

# MA Directed Reading List, Fall 1999

## Oral Historical Methodology

Supervisor: Sean Cadigan  
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### Historiography

Henige, David. Oral Historiography. London 1982: 7-22.

*Why did oral history fall out of favour in the western historiographic tradition? What accounts for its rediscovery in the mid-20th century?*

Thompson, Paul. The Voice of the Past: Oral History. Oxford 1978:

*Does Thompson feel that oral history has a counter-hegemonic purpose? Why would anyone oppose the use of historical methodology? Is the achievement of oral history the supplanting of other historiographic traditions? Is oral history subject or method?*

Hann, Russell G. "Oral History." In Clio's Craft: A Primer of Historical Methods. Edited by Terry Crowley. Toronto 1988: 42-64.

*How have Canadian historians reacted to oral historical methodology? How might oral historical methodology challenge the writing of Canadian history?*

Cohen, David William. The Combining of History. Chicago and London 1994: 1-23, 147-181, 216-50.

*What does Cohen mean by the production of history? Are there any methodological problems that we might associate with such production? If so, are such problems confined to oral history?*

### A Rural Case Study: the Pitfalls

Blythe, Ronald. Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village. London 1969.

Thompson, Voice of the Past: 65-90.

*What are the weaknesses of Blythe's work? Are any such weaknesses intrinsic to oral history, or might they characterize other historical sources? Does Thompson feel that there are particular avenues of historical inquiry that make running the risks of such methodological weaknesses worth writing oral history?*

## Methodology

Henige, Oral Historiography: 23-65

*Which of the methodological problems described by Henige will apply to your own work? Which will not? Why?*

Hoope, James. Oral History: An Introduction for Students. Chapel Hill 1979: 61-122, 131-39.

*Although Hoope is largely concerned with elite interviewing, his discussion of preparation for the interview contains useful tips that are applicable to most forms of interviewing. Establish a checklist of tasks for preparing, conducting, and following up on interviewing for an oral history project.*

*How important is ethical review to oral history?*

Morrison, James. "Gwom meets Bard: Some Thoughts on Oral History in Nigeria and Nova Scotia." In Report of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Oral History Association Meeting, Memorial University of Newfoundland, ... 1982. Compiled by Shannon Ryan. St. John's 1982: 66-74.

*Why does Morrison feel that family history and genealogy are important to oral historical methodology?*

Thompson, Voice of the Past : 91-137, 165-202.

*How may historians deal with the manner in which memory is socially constructed? Why is representative sampling important? What kind of interviewing techniques do you feel would work best in a study of the Margaree? What are the common pitfalls of interviewing? How would you store your data?*

Mannion, John. Point Lance in Transition: The Transformation of a Newfoundland Outport. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

*Describe the oral historical methodology employed by Mannion. Can his approach address the problems of Blythe's? Does Mannion meet the criterion of representativeness set out by Thompson?*

Modell, Judith, and Brodsky, Charlee. "Envisioning Homestead: Using Photographs in Interviewing (Homestead, Pennsylvania)." In Interactive Oral History Interviewing. Edited by Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers. Hillsdale, NJ, 1994: 141-61.

*What are the advantages of using pictures in an interactive interviewing process? Are there any disadvantages?*

Gluck, Sherna. "What's So Special about Women? Women's Oral History." In Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology. Edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baun. Nashville 1984: 221-37.

*Are there subjects which will simply be beyond the ability of some historians to investigate through oral history?*

## Interpretation

Vansina, Jan. "Oral Tradition and Historical Methodology." In Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology. Edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baun. Nashville 1984: 102-06.

*Do the risks of error and falsification separate oral evidence from other types of evidence?*

Alice Hoffman, "Reliability and Validity in Oral History." In Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology. Edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baun. Nashville 1984: 67-86.

*How may the use of different types of evidence verify the reliability and validity of oral historical evidence?*

Thompson, Voice of the Past: 203-26.

*What are the three ways of interpreting oral historical evidence? Which might produce the most innovative history?*

Henige, Oral Historiography: 66-118.

*How important is sensitivity to the context of language in the interpretation of oral evidence? How can the use of written sources help in dealing with such context? How important are dates and metaphors in the analysis of oral historical data?*

Deroche, John E. "Making History: A Sociological Study." In Report of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Oral History Association Meeting, Memorial University of Newfoundland, ... 1982. Compiled by Shannon Ryan. St. John's 1982: 163-73.

*How does Deroche practically deal with some of the theoretical issues raised by Henige in the reading above?*

Grele, Ronald J. "History and the Languages of History in the Oral History Interview: Who Answers Whose Questions and Why?" In Interactive Oral History Interviewing. Edited by Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers. Hillsdale, NJ, 1994: 1-18.

*Is it possible to be completely objective in the use of oral historical data? What does Grele mean by suggesting that the historian and subject create a conversational narrative together?*

Futrell, Allan and Willard, Charles A. "Intersubjectivity and Interviewing." In Interactive Oral History Interviewing. Edited by Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers. Hillsdale, NJ, 1994: 83-105.

*How do Futrell and Willard make the examination of Grele's problem more systematic? What do the authors mean by message design logics (MDLs)? How may historians use MDLs to avoid some of the problems of interpreting oral historical data?*

Chase, Susan E., and Bell, Colleen S. "Interpreting the Complexity of Women's Subjectivity." In Interactive Oral History Interviewing. Edited by Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers. Hillsdale, NJ, 1994: 63-81.

*How may oral historical investigation reinforce social inequality? What steps must the historian take to avoid such reinforcement? May any historian overcome reinforcing such inequalities with any subject?*

Hansen, Arthur A. "A Riot of Voices: Racial and Ethnic Variables in Interactive Oral History Interviewing." In Interactive Oral History Interviewing. Edited by Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers. Hillsdale, NJ, 1994: 107-39.

*How may a priori assumptions about race and ethnicity bias the interpretation of oral historical data?*

Two Full Studies

Gluck, Sherna Berger, and Patai, Daphne. Women's words : the feminist practice of oral history New York 1991.

*Readdress the question on the Gluck reading above.*

Tonkin, Elizabeth. Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History Cambridge 1992.

*What are the genres and conventions of oral history? How does Tonkin interpret oral evidence?*

NOTE: although we won't include the following for examination purposes, you should be aware of the applications of oral historical methodology to the study of social, gender and political history in Paul Thompson's edited work Our Common History (London 1982).