**PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS** (for Powerpoints, please see the individual ppt files for the papers)

**PROGRAMME**

*Coffee, tea, chatter*

**INTRODUCTION**

Welcome, Housekeeping, Introduction - Liz Stanley

**SESSION 1 On archives, stories, audiences & constructed lives**

**Paper 1:** Claire Lynch ‘The literary invasion of the Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiography - A response to the claim that “Nobody wages war with Dostoevsky or Dickens”’

**Cluster 1**

1.i Sally Fincher ‘The diarists’ audience’

1.ii Helen Pleasance ‘The very documented life of Myra Hindley’

1.iii Andrea Salter ‘Stories, or “someone telling something to someone about something”’

1.iv Cate Watson ‘Between diary and memoir: documenting a life in wartime Britain’
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ABSTRACTS

The literary invasion of the Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiography
A response to the claim that “Nobody wages war with Dostoevsky or Dickens”
Claire Lynch, Brunel University

Compiled by John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall, the Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiography contains over 230 unpublished autobiographies of authors who lived in England, Scotland or Wales between 1790 and 1945. The autobiographies were taken as evidence “that in different ways and in different contexts the common people had always been historians of their own lives” (Burnett, Vincent and Mayall xiii).

The archive has remained at Brunel University with “documents of life” in the form of letters, diaries, photographs, sketches and auto/biographies kept in bulging acid-free folders in over-filled filing cabinets. This chapter is concerned with what happened next. As Steedman points out, once an archive is formed, “nothing happens”, it is “indexed, and catalogued, and some of it is not indexed and catalogued, and some of it is lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativised” (Steedman 68).

Whereas much of the previous work based on the archive has been concerned with boiling down the written text to its essence of dates and facts, a new approach using literary scholars and creative writing workshops hopes to narrate the archive through methods more commonly found in the humanities, in short, to reintroduce the literary modes of “experiencing, feeling, interpreting” (Plummer 6).

Through the application of literary techniques this approach sought to question the assumptions that illiteracy prevented self-reflection, or that an unpublished narrative necessarily meant an unpublishable one. The chapter engages with Plummer’s ideas and present the findings of a project which has in several ways sought to implement them.

Bibliography
Sally Fincher, University of Kent

The Diarists’ Audience

Inspired by the methods of Mass Observation, the Share Project (http://www.sharingpractice.ac.uk) is collecting diaries from academics in Higher Education over the course of the academic year 2010-11. The project asks respondents to keep a diary for one day of each month—the 15th—so that, taken together, the diaries form a series of “day surveys”. There are 384 diarists registered, although not all write every month.

Share Project diaries are unusual (qua diaries) in two important respects. One is that there is a known, knowable and external audience, they are written for the project; the other is that (from the outset) they have a defined and limited span, they start in September 2010 and finish in August 2011. As a genre, whilst diaries always have a defined start date, they finish in various and odd ways, infrequently by intent, more commonly by desuetude (Lejeune, 2009): these have stricter boundaries.

At the end of each month, a summary “newsletter”—The Day Survey Reporter—is compiled and sent to participants; it is composed of extracts from diarists’ texts that reflect common themes. In this paper, I will explore this associative relationship between diarist, audience and “newsletter” as a partial but responsive text, and how this relationship impacts the voice (and behaviour) of some contributors.

This relationship reflects two concerns raised by Plummer’s notion of the “continuum of construction” when reporting work of this nature (Plummer, 2001). One is the question of audience: for whom are these diaries written, who is the implied reader, and how does this impact the diarists’ text? Another is the problematic issue of “author intrusion”, of how far I, as researcher, may interpret and edit the contributors’ raw diary entries into another work, and what the different possible degrees of intervention imply.

Lejeune, P. On Diary, University of Hawaii Press, 2009

Plummer, K. Documents of Life 2, SAGE publications, 2001
The words ‘documents’ and ‘life’ both pertain to the figure of Myra Hindley in peculiar ways. Since her conviction in May 1966, with her partner, Ian Brady, for the Moors murders, she has had a very public presence in British culture via a range of documents, while her material body remained shut away in what Claire Grant has termed ‘the dead time’\(^1\) of life imprisonment. Indeed, until her death in 2002 a chief function of popular renditions of her ‘life’, organized around the central document of her arrest photograph, was as evidence that she should remain imprisoned. Through such documentation a particular subjectivity emerged; in the tabloid shorthand for her, she became ‘evil Myra’.

This paper will examine this construction of Hindley, against challenges to it made possible through other forms of documentation. It will examine three challenges in particular; accounts of her as a redeemable criminal, engagements with the construction of ‘evil Myra’ as an icon, and Hindley’s own autobiographical accounts, in which she inserts herself into a poetics of working class experience. Hindley moves, through these challenges, from a singular figure of individual iniquity to a complex socially and culturally placed human subject. The National Archives in Kew justified the release of her prison documents in 2008 because of her ‘historical importance’. If Hindley is to be viewed as such a figure we need to ask what kind of history of the human subject we want her life and documents to tell.

The dehumanization of Hindley as a figure of individual monstrosity depends upon uncritical assumptions of essential humanism. Plummer’s concept of a critical humanism allows an ethical examination of the discourses, textual forms and the relations of power through which Hindley is made knowable, which emphasises their relationship to the lived experience of real people. Plummer’s critical humanism maintains ‘an embodied, emotional self, striving for meaning in wider historically specific social worlds’\(^2\).

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Stories are a familiar feature of everyday life, told in different situations for various purposes. They are also a key part of ‘documents of life’, with ‘life stories’ central to Plummer’s influential work. Indeed, Plummer suggests that we ask: “just why and how people come to tell their stories (or don’t), why and how they assume the forms that they do, what happens to them once told, and how they connect to the life being told” (Plummer, 2001: 42). This chapter responds by discussing my work on ‘stories’ in letters and diaries. This uses ideas for identifying and understanding ‘stories’ suggested by Michel de Certeau in (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. The discussion focuses mainly on stories in letters, specifically those written by South African feminist writer and social theorist Olive Schreiner (1855-1920). What a story ‘is’ is subject to various interpretations, making identification of them across c5000 extant Schreiner letters not altogether straightforward. In addition, often the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are used interchangeably, while de Certeau’s (1984) approach to understanding stories helpfully provides a rigorous framework for distinguishing them.

The paper overviews the broad structure of stories identified using this framework across Schreiner’s letters and uses some different examples of stories in order to point up distinctive features of Schreiner’s ‘epistolary story-telling’. It also considers these ideas in relation to stories in diaries, Nella Last’s Mass-Observation diary (1939-66) in particular. While diaries are also written with some kind of reader in mind, even if only the diarist, this is not the same as having, as do letters, a particular addressee. Overall, Last’s story-telling remains remarkably constant across the 27 years she wrote for M-O, something very different from how Schreiner modulated her story-telling according to her relationships with the addressees of her letters. Focusing on Schreiner’s epistolary story-telling by drawing on de Certeau’s framework provides a useful way to structurally analyse across the very large Schreiner epistolarium, a helpful response to Plummer’s key questions and also a means of working through writer-reader relations in different forms of life-writing, with such relations important to analysing letters and other life documents as “interactive product[s]” (Plummer, 2001: 54).
Between diary and memoir: documenting a life in wartime Britain
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This paper concerns the diary and the memoir in the telling of a life. It draws on two first person narratives of civilian evacuation at the outset of WWII. The first is the diary of Harry Tuckey, a 13-year old boy evacuated from Edinburgh to Fife in September 1939. The second is a chapter in his unpublished ‘memoir’ of these same events written nearly 60 years later. These two sources are treated as topic and resource as a means to examine constructions of self and identity in relation to the wider social discourses of wartime Britain. In addition, the paper examines the relationship between the diary and the memoir, using the memoir as an analytical tool for an exploration of the diary as narrative, and examining how each functions in relation to self and memory.
'Humanist’ Methods in a ‘More-than-Human’ World?

Niamh Moore
Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC), University of Manchester

The paper takes as a departure point for revisiting the critical humanism of Ken Plummer’s *Documents of Life*, Sarah Whatmore’s careful articulation of ‘the urgent need to supplement humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text, with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject’ (Whatmore 2006: 606-607). Though Whatmore is not entirely dismissive of ‘humanist methods’, in the paper I explore the possibilities of reconceiving such apparently ‘humanist’ methods as life stories in the context of what have variously been termed, posthumanism, the posthumanities, a more-than-human world, and turns to affect, materiality and practice. However, rather than take up the technologically enhanced world of some posthumanisms, I turn to the stories of environmental activists in Clayoquot Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. In the summer of 1993, protestors set up a peace camp based on ecofeminist principles to support non-violent civil disobedience and the blockading of a logging road into temperate rainforest slated for clear-cut logging, leading to the arrest of over 800 people. In approaching these oral histories I also draw on Plummer’s work in *Telling Sexual Stories*, though here I have in mind not so much sexual stories, as stories of nature, of women’s nature, of ‘becoming worldly’ (Haraway 2008) through activism and stories of activism, stories which have been hard to tell in the context of feminist controversies over essentialism, but which I understand as stories whose time might finally have come.

References

Identifying the Quotidian in the Heterotopic Universe of Olive Schreiner’s Letters: “I am writing it in between, while I run into the kitchen every now & then to stir the ?lean & the sheep tail I am melting out on the stove; & now it is time to set the table for dinner”

Helen Dampier, Leeds Metropolitan University, H.Dampier@leedsmet.ac.uk

In *Documents of Life 2* (2001: 52), Plummer contends that letters are a “relatively rare document of life in the social sciences”, and suggests that this results from social scientists’ suspicions concerning their lack of direct referentiality. Letters’ reflection of the world of both writer and recipient, the complexities of time in and of letters, and what Plummer refers to as the ‘dross rate’ are all seen to compromise the referentiality of letters as documents of life.

Recognising that no written sources are unmediated or provide transparent access to the past, this paper argues in line with Plummer’s comments, that there is still a tendency to treat letters as directly referential and coterminous with ‘life itself’. It does so by examining the difficulties associated with gaining analytical purchase on the ‘quotidian’ in the letters of feminist writer and social theorist Olive Schreiner (1855-1920). It suggests that some of the ‘defining characteristics’ of letters – their ‘immediacy’, and what Stanley (2004: 208) refers to as their “flies in amber quality” – make it tempting to conflate the ‘quotidian of life’ and the ‘quotidian of letters’, with the latter having a by no means direct, one-on-one relationship with the former.

Instead letters can more usefully be understood by making use of Foucault’s (1967) notion of heterotopias, which he identifies as times and spaces ‘outside’ of time and space. Deploying the concept of heterotopias helps to point up letters as textual constructions, and perceives letters as a universe of their own making, in which what is quotidian in the textual universe of the letters is the quotidian. Rather than conflating the quotidian with ‘the everyday’, this approach forces the researcher to confront the structural characteristics of Schreiner’s everyday letter-writing practices, and to revisit Plummer’s apposite insights about the mediated, artful nature of letters, as well as of documents of life more widely.
It was to be the best carnival ever. However, after much build-up and local publicity, the town’s annual summer carnival stopped abruptly in 1954, and seemingly no one can remember why. It was restarted thirty five years later. Although many townspeople can tell the story of the restarted carnival in 1989, the reasons for the demise of the old carnival seem almost universally forgotten. Or as the account of one townsperson suggests, deliberately silenced. This paper forms part of a much larger ethnographic project concerned with stories in relation to belonging and community in rural Northumberland. Drawing on Plummer's ideas in Documents of Life 2 around memory and evaluating the truthfulness of stories, this paper probes accounts about the demise of the old carnival and its restart. By analysing fieldnotes concerning my conversations with townspeople as well as news reports gathered about both events, this paper explores how stories become 'true memories', frozen by being written down or constantly retold within certain social frameworks. It also considers what happens when they are not written down, retold or apparently remembered. Stories are all told from differing points of view and as such all represent a 'truth' and what may be factually false can seem 'true' to the listener. These ideas are particularly useful in understanding the reasons given by townspeople for their stories, and my own willingness to believe the one account exposing 'the truth' about the failure of the old carnival.
Mona Livholts, Associate Professor of Social Work, Coordinator of The Network for Reflexive Academic Writing Methodologies (R.A.W.), Mid Sweden University.

Abstract. “Once, when she thought she had written, she found her body surrounded by grayish blue, the bluest grey of all colors there were at all times. She is standing on the soft grass in the morning light, looking at the brownish landscape of stones. Making a decision; turning her back on grief.”

Writing Water is the third untimely academic novella in a trilogy of personal narratives based on a woman’s life, writing and desire to reach the Professor’s Chair in the beginning of the twentieth century, Sweden. The novella is set in the university, the writing happens both in the process of writing by the author, and for the main character in the novella in other places. The diversity of forms used in creating a set of interwoven stories is inspired by poststructuralist and postcolonial feminist theory and literary fiction and by methodological approaches, such as theorising of letters, memory work, narrative and autobiography, and photography. In particular, it draws on interpretation of Hélène Cixous’ essay ‘Enter the Theatre’ and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’. The paper engages in revisiting some of the key aspects of Plummers ideas about a ‘critical humanism’ by focussing on the complex relationship between the shaping of personal history and scholarly identity and injustices created by class, gender and ‘whiteness’ through the social act of writing and the social conditions that frames it. It focuses in particular on three aspects of writing life stories in Documents of Life 2. The first aspect is related to how life stories are shaped through shifting practices of genre and writing styles and their formative character—“shaping the very knowledge (or life narrative) we are trying to present.” (2001: 171). This includes creative and reflective writing of diaries and letters. The second aspect engages in the form of the fictional novel and the documenting of life stories. As Plummer argues, the fictional novella form “is largely neglected by the social scientist, even though it may be dealing with true events fully researched by the author”. (2001, 56). Thirdly the paper highlights the importance of the sensory in social research, mainly through the contribution
from poetic writing and the visual/photography. The untimely academic novella elaborates with the concept of time and allows documentation of emotional and sensory perceptions of contradictions. It emerges from messiness, contradictions and ambiguities in the creating of life stories and makes possible for personal, family and society to interact.

**Relevant publications:**


Visible women: Stories of age, gender and in/visibility
Christine Bell, University of Bristol, christine@bellcj.demon.co.uk

Personal indignation motivated the exploration for my doctoral dissertation into the anecdotal ‘invisibility’ of us older women. Nobody sees us any more – or so we are told. My own experience, and that of other older women I know, does not support this hypothesis – certainly not as a general rule or the only tale to tell.

Over a period of around 18 months I corresponded by email with seven other older women (aged between 50-70). In these exchanges we explored our lives, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, sense of visibility or invisibility.

Questions posed – and not necessarily answered – included: What is behind the stories of older women becoming invisible and disregarded? Where do they come from? What do they mean – to women and ‘society’? How might they be challenged? What other stories can be told?

This is a political and philosophical, as well as a personal, issue and raises many questions, drawing on feminist and poststructuralist ideas, around women’s perceptions (and experience) of power and positioning. The work presents a reflective, questioning, subjective, self-indulgent and often moving narrative exploration through the stories of women growing older and not disappearing.

The major part is the poetic representation of the thoughts and lives of eight older women, told in their own words; what Laurel Richardson calls “a poem masquerading as a transcript and a transcript masquerading as a poem” (1997: 139).

With Plummer’s ideas in mind, this work demonstrates the depth and diversity of life stories, using narrative and poetry as ‘data’.

Over the past nine years, children and young people have written nearly nine thousand letters to the president of Finland, Tarja Halonen. Almost without exception the letters are handwritten and decorated on a carefully chosen paper. The most precious stickers, glossy pictures and glitter decorate the notepaper. The writing styles are varied, and at the most extreme a letter written to the president is presented as sacred and secret, as a devout plea, almost like a prayer. These writings grasp the historical moment and in this sense the letter provides a durable medium for moving words. On the other hand, literacy is a powerful tool and in the writing data collected it is clear that the letters has a liberating effect in their writers. In the letters, nature is repeatedly brought up, worried about and respected; and not only on the level of speech, but on the level of action as well. Along with this, the young letter-writers tell about their lives, the environments they live in, and the matters which are the most meaningful to them. This chapter derives from children's life-writing with a special reference to nature, and they are the ‘Forest Talks’, as I call them. In my data, Mother Nature seems to speak particularly to daughter-citizens, and them to the female ruler. I am asking how the children create, write and inhabit these spaces. In context of ‘documents of life’, I explore my letter-data as an ‘interactive product’ which may be said to have ‘two parents, the writer and the recipient’ as Plummer (2001, 54; Ponsonby 1923, 2) asserts. In terms of ‘the narratives of life-patterns’ I explore how (much) a life may be open to ‘will and agency’ in the early years while the letter-writers are children and young people.
The session will present a multidimensional approach to historical research by exploring the lives and memories of a group of elderly Holocaust survivors in modern day Vilnius through the lens of their ‘special’ places and objects. Incorporating Dilthey’s premise that ‘testimony’ can be viewed as a series of multi-layered expressions which “gather together” and “fix” lived experience such as gestures, facial expressions and words but which can also include more permanent forms such as works of art, architecture, land and written texts, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s suggestion that ‘documents’ can be seen as signs which point away from themselves, towards something else, towards life, it illustrates that testimony is not restricted to words alone but rather that everything – a stone, a clock, an amber pendant, a pair of spectacles, a flower – speaks. Drawing on such diverse influences as Hasidic master, Rabbi Nachum of Bratslav, Canadian environmental artist, Marlene Creates, cultural anthropologists, Barbara Myerhoff, Michael Jackson and Ruth Behar and the writings of Jung, Berlin, Solnit, Micahels and Auslander, the paper explores how by moving beyond words, verbal or written, we can extend the range of our canonical sources and can build on Plummer’s call for research practises that encourage the creative, expressive and the interpretive storytelling of lives with the inclusion of a spiritual dimension.

Things are never just things; our memories are inscribed on and through the objects we hold close. Place too is a site of meaning, carrying within deep and long-term historical understandings. In a city like Vilnius where so few survived, where words falter, it is the earth, the trees, the doorways and the pavements that now bear silent witness to the past. A vast massacre pit, a dilapidated synagogue, a gold powder compact, an amber pendent and an old prayer-book, these are the documents of life in a city like Vilnius.