

University of Wollongong



DISSENTING VOICES SYMPOSIUM
Literature, Identity and Culture Research Group
Faculty of Arts
October 1-2, 2009
Venue: University of Wollongong: 67.101



Conference Organisers

Anne Collett

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&

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Tracey Emin, 'me at 10'

Tracey Emin, *Me at 10* from *Family Suite* (1994)

From Tracey Emin 20 Years, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh 2008

Literature, Identity & Culture Research Group
 Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong
Lifewriting Symposium: ‘Dissenting Voices’

PROGRAM

Wednesday September 30th (6.00-7.30 in the Wollongong City Library)
 ‘Performing Poetry’ with Olive Senior and local poets

Thursday October 1st
 Building 67.101

8.30-9.00	Registration
9.00-9.30	Welcome to Country Welcome to the University of Wollongong: Professor Judy Raper, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
9.30-10.30	Keynote: Maureen Perkins, “Refusing to Write: Resisting the Autobiographical Imperative”
10.30-11.00	Morning Tea
11.00-12.30	Session 1: <i>Terms from Elsewhere</i> Mary Besemerer, “‘An Irritating Mosquito Buzz on the Periphery’: the ‘Minority Voice’ of Translingual Immigrant Life Writers” Nicola Evans, “Portrait of the Artist as an Auteur” Tony Simoes da Silva, “Conversations with History: South African White liberals and the Passing of Apartheid”
12.30-1.30	Lunch
1.30-2.30	Keynote: Olive Senior, “‘Hearing Voices’: Inviting the Outsider into the Text” [Supported by the Centre for Canadian-Australian Studies, UOW]
2.30-3.30	Session 2: <i>Dissenting Letters</i> Anne Collett, “when writing is not writing, and not telling a story is telling a story” Gillian Whitlock, “Salam Alaikum and G’day”
3.30-4.00	Afternoon Tea
4.00-5.30	Session 3: <i>Spectacular Dissent</i> Maureen Clark, “Sex Art ‘n’ Montsalvat: Betty Roland's The Eye of the Beholder” Dorothy Jones, “This World and That World: Janet Frame’s Autobiography” Amanda Harris, “Writing for Posterity: the Several Lives Recorded in Ethel Smyth’s Autobiographical Writing.”
6.30	Conference Dinner

Friday October 2nd

9.00-10.00	Keynote: Margaretta Jolly “Consenting Voices”
10.00-10.30	Morning Tea
10.30-12.00	Session 4: <i>Activist Subjectivities</i> Michael Jacklin , “‘This Is How My Treachery Began’: Narratives of Dissent and Displacement from Iran and Afghanistan to Australia” Sarah Ailwood , “Dissenting Voices: Personal Narratives and Reform of Married Women's Property Law”.
12.00-1.00	Lunch
1.00-2.30	Session 5: <i>Self-Ethnography</i> Chris Barker , “Dissenting Voices: The Hearts of Men” Luz Mercedes Hincapié , “She Speaks with the Serpent’s Forked Tongue: Expulsion, Departure, Exile and Return” Siobhan McHugh , “Marrying Out”
2.30-3.00	Afternoon Tea
3.00-4.30	Session 6: <i>Elusive Selves</i> Guy Davidson , “Susan Sontag, Sexual Dissidence, and Celebrity” Irene Lucchitti , “The Dissenting Voice of Marta Becket” Sue Thomas , ‘[U]ngodly Agents’ and ‘Unsainting’ Dances: Historicising the Character of Dissent in William Dawes’ Letters Home and Work Diaries, 1823-1827
4.30-5.00	Concluding Remarks

ABSTRACTS & BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Sarah Ailwood (University of Canberra)

Dissenting Voices: personal narratives and reform of married women's property law

This paper examines women's personal narratives in public debate of married women's property law in the nineteenth century in Britain, the United States and Australia. It will provide an overview of laws relating to married women's ownership of property and its economic and social implications. It then explores how the stories of married women - in the form of newspaper articles, published autobiographies and submissions to parliament - influenced public discourse, parliamentary debate and ultimately reform of the law regarding married women's property ownership. It is particularly concerned with women's constructions of self in these narratives and will particularly focus on Eliza Davies' *Story of an Earnest Life* published in 1880.

Sarah is a lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of Canberra. Her research focuses on women's writing. Her current project investigates intersections between women's life writing, legal experience, law reform and ethics. Her other research interests include Jane Austen and other Romantic women writers, men in women's texts, Katherine Mansfield and modernism. Sarah is also legally qualified and has worked in various legal professional roles. She currently convenes the first year law program at the UC.

Chris Barker (University of Wollongong)
Dissenting Voices: The Hearts of Men

This paper reflects on my book 'The Hearts of Men', which, based on 100 interviews, concerns the emotional lives of men. I want to contest the view that men are emotionally autonomous beings untroubled by contemporary cultural change. However, I also want to dissent from the popular view that men are emotional cripples who can't talk about emotion.

My purpose is to explore a paradox at the core of my project. On the one hand I undertook the work as a way of reflecting on the emotional difficulties of my life, which I share with other men. There is for example a strand of men in our society who suffer from depression and alcohol abuse and whose behaviour is problematic. Thus, I talked with a group of heroin users.

However, I was also motivated by a sense that I was not the emotional illiterate I saw men portrayed as. I was able to talk about my emotional life, even when it was problematic. I argue that men are not as emotionally illiterate or as incapable of talking about emotion as is often suggested. For example I discuss corporate executives and sportsmen, often thought of as emotionally illiterate (witness the current public concern about NRL footballers) or as proponents of traditional gender roles, who are emotionally sophisticated. I also talked to Buddhist men and participants in the 'men's movement' who offer a dissenting view of masculinity.

I do not pretend that my study is disinterested research in which I played no part. Instead I show the reader some of my own motivations and prejudices. Here I dissent from a view of research as 'neutral', which includes men's disguising of their own personal voice within writing.

Chris has been a teacher and researcher in schools and universities for over 25 years. He is currently Associate Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Wollongong. Chris is the author of a number of books that are linked together by an interest in culture, meaning and communication. They include *Cultural Studies: theory and practice* and *Making Sense of Cultural Studies and Cultural Studies* (Sage). His work combines theory development and ethnographic empirical research. At present he is exploring questions of culture and emotion in contemporary life with particular reference to story telling. His most recent publication is *The Hearts of Men* (UNSW press 2007). Together with his colleague Professor Brian Martin Chris recently launched an innovative undergraduate subject on 'Happiness: causes and conditions'.

Mary Besemer (Australian National University)

'An irritating mosquito buzz on the periphery': the 'minority voice' of translingual immigrant life writers

In *Lost in Translation* (1989), her evocative memoir of migrating as a child from Poland to North America in the 1950s, Eva Hoffman diagnoses her impatience as a university student with her American friends' seemingly obsessive focus on their relationships to their mothers as a case of a marginal or peripheral vision, which falls outside, and fails to connect with, the terms of debate taken for granted by those speaking the dominant language:

An oppositional voice – a voice that responds to a statement with a counterstatement and says no, you're wrong, it's not the mother but the daughter who's at fault – is part of the shared conversation. But a minority voice – a voice that introduces terms outside the tensions of a particular dialogue, terms that come from elsewhere – is usually heard only as an irritating mosquito buzz on the periphery, an intrusion that the participants in the main conversation want to silence quickly and with a minimum of rudeness, so they can get on with the real subject. (1991 [1989]: 266)

With reference to Hoffman's memoir and four reflective essays, by Bulgarian-born French semiotician Tzvetan Todorov (1985), Russian-born American writer Irina Reyn (2000), Indian-born US author Gini Reticker (2000) and Russian-born Australian journalist Irene Ulman (2007), I look at how immigrant life writers have represented experiences of introducing 'terms from elsewhere' into established local debates by virtue of their 'minority' conceptual and normative outlooks on the issues at stake, as immigrants from another language background.

Mary is a Research Associate in the School of Language Studies, ANU, and the author of *Translating One's Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography* (Peter Lang, 2002) and articles on immigrant and travel memoir. She co-edited *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures* (UQP, 2007) and is co-editor of the Routledge journal *Life Writing*. Forthcoming publications include 'Intimately strange societies: cultural translation in travel memoirs of origin', to appear in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*; and 'Emotions in Bilingual Life Narratives' in *Linguistic Relativity and Bilingual Cognition*, Vivian Cook & Benedetta Bassetti eds. (Taylor & Francis, 2010). Her areas of interest include contemporary autobiography and autobiographical fiction, cross-cultural memoir, travel writing, bilingualism, and emotions and culture.

Maureen Clark (University of Wollongong)

Sex Art 'n' Montsalvat: Betty Roland's The Eye of the Beholder

Betty Roland's semi-autobiographical book *The Eye of the Beholder* (1984) is a study of Montsalvat, an artist's colony in Eltham, Victoria. Montsalvat was established in 1935 and was the brainchild of the painter and advocate of free love, Justus Jørgensen. Ostensibly, the book is about Montsalvat and the comings and goings of the many poets, painters, writers, actors and film makers who frequented the colony over a period of more than 40 years. As Roland tells it, however, the Montsalvat story is bound up in asymmetrical gender-relations of power where creativity and sexuality are intertwined in the construction of a sense of self and belonging. What I hope to do here, is to demonstrate that *The Eye of the Beholder* is not simply an examination of Montsalvat and its place in Australia's bohemian culture. Rather, the book is an expose of Jørgensen's Svengali-like maltreatment of 'his women', which Roland saw as commensurate with the flaws in his overall composition of self, and the stand she took against him. It is also an exploration of Roland's sense of self in a socio-historical landscape that was less accepting of women as sexual beings than might be the case today.

Maureen completed her Ph.D at the University of Wollongong (2004) and is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Faculty of Arts where she teaches across the disciplines of Media and Cultural Studies and English Studies. Her research interest is identity and cultural transformations in a postcolonial world, with a specialisation on the effects of acculturation and marginalisation in the (re)fashioning of the self. Her monograph *Mudrooroo: A Likely Story* was released by Peter Lang, Belgium in August 2007. She has also published numerous book chapters and articles on the writing of both Mudrooroo and Janette Turner Hospital with refereed journals such as *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Australian Literary Studies*, *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, *Kunapipi* and *New Literatures Review*.

Anne Collett (University of Wollongong)

when writing is not writing, and not telling a story is telling a story

When, in 1965, the South African poet, Dennis Brutus, was released from eighteen months' imprisonment he was still subject to restrictions on travel and a ban on all publication and dissemination of his writing remained in force. In order to circumvent the ban (and the travel restriction) he wrote 'letters' to his sister-in-law Martha in the form of poetry that was intended for later publication. Based on his own experience of prison, the 'letters' were written to Martha ostensibly to give her an understanding of what her husband (and his brother) now also imprisoned on Robben Island, might be experiencing; perhaps in the belief that knowledge is better than ignorance: 'knowledge, even when it is knowledge of ugliness seems to be preferable, can be better endured,' he writes in Letter No.9. But the poems are also the means by which Dennis himself might 'make sense' of the experience. He explains in interview that

as the experience moved further away from me or I moved further away from it in time and it became less intense, it became more manageable. I could at first only write about it from the outside, but later on I could live inside it, to some extent ... the sharper ones [poems] were written further and further away.

I am interested in this paper in thinking about how writing allows an individual to 'make sense' of trauma; more particularly, how writing *to someone* and *for someone else* rather than writing to the self, aids that process. I am also interested in the degree to which this act of writing an experience so beyond 'the ordinary' that it might take on the aura of unreality, is made 'real' (art makes real), and also how this act of writing revealed to Brutus something of how felt experience is transformed into art. Finally, I would like to think about the way genre is shaped by circumstance – both in the 'choice' to write poetry as letter/letter as poetry and in the re-ordering of the poems to create a narrative trajectory that conformed to an expectation of 'biography' rather than to the randomness of 'memory'. (*Letters to Martha* was first published in 1968 and then re-published and re-arranged in 1973 as part of *A Simple Lust: Collected Poems of South African Jail & Exile including Letters to Martha*.)

Anne teaches in the English Literatures program at the University of Wollongong and is the editor of *Kunapipi*: journal of postcolonial writing & culture. She is co-ordinator of 'Women Writing the Self' research group whose members are publishing a book on women's life writing with Palgrave Macmillan, UK. Anne's research lies in the area of 19th and 20th century colonial and postcolonial women's writing and visual arts, and in poetry. She has recently published articles on Olive Senior, Kate Llewellyn, Judith Wright, A.D. Hope, Pamela Mordecai, Kamau Brathwaite and Emily Carr; and is currently completing a monograph (with Dorothy Jones) on gendered colonial modernity in the work of Judith Wright and Emily Carr.

Guy Davidson (University of Wollongong)
Susan Sontag, Sexual Dissidence, and Celebrity

Susan Sontag made her initial impact on public consciousness in the 1960s with a group of essays that challenged the devotion to high culture that characterised mid-century U.S. intellectual life. It has rightly been pointed out that Sontag's investment in unsanctioned and popular forms of aesthetic perception and expression has been overstated, as Sontag was primarily an aficionado of the challenging rigours of modernism. Nevertheless, her repudiation in the 1960s of the high culture/popular culture divide and her call for an 'erotics' rather than a 'hermeneutics' of art now make her look like a vanguardist of what is now called postmodernism.

Sontag also seems very much of her time—and very much a part of postmodernity—in her celebrity status. The dissemination of her likeness via photographs and TV appearances ensconced her in the memory bank of U.S. image culture. But Sontag disavowed her own participation in the postmodern mediascape and her own celebrity status, and actually denounced the pervasiveness of photography and TV. In this paper I'm interested in relating these tensions or contradictions in Sontag's career to her sexuality. Beginning with her famous essay 'Notes of Camp' (1964), Sontag aligned herself (somewhat uneasily) with metropolitan gay culture. This, along with her emphasis on the erotic dimensions of art and her own sexualised image means that Sontag can be aligned with that aspect of postmodern culture known as the sexual revolution. On the other hand, though, Sontag was possibly the most famous undeclared lesbian in recent history. While she largely eschewed life writing, her fiction, essays, and interviews have often been read by critics for their autobiographical resonances. I extend this critical tendency by attending to the articulation and elision of what Jonathan Dollimore calls sexual dissidence in Sontag's writing, taking up the related issue of the tension and interplay between a 'modern' (secreted) sexual self and a 'postmodern' (branded) one. I also reflect on the difference the publication of the first of a series of three projected volumes of her journals makes to our ideas about Sontag and sexuality.

Guy is a Lecturer in the English Literatures Program, University of Wollongong. His research for the most part focuses on the interrelations between sexuality, commodity culture, and literary form in two main contexts: 20th and 21st century US literature, and British and American literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He has published book chapters on Thomas Hardy and on Samuel Delany, as well as essays in journals such as *GLQ*, *Henry James Review*, *English Literature in Transition*, and the *Journal of Modern Literature*. He is currently completing a book, *Queer Commodities: Consumer Capitalism and Same-Sexuality in Contemporary U.S. Fiction*. In his other recent work, Guy has examined the role of obsession in contemporary avant-garde American literary fiction as well as property and possession in the writing of Henry James. His current emerging research project, of which his paper on Susan Sontag is part concerns sexuality and literary celebrity from 1965 to the present. Another essay associated with this project, on Patrick White, will appear in the October 2009 issue of *Australian Literary Studies*.

Nicola Evans (University of Wollongong)

Portrait of the Artist as an Auteur

The idea of the auteur was introduced to film studies in the 1950s as a means of downplaying the commercial aspects of film and boosting its status as an art form by casting the film director as the sole creative force behind the film. Modelled on Romantic ideas of the artist, the title of 'auteur' was bestowed upon a select group of film directors whose personal vision was thought to transcend the industrial circumstances of film production. The auteur theory provided an impetus for critics and cinephiles to search the film for the hand of the director, finding in the film's style or themes traces of the particular concerns of an individual author. At times auteurist readings of texts overlapped with autobiography, particularly in the reading of a film as expressive of the artistic life of the director. Auteurism has also been successful as a marketing strategy. Name brand directors such as Tarantino or Scorsese help to identify the film for potential audiences through the personas that such directors cultivate and perform in interviews and talk shows. In 1991, Timothy Corrigan argued that the commerce of auteurism has all but supplanted the film text. In this new auteurism 'we want to know what our authors and auteurs look like or how they act; it is the text which may now be dead' (100).

Corrigan's remarks have been taken as prescient of the way in which film has developed on DVD. Nowadays it is rare for a film to be sold without an array of material employing the technology of autobiography, including production diaries, directors' commentaries and features going behind the scenes to see the director in action. However, to argue that the text is dead supports a hierarchy between the proper film text and its superfluous 'extras' that may no longer be productive. An alternative perspective is suggested by Derrida's treatment of the literary preface as an extra that is both inside and outside the text, complicating our understanding of the expressive relations between the work and the artist.

Using the literary preface as a reference, this paper asks to what extent documentaries about the making of a film are a comment on the making of an artist. The paper addresses these questions through a study of David Lynch's film *Inland Empire*, a reflexive text that repeatedly calls into question the relationship between performances on camera and off camera and that is therefore particularly interesting to study in its DVD form, where the off camera space expands to include several performances by the director.

Nicola holds degrees in English Literature from Oxford and a PhD. In Communication Research from The Annenberg School in the U.S. and is currently a lecturer in the Media and Cultural Studies program at the University of Wollongong.

She has written for film and cultural studies journals on theories of identity and transgression, and is currently exploring the idea of 'backstage' and 'offscreen space' in film.

Amanda Harris (University of New South Wales)

Writing for Posterity: the Several Lives Recorded in Ethel Smyth's Autobiographical Writing.

English composer, writer and feminist Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) lived a series of acts of dissent. Her prolific autobiographical writing, appearing across nine published volumes (1919-1940) produced a narrative of rebellion against the male culture of musical life from which she was excluded as a female composer. In this paper, I will argue that Smyth's focus on writing was not the reason for her lack of success as a composer that some writers have described it as, but on the contrary was a deliberate intervention by Smyth into the neglect of her musical works by the press and music institutions. Yet, there are deeper levels of dissent that appear when we look beyond the published instances of Smyth's writing. In spite of the apparently candid tone of her memoirs, the politicised and controlled portrait presented there obscures many of the private unconventionalities of Smyth's life. The repetitive narrative of a chaste heterosexual love triangle in Smyth's youth, which appears as a kind of literary trope through each volume of the memoirs, masks her less conventional ongoing romantic relationship with a married man and simultaneous love affairs with women. Smyth's private letters reveal a refusal to conform to her society's expectations of marriage, fidelity and chastity that goes beyond the humorous quips against matrimony that she allowed to be published. This paper will explore the importance of holding in tension the different kinds of life writing engaged in by Smyth. It seeks to argue the centrality to Smyth's identity of writing her life in diaries, letters and memoirs, but also makes important distinctions between the intentions of these different contexts for telling her life story.

Amanda completed her PhD at the University of New South Wales in 2009 on Female Composers and Feminist Movements in England, France and Germany at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Her interest in composing women and music at this time is focused on the cultural conditions and politics of early twentieth century life and the life writing that sustained several composers' careers. She is particularly interested in the composers Ethel Smyth, Lili Boulanger, Luisa Adolpha Le Beau, Louise Hérítte-Viardot and Armande de Polignac. Recent articles explore the perspectives of early first-wave feminist movements on women in music and discuss what Ethel Smyth's unpublished correspondence reveals about her sexuality and romantic life. She lectures in the musicology programs of the Universities of New South Wales and Western Sydney.

Luz M. Hincapié (University of Sydney)

She Speaks with the Serpent's Forked Tongue: Expulsion, Departure, Exile and Return

In this paper, I want to discuss how Ruth Behar mixes self-reflexive writing with her anthropological work and how this has inspired me to think about my own personal experiences within the context of my academic research. Behar, who has been accused of lacking objectivity, distance and 'high theory', does not claim her writing to be 'true science'. She urges instead for a writing that is vulnerable—a self-ethnographical writing which takes us somewhere we couldn't otherwise go, moves us to identify intensely with those one is writing about, and leads us to think passionately about serious social issues. In this manner, I will explore Behar's notion of 'vulnerable writing' to approach issues and experiences from my own life history which inform my research on migration and identity. Expulsion, departure, exile and return—recurrent themes in her writing—have likewise been central in my reflections on my family's experience of migration from Colombia to the United States and have sparked my interest in the migration of Japanese to Colombia. In an avowedly multicultural society with a complex history of racial and cultural *mestizaje*, I am compelled to ask how second and third generation Japanese-Colombians engage with notions of identity, race and gender. Here, I will draw parallels between Behar's vulnerable writing and my work on life history writing of Japanese immigrants to Colombia. My desire to tackle this little known episode of Colombian history from the experience and point of view of the descendants of this migration, using life history methodologies, stems from the hope of drawing deep connections between personal experience and the subjects under study; between what writing vulnerably means and a disbelief in an objective scientific gaze; between the responsibility of speaking from the margins (and not the center of the Western Academy) and understanding the privileged position I occupy, a position which was the product of the migration experience.

Luz graduated from Intercultural Studies at Simon's Rock of Bard College (1990) and received her MA in Postcolonial Literatures from the University of Wollongong (2002) with the thesis *Immigrant, Exiled and Hybrid: Nineteenth-Century Latin American Women Travel Writers*. After a year of teaching in Xi'an Technological University, she returned to Bogotá where she taught at the Javeriana University, and National University, and worked at the Instituto Caro y Cuervo in a research project entitled *The Power of Feminine Images in Colombia: Religiosity, Discourse and Resistance*. Her research interests, publications and conferences centre on the topics of travel writing; migration, diaspora, and identity; Chicana/Latina literature in the USA; Chinese Literature and Asian diasporic literatures specially those within Latin American; as well as Gender, Queer and Postcolonial studies. Currently she holds a University of Sydney International Scholarship to do her Ph.D. in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies. Her thesis research focuses on issues of race, identity and gender in the Japanese migration to Colombia in the early twentieth century.

Michael Jacklin (University of Wollongong)

'This Is How My Treachery Began': Narratives of Dissent and Displacement from Iran and Afghanistan to Australia

Narratives of persecution, imprisonment, displacement and exile have been a fundamental aspect Australian literature: from the convict narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to writing by refugees and migrants to Australia following World War II, to the narratives of those displaced by more recent conflicts. This paper will focus on four texts dealing with experiences of persecution and displacement from Iran and Afghanistan, and published in Australia in the past few years. These four texts reveal an interesting range of approaches to narrating dissent and its consequences. One focuses entirely on experiences of imprisonment in Iran, a consequence of the narrator's participation in student protests in Tehran. Two others divide their narratives between experiences of persecution in the countries of origin and experiences of detention in Woomera. A fourth devotes a substantial portion of the narrative to the subject's return to her home country and the aid organisation she now runs, providing assistance to women and children in Afghanistan. 'Dissent' for each of the subjects represented has changed her or his life irrevocably, forcing each into exile. Yet dissent is not only directed towards governments left behind. In two of the texts, dissent is voiced in regards to the Australian policies of mandatory detention of refugees that existed under the Howard government, and in one of these the narrative centres on the detention of a child and the consequent psychological harm. My paper will situate this range of dissenting voices into the context of refugee discourse that has accrued in Australia over the past decade and ask what role such life writing texts play in readerly engagement with and understanding of refugee subjectivities.

Michael is a Research Fellow in the School of English Literatures, Philosophy and Languages at the University of Wollongong where he is principal project officer on the multicultural subset of the AustLit database. His research interests include writing across cultures, exilic and diasporic writing, life writing and collaboration, Indigenous literatures and multicultural literature. His recent focus on auto/biographical narratives of refugee subjects has stemmed both from his AustLit work and his previous research on collaborative life writing.

Margaretta Jolly (University of Sussex)
Consenting Voices

I know the panic and fear that getting older engenders – especially without money and family. But in my dread, I try to remember it's not, at root, a problem of, or for, my comrades individually, or even of the Movement, but of this stinking, decaying capitalist system. [...] I certainly haven't solved the immediate and future problems of relative poverty and time to do political work. What I miss most is the Movement with its forward thrust, community, sense of purpose, excitement of new discoveries and victories. I miss the Movement more than I miss a child, money or even a man. It's lacking all that's really the pits. And having a child or a man without the Movement to make things more equal is more work, more oppression, more exhaustion.

Carol Hanisch from a letter 'to a feminist friend', August 1989

Moved by the personal writings of political activists who persist in dissenting, I will nevertheless ask what life story approaches can also reveal about those who were once on the political or institutional margins but have moved centrewards. This journey is one that many activist autobiographers have taken, from the Australian/British feminist Lynne Segal to the spectacular example of President Obama after writing his memoir *Dreams From My Father*. Do life stories help us to understand patterns of dissent and consent; can they indeed undo judgements about insiders, outsiders and traitors to the cause? I will reflect upon my own life story work with feminist 'veterans' to open a space for thinking about this in our own lives, especially our lives as ageing and aged subjects. I will also ask us in an academic conference on dissent in life writing, to consider how we might also relate stories of consent to the parallel integration of life writing studies in higher education.

Margaretta is Senior Lecturer in Life History, in the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex. She is joint Director of the University's Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research. Enjoying oral history, autobiography, biography, diaries, Margaretta specialises in the art and history of letter writing. *Dear Laughing Motorbyke: Letters from Women Welders of the Second World War* (Scarlet Press, 1997), presents letters from the extraordinary Mass-Observation Archive to explore war stories as well as arguments about women's roles. Margaretta designed the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (Routledge, 2001) to reflect the field's expansiveness, ranging from Scandinavian life-story competitions to American confessional television, African oral history to Arabic Medieval biographical dictionaries. She explored fictions of memory, war and masculinity in her co-edited *Critical Perspectives on Pat Barker* (University of South Carolina Press, 2005). Her most recent book *In Love and Struggle: Letters and Contemporary Feminism* (Columbia University Press, 2008) won the Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK book prize. This glimpse into intimate archives opens up feminist relationships as they have been expressed in letters and emails since the 1970s. Margaretta is a core member of the International Association for Auto/Biography and on the editorial boards of *Auto/biography*; *Life Writing*, and *Life Writing Annual*.

Dorothy Jones (University of Wollongong)

This World and That World: Janet Frame's Autobiography

Janet Frame describes herself as born into a family where 'words were revered as instruments of magic' and describes the visionary world opening out in childhood through reading, mingled with her own sensuous responses to the natural world. Gradually, however, as she grows more aware of society and its demands on her to adapt, mix and conform, she becomes increasingly uneasy about her place in it. She writes of deliberately choosing to move from 'this world' of conformity with social expectations to 'that world' whose parameters are determined by her own poetic vision. Nevertheless, she insists throughout her autobiography that her proper subject-matter as a writer is the New Zealand social environment, writing in a letter to Charles Brasch: 'There is so much here to be written about – with passion if not always with love'. This paper explores the tension in Frame's autobiographical writing between 'this world' of which she is often sharply critical and 'that world' which she inhabited at such great cost.

Dorothy is an expatriate New Zealander who is currently an Honorary Fellow in the School of English Literatures, Philosophy and Languages at the University of Wollongong where she taught from 1971 to 1976. She has published widely in the area of postcolonial literature, with special emphasis on women writers. Diaries and letters by nineteenth century women settlers in Australia, New Zealand and Canada are major topics in several of her published papers. She is currently engaged in working collaboratively with Anne Collett on a comparative study of the painting of Canadian artist Emily Carr and the poetry of Judith Wright.

Sue Kossew (University of New South Wales)
Writing self as other: J. M. Coetzee's literary 'life writing' in Scenes from Provincial Life

J. M. Coetzee's trilogy of fictionalized memoirs, or 'Scenes from Provincial Life' as he has subtitled them, provides readers with a quirky and peculiarly Coetzee-like perspective on the genre of autobiography. The most recent of these 'instalments' (to use Coetzee's term) is entitled *Summertime* (the two previous ones being *Boyhood* and *Youth*); and is narrated by a 'biographer' supposedly after Coetzee's death. Covering the years 1972-77 of the writer's life, and comprising interviews with people who knew the writer, this third volume is even more distanced from the subject of the memoirs than were the previous two, narrated as they were in the third person. Literary techniques such as the blurring of narrative boundaries between the biographical and autobiographical subject and the 'betrayal' of self and others that is always part of writing a memoir draw attention, as other "late works" by Coetzee have done, to further exploration of the question of 'who speaks' in any literary work. This teasing textual instability and the crossing of narrative borders and genres have increasingly become features of Coetzee's later works.

This paper will consider this new work within both Coetzee's own elusive "life writing" (in the form of the previous two volumes) and the wider literary genre of memoir. In particular, Coetzee's writing of the self as other draws attention to the generic conventions of writing a life.

Sue is Assoc. Professor of English at UNSW until the end of October when she will take up the Chair of English at Monash University. She holds degrees from the Universities of Cape Town, East Anglia and New South Wales. Her work is in contemporary postcolonial literature, with a focus on South Africa and Australia. Her publications include *Pen and Power: A Post-colonial Reading of J. M. Coetzee and André Brink* (1996), *Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee* (1998), *Re-Imagining Africa: New Critical Perspectives* (ed. With Dianne Schwerdt 2001) and *Writing Woman, Writing Place: Australian and South African Fiction* (2004). She has recently returned from 6 months as Distinguished Visiting Chair in Australian Studies at the University of Copenhagen. She is currently editing a book of essays and interviews for Rodopi on the work of Kate Grenville and co-editing a collection of essays on J. M. Coetzee.

Irene Lucchitti (University of Wollongong)
The Dissenting Voice of Marta Becket

Marta Becket was born in New York in 1924 into a life immersed in the arts. As an infant she listened to her mother's music at home and attended the theatre with her father, theatre critic, Henry Beckett. The crib in which she slept, flooded with flickering neon lights, became her first performance space as she tried within its confines to replicate what she had seen in the theatre. Throughout her childhood and in the days of her youth she trained in ballet and in art.

In her early career, she worked on Broadway, dancing in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Wonderful Town* and working in Radio City Music Hall's Corps de Ballet, alongside the famous Rockettes. She developed a one-woman show with which she toured the country until the life-changing day in 1967 when she happened upon an abandoned theatre in Death Valley Junction. She soon made it her own and re-fashioned it as the Amargosa Opera House. In this most unlikely place, she has performed works of her own creation for more than forty years.

In its appearance, format and content, Becket's autobiography, *To Dance on Sands*, which appeared in 2007, reflects a life only truly lived in art and on stage. The dissenting voice of the author is heard on every page, as she considers and refuses anything that might compromise her life as an artist or the art itself.

This paper will examine the significance of the dissenting voice in relation to the autobiographical persona that Becket calls into being in these pages as well as its impact on her concept of audience. It will consider Becket's early inter-related wishes to enter ever "other" worlds and to create an exoticised self as expressions of personal and artistic dissent that find fulfilment in her self-positioning in Death Valley Junction.

Irene is a specialist in early twentieth century Irish literature and culture, with expertise in life-writing and translation studies. She has an abiding interest in the writers of the Blasket Islands. She studied the Irish language at the University of Sydney, and completed her PhD in the English Language Program at the University of Wollongong, where she is now an Honorary Fellow. She has published numerous articles on the Blasket writers and is currently engaged in research into Peig Sayers of the Blasket Island and into Marta Becket of Death Valley Junction.

Siobhan McHugh (University of Wollongong)

Marrying Out

My paper draws on 50 oral history interviews I have conducted on the theme of mixed marriage and sectarianism in Australia from the 1920s to the 1970s. In this era, non-indigenous Australia was polarised between an English Protestant establishment and an Irish Catholic underclass, tensions informed by 700 years of colonial history. To marry across the divide was, for some, to consort with the enemy, and family fatwas, feuds and trauma endured for generations. Children of mixed marriages grew up in a cultural half-world, sometimes rejected by their own parents.

These interviews, part of my doctoral research, will form the basis of a radio series and a book, as well as a multimedia article in *History Australia* (Vol 6, Number 2, August 2009 <http://www.epress.monash.edu/forthcoming.html#ha>).

I have dramatised some stories for radio, to distil emotion or illustrate a historical moment. But each medium is driven by the oral history – the individual's recounting of his/her story, mediated, of course, by my role in editing, positioning and collating it into a congruent narrative. The endless permutations and possible configurations of 55 hours of recordings provide one interpretative challenge; identifying my own sometimes subconscious preconceptions and prejudices adds another. Ethics, empathy and emotion also figured largely in this three-year project.

I will play audio clips that demonstrate the unique power of this medium to present life stories, and discuss the pros and cons of adapting them to print. As the Italian oral historian and scholar Alessandro Portelli observes, 'audio IS the text'.

Siobhan is an award-winning writer, broadcaster and oral historian. Her first book, *The Snowy – The People Behind the Power*, about the building of the Snowy Mountains hydroelectric scheme, won the NSW Premier's Literary Award for non-fiction. *Cottoning On*, a social history of cotton-growing in Australia, was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's History prize, as was her radio documentary, *The Irish at Eureka – rebels or riff-raff?* Her book *Minefields and Miniskirts*, about Australian women in the Vietnam war, was adapted for radio and a stage play. Siobhan's work has been made into TV and radio documentaries and shortlisted for a Walkley Award for excellence in journalism, a Eureka Science Prize and a United Nations Media Peace Prize. She lectures in Journalism at University of Wollongong. See www.mchugh.org

Maureen Perkins (Curtin University)

Refusing to Write: Resisting the autobiographical imperative

What does it mean when someone refuses to write their autobiography? Have they 'failed' in some way? This was the accusation made against the journalist and writer Anatole Broyard, (1920-1990). But in our celebration of the therapeutic work done by life writing, do we do a disservice to those who make a rational decision to refuse that therapy? In *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* Jacqueline Rose writes about the demands of 'the biographical imperative': 'Are we meant to be sleuths, piecing together fragment on fragment until the picture is spread before us? There she is! Sylvia Plath – nothing hidden'. This paper will consider the autobiographical imperative, and read Broyard's silence as dissent rather than failure.

Maureen teaches History and Anthropology at Curtin University. She is also founder and co-editor, with Mary Besemeres, of the journal *Life Writing*. She has published in 19th century British history, and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Currently she is Chief Investigator in an ARC Discovery project about regional characteristics of life writing. Her interests are in interdisciplinary and postcolonial approaches to cultural history, and her work includes *The Reform of Time* (2001), a study of magic, and 'Australian Mixed Race' in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2004). The fields of magic and of mixed race, she feels, are linked in epistemological uncertainty, which is an especial interest.

Olive Senior (Toronto / Jamaica)

'Hearing Voices': Inviting the Outsider into the Text

This will be a reading/lecture as I propose to read extensively from my work (both prose and poetry) to illustrate. In the process, I hope to link this to the wider discussion of 'life writing', especially the question of those who do not possess the pen. How do the stories of their lives get told? By whom? And what strategies might be used?

For me, this question hinges on the use of 'voice' - allowing the subjects - including inanimate objects - to speak directly to the reader in their ordinary everyday voices. I will explain what I mean by 'voice' as a narrative technique and why this is important to me and my work. I would also like to discuss what I call the instrumental nature of voice on the page.

Olive is the author of ten books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction. She is a recipient of the Gold Medal of the Institute of Jamaica among other awards. Her poetry book, *over the roofs of the world* (Insomniac Press 2005) was shortlisted for Canada's Governor-General's Award for Literature, and *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) is a textbook in Caribbean schools. Her short story collection, *Summer Lightning* (1986) won the Commonwealth Writers Prize and was followed by *Arrival of the Snake-Woman* (1989) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995). She is also the author of *The Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* (2004) and the poetry book *Shell* (Insomniac Press 2007), her latest. She lives in Toronto, Canada and Montego Bay, Jamaica.

Tony Simoes da Silva (University of Wollongong)

Conversations with History: South African White liberals and the Passing of Apartheid

In Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), Father Msimangu remarks at one point: 'I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they [White people] turn to loving they will find that we are turned to hating.' (1949)

'Basically the South African white community is a homogeneous community. It is a community of people who sit to enjoy a privileged position that they do not deserve, are aware of this, and therefore spend their time trying to justify what they are doing.' (Steve Biko, 'Black Souls in White Skins?' 1978)

'The generation of white South Africans to which I belong, and the next generation, and perhaps the generation after that too, will go bowed under the shame of the crimes that were committed in their name. Those among them who endeavour to salvage personal pride by pointedly refusing to bow before the judgement of the world suffer from a burning resentment, a bristling anger at being condemned without adequate hearing, that in psychic terms may turn out to be an equally heavy burden.'" (J.M. Coetzee, *Bad Year*, 2007)

Roughly speaking, 30 years separate each of the above three statements about the relationship between black and white South Africans. In the first, a fictionalisation of Alan Paton's own well-known liberal views, the figure of Father Msimangu is used to imagine an apocalyptic turn of events in which the end of apartheid means a coterminous settling of scores during which white South Africans will pay dearly for 'the crimes that were committed in their name' (J.M. Coetzee). In the second extract, Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness movement rejects any notion of a dissenting voice among his white compatriots. Addressing himself specifically to white liberals, in *I Write What I Like* he dared them to be ready for a dialogue with black South Africans *after* the end of apartheid *but* only on terms decided by the latter. In the third extract, J.M. Coetzee, 'a specialist in the middle area...the shades of grey', writes well after the end of apartheid and perhaps because Biko has long been dead, Coetzee now writes in and from a position of exile.

Drawing on these statements, I will read a number of recent texts by white South African liberals as 'conversations with History' that rehearse a deeply raced personal view of 'the betrayal of hope and possibility in the South Africa' they believe they helped craft. These texts range from 'letters to the editor' and interviews to foreign media (Helen Suzman, 2007), to Beyten Breytenbach's public letter to Nelson Mandela (2008), to André Brink's *The Fork in the Road* (2009). While taking into account the form each writer adopts, the paper adopts, essentially, a textual analysis approach that focuses on the speaking position and the vocabulary available to the white liberal in the New South Africa. In the process it seeks to understand how white South Africans who dissented overtly about the regime created in their name are coming to terms with the 'burning resentment, a bristling anger at being condemned without adequate hearing' that Coetzee identifies in *Diary of a Bad Year*.

Tony teaches in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia. He is the author of *The Luxury of Nationalist Despair: The Fiction of George Lamming* (Rodopi, 2000) and of articles on Anglophone and Lusophone postcolonial writing, with a particular focus on Southern Africa, Australia and the Caribbean. Recently published and forthcoming work includes essays in *ARIEL* (2008), *Kunapipi* (2008), *Partial Answers* (2007), *Third World Quarterly* (2005), *Life Writing* (2004) and in edited collections (Routledge, 2008; Lexington Books, 2008; Africa World Press, 2009; Blackwell, 2010; and Palgrave, 2010).

Sue Thomas (La Trobe University)

'[U]ngodly Agents' and 'Unsainting' Dances: Historicising the Character of Dissent in William Dawes' Letters Home and Work Diaries, 1823-1827

Narratives of parts of William Dawes's imperial career have been constructed largely around a romanticisation of dissent of various forms. Since the mid-1990s aspects of Dawes's career in New South Wales (he arrived as a marine with the First Fleet in 1788) have whet the interest, in particular, of creative writers and sound artists: Paul Carter, Jane Rogers, and most recently Kate Grenville. In this paper I turn to his career in Antigua (1813-1836), usually characterised as 'work[ing] on behalf of the anti-slavery cause'. An evangelical Anglican, he was agent of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) there, and between 1820 and 1829 Superintendent of its Sunday Schools in the eastern West Indies. In 1829 he was pensioned off, when the CMS closed its operations in Antigua. My paper focuses on the complexities of Dawes's autobiographical representations in Antigua in his work diaries and in letters circulated through his religious and family friendship networks during what he identifies as a crisis in the wake of the British government shift to an official policy of amelioration of slavery in 1823, the 1823 slave rebellion in Demerara, and a fierce backlash against Methodists in the region. He writes to the Committee of the CMS on 20 September 1824, "during the state of suspense in which we are, the mind is unavoidably exercised with a variety of hopes & fears". His anxiety is realised in self-justifications and appeals; sending numerous long letters to the CMS, many marked "Private", within a few days of each other; trying to set up a correspondence in code; incorporating epistolary material from a range of correspondents, including the earliest known African Caribbean women writers, Anne Hart Gilbert and Elizabeth Hart Thwaites, both Methodists; and reporting the voices of enslaved people. What is at stake for him is the character of ameliorative reform and modernisation in the Caribbean and the character of a regional reform network in which he was involved which called itself 'friends of the rising generation' (of free coloured and enslaved people). I analyse, too, the ways in which the genres of the letter and the work diary inflect the racialisation, gendering, classing and generationalising of the character of dissent. Individuals Dawes identifies as 'ungodly Agents' (his sister-in-law Anne Gilbert's term) were to or did testify for Mary Prince's owner John Wood in the libel suit Wood brought against Thomas Pringle, the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, over Pringle's handling of the slave narrative *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Told by Herself*. Mary Prince was a Moravian convert.

Sue is Professor of English at La Trobe University, Melbourne. She is the author of *Imperialism, Reform and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* and *The Worlding of Jean Rhys*. Her other books include *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (co-authored with Ann Blake and Leela Gandhi), *Elizabeth Robins (1862-1952): A Bibliography*, and the edited collection *Victorian Traffic: Identity, Exchange, Performance*. She has published extensively on nineteenth- and twentieth-century women writers, decolonising literatures, especially Caribbean literature, and nineteenth-century periodicals. Her paper for the Dissenting Voices conference is drawn from the project 'Anglophone Caribbean (auto)biography, plantation slavery, and the traffic of colonial reform and modernisation 1807-1834', funded by the Australian Research Council.

Gillian Whitlock (University of Queensland)
Salam Alaikum and G'day.

During the Pacific Solution asylum seeker narratives were available in relatively limited forms, most specifically in editions of autobiographical fragments produced by activists on their behalf. Representations of asylum seekers in the mass media were carefully controlled, allegedly in the national interest. In the recent past collections of asylum seeker letters are now entering the archives and becoming available for scholarly research. In this paper I will discuss two major collections of letters now held at the Fryer library: the Burnside Durham and the Elaine Smith collections, in total some 30 boxes of letters that are a rich archive of dissenting voices. Letters are a traditional instrument of human rights activism, and in this paper I will consider the various registers of dissent that emerge from the many hands, voices and ears that are now emerge in Nauru correspondence.

Gillian is a professor in English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland. Her research interests are life narrative and postcolonialism. Her most recent book, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in transit* (Chicago, 2007) is a study of life narrative and the 'war on terror' that takes up issues of globalisation, testimony, memoir. Her current and new project is archival work on asylum seeker letters from Nauru during the Pacific Solution. It is part of a larger concern for life narrative and negotiations on the limits of the human.

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