Chapter 6

Audrey Hepburn, nostalgia and postfeminism in the 1990s

A strong independent woman with a man (Mel)

> People are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires . . . A text can only mean something in the context of the experience and situation of its particular audience.
> (Grossberg 1992: 52–53)

I want finally to turn to a set of discussions I had with young women who have grown up with Audrey Hepburn in the 1980s and 1990s. In beginning this chapter with words from Lawrence Grossberg's essay 'Is there a fan in the house? The affective sensibility of fandom', I want not only to suggest the very different relationship of those young women to Hepburn, but also to signal once again what has been a central, structuring concern. In the process of conducting and writing about this research, the complexity of the relationships between the text 'Audrey Hepburn', my reading of that text, the readings of those women who spoke to me, and indeed my reading of their readings – in short, the issue of where 'meaning' is located – has been a problematic to which I have continually returned. Can 'Audrey Hepburn' be understood to 'mean' outside of this collection of specific readings? And indeed, how do those readings stand in relation to each other?

Grossberg's emphasis is on meaning as situated, as produced exclusively in relation to 'lives, experiences, needs and desires': the suggestion is that a text has no meaning outside of these readings. I want to hold onto Grossberg's sense that texts are made to mean in relation to context and situation of the reader, but I want to complicate the picture a little. Grounded in this research, my argument is that we can understand a text – here 'Audrey Hepburn' – to offer certain structures and concerns: in this case, the narrative of transformation, for instance, and a concern with the production of

femininity through dress and behaviour. These structures and concerns may be 'preferred' or *resonant* to an audience whose habitus produces those structures and concerns as especially significant. We can argue, as I have in Chapter 2, that narrative structure and aesthetic organisation may offer a point of entry to the text, an address to an audience whose subjectivities are constituted in relation to a particular discursive formation such as femininity. As a concrete instance, then, I share with all the women I spoke to the experience of growing up female. While we may each have different levels and kinds of investment in them according to class, generation, education, race, ethnicity, sexuality, we share an understanding, for example, that certain codes and rules exist in relation to femininity, and that the narrative of transformation is a familiar structure in relation to this. We can and do identify them in the text. In this sense, it could be said that our habitus is shared around gender. To what degree these tropes matter to us, however, and how this is manifested in the way we talk, depends on how we share that habitus in relation to those other factors within which gender is embedded. John Fiske points out that Bourdieu's notion of habitus is particularly useful for the way in which it 'refuses the traditional distinction between the social and the individual', suggesting how 'cultural tastes and habits are produced by social rather than individual differences' (Fiske 1992: 33, 37). I would argue that the advantage of Bourdieu's formulation is that it can be taken up as a way of placing emphasis squarely on the role of shared *social* rather than simply shared *psychic* structures, whilst keeping in play a sense of the way in which the specificity of one's personal history and indeed unconscious processes significantly determine the way a text is made to mean.

One factor may play a more significant role – class, say, or, as in this chapter, generation. These structures allow situated, skilled readings to be made. For instance, while I offered a skilled symptomatic film studies reading of the relationship between Audrey Hepburn, the urban and the domestic in Chapter 5, finding trouble in the text and insisting on the lack of resolution in these narratives, as the material considered in this chapter will show, the young women I spoke to who have come to Hepburn in the 1980s and 1990s pick up the same set of concerns, but offer a series of skilled postfeminist readings which produce Audrey as a girl who manages to 'have it all'.

Thinking about the different ways in which these structures and concerns around Hepburn were discussed by the two generationally

distinct groups of women I worked with is a useful way of illustrating the point. Furthermore, this in itself is impossible without a consideration of the ways in which I was able to read their readings. Looking at the interviews I conducted with the group of women who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, it is clearly the case that I have been able to read the narrative of transformation which is central to the text 'Audrey Hepburn' through the way it is embedded in those women's memories of growing up, their personal stories and experiences. Their retelling and reordering of their own trajectories around discussion of *My Fair Lady* resonates with this structure concerned with growing up, coming to a new kind of femininity and shifting in social status. Their relationship to that structure is manifest in the way in which it is profoundly embedded in memory and personal experience; this is often shared along lines of social class. These stories of personal development and history are interested particularly in narrating the self; in another way, they are also stories about becoming modern.

In contrast, the interviews with young women growing up in the 1980s and 1990s produced quite different kinds of knowledge. Necessarily they are not about memory; they are less about personal experience and personal history – in a very important way they are much less about a coherent understanding of 'the self' and more about the contradictory nature of identity. These interviews are quite self-consciously about questions of representation, and are thus particularly useful for what they can suggest about the nature of the relationship between these young women and Audrey Hepburn in the contemporary. They are suffused with a sense of the experience of growing up with postmodernity; the quality of the talk is significantly different – it is highly media-aware and often deconstructive and analytical in approach. Femininity, for instance, is here understood quite precisely as a construct and as performative. Where this kind of critical repertoire was available to some women I spoke to in the pilot interviews and in the first group through higher education, for these girls it is rather a consequence of the historical moment in which they have grown up. So, whereas in a number of the 1950s and 1960s interviews the significance of the transformation narrative was apparent through the way in which the women structured their personal narratives in memory and in talking about Hepburn, the approach of the younger women is analytical, deconstructive of the film narratives and Hepburn's image, and their relation to the

Hepburn look is generally profoundly performative. Despite the fact that the younger women appear to have an increased sense of intimacy and connection with Hepburn, their talk was largely characterised by a critical distance which made this set of interviews in some ways more difficult to deal with analytically, as at times they almost seemed, in a rather postmodern way, to contain their own analysis.

Lawrence Grossberg usefully suggests that 'we can call the particular relationship that holds any context together, that binds cultural forms and audiences, a "sensibility". A sensibility is a particular form of engagement or mode of operation' (1992: 54). Grossberg's notion of sensibility here is surely something akin to Williams's 'structure of feeling' (1977). While a number of understandings of Hepburn are shared across divisions of generation, the particular kinds of meanings which are made are nuanced in ways suggestive of both the historical situatedness of reading, and the particular sensibility or structure of feeling which characterises them. This indicates how reading formations – the relations between audiences and cultural forms – are structured in relation to historical specificity, and at the same time how they are also about more nebulous attachments – affect, feelings and investments: resonance and recognition. The young women in this second group of interviews describe themselves as having grown up in the 1980s and 1990s;[1] it became evident, however, that the youngest women, who saw themselves as having grown up in the 1990s, revealed a quite distinctive sensibility in relation to Hepburn and her films.

I had difficulty in describing the first group of interviewees as 'fans' of Audrey Hepburn; many of the questionnaires I received as a result of my original advertisement in *Sewing with Butterick* were either already unsigned or requested anonymity if I used material from them. The relationship between these young women and Audrey Hepburn was quite different – there was a significant degree of what might be described as 'fandom'. Cally, Anna and Lucy all showed me pictures of Audrey, on bedroom walls or in books. All the women had videos – a commemorative box set which included *Roman Holiday*, *Sabrina*, *Funny Face* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was available at the time of the interviews and was either owned or desired by most of the interviewees. Jayne, the only interviewee in this group to have the responsibilities of a family, did not have a video collection, but was eager to start one which would include the films of both Audrey Hepburn and Doris Day. She told me, though,

that she had never been able to do this because 'many a time you say these things and then never get round to it – or the money's never there – and you think, Oh, God, I've got to get this, so I'll get that next month, I mean you know, but you're never going to get it – there's always more – there's always other things that money's got to be spent on', for instance the house which she and her husband were in the process of redecorating, and the children. Her own 'fan' interests were at the bottom of her list of priorities.

Everyone who had seen the remake of *Sabrina* with Julia Ormond and Harrison Ford hated it, and those who hadn't hated the *idea* of it. The women in this group had particular kinds of 'expert' knowledge about Hepburn and her films which generally was not in evidence in the first group. Cally, for instance, described herself as 'a real film buff', and Chloë, who had a really detailed knowledge of a number of Hepburn's films, said 'I feel like such an anorak – it's *so* bad –' at a point in the interview where I admitted sharing her level of investment, clearly demonstrating an awareness of the way in which 'fandom' is often considered to be problematic. They sometimes knew things about her life, but the group was divided between those who had read biographies and sought out information (Cally, Anna, Jayne) and those who were adamant that reading about Hepburn's off-screen life would 'spoil' it for them (Chloë, Mel). Lucy had only read a little about Hepburn's life and shared this feeling, but interestingly, had read lots of other film-star and celebrity biographies.

What united the group, though, was a common love of 'old movies', often 'old black and white movies', particularly those of Audrey Hepburn. Where the women in the 1950s/1960s group often came to Hepburn through women's and film-fan magazines and were less invested in the films (which may, of course, be an issue related to memory), these young women were all very invested in the movies as well as the style, and had come to Hepburn through them, going on to search out more films, pictures or information. In the light of the way in which Hepburn's image had circulated in the 1990s, it was perhaps to be expected that the film around which most of the discussions were focused was *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. The women's particular interests in Hepburn varied, but were split broadly in a very interesting way which I will discuss in more detail in the second part of this chapter. Briefly, where the slightly older women (Cally, Anna, Lucy, Verity, Jayne) were interested primarily in Hepburn's 'look' – often in a quite performative and sometimes

specifically 'retro' way – and in the lifestyle offered in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Chloë and Mel, the two youngest women, while obviously interested in Hepburn's look, seemed more interested in her character and behaviour in the films, and were invested in a highly nostalgic way in the innocence and romance of the era represented in the films and by Hepburn's stardom.

Mothers and daughters

Before I elaborate on those issues which are related to the generational specificity of this group, I want to begin with a discussion of some features of this set of interviews which were to a degree shared with the first group across the generational division, going on to look at the ways in which even those shared readings can also be understood as generationally specific. This seems to be a useful strategy, because it offers a way of looking at the double 'preferred/skilled reading' structure I suggest above.

As I suggest in the introduction, the literal and metaphorical mother–daughter relationship – actual mothers and influential older female figures, the absence of mothers for Hepburn's characters – figures in this research as a particularly significant formation. While Lucy is actually Shirley's daughter, it is useful to think about the way in which the girls in this group are, in generational terms, the metaphorical daughters of the women in the first group.[2] As in the first set of discussions with 1950s/1960s women, mothers and indeed the idea of 'mothering' featured in each of these interviews to varying degrees.

The majority of the young women had come to Audrey through the same activity – watching old films on television with their mothers in their pre-teenage years. A number of their mothers had been Audrey fans themselves. Indeed, my own introduction to and fascination with Audrey was initiated in exactly the same way. Lucy, for instance, had acquired her appreciation of stars like Hepburn and Doris Day from her mother Shirley (see Moseley 2001). Jayne would watch old films on TV with her mum and through this had developed a love of 'old stars', and Mel and Chloë both remembered first discovering Audrey in this way:

> RM: Can you remember how you first saw Audrey Hepburn, or where, or heard about her?

Mel: I don't know really, I just, . . . my mum sort of introduced me . . . she sort of, watches all the old films, and listens to all the old music and I sort of just got into it through just being brought up in that environment, I don't know – probably the first film I saw was *Roman Holiday*. [RM: With your mum?] Yeah – just sort of, in front of the television – she's sort of got the same sort of opinion of her as me. [. . .]

Chloë: 'Cos like when I was – my mum and I used to watch loads of old films. [RM: Did you?] Yeah, but then – I was thinking about this, actually, I can't, I can't – I remember things like – was she in *The Nun's Story*? [RM: Yeah] And watching ones like that, not things like *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, but more along the lines of – because if it was with my mum it would be things like, *Funny Face* and *Sabrina* – that kind of thing. Watching them with her, and then I didn't really, I don't think, think 'Oh that's Audrey Hepburn' – and all the stuff that goes on there – just kind of, just sort of, like, knowing about her in the back of my mind, and then it was kind of like – *re-finding* . . . her in a different way when I got older – when I was in later teenage years, got – found a lot more, in her, than I had done then – it was just something we did . . .

While a number of the women in the first set of interviews had enjoyed musical films like *My Fair Lady* with their mothers, their primary access to Hepburn, as I have said, had been through women's and film-fan magazines; for all of the 1990s girls, films on television and subsequently on video had been their primary contact. These were often described as 'classic' films and stars – 'They're all Saturday afternoon classics, or Sunday afternoon classics' (Lucy) – and a number of the young women told me things about the way they watch the films now. There was a degree of solo viewing: Chloë and Cally both talked about watching films alone, and both self-consciously described this as 'anorak' activity. Chloë was quite detailed about her reasons for watching her collection of Hepburn films in this way:

I tend to – I tend to watch them on my own, because they have like – most – a lot of the films I've got – some of them I've got just because they're good films, and some of the films I've got . . . I've got because they really suit certain, kind of, well – what you want at a certain time – if you want to watch such and such a film – because you're in such and such a mood, then you choose that one, and they're the kind of films I would generally watch on my own.

Articulated here is the way in which films can be understood as meaningful in relation to affect and feeling – 'what you want at a certain time'. Chloë watches films to both fit in with and also to create particular moods for herself, as well as because they are in some way 'good'. Cally also preferred to watch alone sometimes:

I do like to sit and watch a film by myself, but I also like, you know, a nice girlie Saturday afternoon sort of film – I've watched films – we've watched *Funny Face* – Anna and I have watched *Funny Face* together – and we've watched *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and things like that – but I do tend to watch a lot of stuff by myself, but I like – it's also quite good – I tend to find though that if you're watching something, or if you go round to a mate's house and it's a social evening, you don't tend to watch the film anyway, after a while – you all start talking and it's just on in the background, sort of thing, so you know – I do like to watch them on my own really, I suppose.

Cally also enjoyed watching these films in a group of girls. What she describes here are quite different kinds of 'fan' activity; solo viewing enables concentration and attention to detail and as we will see, Chloë and Mel, who both preferred to watch alone, were extremely knowledgeable about the details of mise-en-scène and dialogue in Audrey films. Communal viewing is something quite different, and was often described as a 'girlie Saturday afternoon' activity. Again this emerges as about creating 'mood', but here for a group – in Cally's description the film is in the background. It's also about consensus: 'I think the general impression is . . . Audrey's all right! [laughs] We all like our Aud!' Anna talked about her favourite film, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, in a way suggestive of both of these types of viewing:

I was always going on about it, and I taped it when it was on – and it's just one of those films that you – I always had on – every weekend – like you know when you wake up on Sunday and you'd be really hung-over, and you'd be like – cup of coffee and some orange juice – and stick *Breakfast at Tiffany's* on, and one of my friends actually said to me once, that – she actually sat down and watched it once, when it was on the TV and she said – I knew I'd seen this, she said 'I've seen it round your house every morning, haven't I?' [laughter] It's on every Sunday – and it's just like one of those things – like, I know all the dialogue off by heart, 'cos it's sort of, in the back of my head.

I think Audrey begins to emerge, here, as 'one of the girls'; this is a form of intimacy which is perceptible throughout this set of

interviews, and which is related to the ways in which Audrey is understood as 'not sexy' and as 'natural'. As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, these are discourses which were apparent in the interviews with women who liked Hepburn in the 1950s and 1960s; in this chapter I will discuss the ways in which they can be understood to have become historically and generationally specific, and thereby illustrative of the way in which while structures and discourses can be seen as shared, say, in relation to gender, they also become meaningful in relation to the specificities of context – the particular ways in which audiences relate to those structures and discourses describes a 'sensibility' (Grossberg 1992) or 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1977). I will argue that the specific understandings of Hepburn offered by these young women should be understood within the contexts of both postfeminism and postmodernism.

Hepburn was often perceived in a positive way by women who liked her in the 1950s and 1960s as 'not sexy'; in relation to this, she was repeatedly constructed in their talk through discussion of Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot. The notion that Hepburn was 'not sexy' frequently emerged as part of the formation 'classy, not sexy'. This understanding of Hepburn, which is generationally shared, must nonetheless be understood as historically specific. For those women growing up in the 1950s and 1960s the appeal of a star who wasn't sexy may be understood in relation to social imperatives and notions of appropriate femininity. The 1990s girls I spoke to discussed her in a similar way – although quite often they described her more precisely as 'not about sex': 'You see I think she was sexy, and I'd love to look like her, but – she's sexy without being about sex. Whereas Marilyn is sexy, pin-up, chest, everything' (Mel). In the distinctions made between Hepburn and Monroe, 'sex' is always located in the body. As we will see, this construction of Hepburn in the second set of interviews is clearly formed through a peculiarly 1990s inflection of a feminist sensibility which can be described as 'postfeminist'.

Hepburn appealed to Verity, as to a number of the women I spoke to about liking Hepburn in the 1950s and 1960s, because she could be skinny and still be a star, but also because she is not a 'caricature of a woman' – in other words, not excessively gendered. In relation to a picture she had on her wall (figure I.1), I asked Anna why she thought Hepburn is still seen as the world's most alluring woman:

> I think it's because she's got like a really timeless sort of, like – well, she's graceful for a start, you know – you look at the way she carries herself, sort of thing, I mean even if you look at the one where she's sort of like, pulling a little face with the cigarette holder, if it had been like Marilyn Monroe that would have been like, a dead sexy shot – with her it just looks a bit sort of, like somebody's given a child a fag – and like, you know – to play around with it – you know [laughter] it's not – it's sort of like, it's not overtly sexy, do you know what I mean?

She goes on to talk about the casting of Hepburn instead of Monroe (Capote's choice) in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* – she can't imagine Monroe in this role because there would be 'too many curves for a start!' I think Anna's contrast between the two stars is very significant: her identification here of Hepburn as 'graceful' is key. Monroe is indeed too sexy to be graceful – this is a question of poise, as well as the relation of the body to clothing. This is a distinction between the movement of the body which emphasises secondary sexual characteristics (Monroe), or that which emphasises the line of the dress (Hepburn). When Marilyn moves, what is most significant is her body in her clothes – the clothes are only important in so far as they relate to and reveal her body. In Hepburn's performance, the body displays the clothes, rather than the clothes displaying the body. It is not necessarily a question of body shape, then; rather it is one of movement and behaviour. Later in our conversation, Anna talked about the difference between sexiness and 'allure':

> I like the way they do actually use the word alluring – because alluring is a sort of like *drawing in*, you know – it's not like saying who is the most sexiest woman and the most attractive woman, because that's a very sort of . . . *detached* way of looking at it, you know, you're looking at someone and going – oh, you're pretty, or you're this, or you're that, but alluring is – it's like you're inviting, and you're welcoming, you know.

Anna's use of words like 'drawing in', 'inviting' and 'welcoming' is important: it is suggestive of a potential for intimacy which is apparent in almost all of this set of interviews about Audrey's appeal for other women, and of the argument I made in Chapter 2 about the nature of the 'attraction' of clothes in Hepburn's films. Similarly, she felt that in contrast to Audrey, '[Grace Kelly's] got no warmth, though – I mean that's what I always think about her when you look at any of the photos – I always think – she just looks very warm, and

she's just got like that sort of personality whereas someone like you know – Grace Kelly . . .'. This is not a relationship of detachment (as exhibited in the critical work on Hepburn I discuss in Chapter 2); it is rather one of closeness. It is also significant that it is precisely because Hepburn is *not* sexy that many of these young women felt they could be close to her. Anna feels from reading about her that she was felt to be 'very very nice', and says that this is partly why she likes her: sexy girls are not 'nice', are not your friend. When I asked Lucy why she thinks so many women like Audrey, she told me:

> Lucy: A safe rival, isn't she? A bit less than like, Marilyn Monroe wouldn't be a safe rival, you know – you don't think *sexy* when you see Audrey Hepburn, do you? [RM: No, I don't think so] You think *sweet* [laughs].
>
> RM: Do you think she was sexy though?
>
> Lucy: She must have been – I'm assuming she must have been – I mean you can see it more obviously in Brigitte Bardot . . . she's got to be, hasn't she?
>
> RM: I wonder how appealing she actually was to men?
>
> Lucy: Oh the men I know like her, they all like her, but I don't know from when they liked her. But then all the women I know like her, so she must be like a safer – a bit like Doris Day – safe. The girl-next-door type.

Audrey is 'safe' to like here because she is not a sexual rival – there's little likelihood that she will steal away your boyfriend – she is potential-friend material. This is partly because she is sexually non-threatening, and partly because of the potential and desire for intimacy she inspires.[3] This is also linked to the fact that she is understood to be authentic, genuine and sincere; Audrey is 'real':

> RM: If I ask you what you particularly like about her, what would it be?
>
> Anna: Her warmth and spontaneity. Because I think that's what – I mean you're talking about someone you don't actually know personally, but [laughs] – just from the way that she comes across in the films, I think that sort of, you know, there's like a genuine, sort of, affection and generosity of spirit, sort of thing that you get from the roles that she plays anyway. You'd want to be friends with her, basically. You'd hate her guts at the same time – but you'd want to be her friend [laughs], so er . . .
>
> RM: Especially in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, maybe?
>
> Anna: Yeah – especially – I mean – I don't know what it is about that more than any of the other films – maybe because of the – you could actually imagine that whole scenario happening in your life – you can't actually imagine *My Fair Lady* happening in your life, or something like that, but you can with *Breakfast at Tiffany's* – a lot of that sort of – ties in with various bits of my life, so –
>
> RM: Yeah – 'cos in fact – do you remember that day when we bumped into each other in town – when I first asked you about this – P—— had said, 'Oh, talk to Anna' [Anna: Oh right – yeah] and you said to me, 'Oh, I live my life like *Breakfast at Tiffany's*'. [Anna laughs] I just thought that was *brilliant* – I mean, maybe it was a flippant comment – but what did you mean? 'Cos I thought that was wonderful.
>
> Anna: Erm – probably because my life's quite scatty [laughs] at the best of times to be quite honest – and I tend to sort of, wing things and expect them to turn out OK, and I'll do something like, you know, like have a massive party in your house, sort of thing, have the police turn up and just run up the fire escape to someone else's flat and leave someone else to deal with it, you know – there's that whole sort of, acting . . . irresponsibly, sort of thing . . . [RM: And sort of knowing, or hoping, that it'll turn out all right] It's all all right, you know, and sort of, fingers crossed – but that sort of optimism, which is generally what I sort of do – it always reminds me of being basically like a kid, you know – you just run around with actually not knowing what the consequences of your actions are going to be, but sort of, you carry on doing it anyway – and I don't think I've grown out of that, to be quite honest [laughs], so . . . .

Here, Anna describes how she is able to understand her favourite star in relation to her perception of herself and the way she conducts her own life. She made a number of comments of this kind throughout the interview, usually in relation to *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, her favourite film, which repeatedly constructed Audrey as accessible and real in relation to her own experience, and in indeed in contrast to other stars:

> 'Cos all of my – most of the women I really look out – is from that period sort of thing – but it's because she wasn't . . . I don't know how to describe it – she wasn't standoffish, she wasn't like someone that you had up on a pedestal, it was like, you know, you see her running around getting ready because she's ten minutes late, sort of thing, and you're thinking – that could be me – if I looked like Audrey Hepburn – unfortunately I don't [laughs] – and just the fact that she had a really great sense of humour, all the way through it. [. . .] I mean I think what you get with someone like Audrey Hepburn is basically you project your own self onto her a bit, you know, it's sort of – it's like that.

RM: Do you think she's particularly accessible in that way?
Anna: Yeah – oh definitely, yeah. I mean – she doesn't – it's like Ingrid Bergman – you couldn't imagine sort of like – 'Come on Ingrid – let's go down the pub' or something like that – but you could imagine taking Audrey Hepburn out, you know – like the bit where they get drunk in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* – you're just thinking – this could be you – you now, like you're sort of in a bar with Audrey sort of thing – you know.
RM: Yeah – definitely – so I suppose in some ways maybe she is a bit of a girl next door, as well as –
Anna: Yeah – yeah – I mean it's like – I think what it is – even though she looks like drop dead gorgeous, *it could be you* sort of thing – do you know what I mean? It's like you know – whereas I don't think . . . someone like Grace Kelly, you don't think – oh I could actually like you know – *be* like Grace Kelly, d'you know what I mean?

Breakfast at Tiffany's has such purchase for Anna because it seems to say something about her own experience of life in the 1990s. She describes this as 'empathy' and attributes it to the fact that Audrey is 'real'; she is simply 'herself':

> It's just like – and also a lot of what she's – when she's talking to George Peppard in the car, and you know that she really likes him, but she can't deal with the whole idea of a relationship, when she talks about love being like a cage, or whatever, and like, people don't own people – and when I first saw it, that was exactly what I thought – I was like yes! You know. . . . I mean I can objectively say I think Grace Kelly is very attractive – but I would never want to be her, you know, whereas like Audrey Hepburn is someone you can actually sort of think – I mean if you look through most of her films, she's like always, like, herself.

If Anna looked like Audrey, 'it could be her'. It would be facile to suggest the impossibility Anna expresses here of 'looking like Audrey' is attributable solely to Hepburn's whiteness – although that is not to deny that this factor may be in play; most of the young white women in this group felt similarly. In contrast to Grace Kelly, however, whom Anna describes as 'Aryan' and 'too perfect . . . it's like they've got some little clones', Hepburn's naturalness, as well as the individuality of her beauty, makes her a figure that she might aspire to. Hepburn's behaviour, however, is both resonant and appropriable. Audrey is someone you might like to go to the pub with, and indeed someone you could *imagine* going to the pub with.

She offers the potential for intimacy: she's the kind of girl you'd like to know. 'Ice queens' Kelly and Bergman are not accessible in this way – neither of them is 'one of the girls'.

'She's a real phoney'

As in the first set of interviews, here Audrey is always understood to be 'herself':

> I mean, she seems to be *her* in all of her films. Although she's sort of different characters, so there seems to be, this kind of thing, this kind of, thing that you can't define is present in all her films, in her, and she is, kind of, her in all her films – but not in a *bad* way, not like Winona Ryder is, or like how she plays herself in every film – I don't mean that, I mean it was in a *good* way.
>
> (Chloë)

Chloë seems to be pointing here to a sense of how highly defined Hepburn's persona is ('this kind of, thing that you can't define is present in all her films'). At several points in the interview Chloë told me how she always thinks of Audrey as living 'through the films, and that's the only life she has – and they like get her out of a box, and like – she lives in a box, and then they let her out, she does a film, and that's how she lives, and then they put her back in'. Clearly she is aware of the constructedness or unreality of the star Audrey Hepburn. At the same time, what she is also trying to articulate is her feeling that Hepburn is rather more 'self' than persona. The contrast with Winona Ryder is telling; while Ryder is always the same in her films in a 'bad way' – i.e. she always plays the same character – Audrey is just herself in a natural, and therefore good way. Similarly, Cally described Audrey as coming across 'quite naturally, you know, which is – and it's quite unusual in a lot of ways – quite kookie I suppose', and as 'ingenuous', suggesting a certain frankness and artlessness – she is 'up front', she's not hiding anything – what you see is what you get. It is interesting how 'kookie' here is used to mean 'natural'; as I discuss in Chapter 2, the expression 'kookie' was used in the late 1950s and early 1960s to denote a 'different', more unusual kind of (exclusively female) star. This is suggestive then of the way in which other stars are considered 'artificial', not just in terms of the constructedness of their persona, but also in relation to beauty. Indeed the article on 'kookie beauty' from *Mirabelle and*

Glamour was focused on creating a 'natural' look. Jayne also commented on this aspect of Hepburn's appeal in the context of a discussion of the imperative for women to be slim and the current crop of super-thin models. She described how even un-made-up – natural – Hepburn looked wonderful, despite the fact that you could see the shadows under her eyes, unlike those girls who would look awful without make-up. She expertly points out that there are 'touches of blusher' in this image, but that's all: 'There's no make-up to hide it, is there?' Particularly interesting in this respect is the way in which in contrast to current examples of the slim feminine ideal like Kate Moss and Jodie Kidd, Hepburn's extreme thinness is acceptable precisely because it is understood to be 'natural': just how she is. Jayne uses Twiggy as a comparison, around whom she considers there was an attempt to glamorise and impose thinness as an ideal; Audrey 'was just thin'. Twiggy's rise to fame coincides with Jayne's pre-teen years – perhaps a particularly influential time for young girls in terms of feminine role models. Audrey in some respects already represented a time which was past at this moment, and the potential for idealising the recent past should not be ignored. Cally discussed why she likes Hepburn's thinness, and can accept it, in a similar way:

> So it's not for any kind of . . . more unhealthy, sort of, anorexic reasons, or anything like that, it's just that I think she embodies a certain type . . . and I think a lot of women, if they're honest, do like that type – even if they're nothing like it themselves. They've got to see the attractiveness of it, providing it's sort of, natural, and not, sort of, someone trying to starve themselves to death.

Equally, while Anna felt that usually, 'from a feminist point of view' she would find such thinness problematic, in Hepburn's case 'for some reason it doesn't bother me about her at all'.

Audrey is seen to be entirely genuine – this is perhaps the reason why the 'Moon River' moment from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and the 'mouth of truth' incident in *Roman Holiday* were frequently cited as 'favourite Audrey moments' across both sets of interviews. Similarly, a number of women mentioned Hepburn's UNICEF work, and talked about how they felt that her caring and compassion were genuine; for those women who knew about her experiences as a child in occupied Holland, this was felt to be the result of personal experience – the ultimate authentication.

reading thinness through a whp of 90s supermodels

I found Anna's comments on her understanding of Hepburn as 'real' particularly interesting. In this excerpt she talks about Hepburn's appeal in relation to other actresses:

> I mean if you look at most sort of actresses – they've got like you know one particular look – like you know – with Marilyn Monroe it's oh – she's you know, overtly very sexual or whatever, Ingrid Bergman was like very aloof, and that was it – I mean if you see Ingrid Bergman in – what was I watching the other day . . . oh, it was *Indiscreet* with Cary Grant – and it's quite a good film, but she can't actually sort of do comedy very well – because she's still being Ingrid Bergman, yeah – and she's still very detached from the whole thing . . . whereas I – you see she probably – she's got all of those elements, but in one person – which is what most people are like, you know.

Audrey is 'real' because like 'real' people, there is more than one side to her – she's three-dimensional:

> I mean it's like – the bit in – in *My Fair Lady* where they take her to Ascot and you know and she's being perfectly, perfectly serene and you're just like thinking 'Oh God', you know, complete ice queen, and then she's like cheering on this horse and everything [laughter] like that, and you think, well that's like both sides of her personality that most people have got, you know, you've got that bit where you want to be sort of dead detached, but underneath you're like dead excited, like you know, sort of. I think she probably seems more real. You know – it's like admitting that you have got all these characteristics, and you have got all these faults, but that's like what you are, rather than – I mean if you do look at a lot of people like Ingrid Bergman which is probably heresy to P—— to say this, but she's very like two-dimensional, you know, but I mean somebody like Audrey Hepburn's like – you know – all-rounded, you know.

Audrey is human – she has flaws – and this makes her real. She isn't perfect, which makes her an accessible star in contrast, for instance, to Ingrid Bergman in this account. I want to argue that the particular understandings of Audrey as 'real' and 'authentic' which emerge from these interviews with 1990s girls can be seen as an historically specific inflection of the same formation which produced Hepburn as 'natural' in the 1950s/1960s group. It will become apparent that in part, what is understood as Hepburn's 'realism' and authenticity in the sense that Anna describes it above – 'two sides of the same coin' – is rather an expression of the way in which Hepburn's ability to be a number of things at once, thereby managing some key

contradictions of gendered identity, embodies the possibility of utopian resolution.

In the summer of 1996 Chanel launched their first fragrance in many years, 'Allure', which coincided precisely with a revival of lounge and easy listening music and a renewed interest in Hepburn's image. *Harper's and Queen* of June 1996 was one of a number of magazines at this moment to feature Hepburn on the cover (figure I.1) as still 'The world's most alluring woman', often tied in to features on Chanel's newest perfume and articles which attempted to define the essence of feminine allure. Chanel's campaign for 'Allure' featured eight 'different' women, different not only from each other but also from conventional standards of beauty. The emphasis was on warmth, realism and individuality (shared also by the campaign surrounding Calvin Klein's fragrance 'CKBE', and suggested in the title of a short-lived British magazine for women, *Frank*). This key discourse of difference and individuality in relation to feminine allure was carried through in a number of articles at the same moment which featured new young models predicted to take over from current supermodels. Features such as 'The new individuality' (*Cosmopolitan*, July 1996, pp. 200–203) and 'Pretty cool: wonderful today, weird tomorrow? The new supermodels have looks which challenge conventional ideals' (*Vogue*, July 1996, p. 26) described a 'beauty revolution': new values of difference, individuality, naturalness and realism as central to female beauty, 'unvarnished reality' rather than 'glitz and glamour' (*Cosmopolitan*, July 1996). Clearly, this is not a new discourse in relation to standards of female beauty; it is an ideological sleight of hand which was equally evident in material from earlier beauty pages, which I discuss in Chapter 2, and as Wendy Chapkis points out, feminist claims about every woman's 'natural' beauty have been incorporated into widely circulating discourses about femininity, in turn encouraging attempts to produce this 'naturalness' through the purchase and use of cosmetics (Chapkis quoted in Coppock, Haydon and Richter 1995: 24). 'Naturalness' was also key to Hepburn's star image – the construction of her look as natural, different, real and therefore democratic was key to its perceived achievability.

While Audrey Hepburn is then still appropriate to the primary discourse of selfhood and beauty circulating in the mid- to late 1990s, the 1990s girls, while strongly invested in this, at the same time recognise the sleight of hand – indeed there is a powerful sense

in these interviews of the impossibility of 'being like Audrey'. One might be able simply to take up elements of her style in a performative way. The imperative to be natural, to 'be yourself', operates across both periods around both beauty and personality and is offered as key to female attractiveness. What is interesting is the historical specificity of this discourse. In the late 1950s and early 1960s it is 'tasteless' to be artificial – heavily made-up and self-consciously posturing – and this could perhaps be explained in terms of contemporary social mores. In the mid- to late 1990s the imperative to be natural is couched in terms of democracy and 'realism' – it is about authenticity and individuality, although Chanel's 'Allure' is also interestingly discussed in relation to a return to 'good taste'. The discourse of naturalness in female beauty remains a powerful one, even as the highly media-aware young women I spoke to were able to deconstruct it almost automatically. Alongside an understanding of Hepburn as 'natural' and real, the ideological sleight of hand was picked out quite precisely by these young women in their discussions. Audrey, for all her naturalness, is extremely well-groomed: 'She's *very* turned out,' as Chloë put it. Through Audrey, being 'natural' seems to offer the possibility of 'being oneself' as well as being attractive and presented in the right way, and therefore of being successful. She manages to reconcile contradictions which are recognised to be impossible. As I discuss below there was often a keen feminist sensibility at work in these interviews through which these young women were able to deconstruct the complexity of Hepburn's image. In response to a comment she had made, I asked Anna why it was that women like female stars who are not overtly sexy:

> Because – it's probably because of what you'd want to have for yourself – you know, at the end of the day Audrey Hepburn does exist in a little idealised world where you know it's not like she walks out the house and people are wolf whistling at her, or going, 'You're a woman, you can't do this,' or you know, or 'How are you dressing for your interview? How are you dressing for work?, you know, and it *is* in an ideal world, you should be able to look like that all the time, and be judged on your – I mean, OK she does get judged on the way she looks, but you get like people look at her and her personality, whereas like, you know, in an ideal world that would happen but in the real world [laughs] as we all know, it doesn't happen, and so it's probably something like that.

Such a problematisation of the myths of postfeminism is offered alongside an understanding of Hepburn as 'more real' than other stars. While Anna for instance recognises really that Hepburn's world is an idealised one, she appeals to her precisely because through her 'realness' she offers the possibility of a world where women are not judged just on their looks. She looks great – she has wonderful clothes, hair and make-up, and she has the perfect life. At the same time, she is not punished for it. Surely, the emphasis in this set of interviews on the appeal of Audrey as a star who is 'not about sex' is related to this; in 'Audrey-land' a woman can be attractive, well-dressed, successful and herself without being continually reduced to her sexuality. She offers the possibility of 'having it all'.

Nostalgia and escape from the postmodern

At the same time, there is a discourse about authenticity in a number of these interviews which describes a dis-ease with an 'artificial' and self-conscious contemporary world which is recognised to be interested primarily in the ironic. In these instances the 'real' is the authentic and concomitantly the valuable, and is precisely located, through Hepburn, in the past. Chloë and I talked about the current vogue for 1950s fashion, furniture and lounge music, and Chloë commented that the bare 'loft-living-style' interior design of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was currently popular. She thought 'kookie' a horrible word to use, even though it summed up the mood of the film, and she went on to talk about this in relation to Hepburn's behaviour, in which she is particularly interested, at a later point:

> The small, little things, like how she climbs up to get her whiskey while putting her foot in the drawer, and then she sits with her feet in the other drawer, and she's drinking, and *little* things like *that* – just kind of, things that you think God – you know – like I say – it's just so cool – but you couldn't – and you – but you just wouldn't – I mean, you can't say, you would think to do that, because she doesn't think to do that, if you see what I mean – it's just, kind of, *done*, and if you thought to do that, it wouldn't be the same thing at all.

Chloë feels one could not be like Audrey Hepburn precisely because she is authentic and unique; for this woman this is a key part of Audrey's appeal. Although she accepts the possibility of doing the Hepburn look in a performative way, nevertheless at the same time

the self-conscious mimicking of behaviour and style is rejected in favour of an authenticity of behaviour and effect. Hepburn appeals

> because she – it's so un-self-conscious, it's just – seems to be, everything she does is kind of like . . . like a natural reflex thing to do, it's not done in a self-conscious way. And in the way that kooky things are done today, in a really self-conscious, you know, to be kind of . . . What she's doing, she totally seems natural, and that she's doing all the things she would be doing in something like *Breakfast at Tiffany's* – not in the earlier ones, because they're much more, sort of, staged, in a way – apart from the little bits you get, the little gem bits, where she's kind of . . .

Chloë looks for these 'little gem bits' which are her favourite in Audrey Hepburn films – the language is indicative of the worth of the genuine in this account – 'gem' signifies rarity, value and authenticity. The way she talks about Audrey in relation to contemporary female stars is revealing, as in the example of Winona Ryder above; in the same vein she told me, 'Say you just saw one of her films, maybe you couldn't tell, but I think you'd still get . . . insight – a lot more insight into her, and how she was, how I *think* she was, through watching that, than you would say through watching Gwyneth Paltrow in whatever she was in.' There is a clear sense here of the authenticity, the 'realness' of Audrey in comparison to the stars of the 1990s. As we will see in the rest of this chapter, for these two youngest women who grew up in the 1990s there is a clear desire to retreat from the pressures and complexities of the self-consciousness, irony and confusing gender roles of the 1990s and into a period which is seen to embody innocence and idealised heterosexual romance.[4] Before considering the ways in which Audrey emerges as a distinctly postfeminist figure in this set of interviews, I want to set this up through a short discussion of the emphasis in them on 'mothering'.

The capacity of Audrey Hepburn to inspire intimacy which I discuss above also produces a discourse about mothering. Hepburn characters are usually motherless, producing the familiar father–daughter configuration which is either articulated in a family relationship and/or in her pairing with an older man in the formation of the romantic couple. In this way Hepburn is usually doubly fathered, pointing even more strongly to the lack of a mother for her characters. In the interviews, a mother–daughter relationship is formed and

often privileged in personal stories almost by way of compensation for the lack in the narratives. On a simple level, these young women very often spoke about their mothers, as I discuss above and below, in relation to the idea of nostalgia. On another there is a very particular discourse about 'mothering' Hepburn, and, by proxy, *being* mothered. Indeed, in these interviews I continually found myself 'feeling sorry for Audrey' and relating the story of how, after months of vocal training and practice, Hepburn was dubbed, without being consulted, by Marni Nixon on the soundtrack for *My Fair Lady*.

This discourse is articulated in a number of ways. First, there are frequent comments which simply suggest Hepburn's child-like qualities:

> I think there's something quite child-like about her, something quite ethereal, you know, she's not a normal – well, I say normal . . . she's not our average kind of – she seems quite vulnerable in comparison to other people – she's so slight – it's a physical thing – it's those big eyes – and her sort of – she's got some very sort of . . . *sweet*, endearing mannerisms, that . . . I don't know . . . I think she's got that star quality thing, whatever that is – that elusive quality, and it *is* the fact that she is this slight – she's got a very clearly defined image, as well . . . what else can I say . . . but I personally like her because she's got that very sort of wide-eyed, easily affronted, easily offended, kind of [both laugh] demeanour, and it's very endearing.
>
> (Cally)

In this case it is clearly acknowledged that 'it's a physical thing', Hepburn's frailty, which makes her endearing, inspires care. Words like 'sweet' and 'cute' were quite often used of Hepburn in this set of interviews, but were absent from the 1950s/1960s group.[5] Lucy told me:

> She's just like the sweetest looking person you've ever seen, and that's what it is – probably because she looks like a cat! You know – and she's so *little* – well, she's not, she's probably very tall isn't she, but she looks like she needs looking after, and she's really sweet, isn't she? [laughs].

During my interview with Lucy, who loves cats, her own cat came into the room asking to be fed. It had been in a road accident, and consequently required long-term care – just as Hepburn, whom Lucy likens to a cat physically, 'needs looking after'.[6] Similarly, Chloë responded to my comment that Hepburn looks very small against

the New York skyline in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* in a way that focuses on her physical frailty and yet, simultaneously, her ability to cope:

> Yeah – and *so* – she looks so vulnerable, and so kind of, susceptible to all these things, and you really do worry for her in a lot of, and a lot of it – and I mean, physically, she's so small as well, and everything seems to be falling apart at the seams, and you know, and it's all going pear-shaped, and yet, on the other hand she's like holding it together, nonetheless. Erm, so you, and I think it's that maybe you don't want to – I mean you'd *like* to, but you don't want to be her, but you'd kind of, you know, you'd like to sort of, I don't know.
>
> RM: Be like that? Or, have that ability, maybe, to – I don't know – is it appealing, to be – to appear vulnerable?
>
> Chloë: No – I don't mean – to, kind of, I think it would be nicer to know her, than to kind of, be like that, really, or to kind of – if she was vulnerable, to kind of, to know her, and to kind of, you know – you just want to wrap her up, I think.

Again, evident here is the appeal of Hepburn's ability to be successfully two contradictory things at once: here physically frail or vulnerable and yet psychologically strong. Both Chloë and Mel, the two youngest women, point to this element in Hepburn's appeal, suggestive perhaps of the increasing pressure on women in the 'postfeminist' 1990s to both conform to and transcend traditional gender expectations.

While she perceived it as impossible because her frame is so different to Hepburn's, Mel aspired to the kind of fragile femininity she perceived Hepburn to embody: 'I don't know, I suppose she was just . . . something that I wanted to be. Something, almost sort of, fluttery, or something, just so small, and delicate, and just sort of like a butterfly, or something.' Mel spoke very interestingly about her relationship to this form of femininity. Towards the end of the interview she came back to this, saying that Audrey could get away with wearing a kimono: 'And you can imagine her – just like the little Japanese women, like walking really slowly, and doing that little – feminine steps – 'cos they are so feminine, they've got that whole look, but she's got the western face.' Comments of this kind throughout the interviews are full of repetitions of words like 'tiny' and 'little'. What is particularly interesting about Mel's comments is that she relates her aspiration to this fragile femininity explicitly to her mother. Here, we are talking about the possibility of finding 'original' Audrey-style garments in charity shops:

RM: Have you found any, sort of, original . . . garments?
Mel: None that fit me! [laughs] 'Cos they always seem to be a size eight, that Audrey would have got away with. I think, as well, the appeal of her is the fact that she reminds me of my mum. When I would look at old pictures of my mum – I mean, my mum's five foot two, she weighed about six stone thirteen at the time, and she could have been Audrey really. At work, she was – one of her friends actually referred to her as 'her little Audrey', because she really reminded her of Audrey Hepburn – she's got the same sort of hair – a similar look – I mean, she doesn't look exactly like her, but she had the same sort of, shape, and everything. And I think that's sort of some of it as well. She's sort of like, she's my mum but in the big screen.
RM: But isn't that interesting – so she reminds you of your mum in some ways –
Mel: Yeah – she does. But I mean, I've got so many old pictures of my mum, I've got a sort of little album, and I keep them all in there, and I love that – just the fact that she was so – I mean, she's still attractive now, but just the fact that she was this person that I sort of, want to be, almost.

The next time we met, Mel showed me her photo album with the pictures of her mother. In one way, her desire to be like her mother is linked to her general nostalgia for the period when her mother was a young woman like herself. It is interesting, though, that her mother is representative of the mode of femininity she most desires for herself, suggesting a very complex relationship between mothering and being mothered.

Mel's mother was like Audrey, and thus embodied the femininity that she now desires herself. This is a mode of femininity, however, which, as I discuss in Chapter 2, has been considered emblematic of the non-maternal. Mel's desire to be as her mother was would enable her to be physically fragile (child-like/non-maternal) and yet at the same time to be like the person who became her mother and cared for her ('She's sort of like, she's my mum but in the big screen'). In a convoluted way, her wish is perhaps to be able to care for herself like her mother does – to be both mother and child. In a way, this might be seen as a particular form of the postfeminist imperative to 'have it all'. Similarly, Jayne – the only one of these young women to actually be a mother – recalled how at school it was always the petite girls who got the attention:

I think it's because in a way, like when I was younger I was never like the *tiny little* – I went to school – I can always remember that there was someone around at school who looked very much like her – tiny, pretty – all the boys liked her – I mean it's different as you get older – you suddenly become a teenager and you change – I don't know if I'd want to be little and petite now, but I think in the earlier days it's because she always looked so . . . you can imagine *she was the type people would fall for, people would want to do things for*, and I think when you're younger, particularly early teens and that, and perhaps if you're not having such a good time yourself, you know – everyone else has got a boyfriend and you haven't, and you suddenly start seeing someone like her, and you think – 'Oh, I wish I was like her, because if I was like that it would be completely different' – but it's not, though, is it? [emphasis added]

As I suggested above, the first group of women whose memories I consider in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, can be understood as the metaphorical mothers of these young women. As in Mel's more literal model, these metaphorical mothers represent Audrey in generational terms. Audrey might then be seen as the 'mother' who teaches her daughters how to reproduce themselves as feminine – in terms not only of personal style but also of both the need to be mothered and to mother.

Verity, Chloë and Mel all talked to me in quite an extended way about their mothers, all of whom had also admired Audrey Hepburn as young women. The idea of the accoutrements of femininity being metaphorically 'handed down' from mother to daughter is intriguing – suggestive of the ways in which femininity is reproduced, whether within the actual relation between mother and daughter or indeed in the relationship between young women and a female star. In this case the star and the young women who admire her are two or more generations apart and so the modes of femininity in question are necessarily 'old-fashioned' in one way or another. What does it mean when young women in the 1990s hark back nostalgically through Audrey Hepburn to femininities associated with the period when their mothers were young? What, precisely, is at stake in the terms 'classic' and 'timeless' by which they repeatedly refer to those styles?

Dressing up

Perhaps predictably, given the 'retro-chic' context for the renewed interest in Hepburn's image in the 1990s, one of the main sources of interest for these young women was the period look and feel of

Audrey Hepburn films, particularly *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, in relation to both femininity and lifestyle. This was often articulated quite simply in relation to iconic 'moments' (cf. Stacey 1994) and Audrey as a 'style icon' – for instance, the image of Holly looking in at the windows of Tiffany's, the cat, the cigarette holder. Lucy recalled 'the glamour parts of it', but never remembered what happened in the film: 'I think the images at the beginning of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is what does it, isn't it? The idea of just having this great life where you don't work and you know – you go to parties all night and eat breakfast at six in the morning and then go to bed – tripping alongside Tiffany's.' Similarly, Cally told me, 'I also like *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, just because she looks so cool – it's got nothing to do with the film, particularly – it's not my favourite film by a long stretch.' Common to Cally, Anna and Lucy's and accounts was an investment in the kinds of femininity typically associated with this period, in the idea of 'dressing up'. This was associated with particular kinds of music and was accompanied by a performativity often associated with liking 'retro' styles. All of these women referred at some point to the retro styles of the late 1980s which had focused particularly on the 'Beat' look of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Cally told me that she enjoys dressing up and going out and buying 'real glad-rag clothes'. I asked her which was her favourite Audrey outfit, and she told me about the black dress, pearls and cigarette holder from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*:

> Well, I think I'm a bit of a sixties freak, actually. I think that's what it is – and it's just – it is real early sixties *haute couture* and it's just – it's a real classy look that people could wear – say if you were going to a wedding or something – and you wore that everyone would say 'Oh, that's a fab Audrey Hepburn outfit' or something like that, and it's – it's 'cos it's a classic outfit – it's timeless and you know – it's glamorous, it's elegant – it's all this thing about a bygone age when people used to wear hats and gloves and matching bags and all the rest of it, and now everyone's really slapdash, and doesn't really bother half the time, whereas it would be great to wander round looking like that all the time – it would be just excellent!

This short extract is rich in a number of ways. First, there is the nostalgic desire articulated here to be able to 'do' a style of femininity from this historical moment. The 'matching hats, gloves, and bags' look which was particularly important in relation to class and aspiration to certain women in the first set of interviews is now a kind

of subcultural retro style. However, Cally points out that today, this kind of feminine style is really only appropriate on special occasions like weddings – putting on these kinds of clothes is understood explicitly as a performance. Similarly, Lucy told me about her own Audrey dress which her mum made for a party she held: 'I've worn it a couple of times, but you know what it's like, you – when do you find occasions to, unless you're Audrey Hepburn!' This is not to suggest, however, that the contemporary performance of this kind of femininity divorces it from its social meanings. Later on in the discussion Cally returns to this point: 'I've always been the type of person who liked to wear hats – I've always been the sort of person who liked to dress up' and bemoans the loss of opportunity in modern life to 'mak[e] an effort, and you know, mak[e] a big occasion of dressing up – and I love getting ready to go out – it's usually the best part of the night', articulating this as 'glamour'.

Cally goes on to describe the idea she shares with Anna of opening a 1950s-style supper club where there would be easy listening music – 'the sort of stuff my dad was playing when I was a kid, and it's sort of stuck in my mind – things like Jack Jones and Andy Williams, all that sort of – Matt Monroe, Frank Sinatra'. This delight in the contemporary retro mood is clearly in some ways performative in a 'postmodern pastiche' sort of way, and indeed is offered as evidence of 'individuality' in the face of a mainstream take-up of the vogue for easy listening: 'I'm not just saying it because it's trendy, I've always liked his records.' Mel, too, took pride in being the only one in her group of friends to be into this period of films and music. However, I would argue that even though Cally herself later dismisses this as 'just a superficial thing' there is equally a genuine investment in 'dressing up' not just as a pure performance, but also as pleasure in doing the labour of femininity and thereby conforming to the contours of conventional femininity. While in an ironic way Cally likes the idea of 'getting really dressed up on a Friday night and going to a club, and swanning around looking glamorous and making social chit-chat, and generally being very effervescent and charming! [laughs]', she also articulates this in terms of 'loss'.

The use of words like 'classy', 'classic' and 'timeless' is always interesting; what exactly do these terms mean in relation to femininity? While 'classy' and 'lady-like' are words which were used primarily in the first set of interviews, they were occasionally used by younger women too. New girl band 'Hepburn' described Audrey in one of

their first television appearances as the inspiration for their name and 'a classy chick' (*This Morning*, Granada, UK, 1988–2001). Cally described herself as having grown up working-class, but as 'classless' now – i.e. she was associated with a class, but no longer exhibits the signs of that class; nevertheless she uses the word 'classy' to describe Hepburn's style, a word which indicates that something carries the signs of a particular class (middle). Similarly, the term 'classic' usually refers to a hegemonic style of dress which is acceptably neutral – inoffensive because free of the signs of working-class femininity or other unacceptable forms – a little black dress, for instance.[7] Class, as usual in the 1990s, is a structuring absence in fashion as in the wider culture. Anna remarked that her preference for wearing black and liquid eyeliner was was much related to her teenage 'Goth' identity as to her admiration of Audrey Hepburn – a particularly clear example of the way in which Hepburn's hegemonically 'classic' image is flexible enough to accommodate unacceptable 'otherness' and make it safe – in the same way in the 1990s as with 'Beat' style in the late 1950s. A 'classic' look, she points out, is what you come to as you get older, and is something that can 'carry you through'. 'Timeless', in the same way, suggests that something seems to transcend the specificities of historical period – the postmodern, for example, is often referred to as timeless, as lacking historicity – but it should be borne in mind nevertheless that Audrey's 'classic', 'timeless' style is inherently rooted in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and equally is structured by precisely that which it effaces – the signs of class. While for most of these young women, their interest lay primarily in a nostalgic appreciation of the 'cool' fashionable look and lifestyle associated with Audrey Hepburn films, the two youngest women who had grown up in the 1990s placed a greater emphasis on the romantic appeal of the era embodied in Hepburn's films, concentrating on the narrative of the films and the behaviour of the star rather than on style.

Chloë and Mel were invested in very particular ways in the period and style of their mothers' youthful femininity. Chloë talked about her mother as having been cool and glamorous:

> Chloë: Because it's funny – because, like, to see her now, she's like a real, like, *mum*. But then, I've got, like, photos of her – she was *such* a – she was *so cool* – she had like, 'cos she used to – she trained at L'Oréal – [RM: Did she?!] – in London, and Dad was like an engineer on the *Queen Mary*, he was first engineer on the *Queen Mary* – and they were really glamorous, I mean – they're nothing like it now.

> RM: When was this – sixties?
> Chloë: Sixties, yeah. And, all kind of, you know, sunglasses – and the kind of little Chanel, sort of, you know – those – where you have the little dress, and the little jacket over the top, and a kind of really – and Dad was all kind of, like, pinstripe suits – a real bachelor kind of, sports car man, but they're really different people now.

This era of glamour and sophistication is clearly articulated as a moment which is 'lost' in this account – its only reality is in photographs. Chloë's account of Audrey is suffused with a nostalgia for the romance and perfection of this historical moment which coincides with the period of her parents' youth and courtship. Similarly, as I discuss above, Mel talked in detail about her mother as a young woman, her photograph album, and throughout our discussion she repeatedly referred to what she perceived as the 'innocence' of that period:

> The stories she tells, and what she got up to, and it's all – even though she did get up to a lot, it's still really innocent, and the way she thought about things was completely innocent, and doing something bad, was sort of, buying a few cigarettes, or, you know, and that sort of thing, and it's, you know, it's just nice, and I, I want to be able to be in that time, but it's just impossible really, so this is the closest I'm going to get, is clinging on to these people, the idols.

Across this set of interviews a range of readings are produced around Hepburn's image in which feminist sensibilities sit in negotiation with a nostalgic retreat from the contemporary. Uniting these apparently contradictory readings is a set of anxieties which might be described as 'postfeminist': the desire for and simultaneous acknowledgement of the impossibility of 'having it all' – here, in relation to femininity, to be both good/innocent but also naughty and modern. Hepburn emerges as a figure who is particularly appealing because she manages to reconcile these contradictions and, indeed, manages to 'have it all'. How is it that a star largely associated with the 'pre-feminist' 1950s and 1960s can be understood to address and reconcile contemporary 'postfeminist' tensions so satisfactorily? The remainder of this final chapter is devoted to an exploration of this complex interweaving of reading positions.

Having it all

I want to consider a set of reading positions identifiable across these interviews which can best be described as 'postfeminist'; this is

true both of the way in which they engage with the anxieties of 'post-feminism' and of the kinds of desires articulated through this. Furthermore, the understandings of Audrey Hepburn constructed from those positions produce her as a utopian postfeminist figure.

Ann Brooks (1997) makes a helpful distinction between postfeminism as a stage in the evolution of feminism which sees its intersection with 'a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism' (1), and popular notions of postfeminism in the media, commonly identified with a 'backlash' against second-wave feminism by writers such as Susan Faludi. Linked to this is the occurrence of terms like 'the man shortage', 'the biological clock' and the 'career mother' in the media and the blaming of feminism for the pressures faced by women in the 1980s and 1990s. Carried within this is the idea that feminism undermines romantic heterosexual relationships, and in relation to this Brooks refers to research carried out by Susan Bolotin in 1982 which revealed how young women are keen to return to old values, rigidly segregated roles and 'institutionalised notions of heterosexuality, marriage and the family' (Brooks 1997: 4). In Chapter 4 I discussed the repeated association of Hepburn with weddings and wedding gowns in the first set of interviews, and her perceived appropriateness in this respect as a model of sophistication, innocence and 'taste'. For young women of the 1990s, Hepburn continues to be associated with weddings; *Hair and Beauty* magazine (October 1998; figure 6.1) carried a feature on Audrey-style wedding dresses based on Givenchy dresses from her film career. Similarly, Cally told me that her mother had made an Audrey-style ball dress for her sister in shantung silk, for which she used a wedding-dress pattern (similar to her own wedding gown). In answer to my question about wearing Audrey-inspired styles, Cally, who as I have indicated was particularly invested in the loss of opportunity to 'dress up', told me:

> I mean, I must admit, if I was to get married, I always say, 'Ooh, I'll have an Audrey Hepburn style dress', sort of straight – very simple [RM: What would you go for –] – er, I don't know – probably something with a sort of scoop neck, and an Empire line lacy top – short sleeves, and then like a plain skirt, and – and I'd have, sort of, bridesmaids wearing similar sort of outfits, in a different colour – oh, I've got it all planned out – it's never going to happen, but you know [laughs].

Similar comments are made by celebrity Audrey fans Darcy Bussell and Jayne Middlemiss: 'If I ever get married, I would love to dress like Audrey in *My Fair Lady* on my wedding day' (*OK!*, January 1998, p. 56).

Particularly significant here is the way in which young women who are clearly the inheritors of the discourses of second-wave feminism around issues such as equal rights and sexual liberation and who often described themselves as feminist, are nevertheless highly invested, as Brooks suggests, in ideal heterosexual romance in its institutionalised forms. It is this conjunction of feminism (strength, independence, equality) and the pleasures of traditional femininity, both in terms of 'dressing up' and here also 'every little girl's dream' – the white wedding – which I would argue are the particular markers of postfeminism. In important ways, it is this postfeminist discourse which organises the interviews discussed in this chapter.

In *Screen Tastes*, Charlotte Brunsdon (1997) is interested in the way films such as *Working Girl* and *Pretty Woman* both depend on and disavow second-wave feminism, and argues that they 'share an address to, and representation of, a new kind of figure, the post-feminist girly . . . a persona best understood as offering some kind of embodiment of, and engagement with, the changing status of women' (4). Brunsdon points to historical, discursive shifts within feminism in relation to consumption and femininity, suggesting that the reconsideration of the pleasures of feminine consumption identifiable with postmodern feminism are also part of popular understandings of postfeminism (85). A postmodern, postfeminist girl can unproblematically wear a Wonderbra, lipstick *and* be a company director. As I have begun to suggest, what this set of interviews with women to whom this ideal might apply reveals is a simultaneous deconstruction of and yearning for precisely this kind of negotiation. Brunsdon offers a formulation of the relationship of this new figure to femininity which is particularly useful to my project here:

> she is neither trapped in femininity (pre-feminist), nor rejecting of it (feminist). She can use it. However, although this may mean apparently inhabiting a very similar terrain to the pre-feminist woman, who manipulates her appearance to get her man, the post-feminist woman also has ideas about her life and being in control which clearly come from feminism. She may manipulate her appearance, but she doesn't just do it to get a man on the old terms. She wants it all (1997: 86).

6.1 'Ciné-chic' – wedding dresses, Audrey-style, in *Hair and Beauty* (October 1998), pp. 88–89. Reproduction by permission of *Hair and Beauty* magazine

There is a way in which the generations of women I have interviewed in the course of this research precisely span the historical shifts in relation to feminism identified here by Brunsdon, and I would argue that this is particularly the case with regard to their relation to femininity and dress. What the postfeminist women whose understandings of Hepburn in relation to feminism and femininity I discuss below express is both a profound dis-ease with the notion that the goals of second-wave feminism have been achieved, a utopian longing for this, and, frequently, a nostalgic desire for a retreat to 'the way things were back then'.

For a number of these young women as with the 1950s/1960s group, it is the fact that Hepburn can be both boyish and conventionally feminine with equal success that makes her appealing, and importantly, 'real'. In the instance quoted below, Anna identifies this as a characteristic also shared by Doris Day (most of the women of both generations also admired Day):

> Well, you look at her sort of, like, you know, skipping about, wearing, you know, boys' clothing, or whatever and then you see her – you know when they're doing this scene where she's running down the stairs in that sort of it's flashed up red and green and everything like that – it's just like a completely different aspect of her – she gets to show all, like the different personalities that everyone is – 'cos you're not just like 'I'm dead glamorous' or you know 'I'm this' – there's everything and I think that sort of shows in the way that she's – that's what I like about her dressing is she can get away with looking like a bit of a bloke – like Doris Day always looked like Doris Day – whatever she was wearing, you know – even when you put her in a really nice cocktail frock you still thought 'It's Doris Day, isn't it?' [laughter] so . . .

Evidently, this might be read as suggesting a post-structuralist understanding of identity as multiple and contradictory; Audrey embodies this in her ability to be both boyish and conventionally feminine – 'glammed up in a fab frock' with ease and success, refuting any attempt to position her securely. Similarly, it is Hepburn's embodiment of key contradictions which forms the basis of her appeal for Chloë. The particular terms of contradiction she picks out are especially interesting as they focus on Hepburn's ability to combine, for example, innocence with insight, social and personal 'polish' with liberation:

> And the other thing is the dad, in that film, the chauffeur, he says something like . . . when he's driving Humphrey Bogart to work, he says – 'She's like a displaced person, she doesn't belong in a mansion, but she doesn't belong above a garage either', and – you just can't place her, because in some ways she seems so traditionally kind of, *English*, even though, I mean, she wasn't – she seems like, and her vocabulary, some of that is kind of, I mean it's odd, in some ways, and that's one of the interesting things about her, or one of the things I like about her, but she seems so, like . . . *polished*, and like finishing school kind of with her *posture*, and she's so kind of, you know in a way that people aren't, any more, I mean she really seems . . . typically English like that, I suppose stereotypically – but then in other ways she's messing about . . . and like I mean – *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is a totally different thing, I think, anyway, I can't – I sit there, and I think 'I can't, I can't *believe* this.'
>
> RM: Why?
>
> Chloë: Because like, like – you see her *bra*! [RM: I know!] And like, you see her – she answers the door, and she's got like, a sheet around her, and she turns round, and George Peppard's at the door, and she says, 'Oh, well I'll turn around then', and like, all things like – and she gets drunk, and she's smoking, and you just think 'Oh my God, you know, what's going on?' It's really odd, but then, I mean, that – she totally suits that *as well*.

It is the perception of Audrey managing to be both sexually liberated and demure here which is so interesting, and so suggestive of the way in which such imperatives and dichotomies remain pertinent and resonant for young women growing up in the 1990s, despite the popular understanding of the contemporary as 'postfeminist' in the sense that such contradictions are no longer significant. Audrey is so appealing in this woman's account precisely because she manages to appear at one with feminist demands for sexual liberation (although, interestingly, as we have seen she is *not* about sex) while remaining within the bounds of what is considered appropriate feminine behaviour and appearance. The précis on the jacket of Candace Bushnell's New York-set *Sex and the City* (1996) precisely articulated the problematic of negotiating sexual liberation, glamour and 'niceness': young single women 'trying hard not to turn from the Audrey Hepburn of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* into the Glenn Close of *Fatal Attraction*'.[8]

It is perhaps suggestive of the power of Hepburn's persona that Chloë brings together characteristics from film characters almost ten years apart, Sabrina and Holly Golightly, in her figuring of Hepburn. She 'speaks' to young women like Chloë; she is both real and utopian,

because she both expresses and reconciles such contradictions. It seems significant, though, that one of the most notable aspects of Chloë's account was her investment in the romance of the period and films with which she associates Audrey. She returns continually to the 'romance' of these films, seeing this as an 'intellectual escapism' from the 'gritty realism' portrayed in contemporary film, and like a number of the women I spoke to, has no desire to spoil her 'romantic notions' about Hepburn by reading biographical material. This, perhaps, is why she figures Hepburn as 'living in a box' and existing only through her films. Similarly, Lucy, who had read a number of film-star biographies, had resisted reading Audrey's:

> I think maybe it's like you like to keep the myth about somebody and what they're really like, and it ruins it a little bit, doesn't it? I mean I read a little bit about her – unhappy marriages and miscarriages and this sort of thing, and you know, you don't think of that when you think about Audrey Hepburn, do you – you think 'She's got a perfect life' – she must have a perfect life, 'cos she's beautiful [clearly tongue in cheek, laughs] and you know, you have this stereotype in your head, whereas you know, with someone like Marilyn Monroe, you knew that they had a tragic life as well as – you know, and looked like they did, as well.

This desire not to know about Audrey Hepburn the wife, mother, divorcee and sufferer of numerous miscarriages is common to all the women in this set of interviews. Sordid knowledge about Audrey's 'real' life would undermine the utopian possibilities she offers as a star in relation to postfeminist demands. I would argue that it is precisely in this refusal to know that the fragility of the postfeminist myth of 'having it all' is indicated.

While Lucy clearly signals the deliberate naivety of her comment here, her contrast of Hepburn's perfect life with the tragedy of Marilyn Monroe's is revealing. There is clearly a way in which Hepburn is perceived as managing their key combination of innocence and sophistication more successfully, and I suspect that this distinction is located, once again, in the fact that Monroe is perceived as 'about sex', while Hepburn is not. She is naughty, but most definitely still a 'nice girl':

> I don't know, I think she's just an endearing sort of star – she's not – she's not *gross*, or in your face – or – she's sort of reminiscent of a bygone age – she's quite innocent, she's quite charming and elegant [breathes in] you know, but there is the fact that she could be that Holly Golightly sort of character, who's quite debauched in a way, and yet carries it off as though, you know – she's too nice – you can't actually imagine any seedy goings on happening with any of these people, but you know – it's just sort of hinted at, and she gets away with that – she just comes across as being a bit kookie, and a bit sort of – not altogether on the straight and narrow, whereas I suppose her earlier films, she's young, young, charming, vulnerable . . . I don't know.

In a similar way, Chloë pointed out Audrey's ability to make being drunk look charming in this film – precisely the same discourse which was discernible around Hepburn in the 1950s, if updated. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Audrey could make it OK to take off your shoes and spill tea in your saucer in polite company. It seems that in the face of the actual impossibility of managing contradictions like Audrey does, a nostalgic retreat into a past where 'stars were really stars' (Chloë) is the only solution.

The sense that the postfeminist utopia can only be discovered in the past is common across these interviews. Anna talked about why she likes female stars of the 1940s and 1950s:

> I quite like . . . I like *High Society*, Grace Kelly – even though she's simply a spoilt little cow in it – but actually that's one of those films I just like, I think – see it goes back even further – it's people like Katharine Hepburn – is probably, like, another you know like massive sort of heroine – Ingrid Bergman, Lauren Bacall I really like – and also because how that mirrors in their personal lives, because all of them had, really good strong relationships with equal partners, you know, you look at Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy and Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart – they had . . . possibly like, you know, in your little romantic world – the sort of relationship you'd actually want to have, you know – with somebody who treated you like your equal, and not as a woman.

Anna located the possibility of equality between the sexes in a period of the cinematic past often discussed in terms of the strong female characters it offered. She also contextualised Hepburn's characters historically:

> I mean at the end of the day, I always consider myself as a feminist, and you're talking about your heroine is a woman who basically sponges off men [laughs] and that was it, and like didn't get a job, sort of thing, but I think it's like the context of how you look at these things – you know, this was in the 1950s, you know, she was never going to go out and like have a fabulous job, and do this, you know – she made, she

> sort of like lived by her own wits, but then still called the shots – I mean she gets sort of, fifty dollars to go to the powder room, and then sort of, disappears off – you know, up the fire escape, or something. So – she doesn't really compromise her ideals, you know – I mean obviously, if that was happening now, in the nineties, you'd be like slapping the woman round the head, 'C'mon – get a life!' [laughter] you know, but because of like the time that it was in, it's very interesting. And a lot of it is probably the sort of – I don't know – they always seem to sort of, lead their men by the noses, basically. You know – the men at the end of the day, I mean, I know that she's basically prostituting herself in the film, *but* the men are essentially all very weak and the women all tend to be very very strong, you know, and they are just sort of like – you know, the men are sort of like, you know, slobbering about at their feet – basically 'Have me, have me!' sort of thing – and they're just picking and choosing, you know.

Anna's account is clearly informed by second-wave feminism; in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* Hepburn is perceived as a strong woman in control of her life, as well as a style icon, although by 1990s postfeminist standards she doesn't quite measure up. Nevertheless, Anna offers a skilled reading of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* which reclaims Hepburn for feminism: she appears here as a proto-feminist figure. As I discuss above, she also appears in this account as a figure who clearly manages the contradictory pressures Anna sees as experienced by women in the 1990s. Anna uses the examples of a job interview and walking down the street to explain that Audrey can wear the clothes she wants, but be judged for her personality as well as her looks: 'in an ideal world that would happen but in the real world [laughs] as we all know, it doesn't happen.'

The sense that Audrey 'has it all' by managing contradictions which are experienced as irreconcilable by these young women in their own lives is key to her appeal for them. For instance, Audrey was understood by both Lucy and Verity as conventionally feminine in terms of dress, grooming and glamour, but importantly also as non-domestic, particularly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Holly represents the pleasures of being a young, independent woman with a chic urban apartment, free not to do the washing and leave shoes under the bed. As Lucy put it, the opening of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* offers '[t]he idea of just having this great life where you don't work and you know – you go to parties all night and eat breakfast at six in the morning and then go to bed – tripping alongside

Tiffany's'. This is a look Lucy has 'performed' for a party; interestingly, she describes this look as both 'sweet' and 'glamorous'. As I discuss below, there is a significant way in which Hepburn can be figured in relation to two sets of terms in these interviews: she is both 'glamorous and strong' but also 'glamorous and good/sweet'. Where I offered a 'film studies' reading of Hepburn's problematic relation to marriage and the domestic in Chapter 5, symptomatically finding trouble in the text, the young women in this set of interviews offer what I argue can be understood as 'postfeminist' readings which identify the same formation – chic urban femininity in conjunction with romance (but not marriage), and lack of domesticity – *positively* in relation to their own experience and desires. At the same time Hepburn's image is flexible enough to enable her to remain, in other accounts, the ideal bride. In the context of postfeminism, these two readings may co-exist unproblematically. Mel, for example, figures Audrey as Holly as 'a strong independent woman with a man'; as we will see, however, this reading is not entirely comfortable.

Lucy also made very interesting distinctions between Hepburn's and Doris Day's respective relationships to domesticity. Whereas Doris Day is understood as distinctly 'homey' – 'she might rebel for a bit, but she'll settle down and be good', Audrey is a 'good-time girl rather than a woman at home'. Lucy offers a sophisticated reading of the trajectory of this relationship with the domestic across Hepburn's career, situating this historically from the 'pre-feminist' 1950s to the emergence of the women's movement – in the earlier films, for instance *Roman Holiday*, 'she's like good-time, and then does her duty – a bit more Doris Day . . . but yeah – she's definitely a good-time girl in the sixties films, isn't she?' In the 1960s Audrey is both 'glamorous' and 'strong' (non-domestic); 'feminine' and 'feminist' (see Read 2000).

For Lucy, this ideal combination of strength and glamour is not to be found in the contemporary, or even the recent past. She expertly deconstructs current ideals of femininity and postfeminist claims about the redundancy of feminist politics, locating this utopia in the 1960s in figures like Emma Peel as played by Honor Blackman and Diana Rigg. When I offer *Charlie's Angels* (USA, Spelling-Goldberg Productions, 1976–1981) as an example from the 1970s, Lucy argues that they 'didn't fight properly':

Lucy: You see – they were just insipid to me, in comparison to the sixties girls – they were great, and Emma Peel was great, wasn't she?
RM: It's funny though, isn't it – because I mean they're sort of – I mean I agree – but they're sort of like, pre-feminist girls aren't they, as well [Lucy: Mmm – yeah] whereas I suppose you know – the women we had in the eighties and that are more –
Lucy: Theoretically – tell that to the Wonderbra campaign.
RM: I'm interested in why they still appeal to us . . .
Lucy: Even though they're not feminist women, they're very independent, I mean – none of them went home and cooked their husband's tea at the end of an episode – they all lived on their own, and you know – for the sixties – I think that was pretty right on for the sixties – I mean women didn't live on their own in gorgeous flats and have glamorous, like or kick men around, so you know, I think they were pretty good for the time.

She had read numerous biographies of 1960s celebrities including Jean Shrimpton and Terence Stamp, and felt that more contemporary examples would not be as interesting: 'You get this idea that all the best people are dead, and there aren't any film stars replacing them, and you know, when someone dies now, like you know, when Bob Hope goes, or when Frank Sinatra did, it's like – oh, that's it, that's the end.' The past is figured as meaningful, authentic and a time of hope, and despite Lucy's feminist deconstruction and criticism of the domesticity and traditional marriages and relationships of the 1950s female stars she likes, there is still a yearning, as in the accounts of a number of the young women in this set of interviews, for some kind of romantic ideal. While she was disappointed that Jean Shrimpton wanted 'a hotel and a husband and marriage', she also wanted her to declare Terence Stamp 'the love of her life' and 'complete perfection', as he did her.

While such postfeminist readings of Audrey figure her as both strong and glamorous, feminist and feminine, there is also a consensual acknowledgement across these interviews that while strength and glamour is the postfeminist ideal, there is also a concomitant social imperative for women to be 'glamorous and good' (Lucy). Princess Diana and Audrey are both seen as examples of this particular conjunction, with Audrey managing to be strong, glamorous (able to attract a man) and at the same time good. Hepburn's UNICEF work and the comparison with the princess were repeatedly mentioned in relation to this.

Mel's account of Audrey's appeal was especially interesting around the difficult negotiation of these three terms. I would argue that this difficulty is articulated in her confusion about the degree and kind of Audrey's strength and independence, and in her simultaneous and quite particular investment in innocence.

Mel was very interested in old movies, musicals and music, and particularly in the 'innocence' she perceived as the key feature of the era these films represent. At the same time, she was invested in the romance (as opposed to sex) of these films, and in their leading men. The first Audrey Hepburn film she saw was *Roman Holiday*, which she described as the most innocent of her films, where 'it's very sunny – it always seems to be in the day'. In films of this period, she feels:

> It's so naive, and, and like they're all in this sort of bubble and they don't take into consideration all the bad things that are happening, that I mean, which are like you get in films today, which sort of, tackle those issues. But I prefer the ones where you don't have to think about that [laughs], and you know, it's just sort of, the colour is so synthetic, and it spells somewhere nice, and everything's so, sort of, it just – it's all *happy*, really.

While this extract indicates a nostalgic retreat into what is perceived as a simpler, more innocent, happier, sunnier past, it is nevertheless combined, a few minutes later, with a feminist valuing of Doris Day's 'feistiness'; at the same time, though, Mel's choice of the word 'gentlemen' to describe Day's sparring partners is significant, suggesting a rather polite kind of confrontation. Mel acknowledges that this perfect past is a construct in her point about the synthetic colour of these films, and like Chloë sees this as a way of escaping the 'bad things' and difficult issues in the contemporary which are almost 'too real'. She is often criticised by her friends for her 'old-fashioned' taste in films and music, but she reclaims this by talking about her expert knowledge of the films of this era as something which individuates her from her friends, as cultural capital: part of the reason she doesn't like *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is because everyone else does, although I will argue that there is more at stake in her account of this film. While she has no trouble in indicating the strength of Doris Day, she has more difficulty in thinking about this in relation to Audrey; this becomes most apparent in our discussion of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the film most frequently discussed in relation to these issues across this set of interviews.

Importantly, Mel understands the 'tomboy' aspect of Hepburn's persona as 'the real Audrey'. She explains to me why she doesn't like the end of *Roman Holiday*:

> Mel: I don't like her as much at the end.
> RM: Oh – you mean, the bit where she comes out?
> Mel: As the princess, yeah. [RM: Do you like the other –] I like the other bits, where she's pretending, yeah [obvious delight in voice] she's sort of – almost *tomboyish*, and more – how she wants to be, how I *imagine* she wants to be, and then at the end, and she's all – it's the same actually, as *My Fair Lady*, 'cos when she's, sort of, got all her jewellery and everything, and she comes out at the ball, she's not so Audrey Hepburn – she's not the real *person* – she sort of shines through when she's wearing a really simple outfit like in *Funny Face* and she's just walking around in little black leggings, and things – yeah – I think I prefer her looking like that. [RM: Do you?] Nice and simple.

Apparent here is a kind of feminist discourse which understands and prefers the 'natural', unconstructed and therefore authentic Audrey to the 'made-over' version. Accordingly, Mel argues against my characterisation of the films as transformation narratives, preferring to read them as stories of discovery in which the 'real' Audrey is recognised as beautiful, thus enabling her to negotiate the difficult question (in feminist terms) of Audrey being transformed by a man, and to restore both her authenticity and her control of the narrative. She reads *Funny Face*, for instance, in terms of 'the fact that no-one can see that she's wonderful, except this particular gentleman, and I am in this complete bubble of innocence [laughs] and I like it and I don't want to come out, so . . .'. She performs the same strategy in relation *My Fair Lady*, her favourite film:

> It's more a case of sort of seeing – 'cos she is the same person – like at the end she goes back and she visits and stuff though she feels a bit, sort of, like, on the other side now, you can tell that she's actually the same person, she just sounds different – and it's almost – it's more about someone else seeing . . . that she is beautiful, rather than making her beautiful . . . because I think in that film, I think people always mistake it for . . . them sort of, changing her, I think that's – you see I really hate him in that film – he's so horrible, because he – especially when they congratulate each other – it just makes me sick, because I – [RM: It's horrible, isn't it?] – it is, and I'm just completely, completely on her side the whole time, and you almost want her to slip up, just so that he'll have failed, but you know, she does her bit.

Mel wants to argue, in relation to Audrey as with Doris Day, that 'she's the one really doing it', and consequently offers a set of redemptive readings in relation to what I have characterised as narratives of transformation, which produce Audrey as *more* in control of the narrative, rather than Dick Avery (*Funny Face*) or Henry Higgins (*My Fair Lady*). The difficulty she has in reproducing this in relation to *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, though, reveals the problem. She told me she didn't like this film; one of the problems Mel has with characterising Audrey positively in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* relates to her investment in innocence; here Hepburn is

> I don't know – a bit more brazen than she is in anything else, and I don't like that. I don't like the fact that she's you know – the – her character isn't as innocent as the rest of the characters have been – she's got this thing about money, and marrying into it, and the whole – this is her plan, her master plan.

This 'brazenness' is much less of a problem in relation to Doris Day, whose sexuality is often contained within marriage either through the film or by implication at the end. Mel wants to read Audrey, as we have seen, in contrast to Marilyn, as about 'romance': 'There was some sort of innocence there, and though there was always romance, and stuff, it was romance, and it wasn't, you know, sort of hitching up her skirt.' Her initial analysis of the film suggests this, and also points precisely to the way in which Holly manipulates men through her appearance, as pointed out by Brunsdon above in relation to what she terms 'the postfeminist girly'. She wants it all, and this knowingness is unacceptable in Mel's schema of innocence and naivety. At the same time, though, she critiques the way the film finishes with Holly, who began as 'a strong independent woman', soaking wet in the arms of George Peppard. Mel nevertheless describes her as 'still a strong character', although less so than in other films, and likes the way she ends up 'a strong independent woman with a man'. She finally describes her as 'least dependent on a man' in this film, contradicting her initial position. In her ability to negotiate romance and independence, she is a postfeminist ideal, but the terms of the negotiation are uneasy; she repeated this later around Hepburn in relation to dress: 'I'm sort of aspiring to be fragile in my own way [RM: – yeah] so that I look fragile, without actually being so.' It is Mel's difficulty in articulating a coherent position on the issues of fragility/femininity and strength in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and her desire to retreat into a

'bubble of innocence' which point most clearly to the difficulty of this position. Ultimately, Mel, despite her desire to redeem the film and Hepburn's role in feminist terms, ends by returning to her desire for innocence – thus retreating from the difficulty of the position she is trying to articulate into a moment (more perfectly expressed in the romantic comedies of Doris Day and Rock Hudson) in which gender roles are more clearly defined, difficult issues are less explicitly addressed, and endings are less ambiguous. Feminist understanding, postfeminist desire and nostalgic retreat are simultaneously articulated throughout her account.

On the one hand in these readings there is a critical feminist engagement with what writers such as Coppock, Haydon and Richter (1995) have described as the 'myths' of post-feminism, in conjunction with a return to traditional modes of feminine dress and self-production as performative. On the other, and often simultaneously, there is nevertheless a yearning for the possibility of adequately managing the contradictory positions it holds up as ideal (e.g. traditional heterosexual relationship and motherhood combined with perfect career and independence) which is suggestive of the power of those myths even as they can be deconstructed. In the figure of Audrey Hepburn these positions, understood here as impossible and contradictory in 'real' life, are often perceived as successfully reconciled. Mel's account, however, reveals the tensions inherent in that negotiation, and a consequent nostalgic retreat into what can only be described as the pre-feminist in search of the postfeminist ideal.

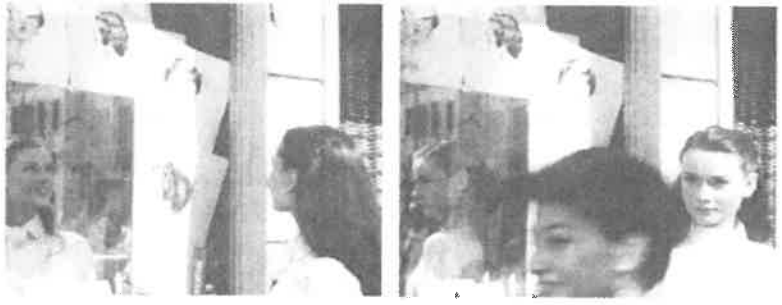
While as Richard Dyer has pointed out, one key function of all stars is to reconcile contradictions, the particular kinds of difficulties Hepburn is seen to successfully negotiate are especially resonant for young women who have grown up into the postfeminist 1990s, and ensure her continuing appeal for this generation of young women. At the same time, Audrey represents hegemonic (and yet 'timelessly modern') feminine style, 'a bygone age', and a time of romance, innocence and clearly defined gender roles idealised by the two youngest women who spoke to me. In this way, as Dyer suggests, Hepburn embodies values which society perceives to be in crisis. It is the polysemic nature of 'Audrey Hepburn' which has secured the enduring appeal of this star: she can be understood simultaneously, in Raymond Williams's terms (1977), as a residual, dominant *and* emergent figure in relation to femininity and the history of feminism at both moments of her popularity in the late 1950s/early 1960s and the 1990s.

Notes

1 I use 'group' here to indicate a grouping according to generation, as with a couple of exceptions the women in each group were not known to each other and all were interviewed separately. See Appendix I for brief a biographical note on the interviewees.
2 Shirley was a pilot interviewee. See Moseley (2001).
3 A number of the women in this group commented, as in the first 1950s/1960s group, that there is no sexual scandal attached to Hepburn.
4 Jameson's discussion of pastiche and the nostalgia film, and his suggestion that this cultural tendency relates to an inability to bring the present into focus, are clearly significant here (Jameson 1983: 116).
5 Hepburn's enormous popularity in Japan is interesting in relation to 'cutie culture'. See Skov and Moeran (1995).
6 Hepburn is often likened to animals in popular rhetoric – she is often thought to resemble a faun. The key thing about the most famous cinema faun, Bambi, of course, apart from his large eyes, is the fact that he loses his mother.
7 Although as Anne Hollander remarks, today's' 'classic' little black dress is the shopgirl's uniform of a previous era (1978: 385).
8 *Sex and the City* is also now a major American TV series (USA, HBO, 1998 –).

Conclusion

When I began this research, I was interested in three kinds of question. The first was about Audrey Hepburn as a star: I wanted to investigate the construction, circulation and reception of her image, but I also wanted to find out something about her enduring popularity. I was interested in why her image had apparently re-emerged in the 1990s, and held such currency with young women across fifty years of social, political and economic change in many women's lives – across the women's movement in the 1970s, for example. I wanted to find out what Audrey Hepburn meant to women who cited her as an inspiration and influence. It emerged that those women who offered to participate in the research fell into two generationally distinct groups: one growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, and the other in the 1980s and 1990s, two periods which are held to represent a set of social and political changes in relation to feminism and the lived experience of women: from the pre-feminist to the postfeminist, perhaps. It seems significant, for instance, that only one woman (Jayne) whose 'growing up' was identifiable with



7.1 On the verge of becoming 'Audrey Hepburn' – the princess contemplates changing her look in *Roman Holiday* (1953)

the early and mid-1970s offered herself as a participant in the research. While it is clearly the case that Hepburn's screen career was really falling away at this time, it may also be significant that this is also the point at which political activism in relation to race and the women's movement was at its height. Hepburn can be a pre-feminist, a postfeminist, but not a feminist, figure. I wondered if the continuing currency of 'Audrey Hepburn' was no more than the iconic power of surface – a depthless pastiche represented by the perpetual return to the image of Hepburn as Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*? Second, I wanted to explore the nature of the relationship between the women I talked with and Hepburn. How was the relationship between them and their favourite female star expressed? Through what kinds of practices did they articulate their fascination for and closeness with Audrey?

Third, there was a more theoretical question underlying and informing my research. I was concerned to explore whether the notion of 'identification' which has been hegemonic in film theory was the most appropriate way to characterise the relationship between female viewers and a female star. In this sense I had a quite an explicit research agenda – to try to work outside psychosexual film theoretical approaches to this relationship, and to maintain an historically, socially and culturally grounded approach to the project.

I approached these initial questions through a tripartite methodology which reflected my concern to address equally questions of text and audience. I carried out textual analysis of the 'star-text' Audrey Hepburn, including in this conceptualisation of the star a consideration of film texts but also press and publicity, gossip and the ways in which 'Audrey Hepburn' has circulated in more ephemeral sites such as women's magazines and film-fan magazines, to produce an idea of the specificity of the address of the star-text. I also conducted an audience research project which in its initial stages included letters and questionnaires, but which in the end focused on a pilot study and a main body of interviews; the final text has been limited to these latter for reasons both of space and parity of method. As a result of this methodology, the book has become as much a reflection on the process of conducting and writing about this approach, as about Audrey and the women who admire her. This meta-critical concern, which in some ways is the richest, if least conclusive, element of the book, emerged unexpectedly in the process of producing it, and was born of a desire to develop a

method which accounted for both text and audience without privileging either. In an organic way, it is also this concern which has literally shaped the book: it became increasingly necessary in the process of writing to fashion a structure which reflected my desire to articulate text, address and audience together. At the end of this process, a key finding, perhaps, has in fact been the uselessness of attempting to separate an idea of 'text' from one of 'audience'.

The findings of this research can be characterised in relation to four key areas which overlap with but in many ways exceed the initial research questions: Audrey Hepburn as star; the social history of British femininity; the nature of the relationship between audience and star; and a rather more methodological question about the complexity of working with both text and audience. The book is necessarily, and as originally intended, about Audrey Hepburn as 'star-text', and about the significance of that star-text for the women I spoke with. A central finding has been in support of Richard Dyer's suggestion that stars can be understood to reconcile ideological contradictions, for instance in relation to gender (Dyer 1991). The research has shown the historical specificity of this operation in relation to Audrey Hepburn – and in this and other ways has something to tell, through the detailed talk of the women who participated, about the social history of femininity in Britain. At the same time it has suggested the significance of the flexibility of 'Audrey Hepburn', akin to Dyer's notion of structured polysemy (1979). Central to this flexibility is the way in which Hepburn has represented both modern, pared-down 'trousers' and fairy-tale 'tiara' modes of femininity, a flexibility which has been key to her appeal both within and across two historical moments: the 1950s and 1960s, and the 1990s.

For women growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, the modernity and/or social acceptability of Hepburn's look was key, and was enabling in relation to factors such as age, region and social class. Yet in this regard, and in the particular context of British society on the verge of women's liberation, it was essential that Audrey was 'boyish, but still a girl'. In the 1990s, while Hepburn clearly functions in an iconic way, what was earlier described as the modernity and/or acceptability of her image is now understood as 'timeless', but not simply in the sense of pastiche. It is rather in relation to a perceived loss of certain ways of being female, particular modes of femininity – dressing up and 'glamour' – that Hepburn appeals. At the same time, what was described as 'boyish, but still a girl' is

rearticulated as 'fragile, yet strong' in an explicitly postfeminist way. In terms of lifestyle and appearance, in the accounts of the young women who have participated in this study, Audrey in the 1950s and 1960s – a 'pre-feminist' figure – represents the management and reconciliation of key contradictions in the lived experiences of these women in the 'postfeminist' 1990s, in a way which is quite explicitly outside domesticity but still invested in idealised, heterosexual romantic love and marriage. Nevertheless, the difficulty of this position is acknowledged in their accounts: 'It's never going to happen' (Cally). While the ways in which the 1990s girls in this study talk about Audrey are 'outside class' (and indeed they often described themselves as 'classless'), there is still a sense, through the powerful appeal of the now 'timeless' kind of feminine glamour Audrey represents, that the same hegemony is still in place, and to that extent, class remains a structuring absence in the final chapter of the book. There is still quite a narrow set of acceptable ways of being a woman – ways which are in fact essentially class-related, if not class-bound (cf. Skeggs 1997).

There are two main things to say about the nature of the relationship between the women in this study and the star, Audrey Hepburn. First of all, they cannot *broadly* be described as 'fans'. Although a number of the younger women I spoke to did describe themselves in this way, as I discuss in Chapter 6, and were highly conscious of how such fandom might be perceived, the women who grew up with Audrey in the 1950s and 1960s explicitly, and without cue, distanced themselves from this identity. Perhaps one thing which this generational distinction suggests is the contrast in the affective nature of the relationship articulated by those women in the study for whom Audrey represented something inherently related to them – something which is part of a particular (past) time in their lives – youthful femininity in a specific historical and sociocultural context – and those young 1990s women in the study for whom Audrey represents something past which they have never known, but which nevertheless speaks to their experience of the present.

Second, there is the question of 'identification'. Existing discussion of the relationship between viewers and stars is either broadly sociological in approach, working within a discourse of 'fandom', or it is within the realms of psychoanalytic theory, focusing on unconscious psychosexual structures and processes and notions of fantasy. The way I have tried to think the relationship between audience (not

necessarily viewer or spectator in the specifically cinematic sense) and text attempts to recognise that unconscious processes do play a part in that relationship – for instance in the mirroring of textual structures and the structuring of audience accounts in relation to the Cinderella motif – although I do not find it useful or necessary to attempt to specify those processes.

What I am interested in as an 'object' is something akin to what Virginia Nightingale has suggested as the 'audience–text relation', which in her words 'operates along a continuum from impersonation to improvisation, where people find ways to enact the themes and discourses of the stories they experience . . . with the problematics of their lived everyday (particularities)' (Nightingale 1996: x–xi). Perhaps the notion of 'usable stories' (Mepham 1990) – the articulation of self through discursive forms which offer ways of producing and understanding that identity, in conjunction with an appreciation of the historicity of discourse – might potentially be a productive position from which to begin. I want to argue that the relationships between audience members and stars are more diverse and indeed nebulous than existing theories of identification, or indeed Nightingale's formulation, despite its insight that 'the self' is inseparable from 'everyday life', can suggest. Accordingly, I want to hold on to the notions of affect, resonance and recognition as useful starting points which enable an address to the specificity of personal history; questions of gender, class, race, sexuality, generation, education and national identity are key factors in determining the form and the nature of relationships between audience member and star-text.

'Resonance and recognition' is a formulation which, as I have suggested above, I intend to indicate the constitution of subjectivity and the coming together of subjectivity with textuality. In this way it is possible to retain a notion of the address of a text, which may or may not be engaged with in relation to the particular conjunction of these factors. 'Resonance and recognition' is a particularly useful formulation in connection with the material from the interviews discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 with women who grew up with Audrey Hepburn in the 1950s and 1960s. It is perhaps the important role played by memory in those accounts, that makes the term 'resonance' and its suggestion of a perpetual, harmonic 'back and forth' so appropriate as a way of conceptualising their relationship with the star. Interestingly, there seems to be a slightly different sensibility at work in the ways in which the 1990s girls in this study related to Hepburn.

While resonance and recognition clearly work in some ways, for instance around Hepburn as a 'pre-feminist' star speaking to their experience of the 'postfeminist' 1990s, paradoxically perhaps in the light of their overwhelming sense of closeness to the star, there is also evidence in their accounts of a kind of performative distance. This distance is indicative of 'pastiche' as a 'structure of feeling', as an historically specific mode of relating to the past, but *at the same time* that distance is also suffused by nostalgia, a sense of the impossibility of capturing the utopian moment Hepburn signifies to them to which they, unlike the other women in this study, do not have access through *experience*.

This, then, brings me finally to what is perhaps the most complex and inconclusive issue of the research. While I have been able to suggest something about the nature of the relationship between text and audience emerging in this study, perhaps more problematic and indeed less attended to in existing scholarship is the intractability of the relationship between textual analysis and audience research when used in conjunction as methodological tools. It is no longer possible at this point in the process of conducting and writing about the research represented in this book, to retrieve something which is 'what I thought about Audrey Hepburn before I began'. It is no longer possible to watch the films or look at images without recalling other images, phrases and stories offered to me in relation to them. In the few scholarly works which do address both text and audience, the complexity of the relationship between the researcher-critic's textual analysis of the 'texts' proper (i.e. not the audience accounts) and their analysis of those accounts is rarely addressed.[1] While Janice Radway (1991) produces her readings of and choice of romance novel texts through her analysis of her readers' accounts of reading them and Helen Taylor (1989) uses audience accounts to variously 'support and question or demolish' her own critical readings of the text (19), Jacqueline Bobo (1995) chooses to separate out analyses of film and novel texts and audience accounts of them. The intractability of the relationship needs to be acknowledged – that in the process of conducting interviews and performing textual analyses one necessarily informs the other, just as the accounts of Audrey given by women remembering growing up in the 1950s and 1960s are necessarily inflected through the process of remembering and informed by their experience and understanding of the circulation of that image in the 1990s.

There is a way in which the three kinds of question which formed the research are emblematic of the interdisciplinary nature of the project, and thus are also representative of the methodological and theoretical difficulties which have both plagued and enriched the experience of conducting and writing about the research. The study of stars, now key to film studies, is essentially both semiotic and sociological in approach; this research project has attempted to address both text and audience, and in its interest in both star and audience essentially speaks to both film studies and the sociological concerns of cultural studies. Equally, it might be argued that historically film studies has been an interdisciplinary field. The theoretical question underlying the research addresses the interdisciplinary nature of the project directly: the attempt to conceptualise audience–star relations outside hegemonic notions of identification in film theory. I have wanted to do this without collapsing the complexities arising from such an investigation into purely sociological terms, retaining an idea of the subject and a sense of the importance of the part played by less than wholly conscious processes. However, it is perhaps the methodological questions arising from the concern with addressing both text and audience, which have most explicitly suggested the problematics and productivity of such an interdisciplinary approach.

I suggest that the conjunction of approaches employed in this research offers a particularly useful way of doing film history, which is perhaps best illustrated in Chapter 5 in tracing the articulation of the Cinderella motif in the three sites: film text, archival resources for investigating the sites of circulation of the image such as women's and film-fan magazines, and audience accounts. What I hope to have offered is an account of the process of bringing history to film, of attempting to get to grips with the moments of the construction, circulation and reception of a 'star-text' such as Audrey Hepburn. This process could be described as a kind of cultural studies of film, film history as personal history and *through* that, social history – a history which is as interested in 'ephemera' and the difficult but inextricable issue of personal experience as it is in other, more conventional kinds of evidence.

Notes

1 Morley and Brunsdon (1999) offer a careful account of the relationship between the text's 'preferred reading' and the decoding of that text by audience members, and are a key exception.

Appendix I: the main interviews

The interviews

The research took the form of open-ended, semi-structured, conversational interviews which usually lasted between one and two hours. The questions around which they were structured are reproduced below. I also asked the women to fill in a form 'About you'. Some interviews took place in my home or in the women's places of work (Barbara, Caroline, Rosie, Chloë, Mel, Verity); the others took place in the women's own homes. I already knew Barbara, Bernie, Janet, Rosie and Verity, who offered to take part in the study; Bernie introduced me to Pat. Other women were introduced to me by friends (Cally, Lucy, Caroline, Liz, Chloë) who then introduced me to Anna, Jayne and Mel. Cally, Anna and Lucy are all single, professional women in their late twenties and at the time of the interviews all were living in rented accommodation in the trendy leafy suburbs of Birmingham. Lucy was living alone; Cally and Anna were both sharing houses with friends. Cally and Anna are good friends, and they and Lucy to some degree share the same culture and were introduced to me through the same person. Jayne was a work colleague of Cally, who put us in touch. Despite her very interesting account of Audrey, I decided to largely exclude Verity from the discussion of the accounts because it emerged that her formative years had been spent in France. The interviews took place over the period which saw the deaths of both Princess Diana and Frank Sinatra.

Transcriptions

In the extracts and quotations from interviews, italics indicate particular emphasis in speech; . . . indicates that a sentence tails off or a pause; – indicates interruption or running together; [. . .] indicates an elision. Extraneous speech indicators have been removed.