

## **Press Replay:**

### **Introduction to the Special Section on Rereading Valerie Walkerdine's 'Video Replay: Families, Films and Fantasy'.**

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This special section returns, over two decades after the paper's first publication, to Valerie Walkerdine's 'Video Replay: families, films and fantasy' (1986), a much-cited, often praised - and criticised - and still-unique piece of writing that lies between psychoanalytic studies, cultural studies, gender studies and critical psychology. The special section asks three scholars and clinicians to respond to the paper now, and as they first read it - Cathy Urwin, who examines its earlier and contemporary clinical interest for her; Sue Thornham, who positions the paper within previous and current cultural studies; and Candida Yates, who maps current psycho-cultural theories and methods through her engagement with the paper. The section ends with an interview with Walkerdine in which she responds to some of the commentators' concerns and describes her own sense of the paper's intellectual and historical place.

'Video Replay' appears in a number of collections (Alvaro and Thompson, 1990; Thornham, 1999) and in Walkerdine's own *Schoolgirl fictions* (1990) so it is not reprinted here. However this introductory paper begins with a simplified outline of 'Video Replay's engaging but complex concerns. The paper then moves on to review briefly the issues raised in the next three contributions to this section, and in the concluding interview.

'Video Replay' began as a chapter in a book, *Formations of Fantasy*, that was a key text for many

UK media and cultural studies academics and students in the 1990s. The nine chapters in the book concentrate, its Preface (Burgin *et al.*, 1986) tells us, on the place of fantasy in cultural theory, between public and private, real and imaginary - as, that is, psychic reality. The chapters are also particularly oriented towards visual versions of fantasy, but aside from 'Video Replay's address to the movie *Rocky II*, just one other paper in the book deals with popular culture. 'Video Replay' is the only chapter in the book that focuses, not just on the 'texts' of film, television, fine art, theories of art and culture, and psychoanalysis, but also on the 'texts' that are constituted by audiences: by viewers' and readers' own practices as they engage with a film.

'Video Replay' was the first paper to bring a psychoanalytically-inflected understanding of subjectivity not just to the study of cinematic texts, an endeavour famously developed in the journal *Screen*, but also to the study of specific audiences, in this instance, a particular family. 'Video Replay' also generated possibilities for deploying psychoanalytic ideas in new ways in empirical psychological and sociological research - something that had been suggested in Walkerdine's (1998 [1984]) Urwin's (1988 [1984]) and Wendy Hollway's (1998 [1984]) empirical work, on topics unrelated to popular media, in *Changing The Subject*, cowritten by them and two others in 1984. The paper's concerns with formations of childhood, particularly female childhood, appeared again in 1986 in *Language, gender and childhood*, coedited by Walkerdine, Carolyn Steedman and Urwin (Walkerdine *et al.*, 1986). These concerns have all remained part of Walkerdine's work; it is in 'Video Replay' that they come together for the first time.

The chapter begins with Walkerdine observing and audiorecording a family as part of her longstanding research on girls, class and education - other aspects of which are reported in her books *The mastery of reason* (1988) and *Democracy in the kitchen?* (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). During one research visit to a family, she finds that the family is watching *Rocky II*. 'How am I to make sense of this?' (1986: 167), Walkerdine asks.

Her first move is to note the voyeurism involved in watching people watching *Rocky*, as well as in observational work and research in general. But she is interested, despite this caveat, in the effects of films and television on families, in how they are 'read' in practice. She points out that the family brings 'complex and already constituted dynamics' (1986: 168) - of for instance class, gender, ethnicity and generation - to watching *Rocky*. Fantasy inflects their watching; so do the material realities of power and oppression. On both accounts, a film is never 'just' a text to its viewers.

Walkerdine describes the Coles as a working-class family living in a public housing estate - a mother and father, a six-year-old daughter who is the object of her research, two other children, and a dog. Two of the children, and the child of a friend were watching the film with Mr and Mrs Cole. Walkerdine sat with the family while they had tea and Mr Cole repeatedly replayed round 15 of the final boxing match in *Rocky II*. She records her 'liberal' discomfort at this violent scene, the family's enjoyment of it, Mr. Cole's exclusion of Mrs Cole, who is positioned as serving the family, and the movie's obsession with a stereotypically masculine, physical, classed struggle towards success. Afterwards, she rented the movie and watched it again, alone in her office. She

found herself completely drawn into it, crying, willing Rocky's success: 'I was Rocky', she says (1986: 169). She now found herself viewing the film from the position of the working class child that she had been rather than the middle class academic she had become. The film offers, Walkerdine says, 'the imaginary fulfilment of the working-class dream for bourgeois order' (1986: 169) through the body, rather than through the other, educational route that she took. There is, she suggests, a 'magic convergence' here for her, as for the family, particularly Mr Cole. Watching the film is an intense act of creative escape. It is this that 'makes Mr Cole want to have the fight on continuous and instant replay for ever, to live and triumph in that moment. And it is this that makes me throb with pain' (1986: 171). The fight is masculinised in the movie. It physicalises working-class women, but it does this differently; Rocky's pregnant wife must do demanding work that hurts her, and it is up to him to protect her. Nevertheless, the two characters are completely dependent on each other. Walkerdine notes that the film offers points of identification for and with women and femininities, as well as men and masculinities; and that all these identificatory positions are available to both female and male viewers.

At this point, the chapter is broken by a page that is blank except for a note that permission to print a still of Stallone as Rocky had been refused. Walkerdine then emphasises the latent as well as manifest meanings of the terms 'fight/ing/er' (1986: 174), a *point de capiton* in the film, the family, and for herself. Mr Cole characterises himself and indeed the whole family as fighters and encourages his children, including his daughter, to fight back if they need to. This combativeness affects the family's and especially Mr Cole's approach to Walkerdine's research. He characterises Walkerdine to his daughter, Joanne, and to Walkerdine herself, as a 'psychiatrist,' assuming a level of surveillance, even though Walkerdine has not mentioned that she is a psychologist. When Joanne demurs at wearing the microphone that is supposed to monitor her speech, Mr Cole acutely says a blank tape will suggest that she has 'nothing to say,' and, perhaps satirically, both tells Joanne to 'act normal' and produces as examples phrases connoting the middle-class 'received pronunciation' of elocution lessons, like 'how now brown cow'. Mr Cole's self-positioning as a fighter is classed and gendered, but that is not all; Walkerdine notes that Mr Cole is physically a very small man. She also describes some possible fears around femininity projected onto his daughter in his discussion of her tomboyish nature, and appearing in his nickname for her, Dodo, which he relates to the extinct bird.

Walkerdine includes an 'annotated transcription' (1986: 175) of part of her observation, which, as Urwin (this volume) points out, is rich in the intertwined familial, filmic and fantasy issues with which she is concerned, and which also offers an innovative approach to studying complex research contexts like families. To give a sense of this transcript, I include here, with some extensions for clarity, the section dealing with the replay of round 15:

**Rocky II, the video**

**(Audiorecorder counter)**

**149**

This is the 15th round again. Rocky

takes lots of punches from opponent.

Then he fights back for a bit.

The crowd is shouting and cheering.  
Who for?

Both fighters are in a bad way - no  
one seems to be winning at the  
moment.

Rocky begins to punch opponent

who is too weak to retaliate by

this time

Both mens' faces are a bloody

mess. They both stagger round the

ring, exhausted, but Rocky just

has the upper hand

The crowd chants, 'Rocky, Rocky'.

Video is switched on

Joanne talks about Jason (friend's  
child. 'He's got all jam (from a  
doughnut) down him.'

155

Everyone is quiet, all watching the

film

161

Mr Cole asks Joanne if she likes her

cake.

(Walkerdine, 1986: 177)

The paper is, Walkerdine declares, building a strong assertion: that material and psychic realities are both at work in the lived practices of this family watching *Rocky*, and that the latter as well as the former are effective. If fictional identities such as that of 'fight/ing/ers' 'become "real" in practices,' Walkerdine says, 'they must have a psychical reality which has a positive effectivity in the lived materiality of the practices themselves' (1986: 183). She returns here to Mr Cole's nickname for his daughter, and relates it more generally to men's infantilising fantasies of women in their care and power, 'narcissistic image(s) of the femininity of man' (1986: 186). These images often have considerable cultural currency. Walkerdine includes here a newspaper image of herself at a local carnival, dressed as the bluebell fairy, holding a wand that her father made in the machine shop at work. She notes the many images of this fancy dress fairy in the family archive. Her father's own nickname for her, 'Tinky' (Tinkerbell), connotes a similar fairytale, undifferentiated, perhaps hysterical femininity. Walkerdine recalls too the multiple incarnations of this fairytale femininity in the *Flower Fairies* books, then and now presented to many little girls, in which phallic, fairytale femininity is visually repeated over and over, with small, insignificant variations. She recalls the desire 'to *be* that fairy - small, protected, adored and never growing up', but also the effort and constraint of being the object of the gaze of the Other: 'To this day I can feel surging through my body the effect of the smile necessary to pose for such a gaze' (1986: 187). Culturally, these efforts and effects are placed under erasure. As Urwin (this volume) emphasises, the bluebell fairy is simply the visual representation of the fancy dress competition. The newspaper did not differentiate between the many little competitors; it did not mention that the bluebell fairy was the winner.

There are many possible readings, even in psychoanalytic terms, Walkerdine says, of her research situation. She indicates some other possibilities focused on preoedipal understandings, including one offered by Urwin (1998 [1984]). She also suggests that many film theorists and audience researchers are moving in similar directions to her, recognising the subject as constituted at the intersection between text and viewer, with no separation between them. We need, she says, empirical work on signification and subjectivity of the type she has attempted, in order to take account of the active subject.

In 'Video Replay', Walkerdine aims to show the 'effectivity of filmic representations within the lived relations of domestic practices' (1986: 189). When such work is pursued empirically, the researcher inevitably has a voyeuristic and regulatory role and will be seen as middle class by participants, whatever her methodological approach. Walkerdine acknowledges her own doubled place here, as researcher, and as the working class child she was, (mis)recognising her participants, as others have done before her. She cites Paul Willis's (1977) similar endeavour in *Learning to Labour*. She also explains that in studying film and families empirically, she wants to maintain, without intellectualising away or separating off, pleasure, and specifically, the

pleasures of 'low' culture. Intellectualisation has its own pleasures, she points out, and conceals its own fears - of, for instance, losing control.

Towards the end of the paper, Walkerdine describes her work as coming close to Freudian analyses of dreamwork, in which 'real life' and fantasy are inscribed within each other. In what I think is a very important formulation - one which I and many others have found very useful (Squire 1989; 2011), she defines her analytic process as having, like dreamwork, two movements : a (foucauldian) 'forwards' movement which 'anchors and fixes the signifier within concurrent practices, producing the regulative effectivity of the term' - for instance, fight/ing/er - 'as it operates as a relation within a regime of representation and truth'. The other, 'backwards' movement 'traces the associations of the signifier into the unconscious' (1986: 193)- a formulation . The paper traces 'backwards' the ideosyncratic placement of 'fighting' within individuals' psychic worlds and, moving forward, the the gendered and classed inscriptions of 'fighting,' and its signification of resistance. But this does not end up a romanticised revisioning of *Rocky II*'s place in a family's life. Characteristically, Walkerdine settles for contingent understanding, not resolution, ending the paper with ellipsis: 'embourgeoisement is the only dream left in all those desires for, and dreams of, difference... ' (1986: 197).

Cathy Urwin focuses on 'Video Replay''s foregrounding of reflexivity, the emotions, and psychoanalysis within empirical investigation, and essays her own extension of the paper's analysis. She points out how effectively the piece recasts passive watching subjects as active, and the role of the 'annotated transcription' in so doing. Tangentially to the anchoring role of fight/ing/er in 'Video Replay,' however, Urwin considers femininity within this research situation as adding another dimension. She points out the ways in which watching the video depends on Mrs Cole even if she is not always there; how her alliance with Walkerdine brings the researcher into the family; and how she is the agent of the sweetening practices of cake-distributing and eating that occur alongside and sometimes in odd conjunction to watching the film - as when Joanne says of the little boy also watching, at one of the bloodiest moments in the movie, 'he's got all jam down him.' Urwin also points out the relation of the watching practices described in this paper to contemporary audiences' engagements with reality shows, media specifically engineered to produce a kind of parasocial intimacy.

In her commentary, Sue Thornham approaches 'Video Replay' from the rather different perspective of media and cultural studies, comprehensively situating it against '*Screen theory*' , the passive subject involved with that, and the cultural-studies subject without a text. She remarks on the similar dichotomy within feminism at the time, which set women's construction within texts against women subjects within audiences and points to the place of foucauldian discourse theory as a bridge in both cases, though one that left many issues around subjectivities unaddressed.

In the last commentary, Candida Yates describes how refreshing 'Video Replay''s reflexivity was for cultural studies academics at the time it was published - despite criticisms of it, and its implicit denigration as 'feminine,' not-serious work. In this regard, 'Video Replay' suffered

double jeopardy since it also focused on the low-cultural form of Hollywood film. Yates points out that the paper's address to active family audiences, though recognised as significant, has not been developed as much as might have been expected since. She describes her own efforts at working, like Walkerdine, with an 'ethnography of the unconscious,' and developing it, as Walkerdine suggested, in relation to other psychoanalytic ideas - in Yates's case, in relation to conceptualisations of earlier, transitional phenomena. For Yates, 'Video Replay' also addresses masculinities and women's relations with them in a breakthrough way that enabled her own work in this field.

The e-interview with Valerie Walkerdine, conducted in the light of the commentaries, was embarked on as a way to reflect on all three pieces, as well as on Walkerdine's current perspective on 'Video Replay', on how the paper's concerns have travelled into her later work, and on how she sees this tradition of work developing in the future.

'Video Replay' is a striking and original paper in many ways. It pays attention to 'low' culture as textually complex; it addresses popular media as important aspects of social and personal relations. It takes on fantasy and the unconscious within empirical work, specifically, research on the messy and multilayered field of family viewing practices. It treats 'identities' as sets of identifications, a now-common approach (see for instance, Hall, 1997); it understands subjects as positioned at the intersections of social fields, currently a popular and fruitful perspective (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It is not afraid to make reflexivity part of its project without being overwhelmed by it. It puts together a 'forwards' analytic movement towards history with a 'backwards' analytic movement towards the unconscious. Its questioning of theoretical approaches to femininity in popular culture has been paralleled within film theory itself (for example, De Lauretis, 1987; Doane, 1991) It foregrounds classed, particularly gendered, classed

identifications, as Walkerdine's work has consistently and influentially done (see for instance Reay, 1998; Skeggs, 2004). And it refers to a broader collectivity of people working on similar problematics, linking it to a 'coauthored' field of work, as Walkerdine's often literally coauthored work has, again, repeatedly done (for example, Henriques et al., 1984 [1998]; Walkerdine et al., 1986; Walkerdine et al., 2001; Walkerdine and Blackman, 2000; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). The writers within this special section are part of this reading, writing, practising collectivity, and in their contributions here extend it

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