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Life Narratives and Youth Culture

Representation, Agency and Participation

Kate Douglas and Anna Poletti

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Life Narratives and Youth Culture

Representation, Agency and Participation

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Introduction

Youth, Life Narrative and the Self(ie)

In December 2013, the *New York Post* ran a front-page story titled "Selfie-ish: My Selfie with Brooklyn Bridge suicide dude." A young woman had apparently taken a photograph of herself in front of a suicidal man on the bridge. The "selfie," a now ubiquitous term and practice, refers to a photograph taken of oneself, usually taken with a mobile device, posted on social media sites (such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, etc.) which invites response from friends of followers.[1] As many commentators have noted, the term selfie is most often associated with the photographs teenage girls post of themselves on social media sites as a means for asserting agency and participating within culture (Hall 2013; Harrod 2009; Losse 2013; Murphy 2013).

In the Brooklyn Bridge case, conveniently, someone was on hand to snap a photo of the woman taking the photo. The *New York Post*'s story went viral across mainstream and social media and wide condemnation

[1] The term "selfie" was the *Oxford Dictionaries*' word of the year for 2013; the term increased in usage by 17,000% during 2013 (Freeland 2013).

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followed.[2] The media condemnation was levelled at the nameless woman, but more vehemently at the wider culture of narcissism and self-obsession that this woman came to symbolise. According to such commentary, this modern age is turning many young people into heartless egomaniacs, obsessed with their own photographic images and narratives.

There are a range of exaggerations and misconceptions here that provide inspiration for our inquiry in this book. First, let us start with the idea that photographic self-portraiture is a new phenomenon. It simply is not: self-portraiture has a long and varied history from daguerreotype self-portraits of the nineteenth century, through to the many different types of portable cameras (i.e. with timers) which emerged in the twentieth century. The digital, portable camera has, in the past decade, found a home in the omnipresent (and now with forward-facing option) mobile phone camera. The photographic methods of using a mirror or an outstretched arm or hand to capture a self-portrait were practised throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, just as they are now.

Second is the suggestion of a crisis in youth self-representation. Self-representation cannot simply be dismissed or explained away through accusations of superficiality and narcissism. As many cultural commentators have noted (in relation to the selfie and more particularly the *New York Pos*t example) selfies are also an act of socialisation; they reflect a desire for social and cultural participation and connection, for visibility and affirmation (Jones 2013; Freeland 2013). Sharing selfies can also provide an opportunity to take control of one's self-image (e.g. consider Instagram's filtering and editing tools or Snapchat's timed snaps).

But contemporary cultures, particularly in the Western domains of the global north, have a deeply contradictory relationship with young people engaging in public modes of self-representation, as Jonathan Jones (2013) notes: "like so many cultural phenomena into which millions throw themselves can be seen on the one hand, modern, democratic, liberating instruments of progress and yet on the other hand, with equal

[2] Jonathan Jones (2013) is suspicious of the timeliness and good quality of the photograph taken of the woman taking the selfie. He raises the possibility of the whole incident being a sensationalist "set up" to play on the notion that this is "the worst" of a broader social problem. The so-called bad taste selfie is a wider phenomenon. For example, there is a well-known Tumblr blog "selfies at funerals." The Brooklyn Bridge selfie photographer was never publicly named perhaps because she was only ever intended to be symbolic of a wider cultural concern.

validity, as time-eating cybermats of the apocalypse." Of course, the corporate powers which heavily influence the cultural practices of young people play a significant role in such perceptions. But the good/bad, productive/time-wasting binaries suggested here are not useful, and as Jones argues, high-profile public examples of self-representation gone bad—like the Brooklyn Bridge selfie-taker—become a convenient scapegoat for the ambivalent and often confused responses that critics have to young people's cultural agency and use of social media. These debates run concurrently with broader cultural discussions around, and constructions of, childhood innocence, and link into cultural anxieties and moral panics around the need to protect children and youth from danger and harm (Cockburn 2012; James and Prout 1990; James 2009).

Third is the prevalent misconception that there is something new and unusual about a young person wanting to share his or her life story with a public. While technologies have made self-representation much more accessible, prevalent and popular, self-representation, through varied cultural modes, has been happening for as long as people have lived. Scholarship in life writing studies, sociology, anthropology and cognitive science argues that self-representation and the telling of stories from life are powerful components of and drivers of human communities and cultures.[3] What differs across time and context is the extent to which the writing practice is self-directed—a private activity where the process is driven by the need for self-understanding in the individual—or public-directed, where a life writer records their life and what they see around them with a real or imagined audience in mind. When considering how a specific life writing text engages with privacy and publicness, we need to think of these states existing on a continuum, rather than in a binary. As we discuss further below and explore throughout this book, the audiences for life writing are incredibly varied: they can be small and localised, broad yet historically specific, or may be as grand as the historical record. The communicative intention in life writing is thus wide and diverse, and requires careful attention from the critic: life writers may bear witness to the life of others and to history, intervene in their community's

[3] See, for example, Paul John Eakin's (1999) engagement with cognitive science and theories of identity in *How Our Lives Becomes Stories*, and Kenneth Plummer's (2001) analysis of "the sociology of stories" in *Telling Sexual Stories*: *Power, Change and Social Worlds*.

dominant understanding of experience, offer themselves as representative subjects or speak for marginalised communities. This intention is then complicated by the contexts in which a text is circulated, where editorial intervention, paratexts and republication for new markets bring the text into different sites of reception.

Seen in this context, young people have not emerged as prolific life storytellers simply because of mobile technologies; we argue, and will show in this book, that young people have made a consistent and significant contribution to various first-person genres throughout literary and cultural histories. Allison James (2011) notes that "one of the most important theoretical developments in the recent history of childhood studies [has been] the shift to seeing children as social actors" (p. 34). Their contributions to culture are worthy of study in their own right. However, childhood and youth studies scholarship has highlighted a tendency for childhood and youth experience to be homogenised, which often denies diversity and individuality of childhood experiences (James and James 2004; James and Christensen 2007; Liebel 2012). We want to show the ways that life writing texts have represented diverse experiences of youth over time, and have written these experiences into culture and history. For example, the youthful behaviours, identities and, perhaps most significantly, the texts produced by contemporary digital practices can be situated in relation to a long textual history. This book makes visible a portion of the archive of young peoples' life writing practices in order to both provide context for current digital practices and examine more closely the contributions young people have made to the field of life writing both as practitioners and innovators.

We also consider how life narrative practices can be a means for young writers and artists to increase their participation within their respective cultures. We will demonstrate that the production of life writing for a public is a means for asserting agency for many young people, in many contexts. This means recognising that while young people may have the means to produce cultural texts, it does not mean that they all feel empowered to do so, or that these texts are responded to ethically by those who receive them. Rather than thinking of self-representation as a ubiquitous activity in contemporary youth culture, we situate it as a practice with a long and diverse history in which young writers have deployed

life writing to communicate their experience, take charge of their own self-image and show themselves to be "active participants in society" (James 2011, p. 34). Life writing is a key strategy young people have used to intervene in and reorganise how youth are perceived, and to create new spaces for other young people to respond and represent the self.

Further, life writing often provides a way for young people to negotiate and assert their citizenship. As Tom Cockburn (2012) notes "Children's contributions to society continue to be belittled and devalued, and not accorded the respect and recognition of being involved in mutual esteem and solidarity" (p. 201). Young people are active participants in and contributors across different levels of society, culture and politics (James and James 2004; Liebel 2012); and Cockburn argues for a "reinvigoration of participatory forms of democracy" so that children's voices "can be heard more clearly and recognised" (2012, p. 201). As we discuss further below, cultural participation plays a pivotal role in citizenship and youth life writing. Life writing has been a way for young people to contribute to discussion in the public sphere, and to put issues on to the wider public agenda.

Youth is a widely thought of as "a time of experimentation with different styles of communicating and articulating identity" (Stern 2007, p. 2). However, traditionally, stories about young people's lives, like young people's literature and culture, have been "written by adults, illustrated by adults, edited by adults, marketed by adults, purchased by adults, and often read by adults" (Jenkins 1998, p. 23). And within culture, more broadly, as Henry A. Giroux (2000) contends, experiences of youth are rarely narrated by the young. He writes:

> Prohibited from speaking as moral and political agents, youth becomes an empty category inhabited by the desires, fantasies and interests of the adult world. This is not to suggest that youth don't speak; they are simply restricted from speaking in those spheres where public conversation shapes social policy and refused the power to make knowledge consequential. (p. 24)

Through authoring, sharing and responding to life writing young people have found ways to make their knowledge and experience consequential.

Life narrative has, and continues to be, a powerful and effective means for young people to engage with and respond to the discourses that construct them. These authors have sought and constructed diverse audiences for their life narratives, from peer groups, intimate publics, the historical record and public literary culture. However, the utilisation of life narrative as a means of making knowledge and experience consequential brings certain tradeoffs, and this book explores how young people seeking to have their stories heard through professional publishing, subcultural and online environments must adhere to generic expectations and discursive structures that make their identities and experiences intelligible to their chosen audience. The case studies examined in this book elaborate the wide diversity of texts young people produce, and the complex negotiations and possibilities for producing alternative and conforming stories of young lives. Young people's life narrative has played a role in establishing "youth" as a distinctive speaking position. In using life narrative for this purpose, young people are not alone, as a large variety of individuals and groups have deployed life narrative as a means of making visible their experiences and histories: indigenous communities and oppressed racial and ethnic minorities, women, refugees, Holocaust survivors, gays and lesbians, survivors of rape and child abuse. In recent decades, as scholars such as Leigh Gilmore (2001b), Julie Rak (2013) and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1996, 2001, 2010) have observed, life narrative has moved from being a cultural form associated with the lives of "great men" to being a dynamic and influential means for people and communities to write themselves into culture and history.

Our study is significant because it is the first project to bring the disciplines of life writing and childhood and youth studies together. It addresses two gaps in scholarly practice: the largely neglected status of youth-generated writing in the study of life writing, and the broader lack of close textual analysis of the texts produced by young people in the sociology/cultural studies of youth. How can a historical understanding of youth and life narrative contribute to our understanding of the current practices of life narrative in youth cultures and in online environments? In bringing an historically informed focus to the textual practices in contemporary youth cultures, our aim is to make a significant contribution to the knowledge base in a number of fields (particularly

life narrative studies, literary studies, cultural studies, history and youth studies), and make available important historical knowledge of youth self-representations that predates and is contemporaneous with the Internet and electronic mass media culture. We use life narrative methods to draw attention to the practices of authorship and textuality behind texts that have more commonly been analysed and explained through youth cultural practices or identity markers. We have chosen a selection of case studies to present and complicate the notions of private and public self-representation. We aim to show a snapshot of the contemporary practices, cultures, genres and spaces available for youth self-representation, and then, look more widely to consider these acts of self-representation as a means of asserting cultural agency.

"Youth" and Young People: A Note on Terminology

We use the term "youth" in recognition of its unique status as a culturally and socially constructed category which is relational to the changing definitions of childhood and adulthood. The terms "youth" and "young" evoke a range of images, stereotypes and definitions. These terms have, at once, positive and negatives connotations, as Gill Jones (2009) outlines, "youthfulness"

> conveys qualities such as strength, beauty, idealism and energy, which are seen as desirable and coveted by older groups, but on the other hand is also associated with 'inferior' characteristics of inexperience, lack of wisdom, hot-headedness, experimentation, naivety, greenness, and lack of maturity and sense. (p. 2)

For example, as Johanna Wyn and Rob White (1997) note, "youth" was commonly masculinised (and often racialised) in the UK and USA in the 1950s to refer to research on young men from working-class backgrounds (p. 18). However, in the 2000s, "youth" has emerged—through cultural texts and scholarship—as a much more complex, and plural categorisation. It is now more commonly used to signify an important stage in

identity formation and transition (Weber and Mitchell 2008). Although the word youth is often used interchangeably with "adolescence," in more recent times, youth has been used to encompass a much wider age period—adolescence through to early-to-mid-twenties—responding to social trends such as young people living at home longer, delaying marriage and full-time employment (see Best 2007; Giroux 2009; Gill Jones 2009; Helgren and Vasconcellos 2012; Savage 2007). As Wyn and White (1997) observe, in the twenty-first century, youth has become less about a biological age and more a process by which young people "engage with institutions such as schools, the family, the police, welfare and many others" (p. 3). So, now most theorists of youth define it as "associated with the period between leaving school and becoming adult in socioeconomic terms and thus currently covers the period, in most countries, between around 15 years and the mid-20s, though both these age 'boundaries' are constantly rising" (Gill Jones 2009, p. 11). For example, in creative industries, most writers under the age of 30 are referred to as "young writers" and many literary awards for young writers extend their age boundaries even further.

So, youth is a shifting paradigm defined most often "from above," and one of the key ways in which youth is defined is through a consideration of the cultural practices and texts that young people participate in and/or create. Cockburn (2012) and others (such as Qvortrup et al. 1994; Liebel 2012) have noted the importance of citizenship in how childhood and youth are defined; "children are in some respects 'not citizens': they have not 'come of age' and consequently do not have the same obligations (such as financial responsibility) that adults hold" (Cockburn 2012, p. 1). The social criteria attached to children's citizenship are ever shifting—what is expected and what rights are bestowed. For examples, the 1960s and 1970s are thought of as a period of "children's liberation"—where community support increased for children's rights (and associated responsibilities) (Archard 2004, p. 70). Participation within cultural activities and institutions is an important way to meaningfully exercise citizenship. This book considers the wide variety of ways producing and circulating life writing has allowed young people to claim citizenship, and make specific claims *as* citizens through the deployment of the genres of life narrative. The cases studies in this book demonstrate a long tradition of life writing

being used to establish young people's right to contribute to the cultural and political conversation on issues such as feminism, the impact of war, and the personal and social cost of drug abuse, alcoholism and suicide. The close study of such uses of life narrative offers an important and hitherto under appreciated perspective from which to examine how young people negotiate and intervene in the political and cultural fields of their society. The use of life writing by young people has both relied upon the larger history of life narrative practice and made important innovations in its applications. In what follows we outline how this study requires an interdisciplinary approach that brings together youth studies, including the sociology of youth, and the field of life writing studies.

Life Narrative as a Literary Form and Cultural Practice

Life writing, an umbrella term for non-fictional literary texts, has a long history dating back to the Greeks and Romans, and beyond Western culture. A multitude of forms from oral traditions through to the "apologia," the "confession," the "life" and more well-known forms such as "biography" and "diary" have each shaped contemporary forms of life writing. Life writing has become one of the most popular and culturally significant literary forms of recent years. There has been a great deal of scholarly attention given to life writing as a literary subgenre, much of which has focused on the shift from the "great man" mode of auto/biographical practice to life writing from the margins: most notably stories which attend to social justice issues, to trauma, and the representation of minority groups. Recent scholarship has also focused on the different forms of life writing, particularly the technologies that people use to tell stories about their lives and to circulate these stories in the public domain. In such instances, life "writing" becomes life "narrative" as visual cultures intersect with the written word (Poletti 2005, 2008, 2011; McNeill 2012; Morrison 2014; Rak 2005, 2013, 2015).

The term "life narrative" encapsulates a wide and continually expanding field of textual practices used for the non-fictional representation of the self and lived experience. From longstanding forms such as the diary,

the letter and the long-form autobiography to more contemporary practices such as the selfie, blogs and social networking profiles, life writing—the act of representing one's own life or the life of someone else—involves an engagement with the past and a reflection on identity in the present (Smith and Watson 2010, p. 1). Its non-fictional status is central to life narrative's power to command audiences and to make visible experiences and lives. At its heart, what distinguishes life narrative from fictional media forms is its claim to have some relationship to the truth of lived experience. Truth claims are what mark out the genres of life narrative, and each has their own tropes for establishing a relationship with the objectively identifiable person of the author (the "historical I") and the contents of the text. This promise of truth is guided by generic conventions, such as the author's name on the front of the book being the same as the name of the narrator and protagonist of a published autobiography and memoir, a signature and familiar handwriting in the case of a letter, or an identity that can be verified via Web search (Lejeune 1989). However, as many critics of autobiography and biography have discussed, while the promise of truth is at the core of life narrative's appeal and power, the delivery of truth is a deeply complex and fraught undertaking. The core tension in life narrative between truth and telling a story or presenting an experience in a way that is interesting, evocative and aesthetically engaging is what distinguishes life narrative from journalism (at least in theory) and places significant pressure on the life writer to plot, organise, edit and narrate their experience in a way that will reward and maintain audience attention. The fundamental importance of this delicate balance—and its power to command attention—is dramatically demonstrated when life narrative hoaxes are revealed, such as James Frey's exaggeration of his criminal history in his Oprah Winfrey endorsed memoir of addiction *A Million Little Pieces*, the *Gay Girl in Damascus* blog that galvanised public attention during the Arab Spring but turned out to be written by a male American graduate student, and the complex web of deception created by Norma Khouri in her memoir of an honour killing *Forbidden Love*. While the susceptibility of life narrative to hoaxing is grounds for many to dismiss all instances of life writing as suspect, it also makes life narrative a mode of cultural production that can be heavily policed—by audiences, journalists, publishers and critics.

Yet because of its contentious and precarious ability to make truth claims about lived experience, it remains a uniquely powerful form of textual production that can yield insight into the specificity and locatedness of human experience, as evidenced by Salam Pax's blogging of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (*Where Is Raed?* later published as *The Baghdad Blogger*) and Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

It is not just the problem of telling the truth about an aspect of one's experience or identity in a way that engages audiences that makes life narrative a uniquely challenging task for the life writer. Memory, a primary resource in constructing a representational text about one's life, is notoriously and sometimes richly fallible. How can a life writer feel confident that they *know* the truth? How can they, and the reader, be sure that what they remember actually happened? Writing and reading life narrative inevitably brings up these difficult questions of epistemology, and each writer solves this problem differently. This book will demonstrate how young life writers, like all authors and artists who have attempted to represent a truth about themselves—to make their knowledge and experience consequential by communicating it to an audience—have found inventive ways to convince the reader, and themselves, of the truth of their story.

In the corpus of texts examined in life narrative studies, the contribution of young authors to the development of key genres and periods of life writing is invisible. This book aims to demonstrate how focussed attention on life writing texts by young people furthers understanding of key questions about the uses of life writing generally, as well as by young people specifically. In particular, thinking of young people as a distinct group of practitioners of life writing expands current scholarly analysis of how individuals engage with and respond to the discourses that shape their position in the social field. Scholars in childhood and youth studies have noted the importance of "self-expression" to young people's socialisation, autonomy, participation and agency (Baraldi 2008; Cockburn 2012), however bringing the critical tools developed in life narrative studies to these texts complicates this view and enhances our understanding of how young people deploy and innovate existing genre tropes. Further, childhood and youth studies have much to offer life writing studies in terms of a critical engagement with "youth" as an influential

discourse of identity. In the section that follows, we give a brief overview of the contribution young life writers have made to life writing with the aim of making a lineage and an archive of youth life writing that the contemporary case studies we examine in more detail in later chapters rest upon. These case studies will illuminate the powerful ways in which young writers have used life narrative genres as a means for participating within cultures and writing their stories into history, while renegotiating the norms and discourses that often place them on the periphery of social and political discussion. In the next section, we demonstrate what this approach looks like by delimiting three types of life writing in which young people have been active and innovative participants.

Making Visible Young People's Contribution to the Archive of Life Writing: Three Spaces of Youth Life Writing

Historically, young writers have played a prominent role in life narrative. The diverse activities of young life writers and artists can be understood as being constructed and circulated in three distinct spaces, with different audiences and genre tropes: private written forms; public literary forms; and multimedia texts, which blur the boundaries between private and public and have been the focus of extensive research in media and youth studies, and cultural debate about young people and online "risks." In what follows, we locate and historicise the online life narrative practices which have come to define contemporary youth life narrative (blogs, status updates/micromemoirs and photosharing) within broader youth-authored creative and cultural practices and traditions to provide much needed historical context to contemporary debates.

Private Written Forms

When people think of young people's life writing prior to the internet, they likely think of the diary. Indeed, the adolescent diary has itself become a site of mediated self-representation through multimedia projects such

as *Mortified!*, where people read from their teenage diaries, usually for comic effect. As an ostensibly "private" written form taken up by young people, the diary has a deep and complex history related to the development of education, and the formation of gendered identity in a number of cultures, particularly British, French and American. In these cases, the diary form was rarely entirely "private" (without audience), but was fostered as a genre of the personal that young women shared—sometimes strategically, sometimes in response to surveillance requirements—with members of their community. Recent scholarship on young women's diaries suggests interesting links to many forms of online self-representation, where young people respond to the social requirement of a stable identity by engaging in self-representation and self-evaluation, a practice that also exposes the individual to the judgement of others.[4] As Sonia Livingstone (2008) recently observed in opening her discussion of young people and online practices:

> Young people have always devoted attention to the presentation of self. Friendships have always been made, displayed and broken. Strangers—unknown, weird or frightening—have always hovered on the edge of the group, and often, adult onlookers have been puzzled by youthful peer practices. (Livingstone 2008, p. 394)

In what follows, we demonstrate how scholarship on young women's diaries of the nineteenth century provides interesting evidence to support and complicate this claim. In the interests of brevity, we will discuss the case in France, as recent scholarship by leading researchers of French life writing, Philippe Lejeune and, more recently, Sonia Wilson (2010), have made available primary texts for consideration and provided important analysis of the role of life writing in the formation of identity in the case of the "jeune fille" (young girl) (Lejeune 2009, pp. 129–143; Wilson 2010). Lejeune's research has shown that in France, the diary's use as a tool for the education of girls began in earnest in the nineteenth century. Girls were often required to keep diaries by their teachers and parents and

[4] Following Judith Butler (2005), we might position the diary as a technology devised to assist young people in developing a repertoire of self-knowledge that adheres to the dominant discourses of subjectivity (gendered, religious and age-specific) to sure up the performance of identity that is a condition of access to the social.

to read aloud from them when asked. Diaries were coaxed by members of a girl's social network: her parents may instruct her to keep a diary, but she may also do so because "it has become the latest fashion" among her peers (Lejeune 2009, p. 136).[5] The publication of diaries as a memorial to the spiritual perfection of girls who had died young began in the 1860s, and confirmed for girls themselves that the diary had the potential for a wider audience. Where diaries of young girls are published after their death, they function as representative subjects of an ideal religious, youthful femininity (Lejeune 2009, p. 131).

Diary keeping was one of the means through which young women of certain classes in France became subjects—as reflective self-writing was a response to the hail of the discourse of education. As Lejeune asserts, it was, for a period, literally a mandated activity for the development of an identity. However, keeping a diary and reading from it was also, in some cases, a means of connecting to peers—who may also be keeping diaries—and other members of a girl's social circle. A young woman may read aloud from her diary to both entertain select friends and family and conform to surveillance of the formation of her identity (Lejeune 2009, p. 136; see also Wilson 2010, p. 1). Lejeune observes after his study of diaries of young women held in the archives of French families: "One realizes that in the nineteenth century, diarists were censored both ideologically and aesthetically" (Lejeune 2009, p. 131).

Wilson's recent study of the diary of Marie Bashkirtseff provides a compelling example of the complex social and personal uses of the diary by a young woman between the ages of 15 and 25 during this period. In what follows, we examine only one element of Wilson's important study: her discussion of the particular importance the diary played in Bashkirtseff's process of educating herself in the requirements of youthful feminine self-display (dress, behaviour and physical poise) required of a young woman on the periphery of polite society (Wilson 2010, pp. 86–87). This provides vital historical detail that can be used to understand the long history of young people's use of self-life-writing as a means of producing and

[5] Extending Kenneth Plummer's work, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) use the term "coaxing" to describe the production of life narrative in response to a person, institution or cultural imperative that requires life story (pp. 50–56).

sharing an identity that is in keeping with social expectations and the important and complex role of mediation in that process.[6]

Marie Bashkirtseff was born in 1858 and wrote in her diary every-day from age 14 until her death from tuberculosis in 1884, aged 25. The child of unhappily married parents, Bashkirtseff moved with her mother and brother from her native Ukraine to Nice, where they lived on the periphery of polite society. Bashkirtseff longed to be a great artist, she trained at the Academie Julian and submitted paintings to the salon. However, in 1884, with her tuberculosis confirmed and frustrated by the limited reception of her painting, Bashkirtseff began to think that perhaps it was her diary that could secure her fame. On May 1, 1884, she wrote a preface for her diary, which begins:

> What is the use of lying or pretending? Yes, it is clear that I have the desire, if not the hope, of staying on this earth by whatever means possible. If I don't die young, I hope to become a great artist. If I do, I want my journal to be published. It cannot fail to be interesting. (Bashkirtseff 1997, p. 1)

In her study of Marie Bashkirtseff's diary, Wilson furthers our understanding of the kind of attention young women paid to the presentation of self by analysing Bashkirtseff's recording and reflecting upon fashion and self-presentation in her diary. Bashkirtseff records in great detail both her own *toilette* and the ensembles of other women and girls she sees on the promenade and at parties. She records her study of the effects of different emotions, and light, on her countenance (Wilson 2010, p. 87). For example, on Friday February 18, 1876, she writes:

> At the Capitol this evening, there was a grand masked ball. Dina, her mother and I went at 11:00. I didn't wear a domino, but a black silk dress with a long trim and a tight-fitting bodice. It has a nice tunic of black gauze with silver lace trimmings draped in front and bunched up behind so as to make the most graceful hood imaginable. My black velvet mask is trimmed

[6] See, for example, Wilson's chapter on Bashkirtseff's preface to her diary (written shortly before her death from tuberculosis) (2010, pp. 25–45) which analyses Bashkirtseff's complex engagement with dominant discourses around autobiography, the diary, and the "jeune fille" as a writing subject "incapable of knowing herself" (Wilson 2010, p.39).

> with black lace. I wore light-coloured gloves and a rose with lilies-of-the-valley in the bodice. Our appearance created a sensation. … I changed escorts several times. (Bashkirtseff 1997, p. 356)

Wilson argues that Bashkirtseff's diary can be read "as a narrative of apprenticeship in the feminine art of self-display," perhaps also an apt description of young women's use of the selfie (Wilson 2010, p. 86). "If the male autobiographer traditionally represents his passage from childhood to manhood in terms of a forging of the self through the affronting and surmounting of obstacles," Wilson suggests, "for the young woman of a certain social standing, successfully entering *le monde* and maintaining a position within it necessitated the acquisitions of skills in the (re) presentation of her person" (Wilson 2010, pp. 86–87). Here, Wilson provides an important precedent for the practices of self-display online, as she demonstrates how the diary was a tool used by young people to record and analyse observations of themselves and others, and refine their practice of the complex art of self-display that was a vital component of their interpellation to gendered identity.

This education extends, in the case of Bashkirtseff, to the more subtle and arguably more important lesson that the desire for self-display and the labour required to undertake it must be disavowed. Responding to the concerns of the Russian consul in Nice, in 1873, "that Marie with her taste for fine dress and pretty boots sets a bad example for his own daughters" (Wilson 2010, p. 90)—a concern which could result in her being ostracised from society in Nice—Marie records how she alters her behaviour when the consul appears at a party (Wilson 2010, p. 90). In recognising that she must *hide* her desire to be admired, Marie learns the valuable lesson that "managing the display of one's desire for display is all part of the art of self-display" (Wilson 2010, p. 90). Bashkirtseff does not cease to desire opportunities for self-display, as her journal and its preface indicate, but recognises the need to limit expressions of that desire in public. Indeed, by Friday February 18, 1876, Marie is able to recognise that it is a slight to say of another woman "You've been staring at her, God knows. She seems to be very well pleased—and poses" (Bashkirtseff 1997, p. 357).

Wilson's analysis of Bashkirtseff's journal gives us insight into the pedagogical function of life writing, where autobiographical acts are a tool

for learning *how* to be an individual in a given time and place. From Bashkirtseff, and Wilson's analysis, we learn that life writing can be a process of working through and working out one's relationship with normative discourses of subjectivity: in Marie's case, that being a young woman involves the enormous work of self-display, but that work must never be visible or spoken of, nor should a young woman appear to desire attention too strongly. In Bashkirtseff's journal, we see a young woman making sense of the discourses of gender and youth of her time, educating herself in these normative discourses, but also keenly critiquing their limitations when she feels their constraint. Such an example provides new ways of thinking about many digital forms of sociality and self-representation, where young people communicate with peers through cultural practices that document their identity work.

We can only briefly mention here another private written form historically used by young people, and which we will take up in more detail in our chapter on Riot Grrrl. Like, diaries, letters were often read aloud to family members, shared and reported on (Schneider 2005, p. 22). Gary Schneider discusses letters in the early modern period as "sociotexts: collective social forms designed, understood, and expected to circulate within designated epistolary circles" (Schneider 2005, p. 22). As we will explore in more detail later, letters were private forms written in the service of personal relationships, but also circulated among an audience of known interlocutors that had specific expectations—regarding the author's self-representation.

Public Literary Forms

Like the more localised forms of life writing outlined above, young writers have been engaged in public, literary forms of life writing for centuries. The corpus of texts is expansive; we offer some notable examples in this section. For instance, historically, much of the life writing by young people has been assumed to belong to other prominent genres—for instance, poetry—and not labelled as autobiography. This is perhaps a reflection on life writing's position within the literature cultures of these times. Nineteenth century French poet Arthur Rimbaud, the Romantic

poet John Keats, and World War I poets Ivor Gurney and Wilfred Owen each penned some of their more notable works during their youth period. Many of these works were written explicitly from life experiences—asserting particular styles, subjects, identities and perspectives for youth. For example, Wilfred Owen's often quoted "Anthem for a Doomed Youth" (1917), was written when he was just 24. Employing sombre, graphic realism, Owen reflects on the death of young soldiers and the unceremonious end to the life of those who died on the battlefields of World War I. Owen had witnessed this first-hand and the poem reflects Owen's politics on war and his intention to advocate, through his poetry, for the young that died.

War has provided a distinct subject and a space for young life writers in the last two centuries. Arguably, the most famous of all young life writers, indeed, the most famous diarist is Anne Frank who penned her Holocaust memoir from age 13. *Diary of a Young Girl* came into public circulation in 1947 and is still widely read. Since then, many (young) World War II diarists have been discovered and their diaries published (whether in their entirety or anthologised, or both). These narratives, which were often published many years after the fact, have a social justice agenda: adding to historical records and indeed, offering historical maintenance. In this, they differ widely in intention, textual strategies and circulation from the diaries discussed in the previous section.

The World War II diaries written by young people fuse the private and public: so many of these young authors anticipate a reader beyond their immediate family and friends—taking up a role of cultural historian, or perhaps seizing their opportunity to fulfil their dream of becoming a writer made famous by their recording of historical events. We discuss these texts in more detail in Chap. 3. Anne Frank's legacy continues to propel the production and reception in the twenty-first century of war diaries and memoirs by young writers. In the early 2000s, twenty something bloggers, Salam Pax and Riverbend, gained notoriety (and book contracts) through their insider's view on the invasion of Iraq. And Ishmael Beah, former child soldier in Sierra Leone, achieved infamy (and visibility) for young people's testimonies of civil wars in Africa (see Chap. 4).

In the public literary forms of young people's life writing, as Kate Douglas (2010) contends, it has been narratives of extremity that have been of most interest to publishers and, in turn, readers. Another subgenre which exemplifies this is the plethora of narratives published in the 2000s of exceptional girlhoods. We return to this trend in Chap. 6.

Young People, Media and Identity

The internet has become one of, if not the most significant spaces for hosting young people's life narratives during the 2000s. There has been a great deal of often negative media attention on young people's self-representation, particularly in the use of first-person media. To summarise briefly, mainstream media discourse has focused on safety issues (particularly online predators) and questions of autonomy and reasonable use, and young people's apparent tendency towards exhibitionism and narcissism when engaging with digital media, antisocial behaviour and bullying. Of course, such commentary can raise valid, well-founded concerns. However, such criticism can often hijack conversations about young people's cultural participation. These discussions often fail to account for the complex relationship young people have with digital media, creativity and self-representation. As David Buckingham (2008) astutely summarises:

> the needs of young people are not best served either by the superficial celebration or the exaggerated moral panics that often characterize this field. Understanding the role of digital media in the formation of youthful identities requires an approach that is clear sighted, unsentimental, and constructively critical. (p. 19)

There have been numerous excellent studies across scholarly disciplines (e.g. education, health sciences, media studies, psychology and sociology) into young people's use of digital media which provide a solid foundation for our consideration of such texts as life narrative practices producing life narrative texts. Much of the scholarship has looked into why young people are such strong and enthusiastic adopters of these tools and practices. danah boyd (2008) examines these questions via considerations

of "identity formation, status negotiation, and peer-to-peer sociality" (p. 119). boyd introduces the concept of "networked publics" to explain how young people use digital media to write themselves and their communities into public life. She argues that these activities reveal new ways for social interaction which show how young people gather and interact within networked publics.

Other studies look to correct misconceptions and negative stereotypes that so often dominate discussions of young people's digital media usage, and instead show the ways in which this participation may be, for example, creative and empowering. Susannah Stern (2008) discusses the importance of talking to young people about their experiences of using digital media if we are to reach an understanding of its effects on young people's lives. For Stern, these practices are characterised by "meaning making and identity production" (p. 114). Similarly, Sandra Weber and Shanly Dixon (2007a) discuss the implications of young people growing up "surrounded by digital technologies" (p. 1). They summarise the often polarised responses to young people's use of new media: on the one hand, new media is thought to open up unprecedented opportunities for young people to access information and engage in creative pursuits; on the other hand, there are the "moral panics" affecting young people's safety online (and other scholars such as Buckingham (2003, 2006, 2008); Shade (2007); and Stern (2008) also highlight this preoccupation).

Weber and Dixon (2007) remind us of the increased capacity (via digital tools) for young people to tell stories about their lives and engage in "civic participation" (p. 9). Such life storytelling occurs alongside the recreation and entertainment value afforded by online activities. Similarly, Buckingham in his edited collection *Youth, Identity and Digital Media* (2008) focuses on the empowerment, citizenship and identity formation afforded by participation in digital media. He looks at the ways in which participation in these media can be liberating—offering "symbolic resources" for empowerment, more autonomous forms of communication, and for constructing communities (p. 5). Buckingham points to the impact of gender, class and ethnicity on this access. This is an important and recurring preoccupation of this scholarship. Marc Prensky's idea of the "digital native" has often been deployed inappropriately under the assumption that children of the

digital era are born hardwired to technology. But as Weber and Mitchell (2008) argue, the "economic digital divide" is significant now, often overlooked "and possibly growing" (p. 25). These are issues we are keen to take up in this study—to consider the role that socioeconomic background, race, cultural, gender and sexuality might play in the modes of life narrative young authors produce.

Other scholarly work has focused on identifying and indeed often defending young people's participation and textual production in the digital realm as significant cultural work. For example, Mary Celeste Kearney's influential work on "girls making media" (2006) traces the participation of female youth in the production of media including digital media in the 1990s and 2000s—from online communication through more direct methods of creation such as magazines, webpages, films and sound recordings. Kearney sees these cultural texts as a site of cultural and political assertion and resistance, used for defining girlhood identities. Similarly, in her empirical study of young people's interactions in online communities, Angela Thomas (2007) observed young people from Australia, Canada, the USA, Switzerland and Holland. Thomas' study is primarily interested in identity construction and communication ("social fantasy, role-playing … leadership, learning, power, rebellion and romance") (p. 1). Thomas rightly asserts "the complexities of the social and cultural lives" of young people (p. 2). Quoting Henry Jenkins, Thomas (like Weber and Mitchell) shows young people as "producers" and "active citizens" in their cultural worlds (p. 4). She discusses the ways in which young producers use "images and avatars" to form online identities. Images and avatars, along with other forms of self-representation or self-portraiture, are important to our project too as we consider the ways in which images and symbols form part of young people's life narrative texts.

When we think of digital media participation, textual production—the creative outputs of participation—is important but often overlooked. Much of the scholarship cited above considers youth behaviours, the processes by which they create and consume cultural texts, and the identity formations that result from cultural engagement. But our focus is textuality: we want to ask questions about youth-authored texts and their production; we want to read and learn from these texts. We also,

fundamentally, want to witness the existence of these texts and respond ethically to them. As other scholars have noted, there is a risk that when young people produce cultural texts, they do so among themselves: their audiences are other young people rather than opening up dialogue with others (Cockburn 2012; Haddon and Livingstone 2012; Schechter and Bochenek 2008).

Kathryn C. Montgomery (2007) reminds us of the ways in which digital life narrative texts are created every day by young "produsers," to borrow Axel Bruns' (2008) term:

> As active creators of a new digital culture,... youth are developing their own Web sites, diaries, and blogs; launching their own online enterprises; and forging a new set of culture practices.

Sometimes storytelling is as simple as sharing a Tweet or Facebook status. As Weber and Mitchell (whose 2008 study involved reading the webpage creations of preadolescent and adolescent girls and boys) point out, such stories are often non-linear and multivoiced and leave "a digital trail" (p. 27). We can take this evidence of the digital fingerprint further now: consider, for example, "following" someone you admire on Twitter, "checking in" on Facebook and revealing your "likes" through a click, offering a visual record of your day via Snapchat, or constructing relational lives by posting photos and "tagging" friends on Instagram.

In other instances, life storytelling happens through more complex creative practices. For example, young people were the first to seize upon and develop interactive Information and Communications Technology for creative writing, and mechanisms for publishing and distribution (Abbott 2003, p. 85). In online spaces, young life writers have been able to bypass traditional modes of publishing and self-publish aspects of their life narrative through photographs and music, for example. These practices allow young people to exert some control over media production and through this, the production of their life stories, to authenticate their own life experiences through participation in everyday culture. This is especially pertinent for youth cultures because, as previously mentioned,

the societies from which these texts emerge are largely ambivalent about their existence and validity.

Life Narratives and Youth Cultures: Representation Agency and Participation

This book is structured around three sections: the first "Young Writers and Life Narrative Encounters: a Brief History" (which includes this Introduction) considers some of the foundational texts, genres and literary histories which young life writers have contributed to. While our Introduction conceptualises three modes of youth life writing—private written forms, public literary forms, and multimedia forms that move between public and private through production and consumption—Chap. 2 "Youth and Revolutionary Romanticism: Young Writers within and Beyond the Literary Field" tracks the discourse of youth and artistic production in Bourdieu's influential theory of the literary field (1996). In this chapter, we argues that the position of "youth" within the literary field, with its focus on rebellion and innovation, has shaped the production, consumption and distribution of youth-authored life narrative in literary history. This trope of youthful rebellion, we argue, functions as a discourse that has given young life writers access to the literary sphere, and is one that many young life writers embrace. In the second part of the chapter, we consider an example of young people who are excluded from the positive conceptualisation of youthful artistic rebellion by race, gender, sexuality and class. Being "rebellious" has different connotations, for example, for young African American men on urban streets, for young women seeking their place in new artistic movements and for young people who have limited access to cultural capital and cultural resources. Tracing the influence of the Romantic view of creativity on the discourse of youth as agents of cultural innovation as theorised by Bourdieu, we examine the complex relationship a variety of young life writers have had with the legacy of Romanticism and its view of the artistic self.

The second section considers why war has emerged as a significant site for young writers' life narratives. These diaries recount experiences living

in European cities during the war, different experiences of exile, radicalism and protest. In Chap. 3 "War Diaries: Representation, Narration and Mediation," we examine some examples from World War II diaries by young writers. These texts play a significant role in contributing to history: to knowledge of the war, and to Holocaust narratives, but they accomplish much more. We want to consider how these texts might contribute to an understanding of young people's diary practices. To what extent are these texts self-consciously literary? We argue that these texts make an important contribution to understanding and historicising both young people's life writing and life writing of trauma. These writings offer a poetics for representing trauma, and an aesthetic for writing about resistance. We will also consider what happens to these narratives as they travel through their various mediations: from embodied, first-person narratives by adolescent witnesses, to the original material diary, to discovery (preservation and archival), through to translation, publication and often to anthology. What mandates are given (from the outside, and after the fact—by editors, anthologisers and reviewers) to youth life writers documenting war? Where do these texts fit within cultural paradigms for thinking about youth in crisis?

The interstices between private and public narratives are of great interest to us. Of course, even when an author chooses to circulate his or her life narrative publicly, they cannot foresee the text's transit: who will read it and how it will be read. For example, a young memoirist writing trauma may not anticipate the possible negative implications of their once private story entering the public domain, where reception may include suspicion, public interrogation, even ridicule. In Chap. 4 "Lost Boys: Child Soldier Memoirs and the Ethics of Reading," we map the reception contexts for a selection of published memoirs of African child soldiers—drawing on the examples of Ishmael Beah and Emmanuel Jal—to consider the ways in which these memoirs have been read. Drawing on the important work on life writing and ethics (Whitlock 2007; Couser 2004, 2012), we explore what an ethical reading and ethical scholarship of these youth-authored trauma testimonies might require. This case study reveals the need for deep, complex questioning and reflection when it comes to the study of youth-authored life narrative and the deployment of trauma

narratives within scholarship. For example, the texts must be considered in light of discussions about the rights of the child. We must also consider how these texts might address social justice issues considered of international important. Finally, in reading them, we must consider generational power imbalances, for instance, in the reception of these childhood stories by adult readers.

The third section focuses on life narratives of girlhood as a further subgenre of youth life writing. Drawing on research in the newly formed Riot Grrrl collection in the Fales Library at New York University (NYU), Chap. 5 "The Riot Grrrl Epistolarium" traces the use of letters as a primary means of negotiating the intersection of the personal, the political and the public in the lives of generations of young women. As the research of Margaretta Jolly has demonstrated, letters play a vital role in the construction and maintenance of female friendship and political action (Jolly 2008). The role of letters in providing a reliable and constant channel of communication in times of personal and cultural revolution is compellingly demonstrated in the papers of the Riot Grrrl, as their sustained critique of the role of young women in music and punk culture took them into unchartered territory, forcing them to negotiate increasingly complex relationships with the mass media, the music industry and their peers. This chapter will analyse how letters and other mailed ephemera such as zines and manifestoes, were used by the Riot Grrrls to define, sustain and develop an important youth cultural movement. The use of letters were particularly important in supplying support and discussion regarding young women's right to cultural participation and self-determination, and their right to make spaces for their creative practice that were not governed by the dominant practices of the punk subculture or the commercial music industry.

Chapter 6 "Impossible Subjects: Addiction and Redemption in Memoirs of Girlhood" considers a particular trend in published memoir by young women which has been pervasive in the 1990s and 2000s. Although young women are some of history's most silent subjects, young female life writers have played an important role in developing the public literary form of contemporary life writing. Young writers such as Koren Zailckas have made their mark on life writing with stories of addiction

and mental illness. One of the significant trends is the multitude of recently published narratives of exceptional or "borderline" girlhoods (to borrow Elizabeth Marshall's term) (2006, p. 117).

These contemporary texts follow on from the likes of Mary Karr, Susanna Kaysen, Lauren Slater and Elizabeth Wurtzel from the 1990s—and cover territory such as illness, addiction and sexuality. The interest in these memoirs reveals the market for girlhood memoir. But it is more than their youth that is of interest: it is their narratives of extremity and importantly conversion via creativity. These have, and continue to be, highly visible modes for young female life writers at this cultural moment, most likely because they often confirm prevalent ideas about girlhood.

Girlhood memoirs may deal explicitly with adolescence (e.g. Zailckas' memoir *Smashed: Memoir of a Drunken Girlhood* (2005), Abigail Vona's *Bad Girl* (2004) and Melissa Panarello's *One Hundred Strokes of the Brush before Bed* (2004)), but girlhood memoirs also often engage with the notion of the "quarter-life crisis"; for example, Diablo Cody's *Candy Girl: A Year in the Life of an Unlikely Stripper* (2006) and Brianna Karp's *The Girl's Guide to Homelessness* (2011) explore very different early twenty something crises. *Smashed*, for example, employs a cross-discursive style to construct and resist paradigms for thinking about youth. We are interested in what this approach reveals about young female writers and their complex relationships with life narrative. For example, how do critics position Zailckas as a "young" life writer (e.g. different to other contemporary life writers)? Zailckas authorises her narrative by gesturing towards a distinctive youthful voice which builds upon the conventions of contemporary memoir more generally. Her narrative voice aims to find an aesthetic for representing girlhood within memoir; to remind the reader of her youthfulness; and to offer overt political commentary on youth issues. These aims do not always sit well within the memoir, but her approach reveals something of the cultural position and work of young women's life narrative in the 2000s.

The section titled 'Youth Publics' begins by drawing on the work of Lauren Berlant (2008, 2011) to consider the ways in which young life writers situate their work in terms of public and private spaces. Most

research on alternative youth cultures, such as zines, have focused explicitly on the political and resistant dimension of their practices. However, as previous work by Poletti (2005, 2008) has argued, zines and other do-it-yourself textual sites are dynamic and vital sites of life writing. In Chap. 7 "Zine Culture: A Youth Intimate Public," we consider zine culture as an intimate public (Berlant), examining how they create a space in which young people discuss, negotiate and debate how to live. Central to this analysis is a consideration of how the textual forms prevalent in DIY culture create the opportunity for young people to reduce stigma about mental health and suicide in an environment largely separate from adult culture and dominant discourses of youth. This chapter will draw on close reading of themes across zines from America, Canada and Australia, as well a consideration of historical context and the interconnectedness of national zine cultures.

Young peoples' use of digital technologies is incredibly diverse (Abbott 2003; Buckingham and Willet 2006; Weber and Dixon 2007). In keeping with the book's focus on examining how young people have used life writing to critique discourses of youth, this final chapter examines two recent examples of activist projects that explicitly utilise youthful subjectivities with political and social change. We consider two young women's use of the blog to critique the political situation and its impact on the education of young women in their countries: Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan and Isadora Faber in Brazil. We examine how Yousafzai and Faber have crafted a speaking position that utilises the ideologies and cultural constructions of childhood and youth—particularly as citizens and representatives of a nation's future—to become the voices of educational reform.

A Brief Note on Method and the Ethics of Studying Youth

Other studies of youth have focussed on research methodologies—questions about the appropriateness of studying youth and how such research might be completed ethically. This is something that is of interest to us in this project: even though ours is not an empirical, qualitative study

of youth authors themselves, since we are engaged with youth-authored texts, we must also be attentive to ethical methodologies and also ethical responses to these texts. Amy L. Best (2007) notes the growing interest in youth studies across a range of disciplines and discusses the complexity of issues and dilemmas that arise from studying youth. In *Researching Youth*, edited by Andy Bennett, Mark Cieslik and Steven Miles (2003), the authors, noting a dearth of discussion on the methods for studying youth, offer case studies around the challenges faced when undertaking youth research. To summarise, some of these include: the competing agendas of the different disciplinary areas from which youth studies projects emerge, the unequal power relationships between researcher and subject, and the possibility of youth research being co-opted by the media to promote negative stereotypes of youth subjects. There is also the tendency for researchers to look at the minority of "spectacular" youth (influenced by media and government discourses around youth) rather that the majority of everyday youths. And inevitably, there has been a Western focus (particularly the USA, UK and Australian) in these projects.

As the interest in youth studies grows, and as youth "industries" thrive, new methods develop for inquiries into youth, and researchers must commit to showing a diversity of subjects. But, of course, at this same moment, more and more political, moral and ethical issues emerge from researching youth.

In our project, we decided on particular case studies which attended to different modes and subgenres which we saw as prominent spaces for young writers. This is necessarily an interdisciplinary endeavour. However, our roots are in literary studies so our methodological approach is textual, contextual and paratextual analyses. We work within Australian cultural and thus Western, global north scholarly domains, and thus are immersed in and influenced by the cultural and publishing spaces within which we work. We are more qualified to speak about these domains. But, of course, this is a limitation of our study; our interpretation and indeed construction of youth life narrative will be confined to texts and practices which we can access and consider. We recognise the multitude of texts and practices which exist outside of our compass here and hope that our methods and maps might enable further research into youth life narratives emerging within different cultural and national spaces.

This review of young people's life writing practices reveals young writers' long engagement with autobiographical modes of storytelling as a process of mediation focused on subjectivity, identity and community. Young writers tell personal stories as they enter available cultural spaces—attempting to take control and shape these different subgenres—inevitably (at different times) conforming to and also transgressing sanctioned forms and subjects.

In attempting this partial historical review which extends to contemporary examples, we are not attempting to set up "good text" "bad text" paradigms for young people's life narrative (depending on evidence of young people's creative agency within the different texts and modes). Each of these examples tells us something significant about young writers' creative engagement with self-life-writing, revealing insights into constructions of youth identities, communities and creative styles via autobiography. These texts, collectively, show young people to be active producers of life narrative and how self-life-writing as a process of mediation offers a visibility and sanctions these narratives.

However, these texts and sites also remind us of the process of mediation at work in almost all life writing. In many instances, young people's life narratives are mobilised for adult agendas. The "use" of young people's life narratives in public sites raises ethical questions: for example, do such texts establish therapeutic frameworks only to bypass the ethical responsibilities that stem from them? When young writers engage with established life narrative genres and models the life writers are asked to "Put your life narrative here," but there is no infrastructure for assessing the ramifications of such participation. For example, what if the young writer later regrets their youthful creative entry into the public sphere? Young life writers potentially become "vulnerable subjects," to use G. Thomas Couser's (2004) term. But perhaps, we are assuming (unnecessarily) a lack of agency on the part of youthful life narrators here. There's an agency within the participation itself; the imposition of parameters and mediation is inherent within almost all life writing texts. How can we define autonomy and/or autonomous creativity? How do we know when it is evident? It is not productive to underestimate the individual agency and creativity at work in these life narratives. When studying youth life narratives, it is important to look closely and to not underestimate the

creativity at work. Kearney (2006) points to Angela McRobbie's and Jenny Garber's work on girls' bedroom culture,

> by continuing to focus primarily on the immaterial leisure activities of girls' bedroom culture, such as listening to records and daydreaming about stars, they ignored its material and productive components, such as letter writing, scrapbook making, and newsletter production. (p. 23)

To borrow terms from Holloway and Valentine (2003), it is better to be a "booster" rather than a "debunker" of young people's life narrative (p. 72). The life narrative texts surveyed in this book unlock opportunities for creativity: for artistic production and for life stories that offer a very meaningful addition to the corpus of life narrative texts. These texts mark territory for young people's life narrative—an under-theorised life narrative mode—and create a space for their ethical reception.

2

Youth and Revolutionary Romanticism: Young Writers Within and Beyond the Literary Field

In this chapter, we will examine the role that generational logic plays in shaping young people's use of life narrative discourse and the responses to young people's life writing. This chapter brings together the analysis of the importance of life narrative—particularly memoir—in bringing marginalised voices into the literary and cultural field (Couser 2012; Smith and Watson 2010) with an account of how generational logic *shapes* the conditions of recognition of writers *as writers* and participants in the literary field. We also contend with the status of memoir in the literary field, an issue that recurs in a number of chapters throughout the volume. In explicating the role of generational thinking in Bourdieu's influential account of the field of cultural production, we contribute to the analysis of generational thinking as a structural social force akin to race, class, gender, sexuality and able-bodiedness in critical youth studies (Alanen 2011; Lesko and Talburt 2012). Bourdieu's account of the literary field demonstrates one instance of "the cultural systems of *meanings, symbols and semantics* through which existing generational categories and their interrelationships are produced and rendered culturally meaningful" (Alanen 2011, p. 169). This analysis is fundamental to our project's

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aim of examining how life narrative discourse is an important strategy for cultural participation, agency and citizenship because generational logic is a significant component of the discourse of youth to which young people respond in their writing and which shapes the reception of their writing. We begin with how young people's life writing has recently been discussed within the context of "youth" as a time of risk-taking that elicits concern from adult commentators.

The Risky Business of Youth Life Narrative

In 2015, a number of cultural commentators expressed concern about young people and life writing. The *New York Times Book Review* asked "Should There Be a Minimum Age for Writing a Memoir?" in May (Jamison and Moser 2015). In September, Laura Bennett wrote a long essay for *Slate* examining "The First-Person Industrial Complex" and the draw of confessional essays for young female writers who are starting out in their careers. While Leslie Jamison and Benjamin Moser took up the question in the *New York Times* as being largely about the craft of writing, Bennett took a much wider approach. Her thesis is that the current trend for young women writers to get their first published piece by writing about dramatic, and often traumatic, personal experiences "feel like one-offs—solo acts of sensational disclosure that bubble up and just as quickly vaporize. Rather than feats of self-branding, they seem to be … professional dead ends, journalistically speaking" (Bennett 2015). For Bennett, the genre of the first person confessional essay is a risky one. The risk is personal and reputational, what might seem like an edgy and interesting disclosure at 25 could be a headline that haunts you at 45 or 50. Her concern appears to be how young writers make decisions about genre and content in the context of late modernity, where, according to some theorists of youth, there are reduced ritual and structural markers of identity (Jones 2009, pp. 25–26). Bennett also restates the well-known discourse of youth as a life stage characterised by risk. Bennett's argument demonstrates how the perception of youth as a life stage that inherently involves "ignorance of the rules of the game or [the] lack of power to change them" (Jones 2009, p. 101)

intersects with ideas about life writing as a genre and publishing as practice. It is her view that:

> We've arrived at a strange, counterintuitive point in the evolution of the first-person Internet. On its face, the personal-essay economy prizes inclusivity and openness; it often privileges the kinds of voices that don't get mainstream attention. But it can be a dangerous force for the people who participate in it. (Bennett 2015)

The tension between participation and agency that Bennett wrestles with in her essay is central to the study of life narratives in youth culture. In this book, we are considering a range of examples where young people have deployed life narratives to establish their agency, to increase their visibility in the mainstream (adult-dominated) political field and to create their own fields of cultural production. The book centres around three key terms, "youth" (a discourse that prescribes certain ideas about what it means to be a young person and what their place in society is), "life writing" (a discourse and a practice centred around writing from and about lived experience, sometimes through the established literary genres of memoir or autobiography) and "young people" (actual individual and collectives of people of a certain biological age). As outlined in our introduction, our project charts a range of text types, socio-political contexts and *uses* of life writing by young people in order to examine their contribution to the field of life writing, and to consider how their diverse uses of life writing can expand scholarly understanding of life narrative as a creative, social and political practice.

Attention to the deployment of "youth" and claims about young people and generations in Bourdieu's account of the literary field offers the field of youth studies insight into how the discourse of youth influence the field of action and positions available to young people who are writers. In this respect, examining Bourdieu's use of generational logic contributes to an understanding of "the material, social and cultural processes though which individuals acquire the social quality" (Alanen 2011, p. 163) of "youthfulness" and the status of "youth" in a given field of cultural activity. For the study of life writing, Bourdieu's account of the literary field provides two important insights that our project expands

on: (1) field theory helps explain the continued difficulty young writers face in entering the literary field, despite (and perhaps because of) their rising prominence as producers and consumers of "automedia" (Rak 2015); and (2) it allows for a clear view of the continuing influence of the strong association between youth and creativity forged by the Romantics. Bourdieu's arguments regarding the role of genres within the literary field provides a possible explanation as to why young writers often turn to life writing as a means of entering the field.

As Gill Jones argues, "[i]t is clear that understanding the concept of youth means understanding the relationship between young people and society. Young people do not act in a vacuum but in a social context which helps to shape even the most apparently autonomous actions" (Jones 2009, p. 30). Here, we develop a literary critical framework that can account for the intersection of "youth" and "life writing" in the works authored by young people that are explored in this book. Why is it, for example, that young women's memoirs of addiction have proven to be successful commercial products of the memoir boom? Why have young men used life writing to record their experiences of war and violence? To answer these questions, we need to recognise that young people as authors of life writing sit at the nexus of a range of discourses, which we see Bennett wrestle with in her essay. How conceptions of authorship intersect with the social position of young people and the ideals and expectations attached to "youth" is the primary focus of our study. We consider how the discourses of the subject that inform the practice of life writing are also nested within hierarchies of genre that shape the contemporary literary field; positioning life writing *as* risky (more so than other genres) is but one example of how this valuing of genres occurs. In the case of young writers seeking publication, they act in relation to the pre-existing and dynamic values that shape the literary field, which Bourdieu demonstrates has its own logics, discourses and values that sit in relation to the broader field of power. Thus, the act of *writing* occurs in relation to a distinct cultural and social context.

This chapter is organised into four parts. The first part examines the importance of the generations and generational thinking in Bourdieu's formulation of the literary field. The second part of this chapter extends the consideration of the place of youth in the literary field to the role

of genre, and we outline the relatively low status of life writing within the hierarchy of genres Bourdieu argues is a constitutive element of the field. We also consider how judgements about the aesthetic value of a literary genre are partly predicated on judgements regarding the cultural capital of readers. This has particular relevance for how writing by young people *for* young people is perceived. In part three, we analyse how the young American memoirist, Dave Eggers, negotiates the low status of life writing in the literary field through an appeal to the positive associations between youth and aesthetic innovation that inform the field through the legacies of Romanticism. In part four, we contrast the reception of Eggers' first memoir with the role that memoir has played in the depiction of young African American masculinity and social disadvantage through the prominent narratives and postures of "gangsta culture," where the hierarchies of genre are inverted and the writing of memoir is seen, by a number of critics, as a "legitimating strategy" (Boyd 1997, Chapter 3).

Bourdieu and the Role of Generations in the Literary Field

Pierre Bourdieu's description of the literary field is one example of his larger theoretical paradigm of field theory. In his influential work *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu uses the French literary culture of the late 1800s as a case study for explicating "the rules of the game" that determine the creation, consecration and distribution of literary value. Drawing on his other influential concepts developed through an attention to the processes of distinction, such as his work on the various types of capital (social, cultural, symbolic, etc.) and his conceptualisation of the *habitus*, Bourdieu describes the processes and positions that prescribe literary activity. Of significance for literary studies is the attention Bourdieu gives to the range of cultural intermediaries in the literary field: the role editors, publishers, critics, scholars as well as authors play in the field *beyond* the production of text.

Widely adapted in sociology, in literary studies in English, Bourdieu's work was influential in establishing a turn away from poststructural and postmodern accounts of textuality towards a sociology of literature

(Moi 1991, p. 1018). Writing in *New Literary History*, leading feminist literary theorist Toril Moi explained the appeal of Bourdieu's approach being in his development of a "*microtheory* of social power" (Moi 1991, p. 1019, emphasis in original). While his accounts of the reproduction of power draw heavily on the Marxist tradition, for Moi, it is the method that Bourdieu explicates that makes his work most exciting. Yet Bourdieu's work on the field of cultural production has had a mixed reception in English-language media and cultural studies, where his focus on the avant-garde has been seen to overlook the nuances of the sphere of global cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh 2006; Couldry 2003). While the first phase of the application and explication of Bourdieu's work may be coming to an end (at the end of 2015, *New Literary History* released an issue titled *Beyond Bourdieu*), Bourdieu's method and elucidation of the workings of power in the literary field will remain of use to scholars interested in the social and political conditions under which literature is produced, circulated and read. As David Hesmondhalgh (2006) has argued, field theory cannot be applied in isolation, and in this chapter, we apply it in conjunction with theories of genre, and a closer attention to the location of the individual writer at the intersection of *multiple* fields (Alanen et al. 2015, p. 4).

In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu argues that social conditions in Paris in the latter half of the nineteenth century created the opportunity for the development of the literary avant-garde. This, in turn, enabled the literary field to become partially autonomous from the larger field of social power and indeed *feed back* into the field of social power through its own processes of consecration (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 48–140). (For the purposes of this discussion, we are leaving aside the debate in literary studies regarding whether "avant-garde" can be used as a transhistorical term, see Suleiman 1990, p. 11.) Once established as autonomous, the literary field is defined by contestation and struggle over the distribution of literary value (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 214–216). The terms under which these struggles take place are the "rules of the game" that constitute the field, and the positions available to individuals within the field shape the role they can play in the game, and the effect they can have on the outcomes of a given moment of struggle. A central element of the struggle over literary value occurs between the poles of the avant-garde (who value art for art's sake and aesthetic innovation) and the commercial end of the field that

values popularity and profitability (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 120–121, p. 134, p. 223; see also Hesmondhalgh 2006, pp. 211–216).

The examples of life writing by young people that we examine in this book cover a range of publications and positions in relation to these poles, from commercially successful memoirs to the writing of Riot Grrrls and zine makers who cultivate an antithetical position to profit and popularity and to the ideals of aesthetic standards through adaptation of the values of punk. As our discussion in each chapter demonstrates, regardless of where they are placed within or in relation to the literary field, young people must first be recognised as players in the field. This requires that young people become engaged in "the rivalries [for] the monopoly of literary legitimacy, that is, among other things, the monopoly of power to say who is authorised to call himself a writer … or even to say who is a writer and who has the authority to say who is a writer; or, if you prefer, the monopoly to the *power of consecration* of producers and products" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 224). On the one hand, publication by a reputable publisher may be a sufficient act of consecration for an individual young person to be able to call themselves a writer, however, as we discuss in more detail below, this is complicated by the compromised position of memoir and certain types of life writing in the hierarchy of genres that also influence the distribution of value in the literary field (Bourdieu 1996, p. 89, p. 114, p. 121, p. 231).

One position available to young people within the literary field is to align themselves with the position of youth. For Bourdieu, it is youth that creates "almost by definition" the opportunity for change in the distribution of power and what is valued in the field (Bourdieu 1996, p. 240). Youth are

> the ones who are … most deprived of specific capital, and who (in a universe where to exist is to be different, meaning to occupy a distinct and distinctive position) only exist in so far as—without needing to want to—they manage to assert their identity (that is, their difference) and get it known and recognised ('make a name for oneself') by imposing new modes of thought and expression which break with current modes of thought and hence are destined to disconcert by their 'obscurity' and 'gratuitousness.' (Bourdieu 1996, p. 240)

Let us consider in more detail the importance of generational logic—and discourse of youth—to Bourdieu's account of the terms under which struggles are played out in the literary field.

The first distinction Bourdieu makes in theorising the importance of youth as a position and a discourse within the field of cultural production (whether literature, painting or music) is to clarify the concepts of "biological age" and "social or artistic age" (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 146–159). The struggle for the power to influence the granting of the title of "writer" and to consecrate works of art as valuable takes place between the poles of the avant-garde and commercial art. The struggle between these two poles over the term "writer" and what kind of writing "counts" centre on whether commercial success equates with aesthetic innovation or value (the avant-garde says a definitive "no" to that), or if the *number* of people who read your work is in anyway an indicator of the value of your writing (the commercial practitioners say "yes" to that) (Bourdieu 1996, p. 142). Bourdieu produces a fine-grained account over hundreds of pages of how positions are taken in this debate in *The Rules of Art*, and here, we focusing on his analysis of the role of ageing and generations in this process. Bourdieu's account of how age functions as a discourse within the literary field relates to the differing values associated with existing aesthetic forms between the two poles. For the avant-garde, art for art's sake and aesthetic innovation are the markers of value (with the aim being to enhance symbolic capital), while the players in the commercial end of the field value reliable forms and genres with a known audience (and with the aim being to produce economic capital) (Bourdieu 1996, p. 142). Thus the "social or artistic age" of an individual in the field is determined by the generational position they have in the field: those who seek cultural capital through the production of new forms are assigned the position of the "young" (regardless of their biological age), while those who write into existing forms and seek large audiences are assigned the role of the "older" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 150): "Thus 'authors with intellectual success' … are younger than the authors of bestsellers" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 153).

The appeal of the position of the youth (or "young artistic age") in the literary field comes from its association with the end of the field that seeks a high degree of autonomy of value for literature from the larger social field and its systems of value:

> It is clear that the pre-eminence given to youth by the field of cultural production comes down, once again, to the spurning of power and of the 'economy' that is as its root: the reason why writers and artists always tend to place themselves on the side of 'youth' by the way they dress, and their corporeal hexis especially, is because, in image as in reality, the opposition between age groups is homologous with the opposition between the serious 'bourgeois' and the 'intellectual' rejection of the spirit of seriousness. (Bourdieu 1996, p. 154)

This symbolic position of youth within the field is underpinned, for Bourdieu, by a series of sociological factors that contributed to the formation of the French avant-garde from the decline of Romanticism and into the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet, we must also recognise that this position is complicated by extent to which "youth has become a symbolic value that can be marketed to a wide range of audiences" beyond young people themselves, an issue we will return to (Buckingham 2006, p. 5). Bourdieu posits changes in the lives as young people as the precursor to the establishment of the literary field as an autonomous field of value. The increased access to education in the early part of the nineteenth century resulted in an "inflow of a substantial number of young people without fortunes, issuing from the middle or popular classes of the capital and especially the provinces, who come to Paris trying for careers as writers and artists" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 54). While the printing press had increased the market for cultural goods, Bourdieu argues that in the early nineteenth century, in France, "business and the civil service (especially the education system) cannot absorb all those with diplomas from secondary schools, whose numbers are increasing rapidly throughout Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, and will see a new rise in France under the Second Empire" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 54). Over the eighteenth century, the rising market in books had slowly freed writers from their economic reliance on the bourgeois as patrons, and thus the generations of young people in the early to mid-nineteenth century had both more education and saw more opportunity for economic autonomy in the cultural field of production. (See e.g. Geoffrey Turnovsky's discussion of how Rousseau embraced the sale of his writing in the book market as means of freeing himself from the requirement to

be liked by the bourgeoisie who populated the Salon (Turnovsky 2003. See also Woodmansee's discussion of Schiller's decision to leave the financial protection of the Duke of Württemburg at age 22 [Woodmansee 1984, pp. 432–433]). Thus, the nineteenth century in Paris saw "the assemblage of a very numerous population of young people aspiring to live by art, and separated from all other social categories by the art of living they are in the course of inventing" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 55). This art of living they invented is "bohemia," the practice of living for art and experience, and a way of living that is fundamental to establishing the literary field (and other fields of cultural production, such as painting) as autonomous from the larger field of social production. These changes in the character of the population produce a new social class, "the 'proletaroid intellectuals'" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 57) who possess similar levels of cultural capital to the bourgeois, but none of the (inherited) economic capital. It is precisely this way of living that has become a commodified identity of interest to "adults aspiring to recover lost values of youthful energy and rebellion" (Buckingham 2006, p. 5).

Thus, in Bourdieu's account, the view of creative genius inaugurated by Romanticism—that a "genius is someone who does something utterly new, unprecedented, or in the radical formulation that he prefers, produces something that never existed before" (Woodmansee 1984, p. 430)—combined with the changing social factors for young people in Europe in the nineteenth century produced the conditions under which the avant-garde was formed and became the basis for the emergence of the literary field as a (relatively) autonomous field of value. In *The Rules of Art*, he spends considerable time examining the importance of the combination of Romantic ideals regarding creativity with sociological factors such as the interactions between the new population of young people in Paris who wish to earn their living by writing in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. In the latter part of the century, their success in inventing a new way of living (to live for art) and new forms of value has solidified into a philosophy and set of practices and institutions that counter-balance the commercial view of cultural production.

Bourdieu's theory of the formation of the avant-garde and in its influence on the literary field demonstrates the complex dynamic between young people and discourses of youth, but does not account for the

extent to which—in contemporary media culture—youth is a symbol that can be associated with products, a market segment, and a subject position available to individuals within the field of cultural production (Buckingham 2006, pp. 2–6). Bourdieu argues that the young people of the "proletaroid intellectuals" formulated a philosophy that sought to establish a positive association between being young and artistic value, yet we must remember that this occurred within a much larger social field with investments in adolescence as a life stage, the importance of rationality rather than tradition and the emphasis placed on education as a means of freeing young people from myth advocated by Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau (Jones 2009, p. 7). The moment in time that is Bourdieu's focus sits within the much longer history of the "understanding of life as a progress from one age with its own particular properties and functions to another" which has "ancient origins" (Griffiths 1996, p. 19) and which has been heavily commodified in large-scale cultural production. We must also recognise, as Leena Alanen argues, the powerful social and cultural influence of the logic of generational order and the tendency for generational thinking to structure social practice (Alanen 2011, p. 162). Despite its limits, particularly the extent to which it ignores the commodification of youth, what is telling about the role given to generational thinking in Bourdieu's theory of the development of the field of cultural production is that it provides a partial historical account of the development of the association between being young and innovation which have come to dominate consumer capitalism and lead to the conflation of the obsession with "the new" with a perceived privileging of young people as creative artists. For example, writing in another *Book Ends* column in the *New York Times*, on the topic of obsession with the new, Anna Holmes (founder of *Jezebel*) writes:

> Look at almost any industry of cultural creation, high or low, and you will see the ways in which youth is embraced and amplified, celebrated and lusted after, often to the detriment of the old. Take the book publishing industry, which lavishes attention on the young and the photogenic, though neither youth nor beauty guarantees fresh ways of thinking or storytelling. We can see the privileging of youth in other forms of media, like Hollywood, where actresses are considered over the hill when they hit 45,

> or journalism, where veteran editors and reporters get pushed aside for 20-somethings just because 20-somethings exhibit some facility with content management systems and Facebook feeds. (Deb and Holmes 2015)

Opinions such as those expressed by Holmes demonstrate the fickle nature of discourses of subjectivity. The individual young writer may benefit from the associations between youth and artistic innovation and the perception of youth as being synonymous with a rejuvenating "'fresh contact' with the social and cultural heritage" (Mannheim 1972, p. 293), but they are always at risk of this association being turned against them as evidence of their lack of authentic or genuine contribution. This view can also position texts authored by young people as part of the "churn" of popular culture and therefore disposable or ephemeral, rather than as contributing to field in a more lasting fashion. This risk is further complicated for young people writing life narrative because a logic of hierarchies of genres—in which life writing is also perceived as a risky and commercial activity—also shapes the system of value in the literary field.

The Contemporary Hierarchy of Genres: The Status of Life Writing

According to life writing scholar Leigh Gilmore, "[s]omewhere around 1996," as the US economy boomed, "another pocket of extraordinary vitality emerged" in the form of a significant rise in the publishing of autobiography and memoir (Gilmore 2001a, p. 128). For Gilmore, "this memoir boom did not prominently feature elder statesmen reporting on how their public lives neatly paralleled historical events. Instead, memoir in the '90s was dominated by the comparatively young whose private lives were emblematic of unofficial histories" (Gilmore 2001a, p. 128). While noting the relative age of the authors of the memoir boom, Gilmore does not focus on this as a key factor in the trend she is analysing. Gilmore's article, along with Rak's in-depth exploration of the market for memoir in *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (2013), demonstrate that memoir and autobiography occupy a position aligned with commercial publishing in the literary field. This places life writing as a

genre to be rejected by the avant-garde in the contestation over value in the literary field.

According to Bourdieu's logic, authors, particularly those seeking to craft an identity aligned with the avant-garde, position themselves partly by rejecting earlier forms and approaches which are established and commercially viable. Bourdieu demonstrates this position-taking through the example of Flaubert who "[i]n choosing to write novels … laid himself open to the inferior status associated with belonging to a minor genre. In fact, the novel was perceived as an inferior genre, or rather, to use Baudelaire's words, a 'routine genre', a 'bastard genre'" (Bourdieu 1996, p. 89). Bourdieu cites the preface to *Madame Bovary* where Flaubert writes: "The irritation produced in me by the bad writing of Champfleury and the so-called realists has not been without influence in the production of this book" (Flaubert qtd. in Bourdieu 1996, p. 88). This example of a clear statement *against* the aesthetic project of his contemporaries demonstrates how Flaubert takes up a position within the field that is based on contestation over aesthetic value as codified in genres. The hierarchy of genres came to play an important role in *disarticulating* literature from the larger sphere of social and economic power (Bourdieu 1996, pp. 114–121).

> The progress of the literary field towards autonomy is marked by the fact that, at the end of the nineteenth century, the hierarchy among genres (and authors) according to specific criteria of peer judgement is almost exactly the inverse of the hierarchy according to commercial success. (Bourdieu 1996, p. 114)

Given the literary field exists in the tension between the poles of the avant-garde and the commercial view of cultural production, it is perhaps not surprising to think that each pole will value genres differently. (In his analysis of "The Market for Symbolic Goods" in France in the 1970s, Bourdieu demonstrates that the hierarchy of genres is still in play in the contemporary literary field and is visible in the differing positions occupied by publishing houses through a comparison of two publishing houses founded in the mid-twentieth century (Éditions Robert Laffont and Les Éditions de Minuit) (Bourdieu 1996, p. 153, see also footnote

21). As Rak demonstrates, this logic persists: "In the case of memoir, the history of the genre as something not fictional and not quite literary means that it is harder to forget that memoirs are commodities produced by an industry" (Rak 2013, p. 45). The commercial success of different life writing genres has been a consistent feature of the book market in the West (Smith and Watson 2010, pp. 115–117), and thus memoir and autobiography have long been aligned with the economic rather than the aesthetic end of the field.

In Bourdieu's account, it is not just the opinions of writers and publishers about the value of specific genres that influence the hierarchy of genres. Assumptions regarding the cultural capital of the audience also shape the status of genres in the literary field. Bourdieu argues:

> In effect, the credit attached to any cultural practice [in the autonomous field] tends to decrease with the numbers and especially the social spread of the audience, because the value of the credit of recognition ensured by consumption decreases when the specific competence recognised in the consumer decreases. (Bourdieu 1996, p. 115)

Those members of the field invested in its autonomous status *devalue* the opinions of those who are not also players in the field; thus, the opinion of the "general public" is not an adequate form of consecration for a genre. The study of life writing itself is not immune to these debates, as demonstrated in Rak's critique of Gilmore's focus on aesthetic innovation in *Boom!* (Rak 2013, pp. 158–159). It is this combination of judgements about genres and their readers that doubly marginalises young writers who engage in life writing, particularly when that writing is intended to be read by other young people.

This association between the perceived aesthetic merit of a genre and its association with readers whose cultural capital is dismissed is not new to scholars of life writing. Rak establishes this in the opening of *Boom!* through an anecdote about the reading habits of her grandmother. A dedicated reader of "memoir and biography," Rak depicts her grandmother as a woman who read "every day" (Rak 2013, pp. 1–2): "In the afternoons, when the sun shone a little over Lake Champlain in Vermont, my grandmother would stretch out on a day bed on her screened-in back

porch, put on a pair of half glasses, pick up her latest book and read" (Rak 2013, p. 1). A page of life writing about her grandmother leads Rak to her scholarly point: "My grandmother was the sort of reader who most scholars of literature and even of auto/biography tend to overlook, if they think about readers at all" (Rak 2013, p. 2). Rak argues that the commercial success of memoir has led "critics of autobiography … to overlook" the kinds of books written for this popular audience (Rak 2013, p. 3). (See also Smith and Watson's observation that "that autobiography has historically been a popular form consumed by reading publics hungry for intimacy and vicarious adventure" [Smith and Watson 2001, p. 12]). For Bourdieu, this oversight would fit with the logic of the literary field and the place of literary scholarship within it. Aligned with the avant-garde, literary scholars and critics have traditionally worked to consecrate literary works and authors who produce texts designed to further the practice of art for art's sake, rather than commercial gain (Bourdieu 1996, p. 229).

So where does this leave young people who undertake life writing? Rak's evocation of her grandmother as a reader highlights the problem of legitimacy facing young life writers who may be seeking a place within the literary field. This problem is especially acute for those young people writing for their peers, given audiences of young people have little cultural capital in relation to determining literary value in the field, as seen in the commercial success and perceived low aesthetic merit of "young adult fiction." Rak's argument also points to the limits of applying Bourdieu's concept of the literary field in isolation. While it is no doubt important to consider how the relative autonomy of the field of cultural production influences the production, circulation and reception of literature, contemporary life writing scholarship is also motivated by an interest in understanding the cultural, political and social *uses of life narrative*. We must combine the perspective offered by field theory with an interest in "the work of memoir" (Couser 2012, p. 169). Indeed, this interest is the more common terrain for life writing scholarship, which since the 1980s has been attentive to the social and political function of life writing as much as it has been concerned with elucidating its aesthetics (Smith and Watson 2010, pp. 198–199). The study of life writing may still participate in the literary field as a means of consecrating acts of life writing due to its association with the academy, but contemporary scholarship does

not take identifying and consecrating "great works" as its sole aim. It is in the interplay between the autonomous space of the literary field and the larger field of power that most life writing undertakes any work at all, and our project seeks to understand how this interplay shapes the life writing of young people, and how young people strategically use this interplay to influence the discussion that occurs in the larger field of power on issues that are important to them, such as education, gender equality, war, and the challenge of making a life worth living in conditions of late modernity.

But an interest in how the terms "youth," "life writing" and "young people" intersect cannot get far without recognising that young people occupy a range of social classes and positions within the larger field of power as well as being members of a social class defined by age. We must consider how the discourses associated with youth in the literary field create vastly different opportunities for individual young life writers because of the varying outcomes of the intersection of the "youth" with discourses associated with race, class, gender and sexuality. This turn in our discussion brings a focus on life writing as a textual practice that is defined by unique challenges of negotiation between author (as represented by the narrator) and reader, because, as Leigh Gilmore argues:

> For many writers, autobiography's domain of first-person particularities and peculiarities offers an opportunity to describe their lives and their thoughts about it; to offer, in some cases, corrective readings; and to emerge through writing as an agent of self-representation, a figure, textual to be sure but seemingly substantial, who can claim 'I was there' or 'I am here.' (Gilmore 2001a, p. 133).

A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius: Masculine Position-Taking and Literary Revolution

In 2000, Dave Eggers, then 30 years old, published his first book. A memoir, audaciously titled *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, the book detailed his experience of losing both his parents to cancer

(within just over a month of each other) when he was 21 years old, and his subsequent decision to raise his younger brother Christopher rather than make him a ward of the state. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* was a bestseller, receiving near unanimous critical acclaim despite its length (over 500 pages) and the memoir beginning with over 20 pages of non-diegetic commentary by the narrator in the form of "Rules and Suggesting for the Enjoyment of this Book," "Preface to this Edition" (included in the first edition) (Eggers 2001, pp. xi–xvii), a contents page, and 13 pages of acknowledgments. Reviewers were unanimously surprised at Eggers ability to blend a high level of post-modern self-consciousness and humour with genuinely moving writing about the experience of losing his parents and his relationship with his brother. Eggers proves himself to be an agile and skilled stylist through the juxtaposition of the 20 pages of joking self-referential discussion of the memoir genre and the problem of trying to write truthfully about real life and the first chapter of the memoir that depicts the last days of his mother's illness in gritty realist detail. Eggers' memoir was published on the cusp of a shift in literary trends, as the rise of postmodern literature that defined the last decades of the twentieth century was replaced with the tendency in literary fiction towards "New Sincerity" (Kelly 2010). Published in the context of the memoir boom, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* contributed to a shift in the literary field from valuing texts that deployed irony to defend *against* the construction of meaning (usually associated with the fiction of postmodernism) to those that deploy irony as a strategy in a sincere pursuit of it. Reviewing the memoir in *The Christian Science Monitor,* Ron Charles articulates the sense of possibility generated by Eggers' writing by saying "this may be the bridge from the Age of Irony to Some Other As Yet Unnamed Age that we've been waiting for" (Charles 2000).

Eggers now (in)famous pages of commentary brought the literary technique of romantic irony to his writing of memoir. According to influential German Romanticist Friedrich Schlegel, "ironic works of art are informed by an awareness that their own expressive or representational means are necessarily incommensurate with the transcendental Idea they strive to comprehend" (Christie 1999). Eggers' memoir strives to comprehend the significance of being orphaned and taking on

the role of parent to his eight-year-old brother. Eggers self-consciously presents his brother and himself as a unique, divine and chosen family unit; "I had expected open arms from all, everyone grateful that we, as God's tragic envoys, had stepped down from the clouds to consider dwelling in their silly little buildings," (Eggers 2001, p. 73) he writes of their search for an apartment in California. Romantic irony is a technique of dominance over the work—where the author deliberately punctures the veneer of the literary work in order to comment on its limits (Baldick 2008)—and a *performance* of the author's virtuosity and skill, as seen in one of its most famous incarnations, Sterne's *Tristam Shandy* (1759).

Eggers' use of romantic irony in situating his memoir is an excellent example of how a biologically young author uses a complex suite of literary devices to predict and disarm the sceptical reader. The memoir is explicitly calibrated to speak to preconceptions about the place of young writers and life writing in the literary field. Eggers draws on romantic irony to explicitly position memoir as a genre defined by bad writing and commercialism, and by doing so aligns himself (as Flaubert did with the novel) with the avant-garde aesthetic impulse. Unlike Flaubert, however, Eggers' narrator performs a struggle to even *name* the genre in which he is writing, with the narrator stumbling over the acknowledgement of "the writing of this … this … *memoir*" (Eggers 2001, n.p.). This stilted and italicised recognition of genre explicitly acknowledges its low status, which the narrator goes on to explicate in more detail through an anecdote set around a meeting between the author and an "acquaintance," who

> …sat down opposite, asking what was new, what was *up,* what was he working on, etc. The author said Oh, well, that he was kind of working on a book, kind of mumble mumble. Oh great, said the acquaintance who was wearing a sport coat made from what seemed to be (but it might have been the light) purple velour. What kind of book? asked the acquaintance. (Let's call him, oh, 'Oswald.') What's it about? asked Oswald. Well, uh, said the author, again with the silver tongue, it's kind of hard to explain, I guess it's kind of a memoir-y kind of thing—*Oh no!* said Oswald, interrupting him, loudly. (Oswald's hair, you might want to know, was feathered.) *Don't tell*

> *me you've fallen into that trap!* (It tumbled down his shoulders, Dungeons & Dragons-style.) *Memoir! C'mon, don't pull that old trick, man!* He went on like this for a while, using the colloquial language of the day, until, well the author felt sort of bad. (Eggers 2001, n.p)

Here the secondary character is used to give voice to scepticism about the validity of writing memoir. Oswald refers to memoir as an "old trick," evoking the prejudice that "memoirists are talentless writers who just want to make money" (Rak 2013, p. 14). Yet Eggers' narrator also begins to make available scepticism about Oswald himself through the inclusion of seemingly irrelevant information regarding his appearance (his haircut and clothes). These bracketed observations encourage the reader who may be sympathetic to Oswald's dismissal of the genre to consider the possibility of adopting a sceptical position in relation to Oswald himself. Anyone with a "Dungeons & Dragons-style" haircut may lack the necessary cultural capital to present a critique of Eggers' project. This deft offering and undermining of positions for the reader's allegiance continues,

> After all, maybe Oswald, with the purple velour and the brown corduroys, was right—maybe memoirs were *Bad.* Maybe writing about actual events, in the first person, if not from Ireland and before you turned seventy, was *Bad.* He had a point! Hoping to change the subject, the author asked Oswald, who shares a surname with the man who killed a president, what it was that *he* was working on. (Oswald was some sort of professional writer.) The author, of course, was both expecting and dreading that Oswald's project would be of grave importance and grand scope—a renunciation of Keynesian economics, a reworking of *Grendel* (this time from the point of view of nearby conifers), whatever (Eggers 2001, n.p).

Here, Eggers references a common prejudice expressed against people who take up life writing when relatively young. As Leslie Jamison puts it in her defence of young writers of memoir, this prejudice is partly about how one's position in the "stages of life" intersects with one's ability as writer; a biologically young person may not have had enough temporal distance from the events they are writing about to work in the "sophisti-

cated form" of memoir which is "a call for drafting and revision, for the ways we can productively re-examine our own stories and dig underneath our familiar narratives of self to find the more surprising layers beneath" (Jamison and Moser 2015). Eggers' narrator evokes the writer of seventy as the preferred author of memoir because this advanced age is generally taken to provide the writer with adequate emotional and temporal distance to produce an *aesthetically* complex work. Proximity to events in time is seen, in terms of the craft of writing, as preventing this writerly distance: "The work of this excavation can often happen more easily with distance," Jamison admits (Jamison and Moser 2015). Eggers' narrator admits this too, and bolsters Oswald's credibility as a commentator on literary value (despite his physical appearance) by informing the reader that he is a "some sort of professional writer." Oswald may also represent a writer more closely aligned with the principles of value associated with the avant-garde, as the narrator suggests that his writing project, if not an intellectual work, will take on the aesthetically innovative (and intentionally provocative) task of retelling a section of the ancient tale of *Beowulf* from the perspective on a cluster of tress. (Eggers may also be referencing the 1971 novel by John Gardner titled *Grendel* which rewrites the section of *Beowulf* from the antagonist's perspective.) Here, Eggers makes available a position for the reader to be suspicious of the grandiose claims of the avant-garde, expanding the range of positions held by his potential reader in relation to the status of memoir that be accommodated by his narrative. We can side with the slightly unfashionable but authoritative Oswald and maintain some doubt about the young author's motivations for writing in a low genre, but we may also be reading memoir precisely because, like Julie Rak's grandmother, we are interested in "writing about actual events, in the first person" rather than art for art's sake. The narrator brings the anecdote to a close by revealing to us Oswald's writing project:

> But do you know what he said, he of the feathered hair and purple velour? What he said was: a screenplay. He didn't italicise it then but we will here: *a screenplay*. What sort of screenplay? the author asked, having no overarching problem with screenplays, liking movies enormously and all, how they held a mirror to our violent society and all, but suddenly feeling

> slightly better all the same. The answer: A screenplay "about William S. Burroughs, and the drug culture." Well, suddenly clouds broke, the sun shone, and once again, the author knew this: that even if the idea of writing about deaths in the family and delusions as a result is unappealing to everyone but the author's high school classmates and a few creative writings students in New Mexico, there are still ideas that are *much, much worse*. Besides, if you are bothered by the idea of this being real, you are invited to do what the author should have done, and what authors and readers have been doing since the beginning of time: PRETEND IT'S FICTION (Eggers 2001, n.p).

In this final series of manoeuvres in the anecdote, Oswald's rewriting of recent literary history allows the narrator a way out of the impasse of confidence brought on by his recognition of the problems of writing memoir. Eggers' rhetorically complex staging of this interaction is but one example of many instances where his use of romantic irony works to establish trust between the narrating "I" and the reader. This relationship of trust is fundamental to the work of memoir and autobiography, as Smith and Watson argue:

> Because issues of authenticity can be crucial to autobiographical acts, life writers have much at stake in gaining the reader's belief in the experiences they narrate and thus having the 'truth' of the narrative validated. Persuasion to belief is fundamental to the intersubjective exchange of … narrator and reader. … the autobiographical relationship depends on the narrator's winning and keeping the reader's trust in the plausibility of the narrated experience and the credibility of the narrator. (Smith and Watson 2010, p. 34)

As Eggers' narrator makes clear, one of the problems of the relationship of trust between his narrator and the reader in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* is Eggers' biological age. The piece of commentary in the text—the "Rules and Suggestions for Enjoyment of This Book"—advises that "many of you might want to skip much of the middle, namely pages 239–351, which concern the lives of people in their early twenties, and those lives are very difficult to make interesting, even when they seemed interesting to those living them at the time" (Eggers 2001, n.p).

Receiving near unanimous praise, the strategy of acknowledging the degraded state of memoir and the dubious authority of a young writer pays off for Eggers—perhaps in the ultimate irony—because critics are able to place him within a tradition of innovative male authorship. Michiko Kakutani, writing in the "Books" section of the *New York Times* claims that despite "his use of pomo [postmodern] gimmickry":

> It's the sort of book David Foster Wallace, Frank McCourt and Tom Wolfe might have written together if Mr. Wallace had never heard of Thomas Pynchon, if Mr. McCourt didn't grow up poor in Ireland but middle-class in the suburbs of Chicago, if Tom Wolfe weren't the sort of writer who wears white suits and ice-cream colored shirts but were a 20-something slacker with a taste for shorts and T-shirts and lots of postmodern pyrotechnics. (Kakutani 2000)

What might be considered inappropriate in a young writer who aligns himself with the avant-garde interest in aesthetics—writing in a genre and therefore accepting the restriction of one's creativity (Rak 2013, pp. 18–19)—is redeemed as an act of aesthetic innovation because, as a young writer, success in memoir is viewed *as* exceptional and rule-breaking because the guiding assumption in the literary field is that memoir is best written by the biologically older. Combined with the uniqueness of the experience he narrates in the book itself this deft use of literary technique allows Eggers to live up to, while also maintaining his ironic commitment to, the romanticism of the title.

As a young writer of memoir Eggers spends considerable time in his text attempting to secure "the authority to narrate" which, Smith and Watson argue, "is hard-won in a constant engagement with readers posited as sceptical (sic), unbelieving, resistant and even hostile" (Smith and Watson 2010, p. 34). Eggers' success is not solely down to his deft use of literary technique in creating a self-effacing authorial subject who is the subject of pithy narration. His success is achieved in the literary field where critics interpret and consecrate his text in relation to his biological age and his gender and a gendered history of

literary innovation. The tendency for the narrative of innovation and avant-garde practice in literary history to be (re)constructed as a lineage of male writing has long been the focus of feminist critique in literary studies (see Woolf 2001; also Suleiman 1990, pp. 28–32). This history is also commonly narrated as a history of White writers (Gates 1985, pp. 1–3). Eggers' ability to negotiate the complex ways that discourses of youth shape the reception of writing in the literary field is in part made easier by his status as a White man who had already established a place in the field by publishing a magazine. We must acknowledge that the task would be significantly more difficult for a "complete unknown" young writer who, in addition to being biologically young, may also be attempting to negotiate the influence of discourses of race, class and gender on the position of writer.

In order to open out our discussion to an analysis of how race, class and gender shape access to the position of "writer" in the literary field, we consider the role of memoir in legitimating the aesthetics of the hip-hop subculture known as "gangsta." This furthers our analysis of how identity discourses, in particular, race and class, intersect in with discourses of authorship, age and genre. It also reminds us that any application of Bourdieu's theory of the literary field must consider the simultaneous placement of individuals in *multiple* fields (Alanen et al. 2015, p. 4) if we are to avoid what Bernard Lahire rightly observes as the tendency for Bourdieu's theory to be applied in such a way that "writers are reduced to their existence-as-members-of-the-field, even though such a reduction is especially problematic in the case of non-professionalised worlds that, generally speaking, require actors to be inscribed in extraliterary spheres of remuneration" (Lahire 2015, pp. 389–390). Examining the intersection of the literary field with the field of hip-hop demonstrates that the hierarchy of genres within the literary field takes on a different set of values when viewed within the larger field of popular culture, where published memoir is positioned as one media among many. As David Hesmondhalgh argues, attending to nuances of the sphere of large-scale cultural production is an area where applications of Bourdieu's theory can improve on the "highly selective" focus on the avant-garde in Bourdieu's theorising (Hesmondhalgh 2006, pp. 218).

Race, Class, Youth and the Literary Field: Gangsta Rap and gangsta Memoir

Writing in 2001, Patricia Hill Collins was one of many theorists of Black experience who argued that the generational logic proposed by Mannheim could be applied to mark out the experience of the "Black hip-hop generation" (Collins 2001). Drawing on the work of Bakari Kitwana, an influential commentator on hip-hop who marks out the "hip- hop generation" as referring to African Americans born between 1965 and 1984, Hill Collins uses this term to refer to the generations of African Americans who have grown up in the context of entrenched poverty due to the erosion of manufacturing in the postindustrial American economy and the simultaneous undermining of the politics of collective advancement for African Americans during the "decline of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1950s and 1960s" (Collins 2001, Introduction). She argues that "contemporary Black youth grew up during a period of initial promise, profound change, and, for far too many, heart-wrenching disappointment" (Collins 2001, Introduction). Todd Boyd, an influential scholar of hip-hop and African American popular culture, also argues that class is a fundamental component of the most visible form of hip-hop known as gangsta rap (Boyd 1997, Chapter 1). Boyd and Hill Collins analyse the complex positioning of young African Americans in the popular culture of the late 1980s through to the early 2000s in which hip-hop has offered unprecedented levels of visibility to Black working-class youth, including their rising status as a market for popular culture, while the actual lived experiences of young African Americans remain on the political margins, or "beyond the reach of communal and government intervention" (Boyd 1997, Chapter 1). While we are unable to do justice to the body of scholarship on hip-hop in what remains of this chapter, in what follows we examine how life writing—and, in particular, published memoir—has been theorised as an important indicator of the success of hip-hop in the field of large-scale cultural production, the acceptance and legitimation of gangsta as an aesthetic that speaks from and about the experience of the intersection of poverty, race, and youth.

For Boyd, rap is "one of the few avenues for the articulation of lower-class black male angst relative to the postindustrial environment" (Boyd 1997, Chapter 1). Continuing the strong folk and oral tradition of African American culture, Boyd argues that rap is a powerful and highly visible contemporary aesthetic drawn from the experience of entrenched poverty and disadvantage experienced in urban, African American communities (Boyd 1997, Chapter 1). Yet as many commentators of hip-hop and gangsta rap in particular note, this social and political disadvantage sits alongside the heightened cultural capital and visibility of young African Americans as consumers and artists in popular culture. Since the 1970s, young African Americans in America have created a field of autonomous aesthetic and cultural value through hip-hop (Boyd 1997, Chapter 3; Clay 2001; Metcalf 2012, Introduction). As an autonomous field of cultural production that is connected to the cultural industries through mediators such as record companies, hip-hop is also defined by struggle and contestation over value (what it is, and how it is constituted) which is partly structured, in the case of gangsta rap, by a relationship with artistry as a means of gaining economic capital given the lack of employment opportunities for members of the working class. The possibility of escaping poverty through artistic success (as demonstrated in the careers of many gangsta rappers) is balanced by continued discussion and contestation of over what constitutes authentic hip-hop within the field.

In her study, *The Culture and Politics of Contemporary Street Gang Memoirs*, Josephine Metcalf examines how memoir contributed to "a wider body of gangsta culture that commenced in the late 1980s with gangsta rap" (Metcalf 2012, Introduction). Metcalf and Todd Boyd agree that the success of the memoir *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (1993) by Sanyika Shakur (also known as Monster Kody) represented a significant shift in the visibility of hip-hop, and gangsta rap in particular, as an aesthetic drawn from the lived experience of marginalised Black youth. For Metcalf, the memoirs function as powerful pedagogical texts because they follow the trajectory of the conversion narrative, drawing on the tradition of African American autobiography (Metcalf 2012, Introduction). Metcalf cites the positive review by Michiko Kakutani (a recurring figure in this chapter because of her

role as a cultural intermediary) in the *New York Times* as evidence of the memoir's "social significance, … engagement with debates about the cultural politics of race and youth (including issues of commerce), and … formal and aesthetic dimensions" (Metcalf 2012, Introduction). Boyd's discussion of *Monster,* presented in the context of a sustained analysis of hip-hop's relationship with contemporary Black masculinity, also positions the memoir as a rare example of literature that is "the product of the truly disadvantaged male perspective, in a world where Black women tend to dominate the 'high' cultural realm of literature and fiction (e.g. Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Terry McMillan" (Boyd 1997, Chapter 1).

Boyd's depiction of African American cultural production being carved up into "high" and "low" forms which are gendered (literature being high and female, popular music being low and male) challenges us to recognise that any account of a given field (literature *or* hip-hop) and the subject positions available within it must take into account how discourses of identity from the larger field of social power intersect with the operations of the field. Some may not agree with his description of women as the dominant representatives of African American creativity in the literary field, yet we would suggest that his analysis provides a useful provocation. While the analysis we presented above demonstrates how a White male author like Dave Eggers must negotiate a hierarchy of genres that situates memoir as a low form, in Boyd's account, African American men from the working class must negotiate a gendered and classed hierarchy that may limit their ability to be recognised as writers.

> The publication of Monster's memoirs demonstrated that this area of culture [gangsta culture], in addition to its public popularity, should be regarded as an important commentary on the state of contemporary urban postindustrial existence for lower-class African American males. The *literary reification* of gangsta culture through Monster Kody's autobiography forced us once again to take 'seriously' those voices which operate on the margins of society. (Boyd 1997, Chapter 3 emphasis added)

In the years since Boyd wrote this paragraph (in 1997), the writing and music of hip-hop has continued to work with an aesthetic forged in relation to the experience of young marginalised African Americans.

In 2010, another piece of life writing about the life of a young African American man caught up in criminal activity and grinding urban poverty was reviewed by Kakutani in the *New York Times*, this time it was Jay-Z's *Decoded*. In her review, Kakutani writes:

> In the end, "Decoded" leaves the reader with a keen appreciation of how rap artists have worked myriad variations on a series of familiar themes (hustling, partying and "the most familiar subject in the history of rap — why I'm dope") by putting a street twist on an arsenal of traditional literary devices (hyperbole, double entendres, puns, alliteration and allusions), and how the author himself magically stacks rhymes upon rhymes, mixing and matching metaphors even as he makes unexpected stream-of-consciousness leaps that rework old clichés and play clever aural jokes on the listener ("ruthless" and "roofless," "tears" and "tiers," "sense" and "since") (Kakutani 2010).

Kakutani acknowledges Jay-Z's significant cultural and symbolic capital as an artist in the field of hip-hop, but her recognition that his writing skills are essentially founded in adept use of "traditional literary skills" suggests that she is prepared to recognise him as a writer. Boyd's analysis of the role of memoir as a literary form that can consecrate the aesthetics and lived experiences represented in hip-hop and Kakutani's recognition of Jay-Z's skills as a writer demonstrate that memoir can play role in amplifying the aesthetics and life narratives of hip-hop into the literary field.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the role of generational thinking in Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the literary field in order to demonstrate how this influential theory of cultural production retains and retools "youth" as a "relational concept [that] exists and has meaning largely in relation to the concept of adulthood" (Wyn and White 1997, p. 11). Bourdieu's application of generational logic clearly demonstrates what youth researchers have long recognised to be the slippery relationship

between the social conditions of specifically located groups of young people who share historical, political, social and economic circumstances, and the more generalised and persistent influence of biological age and the narrative of life stages in social and cultural theory. Our analysis has shown how his successful engagement with this logic is reliant both on his adept use of literary technique—most notably romantic irony—and the willingness of other players in the field to locate Eggers within a White masculine literary tradition. Thus, the case of *A Heart Breaking Work of Staggering Genius* demonstrates how an individual young life writer can both productively work with the pre-existing ideas about youth that inform the field of cultural production, while also (unwittingly) benefitting from gendered and raced narratives of literary history. Yet this account is necessarily complicated when we attempt to account for young life writers whose race, class and/or gender may complicate such a strategy. The example of the role of memoir in legitimating the aesthetics associated with gangsta hip-hop demonstrates that the logic of the literary field is not stable, nor can it be considered in isolation from the field of large-scale cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh 2006) and the larger field of power. In the case of gangsta hip-hop, the low genre of memoir becomes a means for young African American men to be recognised as writers and in so doing intervene in representations of African American youth. In both cases, life narrative is a space of opportunity for the exercising of agency bounded by the pre-existing discourses regarding aesthetics and identity.

In the next section, we consider another means by which young writers have written their experiences into histories and cultures. We explore how war and conflict have become receptive cultural sites to children's voices and non-fictional literary interventions. To what extent is the innocent youth "deployed" in such representations to offer ideological challenges to cultural memory and history? How does literary mediation impact upon young writers' cultural agency? We begin this discussion by reading anthologised youth Holocaust diaries.

Part II

Writing War

3

War Diaries: Representation, Narration and Mediation

The back cover of Jacob Boas's edited anthology *We Are Witnesses* (1995) reads: "the five diarists in this book did not survive the war. But their words did. Each diary reveals one voice, one teenager coping with the impossible."[1] Boas's anthology of young World War II diarists is one of three anthologies that we discuss in this chapter. These anthologies reveal the methodological creative, ethical, ideological and cultural work attempted by these texts. Is it possible to locate and share the voice of adolescent diarists who died in the Holocaust? Why attempt such cultural work; who are these anthologies for? Can the young voices be adequately contextualised and historicised by the anthology form? Can the young voice still be heard amidst the multiple mediations affecting the original diary text?

[1] There is a point to be made about genre straightaway. Though all three anthologists refer to the texts that they include as "diaries," not all of the authors do. For example, David Rubinowicz, who we focus on in our discussion, never refers to his writing as a "diary"—but nor does he say it is not a diary, and he does not refer to it as anything else (journals, notebook, etc.). So, for the purpose of this chapter, we use the term "diary" though acknowledge it may not have been the term the young authors might have used to describe their own work.

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Arguably, the most famous of all young writers is a war diarist, and indeed, the most famous diarist is Anne Frank who penned her Holocaust memoir from age 13. *Diary of a Young Girl* came into circulation in 1947 and is still widely read. Since this time, a plethora of World War II young diarists have been unearthed and published: whether in their entirety or anthologised (or both). Some notable examples include David Rubinowicz (Poland), Eva Heyman (Hungary), Moshe Flinker (Holland) and Yitshok Rudashevki (Lithuania). These diaries recount experiences living in European cities during the war, different experiences of exile, radicalism and protest, and, of course, experiences from work camps and death camps. As Susan Honeyman (2011) notes (with cynicism): "the literary descendants of Anne Frank keep turning up (or being 'discovered' by adults with publishing ties) wherever there is armed conflict" (p. 73).

In this chapter, we examine some examples from particular archives of World War II diaries by young writers. These texts play a significant role in contributing to history: to knowledge of the war, and to Holocaust narratives, but they accomplish much more. To what extent are these texts self-consciously literary; do the writers obey the conventions of the diary form? Do the writers imagine a reader? What evidence is there of literary consciousness, of style and poetics, of subjectivity or of intertextuality, for example? We argue that these texts make an important contribution to understanding and historicising both young people's life writing and life writing of trauma. These writings offer a poetics for representing trauma and an aesthetic for writing about resistance.

We will also consider what happens to these narratives as they travel through their various mediations: from embodied, first-person narratives by adolescent witnesses, to the original material diary, to discovery (preservation and archival), through to translation, publication and often to anthology. What mandates are given to youth life writers documenting war (often after the fact)? Where do these texts fit within cultural paradigms for thinking about youth?

Children Writing the Holocaust: Youth and the Diary Form

> During the Holocaust, from one end of Europe to the other, from before the outbreak of war until the liberation, young people kept journals and diaries. They wrote in leather or clothbound books, or in albums embossed in gold that had been received as gifts for birthdays and holidays; they carried their journals with them from their homes to hiding places, from transit camps to ghettos. When times grew difficult, they smuggled and stole scraps of paper, found pencil stubs and worn ink pens; they scribbled by carbide lamp or candlelight in school notebooks, address books, calendars, and ledgers, on the backs of cheap paper notices and thin brown bags, and in the margins of the published works of other authors. Despite fear and repression, despite hunger, cold exhaustion, and despair, despite crowded living spaces and a lack of privacy, and despite separation from home and loved ones, young people documented their experiences and their impressions of their lives, and in so doing marked their places in the world. (Zapruder 2002, p. 1)

Many children's World War II diaries have been recovered and exist in various forms across the globe: entire manuscripts, fragments, in translation, as published books and in digitised forms. They exist in private collections, museums and libraries, and in digital repositories. Alexandra Zapruder lists 66 "young diarists of the Holocaust" in *Salvaged Pages*. She explains: "Since the discovery of Anne Frank's diary, more than fifty-five diaries of young writers have emerged from all corners of Europe, written in various languages, reflecting a wide range of wartime experiences" (p. 2). The recovery of these diaries can, of course, be contextualised by a brief discussion of Anne Frank's diary. Sue Vice notes a "surprising" lack of scholarship on young people's Holocaust and World War II diaries (other than Anne Frank) (p. 120). But it is perhaps not so surprising as Anne Frank has become *the* iconic and authoritative child figure of the Holocaust. Frank's diary has become one of the most central literary texts of the twentieth century: published multiple times, translated into many different languages, selling millions of copies, and generally being a much-loved book. Many scholars have written about the "misuse" of

Anne Frank's diary (Bunkers 2001; Gilman 1988; Loewy 1999; Wertheim 2009). The text can be interpreted through different critical lens: as diary, Holocaust narrative, coming-of-age, story, feminist life writing and so forth. Scholars of Anne Frank have argued for the importance of reading this as a work of literature, which, in this instance, reveals much about life writing methodologies, young adult life narrative as confession and as coming-of-age narrative, for example (a point we return to in the next chapter of this study in which we discuss child soldier memoirs) (Charnow 2012, p. 291). The success and cultural significance of this diary might signal a readership for other similar diaries. The importance of Frank's diary also suggests that the diary form is thought to offer something significant and valuable to readers. As Zlata Filipovic (2006) writes in her introduction to an anthology of young people writing about war:

> Diaries provide an immediate experience of events, before the benefit of hindsight or tricks of memory can distort or influence an account. … While they are not written to be historical records, the diaries end up being exactly that, in a powerful, personal, and human way. (p. xiii)

The diary, often neglected by literary and autobiography scholarship, has "great narrative potential in its representation of time, voice and viewpoint" (Vice 2004, p. 118). It is a "mixed genre: it is seen as a historical document but also as a cultural narrative" (Vice 2004, p. 120). The choice of the diary (over other genres of writing) is not so surprising. For many amateur writers, the diary is the only literary mode available; for children writing in the World War II period, the diary was the expected and accepted cultural practice with a strong history. As Sally Charnow (2012) notes, "Diary writing burgeoned in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially among adolescent girls, as adolescence emerged as a new subject of attention in European and American public life" (p. 294). Diaries provided "vehicles for self-actualization of a personal and, sometimes, a public professional self" (Charnow 2012, p. 294). Young people's diaries often provide a perspective into the "emergent artist's process" (Charnow 2012, p. 308). These issues considered, during our analysis, it is important to ask how does the Holocaust diary might challenge what we know about the diary form more generally.

The two perspectives quoted above suggest what the diary might "do" in terms of offering perspective, constructing historical knowledge—for example, potentially offering unmediated immediacy of perspective. For readers, a diary may become a simple and accessible "way in" to an issue. But, of course, there is a danger in imagining that diaries offer an unmediated perspective on history; no writing can occur in a cultural vacuum and most writers are at least somewhat aware of the genres and expectations of genres that they are writing into.

So, as Vice (2004) reminds us, we should read these texts as "cultural narratives." These diaries are also literary texts, and more particularly, life writing. These classifications are important to our reading here. In reading these diaries, we are less interested in what these texts can tell us about the Holocaust, and more focussed on what these diaries reveal about young writers as life writing practitioners. For example, in her study of children's writing about the Holocaust, Vice (2004) notes "Diaries written by children and teenagers during the Holocaust years are striking and unusual documents *and* texts. They offer the impression of a return to the moment of events unfolding. Yet the writers … are conscious of the limitations as well as the possibilities of the diary form, and all take this form to its temporal and structural limits" (p. 118). For example, it is well known that Anne Frank edited her diary at various points in writing it, where it is not necessarily clear whether the writers we discuss in this chapter did the same.

The youthful figure adds another layer by which we might explain the circulation of and readership for these diaries. In the twenty-first century, people expect to hear children's voices (and indeed see children's faces) during times of war and conflict. As Mark M. Anderson (2007) argues: "children have consistently proved to be the moving and believable witnesses" (p. 2). The youthful voice and perspective is a privileged one: often considered pure and authoritative. And as we discuss in Chap. 8, when we look at activist "bloggers" Malala Yousafzai and Isadora Faber, the voices of youth are often sought after in times of struggle and conflict to make sense of issues, and gain an experiential perspective that might be otherwise missing from public discourse.

There is a rich historical context for this which presents us with a range of paradoxes: on the one hand young people's voices have gravitas which

can be celebrated, mediated (and of course manipulated) for various cultural and political gains; on the other hand, the innocent child figure is often presented as a passive victim in need of adult intervention in times of war and conflict. For example, Anderson (2007) discusses how the child victim is central in cultural representations of the Holocaust:

> For many Americans with little knowledge of European history, who are often baffled or bored when confronted with the maze of geographic locales, statistics, and confusing political ideologies inherent in this complex event, the figure of the persecuted child turns the Holocaust into a moving and accessible story with religious and mythic associations. Transcending history even as it affirms the most dreadful historical reality, it appeals to our own memories of childhood, our identities as parents, sisters, brothers: it speaks to us in existential and moral terms, and only secondarily in historical or political ones. This is the source of the Holocaust's power as *narrative*. … But it is also the source of its potential exploitation. (p. 2)

He explains: "While rhetorically effective, the figure of the child victim can also distort, personalize, and dehistoricize the Holocaust, providing a false sense of solidarity and understanding in mainstream audiences" (p. 1). (Anderson points to the 1978 docudrama *Holocaust* and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* [1993] and the central symbolism of the child in creating empathy for Holocaust victims.):

> Consider the one spot of color in the black-and-white Holocaust sequences: the little red coat worn by a small girl who wanders alone through the streets of Krakow ghetto as it is being razed. Her orphaned journey serves as the film's visual and emotional leitmotif for the essential inhumanity of the Holocaust. (p. 10)

Anderson goes on to discuss the Holocaust Museum in Washington and the centrality of the child figure in the cultural memory of the Holocaust for Americans.

> But how could a museum tell a 'story' of such unmitigated atrocity and still be able to draw a broad audience? … Children visitors thus posed a special dilemma for the Holocaust Museum, but they also provided a brilliant

> solution. The larger number of child visitors not only justified the museum's choice of a toned-down version of historical events but also supplied the 'hot' story … the story of innocent child victims and evil adult Nazis … the ground floor exhibit [a fictional story framed as a life narrative of a typical Jewish child Holocaust victim] reduced the Holocaust to a children's tale largely unencumbered by external political events (there is no mention of World War II, for example), and where adults serve as incidental extras to the main stars. (p. 14)

In such instances, as Anderson argues, the child figure is universalised: cultural context is erased and the child is potentially depoliticised. So, the empathy comes for the child and secondly for the cause.

This context also explains the later success of Zlata Filipovic's diary. Writing about her experience of the Bosnian war in Sarajevo from 1991 to 1993, Zlata's diary was sent to a French publisher by one of her schoolteachers. Following this, the diary

> … was auctioned off in a sale conducted by its French publisher. With a bid of $560000, Viking Penguin (a subsidiary of Penguin Books) won the rights to publish *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life.* … After publication in the U.S. the diary began to reach an ever-widening mass audience. … Irene Webb of International Creative Management … announced 'It's like the *Diary of Anne Frank* but with a happy ending)'. (Smith 2006, p. 151)

Though it is not surprising to see Zlata's diary compared with Anne Frank's (such promotion is common within literary cultures), Sidonie Smith (2006) notes that "The attention garnered by the diary and its circulation within the United States and Europe produced an aura-effect around Zlata herself, elevating her and legitimating her as a 'universal' voice of the child suffering from human rights abuses" (p. 152). Smith writes that "In the years after the diary's publication, Zlata became a 'spokeschild' for the conditions of ethnic genocide and displacement in the former Yugoslavia" (p. 151). Zlata became a

> marketable archetype of the suffering victim of ethnic nationalism in extremis […]
>
> The affective appeal of the Sarajevan girl's story of lost childhood becomes intelligible to a broad, educated readership through the global

> aftereffects of collective world memory of another 'ethnic' girl's narrative of lost girlhood and lost life. (pp. 152–153)

So, Smith problematises this cultural "use" of Zlata and the reception of the text that seemed to hinge exclusively on the appeal of the child. Smith argues that the circulation of a diary like Zlata's functions to "flatten history" "through an appeal to empathetic, de-politicized sentimentality" (p. 154). Smith's arguments here are persuasive and function as a cautionary tale for those reading (and thus mediating) such cultural texts. For example, as we read the children's Holocaust diaries in this chapter, we are deeply conscious of the possible impact of our mediation—as we attempt to bring these (anthologised) diaries into a more general discussion of youth-authored life narrative. How do we avoid "lifting that subject out of history and politics," to follow Smith's reproving position (p. 154)? We must be careful not to brand these young writers as "emblematic youth … allow[ing] us to abstract the many, overlooking their complex humanity" (Honeyman 2011, p. 80). But at the same moment, it seems paternalistic, unjust, and even callous to *not* acknowledge these diarists, to not read these texts (and this point—about the ethics of reading young people's life narrative—is one we return to in Chap. 6 of this study). We need to attend to the mediation, but we want to consider the ways that anthologising might allow us to access and respond to the testimony within.

Children of the Holocaust (1995); *We Are Witnesses* (1995); and *Salvaged Pages* (2002)

As Pamela Graham notes:

> Over the past 30 years or so, the literary anthology has emerged as a productive tool for destabilizing value-laden ideas of 'national literature,' as well as for intervening in identity politics debates. Critics in North America have long argued that the anthology is an important vehicle for the representation of marginal voices and experiences. (2013, p. 69)

Anthologies make texts and voices visible through the act of collectivising them and consecrating them as part of a significant cultural text, alongside other similarly worthy voices. Anthologies are often tools of literary activism, and they tend to provide a means for a range of voices to be represented within one text (Graham 2013, p. 70). However, as Patricia Eliades (1995) argues, although anthologies do have the potential to represent a range of voices and make marginalised writers more visible, they also run the risk of being reductive, universalising and remarginalising those they seek to make visible (p. 74). Anthologies tend to offer singular identity markers (e.g. in our example: adolescents, innocents, Holocaust victims, brave and forgiving) and thus attribute a singular identity on to a potentially very diverse group. The selection of authors and the editorial approaches of those constructing the anthologies will inevitably have a significant impact upon how the text is received and interpreted by readers. Thus, editors assume significant authorship in anthologies.

Laurel Holliday's *Children in the Holocaust and World War II: Their Secret Diaries* (1995) purports to be an "unprecedented anthology of diaries written by children all across Nazi occupied Europe and England, twenty-three young people, ages ten through eighteen, recount in vivid detail the horrors they lived through, day after day" (back cover). In her introduction, Holliday explains: "This is the first anthology of the diaries children wrote during World War II and the Holocaust" (p. xiii). (As we discuss further in this chapter, it has not been the last.) This anthology is said to be as powerful as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Zlata's Diary*. It is not surprising then, that this anthology and the one we discuss further on in this section—Jacob Boas's *We Are Witnesses*—were both published in 1995—the year after the publication of *Zlata's Diary*. As Kate Douglas observes, one of the markers of the non-fiction industry of the mid-1990s through 2000s is the wave in publication of similarly styled texts. The mid-1990s was a significant period for the publication of life writing relating children's experiences of trauma (2010, p. 3). Aimed at a young adult readership (and beyond), the front cover of Holliday's anthology states that the book has won a School Library Journal award for "Best Adult Book for Young Adults" and a "New York Public Library Best Book for the Teen Age" for 1996. Similarly, in Boas's *We Are Witnesses* (which we discuss further on in this section), there is a foreword written

by former schoolteacher Patricia C. McKissack. The tone of her address here is to school children—the anticipated readership for this anthology.[2] McKissack writes:

> Come, meet David, Moshe, Yitzhak, Eva, and Anne, whose diaries are personal accounts of the true horror of the Holocaust. Their stories are intense and, at first, may startle you, even make you feel uncomfortable. Perhaps you'll experience some anger and frustration. That's okay. I sure did. But slowly I came to realize that these young writers weren't messengers of anger and hatred, suffering and dying. Actually, they were ordinary teenagers—much like you, your brother, sister, or friends—seeking a reason why such extraordinarily terrible things were happening to them, their families and friends. (p. viii)

While such a description offers an engaged and positive reading of the youthful diaries and voices, it is also universalising and reductive, and ultimately does not ring true when reading the diary entries which are highly diverse, unpredictable and shifting in their representation of personal history, adolescent experience and the Holocaust. So, in their focus on the child, these anthologies were marketed to the same readership as *Zlata's Diary*: young adult readers and adult readers alike. Young adults might receive this book in educational contexts, find empathy and read these narratives in the spirit of civic responsibility and adult readers are invited to witness the innocent children within and adopt the role of protector.

The subtitle of this anthology "Their Secret Diaries" reads a little awkwardly: not all of the diaries presented here were secret. The inclusion of such a subtitle seems overly sensational and perhaps a marketing ploy to add to the mystery and intrigue of the stories within. It seems oddly insensitive to promote the book in this way, in light of the fact that so many of these child authors died in the Holocaust. It also seems incongruous to the tone of the anthology more generally. Acknowledging the critiques we have already offered on the limitations of the anthology form,

[2] Amazon.com recommends the book for readers aged 11–15. The Amazon.com reader reviews of *We Are Witnesses* teachers include comments from teachers who report including this book in their literature and/or history teaching.

this book has many strengths. The author assumes the role of curator and editor, transparently explaining her methodology in both the introduction to each book and in short introductory sections to each chapter. For example, in the Introduction, she explains:

> To provide as full a picture as possible, the excerpts for this book have been drawn from as many as a hundred of each child's diary entries. Of necessity, however, much was omitted since most of the diaries are long enough to comprise full-length books. And because of space limitations, children's diaries that are readily obtainable, like Anne Frank's, have not been included in this anthology.
>
> In the interest of authenticity, I have not corrected the children's punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Nor have I changed the various names the children used for geographical locations.
>
> Many of the children's diary entries were undated. When possible, I have deduced dates from the content of the writing and enclosed these dates in brackets. (p. xxi)

The short introductory sections to the chapters most commonly explain how the diary was found, where the manuscript now lies, if it was previously published (and how/where), and sometimes information about translation. It is clear that by including 23 different authors from different locations in Europe, who had significantly different experiences of the Holocaust and World War II, Holliday is aiming for diversity in representation. She includes Jewish and non-Jewish testimony; the narratives of girls and boys of different preadolescent and adolescent ages; and the testimony of children who died and those who survived.

What is missing—what we might want to know as we read the sections from the diaries included in *Children of the Holocaust and World War II*—is some acknowledgement of why the author/curator chose these particular extracts for inclusion, because in these choices, she tells a story about childhood experience of the Holocaust and World War II, and shape the reader's perception of these events and the young authors' experiences. In her acknowledgement section, Holliday thanks various librarians for helping her obtain "hundreds of books from around the world." She also thanks those who helped her with translations and those who helped her select extracts.

Holliday adopts the role of curator; this is a textual and historical recovery project.[3] She rightly claims that without anthologies such as these, readers might never access these stories, and the stories deserve to be read:

> many of the children's diaries have been all but lost to history. Either they were never published in book form or there are only a handful of copies left in the world's major libraries. It is astonishing that, even though most of them are as powerful and well-written as Anne Frank's diary, they have remained obscure while hers has been thought of as *the* child diary of the Holocaust … in some ways, Anne Frank was not representative of children in the war and the Holocaust. Because she was in hiding, she did not experience life in the streets, the ghettos, the concentration camps, as it was lived by millions of children throughout Europe. (p. xiv)

It seems significant, that unlike Boas's anthology that we discuss further on, Holliday's anthology does not include Anne Frank. This is a deliberate and political choice on Holliday's part: it would seem to be her view that the fame of Anne Frank's diary has obscured the acknowledgement and circulation of other young voices and diaries that are just as significant, and indeed, collectively, offer a more diverse representation of children's experience of World War II.

Holliday's other significant role is as advocate and champion for these young writers who may no longer be able to speak for themselves. One of the goals of anthologies such as this one is the assertion of value: these are texts that matter. In her Introduction, she writes:

> The nine boys and fourteen girls in this collection, Jews and gentiles alike, described what the Nazis did to their families and their towns without guarding their feelings or mincing words. They wrote with courage—even humor—and they wrote very well. (p. xiii)

[3] According to her book jacket bio, Holliday is a former college teacher, editor and psychotherapist, but now a full-time writer. She has authored other anthologies about children's experiences of war: *Our Lives in the Crossfire of Northern Ireland*; *Children of Israel*; and *Children of Palestine: Our Own True Stories*.

Of course, readers do not necessarily need to be told by Holliday that these diaries are well-written and contain important subject matter, but it does not hurt that she advocates for the literariness of these texts—something so often denied to young writers. (This is a recurring issue for this study more broadly.) Holliday also offers comments on the diversity of the young authors' writing styles, subjects and reasons for writing. In doing so, Holliday moves against the sorts of "flattening" of history that are common to the anthology form; her goal is to show difference. Holliday also offers context to their writing that the reader might not otherwise know, for example:

> To write as frequently and as much as these children wrote was no simple matter. To begin with, they needed to find materials for writing. Pens and paper were difficult to obtain in the concentration camps and ghettos. Those children who were under Nazi guard also needed to find a place where they would not be observed writing. And, once they had written their stories, the children had to find a suitable hiding places for their work so that it would not be confiscated during Gestapo searches. (p. xv)

Such contextual information does enrich the experience of reading the diary entries because it locates the children in time and place. These are not universal innocents: these are children with particular experiences and narratives to share. And despite attempts to universalise these children in the reception of these texts (e.g. Paul Dean's review of the book from the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* which is quoted on the back cover of Holliday's anthology: "Children, always so precious … assume divinity in this poignant volume that touches the worst level of humanity"), the presentation of their diary extracts demonstrates their diversity and different experiences.

Boas's *We Are Witnesses* (also published in 1995) is as curious as it is powerful and potent. A more pared down, more heavily edited and annotated, and indeed shorter version of Holliday's anthology, and focussed on the experiences of "five diaries of teenagers who died in the Holocaust" (to quote the book's subtitle) the anthology is a fragmented construction of diary entries from five young men and women: Jewish teenagers who died in the Holocaust: David Rubinowicz, Yitazhak Rudashevski, Moshe

Flinker, Eva Heyman, and Anna Frank. Their diaries were recovered by relatives or friends and now exist in European archives as significant cultural testimonies of World War II, the Holocaust. But these diaries also often signal personal coming-of-age narratives, and offer portraits of the artist as a young writer or politician. In summary, these diaries signal many different qualities at once. The title has a double meaning: "We" are the authors who collectively witnessed the atrocities of the Holocaust and their diaries are offered as important cultural commentary and records of their individual experiences of war. But "We" are also the readers of this book: the second-person witnesses who must bear witness to the testimonies within and never allow these stories to be forgotten or marginalised.

The diary entries are interspersed with bridging commentary by the author. Where some diary entries are quoted in their entirety, others are quoted in sentences here and there and even half sentences or phrases punctuated by Boas's commentary. There are, or course, a myriad of potential reasons why Boas's commentary is so central to the text. This is never explained overtly within *We Are Witnesses*, but such an approach is common to anthologies like this one, so the reader is left to assume that this approach might relate to the perceived limitations of anticipated readers of the text. Boas is likely working with original manuscripts, or even translated manuscripts or edited manuscripts. The diary entries might lack a narrative "flow" or logical structure and might be difficult to read in their original state. The diaries might be very detailed and deeply contexualised with local language and flavour which readers might find difficult to comprehend. It is difficult to know, definitively what editorial changes have been made to the original texts and why. But this is informed speculation based on what we already know about how anthologies work. Arguably the anthologising processes are very well intentioned and there is little chance that these voices would have reached a wide readership had it not been for adult intervention and support of these narratives. Further, one of the benefits of anthologies is the ability to see difference and diversity (in terms of experience) but also the cumulative effect of collective experience and the potential of these narratives to effect cultural memory: youth experience and voices become consequential.

Boas's methods are made somewhat visible in the author's note and foreword that opens the text. Boas has had the privilege of consulting the original diary texts: he writes of visiting various libraries in Poland, The

Netherlands, Belgium, Israel and the USA. Boas is himself a Holocaust survivor, having been born in a concentration camp in The Netherlands towards the end of the war (p. 3):

> My birth certificate states that I was born on November 1, 1943, in Westerbork, a small farming community in the northeast of Holland. But the certificate is misleading. My first home was a barracks—Barrack 50, to be exact—in the Nazi camp named for the town. From Westerbork, ninety-three trains carried the bulk of Holland's Jews to their deaths in extermination camps located in Poland. The ninety-third, and last, train carried Anne Frank. (p. 3)

This admission lends him an authority and an agenda as witness. In his Introduction, Boas offers significant context (likely for the young reader) from which these young writers emerged: Hitler and the Nazi's invasion of Eastern Europe; the murder of six million Jews, a quarter of whom were children. Boas's history is accessibly presented and sets the scene for the diary extracts he presents:

> The diaries of the Jewish teenagers spell out the anguish of an entire generation. Reading them, however, I was struck by the youngsters' ambition to make something of themselves, their resilience and highmindedness—and pained by their sadness and humiliation, their loneliness and helplessness, and the grief they felt when their friends are cut down. Yet they kept on dreaming, moving forward, preparing to make their way in the world as photographers, diplomats, writers, historians, and workers. (p. 7)

Here, initially by speaking generally about the diarists, Boas's homogenises them rather than pointing to the diversity of their writing and experience. But in the second part of this overview, he widens his reflection to insert a narrative about the broad and diverse potential of these young writers.

One of the advantages of Boas's annotation of each diarist is that he is able to offer some background to how the young writer came to write a diary: the frequency of their entries, how the diary concluded and how the diary was found after the author's death. But, this context does tend to overshadow the diary entries; it becomes authoritative as the voice of the diarist sinks into the background. For example, in the

David Rubinowicz entry, the commentary outweighs the original diary entries by roughly 3:1 and such a ratio is consistent across the entries. Despite the fact that Boas's commentary gives the diary entries a narrative shape and adds colour in the way of historical and political context, it is likely that readers would crave more of the original diary and less commentary. Despite the focus (and likely selective editing) of the diary as war commentary, there are still many elements that shine through across the different authors to distinguish them from each other and reveal that the narratives offer diverse youthful perspectives on the war experience (and we discuss some of these more specifically further on in this chapter).

Salvaged Pages, began in 1992 (xv) but published in 2002, references the two other anthologies in the introduction and, in doing so, has the advantage of being able to explicitly build on the work of these previous texts. In her Acknowledgements and Editor's Note sections "collector and editor" Alexandra Zapruder offers significant detail of the wide and deep research processes she engaged in to assemble this anthology, including interviews with survivors, relatives and friends; archival work; reading existing texts and manuscripts; engaging with foundations; and working with translators. Zapruder describes her methodologies in great detail, including the "three major phases" of research ("gathering information or copies of as many Holocaust diaries of young writers as possible"; translation; choosing the diaries and editing them for publication). It is important to note that Zapruder, preparing this book for publication in 2002, is working in the era of the memoir boom, and also the memoir hoax.[4] A small handful of high-profile Holocaust memoir hoaxes had emerged around this time to affect this subgenre of writing, for instance: Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (1996) and Misha Defonseca's *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years* (1997).[5] So, Zapruder treads carefully here; demonstrating thorough ethical methods are important, and

[4] See Rak (2012, 2013); Gilmore (2014).

[5] Binjamin Wilkomirkski's memoir describes his experiences as a child survivor of the Holocaust and is narrated from a child's point of view. Fragments was a great success; it was translated into nine languages, and won awards. But in 1998, Swiss journalist Daniel Ganzfried challenged the veracity of the memoir sparking much debate around Wilkomirkski's authenticity. Further investigation reveals that Ganzfried was correct and Wilkomirksi's claims were fraudulent (Salecl 2000).

Zapruder offers clear and detailed discussion in the front matter and throughout her anthology. This is essential work, not just because of the context from which this anthology emerges, but also because this book is not intended for a young adult readership. *Salvaged Pages* is larger in size than the two previous anthologies and contains more diarists. What this anthology professes to offer is something that builds on the work of the two previous texts: something more in-depth and comprehensive.

Perhaps the most pressing question when reading these diaries is: Is it possible to hear the child voice? Most literary texts are subject to layers of mediation between the act of writing and the text reaching a readership, and this changes the original text to varying degrees. There are political agendas, power relationships and industry demands that play central roles. In the case of Holliday's anthology, translating, selection and editing seem inevitable in finding a readership—otherwise the stories would never have reached readers outside of archivists, and a readership in the original language (many, if not most of the texts in this anthology are no longer in print). And we are conscious that mediation of texts is an inevitable part of our discourse: as we quote from these diaries, we too edited the quotes that we use, for purpose and for brevity. Is this act exploitative? In some ways, yes, and this is perhaps a subject for a larger study. We want to argue that these diary extracts do provide genuine insights, despite (and perhaps because of) their heavily mediated state.

Blake Eskin (2008) summarises the Misha Defonseca hoax:

> While researching the Wilkomirski case, I came across *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years*, by Misha Defonseca. Published in 1997, Misha is about a Jewish girl from Brussels who walked across Europe by herself during World War II and spent months living in the forest. Like *Fragments,* it's the story of a vulnerable child, alone in the world, who travels great distances and faces perils as chilling as they are difficult to verify. Even if you forget for a moment that Defonseca has two prolonged encounters with wolves in war-torn Europe, her story strains credulity: She walks from Belgium to Ukraine, sneaks into and out of the Warsaw Ghetto, and stabs to death a Nazi rapist who attacks her—all between ages 7 and 11.
>
> Now, 11 years after publishing her memoir and almost two decades since she went public with her story, Defonseca has admitted that she is actually Monique De Wael, the orphaned daughter of two Catholic members of the Belgian resistance. Yesterday, through her lawyer, she released a statement to the Brussels newspaper Le Soir. The story of Misha, she said, "is not actual reality, but was my reality, my way of surviving."
>
> Eskin asks: "Why did people take her seriously for so long?" and discusses how difficult it is to challenge the apparent testimony of Holocaust survivors.

Though there is a wealth of material across these three anthologies, to focus this discussion, we look at one of the diarists who is common to all three anthologies: David Rubinowicz. (Four diarists are common to all three anthologies: Moshe Flinker, Eva Heyman, Yitzhak Rudashevski and David Rubinowicz. These writers appear across all four anthologies most likely because their texts are available and exist in translated form prior to these anthologies.) Looking at the representation of Rubinowicz across the three texts allows us to explore and to explain the different levels of mediation and their potential effects on the youth diary. What we know from the outset is that Rubinowicz's diary has undergone several obvious stages of mediation: from Rubinowicz writing it, it was then found in the rubble of the ghetto, published in Polish as a complete text in 1960, translated into English and published in 1981 and more recently appearing across (at least) the three anthologies we present here.

In *We Are Witnesses*, Jacob Boas offers an overtly young adult mediation of Rubinowicz's diary. Over 25 pages, as previously mentioned, Boas offers an integrated discussion blending his commentary and Rubinowicz's original words. Initially, it is difficult to know which parts are diary and which part is commentary. Rubinowicz's diary entries are mostly indented from the commentary text; but there are instances where Rubinowicz's words appear in quotation marks within the commentary sections. For example,

> Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939. Right away came a decree forbidding Jewish children to attend school. "When I think of how I used to go to school," David wrote in his diary on August 2, 1940, "I feel like bursting into tears, and today I must stay at home and can't go anywhere." He had just turned thirteen. (p. 14)

There are obvious benefits and impediments to such a process of anthologising an original diary, and most of these relate to the anticipated young adult reader.[6] Boas aims to bring Rubinowicz's words "alive" for a young reader who may be reading this text with almost no contextual knowledge about the Holocaust, and the historical time and place that Rubinowicz

[6] Young adult or "YA" texts are those produced, marketed and read by young readers—usually adolescents. See Cole (2009).

writes about. Boas's responsibilities as an anthologist, editor and writer here are multiple, but perhaps principally, his concerns are affected by pedagogy and the possibility (and indeed desire) that this book might appear in classrooms. So, Boas offers his young readers the possibility of textual and contextual reading of Rubinowicz's diary that will allow for the deeper understanding of the experience of the young diarist and the experiences that he narrates. Boas's editorial commentary functions as pedagogy, asking the young reader to witness the broader context and seek to understand it. For example, Rubinowicz's diary concludes mid-sentence, and Boas explains that he and his family most likely lived for three-and-a-half months before being murdered at the death camp Treblinka. Boas explains:

> A document added to the Polish edition of the diary lists the train schedules for the final weeks of September. … The train that carried David left Suchedniow at 4.18pm on the 21st, a Monday, and arrived at Treblinka at 11.24am the next day. In a little over a year, from July 1942 to September 1943, Treblinka swallowed 850,000 Jews. Fewer than forty survived. (37)

This is rich context that the young reader would not necessarily know without Boas's commentary, and helps significantly in reading and understanding the significance of Rubinowicz's diary as Holocaust testimony.

But there are potential problems inherent in Boas's editorial approach too. When diary entries are selected and edited, assumptions are made about what is most important, what readers will find more interesting and so forth. Such approaches tend to assume (and prescribe) a homogeneous reader, and potentially disable the possibility of a more pure, interpretive reading on the part of the reader. For example, in *We Are Witnesses*, Boas includes entries that reflect subjects of likely interest for the reader he anticipates: school/education, family, connection to culture and religion, and observations about the events he sees around him. For example, one entry recounts Rubinowicz's seeing his father taken away by the militia.

> [from the diary] "I looked out of the window for hours on end, thinking they'll soon be back, but the hours went by and still no sign of them. All sorts of ideas went through my mind—whether they'd be arrested, whether such militia didn't really exist. In the end I didn't know what to think."

> [Boas commentary] Someone told him that his father had been taken into "temporary custody," and David "raced home with his bad news." At the time, his uncle, aunt, and grandmother were living with them. "All were alarmed. Uncle went to the militia right away, and Auntie as well. We children stayed behind on our own, except for Grandma. We had no supper at all; at twelve o'clock I went to bed." (p. 17)

Boas's mix of commentary and diary results in a clear chronology of events that allows the reader to follow his story very clearly; it is likely that the reader would not have any questions regarding what is happening. As previously mentioned, the youthful subject and author, and his preoccupations can been heard through the diary selections and quotations Boas makes. But Boas is also a strong part of the construction of Rubinowicz. For example, where in the other anthologies inclusion of Rubinowicz (which we discuss below), he appears reporter, cultural commentary and vulnerable child, perhaps in equal parts; in Boas's selection, there is an emphasis on Rubinowicz's fear and child's-eye observation of the traumatic events that surround him, For example, this indicative entry suggests the extent to which Rubinowicz is able to observe but not fully understand the trauma that affects his community, and the extent to which he lives in constant fear for his and his family's lives:

> April 14, 1942
>
> Early in the morning, I learned that the militia had come to search through the Jews' dwellings. They've taken away three people from one house. … We were very frightened they'd perhaps visit us … and even though we don't own anything, we were very frightened. … While I was sitting at home, I saw a militia man go past, and someone went into Auntie's place. I went to the stairway and heard the Germans were with Auntie and a policeman had come in from the yard. My heart began pounding like a hammer. I didn't go home, but instead walked along the street slowly.

Other sections included here describe David's difficult relationship with his father who was sometimes physically violent towards him: "Father doesn't love me at all, and he wouldn't be sorry if something happened to me" (33). But when his father is taken away, he writes:

> I kept on looking at him until he disappeared round the corner; then I had a sudden fit of crying, and felt how much I love him and how much he loves me. And only now did I feel that what I wrote on May 1 about him not loving me was a beastly lie, and who knows if I won't have to pay for doubting him when it wasn't true at all? (p. 34)

So, the selections and editorial interventions here made by Boas construct David as a young man rendered incredibly vulnerable by the situation, but also by his youth. For the Holocaust diarist to be made visible to the contemporary young adult reader (and of course we are working under the assumption that most would agree that such visibility is important), some mediation is inevitable. And perhaps this is a significant assumption that we are making here, and it is vital to the arguments that we make in this chapter. These young Holocaust diaries are being deployed as pedagogical tools: appearing in curriculum and in libraries across the globe. For example, Charnow (2012) notes "the widespread inclusion of Anne's diary in school curriculum" (p. 293). It is possible that the appearance and indeed centrality of Holocaust texts as central to young people's education in history, citizenship, literary studies and so forth has the effect of silencing other important narratives about traumatic history and communal suffering. This is not something we are able to explore in significant depth in this chapter, but, this is an issue of interest to trauma scholars and is worthy of further attention. While we might raise concerns about the pedagogical approach and tone to presenting a Holocaust diary, could young readers in the contemporary world ever access this text without the sorts of readerships that Boas provides?[7]

In Holliday's *Children of the Holocaust*, we come to learn more about Rubinowicz's diary in relation to form and textuality. (She refers to Rubinowicz as "Dawid" rather than "David," as does Zapruder.) Where there is little or no evidence of David Rubinowicz's anticipated readership for his diary, in Holliday's and Zapruder's anthologies, he becomes a writer. Holliday's curation of Rubinowicz's diary, for example, offers many more entries than Boas's, though much less contextual information (just one page). The reader is presumed to have more contextual knowledge to

[7] Our university students often tell us that they would not have read a particular text had we not put it in front of them; this is likely to also be an issue for young adult readers.

offer a more sophisticated reading of Rubinowicz's diary (while this is also a young-adult volume, perhaps the reader here is presumed to be a little older than the readers of Boas's text, though this is not necessarily made obvious anywhere). Though there is overlap in the content of the entries included within Boas's and Holliday's works—for instance, Holliday also includes the details that mark Rubinowicz as a youthful subject, preoccupied with his family, his education and deeply frightened by the events that are happening around him, there is a wider focus in these diaries—more cultural context, history and reportage. Rubinowicz emerges as a citizen journalist, for instance, he writes:

> 1 Sept 1940
>
> Today is the first anniversary of the outbreak of war. I remember what we've already gone through in this short time, how much suffering we've already experienced. Before the war everyone had some kind of occupation, hardly anyone was out of work. But in present-day wars 90% are unemployed, and only 10% have a job. Take us, we used to have a dairy and now we're utterly unemployed. There's only very little stock left from before the war; we're still using it up, but it's already running out, and then we don't know what we'll do. (p. 80)

Here, Rubinowicz locates his own personal experience within the wider context, which explains his experience, and points to the impact of war on individuals. Such writing unveils the potential of the diary as a different knowledge space to other sorts of knowledge texts (history, war journalism, etc.). Rubinowicz's writing is likely affected by genre conventions: of what he thinks a diary should be, but, since he is not necessarily expecting his diary to be widely read (we are not able to know his perspective on this particular subject), he is not bound by the ethics or conventions of public writing. He has a freedom to write which is unique to him and his experience of the war.

Another quality that emerges within Holliday's extracts of the diary is Rubinowicz's skills as a writer: the power to bring experience into language, his melancholy, and the emotive and spiritual tone of his explorations. For instance:

> May 22, 1942
>
> While praying I felt a deep yearning for Father. I saw other children standing with their fathers, and the parts of their prayers that they didn't know were told to them by their fathers, and who is there to tell me? … only God alone. God give me good thoughts and lead me in the right way. Never before have I felt my prayers to be such a burden to me as today.

The presence of the diary entries—unfettered by commentary—allows for a reading that incorporates textual analysis (even knowing the text is in translation)—and reflecting on what Rubinowicz has achieved as a young writer.

Zapruder in *Salvaged Pages* offers the most contextual information on Rubinowicz: five pages of contextual information on the diary. Zapruder explains that what we received here is a distillation of five notebooks, began "seven months after the German invasion and occupation of Poland" (p. 271). Zapruder presents helpful biographical information on Rubinowicz before offering a mostly descriptive and contextual analysis of the diaries. She explains that the diary opens without an introduction "it is as if Dawid simply picked up his pen one day and began to write, the rhythms of daily life caught seamlessly on the page, uninterrupted by the literary device of an introduction, a summary of recent events, or declaration of the diary's purpose" (271). From here, she gives a general shape of what Rubinowicz writes about in his diary, concluding her foreword with a brief discussion of Rubinowicz's final entry and speculation on what likely happened to him and his family after the final entry ("Although nothing specific is known about the fate of Dawid and his family, they were almost certainly murdered in the gas chambers in Treblinka") (276).

What is helpful about Zapruder's approach and annotation is a lack of specific analysis of the diary entries. Though she foregrounds contextual knowledge and some more specific reflections on the diary, Zapruder ultimately allows the entries to speak for themselves: edited (inevitably) but without interruption or commentary and thus the diarist gets to have the central and indeed final word on their own lives. For example, the entries we receive from Rubinowicz are often pointed and highly confronting: sometimes offering knowledge about the Holocaust that is

widely known but this knowledge is inflected with personal experience. Other entries contain information that is very specific to Rubinowicz's context and experience. For example:

> March 21 1940
>
> Early in the morning I went through the village in which we live. From a distance I saw notice on the shop wall. I quickly went up to read it. The new notice said that Jews may under no circumstances travel in vehicles (the railway had long been forbidden). (p. 276)
>
> June 26 1941
>
> You can still hear the din, sometimes even better now. It hasn't rained for a fortnight. If it stays like this another two days then everything will wilt. (p. 280)
>
> June 29 1941
>
> Today you don't seem to hear the shots anymore, only thundering from time to time. There's a cloud coming up from the north that may produce rain. Human beings are thirsting for it and so are all living plants. The cloud came and the longed-for rain. It rained for over an hour, a bit too little for the parched earth. (p. 280)
>
> April 18 1942
>
> […]
>
> They've taken away the parents from across the road, leaving two little children on their own. Next door they've again taken the husband away; if you look into their window you can see the sadness there. You can forget other people's troubles until a fresh worry comes along. […] (p. 292)

Rubinowicz emerges as a young life writer at these moments: deeply conscious of what is happening around him and committed to recording his own experience and circumstances alongside observations of the communal traumas and suffering affecting others. But as he represents the natural landscape readers can see the symbolism in this writing: the weather is important to his family's prosperity, but also signals the traumatised landscape. In what Rubinowicz includes (and perhaps also excludes), we can gain a sense of what the diary form—at this time—enabled young writers to say and to be. For example, though Rubinowicz touches on his difficult relationship with his father, he does not go into much detail across the diary. Though this diary fits within

some of the traditions of coming-of-age narratives, it offers much more. In Rubinowicz's diary—when we see it more completely—we can see a young writer who might have become a war reporter, or a memoirist, should he have lived. Though there is no addressee, within this mix of personal storytelling and reportage, we see a sense of responsibility for the communal narrative: Rubinowicz's writing reflects a consciousness of the responsibility that comes with writing a diary.

Conclusion

In writing about Anne Frank's diary, Charnow argues: "Her legacy is fragmented and cannot be made whole" (Charnow 2012, p. 308). In this chapter, we have discussed the ways in which anthologies of youth diaries of the Holocaust do not seek to turn fragmented life narratives into a whole—and we argue that this is not a bad thing. Trauma narratives tend to represent fragmented lives and selves, but these fragments can be read in meaningful ways. History often dictates that texts are lost or fragmented by transits, trauma and time. In contemporary life writing, we do not seek to privilege the complete life, or the complete book as *the* central mode of self-representation. We do privilege is the witnessing of life stories. Anthologies are a means of curation, and of distillation; and however problematic, they are a means of receiving and of reading life stories. Releasing and reviving a diary for different readership asserts the importance of reading it.

In looking at the particular examples that we have in this chapter, we have explored how different anthologies come to favour and shape particular aspects of a larger narrative. This is based on anticipated readership, but does reveal something of the ways in which mediation is a mode of reading and interpretation that values certain stories, representations and identities over others. These processes also confirm much of what we already know about the problematic cultural constructions of youth and childhood that tend to homogenise and universalise childhood and youth experience for adult gain. But as we have argued in this chapter: the presentation of the diary (even translated and edited) does give us a snapshot of a young person's life narrative that allows us to witness something of

his or her experience, to see how this young writer perceived their role in their society, how he or she sought agency via life writing as a means of representing the self and participating in the cultural construction of the Holocaust.

In the next chapter, we consider another subgenre of life writing in which young people have emerged strongly to write about their experiences of war and conflict: the child soldier memoir. Where the recovered diary has become the most significant mode for considering young people's contemporaneous writing about World War II, in the early twenty-first century, the memoir has become a significant literary space for young people to write themselves into public discourse about war and conflict. Much like the diaries we have discussed in this chapter, the child soldier memoirs we discuss in Chap. 4 are also heavily mediated texts and the challenge for scholars is to consider these mediation contexts while finding an ethical reading position from which to appreciate the significant cultural work such memoirs may achieve.

4

Lost Boys: Child Soldier Memoirs and the Ethics of Reading

In a 2013 article titled "Lost Childhood" in the *School Library Journal*, Kathleen T. Isaacs offers an overview of recent books for young readers that detail children's experiences of war or conflict. Aimed at teachers and librarians, the article discusses how, at a time when war is the subject of a range of discourses and media accessed by young readers, non-fictional literatures offer a different "way in" to knowledge and perspectives on war and conflict. Isaacs acknowledges that many of these texts include "searing details—hunger and dread, lost limbs, lost families, and lost lives" (p. 51). These are undoubtedly difficult books to read. But Isaacs argues that these books should be read by young readers because they are "solid good reads," "emotionally rich," and contain "political subtexts"; "these are stories that encourage reflection, demand discussion, and stay in readers' minds" (p. 51). She goes on to offer lists of books appropriate for particular age groups. What these books all have in common is that they each represent trauma and displacement caused by war or conflict. All centralise children's experiences and perspectives; most take up the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Each of the texts has a children's human rights agenda whether implicit or explicit.

K. Douglas, A. Poletti, *Life Narratives and Youth Culture*,
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This article reminds us of the many child soldier memoirs that have been published in the 2000s, a significant trend in itself. Some of the prominent examples of this trend include: Grace Akallo's *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* (2007); Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007); Benjamin Ajak, Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng with Judith A. Bernstein *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky* (2005); John Bul Dau and Martha Arual Akech *Lost Boy, Lost Girl: Escaping Civil War in Sudan* (2010); and Emmanuel Jal's *Warchild: A Child Soldier's Story* (2007). As Isaac's article demonstrates, the publication and circulation of these memoirs in educational contexts among young readers place a particular (and indeed continuing) value on reading these traumatic stories. Such texts are positioned as important books: having important educative or didactic functions, but also political significance: readers, particularly young readers, will benefit from reading these texts and taking up the role of second-person witnesses to the experiences described within. This is not a new phenomenon of course: we discussed the well-established relationship between war diaries and young readers in Chap. 3; such texts are often deployed pedagogically.

In this chapter, we consider two prominent child soldier memoirs as case studies: Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007) and Emmanuel Jal's *War Child: a Child Soldier's Story* (2009). Even though, like the youth-authored narratives of war discussed in Chap. 3, these books have gained a strong readership of young readers, we want to shift the focus to consider the ways that adult readers have received and responded to these youth-authored memoirs. When an author chooses to circulate his or her life narrative publicly, they cannot foresee the text's transit: who will read it and how it will be read. For example, a young memoirist writing trauma may not anticipate the possible negative implications of their once private story entering the public domain, where reception may include suspicion, public interrogation, even ridicule. So, in this chapter, we explore what an ethical reading and ethical scholarship of these youth-authored trauma testimonies might require. This case study reveals the need for deep, complex questioning and reflection when it comes to the study of youth-authored life narrative and the deployment of trauma narratives within scholarship.

This is complicated by the question of how these stories of childhood are received, and "used," by adult readers. As we argued in Chap. 2, when young writers author life narratives that are published within the literary field, these narratives are subject to evaluation and critique by a range of "cultural intermediaries" such as editors, reviewers, publishers, scholars and journalists (Hesmondhalgh 2006, pp. 226–227). The role that these intermediaries play in authorising, questioning and consecrating both young life writers (as *writers*) and the narratives they author raises complex questions regarding the role of ethics. We begin with the most immediate question, which is how an ethical scholarly response to these texts might be developed.

Trauma and Ethical Scholarship

Very generally speaking, ethical scholarship is about academic integrity—research that fulfils the requirements of institutions and disciplines and is appropriate for circulation among peers, students and within the community. But, of course, scholarly disciplines and their intellectual communities have their own sets of expectations of research which go beyond the legal and institutional towards the more moral, contextual and often shifting mores which govern how we proceed with research. Such scholarly ethics consider the social and political responsibilities than accompany research. Amina Mama (2007) summarises this mandate:

> To pursue questions of ethics is to engage in an exploration of the good and bad effects of how we live and what we do, to question ourselves and our work. It is to ask the question: "Is what we do and the way we do it moral?" instead of complacently assuming the inherent goodness of our vocation and approach. Ethics do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are deeply affected by matters of identity and context, both of which inform our epistemologies and our applications of the various methods we use. Therefore, to raise questions of ethics in scholarship is to question the moral values—again, the good and bad—of being scholars and producing scholarship. These are ultimately questions of identity, epistemology, and method. (pp. 5–6)

But these dialogues—between scholars and "truth texts," their authors and the trauma they represent—are almost always complex and challenging. Life narrative texts representing trauma operate within literary or cultural discourses, but often engage whether overtly or covertly with other discourses which respond to trauma, such as news media, legal/human rights, and health and welfare discourses. This reminds us that young people's use of life narrative for self-representation and as a means of exercising agency occurs across multiple fields and therefore can be responded to with a variety of values in mind. Scholars, like writers, journalists, critics, policy makers, (to name just a handful of examples) are cultural intermediaries—offering perspectives and interpretations, and acting as interlocutors or conduits for the reception of texts and the issues they represent, for example, among scholars, with their students, and the broader community, depending on the reach of the scholarship.

And, of course, significant responsibilities come with this work. Our anecdotal experience, talking to colleagues, is that there are very different expectations and responsibilities attached to working with non-fiction accounts of trauma compared with working in other sub-disciplines of literary studies. For examples, scholars may feel more obligated to explicitly discuss their motivations or qualifications to read these texts, offer more self-conscious analyses and more transparent discussions of aims and methods.

Patricia Yaeger (2002) powerfully articulates what is at issue:

> we inhabit an academic world that is busy consuming trauma—eating, swallowing, perusing, consuming, exchanging, circulating, creating professional connections—through its stories about the dead. We are obsessed with stories that must be passed on, that must not be passed over. But aren't we also drawn to these stories from within an elite culture driven by its own economies: by the pains and pleasures of needing to publish, by salaries and promotions that are themselves driven by acts of promotion, by the pleasures of merely circulating? (pp. 28–29)

Yaeger's argument asks us to confront troubling truths about the role of the professional reader of trauma texts. But—the alternative—to *not* study trauma texts—to fail to talk about them, or share these texts,

with colleagues, students and friends is troubling for different reasons. These texts are affective; they may have a consciousness-raising, social justice agenda—carrying testimony which might otherwise not be heard or comprehended. These texts can shift the margins of global citizenship and social suffering, to address and implicate, and call for response.

So, there are possibly two issues at stake here: the importance of studying trauma literatures, and the need to find appropriate methods for reading these texts within different scholarly contexts. Jennifer L. Geddes (2008) raises a suite of questions around the ethics of scholarship in trauma studies. She writes:

> Should the way scholars read and write about narratives of extreme suffering differ from the ways in which they read and write about texts about other kinds of things? … And what of scholar's expertise in analysis—how does one analyze someone's testimony of suffering without such analysis becoming either a kind of violation or a detached look at what calls for a response? (p. 1)

These are important questions and points for reflection when studying life writings of trauma. Young writers are often writing from positions of inequality or vulnerability; participating in cultures presents opportunities to gain agency. If a young author is also a trauma survivor, they are culturally double-bound, and their participation within culture may be even more difficult, but consequently even more significant. So, what can we achieve when reading life narratives of trauma penned by young authors, and talking about them with colleagues and students, or in the community? What are the risks inherent within such inquiries—for instance, the potential for the surveillance, fetishisation or romanticisation of youth-authored literatures? What productive dialogues might we have with these texts?

Studying youth-authored trauma texts and focusing closely on ethical reading can bring about some very useful reflections on literary and cultural method, and an impetus for finding new text-appropriate methods. In a study of youth-authored life writing, how might we include a discussion of African child soldier memoirs? Child soldier memoirs have emerged at a time of strong and wide cultural interest in the figure of

the child, and in the experience and representation of trauma. As many life writing scholars including Julie Rak (2013), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), Leigh Gilmore (2001a, 2001b, 2010, 2014) and Gillian Whitlock (2007) have noted—the last decade has been notable for the memoir boom, and many memoirs of trauma have been published. Kate Douglas (2010) has previously explored the significance and symbolism of the child figure in representations of trauma. The other relevant context here is the ways in which Africa is imagined by Western readers and how this might affect the sorts of cultural texts about Africa that are produced and consumed by Western cultures. African child soldier narratives have emerged at this cultural moment. During the 2000s, as more people have become aware of the existence of child soldiers, a plethora of memoirs have appeared within the publishing domains of the Global North.[1] This convergence of publishing trends and the increased visibility of child soldiers in social justice campaigns lead us to focus this chapter on the question of what an ethical reading and ethical scholarship of child soldier memoirs might require.

Life Writings of Trauma: African Child Soldier Memoirs

Broadly speaking, we consider child solider memoirs as a mode of youth life writing within the larger corpus of life narrative texts authored by young people we identify in this study. But their inclusion in a corpus of youth life writing cannot come at the exclusion of other cultural, political and ethical contexts that we identify in this discussion. How do these memoirs reflect a desire to participate within culture and how might these texts reflect young writers deploying life writing modes as they seek cultural agency?

The argument for the inclusion of African child soldier memoirs in Western-based, focused study of youth life narrative is as follows: First, as we outlined above, most memoirs emerge as part of a trend, there are now

[1] For instance, witness the controversial KONY2012 campaign—the viral video which attempted to draw attention to the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his exploitation of child soldiers.

many child solider memoirs in circulation in the West. Second, these narratives have grown from a tradition of young authors writing about war and conflict, as discussed in the Introduction and in Chap. 3. Third, as scholars working within a particular geographic and linguistic space who are interested in manifestations of popular life narrative, the presence of these texts are available to us, appearing alongside other youth-authored- and popular memoir in bookstores cannot be ignored. Nor, as we discuss below, can the press coverage they have received. Child soldier memoirs so often involve a search for voice, for visibility and prompt readers to think about power relations in mediated life writing. These texts significantly expand our methods for reading youth-authored life narratives, for instance, provoking questions about the limits of genre, narrative, authorship and truth.

At the forefront of this consideration of child soldier memoirs is scholarly ethics. An ethical approach to reading youth-authored trauma texts is one than combines the best practice methods from auto/biography studies, trauma studies and childhood/youth studies: a commitment to a very broad literary/cultural method.[2] This attention to ethics has become more urgent as the scholarly and publishing landscapes have changed in the past decade—a result of the memoir boom, hoax controversies, and increasingly interdisciplinary approaches to reading literatures. These changes to the literary/cultural landscape require a reconsideration of scholarly ethics. For example, one of the major changes in literature scholarship in recent times, as we demonstrated in Chap. 2, is a strong attention to the contextual and political domains from which new literatures emerge.

[2] Youth studies scholars have focused on research methodologies—questions about the appropriateness of studying youth and how such research might be completed ethically (Bennett et al. 2003; Best 2007). Some of these ethical challenges include: the competing agendas of the different disciplinary areas from which youth studies projects emerge, the unequal power relationships between researcher and subject, and the possibility of youth research being co-opted by the media to promote negative stereotypes of youth subjects. There is also the tendency for researchers to look at the minority of "spectacular" youth (influenced by media and government discourses around youth) rather than the majority of everyday youths. And inevitably, there has been a Western focus (particularly the USA, the UK and Australian) in these projects. Even though our work here in literary studies is not an empirical, qualitative study of youth authors themselves, since we are engaged with youth-authored texts we must also be attentive to ethical methodologies and also ethical responses to these texts.

The interdisciplinary frameworks that life narrative, trauma studies and the scholarship of childhood and youth offer provide much-needed methodological flexibility for scholars attempting to account for the relationship between young people's life writing and the domains in which they are published and circulated. But, we are also troubled when we read analyses of popular literatures, for instance, youth-authored literatures which entirely sideline literary analyses, which may result in these texts being denied a "literariness." It is important that such texts that emerge from cultural margins—authored by young people from the global south—be afforded the status given to other literary memoirs. So, this has been a motivating force in our research. We argue that an ethical approach to reading child soldier memoirs as youth life writing would deploy a textual, paratextual and contextual analysis of these memoirs which takes into account the ideological and political investments in their publication and reception without denying these memoirs status as literature. Such a reading would examine the cultural, political *and* literary work that these texts may accomplish. It would engage in close reading: for instance, considering language, poetics, narrative structure, voice, characterisation, without fear that that these popular texts will not "stand up" to such a reading, or that such a reading is somehow a form of detachment, as Geddes (2008) implies. Reading trauma memoir and indeed popular memoir requires different templates for close reading which attend to the diverse work these texts may engage in and the contribution they make to literature. Ethical reading also involves a consideration of the cross-discursive literary work we might engage in when we read trauma texts by young writers.

The shift from thinking about ethical representation and writing towards an awareness of ethical reading is a very important one because it reminds us that we have a responsibility when we read and transfer our reading knowledge elsewhere. Ethics is not simply about offering a so-called politically correct analysis of a text. Ethics can be personal, but, within our contexts, they are also professional (e.g. the ethical codes of our institution) and disciplinary (what our subject disciplines expect of us) and it is the latter that we are most interested in here.

The inclusion of child soldier memoirs in a study of youth-authored life narratives might seem unsatisfactory because of a range of criticisms

surrounding the publication of these memoirs. For instance, Alison Mackey (2013) is mindful of the primary criticism of child soldier memoirs: that these narratives, once published, become tainted consumer artefacts—troubled by the "global politics of publishing" and more general market demands for misery memoir, and complicated by the more general "economy of humanitarian consumption" (pp. 99–100). Such a critique implicitly applies the logic that popular texts or those published within the commercial end of the literary field are of less artistic value that than those produced in the sphere of limited production that characterises the avant-garde (see Chap. 2). These texts tap into the stereotype of troubled youth and also into simple therapeutic and recovery paradigms. Particularly, when these texts are consumed in non-African contexts, Mackey (2013) contends, "These narratives respond to—as well as perpetuate—the contemporary demand for stories of violence, displacement, and lost childhood." (p. 100)

These issues are not unfamiliar to scholars working in the more general field of trauma and narratives of childhood and youth. As Mackey and others (Coundouriotis 2010; Moynagh 2011; Schaffer and Smith 2004, 2014; Gilmore 2010) have noted, the relationship between personal life narratives and the broader political frameworks from which they emerge is an extremely fraught one: "the complexities of self-representation do not always line up easily with the cultural work that these narratives are expected to do" (Mackey 2013, p. 101). There are unequal power relationships within the mediation and circulation of life narratives, there are particular norms and expectations within the genre of memoir which dictate the sorts of stories that will be published at any given moment. There are no guarantees regarding how these narratives will be received by readers.

Such observations trigger a significant opportunity (and also responsibility) for scholars to do trans-and-counter-discursive work with memoir: work which considers and juxtaposes different responses to memoirs, diverse contexts for reception, and offers new methods for reading these memoirs. For example, Mackey's (2013) reading of child solider memoirs gives attention to the narratives and stylistics of these texts—her inquiry considers how the texts might "work" on the reader. Though she acknowledges this is a somewhat speculative activity, she considers the

ways that these memoirs might coax the reader into "confronting difficult questions about the limits of universal human rights" (p. 99). So, rather than marking these texts as passive to the broader genres and markets, and to reception, Mackey reveals their potential for active literary work.

In her study of child solider narratives, Maureen Moynagh (2011) also works through these complexities. She considers the ways in which these texts test the limits of human rights discourse. As Moynagh argues, these are texts which "foreground the crisis for human personhood" (p. 54); their representations resist simple notions of victim/perpetrator common to memoir. Child soldier memoirs offer "a textual battleground" for particular representations of childhood innocence "across cultural and political contexts" (p. 47). In her methodology, Moynagh works at the intersection of literary/textual analyses and cultural/contextual analyses, for instance, revealing the ways in which child soldier memoirs ask us to think differently about literary genres like the *Bildungsroman*. Such analyses are crucial because they posit not how new literatures might fit into traditional paradigms, but how traditional paradigms might be rethought to consider and include new literatures. For example, trauma memoirs may be narratives without progression; they will not necessarily depict a conventional child to adult timeline, or "portrait of the artist." As readers, we must be attuned to potential differences.

Mediated but Radical? Emmanuel Jal's *War Child*

Emmanuel Jal's memoir *War Child* was published in 2009. It is important to mention that Jal's memoir is collaborative life writing, written with Megan Lloyd Davies. Often referred to "as told to" life writing, such texts again asked to be read differently to single-authored memoirs. While we know that Beah's memoir was university-workshopped, we cannot be certain of the methods and processes of mediation that developed *War Child*. *War Child* is a story of Jal's traumatic period as a child soldier during Sudan's second civil war. His family are Nuer people, and part of a Christian tradition. Jal's faith is an important theme in the story

and eventually propels him towards a musical career. His father joins the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and shortly after, Jal is recruited (under the pretence of education) to become a child solider for the SPLA.

Reviewing *War Child* Edward W. French (2009) writes:

> Some of the book's most interesting observations seem almost inadvertent, depriving the reader of context that is important to understanding this conflict, and African conflicts in general. From Biafra to Rwanda, and now Darfur itself, the West has a long tradition of reducing them to good-versus-evil stories bereft not just of nuance but also of politics, history and complexity.
>
> There is no gainsaying Mr. Jal's experience of terror, but amid his frequent loathing for Arabs the book provides only a glimpse of the geopolitics of the war, with Ethiopia hosting hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees near their common border and allowing rebels to train on its territory.

Memoirs are often criticised for offering decontextualised or reductive perspectives on socio, cultural, historical and political events that provide the backdrop for the personal story, and Jal's memoir is faulted on these grounds here. Such critiques (again) prompt larger questions about the cultural functions of memoir (a recurring point for discussion in this study). Memoirs are not history books, but do bear responsibility to contextualise individual experience. Of course, different readers might respond to different historical and contextual knowledge. The balance of a narrative is not an exact science. And arguably Jal's memoir does offer much context through the (borrowing concepts from French's review quoted earlier) "glimpses" he does offer which do often point to the "complexity" of the situation he finds himself in. It might seem that Jal's narrative works to satisfy particular stereotypes of Africa as a site of crisis: their innocent children are in need of rescuing. But this is a surface reading, reliant on particular narrow perceptions of the capabilities of memoirs to be radical cultural texts. Here, we present a reading of Jal's memoir as a much more subversive text. The memoir anticipates a Western readership. It challenges the reader to witness the traumatic suffering Jal experienced, while calling out Western interventions as too often ineffectual.

Jal's trajectory—from child soldier to potent activist—is presented as a deeply complex and highly political journey: there were many bumps in the road to recovery and he does not attribute a single person or event as the key to his redemption. In disrupting some of the conventions of the memoir recovery arc, *War Child* never allows the reader to sit easily in a position of knowledge or empathy.

War Child represents Jal's everyday experiences as a child soldier in great detail. Much of this detail is graphic, harrowing and difficult to read: descriptions of domestic violence; his being abandoned by his father during childhood; struggling through misery, disease, injury and starvation; betrayal; torture; mass murder; and uncertain and shifting enemies. The memoir reconstructs his child's-eye perspective to significant effect; for example, when his aunt is raped, the young boy knows that something very bad has happened, but he is unsure. The reader is asked to witness what the boy cannot:

> Inside I could see Aunt Sarah crying as she lay on the ground. I walked up to her and crouched down. She said nothing as she stared at me. But her eyes looked strange. They were empty but full at the same time.
>
> 'Aunt Sarah?' I asked.
>
> She was silent as she slowly got to her feet, walked out of the hut, and turned toward home. No one spoke during the journey, and when we got back to the compound, she didn't tell anyone that we had met the soldier. I never spoke of that day either. Somehow I knew it was a secret to be kept between us, that something very wrong had happened. But I felt confused. Wasn't it nice if the soldier cuddled Sarah instead of shooting her? And why did I feel so sick inside when my auntie didn't even cry about what had happened? (p. 17)

War Child is a coming-of-age memoir—but Jal's is a coming to knowledge through trauma. One of the most important themes in the memoir is Jal's changing perspectives. He is not drawn as a naïve, innocent child on a predictable trajectory from innocence to experience. Jal's mistakes have serious consequences: he is trained and comes to kill innocent people. His development from boyhood to manhood is accelerated and warped by violent nightmares, he writes: "At night as I lay down, pictures of all the hurt people I'd seen played in my head, and sometimes

in my dreams my mother's face would be among them. But I didn't cry. Boys didn't cry" (p. 35). Jal's performance of youthful masculinity is often interrupted by admissions of vulnerability—for example, of feeling abandoned by his father:

> Why hadn't Babba come himself? Why hadn't he sent food and clothes? Why didn't he want to see with his own eyes that I was safe? I knew I must have done something wrong and felt scared as I wondered what it was. I must be a bad son if no one came for me. (p. 49)

Jal is subsumed into the child solider community because he has been left alone, because he has nothing, because he is culturally disenfranchised. *War Child* strikes hard on this point: this is how young people become part of gangs, become terrorists and become violent. When Jal is undergoing his training, the commander tells the boys:

> "Together you will take back the blood of your mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, cousins and grandparents, which was spilled on the earth of Sudan"
>
> "Always remember: the gun is your mother and father now."
>
> Jal reflects: "I looked at him. I had a family, a home again." (p. 92)

Jal disconnection from his kinship and community—indeed his father's giving him up to the army—renders him entirely vulnerable to the influence of the SPLA. In his memoir, he frequently recounts how much he enjoyed being a solider (at the time): how bloodthirsty he was, his eagerness to get back to the frontline. None of this is meant to sit easy with the reader; such admissions are very difficult to read because they do not allow for a simple reading of Jal's innocence and coercion. But such admissions do add to the complexity of Jal's self-characterisation and the construction of him as an honest and revealing storyteller.

As we read through the memoir, we follow his journey from vulnerability to empowerment. For example, the racial hatred and prejudice he feels towards the "Arabs" he fights against is dismantled towards the end of the book and also in the memoir's epitexts. For example, according to the Southern Sudan Artists Association (2011), Jal is now a strong advocate

for peace and reconciliation between the different culture groups and religions in Sudan and Africa more generally:

> His second album, Ceasefire, was released in September 2005 and includes a re-recording of "Gua." This album is a collaboration with the well-known Sudanese Muslim musician Abdel Gadir Salim and brings together opposing sides of the conflict, and different music traditions, to a common ground of the wish for peace in Sudan. The collaboration represents a vision for the future, as two Sudanese men, a Christian and a Muslim, unify and pave the way to overcome differences peacefully. Both musicians endured unimaginable adversity to become important figures, not only in music, but in the future of a country. They accentuate the differences between them and their musical styles, as a symbol of co-existence. The album preaches in four languages, encompasses every type of music in one, in an effort to transform the sound of hope into musical form. Ceasefire is not only the sound of two men collaborating on a musical project, but more symbolically, two halves of a divided nation learning to trust each other.

Of course, it is genuinely difficult for a memoirist in Jal's (or indeed Beah's) position to provide enough context for his (mostly Global North) readership to understand the complexities of Sudan's history, and his cultural group/s, for example. So, Jal's project shifts according to the templates and expectations of the memoir form: to provide an individual experience, deeply contextualised, and with significant resonances beyond the individual experience.

In its overall critique of the civil war in Sudan and the child soldier regimes, and despite being written and published for a Global North readership, *War Child* directs potent criticism at Western institutions and aid organisations that are supposed to protect children like Jal. Though he eventually does get help, the systems are shown to be either ineffectual or corrupt (with the exception of his friend and patron Emma McCune). He writes: "Slowly more khawajas arrived at Pinyudu, with words such as WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME, SAVE THE CHILDREN, UNICEF, RED CROSS, AND MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES written on their tents and trucks" (p. 65). Aid workers ask him to share his stories with them, but it is not clear how this will benefit Jal (and it does not).

As French notes, "These words amount to a provocative challenge to the myth of the beneficent and powerful Western humanitarian worker whose impact is thought exclusively good. Too often in African conflicts these workers' presence has amounted to unacknowledged collusion." Later in the memoir, Jal offers critiques of the USA and UK—particular institutions that are unable to offer him the support that he needs; after he is unable to retain his student visa in the UK, he writes: "Fuck her [the administrator at the visa office]. Fuck white people. Fuck Britain" (p. 225). And in a particularly memorable section later in the memoir, Jal taps into debates about the Bob Geldof-organised "Live 8" events (2005)—music concerts to raise money for poverty in Africa. At the time of the concerts, lead singer of Blur Damon Albarn criticised the line-ups for the events: for an event that was to advocate for Africa, the line-up of artists was predominantly white. Albarn later detracted his statement as the line-ups were made more diverse (Left 2015). Jal's memoir provides a significant anecdote for this contextual backstory. He writes of meeting Bob Geldof and having Geldof tell him that he was not a big enough star to be in Live 8:

> "This is about making poverty history and giving African artists like me a chance to perform. If my music isn't enough, then I can tell my story, tell people about the problems we face in Africa, convince people they must help."
>
> But Mr. Geldof told me he needed people to watch the event and the Chinese would switch off their televisions if I came on.
>
> Anger bit my stomach, as I looked at him, but I knew I must be respectful to the man who'd once fed me. (p. 242)

(Jal is eventually included in the line-up at the insistence of singer Peter Gabriel). It is difficult not to interpret Jal's comment here (about Geldof once feeding him) as facetious. It can be interpreted as an ironic gibe directed at Geldof—the very man (and what he represents: a particular type of Western benevolence) cannot practice what he preaches. Jal is rendered unable to speak because Western voices are occupying all of the available public speaking positions on Africa.

Jal's story is ultimately one of redemption: he is supported by a British aid worker (Emma McCune who sadly later died in a car accident) to flee

to Kenya, were he lived with McCune, continued his studies, and discovered hip hop music. He wrote music that blended the different language of Sudan (Nuer, Arabic, Dinka, Swahili and English), and he engaged in global music traditions in the spirit of reconciliation offering hope for a new, peaceful Sudan. The songs that Jal comes to write and perform are autobiographical, and allow him to explore and connect the spiritual and political and his desire to help people like himself. Jal's memoir ends with his performing at the Live 8 event in Cornwall. As he stands ready to perform:

> For a moment I looked down and saw a shadow of the boy I'd once been standing beside me. He was small, his eyes full of pain and his gun heavy. I stared up into the lights and the sky above me, letting the sound of the crowd seep into my heart and soul. Once before, I had learned to transform the hate burning inside this boy into love. I had wanted to leave him behind. But know I knew I never wanted to forget the message the war child had taught me. We had traveled so far together to reach this place and I would carry him with me as I started a new journey. (p. 246)

This "new journey" includes an impressive array of activity. As well as writing the memoir, Jal founds a charity (Gua Africa), stars in a documentary *War Child* about his life, composes award-winning albums, engages in numerous artistic collaborations, performs at Nelson Mandela's 90th birthday concert and works as an activist. He writes "music and lyrics are my weapons now" (p. 2); his life narrative does not begin and end with this memoir but extends through a plethora of paratexts and intertexts, across different media and cultures. For example, in an interview with Nigel Williamson (2008), Jal is conscious of retaining African styles and subjects in his hip-hop, despite being influenced by American styles:

> "I'm not turning away from the world-music audience which has supported me," Jal says. "There's still an African influence in my music. I don't try to sound American. I rap like an African, because that's what I am. In the song 'Warchild,' I say I survived for a reason: to tell my story. I believe that. I feel a responsibility to do these songs and tell the world what is happening in my country."

The book concludes with Jal making a plea for universal children's rights: "When I look back on my childhood, I know that communities are sometimes forced to give up their children to protect themselves. Childhood in Africa does not hold the same romance that it does in Europe and America. But I would still like to see a world in which no child experiences what I did." (p. 256) Jal's story is remarkable: from child soldier to empowered advocate, it might seem on the surface to be a conventional rags-to-riches, trauma to recovery, innocence to experience memoir of childhood. But an ethical reading of this memoir would read "across" such representations and interpretations to see the radical engagements this memoir makes with Western benevolence and the silencing of particular voices.

The Ethic of Verification: Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*

Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, perhaps the most well-known of all child solider memoirs, provides a further case study for thinking about ethical methods for reading child soldier memoirs. Sometimes the popular media discourse around memoir can be extremely damaging to trauma memoir. Ishmael Beah's account of his two years as a child soldier in Sierra Leone was well received by critics and popular with readers, having sold in excess of 600,000 copies (Sherman 2008.). Beah's memoir became part of the syllabus in many American high schools and colleges, as well as a staple of book clubs (it was selected as the inaugural title in the Starbucks Reading Club) and online discussion boards.[3]

In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah describes his life during Sierra Leone's civil war in the 1990s. During this civil war, tens of thousands of people were killed. The narrative presents its reader with a flawed hero—a young man who confesses to having murdered countless people during his drug-fuelled, civil war battles. Beah, now 33, travels the world as a The United Nations Children's Fund ambassador raising awareness of the plight of child soldiers (Sherman 2008). Young, attractive and eloquent—Beah

[3] For instance, there are Cliffnotes online for the memoir and entries on sites like Gradesaver.

became a spokesperson for the child soldier cause. According to his memoir, in 1997, "Beah escaped Sierra Leone and made his way to New York, where he was unofficially adopted by … activist Laura Simms, whom he had met at a United Nations conference in 1996" (Nason and Gare 2008). He finished high school and started college in the USA. His creative writing talents were recognised by his creative writing professor at Oberlin College—Don Chaon. According to Chaon,

> He (Beah) expressed his desire to write about his own experiences in a memoir. We then began working together, usually once a week, and I would go through the manuscript. For the most part, the rough drafts were coming in with really incredible writing.
>
> I was completely amazed that an undergraduate could write as well as he could and was completely astonished by … his sentences and his metaphors and … by the vividness of his memory. (Nason and Gare 2008)

Chaon continues to say, "I didn't have any questions about the accuracy of the content. I was acting as a writing teacher … it wasn't as if, during the writing of this book, that Ishmael imagined in his wildest dreams that he was writing a bestseller that would appear all over the world." (Nason and Gare 2008) Beah has subsequently penned a novel (*Radiance of Tomorrow* 2014) which is also set in Sierra Leone.

Texts such as Beah's memoir—which often attempt to bring a reader closer to a broader communal trauma—have become potent vehicles for advancing human rights campaigns, as Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith contend,

> These stories demand that readers attend to histories, lives and experiences often vastly different from their own. As people meet together and tell stories, or read stories across cultures, they begin to voice, recognize, and bear witness to a diversity of values, experiences and ways of imagining a just social world and of responding to injustice, inequality and human suffering. (2004, p. 1)

Though they may depict the necessarily limited experience of an individual, and acknowledge trauma and memory loss, these texts are a mode of testimony, and offer a point of entry for readers and the potential to

act as witnesses. So, in offering his testimony via this highly successful published life narrative, Beah has become a "face" for understanding the traumas of child soldiers.[4]

But the wide circulation and acceptance of Beah's child trauma narrative is not where this story ends—but where it begins. The publication of *A Long Way Gone* marked the beginning of complex drama that revolved around the reception of Beah's text and the veracity of his story. To summarise: Beah's narrative was exposed by *The Australian* newspaper as "exaggerated" in parts and "false" in others.

It would be simple to critique *The Australian*'s exposé of Beah's memoir as too narrow and ignorant of the workings of life writing. In the posthoax era, Beah is an easy target because he has taken up the suspiciously recalcitrant autobiography-of-childhood and popular memoir modes.[5] His memoir emerges in a particular literary-cultural context: Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson describe this period as infused by "a crisis of suspicion surrounding narratives of witness in contemporary human rights campaigns" (2012, p. 591). Smith and Watson problematise "the ethic of verification" which affects the reception of trauma testimony, they write:

> To be sure, responsible verification is important to the advancement of rights arguments and activism on the ground. But the ethic of verification can be a problematic one. Its practice of 'outing' false witnessing can serve to discredit testimonial acts that contribute to the exposure of rights violations, violence, and conditions of radical injury and degradation. Thus, we need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the ethical work of testimony, one that does not rely on an over-investment in 'authenticity.' (2012, p. 592)

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[4] As Uzodinma Iweala (2007) reminds us,

According to the United Nations, there are 300,000, if not more, child soldiers around the world. The majority of these children—some as young as six—live and fight in sub-Saharan Africa, and their plight has largely been ignored by the west. Beah's book stands as a vivid testament to his time as one of the nameless and faceless 300,000. (Iweala n.p.)

[5] The autobiography of childhood, commonly a site of flawed prose and imperfectly recalled memories masquerading as photographically remembered narrative, has become a staple of popular literature over the past 15 years. Its popularity has made it one of the most heavily scrutinised literary subgenres. The autobiography-of-childhood form has grown franchise literary celebrities such as Frank McCourt and Dave Pelzer, and exposed hoax authors such as Margaret Seltzer and Anthony Godby Johnson. See Douglas (2010) for a developed discussion of this genre in the late 1990s and the early 2000s.

We can see the problems of the ethic of verification in practice here: *The Australian*'s critique never mentioned the potential impact of Beah's age or any suggestion of traumatic memory loss. The exposé depended simply on Beah's memoir apparently containing untruths; but, of course, there are many other relevant factors here when thinking about how Beah's memoir was constructed and circulated.

The Australian newspaper "exposed" Beah's memoir on two fronts: firstly, that Beah was two years older than he claimed when he went to war (15 rather than 13), and that he served two or three months in the Sierra Leone army instead of the two years he claimed in *A Long Way Gone*. Gabriel Sherman (2008) outlines the genesis of the controversy in his piece for *Slate.com*:

> The story begins last fall when an Australian mining engineer stationed in Sierra Leone named Bob Lloyd learned that one of his employees at the Sierra Rutile mine near Beah's village claimed to be Beah's father. Lloyd had read *A Long Way Gone* and was especially moved by Beah's tragic account of his parents' deaths in a rebel attack on the village of Yele. Elated at the possibility of reuniting Beah with his father, Lloyd tried contacting Beah. … In addition, Lloyd explained in his e-mails that workers at the mine were telling him that the book's chronology was wrong: Rebels had taken over the mine in January 1995, not 1993 as Beah describes in *A Long Way Gone*. If true, that would mean Beah served as a soldier only for several months when he was 14 going on 15.

It turned out that the man was not Beah's father—but the investigation into the veracity of Beah's story continued. Thus began a series of hostile exchanges between Beah's camp—his agent and publishers—and the journalists from *The Australian* newspaper. Further, *The Australian* uncovered various "timeline discrepancies" in Beah's narrative. They mobilised "witnesses" (most of whom have conveniently preferred to remain anonymous) to counteract Beah's testimony:

> A large number of people in Beah's home region, including a local chief, a Catholic priest, medical staff at his local hospital, his family's former neighbours, several local miners and Beah's former school principal have independently confirmed to *The Australian* that the attacks he describes on his

> home town and region happened in January 1995, not January 1993 as stated in his book.
>
> Given that he was handed over to UNICEF staff with a group of other child soldiers in January 1996, his account triples the amount of time that he spent as a refugee and then a child soldier after the invasion of his home town … and the subsequent death of his parents.
>
> For any adult from those towns to mistake the year of the attacks, which were marked by horrific atrocities, widespread killing and the evacuation of whole towns, would be akin to a New Yorker not knowing the date of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. (Wilson 2008)

But unlike many adult autobiographers writing about their traumatic childhoods, Beah is still a very young man—less than ten years removed from the traumatic events he depicts. Some of the events Beah recalls were from a time when he was a cocaine-addicted teenager. Further, it is crucial to note that children and young adults remember differently to older adults. For instance, is it really so odd that Beah remembers the brands of clothing given to him by the army, the titles to rap songs he loves, and details about the foods he ate on his travels—but fails to remember calendar dates?

David Nason and Shelley Gare (2008), in their piece "Ishmael Beah's Flawed Poetic License" which also appeared in *The Australian*, challenge *A Long Way Gone* on the grounds that it was never checked for "factual accuracy." In this article, Nason and Gare purport to paraphrase Beah's writing teacher Chaon "if errors did exist in the autobiography, they should be put down to poetic licence"; (Chaon has since suggested that his words were misquoted to imply that Beah's story could be exaggerated and thus fraudulent. Perhaps, what Chaon wanted to say was that *A Long Way Gone* was structured as a memoir—and in suggesting this, Chaon may be pointing to an understanding and acceptance of memoir as necessarily fragmented—affected by memory loss). And, it seems necessary to emphasise the obvious here: Beah's text was "conceived and developed into a 400-page manuscript that was later reduced to 229 published pages in the hands of Beah's New York publisher, Sarah Crichton" (Nason and Gare 2008). Memoirs are multiply-mediated texts, but this does not mean that we should necessarily be suspicious of them. We just

need to understand how this mediation might work and what the implications of it might be, especially for youth-authored trauma texts.

As Gabriel Sherman (2008) notes, Beah's publishers have not wavered in their support of him and of the memoir. But "these denials haven't stopped *The Australian* from waging one of the fiercest, knock-down, drag-out literary feuds in recent memory." According to Sherman (2008):

> The standoff has spanned four continents and bled into cyberspace, as both sides have entered competing changes into Beah's Wikipedia page. [In 2008, journalist for *The Australian*, Peter] Wilson tracked Beah around London during his European book tour, trying to land an interview after repeatedly being rebuffed by [Beah's publisher] FSG. Wilson even planted questions with a student reporter from the Oxford University newspaper after the Oxford Union banned him from attending Beah's reading there.

Within this journalistic critique, Beah's memoir was stripped almost entirely of its status as human rights testimony. And as we have argued, what seems most absent from this debate is a discussion of the impact that childhood trauma may have upon Beah's ability to accurately recall factual details about this traumatic and drug-influenced period of his adolescence, or his ability to incorporate such facts into the retrospective child testimony he authored. Leslie Mboka, the first social worker to meet Ishmael Beah in a rehabilitation camp for former child soldiers in early 1996, says that *A Long Way Gone* recounts Mr Mboka's experiences with Beah in Freetown but "he was a young child who had been through terrible things so he could easily have got things mixed up" (Wilson n.p.). Scholars working in life narrative studies would take such memory loss as a given. It is worth considering that in contrast to *The Australian* newspaper's position, literary critics in the USA and UK have not chosen not to take up the Beah controversy—perhaps for fear of undermining the work done by Beah in bringing the issue of child soldiers to public attention. *The Australian*'s critique never hinged on Beah's trauma or any suggestion of traumatic memory loss—though it might have been a very easy way for them to discredit Beah. The exposé depended simply on Beah's memoir apparently containing untruths.

Interestingly, in writing his memoir after the Beah controversy allows Jal in *War Child* to (seemingly) actively bypass some of the issues that affected Beah's memoir (and indeed, Jal's memoir, to our knowledge, was never challenged by critics for its veracity). Early in the memoir, Jal lets the reader know that his experiences cannot be measured according to traditional Western conventions of calendar time: he does not know when he was born or how old he is exactly (p. 6). He writes of being born into a traumascape: "There was peace in Sudan for the first three years of my life, but I cannot remember it. All I knew was a war that grew as I did" (p. 6); and later, "Time is like sand running through my fingers as I look back on my childhood, but I think it was almost two years after arriving in Pinyudu that I finally left for training. I was nine years old." (p. 76) Jal is more confident in asserting "In May 1991 is the first certain date in my story because I fought in a battle documented in the history books when I was eleven years old." (p. 117)

There is also a great deal of emphasis placed on Jal's PTSD in the memoir. The memoir contains many vivid and confronting images that speak to the aftereffects of Jal's trauma and call the reader to witness the horror that he has experienced and inflicted. For example,

> My time at the front of the front line taught me just one new thing about war—the worst is when it is over. As the battle falls silent, only the screams of the injured can be heard, and when the guns stop firing and the smell of smoke fades away, the stench of flesh and blood fills the air. … I never slept properly, keeping one eye open all night. (p. 144)

He has nightmares about the faces of those he has killed; he cannot eat meat because the smell reminds him of the flesh of the murdered. The phrase "Pictures. Pictures. In my head" is repeated twice (p. 158) to emphasise his hauntings. The PTSD also infuses Jal's methodology in writing his memoir. In the Afterword to the memoir, he explains:

> It has been hard for me to tell my story—even physically painful at times as I've freed memories buried deep inside. Sometimes my nose bled uncontrollably or dreams would trap me until I woke up to see war still flashing before my eyes as I lay alone on a bed. After nights like those, I would sit

> silently for hours the next day, trying to ease the pain in my chest and calm the feelings inside. (p. 255)

The prologue juxtaposes Jal's recent life with his past to emphasise the enduing legacies of trauma. As he is about to perform on stage:

> suddenly time stands still. The lights, the noise, the colors, bleed into nothing and the faces melt away. I am a child again.
>
> 'God will look after us,' my mother is whispering as we lie under a bed.
>
> She is holding on to my two brothers, two sisters, and me as we hide from a war being waged outside our hut. In the peaceful village we once knew, rockets blow apart houses with families inside, women are raped, and children are murdered. It is genocide and my people are its victims. (p. 2)

Child soldier memoirs must be read as post-traumatic memoirs and thus read differently to how we might read or judge other memoirs of childhood. William Boyd (2007) reviewing *A Long Way Gone* for the *New York Times* writes:

> It is interesting to try to comprehend what act of remembering is going on here. Who of us in our 20s could accurately summon up our day-by-day lives as preteens? As you read "A Long Way Gone," the details allow you to distinguish precise recall from autobiographical blur. Beah can remember the logo on the sneakers he is issued by the army. When he is captured by hostile villagers, he is released because he has a few rap cassettes on him (LL Cool J, Naughty by Nature, among others) and can mime the songs and dance to them. All this has the idiosyncratic ring of precisely remembered truth. But with lines like these, the effect is quite different: "We walked around the village and killed everyone who came out of the houses and huts." Or: "After every gunfight we would enter the rebel camp, killing those we had wounded." The horror is duly registered, but its vagueness and generality don't add up to moments of lived personal history. Indeed, Beah's time in the army, and the accounts of the patrols and firefights he was caught up in, represent only a small portion of this book. And who can blame him? The blood-lust of a drug-crazed adolescent on the rampage with an assault rifle would challenge the descriptive powers of James Joyce.

Boyd goes on to describe Beah's memoir as "a vision of hell … depicted in primary colors by a naïve artist." The difference between this and the *The Australian*'s critique of *A Long Way Gone* is that the exposé denied Beah's text a literary aesthetic. To offer a critique of the "literariness" of published child trauma narratives has proven to be extremely difficult for critics and scholars alike in recent years. As Douglas (2010) proposed, the outpouring of published childhood trauma narratives throughout the 1990s and 2000s sharpened critical focus on the important consciousness-raising and advocacy work accomplished by these narratives—for instance, in allowing child abuse sufferers to speak openly and often graphically about their traumatic childhoods. But this outpouring of trauma within literature also had the effect of widening the gap between so-called literary and popular life narratives, as autobiographies of childhood trauma were increasingly found in the self-help and popular psychology sections of libraries and bookshops. Such texts were, for better or worse, deemed non-literary. In the eyes of critics in the literary field, these texts lose their literary textuality primarily on the grounds of unsophisticated writing—but have also been criticised on the grounds of self-indulgence. Even in the case of trauma texts, we find that young writers struggle for recognition of their writing as having aesthetic or cultural value. As *The Australian's* targeting of Beah demonstrates, a lack of recognition of life writing as a literary undertaking—as distinct from the writing of history—coupled with a denial of a young person's skill as a writer, can result in wilful mischaracterisation of their project and provide a justification for doubting the value of their work. As we discussed in Chap. 2, commercial success can heighten suspicion that a literary work has little aesthetic value, and the consequences of this logic—as the case of Beah demonstrates—can result in a memoir's purpose and context being ignored.

Memoir, Trauma and Youth: Towards an Ethics of Scholarship

In light of these arguments, we propose that a deeper literary intervention might be made in the case of Beah's memoir—one that might resonate more broadly. This intervention re-engages literary and cultural

questions about the relationship between literature and trauma, memoirs and industry mediation, the multivocal nature of life writing, and the spaces available for youth voices. For Mark Sanders (2007), an ethical reading of trauma testimony is inevitably interdisciplinary—for example, studying a text in literary studies would require us to "shift our attention beyond poems and novels, as traditional disciplinary *objects*, to the *activity* of reading and its ethical and political implications" (p. 17). But this process also needs to extend in the opposite direction—to allow literature scholars to contextualise trauma texts as cultural and political texts without denying their status as literary texts. We agree with Geddes who remarks "the narratives themselves [so often] tell us how we should respond to them" (p. 2).

Sanders (2007) discusses how memoir asks us to think differently about truth; the desire for "forensic truth" (the verifiable facts) must give way to an acceptance of "narrative truth" (the personal and subjective truths of storytelling). Within this context, literature scholars might discuss and affirm Beah's story as offering narrative truths and this might prompt a different method for close reading the text. Texts like Beah's can make significant contributions to an understanding of the relationship between mediated narration, memory and trauma. In *Soft Weapons* (2007), Gillian Whitlock writes: "in the shadow of the hoax, we must strive to become different readers. … Hoax, scandal, and impropriety haunt testimony, and this is a good thing. In their wake, we are free to ask questions that might otherwise seem improper" (pp. 127–128). We agree, but further suggest that we must also remain free to ask literary questions (that might seem improper) of trauma texts such as Beah's. It seems dismissive not to. Such readings will allow for an expansion of literary method, rather than attempts to fit these narratives into traditional literary methods. To deny a trauma text its literariness is to deny some of its most vital elements: its subjectivity, narrative truth, the ambiguities of its language and its meanings. As we outline in Chap. 2, it is also to continue to marginalise the position of young writers as artists.

Uzodinma Iweala (2007), reviewing *A Long Way Gone* for the UK's *The Guardian*, writes: "It seems almost frivolous to discuss Beah's style, but it would be unfair to him to ignore it. … One feels a bit awkward pointing out these shortcomings." But why? Beah's text is a literary testimony—its

foundations are the traditions of autobiography; but the memoir also asks us to expand the way we think of these literary traditions and how they work. Using Schaffer and Smith's classifications, *A Long Way Gone* might be classified as a "post-colonial bildungsroman," it is also a survivor narrative. Beah turns himself from victim to survivor "through acts of speaking out that shift attention to systematic causes of violation" (2004, p. 28). For example, in *A Long Way Gone*, through a story within a story, Beah offers insight into his approach to post-traumatic storytelling. Beah's friend Musa, about to tell the boys the story of "Bra Spider": pauses to reflect: "My mother told me that whenever a story is told, it is worth listening to" (p. 74). Musa embellishes the story, to the surprise of the other boys. But Musa defends his storytelling: "I am telling the story, so I can tell *my* version" (p. 74).

Even Beah himself is suspicious of the veracity of trauma stories. For instance, the young Beah hears stories about the war long before the war reaches his life, he describes them as follows: "There were all kinds of stories told about the war that made it sound as if it was happening in a faraway and different land. … At times I thought that some of the stories the passerby told were exaggerated" (p. 5). He learns otherwise through his own experiences—but ironically hopes that people will read and believe his story. As previously mentioned, Beah spends only a fraction of the memoir discussing his experiences as a child soldier, roughly 40 pages of a 229 page memoir. As Boyd (2007) suggests, this forgetting can be traced to Beah's subconscious trauma and/or a self-conscious desire to forget. But it is also a conscious approach to storytelling. Beah's text gives trauma a recognisable literary shape that works within some of the already established referential codes of trauma narration. Traumatic events are fragmented and interspersed through all other events in the story. *A Long Way Gone* is told chronologically—but the child soldier stories recur both in the early stages of the narrative (as prolepses or "flash forwards") and later in the narrative after Beah's rescue (as analepses or "flash backs"). These literary techniques highlight the extent to which Beah's trauma has infiltrated all aspects of his storytelling, like recurrent nightmares. For example, very early in the memoir (in Chap. 3), Beah describes disposing of a dead body. He writes: "These days I live in three worlds: my dreams, and the experiences of my new life, which trigger memories from

the past" (p. 20). Stories about Beah's family and the families of Beah's friends are also scattered (potently) through the memoir. These fragments work to counter the trauma stories—and to show the interrelationship between all the stories which constitute Beah's experience.

Beah finds a voice within these fragmented narrations. He also finds a voice through Shakespeare and hip-hop both of which he uses to improve his English vocabulary. This reminds the reader that this apparently monologic encounter with Beah is nothing of the sort. Further, *A Long Way Gone* also makes numerous powerful statements about the relationship between silence and storytelling. When he is travelling with his friends—trying to stay one step ahead of the civil war—Beah recounts the stories he and his friends tell each other, which are invariably not trauma stories. As his friends' trauma stories leak into this ritual occasionally, Beah comes to understand his friends' quietness. When his friends die, one of the things that Beah laments the most is "there was no one around to tell us stories and make us laugh at times when we needed it" (p. 120). Beah constructs silence as a means for retaining memories—as he closes his eyes, he desperately tries to hang on to his memories of his family.

In this chapter, we have argued that life writing scholars are well placed to engage in the sorts of cross-discursive work which allows for an analysis and synthesis of popular debates and criticism, scholarly discussions, conversations with students, and the community. Scholars can look for the dominant paradigms, and consider the subversive moments (while being careful not to impose them), and for all the literary complexities that lie in between.

Schaffer and Smith (2004) discuss the potentially powerful effects of published life narrative on human rights initiatives—particularly in consciousness-raising, but also refer to the problem of these narratives being taken up in "unpredictable" ways. (p. 32). *The Australian*'s critique of Beah's memoir might be classified as an unpredictable use—and it is a response that has become predictable in popular media responses to published childhood trauma narratives. But this may present life writing scholars with a range of opportunities to deconstruct the particular dynamics, deviations and mediations affecting contemporary published trauma narratives.

But are we becoming too fearful of reading trauma literatures in scholarly contexts, in response to reservations such as those expressed by Yaeger? As Marianne Hirsch (2003) asserts, "aesthetic questions and aspirations might well seem frivolous or inappropriate at a time of mourning. And yet, aesthetic and ethical questions help us understand how our perceptions are affected and structured by public catastrophe." In attending to trauma literatures in scholarly contexts, we may gain a stronger understanding of how cultures respond to and disseminate traumatic experience through literature. We might develop a clearer idea of the relationship between traumatic experience and language or narrative devices at a time when the conventions and limits of trauma representation are in constant flux.

Part III

Girlhoods Interrupted

5

The Riot Grrrl Epistolarium

So far, our discussion of young people's use of life narrative has explored with the complex interactions between young authors, the literary field, and the wider spheres of culture and politics. Taking narratives of trauma as our focus, in the previous two chapters, we have considered the challenges of producing ethical scholarship on youth-authored texts that have been shaped and reshaped by the interventions of cultural intermediaries in the literary field, such as anthology editors. We have argued that memoirs of trauma authored by young people circulate and are received in ways that the authors themselves cannot anticipate, but that recognising and accounting for this should not lead us to underestimate the importance of life narrative in establishing a site of agency for young writers, or how memoir offers a unique and effective means for young people to claim their rights as citizens and agents rather than subjects of adult-led politics.

Taken together, Chaps. 5 and 6 focus on how young women have engaged in life narrative practices in order to disrupt and renegotiate dominant discourses of girlhood, young women's creativity and their agency. We highlight that the use of life narrative discourse for these ends involves negotiating a complex set of aesthetic and discursive conditions that shape the production,

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distribution and reception of young women's life writing. In this chapter, we turn our attention to the role that life narrative has played in young people developing counterpublics (Warner 2002), using the example of Riot Grrrl.

The subject of significant scholarship in youth studies and cultural studies, Riot Grrrl is recognised as a vibrant feminist movement that builds on Women's Liberation. Viewed as fundamental to the "third wave" of feminism, Riot Grrrl was "a political movement [that] inspired girls and young women both nationally and internationally to express resistance against restrictive expectations of girlhood, femininity, and traditional gender roles both in the punk scene … and in 'mainstream' society" (Schilt and Zobl 2008, p. 171). The use of life writing in Riot Grrrl zines has been studied extensively by critics such as Schilt and Zobl (2008), Alison Piepmeier (2009) and Mary Celeste Kearney (2006), whose work has established the importance of self-publishing to the articulation of Riot Grrrl's feminist agenda, its community-building efforts and its success in creating avenues for girls and young women to speak about their lived experience. In this chapter, we examine another important written form in Riot Grrrl that has not received sustained attention from scholars. We examine the importance of the letter in establishing a network, articulating the aims of Riot Grrrl and of fostering a sense of participation and ownership of the movement. We offer a typology letters that were written and received during the years Riot Grrrl was actively being taken up and explored by women across America and in other English-speaking countries, such as Australia and England. Drawing on the recently established Riot Grrrl Collection housed at Fales Library at NYU, this chapter examines the importance of writing, receiving and publishing letters in a youth culture that arose just prior to the enormous impact that digital technologies and the Internet would have on youth cultures and youth organising.

Riot Grrrl: The Convergence of Youth, Gender and Cultural Production

As we discuss in more detail in the following chapter, the social experiences and the cultural activities of young women have been a key interest of youth studies in recent decades. Riot Grrrl has been a vital case

study for feminist scholars of culture and media interested in young women's engagement with feminism and is an important case study for understanding how a new generation of women take ownership over the discourse of feminism and apply it to their own lived experience. Like earlier forms of feminism, life narration has been a key component of this process. Making and being an audience for the art and culture made by other young women—other grrrls—was a central ethos of the Riot Grrrl movement which Mary Celeste Kearney argues became "the first economy for girls' media production" (Kearney 2006, p. 52). Demanding the right to represent themselves and issues relating to their lives, Riot Grrrls wrote and self-published, but also organised to participate in established spaces of feminist protest around issues such as abortion, sexual harassment and women's participation in culture and politics (see Marcus 2010). Acting out the discourse of do-it-yourself required young women to become producers and facilitators of the culture they wanted to consume, rather than consumers of the music, media and art offered by the mainstream cultural industries. Thus, Riot Grrrl is an excellent example of how young people engage with the discourses that shape their position in society and culture through the production of culture. When young people take on the production of culture for themselves, they acknowledge that "Culture is the primary terrain in which adults exercise power over children both ideologically and institutionally" and in which "childhood is organized, learned, and lived" (Giroux 2000, p. 4). Many members of these bands made zines, manifestoes and held meetings, acting out the do-it-yourself ethic to creates spaces for young women's cultural production and innovation, self-expression and self-representation through music, writing, visual art and dance (see Kearney's discussion of some of these elements, 2006, pp. 68–81). For its core participants and proponents, Riot Grrrl was built on the hard work of touring, weekly or monthly meetings, writing, copying and circulating zines, and turning up as an audience member for other riot grrrls and at political protests.

From its beginnings as a feminist movement within the existing North American punk culture, Riot Grrrl briefly became a conduit for the visibility of young women's cultural production and self-representation in the mainstream media. As with other youth-led movements before it, Riot Grrrl was often reduced to a form of youth consumerism and thinly

conceived youth rebellion. Riot Grrrl was often presented in the media as a fashion trend, rather than a movement that repositioned young women as makers of culture (Fateman in Darms 2013, p. 17; Marcus 2010, pp. 234–239). The tense relationship between grass roots youth culture and the mainstream media and cultural industries is a defining element of the history of Riot Grrrl, and is widely discussed in scholarship on Riot Grrrl (e.g. Eichhorn 2014, pp. 85–86; Thompson 2004, p. 60) and popular histories such as Sara Marcus's well-received *Girls to the Front: A True History of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* (2010).

This chapter examines the importance of the established life writing form of the letter to Riot Grrrl. We do this partly to make visible an important element of Riot Grrrl that has not been the subject of scholarship, but also because the letters of Riot Grrrl provide a compelling example of how youth cultural practice utilises and innovates autobiographical forms. In reading the letters of Riot Grrrl as cultural production, we position them as a vital part of the empowerment of young women as cultural producers that the movement sought to develop. We read the private and semi-private form of the letter for its aesthetics, rather than as sociological documents. We hope to demonstrate that letters played a vital role in the Riot Grrrl "networked media economy" which Kearney theorised as being made up of zines, music, film and video (Kearney 2006, pp. 68–81).

Our approach is guided by the arguments presented by Kate Eichhorn in her recent work on Riot Grrrl. Much of the early attention given to Riot Grrrl, Eichhorn demonstrates, was through the lens of subcultural studies and "the broader category of girl zine writing" (Eichhorn 2014, p. 118). "Viewed through this lens," Eichhorn suggests, "most apparent are the common issues Riot Grrrl and other girl zines address (for example abuse, eating disorders, sexuality, and so on) rather than the mode of address or the procedures at work in the text" (Eichhorn 2014, p. 118). The lack of discussion of Riot Grrrl as an aesthetic movement that enabled young women as artists and aesthetic innovators evidences the uneven access young people have to the literary field we explored in Chap. 2. As Johanna Fateman, a participant in Riot Grrrl who donated her papers to the Riot Grrrl Collection, states in an interview with Eichhorn in 2010, "Riot Grrrl was … an aesthetic thing (rhetorical, theorized)" and

"[i]ts status as a political movement and social phenomenon still seems to overshadow its status as an artistic movement. Its products still aren't discussed much *as art*" (Eichhorn 2014, p. 112, emphasis in original). As both chapters in this section explore, young women's life writing is often expected to undertake this social or political work if it is to find an audience and avoid the charge of narcissism.

Our consideration of a sample of letters from Riot Grrrl is mindful of what Mimi Thi Nguyen describes as the "aesthetics of access … through which the personal and the political collapsed into a world of public intimacy" (Nguyen 2012, p. 174) that defined Riot Grrrl as a movement dedicated to cultural production. To address this, we situate the use of letters in Riot Grrrl within a larger practice of feminist letter writing (Jolly 2008) and a theory of the letter as a life writing form (Jolly 2008, Stanley 2004, 2011, 2015). By focussing explicitly on letters, we bring much needed consideration of how the letter *as a form* performs the desire for intimacy and enacts intimacy itself. As "*internal* binders and mediators" (Jolly 2008, p. 244) of feminist movements such as Riot Grrrl, letters are a powerful example of how a specific form of life writing is both a theory (of the importance of intimacy and women's kinship) and a practice that contributes to the literature and archive of that movement (Jolly 2008, p. 52). Our approach is also informed by Ann Cvetkovich's theorising of the "public cultures" associated with subcultural or non-dominant cultural formations. Cvetkovich's work encourages us to consider how the letter is used by the Riot Grrrls to build a community and public culture. Following Cvetkovich, we approach Riot Grrrl as a public culture that exists "in the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories" (Cvetkovich 2003, p.8).

The recent formation of the Riot Grrrl Collection gives unprecedented access to a wide variety of writings produced in Riot Grrrl, and archival research undertaken at Fales in September 2014 forms the basis of this chapter. As we discuss below, accounting for letters and their circulation based on archival collections is inherently partial, yet paying attention to the kinds of letters and the kinds of life writing they represent offers the opportunity of deepening our understanding of the importance of Riot Grrrl as a cultural movement and the role of life writing as a practice and an ethos in its success.

Letters as Life Writing

The question of how to approach letters as a form of life writing or "documents of life" (Plummer, p. 18) has been extensively discussed by scholars in the social sciences and the humanities (Plummer 2001, Cardell and Haggis 2011, Stanley 2004, 2011, 2015, Jolly and Stanley 2005). Jolly and Stanley's 2005 article "Letters as / not genre" maps the tensions between an approach to letters that focus on their status as written documents with literary potential—"how to account for the aesthetic potential of letter writing" (Jolly and Stanley 2005, p. 102)—and "a historical/sociological perspective on letters as a social practice" (Jolly and Stanley 2005, pp. 105–106). By the time they collaborated on this article, both had completed significant pieces of scholarship on feminist letter writing and, in their theorising of the letter, moved away from the highly influential theory of the letter proposed by Jacques Derrida in *The Post Card* (1987) and other writing. For Derrida, the letter is marked by loss and mourning, the play of presence and absence, and the impossibility of the referent (Derrida 1987). Scholarly discussion of letters—as with other forms of life writing—tends to raise more questions than it answers about letters as a social practice; as historical documents; as claims to knowledge or evidence that can underpin a claim to knowledge; as gift; as discourse (see e.g. Cardell and Haggis 2011, pp. 129–130). As Jolly (2008), Stanley (2011) and Whitlock (2008) have shown, what letters meant and what forms of sociality, aesthetic innovation and communication they made possible can only be understood in relation to a specific collection.

Yet at the same time, letters have a set of properties that do seem to typify them as a distinct life writing form. They have a unique dialogic aesthetic, as Plummer puts it "every letter speaks not just of the writer's world, but also of the writer's perceptions of the recipient" (Plummer 2001, p. 54). They also have a uniquely complex relationship with time, as Nicky Hallett argues: "Letters … are of the moment. They (seek to) capture and convey the concern of their writer, what is paramount in her mind right then" (Hallett 2002, p. 108). For Stanley, letters "share some of the temporal complexities of photographs" because they "represent the moment of their production" (Stanley 2004, p. 208). In Esther

Milne's consideration of *Letters, Postcards, Email,* the physical, corporeal co-presence of author and recipient is replaced by the creation of presence through "the complex interaction between cultural practices and technological infrastructure" (Milne 2010, p. 26). What letter writing can be said to represent, and what kind information it can tell us about the past—the moment of writing, the person who wrote them or the more general milieu in which they circulated—must be acknowledged as limited. For Hallett, one of the aspects that makes the letter a uniquely literary genre is this ambiguous relationship with time and the authorial subject:

> The originating 'I' who dashed off, or even pored over, the letter may be very different by the time the script has arrived; and despite all generic expectations (that this is a mode of trust, that letters are essentially non-fictional constructs, unless they acknowledge their own exploration of fantasies) that such texts will replicate, mirror, echo the true self who sent it—despite all this, how far was that originating 'I' *ever* identical to the original, the 'real' 'I' who wrote? (Hallett 2002, p. 110)

Despite these challenging questions, it is easy enough to agree on general characteristics of "letterness" that include a clearly identifiable address (a person, an organisation, an "open letter" to a community) and their status as an object sent and (usually) received. Letters scholarship, however, reminds us that what can be said about these characteristics must be cautiously approached. Once we have identified a collection of letters to read, as we did in The Fales Riot Grrrl Collection, how do we read and account for them?

What Letters Can Tell Us About Riot Grrrl

How researchers and cultural historians narrate letters can have lasting implications for how Riot Grrrl is understood. Letters can be powerful evidence in "the recent retrospective turn to tell the story of riot grrrl" (Nguyen 2012, p. 188). Indeed, in Marcus's *Girls to the Front*, letters and letter writing appear numerous times (Marcus 2010, pp. 6, 43,

46, 207, 243). The temptation may be to renarrate a specific exchange of letters and the practice of letter writing to produce representative subjects.

An example of this can be found in Marcus's narration of an exchange of personal letters early in the story of *Girls to the Front*. The story she tells, in the lively and vivid prose that characterises the book, details the experience of Christina Woolner, who in 1991 was "a senior at a progressive boarding school" who identified as bisexual, dressed "like a goth" and was "chubby" (Marcus 2010, p. 143). Marcus's account of Woolner's experience transforms her into a character ("Christina") whose experience depicts the triumphs of letter writing. Christina's position before she encountered Riot Grrrl was one of self-loathing:

> in her last year of high school she still had never been kissed, never been asked out. Even though she was bright and talented, and went to a school where misfits were the norm and cheerleaders didn't exist, she still felt like a loser because she wasn't a skinny girl going out on lots of dates. (Marcus 2010, p. 143)

When Christina saw Bikini Kill in 1991, she purchased a copy of their zine that included a "dork manifesto" (Marcus 2010, p. 143) which, the narrator tells us, immediately made Christina feel "excited to transform her uncoolness into an asset through the alchemical power of some jerry-rigged feminist theory" (Marcus 2010, p. 144). Yet Christina's embrace of the zine's manifesto was tempered by a suspicion that it did not really apply to her: "something wasn't lining up. The girls in Bikini Kill *weren't* dorks, not the way Christina was. They were self-assured, beautiful, thin: They looked like models, practically, so what were they doing preaching the merits of dorkiness?" (Marcus 2010, p. 144). This problem of the burden of representativeness, familiar to feminist politics since its beginning and to autobiographers, is overcome by her seeing that the zine published letters from readers, "so Christina knew that if she wrote a letter it would be read" (Marcus 2010, p. 144). Marcus's narration continues:

> She wrote back that same night, saying that she loved the zine but also felt alienated from it because (she wrote), you see, I really *am* a dork, not like

> you; I'm chubby and dorky and a total nerd. What she meant but didn't write explicitly: I would love to claim my oddness as cool, but if beautiful girls take over the 'dork' label, where does that leave me? (Marcus 2010, p. 144)

Marcus's use of narration in detailing Woolner's experience reveals her investment in celebrating the power of letter writing in Riot Grrrl. Her appropriation of Woolner's voice and experience is undertaken in order to emphasise how the zine—as a privileged media form of Riot Grrrl—empowered individual girls to get involved in the discourse of the movement by "writing back" to the young women who appeared to be leading its development (in this case, members of Bikini Kill). Marcus's choices as a writer reinscribe this division between the everyday teenage girls (whose voices are available for appropriation) and the cultural figures whose creative practice is the hub of the movement. Marcus's story about Christina continues:

> Kathleen [Hanna, of Bikini Kill] was getting a lot of letters that year, from boys who felt excluded or attacked by her band, and from girls who felt galvanised or intimidated or both. She replied to as many as she could. In Kathleen's letter back to Christina, she wrote that lots of people feel uncool on the inside even if you can't tell by looking at them. She also wrote that she was trying to use attractiveness as a tool for getting her message out. … Most important, Kathleen wrote to Christina, 'You've got to do a zine, cool dork girl!' (Marcus 2010, pp. 144–145)

Respectfully referred to in the third person, and delimited with quotation marks, Marcus's text retains a respectful distance from Hanna's point of view. Yet, in the previous parts of the story, Marcus's narration does not reserve the same respectful distance from Woolner, whose first person point of view is combined with the narrator's in order to make Christina a character available for the reader's identification. Marcus's treatment of letter writing clearly depicts the importance of letters in the aesthetics and politics of Riot Grrrl. Christina asks a question about Riot Grrrl that Hanna answers, and in providing that answer, she provides Christina with the encouragement she needed to make a zine about her own experience which she circulated at Riot Grrrl events

(Marcus 2010, p. 163). Marcus's account of letter writing makes clear how the zines were *used* by individuals within the movement to spread the word and make individual connections, and in what follows, we build on her account by offering the first attempt to describe the features of letter writing in Riot Grrrl as a theory and a practice of life writing that was both important for individuals and fundamental to the development of the aesthetics of Riot Grrrl as a cultural movement. We do this by thinking about the letters of Riot Grrrl as an epistolarium. Before we discuss the letters in detail, however, we will provide some context in relation to the letters we accessed, and their position within a larger archive of materials relating to Riot Grrrl.

Archiving Riot Grrrl: Positioning the Epistolarium

Writing about the formation of the Riot Grrrl archive, the senior archivist at Fales, Lisa Darms states: "I wanted to preserve this history in all its multiplicity, in a way that opens up the movement, eschewing strict periodization and categories, while still making it accessible" (Darms 2012, p. 336). One impetus behind the formation of the Riot Grrrl Collection was to extend the visibility of Riot Grrrl beyond the publications and art forms that had come to dominate scholarly and historical accounts of its activity, namely zines. The problem of the over representation of zines in remembering and interpreting Riot Grrrl is addressed explicitly by Darms who claims that "the relative preponderance of zines in this and other collections, their importance as a mode of riot grrrl activism seems overstated" (Darms 2012, p. 338). To counter this, Darms articulates the aim and contents of the Riot Grrrl Collection in the following way:

> The Riot Grrrl Collection's primary mandate is to collect the personal papers of musicians, writers, artists, and activists involved in the movement's early years (1989–1996). The papers demonstrate the donors' creative processes, we well as the development of the movement overall. … In addition to zines (and zine masters), Fales collected riot grrrl-related correspondence, artwork, journals and notebooks, audio and video recordings,

> photographs, clippings, and flyers, as well as source materials relating to the creation of these works and events. (Darms 2012, p. 337)

This mandate to collect and organise the papers of Riot Grrrl participants in "the archival and manuscript tradition" (Darms 2012, p. 337) results in the contents of the Riot Grrrl Collection being organised biographically. The contents of the archive are identifiable through the identity of the donor, thus within the Collection, there exists a number of collections of papers, such as the Kathleen Hanna Papers, the Ramdasha Bikceem Riot Grrrl Collection and the Tammy Rae Carland Riot Grrrl Collection. Wherever possible, the papers are entered into the archive in the order the donor kept them, preserving the categories the donors themselves used to organise their material. The Fales team does, however, impose some order where they may be none, organising material alphabetically or chronologically in some instances. Letters are visible in the Riot Grrrl Collection through the category of Correspondence, which is presented as a Series or Subseries within a given person's papers. For example, in the Kathleen Hanna Papers, letters appear as files in Series 1: Filing Cabinet Files, which is "comprised of the contents of a filing cabinet in which Hanna stored Riot Grrrl related materials from the early 1990s until the collection was donated to Fales in 2010" ("Guide"). Files in this series include several folders titled "Old Tax Stuff" and "Le Tigre Memories" as well as numerous files dedicated to Hanna's zine projects. By contrast, the letters in the Molly Neuman Riot Grrrl Collection are filed as a Series titled "Correspondence" which is alphabetically organised (e.g. "Correspondence Filed Under H") and numerous files of "Miscellaneous Papers." In the case of Neuman, the letters are presented "in the original order" ("Guide"), while in the case of Ramdasha Bikceem's correspondence files, alphabetical order has been prescribed, with little sense of how Bikceem may have stored the letters herself. By organising the papers in this way, Fales allows the researcher partial access to how some of the donors positioned letters stemming from their involvement in Riot Grrrl in their personal archives. Hanna comments that the choice of archive (Fales) was also a statement about Riot Grrrl aesthetics: "It's like people who make paper fanzines in 2010 are making a specific choice to reach a smaller audience than maybe a blog could, it's an artistic decision.

One that has to do with having a tactile object that exists in the real world and can be physically passed from person to person. Choosing an archive that has an intended audience and isn't for everyone is a similar choice to me" (Hanna in Eichhorn 2014, p. 105).

The visibility and prominence of letters of Riot Grrrl in the Fales Collection clearly situates letter writing as one of many art forms utilised by the movement in the articulation and circulation of its ideas and aesthetics. Of the hundreds of files held in the collection, a significant number includes correspondence. Of course, Darms' decision to use existing manuscript approaches to organise the papers contributes to this visibility, as "correspondence" is a longstanding category for the organisation of personal papers. Yet, there is no denying the sheer number of letters in the Riot Collection. Over the course of a five-day visit to the archive in September 2014, Anna viewed 99 folders of correspondence, taken from the following collections within the Riot Grrrl Collection: Ramdasha Bikceem Riot Grrrl Collection, 1974–1998 (bulk 1991–1995); Tammy Rae Carland "I (heart) Amy Carter" Riot Grrrl Collection, 1989–1996; Johanna Fateman Riot Grrrl Collection, 1991–2006; Kathleen Hanna Papers, 1988–2005; Elena Humphreys Riot Grrrl Collection, 1972–1998 (bulk 1991–1996); Mr. Lady Archive, 1992–2005; Molly Neuman Riot Grrrl Collection, 1986–2002 (Bulk 1988–1996). Of the 116 folders of correspondence in these collections, Anna viewed all but 17 folders of correspondence from the Neuman Collection. These collections were selected using a number of criteria: the status of the donor in current histories of Riot Grrrl (Hanna, Neuman), the extent to which correspondence was a significant feature of the collection (Neuman, Bikceem and Carland each has over 20 folders of correspondence in their papers), and a desire to have a mix of roles in Riot Grrrl represented, with musicians such as Hanna and Neuman; zinesters such as Carland, Fateman and Bikceem; zinemakers and organisers such as Humphreys who was heavily involved with the New York City chapter of Riot Grrrl; and distributors such as Mr. Lady, a record label dedicated to "supporting lesbian and feminist musicians and artists" run by Tammy Rae Carland and Kaia Wilson ("Mr. Lady Descriptive Summary"). Many of the women who have donated their papers to the Collection played multiple roles in Riot Grrrl's cultural production. Tammy Rae Carland was an influential writer

through her zine *I (Heart) Amy Carter*, while also playing an important role in the distribution of Riot Grrrl music and culture through Mr. Lady. Fateman, too, played multiple roles, conducting her own art practice throughout the period, forming the band Le Tigre with Hanna, and sometimes acting as Hanna's editor. Bikceem was an important proponent of girl's skateboarding and an influential writer and critic of Riot Grrrl through her zine *Gunk*. Neuman, too, wrote the influential zine *Girl Germs* with her friend Allison Wolfe, with whom she formed the important Riot Grrrl band Bratmobile.

In our characterisation of the Riot Grrrl epistolarium below, we have attempted to provide sufficient quotations from the material to support our argument, within the limits placed on us by the need to secure approval for reproducing material from every author. (Copyright of all materials within the archive remains with the authors. This limits our ability to provide lengthy citations and examples from the letters.)

The Riot Grrrl Epistolarium

A representative approach, such as the one taken by Marcus in the case of Christina Woolner, offers some insight into how letters functioned in Riot Grrrl by renarrating individual instances of letter writing. We have a slightly different task in mind, following Jolly and Stanley into the epistolarium in order to provide "some kind of overview" that "constitutes an albeit provisional attempt to comprehend an entirety that never actually existed in the form of 'a whole' or 'a collection'" (Stanley 2004, pp. 204–205). We take up the concept of the epistolarium in order to suggest what might characterise features of the Riot Grrrl letters based on the limited view of it offered by the Fales Riot Grrrl Collection. The Fales collection is in no way representative of the movement, and there are no doubt elements of the Riot Grrrl epistolarium that remain invisible or barely visible because of the collection's focus on *active* members of Riot Grrrl. Our view is also limited by the unknown numbers of letters and groups of correspondence that may have been discarded by Riot Grrrls. Our thinking about the Riot Grrrl epistolarium is but a first attempt to look at the letters of Riot Grrrl, and, if anything, indicates the further

work that can be undertaken as the Fales Riot Grrrl Collection grows, and as other collections of Riot Grrrl letters emerge.

To begin, what is an epistolarium?

In one of a number of articles in which she develops, rethinks and refines the concept, Stanley proposes the following definition:

> The epistolarium is a heuristic for thinking about letters and other epistolary activity. It is concerned with the epistolary output of a particular person … or organisational entity … and considers the dialogical, perspectival, emergent and sequential aspects of this. It also incorporates (at least) four dimensions of their letters: (i) what now remains, someone's extant letters and other epistolary material; (ii) all their epistolary activity, all the letters they ever wrote including in some way those no longer extant; (iii) all their (extant or total) letter writing, and also all that of their correspondents in writing to them (their correspondences in full); and their 'ur-letters,' that is, the simulacra that are produced by editorially transcribing and publishing 'the letters of John Keats' or 'the correspondence of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West'. (Stanley 2011, p. 137)

The concept of the epistolarium makes it possible for the scholar working on a body of correspondence, which may be spread out over numerous archives, to develop an understanding of how letters were used by a specific individual or group of individuals while acknowledging the partiality of the material available. Initially, highly influenced by Derrida's arguments about loss and absence as the defining characteristic of the letter, Stanley's sustained work on the extensive epistolarium of the South African feminist and social theorist Olive Schreiner (1855–1920) has led to a number of publications on the topic (Stanley 2004, 2011, 2015, Jolly and Stanley 2005). Stanley's theorising of letters through the concept of the epistolarium can assist an examination of letters in Riot Grrrl by providing a way of accounting both for the partiality of the material available, and by encouraging us to think about the writing and receiving of letters as a key component of the cultural activity *of* Riot Grrrl. Approaching the dozens of folders of correspondence held in the Fales collection as an epistolarium allows us to consider how the movement used this life writing form—alongside the personal writing of zines—to enact key tenets of Riot Grrrl philosophy, to seek connection across

distance and to forge relationships. The letter is not *incidental* to any of these elements of Riot Grrrl, it is not merely a communication tool that the participants in Riot Grrrl made use of for their ends. Rather, the Riot Grrrl epistolarium shows us young women using the intimacy and reciprocity that is unique to the letter form to instantiate the movement and to explore the possibility of different relationships between girls.

Based on our research in the Riot Grrrl Collection, we propose that there are two kinds of letters that characterise the Riot Grrrl epistolarium. One kind is the letter of "first contact." These letters represent an attempt to *establish* a relationship of reciprocity, sometimes with a named addressee (as Woolner wrote to Hanna) and sometimes with "Riot Grrrl" itself. The second type of letters that characterise the epistolarium are letters between people who already know each other. These letters offer a material representation of the movement and the network, and link young women to each other across distance. In what follows, we elucidate the characteristics of these elements of the epistolarium.

First Contact

In her author's note, titled "I Was Going to Be One of Them," Sara Marcus describes her experience of connecting with Riot Grrrl via a letter. After reading about the Riot Grrrl movement in the (in)famous 1992 article in *Newsweek*, a young Marcus "scoured the *Washington Post* Style section, studied the 'Meetings' classified ads in the *City Paper*, looked under 'Riot Grrrl' in the DC phone book, and checked the bulletin board of the feminist bookstore downtown" (Marcus 2010, p. 4). When the feminist journal *off our backs* published an interview "with a few riot grrrls—and listed the group's post office box address," Marcus "mailed off an effusive letter" (Marcus 2010, p. 6). "I heard nothing back for months," she tells us (Marcus 2010, p. 6). (Later, when Marcus starts attending chapter meetings at Positive Force House in DC, she finds a filing cabinet "stuffed full of letters from girls like me who had happened upon the address and written in, seeking encouragement, hope and connection" [Marcus 2010, pp. 8–9].) When Marcus finally received a reply, it was not in the form of a letter from another girl, but was "an envelope …

with three xeroxed flyers" (Marcus 2010, p. 6). The Riot Grrrl epistolarium is full of the kinds of letter Marcus wrote. Specific collections that hold numerous examples of them are the papers of Tammy Rae Carland, Ellena Humphreys and Ramdasha Bikceem. The first contact letters of the epistolarium fall into two groups: those like Marcus's which address "Riot Grrrl" as a movement rather than being written to an individual, and those letters written to zine writers and band members, which we discuss below. Many "first contact" letters are housed in the Humphreys collection, as she was instrumental in organising the Riot Grrrl NYC chapter. These letters often lack an addressee and are addressed directly to "Riot Grrrls" or, in some cases, to the "Staff Person," a phrasing that echoes the formal function of the letter and its use in communicating with institutions. In the Riot Grrrl Collection these open, first contact letters come from both women and men, and from countries outside the USA (including Australia, Finland and France).

In theorising the letters as a gift, Liz Stanley suggests that "[i]n the *epistolary* gift exchange, what is circulated are the letters sent and replied to, but, more particularly, it involves the circulation and symbolic gifting of relationships—the reciprocity of correspondence" (Stanley 2011, p. 140). In the first contact letters written to Riot Grrrl chapters, girls ask the movement to give something to them. These letters are less securely placed in the rhetoric of addressee–addressor than a letter with a defined recipient, and are more akin to the mythic message in a bottle. A letter is sent not to an individual, but to an amorphous and wished-for group. The letter *is* the wish for reciprocity, a document of seeking. This seeking and wishing letter sometimes comes as a plea: a strategy possibly intended to elicit a response by establishing the letter writer as a girl in need of help *from other girls*, and thus establishing the Riot Grrrls (the idealised addressee) in an ethics of care. For Jolly, an ethics of care is fundamental to feminist letter writing in the second wave, where "epistolary discourses and practices reached for the idea of liberation through a certain form of unquantifiable personal engagement" (Jolly 2008, p. 88). For the letter writers of the second wave, revolution comes through relationships, not despite them. Yet, for Nguyen, this idealism and its retelling in histories of Riot Grrrl "when viewed in light of histories of desire for access and attachment to racial, colonial others, may turn out to be the reiteration of

those histories in new idioms" (Nguyen 2012, pp. 174–175). That is to say, that Riot Grrrl's focus on intimate self-knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge with other girls created an environment in which "some persons—persons of color, for instance … bear the burden of representation ('you are here as an example') and the weight of pedagogy ('teach us about your people')" (Nguyen 2012, p. 180). The "first contact" letters in the Riot Grrrl epistolarium dramatise this tension: who is asked for help, and who bears the "burden" of helping? This tension has parallels with Jolly's examination of the dynamic and fluctuating discourses of self-care, autonomy and community in second-wave feminism (Jolly 2008, pp. 164–171).

In Marcus's account of Riot Grrrl, these attempts to establish relationships are depicted as successful (as in her own story, and that of Christina) and the responsibility of answering the letters falls to the young women running Riot Grrrl chapters. Her depiction of the response to first contact letters in the Riot Grrrls Twin Cities (Minneapolis), drawing on an interview with Elizabeth Anthony, a key member of the group, provides important insight into how Riot Grrrl chapters dealt with the influx of this kind of correspondence:

> Elizabeth added her address to the list of Riot Grrrl chapters that was traversing the country in zines and on flyers. Letters poured in to Elizabeth's campus mailbox from girls all over the country, especially from the Midwest. The letter writers wanted information about what Riot Grrrl was, advice on how to start a chapter, or just some reassurance that there was *hope* for people like them. One girl writing from North Dakota lamented that nobody in her town even knew what feminist was. 'It was kind of like they just wanted us to know they existed out there,' Elizabeth said. She divided up the mail among the chapter's members, and everybody who wrote in got a response. (Marcus 2010, p. 207)

Here the collective work of a Riot Grrrl chapter answers the individual gifts and the request of each sender to "know more" about Riot Grrrl. The presence of these "first contact" letters in the archive and the narrative of the work of responding to the letters presented by Marcus offers a glimpse of the epistolarium: the letters reportedly sent, possibly now lost,

the work undertaken by the Twin Cities Riot Grrrls to give each letter writer a personal response.

Later in her history of Riot Grrrl, Marcus adds another piece of information about the way "first contact" letters generated activity in the epistolarium. Confronting the "morass of mail that had been building up ever since" Riot Grrrl had been reported in the music magazine *Spin*, it takes the DC Riot Grrrl chapter members "six hours to open all the envelopes, unfold all the handwritten notes" (Marcus 2010, p. 243). Instead of responding to the attempt to establish a personal relationship with Riot Grrrl through the gift of the letter, Washington, CD chapter "made a new zine to send to the supplicants" encouraging them to take up the Riot Grrrl cause in the spirit of DIY, rather than seeking permission to start a chapter or become involved (Marcus 2010, p. 243).

In this example, a letter-gift is responded to with a zine-gift. The letters spur the chapter members into action to make a zine that can be given to the hundreds of girls that sent letters attempting to create a relationship with the movement of Riot Grrrl. The Riot Grrrls respond to the ethic of care by working collectively in a form (the zine) that sits somewhere between the public and private form of address, showing that in the case of Riot Grrrl, the epistolarium extends to include other media forms. In this case, the Riot Grrrls make a tactical shift in media (De Certeau 2011): responding individually to the hundreds of letters is too time consuming for a group of volunteers, and the repetitive nature of the questions asked could lead to the exhaustion with politics Mimi Thi Nguyen reports was experienced by Riot Grrrl of colour Bianca Oritz who feels "time and emotional labour [was] wasted writing personal letters to 'one million white girls,' especially where women of colour critics (such as herself) are relegated to the role of educator" (Nguyen 2012, p. 180). The tactical responses of the women of colour Riot Grrrls such as Oritz, Nguyen and the members of the DC chapters show that letter writing could generate zine making, an important shift of address that extends the texts of the Riot Grrrl epistolarium to include the one-on-one reciprocal relationship of correspondence and the more ambiguous, and rhetorically complex form of the zine, where the zine writer deploys a complex narratorial perspective and multiple forms of address (see Piepemeir 2009, Poletti 2008). Nguyen's arguments about Riot Grrrl and race, Marcus' interviews with Riot Grrrl chapter members

and the letters archived in the Fales Riot Grrrl Collection demonstrate that zines were important to Riot Grrrl because they allowed some Riot Grrrls to respond to the request for a relationships in a more flexible and removed form. Yet this is not to imply that the forms of address in letters are simple or "merely" personal, as the second type of "first contact" letters in the Riot Grrrl epistolarium demonstrate.

Fan Grrrls

While "first contact" letters written to Riot Grrrl chapters sought information and to establish an ethics of care in the recipient, the Riot Grrrl epistolarium also includes first contact letters that we will refer to as "fan grrrl letters." Letters of this kind are intended to show the recipient—usually a girl musician or zine maker—that the author has something to *give*. Attention, appreciation, confirmation of experience and encouragement to continue to create are offered up to the addressee of these letters, and Tammy Rae Carland and Ramdash Bikceem's papers evidence that many such letters were an important part of the Riot Grrrl epistolarium. "Fan grrrl" letters written to zine makers and musicians narrate identification, love, admiration and gratefulness. These letters are some of the most interesting in the archive because they evidence the success of the "girl love" slogan of Riot Grrrl, showing the effort girls put into writing to the artists who were engaged in cultural production. Fan grrrl letters reconfigure the degraded cultural figure of the teenage girl fan as both the engine (most voracious) of mass produced popular culture and an emblem of the mindless female fandom (Driscoll 1999, p. 177) into a supportive source of energy and love for the female artist. By insisting that girls love and support each other, Riot Grrrl allowed for the expression of fannish appreciation of their peers. Coupled with the punk ethos of DIY and the explicit eschewing of an aesthetics dependent on a mastery of the tools of cultural production, the letters of Riot Grrrl suggest a circuit of energy and support was created and maintained through life writing—girls being fans of girls, and expressing that fandom through letters and other means provided the validation for Riot Grrrl artists and writers to continue to make work despite mainstream media attention

often involving sensationalist and gender-focussed coverage of the female artists associated with Riot Grrrl (see Strong 2011).

Marcus summarises the importance of girls being audiences for the work of other girls when she writes that one important element of the "girls to the front" ethos of Riot Grrrl bands was that it put a supportive audience in front of the female musicians. The tactic also bound the audience together in the moment and in reference to their future creative potential. At Riot Grrrl gigs, girls would all dance

> … together, facing the stage, rapt, performing complete absorption in the [Riot Grrrl] band that was playing—both as a retort to [male] slammers … and as a defiant embrace of fandom, so long a disempowering stance for girls but now rehabilitated. Because their fandom could draw art into the world, pull it into the open like heat bringing blood to the surface of skin. By going wild when Bikini Kill or Bratmobile played, the girls were making a promise to one another that as soon as any of *them* got a project going, there would be an adoring passel of girls up front, dancing like crazy. (Marcus 2010, p. 125)

Fan letters to zine writers were often a similar performative act: by writing to each other in response to their zines, girls made manifest the audience zine writers imagined and posited through their publications (Warner 2002). The Riot Grrrl's use of physical presence at gigs and letters to zine makers and musicians resonates with please use of letters in second-wave feminism where women "are one another's best lovers as well as correspondents" (Jolly 2008, p. 29). This love, as many of the letters testify and Nguyen argues, is troubled and troubling, but like the second-wave letters studied by Jolly, "as a record of a romance with the *idea* of political identity itself, these letters form an importance element in the 'corporeal soul' of feminism, as well as a literary culture based on women's writing and reading for one another" (Jolly 2008, p. 48).

Letters to Carland and Bikceem evidence their power as coaxers of life writing, and why letters were of particular importance to the Riot Grrrl movement. As material gifts that seek to establish as relationship of reciprocity, letters allowed readers of Riot Grrrl zines to give something back, both materially and symbolically, to the zine makers whose work was so important to the movement. The primacy of personal experience and

life narrative *to* the Riot Grrrl ethos—a reworking of the second wave's consciousness-raising strategies—also made letters a perfect medium for readers of zines isolated from the areas of geographical concentration of Riot Grrrl (Olympia, Washington DC, Minneapolis, New York City) to seek and establish a physical connection with the movement. In the collections donated by Bikceem and Carland, we see many readers of their zines write in to confirm how important the zine was to them, and offer up narratives from their own lives to inaugurate the gifting and reciprocity inherent in the personal letter form.

In a letter dated November 1 1994, Miriam Basilio writes to Carland:

> Dear Tammy Rae,
>
> I am writing because I got a copy of I (heart) Amy Carter when I was in S.F. this summer & I think it's amazing!!! (I feel kind of like a giddy teenager writing a fan letter or like I'm writing a letter to a prospective pen-pal).

Basilio writes that she attends NYUs graduate programme in Art History, and offers Rae some references for further reading on women's art practice and politics, as well as commenting on an exhibition of work made in response to the trial of Aileen Wuornos, a sex worker who had murdered seven men (later the subject of the award-winning film *Monster* [2003]). Basilio closes her two-page letter by offering to send Rae a copy of a forthcoming zine she has writing in, saying "Anyway, I just wanted to tell you that I (heart) Amy Carter is inspirational!" signing off with her first name and a small self-portrait drawn in biro[1] (Fig. 5.1).

This mix of self-consciousness about writing and her offering up of material from her own life and experience through the letter to Rae is echoed across the fan grrrl letters in the Fales Collection, particularly in the collections of zine makers Bikceem and Carland. Bikceem, for example, received numerous letters from girls who were also engaged in skateboarding who describe their own position within their local skate scene, the resources available, and how they relate to the boys and men

[1] Basilio confirmed in correspondence with the authors that she and Carland went on to collaborate on projects, with Basilio appearing in one of Carland's films, and authoring a peer-reviewed article that included an in-depth discussion of Carland's artwork that engaged with the Wuornos case.

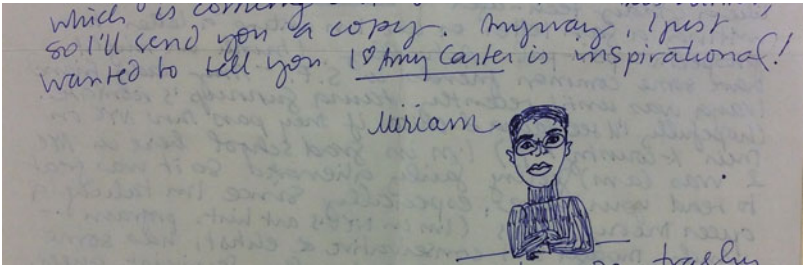

Fig. 5.1 Extract from a letter to Tammy Rae Carland from Miriam Basilio (The Fales Library Riot Grrrl Collection, New York University. Tammy Rae Carland "I (heart) Amy Carter" Riot Grrrl Collection MSS 290, Series I Correspondence. Reproduced with permission from the author)

who also skate locally. (See e.g. the letter from Denise Enriques [Guide to Ramdasha Bikceem Riot Grrrl Collection].)

The "fan grrrl" letter of first contact also appears in Riot Grrrl zines, such as *Girl Germs*, where letters to the zine makers Allison and Molly are published in the zine itself (Darms 2013, pp. 54–55). These "ur-letters" (Stanley 2011, p. 137) demonstrate that, during its most active years, the importance of letters to the movement was presented in the pages of zines. In issue 3 of *Girl Germs,* letters are reformatted and republished in the letters page, echoing the format of the "Letter to the Editor" pages of commercial print media such as magazines and newspapers. The "ur-letters" are twice removed from their original context when they reappear in facsimile reproductions of the zine pages in the publication about the Fales Collection edited by Darms. As we have seen with Marcus's account of Woolner's letter to Hanna, the publishing of letters within zines formed an important part of the rhetoric of accessibility of Riot Grrrl, one that is critiqued by Nguyen and which we discuss in more detail in our conclusion.

The Work of Articulation: Letters Between Friends

While the "first contact" letters offer a vital means for young women to overcome geographical distance in forming the community, letters also played an important role in maintaining and fostering personal and

artistic relationships that developed within Riot Grrrl, particularly for the young female musicians who were often on tour with their bands (such as Hanna and Neuman). Such letters, as Liz Stanley has argued, are a recognisable form of life writing that trouble Derrida's theoretical formulation of the letter as a form defined by absence. In her discussion of Olive Schreiner and her many correspondents, Liz Stanley observes:

> for many of these correspondents, their letters are the continuation of presence by other (epistolary) means, with the interrupted presence of these people in a sense 'joined' by letters that maintain the flow of contact, exchange, chatter and so forth that would have taken place (in somewhat different ways) when present to each other face to face. (Stanley 2011, pp. 137–138)

For Stanley, it is a wilful act of misrecognition by the critic to apply the strictly deconstructist view of writing to epistolariums that include letters that clearly suggest the form can be used to maintain *co-presence*. Among the musicians represented in the Riot Grrrl epistolarium, such as Hanna and Neuman, there is ample evidence that letters were a key aesthetic form that offered a means of materially symbolising allegiance and collaboration across geographical distances.

One example of how letters extend co-presence and the ethos of collaboration can be found in the collection of letters Joanne Fateman kept from Kathleen Hanna. Fateman stored these letters together, and in the epistolarium, they are collected in a folder titled "Kathleen" (Fig. 5.2).

This particular letter is a trace of Hanna and Fateman's collaboration as artists and friends and indicates the variety of roles and identities that Riot Grrrl made available to Hanna. Two spare keys to Fateman's home are taped to the letter, which includes a mix of typed and handwritten text from Hanna. Hanna is returning the keys, and sending Fateman the proceeds for the sale of her artwork in an art show organised by Hanna. While Hanna comments ironically on her role as a "sleazy art dealer," the letter is also a document of the DIY ethos associated with punk that Riot Grrrl was in the process of turning to feminist cultural ends: rather than wait for their artwork to be exhibited, young women such

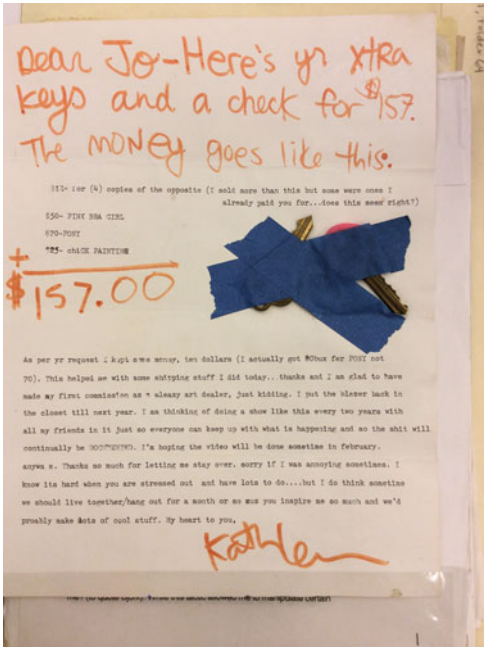

Fig. 5.2 Letter from Kathleen Hanna to Johanna Fateman (The Fales Library Riot Grrrl Collection, New York University. Johanna Fateman Collection MSS 258, Series III Correspondence. Reproduced with permission from the author)

as Hanna were organising, managing and accounting for (both literally and figuratively) the artistic work of other young women. Alongside outlining Fateman's financial share of the proceeds from the sale of her artwork Hanna articulates her point of view on the larger importance of the exhibition and the purpose of the work she undertakes as an organiser: "I am thinking of doing a show like this every two years with all my friends in it so that everyone can keep up with what is happening and so that shit will continually be DOCUMENTED." Statements of intent such as this are common in letters among the young women and men who got to know each other through Riot Grrrl and who maintained a correspondence. In letters such as these, the *purpose* and *intent* of Riot Grrrl and its political commitments is both worked through and enacted. This work includes acknowledging the ethical requirement

to consider how Hanna's advocacy for Fateman's artistic practice—her work as the "sleazy art dealer"—occurs within an intimate friendship that includes Fateman hosting Hanna in her home**.** In a letter such as this, as in Miriam Basilio's letter to Tammy Rae Carland, we see multiple "I"s on the page, as the author forges new identities through dialogue with the receiver. Both Hanna and Basilio present themselves as advocates, potential collaborators and a source of resources for the recipients of their letters. Yet they also renegotiate and attempt to retool identities from the larger cultural context, the "sleazy art dealer" associated with the commodification of art (an anathema of punk) and the figure of the female fan, a figure Riot Grrrl successfully repurposed into a vital source of energy and empowerment.

The use of letters to extend and maintain co-presence in order to continue the work of discussing what Riot Grrrl is and could mean can also be found in the Fateman's letter to Hanna. In this letter, Fateman relates a conversation across the feminist generations that she has had with her "feminist art lady" teacher at college:

> I have been doing some work for one of my teachers who is a seventies feminist art lady. She was asking me about riot grrrl and then she gave me a copy of a letter that one woman in the feminist art scene gave another concerning a remark she made about the Guerrilla Girls (publicly). Of course there are a lot of differences between RG and Guerrilla Girls but my teacher's point was to share "living history" about how … the media fuels women's misconceptions about each other. (Fateman cited in Darms 2012, p. 339)

Fateman includes a reproduction of the letter shared by her teacher with her own letter, enfolding the earlier practices of letter writing among feminists into her own correspondence with Hanna. For Darms, "[t]he letter—and its enclosure within Fateman's original correspondence—illustrates the repetitions that characterize activism, where each generation must relearn the lessons of the past, and which the existence of an archive of activism might be able to interrupt" (Darms 2012, p. 339). This somewhat melancholy interpretation, that rightly justifies the importance of the Fales Collection making these histories more widely

available, could be tempered by examining the larger narrative context in which Fateman introduces the earlier letter she has been shown. Immediately before introducing her teacher and their conversation, Fateman has been updating Hanna on her activities and her feelings. Fateman reports that she is really enjoying living in New York and is realising how to approach art school so she can get what she needs from it (Fateman in Darms (2013)). This sentence precedes the introduction of the teacher and the shared letter, and Fateman's reflection on the continuing struggle female artists have against the patriarchal discourse that encourages women to constantly feel in competition with each other. This competitiveness was a key focus of critique in Riot Grrrl and the "grrrl love" slogan was a primary means of encouraging young women to question this element of their socialisation. In sharing the history of how an earlier feminist had attempted to critically engage with fellow feminist and artist, Fateman offers up a resource to Hanna that can feed into their collective project.

The Riot Grrrl Archive evidences many exchanges of correspondence such as that between Hanna and Fateman. Their presence indicates that the letter—as a physical object as well as a complex aesthetic and rhetorical form—gave many Riot Grrrls an avenue for exploring and negotiating a collective aesthetic and political project. In taking up the letter form as a key medium in the practice of Riot Grrrl, the young women continued a long tradition of feminist letter writing (Jolly 2008, Stanley 2011, 2015). But does the continuation of this association between feminism and life writing inevitably limit the political force of the Riot Grrrl's feminism?

The Problem of Intimacy for/in Young Women's Feminism

For Mimi Thi Nguyen, an active participant in Riot Grrrl and now a scholar of gender studies, the importance of personal experience and the exchange of life writing in Riot Grrrl must be understood as occurring within a larger cultural trend that

> register[s] how neoliberalism and its emphases on the entrepreneurial subject shapes even progressive or feminist adjustments to the structural determinations that constitute the historical present, engendering an emotional style, and a rhetorical practice, that sometimes glossed intimacy for reciprocity, experience for expertise, and misrecognized how forces work through these idioms. (Nguyen 2012, pp. 177–178)

Like Leigh Gilmore's (2010) warning about the "neoconfessional" genres of life writing proliferating in mainstream American culture through neoliberal forms such as Oprah's book club, Nguyen is sceptical about the political efficacy of Riot Grrrl's reliance on the life writing discourse of confession as a means of establishing an ethics of care. Nguyen's concern appears to centre on the danger of life writing forms being "juxtapolitical" "acting as a critical chorus that sees the expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration as achievement enough" (Berlant 2008, p. x). As we discuss in more detail in our chapter on zines, this question of the political efficacy of young people's life writing is a recurring one in scholarship, particularly when it is concerned with life writing and other cultural activities that occur in counterpublics. As our discussion of the memoirs of child soldiers also showed, the question of the "efficacy" of young people's life writing haunts the young writers who seek publication in the market; a problem we explore further in the next chapter, when we examine memoirs of "girlhoods at risk." Yet, the Riot Grrrl epistolarium demonstrates that the diverse uses of life writing discourse resist an easy classification as confessional, and that life writing can serve a range of purposes. An important means of documenting the work of making cultural spaces determined by young women (as seen in Hanna's letter), letters also offered an aesthetic for performing and exploring multiple positions in relation to the personal–political commitment Riot Grrrl demanded. While the offering of personal information (as in the letter from Miriam Basilio to Tammy Rae Carland) and contextual information (suggestions for further reading or updates on cultural activity that may or may not be aligned with the movement) regularly appears in the correspondence, the letters in the Fales Collection show that this is not always presented in a confessional mode that was unaware of how forces of neoliberalism demand that young people both undertake the work of

self-reflection and self-determination associated with youth as a life stage, and present that work as an entrepreneurial project. In the case of Hanna and Fateman, for example, the work of finding a way to be a young female and feminist artist is undertaken through a complex and shared negotiation of practices that seek to make a feminist historical present, as Hanna asserts: "so that shit will continually be DOCUMENTED." For letter writers seeking connection with Riot Grrrl artists, the subject position of the fan is renarrated in order to perform the support for young women's creativity that defined Riot Grrrl. The privacy of the letter form, compared with the more public form of the zine, is central to this work because it enables more critical reflection on female artistic practice, speculation and thinking-through, free from the need to present a "united" feminist front, such as that articulated in infamous "Revolution Grrrl Style Now" manifesto.

For Jolly, the epistolary forms of feminism can be understood as "ropes that twist together romance and realism, gift and demand, education and desire, rejection and dependence to form a literature that is not only rhetorical in the classic sense of an art of persuasion but eloquent about relationship itself" (Jolly 2008, p. 75). In connecting the letters of Riot Grrrl to the existing scholarship on letters in feminism, we have shown how the Riot Grrrls continued and repurposed these ropes for their own use. We have also shown how the Riot Grrrl letters are positioned with the larger media ecology of Riot Grrrl, which included the vital forms of music, zines and visual art. The Riot Grrrl epistolarium holds an important place within this media ecology because the form of the letter allowed young women to forge and negotiate their relationships with each other and with the movement they were founding. These relationships were the foundation of Riot Grrrl's call for increasing young women's cultural participation and agency.

6

Impossible Subjects: Addiction and Redemption in Memoirs of Girlhood

The "Bad Girls" of Memoir

In 2005 Abigail Vona's memoir *Bad Girl: Confessions of a Teenaged Delinquent* was released. The memoir is a redemption narrative recounting Vona's experiences of adolescent drug and alcohol abuse, violence, self-harm and stealing. Written at age 19 about her experiences just 3–4 years earlier when she attended a "behaviour modification camp," Vona's memoir fuses psychiatric documents with youthful prose to offer a controversial insight into the experiences of Vona and her parents. Various similarly styled memoirs, with aligned subject matter, were released during the first decade of the 2000s, suggesting a readership for what has been broadly referred to as the "borderline girlhood" subgenre of memoir (Marshall 2006). The "borderline girlhood" mode of memoir first emerged strongly in the early 1990s with the publication of highly successful, often notorious memoirs such as Susannah Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1994)—a coming-of-age memoir relating Kaysen's struggles with mental health and institutionalisation (Marshall 2006). Other notable memoirs emerged at this moment, from Marya Hornbacher, Mary Karr, Lauren Slater and Elizabeth Wurtzel—covering territory such as illness, addiction

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and trauma. The interest in these memoirs reveals a strong and enduring market for girlhood memoir; but it is more than these young women's youth that is of interest: it is their narratives of extremity and importantly conversion or redemption via creativity. Rebecca Traister (2005) quotes a *New York Post* article bemoaning this trend, "The genre of female memoir … 'is on the verge of being inundated with confessional memoirs by girls whose main qualification is merely their extreme youth.'"

Although young women are some of history's most silent subjects, young female life writers have played an important role in developing the public literary form of contemporary life writing. A quick search of Amazon.com reveals a plethora of memoirs of adolescent crises published in the 2000s ranging from the popular/sensational through the middlebrow and literary. Girlhood memoirs also often engage with the early-to-mid-twenties years, for instance, the notion of the "quarter-life crisis"; for example, Diablo Cody's *Candy Girl: A Year in the Life of an Unlikely Stripper* (2006) and Brianna Karp's *The Girl's Guide to Homelessness* (2011) explore very different early twenty something crises. Such memoirs may be retrospective—for instance, written ten years after the fact (such as Cupcake Brown's *A Piece of Cake* [2007], Janice Erlbaum's *Girlbomb: A Halfway Homeless Memoir* [2007], or Heather King's *Parched: a Memoir* [2006]), or written with more immediacy—during youth, shortly after the events represented (such as Vona's aforementioned memoir, Kerry Cohen's *Loose Girl: a Memoir of Promiscuity* [2009] and Koren Zailckas' *Smashed: Memoir of a Drunken Girlhood* [2005]). It is the latter: texts written by authors during their youth, that we are most interested in here.

This trend to write or indeed desire to read about borderline girlhoods can be aligned with the "memoir boom" more generally. Ben Yagoda (2009) quotes Nielsen Bookscan in suggesting that sales of personal memoirs increased by 400% between 2004 and 2008 (p. 9). As Julie Rak (2013) notes, this does not take into account the circulation of memoirs in libraries or in the used-book trade (p. 8). Memoir sales continue to rise steadily, and this period also witnessed a significant rise in memoirs written by non-celebrity authors (Rak 2013, p. 9). Another relevant context here is the growing readership for, and appeal of, memoirs of trauma. "Misery memoir," characterised by representations of abuse, poverty and illness, became popular in the 1990s and its popularity endured into the

2000s (Yagoda 2009, p. 8–9). The most infamous of all misery memoirs is Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1998)—McCourt's hugely successful retrospective memoir of growing up impoverished in Ireland set the tone for memoir for many years following. Many successful autobiographies of childhood were published in the late 1990s and early 2000s, making this one of the most significant literary trends of the period (Douglas 2010). But the literary transactions that follow such cultural trends are more complex than the simple sharing of appealing and inspiring stories or rags-to-riches. As Hilary Mantel (2005) astutely reminds us, there is profit in painful stories and where young writers are concerned, it can be a highly exploitative venture:

> Misery into money; have publishers ever found an easier trick? Take a plain white cover, and decorate it with a blurry picture of a weepy toddler or stricken teenager; prepare for a best-seller, cashing in on the public appetite for self-congratulation. Such books are perversely cheering; as their reader, you are bound to be healthier and luckier than the junior punchbag within.

As suggested in the Introduction, adult writers (such as McCourt) engaging with the past and representing the child self have come to dominate non-fictional genres and occupy the available spaces for representing childhood and youth and negotiating these cultural identities. Further, when there are spaces for young writers to enter the literary sphere via memoir, trauma stories or "stunt" memoirs offering novel or provocative perspectives is often the most privileged mode.[1] For example, Janet Maslin (2005) writes of Koren Zailckas' alcohol abuse, suggesting, "It plagued her life, but it has jump-started her career." The complexities of responding to trauma memoir are multitudinous and have been explored by scholars such as Kylie Cardell and Kate Douglas (2013), Leigh Gilmore (2010, 2014) and Gillian Whitlock (2007). We hope to add to this dialogue in considering why borderline girlhoods have been such a feature of published memoir in the 1990s and 2000s. Why are narratives of fall and redemption such privileged modes of self-representation? How might the

[1] The term "stunt memoir" refers to a writer who lives a particular experience with the intention of writing about it. See Couser (2012, p. 13) who mentions A.J. Jacobs's *Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible*.

genre of memoir enable and, indeed, disable representations of girlhood? What cultural contexts (relating to perceptions, stereotypes and representations of girlhood) enable such memoirs? And finally, what challenges—whether practical, scholarly, moral or ethical—might such texts create for life writing scholars? In what ways do such representations of girlhood offer us "impossible subjects?" Shauna Pomerantz (2009) writes:

> As impossible subjects, girls are defined and regulated by an overarching dichotomy: the 'girl' as object and the 'girl' as subject. In the first category, the 'girl' is an object of the researcher's scrutiny, concern and derision … the 'girl' lacks agency, is viewed as a cultural dupe. … In the second category, the 'girl' is construed in exactly the opposite way. She is a subject with agency and the authority to control her own life. … Research based on this pole is celebratory in tone as in 'You go, girl!' and 'Girl power!' … I will offer a third option, one that is predicted on a feminist post-structuralist stance that eschews binary oppositions and narrow definitions in favour of generativity and the proliferation of difference and complexity.

How might these texts navigate the complex middle ground (for reading girlhood) that Pomerantz refers to?

We argue that the trends associated with published memoirs of girlhood deserve a nuanced analysis and that the discussion must be informed by the varied contexts from which these memoirs emerge. These are not simple narratives of fall and redemption. Our focus in this chapter is memoirist Koren Zailckas and her two memoirs: *Smashed* (2005) and *Fury: True Tales of a Good Girl Gone Ballistic* (2010) (though we make brief references to other memoirs from this era as relevant). *Smashed* and *Fury* employ a cross-discursive style to construct and resist paradigms for thinking about youth. We are interested in what this approach reveals about young female writers and their complex relationships with life narrative. For example, how do critics position Zailckas as a "young" life writer (different to other contemporary life writers)? Zailckas authorises her narratives by gesturing towards a distinctive youthful voice that builds upon the conventions of contemporary memoir more generally. Her narrative voice aims to: find an aesthetic for representing girlhood within memoir; remind the reader of her youthfulness; and offer overt political commentary on youth issues. These aims do not always sit well

within the memoirs, but her approach reveals something of the cultural position and work of young women's life narrative in the 2000s.

Positioning "the Girl"

As we have discussed throughout this study, perhaps the most significant shift associated with the term "youth" is its widening scope. The concept of youth and youthfulness now commonly encompass 20 somethings. The "girl" or "girlhood" is a similarly wide-ranging referent; just as "child" and "youth" are social, cultural and historical constructions, so is girlhood. But there is a fascinating and separate politics that has affected the notion of girlhood from the 1990s through the 2000s. As Mary Celeaste Kearney (2009) notes, scholars have become increasingly interested in girlhood, as distinct from feminist or women's studies, in recent decades. Kearney notes that when she entered graduate school in 1990 "Girls' Studies" did not exist as a notable scholarly discipline; girls had been largely marginalised by both feminist scholarship and youth-focussed scholarship. Kearney notes the important work of scholars in the 1970s and 1980s: most significantly Angela McRobbie and colleagues who were committed to studying girlhood and girlhood culture as "unique social formations." As Kearney (2009) argues, much has happened in the 2000s. Girlhood has become an important topic for interdisciplinary inquiry. She writes:

> In the first five years of the twenty-first century, academic presses virtually doubled the number of girl-specific monographs and anthologies that were published in the previous decade. Girls' Studies scholarship has also appeared in numerous referred journals, particularly those associated with youth research. … At least seven feminist journals … have devoted entire issues to girl-specific themes. More significantly, the first girl-centered academic periodical—*Girlhood Studies: An Interdisiciplinary Journal*—was launched in 2008.

Kearney acknowledges that though much of the scholarship has stemmed from research in the USA, Canada, UK and Australia; there is much scope (and hope) that girlhood studies will flourish outside of these national contexts.

As feminist scholars such as Angela McRobbie (1991) and Mary Celeste Kearney (2006, 2009) have noted, in literary and cultural discourses, "youth" is a term more often associated with young men; girls have been less visible as producers of culture. Further, as Catherine Driscoll (2002) contends, girls are "highly visible in … Western culture—mostly as a marker of immature and malleable identity, and as a publicly preeminent image of desirability." (p. 2). Pomerantz (2009) offers this summary,

> the 'girl' is one of the most talked about—and delineated—social categories in North America. Yet rather than generating more and more ways for girls to 'be' in our society, this proliferation of discourse has limited possibilities for girls, trapping them within polar states that regulate what they can say and do. These polarities condemn or condone, pathologize or normalize, ignore or glamorize, girls. … The 'girl' is talked about as either excess or lack, good or bad, nice or mean, chaste or slutty, aggressive or passive, fat or thin, healthy or unhealthy, powerful or submissive, a real go-getter or completely out of control.

This is the era that grew the *Girls Gone Wild* franchise, and a plethora of similarly styled cautionary tales about girlhood that arrive via entertainment.[2]

Though some scholars have simply reinforced the moral panics promulgated in the popular discourses surrounding girlhood, many scholars have done the opposite. For example, Pomerantz (2009) notes that "in the early 1990s … third-wave feminists reclaimed the 'girl' as a powerful, playful word." "Girl power" and the notion that young women were powerful cultural actors drove significant ideological and scholarly movements that were in direct opposition to the idea that girlhood was a period of cultural disenfranchisement. Riot Grrrl, which we discussed in Chap. 5, has been of lasting influence on scholarship of young women and feminism, in feminist popular culture and has become emblematic of the resistant use of "grrrl power." But as Pomerantz argues, there was a troubling neoliberal ethic underlying these philosophies, a critique Mimi Thi Nguyen extends to Riot Grrrl. The "girl" is also a symbol: the notion

[2] For a useful summary of this cultural phenomenon, see Gray who explores the problematic exploitation of young women by the "Girls Gone Wild" programmes.

and indeed performance of girlhood is not restricted to young women under the age of 18. As Gayle Wald (1998) contends, female musicians in their twenties often appropriate girlhood offering "strategic performances of girlhood" and a "deliberate cultivation of various 'girlish' identities in their music, style and stage acts" (p. 586).[3] Wald argues that such performances are celebrations of girlhood "as a means of fostering female youth subculture and constructing narratives that disrupt patriarchal discourse within traditionally male rock subcultures" (p. 588). For example, Gwen Stefani's anthem "Just a Girl" writes back to troubling stereotypes of "bad" or helpless girlhood by suggesting how such identities and labels are forced upon young women. So, the refusal of womanhood, and the embracing of girlhood on the part of twenty something woman might function as a political act or advocacy: a means of suggesting arrested development and that the problems of girlhood extend into adulthood.

And, of course, at the coalface of cultures, young women sought ways to take control of their own image offer and self-representations across various texts and media**.** As well as the music, zines and letters of Riot Grrrl, in the early 2000s, girls became increasingly visible and indeed notorious in self-published modes of life narratives such as in blogging, as "camgirls," or in the earliest incarnations of social media such as MySpace. Such spaces and media offered a means for young women to communicate, form like-minded communities, create and self-publish, but perhaps most significantly, engage with cultural production and take greater control over their representation. Inevitably, there were problems associated with such public engagement, particularly relating to safety but also perceived narcissism, self-indulgence and fakery. Of course, none of these problems relate exclusively to *young women's* engagement with the Internet.

In other media, however, marginalised from mainstream cultures, young women have engaged in a variety of distinct modes of life narrative: from high-school journaling projects through to zines, photo-sharing, social networking, in blogs and vlogs, and on websites such as *PostSecret*, to name just a handful of examples. Young women are creating and sharing stories about their aspirations and fears: finding spaces to talk about any subject imaginable. Young women's life narrative, seen as a subgenre

[3] Wald refers to Gwen Stefani, The Spice Girls, Courtney Love and Lisa Loeb as examples (p. 586).

of life writing, forms what G. Thomas Couser (2012) describes as a "threshold genre in which some previously silent populations have been given voice for the first time. These are historically and culturally significant developments" (p. 12). For scholars and cultural commentators, Riot Grrrl has proven to be one of the most significant examples of this shift to cultural production by young women. However, while Riot Grrrl has had a lasting influence on the aesthetics of some uses of online self-publishing forms, particularly the use of a strident feminist point of view and speaking position for life writing, the self-published life writing that has flourished online in the last 20 years unsurprisingly ranges from the politically and/or aesthetically innovative to examples that demonstrate the continued damage certain discourses of femininity can cause in the lives of vulnerable young women (such as writing and self-publishing of the pro-anorexia community).

To summarise: there are many modes, methods and practices of life narratives in which girls might tell stories about their experience of girlhood. Memoir is perhaps the most culturally central or mainstream of these. The era we discuss in this chapter—the late 1990s and early 2000s—is the so-called age of memoir (Couser 2012, p. 3), and comes directly after the period in which Riot Grrrl was most active. Memoir offers a significant cultural space for the narration of life experience that offers some power and potential cultural capital to the narrator. As Julie Rak (2013) argues: "The books of the memoir boom are produced by mainstream presses for large audiences" (p. 3). Memoirs have a potency that is different to fiction and other knowledge discourses; readers make different investments in memoir to other types of texts (Couser 2012, p. 17). Memoir has "a dual status as marketable commodity and as a part of discourses about personal identity" (Rak 2013, p. 6). It is not a site exclusively for the negotiation of individual identities but for much larger, collective discussions and explorations of identities. Memoir involves complex methods and processes which have proven to be desirable and empowering for writers and readers alike:

> Readers of their stories are themselves individuals who have chosen to read about the lives of others for many reasons … published memoir is not a narcissistic discourse. The attempt to write oneself into a narrative results

> in the creation of oneself as "other," a person who exists in a book as a character, in order to turn one's life into a story for others' enjoyment, provocation and education. (Rak 2013, p. 8)

It makes sense that young women might want to access and occupy this cultural mode because memoir is such a central literary mode for the twenty-first century. Despite the often weak position of memoir in the literary field, memoir offers so much more potential literary capital and cultural agency than the other aforementioned life narrative practices often associated with girlhood because of the cultural capital associated with the literary field, and the role of editors and publishers in consecrating the writing of young authors through publication. These acts of consecration still count for young writers and help individual writers standout (as authors, as personalities) from the crowded field of online texts that are both self-published or appear in online magazines.

The Girl, the Memoir

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when girls have been written about in popular and indeed some scholarly discourse, they have often been represented as troublesome and unwieldly. Pomerantz (2009) discusses the dominant moral panics around the representations of girl and girlhood: "the mean girl" (Fey 2004; Simmons 2002); the "Ophelia complex" (Pipher 1994) and the "girls-gone wild syndrome" (Levy 2005; Hardwicke and Reed 2003). Pomenrantz (2009) summarises: "As a result, girls have endured an enormous amount of surveillance, bad press, and negative labelling, making deconstructive interventions crucial in order to counterbalance the harmful effects of this discursive formation on girlhood." Girlhood has been discursively produced, but girls "take up and resist" "truths" about girlhood "when they negotiate their identities in the social world" (Pomerantz 2009). The letters of Riot Grrrl discussed in the previous chapter demonstrated how a private life writing form could be used for this negotiation for members of a delimited community, in this chapter, we aim to position memoir as one such negotiation where girls might work within established, public and often restrictive modes

of literary production with the larger goal of resisting and challenging dominant discourses affecting the representation of girlhood. Of course, there is an element of "damned if you do and damned if you don't" in such literary interventions. Arguably, girls writing within a mainstream, published mode like memoir are inevitably going to perpetuate girlhood stereotypes, challenge them, and achieve much in between.

So, how might a young, usually first-time writer whose text will undergo multiple mediations prior to publication, offer resistance or a radical engagement with girlhood issues and representations? In previous chapters (and in those to come), we have argued that despite its obvious limitations, published memoir has often been a conducive space for marginal voices and perspectives to emerge powerfully and potently—to show different "ways of being" and to negotiate identity politics. Memoir offers histories that are complex and often contradictory, but most often presented contextually. The process and representations offered within memoir are not without complications, of course, but our method of analysis here is to engage and show how memoir can complicate established truths and dominant discourses—to make impossible subjects possible.

Koren Zailckas: *Smashed*

In 2005, at just 23, Koren Zailckas was proclaimed memoir's next big thing on the publication of her controversial memoir (she followed this up with a second memoir, *Fury* in 2010). Zailckas has since engaged in various modes of life narrative across different media. She has a website: KorenZailckas.com; she is on Twitter; she has a Tumblr blog and has also contributed journalism to *The Guardian*, *Glamour*, *Jane* and *Seventeen*. Using these platforms enables Zailckas to exercise a good degree of control over her public image (outside of her memoirs). Further, participating in these social media enables Zailckas to extend her life writing. Her Twitter and Tumblr (which often overlap in content) are self-consciously cultural and often political. Zailckas talks about the books she is reading, the museums she is visiting, her travels and so on. She promotes and reflects upon literary events and her own readings; she links to media

articles she has authored. She writes about public issues. She includes photographs of herself and of her observations. She engages with her readers consistently; for example, Zailckas' Tumblr blog invites readers to write to her (on particular topics) and she employs these reader posts as part of the text. Zailckas is a model multiplatform, interactive contemporary life writer.

Smashed was a *New York Times* best-seller and critically acclaimed for its "credibility" and "candour." Zailckas has good life writing pedigree; she was taught by Mary Karr at Syracuse University and Karr has subsequently "blurbed" Zailckas' two memoirs. This blurbing positions Zailckas as part of a tradition of girlhood memoirs. The difference between Karr and Zailckas is, however, the distance between them and their girlhood at the time of writing. Unlike Karr's retrospective memoir, in *Smashed*, Zailckas writes of a girlhood she is still very much living. *Smashed* is a memoir recounting roughly the previous 10 years of her life (her memoir begins when Zailckas took her first drink at age 14). Zailckas wants to set twenty-first century girlhood apart from girlhoods of previous eras. She wants to remind the reader of the expectations and contradictions facing young women at this cultural moment:

> [My mother] wants me to have everything she never had as a girl, which, on top of piano lessons and designer jeans, includes buoyancy. She wants me to rise to the top of the worst situations. She wants to raise a modern woman: someone who is cool and collected, a vixen, a maneater, hell-on-wheels in heels. (p. 33)

Her girlhood is not positioned as unique, nor her experiences individual. She offers her mother as an example to contextualise her own girlhood as remarkably different. For Zailckas, the girlhood period, as she experienced it in the late 1990s and early 2000s, presents a range of paradoxes and challenges and these emerge both within and around the memoir Zailckas constructs.

Arguably, *Smashed* is simply a product of its time—one of a plethora of tell-all "misery memoirs" which trade in trauma and draw on pervasive cultural stereotypes of young Americans or, more particularly, young American women. And indeed, this might well have played a large part

in how this memoir found a publisher. As we have already discussed in this chapter, Zailckas was and is writing at a time of particular interest in girlhood, when particularly strong cultural investments had been made in the notion of girlhood as vulnerable and "in crisis." As Couser rightfully contends, memoirists commonly "cash in" on the success of similar memoirs. Such memoirs "constitute subgenres that attract habitual readers" (Couser 2012, p. 5). *Smashed* could be read as speaking to particular strong stereotypes about girlhood phases. For instance, Mary Pipher's (1994) psychoanalytic notion of the "Ophelia" complex proposes that girls' self-images and identities fragment at puberty. The pubescent girl loses control of her so-called authentic, prepubescent self, succumbing to a range of external pressures, for example, from the media and peer groups. Such theories (problematically) suggest that girlhood is a "riddle … a form of irrationality and madness" (McCarthy 1998, p. 196).

But Zailckas vehemently defines her memoir against such stereotypes of American girlhood. She presents her book as part personal/reflective, literary project and part sociological/didactic one. Such an approach is not unique to Zailckas. It is clear when reading book reviews of trauma memoirs that the convention is to expect "wisdoms" from these texts: a sense of why the "bad thing" happened and how it was resolved. As Couser (2012) argues, memoirs have a different relationship to the world than fictional text does; "It has, or aspires to have, more *traction* (pulling power) than fiction" (p. 170). Life writing has been "a key medium for asserting and expanding human rights, worldwide" (p. 176). Many memoirs have historically existed "to have real effects in the real world [often having] little, if any pretension as literature" (176). Elizabeth Marshall (2006) notes that girlhood memoirs are commonly positioned within culture as instructive: set by therapists and on college reading lists (p. 117). But do young writers, and indeed girl writers, carry a more urgent burden here? On reading *Smashed,* it seems that this memoir occupies a cross-discursive space—mandated to engage directly with cultural discourses on "youth in trouble" and do cultural work, while at the same time, to find an aesthetic for representing youthful alcohol abuse. Of course, one should not necessarily exclude the other, but these mandates form an awkward partnership in the memoirs. When a memoir is labelled a "must read" or considered representative, this can result in increased social and political pressure and

responsibility for the text and author that might be unwanted. Zailckas' project, like many memoirists, seems to be to find a literary truth: the right words to represent her own experience but also to contextualise it within a culture and world that has shaped her experiences and brought her experiences to be. The notion of representativeness, then, is more often imposed from outside of a memoir than from within it.

Zailckas' memoir is self-consciously literary and critics seem to agree that the memoir is very well crafted. For example, in her review of *Smashed,* Lucy Mangan (2005) writes: "There is usually nothing more boring … than an account of drunken exploits. It is a testament to Zailckas's hard, fast, clever writing that *Smashed* does grip from beginning to end." Her creative writing education is evident in her craft. For example, she embeds an understanding of memoir as a discourse in *Smashed* and reflexively explores the relationship between addiction and memory loss:

> I won't remember the chair that wheels me down the hospital's hall, or the white cot I am lain on, or the tube that coasts through my esophagus like a snake into a crawl space. Yet I will retain these lost hours, just as my forearms will hold the singes of stranger's cigarettes in coming years. … This is the first of many forgotten injuries that will imprint me just the same […]. (p.xii)

Another example of this is "It's strange the way the mind remembers forgetting. … Instead of receding into my life's story, the lost hours will stand out." (p.xii) Zailckas clearly wants to write a "literary" memoir. In his discussion of memoir, Couser (2012) discusses Mary Karr's criticism of James Frey. Couser writes: "[this criticism] reflects a significant dynamic of the memoir boom—resentment and resistance by writers who consider themselves literary artists—even, or perhaps especially, when they have made their fame in the same genre" (p. 6). There is territory to defend: literary memoirists do not want to be cast in the same mould as popular memoir.

Zailckas invokes a literary style and literary references as a way of authorising her perspective. The memoir explicitly negotiates a space between different discourses of adolescent girlhood. However, there is an incongruity between this crafted prose and the strong didactic tone which

pervades the text and this often makes *Smashed* difficult to read. Rebecca Traister (2005) suggests it often "reads like a well-crafted term paper." The memoir is a fierce polemic against the alcohol industry and its influence on, and abuse of, young women. *Smashed* is awkwardly bookended with a moralising preface and a conclusion that reads like a broad social commentary. The memoir (often clumsily) intersperses (often rather thin) sociological information about girls' drinking habits. For example,

> My intention, in telling this story from the very beginning, is to show the full cycle of alcohol abuse.
>
> I grew up in the Northeast, a white, middle-class teenager among other white, middle-class teenagers, which plunks me down in one of the highest demographics of underage drinkers. I am also Catholic, a faith that some researchers find increases the odds that teenagers—particularly girls—will drink, and drink savagely. (p.xiii)

It is, of course, difficult to know whether this style was the author's choice or something suggested to her, but it is worth considering how such an approach works to construct the memoir's authority and purpose. For instance, it makes assumptions about the reader's inability to "join the dots" and to consider the memoir's wider cultural resonances. And it casts memoir (or perhaps more particularly, memoirs written by young authors) as "insecure" texts. The assumption informing this preface is that an aesthetic project interested in the intersection between writing and experience, a project that could be described as "literary" is not adequate to justify a young woman writing a memoir—there must be another "string to the bow"—a therapeutic or sociological one. As we discussed in Chap. 2, this additional purpose for the memoir demonstrates the difficulty many young writers face in positioning their life writing, or having it received, within the frame of "art for art's sake" associated with the avant-garde. Unlike Dave Eggers, who uses his preface to clearly establish his project as one associated with the avant-garde, Zailckas' artistic project of writing about experiences that are partially or totally lost to memory because of her alcohol abuse is bookended with justifications that foreground why such as project is (also) socially useful. While Eggers' book can be located within a history of

male literary practice which rejects a directly "social" outcome for his project, Zalickas' book sits uncomfortably between the aesthetic and the social.

Within this frame, the text must perform cultural work on the subject of young people and alcohol abuse. Zailckas' age is significant in constructing the memoir's authority and in establishing her as an authentic voice of youth. *Smashed* contains constant reminders of its author's youthfulness. Zailckas commonly refers to her youthful appearance and infantilises her adolescent self, for example, she describes being taken to hospital by her parents after an alcoholic bender:

> When the car pulled up in front of the emergency room, my father says, he carried me through the doors the way he used to carry me to bed. […] My dad will say later that the doctors were far less compassionate when my test results revealed I was just another teenaged girl who'd nearly poisoned herself by drinking. (pp. 94–95)

Invoking the innocent child carried to bed by her father, and juxtaposing this figure with an abusive drunken teenager on the edge of consciousness, Zailckas reminds the reader of her twofold immaturity. This immaturity is symbolised and reinforced by bodily vulnerability: one recently past (childhood) the other in the narrative present. This approach positions Zailckas' girlhood as an interstitial space from which she is struggling to emerge into adulthood.

In moments such as these, Zailckas carves territory for young life writers to define and explore their youth. But it is here where obvious tensions emerge—Zailckas negotiates the terrain between her experience and her sense of what a conventional girlhood is or should be. She is working within available narrative spaces—a sense of what she is allowed to say or should say about her girlhood—and it shows. *Smashed* draws on a very familiar life writing template—Zailckas laments that her girlhood was not "normal," but also asserts that her experiences are very common. For example, the first three chapter titles in *Smashed* begin with the word "first": "first taste," "first waste" and "first offense." Zailckas often writes of her alcoholism in sexual terms, suggesting she will "consummate" her relationship with it (p. 29). Zailckas, the attractive, youthful subject is

sexualised by these representations.[4] Zalickas' description of her alcohol abuse often shows its appeal; however, she also critiques the narrated I's romanticised view of alcohol consumption:

> Just as e.e.cummings disregarded syntax, I am ignoring the minimum legal drinking age in the name of beauty, fun, and an artful existence. Of course, I don't yet know about cummings's critics, the folks who say that ignoring the rules is just as restrictive as following them. (p. 54)

Drawing parallels between rules for living and rules for writing is a perfect example of the negotiation between aesthetics and social purpose the memoir negotiates. To satisfy the perceived need for the memoir to undertake social work, Zailckas is tough on herself and it is worth considering in more detail whether her need to contend with discourses of girlhood prompts these apologies. Janet Maslin (2005) writes that *Smashed* is a story of a "smart women doing stuporous things." And Zailckas straddles these identities in the memoir. For example, Zailckas often muses on gender inequalities and these treatises again sit awkwardly in the text, as if Zailckas imagines that this is what she is supposed to say, what she is expected to write about, as she writes: "I envy the fact that boyhood's rules are consistent. Being male is not a mess of contradictions, the way being female is. It is not trying to resolve how to be both desirable and smart, soft and sturdy, emotional and capable" (p. 18). She discusses the relationship between drinking and mental illness and sexual assault to paint a picture of girlhood in crisis. For instance, she also offers a very strong critique of college life and cultures, suggesting that colleges promote alcohol abuse:

> It's strange the things that the university does to celebrate its own year-end windup. Not only does the administration permit the MTV idiocy, the

[4] Though this is not as explicit as Abigail Vona's memoir *Bad Girl* with its highly sexualised cover image of Vona. According to *The Daily Telegraph*'s review of Vona's memoir, Vona

> isn't too happy that the picture screams "white trash". "But who isn't being exploited nowadays?" she sighs. Naively, perhaps, she hoped that the book would serve as a self-help companion to the 12-step rehabilitation programme the inmates at the Village followed. Instead, it is being promoted as a Prozac Nation for our times, penned by a latter-day Lolita.

> condom expo and video-game booths and second-rate performances by third-rate pop stars, it also sponsors carnivals on the lawn outside the underclassmen dorms, complete with ring tosses, animal balloons, and cotton candy circulating sticks. (p. 173)

In doing so, Zailckas plays into prevailing psycho-social discourses of girlhood as a time of psychological crisis. The memoir is paradoxically full of generalisations about girlhood but, at the same time, Zailckas is vocal about wanting to challenge stereotypes of alcohol abuse among young women. And thus *Smashed* also does cultural work as a feminist intervention into representations of girlhood. She writes,

> Girls don't drink in the name of women's liberation, for the sake of proving we can go drink for drink with the boys. We don't drink to affirm we are "sassy" or "self-confident" which newsweeklies have lately suggested. Nor is our drinking a manifestation of "girl power" or "gender freedom" or any of the other phrases sociologists interchange with happiness. On the contrary, most every girl I've known drank as an expression of her *unhappiness*. I too drank in no small part because I felt shamed, self-conscious, and small. (p.xvi)

Passages such as these puncture the veneer of youth, and girlhood, as an idealised period of experimentation and joy. By highlighting that the heavy drinking associated with "partying" is underpinned by unhappiness and shame, Zailckas draws attention to negative emotions that drive what, to an outsider, looks like hedonistic behaviours. Her insistence that these emotions have a gendered component—that, in her experience at least, they partly stemmed from being a girl—is part of her feminist project. There is, of course, an assumption of homogeneity of experience here, but Zailckas sees her mandate as a contentextual, authoritative spokesperson perhaps rather than representative figure, as she is careful not to homogenise girl culture:

> I also wrote this book because I wanted to quash the misconceptions about girls and drinking: that girls who abuse alcohol are either masculine, sloppy, sexually available, or all of the above, that girls are drinking more and more often in an effort to compete with men, and that alcohol abuse is a life-stage behaviour, a youthful excess that is not as damaging as other drugs.

> You can find girls who abuse alcohol everywhere. We are everywhere … overachievers athletes, dropouts, artists, snobs, nerds, runway models, plain-Janes, and so-called free-thinkers […]. (p. xviii)

The feminist component of her project extends to a frank assessment of the risk of gendered violence faced by young women, and how the drunken girl has become a symbol of both hedonism and of risk:

> I don't think people realize that drunk girls are themselves a fetish object. The phrase itself is as porn sensitive as *schoolgirls* or *lesbian orgies*. Type it into an Internet search and you'll get more than 450,000 porn sites in less than twenty seconds … ones that highlight "dead-drunk girls passed out," and publish gritty, overexposed pictures of girls lying unconscious while anonymous male hands pull off their underwear. (p. 203)

Zailckas carefully contextualises her experiences within broader cultures that promote and fetishise girls drinking or that utilise drunk girls as symbols of a "good time":

> I've also had it with *Girls Gone Wild* producer Joe Francis, and with the thousands of aspiring home-movie makers he seems to have spawned: the men who linger on the sidelines of nightclubs like vultures, watching for the girl who totters on her feet and slurs her words, before luring to pull up her skirt. […] I'm pissed at the government that would, through its allocation of dollars, have us believe that drug abuse is either a bigger issue or a more worthy one than underage drinking, neither of which is the case. […] I'm tired of the world that won't rescue girls until we're long past the point of saving. (pp. 334–335)

Zailckas positions herself as a different type of "girl gone wild"—resisting institutionalised notions of "normal" and "deviant" girlhood[5]; *Smashed* is offered as a counter representation to popular texts that exploit and commodify vulnerable subjects.

In the conclusion to *Smashed*, Zailckas writes:

> Over the course of writing this book, I've learned that if any of us, girls and women, want true strength born of stability, we need to find a more

[5] To borrow Driscoll's terms (2002, p. 47).

> productive outlet. Drinking, like all forms of self-destruction, isn't a valid art form because it allows the world to rejoice in our weakness, the inferiority that it has always expected of us. … We will never really free ourselves of our inhibitions in dank bars. But I believe we can shed them in our projects. In our music, in our films, and on our canvases, we can be wildly immodest. (p. 333)

So, for Zailckas, where the book is a critique of the alcohol industry, it is embedded within forms of youth socialising (such as the end of year celebrations at college), and with gender, it is also a celebration of women and creativity where life writing is positioned as saviour. Alcohol reveals the limited subject positions so often available to young women. Memoir promotes openness, a sense of solidarity and shared experience.

Fury

> It often seems that girlhood has congealed into a single sad story in which imperiled girls await rescue, with limited hope or success. In this story, girls appear in perpetual crisis and permanently vulnerable not only because of dire circumstances but also because of something intransigent and intrinsic to girlhood itself. Girls in crisis make an ethical claim upon our attention, and they should; but the permanently vulnerable girl is a deceptively apolitical and amoral figure that blots out representations of gendered autonomy (political, ethical, and personal). By focusing on girls in this way, women do not appear as moral and political agents lodged in material conditions of harm, capable of analyzing these conditions and proposing means of remediation. The figure of the vulnerable girl is tied to the absent figuration of women as fully human and as political agents. (Gilmore and Marshall 2010, p. 667)

In their article from which this quote is drawn, Gilmore and Marshall explore the possibility that memoirs can agitate on the problematic representation of girlhood in crisis. By providing context and complexity to representations of girlhood crisis, memoirists may add dimension and depth to one-dimensional cultural stereotypes that impact negatively upon girls and self-representation in girlhood. But as a memoirist like Zailckas publically represents herself in crisis, how does she side-step

merely perpetuating and indeed "riding the coat-tails" of this stereotype? After all, one reader's complex representation of political agency might be another's vulnerable subject. This is the complex and shifting terrain that memoirists find themselves in.

In the tradition of other memoirists writing about girlhood (including Marya Hornbacher, Mary Karr and Lauren Slater), Zailckas penned her difficult second memoir five years after the success of *Smashed*: *Fury* was published in 2010. (*Fury* was followed by her first novel *Mother, Mother* in 2014). Yet, the turn to fiction writing did not mark the end of Zailckas' work as a life writer, in commentary and interviews around the publication of *Mother, Mother*, Zailckas spoke openly of the breaking down of her relationship with her parents ("My Mother is Dead to Me"). Such commentary functions as a significant afterword to *Fury*, in which she seems to be addressing and indeed resolving some of the conflicts she had with her parents, and reminds us of the ways that memoir's intertexts extend the life of memoir.

One of the fascinating meta-qualities of *Fury* is that there is much detail in the memoir about her creative method and difficulties writing. Zailckas writes with significantly more literary authority (and also, experience and knowledge) in this second memoir. Zailckas acknowledges early in the memoir that she wants to write a book about anger: related to, but not necessarily driven by her own experiences of fury. She wants this memoir to follow the sociological methods introduced in *Smashed*, and lean more towards objectivity. But she again finds herself telling a more personal story that extends her coming-of-age story begun in *Smashed*. Zailckas' preoccupations, even into her twenties, revolve around her relationships with her parents and sibling. Though significant sections of the memoir concern her relationship with her boyfriend (breakup and reconciliation), her pregnancy and miscarriage, the memoir is largely about the emotional legacies of her upbringing. In the prologue, she writes:

> The pages that follow are an account of the continued aftermath of my stunted adolescence. Here is the fallout from the years spent drowning emotion with drink instead of recognizing my feelings, exploring them, and, in doing so, reclaiming my family's particular power to obliterate or redeem me. I didn't set out to write a sequel to *Smashed*, but I have lived

> without an awareness of my past, and every life crisis dredged up the unexamined aspects of a much older story. (p. 2)

So, although she did not intend to write a sequel to *Smashed*, *Fury* becomes just this. It is similarly styled: a blend of life writing discourse and sociological commentary (though the latter is less present in *Fury* than *Smashed*). Much of *Fury* shows Zailckas on the cusp of achieving the markers of traditionally associated with adulthood in the West, such as financial independence, a stable partnered relationship, a vocation and, perhaps most importantly, her own living space. Despite the success of her first book *Smashed*, Zailckas finds herself (following a difficult intercontinental breakup and move) back living with her parents, facing anger management issues, recognising anger (and related) issues in other members of her family, addressing the complex issues of therapy and medication (including alternative medicines) and working out whether she has a future with her musician boyfriend—all while attempting to write her difficult second book.

The focus on anger is an important one when it comes to thinking about girlhood: Zailckas shows (though perhaps not always overtly) that anger, and more particularly representations of, and responses to anger are gendered and ageist. It is not simply that Zailckas (and others like her) are difficult "bitches"; Zailckas' exploration of anger offers a much more nuanced exploration of the ways in which girls are often denied the emotional response of anger. For instance, as she quotes Harriet Learner's *The Dance of Anger*, she reflects:

> I identified with an affliction the psychotherapist calls the "nice lady syndrome"
>
> *Although "nice ladies" are not very good at feeling angry, we may be great at feeling guilty. As with depression or feeling hurt, we may cultivate guilt in order to blot out the awareness of our own anger. Anger and guilt are just about incompatible.*
>
> I cultivated such an appetite for guilt that neither the Catholicism of my childhood nor my recent agnosticism served it up in large enough portions. (p. 13)

She spends time in the memoir exploring the theoretical studies—the sociology of anger—alongside reflections on her upbringing, her family's

European cultural heritage, and more general discussions of US historical, cultural and gendered responses to anger. In offering these reflections, Zailckas engages with master narratives of girlhood and mental health, and also ideas about inheritance: where these emotional responses (or lack thereof) come from. Marshall's assessment of Zailckas' forerunner Susanna Kaysen seems appropriate here: "[she] intervenes in knowledge about feminine adolescence … to make visible and counter gendered pedagogies that seek to define feminine adolescence, especially white middle- and upper-middle-class adolescent girlhood, as a period of traumatic passage" (p. 117). Again, though this is Zailckas' experience and memoir, she is keen to consider the broader contexts for anger and the experiences of young women in a culture which might too often adopt a repressive "toughen up princess" response to young women's anger.

This is a memoir that looks inwards and outwards. It is clear that Zailckas does not want to isolate herself as unique, but she does, out of necessity, draw from her experience and invite the reader to see the deeper resonances of an individual's experience of girlhood anger. The core element and perhaps resolution that Zailckas reaches in *Fury* is that she must complete a reconciliation with her childhood self (and the events of her childhood) if she is able to become a functioning adult who is able to raise a child of her own. Following her miscarriage, and a very difficult argument with her parents and sibling, she writes:

> I need to mourn not only a baby, but also the fact that I've finally come face-to-face with the source of my anger. My family has never really loved me for the person I am, only as the competent robot I pretend to be. I've never really been accepted without fine print, in the absence of stipulations or strings.
>
> If I don't come to terms with these lonely facts now, as an adult, they might eventually affect the way that I mother too. The legacy will continue. (p. 249)

So, *Fury*'s coming-of-age elements extend to Zailckas' concerns about what inheritance she might offer her own child:

> No, I need to know with 100 percent certainty that I won't use a kid to work out any unresolved emotions from my childhood. To this end, it

> seems especially important that I find some balance between aggression and passivity. I don't want my issues to blind me to my child's own emotions. (p. 199)

Zailckas' musings here can be interpreted in numerous ways. Of course, such reflections are not unexpected: she is following a plethora of cultural scripts here connected to appropriate girlhood/youth, but also femininity, the maternal and so forth. Her rebelliousness has morphed into idealised reflections of future female adulthood imbued with a sense of maternal responsibility, complete with realistic, intelligent responses to nature/nurture parenting debates. Zailckas' tone is personal, but also urgent and didactic. This is also not new: as Marshall notes, the popular girlhood memoirs of the 1990s which privileged the recovery arc were often positioned by reviewers as "must read" books for young women in high school and college (p. 117). Zailckas is keen to locate these reflections beyond her personal experiences and beyond her family.

Conclusion: Making the Impossible Subject Possible

In the 2000s, it is not at all unusual for young women to write publically about health, mental health and wellness. Most of these expressions are self-published: on blogs and on social media. But despite such outpourings, published memoir has remained a key site for young women to launch into the literary public sphere. Memoir is a privileged mode: it offers something different to the raw confessions of social media. The industries that publish memoirs demand multiply-mediated texts which adhere to certain templates, trends and reader demands. So, what happens when raw youthful experience meets the literary field? Is there room for radical engagement, cultural participation and the demonstration of agency? If girlhood is an impossible subject, what representations does memoir make possible?

Zailckas' memoirs reveal the uneasy cross-discursive function that impedes and impels so much contemporary memoir. *Smashed* struggles to find a balance between poetics—of creating methods for meaningfully

representing her youthful identities and her alcohol addiction—and the compulsion to make her text a public service announcement on the perils of teen drinking and wayward girlhood. The latter seems to be a prevalent expectation of what published youth memoir will be. Memoirs of extremity like Zailckas' work because Zailckas is contrite: hers is a conversion narrative that tracks her redemption through life writing, as Maslin (2005) observes:

> Now 24 and living happily ever after, the reformed author looks back on her past with all of this genre's requisite narcissism and melodrama … the whole point of "Smashed" is that these excesses are behind her.

For the most part, *Smashed* follows the conversion track rather faithfully. However, the text also works hard to reveal the inherent paradox in telling a rebellious tale according to conservative narrative templates. *Smashed* and *Fury* reflect a deep awareness of the exploitation of young women as cultural subjects, and ironically, Zailckas is able to trade on this (for the publication and circulation of her memoirs) but also vehemently challenge such exploitation within her textual polemic. Zailckas offers long lamentations about her alcohol abuse and later her anger, but it is clear that she knows what we all know to be true: her alcohol abuse and her anger have given her viable subjects for her memoir. And as Zailckas no doubt grapples personally with her addiction and anger, she also grapples creatively with them—with how to give them a meaningful shape. As the didacticism threatens to overwhelm the storytelling, these memoirs become. "Limit cases" (to use Leigh Gilmore's term)—revealing the challenges faced by young memoirists emerging from the margins. It is likely that we would never have heard Zailckas' stories had she not "towed the line" of acceptable representation and conformed to some of the narrative and discursive tropes that shape the representation of youth and girlhood. But it is also clear that the memoirs make strong gestures of disruption—for example, in their critique of the conflicting social norms, cultures and institutions that perpetuate gender inequality. Zailckas responds strongly to the difficulties of negotiating gendered experience not just as a feminist but as a *young* feminist, locating herself as a youthful subject negotiating both the demands of youthful social

life and the stereotypes of girlhood that shape adult culture's perception of girl's experiences. She tries to resist what she sees as the identities and subject positions allocated to her and to resist binaries to show diverse experiences of girlhood. So, though complex and sometimes even contradictory, *Smashed* and *Fury* shows how life writing by girl authors prove to be a vehicle for visibility and for intriguing cross-discursive cultural work.

In the next chapter, we continue our focus on how young writers use life writing discourse to make sense of and negotiate fundamental questions they face as individuals and in their social groups. We maintain our focus on aspects of young peoples' lives that generate considerable public concern and policy responses; in Chap. 7, the focus moves from girlhoods in crisis to the issue of youth suicide. Like Zailckas, the writers we discuss in this chapter use life writing to speak from experience into a cultural context where young people are rarely given the opportunity to contribute to the public debate on the issue. Unlike Zailckas, however, the writers we discuss in Chap. 7 eschew mainstream publishing and engage in analogue self-publishing by making zines, an artistic practice that creates a counterpublic where discussion about youth suicide is led entirely by the experiences and concerns of young people themselves.

Part IV

Youth Publics

7

Zine Culture: A Youth Intimate Public

In 2014, the World Health Organisation (WHO) released the first report into global suicide prevention, *Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative*. Gathering data from across the world on instances of suicide and the variety of programmes intended to prevent it, the report provided an unprecedented perspective on suicide as a global and national issue. A key finding of the report was that, in global terms, suicide is the second leading cause of death for people aged between 15 and 29 (WHO 2014, p. 3). Key messages of the report included that suicide is preventable, that limiting access to common methods of suicide (such as firearms, certain medications and poisons) is effective, and that "[c]ommunities play a critical role in suicide prevention" (WHO 2014, p. 9, p. 73). The report goes on to warn that "broad generalizations of risk factors are counterproductive," and that preventing suicide must be driven by an understanding of context. One important piece of context is that suicide rates are higher "among those who are minorities or experience discrimination" (WHO 2014, p. 11). Cited examples of linkages between discrimination in the report include: people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex, and people who are affected by bullying, cyberbullying and

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peer victimisation (WHO 2014, p. 36). Young people are strongly represented in both these groups.

According to the report, key risk factors for suicide have a number of social and community components, including stigma associated with seeking help for suicidal thoughts or behaviour; inappropriate media reporting of suicide; stresses of acculturation and dislocation; discrimination; trauma and abuse; sense of isolation and lack of social support; and relationship conflict, discord or loss (WHO 2014, p. 31). These factors can intersect with individual risk factors including: a previous suicide attempt; mental disorders; harmful use of alcohol; hopelessness; and chronic pain (WHO 2014, p. 31). While the report clearly indicates that there is an important role for the health care system in suicide prevention, it emphasises that preventing suicide requires a response from a range of sectors.

In this chapter, we explore how young people themselves have created an important social and community response to the high rates of suicide among their population, through the creation of a community that does not stigmatise mental health or suicidal thoughts, and in which people can openly discuss their struggles with suicide and bereavement by the suicide of a friend or loved one. While the WHO report indicates that "[t]here are increasing concerns about the supplementary role that the Internet and social media are playing in suicide communications" (WHO 2014, p. 32) because these sites can increase the accessibility of information about how to undertake suicide, we will demonstrate that zine culture is both a "responsible" and youth-driven social network that addresses the need for community support around suicide. The WHO report emphasises the need for an evidenced-based approach to evaluate suicide prevention, and while there is currently little evidence of the effectiveness of websites that promote help-seeking behaviour, we agree that there is a need for further study in this area. In examining how young people use zines to discuss suicide and bereavement, we are identifying a data set that is worthy of further study regarding its effectiveness in preventing suicide among young people through follow up interviews and study. In our analysis, we examine how the community uses zines as a unique media form supplemented by online activity to circulate material designed to foster community discussion of suicide. Our identification of

zines as a space where young people conduct a discussion about suicide using life narrative discourse adds to the ongoing widespread concern regarding young people's civic engagement and their perceived "lack" of engagement with established, institutional sites of civic life (Harris et al. 2010, pp. 10–14). As many scholars have argued, this adult anxiety about youth participation in civic life often has less to do with the actual activities and political commitments of young people, and more to do with how "youth" is an identity category upon which anxieties about democracy can be projected (Jones 2009, pp. 181–182). We will return to these concerns in our conclusion, but begin by examining the importance of life writing to the formation of spaces where young people analyse and consider how they can respond to the issue of suicide.

Life writing plays a key role in talking about suicide in zine culture because of its potential to help individuals and communities better grasp the relationship between individual experience and the social field. Life writers are often seeking to see more clearly the lines of construction and influence that constitute the contact zone between individual experience and the social. Indeed, the value of life writing is often seen to lay in its ability to make this space visible in particular historical periods, from particular narratorial perspectives. As we have been exploring throughout this book, young people in particular have deployed life writing to make specific claims about the intersection of their experience, and the experience of the peers, with discourses that define the social in their time and place. In this chapter, we explore how young life writers have been drawn to the question of suicide—sparked by their own feelings towards it, or by the deaths of loved ones—as a means of thinking about the interplay between individual and the social. We consider individual zines from Australia and the USA, and the transnational "zine culture" made visible in online forms. We will examine how, in actively creating and nurturing a non-commercial and decentralised site of encounter between the individual and the collective through the production and circulation of zines, young people create an intimate public. We examine how self-publishing handmade texts known as zines have created a durable and dynamic site of life writing by young people where they both understand their own encounters with suicide, and create a youth-authored contact zone between the individual young person and a collective of young people.

In so doing, we extend the focus of our study, which has so far considered professionally published works of memoir and young people's use of the older forms of diaries and letters, to consider an entirely new and distinct media form. Zines began as publications circulated by fans of science fiction in the 1930s, but since their adoption by the punk movements in the UK and North America, have become a quintessential youth media.

Zines: An Analogue Network

Prior to the Internet, zines were probably the best example of a globalised mediated youth culture. Self-published texts, ranging in length from 1 to 30 pages, zines (pronounced "zeens") are produced in small editions usually using the photocopier. They are sold and traded through mail order distributors or on the craft site Etsy, in temporary physical spaces such as at markets or fairs, and in independent record and bookstores. Since the explosion of the Internet, zines remain a dynamic international network of publishing and reading, where the handmade text has gained importance in juxtaposition to the ease of online "push button" publishing.

The topics covered in zine culture are diverse, from recipes to music, "how to guides" to sustainable living, fiction, journalism, politics and comics. However, a dominant genre over the last 20 years has been the personal zine—or "perzine"—an autobiographical mode that takes the author's life or experiences as the focus. This trend in youth self-publishing mirrors the larger shift towards autobiographical discourse in English-speaking cultures, epitomised by the "memoir boom," the confessional talk show genre and, in US political culture, in particular, the increasingly significant role played by affect and identification in the conceptualisation of citizenship (see Berlant 2008; Rak 2013). Poletti's (2008) large-scale study of autobiography in Australian zine culture found that young people use the "underground" medium to speak to each other about a range of issues in their lives, including current political issues (such as Australia's involvement in the invasion of Iraq), negotiating government services such as Centrelink (which administers student and unemployment payments), travelling, sexuality, identity and experiences with mental health. There has also been considerable critical

attention given to the use of zines by young women, in studies by Mary Celeste Kearney (2006), Jennifer Sinor (2003a) and more recently Janice Radway (2011) and Alison Piepmeier (2009).

In what follows, we examine how the zine functions as a unique form of mediation of life narrative, and how it retains its status as a sequestered site of reading and writing through eschewing the pressure to publicness that comes with other mediated forms, particularly those online. We situate this in the context of the extensive scholarly attention given to the use of zines in Riot Grrrl, and suggest that approaching zines through recent theorising of publics can explain the much larger—and less analysed—use of zines for life writing by a diverse range of young people in Australia, Canada, the USA, the UK and Europe. Taking zines about suicide from Australia and the USA as our case study in the second part of the chapter, we examine how life writing in zines is an example of an intimate public addressed to a key question of self-determination: the question of how to forge a life worth living.

Materiality and Mediation: Reading Zine Culture as a Public

While some booklet publishing software exist online, the vast majority of zines are handmade by their authors. This is an important threshold for participation in the culture; participants must learn how to physically make a zine by mastering skills in layout, including pagination, photocopying, collation and binding. While it is tempting to think of this handmade approach to textual production as "relatively inexpensive and unsophisticated" and "requiring minimal education and technical skill to produce" (Kearney 2006, p. 143), we argue against downplaying the skills, time and commitment required to make zines. Making a zine is not resource neutral, it requires paper, a photocopier or other means of reproducing a text, adequate physical space in which to undertake collation, and time. In both Australia and the USA, not-for-profit collectives provide space and resources for zine making to be undertaken. In Portland, the Independent Publishing Resource Centre (IPRC) offers photocopying, letterpress and binding equipment for use. In Australia,

the Octapod (in the port city of Newcastle) and the Sticky Institute in Melbourne also provide cheap or free access to resources and space for zine making. The varying complexity and quality of zines—from basic black and white photocopying, to the use of a range of materials such as coloured papers, letterpress and clear plastic overhead sheets used to create complex relations between words and images—also evidences the skill, ingenuity and conscious engagement with materiality that characterises zine culture. As Radway argues, as well as being texts, zines "are also material objects crafted of paper, images, handwriting, myriad typefaces, staples, twine, glitter, stickers, and much more. They are aesthetic objects crafted with the intent of producing certain kinds of affects and experiences among their users" (Radway 2011, p. 147).

While one person can produce a zine, as opposed to the chain of professionals required to produce mainstream commercial media, it would be a mistake to conflate do-it-yourself techniques with a lack of sophistication or application of skills. If you doubt this, we encourage you to put down this book and start making a zine. Before you do this, you may wish to consult the discussion thread on *We Make Zines* (see below) titled "Ways To Make A Zine" that has been running since 2008 and, at the time of writing in mid-2014, continues to be an active site of skill sharing.[1]

While we disagree with Kearney's characterisation of zines as requiring minimal skill to create, being easy to distribute, and requiring "only basic composition skills" (Kearney 2006, p. 163), we agree with her argument regarding how the do-it-yourself approach to textual production and distribution has been characterised in cultural and media studies. Much of the early scholarship of zines has been strongly influenced by a particular application of Marxist theory in subcultural studies (Kearney 2006, p. 147; see Duncombe 1997). The extent to which self-publishing is a political critique of the mass media's control of dominant narratives by each individual zine maker is debatable, and Kearney and Poletti argue that attempts to synthesise zine culture into a political movement run into significant problems by over emphasising the resistant political commitments of authors and readers (Kearney 2006, p. 147; Poletti 2008, pp. 18–32). Rather, we suggest that the importance of zines is better

[1] As this book was going to press, the We Make Zines ning was in the process of moving to a new host after the service provider increased the charges for groups using the service.

understood as serving aesthetic and communicative ends—particularly in the case of personal zines—rather than (narrowly defined) resistant political ones. This is not to suggest that zines are not political. It is precisely the opportunity to engage in mediation—through life writing and textual production—that attracts many young people to zine culture, and makes zines an important site of young people's self-representation, and we return to this question in the conclusion of the chapter. But we begin with the more pressing question: how do we characterise young people's use of the zine?

Writing from within media studies, and a disciplinary framework focussed on identity and subjectivity rather than autobiography, Kearney examines zines made by girls as "a rich resource for studying young females' various discursive explorations of identity" (Kearney 2006, p. 152), an emphasis that—at the time Kearney was writing—sought to reorient the critical attention given to zines by girls as a means of building community (Kearney 2006, pp. 147–148). While stating she "does not mean to dismiss or reject zines' significance in the formation and maintenance of communities and collective forms of identity," Kearney argues that "it is important not to downplay the nonsocial and noncollective [sic] functions of such texts, for while communication is a primary goal for most zinesters, it is not their only or most privileged objective" (Kearney 2006, p. 48). Kearney's recognition of the important role zine making plays in identity work, where this practice is thought of as a process by which individual young people "'try out' various forms of identity" (Kearney 2006, p. 148) is relevant to our study. However, Kearney's adherence to the view of young women as occupying a transitional space between girlhood to womanhood (Kearney 2006, p. 146, 304), coupled with an emphasis on zine making as a self-focused process of identity work, risks confirming the bias that the cultural productions of young authors are of more use and interest to the authors themselves than to "the culture at large" (usually adult culture) or audiences beyond their peer group. As Jennifer Sinor suggests, "It is easy to dismiss as uncomplicated or juvenile what a 16-year old girl in Ann Arbor, Michigan is writing late at night in her computer" (Sinor 2003a, p. 242). While certainly not a dismissal, Kearney's characterisation of the zine form as unsophisticated, and her focus on zines as a means for individual writers to "try

out" identity in the context of the ever shifting discursive production of identity that she sees as characterising the postmodern, could be read by some as reinscribing simple distinctions between public, audience-directed texts and personal, self-directed forms of writing about the self. While positing zines as identity work that may not be public-driven (a characterisation we clearly disagree with), Kearney remains disappointed with the level of self-reflexivity she finds in personal zines:

> Unfortunately, too few Grrrl zinesters demonstrate an awareness of identity as multiply constructed and experienced, which suggests both their privileged social status as well as their lack of exposure to or unwillingness to embrace US third world feminism. Though many female youth involved in zine culture are bisexual or lesbian and therefore explore their sexuality alongside their sex and gender, by comparison very few nonwhite and poor girls of colour make zines; as a result, race and class are only rarely considered as significant, inseparable components of identity. (Kearney 2006, pp. 155–156)

This criticism arises because Kearney de-prioritises and devalues the labour and skills required to make zines. If, however, we keep in mind that zine culture *is* a resource-intensive process of mediation, and that knowledge, time and resources are a barrier to participation in zine culture, Kearney's observation about the lack of participation from poor youth is reflective of larger issues regarding barriers to participation in cultural production generally, rather than as a personal failing of the zine makers themselves to live up to the political ideals Kearney agrees should be applied with caution to zine culture. We would also suggest that the lack of recognition of intersectionality she finds in female authored zines could be partly the result of her sampling choices: "I use the term *grrl zines* to identify those texts that foreground an exploration of female identity and experience, and *grrl zinesters* when referring to the producers of such texts" (Kearney 2006, pp. 153–154, emphasis in original) and the historical focus of her study. In the context of girl studies and its explicit focus on zines produced under the rubric of Riot Grrrl, Kearney's frame of analysis is entirely justified. Yet Kearney's approach, and Radway's more recent historicising of Riot Grrrl zines, risks marginalising contemporary zine

practice as coming after a "golden age" invented by academic research. Radway's discussion of the "after lives" of the zines of Riot Grrrl notes that some women who participated in the youth culture of Riot Grrrl are now adults who use their cultural and professional influence to establish zine collections, publications and scholarship which "has interjected the voices and works of adolescents into the legitimated precincts of knowledge production" (Radway 2011, p. 145). As Kearney observes in her conclusion, the dominance of the "Grrrl zine" space by white middle-class women was explicitly challenged by a strong response by zinesters of colour (Kearney 2006, p. 292), a fact often represented in the zine collections that continue to collect from contemporary zine culture. Yet their zines risk exclusion from Kearney's sample if they appeared in the large body of zines on the topics of work and unemployment, queer activism, and radical politics such as veganism and squatting. So too the work of now adult participants in zine culture to collect and value the texts of contemporary young people risks being overshadowed by the academic preoccupation with Riot Grrrl in zine criticism. (We seek to contribute to the scholarship valuing the importance of Riot Grrrl in our chapter on the use of letters in the movement. (See Chap. 5)

This overview of the literature on zines is not intended to suggest that the focus on zines authored by young women in feminist media studies or girl studies is unjustified. However, the extensive academic treatment of zines by young women, and the relative scarcity of academic work on zine culture more broadly, has led to a narrow focus on zines in academic discussion that could give scholars unfamiliar with zine culture the impression that zines as *primarily* a medium of third-wave feminism. In fact, zines—including feminist zines by young women—circulate in self-identified "zine cultures" or scenes, where a wide variety of topics, issues, styles of writing, authors and readers co-exist and interact. While much critical attention has been focussed on the extent to which the zines of Riot Grrrl were written by girls *for* girls, feminist zines and zines by young women now circulate within a much larger milieu constituted by the form of the zine, its capaciousness and dedicated readership.

Our analysis of personal zines using recent theories of publics in conjunction with autobiography studies brings attention to the interplay between individual identity work, affect and solidarity in personal zines.

Shifting away from the concepts used to read girls' zines as a means of constructing "community" and "networks" based on gender identity—common terms in media studies, and early studies of Riot Grrrl—to the idea of the "public," makes possible a more nuanced analysis of the interplay between the personal and the collective, the affective and the political in the larger field of zine culture, and, in particular, in the popular zine genre of the "personal zine" (also known as a "perzine").

This interplay in zine culture often pivots on the modes of address and connection with the reader made possible by the use and adaptation of autobiographical discourse. We follow Rak's framing of autobiography as a discourse, rather than a genre, which encourages us to recognise how life narrative texts that circulate outside institutionalised media—such as book culture and broadcast media—make marginalised subjectivities visible:

> Autobiography must be thought of as a discourse rather than as a genre, and as discourse that is sustained by the trappings of identification that have underwritten what the self is and how it has been seen in much of the Western world. When autobiographical discourse is used by writers or speakers who do not have access to the privileges of autobiographical identity—such as print literacy, a sense of one's "place" in history that others will recognize, or the leisure time to write a book—then that discourse changes as it is used, even as it brings certain advantages. (Rak 2004, p. ix)

As a non-fictional discourse, life writing is the practice of mediating a life to have it recognised by a public. To do this, each text purports to speak some truth about the self and about a life. Makers of personal zines—like all life writers—work to establish a relationship with their reader that confirms that they write about their life "in a spirit of truth" (Miller 2007, p. 538), and they use both material and textual strategies to do this (see Poletti 2008; Piepmeier 2009). The handmade nature of zines is key to maintaining and regulating the size of the audience because they are both difficult to access—circulated in comparatively small print runs and sold in non-commercial and out of the way spaces—and require considerable time to produce and distribute.

As a mediated youth culture, zines are an excellent example of Warner's theory of the public as the product of self-organising discourse. Young

people's use of autobiographical discourse in zine culture is a means of engaging in cultural practices for self- and world-making. Producing autobiographical texts for a limited and self-selecting public gives young people access to the discourse of autobiography in order to explore, construct and communicate narratives of identity, ethics and self-determination. Unlike other sites, such as those studied by Anita Harris, where young people are "incited to [autobiographical] discourse" (Harris 2004, p. 125), zine culture remains largely resistant to attempts to commercialise or control it. Indeed, zine makers create a public *of* autobiographical discourse through specific practices of mediation, and in doing so retain control over the circulation of zines by writing for "known" strangers (Warner 2002, pp. 54–55).

Thinking of zines as an autobiographical public helps us recognise the writing and reading of zines as a means of imagining and making a world of like-minded others. Warner describes the importance of strangers to the formation of publics and their ability to enable hope:

> The unknown element in the addressee enables a hope of transformation; the known, a scene of practical possibility. Writing to a public helps to make a world, insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterizing it. (Warner 2002, p. 64)

In zines, material strategies are often used to postulate and characterise the reader as known and intimate. For example, the use of envelopes as covers, the inclusion of handwriting on covers and inside the zines, colour and collaged covers that mark each individual zine as being handmade, and the practice of editioning each copy. At the level of the written text, it is in the opening pages of the zine that the work of imagining an unknown addressee often occurs. For example, in the Australian personal zine *Ampersand and Ampersand #3* (2010), the narrator (Amanda) describes her doubt about the value of narrating her experiences of her recent diagnosis with polycystic ovarian syndrome and the risks communication entails:

> I have never been able to just casually talk about my emotions and those who have been in conversations with me when I've tried to open up and

> overcome my own walls will recognise how silly I often look—I lose my voice, my mouth opens and closes like a guppy, I fidget uncontrollably and I generally appear constipated. (Amanda 2010, n.p)

The risks of sharing experience in person and in speech are described here as manifesting in bodily evidence of embarrassment and discomfort, and a suspicion that the addressee (in person) will notice these bodily clues to Amanda's resistance to speak about her feelings and see them as "silly," rather than empathetically respond to her struggle for articulation. On the next page, this risk of looking "silly" is presented as being compounded by the threat of miscommunication:

> I can't help but feel that revealing anything of myself to others is to set myself up for the inevitable disappointment of miscommunication. There is a certain inelegance to putting emotions into words and saying them out loud—seeing them leave you, twisting and turning and changing shape as they do, inevitably becoming something that you don't recognize. (Amanda 2010, n.p)

Again, it is the bodily presence of the speaker and the addressee that symbolises the dangers of communicating feelings: Amanda charactertises the process of putting emotions into words as inelegant, and involving clumsiness or imprecision of expression. This risk is compounded by the problem of interpretation: once achieved, the meaning of verbal expression is unfixed, "twisting and turning and changing shape … inevitably becoming something that you don't recognise." In Amanda's formulation, speaker and addressee confront bodily and semiotic barriers to communication and recognition. It is the act of mediation—the zine—that is posited as the solution to these problems:

> This is why I keep coming back to zines. The words are still mine, but in a zine they are somehow separate from the neuroticism and trust issues that make it so hard to open to those close to me. In a zine I can write what is important to me without fear because I will never have to see if you react with indifference, boredom or judgment. (Amanda 2010, n.p)

These descriptions of the problems associated with face-to-face communication establish the idealised addressee of the zine, and mark out the importance of a mediated site of communication as the solution to problems of autobiographical and interpersonal communication. Here, then, is an example of the world-making Warner describes in publics: the imagining of a solution to problems of talking face-to-face by positing an idealised addressee and a narrating self who is unhindered by the bodily habits which undermine Amanda's ability to talk about "so many important things."

Evidencing a World Online: The We Make Zines Ning

Warner qualifies his suggestion regarding the world-making potential of publics by stating that: "This performative ability depends, however, on that object's being not entirely fictitious—not postulated merely, but recognised *as a real path for the circulation* of discourse. That path is then treated as a social entity" (Warner 2002, p. 64 emphasis added). While the zines themselves materialise the path for the circulation of youth autobiography in their modes of distribution, online spaces have recently opened up that extend zine culture online precisely to evidence, but not replace, the social entity that is imagined by zine narrators. The relatively new development of online networks for zine makers, which often replace the more locally focused and provisional dedicated email lists and text-only discussion boards of Web 1.0, extend the physically mediated culture in the online environment in order to affirm zine culture's status as a public, and to increase access to it. The *We Make Zines* "ning"[2] is one example of how zine culture has extended online in a way that supports and validates the practice of handmade text production and distribution,

[2] A "ning" is a social networking platform designed to allow people to create and monetise networks. Originally a free service, ning is now a subscription-based operation. When the *We Make Zines* ning began, the service was free and it has been successfully maintained by donations. Other examples of websites that extend zine culture to the online domain and in so doing create the social entity to which zine texts can be addressed are the Zine Wiki (zinewiki.com), and Chip Rowe's website which accompanies his book *The Book of Zines* (www.zinebook.com).

and solidifies its importance as a public of autobiographical discourse. Krissy, the Portland Oregon-based zinester who began the ning describes the aim on the home page:

> We Make Zines is an online community for zine makers and readers. Although there are many social networking sites out there, there is little that focuses on zines. We all have our facebooks or blogs, but those accounts are filled with friends from work, from the third grade, people who don't know what a zine is and some who probably don't care.
>
> This space creates a place that focuses on the zines. I want this place to be less about personality and friends and more about the zines—what we produce and read (Krissy n.d, n.p).

Like Amanda, Krissy confirms the unique addressee posited by the zine maker: someone different from the "usual" members of one's social life and network. Importantly, sites such as these give zine culture a fixed online presence—evidencing the social entity to which zines are addressed—without replacing the homemade texts, their ephemeral nature or the relationships the material object of the zine make possible. The handmade and the ephemeral nature of zines, so central to their appeal as a site of youth autobiographical practice, is not impacted by the creation of social networking spaces. Rather, these sites have been developed to increase access to the world-making public of zine culture, thus strengthening its status as a legitimate space of cultural activity, while maintaining the thresholds to participation outlined above. This online presence, and distinct culture of youth life writing, sits alongside more recent practices of life narrative taken up by young people online.

An Intimate Public: A Scene of Consolation and Discipline

Zine making and online sites dedicated to zines make the public created by zines more visible, yet zines also create an intimate public, which offers young people the opportunity to feel part of a collective experience and struggle. Social theorist Lauren Berlant defines an intimate public as created by texts that provide readers with the feeling of being part of a

collective: "Whether linked to women or other nondominant people, it flourishes as a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging that provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live" (Berlant 2008, p. viii). As an affect theorist, Berlant's focus is not on texts that present common *experiences* (although intimate publics can rely on and repeat certain scenarios) but generate common *affects*. For Berlant, "Publics are affective insofar as they don't just respond to material interests but magnetize optimism about living and being connected to strangers in a kind of nebulous *communitas*" (Berlant 2008, p. xi). Berlant's focus on affect extends to close attention to the *affective* dimension of the experience living as a member of a non-dominant group: "aloneness is one of the affective experiences of being collectively, structurally unprivileged" (Berlant 2008, p. ix) and intimate publics counter that experience of aloneness by offering collectivity. An important component of Berlant's theory of the intimate public is that it operates as a market; texts are produced, marketed and members of the intimate public are consumers of those texts. As Poletti has investigated in earlier work on zine culture (2008), zines circulate in an alternative economy to a traditional market. While available for purchase, most zines sell for under $10 and many zine makers will trade their zines for other zines or homemade objects rather than for money.

As a group often excluded from traditional and traditionally powerful forms of public life, including the polling booth, young people create and are the subject of a variety of intimate publics. Individual young people access intimate publics in order to enter into a scene where they can discuss, confirm and debate how to live. There are plenty of intimate publics directed towards young people that include limited amounts of material written by young people themselves, such as commercial youth cultures (Hollywood films, popular music, television serials and teen magazines) as well as interest-based websites and religious and secular youth groups. Zine culture demands our attention because it has proven to be a resilient and flexible intimate public constituted by texts written by young people, or that people enter into when they are young and remain connected with as they age.

In Berlant's case study, an intimate public is organised around women and "is distinguished by the view that the people marked by femininity

already have something in common and are in need of a conversation that feels intimate, revelatory, and a relief" (Berlant 2008, p. ix). In zine culture, the intimate public is partly concerned with process of self-determination. In what follows, we examine young people's use of zines to discuss the question of how to live by making zines about suicide. While it is difficult to accurately quantify how often zines about suicide are produced in zine culture, we can identify some indicators that it is a topic of recurring interest. In the Zine Collection at the Barnard Library at Columbia University, for example, over 50 zines are entered into the catalogue as addressing suicide and mental health. In the Bingham Centre, at Duke University, there are 11 zines catalogued as being about suicide, and 29 in the broader category of mental health. The State Library of Victoria, which houses a large collection of zines in Australia, uses a range of keywords to catalogue zines in this area, including depression (a common term in the Barnard catalogue also) and youth suicide. Other important collections, such as the QZAP queer zine archive, do not facilitate keyword searches, making it impossible to know how many zines in that archive address the topic. The *We Make Zines* ning regularly includes announcements of the publication of zines about suicide and mental health issues, which occur in the discussion group dedicated to perzines.

The persistence of the question of *living* itself in zine culture indicate that zines offer an experience of collectivity defined by the recognition that others are also confronting the question of how to live, and how to claim one's right to live in a way of one's choosing. We will begin by examining an Australian zine, *Nearly Healthy*, that demonstrates how zines are an example of young people making an environment for an individual to link their experience to the collective and in doing so produce new ways of thinking about their relationship with living. We will begin by examining how the labour of zine production is a metonym of the process of seeking self-determination—through the making of zines addressing the question of how to live, zinesters enact the labour, commitment and care that they discover is needed to live a life they can bear (Fig. 7.1).

> If the question really is whether to live or die, and the answer is to live—and I really want that to be the answer—then I would have to start constructing the life I want to live immediately. To do so would mean examining the things that were preventing me from living that life.

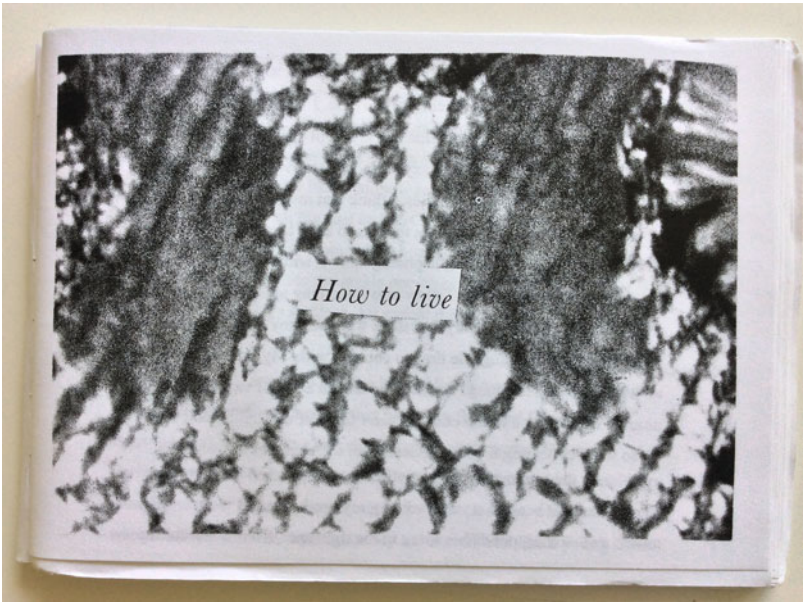

Fig. 7.1 Excerpt from the zine *Nearly Healthy* (2010) by Emma D (Reproduced with permission from the author)

> Everything must be brought into question, accepted or rejected. A revolutionary project: *how to live*. (D 2010, pp. 7–8)

In 2010, long time zine maker Emma D. released the zine *Nearly Healthy*. The zine explores Emma's relationship with mental health, politics and suicide. The zine opens with the story of another zine Emma wrote, a zine released in 2007 about being 25-years old. The opening vignette evokes a strong sense of place: set in Emma's mother's house, the unnamed 2007 zine was written "at the dining room table that had layers of glitter, newspaper print and pen marks etched into the waxy surface from over ten years of my letter writing, zine and art activities" (D 2010, p. 3).

As well as making a zine in 2007, Emma did another kind of writing as well:

> At the time of writing my twenty-fifth birthday zine, I also wrote a secret letter to myself in a notebook … on one of the last pages there is the small note written when I got home, when I was sitting at my mum's living room

> table. It's a promissory note which gives me five years—until my thirtieth birthday—before I am allowed to think about suicide again. (D 2010, pp. 5–6)

With this admission, the narrator tells us that she cannot wait until the five years are over: "I have been living with this silent ultimatum for three years now, and I've decided that I'm not Stalinist enough to live my life in five year blocks. Five years is not enough" (D 2010, p. 7). In this zine, Emma wants to confront her coping strategy of breaking time down into small blocks to make it manageable: "When I was school, or working at a job I hated, or in any other tedious situation I longed to escape from, I would break the hours down into five or ten minute blocks. Waiting for five or ten minutes is easier than waiting for five or ten hours. That is not how I want to live my life" (D 2010, p. 7). *Nearly Healthy* is the project that will allow Emma to break from her coping pattern and begin the process of "constructing the life I want to live immediately" (D 2010, p. 7). Emma uses the zine to explore and document the personal, social and structural conditions that have until now made constructing a life she wants to live feel difficult, or impossible.

What *Nearly Healthy* powerfully demonstrates is the metonymic relationship between textual production and living. The making of the zine is a metonym for the making of a life, because in zine making, the creator must answer each creative decision about the text themselves. Unlike other forms of self-publishing that utilise templates designed to alleviate the material challenges of publication—layout, font size and selection, binding—zines require the creator to answer every question about the text's material, as well as textual, features. While this practice links zines to the practices of do-it-yourself and amateur cultural production (Poletti 2008, pp. 30–33; Spencer 2008), it is also constitutive of zine culture as an intimate public: zine makers are a public of people who see and value the relationship between the craft of self-publishing and the practice of living. It is an intimate public that trades in texts that are valued as objects, and as products of labour. Thus, the "ning" set up to promote social networks between zine producers is titled *We Make Zines*—zines are a practice and a process, and in the case of zines about suicide and loss, they are a type of creative labour—writing, laying out,

assemblage—that produces texts and lives. The labour of this process is often narrated in zines. Towards the end of *Nearly Healthy*, Emma writes:

> In 2007, I put off thinking about suicide for five years because at the time that's all I felt I could do: put it off. I couldn't imagine it not ever being an option, question. … How will it stop if we don't talk about it?
>
> This is something like the 6th draft of the conclusion. I feel as though I have to return to the question I began with—the question of suicide—but I keep finding myself skirting around it, calling it "the question" or "that feeling" or "that action." Partly, I am afraid to admit that I have been suicidal. I am afraid of what people will think of me. (D 2010, pp. 63–64)

The order of the narration towards the end of the zine draws a direct relationship between the necessity of talking about suicide as a means of preventing it, the *creative* difficulty of doing this meaningfully or effectively ("This is something like the 6th draft"), and the emotional difficulty of speaking *directly* about suicidal ideation ("I keep finding myself skirting around it"). The recognition of suicide as a collective problem—discussed further below, and raised in this zine by the mention of the suicide of a friend when Emma "was younger" (D 2010, p. 65)—and the negative effects that accompany talking about it are countered in the intimate public of zine culture by the labour of textual production, self-making and the struggle for self-determination. As Amanda's narrative also demonstrated, it is in the labour of making zines that zine makers find consolation and a feeling of collectivity that buttresses them in confronting the problem of how to live. In this sense, zine culture works as intimate public not because it is often constituted by confessional life narrative discourse, but because the practice of zine making—writing, laying out, assembling and distributing a text—offers the promise of "a better experience of social belonging" (Berlant 2008, p. viii) through the production and circulation of zines themselves. Alison Piepmeier describes this as the "pedagogy of hope" (Piepmeier 2009, p. 155) undertaken in girl zines. We will return to the tension between Piepmeier's reading of hope, and Berlant's theory of the intimate public in our conclusion. Whether viewed as a pedagogy or a material embodied practice that offers a promise, this

experience is founded on the metonymic relationship between textual production and living, and the value accorded to amateur cultural production through zine culture's associations with do-it-yourself and punk culture (Duncombe 1997; Kearney 2006; Spencer 2008). As Poletti has explored, this entails constant negotiation in the texts themselves between the zine maker as narrator and their reader (Poletti 2008, pp. 59–103).

Through the process of making zines, the ideal of self-determination is pursued, but zine makers are ever mindful of the slippages inherent in communication and the problem of being misread—the zine itself, as text, is not a perfect manifestation of the desire for self-determination. As objects, zines—and their predecessors, fanzines—have always differentiated themselves from the sleek, perfect materiality of commercial magazines by embracing imperfection. While early fanzines could not aspire to the professional finish of commercial magazines because of the cost and difficulty in accessing offset printing for small print runs, contemporary zine culture remains committed to the aura of the handmade, and the roughness of the photocopied object (see Poletti 2008, pp. 239–287). As the constitutive object of the intimate public of zine culture, imperfect handmade texts reinforce the *feeling* that to be worthwhile, life (and the zine) must be more than something that conforms to established rules (of layout, of life goals). In this sense, zines can also be read as countering normative assumptions about what life and life writing looks like, and in doing so undertake valuable work in validating non-normative subjects (see Cover on young queer lives as grievable lives [Cover 2012]). The zine as a handmade object is valued for its imperfections and the traces of the author it leaves behind, just as the lives zines about suicide seek as alternatives to death are not perfect, complete or adhering to existing models or stereotypes (Fig. 7.2).

An example of this can be seen in *Your Secretary #4* (n.d), a zine that documents Jami's response to losing four friends to suicide in two years, where the acceptance of imperfection is registered in the zine object and the narrative. Imperfection and struggle are registered in the narrative through Jami's reflection on moving from Detroit to Chicago, as well as at the material level of the zine itself. Like *Nearly Healthy*, the zine opens with a vignette about place, Jami is told by a friend in Detroit that a well-loved decrepit apartment building has burned down. The loss of the

Fig. 7.2 Excerpt from the zine *Your Secretary #4* (n.d.) by Jami Sailor (Reproduced with permission from the author)

apartment building, a landmark of Jami's life in Detroit, occasions the narrator to reflect on permanence:

> Despite our better judgement we had taken for granted Forest Arms existence. […] This was foolish. Things change. Things deteriorate. Sometimes they deteriorate slowly, in plain view like most (but not all) of the mansions of Brush Park, a spectacle. We were supposed to be used to this in Detroit. To keep our expectations low. Sometimes things went fast, overnight; a mugging, a restaurant closed due to unpaid taxes, a car thieved away. In Detroit, businesses pop up and burn down. Hope flares and is extinguished. Nothing can be taken for granted. Everything is a fight (or flight). (Sailor n.d, n.p)

This early depiction of Detroit in the zine—a prominent symbol of the US economic and social decline—raises the question of how one should feel, what expectations one can have, in light of the "fraying" of

what Berlant calls "fantasies" of "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy" (Berlant 2011, p. 3). Detroit's physical fragility—mirrored in the ephemerality of the A5 photocopied zine—makes it an inhospitable environment for living that Jami and her friends need to survive; "I used to claim, with pride, that Detroit is like a giant baby play-pen filled with scissors and broken glass" (Sailor n.d, n.p). Jami left this play-pen for Chicago—a seemingly healthier city—and it is while she is living in Chicago that she loses four friends to suicide. Jami does not speculate on her friends reasons for choosing to die, the zine instead remains focussed on the question we are suggesting motivates the intimate public of zine culture—how to live?

In *Nearly Healthy*, idealised self-determination and communication is rejected in Emma's discussion of people who may read the zine having never experienced thoughts of suicide. This figure—a textual representation of a reader who does not share Emma's experience—first appears in the narrative as Emma's friend. This friend appears as the narrator moves from describing feelings of frustration and exhaustion with the experience of alienation from life to a tentative conclusion that there may be structural explanations for one's inability to stay attached to living. This section of the zine begins with a description of that narrator's frustration with thoughts about suicide. "I'm sick" is the refrain, and the passage moves between the two meanings of the word "'sick," as denoting illness (in a binary relationship with health) and its vernacular use as a term for frustration: "I'm sick of the people I love feeling like they don't deserve to speak, to live, to take up space. I'm sick of this endless self-analysis, of having to think in terms of sickness and heath (sic). I'm sick in a sense that I don't quite agree with" (D 2010, pp. 13–14). The narrator then tells us that her partner "works in a library in Double Bay—one of the richest suburbs in Sydney" and that he reports that "the most popular books in the library are ones that deal with anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses" (D 2010, p. 14). This leads Emma to speculate, "it's not just 'us,' in the poorer west, who are gripped by this plague" moving from the personal to the general, and the potentially political, this section of the zine reaches the tentative conclusion that "*something is making us sick*, in more ways than one" (D 2010, p. 15). Yet Emma immediately

withdraws from the potential of a universal claim about the problem of how to live, by stating:

> I think this, and then I remember a close friend who once said that they had never been depressed, could not understand it, there was too much beauty in the world. I was absolutely staggered. … The possibility that some people are actually genuinely comfortable with themselves and their pace in the world had just not occurred to me. (D 2010, p. 15)

This recognition that Emma's experience is not universal is vital to the constitution of the intimate public. Intimate publics are, by Berlant's definition, circumscribed by their members' common experiences and the feelings they generate, which are assumed by the logic of the intimate public to pre-exist the formation of the public in the production and circulation of texts (Berlant 2008, p. viii). Emma's friend and the reader who have not experienced thoughts of suicide are used in the text to discipline the narrator's tendency to generalise beyond the bounds of the intimate public, but these others also play a vital role in moving the narrative from the personal to the collective. At the end of the zine, after discussing the difficulty of writing the conclusion to the zine, Emma returns to the figures who stand outside the intimate public:

> Partly, I am afraid to admit that I have been suicidal. I am afraid of what people will think of me. Will they begin walking on egg shells, assuming my fragility? I am not fragile. Will I come off like some kind of expert, as if I know all about this thing, about suicide, like I have all the answers? I don't know the answers. I don't understand why some people act on that feeling and others stay alive. I am afraid of alienating people who have not felt this way, who do not understand why their friends and family members and coworkers (sic) and comrades take their own lives. The people who wonder what they could have done to save them, when there is still so much beauty in the world. (D 2010, pp. 64–65)

Those who see beauty in the world, who do not have to construct beauty of their own, are evoked to support the zine's conclusion that only collectivity, instantiated in zine making and zine reading, can help solve the

problem of how to live. *Nearly Healthy* ends with this reflection on zine practice:

> I'm frustrated that words don't work for me as I'd wish, but glad that there are people who make and read zines. I don't often think of zines as a collective project, but maybe that's what they are. When I think that, I fell like I'm part of something that's important, an effort to describe and understand our lives, a sort of self-survey of everyday life, and I feel hopeful. (D 2010, p. 71)

Conclusion: Hope and the Juxtapolitical

For Berlant, intimate publics provide consolation to their members by connecting individual experience to the collective. Yet her theorisation of the intimate public is partly driven by a desire to understand why it is that recognition of collective subordination rarely translates into direct political action in contemporary democratic societies organised by consumer capitalism. This is where her theory is in tension with Piepmeier's adaptation of bell hook's concept of "pedagogy of hope." For Piepmeier, to read girls zines as political work, a redefinition of political is required: this political work "function[s] as hybrid public/private sites of self-expression and social change aimed at a broader cultural norm rather than specific political or electoral outcome" (Piepmeier 2009, p. 158). Rather than redefine the political, Berlant asks a more direct question, given the powerful affective charge that connects members of an intimate public, why do we not see more impact from their members at the ballot box, in the traditional media sphere, or in local community organising? Berlant's exploration of the women's intimate public in American culture is an attempt to understand "the difficulty of inducing structural transformation out of shifts in collective feeling" (Berlant 2008, p. xii). The answer she comes to is that intimate publics are "juxtapolitical": a mode of sociality that "thrives in *proximity* to the political, occasionally crossing over in political alliance, even more occasionally doing some politics, but most often than not, acting as a critical chorus that sees the expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration as achievement enough"

(Berlant 2008, p. x). *The Female Complaint*, and Berlant's other writings on publics and affect such as *Cruel Optimism*, is cautious and nuanced in its analysis of what naming the juxtapolitical might mean. Her theorising does not reinscribe the binary logic of thinking and feeling that sees feeling as useless or harmful to "rational" politics and political organising, rather it is an attempt to theorise how the experience of marginalisation creates the desire for affect:

> One of the main jobs of the minoritized arts that circulate through mass culture is to tell identifying consumers that 'you are not alone (in your struggles, desires, pleasures)': this is something we know but never tire of hearing confirmed, because aloneness is one of the affective experiences of being collectively, structurally unprivileged. This is barely a paradox. You experience taxonomic saturation ('labels') personally, but they are not about *you* personally. They are bigger than the both of us. What gets uttered is a collective story about the personal that is not organized by the singular autobiography. (Berlant 2008, pp. ix–x)

We think this approach better captures what is meaningful about the world-building work that zine culture does than Piepmeier's redefinition of political work. In bringing Warner and Berlant's recent theories of publics to a consideration of young people's life writing in zine culture, we hope to have demonstrated how the concept of the public brings much needed nuance to the question of the political efficacy, or limits, of zine culture and the pedagogies of hope it may practice. Like Janice Radway, who sees zines by young women as producing "*intersubjects*, girls constituted in relation to and therefore always together with others" (Radway 2011, p. 148 emphasis in original), reading life writing in zines as producing an intimate public focussed on the question of agency allows us to appreciate these youth-authored texts as both powerful forces for the discussion of the life experiences of young people, and limited in their capacity to translate that power into substantive cultural change. Examining zines about suicide, however, allows us to see that young people use the production, circulation and reading of zines as a means of discovering and articulating their agency *for themselves and each other,* with little reference to adult-sanctioned cultural and policy spaces.

This makes life writing in zines of interest to those outside the intimate public, as it is a powerful example of young people's agency and, in particular, their repudiation of a view of youth as the subject of adult-discourse and study which positions them, along with children, as "inadequate, incomplete and dependent," and worthy of concern because they "represent the future of the social world" (James 2011, p. 37).

In our final case study, we return our attention to young life writers who address adult audiences, and examine how two young educational activists have used the templates of social media forms to speak from their experience. We consider the complex textual, cultural and political work undertaken by Isadora Faber and Malala Yousafzai, who employ the discursive position of children and youth as representatives of the social world to authorise their work as activists.

8

Youth Activism Online: Publics, Practices and Archives

In this chapter, we engage in a methodological experiment where we read and interpret life narrative texts written in languages that we cannot read. But our efforts to do so reveal our agenda: the rights of young life writers to be heard and to be engaged with, intellectually, ideologically, aesthetically and ethically by scholars. We want to consider how these texts might emerge (productively) outside the nation of origin and be witnessed. We consider the significance of two girl-authored "blogs" in challenging educational inequalities and lobbying for reform. Isadora Faber's and Malala Yousafzai's blogs, (and subsequent publications and social media engagements) offer potent case studies on the complexities faced by young life narrators asserting cultural agency—in making knowledge and experience consequential—particularly when participating in the politics of education. As Gill Jones notes, youthful identities are, in part, carved from "how young people fit into social structures" (2009, p. 11). Youth is an identity category partly constructed on compulsory education and the sequestering of young people into the youth-only space of the school. So, in this discussion, we examine how Yousafzai and Faber have crafted speaking positions that utilise the ideologies and cultural constructions

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of childhood and youth—particularly as citizens and representatives of a nation's future—to become the voices of educational reform. We also consider the potential "uses" of these texts (by others beyond the authors) for political and/or economic gain.

In raising language and translation issues in this introduction, we signal our intention to explore the transits of these life narratives: how these digital projects and their authors have reached an audience beyond their national contexts. How have these texts (both intentionally and inadvertently) engaged with international publics, and what are the implications of these engagements?

Malala Yousafzai

Supported by her education activist father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, Malala began speaking publicly about her right to an education in 2008 (at age 11) at the Press Club in Peshawar (Westhead). In the following year, Malala started writing a pseudonymous blog for BBC Urdu when she was 11-years old (the blog was published in Urdu and English) (van Gilder Cooke 2012). As the story goes, the Head of BBC Urdu, Aamer Ahmed Khan, had an angle for reporting news from the region to have an anonymous school girl blog about her life in the region.[1] Of course, this is intriguing in itself: amid the plethora of available sources of knowledge on this issue which include military propaganda, journalism (from different sides), human rights discourse, and interdisciplinary "expert" scholarship, there was a perception that there might be a need for another accessible and authentic angle on the events in Pakistan. Why an anonymous schoolgirl

[1] The genesis of Malala's blog has been reported differently across media articles. For example, Basharat Peer's (2012) piece for the *New Yorker* credits Mirza Waheed, former editor for the Urdu section of the BBC World Service for negotiating Malala's blog. According to this piece:

> [Waheed] got a proposal from one of his reporters in Pakistan, who was covering the takeover of Swat Valley by the Taliban militants led by Maulana Fazlullah, or "FM Mullah." Fazlullah had banned TV, music, and girls' education; bodies of beheaded policemen were hanging from town squares. Abdul Hai Kakkar, the reporter, had first approached Ziauddin Yousafzai, a local school director, to get a female teacher to write about life under the Swat Taliban. No teacher agreed, but his eleven-year-old daughter, a seventh-grade student, was interested in writing a diary. (Peer 2012)

blogger? (The blog is pseudonymous rather than anonymous because Malala adopts the pen name Gul Makai. But it is often referred to as an "anonymous blog.")

Clearly anonymity and pseudonymity allow for the concealment of an identity and the protection of the authorial subject. But they also add a level of mystery, intrigue and even gimmickry: enticing a readership that might not otherwise be interested. Pseudonymity may also signal the probability of raw honesty from the writer, and this is certainly how this blog is structured and presented to a readership: the blogger will provide something distinct from existing journalistic discourse. It will be reportage, but it will be direct and experiential: from a first-person witness. Indeed, this combination of narrative techniques (first-person pseudonymous reportage of everyday life) and technology (the blog) had already proven to be a highly effective means of increasing the visibility of experiences "on the ground" in the Middle East in the case of Salam Pax's blog *Where is Raed*? during the second Gulf War in 2003 (Whitlock 2007). The subsequent *A Gay Girl in Damascus* hoax, made during the Arab Spring in 2010, also attempted to utilise the wide-appeal of life writing from the Middle East to further the cause of the Syrian uprising.

In the case of "Gul Makai," the desire to have a young girl narrate the events from Swat signals the importance of gender and youth as important aims for the project and themes for the blog. As we have discussed throughout this book, youthful voices are so often missing when it comes to recording political and historical events, and young women's voices even more significantly absent. So, a youth-authored blog potentially fills a gap in knowledge and perspective: prioritising particular subjects such as young women's right to an education in Pakistan, and functions as a call-to-action from someone "at the coal face." Of course, BBC Urdu (and the BBC beyond this) has much to gain from the inclusion of a youthful voice like Malala's: young writers are, conventionally, highly sympathetic and believable. The success of such a blog means an increased readership (and thus economic gain) and an increased cultural capital gained from being associated with the writer and text.

The purpose of the blog was to advocate for young women's right to an education. At the time, Malala lived in the Swat Valley in Northwest Pakistan. The region was Taliban-occupied and the Taliban was trying

to ban girls from attending educational institutions. Malala's family was actively involved in education; they ran a school in the region (Ellick and Ashraf 2009). So,

> Malala chose a pseudonym—Gul Makai, the name of a heroine from a Pashtun folk tale—and began dictating her diary to Kakar weekly over the phone. She described going on trips to buy bangles, living in a place as beautiful as the Swat Valley and the disappointment of being banned from school by the Taliban. It was just the sort of personal story the Urdu desk had been looking for. "We were absolutely thrilled by the way she was writing. I wouldn't call it mature. I would call it a very, very fresh, untainted and straight-from-the-heart sort of a take on what was going on," says Khan. "She would use these little anecdotal bits to bring out the atmosphere of fear surrounding schools and children in particular. She was clearly a very, very intelligent and a very observant girl." (van Gilder Cooke 2012)[2]

The blog ran from January to March 2009 and was very popular with readers "including Pakistani readers in the United Arab Emirates, India, the U.S., Canada and the U.K. … As well as being translated into English for the BBC, her entries were regularly reproduced in local Pakistani media." (van Gilder Cooke 2012).

Some commentators have retrospectively wondered whether the BBC did enough to ensure her anonymity: after all, Malala was already becoming a high-profile activist (like her father) at the time that the blog was gaining momentum (Chowdhury 2012; Tahir 2012). But, of course, the larger issue is that Malala should never have been in danger in the first place: she should not have been living under the threat of physical violence because she spoke publicly about girls' right to an education.

So, at this time (2009), two things were happening concurrently: the anonymous blog was achieving a wide readership, and Malala was

[2] Again the *New Yorker* article reports this differently. According to this piece, the method by which the BBC received Malala's diary was as follows:

> Malala passed on hand-written diary pages to our reporter and he would scan and e-mail or fax them to me," Mirza said. "I would edit it to retain its directness, its raw texture, and at times, as I edited her, I would well up." (Peer 2012)

becoming well known for her advocacy work. Following the release of Adam B. Ellick's and Irfan Ashraf's 2009 documentary, Malala became known and began giving interviews and emerging as a public figure on the issue of the right of young women to an education. She became a mentor to other young journalists through the Open Minds project.

According to Besharat Peer (2012), Malala's community work and rise to prominence continued over the following two years:

> She [Malala] would be featured in two (New York) *Times* videos, which brought her considerable attention, but Malala became a celebrity in Pakistan in October, 2011, when Desmond Tutu announced her nomination for an international children's prize. It seems to have been the first time that her identity as the writer of the BBC diary became known to the broader public; the citation for her nomination mentioned her use of "international media to let the world know girls should also have the right to go to school."
>
> Her public profile rose further after the Pakistan government awarded her the first National Peace Prize, in December 2011. "In a situation where a lifelong school break was being imposed upon us by the terrorists, rising up against that became very important, essential," she told a Pakistani television network. When the interviewer asked her about fear and danger, Malala, speaking in a clear, forceful voice, said that her father, who worked for women's education and fully supported his daughter, had inspired her, and that her mother had told her to speak up for her rights. And then, in a rather prophetic moment, she envisioned a confrontation with the Taliban: "I think of it often and imagine the scene clearly. Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them what they are trying to do is wrong, that education is our basic right."
>
> The growing fame and her determination to speak out for girls' education put her on the Taliban radar. Malala was active on Facebook under her own name, and the extremists would threaten her online. The cover photo of a public Facebook page dedicated to her is an exhortation to primary education, a cause she embraced and lived from a very young age: "One in ten of the world's children who don't go to primary school live in Pakistan." And a flood of messaging is expressing support, saying prayers for her. "plz stay with us. we need the girls like u for betterment of Pakistan," a young girl wrote.

Sadly, perhaps most people will know what happened next: the horrific incidents of October 9, 2012, cemented Malala's international profile. On this date, while on the school bus, Malala was shot at close range by the Taliban and critically injured. She had brain surgery in Pakistan to address the damage caused by the bullet that passed through her brain (Yusufza 2012). She was transferred to the UK a week later for treatment and rehabilitation. Though her injuries were very serious, she made a good recovery and was discharged from hospital in January 2013. Malala is currently living with her family and attending school in Birmingham in the UK.

Malala's achievements from here are wide and varied. She is a prominent human rights campaigner with a special focus on young women's right to an education. She has worked with the United Nations (UN) and also in speaking to world leaders such as Barrack Obama and Gordon Brown. Malala co-authored (with Christina Lamb) a book, (written in English) *I Am Malala* (2013). In 2013, she was named one of *TIME* magazine's most influential people; in 2014, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. A documentary was made about her life (*He Named Me Malala*, 2015). In August 2015, she received As and A*s in her General Certificate of Secondary Education (GSCE) exams ("Malala celebrates" 2015).

There is much to say (and indeed has been said) about the extraordinary achievements of Malala Yousafzai, but here, we want to look closely at her blog as a mode of youth life narrative. Why was there so much engagement with Malala's blog? How did the blog entries (and do they now) exist as an archive of girlhood experience, and how did they reach publics? How do the blog posts anticipate a readership? What is included, and perhaps, what is also left out of these blog posts? We know (from the somewhat contradictory contextual discussion above) that the blog posts were edited and translated. What are the possible effects of this?

Gul Makai

As previously noted, the blog first appeared on BBC Urdu with an expected readership of Pakistani people living in different parts of the world. Extracts from the blog later appeared on the main BBC site.

So, at this point, the blog has undergone various mediations between Malala writing the blog (and perhaps her father reading it and helping in this process), it being received by the BBC contact, being edited, or certain extracts chosen for BBC Urdu, and then extracts being chosen for the BBC news site. We cannot know precisely the extent of these mediations, but it is worth acknowledging and speculating on the possibilities here, because these mediations do impact upon the interpretations readers will make of the blog posts.

The BBC news story, titled "Diary of a Pakistani School Girl" (2009) is annotated with photographs from Swat, the town that Malala lives in, and the site offers this introduction:

> Private schools in Pakistan's troubled north-western Swat district have been ordered to close in a Taliban edict banning girls' education. Militants seeking to impose their austere interpretation of Sharia law have destroyed about 150 schools in the past year. Five more were blown up despite a government pledge to safeguard education, it was reported on Monday. Here a seventh grade schoolgirl from Swat chronicles how the ban has affected her and her classmates. The diary first appeared on BBC Urdu online.

The blog is thus contextualised as being primarily about educational inequalities, but more particularly, the Taliban's oppressive impact and the government's inability to protect young women's right to an education.

The blog itself offers ten short entries, each with a date and title for example: "Thursday January 15: Night Filled with Artillery Fire." The two strongest features of Malala's entries are: (1) the juxtaposition of her desire for education and descriptions of life in war-torn Pakistan; and (2) a consciousness of the public nature of her writing and its potential to reach an audience. For example, she writes:

> The night was filled with the noise of artillery fire and I woke up three times. But since there was no school I got up later at 10 am. Afterwards, my friend came over and we discussed our homework.
>
> Today is 15 January, the last day before the Taleban's edict comes into effect, and my friend was discussing homework as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

> Today, I also read the diary written for the BBC (in Urdu) and published in the newspaper. … My father said that some days ago someone brought the printout of this diary saying how wonderful it was. My father said that he smiled but could not even say that it was written by his daughter.

In other entries, she speaks of not knowing whether the school will reopen for the following school term (grappling with a lack of information). She imagines herself as representing the girls she goes to school with, and, in a personal and emotive tone, describes the feelings of longing and loss around her schooling:

> This time round, the girls were not too excited about vacations because they knew if the Taleban implemented their edict they would not be able to come to school again. Some girls were optimistic that the schools would reopen in February but others said that their parents had decided to shift from Swat and go to other cities for the sake of their education.
>
> Since today was the last day of our school, we decided to play in the playground a bit longer. I am of the view that the school will one day reopen but while leaving I looked at the building as if I would not come here again.

Such posts also emphasise the commitments of parents to their daughters' educations, working to dispel any myths around this issue.

In other posts, we are reminded of the young girl's vulnerability to communal trauma as she relates stories she overhears from her parents and from children at school (of death and destruction), as well as her hearing the bombing campaigns. For example, in her post of January 3, 2009, titled "I am afraid," she writes:

> I had a terrible dream yesterday with military helicopters and the Taleban. I have had such dreams since the launch of the military operation in Swat. My mother made me breakfast and I went off to school. I was afraid going to school because the Taleban had issued an edict banning all girls from attending schools.
>
> Only 11 students attended the class out of 27. The number decreased because of Taleban's edict. My three friends have shifted to Peshawar, Lahore and Rawalpindi with their families after this edict.

> On my way from school to home I heard a man saying "I will kill you." I hastened my pace and after a while I looked back if the man was still coming behind me. But to my utter relief he was talking on his mobile and must have been threatening someone else over the phone.

This post reads like a short story—a thriller with a dramatic climax; but the reader is well aware that this is not fiction, and the emotional and physical vulnerability expressed by Malala is immediate to her. Again, the everyday practices of sharing family meals and going to school are discussed alongside the larger violent conflicts, and it is likely that this was the mandate given to Malala.

The blog consistently criticises the government's and army's inability to protect the schools from destruction and for not prioritising education, for example, on January 18, 2009, she writes:

> My father told us that the government would protect our schools. The prime minister has also raised this issue. I was quite happy initially, but now I know but this will not solve our problem. Here in Swat we hear everyday that so many soldiers were killed and so many were kidnapped at such and such place. But the police are nowhere to be seen.

And on January 19, 2009, she writes:

> But the army is not doing anything about it. They are sitting in their bunkers on top of the hills. They slaughter goats and eat with pleasure.

As we discuss further in this chapter, a child's ability to criticise the institutions that affect their everyday lives is often very limited. But the Internet provides a space to engage directly (as a citizen journalist) and become a more visible stakeholder and activist. Malala's commentary here reveals and engages directly with the power structures that are affecting her. She uses life writing and the form of the blog as a means to write directly of the ways that adults are letting children down.

Malala's blog, as published by the BBC, contained ten entries—about a paragraph each. It is not clear whether this is the sum-total of entries Malala wrote, but her success as a writer and speaker has gone way

beyond this. Malala has become a public intellectual and human rights worker who has advocated on behalf of many. As a survivor of violence, she has become an iconic figure of bravery and resilience. Inevitably though, Malala's rise to prominence, and her symbolism to the West as a rebel from the East, has been problematised by some critics. Huma Yusuf summarises the three main complaints stemming from Malala's rise to prominence:

> Her fame highlights Pakistan's most negative aspect (rampant militancy); her education campaign echoes Western agendas; and the West's admiration of her is hypocritical because it overlooks the plight of other innocent victims, like the casualties of U.S. drone strikes.

There is recognition that a blog (or any piece of public life writing than resonates widely) can never be just that. The pen is mighty and Malala's success proved advantageous to powerbrokers with agendas who might recruit her to their cause. For instance, Assed Baig (2013) notes in his *Huffington Post* piece "Malala Yousafzai and the White Saviour Complex":

> Straight away the Western media took up the issue. Western politicians spoke out and soon she found herself in the UK. The way in which the West reacted did make me question the reasons and motives behind why Malala's case was taken up and not so many others.
>
> There is no justifying the brutal actions of the Taliban or the denial of the universal right to education, however there is a deeper more historic narrative that is taking place here.
>
> This is a story of a native girl being saved by the white man. Flown to the UK, the Western world can feel good about itself as they save the native woman from the savage men of her home nation. It is a historic racist narrative that has been institutionalised. Journalists and politicians were falling over themselves to report and comment on the case. The story of an innocent brown child that was shot by savages for demanding an education and along comes the knight in shining armour to save her.
>
> The actions of the West, the bombings, the occupations the wars all seem justified now, "see, we told you, this is why we intervene to save the natives."

This is undoubtedly complex terrain. As Gillian Whitlock (2007) has argued, life narrative from locations of Western military conflict can easily become "soft weapons" in the campaign to maintain public support for military intervention and the financial support for foreign governments who are deemed allies of the War on Terror. Clearly, the success of Malala's multiply-mediated text and public identity can be largely credited to the Western (politically charged) media's championing of her cause. But it seems unjust to deny Malala and her father significant agency in this process, as Baig implies: after all, Malala and Ziauddin Yousafzai had been working tirelessly for some time as educational activists in Pakistan. The example of Malala raises fundamental questions for life narrative researchers regarding the transnational circulation of life writing, and how it is utilised by activists to communicate beyond their local communities. Larger questions about universal children's and girl's rights emerge at this juncture. These larger questions and contexts go some way to explaining the conflicting reactions to Malala.

For critics like Baig, the veneration of Malala is reductive, he writes:

> The truth is that there are hundreds and thousands of other Malalas. They come from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other places in the world. Many are victims of the West, but we conveniently forget about those as Western journalists and politicians fall over themselves to appease their white-middle class guilt also known as the white man's burden. […]
>
> I support Malala, I support the right to education for all, I just cannot stand the hypocrisy of Western politicians and media as they pick and choose, congratulating themselves for something that they have caused. Malala is the good native, she does not criticise the West, she does not talk about the drone strikes, she is the perfect candidate for the white man to relieve his burden and save the native.

Such commentary is persuasive and reminds us of the problematic histories facing many life narrators whose narratives have (not necessarily by their design) become master narratives and perceived to be representative histories, which, in turn, dilutes other histories and prevents other narratives from being received. Of course, Baig's criticisms here are not centred on the blog of Malala Yousafzai but on the larger reception and

symbolism of "Malala." This should not necessarily diminish the important life narrative work achieved by Malala, or the textual and contextual reading of the blog that we offer here. Beyond the plethora of political issues and controversies that we have outlined here is a young woman who has engaged herself within complex debates affecting her future. We cannot know (conclusively, exactly) the extent to which she has exercised agency and autonomy in writing her blog. What we aim to recognise here is something about the methods, practices and circuits through which this blog, and the paratexts that have stemmed from it. Connections between Malala and similarly styled bloggers who emerged after her seem inevitable, and perhaps Brazilian education activist Isadora Faber would not have gained as strong momentum had it not been for the foundations laid by Malala Yousafzai.

Isadora Faber

In 2012, as a 14-year-old high school student in Brazil, Faber launched a Facebook-based "blog" (we will initially refer to it as a "blog" because this is what it has been most often publicly referred to as. But it is not really a blog and this is something we unpack later in this chapter). The blog is titled: *Diário de Classe* (its English title "Classroom Diary.")[3] As previously mentioned, we do not speak Portuguese, but our earnest hope here is not to decontextualise Faber's work from its language or context. Our reading and methodological position, and the reception of Faber's blog nationally and internationally are recurring issues for this chapter. Faber is a witness who engages in "e-witnessing," to use Kay Schaffer's and Sidonie Smith's (2004) concept. Her goal is to draw attention to some of the problems she was experiencing at her public high school in Florianopolis. So, she took photos with her mobile phone and posted these photographs—of dilapidated buildings, classrooms in dire need of maintenance, broken desks, bathrooms

[3] In an interesting (and ironically Facebook-like) twist, Faber has a co-creator when the blog first began: her best friend Melina is acknowledged in the *SBS Dateline* interview (which we refer to throughout this chapter). It is said that Melina did not want to continue working on the blog when the controversy started to set in.

that were barely functional, and poorly prepared and unhealthy school dinners—on her Facebook page. She also offers direct critiques of what she perceived to be substandard teaching, for example, on August 22, 2013, she writes:

> Today the teacher of geography was missing for the second time this week. [We] watched a movie in 4 ' easy instalments. Nobody deserves this; it is a pure waste of time.

When we quote from Faber's blog we quote the Facebook English translation in the text. This is a somewhat fraught methodological approach. (How can we be sure of the accuracy of this translation, unlike Malala's blog, which was likely translated by an official BBC translator from Urdu to English?) However, as previously mentioned, we are interested in the international transit of this blog. Though many, perhaps most of Faber's most dedicated readers will engage with the text in Portuguese, her many international followers (such as us) will read the blog in translation. So, in this spirit of this engagement, we follow the Facebook translations and this gives us a further layer of textuality to our encounter with Faber's work. Faber's blog creates numerous methodological challenges with thousands of "shares" for each post and hundreds of comments, and further dialogue and discussion that Faber often engages in. It would be impossible to read and consider all of this even if we could read Portuguese.

Most of Faber's posts relate directly or indirectly to education. For example, on January 8, 2015, she posts about the disparity between politicians' pay rises and those given the teachers. She writes:

> Where will the neglect with education [end]? We all know that things need to improve and very much and to this end, the teacher has to be valued and motivated. The minister said that the teachers have to work for love. […] Surely the minister works for love, receiving more than $ 30 thousand in the month. (*Diário de Classe* January 8, 2015)

Faber has found herself deeply engaged in many complex issues and challenges around educational reform in Brazil to which there are no

easy answers. Like Malala, Faber shaped a role for herself as eyewitness citizen journalist. In her blog, we hear Faber's voice and her experiences (through video clips and through her writing). She documents her everyday world—including many of her own personal experiences. The significance of Faber's speaking out (and eventually being heard) on these issues should not be understated. As Sandra Weber and Shanley Dixon (2007b) (and indeed other theorists of childhood and youth have noted), "as policy makers, educators, child advocates, and parents continue to debate … issues [affecting children], the voices and experiences of young people are largely absent" (p. 4). Faber is highly skilled with her use of social media and mainstream media and is using these forums to insert the voice of the young people affected by educational policy into the public sphere.

When Faber mixes and mashes other forms of media into her blog—news articles and clips—she becomes a "gatewatcher" (Bruns 2005) observing and interpreting knowledge which passes through different "gates" of media and culture, and reposting items on her blog which are of interest to her and other would-be educational reformers. But most significantly, Faber juxtaposes her micro and macro cultural worlds. Faber assert that the personal experiences of public school children are highly political; she shows that the activism that surrounds this issue is not the sole domain of middle-class adults.

As Schaffer and Smith contend, "Digital environments raise provocative questions about how to approach emergent acts and instances of witness." (2004, p. 224) Isadora Faber sought reform at a time when the global spotlight was, and indeed still is, on her country (the 2014 World Cup and the forthcoming Olympics in 2016,[4] Tedx 2015). Around the

[4] For example, on July 24, 2014, she writes:

> Tomorrow is the game of selection. During the last few days it was the Neymar. Arrived to threaten the family of the Colombian that made the lack. All moved with the situation, with pity, angry, outraged, wanting to justice. Even in the stadium he has already been attended by doctors and did some tests. In a few minutes left of helicopter to hospital with everything that has a right, the photo of the magnetic resonance of column of him walking in all channels in a few hours. Do not throw more the World Cup for that ends this weekend but by the end of the month should be playing. Ended the dream of the Neymar. … Guys, i am also sad at the time, but it is like that. My father said that needs work several years to gain what

time of the football World Cup, Faber makes many posts about the economic legacy of Brazil hosting the World Cup and the 2016 Olympics and how she believes that the money would have been better spent on schools and hospitals. Faber is also particularly interested in national and global issues affecting young women. For example, in response to the kidnapping of 270 young women in Nigeria by Boko Haram, she posted a #bringbackourgirls photo on her page.

Faber's page was promoted by articles written in the Brazilian newspaper *OGlobo* (the globe): one of the largest and most influential newspapers in the country (Oglobo 2013; Vanini 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). She quickly amassed "likes" and forged intertextual networks; within weeks, fellow Brazilian students were posting similar photos on her page from their own schools: "images of ruined, run-down and flooded buildings, or fights and vandalism in the classroom, and of weeping and shouting teachers" (Spigel 2013). Faber gained media attention locally (the local television station came to her school) and then nationally (Spigel 2013). Faber was asked to appear on talk shows in Brazil, quickly becoming a "voice of youth" on public education and the need for reforms (Tedx 2015). Faber was named by *Newsweek* as "Brazil's Bravest Blogger," and Brazil's *Financial Times* "recognized Isadora as one of the 25 most influential personalities in Brazil" (Tedx 2015). Faber, despite and also because of her youth, has become a key figure in discussions of public education in Brazil. Recently, Faber has set up her own non-government organisation (NGO) "to improve public education in Brazil" (Tedx 2015). Faber's Facebook blog has (at the time of writing this paper) 597,393 "likes." The blog's success resulted in a book contract for Faber—her book was published in 2014. Like other social media projects, Faber's journalistic assemblage blurs the boundaries between the professional and amateur writer/reporter in creating new and productive spaces in between.

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the Neymar earn per month. Who of you had immediate medical attention when felt something? Exams and results in time, instant magnetic resonance, no need to mark, then, displacement by helicopter. How many of us here has been on helicopter? Who does not need to make an hour to do exams? For sure Neymar is being very well treaty and spoiled. Neymar did at the time. Florianopolis is waiting here in hospital with beds has closed for lack of staff and I have not seen any demonstration on Facebook. Let us not forget the reality, the world cup ends Sunday and life goes on.

Life Narrative and Participation: Controversy and Control

But perhaps predictably, like Malala, it has not been all smooth sailing for Faber. Faber has not been celebrated by everyone in Brazil with many students, teachers and education administrators being opposed to her actions (there are many such comments on her Facebook page alongside the many messages of support). Some of her teachers complained that they were being unjustly targeted; one teacher filed a complaint for libel (Spiegel 2013). Faber also received anonymous death threats on Facebook. And on November 7, 2012, Faber blogs about a rock attack on her house which injured her grandmother.

A young person with an audience is a scary prospect for many adults. Jill Walker Rettberg (2014) discusses the ways that social media provides "tools for self-improvement and self-knowledge and the power relationships that shift and are contested when new groups of people share their self-representations in the public sphere" (p. 2). She argues,

> It is striking that young women in their teens and early twenties for the first time have found platforms that allow them to speak without censorship to large public audiences, society's kneejerk reaction is to mock them … mockery, hatred and pathologising are used as disciplinary strategies to put young women in particular back in their place. This is about power and about who has the right to speak in public or share images in public. (p. 18)

There was likely a perception among her critics that Faber was overstepping the boundaries of knowledge and experience. For example, on November 8, 2012, Faber writes on her blog that she has been criticised for seeking fame and being naïve on the consequences of her social media use, and failing to understand the complexities of the inequality she was bringing to attention. It would be naïve and indeed insulting not to consider that Faber was perhaps clever enough to have worked the system here; she would have been well aware of the power of social media

(to infiltrate mainstream media) to shame the Education Department into action. As Susannah Stern (2008) notes:

> some young people view personal sites as avenues to participate in, or respond to, a culture that valorizes publicity as an end in itself. Indeed, they feel that personal sites can serve as symbols to others and themselves that they belong to and in the public culture. This does not mean that young authors uncritically buy into the dominant messages about celebrity and pop culture that persist in mainstream media, but rather than many have recognized the cultural value of self promotion and are motivated to publish online in consequence. (p. 101)

In her Tedx (2015) talk, Faber jokes about the fact that every time she complains now things are "fixed" within a week. And in the interview with the Education Department representative, she seems conscious and careful to suggest that it was a cultural movement, rather than just one student (Faber) who influenced the reforms. (*SBS Dateline* 2014) So, the criticisms of Faber may or may not be founded, and however fascinating, it is not our position to make such judgements. What we do want to talk about is the ways in which Faber's practice is contextual, intertexual and also multiply-mediated.

As was the case with Malala's blog, there is a lot we cannot know about the production of Faber's texts: from her blog to her book. We know (from the *Dateline* documentary) that Faber initially worked on the blog with her friend Melina. But what is not obvious is the extent to which anyone else might have influenced the writing and production of the text (e.g. parents or teachers). There are certainly stakeholders with much to gain (whether economic or ideological) from Faber's success and role as an education reformer. Faber's identity potentially becomes entrenched in the project and her subsequent writings may become expected and formulaic. It is impossible to know the extent to which Faber feels empowered or constrained by the representations that she makes. And perhaps it is unfair to Faber to speculate in this way as it assumes young people cannot complete such important political work autonomously. Of course, this is not the argument we want to make here. However, it is impossible for cultural work to emerge in a vacuum.

For instance, when Faber moved into the book-publishing world, her work would have been multiply-mediated: by editors and publishers, and Faber's work is privileged and commodified which shifts the limits of what Faber is able to do in her writing.

Contexts affect how young people receive and interact with digital technologies, and it is important to think about the circumstances from which Faber takes up, adapts and integrates these technologies and social media tools into her daily observations and passions. Faber has grown up in a globalised world; the Internet, social action era; inspired by other young activist bloggers from across the world (e.g. the aforementioned Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan and Martha Payne in Scotland).[5] It is perhaps not so surprising that in 2012, Faber chose Facebook over other platforms to publish her activist writing. This speaks to the point we made earlier that by common definitions, this is not really a blog. It is a public Facebook page which invites interaction: likes, shares, comments discussion and so forth. These pages generally have an author or authors who disseminate information on particular subjects. Communities of "like"-minded people join the page by "liking" it and then anything published on the page will appear in the "liker's" Facebook newsfeed. And as one person likes a page or story, this is commonly displayed in their friends'

[5] Martha Payne is another example of an influential girl blogger who aimed to bring attention to substandard conditions in her school through her blog "Never Seconds." "Never Seconds," begun when Payne was just nine-years old as a school writing project, detailed the unhealthy or, often unsubstantial, school dinners she received at the public primary school she attended in Lochgilphead, Scotland. Payne's blog went viral after a tweet from Jamie Oliver. Payne soon began receiving and publishing pictures of school dinners (whether healthy and unhealthy) she received from children across the globe (Allen). These meals were rated in the style of food blogs. Media interest followed, and Payne offered interviews in print, radio and television. Like Isadora Faber, Payne experienced resistance to her blog from the school and local council was banned from posting photographs on her blog. This inevitably brought more (positive) attention to Payne and the ban was overturned (Cellan-Jones 2012).

Payne sought to draw attention to the ways school dinners were impacting on children's health and aimed to raise money for the charity "Mary's Meals" (which raises money for children's meals in Africa). Payne succeeded; her blog has (of April 2014, the last time the blog was updated) received 10 million hits and Payne has raised over £130,000. Payne (along with her father) wrote a book (*Never Seconds: The Incredible Story of Martha Payne*) published in 2012, which was endorsed by Jamie Oliver. Some of the proceeds from the book go to Mary's Meals. Payne won a series of awards for the blog including Time's Top 25 Blogs of 2012 and The Observer's Best Food Blog of 2012. She also won the Liberty Human Rights Young Person of the Year ("Never Seconds" 2015).

newsfeeds. Those who like or comment on a Facebook page become part of its textual production.

Faber most likely worked within Facebook because of its popularity in her country and beyond. Brazil has over 65 million Facebook users, second only to the USA, and the average time spent on Facebook by users increased by 208% between 2012 and 2013 (Holmes 2013). Faber may have recognised the significant potential reach of Facebook was beyond any blogging platform. The affordances of Facebook as a site for public life narrative practice and/or activism has been documented by scholars such as Aimée Morrison (2014) and Laurie McNeill (2012). High traffic, quick sharing and "like"-contagion so often associated with Facebook create high stakes for circulation and consumption. Facebook, as it evolves, offers useful possibilities for information access, creativity and making and sharing knowledge.

From the perspective of life writing studies, it is clear that these pages are not simple, single-authored texts but "auto-assemblages … the ongoing selection and appropriation of content across several modes brought together into a constellation for the purpose of self-representation" (Whitlock and Poletti 2008, p. xiv). Auto-assemblage includes the pages and articles we share on Facebook, what we like, read, comment on and so forth. This would reveal the produsers' location, occupation, and who their family and friends are, interests and political leanings, for example.

Morrison's discussion of Facebook's affordances reminds us that Facebook enables, shapes and limits the sorts of stories Faber was able to tell, just as Faber deploys Facebook to work for her and her cause (Morrison 2014, pp. 112–131) Faber's identity—as educational activist and writer—is validated and propelled by Facebook which provides an audience and wide dissemination for Faber's project. Faber, as a cyberactivist, was likely conscious of the high level of "slacktivism" and "clicktivism" affecting many Facebook-based activist projects. Faber can hardly be accused of either: The page records her actions and reflections and ultimately she has been praised for bringing about genuine educational reform from her life narrative project. But it is also important to acknowledge that when it comes to her activism, there are limitations on the experiences she can observe and document; comments about teachers might well be decontextualised from the experience of teachers.

For example, on October 7, 2012, Faber asks why teachers do not want cameras in classrooms. She argues that teachers should have nothing to hide and should not perceive themselves to be "victims of a social networking dictatorship."

While working with a publishing platform dedicated to life writing, and writing from her experience, Faber is "citizen journalist" (Rettberg 2008, p. 84); a professional journalist might have told her story but did not. Faber has freedom of speech but these freedoms are not without parameters (as previously mentioned, she was sued for libel). Faber is not governed by journalistic ethics in her personal blog, but there are moral and legal stakes that she must abide by and Faber's ethics may require closer discussion. Faber works with a blended authorial position, citizen journalist and life writer, documenter and subject. The success of her project rests on maintaining the balance between these two closely related but distinct genres. We would argue that her status as a young person, and her ability to strategically deploy certain ideals associated with youth, is central to her ability to negotiate these.

Faber is working within different cultural traditions—past and recent: youthful rebellion, life narrative as a tool for social justice, "participatory culture"—to use Henry Jenkins' (1998) term "girls making media" to borrow Mary Celeste Kearney's (2006) idea and also cyberadvocacy. David Buckingham (2008) argues that much of young people's social media use is for "information retrieval" and to "reinforce local networks amongst peers." Buckingham proposes "only a minority are using the technology to engage in civic participation, to communicate their views to a wider audience, or to get involved in political activity" (p. 14). So, Faber's work here is significant; she has self-published and self-promoted to gain networked publics (to use danah boyd's concept). She has built an audience and disseminated her narratives. Faber's blog reflects particular knowledge and desires for: cultural participation; agency and self-determination; and active, meaningful, goal-based social networking across her nation and the globe. With the rise of digital technologies and access to these technologies, young people are no longer restricted to the role of cultural consumer but are active and impactful cultural producers.

For example, in juxtaposing her personal experiences with larger cultural and political events, groups, goals and desires, Faber reveals her

sense of connection to these difference spheres and a developing awareness of the potency of life narrative and social media. For example, on June 27, 2013, she writes:

> Today we can have a certainty, the political pressure in the works. When I started the diary and began to have impact, as soon as the city came and renovated the school, several other diaries have also resulted. It took just a week of demonstrations and changes have already occurred. … The popular pressure has worked. These are victories of the people that came out in demonstrations … a slap in the face for all who said that the movements had no leaders, had no goal. … Ever noticed how the timeline of your Facebook has changed? Everybody is talking about politics … everyone is more involved in what is happening. All this also served to prove once the strength of social networks.

It is not surprising that Faber succeed in upsetting her adult foes because this was precisely her intention (for better or worse), and as Weber and Dixon (2007) note, the life narrative tools at a young author's disposal "provide young people with symbolic resources for constructing or expressing their own identities and, in some instances, for evading or directly resisting adult authority" (p. 5). Her youthful perspectives can offer unique, experiential knowledge. The interest in Faber's journalistic life narrative reveals particular cultural investments in "personal authenticity" and "the amateur" (p. 92).

Conclusion

Our reading of Faber's and Yousafzai's blogs reveals the global circuits of politically engaged life narrative texts authored by young writer activists. Malala's story was one of large global significance: the majority of those who consume mainstream news and social media in the West would have heard of Malala. We similarly encountered Faber's story as it travelled through international circuits: on an Australian news and current affairs programme SBS *Dateline* in 2014. As we conclude this chapter, a question remains: Why did not we choose an example that we could "read"

better: texts in languages and contexts that are familiar, texts that have proceeded through transparent mediations? Reading involves a multitude of methods, senses and desires. And Malala and Faber deserve to be read.

One of the recurring problems for us as we read life narrative texts authored by young people is the tendency to read these narratives contextually and politically rather than aesthetically or artistically. Here, we are reading Malala's and Faber's narratives largely contextually—for their political potency rather that the beauty of their words because we cannot read them, and thus this limits our ability to understand their projects and the complex responses to it.

Malala Yousafzai and Isadora Faber have achieved many things in their writing but perhaps most significantly each has brought about a shift in cultural agency; both have disrupted power relationships around knowledge about education in Pakistan and Brazil, respectively. It is usually youth who are surveilled in the classroom (and beyond); Malala and Faber have turned the tables. Historically, young people are not usually the ones most commonly talking about education policy and reform and setting agendas.

Life narrative offers a powerful tool for Malala and Faber to write and thus make their experiences consequential. These writings are not using autobiographical social media to speak exclusively to their peer group; Malala and Faber target adults squarely in this dialogue. These writings explicitly link youthful subjectivities with political and social change. Each has crafted a speaking position that utilises the discourses of youth—particularly as representatives of a nation's future—to become a voice for educational reform.

9

Conclusion: Youth, Agency and Self-Representation: What Cultural Work Can Life Writing Do?

In taking young people's life writing as the focus of this project, we have sought to explore how diverse groups of young people have used life writing in the service of citizenship and to articulate their agency. In undertaking our research, we have been motivated by an interest in seeking an answer to the question James and James asked in *Constructing Childhood* (2004):

> To what extent do—and can—children contribute to social change? Are they outside the cultural politics of any society or can the things that children do, either as individuals or a group, have an impact on society, instigating processes of social transformation, as well as social and cultural reproduction*?* (James and James 2004, p. 3)

In September 2015 Malala Yousafzai appeared on the Ellen Degeneres chat show. Degeneres talked about having read Malala's memoir and having watched the documentary about Malala's life; such is the global reach and mainstream resonance of Malala and her story. The focus of the interview was Malala's forgiveness, resilience, and ongoing commitment

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to advocating for the rights of young women to an education. In watching this interview we are again reminded of some of the central questions of this project: how do young people participate in life narrative practices, and how do these texts and practices emerge in public domains and counterpublics? What sorts of narratives and representations gain the most traction with readers or audiences for these texts? To what extent do young writers exert agency in the production, circulation and reception of their life narratives? And to what degree are such narratives mediated and indeed controlled by adults who have much to gain (politically and economically) through the 'uses' of young people's public images and life narrartives?

In the social sciences, the framing of these questions relates to what is known as the "structure/agency" debate, and as we were finalising our manuscript Spencer and Doull (2015) published a useful overview and analysis of the terms of this debate in relation to the question of young people's agency and how it is conceptualised in youth studies research. Our project has demonstrated how the questions of youth agency could be approached from a literary studies perspective, and considered what might be gained from an interdisciplinary approach to this shared question.

In commencing this project we set out to consider a series of significant case studies to historicise and contextualise recent sites, cultural spaces, and genre modes from which young people's life writing has emerged in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: from the legacy of Romanticism and how it has shaped the position of young writers in the literary field, through war diaries from World War II, child solider memoirs, Riot Grrrl letters, girlhood health and wellness memoirs, zine culture, and activist media. We wanted to break down the often binaristic interpretations that have been made of young people's life writing: as either remarkable and groundbreaking, or as troubling and problematic, by committing to more nuanced, textual and contextual analyses of these texts that reveal the complexities of the production, mediation and circulation *as* life narrative. To do this, we have explored the ways in which young people create and deploy life narrative texts as an assertion of cultural agency and a means of inserting their experiences into cultures. A central concern has been to look at the cultural work that youth-authored life writing can

do in terms of asserting young people's voices and creative practices into a variety of public spaces. Inevitably there are various mediations and indeed impediments to these cultural processes and accounting for this, while keeping the young author clearly in view, has been a primary aim of this project.

The case studies that we considered allowed us to explore some of the diverse practices and genres from which youth life narratives have emerged. We found that young life writers provided three distinct challenges for life writing research:

Methodologically: we had to find, adapt and practice different forms of literary and cultural analysis fitting of the diversity of the texts and the questions they asked of us as readers and researchers.

Ethically: we needed to consider how to read through trauma, how to interpret through power imbalances and other inequalities that the texts brought to our attention.

Genre, circulation and mediation: as we read texts from counterpublics created and largely maintained by young people, and also texts that have proceeded through varying levels of mediation, we needed to read with knowledge of genre, textuality, and cultural production. The research must be sensitive to the different, often unique and unfamiliar transits of these life narratives and be attuned to the reading practices required, and the probability of encountering problems and questions we might not be able to access or answer.

The most significant finding of our research was that young people have represented their lives through various modes and genres of writing during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The contribution that these writers have made to the genres of life writing has often been overlooked or interpreted in more limited ways. We have also found that life writing by young people has considerable cultural impact: in discussions of defining events of the twentieth and twenty-first century (such as the Holocaust and the civil wars in the aftermath of colonialism), and by contributing to the discussion of issues seen to be define youth as a time of risk (such as substance abuse and suicide). We have explored the contribution that these youth-authored life narrative texts have made to making young people's lives and perspectives more visible, and explored the complex discursive terrain in which the narratives themselves circulate.

Life narrative discourse facilitates young peoples' agency because it is an established discourse for representing diverse lives, experiences, perspectives, and knowledges. It is also a discourse that allows young people to make claims that their experiences and knowledges are consequential. In applying theories of childhood and youth to read life narrative we are suggesting vital and productive intersections between the disciplines of youth studies (largely conducted in the social sciences) and life writing studies (largely conducted in the humanities). For example, we aimed to show the significant contribution young people have and continue to make to literary cultures, texts and practices (where the focus recently has more commonly been young people's representation in and contribution to popular cultural modes such as social media texts and practices). So, life narrative forms have provided a means for young people to not only participate in, but to generate cultures and texts. One of our key findings here is that young people's life writing does more cultural work than is acknowledged by either of the disciplines that we have engaged in through this research. The genres and texts we have considered in this project have had significant impact upon literatures and literary cultures. For instance, many of the texts that we have cited in this study have been important to recent discussions and debates around life writing (memory, truth and hoax; authorship and mediation). Further, many of the case studies raise vital issues for childhood and youth studies around agency and participation in cultures (inequality, generational issues, and subcultures).

There were inevitably limitations to our research. We could only include seven case studies but we are deeply aware that there were so many more texts we might have considered: across age groups, class and cultural backgrounds, dis/abilities, and through different medias and genres. While we touched briefly on hip-hop in Chapter 1, for example, we did not have the space to consider of how hip-hop has become a globalised aesthetic that has empowered young people to speak about their experiences in postcolonial societies such as France and Australia, and about the experience of being the children of migrants in the United States and United Kingdom (see Alim et al. (2009), Mitchell (2001)). We were also unable to discuss the increasing use of adult-authored life narrative that take young people as their intended audience, such as the American project *It Gets Better*,

which deploys autobiographical discourse by queer adults to attempt to address high rates of suicide amongst queer youth (see Cover 2012). There is clearly room for the identification of further case studies that will deepen our understanding of the variety of ways young people use life narrative, and the contexts in which they take it up. There is also further scope for future research to continue to demonstrate the significant contributions that young writers make to life narrative genres and methods, and the importance of youth life writing in inserting young people's perspectives on contemporary social issues. For example, Rebecca Starford's 2015 memoir *Bad Behaviour: A Memoir of Bullying and Boarding School* is released into a climate where there is renewed public concern and policy interest in bullying and its impact on young people.

Further, we are native English speakers working within Australian institutions and thus we were limited to English-language texts that we were able to readily access. Future research might adopt some of the methodological and theoretical paradigms we propose here and apply them to youth-authored texts from different geographical locations and in different languages. Such approaches would make an important contribution to both childhood and youth studies, and life narrative research in that these studies would reveal deeper knowledge and perspectives on the sorts of life narrative texts being produced by young writers and artists across the world.

From a literary studies perspective, this study has been unable to consider and account for the extent to which young life writers are in dialogue with the established literary forms of the novel of youthful experience, such as the *bildungsroman*, and novels of real life (*roman á clef*). Nor have we been able to consider the long history of young people authoring such texts. The work we began in Chapter 1 could be productively extended by further work in this area, and through a more detailed analysis of the continued influence of Romanticism (particularly British Romanticism and is cluster of young authors) on conceptualisations of young people's creativity.[1]

[1] For readers unfamiliar with this element of literary history, we are referring to the brief and influential careers of the "second generation" British Romantic poets, many of whom died in their late twenties or early thirties.

Undertaking this study has also made us aware of the need for more reader and audience research that seeks to understand how young people themselves read and make use of youth life writing. Metcalf's (2012) study of the use of gangsta memoir in classrooms, for example, and her interviews with young people who were given the texts to read, provides an instructive example of how such research might be undertaken. Reader studies within counterpublics, such as zine culture and online spaces where young people are writing and reading life narrative, could also strengthen our understanding of the uses of life narrative in youth cultures by expanding the research purview to include young people as 'everyday readers' of these texts. The vast body of ethnographic work on young people's use of social media (for example boyd 2006; 2008, Robards 2012) could be productively extended in this direction.

There are also significant methodological challenges to be addressed when visual and screen-based life narrative is given more attention than it has been in this study. The direct-to-camera performances on YouTube, the aesthetics of collage and appropriation that define many Tumblrs, and the complex presentation of life experience through the Instagram feed are all spaces where youth cultures—both public and counterpublic—adopt, make use of, and critique the importance of autobiographical discourse to contemporary culture. Young people's use of these forms are often the subject of concern or suspicion in the popular media, and scholars of life narrative and youth studies can make significant contributions to how these practices and the texts they produce can be understood.

Finally, what we hope we have achieved in this research is to follow the mandates set out by our colleagues in interdisciplinary childhood and youth studies: to consider new paradigms for reading and responding to childhood and youth-authored cultural practices (James and Prout 1990, p. x). Our focus here has been on texts and textuality: the extent to which life writing forms enable us to read or indeed hear young people's voices within different literary cultures and texts, and the impact of mediation on young people's life writing. In doing so we have asserted the centrality of young writers to non-fictional literary studies (and indeed to culture more generally), but also the diversity of practices that young people practice when they engage in self representation. We have discussed the innovative contributions that young writers have made, analysed these

texts according to established methods from literary and cultural studies, and argued for new literary methodologies for reading these texts—particularly in relation to reading through mediation and practising ethical scholarship. We hope that our future scholarship, and that of others, might look to new connections and cross overs between interdisciplinary life writing scholarship and studies in childhood and youth, to further consider the productive and exciting scholarly relationships that may develop from here.

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