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ORAL HISTORY

Linda Shopes

WHAT ORAL HISTORY IS, AND ISN'T

Oral history is a protean term. Within common parlance, it can refer to recorded speech of any kind or to talking about the past in ways ranging from casual reminiscing among family members, neighbors, or coworkers to ritualized accounts presented in formal settings by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers. Most typically, the term refers to what folklorists call *personal experience narratives*—that is, orally transmitted, autobiographical stories crafted to communicate meaning or what is valued to others (Dohly, 1989). Oral history in this mode is exemplified most notably by the work of Studs Terkel (1967, 1970, 1974, 1984), whose multiple volumes have done much to popularize the term, and more recently, of David Isay (2007), whose StoryCorps project has been rekindling interest in the storied quality of everyday life. Typically, the term registers a certain democratic or populist meaning: *oral history* implies a recognition of the heroics of everyday life, a celebration of the quotidian, an appeal to the visceral!

Among practitioners, however, oral history has a more precise meaning. The Oral History Association (2010) defines oral history as “a way of collecting and interpreting human memories to foster knowledge and human dignity.” Donald Ritchie (2003), in his guide, *Doing Oral History*, describes it as “collect[ing] memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews.” He continues, “An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization, or other form of public presentation” (p. 19). Valerie Yow (2005), in her *Recording Oral History*, states, “Oral history is the recording of personal testimony delivered in

oral form.” Distinguishing this practice from memoir, she notes that in oral history, “There is someone else involved who frames the topic and inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memory, and records and presents the narrator’s words.” Recognizing that various terms are used to describe this same activity, she concludes, “*Oral history* seems to be the [term] most frequently used to refer to the recorded in-depth interview” (pp. 3–4). *characteristics*

These definitions suggest six characteristics of oral history as a professional, disciplined practice. It is, *first*, an interview, an exchange between someone who asks questions, that is, the interviewer, and someone who answers them, referred to as the interviewee, narrator, or informant. It is not simply someone telling a story; it is someone telling a story in response to the queries of another; it is this dialogue that shapes the interview. Moreover, oral history generally involves only these two people. Although oral historians will occasionally conduct group interviews, these are generally done as preparation for or follow up to an individual interview. Oral historians value the intimacy of a one-on-one exchange. *Second*, oral history is recorded, preserved for the record, and made accessible to others for a variety of uses. Ritchie (2003) goes so far as to say, “An interview becomes an oral history only when it has been recorded, processed in some way, made available in an archive, library, or other repository, or reproduced in relatively verbatim form for publication. Availability for general research, reinterpretation, and verification defines oral history” (p. 24). These two primary characteristics of oral history suggest that it is properly understood as both process (that is the act of interviewing) and product (that is, the record that results from that interview).

Third, oral history interviewing is historical in intent; that is, it seeks new knowledge about and insights into the past through an individual biography. Although it always represents an interplay between past and present, the individual and the social oral history is grounded in historical questions and hence requires

give status for topics

that the interviewer has knowledge of both the subject at hand and the interviewee's relationship to that subject. *Fourth*, oral history is understood as both an act of memory and an inherently subjective account of the past. Interviewees record what an interviewer draws out; what the interviewee remembers, what he or she chooses to tell, and how he or she understands what happened, not the unmediated "facts" of what happened in the past. An interview, therefore, renders an interpretation of the past that itself requires interpretation. *Fifth*, an oral history interview is an inquiry in depth. It is not a casual or serendipitous conversation but a planned oral scheduled, serious and searching exchange; one that seeks a detailed, expressive, and reflective account of the past. Although framed by a broad set of questions or areas of inquiry, an oral history interview admits a high degree of flexibility, allowing the narrator to speak about what he or she wishes, as he or she wishes. Finally, oral history is fundamentally oral, reflecting both the conventions and dynamics of the spoken word. This may seem self-evident, but decades of relying on transcripts, which can never fully represent what was said, have obscured this fact. Only with the widespread adoption of digital technology are oral historians beginning to engage seriously with the reality of oral history.

Oral history generally distinguishes between life history and topical interviews. *Life history interviews*, often undertaken within local or community settings, record a narrator's biography, addressing topics such as family life, educational and work experiences, social, political, and religious involvements, and, at their best, the relationship of personal history to broader historical events and social themes. Typically, life history interviews aim at recording everyday life within a particular setting. Topical interviews, often done as part of a larger research project, focus on specific elements of an individual's biography, for example, participation in the U.S. civil rights movement, a topic well documented by oral history. In practice, many interviews include both life history and topical elements; lives, after all, are not easily compartmentalized.

Whether a life history or topical interview or some combination of the two, the best interviews have a measured, thinking-out-loud quality, as prescriptive questions work and rework a particular topic, encouraging the narrator to remember details, seeking to clarify what is muddled, making connections among seemingly disparate recollections, challenging contradictions, evoking assessments. The best interviewees listen carefully between the lines of what is being said to discern what the narrator is trying to get at and have the confidence to ask the hard questions. Yet all interviews are shaped by the context within which they are conducted, as well as the particular interpersonal dynamic between narrator and interviewer. An interview can be a history lecture, a confessional, a verbal sparring match, an exercise in nostalgia, a ritual tale, or any other of the ways people talk about their experiences.

Although the act of interviewing lies at the heart of oral history, best practices define the oral history process as considerably more extensive (Larson, 2006; Mackay, 2007; Ritchie, 2003;

Yow, 2005). The interview is preceded by careful preparation, including defining the focus of the inquiry, conducting background research in secondary and primary sources, developing skills in interview methods and in using recording technology, identifying and making contact with the narrator, cultivating rapport, conducting a preinterview, and developing an interview outline. An interview is then followed by a number of steps designed to facilitate preservation and access, including securing permission for others to use the interview by means of what is termed a *legal release*; making one or more copies of the original recording; placing these in a secure, publicly accessible repository; cataloguing or developing a finding aid for the interview; and developing a means of accessing what has been recorded without listening to the entire interview, by either online search methods. If the interview is part of a larger project or program, additional considerations come into play, including project planning and design, management and staffing, office space, work flow, budget and funding, and the development of products or outcomes.

Oral history is thus distinguished from other kinds of interviewing. Its open-ended, subjective, historically inflected approach is quite unlike the highly structured opinion polls and surveys of current attitudes and behaviors conducted by sociologists, political scientists, and market researchers. Similarly, it is unlike interviews conducted by many journalists and documentary workers, who seek quotations to fit the story they are developing today rather than let the narrator define the plot of his or her own story for the historical record. (This is not to deny, however, that the line can be blurry; some journalists and documentarians are excellent oral historians, though they may not refer to themselves as such [Colles, 1997].) Oral history also differs from interviews done in a clinical or therapeutic setting. Although both are conducted in depth and recognize intersubjectivity and personal biography—and notwithstanding that an oral history interview often has a salutary effect on both narrator and interviewee—clinical interviewing posits dysfunction and seeks to help a person resolve personal problems, sometimes, as in narrative psychology (Bruner, 1990; Politigonis, 1988; Spence, 1982), by reframing the person's story. Oral history, however, does not seek to change the narrator; it proceeds from the assumption that the narrator has been an active agent in fashioning his or her life and life story.

Oral historians are perhaps most closely allied with anthropologists and qualitative sociologists in their approach to interviewing; all, in Clifford Geertz's (1974) resonant phrase, seek "the native's point of view." Oral historians, especially those interviewing individuals who share a particular social setting, will often engage in the anthropologist's practice of participant observation, and anthropologists and sociologists, though generally focusing on the ethnographic present, do recognize at times a historical dimension to the topic at hand (Altkinson, Coffey, & Delamoni, 2003; di Leonardo, 1987; Mintz, 1979;

Silverman, 1997; Vansina, 1985). Oral historians also share certain approaches and practices with folklorists: Although folklorists focus on the formal and aesthetic qualities of traditional narratives, they and oral historians record firsthand accounts as part of the collective record of a culture; and within contemporary practice, both approach oral materials as subjective texts, constructions of language and mind, whose meaning demands a level of decoding (Abraham, 1981; Davis, 1988; Jackson, 2007; Joyner, 1979).

Although oral history differs from the methods and purposes of other kinds of interviewing and allies most comfortably with the assumptions and intentions of history, it can be deeply interdisciplinary in the ways it seeks to understand interviews. Oral historians have looked to psychology for understanding the emotional undercurrents of an interview; to communications for the structure and dynamics of the interview exchanges; to folklore and literary studies for the storied quality of interviews; to anthropology for the culture clash that often occurs as two different mentalities collide within the narrative; to cultural studies and critical race and gender studies for ways the social position of both narrator and interviewer underlies what is—and is not—said; to performance studies for the presentational quality of interviews; and to gerontology for understanding the way the imperatives of aging shape an interview. Indeed, much of the most creative thinking about oral history comes from practitioners trained and working in fields other than history.

This essay has thus far presented oral history in its own ethnographic present, for it has advanced a broad description of a practice that in fact has not been static but has evolved over several decades. Useful for laying out some generally—although not universally—agreed upon characteristics of oral history, for setting some boundaries, and for helping fix this indeed very protean term, this discussion has nonetheless stripped oral history of its own historical development. Thus, subsequent sections will discuss the development of oral history over time as both a method of research and mode of understanding the past (Gluck, 1999; Grale, 2007; Thomson, 2007). Collectively, they will address changes in practice, linking them to broader changes in the academy and within society, consider the politics of oral history as an intellectual and social practice, and outline oral history's institutional development. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of legal and ethical issues in oral history, including its problematic relationship with institutional review boards.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS: ORAL HISTORY AS AN ARCHIVAL PRACTICE

Historians have long used oral sources for their work, either conducting interviews of their own or drawing on firsthand accounts recorded and preserved by others (Sharpless, 2006). No less than the ancient historian Thucydides interviewed participants for his

history of the Peloponnesian War, observing that "different eyewitnesses give different accounts of the same events, speaking out of partiality for one side or the other or else from imperfect memories" (Ritchie, 2003, p. 20). Accounts of Aztec and Inca life recorded by Spanish chroniclers in the 16th century and of Mexican and American settlers in California recorded by Hubert Howe Bancroft and his assistants remain valuable sources for historians today. Similarly, Henry Mayhew's inquiry into the living and working conditions of London's working classes in the mid-19th century is only the first in a long line of investigations that have relied heavily on evidence obtained by talking with the subjects of the inquiry; these social studies have both goaded reform and informed scholarly history.

Nonetheless, reliance on oral sources fell into disfavor during the late 19th and much of the 20th centuries, as the practice of history became increasingly professionalized and as positivism became the reigning academic paradigm. The German historian Leopold von Ranke's dictum that the goal of history was to recount "how it really was" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*) described a form of scholarship that increasingly relied on the (paper) documentary record, or as C.-V. Langlois and Charles Seignobos, two French historians, put it, "There is no substitute for documents: no documents, no history" (Thompson, 1988, p. 51). Reliance on what had often been an informal practice of talking with people thus became suspect. Indeed, early efforts to record firsthand accounts of the past were often idiosyncratic or extemporaneous affairs, conducted according to methods that were more or less rigorous in any given case and with no intention of developing a permanent archival collection. Furthermore, the absence of mechanical—or digital—recording devices necessitated reliance on human note-takers, raising questions about accuracy and reliability.

Dating oral history's beginnings in the United States is a quixotic exercise at best. Some reckon its origins in the Depression-era Federal Writers' Project (FWP), which recorded thousands of life histories with individuals from various regional, occupational, and ethnic groups during the late 1930s and early 1940s (Hirsch, 2006, 2007). The best known of the FWP interviews are the slave narratives, accounts by elderly men and women who had experienced slavery firsthand. Rediscovered by scholars in the 1970s, these narratives have become important sources for a reorientation of the historiography of American slavery from one that views slaves primarily as victims to one that recognizes the active agency of enslaved persons within a system of bondage (Blassingame, 1972; Genoves, 1974; Rawick, 1972). But what about the interviews James McGregor conducted in 1940 with survivors of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre? Or the interviews done by Bancroft and his associates?

Nonetheless, the Oral History Research Office (OHRO) at Columbia University, established by Columbia historian Allan Nevins in the late 1940s, is generally acknowledged as the first oral history program in the United States; a distinction likely related to OHRO's prominence in institutionalizing and professionalizing

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oral history in its modern incarnation (Starb, 1984). Recognizing that the bureaucratization of public affairs was tending to standardize the paper trail and that the telephone was replacing personal correspondence, Nevins came up then with the idea of conducting interviews with participants in recent history to supplement the written record. He wrote of the need "for obtaining a little of the immense mass of information about the more recent American past—the past of the last half century—which might come fresh and direct from men once prominent in politics, in business, in the professions, and in other fields; information that every ordinary column shows to be perishing" (Starb, 1984, p. 8). It took a decade for this idea to reach fruition. Nevins and his amanuensis—for these early interviews were recorded in long-hand—conducted their first interview in 1948 with New York civic leader George Meany.

Several universities soon followed Columbia's lead and established their own oral history programs: the University of Texas in 1952, the University of California at Berkeley in 1954, and the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Michigan in 1959. The Harry S. Truman Library and Museum inaugurated its oral history project in 1961, interviewing Truman's family, friends, and associates; thus initiating the practice of oral history at presidential libraries. Columbia's 1965 annual report listed some 89 projects nationwide, fostered partly by the development of recording technologies.² By the mid-1960s, oral history was well enough established to form the Oral History Association (OHA), founded in 1967. After publishing its annual proceedings for five years, in 1973 OHA began publishing an annual journal, the *Oral History Review*; in 1987 the *Review* became a biannual publication. Recognizing the need to codify standards for oral history, it developed the first iteration of the current *Principles and Best Practices for Oral History* (2009) in 1968. The document is generally regarded as defining the parameters of best practice.³

Unlike previous interviewing initiatives, these early oral history programs were distinguished by both their permanence and their systematic and disciplined approach to interviewing. Staff and affiliates developed projects that included a number of interviews on a single topic and were designed to fill in gaps in the extant record. These were explicitly archival. The point was to record on tape, preserve, and make available for future research recollections deemed of historical significance. Archival exigencies have thus defined what have been generally understood as fundamental features of oral history and have been codified in established best practices. Two merit particular attention. First is the matter of releases: Because an interview is understood as a creative work, it is subject to the laws of copyright, and these laws deem the interviewee, as "author" of the interview, to be the owner of the copyright. It is by means of the legal release form that the interviewee signs over or "releases" to the sponsoring institution—completed by researcher or the repository that accepts completed interviews—rights to the interview, and, if the interviewee chooses,

sets certain limits to access. This is analogous to the deed of gift form by which archives typically acquire materials from donors, and indeed, some oral history interviews are transferred to an archive by a deed of gift (Neuenschwander, 2009). The legal status of the interviewer is unclear, but in practice he or she is often considered a cocreator of the interview and hence cosigner of the release.

Second is the matter of transcription. Transcribing interviews, that is rendering recorded speech in writing, has long been accepted as an essential part of the oral history process, on the assumption that a transcript will increase access considerably. Given that archives and the scholars who use them have historically been document driven, this assumption is understandable. Paper, unlike audio or visual media, is a familiar and comfortable form; it's easier and faster to scan a paper document than listen to or view an interview; words fixed on paper ensure accuracy of quotation in print; and they confer a certain intellectual authority on what could be construed as an ephemeral form. For years, oral historians accepted the transcript as the primary document of an oral history interview, despite its inevitable distortions and early on, some programs destroyed or reused audiotapes (Allen, 1982; Baum, 1977; Mazé, 2006; Samuel, 1971). Only recently has the general consensus shifted away from the transcript and toward the recorded interview—the oral narrative—as the primary document with the development of digital media has come a growing interest in supplementing—or supplanting—the transcript with digital access, topics that will be taken up later in this chapter.

Best practice also dictates that transcribed interviews be returned to the narrator for correction, amplification, and emendation, to obtain the fullest, most accurate account. This practice, coupled with the need for releases, can pit the rights and privileges of the narrator against the imperatives of scholarship. Law and custom give the narrator enormous control over the presentation of his or her story; and when, as is often the case, the narrator is someone who otherwise has little control over the circumstances of his or her life, this is certainly just. Still, a narrator can place restrictions on the interview by means of the release and can delete significant but unflattering embarrassing, even incriminating information from the transcript, to the impoverishment of the historical record.

Because these early oral historians had been schooled in the Rankian document- and fact-based historiography of the times, they considered interviews to be a means of creating new facts that would lead to a more complete account of the past. The interviewee was viewed as a storehouse of information about "what actually happened"; the interviewer, a neutral presence who simply recorded these facts; and the interview, a document to be assessed like any other source for its reliability and verifiability. Michael Frisch (1990a, p. 160) has referred to this as the "more history" approach to oral history, "reduc[ing] [it] to simply another kind of evidence to be pushed through the historian's controlling mill." Because oral history was something of a maverick practice,

dismissed by most historians as unreliable hearsay, a source of anecdote or color but little else, one finds a certain defensiveness among early practitioners and a strenuous effort to articulate systematic means of assuring and assessing the validity, reliability, and representativeness of interviews (Moss, 1977).

■ SOCIAL HISTORY AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF ORAL HISTORY

The social movements and intellectual upheavals of the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond had enormous impact on oral history and, more modestly, vice versa. Who was interviewed, who interviewed them, what they were interviewed about, and the purpose of interviews all experienced significant shifts in these decades, not so much replacing the earlier, archival approach as building on it or occurring on a parallel track. Whereas early oral history programs, in line with the dominant historiography of the postwar era, had tended to interview the "elite"—that is, the postwar era, had tended to interview the "elite"—that is, leaders in business, industry, and politics as well as distinguished individuals in the professions, the arts, and related fields—by the 1970s, oral history's scope widened considerably, in response to scholars' growing interest in the experiences of non-elites, ordinary people—anonymous Americans, as they were sometimes termed. As social history—that is, the history of social relationships among generally unequal and often competing groups—became the dominant historiographic paradigm, oral history became an essential tool for recovering the experiences of those to whom historians were now turning their attention. As Ronald Grate (2007, p. 12) has written, "The objective was to document the lives and past actions of classes of people heretofore ignored by historians; in particular the working class, but also racial and ethnic minorities, women, and sexual and political minorities. These are people whose lives were traditionally ignored or purposefully forgotten: people whose history [had been] . . . understood by examining documents provided by those who were outsiders to the communities under study, upper-class commentators for the most part, but also journalists, social and other service workers, or anyone who had left a written record." Interviewees thus began asking about everyday life in working-class communities, about the differing experiences of women and men within families, about ways minorities created purposeful lives within deeply constraining circumstances. Interviewees began to ask not only "What happened?" but also "What was it like?" "What did you do about . . . ?" "How do you understand . . . ?"

At the same time, oral history became a practice carried out less exclusively for archival purposes and increasingly by individual scholars conducting interviews for their own research projects. In some cases, scholarly interests catalyzed the development of ongoing, multifaceted oral history programs, such as the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill, where scholarly research and archival collection building have gone hand in hand since 1973. Yet some scholar-interviewers, operating outside of an institutional oral history archive, did not always adhere to established standards with the same rigor as the pioneering oral history projects. Some were unwilling to pursue topics that lay outside their immediate interests, thereby limiting interviews' usefulness to others; some, less concerned about the future use of interviews and often with fewer resources than ongoing projects, failed to secure release forms, or to transcribe interviews, or even to place them in public archives.⁴ The last especially is of concern, for it violates historians' professional commitment to open access to sources. These shortcomings notwithstanding, oral history has played an important role in democratizing our collective understanding of the past; interviews have added new knowledge about previously excluded or underdocumented groups and have restored voice and agency to those whom the extant record has often objectified. To cite only one example, John Bodnar's *The Transplanted* (1985), its title deliberately plying off Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* (1951) and its interpretation deeply informed by the biographical narratives of dozens of interviewees, represented Eastern and Southern European immigrants to the United States not as disoriented and "uprooted" anomic individuals, unable to gain a footing in the new world, but as men and women actively deploying creative strategies to fashion a new life as transplants to that world. Collectively, interviews conducted within the social history paradigm have challenged dominant top-down narratives of the past and addressed the relationship between subordination and agency. More recently, this kind of oral history has occurred within the context of ethnic and queer studies, as scholars probe notions of identity, break long-held silences, and broaden our understanding of "who counts" in history.

Oral history has democratized not only the historical record but also the practice of history, involving people outside the academy and established archives as producers and interpreters of their own history in addition to serving as interviewees. Increasingly during the 1970s and on into the present, local organizations and groups—historical societies, museums, and libraries and also churches, unions, senior centers, and other grassroots groups—have carried out oral history projects to document their own history, often developing performances, exhibitions, media productions, and other creative work to extend the reach of the interviews. It is probably accurate to state that since the mid-1970s, at least as many oral history projects have been located outside the academy as within, as early as 1973, a directory listing oral history centers in the United States located half of them outside of a college or university setting (Starb, 1984, p. 12).

Still, scholars have often become involved in these projects as organizers, workshop leaders, consultants, collaborators, and interviewees in a self-conscious effort to engage with communities, often those they themselves are studying. In recent years,

academic involvement in community oral history projects has taken place under the rubric of "civic engagement" or "public history" as students and faculty work with community collaborators to document and present aspects of the local past. Frisch (1990b) has written about oral and public history's capacity for sharing authority between interviewer and interviewee, creating opportunities for a "profound sharing of knowledge, an implicit and sometimes explicit dialogue from very different vantage points about the shape, meaning, and implications of history" (p. xxii). Academically trained oral historians working "in public" and their local partners frequently struggle with the implications of such sharing, as they confront differences between scholarly understandings of history as an interpretive activity and vernacular notions of storytelling, between a scholar's interest in a critical approach to the past and a community's self-interest in promoting a positive image or in avoiding unwelcome aspects of its past, between academic languages and styles of work and less formalized practices. These differences, difficult as they are to negotiate, point to larger social differences, in class and race, in generation, in education, in social and political views, and in that context are often resolved only uneasily, or partially (Diaz & Russell, 1999; Lewis, Waller, & Hinsdale, 1995; Shopes, 1986, 2002a).

In a practice that is less about community history and more about advocacy, some have connected oral history with broader humanitarian and civic concerns. Oral historians have, for example, been involved in reminiscence work with older adults, engaging in the integrative process of life review (Bornat, 1993; Butler, 1963) and in "truth telling projects" designed to reconcile former antagonists (Lundy & McGovern, 2006; Minkley & Rassoo, 1998). They have developed projects that both document and support redress for human rights abuses such as the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (Densho, 2010; Dutoy, 2008) or more recently, the lengthy detention without trial of suspected Muslim terrorists in the United States (Shickel, 2010). Oral historians have conducted interviews with displaced or homeless individuals as a means of stimulating and informing a broader activist agenda (Kerr, 2008), used the local knowledge gained in interviews to inform development projects around the globe (Cross & Barker, 2006; Slim & Thompson, 1993), and connected oral history with work for social change in numerous other ways.

Whether occurring inside or outside the academy or somewhere in between, oral history in this democratic mode has often been grounded not only in an interest in a more expansive sense of what counts as history and who counts as historians, but also in a progressive politics, an interest in using history to inform and at times to intervene in movements for equality and justice. As in other fields, the most forceful voice for a politically engaged oral history has often been feminist scholar/activists. buoyed by the energy of the women's movement, they argued early on that "women's oral history was not merely about women,

It was by and for women, as well" (Gluck, 2006, p. 360). Recognizing that the personal is political, interviewees were eager to discover the female experience. Given the nature of that experience, women, it was argued, brought an especial empathy to interviewing "their sisters." At times, the goal was as much about using oral history as a means of consciousness-raising, empowerment, and change as it was about generating new knowledge, indeed, flushed with the excitement of opening the new field of women's history, interviewees tended to take what narrators said at face value—not, it must be said, an entirely inappropriate response for people who had too often been historically silent, or silenced (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Bloom, 1977; Gluck, 1977; Oakley, 1981).

Practice and reflection challenged these rather naive formulations (Armitage, 1983; Armitage & Gluck, 1998; Gluck & Patai, 1991). Documentation of "the female experience" often failed to account for social and ideological differences (Geiger, 1990). Empathy could be a manipulative ploy, resulting in unguarded revelations that were later regretted and unrealistic expectations for a continuing relationship with the interviewer (Stacey, 1991). Efforts to raise someone's consciousness could become a patronizing refusal to hear another's point of view. And failure to subject narrator accounts to critical analysis reflected what Frisch (1990a) has referred to as "anti-history"—a counterpoint to the "more history" approach noted earlier—by which he means viewing "oral historical evidence because of its immediacy and emotional resonance, as something almost beyond interpretation or accountability as a direct window on the feelings and... [hence] on the meaning of past experience" (p. 160).

Recognizing that oral historians often share a broad sympathy with the people they interview and the intimacy that can develop in an interview, Yow (1997) has cautioned against "like-ing interviewees too much." Doing so can create an interview that is collusive, rather than searching. Hesitations, contradictions, and silences are not probed. Deeply painful memories are dismissed with ameliorative words. Cues to information that might shake the interviewer's positive view of a narrator are ignored. Challenging questions are not asked out of deference or to avoid an uncomfortable breach in mutual regard. To counter this tendency, Yow advocates a critical reflexivity, managing one's own emotional reactions to the narrator, challenging one's interests and ideological biases, thinking beyond the questions one intends to ask and developing alternative lines of inquiry. Although not a concern of feminists exclusively, feminist oral historians were among the first to consider power relationships within the practice of oral history and, with colleagues addressing issues of race and ethnicity, have remained among the most sharply attentive to them (Coles, 1997; Gluck & Patai, 1991). How, they have asked, do knowledge production in oral history and the uses to which that knowledge is put reproduce unequal social relationships? Although doubts about "studying down"

have somewhat attenuated over the years, it is still relevant to ask how the assumptions, questions, language, nonverbal cues, and modes of presentation of a relatively privileged interviewer can constrain a less privileged narrator. If scholars build careers based on recording and presenting life stories of others, how is it still appropriate to ask how they might share some of the tangible rewards of that work with narrators and their communities. If oral history's much vaunted capacity to "give voice" assumes, naively, that narrators need the oral historian to find their voices, it is still useful to consider how, in the words of oral historian Alessandro Portelli (1997a, p. 69), we might responsibly "amplify their voices" within the public arena. If, as practice often demonstrates, a rough equality can exist within the bounded space of an interview, if indeed interviewees can retain the balance of power by deciding what to say and what to withhold, it is still useful to consider how one deploys power in presenting and interpreting the lives of those who have freely and in good faith shared them with us. Oral historians (James, 2000a; Kerr, 2003; Rouverol, 2003; Stizra, 2003) continue to confront these questions, negotiating uneasy compromises with narrators, alternating their own interpretive voice with narrator voices; sometimes letting narrators have their say with little comment, sometimes deploying interviews within the context of their own narrative.

As a result of the range and depth of work in oral history since the 1960s, it has attained broad academic acceptance and the credibility it lacked in earlier years. Of course, the evidentiary value of oral history still had its critics. Historian Louise Tilly (1985, p. 41), with a bias toward quantitative evidence, referred to personal testimony, with its emphasis on the individual, as "ahistorical and unscientific." Oral history has also shared in the critique of social history as overly concerned with the quotidian details of everyday life, celebratory of individual agency, and insufficiently attentive to ways the structures of power and relations of inequality constrain action. And local oral history work can be parochial and laced with nostalgia (Shopes, 1986, 2002a). Nonetheless, the dominance of social history during the 1970s and 1980s muted much of the earlier criticism, and we might summarize the two outstanding achievements of oral history in the democratic mode as restoring to our collective record of the past the voices of the historically silenced—if not historically silent and as providing a medium of exchange between the academy and communities.

Although the intent and topics of oral history interviews had shifted by the 1970s and the venues for practice broadened, as a source they were generally viewed much as they had always been, as transparent documents in the positivist tradition, purveyors of facts that were adjudged to be either true or false. Some oral historians, however, were gradually beginning to understand that something more was going on in an interview: that what a narrator said had something to do with the questions

posed, the mental set of both narrator and interviewer, and the relationship between them, that narrators were telling stories, compressing years of living into a form that was shaped by language and culturally defined narrative conventions; that memory was not so much about the accuracy of an individual's recall and about how and why people remembered what they did; and that an interview was in many ways a performance, one that demanded our moral attention.

FROM DOCUMENT TO TEXT: ORAL HISTORIAN'S MOVE TO INTERPRETIVE COMPLEXITY

Identifying a single turning point in the way oral history is understood is impossible; change has come from practitioners operating in a variety of intellectual contexts and has reflected broader theoretical currents. In the United States, Frisch (1990c) was perhaps the first to raise questions about the particular kind of historical evidence oral history provides in a review of Studs Terkel's *Hard Times appearing in 1972*. Unlike many reviewers, who lionized the book as the pure voice of the people, Frisch found the stories of individual failure and collective survival troubling, leading him to ask, "At what distance, in what ways, for what reasons, and in what patterns do people generalize, explain, and interpret experience? What cultural and historical categories do individuals use to help understand and present a view of experience?" (p. 11). By opening up these sorts of questions, Frisch suggested "oral history... encourages us to stand somewhat outside of cultural forms in order to observe their workings. Thus it permits us to track the elusive beats of consciousness and culture in way impossible to do within" (p. 13). Grele (1991a) brought a similar sort of reflexivity to oral history in a number of essays first published in the 1970s. Among his many insights is the especially fruitful one that an interview is a conversational narrative that incorporates three sets of structures—linguistic, performative, and cognitive—and that an analysis of these structures tells us a good deal about what, in addition to the obvious communication of information, is going on in an interview. In what is perhaps the most cited article in the oral history literature, Portelli (1991) analyzed why oral accounts of the death of Italian steel worker Luigi Trastulli, who had been shot during a workers rally protesting NATO in 1949, routinely got the date, place, and reason for his death wrong, placing it instead in 1953, during street fights following announcement of the firing of more than two thousand steel workers. He argued that narrators manipulated the facts of Trastulli's death to render it less senseless, more comprehensible, and politically meaningful to them, concluding that "errors, inventions, and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meaning" (p. 2).

These three seminal works and others (Passerini, 1980, 1987; Tonkin, 1992) initiated a gradual shift in the way oral historians

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think about their work. They did not change the methods of oral history—who is interviewed, what they are interviewed about, or how interviews are used; these elements of oral history have remained broadly democratic. Rather, these works have led practitioners into more theoretical territory, to focus less on the content of what a narrator has said and more on the meaning embedded in or lying underneath the words. This approach to interviews—as opposed to interviewing—arose from close attention to the dialogic exchange that lies at the heart of an interview, as well as sustained engagement with the narratives generated. This approach also reflected broader intellectual trends of the last decades of the 20th century, including what has been termed “the linguistic turn” in scholarship, in which attention to the semantic and the symbolic have come to challenge the positivist paradigm. An interpretive approach to oral history has been further stimulated by the growing internationalization of oral history, bringing U.S. oral historians into closer contact with the work of their more theoretically inclined continental colleagues. Beginning in 1979, oral historians from around the world have been meeting biennially under the aegis of what became formalized in 1989 as the International Oral History Association. Beginning in 1980, work presented at these meetings has been published in a series of journals and annual publications, including the influential *International Journal of Oral History* published from 1980 through 1990.

It is difficult to summarize what is a diverse, complex, sometimes dense literature, but at bottom is the notion that interviews are hermeneutic acts, situated in time. Meaning is conveyed through language, which in turn is shaped by memory, emotion, and identity and through nonverbal expression and gesture, which give both immediacy and emotional depth to the exchange and further command the listener's attention. Interviews thus offer clues into narrators' subjectivities, or more accurately, the play of subjectivities—the intersubjectivity—between narrator and interviewer. Understood in this way, interviews are not documents in the traditional sense, to be mined for facts, but texts, to be interpreted for ways narrators understand—and want others to understand—their lives; their place in history, the way history works.

These more theoretical approaches to oral history can perhaps be approached by considering several examples from both published work and actual interviews. Consider the dialogic nature of an interview, the way it is the product—or expression—of two people talking. Historian Thomas Dublin (1998) came to understand this quite pointedly as he was reviewing family photographs with a husband and wife he had interviewed previously about the decline of the anthracite coal mining industry in Pennsylvania: “I expressed surprise at seeing so many pictures taken on [Tommy's] hunting trips with his buddies. When I commented that I had not realized how important hunting had been in Tommy's life, he responded good-naturedly, ‘Well, you never asked’” (p. 21). Eva McMahan (1989, 2006) spins out the

meaning of “asking”—and answering—by proposing a Conversational Analytic Framework for understanding the way meaning is actively negotiated within the interview exchange. By looking closely at the way the conversational moves and the rules that govern it, McMahan argues, we are able to see how “the oral history interview interaction is constitutive” (2006, p. 348) of meaning, not simply a recording of facts. Her work opens up rich possibilities for a rigorous analysis of interview dynamics. More practically, it has informed a more self-conscious, disciplined approach to interviewing.

Because an interview is a communicative event, communication sometimes becomes difficult or breaks down, pointing to issues of cognitive and social dissonance. Julie Cruikshank (1990) and David Neufeld (2008) describe how their interviews with Native Alaskan and First Nations Canadian elders resulted in life stories that did not conform to Western notions of autobiography as a chronological, ego-centered narrative, but rather mixed personal history with mythic, highly metaphorical stories. For Cruikshank, the challenge was to negotiate cultural differences about what properly constitutes a life history; for Neufeld, it was integrating these parallel narratives into historical programs for Parks Canada. Daniel James (2000b) describes the way incongruent expectations, an aggrieved narrator seeking to tell his version of Peronism, and James's own instance on penetrating the narrator's obfuscations while withholding his own views, resulted in a frustrating exchange and what he viewed as an act of symbolic violence.

Sometimes, meaning can be construed from what is not said, from silences in an interview. Luisa Passerini (1980, 1987) demonstrated the way the absence of talk can be not the result of “never asking,” but of broad cultural significance. Recording life histories of members of the Turin, Italy, working class, she found that narrators frequently made no mention of Fascism, whose repressive regime nonetheless inevitably affected their lives. Even when questioned directly, narrators tended to jump directly from fascism's rise in the 1920s to its demise in World War II, avoiding any discussion of the years of fascism's reign. Passerini interprets this as evidence on the one hand “of a scar, a violent annihilation of many years in human lives, a profound wound in daily experience” among a broad swath of the population and, on the other, of people's preoccupation with the events of everyday life—“jobs, marriage, children”—even in deeply disruptive circumstances (1980, p. 9).

Addressing the narrative qualities of oral history, Mary Chamberlain (2006) has assessed ways that an oral history interviewee (or narrator) represents experience through language, drawing on a vast and diverse cultural repertoire to describe, structure, and make sense of his or her lived experience in ways that are, of necessity, highly selective. Chronology (first this, then this) and causality (this → this), for example, often are used to structure oral history interviews in Western societies. Similarly, narrators frequently make

themselves the hero (or antihero) of their own stories, which can be partly attributed to the fundamentally ego-centered nature of oral history, but also represents the modern valorization of the individual, of living purposefully, overcoming odds (or not), progressing (or not) through life, achieving resolution (or not).

Interpreting oral history as narrative means looking for underlying patterns of meaning within the interview. Karen Fields (1994), reflecting on interviews she conducted with her grandmother, has argued that what “Gram” was trying to communicate to her, through anecdotes, stories, and commentaries, was not so much knowledge about her life as a black woman in the Jim Crow South, but wisdom and counsel for how Fields herself could live honorably in the present. Similarly, Linda Shopes (2002b) has developed the notion of iconic stories—concrete, specific stories embedded within the interview that “stand for” or sum up something the narrator reckons of particular importance. Often these are presented as unique or totemic events in the person's history, even as they include tropes common in folklore or popular culture. Grele (1991b) has analyzed closely the contrasting “structures of consciousness” present in interviews with two Jewish immigrants to New York, identifying “the particular vision of history articulated in [each] interview” (p. 213). It's not the content of the interview that interests him, but the way what's said conveys the broader ideological bases of the narrators' understanding of their personal pasts.

Oral history narratives thus connect the individual and the social, drawing on culturally agreed upon (or disputed) mental sets and modes of expression to tell one's story. These sets and modes are themselves deeply embedded in the culture. Portelli (1997b) notes how men tell war stories, women hospital stories, in both cases connecting their lives with gendered social experiences. Writing about the 1921 race riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Scott Ellsworth (1982) coined the phrase “segregation of memory” to describe the opposing ways Blacks and Whites remembered this gruesome event, the result of their own racialized experience of it. Alistair Thomson (1990) uses the ambiguous term “composure” to suggest a more complicated relationship between self and society is articulated in an interview: “In one sense we compose or construct memories using the public language and meaning of our culture. In another sense we compose memories, . . . which gives us a feeling of composure. . . . an alignment of our past, present and future lives. . . . The link between the two senses of composure is that the apparently private process of composing safe memories is in fact very public. . . . We compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable or if we have been excluded from general public acceptance, we seek out particular public which affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives” (p. 25).

Thomson's use of the term “memories” to refer to the construction of narrative in oral history suggests how deeply implicated memory is in oral history, in both an organic and social sense. Oral history records accounts about the past, but the recording takes place in the present; memory is the bridge between the two. In line with the interpretive turn, oral historians have become less deferential about the evidentiary value of these memories and, drawing on the work of psychologists, have come to recognize that narrators do misremember. They collapse events, skew chronology, forget, and get details wrong; they “remember” as firsthand experiences what others, in fact, have told them and recall as true that which is false because they wish it to be so. Moreover, concerns about the reliability and validity of individual memories have become less important in recent years as, following Frischtel and Portelli's work, oral historians have turned concerns about accuracy on their head, recognizing that memories, like narrative, are highly social, expressive of ways the present mediates a narrator's recollection of the past and are generated within ideological, often politically charged contexts. Kim Lacy Rogers (2006) interviews with veterans of the U.S. civil rights movement decades after their years of peak activism reveal a pervasive sense of disappointment and grief as the movement's promise of equality has been only partially realized and economic and social distress continues to plague their communities. Portelli's (2003) study of a Nazi massacre in Rome and Susana Kaiser's (2005) work on postmemories of the military dictatorship in Argentina demonstrate ways oral history serves as a counter-memory of events that official histories have erased, distorted, or manipulated in service of a false consensus.

Theories of performance, drawn from both folklore and communications studies, have also informed the interpretation of oral history narratives. An interview is, most obviously, a performance for the interviewer, in which the narrator presents himself or herself as much through embodied movements—gesture, facial expressions, and the like—as through actual words, a fact that supports the use of video in interviewing. As Samuel Schragel (1983) has argued, an interview is also a cultural performance that looks both backward as a narrator reifies well-rehearsed accounts of the past, told and retold to create a certain version of events, and forward, as he or she self-consciously speaks through the interview to “history” to the audience of future users whom he or she wants to inform, persuade, inspire. Jeff Friedman (2003), Della Pollock (2005) and others (Bauman, 1986; Denzin, 2003) have further theorized oral history as a doubly changed performance: the narrative encounter itself focusing in the changed or liminal space between two people operating their careful attention on each other to create something of value. It also changes the listener, first the interviewer, but then all who receive the interview, to pay attention, to witness, and also to act in ways that respond to the teller's story, sometimes through actual acting, that is via a dramatic production

scripted from interviews and acted before an audience, and sometimes through acting in the world, with a moral vision inspired by the stories one has heard.

Although the interpretive approach to interview texts has dominated the discussion of oral history in recent years, it must be acknowledged that it has not been fully embraced by all who conduct or use interviews. In fact, most continue to consider oral history in the traditional documentary sense as one source among many or to highlight voices that have previously been muted in our collective understanding of the past. Some are concerned that a focus on the subjective, textual nature of interviews will obviate the need to triangulate them with other sources and assess their veracity; others that oral history will become more self-referential rather than remain the intellectually and socially expansive practice it has become. Still others are uneasy that critical analyses of interview texts create scholarly products that objectify narrators, distancing them from their own words. These are among the many questions in the field that remain open.

■ THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Like the invention of movable type in the 15th century, digital media are transforming the culture, changing the ways we record and receive information; our scholarly practices, patterns of social interaction, and leisure pursuits; and, as some argue, the very way our brains work. And, like those living in the 15th century, we don't know where the digital revolution will lead; how the changes it is setting in motion will affect everyday practices and modes of thought, as well as the global economic, social, and political landscape. Oral historians share in both the transformations and uncertainty of the digital revolution.

Undoubtedly, digital media are transforming the way interviews are recorded, preserved, and accessed. Digital is now the preferred format for recording audio interviews and some consensus exists on recording and preservation standards. However, given the rapid development of relatively easy to use, inexpensive video recording devices, video interviews are rapidly becoming the norm, though standards are less well established. It has been said that widespread access to the tools of digital media is making everyone a documentarian, creating a certain elasticity in what properly constitutes oral history raising legitimate questions about quality and requiring archivists to think anew about what sorts of materials have the potential for lasting significance to warrant acceptance from donors. Migration of analog recordings to digital format and the lack of metadata standards for cataloguing digital interviews are also concerns for those overseeing archival collections.

Perhaps the most significant impact of new technology on oral history to date is the remarkable access the Internet provides to interview collections (Orle, 2007; Thomson, 2007). Interviews once languishing in archives, used only by the occasional

researcher, now are widely accessed by students and the interested public as well as by the scholarly community. Though generally heralded as a positive development, opportunities for misuse, violation of copyright, and unwelcome exposure to a vast audience, always present to a degree in oral history, have increased exponentially with Internet access. Likewise, the ethics of placing online interviews recorded in the pre-digital era for which the narrator gave no explicit permission for such "future use" is a continuing concern.

However, new media's impact on oral history extends to matters that are far more than technical; it can be argued that digital technology is shifting the terrain on which oral history has been practiced for the past six decades. Fundamentally, by allowing direct access to the primary document—the recorded interview—new media offer opportunities to restore the oral and the kinesthetic to oral history, and hence the layers of meaning communicated by tone, volume, velocity, pauses, and other nonverbal elements of oral communication, as well as the performative elements of the speaking body. Although oral historians continue to look forward to the development of sophisticated voice recognition software that will automate transcribing, some are also suggesting that direct access to digital audio and video recordings and the continuing growth of online publication may obviate the need for transcribing at all. Furthermore, the sonic and visual qualities of oral history interviews are grounded in the senses of hearing and seeing, which in turn are linked to neurophysiological receptors that trigger emotion. In short, hearing and seeing oral history interviews create a more emotional response in the user than does reading transcripts—a fact that enhances oral history's cultural power, connects it more deeply to the imaginative realm of the humanities, and challenges traditional notions of history as rational, critical inquiry.

Currently, some of the more creative work in oral history lies in the development of digital tools by means of which "the audio-video materials themselves—not the transcribed text version—can be searched, browsed, accessed, studied, and selected for use at a high level of specificity" (Frisch, 2006, p. 10). The implication is not simply greater access within and across interviews, but a "post-documentary sensibility" that is, the displacement of "the authority of the mediating intelligence or documentary authorship . . . by a sharable, dialogic capacity to explore, select, order, and interpret" interview materials in an "ongoing, contextually contingent, fluid construction of meaning" (p. 113). In other words, a radical democratization of ways oral history can be used. This nonauthoritative approach to using interviews can be further enhanced by emerging modes of user-driven indexing via tagging. Steven High and David Sworn (2009, pp. 2–3), themselves advocates of digital oral history, nonetheless recognize "indexing can also conflict with the basic ethos of oral historical research: far from giving voice to interviewees, indexing risks smothering and de-contextualizing their life stories, . . . occluding the anomalous and specific in favour of

the cross-referentially afforded by topics and themes that are common to all interviews." Again, this sort of misuse of oral history is not new to the digital era; digital tools simply magnify enormously possibilities for doing so.

In these ways, new media are transforming oral history from an archival and research practice to a presentational one. Increasingly interviews are being conducted not to create a formal archive or to inform a research project, but to form the basis of a website devoted to a specific topic. Often this involves collaboration among diverse partners across disciplines and institutions; equally often, allied practices such as digital storytelling include active citizen participation. Although these shifts can further democratize an already democratic practice, they also threaten the depth, range, and especially the critical cast of archival oral history, as interviewees interview with an ear to the sound bite and interviewees speak more guardedly, mindful that their words no longer enjoy the protection of archival gatekeepers. These concerns too are neither new nor unique to oral history; still, new media place them front and center of the craft, even as oral historians share in larger debates about democracy and authority in a digital environment.

■ LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN ORAL HISTORY

Whereas legal issues in oral history can be understood as state-sanctioned rules for specific elements of practice, ethics refers to a higher standard governing the right conduct of relationships within the broad context of an interview or project. In his definitive *A Guide to Oral History and the Law*, historian and attorney John A. Neueneschwander (2009) outlines key legal issues in oral history: release agreements, related to ownership of the interview and copyright; subpoenas and freedom of information act requests compelling the release of interviews; defamation; and privacy. All have important implications for oral history, but the two issues most commonly encountered are copyright, discussed earlier as a *sine qua non* of archival oral history, and defamation, defined as "a false statement of fact printed or broadcast about a person which tends to injure that person's interest" (p. 32). Insofar as "one who repeats or otherwise republishes defamatory matter is subject to the liability as if he had originally published it" (p. 33), any oral history project or program that makes available an interview that includes defamatory material is equally liable as the party making the original statement. Defamation is thus a serious issue for oral history, but it is also subject to several constraints and difficult to prove. For one, the injured party must be living—one cannot defame the dead; for another, statements construed as opinion, nothing more than conjecture and rumor, are not considered defamatory. Confronted with a potentially defamatory statement, the oral historian has several courses of action: consult other sources in an attempt to determine if the statement, however extreme, is, in fact, true—if it's true, it's not defamatory;

close the defamatory portion of the interview until the defamed person has died; carefully edit the statement to excise the defamatory material while not significantly distorting the record; and delete the defamatory material—a problematic action that violates norms of academic freedom.

Legal issues, though at times complicated, are relatively straightforward when compared with ethical issues, which often require the exercise of judgment and involve matters over which conscientious practitioners may reasonably disagree. While there is a lively ethical narrative within oral history (Blee, 1993; Klayner & Cothers, 2007; Shopp, 2006), perhaps the best place to start to understand both fundamental ethical principles and some of the nuances is the Oral History Association's *Principles and Best Practices for Oral History* (2009). To generalize, these *Principles* define standards governing the oral historian's relationship to the narrator, to standards of scholarship for history and related disciplines, and to both current and future users of the interview. The first two of these relationships concern us here. Fundamental to the interviewee-interviewer relationship is the notion of informed consent—that is, that the interviewee is fully informed about the purpose, scope, and value of the interview; how it will proceed; its final disposition and the uses to which it will or may be put; and issues of copyright—in other words, everything the interviewee needs to know to make an informed decision about whether to consent to the interview—or not. Recognizing the rights of scholarship, that is, the second set of relationships, the *Principles* also state, "Interviewees must take care to avoid making promises that cannot be met, such as guarantees of control over interpretation and presentation of the interviews" (n.p.).

The *Principles* also recognize the dialectic quality of these dual allegiances and at least imply the potential for conflict: "Oral historians respect the narrators as well as the integrity of the research. Interviewees are obliged to ask historically significant questions. . . [and] must also respect the narrators' equal authority in their own style and language. In the use of interviews, oral historians strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline, while avoiding stereotypes, misrepresentations or manipulations of the narrators' words" (2009, n.p.).

The problem arises when responsibility to the narrator conflicts with the claims of scholarship and the broader public good. One might easily imagine lines of inquiry that disorient a narrator or that lead to revelations, intended or not, that might be construed as damaging to the narrator or to others. One might just as easily imagine a narrator who deliberately misrepresents the facts of a situation, for whom intellectual honesty is not a value. Or consider the example of filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, who exposed perpetrators of the Nazi Holocaust by filming them with a hidden camera—verboten in oral history and other field-based practices—and then included their testimony in his epic film *Soloft*. Does the public's right to hold war criminals accountable trump Lanzmann's failure to secure informed consent? Or not?

Standard professional practice, privileging the rights of the individual narrator, would claim that Lanzmann acted unethically; broader civic or moral claims would suggest otherwise.

Although extreme, the example of Lanzmann points to what many oral historians believe to be a fundamental incongruity between their practice and federal regulations governing the ethics of research involving human subjects, codified as Title 45 Public Welfare, Part 46 Protection of Human Subjects (referred to as 45 CFR 46 or the Common Rule), with authority for implementation residing in the Office for Human Research Protections at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and delegated to local, often campus-based institutional review boards or IRBs (Schrag, 2010; Shopp, 2009). In brief, 45 CFR 46 includes "interaction" with human subjects as one of the research modes subject to ethical review by an IRB review and hence has been applied to oral history. Although the terms of 45 CFR 46 also "exempt" most interviewing from IRB review, only an IRB can confer an exemption, in effect requiring a researcher to submit his or her research for review.

Most problematic, however, is language in the Common Rule, which does not exempt—and hence raises concern about—interviews for which "disclosure of the human subject's responses outside the research could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation" (46.101 [b] [2]). IRBs have used this language to ask oral historians to submit detailed questionnaires in advance of any interview; to avoid sensitive, embarrassing, or potentially incriminating topics; to maintain narrative anonymity despite an interviewer's willingness to be identified; and to refrain or desist from interviews and transcripts after the research project is completed—all of which violate fundamental practices and principles of oral history. At times information in an interview, if made public, can indeed place a person at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to one's financial standing, employability, or reputation. To constrain such inquiry a priori, many oral historians argue, undercuts the "integrity of the research" and impinges on academic freedom. The Oral History Association, in concert with the American Historical Association, has attempted to negotiate a broader exclusion from IRB review of oral history, but efforts to date have been largely unsuccessful. At best, they have alerted college- and university-based oral historians and their IRBs—which enjoy considerable autonomy—to potential conflicts and encouraged informed dialogue and mutual accommodation.

It is perhaps appropriate to conclude this section, and this essay, with Portelli's (1997a, p. 35) observation about law and ethics, which aptly summarizes the impulses, simultaneously humanistic, scholarly, and political, underlying much work in oral history: "Ultimately, in fact ethical and legal guidelines only make sense if they are the outward manifestation of a broader and deeper truth sense of personal and political commitment to honesty and to truth. . . . By commitment to honesty I mean

personal respect for the people we work with and intellectual respect for the material we receive. By commitment to truth I mean a utopian striving and urge to know how things really are, balanced by openness to the many variants of how things may be."

NOTES

* In developing this article, the author has drawn in part on the background paper on oral history she wrote for the Mellon Project on Folklore, Ethnomusicology, and Oral History in the Academy, and gratefully acknowledges the American Folklore Society copyright holder of the report, for permission to draw on it. The full text of the report is available at <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/association-business/>

1. First use of the term *oral history* to describe the practice of interviewing participants in past events is generally attributed to Allan Nevins, founder of Columbia University's Oral History Research Office. Oral historians find the term maddeningly imprecise and debated its utility during the early years of the Oral History Association's existence. Nevins's successor, Louis Starr wrote in 1974, "Heaven knows, oral history is bad enough, but it has the sanction of a quarter-century's usage, whereas presumably more beguiling substitutes like *living history* and *oral documentation* and sundry other variants have gone by the boards. Oral history is a misnomer to be sure. Let us cheerfully accept that fact that, like *social security* or the *Holy Roman Empire*, it is now hopelessly embedded in the language: one encounters it on every hand" (Mortstrey, 1980, p. 40).

2. Wire recorders, based on German Magnetophones captured during World War II, first became available in 1948. Columbia began using them to record interviews in 1949. They were supplanted by reel-to-reel recorders, then in the mid-1960s by cassette tape recorders, which became standard for oral history until the digital revolution at the end of the 20th century.

3. The 1968 document, titled *Goals and Guidelines* (Oral History Association, 1969), was considerably amplified as a checklist of "valuation guidelines" in 1979, and revised in 1990 and again in 1998 to take into account new issues and concerns, including new technologies and increasingly diverse uses of oral history. A thorough revision was undertaken in 2008–2009 to abbreviate and consolidate what had become a rather cumbersome document developed by accretion.

4. Editors of two oral history book series have estimated that releases had not been secured for perhaps one half of the interviews used in manuscripts they have reviewed.

5. For the full debate, see Tilly, "People's History and Social Science History" (1983); Thompson et al., "Between Social Scientists: Responses to Tilly" (1985); and Tilly, "Louise Tilly's Response to Thompson, Passerin, Bertaux-Wiame, and Portelli" (1985).

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