

# REFLECTIONS

## Looking for trouble: exploring emotion, memory and public sociology

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**Abstract:** This article is a verbatim record of an inaugural lecture,<sup>1</sup> reflecting on twenty years of working at one university. In this lecture, I discuss the ways in which academic inquiry, teaching and community engagement have been linked in specific oral history projects. I focus on opportunities for working across disciplinary boundaries. I discuss culturalist understandings of emotion and memory and their implications for oral history research.

**Key words:** emotion, memory, oral history, public sociology, cultural studies

Hello. Thank you all – colleagues, friends and family – for coming here this evening and thank you John<sup>2</sup> for your generous introduction.

I plan to use this lecture to reflect on my twenty years of working at London Metropolitan University and to speak about the many opportunities I've had, as well as the ideas and partnerships that have mattered to me during this time.

Before I go on, I'll just say that I also did some things before coming here. I grew up and went to school in Salisbury. I studied history and sociology at the University of East Anglia as part of a BA in European and Social Studies. I studied for an MSc in Medical Sociology at Bedford College, London and I completed my PhD in Cultural Studies in Australia, at the University of Technology Sydney. I worked as a social researcher in a health centre and was engaged in numerous activities – discussion, writing, campaigning – connected with health politics. Broadly, that accounts for 20 years of academic life before Londonmet. And so, Londonmet...

In January 1994, I started work at London Guildhall University (LGU), later to merge with the University of North London to form London

Metropolitan University. I joined a small team, teaching a BA in Communications and Audio-Visual Production Studies that was quickly expanding. Almost immediately, two things happened that have profoundly influenced my work ever since.

First, I was asked by course leader Mo Dodson to teach a module entitled 'Cultural History: Methods and Perspectives' and to include a section on oral history. Second, I met fellow new lecturer Deidre Pribram with whom I began talking about the unrecognised but nevertheless palpable influence of emotion on academic and cultural political life. In part, this was connected with the pressures of coming into a fast-changing situation, with a rapidly increasing number of students. As it happened, I was also connecting with two shifts in academic thinking in the humanities and social sciences: a turn to biography and the beginnings of a turn to emotion/affect. Later, it became clear that there were significant tensions as well as resonances between the two.

The focus on oral history was exciting and new to me, although I was familiar with qualitative interviewing in my job as a social researcher

and through my doctoral research. Oral history involves working with memory to produce new understandings of the past. Oral historians interview people about the past as they have lived it and now reflect on it. As oral historian Alessandro Portelli wrote over thirty years ago, oral history 'tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*'.<sup>3</sup> More often than not, oral historians focus on the everyday experiences of subordinate groups or political minorities unrecognised in official written records. Oral history is part of both academic inquiry and a community-based movement directed at democratising history (by including more people in knowledge production) and empowering subjects (by recognising their experience). As Katharine Hodgkin and Susanah Radstone suggest, oral history offers a framework for 'contesting the past', that is, rethinking what the past 'contained', who can speak about it and how it can be represented.<sup>4</sup>

My interest in emotion at that time also touched on something seemingly unrecognised. In the mid-1990s there had been little investigation of emotion within Cultural Studies. This was surprising. Cultural Studies is particularly concerned with studying meaning and power relations. Stuart Hall defined culture as a set of historically specific *practices*, representations, languages and customs, 'concerned with the production and exchange of meanings'. Culture, he said, is about 'feelings, attachments and emotions as well as concepts and ideas'.<sup>5</sup>

There had been earlier indications of how emotion might be viewed as cultural (as well as personal) and linked to power relations: in feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar's conceptualisation of 'emotional hegemony' (in the 1980s) and cultural theorist Raymond Williams' concept 'structures of feeling' (in the 1960s).<sup>6</sup> Jaggar was one of a number of feminist philosophers and critics of science writing in the 1980s who sought to disrupt a series of (gendered) conceptual dichotomies underpinning Western thought: specifically, culture and nature, mind and body, reason and emotion, objectivity and subjectivity.<sup>7</sup>

Reason was considered necessary to the production of objective and reliable knowledge and emotion as likely to subvert inquiry. Jaggar used the phrase 'emotional hegemony' to describe a process whereby dominant political and social groups (usually white, middle-class, male) were aligned with reason and objectivity and subordinate groups (usually black, working-class, female) with subjectivity, bias and irrationality. She argued that being understood as essentially 'emotional', where this is equated with being irrational, disqualified subordinate groups from academic inquiry and political leadership and justified their continuing subordination.

Williams' concept structure of feeling refers to 'the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time'.<sup>8</sup> Williams was trying to

address the phenomenological question of how one lives the complex historical articulation of material, social, economic and cultural elements that make up culture 'as a whole way of life'.<sup>9</sup> Williams does not explicitly link structures of feeling to power relations or hegemony, but such connections have since been made, for example, by Lawrence Grossberg in his writings on 'affective economies'.<sup>10</sup>

In the mid 1990s, these concepts - 'emotional hegemony', 'structure of feeling', 'affective economies' - were important starting points for developing a cultural analysis of emotions. Of course, emotion had been extensively studied within various branches of psychology and psychoanalysis. But, there was a tendency in these disciplines to locate emotions primarily in the minds and bodies of individuals and treat them as universal entities. The turn to emotion in the humanities and social sciences was to bring other concerns into the frame: investigating how emotions vary between cultures; how they change over time; how they are shaped by social structures, institutions, ideologies and power relations.

When I started at LGU, I was publishing articles and a monograph based on my doctoral research on feminist theory and embodiment.<sup>11</sup> From the late 1990s, Deidre Pribam and I were co-writing articles on emotions<sup>12</sup> and co-editing a book, which aimed to bring together emerging literature - from cultural anthropology, history, sociology and cultural studies - and to define a new field of emotion studies within cultural studies.<sup>13</sup> So, oral history and a cultural analysis of emotion shared some intellectual territory: a focus on something un- or under-recognised, experience and meaning.

### **Oral history in teaching and research**

Oral history as part of the undergraduate curriculum presented opportunities and challenges. It generated learning opportunities for students and possibilities for collaboration with agencies beyond the university as well as linking teaching and research. It also raised questions about the nature of participation, memory and experience.

There was already a commitment to oral history at London Guildhall University when I arrived in the mid-1990s. Colleagues Mo Dodson and Karen Goaman were running a module entitled 'Communication History' in which they asked students in their first semester of study to interview a family member and write the interview up in both an academic and journalistic style. One of the important things about this module was that students were invited to participate in producing knowledge and, it was hoped through this, discover the university to be a less alien place. That our students were mainly from local London boroughs and often the first person in their families to go to university was a major factor in the success of this initiative. In



those days, around 400 students took this module each year.

This initiative inspired me and, I think, many of our students. In my second year module, 'Cultural History Methods and Perspectives', students learned how to critically analyse an oral history interview, reflecting on the research process and comparing oral history with other historical methods. Many students interviewed a family member or neighbour. Often their stories told of migration and settlement, work (often in nursing, the catering industry or transport), childhoods lived in other countries, and also, but less frequently, the un-swinging 1960s and various forms of political activism. In the early years, around 200 students a year took this module.

In 1997, keen to find new learning opportunities for students, I met with the oral history curator at the Museum of London. We arranged for cohorts of second year students to work with sections of the museum's oral history collection: for example, one group listened to, analysed and wrote summaries of interviews about early twentieth century housing conditions in the East End. Gradually, others got to hear of our interest in oral history and a number of collaborations followed.

In 1998 the LGU chaplain, William Taylor, approached me about developing a project which involved students in talking to local 'disadvantaged' people and used storytelling to create images of London from its margins (as an alter-

native to more glamorous images produced to mark the millennium). In response, third year students taking a module entitled 'Oral History' worked as a team with me to: first, volunteer weekly for a month at a day centre for homeless people in Aldgate; and second, interview people using the centre about their experiences of homelessness. Two small cohorts of students (eighteen in all) were involved in 'Talking About Homelessness' (2000-2001) and seventy-six people were interviewed.<sup>14</sup>

Around this time (1999/2000), I met John Gabriel, who was also very interested in oral history and this was the beginning of many years of working together on projects. Connections with the Museum of London and 'Talking About Homelessness' led to two new projects: 'Care Stories' and 'The Refugee Communities History Project'. Julia Granville, a family psychotherapist and social worker at The Tavistock Clinic, had heard about 'Talking About Homelessness' and invited us to develop a project with young care leavers. 'Care Stories' involved seven third year students getting to know seven young care leavers and interviewing them about their experiences of being in care. Postgraduate students filmed interviews and these were edited to make a twenty-minute film highlighting the voice of the young person for use in professional training.<sup>15</sup> Our partners in the project went on to produce a further film and booklet contextualising the first film, as part of a resource pack used,

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nationally and internationally, in the training of foster carers.

In 2000, thanks to the Museum of London connection, we became partners with the Evelyn Oldfield Unit, the Museum of London, and fifteen refugee community organisations (RCOs) in an oral history project documenting the economic, social and cultural contributions made by refugees settling in London since 1951. 'The Refugee Communities History Project' (RCHP) endured a long period of gestation, but eventually secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Trust for London. Between 2004 and 2007, John Gabriel and I were involved in the project steering group and training fifteen fieldworkers (one from each RCO) to conduct interviews and develop a variety of outcomes, including contributing to a final exhibition at the Museum of London.<sup>16</sup>

These projects took seriously the importance of participants not only of getting to speak about their lives but also being heard by an audience both in the present (through interview) and imagined future (through exhibition, broadcast, publication, theatre and web pages). In other words, different forms of cultural production were crucial to how the ordinary voice was not only elicited, but also amplified and heard by (disparate) others.<sup>17</sup>

Training for the RCHP was delivered via two MA-level modules, which became the building blocks for an MA in Life History Research, which I later developed. We also delivered some of the MA course content as short courses supporting other HLF-funded collaborative projects. For example, we worked with Eastside Community Heritage on 'Working Lives of the Thames Gateway' (2008-2010), which documented experiences of working in the disappearing industries of east and south-east London. We worked with IARS (a youth-led organisation) and the Women's Library (2011-2012), to make a documentary film focused on Muslim women's participation in sport since 1948. *Sporting Sisters: Stories of Muslim Women in Sport* is on YouTube and has had 15.5 thousand hits.<sup>18</sup> We have been very fortunate to work with Suzanne Cohen, who has made an invaluable contribution to audio-visual production in recent projects.

These projects have involved looking beyond the university, to enhance student experience and engage in conversations with different communities. At this point, I'd like to say something about the title of this lecture.

'Looking for trouble' refers first to my sense that this is what academics do (they search for problems that are complex and hard to unpick), and second to the idea that 'memory' and 'emotion' are especially troublesome ideas. 'Public sociology' is another way of talking about ideas that matter to me and making connections within and beyond the university.

Five or six years ago, John Gabriel and former colleague Peter Hodgkinson stimulated debate in the faculty around the idea of public sociology and, specifically, the work of American sociologist Michael Burawoy. Burawoy wrote that sociology is motivated by a desire to improve society (although this may mean many things to many people). He proposed a fourfold typology of sociology comprising: professional, policy, critical and public.<sup>19</sup>

Public sociology brings sociology into conversations with multiple publics. The traditional public sociologist investigates debates within or between publics, but might not actually take part in them. The organic public sociologist works 'in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counterpublic.'<sup>20</sup> Of course, for many, this was not new. Patricia Hill Collins pointed out the term 'public sociology' simply gave a name to what she had been doing for years.<sup>21</sup> The oral history projects I have described, with their focus on community-based research and 'subaltern knowledges',<sup>22</sup> enacted a kind of organic public sociology. They enabled us to engage in multiple conversations with multiple publics: first, students engaged in work-based learning as interviewers; second, professionals from community-based organisations; third, a number of marginalised groups; and last, numerous diverse audiences who respond to various media outputs from these projects.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, these publics were not discrete and clearly distinguished: academics were part of the projects' steering groups and designers as well as providers of education and training. In the case of the RCHP, the participants were both 'students' and members of refugee community organisations and, in some cases, refugees themselves.<sup>24</sup>

To be clear, I am not trying to subsume oral history under public sociology. But, I would say that public sociology is a useful term in so far as it provides a basis for conversations across disciplines, within and beyond our faculty. As colleagues and I have argued,<sup>25</sup> public sociology frames much of the faculty's activity, specifically, through its commitment to: promoting social justice; widening access to higher education; supporting research that seeks to shape policy and enhance service delivery; and, finally, working collaboratively with marginalised communities using participatory methods in capacity-building initiatives. Public sociology is both a description and aspiration.

Now, I'd like to highlight some issues emerging from the oral history projects I've mentioned and to make some critical connections with my work on emotions.

### **Experience, emotion and memory**

In late modernity, things have turned increasingly personal. And, memory, emotion and experience are entangled in processes of personalisation.





Biographical narratives consist of individual reflections on experience of the past, with particular focus on meanings and feelings. Yet, experience as a potential source of knowledge connotes authenticity to some and provokes profound suspicion in others.

Elizabeth Tonkin suggests that oral accounts of the past are often social activities in which narrators claim authority to speak to particular audiences.<sup>26</sup> In 'Talking About Homelessness', several interviewees clearly staked out their authority to tell based on their own unique experience of 'being there' – on the streets – and hence the impossibility of someone who has not been there fully understanding what it is like.<sup>27</sup>

... if someone wants to see what it's like, they've got to do it, then you know what it's like ...<sup>28</sup>

... I'll tell you something lass ... never say to anybody 'I know what you're going through', never say 'I understand what you are doing' cos you've never done it yourself, cos you don't, you don't.<sup>29</sup>

Their statements reveal the limits of representation, the fact that tellers' words are not the

same as the past they have lived<sup>30</sup> and, as Spivak points out, that what is known is always in excess of knowledge, which is never adequate to its object.<sup>31</sup>

Students readily accepted the privileged status of those same ontological moments and the limits to their own understanding (based on inexperience) and, thereby, helped to co-produce the interviewees' authority to tell. At the same time, they insisted that listening to interviewees' stories constituted significant 'ontological moments' *for them as students*. Repeatedly, they wrote (in the diaries they kept) that learning (about the lives of homeless people, voluntary agencies and themselves) from 'being there' – at the drop-in centre – was superior to reading: because you 'experienced it yourself'.

Autobiographical narratives communicate authenticity in so far as they are understood to express unique experience and a genuine sense of who the narrator is. Emotion plays a part here since, in contemporary Western cultures, the individual is imagined as a bounded private self with emotion at its core: expressions of emotion reveal who a person really is (inside and beneath appearances). Expressions of emotion are seen as simultaneously expressions of individual identity and authenticity.

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Now, there are some sticky issues here. The entanglement of experience with identity and emotion in the individual story potentially threatens to personalise social issues. So, work needs to be done to link individual biographical accounts with social patterns and change. I think this requires radical contextualisation. How?

If we view biographical accounts as a means whereby the subject makes sense of his/her journey through history, and change, then we might also acknowledge that ways of giving meaning – language, norms and systems of judgement – have their own histories.<sup>32</sup> And, we might acknowledge that individual stories are affected by social relations, cultural narratives and discourses in the present. Indeed, a number of theorists (Bourdieu, Stanley, Steedman, Ricouer) claim that the concerns of the present – one's place in the world and relations with others – *inevitably* insinuate and shape the past in storytelling.<sup>33</sup> We might also understand identity (understood as a coherent sense of self over time) and experience as products rather than causes of the personal story.

But, does this line of thinking – radical contextualisation – diminish the potential significance of individual biographies to history, and agency? Not necessarily. Anna Green suggests that we can both acknowledge the significance of contexts and discourses *and* re-assert the value of individual remembering and capacity of individuals to critically assess and contest these.<sup>34</sup> However, I would tend to view those capacities as also socially generated.

### Contexts

'Talking about Homelessness', 'Care Stories' and 'The Refugee Communities History Project' generated many hours of recorded interviews covering a great many topics, but had some themes in common. Interviewees spoke at length (and movingly) about loss, home and (a sense of) belonging. Questions that interested me particularly were: how do people come to tell particular stories, in particular ways? How do particular stories come to matter to others? So, in writing about these projects, I have focused on the cultural, historical and discursive contexts in which auto/biographical stories were told.

Contexts include the problematisation of certain social groups (homeless, looked after, refugee) and certain ways of understanding and talking about topics. Context also includes (relatedly) the aims and agenda of a project, research relations (between interviewer and interviewee) and the interview process and questions. It also includes cultural narratives, which insinuate the interpretation and articulation of experience in interview and subsequent forms of cultural production.

Retrospectively, I came to see that emotion was entangled with all contexts, processes and

relations: that specific emotions might be part of the dynamics of unequal relations, working (as Sara Ahmed has argued) to 'align some subjects with others and against some others'.<sup>35</sup> For example, 'The Refugee Communities History Project' was conceived against a backdrop of growing hostility in policy debate and media coverage towards asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants (all conflated). Critics had identified a change in the nature of discourse on asylum, involving a withdrawal of sympathy for forced migration and a focus on the *problem* of asylum seekers in terms of increased volume and its implications for British society and the economy.<sup>36</sup> This discourse identified asylum seekers as a source of public fear and anger among disadvantaged groups (thought to perceive themselves to be in competition for resources and services, and presumed to be less tolerant). In this way, a cultural politics of fear was enmeshed with a politics of inequality.<sup>37</sup>

'The Refugee Communities History Project' had some 'emotion work' to do in contesting negative public images of refugees as bogus, a drain on national resources and a threat to national identity and security, by producing a counter-discourse based on refugees' own words.<sup>38</sup> The design of the project – through its aims, selection of interview subjects and interview questions – encouraged the telling of certain kinds of narratives. These emphasised authenticity in seeking asylum and the positive contributions of refugee subjects to the history, culture and economy of London. A strong focus on contribution, in the project agenda and in individual interviews, created the idea of the successful or 'good' refugee as someone who gives something back.<sup>39</sup> But, 'giving something back' meant different things to different people.

For some it involved success in mainstream society through conventional achievements: high status and/or well-paid occupations, or gaining UK qualifications. Others described sacrifices – such as low-paid work, more than one job, working long hours as well as caring for family – made in order to support their children's 'success' in conventional terms. Some described working in the areas of paid/unpaid refugee sector work. Many of those interviewed articulated a sense of themselves as passionately committed to social justice, community and helping others. They elaborated an ethics of existence that focused less on individualism and individual attainment and more on collective political action. For example, a woman who arrived in 1975 from Chile (at the age of twenty) talked of the importance of being political:

... as a political animal, in, in a way, you, you know I would always find a way to be political, in, in that sense. So, in a way ... because you are driven by, by, by it somehow, it doesn't

matter whether you end up in Kathmandu, or Kenya, or wherever, you know, you will find, what your place is, you know? So in terms of, my personal gain, my personal position, I didn't have any intents. Of politics I have a hell of a lot, yes, and in that sense I would, yeah, participate in everything that was going ...<sup>40</sup>

So, interviewees offered a critical take on 'contribution'. They were also critical of the idea (underpinning the project) that 'refugee' described an identity. The project invited individuals to speak about their experiences *as refugees*, positioning them as 'authentic sources' by virtue of a pre-existing (refugee) identity, which was further consolidated and reinforced through speaking. But, some sought to distance themselves from the label 'refugee', on the grounds that they felt it stuck to, diminished and disempowered them. They felt subordinated by representations of the refugee *both* as bogus *and* genuine. Acknowledging the realities of persecution and the need for protection, some felt that dominant understandings of 'the genuine refugee' as incapacitated by 'sadness and loss' took over, making them into perpetual victims and objects of pity. Instead, some emphasised their anger at the circumstances in which they were forced to migrate: 'What I had was rage – I was very, very angry'.<sup>41</sup> Unlike pity and compassion, perceived as subordinating, anger and rage were considered empowering, providing a ground for collective political activism. Here, emotion provided a vocabulary for talking about, enacting and contesting unequal power relations.

### Interviewer and interviewee relations

The research relationship – specifically, the dynamic interaction between interviewers and interviewees – also helped to shape the narratives produced. In 'Talking About Homelessness' and 'Care Stories', students were apprehensive about interviewing: specifically, they were concerned about being able to respond adequately to accounts of (potentially) distressing experience. But, they were prepared in seminars, through background research on homelessness and the care system, and learning interviewing and recording skills. They had a chance to get to know interviewees and develop rapport in advance through volunteering at the day centre ('Talking About Homelessness') and through meetings and social activities ('Care Stories'). Project partners also set up support systems for interviewers and interviewees, so that they could talk to someone about issues that came up in interviews.

Here, I'll say a bit more about 'Care Stories'. Interviewees and interviewers had more in common: age, shared leisure interests, as well as some aspects of social and cultural background. They got on very well with one another and engaged in

mutually-reflective conversations about what it means to be a young person and the emotional resources needed to develop a sense of independence. In all the interviews, interviewee and interviewer communicated with warmth, enthusiasm and openness. Project partners felt that the stories told were very frank and the result of a special chemistry in the interview relationship.<sup>42</sup>

Young care leavers were asked about their experiences of being in care. They described lacking stability, love, support, a sense of belonging and trust. One consequence of moving frequently between foster carers and social workers was that young people had to begin new relationships and tell 'their stories' over again. Several said they were reluctant to repeatedly 'open up to' and trust yet another professional and anxious about the growing number of people who knew a great deal about them. They were concerned that they had little or no control over how information about them circulated. One young woman spoke of the notes written about her, unseen by her, which preceded her in every new placement, shaping in advance each new carer's expectations of her:

... When you leave a house and you're packing your clothes and you're packing your books and you're packing everything in your life. You're also packing, em ... an in ... what is it called? An invisible package there as well, which is the piece of papers that you can't see that is obviously floating around you and everybody else is reading about you and they know about you, they're doing courses about you ... coz like it just ... you don't know what to say or what to do about it. Coz like if it was in front of your face you could just say 'look, yeah, I don't think that's right.' But they don't show it to you, they share that information among themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Obviously, our project also placed the young people in the position of being expected to tell their stories again in interview. Ironically, the video made from the interviews was to be shown to people 'doing courses' on looked after children. Perhaps, the difference here was that the young people chose to participate and critically reflect on their experience of foster care, and were given an effective medium (film) for doing this and access to an audience of relevant professionals. They were keenly aware of potential audiences beyond the interview. One young man said forcefully: 'Those kids in care they want to be heard' and, turning to camera, 'Whoever is going to look at this [film] please sit down and listen and try to understand'.<sup>44</sup>

Listening to the voices of the young people – *how* they speak as well as their words – conveys a sense of the intensity of feeling and *how much* things mattered. It is possible to sense the elusive





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chemistry of the interview and the entanglement of self-confidence, authority and vulnerability.

Anne Karpf has argued that the embodied human voice is sometimes ignored in oral history. Instead, voice is treated as an instrument or resource, as illustration or figuratively (as political or authorial).<sup>45</sup> Analysis often fails to take account of what the voice – through intonation, tone, rhythm, volume and so on – communicates beyond the words spoken. But, it is possible to think of emotion in relation to oral history as both *topic* (in the design of projects and content of interviews) and *texture* (in the chemistry, intensity and inflection of interviews).

Cultural theorists (such as Brian Massumi, Lawrence Grossberg and Elspeth Probyn) distinguish 'affect' from 'emotion' (in part, as a response to a perceived over-emphasis in cultural studies on representation and meaning).<sup>46</sup> They understand affect as intensity or energy that is beyond conscious knowing and organising systems of representation; that is, as unstructured and a-semiotic. Affect is not linked to identity and is pre-personal. Emotion, on the other hand, is equated with the quality of an experience achieved through semiotic processes: it is narratively structured and organised.<sup>47</sup> That is, emotion is intensity recognised, owned and made personal: it is biographical. Emotion is, perhaps, more amenable to analysis.

### Recent work on emotion

Recently, I have been working on a monograph entitled *Media, Emotion and Identity*. This has proved very challenging, not least because it brings together three major concepts, informed by an increasingly large body of academic work. In this book, I examine emotion as a cultural phenomenon through close analysis of selected media texts and technologies. Much of the book focuses on meaning, working with the idea that media texts participate in the production and circulation of meaning and creation of everyday culture. I analyse texts which have helped to give prominence to individual emotion: for example, mediated debate on an economics of happiness; examinations of loss and grief in the Danish crime drama *The Killing*; the negotiation of intimacy in US drama *In Treatment*. I explore the cultural political implications of an intensifying focus on individual emotion.

Excessive focus on individual emotion may be a matter for concern in so far as individual emotion becomes the prime lens through which to view the world and our relations with others<sup>48</sup> and the source of social problems: that is, where negative feelings of self-worth and unhappiness are seen to impact on social and economic, as well as personal, life.

In *Media, Emotion and Identity*, I also analyse the ways in which emotion has been talked about



as a more collective phenomenon in recent media coverage and academic discussion of the UK riots, the Olympic and Paralympic Games and new social movements. There has been limited academic inquiry into collective emotion and media. But, Stephanie Baker has written about the UK riots<sup>49</sup> and Manuel Castells has written about the emergence of new forms of protest, from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street.<sup>50</sup> Broadly speaking, these two academics argue that protest starts with the emotions of individuals, angered or outraged by specific (unbearable) events, who connect and share feelings with others via an effective (in this case, digital) channel of communication. Mutual recognition of shared emotions – cognitive empathy – made possible through the internet engenders feelings of togetherness and possibilities for acting.

This is interesting work and important. However, I am critical of it on the grounds that it assumes a highly self-aware subject, and imagines individuals as separate from the social environment to which they respond and the technologies they use. I have sought to question established binaries: such as rational/emotional, individual/social, human/technology. Also, a focus on the self-aware individual tends to neglect those aspects of lived existence that are *not yet* recognised and clearly articulated, but may nevertheless influence lives.

In exploring ways of conceptualising emotion as *both* individual *and* collective, personal and cultural, I have turned to a number of different theorists. I have also returned to Raymond Williams' concept 'structure of feeling'. Structure of feeling is not quite the same as emotion or affect. Apart from anything else, it suggests something more enduring. Structure of feeling refers to lived experience, which is *simultaneously* personal and social.<sup>51</sup> It refers to 'the felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time.' It is lived at the historical intersections of (I think we can infer) *unequal* – social, economic, material, cultural – relations and at the limits of semantic expression.<sup>52</sup> Williams developed and applied structure of feeling as a class- and period-based concept in the analysis of literature, proposing that a pattern – of feeling rather than thought, consisting of impulses, restraints and tones – is detectable across a range of otherwise unconnected works.<sup>53</sup> He argued that a structure of feeling – unacknowledged in official records – is tangible in a set of works as an articulation of experience, which lies beyond them and finds semantic recognition.<sup>54</sup> But, he acknowledged, 'an articulate structure of feeling' is not necessarily equivalent to 'an inarticulate experience', and the difference reflects uneven access to the means of cultural production.<sup>55</sup>

Structure of feeling signals what is not captured by representation, drawing attention to a gap between 'what can be rendered meaningful or knowable and what is nevertheless liveable.'<sup>56</sup>

Structure of feeling might be used in the analysis of auto/biographical accounts. For example, the reflections of participants in the UK riots (collected as part of *Reading the Riots*, a collaborative undertaking between the *Guardian* and researchers at the London School of Economics) can be analysed for what they might tell us about the felt sense of the quality of life in austerity Britain for some sections of the population.<sup>57</sup>

The co-produced accounts highlight specific emotions such as anger at the shooting of Mark Duggan and euphoria linked to a sense of empowerment through interviewees' participation in lawlessness that the police struggled and failed to contain.<sup>58</sup> A seventeen-year-old young woman said 'People were just passing fags from the counters' and 'You know what? For once it felt like you had so much power.'<sup>59</sup> But, the narratives also (potentially) tell of longer term structures of feeling consisting of resentment towards the police, large corporations and the government. Those interviewed resented police practices of stop and search, harassment, disrespect and humiliation. They resented big business, advertising and media corporations for fuelling a consumerist culture from which the jobless felt excluded. They resented the government and its austerity policies, which had led to benefits cuts and unemployment; lack of job opportunities; removal of EMA; and increased tuition fees. They resented the disparity between the jobless and bankers receiving huge bonuses.<sup>60</sup> Using structure of feeling as an analytic tool identifies an affective dimension to unequal relations and a potential arena in which to contest inequalities and dominant understandings of events: potentially challenging the idea that rioters were acting mindlessly and the de-politicisation of the protest at the shooting of Mark Duggan.

I have argued that we need to pay more attention to emotion in academic inquiry and cultural politics. I have been wary of an apparent over-emphasis on individual emotion in contemporary cultural life. I am not against individual emotion – far from it – but this has been extensively studied in the 'psy' disciplines<sup>61</sup> and I think we need to also investigate it from other perspectives. We need to be critical of *how* emotion is thought and talked about. A cultural analysis of emotion focuses attention on the broader contexts – historical and hegemonic – in which emotion figures, or not, and how it helps to align subjects within unequal power relations. Ideally, it investigates specific emotions and troubles borders and distinctions: between the individual and the social, the articulated and the unarticulated.

### Other connections

I have spoken about some of the collaborations and ideas that have been important to me. I'd like to (briefly) mention some on-going associations. I have been fortunate to work with colleagues Sue Andrews, Mick Williamson and Dipti Bhagat in

the CASS<sup>62</sup> to establish a digital photographic archive. Initially, we worked with local photographer Paul Trevor to edit his vast collection of photographs of everyday life in London's East End in the 1970s-1990s and curate a collection of 250 images deposited with VADS (an online resource for the visual arts).<sup>63</sup> From there, the CASS East End Archive developed, collecting bodies of work by photographers variously engaging with the idea of 'the East End'. I no longer lead the project, but am still associated with it and hope soon to get to grips with one of its original aims: to develop a related oral history collection.

Despite the regrettable closure of the MA Life History Research, some of its content and concerns – with oral history and community engagement – have survived in a new module – 'Media and Communities' – designed and taught with my colleague Peter Lewis, an expert in community media. Students work with local community organisations, interviewing them about their activities and histories in order to make a radio or film documentary. We've yet to see what this year's cohort will come up with but last year students produced some very good films: for example, on the independent cinema The Phoenix and, working with Rowan Arts, on religion and homelessness.

Since 2007, I have been associated with the *Oral History Society* as a trustee and one of the editors of the *Oral History* journal. This has been an important connection and a source of inspiration. Here at Londonmet, we hosted and co-organised with the Oral History Society two conferences on 'Community Oral Histories' (in 2001 and 2007).

## Finally

I hope this lecture has given you a sense of what I have been up to over the years at Londonmet. I've moved across disciplines and departments. Sometimes, I worry that I've been too nomadic, not putting down deep enough roots anywhere. But, this has been a fascinating journey and, I think, often productive. With modest funding (from the Heritage Lottery Foundation, Higher Education Active Community Fund and the King's Fund) we've developed some interesting projects and contributed to some engaging outcomes (not only academic papers but also websites, films, exhibitions and so on). And, I have greatly valued the opportunity to combine research, teaching and engagement with local communities.

London Metropolitan University has experienced a number of problems in recent years and these are well known. Some are common to the higher education sector; others are more local. We have lost undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and some experienced colleagues. I don't want to deny or diminish the ramifications of these events. But, I would like to say that Londonmet is also a place of great energy, creativity and opportunity (for students and staff). I have had opportunities to work in a way that I don't think I would have had in most other institutions: at least, certainly not when I started out.

I am delighted to be awarded the title of Professor at London Metropolitan University and look forward to many more collaborations and conversations.

I'd like to say thank you to my family, friends and colleagues for supporting and encouraging me over the years. Thank you all for coming here tonight and for listening.

## NOTES

1. An inaugural lecture is given to an invited audience by an academic recently promoted to professor. Jenny Harding was awarded the title Professor of Cultural Studies and Communications at London Metropolitan University in August 2012.

2. John Gabriel, Professor of Sociology and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, London Metropolitan University.

3. Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, second edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, pp 32-42 (p 36). This article was first published in Italian in 1979 and in English as 'On the peculiarities of oral history' in *History Workshop Journal*, no 12, 1981, pp 96-107.

4. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

5. Stuart Hall, 'Introduction', in Stuart Hall (ed), *Representation: Cultural*

*Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage/Open University Press, 1997, pp 1-11.

6. Alison M Jaggar, 'Love and knowledge: emotion in feminist epistemology' in Alison M Jaggar and Susan R Bordo (eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp 145-171; Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965 (1961).

7. For example, see: Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, Milton Keynes: Open University, 1986; Jane Flax, 'Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory', in Linda Nicholson (ed), *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1990, pp 39-62; Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: the Life and Work of Barbara McClintock*. New York: WH Freeman, 1983; Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984; Hilary Rose, 'Hand,

brain and heart: a feminist epistemology for the natural sciences' in Sandra Harding and Jean F O'Barr (eds), *Sex and Scientific Inquiry*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp 265-282; Jaggar, 1989.

8. Williams, 1965, p 63.

9. Lawrence Grossberg, 'Affect's future: rediscovering the virtual in the actual', interview by Gregory J Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, in Gregory J Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010, pp 309-338.

10. Lawrence Grossberg, 'Postmodernity and affect: all dressed up and no place to go' in Jennifer Harding and E Deidre Pribram (eds), *Emotions: A Cultural Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, pp 69-83; Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997; Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

11. Jennifer Harding, *Sex Acts: Practices of Femininity and Masculinity*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 1998; Jennifer Harding, 'Bodies at risk' in Alan Peterson and Robin Bunton (eds), *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997; Jennifer Harding, 'Sex and control – the hormonal body', *Body and Society*, vol 2, no 1, 1996.
12. Jennifer Harding and E Deidre Pribram, 'The power of feeling: locating emotions in culture', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol 5, no 4, 2002, pp 407-426; Jennifer Harding and E Deidre Pribram, 'Losing our cool? Following Williams and Grossberg on emotions', *Cultural Studies*, vol 18, no 6, 2004, pp 863-883 (p 872); Harding and Pribram, 2004.
13. Harding and Pribram, 2009.
14. Jennifer Harding 'Talking About Homelessness: a teaching and research initiative in east London', *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol 7, no 1, 2002, pp 81-95.
15. Jennifer Harding and John Gabriel, 'Communities in the making: pedagogic explorations using oral history', *International Studies in the Sociology of Education*, vol 14, no 3, 2004, pp 185-201.
16. Annette Day, Jenny Harding and Jessica Mullen, 'Refugee stories: the Refugee Communities History Project, partnership and collaboration' in Hanne-Lovise Skartveit and Katherine Goodnow (eds), *Museums and Refugees: New Media, Play and Participation*, Paris: UNESCO, 2008.
17. Jean Burgess, 'Hearing ordinary voices: cultural studies, vernacular creativity and digital story telling', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol 20, no 2, 2006, pp 201-214.
18. *Sporting Sisters: Stories of Muslim Women in Sport* film: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOC7qfv90FE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOC7qfv90FE)
19. Michael Burawoy, *American Sociological Review*, vol 70, no 1, 2005, pp 4-28.
20. Burawoy, 2005, p 28.
21. Patricia Hill-Collins, 'Going public: doing the sociology that had no name', in Dan Clawson, Robert Zussman, Joya Misra, Naomi Gerstel, Randall Stokes and Douglas L Anderton (eds), *Public Sociology*, London: University of California, 2007, pp 101-116.
22. Burawoy, 2005, p 18.
23. John Gabriel, Jenny Harding, Peter Hodgkinson, Liz Kelly and Alya Khan, 'Public sociology: working at the interstices', *American Sociologist*, vol 40, no 4, 2009, pp 309-331.
24. Gabriel, Harding, Hodgkinson, Kelly and Khan, 2009.
25. Gabriel, Harding, Hodgkinson, Kelly and Khan, 2009.
26. Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts. The Social Construction of Oral History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
27. Harding, 2002.
28. H interviewed by M, April 1999.
29. G interviewed by K, April 1999.
30. Keith Jenkins, *Rethinking History*, London: Routledge, 1991.
31. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York: Routledge, 1987.
32. Nikolas Rose, 'Identity, genealogy, history' in Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (eds), *Identity: A Reader*, London: Sage/Open University Press, 2000, pp 313-326 (p 314).
33. Pierre Bourdieu, 'The biographical illusion', in du Gay, Evans and Redman, 2000, pp 299-305; Paul Ricoeur, 'Narrative and time', *Critical Inquiry*, vol 7, no 1, 1980, pp 169-90; Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, London: Virago, 1986; Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.
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35. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p 42.
36. Alice Bloch and Carl Levy (eds), *Refugees, Citizenship and Social Policy in Europe*. London: Macmillan, 1999; Liza Schuster and John Solomos, 'The politics of refugee and asylum policies in Britain: historical patterns and contemporary realities' in Bloch and Levy, 1999, pp 51-75; Miranda Lewis, *Asylum. Understanding Public Attitudes*, London: IPPR, 2005.
37. Lewis, 2005.
38. Jennifer Harding, 'Emotional subjects: language and power in refugee narratives' in Harding and Pribram, 2009, pp 267-279.
39. John Gabriel and Jennifer Harding, 'On being a "good" refugee' in Gargi Bhattacharyya (ed), *Ethnicities and Values in a Changing World*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, pp 135-154.
40. MV interviewed by D, January 2006.
41. MV interview.
42. Jennifer Harding, 'Questioning the subject in biographical interviewing', *Sociological Research Online*, vol 11, no 3, 2006.
43. K interviewed by E, November 2003.
44. M interviewed by T, November 2003.
45. Anne Karpf, 'The human voice and the texture of experience', in this edition of *Oral History*, pp 48-53.
46. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002; Elspeth Probyn, 'Everyday shame', *Cultural Studies*, vol 18, no 2/3, 2004, pp 328-349; Grossberg, 1992.
47. Massumi, 2002.
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49. Stephanie Baker, 'The mediated crowd: new social media and new forms of rioting', *Sociological Research Online*, vol 16, no 4, 21, 2011.
50. Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
51. Williams, 1965, p 63.
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53. Raymond Williams, 'On Structure of Feeling', in Harding and Pribram, 2009, pp 35-49 (p44).
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55. Williams, 2009, p 47.
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57. The UK riots took place between 6 and 12 August 2011. *Reading the Riots*. Accessed online at [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots\(published\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/46297/1/Reading%20the%20riots(published).pdf), 27 January 2014.
58. Twenty-nine-year-old Mark Duggan was shot on suspicion of handling a gun and was killed by police in Tottenham, north London, UK, on 4 August 2011. News spread quickly and on 6 August about 300 people gathered outside Tottenham police station to protest at the shooting and demand justice. The protest later developed into a major disturbance as two police cars were attacked and set alight and local shops were looted. Images of burning police cars and looting were circulated via social media and more people arrived to join in. Disturbances involving arson, looting and destruction of police property followed in other London boroughs and other UK towns and cities (Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Nottingham and Liverpool).
59. The *Guardian*, Paul Lewis, Tim Newburn and Dan Roberts, *Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of Disorder*, London: Guardian Books, iPad edition, 2011, p 21.
60. The *Guardian*, Lewis, Newburn and Roberts, 2011, p 21.
61. See Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul, The Shaping of the Private Self*, second edition, London and New York: Free Association Books, 1999. Rose uses the term 'psy' to refer to psychology and related disciplines and expertise. He argues that psy not only refers to ideas, cultural beliefs and specific practice but also plays a significant role in contemporary forms of political power (p vii).
62. The CASS Faculty of Art Architecture and Design is one of the four academic faculties at London Metropolitan University.
63. VADS [web page]. Accessed online at [www.vads.ac.uk/collections/EEP.html](http://www.vads.ac.uk/collections/EEP.html), 28 April 2014; Jenny Harding, 'The Eastender Archive Project', *Activate* 3, 2007, pp 2-3.

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