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Advanced diarology: mortification, materiality and meaning-making

Abstract:

Public diary-reading events, arguably originating in the USA in 2002, continue to draw participants eager to share their teenage angst and juvenilia, yet there is little scholarly reflection on this peripheral practice of performative writing. Having birthed our own version in 2017 – within the safe harbour of the academy and using an intuitive, practice-based methodology – we believe there are some useful questions to pose about the autoethnographic contributions of this mortification rite. Eighteen months in, we are further moved to ask, what is happening in the presentational and performative space as we show our younger selves to one another as we have, and do? This article, a follow-up to our previous *Diarology for beginners* (2019), formally reiterates on the page the associative leaps and communal meaning-making arising from our explorations so far. Prompted by questions, such as, 'Is the practice of diary keeping inherently gendered? Is it about becoming visible? Audible? Memorable? What? And what is the impulse to publicly share the archives?' (Munro, Murray and Taylor 2019), we draw on the literature around diary *keeping*, as well as theories on voice, gender and creative autoethnography, as a way into understanding diary *performing* and the public sharing of juvenile shame.

Biographical notes:

The three authors are the founding members of RMIT University's non/fictionLab's Symphony of Awkward research collective, which investigates the performance culture around juvenilia.

Stayci Taylor is a lecturer with the Media programs at RMIT. She brings to her research a background in theatre and television and in 2017 won an RMIT prize for research excellence. She has published on screenwriting, gender, creative writing and digital media in books and journals including *TEXT, New writing* and *Senses of cinema*. She is currently co-editing three edited collections, including two on the topic of script development for Palgrave Macmillan.

Kim Munro is a filmmaker, research and educator. Her PhD focused on voice and listening in documentary. Her research and teaching interests are around socially engaged practices, non-linear, experimental, collaborative and participatory documentary projects. She has recently published writing in *New cinemas, Frames*

Cinema journal, *Studies in documentary film* and the book *Female uuthorship and the documentary image*.

Peta Murray is a writer, dramaturge, teacher and Vice Chancellor's postdoctoral research fellow at RMIT. Her practice-led PhD, 'Essayesque dismemoir: w/rites of elder-flowering' employed variations of the 'performance essay' to devise playful and participatory nonfiction on themes of the creative life course. Current research interests include the use of creative methods in ageing studies, and the deployment of new secular rituals as containers for the crafting of communal and counter-narratives. Her critical writing includes a chapter in *Creative manoeuvres: writing, making, being* and a contribution to *TEXT*'s special issue 'The essay'.

Keywords:

Diary – performance – periphery – nonfiction – voice

Introduction (a background)

The study of diary writing has a long and extant history, and the field is rich with commentary (see Bunker 1996, Huff 1996), literary diaries such as the seven volumes from Anaïs Nin (1931-1974) and the five from Virginia Woolf (1915-1941), scholarly bibliographies (see Hogan: 2014) anthologies and compendia. Attention has been variously directed to the writings of childhood and youth (see Cardell and Douglas 2015), the scrivenings of women and girls from particular locations or eras (see, for example, Huff 1985, Bunker 2001) and to the re-purposing of the diary in and for the digital age (see Cardell 2014). The study of diary readings however, and in particular, public ones, is a newer field and as such, deserving scholarship. As Kate Douglas writes, with the 'digital turn', we are now witnessing an interest in the archiving and rehabilitation of documents and texts from childhood (2019: 194), the personal collections of many a would-be writer, angst-ridden teen or shy reclusive adolescent. And with this archival interest, has come the opportunity for sharing these early works with audiences.

Our diarological delvings to date, conducted under the banner of The Symphony of Awkward research collective, are in exploration more of 'process' than of 'form', much as diaries 'are an activity as well as a product' (Gannett 1994: 279). The experiments ensued from observations discussed in March 2017, around our growing awareness of a certain kind of social phenomenon that was observable and of the zeitgeist. We are able to point towards a range of events, mostly in America, but also in the UK, with titles like *The salon of shame*, *Cringe*, and *My teenage angst*. Their common elements include the sharing of unexpurgated childhood diary entries before an audience and the point appears to be participation in a public rite of 'mortification' – a kind of penitential act of self-discipline in quest of transformation or liberation.

But there is more to be found here. Professor Lucy Robinson writes that when reading aloud from her teenage diary at such an event, 'it raised the question of who I thought I was writing for at the time' (2015). Having birthed a version of this of our own – within the safe harbour of the academy – we were, at first, similarly interested in exploring such questions around for whom it was our youthful selves were writing. A wave of these diary reading events, arguably originating in the USA in 2002, continues to draw participants eager to publicly share their testimonies to teenage angst yet, aside from the very recent (at the time of writing) chapter by Douglas, and Robinson's blog post (presumably extra to her formal scholarship) there appears to be little scholarly reflection on this peripheral practice of performative writing. This article, a follow-up to our previous 'Diarology for beginners: articulating playful practice through artless methodology' (2019), aims to contribute to this gap in the field. Here we reiterate our early explorations so far, albeit ones that took place in our own controlled, laboratory conditions, which suggest such activity is likely to prompt associative leaps and communal meaning-making. As such, we continue to deploy the methodology explored in the previous article, which 're-purposes found materials to create new life narratives, each iteration of which finds form and gathers vitality' (Munro, Murray and Taylor 2019), and move our investigation forward to what is happening in the actual presentational and performative space as we show these younger selves to one another as we have, and continue to do.

In mid-2017, we put out a call to other members of the non/fictionLab (a research group within RMIT University's School of Media and Communication), inviting them to excavate their own juvenilia (including, and perhaps especially, their childhood and teenage diaries) with a view to sharing the contents in the name of investigating the phenomenon we had observed. Initially, we worked with a central question, interested in whether or not the practice of sharing one's juvenilia would reveal something about the creation of that artefact, and uncover expectations for that artefact held by the self who created it. We continue to explore these and other mysteries *with* and *through* the interweaving of reflections, observations, reviewed scholarship and our own diary excerpts, using a 'responsive and reflective' methodology like so many emerging from creative arts enquiries, that being 'a way of working that emerges from the incubation of and reflection on a project/practice' (Sempert et al. 2017: 206).

This article takes the shape of a polyvocal collage of fragments which layer personal, ethnographic and scholarly accounts of what can be gleaned from our explorations in performing our diaries. The writing intends to perform the interplay of voices, narratives and insights in the *lasagnification* of our lives – a term we consider one of our conceptual contributions to explorations of the phenomenon of diary sharing. The notion of *lasagnification* is inspired in part by those diaries formatted in annual layers (one date, but five years, to a page), and has been progressed by our observations of the layers of meaning uncovered with expurgating and stratifying one's archives in the company of others. In this way we invite those same 'associative leaps and communal meaning making' (Munro, Murray and Taylor 2019) available in our live sharing sessions. Following a hunch that the increasingly (female) gendered skew of the project might have something to tell us about women's 'relative muteness in the public sphere' (Beard 2017: 33), we have subtitled these collected strata according to notions of *voice*.

Enter Peta's voice

The final two lines in the 18 March 1975 entry of my 'lasagne' diary (see above) state: 'TODAY I GOT A HANDWRITTEN REPLY FROM GLENDA JACKSON. The high spot of an otherwise foul day. Jane has banned me from speaking' (emphasis in original).

Jane has banned me from speaking.

This gets me thinking about the voice. My voice. Others' voices. What makes me speak? What - or who - stops me?

Then I find myself thinking about how in choral singing, one (which one? the conductor?) talks about each part or vocal line and the moment of its entry into the fabric of the music. Of how the tenors enter here, the altos enter over there, and so on. I am trying to work out where and how to enter this article, as a kind of musical construction, and with what or whose voice. Do I bring my lower register, my deeper notes, a voice of 'authority' I have cultivated over many years as a writer and a teacher? Or do I start somewhere else, somewhere higher, and more breathless? Somewhere girlish?

Either way, who gets to speak first?

Scholar/philosopher Mary Beard has 'spoken' at length about qualities of the female voice that have come to be found, read, heard as repellent, weightless, lacking the necessary gravitas for due attention to be paid, lacking the clout for politics, and so on throughout the Western world. It might be good to put a quote from Mary Beard's lecture, *The public voice of women* here:

Yes, maybe let's have Mary speak first.

NOT THAT MARY. THE OTHER MARY: CAPPELLO?

Peta's voice on Mary's voice: the archive and the cull

As I sit down to try to map out my contribution to this article, I am about two weeks into a deep clean-up-cum-cull of my home office. I have attempted this task many times before, shuffling, re-ordering, filing and occasionally even shredding clumps of documents whose use-by date has come and gone. But this time I am serious. So serious that I have rented a lockable 240 litre document bin from a commercial company who promises to shred, in confidence, the contents of said bin, once I am ready to surrender it, and to give me a certificate of *shreddibacy* – I made that word up – in return.

The work is slow and meets with considerable inner resistance. I find it hard to begin each day, not only because part of me does not want to surrender my stash or even to acknowledge its existence, but also because the part of me that is ready to do so does not want to be rushed through the task. She does not wish to walk down memory lane, so much as saunter it, like a flaneuse, winding, weaving, changing tack. There is the pull of the past in every drawer. I have lost hours to files of ephemera from overseas trips, including the many newsy newsletters and bon mots I sent family and friends. I have blushed anew at bundles of love letters and terrible poetry, I have cringed at early drafts and notes of plays and stories that went on to become part of my artistic oeuvre. Or did not. As the case may be. The whole room that is this office has become a kind of walk-in diary. Meets rabbit hole.

I want to find a way to join this to Mary Cappello's idea of 'awkward' and to something about the female voice and beyond this to *essayesque dismemoir*, and as I sit to write this I feel it may even have a connection to the June and September 1973 issues of the anarcho-surrealist-insurrectionary-feminist (ASIF) newsletter, copies of which were shown and shared with me by my friend RL, and have been in my safe-keeping for two years since. There is something in the fact that she will not let me give them back to her, because she then might have to make the decision herself, whether to keep, or to dispose of them. Whether they are fit for the archive, or the shredder?

Mary Cappello begins *Awkward: a detour* (2007) with a cull of her own, going further, to call it a purge. I had no idea when I opened this book of nonfiction what was awaiting me. The structure of the book itself is an object lesson in filing. Its macro-structure is in four parts, and each part is divided into separate 'drawers' labelled breathing, touching, breaching, baring (part 1), facing, falling, and stalling (part 2), surging and detouring (part 3) and a final label, delving (part 4). Even the mathematics of this is

interesting. It is a kind of algorithm of distillation. But Cappello does not stop here. Under each label, like an accordion file, are further 'compartments', each expansive enough to explore a specific notion of awkwardness. We have notions of physical awkwardness in, or rather, under splayed, of social awkwardness, in or under ill-mannered, and on she goes, concluding, one supposes with spiritual awkwardness, under the notion of ecstatic. I am yet to read so far. I am too busy with the awkwardness of the cull of my own.

Scholarly voice on mortification

The term mortification derives from the church Latin mortificare ('to put to death') but while the mort = death part is clear in the etymology, the meaning is broader. Mortification means that one deliberately undergoes some kind of suffering, so as to transform, or be transformed. So, what sorts of suffering, what modes of mortification, might be uncovered in a practice-based research enquiry into the performance of teenage testimony?

Saint Paul sets it out as follows. In his Letter to the Romans, he advises the early Christians, 'if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death [mortificetis] the deeds of the body you will live' (8:13). Elsewhere, in the Letter to the Colossians he counsels: 'Put to death [mortificate] what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry' (3:5).

So, its Christian origins aside, mortification may be observed to have broader readings, meanings, practices that aim at the spiritual (or otherwise) transformation of an individual through the administration of specific forms of discipline. These often involve self-denial (abstinence, chastity, fasting for instance) but may go further to entail pain and suffering.

Mortification then, refers to the suppression of that which is earthly, that which would arise out of the body. The body of course being the site of what is wounded in man and gives rise to his concupiscence – his tendency to lust and longing, to all evil desires born from the stain of original sin. And, as feminism in all its many waves has told us, that which is of the female body is genuinely particularly and all the more stained, and therefore, all the more in need of mortifying. As an action. With these things considered, it is little wonder that the gendered makeup of the Symphony of Awkward events has been exclusively female to date.

Enter Stayci's voice

Diary entry: 16 November 2017

At this point, I've become very aware of who I'm writing to, or for [...] I am of course anticipating being read by, and likely reading this aloud to, my sister diarologists. This means that this homework – pleasurable, interesting and useful as it is – is not helpful in answering the question oft asked in our sessions – to whom were our younger selves writing, or, to whom did they imagine they might be writing? The very fact of our being

a collective is an unsolvable variable in this laboratory experiment. The point at which I became aware of this was when I wrote [earlier in the entry from which this is excerpted] 'I won't go into the reasons why…', although I suppose, thinking on it, it recalls my 13 year old self's [propensity for writing] 'to cut a long story short'. More self-conscious, probably, are the couple of 'rule-of-three' punchlines written earlier. Would they be there if I wasn't, at that point, unconsciously anticipating reading this aloud?

Scholarly voice on mortifying events

Public record of this practice of sharing one's childhood artefacts with audiences suggests a short but busy history, which can be traced to 2002 with the emergence of *Mortified* (US), formally the *Mortified shoe box*. As the website states, the founders began curating material 'when the discovery of an unsent teenage love letter led to an email asking people if they knew anyone who wanted to share their childhood writings on stage' (n.d.). They underestimated the appeal of this proposal, and note the 'email went viral and soon, responses poured in from strangers near and far' (n.d.). The language around these events – and there are now many beyond *Mortified live*, including Seattle's *Salon of shame* – implies a level of exposé: *Mortified* invites us to 'share the shame' and 'the embarrassing stuff' (n.d.), and the *Salon of shame* promises that 'Everybody wins when it comes to embarrassment!' (n.d.). Of note are the frequent mentions of (or invitations to) an audience: 'We invite you to join us as we drink and exploit ourselves for your entertainment!' offers the *Salon of shame* (n.d.). Likewise, *Mortified live* trumpets 'Witness adults sharing their most embarrassing childhood artefacts [...] Hear grown men and women confront their past' (n.d.). Also notable is that the *Salon of shame* advises participants '**Please make sure your writing is at least a decade old.** We don't want to laugh at your current pain – we want to laugh at your vintage pain' (n.d.; emphasis in original). From these two ongoing events alone – and there are many more, worldwide – it is apparent there is a growing culture around the sharing of these archives, necessitating the development of terms and conditions and rules of engagement. For Douglas, these public events of diary sharing provide experiences in a collective sharing of 'shame' and 'vulnerability' while also bringing 'certain cultural benefits' which include 'a perceived engagement with something raw and real; the possibility of catharsis; and the potential to engage an audience of witnesses by tapping into cultural memory of childhood in the 1980s and 1990s' (2019: 200). Beyond the diary as cultural artefact, we have come to understand the diary as an open text that 'does not anticipate its own ending and closure' (Rascaroli 2009: 115), and therefore remains forever unresolved, even when and if the practice of keeping a diary has been abandoned. This presents us with another way in which to consider the appeal of publicly sharing its contents – these reading and sharing events offer themselves as the long-awaited, if unconscious, search for contextual resolution; a gallery in which to hang one's self-portrait alongside those of others.

Enter Kim's voice

'I wear black on the outside because black is how I feel on the inside' (lyric from The Smiths *Unloveable* – excerpt from Kim's diary, aged 16).

I think of addresses to the self as imagined through an unknown Other and wonder to whom the teenage diary is addressed if not ourselves.

At home, I search for overlooked material in two plastic crates of childhood and early adult stuff my dad has kept. I look for secrets and clues of my self. I find a scrapbook of my own memorabilia, a collection of letters, secret class notes, tacky postcards, a boyfriend's number on a yellow serviette, handmade wrapping paper sprayed with Australis perfume, receipts and other items of dubious sentimental worth. I read an inscription to the reader; Dear Reader. As a fifteen-year-old, I had imagined someone finding this great chronicle of the times, wishing them good tidings in browsing the 'monument archive'.

Kim's other voice, on the pre-formed voice

Looking back at the diary entries now, I am curious about who this 'pre-formed' or perhaps 'proto-formed' person was. While the diary acts as a place to craft our teenage voice, in isolation, the voice that is created is an assemblage constructed from our friends, parents, desires, adversaries, pop-cultural references, societal influences, teachers and other figures of authority. For Gannett, to keep a diary is 'to foster a movement toward reflection and reflexivity and away from a simplistic notion of the autonomous, contained, singular self' (1994: 279). This being said, the diary is a site for crafting the self in both self-conscious and unconscious ways, performing resistance to social pressures, trying out versions of gendered identity, inscribing our shifting alliances with friends and family, and navigating a sense of place.

Speaking of such a 'pre' and 'fully' formed self is to make the assumption that we are changing and developing selves until we finally arrive. Adopting a more relational position to subjectivity subverts the idea of the fixed self. For posthumanist theorist Rosi Braidotti, subjectivity is always relational and multiple, a 'collective assemblage, a relay-point for a web of complex relations that displace the centrality of ego-indexed notions of identity' (2014: 171). What we think, feel, experience and how we respond are all contingent on who and what we come in contact with.

Peta's diarological voice: entry about the first meeting

There were many expressions of initial interest in the Symphony of Awkward, but when it came to the crunch there were also a lot of last-minute apologies. It was around these, perhaps, that we arrived at one of the principal protocols of our sessions to date; perhaps something that sets it apart from others, and this is the expectation that all participants will share. If you attend a Symphony of Awkward soiree it is expected that you will (would) show and tell. There are (were) to be no voyeurs, no audients-only. Anyone who comes (came) along will be (was) required to disclose or display some artefact of an earlier self.

Stayci's didactic voice interrupts

It should be noted that, while these protocols were sustained throughout the first two years of this project and continue to be upheld within the laboratory conditions of the Symphony of Awkward soirees, we have since begun devising and refining a methodology for the public-facing event that we now deliver as DbK (Diary Bingo Karaoke). However, as a not insignificant point of difference between other public events such as *Mortified*, rather than 'carefully selecting and curating the child self for effect' (Douglas 2019: 200), the Symphony of Awkward methodology treads a careful line between the self-selected diary entries, read unedited, and the bingo-wheel randomisation which draws on readings around pre-selected themes. This emphasises less overtly the comic effect of the adolescent scrivenings in favour of giving voice to the gamut of emotions in all their awkward, sad, angry and reflective moments.

More recently we have trialled LHR (LiveHypotheticalRadio) in a conference setting (where pre-recorded and live audio of diary sharing and reflection is introduced) and see further public possibilities for this 'mix' in a range of settings and across a broader audience. While we situate our experiments and developing public outings in the lineage of the larger scale mass-audience events that we reference, we are also cognisant that the methodology that emerged from the early (unbroadcast and unticketed) soirees has informed the practice-led research in ways necessitating further reflection (to come).

Peta's diarological voice resumes: the first meeting (continued)

That first session was comprised of a small but lively group of women only, all of whom agreed to show and tell (or 'overshare' as we later declared this). Artefacts and archives on display ranged from conventional childhood diaries – often in unique bindings that were sold as suitable gifts for tween and teenaged girls, back in those days – as well as more prosaic newsagent-brand offerings. There were also more distinctive contributions, such as travel diaries kept at formative moments in early adulthood, and photo archives documenting a startling array of 20th century hairstyles. At this first session it was more than enough to simply go around the room and hear from each contributor, in her own words, in her own voice. No other constraints or randomizing instruments were applied, and, as we have reported elsewhere, the chief applications of the evening were bibulous and gustatory – the wine flowed, cheese and biscuits were scoffed, and in what was to become a signature 'move' a Cheezel bowl was filled and refilled with lurid yellow Os (Munro, Murray and Taylor: 2018).

Another notable feature was the gender skew of the first meeting, which set the tone for that evening, and continues to this day. To date only one male colleague has expressed even a passing interest in joining these sessions, and not one man has yet crossed the threshold of a Symphony of Awkward soiree. It appears that only women have kept these records of their girlhood selves, seeing some kind of ongoing or lifelong value in archiving them, or in their legacy. Or perhaps our male counterparts never kept them in the first place. If one was to compel a male colleague to bring in something from his childhood archive, what would he have to share? Would it adopt this same kind of text-

based form, or is it more likely to be a trophy or a medal, or a ham radio or a wooden platter made in the carpentry workshop?

Our suspicion, as children of the seventies, eighties and nineties, is that our male friends at school did not keep diaries. More than this, we suspect they were not given them, as we girls so often were. This is why scholars, such as Gannett, consider the 'diary as part of an ongoing, feminist project liberating the traditional discursive practices of women' (1994: 278). The stationery store – think the big branded chains – remains to this day a kind of sacred site and place of pilgrimage for girls of a certain age. Stationery in all its forms is all but a devotional object for many women and girls prompting, for instance, such headlines as 'Why grown women really fetishise stunning stationery' in lifestyle sections of newspapers, for articles quoting psychologists observing, for example, 'as children we have few options [beyond stationery] for controlling our environment or expressing our individuality' (Bussey, citing psychologist Emma Kenny 2015).

Stayci's voice responds

In August 2012, I was packing for an adventure in the Nevada desert, by way of Reno, to attend the Burning Man festival. As if we didn't have enough to cram into our limited baggage allowance to survive the conditions and adhere to the values, I had to reserve a few grams of my 23 kg for taking two of my teenage diaries. An inspection of the extensive online program had revealed that *My teenage angst* (a live diary reading event based in Denver, Colorado) was inviting participants for their Burning Man outing. This would be my second public diary performance, a number I have yet to exceed outside of the (so-far) inhouse Symphony of Awkward. The first had been a guest spot in a highly curated event in New Zealand three years earlier. This had been part of a comedy festival and my excerpts had been well-received and earned the requisite laughs. As I had yet to become curious about the nature of such events beyond their entertainment value, I was eager to have them rolling in the dusty aisles once again.

Alas, my return season did not quite reach the giddy heights of my debut. I was, like the other readers, competing with the ambient noise in the Centre Camp Café. More significantly, the small, international audience were somewhat bewildered by my New Zealand accent and rapid delivery, and the predominantly US contingent were more shocked than amused by tales of alcohol and drug use by a fourteen-year-old would-be bad-ass. But the experience now offers useful insights, when I reflect upon the impression made on the audience by the lone male reader in the line-up.

His entrance was met by a palpable pique of the spectators' attention. Let's face it; a bunch of oversharing women was one thing; but what rare creature was this? I remember the book from which he read was much larger than that of mine or the other women – a foolscap size perhaps – and within were his reflections upon a love, perhaps unrequited? Or maybe a break-up, a betrayal ... featuring a cast of characters from a shared house? I remember little of this content, clearly, because it wasn't what was revealed, I suggest, but the fact he was revealing it at all.

He was British, self-deprecating and these traits, combined with the raw material, united the audience in a collective swoon – an audience that included my two traveling companions, staunch feminists both but neither, apparently, immune. The man, at first visibly surprised by his impact, soon warmed to the role of Diary King and opened page after page, far exceeding the allotted time and clearly reading past what he'd prepared. The longer he outstayed what I considered his welcome, the further I departed from the group hypnosis, but then again, I'm an unreliable witness – somewhat of a stickler at the best of times and, in this case, thoroughly upstaged by someone breaking the rules. But, in light of recent reflection, it is useful to consider what rules he was breaking, exactly. To keep a diary (in both senses of the phrase) and then so willingly share its contents, may have been at the core of the rapt attention – a reward for this brave breach of masculinity.

Kim's diarological voice: the meetings progress

For months now a small group of us have been meeting to read our diaries. We load our plastic plates with yellowy-orange snacks usually containing cheese and their subsidiaries. The order of reading is facilitated by the element of chance, the bingo wheel. We take turns in reading and listening and asking questions. The material is varied and personal, but I also know that there is overlap between obsessions, awkwardness, revelry, secrecy, shame and a general muddling through the unpleasant juvenile years. This becomes a shared space for a collective voice that transcends our singular subjective position. I am reminded of Braidotti's writing on the subject not as singular but as relational, shifting and constantly being negotiated in a dynamic exchange of contingencies. On the subject of writing, Braidotti suggests, 'Letting the voices of others echo through my text, is therefore a way of actualising the non-centrality of the 'I' to the project of thinking, while attaching it/her to a collective project and political moment' (2011: 67). The written diaries that were very much the work of a nascent solo voice have become strands in a new weave through the semi-public vocalisation.

I think about who this person aged fifteen years and three-and-a-half months-old is. Was. She is far enough from me to feel detached from her. I feel a kind of pride in the lack of shame demonstrated by her bold ego. Similarly, in the written diary, I see how she (I) performs her own popularity among friends and boys. She is in control of her rebellion against authority at school and embarrassed by having parents. She swears in a way that makes me bristle now. She revels in the superiority of her cultural interests or 'skills' in jet-skiing and meditation. Any failure is transformed into an abject distancing through a 'I never liked him/her/it/them/that anyway'. But then there are moments when another truth leaks through with evidence of self-doubt:

'I am crying as I write this'

or

'Kane rang tonight. I hope he doesn't think my braces are that bad and I hope they don't do anything to our relationship'

and

'I went to the Hilton to see if I could spot Pink Floyd. I didn't tell anyone this as they'd think me silly'.

Peta's diarological voice

It should also be acknowledged that at a certain point, and quite early in the process, it became – perhaps more from my point of view than others' – a deliberately cultivated women-identifying-only space. It became part of the safety of the sessions, for me, that it be protected as such. And it wasn't that active defence was required – as I have said, the men have hardly been hammering at the doors with their diaries – but even so, in terms of the psychosocial experience there was something essential to the ongoing success of the project that has been lodged in this separatism and the inherent sense of sanctuary it affords. It also makes me think about this gendered kind of mark-making as we as girls tried to put ourselves on the record in some way. My childhood diary is evidence, like graffiti, or a tag on a wall – Peta was here! (Or there. In 1972, and 73, and 74, Peta was, like Foo, attempting to etch herself into or onto the surface of the world.) Makes me want to dig into that word – etching. It's like a kind of engraving, but not so deep, I suspect, not so permanent. Not a deep mark-making, so much as a scratch or a glance upon the times. Engraving is more pompous and somehow invited and ceremonial. To etch oneself is an illicit activity, a defacement.

What does this mean, and to what needs in this cultural moment does it speak? Why should it matter when a middle-aged scholar has an encounter with her girlhood self? And what does this have to do with the study of creative writing or of broader writing programs at large?

In terms of the last question we surmise that inside the juvenile self is the pre-formed and pre-forming voice. That the cultivation and curation of this first voice 'on the page' is a critical phase in the life cycle of the putative artist. In this way, we might think of 'the archive as residue, as a way of "working through" in order to compose new work that is creative and generative; and archive as experience, a way of exploring the possibilities' (Rendle-Short 2012: 1). What, then, might it mean that girls of our generation were offered this so often and so freely? What was the message within? Was it 'practice now for publication, we all can't wait to hear what you have to say'? We doubt it. The more likely subtext reads along the lines of 'you might as well get used to talking to yourself now, because no one else is ever going to be interested!'

And thus, boys were not offered diaries, or the art of diarising, at that same age. They did not need either. They could already speak into and inscribe themselves upon the world and be both seen and heard, even in short trousers and without the dinkiness of a diary. For as Cinthia Gannett observes of (male) writers and theorists of writing like James Moffett, Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, Donald Murray and Donald Graves 'each one has felt it necessary to make some kind of a distinction between the diary and the journal, characterizing the diary either as trivial (the rote recording of everyday events), or as the more personal of the forms' (1992: 26). Meanwhile, we were being told, as girls, through these invitations to pen our thoughts on a regular basis, that we need do so inside something lockable. Many diaries had locks and keys; this was part of their

allure. Therefore, they came with the injunction – this is private, this is secret, this is not to be told or shared. This is unspeakable.

Often the 'unspeakable', of course, was mere dross. The dull doings of our days. What we ate. Where we went. What we wore. Who we liked and who we loathed from day to day. There is little by way of insight, although as we read about those girls now, we have accumulating insights into them that they never knew.

(Stayci's) scholarly and diarological voices collide

One perceived value of these events for both participants and audience may be that these artefacts are 'evidence' where childhood memories are unreliable. As Robin Hemley reminds us, these memories are inevitably conflated and sometimes recollections of memories rather than the events themselves (2017). Hemley makes his point in the context of memoir, arguing that the 'autobiographical pact' (from Philippe Lejeune), promising the reader a certain 'authenticity', does not take into account that the memoir – by modern definition, an impression of a life event – is not reportage (Ibid.). The childhood diary is itself an unreliable artefact – as Gannett observes, diaries 'do not contain "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth", nor are they direct, authentic and complete representations of the self" (1994: 278). They do, nonetheless, offer tangible evidence to substantiate, evoke or hone those memories, complicating this notion of impression versus reportage. 'While autobiography and memoirs are written at considerable temporal distance from the narrated facts' writes Laura Rascaroli, 'the diary is composed simultaneously with the events, or after a minor interval' (2009: 115). This is not to reduce childhood diaries to source material for memoirists seeking to buttress their claims to authenticity (should such a distinction be possible or even desired). Rather, this is about the diaries themselves; artefacts that are interesting precisely because they sit outside of the objective, contextual frameworks afforded by hindsight. To conflate memories, arguably, is to enable ourselves to make sense of them in a narratological sense; those sampled events – as recorded in the usually rigid chronology of the juvenile diary practice – are severed from the remix. Our archives are the unmix; ingredients laid out raw before processing. We argue, then, that the appeal of the performed diary has something to do with its lack of 'realized effort to assemble the puzzle of what happened in the light of subsequent realization' (Birkerts 2008: 8), given the child or teenaged diarist so far holds no such vantage point. It is almost certainly this absence of distance that the *Salon of shame* seeks to protect, when advising participants 'DO NOT turn your reading into a performance piece with a prepared introduction [...] Keep your witty, self-aware asides to a minimum' (n.d) (emphasis in original).

To ask, 'when and under what circumstances does a diary become a memoir?' is a question for others to ponder. Our query centres upon the possibilities arising when the contents of one's juvenile archives are performed publicly. More specifically, we are interested in the contextual consequences when multiple archives are laid bare in the same event.

Reflecting (for 'homework') on a choice of reading for a Symphony of Awkward diary 'performance' it is noted (Taylor 2017):

> Having made a conscious choice to steer away from the comedy of my teenage would-be bad ass and very young self, I thought I'd chosen something banal – believing banality must necessarily be a part of what we explore. But fuck me if it wasn't still funny. The diaries of a child for whom worldliness and truly genuine hardship has yet to happen just probably are.

And (Munro 2017):

> Midway through Friday afternoon, I wondered really if my diary could sustain another reading of the Kim and Kane refrain. I opened it at whim and struck upon the mood I was feeling … life is too much, an abundance of homework to do, exciting moments of the school dance the night before, and banality and pain of orthodontic treatment. I only have one diary and it contains a daily entry over 5 months when I was fifteen written on pastel pinks, blues and yellows, encased in a slightly padded shell with vinyl exterior. This period was filled with obsessions, feelings of injustice from adults, telephone conversations cut short by my dad giving me the wind-up signal and riding my bike to cafes and buying records and brown cardigans that I deemed 'wild'.
>
> Part three of the symphony began with Cheezels and wine, an homage to childhood paired with the reality of the present. This iteration saw the introduction of a bingo wheel where the randomly selected numbers introduced a game of interpretive chance. Interpretive, luckily, as although we had committed to the Symphony of Awkward, some entries really are too shameful to read.
>
> The calling of the numbers again coincided with more revelations about the rise and fall of my then boyfriend Kane. In my estimation he went from being the 'ultimate' to 'not a rager like me'. In reality, he was really nice but I wanted to smoke marijuana and he disapproved.

To perform one's archive publicly, then, is to rescue it from what Rachael Langford and Russell West identify as its liminal state between the private and the public (1999: 8-9). That is to say, as Rascaroli notes, within this otherwise solitary practice 'an 'other', an implied reader, is always projected on to the text' (2009: 118). In the case of my 10-year-old self, this reader was frequently addressed directly, mostly with apologetic disclaimers and promises to improve the experience:

> Wednesday 3 January, 1979
>
> Dear Diary,
>
> Sorry! Nothing interesting. Dad bought some clip-on sunglasses.
>
> Sunday 6 January, 1980
>
> Dear Diary,
>
> It's 10:15pm so I'll be going to sleep soon but I know if I leave you till tomorrow that I'll get behind and you'll be like all my other diarys (sic) with lots of blank pages. I guess that if I know I'll be staying up late I'll have to make sure that I get it done in the day.

> Friday 18 January, 1980
>
> PS. It's 8:15 and I've just woke (sic) up on the morning of 19/1/80, and I'd just like to say that although this page is true, would the reader please note that when this was written it was about 10:00 at night and it wasn't really as bad as all that!
>
> Wednesday 23 January, 1980
>
> Dear Diary,
>
> Today I'm writing like this because this is how you have to write at D.N.I [Dunedin North Intermediate] so you'll probably be getting this in the future and possibly more cos (sic) I'm not familliar (sic) with this writing and there's more to it, I think. I'm not sure about 'I's' either as you can see by observing my writing.

As Culley points out of diary writing practice, 'The importance of the audience, real or implied, conscious or unconscious, of what is usually thought of as a private genre cannot be overstated' (1985: 11). The drive to put the content in front of an actual audience might be seen as a likewise conscious or unconscious lifelong search for this trusted readership. It goes without saying that in order to participate in such events, one must still have possession of their artefacts. We frequently seek from each other, in our group's discussions, the reasons why we have kept our diaries, and ponder whether the opportunity to share their contents provides, for some of us, the answer. Perhaps Peta's earlier entry has something to tell us. Maybe we need to go back.

Peta's diarological voice: on diaries as gifts, and other girlhood treasures

While you are doing so, I want to go over here, and try to bring together something that came to me in the night, as many of my more useful thoughts do. I was thinking about these articles I am trying to write. I was worrying away at them in my sleep; sleep-working, I call it, moving between this one and the others, stirring ideas about, as if in pots on a stove. And I found myself thinking about how my childhood diary was given to me as a gift when I was about 9 or 10 years of age. I do not remember who gave me the gift, but it was most likely my parents, or one of my siblings (as a gift chosen for them to give me) and the inference is that I must somehow have been seen to have arrived at that certain age in which a degree of privacy, or even secrecy, becomes not just welcome, but necessary. In the gift of a diary I was being offered some kind of other space where I could place, could 'say', could express in confidence, things that I did not wish to, or was unable to speak out loud. Or things that others might not wish to hear me say? I shared a room with my sister (eighteen months younger) for most of my childhood, indeed until I left home at the age of seventeen, so it is not as if I did not have someone to talk to, to confide in, 'in real life' should the need arise.

I wonder now about this. Why it was that so many pre-pubescent girls of my era and demographic were deemed to arrive at a point when their thoughts were so … what? Unsavoury, uninteresting, just plain un— as to need to be kept under wraps in this manner? The diary I am thinking of and have still – the 'lasagne' diary from which I have been reading at our meetings – is distinctive for its little lock and its long-lost key.

Indeed, I venture to suggest that when I received the gift, it would have been its lockability, its key-controlled snoop-proof-ness – more than the call of all the blank pages therein – that entranced me. A diary invites doing. Lock. Unlock. Lock. Unlock.

It is that rarest of things: an ACTION TOY FOR GIRLS.

Kim's scholarly voice interrupts

In *Ear hustle*, a collaborative podcast made by an artist and some inmates in San Quentin Prison, California, one of the participants, Curtis, reflects on how he started writing a diary. Curtis had been convicted under the 'three strikes and you're out' policy and faced with fifty years inside, and his wife and daughter vanishing, he began his diary project (Roberts 2017, 00:20:23.10 – 00:21:49.01):

> Curtis: You know, when I, when I first came [to prison] in in 1995, I, uh, I started writing a diary, and I've never written a diary in my life. You know, and I remember a few of my cellmates are telling me that men call it journals. Um, ok, whatever, but, uh, it was for my daughter. I would write her letters in there.
>
> Nigel: Was it— Wait, in your mind, what's the difference between a journal and a diary?
>
> Curtis: Truthfully, a journal is like, it's very manly. A diary is very feminine and it's very personal.
>
> Nigel: Okay. This is a hard question. Can you give me a sentence, okay, two sentences, that say the same thing. One would be in a journal and one would be in a diary. I'm just curious how they would be crafted in a different way.
>
> Curtis: The journal would say, 'Dearest, Christiana, this is your dad. I'm in prison. I miss you. Hope you remember me.' A diary would say, 'My dearest, darling Christiana, this is your daddy. I have never forgotten you. I want you to know that I'm the idiot that put myself here. It was not because of you, and that I love you, and I am so sorry.

Curtis's writing conjures a very 'real' imagined audience, largely because this diary/journal is a collection of letters he wrote. After being returned, unread, he transformed them into a diary where they became a kind of dialogue with himself. For Curtis, the word 'diary' is considered so feminised that the more pragmatic synonym of 'journal' is suggested as more fitting. While this may be a matter of semantics, there is disagreement among scholars whether any distinction should be made between what kind of narratives and writing might constitute the journal and the diary (Smith and Watson 2010: 267).

Peta's voice continues

But in the temporal overlay of the night I also thought about another book shaped gift I am certain I was given at around the same age. It may have been a birthday gift, but more likely it was a gift bestowed upon me by my Catholic aunt (and godmother) on the occasion of my Confirmation. For some reason I conflate the timing of the two. In my sleep I called the book – it was a book - *These are your saints*, but when I Googled

that this morning, I drew a blank. But now, just now, I realised it was called *Here are your saints*, and I have Googled it again, and I am now looking at a photograph of the front cover.

The author is Joan Windham. The publisher is Sheed and Ward. And if I jump online now it looks like I can order a hardcover copy from Patty's Bookshop, wherever that may be, somewhere in the USA, in an 'Acceptable, though used condition', with 'moderate edge wear', for just $14.99 plus shipping to Australia.

The book is described as containing brief biographies of twelve saints. With illustrations – I can see examples on the front cover – by Frank Russell. It was first published in 1948. And what I realised in the night was that it was full of stories of mortification and martyrdom (with pictures by Frank Russell) and that somehow it was thought appropriate to fill a young girl's head with these ideas at the same time as it was also good to be telling her, if indirectly, to SHUT HER MOUTH. (I would love to look at the illustrations. I have a vague memory that they depicted several of the saints under duress, as it were, being executed or tortured.)

In our Symphony of Awkward meetings, we turn to our diaries and re-open them, and it is as if we are re-opening our mouths. The diaries open and close, flap flap, they become, in effect, mouthpieces. Blah, blah, blah. Words come out, in our youthful voices, and we fold them into the shape of a fugue. Call and response, question and answer. We are heard, though mortified. And somehow we are changed, transfigured. Again, I chose this word for its musicological echo – a fugue in music, according to my *Dictionary* app is a 'short succession of musical notes, as either a melody or a group of chords, that produces a single complete and distinct impression.' But I also use it to denote shape-shifting. To be transfigured, said app also tells me, is to change in outward form or appearance; transform BUT more than this, to change so as to glorify or exalt.

And thus we contend that our rites of mortification induce supernatural change by which we are somehow, collectively, exalted. To be exalted is of course to be lifted up, elevated, raised in status and power. For women, this feels good. Which can only be a good thing.

Kim's diarological voice: to diarise is to be with one's self

I was recently in the suburbs of Philadelphia and one evening, needing some time to myself, I rode to a local bar, bought a pint of beer and sat down to write a diary entry. This wasn't necessarily planned but since I was out of the range of internet, it struck me as a very good idea. Although far from teenhood, diarising, as Gannett writes, serves as a method in which to 'construct and reconstruct "self" and "voice"' so as to 'serve as the site of coming to know oneself' (Gannett 1994: 278). Plus, it had been a long time between diarising. The last time I wrote a diary entry had been at the end of a significant relationship in the previous decade. I remembered it as a place to write my secrets and pain. It had been even longer since I had kept the almost daily habit for a short-lived five months when I was fifteen years and three and a half months. This had been a padded vinyl volume with pastel pages and images of bold musical notes and piano keys. Now, sitting in this unlikely sports bar surrounded by Christmas parties, I

wrote with the consciousness of trying to understand why I would write a diary entry. What I would say, where would it lead me and how would I write towards understanding, a future yet considered, a coming into being through the action of writing.

Seated at a large round table with eight chairs, I began writing in my multi-functional olive-green notebook/planner/organiser/journal with 'Dear Diary'. As I wrote, I recalled Joan Didion's reflection on why she writes; 'Had I been blessed with even limited access to my own mind there would have been no reason to write. I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear' (n. p.). But writing with the consciousness of an adult feels far from what the awkward secret musings of a teenager though there is still something about the dialogue with self.

These days I make films, or if I don't, then I am often filming things and places and where I find myself. Collecting fragments that I revisit and shape, overlay and remix. I think of this a diaristic practice.

The written diary, like the photographed or filmed image, freezes a moment or events. Yet while we assume the indexical photographic image tells us an unequivocal 'truth', the written word is more slippery, less reliable, somewhat concocted. It is also a narrative and the recounting through selection and sequencing for maximum effect. The written diary's filmic cousin may be the self-portrait or diary film. The difference being the temporal lapse between when the material is filmed and the later event of editing. Shaping the material says more about who the maker is now rather than who we thought we were at the time. Looking back in dialogue with a previous 'version' of oneself. Rascaroli suggests that the self-portrait or diary film is 'addressed primarily to the self as Other' (60). But perhaps another difference between the written and the filmed is that the diary film has an intended audience. Rascaroli goes on to say that this address is always public and also for 'posterity' (Ibid.). We might wonder if the written diary was always intended for an audience in our preformed subconscious desire to be seen and remembered.

Conclusion

> Last night, no tears. But song. And I sang with gusto in a room full of women; some I knew, some who were new to me. Something about the shape of the night, something about the showings and the tellings, and how the songs came after these admitted something else to the space, opening up the privacy of each girl's girlhood memories to a collective howl of adult-sized joy or shock or recognition. The music inflated even the smallest emotions, so that they expanded, filling the room with colour, with noise, with feeling that we have perhaps been holding in – without knowing – for years? (Murray 2017).

Rascaroli points out that it has been frequently claimed that every diarist secretly dreams of publication, or, at least, is conscious of creating 'a text capable of seducing a reader' (2009: 118). But the thought of a posthumous publication fills some of us with dread, not assuaged by the suggestion that one would likely be considered in some way

accomplished for there to be such demand. Some of us will leave our archives with demolition instructions. Thus, we might consider the possibility that to perform one's diary before it's 'found' (posthumously or otherwise) suggests being in control of where (and how, and which parts of) these archives are made public. Yet, by performing the diary, it still becomes something of a public artefact, and perhaps is thus freed from being a perpetual work-in-progress. The audience, then, like the implied reader, fills the role of preserver of the life record (Culley 1985: 8). In other words, presenting and/or performing these archives publicly completes an otherwise unfinished circle – the work finally finds its audience and, by that, its 'forever-available and sympathetic friend and confidante' (Rascaroli 2009: 118).

The price to pay for this resolution – especially in the context of those events transparently peddling awkwardness, embarrassment and mortification – is the public exposure and disclosure of one's own shame. Our project seems vulnerable to double scrutiny, in that we are attempting to also theorise such activity. In this way, our emerging scholarly work might be seen as an autoethnographic project seeking to 'embrace vulnerability with purpose' (Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis 2013: 24). This is where our research takes us next.

In this article we have set out to perform on the page our early thinking around the preponderance of female (or female-identifying) voices in this emergent practice and offered some insights into the under-theorised notion of publicly 'performing' one's diaries. Our early explorations in this space, albeit under controlled, laboratory conditions, suggest that the activity creates (becomes?) a kind of an intervention, wherein or whereby, as Francesca Rendle-Short has proposed 'thinking of the material in playful ways, generates a lateral view about what might be found, what is left out; what remains secret and unsaid. It allows for the makings of some sort of counter-archive, an expression of voice where traditionally there has been silence' (2012: 9).

Restoration of voice, in our observation, promotes joy; joy in turn promotes well-being and a sense of renewed purpose, these in turn increase agency and build capacity. Thus, may diarology as a communally-experienced rite of mortification in the form of shame-sharing – or more accurately as a form of shame-letting – deliver moments of equanimity and reconciliation with forgotten personas and proto-formed selves.

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