PUBLIC PRIVACY: RECIPROCITY AND SILENCE

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In his 1958 poem 'Dedication to my Wife' TS Eliot proclaims "these are private words addressed to you in public". Simultaneously written for his wife, Valerie Fletcher, and to the implied you of a discourse network, Eliot's poem helps to illustrate the narrative voices and silences that are constitutive of an intimate public sphere.

This paper situates reciprocity as a condition of possibility for public privacy. It shows how reciprocity is enabled by systems of code operating through material and symbolic registers. Code promises to control communication, to produce neutral, systemic forms of meaning. Yet such automation is challenged by uneven and fragmented patterns of reciprocity. Moreover, examining the media of public privacy reveals historical trajectories important for understanding contemporary socio-technical platforms of reciprocity.

To explore the implicit requirement of reciprocity in publicly private practices, three sites of communication are investigated framed by a media archaeology perspective: postal networks, the mail-art project PostSecret and the anonymous zine 'You'. Keywords: Public privacy, reciprocity, epistolary, postal networks, access, control, code

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INTRODUCTION

This paper deploys a media archaeology perspective to analyse the discursive and material practices framing contemporary understandings of 'public privacy'. With its focus on "unnoticed continuities and ruptures" (Parikka and Huhtamo, 2011, p. 3) media archaeology provides a productive method to demonstrate how emerging forms of "socially mediated publicness" (Baym and boyd, 2012) are techno-historically informed. In addition, media archaeology approaches seem particularly pertinent for examining how reciprocity is coded

in complex and perhaps contradictory ways. Inflected by German media theory, media archaeology persistently negotiates the tension between system and meaning; form and content or, indeed, automation and autonomy (Parikka 2012). Code promises to control communication, to produce neutral, systemic forms of meaning. Yet such apparent automation is challenged by uneven and fragmented patterns of reciprocity.

We situate reciprocity as a condition of possibility for public privacy through an investigation of three sites of communication: postal networks; *You* zine; and *PostSecret*. The paper begins by defining the use of the term 'public privacy' before moving to a brief survey of the key literature on 'reciprocity' in media theory. We then introduce the case studies framed by what we are calling 'the media of public privacy'. This phrase gestures to the affective and material relations of reciprocity that operate across historical and contemporary platforms.

The term public privacy is employed in this paper to describe narratives of intimacy which are personally significant and are conducted through modes of communication considered to be public, potentially making the meaningful exchange public. Public privacy assumes risk. Conducted in 'public', public privacy may be witnessed and reciprocated by indeterminable others who also have access to the exchange. To counter this, the personal exchange may be coded or obscured (Marwick and boyd, 2011) or the other to whom the communication is directed may not be specifically identified. The positioning of a reciprocal other is a required element in public privacy. Rhetorical strategies are employed to position the reciprocal other, specific to the socio technical setting. As the examples discussed in this paper demonstrate, the exchange may be directed to a subjectively positioned public, addressed as 'you'.

Public privacy is a process which holds expectations of reciprocity. Enactments of public privacy have received considerable attention in regard to the actions of social network users where intimate, private narratives are conducted in public (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Hjorth, 2011; Lovink, 2011). As Daniel Solove states "our activities often take place in the twilight between public and private" and "[p]rivacy is a complicated set of norms, expectations, and desires that goes far beyond the simplistic notion that if you're in public, you have no privacy" (Solove, 2007, p. 166). This paper builds on the acknowledgement that public privacy is not a new phenomena nor is it confined to social media practices (Marwik and boyd, 2011; Solove, 2007). There is value in demonstrating the traces of these practices in other media forms. Practices of public privacy have been newly defined against technological developments in social media which risk supplanting an understanding of the existence of these practices in other media forms (Tufecki, 2008). Each of the examples discussed in this paper demonstrate a negotiated balance between privacy and public disclosure suggesting that as Tufecki argues, privacy is a "process of optimisation between disclosure and withdrawal" (2008).

This paper questions the role of reciprocity in public privacy. We ask how reciprocity is implicitly positioned in such exchanges by means of a purposive selection of case studies that demonstrate examples of public privacy across different media forms. For each case study we focus on the rhetorical strategies by which public privacy is situated and to which reciprocity is conditional. To both contemporary and historical case studies we ask whether legibility and publicness are mutual. We question whether public privacy is possible without legibility and consider the importance of access to both text and context.

BRIEF SURVEY OF EXISTING LITERATURE ON RECIPROCITY

For Kate Crawford (2009) the process of reciprocity is captured in the metaphor of

listening which might represent a more productive term than 'reading'. 'Listening' opens analysis to the centrality of the reciprocal other whose active stance has been elided by deployment of the label 'lurker'. Such perjorative terms omit what we determine as the necessity of the reciprocal (if silent) other in public. Crawford views listening as a necessary participatory act; we also argue that listening is reciprocal as the act of listening is an engagement with the text or utterance that renders it 'heard'. What makes a private utterance public is that it may be heard by another, the silent other, otherwise termed the lurker. While listeners or lurkers do not contribute in the same manner as more visible or vocal participators, they play a contributing role. Listening is a receptive, reciprocal practice of dynamic attentiveness (Crawford, 2009, p. 527). Crawford defines reciprocal listening in Twitter as "hearing and responding to comments and direct messages" (2009, p. 530), associating background listening to the intimate reciprocity of private detail in public spaces such as that in social media sites: "the disclosures made in social media spaces develop a relationship with an audience of listeners. Further, *those background listeners are necessary to provoke disclosures of any kind*" (Crawford, 2009, p. 528-9 emphasis ours). The possibility of reciprocity is an enabling condition for disclosure.

Disclosures of public privacy have the potential to 'speak to' both an audience of listeners (the public) while disclosing intimate details or addressing a specific subject (the private). We identify specific rhetorical strategies by which audiences of listeners are identified and placed as necessary participants in utterances of public privacy.

As Lauren Berlant (2008) has demonstrated, reciprocity plays an integral role in the construction of 'intimate publics'. Indeed, her schema for the way reciprocity functions across technologically mediated publics is key to the political significance of a feminised mass commodity culture. In a sense it is the 'longing for reciprocity' (Berlant, 2008, p. 5) that calls into being these intimate publics although, paradoxically, it is also this desire that the intimate public sates. As Berlant explains:

> an intimate public operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires … participants in the intimate public feel as though it expresses what is common among them [and] it flourishes by circulating as an already felt need, a sense of emotional continuity among women (2008, p. 5)

Berlant's work reveals in sentimental culture, 'the female complaint', an intimate public that is riven with political ambivalence and symbolic struggle. Since the texts produced by this public are often generically 'mainstream', the citizen participates in and contributes to the maintenance of normative regimes while simultaneously attempting to resist. Hence a double movement animates the intimate public as it adheres to an "absolute historical locatedness" and at the same time articulates "restlessness". It exhibits both a "rage for change" and "passivity"; and is underpinned by a "refusal of the terms of the conventional world" while also demanding that world "be reciprocal" (Berlant, 2008, p. 268). In a recent special issue of the journal *Biography* dedicated to "life writing and intimate publics" the contributors grapple with the apparent irreconcilable binary in Berlant's research. The essays argue that her writing posits a feminist agency but is nonetheless "deeply sceptical about claims for emotional belonging" because the public economies of reciprocity and intimacy are circular, presuming "connection in order to create it" (Jolly, 2011, p. v).

For us, the strength of Berlant's critique of reciprocity is the insistence on its partial,

fragmented and contrary nature. All too often the term is deployed as a motherhood statement that assumes its mere appearance in the relevant socio-technological exchange signifies unerring benevolence. Moreover, as we hope to demonstrate, reciprocity is not always evenly distributed or beneficial to all participants but is, rather, sensitive to language and its mediated paths of distribution.

An intimate public requires access to intimacy, it responds to the circulation of such intimacies by affecting a sense of normalisation which Berlant calls "fantasies of belonging and reciprocity" (Berlant, 2008, p. 66). This sense of normalisation is affected not by the content, but by the feeling of engaging with the content. Legibility here is not about the narrative conveyed but the formalisation of engagement with such content. The style of content must be legible in its homogeneity for an intimate public to exist around it. A zine reader recognises a zine tucked in the corner of a record store. The contents of the zines are emotionally encoded, but much like Ann Cvetkovich's work where she terms cultural texts as "archives of feeling", the practices of production and reception that surround them are similarly encoded and recognised (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 7). The content of particular postcards may be arbitrary and variable but the practices by which postcards are produced and distributed is of specific value. Social media such as Twitter and Tumblr use the form of the interface to be legible. A Twitter follower recognises a feed by the url and by the limitation of the text to 140 characters. Ilana Gershon refers to this as a shared media ideology, where there is an assumption of a common framework of referentiality within which the content is understood (Gershon, 2010). This assumption is problematic as it is not always the case, such as when a letter is circulated to those beyond the initial addressee.

The Media of Public Privacy: historical and contemporary platforms

Postal History and Public Privacy

If, as danah boyd has demonstrated, "privacy in the public age" relies on forms of social steganography where interlocutors "hide in plain sight", communicating simultaneously with different audiences (boyd, 2010), then the postal system is a key site for historicising public privacy. Users of postal networks have regularly found ways to produce private, individual affect despite the fact their correspondence circulates across a public, standardised signifying system. As Bonnie Wilson argues postcard writers of the early twentieth century were aware that their words were "fair game to everyone" and so correspondents "hinted at feelings by their choice in scene - whether comic or romantic - and made oblique references to events that only the recipient would understand" (2004, p. 89). Similarly, Tom Philips has shown how courting couples who wish to avoid the curious eyes of parents, siblings or servants discovered "the final mode of obtaining privacy was a code". Such strategies of secrecy, he explains, include 'mirror writing' and the use of back-slang, shorthand or acronyms (Phillips, 2000, p. 13-14).

Indeed, the introduction of the postcard in 1870 was met with anxiety precisely because of its capacity to transform the public sphere by broadcasting hitherto private messages publicly. As a late nineteenth century commentator, G W Green, notes "my grudge against the postal card … is the tendency to read, against your own will, postal cards, not addressed to yourself. There is a fascination about the thing which is very like kleptomania". The author recounts a compelling story in which he suspects a postal clerk of reading postcards in just such a manner, devising a plan to halt this practice and hence save the clerk from being sacked. Rather than to ask the employee directly to desist, Green conveys his cognisance of the postal transgression through the use of code:

> I ingeniously dropped on the Postmaster's table … a postcard

addressed to his unmarried sister. As we were talking, he picked it up and read an impassioned declaration written by myself. He smiled; I tore up the card and the clerk was retained. (as cited in Carline, 1972, p. 55)

Postcard media enabled new concepts of privacy and anonymity to emerge, the cultural and legal framings of which were made visible through libel action. For a British newspaper of the period, the "hidden slanderer" was one of society's "worst enemies", yet the invention of the postcard had:

> Placed a weapon in his hands which, compared with a common letter, is like a mitraillense by the side of an old-fashioned musket. It scatters the shot over a whole neighbourhood … An anonymous charge for which there is no justification being written on a postcard, should carry with it a heavier punishment than one contained inside a letter (Manchester Courier, 1890, p. 3).

During the late nineteenth century there were more than 40 postcard libel' cases heard in British Courts with some of these attracting quite severe punishment. In 1899, for example, Edwin Aldridge was found guilty of 'atrocious' libel for a postcard he sent concerning a rejected marriage proposal he had made to a woman, Harriet Baxter. Experiencing extreme pique and anger following the rejection, Aldridge sent vitriolic postcards to Baxter's father and aunt for which he was sentenced to six months in jail (*Worcestershire Chronicle* 1899, p. 6). Another case, found a man guilty of libelling his own solicitors because they had unsuccessfully represented him in a real estate dispute. The defendant was charged 100 pounds for claiming on a postcard "I have been tricked and swindled in the whole business from first to last" (*Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 1895, p. 3)

However, in certain libel cases the potential anonymity of postcard media inspired feats of remarkable detective work. One such 1920s case involved a woman accused of circulating a great volume of postcards over a six month period, the contents of which contained language so 'indecent and filthy' these could not be read aloud in court. Since the cards were not signed, the police needed to prove their hunch of her illegal, libellous practices. So, with the assistance of the Post Office, they inscribed stamps with a secret code and then tracked the sale and subsequent passage of these stamps through the postal network. The woman suspected of indecency, Diana Langham, was closely monitored by the police as the news item explains:

> Detective Sergeant Giles kept the accused under close observation. He got behind her, observed that while she was fidgeting with her pocket, part of a postcard protruded … after waiting about for some time, the accused went to the pillar box and took something out of her hand and put it into the aperture. When the box was opened it was found four letters, and only one postcard, similar to the one the Detective saw protruding from the woman's pocket. The stamp upon it also displayed the secret marking (Nottingham Evening Post 1923, p. 5).

In a sentencing that conveys both the poignancy of the crime and the impact of this still relatively new media, the Judge found it an "outrage" that Postal workers and recipients were forced to encounter the indecent postcards. Langham's actions amounted to "shocking wickedness" and she was sentenced to six months jail (Western Daily Press, 1924, p. 8).

If postcard communication relies on a particular form of social steganography in order to speak privately in public, letter writers of the period also faced comparable conditions. The assumed privacy that postcard media threatened was, in fact, fragile and contingent. It was common practice during the Romantic and Victorian eras for correspondents to have their letters circulated, in some cases without the author's approval or knowledge. As the British writer, Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855) says of this epistolary custom:

> A friend, to whom I have long been in the habit of writing very frequently, had a most whimsical trick of sending my careless letters round to half her acquaintance … in this manner travelled my unlucky epistles; and I, quite unsuspicious, wrote on as carelessly as ever, till at length one of my letters, written to Miss R in London, actually returned to me here, by the hands of a mutual friend to whom she had lent it (as cited in L'estrange, 1870, p. 152).

This should not suggest that correspondents were always satisfied to have their letters read by a third party. One of Mitford's closest friends, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 - 1861), for example, regularly expressed uneasiness about the potential for her letters to circulate publicly (Kenyon, 1897). What is highlighted by this cultural practice, however, is the complexity of the contours that shape and regulate public privacy. Indeed, Barrett Browning and Mitford often discussed the associated epistolary convention of literature - that of writing letters for publication. The two would raise this topic in relation to others' published correspondences, epistolary fictions and the possibility they would themselves achieve epistolary fame. Yet they disagreed quite forcefully about the role of epistolary publication in the construction of a public figure. This disagreement was particularly pronounced when talking of their literary friend and correspondent Harriet Martineau and the latter's reluctance to allow her private letters to be published. Mitford agreed with Martineau's decision while Barrett Browning viewed it as a kind of withholding a "selfish" action almost like a "death". According to Barrett Browning, the artist as a "teacher of the public" had an obligation to make public that which began as the "secrets of our daily lives and inner souls" (Kelly and Hudson, 1984, p. 77). In a series of letters exchanged between Barrett Browning and Mitford, the two raise some foundational questions of modernity: What is the relation between the private inner self and the public persona? Under what cultural conditions does 'celebrity' emerge? What role do the economies of writing and the technological regimes of circulation and publication play in the construction of 'image'? Maintaining her argument that the artist owes a certain debt to society, Barrett Browning writes:

> The inconvenience of celebrity … which is the interest taken in you by the whole world is a noble tax to pay after all … When we are beloved in private life, our very headaches, our very smiles & the choosing of our ribbons are matters of interest to the persons who love us. Do we complain of the tax of this attention to minute things? (letter dated 16 January 1844, in Kelly and Hudson, 1846, p. 163)

Epistolary discourse traverses the public and private spheres. Historically, the genre includes works of fiction as well as, for example, letter collections of 'real people'. Indeed, it is thought the origin of epistolary fiction, that is, novels told through letters, can be traced to the letter writing manuals of the eighteenth century together with published letters of 'real' authors (Meltzer, 1982, p. 515-529). Part of the attraction of letter fiction as a rhetorical

strategy is its capacity to involve the reader in the ostensibly 'private' lives of correspondents. As Thomas Beebee puts it, "epistolary fiction is a function rather than a thing; it arises when an outside 'real' reader takes up the position of the fictional addressee" (1999, p. 8). The addressee - of epistolary discourse, social media, and postal projects - is a central figure in our argument concerning reciprocity and public privacy. We now turn to an analysis of how forms of address structure affective relations.

RECIPROCITY: NARRATIVE VOICE AND FORMS OF ADDRESS

A common rhetorical strategy to indicate intimacy is the use of the designation 'you' or 'we', which determine a relationship to a specific other to whom the intimacy is addressed. There are occasions where the specific other is named, such as TS Eliot naming his wife as the recipient of his dedication and the addressees of personal letters; there are also occasions where 'you' is used to assemble an intimate public, who unnamed, are each positioned as the potential recipient of the utterance. The rhetoric of addressing a specific 'you' heightens expectations of reciprocity, though as we will discuss later, identifying as a potential recipient does not mean that the intimate intention will be available. Such strategies of the rhetoric used in letters, zines and social media sites demonstrate the author's imagination of a reader beyond the text.

Reciprocity in epistolary communication is produced, in part, by its reliance on the linguistic device of deixis, the ability to convey, at once, the acts of writing and reading; encoding and decoding, posting and receipt. As David Barton and Nigel Hall explain:

> As a genre, letters have specific forms of deixis, that is, ways of referring to the writer and the intended reader and to space and time. The writer is present in the letter, often through the use of the word I and in the signing of the letter. There is usually a specific reader, or readers in mind and they are invoked in the salutation and in the use of you. The writer constructs an intended reader in the text … two worlds are invoked: the here and now of the writer and the here and now of the reader. (1999, p. 6)

Epistolary practice differs markedly in its deictic usage from other related modes of written communication. The diary, autobiography or memoir, for example, are often considered to resemble letter writing in their generic framing as 'authentic' and 'sincere' but differ in the modes of address through the use of first and second person pronoun. At the risk of stating the obvious, the epistolary form is distinguished by its relatively high use of second person pronouns. Where the 'you' of the diary and memoir remain implicit, in letter writing and email the addressee becomes foregrounded. As well as the high use of second person pronouns in epistolary language, the systems of distribution require that the identity of a recipient be made explicit. The law of the epistolary genre - its technological protocols, social conventions and economic structures - is underpinned by the assumption that communication is destined to an identifiable reader. This socio-material condition is, of course, what makes the epistolary form such a rich resource for theorists such as Jacques Lacan (1973) and Jacques Derrida (1987).

In addition to the manner by which deixis constructs reciprocity in letter writing, the expression of sympathy and empathy by correspondents is a related strategy. As a trope of Romantic sensibility, epistolary sympathy produces reciprocity through the constant oscillation between self and other, "a process of creating at once a personal and a shared identity" (McCarthy, 1997, p. 98). Writing to her friend's ailing father, Elizabeth Barrett Browning exclaims "into all that you must have felt I deeply enter" (Kelly and Hudson, 16

April 1838, p. 26). This phrase eloquently illustrates the close conceptual and affective link between sympathy and reciprocity since it focuses on the constant blurring of the boundary between self and other. As Thomas McCarthy explains the "profound involvement in another person's inner life" necessarily involves a high level of introspection. "Romantic correspondents knew implicitly that the self is affirmed by sympathising with another as much as it is by the sympathy of another" (1997, p. 98).

If 'you' functions as a signifier of reciprocity in epistolary discourse, this is not always the case for all genres of written communication. As proof of its contingency and mutability, use of the second person pronoun in narrative fiction, for example, differs markedly from the epistolary case. Indeed, as narrative theorists suggest rather than to increase reciprocity or empathy by 'drawing the reader and narrator close' the use of second person 'you' actually creates 'dissonance' because addressing the protagonist as 'you' distances the reader (Keen, 2007). Where the you of narrative prose is, relatively, uncommon and often 'experimental', in poetry, especially the lyric, second person address is conventional yet no less ambiguous. It may refer to an actual, individual person (as is partly the situation with TS Eliot's poem that opens this paper) or the address might be aimed at the reader (one could also identify Eliot's poem here too). This brief outline of the rhetorical and affective impacts of narrative voice provides the context for the following discussion of two epistolary-based projects at the heart of which lies the problematic of address.

You

The zine *You* is an ongoing project that began in 2001 edited by a zinester known only as 'Luke You'. Anonymously produced and distributed around the globe though predominantly in Melbourne, Australia it is packaged in hand decorated paper bags and secured with staples so that the locator or finder of the zine must open it for herself. The packaging both holds and obscures the contents so that the act of unsealing is an experience reserved solely for the initial receiver. The sealed wrapping, much like the envelope of a letter, signifies that there is a singular addressee who may open the package. This is reinforced in the familiarity of the opening address which is always 'Dear You'. Through the packaging and opening address the reader is positioned as the sole recipient. The closing statements similarly imply an ongoing relationship of familiarity with many editions of the zine closing with the words "I'll speak to you again soon" signifying an expectation of reciprocation, and ongoing relations.

One particular example is dated Monday, 6 January 2003 2.50pm, and located "on the blue couch" which assumes a familiarity with the features of 'Luke You's surroundings. The letter also contains reference to others ("Nathaniel Dean" and "Sam") which implies the reader has either an awareness or acquaintance with them. These, together with the packaging and terms of address, situate the reader in a reciprocal role. The contents of the zines are frequently anecdotal, relating scenarios, thoughts and minutiae of every-day life. Through these disclosures of intimate details, *You* invites sympathy and empathy as effects of reciprocity.

The 'you' addressed in *You* is implicit. The system of distribution does not require identities of recipients to be explicit, and also allows for the identity of 'Luke You' to remain obscure. Indeed, there are editions of the zine in which the writer is identified as someone other than 'Luke You'. In one such edition, a person by the name of John recounts a wedding he attended and his reaction to what he refers to as the 'machination' of the event. In another edition Bridget writes the lyrics to four songs, including a description besides each one of its relevance to her. Both Bridget and John employ the same deictic devices as in the

letters from 'Luke You'. They each begin their letters with "Dear You" and though they end with different statements ("Til next time, my friend...Much love n' hugs, John" and "Well I hope all is well with you and I will talk to you later, Love from Bridget. XXX"), the sentiment of reciprocity is contingent with the format of *You*. This has an effect of dissonance: are these the persons to whom 'Luke You' has been writing? Has the reader assumed the place of a 'real' addressee or are they all fiction? Is this what Beebee calls the function of epistolary fiction (1999), positioning the 'real' reader as the fictional addressee?

Similar strategies are also utilised in another epistolary project called *PostSecret*. *PostSecret* is a useful site for discussion on public intimacy (Poletti 2011) yet the arguments put forth have been limited thus far to the literary sphere.

<div align="center">*POSTSECRET*</div>

Frank Warren began the project *PostSecret* in 2004 by distributing in public spaces such as libraries and train stations a quantity of blank postcards. The recipients of these postcards were asked to "Share a secret?" Contributors were instructed to use the blank postcard to tell a true secret that they had never shared with anyone before. The telling of the secret would be anonymous, the sender had no requirement or expectation to provide identifying information. Postcards were sent to a specified address (Warren's) and contributors and potential contributors were invited to view submitted secrets at a blog set up to catalogue them. A proportion of the secrets submitted continue to be catalogued on the blog and a number of anthologies have been published from the project. A community has also developed around the site's forum. In mid 2011, PostSecret launched an iPhone application which provided another venue for the submission and circulation of secrets. It became one of the highest selling applications through the Apple Store but, as Warren has explained, a focus on "absolute anonymity" was the reason for its relatively brief life. In January 2012 it ceased operation due to complaints made to Apple and the FBI about offensive and "gruesome" uploaded content (Warren, 2012).

Participants in *PostSecret* identify themselves through the first person using phrases such as "I never told you that.." and "sometimes when I'm alone I ...". As with *You* the reader stands in for a fictional 'you', except in *PostSecret* the disclosures and the people they concern are imagined to be real also. Not all occasions allow for the audience to position themselves as the 'you' being addressed. The intimacy about which 'you' is addressed at times identifies specificities of the relationship whereby the reader is made aware of the dissonance between their position as 'you' and the 'real' you to whom the secret refers.

While there are many different producers of the postcards, each postcard is understood to depict a subjective sentiment. The disclosures are fragile and precarious in that a producer might be discovered through the revelation of personally identifying information. Some use their own image in the creation of their postcards and speak in the community forum on the website of being recognised while out in public. Equally precarious is that the 'you', for whom the reader stands in, might be present in the intimate public to which the disclosure is made. Often it is not clear whether this is desired or feared. While secrets are certainly shared in *PostSecret*, they remain as secrets in a number of ways. The secret may only partially be disclosed, perhaps also coded. Though the secret is shared to an intimate public potentially accessible to a wider audience, there are other publics from which it is not directly circulated. The reciprocal audience are invited into an intimate party of secret keepers, reinforcing a bond of reciprocity. In addition, the producer of the postcard need not identify themselves. In *PostSecret* the intimate public is the reciprocal audience. The connection between the *PostSecret* community and the secrets disclosed is figurative rather than lit-

eral. Whilst the secrets might not be specific to them, readers may still find that particular secrets resonate with their own experiences. The experience is part licentiousness and part sympathy.

In line with a media archaeology approach, the material form of these texts must be acknowledged. Contributors to *PostSecret* are provided with three tips: "Be brief", "Be legible" and "Be creative". Anna Poletti in her discussion of how *PostSecret* shapes the form and content of submitted secrets calls attention to the instructions "Be brief" and "creative" but neglects the instruction "Be legible" (Poletti, 2011, p. 33). We would argue this exhortation is central for understanding the "media ideologies and idioms of practice" (Gershon, 2010, p. 21) that underpin *PostSecret*. While the instruction to "Be legible" appears as 'merely' a requirement of the technological form, this does not guarantee clarity. As we have seen, at the discursive level, language code may intervene to render messages inscrutable.

SILENCES, INTERJECTIONS AND CONTESTATIONS

ANXIETIES

Reciprocity is fickle. Authors have little control over audience interpretations and the desired form of reciprocity is not guaranteed. As Nancy Miller argues, anxiety "always threatens the enterprise of going public with private stories" (Miller, 2002, p. 137). Miller places this anxiety as fear, factoring that reciprocity requires interest in the individual and therefore a lack of reciprocity may be because (or may be feared to be because) there is no one who cares. This she claims is the universal fear of the writer (p. 137).

How might anxieties be acted upon? Authors may cautiously address the reciprocal audience, forewarning them of the private nature of the disclosures to be made. Authors also express doubt they may have in their reader's ability to empathise or understand, "I'm not sure if *you'll* understand this but..." or doubt as to the trustworthiness of the reader: "I'm not sure I should be telling *you* this..." Authors may also change their mind following disclosure, particularly if in retrospect they feel overexposed. Moments when users retract posts or tweets signify the fragility of public privacy. Public privacy is fraught with anxieties: that the utterance be misunderstood; that it be understood by too many; that what was thought to be ambiguous and intriguing is quite transparent and that this transparency may lead to detrimental consequences. While a producer of zines might retrace their steps and remove non-claimed copies and letter writers might approach their addressees to return or destroy their letters, or stalk the mailbox and plead with the postman to return their relinquished letters, the retraction of Twitter and Tumblr posts matter most to the archives of the web - for once posted the record of their existence is irretrievable, though it may be rendered invisible. Retractions of any form signify fragility or discord in the expectations of the reciprocal relationship. Retractions are risk recovery measures, hasty actions demonstrating the possibility of internal conflict or rebuttal.

ACCESS

Access and context are key components of publicly private communication. The limitation of access is in part what defines privacy (Gavison, 1980, p. 421). To identify the private intimacy of a message requires the reader or listener to have access to a suitable context by which to determine the meaning. Context is also important to the writer, it is crucial for them to know the context in which their message will be read, shared or interpreted (Nissenbaum as cited in Solove, 2007, p. 165).

Access to content is distinct from access to context. Access to meaning requires access

to both content and a suitable context. The desired state of communication is access to meaning. Expressions of communication that are openly coded so that the interlocutors and content are visible and sufficient context is accessible, allowing any intimacy contained within the message to be publically observed, places the public as a potential interlocutor in the exchange. Other communications may be termed 'false phatic', for their meaning to be understood requires knowledge of context. To onlookers the communication appears to be a phatic or banal utterance of little significance other than its statement of existence which belies the intimacy of the private meaning. The public are equally placed as necessary in the exchange though their potential interlocutory function is purposively obstructed. Public obscure communication is partially coded, the interlocutors may be identifiable to a public and a meaning may be discerned though it may not be the intended meaning due to differing understandings of context. There are also exchanges where it might be deduced that an intimacy is being conveyed but the witnessing public have no access to the meaning themselves having insufficient context such as an absurd message between siblings on Facebook. Public obscure communications are like teasers, playing on a sense of intimacy while hinting at a further story which for the present moment is beyond the grasp of the general audience. To some this might incite a motivation to uncover the hidden meaning.

Public obscure communication incites a desire for access to meaning, where the onlooker (whether an intended one or not) is able to identify that they have only partial access or their contextual framework is insufficient. This may be evidenced in comments and replies such as "huh?", "what's going on?", "what's happened?" or "I don't get it?", often it is evidenced in silence though the lack of response may indicate a failure to incite such desire, playing on anxieties identified earlier by Miller (2002). It is this incitement or desire for meaning that nurtures and creates the relationship between each of the necessary interlocutors of public privacy - the addressee, the addresser and the audience.

Control

Solove identifies that there is little recognition of the importance of control in discussion on privacy (2007, p. 185). As demonstrated in Madejski, Johnson and Bellovin's (2011) study on control of privacy settings in social media sites, there is an inherent risk in public privacies whereby lack of attention to, or competence of privacy settings, may render reading impossible by making the content inaccessible or potentially more hazardous and may make public privacies simply public by providing access to additional content whereby the context for understanding a publicly intimate message is widened (Madejski et al, 2011). Control of access is shown to be of greater importance and risk to privacy than content.

Transgressions of public privacy arise when the distribution of content or information is out of the control of the interlocutor who initiated the exchange. The distress felt by Elizabeth Barrett Browning about the possibility her letters might circulate without her consent foregrounds the sentiment of users of more contemporary media forms. Public privacy promises subjects the capacity to control context and to limit the opportunities for others to direct or distribute their content. Reciprocity is key to public privacy, therefore, since it is the gauge by which the control of content or access is measured. Public privacy relies on reciprocity in order to determine whether appropriate privacy has been sustained. Silence as a response may mean that the message has been too carefully concealed, while an unanticipated response may mean that the message is too easily accessible.

CONCLUSION

As Crawford argues in regards to reciprocal listening, studies on reciprocity allow for more detailed examination of the nuances of agency in online media (2009). The recip-

rocator is shown to be a key interlocutor in communication practices, though one that is often overlooked (Solove, 2007; Tufecki, 2008). Acknowledging the centrality of the reciprocator(s) in the communication process opens up paths for analysis which operate beyond the initiating interlocutor to whom most attention is usually paid. While postal systems regulate and automate communication, through the standardised writing space of a postcard for example, reciprocity is not always a predictable process. By investigating diverse systems of code - narrative, material, affective, discursive and legal - used by different media forms, this paper demonstrates how uneven, fragmented patterns of reciprocity function within public privacy.

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