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Memory, Narrative and Histories: Critical Debates, New Trajectories

edited by Graham Dawson

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Introduction

Graham Dawson

Memory, Narrative and Histories: Critical Debates and New Trajectories is the first in a new series of occasional Working Papers to be published by the Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories at the University of Brighton. Drawing on the University's long-standing research strengths in humanities, arts and social sciences, and emphasising the plural 'histories', the Centre engages with multi- and interdisciplinary research on the complex relationships between present and past; dealing, for example, with subordinate and marginalised histories, archive practices, and the complexities of popular memory. Research collaboration draws on scholarship in a range of disciplines including history, cultural studies, literary studies, sociology, cultural and human geography, visual studies, performance studies, critical theory, psycho-social studies, and narrative theory.

The Centre promotes dialogue about the methodological, epistemological and theoretical issues at work in the study of memory, narrative and the making of histories, resulting in an institutional locus which embraces creative and critical practice, and encompasses academic, professional and community development. It explores the relations, and facilitates links, between academic scholarship and the work of other practitioners and stakeholders involved in making histories, in representing the past, and in producing forms of remembrance and commemoration. Reflecting these emphases, the Centre's key areas of interest are identified as: Archives and Histories; Life Writing/Creative Writing; Community History; Cultural Memory; Oral History and Life History; and Public History.

The papers collected in this publication were originally delivered at the Centre's Launch Symposium on Memory, Narrative and Histories which took place on the Falmer site of the University of Brighton on 6th December 2008, attended by over sixty people. The aim of the symposium was to act as a catalyst, stimulating discussion amongst researchers and postgraduate students across the University, and with colleagues from the University of Sussex and wider afield, about developments in and across these linked fields of activity. By encouraging critical reflection on evolving traditions, new directions and future possibilities, the symposium was envisaged as a way of setting an agenda for the Centre's work.

Seven speakers, all experienced researchers and practitioners in one or more of the Centre's key areas of interest, were invited to provide a personal overview of recent trends, current debates, and new trajectories within their field. In the first session, Public History and Community History, Hilda Kean of Ruskin College, Oxford, spoke about 'People and their Pasts. Aspects of Public History Today'; and Glenn Jordan, of the University of Glamorgan and Butetown History and Arts Centre in Cardiff, delivered an illustrated talk on 'History, Memory, Cultural Politics: A People's History Project in Cardiff Docklands'. The second session, Archives and Histories, involved Andrew Flinn of University College London speaking on the theme of 'Archives and their Communities'; and a paper by Dorothy Sheridan of the University of Sussex, 'Archive Fever and Archive Struggles: Tensions in the Creation, Care and Use of Archives with Stories from the Mass Observation Archive'. In the third session, Life History, Life Writing, Creative Writing, Margaretta Jolly from the University of Sussex spoke on the theme of 'Life History and/vs. Life Writing'; and Michelene Wandor, writer and Royal Literary Fund Fellow, drew on examples from her own writing to explore 'The Voices of Creative Writing, Past and Present'. In the final session, Carrie Hamilton of Roehampton University gave a paper on 'Cultural Memory and the Emotions: Exploring the Connections'. The symposium concluded with a plenary drawing out key themes of the day led by a respondent, the Centre's director, Graham Dawson.

Five of these papers have been developed for publication and are collected here. In her paper, Hilda Kean considers how to move debate on Public History-making away from an emphasis on 'professional' historians reaching out in accessible ways to 'the public'. Such formulations assume that history is a given rather than a process and maintain the division between the so-called 'professional' and the 'amateur'. Kean suggests that thinking about the ways in which people engage with their pasts – and develop such engagement in various forms – may provide us with a different and more dynamic starting point for historical practice which breaks down rather than reinforces current divides.

Andrew Flinn examines the impact of some recent developments with regard to the production of history and the role of the archivist. In particular, drawing upon an AHRC-funded research project, 'Community archives and identities: documenting and sustaining community heritage', he considers the growth of independent community archives and heritage initiatives. While firmly rooted in older traditions of history from below, History Workshop and identity politics, such initiatives have also emerged in new forms; partly as a response to technological change but also due to greater awareness of, and challenge to, the partiality of orthodox national historical narratives. His paper identifies a related challenge to professional authority, also enabled by technological change;

namely, the growth of user-generated content whether it be of archival material uploaded to community sites, or descriptions and tags added by users to heritage-institution catalogues. Flinn argues that, although the archive profession once ignored these initiatives and many remain concerned about the challenge of the crowd to the expert, and of replacing ‘I think’ with ‘we think’, others are now exploring ways in which a transformed profession might seek to support and embrace these developments as a way of diversifying and democratising archives and the histories that are, in part, written from them.

Mass Observation set out to document the everyday in all its minute detail and to ensure that so-called 'ordinary people' had the opportunity to record their own history. Considering both the original initiative that created the Mass Observation Archive in the 1930s and the contemporary Mass Observation project, Dorothy Sheridan identifies a complex triangular relationship between the archive creators (who include the author-contributors), the archive collectors and curators, and the archive users (within and beyond the academy). Her paper explores some of the resulting tensions and reflects on the ensuing struggles for representation and possession.

How do the fields of oral history, life history and life writing relate? Using Alistair Thomson’s notion that oral history has undergone four ‘paradigm transformations’, Margaretta Jolly traces shifts in the shared histories and passions that link these areas of enquiry. Her paper also investigates persisting disciplinary faultlines between literary-based and historically-based traditions of research, and considers what they can tell us about the difficulties in integrating oral and written life-story work, with reference to Guatamalan activist Rigoberta Menchu’s story. How do interdisciplinary ideals hold up against the realities of institutional and professional pressures? Digital life-story telling, a form of audiovisual literacy and Thomson’s fourth paradigm transformation, logically brings oral and written methodologies together. But, Jolly argues, we have yet to provide an adequate synthesis of life history and life writing.

Turning finally to research on memory, Carrie Hamilton's paper examines the importance of emotion in analysing forms of 'collective memory' and individual life stories. Arguing that the relationship between memory and emotion is not often spelt out or theorised, Hamilton explores the links between them in the context of the recent ‘turn to affect’ in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Her paper draws on memory studies, cultural theories of emotion, the history of emotions and oral history, as well as her own research on memory and emotion in relation to political subjectivities in the Basque country and Cuba.

A number of common themes run across and between these papers. Firstly, they share a preoccupation with the social relations of knowledge production, and an interest in transforming modes of professional and institutional authority – whether that of the academic historian, the archivist or the museum curator – through practices that draw professionals into collaboration and negotiation with historical practitioners situated in wider cultural locations (variously characterised as 'the public', 'the community', 'the people').

A second theme is the continuity between transformative practices of this kind in the early twenty-first century and previous projects – whether the History Workshop movement centred on Ruskin College after 1967, Mass Observation in the 1930s, or popular history initiatives of the early twentieth century – which are constituted as reference points, inspirations or traditions, creatively adapted to meet changed circumstances and emerging needs. In this respect, the particular influence of Raphael Samuel – teacher, writer, pioneer of the Ruskin-based History Workshop, founding editor of *History Workshop Journal* – is evident throughout these papers. This is a sign of the continuing vitality and motivational power of Samuel's vision of a democratic, participatory and liberatory culture of history-making. It is also an indicator of unfinished business within the cultural politics of 'the past', involving an ongoing process of challenge to the appropriation of history, whether by the state, by the academy, or by professional interests. Such challenges manifest in diverse ways: they may assert the centrality of history-making to the experience of class and other social oppressions; they may celebrate the depth and vitality of 'amateur' history-making (nowhere more evident than in the extraordinary growth of genealogy, rooted in popular fascination with the family as narrative); or – as Raymond Williams urged – they may work to build counter-hegemonic 'alternative traditions' that draw new lines of connection between the present and the past, reconstructing received histories the better to contest the present and the future.

It follows that, thirdly, these papers embody a common commitment to enhancing intellectual exchange and dialogue across the faultlines of affiliation, discipline and practice that may divide us into discrete enclaves – as public *or* community historians, as interested in archives *or* memories, as practitioners working under the banner of life writing *or* oral history, as historians *or* literary critics *or* cultural analysts. In engaging debates, perspectives and approaches that often have rather different and disconnected starting points, the papers help us to see and think about the links between these various endeavours, and thus the possibilities of transformative practice.

The five authors have taken various approaches to translating their spoken paper into publishable writing; some retaining the more informal and discursive style of the original, others developing their talk into a more formally elaborated written paper. Both styles are embraced in the ethos of this new series, Working Papers on Memory, Narrative and Histories. Inspired by the mode of publication – the so-called Working Papers in Cultural Studies – adopted in the 1970s by the now defunct (and greatly missed) Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the

University of Birmingham, this series will provide an in-house vehicle for publishing papers from our Centre's symposia, conferences and other public events; 'work-in-progress' and occasional papers; and other fruits of the Centre's research activity and collaborative work with academic, professional and community partners. Each number in the Working Papers series, edited and presented to the highest scholarly standards, will be published as a bound paper booklet (available from the Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories, c/o CRD, Faculty of Arts, University of Brighton, 58-67 Grand Parade, Brighton, BN2 0JY, UK), and simultaneously in pdf format on the Centre's website <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/mnh>, with a view to facilitating ongoing debate. All contributions to this first number have been read, and revised in the light of editorial comments, by myself and another member of the Centre's Steering Group. I am grateful to Mark Bhatti, Paddy Maguire, Lucy Noakes and Deborah Phillips for their assistance and input.

Thinking about people and Public History

Hilda Kean

There are various definitions – and forms of practice – of Public History.[1] For some, Public History is based on the form and nature of transmission of historical knowledge to wider audiences. This might be exemplified by the Doing Public History website established at Royal Holloway College, University of London which is seeking to promote 'cogent reflection on the relationship between the academic historian and the public.'[2] The use of the definite article provides a focus upon those who are seen to be creating history and those who are its recipients. In such a definition 'agents' and 'consumers' are promoted while the 'thing' being transmitted, History, is taken as a given. Such definitions imply that the historian, usually seen as professionally trained, is performing an active role and the 'public' a passive one. The onus therefore is upon the historian to ensure that the body of knowledge transmitted is accessible. This has the dual effect of engaging 'the public' but also of enhancing the separate status of the historian as the disseminator who not only possesses knowledge but the skill of transmission. This approach does not necessarily question such roles although, as John Tosh has suggested in his latest book, the dissemination of ideas can be a democratic impulse. Here Tosh defines Public History as involving 'the free access of the public to the findings of historical scholarship.'[3] He has rightly criticised a definition of Public History as 'an option to be pursued by a handful of publicity-seeking academics.' However for him the emphasis in Public History is both upon 'the injection of historical perspective into crucial public issues' and of academics 'sharing with the public their own scholarly expertise.'[4] A good example of this dissemination within the public domain is the approach of the History and Policy website. Its intention is both to influence the formation of government policies and inform public debate through providing 'policy-relevant history.' Its emphasis is upon demonstrating the relevance of history that might be used by policy-makers. It also seeks to increase the status of historical research in relation to current policy.[5]

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[1] This paper draws on ideas discussed more fully in Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton, 'Introduction: people and their pasts and Public History today', in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts. Public History Today* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-20.

[2] <http://www.doingpublichistory.org/>, accessed 29 January 2009.

[3] John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 119.

[4] Tosh, *Why History Matters,* pp. 142-3.

Pasts: processes and people

I want, however, to pose a different way of thinking about Public History which places less emphasis on any distinctiveness of 'historian' and 'public' and more upon the process of how the past becomes History. Access and dissemination are laudable, but by themselves are insufficient concepts with which either to explore the keen enthusiasm for the past in the popular domain or to develop creative ways in which such engagement can produce different understandings and practices by those who are not 'professional' historians. An aspect of this approach is to seek ways of de-mystifying what historians do through sharing conceptual and not just content-based knowledge.

We have tried to adopt such an approach at Ruskin College through conferences, courses and publications.[6] A rigid demarcation between 'historians' and 'their publics' has not been the focus, rather emphasis has been on the processes and materials that might lead to new forms of wide understanding. The premise has been that people are active agents in creating histories. Included within this definition are those who make their living from this practice as well as those involved in community, local and family history projects. This 'fudging' of roles has been explored by Robert Archibald who has suggested 'public historians do not own history' but are merely collaborators, particularly in community-based histories.[7] Rather, one might seek to explore the possibilities of a participatory historical culture, as David Thelen has phrased it, where the 'past should be treated as a shared human experience and opportunity for understanding, rather than a ground for division and suspicion'.[8]

Sharing is surely positive. However, a definition of sharing that consists simply of 'the historian' sharing with 'the public' is rather onesided. We might also go beyond this, recognising the need to share, participate and engage not so much as 'experts' in 'history' but as people with an interest in the relationship between the past and present who are willing to explore, acknowledge and value different ways of configuring this. There may, of course, be a gap in historical understandings between those trained as historians and the audiences for their work but this gap will not be shortened by 'historians' merely reaching out to 'the public'. Rather, as David Glassberg has suggested, new ways of thinking about the past may be grasped by 'reaching in to discover the humanity they share'. The recognition of the historian's – as much as the public's – personal need for the past is key to different understandings of the past.[9] If History does embrace an acknowledgement of people's role in making history – and includes historians within this idea of people – this presents challenges.[10] It can be an unsettling but perhaps a good place to start in opening up historiographical practice.[11] Exploring our engagement with our own and others' pasts may help us develop different ways of thinking about Public History and of sharing ideas or validating – or scrutinising – experience.

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[5] <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/philosophy.html>, accessed 14 December 2008.

[6] Public History conferences organised at Ruskin College have included Official and Unofficial Histories; Personal and Public Histories; Placing History; Radical and Popular Pasts; and People and their Pasts. Publications include Hilda Kean, Paul Martin and Sally Morgan, eds., *Seeing History. Public History in Britain Now* (London: Francis Boutle, 2000); and Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton, eds., *People and their Pasts. Public History Today* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Since 1996 we have run an MA in Public History and organise a regular, open, discussion group with a range of speakers.

[7] Robert Archibald, *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (New York: Altamura, 1999), pp. 155-6 as quoted in A. S. Newell, ' "Home is what you can take way with you": K. J. Ross Toole and the making of a public historian', *The Public Historian* 23:3 (2001), p. 70.

[8] David Thelen, 'A participatory historical culture', on the Center for History and New Media website, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/survey/afterdave.html>, p. 2, accessed 4 January 2007.

Different historians' approaches

The intellectual influence of Raphael Samuel has helped underpin this approach particularly his acknowledgement of the value of historical study to our very identity as human beings:

> If history is an arena for the projection of ideal selves, it can also be a means of undoing and questioning them, offering more disturbing accounts of who *we* are, and where *we* come from than simple identification would suggest.[12]

Across the wide range of his research and publications, Samuel returned

> again and again to the idea of history as an organic form of knowledge, and one whose sources are promiscuous, drawing not only on real-life experience but also on memory and myth, fantasy and desire; not only on the

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[9] David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: Massachusetts Press, 2001), p. 210.

[10] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 2, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain*, ed. Alison Light with Sally Alexander and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Verso, 1998), p. 223: my emphasis.

[11] Hilda Kean, *London Stories. Personal Lives, Public Histories* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2004), pp.186-90.

[12] Samuel, *Island Stories*, p. 222.

> chronological past of the documentary record but also the timeless one of 'tradition'.[13]

History was *not* the prerogative of the historian but 'a social form of knowledge; the work in any given instance, of a thousand different hands.'[14] As he elaborated in *Theatres of Memory* there was a long legacy of historical practice by self-educated 'amateurs', such as John Aubrey, the seventeenth-century notator of places including the World Heritage site of Avebury.[15] Explorers of the past were not – nor could be – neatly divided into 'professional' and 'public'. Rather, if 'history was thought of as an activity rather than a profession, then the number of practitioners would be legion'.[16]

Both in *Theatres of Memory* and in his earlier work Samuel developed historiographical insights into the nature of material for writing history and the validity of personal experience and memory, to the extent that in their recent collections on memory and history, Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone situate their work as a development of Samuel's ideas contained in *Theatres of Memory*, stating that work on social and cultural memory 'has come to be known as 'public history'.[17] Samuel recognised the value of autobiography, stories, legends or songs that a child might learn at a grandparent's knee, noting that a 'different order of evidence' would lead to a 'different kind of inquiry'.[18] As early as 1976 in an important article on the diverse, non-traditional range of materials used by local and oral historians he had demonstrated both the validity and possibility of constructing different histories by using different materials.[19] This position was later demonstrated in his book on the miners' strike of 1984-5, *The Enemy Within*. Here letters, diaries and speeches made during the strike provided a focus on individual experience, rather than on the nature of collective acts.[20] Using material created and collected by activists, the book attempted to show 'the ways in which history is made behind our backs, in spite of our best intentions rather than because of them.'[21] By the 1990s he started to discuss such approaches using the term Public History that was employed in the United States, he said, to encompass 'an assortment of retrieval projects, oral history projects and heritage interpretation programmes which exist in the civic sphere quite independently of the universities.' But additionally, he was concerned that this term was applied 'more ecumenically to the best of citizen initiatives and local enthusiasms.'[22]

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[13] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p. x.

[14] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 8.

[15] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 11; Brian Edwards, 'Avebury and not-so-ancient-places: The making of the English heritage landscape', in Kean, Martin and Morgan, eds., *Seeing History,* pp. 65-80.

[16] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 17.

[17] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, 'Introduction', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 3. See also Hilda Kean, 'Public History and Raphael Samuel: A forgotten radical pedagogy?', *Public History Review* 11 (Professional Historians Association, New South Wales, Australia, 2004), pp. 51-62.

[18] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 11.

[19] Raphael Samuel, 'Local history and oral history', *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976), pp. 191-208.

[20] Raphael Samuel, Barbara Bloomfield and Guy Boanas, eds., *The Enemy Within: Pit Villages and the Miners' Strike of 1984-5* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. xvii.

The nature of the historical process has also been crucial in the work of Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, in particular *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*.[23] Their survey of North American people explored historical activities and the social needs and historical sensibilities underlying them. They showed the complex ways in which people used the past in making their own identities, and negotiated the present and navigated the future. The past and the present were brought together in an analysis of the ways in which people both made the past part of their everyday routines and turned to the past 'as a way of grappling with profound questions about how to live.' People used their pasts, their work indicated, to address questions about 'relationships, identity, immortality, and agency'.[24] The past was not a distant or abstract, insignificant entity but a key feature of people's present lives.

Rosenzweig and Thelen's *Presence of the Past* was written against a politically conservative climate in the United States. Particularly controversial was their suggestion that people's understanding and use of the past was 'intimate and personal'.[25] For some historians working in the presentation of history, for example in museums, this was seen as potentially threatening. As James Gardner acknowledged in his presidential address to the National Council on Public History, the 'public's understanding and use of the past', as noted in the Rosenzweig and Thelen study, provided a 'fundamentally different sense of the past than what we as public historians are committed to exploring and sharing.'[26] Particularly worrying was the concept of valuing individuals' experience of the past, *unmediated* by the professional input of historians, since this was seen as part of the raison d'etre of those seeking to present 'history' to 'the public' outside academic institutions.[27] As Thelen observed in his afterthoughts on the project, their book provided 'evidence that academic history differs from everyday history'.[28] Thelen has been critical of professionals who dismiss experience as inconsequential, private or self-deceptive or fail to respect 'differences in grandmothers' stories, museum exhibitions, and manuscript collections as trusted sources for approaching the past.'[29]

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[21] Samuel, Bloomfield and Boanas, eds., *The Enemy Within*, p. xv.

[22] Raphael Samuel, Handwritten notes for typed draft of Public History degree, Raphael Samuel Archive (Bishopsgate Institute), file 442.

[23] Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[24] Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, p. 18. See also a discussion of an Australian version of this project in Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, 'At home with the past: Background and initial findings from the National Survey', in *Australians and the Past*, special issue of *Australian Cultural History*, 22 (2003), pp. 5-30; and Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads. Australians and the Past* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 2010).

[25] James B. Gardner, 'Contested terrain: History, museums and the public' (NCPH president's annual address), *The Public Historian* 26:4 (2004), p. 13.

[26] Gardner, 'Contested terrain', p. 13.

Roy Rosenzweig subsequently argued that he recognised 'the terrain of the past that is so present for all of us' and did not dismiss the role of professional historians but rather sought to explore how such scholars can talk to, 'and especially *with*, those audiences'. In his attempt to bring the spheres of the professional and popular history-maker together, this involved, he suggested, working harder at listening to, and respecting, the work of popular history makers to see the common experience that bound them.[30] For his part Thelen maintained that in practice there was a blurring between personal/private and public. Such categories, he declared, were artificial: 'The dichotomy between 'intimate' and 'national', public and private, dissolves into dynamic and reciprocal interaction'. Respondents to their survey, he pointed out, 'more often mentioned public experiences than private ones as the most formative of their lives, but they mentioned those public events most often as intimate experiences.' This was not a rejection of national pasts, for example as treated in museums, or important political events. Instead, it was an acknowledgement that these occurrences are often remembered and perceived as personal events. Such a *participatory historical model* 'would take seriously how […people] live lives and meet needs in relationships driven by forces different from those that power institutions and cultures'.[31] For Rosenzweig and Thelen, history as practised within universities was but one of many historical practices.

Possible ways of breaking down barriers

As I suggested with Paul Martin and Sally Morgan in our collection *Seeing History: Public History in Britain Now*, 'Public History relies on a collective and collaborative effort of people often working in different fields.' We argued that 'what is seen and what is experienced in our everyday lives is as likely to be as significant in our understanding and creation of history as the reading of books or archives.'[32] This approach emphasised the value of different material in the writing of history, freeing a writer from the apparent constraints of the archive, and simultaneously acknowledging that materials found in the course of everyday life were important in understanding the past. Most of our contributors employed their personal experience of locality, work or leisure pursuits as ways of exploring their material. As Jo Stanley explained in her critique of the absence of women in public maritime history, it 'matters to me because I feel hurt, excluded, angry and confused when confronted by any omission of a history that I know exists'.[33]

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[27] Gardner, 'Contested terrain', pp. 12, 13.

[28] Thelen, 'A participatory historical culture', p. 2.

[29] Thelen, 'A participatory historical culture', pp. 3, 11.

[30] Roy Rosenzweig, 'Everyone a historian', on the Center for History and New Media website, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/survey/afterroy.html#32>, accessed 7 February 2007.

[31] Thelen, 'A participatory historical culture', pp. 7-8.

Valuing local and personal experience and material is not necessarily counterposed to broader understandings of the past but rather can alter our perception of them, as Alessandro Portelli has shown in his studies of Italian post-war politics. In analysing his approach to oral history, Portelli has challenged the conventional notions of such an historian recording and analysing the material of the interviewee. Rather than privileging the role of the professional in this process, he suggested that *both* participants in this form of history-making are subjects. There is no oral history before the encounter of these two different subjects, 'one with a story to tell and the other with a history to reconstruct'.[34] Recent work has led Portelli to revisit the way in which the memory of Italian Partisan history was being re-worked. Major historical events, such as the Nazi massacre at Rome's Fosse Ardeatine, were re-appraised in the light of the oral testimony and collective memory of hundreds of Roman citizens. Here the personal and the public have been elided, rather than counterposed.[35]

Longevity: family and national histories

Breaking down knowledge barriers, promoting the use of different materials, valuing engagement – these might all be seen as forms of Public History in which people and their lives and experiences are central. Such work might be said to have long traditions. In the self declared 'first book length reference work' on the subject, *The Craft of Public History*, published by the American National Council on Public History in 1983, the authors debunked the apparent newness of the term describing Public History as an ancient approach to the study of past processes.[36] Professional status was not important. While official or government history was specifically excluded from their definition, genealogy and family history were acknowledged as being 'among the oldest fields of historical practice'.[37] Certainly the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a good example of the ways in which family and personal histories can be relating to broader national and international pasts. Not only has this series responded to an engaged interest in pasts broader than the personal, but the programmes – and the website – have also encouraged viewers to undertake their own researches.[38] This has been achieved in part because the format of the series does not rely on the authoritative single voice of a professional historian, but draws on those with different expertise and experiences including members of the subject's own family and a range of people with different knowledges which might relate to the subject's past.

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[32] Hilda Kean, Paul Martin and Sally Morgan, 'Introduction', in Kean, Martin and Morgan, eds., *Seeing History*, p. 15.

[33] Jo Stanley, 'Putting gender into seafaring: Representing women in public maritime history', in Kean, Martin and Morgan, eds., *Seeing History*, pp. 81-104.

[34] Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 9.

[35] Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 12.

In a peevish article in the *Guardian* in Autumn 2007, television historian Tristram Hunt criticised *Who Do You Think You Are?* For Hunt this was history 'presented as a form of psychological massage' or 'warm-bath TV'. The series was contrasted unfavourably with those on national identity by Simon Schama and Niall Ferguson, seen respectively as 'an extended meditation on national identity' and a 'provocative re-assessment of our colonial legacy'. For Hunt, television history was apparently now in danger of 'telling comforting stories about ourselves to ourselves rather than confronting the past'. 'Today's TV history,' he argued, 'all too often retreats into therapy: an attempt not to explain the past and its modern meaning, but an indulgent search for identity and understanding.' However, often difficult subject matter such as racism, poverty and immigration is routinely tackled in *Who Do You Think You Are?*, creating different ways of engaging with the past and present. Alex Graham, the chief executive of the production company, Wall to Wall, responded, 'This is surely an elitist view. Is a quest for understanding or indeed identity something to be denigrated? Or celebrated?'[39] The Spring 2009 series has included, *inter alia*, programmes that have covered both the slave trade and the English Civil War, through the ancestors of actor Kevin Whately, and aspects of fighting during the Second World War in the Netherlands and post-war reconstruction in Germany through a focus on comedian Rory Bremner. In both instances contributors to the programmes' webpages added further information based on their own researches. One emailer contributed information from his own father's diary on the specific fighting episode discussed in the Bremner programme; another added information about an ancestor of Whately who had been an MP for a 'rotten borough'.[40]

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[36] David F. Trask and Robert W. Pomeroy III, eds., *The Craft of Public History: An Annotated Select Bibliography* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press for NCPH, 1983), p. xi.

[37] Trask and Pomeroy III, eds., *The Craft of Public History*, p xii.

[38] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/whodoyouthinkyouare/past-stories/>

[39] Tristram Hunt , 'Time bandits', *Guardian*, 10 September 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/sep/10/mondaymediasection.television1>; Alex Graham, 'Who do you think you are, Tristram Hunt?' *Guardian,* 17 September, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/sep/17/mondaymediasection9>.

While some historians have been threatened by such public discussion of the past, others have chosen to recognise the potentially inclusive nature of the term 'public'. In a collection which positively recognised the role of 'amateur' practitioners interacting with archaeologists, Nick Merriman helped unpack different ideas of 'the public', embracing within this terminology the state *and* groups of individuals who saw the potential for archaeologists to engage with alternative 'public' opinion to their mutual benefit.[41] Merriman notes that, however hard archaeologists try, 'non-archaeologists will re-appropriate, re-interpret and re-negotiate meanings of archaeological resources to their own personal agendas.'[42] Certainly those who engaged in metal detecting used to be frequently derided by archaeologists. However, the Staffordshire hoard, 'the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold ever found', of 1,500 unique items of precious metals and stones from the seventh century, was discovered by Terry Herbert, a metal detectorist, who then informed professional archaeologists. Dr Roger Bland of the British Museum paid tribute to Terry Herbert's actions in promptly reporting the find and for 'giving every assistance to the investigation of the site'.[43]

In similar vein Paul Gough has shown the ways in which the meta-narrative of the National Memorial Arboretum, now run by the Royal British Legion in Alrewas in Staffordshire, has been challenged by individual organisations creating their own memorials. Labels favour the local and the known and act as 'a running sub-text to the larger ambitions of the site, quiet, unassuming graffiti that is slowly reasserting the private voices within the high diction of the garden's larger plan'.[44] A similar welcoming of 'public intervention' has been analysed by Jon Newman in an account of an exhibition of the photographs of Brixton photographer Harry Jacobs displayed in the gallery of Black Cultural Archives. Here visitors asked for and received post-it notes which they attached to the images to give information about the subjects of the photographs, thus breaking down barriers between personal information and public display. As Newman notes, the images briefly reacquired 'the shared life and meaning that they had once held for the individuals who commissioned and owned them and for the extended families and community who understood their significances'.[45]

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[40] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/whodoyouthinkyouare/new-stories/kevin-whately/index.shtml>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/whodoyouthinkyouare/new-stories/rory-bremner/index.shtml>, accessed 23 March, 2009.

[41] Nick Merriman, 'Diversity and dissonance in public archaeology', in Nick Merriman, ed., *Public Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-2. See also T. Schadla-Hall, 'The comforts of unreason: The importance and relevance of alternative archaeology', in Merriman, ed., *Public Archaeology*, pp. 255-71.

[42] Merriman, 'Diversity', p. 7.

[43] <http://www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk/team/>, accessed July 2010.

[44] Paul Gough, '"Garden of gratitude": The National Memorial Arboretum and strategic remembering', in Ashton and Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts*, p. 109.

In Britain some academic journals have seen Public History as a new concern with which they seek to engage.[46] But, unsurprisingly, for the most part it is outside academic journals that historical engagement is thriving. The proliferation both of family history societies and magazines devoted to the subject, and of family history fairs, is an indication of how seriously the community of family historians see themselves – and makes them probably the single biggest constituency of practising historical researchers within the wider Public History community. Just as importantly there have been campaigns to erect new memorials to forgotten – or discredited – pasts. The memorial of the slave trade in Lancaster, for example, has drawn in a range of local people including historians, teachers, artists and politicians; as has the (currently unsuccessful) campaign to erect a monument to socialist Sylvia Pankhurst near Parliament, and Memorial 2007, a campaign attempting to raise funds to erect a permanent memorial in the Rose Garden of London's Hyde Park to 'honour and acknowledge the millions of enslaved Africans and their descendants.'[47]

Conclusion

When I wrote *London Stories: Personal Lives Public Histories,* I was attempting to explore different ways of writing about ordinary people's lives for which there was often scant conventional material.[48] Much of the narrative of the book was about the *very process* of making history. It recounted a historical journey of sorts through house clearance in Essex, church graveyards in Kent and Shropshire, discussing and sharing of materials with historians of locality and family. It showed the different people involved in creating understandings of the past: a young man – accompanied by his excited dog – mowing between Kentish graves, who shared his local knowledge of his own topography (and that of my ancestors); the prison officers at High Down Prison, the former Banstead lunatic asylum keen to discuss their knowledge of the former asylum's buildings and the way Victorians could construct strong walls; a family historian with whom material was exchanged through the happenstance of a visit to a Tonbridge church on an open day.

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[45] Jon Newman, 'Harry Jacobs: The studio photographer and the visual archive', in Ashton and Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts,* p. 276.

[46] The *Labour History Review*, for example, includes a small Public History Review section as does the *Oral History* journal; the *History Workshop Journal* includes a 'History at Large' section.

[47] Hilda Kean, 'Personal and Public Histories: Issues in the presentation of the past', in Brian Graham and Peter Howard, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 55-72; Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum, 2003); The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, <http://sylviapankhurst.gn.apc.org/>; John Siblon, 'Monument mania'? Public space and the Black and Asian presence in the London landscape', in Ashton and Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts*, p. 159.

[48] Kean, *London Stories.*

The book tried to suggest possible readings of memory, materials, souvenirs, maps, landscape, and different ways of making connections between people and places. It attempted to make the link between personal stories and how they can become histories that go beyond the personal. The voice I adopted was not the authorial single voice of certainty I had used in some earlier writing. The tone was more tentative and exploratory. I was attempting to listen and to share material and perspectives and analyses. Against the conventions of historical writing the book did not conclude with firm conclusions but with questions: 'Whose archive is this now? Whose story?'[49]

Such an approach may well be challenging to those with particular views of historical professionalism. A participant at the recent symposium at the University of Brighton suggested that 'academic' historians *could* offer a broader subject matter context than the family historian.[50] This might be true. But, family historians – and members of 'the public' – are often well able to research social and political contexts. However, they may not have the confidence to pursue imaginative ways of thinking about the past and using materials in different ways. Professional historians may still have a distinctive role in the Public History pedagogic process, as facilitators and voices of encouragement providing a safe but challenging environment in which other historians can develop confidence in their own abilities.

As stated earlier, John Tosh rightly criticised a definition of Public History as 'an option to be pursued by a handful of publicity-seeking academics.'[51] But we also need to think of approaches beyond that of dissemination and explore the value of sharing, participating and engaging not as 'academics' but as people with an interest in the relationship between the past and present who are willing to explore different ways of configuring this. *If* History in the *public* arena can be defined, as Raphael Samuel put it, as 'the ensemble of activities and practices in which ideas of history are embedded or a dialectic of past-present relations is rehearsed',[52] this presents challenges of opening up historiographical practice, of sharing ideas and validating experiences. Acknowledging these challenges may be a good, albeit unsettling, place to start in exploring our engagement as people with our own and others' pasts.

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[49] Kean, *London Stories*, p. 190.

[50] Launch Symposium for The Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories, University of Brighton, 6 December 2008.

[51] Tosh, *Why History Matters,* pp. 142-3.

[52] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present*, p. 8.

Archives and their communities: Collecting histories, challenging heritage

Andrew Flinn

> Historians, of course, do not own the past. We all do. But because historians spend their time studying history, they are in a better position than most amateurs to make reasoned judgments. Historians, after all, are trained to ask questions, make connections, and collect and examine the evidence.[1]
>
> [H]istory is too important to be left just to the professional historians.[2]

The two quotations, one recent and one dating from the first issue of the *History Workshop Journal,* represent two views of an on-going debate over the relative roles of professional and 'amateur' historians and the value of the history they write. Similar debates are to be found in the heritage professions, including increasingly in relation to archives, where the tradition of archivists' sole professional responsibility for managing the materials from which histories are written has been challenged by more independent and participatory approaches. This paper seeks to identify and examine such recent changes in thinking and practice with regard to archives and the archive profession, with particular reference to research being undertaken at University College London (UCL) into independent and community archives. After identifying some of the main drivers for change within the archive sector, the paper will briefly examine traditional professional thinking and practice and then outline more contemporary views which have critiqued traditional understandings and have imagined a refigured archive, in which democratised and inclusive archives might better reflect their diverse audiences. In exploring what this refiguring might mean in practice and how it might be achieved, this paper will then introduce two separate but not unrelated developments, independent and community archives and the enabling of user participation in what have previously been considered areas reserved to the archive profession. It will be argued, that linked by technology and a commitment to democratising archives and heritage work, these two developments (along with others) have the potential to alter significantly how we think about archives and the (hi)stories they tell. Although for a long time the archive profession ignored or dismissed these initiatives, and many remain concerned about these on-going challenges to their professional 'authority', others are now exploring the ways in which a transformed profession might seek to embrace these developments as a means of diversifying and democratising archives and the histories that are, in part, written from them.

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[1] Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games. The Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Modern Library Chronicles, 2009), p. 43.

[2] Sally Alexander and Anna Davin, 'Feminist history', *History Workshop Journal* 1 (1976), pp. 4-6: 6.

Archives in transition

Archivists, the way we think about archives and perhaps even the archives themselves are going through are period of transition and change. Even the word 'archive' has multiple meanings and is open to change and debate. As a noun, archive can stand for the collection and the documents preserved for future use (on the basis of some recognition of their continuing value). It can mean the physical building or space (or even digital space) where such a collection is held. It can also mean the idea of a memory space. As a verb, 'to archive' signifies an act but again one with multiple meaning. In using the term 'archiving' an individual or organisation might be variously describing assigning long-term preservation status to a physical or digital object, the more transitory movement of a file from the in-box to a filing system, the putting of something away in order to be forgotten, or conversely writing something into the record in order to be remembered. The agent of that act – the archivist – sometimes describes a professional (frequently someone who has received training in the academic discipline of archives and records management) but increasingly also refers to those whose archival responsibilities are assumed voluntarily, either personally or on behalf of others, and without professional training.[3]

These definitions of what an archive is or what the word 'archive' means are not fixed but evolve and change, in part responding to their adoption and use by others, including those involved in independent grassroots heritage activity and those working with information technologies. Not everyone welcomes these 'nonprofessional appropriations', seeing them as 'a challenge to our position as professional archivists',[4] but in fact such appropriations and changes in meaning are inevitable in light of ongoing fundamental changes in the nature of archives and the responsibilities of those who work with them.

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[3] See definitions and references for 'Archives' in Richard Peace-Moses, 'A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology', Society of American Archivists 2005 and available from <http://www.archivists.org/glossary/>.

A range of separate but perhaps also inter-related developments in terms of technological advances, public policy priorities (especially with regard to social and economic impacts), and shifts in political and cultural thinking are all responsible for changes in our understanding of the archive. First, developments in technology over the last fifty years but especially over the last twenty-five years have transformed how we think of archives and records. The need to consider the preservation and accessibility of digital content ranging from what is held on the PC (or Mac) on everyone's desk, to the expansion of communication media from email to text and instant messaging, and of course the web and social computing, has transformed our understanding of what a record or an archive might 'look like' and what needs to done and when, to ensure its survival.

Second, since the 1960s, a growing challenge to the legitimacy of authority and authoritative voices within society, and in this case in particular a decline in the acceptance of the right of heritage institutions to tell histories especially when those histories have persistently under-represented or misrepresented many groups within society, has led to a fundamental questioning of the basis on which archives, museums, historians and other practitioners of public history operate. Many of these under-represented groups have responded to their persistent invisibility and/or misrepresentation, by seeking to control and tell their own stories. Stuart Hall described the resulting twin pressures on heritage organisations thus:

> a decline in the acceptance of the traditional authorities in authenticating the interpretative and analytic frameworks which classify, place, compare and evaluate culture; and the concomitant rise in the demand to re-appropriate control over the 'writing of one's own story' as part of a wider process of cultural liberation.[5]

Finally the whole heritage sector, again including archives, has been for the last ten or more years subject to the need to demonstrate its relevance to a whole range of public policy agendas including lifelong learning, health, social inclusion and exclusion, neighbourhood renewal, community cohesion, liveability and well-being. Whilst much of the evidence for such relevance remains somewhat superficial and although the sector has moved beyond rather simplistic economic measurements of impact and to more social and cultural measures of value, it still remains the case that archives must continue to seek to demonstrate their relevance and engagement beyond their traditional audiences. The next section will try to examine the implications of these changes in the context and expectation in which the archive sector operates by briefly exploring what might crudely be termed 'traditional' and 'new' views of the archive.

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[4] William Maher, 'Archives, archivists, and society', *American Archivist* 61:2 (1998), pp. 252–265: 254.

[5] Stuart Hall, 'Whose heritage? Un-settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post-nation', in J. Littler and R. Naidoo, eds., *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 23-35: 28.

Traditional views of archival duties

Any discussion which seeks to contrast perceptions in terms of traditional versus new, old-fashioned versus contemporary, or conservative versus radical is likely to run the risk of reductiveness and a certain over-simplification. This is certainly a danger when applying these terms to alternative views of the archive. So for instance I am going to refer to a 'traditionalist' position, which in fact retains its importance and in some aspects, in response to technological changes, has actually become more influential; and I am going to describe more 'contemporary' and 'radical' views which actually have a considerable heritage. Despite these qualifications, I believe that there has been a definite shift in our understanding of archives and the archive role, and that it is important to explore and acknowledge these shifts.

The traditional view of the archive and the role of archivist – particularly in the United Kingdom as articulated by Sir Hilary Jenkinson – laid particular emphasis on the neutral, objective and evidential qualities of the archive and the passive, impartial and defensive role of the archivist. Jenkinson was Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office in the inter-war period and through his writing (notably the *Manual of Archive Administration*, 1922 and 1937)[6] and his role in establishing courses in archival education continued to be extremely influential on the development of the UK archive profession after the Second World War. He famously referred to the good archivist as the most 'selfless devotee of Truth that the modern world produces'[7] and further argued that the archivist, in order to preserve the impartiality and integrity of the archive, should not be involved in either the selection or the interpretation of the archive and that such choices should be left to others.

According to Jenkinson the primary duties of this neutral disciple of truth should be the moral and physical defence of the document (the preservation and safeguarding of the archive). Access and enabling use were secondary duties only to be contemplated after the primary responsibilities were completed. These primary and secondary duties were not to be reversed: 'The Archivist, then, is the servant of his Archives first and afterwards of the student Public'.[8] Furthermore the archives themselves, if properly looked after could be guaranteed to be trustworthy, reliable, authentic and neutral records of past activities or transactions – drawn up not with posterity in mind but as a product of personal or organisational activity and preserved for administrative reference.[9]

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[6] Hilary Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, 2nd edn. pub.1937 (London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., 1965).

[7] Quoted in Elizabeth Kaplan, ' "Many paths to partial truths": Archives, anthropology, and the power of representation', *Archival Science* 2 (2002), pp. 209-20: 215.

The impact of technology and the expansion of record creation posed a challenge to Jenkinson's traditional view of the neutrality of the archivist by making the act of appraisal a central archival duty, involving the archivist in choosing what is to be preserved and what is to be destroyed, instead of this remaining the responsibility of the record creator alone. Nevertheless for many influenced by Jenkinson such developments have not fundamentally challenged their underlying view of the archive, narrowly defined and selected on the basis of its evidential value in respect to the administrative or business transactions of an organisation. An example of this is the influential yet limited definition of a record (and an archive in this case is a record deemed worthy of preservation) in the international standard for the management of records: 'Information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transactions of business'.[10] This view has been championed by those who have been termed the 'new traditionalists' or neo-Jenkinsonians, and who continue to assert that the authenticity and reliability of the archive can be ensured by adhering to traditional principles and basing the archive on narrow definitions of what is to be kept (transactional records) and pseudo-scientific approaches as to how these decisions are made, especially in the digital environment.

To some critics of the neo-traditional position, its stress on transaction-based archives and the neutral 'disinterested' role of the archivist results in the diminution and under-estimation of the cultural role of archives in favour of providing accountability and supporting business functions.[11] For historians and others interested in historical research, the implications of the (neo-)traditional position are two-fold.

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[8] Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, pp. 15, 44.

[9] ibid., p. 11.

[10] ISO, *ISO 15489-1 Information and Documentation. Records Management Part 1 General* (Geneva: ISO, 2001), p. 3.

[11] For an account of and reflections on these debates see Terry Cook, 'What is past is prologue. A history of ideas since 1898, and the future paradigm shift', *Archivaria* 43 (1997), pp. 17–63; Mark Greene, 'The power of meaning: The archival mission in the postmodern age', *The American Archivist* 65 (2002), pp. 42-55.

First, it significantly narrows the range of materials that are kept – frequently privileging the records and archives of formal institutions, mainstream opinions and the elites in any society over the informal, the 'people' and the periphery, of business and government over the social realm, with the result that the histories that are written and the heritage that is constructed further favours the centre, the elite and the bureaucracy. In an early volume of the *Oral History* journal Raphael Samuel wrote of historians being at the 'mercy' of the limited and narrow sources available to them:

> The reason why history has so often a bureaucratic bias is not I think because of a particular bias of individual historians, but very largely because bureaucratic documents are the ones most often preserved. The reason why so much of the history of the English land is the history of property is because in county record offices so many documents are deeds. Historians have very often simply followed the lines suggested by the documents.[12]

Different sources, more widely drawn, would encourage and enable the production of different histories. Secondly and crucially, an attachment to the chimera of impartiality absolves the archivist from consideration of his or her role in this bias, this narrowness, this process of exclusion.[13] It supports the maintenance of the (self-)image of the archivist as a neutral facilitator of historical research rather than a central framer of that research and the stories that the archives tell.

Re-imagining the archive and the archivist

These 'traditional' perspectives have been thoroughly challenged and critiqued in recent years, resulting, in some writings, in a re-imagining or refiguring of the archive.[14] Rather than an assertion of archives as 'the authentic voice of the past speaking directly to people of the present, without intermediaries or interpretation',[15] as leading archive bodies have routinely claimed in recent years, it has become common to stress the importance of questioning the archive – how it came to be, who created it and why, what perspectives does it represent and what perspectives does it exclude? Elizabeth Kaplan has described the contingency, the partiality and the role of agency in the creation of an archive thus:

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[12] Raphael Samuel, 'Headington Quarry: Recording a labouring community', *Oral History* 4 (1972), pp. 119-20.

[13] Verne Harris, 'A South African archival tale,' *ESARBICA Newsletter* 21 (2007), pp. 5-9: 8.

[14] Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: New Africa Books, 2002).

[15] National Council on Archives (NCA), *Strategy 2006-2009* [c.2006], p. 7; available at <http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/materials/strategy_final.pdf>

> The pervading view of archives as sites of historical truth is at best outdated, and at worst inherently dangerous. The archival record doesn't just happen; it is created by individuals and organizations, and used, in turn, to support their values and missions, all of which comprises a process that is certainly not politically and culturally neutral.[16]

Similarly the neutral, impartial, passive self-image of the profession has also been thoroughly critiqued by a series of writers, inside and outside the archival discipline:

> [U]ltimately, in the pursuit of their professional responsibilities, archivists – as keepers of archives – wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation through active management of records before they come to archives, their appraisal and selection as archives, and afterwards their constantly evolving description, preservation, and use.[17]

Such observations are now relatively common-place within academic archival discourse and may seem obvious to many from other disciplines. However it is important to recognise that what I have termed the 'traditional' (or neo-traditional) view of professional objectivity and neutrality retains a powerful hold within the archival imagination. Nevertheless questioning the way we think about archives and archival practice is not new but has a lineage which can be traced back fifty years or more. Developments in politics and in history (both academic and public) since the 1950s have challenged the partiality and misrepresentations of dominant historical and heritage narratives, and ultimately therefore have challenged the partiality of the sources (the archives) upon which these dominant narratives rest.

The emergence of New Left and identity politics heralded the growth and development of new social, labour, oral, women's, black, queer, and cultural histories. These in turn informed and inspired ideas of how such histories were to be written and shared including history workshops and other radical heritage initiatives, and the enabling of grassroots and community histories. All these movements and endeavours embodied at heart a dissatisfaction with dominant narratives, and a desire to challenge, subvert and transform those narratives by telling other stories, and ultimately pointed to the necessity of creating and collecting new sources on which to base these new histories. Sometimes this has resulted in individuals or groups establishing their own independent archives, libraries and museums.[18]

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[16] Elizabeth Kaplan, 'We are what we collect, we collect what we are: Archives and the construction of identity', *American Archivist* 63 (2000), pp. 126-51: 147.

[17] Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, 'Archives, records, and power: The making of modern memory,' *Archival Science,* 2.1-2 (2002), pp. 1-19: 2.

Within the archive profession, at least until recently, the influence of these arguments and developments has been more keenly felt outside the UK, with debates in the United States,[19] Canada, Australia and, since 1994, South Africa[20] being particularly rigorous. However, even if it was not openly reflected within the professional discourse, these developments did have an impact on UK archives. The records of organised labour and to some extent working-class life were collected more systematically from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, and the awareness of the need for archive collections to better reflect the role of women within society was more widely recognised from the same time. However, archives reflecting other histories such as those of African and Asian heritage, or of gay men and women remained much rarer and largely hidden. Accompanying these changes was a growth in the use of oral history to 'fill the gaps' in historical understanding and ultimately in archive collections. In these ways progress in making collections more democratic and representative was made, particularly at a local level, but it was frequently uneven and never part of a systematic process. It often relied on committed individuals, working closely with activists and historians, rather than being a responsibility taken on by the profession as a whole.

This is beginning to change. There is a growing awareness of the role of the archive and the archivist in the construction of local and national narratives, and of a necessary duty for public archives to more faithfully reflect all sections of society, to enable the writing of histories with 'thick description'. In practice this 're-imagining' has meant a more open acknowledgement of the active and interpretative role of the archivist in moulding and defining collections, a broader and more inclusive definition of what might constitute an archive (including personal papers, diaries, ephemera, oral testimony, memory texts, objects, and perhaps performance, dance, and the built environment), and a willingness to engage and collaborate more fully with those outside the profession and its traditional audiences. To reflect further on these changes this paper will now consider two inter-related areas of 'new' archival practice which both symbolise and are driving change within the archival world and the writing of history; that is, independent or community archives, and the utilisation of community-generated or user-generated content.

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[18] Andrew Flinn, 'Community histories, community archives: Some opportunities and challenges', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28.2 (2007), pp. 151-176.

[19] Gerald Ham, 'The archival edge', *The American Archivist* 38.1 (1975), pp. 5-13.

[20] Hamilton et al., *Refiguring the Archive.*

Independent or community archives

This section is informed by but does not discuss at great length research conducted at UCL entitled 'Community Archives and Identities: documenting and sustaining community heritage'. This AHRC-funded project explored the history, motivations, impacts and challenges facing independent community archive and heritage initiatives, mainly but not exclusively focusing on the history of people of African and Asian heritage in England, and in London in particular. The research has looked at four of these archives in detail, employing a participatory-observation approach, and working closely with each archive on an almost daily basis over a three or four month period. Among other things the project sought to understand better what inspires volunteers and activists to set up and support these initiatives and what challenges they face, and to try to appreciate their impact particularly in articulating alternative or otherwise misrepresented histories. Further details and results from this research can be found elsewhere so this paper will merely briefly introduce the idea of independent and community archives and indicate some of the impacts that they can have on archival thinking and the production of history.[21]

What then are community archives? The terminology is problematic since the meaning of the term 'community' is obviously contested, and not one that everyone working in independent archives would want to use. Nor is 'archive' always a meaningful or helpful description for those working in these endeavours. Terms such as community museum or library, resource centre, oral history or local heritage project are frequently used to refer to very similar types of activity. Nevertheless in the last few years the term 'community archive' (or perhaps better independent community archive) has gained broader currency and some level of wider acceptance. Internationally the term has a variety of interpretations. In Canada it can refer to a local archive funded and supported by local government, whilst in the USA and Australia it is used to refer to informal local archives as well as 'minority' archives. In

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[21] UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project, 'Community Archives and Identities: documenting and sustaining community heritage', 2008-2009. The research team comprised Andrew Flinn, Elizabeth Shepherd and Mary Stevens. This research would not have been possible without the help and partnership provided by all our case studies (Future Histories, rukus!, Moroccan Memories, Eastside Community Heritage) and all the other participants and interviewees. See for further details, including the final report and recommendations <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/icarus/community-archives/>. Some relevant publications include Andrew Flinn and Mary Stevens, '"It is noh mistri, wi mekin histri." Telling our own story: Independent and community archives in the United Kingdom, challenging and subverting the mainstream', in Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander eds., *Community Archives. The Shaping of Memory* (London: Facet, 2009); and Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens and Elizabeth Shepherd, 'Whose memories, whose archives? Independent community archives, autonomy and the mainstream,' *Archival Science*, 9:1-2 (2009), pp. 71-86.

South Africa, a 1998 article used GALA (the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa) to exemplify community archives as ‘archival initiatives that place in the foreground the perspectives of communities – as defined by and for communities themselves’.[22]

In the UK, community archives and the community archives movement incorporates in its definition both locally focussed heritage endeavours and those more politically motivated activist archives. The Community Archives and Heritage Group which seeks to act as a forum and representative body for community archives defines them as inclusively as possible:

> Community archives and heritage initiatives come in many different forms (large or small, semi-professional or entirely voluntary, long-established or very recent, in partnership with heritage professionals or entirely independent) and seek to document the history of all manner of local, occupational, ethnic, faith and other diverse communities [...] By collecting, preserving and making accessible documents, photographs, oral histories and many other materials which document the histories of particular groups and localities, community archives and heritage initiatives make an invaluable contribution to the preservation of a more inclusive and diverse local and national heritage.[23]

In these definitions what is notable about community archives is their variety (in terms of the communities they seek to represent, the organisational forms they take, and their levels of autonomy) as well as the wide range of materials that they collect and in many cases actively create. In terms of the traditional archival understandings discussed earlier, community archives operate within much looser, much broader frameworks where ephemera, objects, works of art, performance, autobiography and oral testimony are all core parts of their collections and are fundamental to the heritage and histories they wish to preserve and share. Our research at UCL distinguished the differences between the motivations and objectives of two types of activity, that is between essentially local history and the more politically inspired archives we mainly studied. However there are also certain similarities in the way that these are all generally grassroots activities which emerge from and are in some respect are answerable to the ‘communities’ they seek to represent, and also in their concern to record and preserve a history that is not, in the minds of those involved, otherwise properly represented.

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[22] Kathy Eales, ‘Community archives: Introduction.’ *South African Archives Journal* 40 (1998), pp. 11-15.

[23] Community Archives and Heritage Group, ‘Our Vision’ (2009), available at: <http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/documents/CAHG_Vision_.doc>.

In recent years there has been a significant growth in the numbers of such initiatives within the UK (frequently responding to social and economic change, taking advantage of limited but newly available streams of funding and embracing the possibilities offered by new technologies) and this has been accompanied by a much greater willingness upon the part of the archive profession to acknowledge their importance. However it is also clear that independent and community archives are not new phenomena. Some local community history groups can trace their history back a hundred years or more as well as to comparatively more recent inspirations such as the History Workshop movement of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.[24]

What motivations underpin these endeavours? As suggested above, at root many of these archives and the history-making activities which accompany them are explicitly conceived as an active intervention in response to under-representation and misrepresentation within the mainstream archive and heritage world, and as an educational resource to challenge, and sustain challenges, to those misrepresentations. The Lesbian Herstory Archive of New York was established in 1975 'to end the silence of patriarchal history about us – women who love women. Furthermore we wanted our story to be told by us, shared by us and preserved by us'.[25] Libraries and archives such as the Institute for Race Relations and the George Padmore Institute and Archive (both in London) are viewed by their founders and key activists as providing much needed counter-hegemonic resources for contemporary struggles.[26]

Writing in *History Workshop* in 1976, Ruth and Eddie Frow explained the causes of the 'disease' which had resulted in their own house being turned into a public resource for the study of working-class history – political conviction and a belief in history as a motivating force for social change:

> We know that eventually there will be a change in our social system; that the country will be governed by those who produce the wealth; that there will be a need and a longing to know what preceded these changes. Recognizing this we set out to gather a library of books and ephemera relating to the labour movement in its broadest aspects.[27]

Although sadly both Ruth and Eddie have now passed away, the Working Class Movement Library in Salford is still acquiring new materials and is a crucial, internationally renowned library and archive of British working-class organisations and struggles.[28]

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[24] Flinn, 'Community histories, community archives'.

[25] Joan Nestle, 'The will to remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York', *Feminist Review* 34 (1990), pp. 86-94: 87.

[26] Flinn and Stevens, ' "It is noh mistri, wi mekin histri." Telling our own story'.

[27] Eddie and Ruth Frow, 'Travels with a caravan', *History Workshop* 2 (1976), pp. 177-82: 177-78.

The Black Cultural Archives (BCA) was founded in 1981 by amongst others, Len Garrison.[29] His work in the 1970s campaigning against the treatment of black children by the UK education system and the lack of black history in the curriculum, led directly to the foundation of the Black Cultural Archives. Initially based largely on his own collections, Garrison intended the Archive as an education resource which would provide the material and documentary evidence of the black experience in Britain, one which would counteract the denial of black heritage to black (and white) children. Garrison explained his objectives for the BCA in this way:

> For years some young Black people have faced the forces of racism and its contradictions and have been ashamed to identify their Blackness as a positive attribute. Victims of the assimilation process, their lack of recognized history has rendered them invisible, thereby disinheriting and undermining their sense of a Black British heritage. The Black Cultural Archives Museum would hope to play a part in improving the image and self-image of people of African and African-Caribbean descent by seeking to establish continuity and a positive reference point. [...] We do not assume that historical data and artefacts by themselves are going to change a child's self-image. They will however, provide the environment and structure within which the Afro-Caribbean child can extend and build positive frames of reference, and a basis for White children to understand the Black presence in an anti-racist context.[30]

After many years of struggling with limited resources the BCA is now on the cusp of a transformation into a professionalised heritage organisation with a permanent home of the highest standard. Whilst this transformation is not without its tensions, the core aspirations to promote the history and heritage of people of African and African-Caribbean descent remain very much the same.

Amongst those community archive projects, concerned as much with place and class as with other identifications, there is frequently a sense of challenge or at least of reproach of the mainstream heritage sector for not fully representing the local or everyday. Eastside Community Heritage describe their aims as being 'documenting the lives of

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[28] For the Working Class Movement Library, see <http://www.wcml.org.uk/>.

[29] For the Black Cultural Archives, see <http://www.bcaheritage.org.uk/>.

[30] Len Garrison, 'The Black historical past in British education', in P. G. Stone and R. MacKenzie, eds., *The Excluded Past: Archaeology and Education,* 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 231-44: 238-39.

"ordinary" people from, and who live in, East London' in order to 'celebrate the cultures and heritage of East London's diverse communities'. This endeavour originated in (and is still motivated by) a sense that mainstream heritage bodies often tend to reflect and reinforce the stereotypes rather than the reality of the lives of those living in East London.[31]

Community-generated or user-generated content

Associated with the challenge to and the implicit rebuke of mainstream heritage collections posed by independent community archives, are the possibilities offered by community-generated or user-generated content. Independent community archives are very much associated with the active sharing of archives and other content generated within the community. As already noted, a major cause of the recent rise in the numbers and profile of community archives has been the adoption of easy to use technologies which support community (in this case meaning largely non-professional) digitisation and description of archival material, particularly images. The best of these digital archives, those that have adopted the Web 2.0 participatory template of collaborative and community working, have gone even further by not only allowing individuals to upload their archive materials and memories but also to comment on and amplify the content submitted by other community members. In the right circumstances and with the appropriate balance of active participants contributing content of different sorts, such community heritage sites have the potential to epitomise Samuel's dictum of history as 'the work [...] of a thousand different hands',[32] offering the potential for the collaborative 'We Think' approach to replace 'I think' in the production of history.[33]

One of the best examples of the latter type of website is the *My Brighton and Hove* site.[34] Run and administered by volunteers, and affiliated to QueenSpark, the long-standing community history and publishing organisation, *My Brighton and Hove* accepts photographs and other digitised materials, as well as allowing memories and commentaries to be appended. The website was launched in 2000, though the project had its origins in a local history exhibition in a local museum in the mid 1990s. By 2009 it had over 9000 pages. Amongst the kind of material regularly shared by users are identifications of people and places in others' photographs, memories and recollections of life and events in Brighton, and amplification of the memories offered by others. Many of the memories and comments offered tend towards more personal family history type of material, but nevertheless, like the personal recollections and photographs of Richmond Buildings,[35] they contain much potentially valuable social history detail about life in post-war Brighton. Elsewhere, such as the sections on crime in Brighton, details are corrected and further stories are added by those who lived through the events in question or were related to individuals within the story recording their own memories of those times.[36] Although the significance of such material can be overplayed ('Let me tell you about my grandpa'[37]), this is the kind of personal material that is otherwise very difficult to collect and which provides vivid and living sources for local and other histories and 'which might well substitute for the absences in the official record'.[38]

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[31] See the Eastside Community Heritage 'Hidden Histories' website, <http://www.hidden-histories.org.uk/>.

[32] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 8.

[33] Charles Leadbetter, *We-think: Mass Innovation, Not Mass Production. The Power of Mass Creativity* (London: Profile Books, 2008.

[34] <http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/>.

What is the significance of these developments? Samuel's identification of the production of history as the work of a 'thousand hands' demonstrates that awareness of collaborative creation is not new, though it may be better and more easily facilitated by technological developments. In the case of independent community archives and community-generated content, this kind of material being created and then being utilised by historians and others is not novel either. Histories from below have long made a virtue of speaking with or at least listening to other (rarely heard) voices, and it is no surprise that oral history, which was at the heart of so many of the history-from-below and History Workshop initiatives of the past, remains one of the core approaches within independent community archives and history endeavours. Indeed one could view oral history as an early and often successful attempt to capture user-generated content (albeit mediated through the interview process) and insert seldom heard voices into mainstream historical narratives. In this sense, whilst archives and historical practice may be challenged by community-generated content and the collections held by independent archives, these challenges remain much the same as the ones posed by earlier experiments in oral history and communities telling their own stories in response to the absences in the sources and orthodox historical narratives. These challenges bring us inevitably back to the debates about the authority and expertise of the 'professional' historian (and archivist) with which this paper began.

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[35] <http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/category_id__1408.aspx>.

[36] <http://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/category_id__166_path__0p116p.aspx>.

[37] Jessica Sedgwick, 'Let Me Tell You About My Grandpa: A Content Analysis of User Annotations to Online Archival Collections.' Presentation at Society of American Archivists conference, 2009, available at <http://www.slideshare.net/jmsedgwick/let-me-tell-you-about-my-grandpa-a-content-analysis-of-user-annotations-to-online-archival-collections>.

[38] Hilda Kean and Brenda Kirsch, 'A nation's moment and a teacher's mark book: Interconnecting personal and public histories', in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean, eds., *People and their Pasts: Public History Today* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 199.

In a contemporary context what is new is perhaps the consideration of how to make these online collaborative endeavours a success by encouraging 'deeper' levels of participation and sharing. Joy Palmer has questioned the validity of some of the recent wave of Archive 2.0 initiatives that proceed from the 'often untested belief that if we build the right tools to promote interaction, "they" (our elusive users) will come'.[39] Questions of motivation and ownership may provide some of the answers to this dilemma and there are indications that there is greater potential for collaborative participation on those grassroots community sites whose development has been organic and viral than with those initiatives associated with mainstream heritage organisations where a passive consumption of content may be the cultural norm.[40] Huvila ('participatory archives')[41] and Giaccardi and Palen ('living heritage practice')[42] suggest a fuller, deeper collaborative partnership is possible between users, archives and those who administer them, and that this would ultimately result in a richer and more rounded heritage for all. However it seems likely that such partnerships will work most effectively when, as in the community archive model, there is a strong sense of common ownership and shared identity between the users and the archival activists.

Ultimately the material which results from such collective endeavours represents a significant opportunity for archivists and historians to broaden the range of the sources that their work draws upon. For social historians and anyone involved in producing public histories, the materials held and created as part of community archive activity should be a tremendously valuable resource, offering a window into the lives, memories and experiences of various communities which are often under-represented or misrepresented in mainstream collections. As Samuel suggested, the type of histories which can be written are also potentially changed by the transformation of the archive and the archivist. The 'thick description' history which he advocated and which places rounded individuals (with families, beliefs, interests, etc.) and individual agency at the centre of historical narratives can only be achieved with a more imaginative approach and the use of a wider range of sources, notably oral history, autobiography and other memory works.[43]

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[39] Joy Palmer, 'Archives 2.0: If we build it, will they come?' *Ariadne* 60 (2009), available at <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue60/palmer/#21>.

[40] Janice Affleck and Thomas Kvan, 'A virtual community as the context for discursive interpretation: A role in cultural heritage engagement', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14:3 (2008), pp. 268-80.

[41] Isto Huvila, 'Participatory archive: Towards decentralised curation, radical user orientation, and broader contextualisation of records management', *Archival Science* 8 (2008), pp. 15-36.

[42] Elisa Giaccardi and Leysia Palen, 'The social production of heritage through cross-media interaction', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14:3 (2008), pp. 281-97.

As an example, along with Kevin Morgan and Gidon Cohen, I was involved in writing a book on a traditional subject, the history of a political party, in this case the British Communist Party.[44] But what the book sought to do was to take an innovative prosopographical approach, seeking to tell the collective biography of the Party through the lives of its members. To achieve this we used not only the official party records but also extensive life-history interviews and all manner of biographical and autobiographical material. We were not only interested in their party lives but wished to examine British communism through the prism of all aspects of the lives of its members. This kind of approach, one of many potential thick-description histories, is an exciting one but it is dependent on the location, preservation and utilisation of a much broader range of sources than is normally the case.

Conclusion – towards a transformed and re-imagined archive

Over the last thirty years or more, political challenges to the subject and the form of academic histories have been accompanied by significant questioning of the construction and the content of the archive, the role of the archivist in that process, and the partial public heritage which is produced from these archives. One manifestation of these challenges are those independent community initiatives which have sought, often in very difficult circumstances, to challenge the exclusions and marginalisations by establishing their own archives and by telling their own histories. Independent or community custody of archives and cultural property means that decisions about what is to be preserved, and how (and by whom) the material is to be accessed, remain within that community and not with some external academic or professional body. This gives the group or community in question some control over its representation and the production of its histories. New technologies which allow communities (however defined or policed) to share and participate in the construction of these histories online potentially extend this autonomy and independence. Such control and authority might in some circumstances lead to inward-looking, exclusive and even offensive characterisations of 'others', but it is not an inevitable development. Rather most independent archives and community-shared and community-generated content represent a counterpoint to otherwise frequently exclusionary and marginalising mainstream narratives. These projects are not politically neutral but frequently arise from and are part of social movements with broad political, cultural and social agendas of transformatory change which fundamentally challenge the mainstream. As such, they remind mainstream archives and other memory institutions of the need to re-imagine, diversify and transform their collections and narratives.

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[43] Raphael Samuel, 'Local history and oral history', *History Workshop* 1 (1976), pp. 191-208; Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 161.

[44] Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920-1991* (London: Rivers Oram, 2007).

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Possession: Tensions in the creation, care and use of archives, with reference to Mass Observation[1]

Dorothy Sheridan

In 1990, A. S. Byatt's novel *Possession* was published and went on to win the Booker prize. It is the story of obsession, love, biography, literary manuscripts and the passion of possession. I remember feeling when I read it that there was something odd about it, something missing. The most powerfully drawn figures are, on the one hand, the *academics,* the biographers, the researchers, the students, the readers of the manuscripts and – on the other – the *creators* of the manuscripts, the long-dead writers and poets of the Victorian period who had generated the texts. What I realised eventually, and what struck me as an archivist, was the absence of any intermediary – the archivist or curator – as an equally strongly-drawn character. In the first few pages of the novel, which take place in the London Library, there is a 'librarian', a person who is nameless and genderless, who delivers the precious book which so excites the researcher, who wipes away the dust (and there is *always* dust in an archive), who is given no direct dialogue to speak by Byatt, who then 'tiptoes' away … and who does not appear again.[2]

This is not a trope which is confined to literature. A week before the symposium for which this paper was produced, I was listening to an item on BBC Radio 4 in which the biographer, Andrew Lycett (an experienced archive user as well as an eminent literary scholar) was being interviewed by Kirsty Lang about his 'discovery' of a Dylan Thomas manuscript.[3] The manuscript was a script for a play called *The Art of Conversation,* which had been archived at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. In her introduction to Lycett, Kirsty Lang said: 'The radio play was forgotten in a dusty archive' (*dust* again) until Lycett came upon it. Lycett continues in this vein in his own account of his 'discovery'. Perhaps it was indeed 'dusty', and maybe it was forgotten, but anyone who has seen images or visited the multi-million dollar emporium that is the archive at Harry Ransom Center in Texas, with its state-of-the-art facilities, its thirty-six million leaves of manuscripts, its one million rare books, its five million photographs and its 100,000 works of art, will know that it is, as it says in its own words on its impressive web site: 'the best maintained and financed archive in the world'.[4] Somehow, 'dusty archive' as an epithet doesn't really fit, nor does the likelihood of something being 'forgotten' in such a magnificent and well resourced institution.

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[1] This is a written version of an oral paper delivered at the Launch Symposium of the Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories, University of Brighton, on 6th December 2008.

[2] A.S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 2.

[3] Andrew Lycett is the author of *Dylan Thomas: a New Life* (New York: Overlook Press, 2004). He was interviewed by Kirsty Lang on BBC Radio 4 in early December 2008.

I began to muse on the notion of the *disappeared archivist* and to look at the place she plays in what I suggest is a site of tension between the users (the researchers, the historians, the literature scholars) and the people who create the archives, whose ideas, stories, papers, documents, life histories are what make archives so significant and rewarding. I also wanted to see how this notion of the 'dusty archive' plays into the notion of the 'disappeared archivist' and what it means, not only for our understanding of archives and their provenance but for our understanding of the writing of history.

How common is the association of dust and archive? A very quick online skim through JSTOR, the digital archive of academic journals,[5] yields some interesting finds. An article about a poetry collection suggests that: 'In [the poetry collection] we should not see a *dusty archive* for social history but rather an application of the creative imagination of another age'.[6] Here we have in stark opposition the archive (and also alas, social history) with creativity and imagination. In the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, in an article about the displacement of peoples and their cultural inheritance, we find:

> The discovery of relics and legends or stories or memories of oneself that either romanticise or demonise the past or present [...] are precisely the product of movement, travel and displacement. Such memories [...] are not simply *inculcated belief systems stored up in the past like some sort of dusty archive*, but are [...] living creations.[7]

Again, there is here the juxtaposition between the negative image of the archive and the positive notions of creativity, of being alive, of movement. Another example appears in the *Art Journal* (2003), where the reviewer of a book about 1960s art by the art critic, James Meyer states: 'Yet Meyer's [history] is not the frozen time of a *dusty archive* that senselessly records it all.'[8] The reviewer goes on to extol the liveliness and creativity of the writer's account, in contrast to the image of the frozen archive as not only dusty but also *senselessly* recorded – as if there were no sentient being present. The author of an article in the *Musical Times*, writing about a music conference, predicts that maybe there will be some breakthrough in the field of musicology: 'Although no major bombshells are anticipated as yet – say the discovery in some *dusty archive* – of an unknown or lost work [...]'.[9] These dusty mausoleums, these dusty archives, then, are the lifeless backdrop against which sits the possibility for some astounding scholarly triumph. So, Andrew Lycett *discovers* the Dylan Thomas manuscript; A. S. Byatt's character at the London Library positively salivates over the book he *discovers*. Archives then are dusty, dead and lifeless. The academic scholar must become the intrepid explorer, making discoveries in the terrain of the unexplored, the untouched, the neglected and the unrecognised.

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[4] <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/>

[5] <http://www.jstor.org/>.

[6] Don A. Monson, 'The troubadour's lady re-considered again', *Speculum* 70:2 (1995), p. 273. My emphasis here and in the following examples.

[7] Michael Anderson, 'Children in-between: Constructing identities in the bi-cultural family', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5:1 (1999), p. 24.

However, despite the delights waiting to be enjoyed, the scholar's adventure in the archives is fraught with temptation. Another example from this JSTOR search asserts: 'the demands of contemporary academic management, pedagogy and going to conferences may make it all but impossible to give in to that oh-so-fulfilling *jouissance*, that is to luxuriate in the real *dusty archive* during the day […]'.[10] A marvellously rich account of the nineteenth-century scholar's sensual engagement with the 'dusty archive' is described by Bonnie G. Smith. She considers the practice of archival research in the moulding of professional masculinities where: 'disciplined by the seminar to become venturesome "citizens", young professionals set out for the archives where they hoped to break open the gates of the documentary "harem" and save the "fairy princesses" residing therein, and find the truth in the process'.[11] Smith goes on to explore accounts of reported archive practice which draw on sexual and fetishistic metaphors:

> One caressed a rare book, wrote the historian Hanotaux, because it was 'enveloped in skin like a woman'. Expressions of fetishism as an attachment to an object that enabled sexual and not just religious feelings protected one from excessive attachment to the archive and thus gained in resonance. Ranke's characterisation of his archival research

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[8] Christine Mehring, 'Review: Minimalism: Art history as detective novel', *Art Journal* 62:1 (2003), p. 96.

[9] Fabrice Fitch, 'Down in the valley', *Musical Times* 136:1831 (1995), p. 464.

[10] Michael Camille, Zeynep Celik, John Onians, Adrian Rifkin and Christopher B. Steiner, 'Rethinking the canon', *The Art Bulletin*, 78:2 (1996), p. 210.

[11] Bonnie G. Smith, 'Gender and the practices of scientific history: The seminar and archival research in the nineteenth century', *American Historical Review* 100:4 (1995), p. 1153.

> as driven by ‘desire’ and ‘lust’ invoked the fundamental truth of sex while his metaphors of princesses and virgins sheltered him in pure love. ‘Each discovery,’ Seignobous and Langlouis exclaimed about finding an untouched document in a *dusty archive*, ‘induces rapture’.[12]

The lure of the archive, with its unspecified dangers and temptations, is re-stated for the twenty-first century by Carolyn Steedman in her significantly titled book, *Dust*. She describes the warnings given to students about the place of archives in the process of history writing:

> Students are told about the many types and varieties of repository and record office and the fragmentary incomplete material they contain; they are told about the ‘cult of the archive’ among certain historians and those sad creatures who fetishise them; they are warned about the seductions of the archive, the entrancing stories that they contain, which do the work of a seducer.[13]

Steedman describes her own archive fever, what she calls 'fever proper', to distinguish it from what she feels Jacques Derrida meant by 'Archive fever'. She describes Derrida’s '*Mal d’archive*' as the exercise of power, the power not so much to *use* the archive but to establish it as a symbol of state power and authority. For Steedman, the fever is to *enter* the archive and to *use* it. Part of Steedman’s fever is the opportunity that the archive provides for her to relate directly with the creators of the archive. In her account, she implies that the primary, and perhaps only, relationship within the archive is the one between her and the texts and, beyond the texts, the writers of the texts: 'What keeps you awake', she says autobiographically, 'is actually the archive, and its myriads of the dead, who all day long have pressed their concerns on you, you think these people have left *me* the lot'.[14] In this incarnation, the 'dusty archive' continues to represent temptation, a seductive treasure trove, a place eliciting both passion and pleasure, and a place where academic reputations may be made; above all, a place of a singular and intense connection between the scholar and the archive creator.

There is in all these accounts the same significant absence as in Byatt’s *Possession*; there is no active agent to care for the neglected, forgotten, uncared for gems imprisoned in these un-peopled dungeons. The manuscripts are just waiting for discovery, the prince’s kiss. So how, coming back to the title of Byatt’s novel, does this relate to the notion of possession or even possessiveness? Does the scholar-historian, like

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[12] Smith, 'Gender and the practices of scientific history', p. 1172.

[13] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. x.

[14] Steedman, *Dust*, p. 17. My emphasis.

Steedman herself, desire to possess the archive? Does the acknowledgement of an intermediary, an archivist or curator, imply an obstacle to that desire or even a rival in the pursuit of gratification?

Some of these questions can be answered by looking at literary and historical representations of the archivist and, indeed, at the ways in which archivists themselves have represented their own profession. Elsewhere in this collection, Andrew Flinn explores the traditional role of the archivist and argues that it has now become necessary for the profession to meet new challenges to its authority as archives diversify and democratise.[15] As he acknowledges, all archivists are susceptible to the lure of power, and can succumb to an élitism, especially among an older generation of archivists, which still colours the way in which many archive-users think about archivists. So we have colluded, both as archivists and as scholars, in perpetuating the image of the archivist as a terrifying and forbidding gatekeeper. The extreme representation of this image is beautifully caricatured in Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, when the protagonist visits the monks' scriptorium in his quest for knowledge:

> The Librarian came to us [...] His face was trying to assume an expression of welcome but I could not help shuddering at the sight of such a singular countenance. He was tall and extremely thin, with large and awkward limbs […] In his physiognomy there were what seemed traces of many passions which his will had disciplined but which seemed to have frozen those features which they now ceased to animate. Sadness and severity predominated in the lines of his face [… H]is eyes were so intense that with one glance they could penetrate the heart of the person speaking to him and read the secret thoughts [...].[16]

This terrifying spectre is the all-knowing, all-seeing janitor who has the key to the mystery and has to be bearded by the seeker after truth in order to unlock the secrets of the archive. So here we have, in contrast with Byatt's almost invisible functionary, an alternative, though still negative, image of the omnipotent archivist who may choose not to share his knowledge, or who might prevent access to the treasure trove, who might 'keep stuff back'. Unlike a library with its public catalogue, access to archives is often mediated through the archivist in person, because so much material is never listed or catalogued. Best then, in stories of passion and possession, that the archivist is conveniently absent so that the relationship between the scholar and the text and the creators of the text can be exclusive and unhindered.

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[15] Andrew Flinn, 'Archives and their communities: Collecting histories, challenging heritage', above.

[16] Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (London: Picador, 1984), p. 73.

Where does this playful peroration take us? I want to re-insert the archivist into the story of writing history not only because I am one and have my own professional vested interests but, more importantly, because the archivist materially affects how we think about historical research itself. Archives are places of active engagement long before and long after the scholars visit. The items in archives are tidied and cleaned and mended; they are felt and smelt and explored, and they are moved and catalogued and indexed and arranged; they are selected and displayed; they are scanned and transcribed and copied, and they are read and enjoyed; they are talked about to friends and colleagues; they make us laugh and cry; they shock us and they disgust us, they bore us and frustrate us, they make us cross and sometimes we have to struggle to read them. We, the keepers of the archives, imagine the creators of these archives. Who were they and why is their material in front of us? What do we owe them? What were their intentions in leaving their stories behind?

The archive is indisputably peopled. Moreover, it is entirely constituted by all the people who have ever written for it, in it, on it or about it. In the introduction to her excellent collection of readings, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History*, Antoinette Burton writes:

> [A]rchives do not simply arrive or emerge fully formed; nor are they innocent of struggles for power in either their creation or their interpretative application. Though their own origins are often occluded and the exclusions on which they are premised often dimly understood, all archives come into being in and as history as a result of specific political, cultural and socio-economic pressures – pressures which leave traces and which render archives themselves artefacts of history.[17]

Any archive involves a complex triangular relationship between three agents: firstly, those who cause that archive to exist and who go on to provide the resources and the care for its survival and accessibility, secondly, those whose stories are held within the archive, either as authors or as the subjects of the records, and thirdly, those who use the archive: historians, scholars, students, the public. Each participant in this relationship has a social and political influence; each has a differing level of both cultural and economic power. In this model, the archivist plays at least as significant a role as the creators and the users. When you come to apply a three-cornered model to a real situation, the plot thickens. The categories start to slip, demonstrating that the relationships are dynamic and that it is possible to transmute between categories and to inhabit more than one role at once: as archivist/scholar, as scholar/archive creator, or as archivist/archive creator. This slippage within a dynamic relationship can be used to understand the provenance and continued activity of the Mass Observation Archive.[18]

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[17] Antoinette Burton, 'Archive fever, archive stories', in Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 6.

The archive creators include first the original founders of the Mass Observation organisation itself – Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge, Humphrey Jennings and their group of friends. They set out in 1937 to create an 'anthropology of ourselves' by involving thousands of other people in the creation of a massive written record of the years 1937 to the 1950s.[19] Many of the people recruited to the project were volunteers, like the diarist Nella Last.[20] By contributing to the project over many years, Nella and these many other writers (of diaries, replies to directive questions posed by the founders, and other material) are equally responsible together with the founders for creating the resulting Archive. So too, since 1981, are the contemporary Mass Observers who continue to augment the Archive as part of the 'Mass Observation Project', a revival of the original Mass Observation idea which asserted that anyone can participate in the documentation of their everyday lives. These writers, most of whom will never have met the original Mass Observers, the staff of the present-day Archive or the researchers who use it, nevertheless exercise their own influence not only over the content of the Archive but also in how the Archive develops through a constant dialogue over the meanings and uses of the contemporary Mass Observation Project.[21]

The archive users of Mass Observation – who may be students, or established scholars, or journalists or artists, novelists, poets, or historians and other researchers of various kinds – are also in a sense archive creators who have made contributions, past and present, to the Archive. When visitors come to read the Archive (either in reality or virtually), they enter into a relationship with all those participants and commence a process of interaction which changes the nature of the engagement. How they read what they find, how they understand it, how they reproduce it, how they represent it, has a tangible impact on the Archive itself, just as the experience of engaging with the Archive will bring about changes for them in how they understand the world, and subsequently how they may contribute to the Archive.

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[18] The Mass Observation papers came to the University of Sussex in 1970 and were established as a public archive in 1975. See <http://www.massobs.org.uk>.

[19] Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Mass Observation* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1937).

[20] The late Nella Last was one of approximately 500 people who responded to Mass Observation's call for contributors by sending in her monthly diary installments. Two edited volumes of her diary have been published: *Nella Last's War: The Second World War Diaries of 'Housewife, 49'*, eds. Richard Broad and Suzie Fleming (London: Profile Books, 2006 [first published as *Nella Last's War: A Mother's Diary, 1939-45* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press 1981)]; and *Nella Last's Peace: The Post-War Diaries of 'Housewife, 49'*, eds. Patricia Malcolmson and Robert Malcolmson (London: Profile Books, 2008).

[21] Since 1981, the contemporary Mass Observers have been invited to comment on the Project, to suggest themes for directives and (in response to a directive on their participation in Mass Observation in 1991) to record their views of the value of Mass Observation for them personally and for the study of everyday life. Many of them do not need to be invited and can be critical and challenging – usually constructively – at any time.

Archive creators have also contributed as both archivists and archive users. For example, Tom Harrisson returned to the archive he helped to create in 1970. The papers generated by the research activities of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s had been rescued by the social historian Asa Briggs (then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex) from a basement in London, where they had lain unused for many years. Harrisson was charged with the task of making the collection accessible for public use and, in particular, with promoting the Archive as a resource for scholarly research. During Mass Observation's early active phase, the papers had not been open to anyone except Harrisson and his team of investigators. They had exclusive access to (their own) material which they used as the basis for producing a series of published (and unpublished) books and articles and reports. Once at Sussex, Harrisson was asked by Briggs to combine the role of creator (and owner) of the Archive with the role of curator and welcoming, facilitating host, effectively to *share his Archive* with others.

This new role was not easy for Harrisson. On the one hand, he was keen to demonstrate the value of the unique enterprise that he and his friends had established so long ago. He longed for academic recognition both for himself and for Mass Observation as a legitimate social research methodology.[22] On the other hand, he jealously guarded his papers and suspected potential visitors of all kinds of iniquities – from students making love among the boxes, to rival scholars stealing his best ideas. He insisted, for example, that one large section of material from the 1930s (the Worktown Collection, a study of Bolton) plus four dark green and ancient wartime filing cabinets full of typed reports should all be crammed into one small locked room together with the photocopy machine so that no one could make off with any of the material – or worse, use it for a book before he himself was finished with it. Only a few years after the establishment of the Archive as a public resource at Sussex, Harrisson was tragically killed in a road accident. It may be, paradoxically, that it was only after his untimely death in 1976 that it became possible for the Archive to be truly opened up. Harrisson, like

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[22] Tom Harrisson was in fact made a Visiting Professor at Sussex in 1975.

Byatt’s scholars and generations of archive users, struggled with possessiveness, with the desire not to share.

Harrisson has been replaced by the new 'possessors' of the Mass Observation Archive: the Trustees (who are the legal owners); the University of Sussex as the institution that houses and maintains the collection as its main benefactor; those who commission directives and talk of 'their directives' (the academics); the new generations of researchers, writers and students; the Mass Observers themselves – past, present and those yet to take part. And, finally, the 'reinserted archivist', myself, together with the many colleagues who have worked with me over three decades and with whom I have shared a certain possessive passion for the *not* so *dusty archive.*

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Oral history, life history, life writing: The logic of convergence

Margaretta Jolly

Three histories and four paradigms

If you ask any of the rising number of literary critics interested in life writing whether they had undertaken a life-history interview, worried about memory, wrestled with sharing authority or noticed an overlap between life storying and therapy, you will see a forest of hands go up. Conversely, oral and life historians today are as likely to be excited about the poetry of the voice or the plot of a memory as they are about its correlation to an archive. Yet few life writing critics consider themselves to be either oral historians or versed in life-history research. Likewise oral or life historians and narrative theorists cleave to different journals, conferences and canons. As an erstwhile critic turned oral historian, I have become fascinated by the ambivalent relationships between these ostensibly close fields. Oral history, life history and life writing are family, but are they siblings, cousins, or estranged aunts and uncles once-removed?

Overview texts in the field suggest a passionate kinship. Historian Paul Thompson introduced his second edition of *The Voice of the Past* in 1988 by noting that in the ten years since the first, 'we have developed firmer links with life-story sociology'; by the third edition in 2000, he celebrates the interdisciplinary character of the movement which [...] has inspired, for example, the move towards a more narrative perspective'.[1] Sociologist Norman Denzin asserted in 1989 that a 'family of terms combines to shape the biographical method', including:

> method, life, self, experience, epiphany, case, autobiography, ethnography, auto-ethnography, biography, ethnography story, discourse, narrative, narrator, fiction, history, personal history, oral history, case history, case study, writing presence, difference, life history, life story, self story, and personal experience story.[2]

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[1] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. xi-xi.

[2] Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (London: Sage, 1989), p. 27.

Brian Roberts built on this in his 2002 *Biographical Research* to define a cross-disciplinary field through its respect for the people that are its subject.[3] Literary-trained Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson arrive at a similar place in their 2001 *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, outlining 'Fifty-two genres of life narrative' that include autothanatography, biomythography, case history, ethnocriticism, letters, oral history, personal essay and self-help narrative'. Despite their opening assertion that life narrative should not be confused with historical documentation, they continually position it as a practice that puts the self into social and historical context.[4] My own *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* justified its inclusion of 'testimony, artifacts, reminiscence, personal narrative, visual arts, photography, film, oral history, and so forth' as part of the democratising of knowledge that life writing so charismatically represents.[5]

But words are cheap! Paul Thompson warns us that 'while relations between different groups using life-story evidence are generally amicable', differences of terminology and method, contain 'potential seeds for sectarian fragmentation from which all would be the losers'.[6] One way of testing the depth of relationship is to identify the deeper conditions that have produced today's wide-ranging intellectual excitement about the life story. To do so, I would like to play a thought-experiment and apply Alistair Thomson's mapping of oral history through 'four paradigmatic revolutions', to the history of life history and life writing. According to Thomson, oral history has evolved in distinct phases: first, the postwar renaissance of memory as a source for 'people's history'; second, the development, from the late 1970s, of 'post-positivist' approaches to memory and subjectivity; third, a transformation in perceptions about the role of the oral historian as interviewer and analyst from the late 1980s; and finally the digital revolution of the late 1990s and early 2000s. In this map, we see a general pattern emerging in which oral and life history have been closely allied throughout, while life writing criticism has more recently converged with both, in many ways precipitated by the impact of continental philosophy on all three fields. Thomson situates the origin of contemporary oral history as post Second World War, with the gradual acceptance of the validity of oral evidence by professional historians, and the increasing availability of portable tape recorders. By contrast, life-history methods had already flowered in the documentary movement of the 1920s and 1930s, ranging from the eclectic anthropologies of British Mass Observation and Bronislaw Malinowski to the Chicago School in sociology. The 'paradigm', however is very similar, combining popular representation with a new perception that the life story could be an important 'source' of academic knowledge. How far this went in any of these circles is a point of debate; as Thomson points out, the first formal oral-history project at Columbia University in 1948 recorded white male elites; the timing and pattern of his 'paradigms' have differed markedly around the world. Nationalism was as important as socialism or democracy in many early efforts in both oral and life history, for example in the Roosevelt government's Federal Writers' Project to record the lives of former slaves, Mexico's national oral history programme (since 1959), and China's interview-based (and now many-volumed) history of the Party, *Red Flag Floating in the Sky* (1958 to the present). Ken Plummer, too, cautions that the making of an auto/biographical society 'is a very messy genealogy with many pathways, dilemmas, shifts in fortune and trajectories hinted at'.[7] Yet Plummer describes the Chicago sociologists that produced the immigration story of *The Polish Peasant*, and the life histories of 'delinquents' as 'spawned on romanticism and libertarianism'.[8] Their politics may seem naïve in retrospect, but their methodological combination of experiential knowledge, life narrative and a sympathy to the 'marginal and the underdog' clearly echo the values of many of the first wave of oral historians such as Studs Terkel in the States, George Ewart Evans and Paul Thompson in the UK and Mercedes Vilanova in Spain.

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[3] Brian Roberts, *Biographical Research* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002).

[4] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 10-12.

[5] Margaretta Jolly, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (London and Chicago: Routledge, 2001).

[6] Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, pp. xi-xii

Was life writing during this period also conceived of as a means to capture 'history' through memory? Yes and no. Its first 'modern' moment came earlier, from 1918-40, with a few early critical studies and, more splashily, with the 'new biography' of modernists like Lytton Strachey, Andre Maurois, Virginia Woolf, and the autobiographical experiments of such mould-breakers as Joyce, Henry Adams, Stein, Liang Qichao and Gandhi. Many of these wrote theoretical or polemical essays about what they were doing, seeing it as part rebellion against nineteenth-century hagiography and part philosophical and psychological investigation, much influenced by psychoanalysis. Such experiments were evidently as much concerned with stylistic innovation as with finding a new source and constituency of historical information. The nature of memory fascinated them, but as part of the mysteries of consciousness propelled on the wings of psychoanalysis. If we add in their deep investment in the interiority of writing, in contrast to the orality that Thomson stresses in relating the first paradigm to the invention of the portable cassette recorder, we might say that at this stage paradigms were not so much shared as working in parallel. Rather than 'memory as source', 'psychobiography' would be a better phrase for a pop paradigm.

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[7] Kenneth Plummer, *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to a Critical Humanism*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2001), p. 103.

[8] Plummer, *Documents of Life 2*, p. 114.

Oral history's second 'paradigm', the development from the late 1970s, of 'post-positivist' approaches to memory and subjectivity according to Thomson, suggests stronger similarities. On the face of it, this is because historians and social scientists began to embrace literary critical perspectives, under the spell of French philosophy and the social movements of the 1960s. Sociologists interested in biography such as C. Wright Mills, much like early oral historians, had been on the defensive with the rise of quantitative methodologies. By contrast, life writing critics during this period were occupied with measuring 'Truth' against aesthetic 'Design', so were more able to take the imaginative functions of the life story on its own terms.[9] Indeed, as structuralism and poststructuralism replaced New Criticism, interest in the 'bios' became a shameful admission next to the enchantment of 'graphe', the text. Thus critics of autobiography like James Olney, Elizabeth Bruss and Paul John Eakin led the way in theorising the epistemological and ontological puzzles of life story, signalled decisively by the French structuralist Philippe Lejeune's concept of 'the autobiographical pact' of 1970.[10] Since then, oral history has been transformed by the literary-trained Alessandro Portelli, and the similarly relativist Luisa Passerini and Michael Frisch. Similarly, in sociology, symbolic interactionism of the 1960s was soon interwoven with a fascination with narrative and its structures by leading life historians in this period such as Ken Plummer, Daniel Bertaux and Norman Denzin. In anthropology, the so-called 'thick description' of Clifford Geertz and James Clifford also privileged the poetic, played out in the methodologies of oral and life historians such as Ruth Finnegan and Elizabeth Tonkin.

What about Thomson's third paradigm; a transformation in perceptions about the role of the oral historian as interviewer and analyst from the late 1980s on? In that period in sociology and anthropology we see the flowering of the much touted 'narrative turn' in which similar preoccupations with the location and identity of both 'biographer' and 'biographee' predominate. Here too, feminist political philosophy was a decisive influence, with cross-disciplinary thinkers like Liz Stanley coining the notion of the 'auto/biographical I' to represent the inevitable entanglement of viewer and viewed, even as subjectivity was analysed ever more fluidly as a political, linguistic construction. While oral and life historians brought the politics of the interview into focus, life writing critics looked for the relationships that a text represented and also produced. Again, this was rooted in social movements of the time, for example in debates over whether minority or women writers wrote more 'relationally', on the special interests of relational genres like the epistolary or the collaborative story, and on newly relational notions of selfhood. Smith and Watson were particularly important in popularising and synthesising such perspectives in a range of texts that brought life writing decisively out of the literary, for example in analyses of twelve-step recovery narratives and deaf autobiography.[11]

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[9] Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie', 1st pub. 1956, in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, 1st pub. 1960 (New York and London: Garland, 1985).

[10] Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

By the early 1990s, then, there were real convergences across disciplines. I find that Ken Plummer's description of oral history as 'a global, fragmented social movement hell bent on tracking, retrieving, recording and archiving the multiple worlds of our recent past' a powerful way of seeing all these fields.[12] We shared a sense of political engagement, mass education, community activism, and identity politics. This was also a period in which postcolonial perspectives began to be more influential, both testing some of the romanticism of Western life-story theorists and challenging narrow empiricisms.[13] And life-story studies across the board gained strength from their initial weaknesses. What was unreliable became perspectival. What was experiential became phenomenological. Hence the rise of autobiography over biography, in which the problem of self became its own solution, and the invention of the reflexive researcher, where the interview as a 'memory event' reflects the theory that history itself is performative, collaborative, remembered. There has also, at times, been a disciplinary bargain here: the literary critic saves the unreliable historian or sociologist; the historian or sociologist saves the aesthetically weak life writer.

A critical example of this bargain was the response to the famous book *I, Rigobertu Menchú*.[14] First published in 1982 as *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* [My name is Rigoberta Menchú and this is how my conscience was born], this presented a translated transcription of interviews by a French-Venezuelan anthropologist with Menchú, about the persecution of indigenous people in Guatemala. Plummer describes it as a classic 'long life history', and since it was recorded by an anthropologist, it probably was more strictly that than an oral history.[15] But it quickly became taken up by human-rights activists around the world as an important historical account of abuses by a regime propped up by Reaganites. (Menchú got the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.) So when another anthropologist, the American David Stoll, challenged its factual accuracy in the late 1990s, it became notorious as an early case of the autobiographical ‘hoax’. Stoll compared Menchú’s interview with government documents, reports, and land claims. He also interviewed former neighbours, locals, friends, enemies, and others. On this ‘evidence’, he argued that Menchú’s father, while poor, was relatively prosperous by local standards and had indeed won a land grant from the Guatemalan government. He also said that the father’s success had led to a land claim dispute with his wife's relatives, disrupting Menchú’s image as a leader of a united oppressed people, and that she had exaggerated personal suffering, notoriously claiming that her family had been forced to watch her brother being burned to death when in fact he had been shot when they weren’t there. Menchú’s defenders responded by using literary criticism to redefine testimonio as operating like literary autobiography, at the level of symbolic, collective truth.[16] (Generally, her people had been deprived of land; many of her relatives were killed.) And life historians pointed to what is lost in translation not just from Mayan to Spanish to English but from oral narrative to a politically charged, uncomprehending print culture. The anthropologist was also severely criticised for keeping royalties for herself.

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[11] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[12] Plummer, *Documents of Life* 2, p. 29.

[13] Francoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989); José Sebe Bom Meihy, 'The radicalization of oral history', *Words and Silences* 2.1 (2003), pp. 31-41.

[14] Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (London: Verso, 1984).

[15] Plummer, *Documents of Life 2,* pp. 23-24.

Translations… and the fourth paradigm

The hybrid field of political ‘testimony’ from the late 1980s, then, became the fulcrum at which various life-story-based fields converged. Even more influential than Latin American testimonio was the discourse surrounding Holocaust testimony, at least from the perspective of North America, European and Israeli scholars. This was ignited by the generational politics of the Second World War, in which living memory was at stake, though Thomson draws out the wider context as one of rapid socio-economic change. Lawrence Langer’s influential *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, published in 1991, drew on perhaps the most well known of all oral-history archives, the Fortunoff Video interviews with Holocaust survivors, and established the vagaries of traumatic memory at the centre of testimonial debates.[17] Closely linked were arguments about the limits of textual representation.[18] Indeed ‘trauma’ and ‘memory’ became fields of ‘studies’ in their own right.[19] A special issue of the *Oral History* journal in 1998 on 'Talking and Writing', for example, features articles on the Stasi files, the 'gendered silences' of a South African Jewish woman's anti-apartheid narrative, traumatic Latvian memories, documents of ex-slave narratives of the 1930s, autobiography and learning disability, and writing work with people with dementia. If we sample what *Biography* and *Auto/Biography Studies* (the two main US journals in the field of life writing) were offering that same spring, we get a further sense of convergence. The former displayed a range of articles on the inadequacy of traditional 'heroic' biography in the face of today's 'new personalism'. *Auto/Biography Studies*, meanwhile, did a special issue on 'autobiography and neuroscience'. In the UK, *Auto/Biography*, the journal of the British Sociological Association Auto/Biography Studies group, also suggested an underlying frame of trauma, testimony and memory work, in articles ranging from 'Remembering Latvian childhood and the escape from history' to 'Symbolic disorder: The terms of anorexia nervosa and the weight of representation'.[20]

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[16] Arturo Arias and David Stoll, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[17] Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[18] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[19] Leigh Gilmore, 'What do we teach when we teach trauma?', in Miriam Fuchs, Craig Howes and Modern Language Association of America, eds., *Teaching Life Writing Texts* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008); Kerwin Lee Klein, 'On the emergence of memory in historical discourse', *Representations* 69 (2000), pp. 127-50.

Yet despite this obvious convergence of both politics and method, the synthesis of life history, oral history and life writing is incomplete. How far have the numerous critics who debate the ethics of life writing, particularly of non-literary subjects, considered the tight parallels in oral-historical discussions about interview contracts, for example? Conversely, how far have oral and life historians worked with life writing critics to analyse the stored-away letters, diaries, albums that surface during interviews? Why do oral historians persist in agonising about transcription and critics stress about the life beyond the text, looking towards – but often past each other in doing so? Matti Hyvärinen makes a similar point about the many faces of the 'narrative turn', pointing out that outside Paul Ricoeur, Donald Polkinghorne and Jerome Bruner, very few scholars other than literary scholars during the 1980s were familiar with narrative debates within literature studies.[21] The 2007 *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry* barely recognises the existence of a literary theory of narrative.[22] On a different level, how many people attend both the International Oral History Association and the International Auto/Biography Association conferences? Clearly there is the issue of capacity. As all these fields and higher education itself expands, we are locked into scarcity in growth, pressed into further specialisms. But there is also an analytic and institutional faultline that erases many of these overlaps. Why?

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[20] Vieda Skultans, 'Remembering Latvian childhood and the escape from history', *Auto/Biography* 6.1/2 (1998), pp. 5-14; Lucy de Fabrizio, 'Symbolic disorder: the terms of anorexia nervosa and the weight of representation', *Auto/Biography* 6.1/2 (1998), pp. 27-84.

[21] Matti Hyvärinen, 'Revisiting the narrative turns', *Life Writing* 7:1 (2010), pp. 69-82.

[22] D. Jean Clandinin, ed., *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (London: Sage, 2007).

One reason is the persistence of deep disciplinary allegiances to the tools and histories of each medium. Oral historians and life historians have made their trade arguing with class and colonial structures of literacy itself. This has not exempted them from the paradox of transcription, in that they have never managed to get away from a dependency upon print. Yet there is deep unease about the status of the text, reflected in the continual uncertainty as to whether oral history is actually the interview or the interpretation, a primary or secondary source. Raphael Samuel and Francis Good, amongst many others, champion the specificity of the interview as an oral advocacy that challenges the power and knowledge of the scribe.[23] In contrast, life writing critics have been keen to show that life writings are still *writing*, in which 'graphe' does not equate with 'bios' or even 'auto', and indeed that it is this literary constructedness that supports its ability to challenge the social order. Here, notwithstanding overlapping political and philosophical paradigms, a stake in the medium takes them in opposite directions.

This brings us to Thomson's fourth paradigm: a 'dizzying digital revolution in oral history' since the late 1990s, which he also allies to a new globalisation of the field. Though Thomson declares its outcomes are impossible to predict, he celebrates the new potential for vast forms of self-representation, beyond the fact that email and the internet are facilitating international dialogue:

> Very soon we will all be recording interviews on computers, and we can already use web-cams to conduct virtual interviews with people on the other side of the world. Audio-visual digital recordings will be readily accessible in their entirety via the internet, and sophisticated digital indexing and cataloguing tools – perhaps assisted in large projects by artificial intelligence – will enable anyone, anywhere to make extraordinary and unexpected creative connections within and across oral history collections, using sound and image as well as text. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software can already be used to support, extend and refine the interpretation of large sets of oral history interviews, and will, inevitably, become more sophisticated and powerful.[24]

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[23] Raphael Samuel, 'The perils of the transcript', *Oral History* 1.2 (1971), pp. 19-22; Francis Good, 'Voice, ear and text: words, meaning, and transcription', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 362-73.

[24] Alistair Thomson, 'Four paradigm transformations in oral history', *Oral History Review* 34.1 (2007), pp. 49-70: 68.

Thomson here draws on the work of oral historian Michael Frisch, who argues that this digitisation of sound and image will return aurality to oral history in a way that painful attempts to develop print simulacra of the voice never could.[25] Frisch has even gone so far as to set up a company to attempt to do this through providing a software service that navigates audio and video material without relying on keywords or other text-based indexes to find – for example – changes in facial expression or pace. While apparently a merely technical development, Frisch brilliantly situates digital life story-making as part of a 'post-documentary sensibility'.[26] By this he means that the distinction between the oral-history recording as source and the oral history as product – or 'documentary' – fades when the recording can be so easily accessible, but also so easily reconfigured. As important to this 'sensibility' then, is the parallel erosion of the institutional differences and hierarchies between interviewee and interviewer, archivist, researcher, and publisher. We can add to this the merging of historian and critic, writer and producer. His example of family video collections that could be instantly generated or recast in response to any particular family or community occasion is interestingly one that also crosses the oral and the visual, and the public and the private.

Yet digital technology has evidently also made writing a central, sometimes primary mode of relationship. In addition to its new geographical reach, computer-mediated communication has imported textuality to many new social contexts. For every work or public meeting we have an email, a wiki or a listserve, for every phone call we have a text, indeed, for every photo or video posted on Facebook or YouTube, we have a blog, tweet or caption. Thus while digital technology can arguably resolve one of the longest-standing theoretical problems for oral historians in making oral recordings easily publishable and interpretable, it does not let us escape enthrallment to the text. Rather, it returns us to it in a new guise, as we attempt to make sense of a new technology of the word. This new literacy crosses oral and literate, as many have observed, and in this sense challenges some of the classic attributes of print culture: logic, abstraction and interiority. At the same time we are clearly in no position to return to the folk mentalities of traditional oralities. I am not arguing that the digital revolution is either clean or total – literacies are highly relative in meaning and also coexist with each other. Yet most now accept that digital writing is bringing with it new forms of consciousness as well as new political economies and socialities.

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[25] Michael H. Frisch, 'Three dimensions or more: Oral history beyond the paradoxes of method', in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, eds., *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), pp. 221-40.

[26] Michael H. Frisch, 'Oral history and the digital revolution: Toward a post-documentary sensibility', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 102-14.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, for example, whose work I have already cited as important in developing the 'third paradigm' in this history, are currently exploring 'subject formations beyond the book: the visual-verbal-virtual contexts of life narrative'. Life writing in the digital age is defined, for them, by four features: performativity, positionality, relationality, and automediality.[27] While the first three terms have been the driving features of the autobiographical self in the last twenty or so years, 'automediality' is now demanding attention. Its modes produce a self that is networked into multiple intimate public spheres, neither released into a utopian virtual democracy, yet only partly constrained by the old forms of the nation state and print class. Smith and Watson see examples of the auto-mediated self in 'life casting', a practice of twenty-four hour autobiographical video 'streaming', and 'tumblelogs' in which people create personal websites made up of mixed media micro-blogs and assemblages of links, as well as in the more text-based old/new genres of online diaries, travelogues and usergroup confessions. Mark Poster, Kate O'Riordan, Julie Rak and others go further, seeing such digital life-story practices as identity theft, online DNA searches, and virtual gaming in Second Life as constitutive of new kinds of selfhood and physicality, whether in terms of a 'humachine', a biodigital life, a trans-human or enhanced self.[28] But even in more humble digital life writing forms like email – still the most popular form of online activity – we see old epistolary modes being reborn in ways that challenge old structures of authority and trust, authorship and identity, distribution and publication.

Such theorists echo Frisch's invitation to go beyond the conventional distinction between the 'raw and the cooked' of recording and interpretation/publication. At the same time they make plain that the multimediated life story requires a difficult engagement with the impact of extreme textuality, in the sense that the forms of grounding evolved even in the highly distanced and distributed world of print are dissolving. On one level digitisation is proving to be 'the revenge of the audiovisual';[29] on another, it is the construction of a multimediated social structure that some say has already passed its utopian moment. Mark Poster says that modernity called people to account for themselves in narratives that were central to everyday life. But today, narrative itself is under attack. 'The digitisation of narrative enables an extreme separation in space between narrator and listener, as well as an instantaneity of transmission of the narrative and response to it, and requires a globally networked machine mediation that envelopes the narrative.'[30] For Poster, these conditions, along with the interactivity of hypertext, ultimately 'evacuates all meaning from the term *narrative*'.[31]

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[27] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'Subject Formations Beyond the Book: The Visual–Verbal–Virtual Contexts of Life Narrative', paper presented at The Work of Life Writing conference, Kings College, London, 2009.

[28] Mark Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Julie Rak, 'The digital queer: Weblogs and internet identity', *Biography* 26.1 (2003), pp. 166-82; Kate O'Riordan, Tania Bubela and Matthew Nisbet, 'Science communication reconsidered: challenges, prospects, and recommendations', *Nature Biotechnology* 27 (2008), pp. 514-18.

[29] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 327.

We can see how this challenges both memory and trauma studies as the children of Thomson's third paradigm. Frisch concludes that 'new digital tools […] may become powerful resources in restoring one of the original appeals of oral history – to open new dimensions of understanding and engagement through the broadly inclusive sharing and interrogation of memory'. And certainly, interactive online community archives like My Brighton and Hove are framed precisely as acts of social regeneration and engagement that work intriguingly in combination with place-based politics. Indeed, the Brazil-based *Museu de Pessoa* (Museum of the Person) launched the online 'Listen! – International Day for Sharing Life Stories' in conjunction with the California-led Center for Digital Storytelling to 'celebrate and promote life stories, as a way to encourage critical thinking, cultural democratization and social transformation'.[32] But others see digital technology as 'outsourcing' not only collective memory in this sense but the traditional cognitive functions of narration that support identity.[33] Similarly for trauma. The internet has proved sympathetic to testimonial and human-rights life story-telling as a network of niche interest groups. It has also facilitated the global commodification of this discourse that explains the rise of autobiographical hoaxes.[34]

Digitisation demands a new level of conceptual integration between life and oral history and life writing that goes beyond the merely methodological. One place to start, however, is with those who have made it their primary business to understand and work with new media. Tara Brabazon, for example, recently argued that oral history may flower as well in Media Studies as in a History department today, both in new recording and new publishing technologies. This can be a two way exchange, as oral-historical perspectives temper the tendency of the media to invest in celebrity lives alone. In fact, teaching podcasting and the like to community groups can be used to represent those oppressed by 'the digital divide' itself. Oral history and media practice can be mutually beneficial in other ways too:

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[30] Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*, p. 129.

[31] Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*, p. 135.

[32] See the project website, <http://www.ausculti.org>.

[33] José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007); Chris Locke, 'Digital memory and the problem of forgetting', in Susannah Radstone, ed., *Memory and Methodology*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), pp. 25-36.

[34] Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

> In a Web 2.0 age, oral history provides an engaging opportunity to explore the ethical considerations of using software – spanning from Audition III to Audacity with MixCraft in the mid-price and complexity range – to construct and control oral history files. These programmes allow precise editing, looping and sampling from interviews. Such technical flexibility raises ethical challenges for 'reclaiming' an 'authentic voice'. Similar to the impact of Photoshop on photojournalism, the capacity to remove one word and drop in another raises research questions about the ability to change the views and meanings of others. Oral history therefore not only provides a way for students to learn the skills and strategies for conducting interviews, but also to explore the impact of copyright on recorded speech.[35]

Similarly, it may be those more technically versed in both the media and IT that can fully reframe traditional life writing debates over truth and fiction, 'auto' and 'graphe', and to evaluate the politics of the new media as old print classes lose their grip. Two recent conferences in the Department of Media and Film at the University Sussex, for example, explored how memories are 'mediated' by digital exhibitions, documentaries, Web 2.0 and online archives, and how, simultaneously, our biological and digital life stories are woven together.[36] Another example is a course in ethnographic life-history writing taught simultaneously to students in Eritrea and Washington through Internet exchanges. Students read online texts in life-history methods and then digitally interviewed each other as well as discussing differences between oral and written life stories in the context of the US and Eritrean cultures, before writing and 'posting' their interpreted life stories.[37] Here are familiar debates about the ethics of aesthetics, testimony and trauma, about the knowability of the past and its present uses, but seeded into the emerging constituencies of website users, surfers, designers, funders and artists, possible even in digitally poor contexts.

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[35] Tara Brabazon, 'Freed speech', *Times Higher Education* (2008), at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=403533&sectioncode=26>,
accessed 15 February 2010.

[36] 'Mediated Memories', Journal of Media Practice 10th Anniversary Symposium, 13 July 2009, and 'Biodigital Lives: Making, Consuming and Archiving the Lives of Technoscience', 14 July 2009, organised by the Centres for Material Digital Culture, Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics and Life History and Life Writing Research, through the Department of Media and Film, University of Sussex.

[37] Sandra Chait and Ghirmal Negash, 'Teaching multicultural life-history writing texts through technology's third space: Reflections on a University of Washington-University of Asmara collaboration', in Miriam Fuchs, Craig Howes and Modern Language Association of America, eds., *Teaching Life Writing Texts* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008), pp. 239-51.

Yet if we can learn from Media Studies and Infomatics in such respects, we know too that starting from the medium begs, rather than answers, philosophical questions about consciousness, value and, ultimately, the human narrative that is at the centre of our fields. I would like to conclude, therefore, by returning to Alistair Thomson's argument by way of the prominent 'second wave' oral historian Ron Grele's critique of it. Grele objects that 'digitisation' is not a comparable category to Thomson's previous more politically-oriented paradigms. For Grele, this is partly the consequence of a paradigmatic approach itself, which over-emphasises the role of technology in isolation from its mode of production. This echoes the fears he expressed in his early influential essay, 'Movement without aim', of 1975, where he argued that oral-history interviews would only really be useful if understood as a means to capture historical consciousness.[38] At that time he was concerned to assert that neither the oral nor the interview itself defined oral history, but rather, the movement's 'concentration upon the interplay of ideology and the various conceptions of history'. 'Such a methodology is what distinguishes [the oral historian] from other field workers who use interviews, such as psychologists, anthropologists, and folklorists'. The then missing 'aim' of oral history was to 'bring to conscious articulation the ideological problematic of the interviewee, to reveal the cultural context in which information is being conveyed, and to thus transform an individual story into a cultural narrative, and thereby, to more fully understand what happened in the past'.[39] It seems that he believes that the same aim should characterise contemporary oral history, even as it mushrooms all over the world wide web. But does it? Without this kind of direction, Thomson is wrong to suggest that digitisation, even positioned alongside the internationalisation of the oral history movement, represents a paradigm shift:

> The digital world opens up new possibilities but the real questions remain questions of people in history. One reason for periodisation is to make clear distinctions in changes over time, another has to be to make clear the continuation of old debates. We may think we have settled the tension between technology and historiography only to see it emerge in new clothes, now in a post-colonialist world.[40]

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[38] Studs Terkel and Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory, and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony* (Chicago: Precedent Pub., 1975).

[39] Terkel and Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, p. 48.

[40] Ronald J. Grele, 'Commentary', *Oral History Review* 34.2 (2007), pp. 121-24.

Grele may have been overstating the case, as Thomson's reply to this piece suggests.[41] And the truth is that life and oral historians, like critics, generally remain allied to the print culture they supposedly wish to transcend. However his argument offers another chance to evaluate the contingencies of oral history, life history and life writing, that is, the bigger philosophical paradigms they share. In other words, what is the status of historical consciousness in digital culture? And does it remain a distinguishing mark from other life-history-based enquiry?

Ironically, it is precisely a concern with the status of historical consciousness which now unites those across life-story work, in my view, partly because of the more socially challenging aspects of digital culture. Put differently, across the board we are beginning to return to the issue of the 'life' in oral and life history and life writing, as well as being concerned with the 'auto' and the 'graphe'. It is this ontological question about the status of 'bios' that I would propose as a different way of terming our current paradigmatic horizon, after the epistemological preoccupations of the 1970s and 1980s. As I have suggested, however, we are divided amongst ourselves as to how we interpret it. I have cited some theorists who are embracing digitisation as a means to what they see as expanded rather than diminished 'subjectivity' and relationship, such as Frisch, Smith, Watson, Poster, Rak, even as they continually raise this in the context of debates about agency. Like them, I think it is obvious that we need to embrace a multimedia approach to the life story, in which the old tension between print and orality must be overcome with an approach that can understand multi and trans-media approaches, as well as the trans-national politics that go with them. But for them, this also requires a 'posthumanism' that abandons old ideas of the self contained or self-centred individual human, even one whose agency could only be collectively exercised. The 'bios' for them is increasingly digital, and its collectivities and markers of political consciousness will be virtual.

Alistair Thomson seems to hold back from this view. In an earlier version of his article, Thomson described the history of oral history as less paradigmatically organised, and, though he closed similarly with the multimedia future of the field, he headed it 'technological futures, human dilemmas', adding that 'even if oral history's future is made in digital cyberspace, its heart will continue to be the very human dimension of remembering in relationship with other people'.[42] Ken Plummer, in the best account to date of life narrative across all disciplines, more explicitly concludes that if you put oral history, life history and life writing together, you are inescapably led to humanism. But fascinatingly, in revising his majestic *Documents of Life* from its first appearance as 'an introduction to the problems and literature of a humanistic method' in the early 1980s, he now argues that humanism is compatible with the posthuman in a way inconceivable twenty years earlier and, arguably, pre-digitisation. His 'human being' combines commonly antithetical attributes, as an embedded, dialogic, contingent, embodied, universal self with a moral (and political) character.[43] His proposed method also unites the situated knowledge and pluralism of the postmodern with an emphatic centring of the individual human in his enquiry, for example in arguing that 'it must pay tribute to *human subjectivity and creativity* – showing how individuals respond to social constraints and actively assemble social worlds'. He concludes that 'the telling of a life can be both a humanistic and postmodern project'.[44]

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[41] Alistair Thomson, 'Response', *Oral History Review* 34.2 (2007), pp. 125-28.

[42] Alistair Thomson, 'Fifty years on: An international perspective on oral history', *The Journal of American History* 85.2 (1998), pp. 581-95: 595.

Coda

It is evident that thinking through our philosophical positions about human agency, as well as the new stories and economics of Information Technology, will be the issues for any true integration of our close, but still divided, passions in the field of life story. I have suggested that a pragmatic start will be to look to the models of self, graphe, orality, memory, interview – and above all bios – that are circulating in disciplines and professions involved in new media. But in the end, we will need to grapple directly with the nature of digital citizenship and struggle as it is played out in and with the class, colonial and gender politics of enduring oral/print societies. To this end, I will offer a small coda by returning to the example of Rigoberta Menchú, the Guatemalan activist who was castigated for her political use of an oral-history interview, and who was also lauded for the literary epic it became as a Western textbook.[45] Menchú initially responded to accusations of fabrication by blaming her anthropologist interviewer and editor, Elisabeth Burgos; later she explained her distortions as to do with her fear of reprisals and the need to collectivise her story. After all the political mess over this book, it seems cruel that the translation from interview to print got her into trouble again with her later more autobiographical book, *Crossing Borders*, published in 1998.[46] This was because it was published as if it were simply the collaboration of Menchú and her English translator Ann Wright, when in fact the text had been compiled by a Guatemalan writer and friend, and an Italian journalist. Yet at the end of this book, we find Menchú describing herself as going everywhere with her ‘little computer under her arm’.[47] She also talks about how she would love indigenous Guatemalans to have more access to television and the internet to convey their culture, stories, politics. If you google her name now you find a series of YouTube recordings of Menchú giving speeches for human rights foundations and bidding to be president in 2007. (She lost.) You will also find the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation website which channels impressive amounts of North American charity to indigenous peoples.[48] More interesting still is the online announcement that: ‘The foundations Iwith.org and Rigoberta Menchú have signed an agreement for the project “Digital democratisation of Guatemala” '.[49] Their mission is:

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[43] Plummer, *Documents of Life* 2, p. 262.

[44] Plummer, *Documents of Life* 2, p. 264.

[45] Arturo Arias and David Stoll, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[46] Rigoberta Menchú and Ann Wright, *Crossing Borders* (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

> Organization of the educational system to include Information Technologies (IT) and minority maya tongues, using the experience gained during the last decades in Catalonia, having the **Maya University** in mind;
> Training in using Information Technologies;
> Adaptation and translation of OpenOffice and other OpenSource software to maya tongues.

Like many Non Governmental Organisations' IT initiatives, the website is less than slick and currently its blogger appears to be one Dutch woman, perhaps the only person formally employed on this project. But this should be a long-term investment, and one that will likely support not just testimonies but epistolary lobbying, bloggs, social networking, photographs, sound clips, gaming, music, and history-writing. It will also be one part of the ongoing challenge to reinvent the ‘life’ of the life story across and beyond the divides of Western history, literature and social science; across and beyond the crisis testimony of Guatemala.

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[47] Menchú and Wright, *Crossing Borders*, p. 219.

[48] <http://www.frmt.org/en/>.

[49] <http://www.iwith.org/news/2005/07/14/02>, accessed 15 February 2010. Iwith.org is a non-profit organisation established 'to help NGOs with the use of New Technologies'.

Notes on Contributors

Dr Andrew Flinn is a social historian and archival educator, a senior lecturer and the Director of the Archives and Records Management MA programme in the Department of Information Studies at University College London. He was the lead researcher on the AHRC-funded 'Community archives and identities' project which examined independent community archive and heritage initiatives documenting the history of people of African and Asian heritage in the UK. Recent publications include 'The impact of independent and community archives on professional archival thinking and practice', in Jennie Hill (ed.), *The Future of Archives and Recordkeeping: A Reader* (Facet, 2010), and (with Mary Stevens) ' "It is noh mistri, wi mekin histri." Telling our own story: Independent and community archives in the United Kingdom, challenging and subverting the mainstream', in Jeannette Bastian and Ben Alexander, eds., *Community Archives. The Shaping of Memory* (Facet, 2009).

Dr Carrie Hamilton is Reader in History at the University of Roehampton, London. Her research interests include cultural memory, oral history, gender history, the history of sexuality, feminism, political activism and revolution, all in relation to Spain and Latin America. She is the author of *Women and ETA: The Gender Politics of Radical Basque Nationalism* (Manchester University Press, 2007) and has edited a special issue of *Oral History* on 'Oral History and the Emotions' (38:2, 2010). Her book *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics and Memory* will be published by the University of North Carolina Press in spring 2012.

Dr Margaretta Jolly directs the Centre for Life History and Life Writing History Research at the University of Sussex and is Reader in Education. She is editor of *Dear Laughing Motorbyke: Letters from Women Welders of the Second World War* (Scarlet, 1997) and *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (Routledge, 2001) and author of *In Love and Struggle: Letters and Contemporary Feminism* (Columbia University Press, 2008), which won the Feminist and Women's Studies Association UK Book Prize, 2009.

Dr Hilda Kean is the former Director of Public History and Dean of Ruskin College, Oxford and established the first MA in Public History in Britain which she ran from 1996 - 2011. She has published widely on public and cultural history. Her books include *Animal Rights: Social and Political Change in Britain since 1800* (Reaktion Books, 2000); *London Stories. Personal Lives, Public Histories* (Rivers Oram Press, 2004); *Seeing History. Public History in Britain Now*, with Paul Martin and Sally J. Morgan, eds. (Francis Boutle, 2000); and *People and their Pasts. Public History Today,*

with Paul Ashton, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). With Paul Martin, she is currently editing an international *Reader in Public History* for Routledge and completing a book on the changing human – animal relationship during the Second World War.

Professor Dorothy Sheridan has worked with the papers of the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex since 1974. Her research interests include the ethics and politics of archiving, literacy and writing practices, and contemporary history. Until 2010, she directed the UK-wide writing project which augments the early MO papers with present-day autobiographical and documentary material (see *Writing Ourselves,* Hampton Press, 2000) and she continues her involvement with the MO Archive as a Trustee. She is also a Trustee of the National Life Story collection at the British Library and a director of the Brighton community publisher, QueenSpark Books.

University of Brighton

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Introduction

Graham Dawson

Memory, Narrative and Histories: Critical Debates and New Trajectories is the first in a new series of occasional Working Papers to be published by the Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories at the University of Brighton. Drawing on the University's long-standing research strengths in humanities, arts and social sciences, and emphasising the plural 'histories', the Centre engages with multi- and interdisciplinary research on the complex relationships between present and past; dealing, for example, with subordinate and marginalised histories, archive practices, and the complexities of popular memory. Research collaboration draws on scholarship in a range of disciplines including history, cultural studies, literary studies, sociology, cultural and human geography, visual studies, performance studies, critical theory, psycho-social studies, and narrative theory.

The Centre promotes dialogue about the methodological, epistemological and theoretical issues at work in the study of memory, narrative and the making of histories, resulting in an institutional locus which embraces creative and critical practice, and encompasses academic, professional and community development. It explores the relations, and facilitates links, between academic scholarship and the work of other practitioners and stakeholders involved in making histories, in representing the past, and in producing forms of remembrance and commemoration. Reflecting these emphases, the Centre's key areas of interest are identified as: Archives and Histories; Life Writing/Creative Writing; Community History; Cultural Memory; Oral History and Life History; and Public History.

The papers collected in this publication were originally delivered at the Centre's Launch Symposium on Memory, Narrative and Histories which took place on the Falmer site of the University of Brighton on 6th December 2008, attended by over sixty people. The aim of the symposium was to act as a catalyst, stimulating discussion amongst researchers and postgraduate students across the University, and with colleagues from the University of Sussex and wider afield, about developments in and across these linked fields of activity. By encouraging critical reflection on evolving traditions, new directions and future possibilities, the symposium was envisaged as a way of setting an agenda for the Centre's work.

Seven speakers, all experienced researchers and practitioners in one or more of the Centre's key areas of interest, were invited to provide a personal overview of recent trends, current debates, and new trajectories within their field. In the first session, Public History and Community History, Hilda Kean of Ruskin College, Oxford, spoke about 'People and their Pasts. Aspects of Public History Today'; and Glenn Jordan, of the University of Glamorgan and Butetown History and Arts Centre in Cardiff, delivered an illustrated talk on 'History, Memory, Cultural Politics: A People's History Project in Cardiff Docklands'. The second session, Archives and Histories, involved Andrew Flinn of University College London speaking on the theme of 'Archives and their Communities'; and a paper by Dorothy Sheridan of the University of Sussex, 'Archive Fever and Archive Struggles: Tensions in the Creation, Care and Use of Archives with Stories from the Mass Observation Archive'. In the third session, Life History, Life Writing, Creative Writing, Margaretta Jolly from the University of Sussex spoke on the theme of 'Life History and/vs. Life Writing'; and Michelene Wandor, writer and Royal Literary Fund Fellow, drew on examples from her own writing to explore 'The Voices of Creative Writing, Past and Present'. In the final session, Carrie Hamilton of Roehampton University gave a paper on 'Cultural Memory and the Emotions: Exploring the Connections'. The symposium concluded with a plenary drawing out key themes of the day led by a respondent, the Centre's director, Graham Dawson.

Five of these papers have been developed for publication and are collected here. In her paper, Hilda Kean considers how to move debate on Public History-making away from an emphasis on ‘professional’ historians reaching out in accessible ways to ‘the public’. Such formulations assume that history is a given rather than a process and maintain the division between the so-called ‘professional’ and the ‘amateur’. Kean suggests that thinking about the ways in which people engage with their pasts – and develop such engagement in various forms – may provide us with a different and more dynamic starting point for historical practice which breaks down rather than reinforces current divides.

Andrew Flinn examines the impact of some recent developments with regard to the production of history and the role of the archivist. In particular, drawing upon an AHRC-funded research project, ‘Community archives and identities: documenting and sustaining community heritage’, he considers the growth of independent community archives and heritage initiatives. While firmly rooted in older traditions of history from below, History Workshop and identity politics, such initiatives have also emerged in new forms; partly as a response to technological change but also due to greater awareness of, and challenge to, the partiality of orthodox national historical narratives. His paper identifies a related challenge to professional authority, also enabled by technological change;

namely, the growth of user-generated content whether it be of archival material uploaded to community sites, or descriptions and tags added by users to heritage-institution catalogues. Flinn argues that, although the archive profession once ignored these initiatives and many remain concerned about the challenge of the crowd to the expert, and of replacing ‘I think’ with ‘we think’, others are now exploring ways in which a transformed profession might seek to support and embrace these developments as a way of diversifying and democratising archives and the histories that are, in part, written from them.

Mass Observation set out to document the everyday in all its minute detail and to ensure that so-called 'ordinary people' had the opportunity to record their own history. Considering both the original initiative that created the Mass Observation Archive in the 1930s and the contemporary Mass Observation project, Dorothy Sheridan identifies a complex triangular relationship between the archive creators (who include the author-contributors), the archive collectors and curators, and the archive users (within and beyond the academy). Her paper explores some of the resulting tensions and reflects on the ensuing struggles for representation and possession.

How do the fields of oral history, life history and life writing relate? Using Alistair Thomson’s notion that oral history has undergone four ‘paradigm transformations’, Margaretta Jolly traces shifts in the shared histories and passions that link these areas of enquiry. Her paper also investigates persisting disciplinary faultlines between literary-based and historically-based traditions of research, and considers what they can tell us about the difficulties in integrating oral and written life-story work, with reference to Guatamalan activist Rigoberta Menchu’s story. How do interdisciplinary ideals hold up against the realities of institutional and professional pressures? Digital life-story telling, a form of audiovisual literacy and Thomson’s fourth paradigm transformation, logically brings oral and written methodologies together. But, Jolly argues, we have yet to provide an adequate synthesis of life history and life writing.

Turning finally to research on memory, Carrie Hamilton's paper examines the importance of emotion in analysing forms of 'collective memory' and individual life stories. Arguing that the relationship between memory and emotion is not often spelt out or theorised, Hamilton explores the links between them in the context of the recent ‘turn to affect’ in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Her paper draws on memory studies, cultural theories of emotion, the history of emotions and oral history, as well as her own research on memory and emotion in relation to political subjectivities in the Basque country and Cuba.

A number of common themes run across and between these papers. Firstly, they share a preoccupation with the social relations of knowledge production, and an interest in transforming modes of professional and institutional authority – whether that of the academic historian, the archivist or the museum curator – through practices that draw professionals into collaboration and negotiation with historical practitioners situated in wider cultural locations (variously characterised as 'the public', 'the community', 'the people').

A second theme is the continuity between transformative practices of this kind in the early twenty-first century and previous projects – whether the History Workshop movement centred on Ruskin College after 1967, Mass Observation in the 1930s, or popular history initiatives of the early twentieth century – which are constituted as reference points, inspirations or traditions, creatively adapted to meet changed circumstances and emerging needs. In this respect, the particular influence of Raphael Samuel – teacher, writer, pioneer of the Ruskin-based History Workshop, founding editor of *History Workshop Journal* – is evident throughout these papers. This is a sign of the continuing vitality and motivational power of Samuel's vision of a democratic, participatory and liberatory culture of history-making. It is also an indicator of unfinished business within the cultural politics of 'the past', involving an ongoing process of challenge to the appropriation of history, whether by the state, by the academy, or by professional interests. Such challenges manifest in diverse ways: they may assert the centrality of history-making to the experience of class and other social oppressions; they may celebrate the depth and vitality of 'amateur' history-making (nowhere more evident than in the extraordinary growth of genealogy, rooted in popular fascination with the family as narrative); or – as Raymond Williams urged – they may work to build counter-hegemonic 'alternative traditions' that draw new lines of connection between the present and the past, reconstructing received histories the better to contest the present and the future.

It follows that, thirdly, these papers embody a common commitment to enhancing intellectual exchange and dialogue across the faultlines of affiliation, discipline and practice that may divide us into discrete enclaves – as public *or* community historians, as interested in archives *or* memories, as practitioners working under the banner of life writing *or* oral history, as historians *or* literary critics *or* cultural analysts. In engaging debates, perspectives and approaches that often have rather different and disconnected starting points, the papers help us to see and think about the links between these various endeavours, and thus the possibilities of transformative practice.

The five authors have taken various approaches to translating their spoken paper into publishable writing; some retaining the more informal and discursive style of the original, others developing their talk into a more formally elaborated written paper. Both styles are embraced in the ethos of this new series, Working Papers on Memory, Narrative and Histories. Inspired by the mode of publication – the so-called Working Papers in Cultural Studies – adopted in the 1970s by the now defunct (and greatly missed) Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the

University of Birmingham, this series will provide an in-house vehicle for publishing papers from our Centre's symposia, conferences and other public events; 'work-in-progress' and occasional papers; and other fruits of the Centre's research activity and collaborative work with academic, professional and community partners. Each number in the Working Papers series, edited and presented to the highest scholarly standards, will be published as a bound paper booklet (available from the Centre for Research in Memory, Narrative and Histories, c/o CRD, Faculty of Arts, University of Brighton, 58-67 Grand Parade, Brighton, BN2 0JY, UK), and simultaneously in pdf format on the Centre's website <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/mnh>, with a view to facilitating ongoing debate. All contributions to this first number have been read, and revised in the light of editorial comments, by myself and another member of the Centre's Steering Group. I am grateful to Mark Bhatti, Paddy Maguire, Lucy Noakes and Deborah Phillips for their assistance and input.

Cultural memory and the emotions: Exploring the connections[1]

Carrie Hamilton

The study of cultural memory has much in common with the cultural study of emotion. Both are areas in which cultural theorists, historians and others in the humanities reconceptualise phenomena traditionally associated with the social sciences and sciences, in particular psychology and neuroscience. Memory and emotion are also fundamentally concerned with the relationship between the personal and the political, the private and the public, the individual and collective. For historians such as myself, the study of memory and emotion additionally poses challenging questions about evidence, reliability and authenticity. How can we know that the memories recorded in a life story are accurate reflections of past events, or that the emotions they express represent how people *really* felt in the past? I argue that most contemporary cultural research on memory rests upon a set of assumptions about emotions, in particular that those things that people remember best are experiences associated with strong emotions. However, the inter-relationship between cultural memory and the emotions is often not explicitly theorised. In this paper I want to outline a few of the areas where a further theorisation of the memory/emotion relationship could be beneficial and offer some possible routes for exploration.

Before I continue, I should say that there are areas I am *not* going to cover in any detail. These are precisely where the overlap between emotions and memory is most obvious, namely trauma and nostalgia. Both these concepts are defined simultaneously as forms of memory and as emotions: trauma as a form of severe emotional shock or pain whose traces remain with the subject; nostalgia as the bittersweet feelings associated with the recall of a certain moment or epoch in the past. Trauma in particular has been the focus of extensive research and debate and indeed has been fundamentally important to the development of memory studies generally. Rather than revisit these debates, I want to expand the focus here beyond trauma and nostalgia to examine other ways that memory studies engage with the emotions.

If trauma, and in particular an interest in the problems of representation presented by the memories of survivors of conflict and genocide, most notably the Holocaust, constitute one impulse behind the contemporary 'memory boom' in the social sciences and humanities, a second is an interest in individual remembering and so-called 'collective memory'. It is worth returning for a moment here to the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, often cited as the founder of the concept of 'collective memory'. In his posthumously edited volume *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs argues that social groups (the primary examples he uses are the family and religious communities) have 'the capacity to remember'.[2] While collective memory is often used today with reference to the landmark historical moments or events that constitute the shared history of a certain collective (most often a national or ethnic group), we should recall that Halbwachs recognised the concept as a metaphor.[3] Individual memory, he argued, is always formed within group contexts and is therefore inseparable from the wider memories of other individuals in the group. These memories, especially when they involve repeated patterns, such as family dinnertime gatherings, collapse into one another through time and are constantly 'compose(d) anew'.[4] At the same time, certain memories will leave their mark on the group as a whole.[5] With the example of the family, Halbwachs presents a case of collective memory formed through direct and regular contact among group members. In his work on religious collective memory, he moves beyond the small group whose members know each other personally, to a larger community whose connections are made through a shared set of beliefs and traditions, passed from one generation to the next in the form of texts and practices.[6]

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[1] This paper was delivered as a talk and is therefore more informal in places than if it had originally been written for publication.

With the rise of 'memory studies' in the social sciences and humanities since the late twentieth century, scholars have both critiqued and adapted Halbwachs's theories of 'collective memory'. Some have warned that the metaphor is sometimes taken too literally to imply that groups remember in the same ways as individuals. Others have said that Halbwachs's research privileges the group at the expense of the individual.[7] But what has gone rather unlooked in commentaries on Halbwachs – at least among those using his concept of 'collective memory' – is the fundamental importance for Halbwachs of *emotion* in constructing and cementing collectives. In his essay on the collective memory of the family, Halbwachs argues that upon entering a family an individual's position within that family is determined not by his or her individual feelings but by the pre-existing rules and customs of the family. It is these that hold the family together. Indeed, Halbwachs's theory of family feelings is markedly functionalist, as is, one could argue, his idea of collective memory generally. The point I wish to make here, however, is that for Halbwachs emotions and memory were intimately connected in the family, serving to hold it together in space and across time and generations. As the French sociologist Laurent Fleury has written:

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[2] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 54.

[3] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

[4] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 61

[5] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* p. 68.

[6] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, pp. 84-119.

[7] James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. ix.

> Maurice Halbwachs's originality was to pose the tight link between the sociology of emotions and the sociology of ritual, because the sociology of ritual […] turns out to be inseparable from ritual practices and their socializing function, rediscovering in this way the idea of *forms* and *frames*, which is central for posing the terms of the learning of memory.[8]

This indissoluble connection in Halbwachs between emotions and the role of memory and ritual commemorative practices suggests one reason for the implied, but often unexplained, importance of emotion in studies of collective memory. A further investigation of this link might also help to explain the widespread belief that the 'recuperation' of collective memories of war, conflict and other injustices is a necessary part of emotional healing, that is, collective remembering is a way of countering collective pain.

Another context in which memory and emotion overlaps is found in 'memory work' devised by the German feminist scholar Friga Haug. The uses of this methodological approach to women's experiences and emotions through their memories remain largely unexplored in memory studies in Europe and the Americas, although Haug's work has proven more popular among feminist social scientists in Australia and New Zealand. Whereas in most memory studies, memory is an object of study, in 'memory work' memory becomes a methodology. Memory work involves small groups of women recording and then analysing in written form a range of experiences associated with particular emotions, from anxiety and fear to happiness, and has been used by Haug in particular to explore female sexuality. Although the methodology limits 'memory work' to work with small groups, its theoretical framework, in which memory is a dynamic rather than static phenomenon, always linked to a range of experiences and emotions and subject to change, is of use beyond this immediate context. Particularly attractive from the perspective of a feminist approach is its emphasis on memory as a form of agency and empowerment. As Haug writes:

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[8] Laurent Fleury, 'Maurice Halbwachs: précurseur d'une sociologie des émotions', in Bruno Péquignot et al., *Maurice Halbwachs: le temps, la mémoire et l'émotion* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), p. 64.

> Our task is to use memory work […] to enable a different past to emerge in order to make possible a different present and with it a different course of action in the future. Hence memory work is both a sociological method that is designed to produce knowledge about women's socialisation, and at the same time a method that will enable individual women who have been drawn into the research process to live in a more conscious manner and to make them more capable of acting for themselves.[9]

The examples I've given so far – Halbwachs and Haug – draw primarily on the European sociological tradition. Further research into the relationship between memory and emotion requires a consideration of the ways in which emotions are conceived in different disciplines and indeed within those disciplines. In anthropology, for example, where a whole subfield of ethnography and emotion has developed since the 1970s, debates continue about the relative value of 'universalist' or 'biologist' interpretations of emotions, on one hand, and culturalist interpretations, on the other. While the first interpret emotions as common human experiences and expressions originating in the brain and the body, the latter emphasise the socially and culturally constructed nature of emotions and in particular their place in discourse and language. The emphasis on discourse, some argue, tends to ignore the point that emotions are expressed through the body, and recent attempts to move beyond the universalist/culturalist binary emphasise the interconnectedness of cultural meaning and bodily expression.[10]

In the study of history, in addition to concerns about authenticity and reliability already mentioned, the association of emotion in the political sphere with mass support for fascism and other authoritarian and violent political movements has made some political historians wary of the study of emotion in history. As Barbara Rosenwein argues, when emotions are interpreted as a dangerous force in politics, historians and other scholars are more likely to place value on a 'rational' approach to politics.[11] But the very division of political movements into 'rational' and 'emotional' is problematic; it tends not only to turn political crowds into hysterical mobs, but also to underestimate the importance of emotional attachments as mobilising forces in *all* political movements. In the remainder of this paper, I will draw on my own research into the history and memory of political movements in the Basque country and Cuba to suggest some ways in which contemporary theories of emotion can help to shape memory studies. I want to suggest that oral history, with its attention to memories, the performance element in oral history and the inter-subjective aspect of the interview, is particularly well positioned to help us explore the relationship between memory and emotion.

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[9] Friga Haug, 'Memory work: The key to women's anxiety', in Susannah Radstone, ed., *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 157.

[10] Maruska Svasek, 'Introduction: Emotions in anthropology', in Kay Milton and Maruska Svasek, eds., *Mixed Emotions: Anthropological Studies of Feelings* (Oxford and New York: Berg 2005), pp. 11-12.

[11] Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about emotions in history', *American Historical Review* 107 (2002), pp. 821-3.

In interviews with women who were involved in both the radical Basque nationalist movement and feminist organisations in the 1970s,[12] a common theme emerged: nationalism was identified with the heart and feminism with the head. These bodily metaphors at first appear to represent a basic emotional/rational binary. But they are somewhat complicated by the fact that in their use in these interviews they pose a challenge to common associations of women and feminism as 'more emotional' than men and the world of politics. As an explanatory model, the conflict between a rational, theoretical feminism, on one hand, and an emotionally engaging and heartfelt commitment to nationalism, on the other, was evoked by narrators to explain the relative success of nationalism in mobilising both women and men in contrast to feminism, which always remained a secondary political cause.

But it is not only that nationalism and feminism are differentiated in the interviews through reference to rationality and emotion and different feelings. *Memories* of the two movements are also expressed emotively in very different ways. In spite of their claims that nationalism was an 'emotional' movement, narrators actually recounted memories of nationalist activism rather matter-of-factly, even when recalling difficult or painful events – including experiences of arrest and torture or the death of loved ones. This may be because such stories correspond closely to a collective radical nationalist rhetoric of struggle, suffering and sacrifice and are therefore unlikely to be spontaneous. I am not suggesting that such memories are not painful for the speakers; rather, following William Reddy, I argue that they are examples of the social nature of individual feelings and also of the dangers of reading what he calls 'emotives' either as expressions or denials of 'true feeling', individual or collective.[13]

Memories of feminism, in contrast, were often expressed with mixed feelings. These ranged from joy at memories of organising with other women and the creative tactics often used by feminist groups, to anger and disappointment at the failure of radical nationalism to recognize feminism as an autonomous and legitimate political project. These emotions were not only expressed in words, but also through laughter, a rise in the voice, or a flat refusal to continue discussing the issue. A number of scholars have argued that laughter is a particularly important expression of subjectivity.[14] In recollections of feminist activism, laughter can have different meanings. It may indicate a memory of a joyful moment when a new sense of collective identity was coming into being, when women were organising independently in new ways or drawing on new areas of experience, including sexual identities and intimacies. Alternatively, laughter may mark a defiant response to the ways in which male comrades treated feminism – and feminists – as a bit of a joke. In relation to other memories, laughter can be ironic or mocking – as with the narrator who recalls that in her anti-Francoist family 'my mother always obeyed what my father said. That was, was sacred. [...] My father, of course, was macho like the whole society.'[15]

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[12] These examples are taken from my book, *Women and ETA: The Gender Politics of Radical Basque Nationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

[13] William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 107.

My examples here suggest that laughter can be a clue to the ambiguities and ambivalence of women's feelings and memories about changing gender relations. Additionally, such memories point to the challenges of combining different forms of political activism and suggest that politics itself can be experienced as an emotional conflict. Feminism and nationalism evoked for narrators a variety of often conflicting feelings, including love, affection, hope, anger and disappointment. These competing feelings not only varied among individuals, depending on factors including class, ethnicity, gender, age and individual experiences; they also changed historically through the course of a lifetime and in the context of wider historical circumstances. While the radical nationalist movement continued as an active political force at the time of the interviews in the mid 1990s, the feminist organisations in which several narrators had been active had largely disintegrated, as had the energy and mobilisation of Basque and Spanish second-wave feminism, which was at its peak between the mid 1970s and the mid 1980s. If I were to conduct further interviews today, no doubt nationalism, and even feminism, would evoke different emotional responses among narrators than they did a decade ago. Expanding, to incorporate the dimension of emotion, the fundamental insight that oral history is not about what happened in the past but about the past-present relationship, we can suggest that the association of different political movements or events with certain emotions will change depending on the context in which the interview is held. Borrowing from Raphael Samuel, I suggest that emotion, like memory, 'is historically conditioned, changing colour and shape according to the emergencies of the moment'.[16]

Exploring the emotions associated with particular political movements, and how these change and move across a range of oral history interviews, we can use another of the strengths of oral history, its attention to the importance of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, without claiming to represent the narrators' 'true feelings'. As Reddy argues, emotional sincerity is itself a historical concept: 'Because of emotives' powerful effects and the likelihood that individuals will develop a set of "skills" in exploiting these effects, sincerity must be considered a specialized skill in its own right, that develops only in certain historical and political settings'.[17] If we accept that feelings, like memory, are not best measured in terms of accuracy or sincerity, the way is open for oral historians to explore the historically changing meanings of different emotions, and their relationships to political movements and other social and cultural phenomena.

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[14] Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy 1968* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996 [1988]), p. 68.

[15] Hamilton, *Women and ETA*, p. 33.

[16] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: vol. 1, Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. x.

My second example comes from interviews collected between 2004 and 2007 as part of the Memories of the Cuban Revolution Oral History Project.[18] Here again I will focus on the gendered dimension of memory. As in the case of fascism, mass support for revolutionary socialism has often been associated with dangerous political emotions, mass hysteria and so on. This is particularly clear in studies of Cuba and Fidel Castro that rely on Max Weber's concept of 'charismatic authority'. The problem with this model is that it tends to pathologise political emotions and rely on a distinction between unhealthy, emotional attachments to dictators and healthy, rational democratic commitments. This distinction both ignores the extent to which democratic movements rely upon emotional appeals and underestimates the complex of emotions involved in revolutionary movements, including not only adoration of leaders but also the feelings associated with collective organising and solidarity. In our interviews, memories of the mass mobilisation surrounding the Cuban Revolution during its early years in the 1960s are often expressed using the trope of the love story. Some narrators tell of being seduced by the madness of the moment, others speak of falling in and out of love with the Revolution, while still others speak of the Revolution as a romance. These memories draw on a series of wider contemporary and historical narratives, from Che Guevara's famous declaration that 'the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love'[19] to the tradition of national romance in Latin America going back to the nineteenth century.[20] The question for historians, I suggest, is not whether political love is a good or bad feeling, sincere or manipulated, but rather why love itself proves such a popular trope in memories of the Revolution. I argue that love's association with emotional extremes

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[17] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, p. 107.

[18] The project is funded by the Ford Foundation and Swedish development agency SIDA, and is directed by Professor Elizabeth Dore at the University of Southampton, co-hosted by the Cuban National Centre for Sexual Education (CENESEX) in Havana. Names of interviewees have been changed to protect their anonymity.

[19] Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, 'El hombre nuevo' [1st pub. as 'El socialismo y el hombre,' *Marcha* (Montevideo, 1965)], in Leopoldo Zea, ed., *Fuentes de la cultura latinoamericana* (Mexico City: Fondo de cultura económica, 1993), pp. 321-33: 331. My translation.

[20] Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

– from the giddiness of early romance and 'falling in love' to the intense feelings of betrayal and disillusionment when love goes wrong – makes it an attractive metaphor for both political commitment *and* opposition.

In one interview, Juana, who was in her twenties by the time of the Revolution in 1959, describes her experiences in the 1960s as akin to living in a 'fairy tale' that revolves primarily around key male figures who feature as mythic heroes in her narrative. She recalls meeting several of them personally and weeps when she speaks of the death of Guevara. Juana's loving and mournful recollections of Guevara and the early years of the Revolution are examples of a gendered memory of the Cuban Revolution. I do not mean by this that Juana suffers from a form of 'false consciousness'. Much of her story, including her successful intellectual career, contains examples of the benefits to women of increased gender equality under the Revolution. Moreover, even her brief references to her relationship to her partner, Yolanda, and the history of homophobia in Cuba, show an awareness of the negative aspects of the Revolution's sexual politics. But Juana's description of the Revolution as a 'love story' adds a complexity to this history of gender and sexuality in Cuba. It suggests that even for a narrator aware of the wider material changes in women's lives, and the history of the persecution of homosexuals, the Revolution remains a masculinised memory, and a romantic one at that.

If it is difficult to imagine a Cuban memory of the past fifty years that does not revolve around the Revolution of 1959, it is still worth asking why certain parts of that memory are emphasised at the expense of others. Why is Juana's account of the Cuban Revolution a predominantly male affair? Can her interview help us to answer the question, posed by Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson, 'How are stories forgotten, and is it possible to learn more about how a male-defined collective memory is shaped'?[21] I believe it can, and that emotion plays an important role in this answer. In her more recent work on love in history, Passerini argues that people need a narrative to understand the emotions they feel.[22] The romantic love story, with its personal and political pedigree, provides a narrative that both speaker and listener can understand: a story of a commitment that goes beyond the strictly rational, that is both beautiful and unique, something that does not require further explanation. I am not suggesting that the heterosexual love story has a universal appeal or cannot be taken apart and analysed for its gender and sexual politics. But I do suggest that what Passerini would call 'love discourse' functions to naturalise social relations of power, including gendered and sexual relations, giving the story meaning and resonance for the speaker above and beyond her personal historical experience.

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[21] Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson, 'Introduction', in Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson, eds., *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories*, Vol. IV, *Gender and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 6.

[22] Luisa Passerini, 'Emotions Between History and Psychoanalysis'. Paper presented at the History and Psychoanalysis seminar series, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 17 October 2007.

These brief examples point to some of the ways in which individual memories, especially as expressed in oral history interviews, become attached to or associated with certain emotions, which in turn have wider political meanings in a given historical context. As such, they suggest that turning out attention to emotion may be one way of continuing the ongoing investigation into the relationship between individual memories and ‘collective memory’.

Notes on Contributors

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Dr Carrie Hamilton is Reader in History at the University of Roehampton, London. Her research interests include cultural memory, oral history, gender history, the history of sexuality, feminism, political activism and revolution, all in relation to Spain and Latin America. She is the author of *Women and ETA: The Gender Politics of Radical Basque Nationalism* (Manchester University Press, 2007) and has edited a special issue of *Oral History* on 'Oral History and the Emotions' (38:2, 2010). Her book *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics and Memory* will be published by the University of North Carolina Press in spring 2012.

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Dr Hilda Kean is the former Director of Public History and Dean of Ruskin College, Oxford and established the first MA in Public History in Britain which she ran from 1996 - 2011. She has published widely on public and cultural history. Her books include *Animal Rights: Social and Political Change in Britain since 1800* (Reaktion Books, 2000); *London Stories. Personal Lives, Public Histories* (Rivers Oram Press, 2004); *Seeing History. Public History in Britain Now*, with Paul Martin and Sally J. Morgan, eds. (Francis Boutle, 2000); and *People and their Pasts. Public History Today,*

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Professor Dorothy Sheridan has worked with the papers of the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex since 1974. Her research interests include the ethics and politics of archiving, literacy and writing practices, and contemporary history. Until 2010, she directed the UK-wide writing project which augments the early MO papers with present-day autobiographical and documentary material (see *Writing Ourselves,* Hampton Press, 2000) and she continues her involvement with the MO Archive as a Trustee. She is also a Trustee of the National Life Story collection at the British Library and a director of the Brighton community publisher, QueenSpark Books.