we, in the in the media it's always you know, this is a problem place this is crime this is this that and the other. And they never get it right. (Appendix E2)

The final, and I suggest most compelling conclusion, is that the costumes employed within *The Street* work against the intent of the producers and the production, despite the evident skill and commitment of all the creative practitioners interviewed. As discussed throughout, despite identifying *The Street* as an example of social realism and discussing the left-wing intention of the producers of the text throughout Chapter 2, the construction of costumed representations of the working class still implicitly or explicitly articulates middle-class imaginings or expectations (Beynon & Rowbotham, 2001), because the language of television, where those costumed representations become active, is a middle-class language.

As discussed in Chapter 3, new class formations in contemporary society are not as visible as they once may have been, but visual representations of the working class continue to employ tired symbols as a communicative tool, rather than create new visual expressions of class that reflect the diversity within lived experience. The language of television, the constraining system of representations, has been developed over time by those in control of

media production and products: the middle classes. So despite the fact that the main writer, Jimmy McGovern, is known for his political stance and the political nature of the work he produces, and that the director David Blair and the costume designer Barbara Kidd were chosen because of their understanding of and allegiance to McGovern's convictions, and further that the costume designer Theresa Rhymer explicitly expressed her proactive practice of representing the nuances of working class experience which is driven and informed by her own class position, the result produces a reductive costume vision as diversity and difference are whittled away through the communicative process or the language of television, which remains populated by middle-class imaginings.

As such, as already discussed in Chapter 2, television costuming is a crucial element of social realist drama and can, it is argued, produce and reinforce inequalities and exclusion, marginalizing the lived experience of the social class it claims to represent. That is, I am not suggesting here that the writers, directors, or designers comply with or want to communicate this reductive idea, but recognising that this is the visual language that is established and works and therefore, this is the visual language that is chosen or must be used to communicate the message held within the writing. Chapter 2 argued that realist conventions within social realism, specifically those concerned with costuming, have eroded productive, active, or resistant class consciousness as the viewers sink into sartorial ambivalence, failing to recognize themselves in the clothed experiences of class on screen.

This thesis suggests, therefore, that how ordinary costuming is used within the language of television and *The Street* is part of the dismantling of political identity formation and engagement. It reinforces political ambivalence, inhibiting the development of class consciousness and collective action. The costume the actors wear therefore cannot be seen as neutral but in fact powerfully hegemonic. When dealing with representations that are positioned within the discourse on social class, or more specifically working-class discourse, such as *The Street*, the outward manifestation of the producers' subject position – the costume – becomes actively politicised in opposition to the narrative intention of the same producers, constrained as it is by the omnipotence of middle-class television production.

This research has identified serious and significant social, cultural, and political consequences of screen costuming within television drama written and directed by left wing practitioners, whose aim was to communicate and offer a critique of the inequalities and

experiences of contemporary systems of social stratification within the UK. Despite this context, this research has exposed the entrenched misrepresentations of working-class sartorial practices across the extended case study examined here and has argued that such consistent misrepresentation contributes to the subsequent dismantling of political identity and growth of political ambivalence whilst maintaining a debilitating hegemonic narrative around the working classes within the UK. Going forward, what might be the response or action required to challenge the situation as it is outlined, that will facilitate authentically and productively re-politicising the representations of the working class within television drama? Clearly, to provide an appropriate answer would require further extended research beyond the scope of this project, but it is worth noting now that the answer could lie, in part, in the design and development of mandatory units across costume design courses that foreground co-design as a method to ensure respectful, authentic, and accurate representations of working-class characterisations and communities. The term 'EDI'⁵⁸ - referring to equality, diversity, and inclusion - has produced committees and departments across academic institutions throughout the UK and is now rightly acknowledged as essential for addressing the student experience and redressing issues around retention and attainment. It seems odd therefore that the same themes appear not to be embraced when design practice is taught. Issues identified via the EDI discourse are as relevant to the production of representations of class experience as they are to the experience of class. Currently, according to UCAS⁵⁹ there are 28 providers across the UK that offer undergraduate courses with the word 'costume' in the title – a total of 72 courses were listed. Of those, six employ the word 'screen' within the title of the course. Whilst clearly the design of costume for screen will play a role in the courses labelled as 'Costume Design', 'Costume Interpretation' and 'Costume for Performance', for the limited scope of this portion of the discussion focus was given to the six courses that identify costuming for screen as a defining characteristic of the course. Of the institutions that provide costume courses of this nature and from a very cursory glance at the teaching modules only Falmouth University's 'Costume Design for Film & Television', mentions design that is led by

⁵⁸ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/governance/governance-and-edi/importance-edi-higher-education>
⁵⁹

<https://digital.ucas.com/coursedisplay/results/courses?searchTerm=costume%20&studyYear=2024&destination=Undergraduate&postcodeDistanceSystem=imperial&pageNumber=1&sort=MostRelevant&clearingPreference=None>

or contextualises anthropological, socio-political, or cultural considerations in the design of screen costume. UAL's Wimbledon College mentions designing for contemporary contexts but doesn't offer any more detail.

Since the early part of the 1970s particularly within fields as diverse as economics, architecture, mechanical engineering, and education, both user-centred and participatory design have become fully established. Throughout the ensuing fifty or so years there have been developments in the way such design methods have been employed and written about, ranging from the initial binary of user-centred and participatory practices, whereby with the former the user is the subject and with the latter the user is a partner, to expanding definitions and critiques of co-creation, co-design, and collective creativity. Sanders and Stapper offered a useful and straightforward definition in 2008: 'We use co-design in a broader sense to refer to the creativity of designers and people not trained in design working together in the design development process' (2008:6). Often the practices of co-design have been employed as a means to push for or manufacture the possibility of positive or progressive futures: 'We are moving from the design of categories of 'products' to designing for people's purposes' (Sanders & Stapper, 2008: 10). This is certainly the case when it comes to the field of fashion and/or textiles. We see evidence of this at both the mercenary and altruistic ends of the fashion spectrum; for example, Zhang and Gale highlight how co-design is a useful tool in enabling, extracting and maximising the potential connections between a product and consumer values (2021), whilst Soares et al (2016) discuss co-creation as important in developing inclusive fashion that is able to positively impact the wellbeing of disabled fashion consumers.

It seems a strange anomaly that the idea of participatory or co-creation, which is an established method of design across a variety of sectors, seems not to have been adopted in a formalised way by costume design as a discipline. There are fragments or fleeting moments where ideas move in this direction. For example, there is Bryan-Kinns, Wang and Ji's 2021 research into HCI that included a collaborative co-designed case study on an interactive drama for public performance in rural China- or, even more tangentially, Pantouvaki, Fossheim and Suurla's 2021 article that discusses costume ecologies and the need to work *with* materials. However, for the most part, as with the costume design courses, the notion of working with communities that are being represented in the design of costume remains absent.

Within film and television, the use of participatory practice more often than not manifests with the use of non-actors in front of the camera. This can be routinely employed when organising crowd scenes, particularly if specific ‘types’ of crowds are required, a particular sub-cultural group for example⁶⁰. This practice is also employed regularly as a defining element of the auteur approach by directors such as Ken Loach and his creative teams in films such as the critically acclaimed ‘*I Daniel Blake*’ (2016) or ‘*Sweet Sixteen*’ (2002). As Aubrey notes for Film Stories ⁶¹when discussing Loach’s 2023 project ‘*The Old Oak*’, ‘Like most of Loach’s films, the majority of the parts are played by non-trained actors’ (Aubrey, 2023: 1). Loach’s approach is a key element in the critical acclaim he receives and is a means by which the authenticity of his work is judged, so it remains an oddity that it has not been adopted more widely.

In an industry where the concept of realism is still dominant and there remains an appetite for social realism that explores the experiences of the marginalised - for example, the BBC’s recent production ‘*Rain Dogs*’ (Laxton, R & Perrott, J, 2023) which was described as a ‘bleak,⁶² beautiful comedy drama – which skewers the grotesque realities of class and sex inequality like nothing else’ (Ramaswamy, 2023: n.p.) - there appears to be a problematic omission in the courses designed to produce the creative workforce. Perhaps the reticence for such a development is a further example of hierarchies at play. To incorporate and accept the notion of co-design within costuming would shorten the distance between those representing and those being represented and for some such a foreshortening is unpalatable. The changes or shifts required by educators, researchers and creative practitioners would be substantial, but it is in the development and design of fully inclusive modules within costume courses which address the issues outlined throughout this thesis that lasting meaningful change in the clothed representation of the working class will occur.

⁶⁰ See for example Shane Meadows ‘*This is England*’ (2006) or Elaine Constantine’s ‘*Northern Soul*’ (2014)

⁶¹ <https://filmstories.co.uk/features/interview-ken-loach-paul-laverty-and-the-cast-chat-the-old-oak/#:~:text=Like%20most%20of%20Loach's%20films,inhabit%20the%20character%20of%20Yara.>

⁶² <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/apr/04/rain-dogs-review-no-wonder-daisy-may-cooper-is-being-touted-as-the-next-m-in-bond>

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