

Please comply with the following Copyright notice.

WARNING COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
Copyright Regulations 1969

This material has been reproduced and communicated to you by or on behalf of Sheridan College pursuant to part VB of the *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act).

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further reproduction or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.

Do not remove this notice.

Week 3 Reading

APA referencing

Layman, L. (2010). Ethical imperatives in oral history practice. In C. Clement (Ed.), *Studies in Western Australian History: Ethics and the Practice of History*, 26, 130–150.

Referencing for family history

Lenore Layman, 'Ethical imperatives in oral history practice', in Cathie Clement (ed.), *Studies in Western Australian History: Ethics and the Practice of History*, vol. 26, 2010, pp. 130–150.

Ethical Imperatives in Oral History Practice

Lenore Layman

This article draws on examples from Western Australian oral history projects to explore the historical construction of ethical practice in oral history. It argues that a moral imperative to collect and archive old people's recollections, and to record the memories of groups previously 'hidden from history' have remained constants, while understandings of what constitutes ethical practice as well as its regulatory frameworks (advisory and/or mandatory) have shifted significantly. The focus of ethical concern has moved from the oral historian's responsibility to historical truth to a duty to the individual interviewee; and from the oral historian's overriding authority to the primacy of the interviewee's rights and needs. Confidence in an identity of interest between interviewer and interviewee has waned as has the belief in oral history's capacity to unearth truth in history. While the development of a professional code and associational guidelines has standardised basic practices, curly ethical questions confronting the oral historian remain to be answered individually because they lie beyond the limits of codes and guidelines in a wider moral order. Several of these questions – in situational and interpretive ethics – are raised here. Portelli's argument for amplification and restitution represents a final step in ethical oral history practice.

An imperative to collect and archive

A moral imperative underlies oral history practice. It derives from the particular value modern society ascribes to old people. Maurice Halbwachs, at the end of his own life in the mid-twentieth century, wrote of the social role of the elderly:

... having lived for a long time, he has much experience and is full of memories. Why should old people not then be passionately interested in the past, in the common treasure of which they are the guardians? Why should they not try quite consciously to fulfil the function which gives them the only prestige to which they can now lay claim? ... Society, by giving old people the function of preserving the traces of its past, encourages them to devote whatever spiritual energy they may still possess to the act of recollection.¹

1 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated, and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser, Chicago and London, 1992, p. 48.

Imbued with a belief with modern reco: of collecting and obliterates them. T used the metaphor of the wisdom of th historians save tha it in collaboration. It is a shared proje – in it. A collecti these agencies hav immense and eve plus transcript for

At the beginnin it was society's el public stories whi diary and letter v history has contr several prestigious former parliamen Curtin University more than 60 inte who led the estab and Hazel Hawk prominent on the more than 500 re enormous oral hi with the oral hist purpose of gover

The J.S. Battye oral interviews t 13,000 hours of : The first State Ar growing interest that, while givir an opportunity]

2 For instance, 'C Australian Brar
3 Personal comm
4 Website of the May 2008].
5 Website of the (www.nla.gov.a
6 State Library o Oral History', [accessed May

Imbued with a belief in the social value of this 'act of recollection' and armed with modern recording technologies, oral historians have assumed the role of collecting and preserving recollections before declining health or death obliterates them. To explain the importance of their craft, oral historians have used the metaphor of the book, it being commonly understood as the repository of the wisdom of the ages; thus, when an old person dies, a library burns.² Oral historians save that 'common treasure' of knowledge from oblivion and they do it in collaboration with elderly people who wish to recount their recollections. It is a shared project and all concerned find value – individual, social, historical – in it. A collecting imperative for libraries and archives has followed; further these agencies have themselves become major instigators of more projects. An immense and ever-growing accumulation of oral histories in audio or audio plus transcript forms has resulted.

At the beginnings of the tape recording revolution in the late 1940s and 1950s it was society's elite who pre-occupied oral historians. Theirs were important public stories which demanded preservation, not least because of a decline in diary and letter writing among elites in the same period. This strand of oral history has continued to the present. In Western Australia it is exemplified in several prestigious collections: the State parliament's collection of interviews with former parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, currently 68 in number,³ and Curtin University's John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library (JCPML) collection of more than 60 interviews with those who remembered John Curtin himself, those who led the establishment of the JCPML and also interviews with R.J.L. Hawke and Hazel Hawke.⁴ Another significant repository of interviews with people prominent on the public stage is the National Library of Australia which holds more than 500 recordings relating to Western Australia, dating from 1941, in its enormous oral history and folklore collection.⁵ Enriching the historical record with the oral histories of publicly significant individuals has become a shared purpose of government agencies, and corporate and community organisations.

The J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History began in 1961 collecting oral interviews to 'complement' its research collection and, in 2007, held over 13,000 hours of audio interviews with more than 5,000 Western Australians.⁶ The first State Archivist and Battye Librarian, M.F.F. (Mollie) Lukis, had seen the growing interest in oral history on her official travel to the USA and determined that, while giving priority to collecting print and archival records, whenever an opportunity presented itself and someone could be 'caught before they got

- 2 For instance, 'Oral History Bibliography', Oral History Association of Australia (Western Australian Branch), 1984. PR9598, Battye Library.
- 3 Personal communication, Western Australian Parliamentary Library, April 2008.
- 4 Website of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, <http://john.curtin.edu.au/> [accessed May 2008].
- 5 Website of the Oral History and Folklore Collection of the National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/oh/> [accessed May 2008].
- 6 State Library of Western Australia, *Annual Report 2006–2007*, p. 101. Also 'Western Australian Oral History', State Library of WA website, <http://www.liswa.wa.gov.au/waoralhist.html> [accessed May 2008].

Ethical Imperatives in Oral History Practice

too old, we would make a special effort'.⁷ 'Fortuitous' encounters produced a surprising early collection. When Mr C. Reading, a bullock driver in the 1920s, visited the Battye Library in 1965, Mollie Lukis recorded an interview on working a bullock team and life as a bullock driver. The seven-minute tape and 21-page transcript constitute one of the first entries in the collection.⁸ In 1966, when she visited Collie to collect Collie Miners' Union records for the library, she took the opportunity to interview coal miners and long-term town residents. Seven of the fifteen interviews Mollie Lukis undertook for the Battye collection were with Collie people.⁹

The Battye Library's early emphasis on interviewing 'ordinary people' indicated the direction of most subsequent collecting. Of Western Australia's oral history collections currently located in public repositories over half are local studies collections while the remainder are spread across private and public educational institutions, State government agencies and community groups (Indigenous, labour, ethnic, women's, professional, military, religious, welfare, sporting, cultural).¹⁰ The wide subject spread of these collections points to an oral history practice which reaches beyond recording the successful and influential. It points to the practice of social history.

Social history: an imperative to redress the historical record

The first flourishing of social history in the State occurred with the establishment of the Western Australian Historical Society in 1926, and the origins of oral history lie there also.¹¹ The first article in the first issue of the Society's journal *Early Days* in 1927 was Mrs Francis (Emma) Lochee's reminiscence of early Perth, compiled by her daughter, which began, 'My mother said she could never forget the beauty of the scenery when they arrived in Perth'.¹² In this way family reminiscence merged into oral history in a time before available audio recording equipment or any of the post-war conventions surrounding the oral interview. 'Old colonist' families (who had settled in Western Australia prior to 1890) dominated the early Historical Society and the histories of settler society published in *Early Days* relied heavily on such oral sources.¹³ For instance, A.C. Staples in his 'History of Settlement in Harvey District' published in *Early Days* in 1948 declared:

- 7 Meroula (Mollie) Frances Lukis, interviewer Erika Harvey, June-Oct. 1992, p. 70, OH2527, Battye Library.
- 8 C. Reading, interviewer Mollie Lukis, 1965, OH49, Battye Library.
- 9 Collie interviews, 1966, interviewer Mollie Lukis, OH39, OH41, OH42, OH94, OH95, OH907, OH910, Battye Library.
- 10 *Directory of Western Australian oral history and folklore collections*, LISWA research series no. 7, Perth WA, 1996. See also Western Australian entries on *Australia's Oral History Collections. A National Directory*, <http://www.nla.gov.au/ohdir/> [accessed May 2008].
- 11 Alan Roberts identified a similar pattern in others states. Alan Roberts, 'The Development of Australian Oral History', *Oral History Association Journal*, no. 7, 1985, pp. 3-22.
- 12 Mrs Edward Shenton, 'Reminiscences of Perth. Perth 1830-1840, compiled from the reminiscences of her mother Mrs F. Lochee', *Early Days*, vol. 1, pt 1, 1927, pp. 1-2.
- 13 Paul Hasluck, *Mucking About. An autobiography*, Clayton, 1977, ch. 12.

These are
recently be
the stories

The first syste
Paul Hasluck,
and 1930s he
monthly meet
transcribe the
Society. As a
Mail.¹⁵

Undoubtec
histories was l
alongside her

I found I
Calingiri
was wonc
notebooks

And so, amo
settlers remin
and such like,
Historical Soc
people's merr
were fading f
'real Gropers'
these memori

A differen
Bolton when
Starve In.²¹ B
Western Aus
settlers, farm
ordinary peo
struggle but

- 14 A.C. Staple
1948, p. 29.
- 15 Hasluck, *M*
- 16 For an exte
Erickson, *R*
- 17 Frederica [
Library.
- 18 Rica Ericks
Rica's Storie
- 19 Rica Ericks
- 20 Rica Ericks
pp. 7-15; re
- 21 G.C. Bolton

These are the stories I grew up with in Harvey and Bunbury. They have more recently been checked back and forth among my elderly acquaintances. They are the stories of the real Gropers ...¹⁴

The first systematic collector of these settler stories was the young journalist Paul Hasluck, the Society's first honorary research secretary. In the late 1920s and 1930s he would meet 'a dear old lady or a fine old man' at the Society's monthly meeting, arrange to visit their homes, record their stories in shorthand, transcribe them for the records and sometimes present papers from them to the Society. As a journalist, he would occasionally use the stories in the *Western Mail*.¹⁵

Undoubtedly the most successful and prolific user of oral recall in her settler histories was Rica Erickson. From the 1930s she collected settler family memories alongside her natural history specimens.¹⁶

I found I was establishing a reputation among the people from Toodyay up to Calingiri for being interested in old times, and they fed me with material ... It was wonderful listening to those people ... I've got it all written down in my notebooks still.¹⁷

And so, among library and archival references, she would acknowledge 'old settlers reminiscences collected by the author',¹⁸ 'reminiscences of descendants'¹⁹ and such like, to indicate her oral sources. For Rica Erickson and members of the Historical Society the recording of settler reminiscences was imperative because people's memories of the 'first comers', or 'fabled firsts' as Erickson called them, were fading fast.²⁰ Members believed that the true history of settlement, of the 'real Gropers' in Staples' terms, lay in pioneers' memories. Therefore preserving these memories was a moral responsibility to history.

A different type of social history appeared in 1972 from the pen of Geoff Bolton when he told of Western Australia's depression in *A Fine Country To Starve In*.²¹ Bolton was first to make substantial use of oral recollections in a Western Australian academic history. He quoted the words of former group settlers, farmers, unemployed workers and housewives to create a picture of ordinary people's depression experiences. It was an account of hardship and struggle but not despair. Anecdotes emphasised getting by, coping somehow,

14 A.C. Staples, 'Outline of History of Settlement in Harvey District', *Early Days*, vol. 3, Dec. 1948, p. 29.

15 Hasluck, *Mucking About*, pp. 141-50.

16 For an extended analysis, see Lenore Layman, 'Going Exploring in Settler Society' in Rica Erickson, *Rica's Stories*, edited by Lenore Layman, Nedlands, 2001, pp. vii-xxi.

17 Frederica [Rica] Erickson, interviewed by Erica Harvey, 1992, pp. 148 & 21, OH2526, Battye Library.

18 Rica Erickson 'Early Days at Bolgart', *Early Days*, vol. 6, pt 3, 1964, pp. 46-61; reproduced in *Rica's Stories*, ch. 4.

19 Rica Erickson, 'Old Lags as Faithful Servants', in *Rica's Stories*, ch. 8.

20 Rica Erickson, 'Those Fabled Firsts of the Swan River Colony', *Early Days*, vol. 8, pt 3, 1979, pp. 7-15; reproduced in *Rica's Stories*, ch. 2.

21 G.C. Bolton, *A Fine Country To Starve In*, Nedlands, 1972.

surviving. These anecdotes fitted well with Bolton's theme of a society which 'got along' in a largely consensual, non-militant mode. In the preface to a new edition published in 1994 he reflected that these interviews, conducted in 1968-70, understated depression suffering and hardship.²² Probably they did but that was the way these people chose to record what must have been a terrible experience. That they got by and survived to build a post-war life was the meaning they made and presented to the interviewer, and it is evidence Bolton uses effectively to support his representation of Western Australian society in the period. Its use enriches the history. That the oral evidence might illustrate the successful functioning of a conservative hegemony is a matter of historical interpretation; what is not in dispute is its value as an historical source.

In the 1960s a new social history had emerged, one based in academic specialism and reformist – sometimes radical – politics. Its goal was to use audio-recorded oral history to give voice to ordinary people, to the marginalised and silenced. This new social history did not end oral history's moral imperative; rather, in aiming to give voice to the voiceless, the imperative was strengthened and extended. Paul Thompson saw oral history as necessarily changing the judgement of history by enabling 'the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated' to witness to the past.²³ But it could do much more than this. According to Thompson, such witnessing would not just democratise history, it would raise consciousness, making workers more active historical agents in changing the world.²⁴ Thus the future as well as the past could be transformed. The belief that oral history can empower marginalised or subordinated groups to take their rightful place in society's past and present is embedded in much oral history practice, notably among historians of Indigenous people, labour, women and ethnic groups, making oral history a component of the protest and liberation struggles which exploded in the 1960s.

Oral histories of Indigenous people have been the most significant outcome of the new oral history and have come closest to realising Thompson's goal. They have helped change public understandings and, as a result, government policy. Most telling has been the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), which was built on Aboriginal people's oral testimonies about their removal as children; the Aboriginal Legal Service in Western Australia, for instance, collecting more than 600.²⁵ From the early 1970s Aboriginal storytellers have been publishing their histories 'as told to' or 'edited by' or 'working with' both Indigenous and non-Indigenous oral historians. Sally Morgan's work with her own family members is the most well-known.²⁶ Lauren Marsh and Steve Kinnane collaborated with

22 Bolton, *A Fine Country To Starve In*, new edition, Nedlands, 1994, pp. xx-xxi.

23 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, Oxford, London, New York, 1978, p. 5.

24 *ibid.*, p. 17.

25 *Bringing Them Home. Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, April 1997, Reconciliation and Social Justice Library in Indigenous Law Resources, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/> [accessed May 2008].

26 Sally Morgan, *My Place*, Fremantle, 1987. Sally Morgan, *wanamurraganya. The Story of Jack McPhee*, Fremantle, 1989.

Alice Nannu domain.²⁷ A sustained or non-Indigenous shifting 'bet is participat "between th a strong beli belief shared oral historia Christine Ch which has re stories, often established in Grant Ngabi *Country of the Grant Ngabid* clear his owr

Strictly sj
Aborigine
reminisce
essential v
insight int

Shaw's intent
complemente
Aboriginal 'ir
An explosio
in the 1980s.
of researcher,
Chilla Bulbec

- 27 Alice Nannu
28 'Broken Circ
29 Website of M
30 Grant Ngabi
Gadjerong, Gt
with similar
Bruce Shaw, C
Shaw, Canber
of Eighty Year
31 Ngabidj, *My*
32 Colleen Heat
33 Connie Ellem
34 Carolyn Poliz
A Visual and C
35 Emma Ciccoti

Alice Nannup to bring her story of removal, survival and return into the public domain.²⁷ Anna Haebich's work with both oral and archival sources has been sustained over more than twenty years. Haebich has described working as a non-Indigenous historian on an oral history project with Nyungar people as shifting 'between being someone who is an outsider to being someone who is participating to some extent'. She is, she reflects, a 'person writing from "between the cracks"'.²⁸ Working in such a challenging position is testimony to a strong belief in the social and political worth of the endeavour. It is clearly a belief shared by her fellows. The Kimberley, in particular, has attracted numerous oral historians, notably Bruce Shaw, Pat Vinnicombe, Mary Anne Jebb and Christine Choo, who have assisted the explosion of Indigenous oral histories which has resulted from the determination of Indigenous people to publish their stories, often through Broome's Indigenous publishing house, Magabala Books, established in 1987.²⁹ Bruce Shaw's Kimberley work began in 1970 when he met Grant Ngabidj, 'the real author' of Shaw's first book published in 1981, *My Country of the Pelican Dreaming: the life of an Australian Aborigine of the Gadjerong, Grant Ngabidj, 1904-1977*.³⁰ The title page adds 'as told to Bruce Shaw' to make clear his own role. He wrote in his introduction:

Strictly speaking, this is an autobiography, but until such time as individual Aborigines are able to write their own histories ... the responsibility to record reminiscences ... must fall upon research scholars, journalists and writers. This is essential where older Aborigines are concerned if we are not to lose their unique insight into the recent history of Aboriginal-European contact.³¹

Shaw's intent to gain public recognition for his friend Grant Ngabidj's history complemented his purpose of correcting the historical record by adding an Aboriginal 'insight'.

An explosion of autobiographies and biographies based on oral recall began in the 1980s. Fremantle Arts Centre Press published the work of a number of researcher/writers – Sally Morgan, Lauren Marsh and Stephen Kinnane, Chilla Bulbeck,³² Ron Davidson,³³ Carolyn Polizzotto,³⁴ Michal Bosworth³⁵

- 27 Alice Nannup, Lauren Marsh, Stephen Kinnane, *When The Pelican Laughed*, Fremantle, 1992.
 28 'Broken Circles: An Interview with Anna Haebich', *Limina*, vol. 9, 2003, pp. 9-10.
 29 Website of Magabala Books, <http://www.magabala.com/> [accessed May 2008].
 30 Grant Ngabidj, *My Country of the Pelican Dreaming: the life of an Australian Aborigine of the Gadjerong, Grant Ngabidj, 1904-1977 as told to Bruce Shaw*, Canberra, 1981. Three further books with similar intent followed. Jack Sullivan, *Banggaiyerri, The Story of Jack Sullivan as told to Bruce Shaw*, Canberra, 1983. *Countrymen: The life histories of four Aboriginal men as told to Bruce Shaw*, Canberra, 1986. Waddi Boyoi and Johnny Walker, *Bush Time, Station Time: Reminiscences of Eighty Years as told to Bruce Shaw*, Underdale SA, 1991.
 31 Ngabidj, *My Country of the Pelican Dreaming*, p. 1.
 32 Colleen Heath and Chilla Bulbeck, *Shadow of the Hill*, Fremantle, 1985.
 33 Connie Ellement and Ron Davidson, *The Divided Kingdom*, Fremantle WA, 1987.
 34 Carolyn Polizzotto, *Approaching Elise*, Fremantle, 1988. Carolyn Polizzotto, *The Factory Floor: A Visual and Oral Record, 1900-1960*, Fremantle, 1988.
 35 Emma Ciccotosto and Michal Bosworth, *Emma. A Translated Life*, Fremantle, 1990.

Ethical Imperatives in Oral History Practice

and Geoffrey Blainey and Ronda Jamieson³⁶ – all of whom used oral history to explore individual lives. Sociologist Chilla Bulbeck worked with Colleen Heath to produce *Shadow of the Hill* which tells of the pressures on Colleen's husband Chris, a union site convenor in the Pilbara who finally took his own life. There was a message for readers: 'We hope that city-dwellers will achieve an increased understanding and sympathy; we hope that Pilbara dwellers will successfully organise themselves for a better life in their isolation'.³⁷ Michal Bosworth who worked with Emma Ciccotosto to produce *Emma. A Translated Life* wanted readers to reflect on the social roles which made up women's lives: 'In Emma's life we can see a great deal of the world around her as it affected her, an immigrant, a woman, a wife and a mother, and a carer for the aged'.³⁸ These histories were collaborative enterprises in which authority was shared through the production process and in the attribution of authorship, the autobiographical genre facilitating the collaboration. Most were explicit on their oral history method and the challenge of preserving the storyteller's voice while ensuring readability.³⁹

Oral histories of labour also began to be collected. One of the earliest labour oral historians in Western Australia was a visitor, Wendy Lowenstein, who spent five years in the 1970s travelling around Australia recording memories of the 1930s depression, which she published as *Weevils in the Flour*.⁴⁰ It is moving testimony to people's suffering but at the end of her research she still wrote that she had not plumbed the depths of that suffering.⁴¹ The long-term unemployed were 'victims' and she set out to use oral history to make visible their struggles to live and to live better. For Lowenstein oral history was a sharp tool in the cause of social justice.

For the labour movement the collection of oral history became a means to 'record and promote the history and contemporary struggle of the labour movement'.⁴² It was a component of the revival in union-based cultural activities in the 1980s, given impetus by the Australian Council of Trade Union's arts programme, and the Art and Working Life initiative of the Australia Council.⁴³ Interviews, carried out by Stuart Reid, encompassed not only former trade union

leaders⁴⁴ but also reached to the im powerhouse wor decommissioned ; UnionsWA's supj Labour History (I the Midland Railw Power Station (17

Oral history ha organised labour working lives, ai which had previe evident in succes since its commer work culture at N McAtee's compil. Campaign in 199

With the grow 1970s, women's r history through was among the oral history.⁵⁰ Ca up prior to the (the twentieth cer they were also u: reflect on the op wrote of her fift they have made A social worker connectedness o

36 Geoffrey Blainey and Ronda Jamieson (eds) *Charles Court. the early years*, Fremantle, 1995.

37 Bulbeck, Introduction in Heath and Bulbeck, *Shadow of the Hill*, p. 16.

38 Bosworth, Introduction in Ciccotosto and Bosworth, *Emma*, p. 13.

39 See the introductions to the various texts cited above.

40 Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record in the 1930s Depression in Australia*, Melbourne, 1979.

41 *ibid.*, Preface p. xiii.

42 Trades & Labor Council of Western Australia's entry in the National Library's Oral History and Folklore database, <http://www.nla.gov.au/ohdir/index.html> [accessed May 2008].

43 Art Gallery of New South Wales, *Working Art. A survey of art in the Australian labour movement in the 1980s*, Sydney, 2000.

44 30 oral historie: OH2052-OH207 see Stuart Reid, *History*, no. 3, N

45 Peko-Wallsend-1

46 Powerhouse Liv Mills & Ware in

47 Midland Railwa Battye Library a collection will l Library.

48 Geoff Harcourt, at North Frema History Honour

49 Janis Bailey and 20, August 1998

50 Jan Carter, *Noth*.

51 *ibid.*, Preface.

used oral history
ked with Colleen
ures on Colleen's
ally took his own
ellers will achieve
para dwellers will
olation'.³⁷ Michal
ia. *A Translated Life*
women's lives: 'In
as it affected her,
the aged'.³⁸ These
is shared through
autobiographical
their oral history
e while ensuring

he earliest labour
nstein, who spent
memories of the
ur.⁴⁰ It is moving
he still wrote that
erm unemployed
le their struggles
sharp tool in the

became a means
gle of the labour
cultural activities
ade Union's arts
ustralia Council.⁴³
rmer trade union

, Fremantle, 1995.

pression in Australia,

brary's Oral History
ed May 2008].
ilian labour movement

leaders⁴⁴ but also activists in the Robe River disputes of 1986.⁴⁵ Other interviews reached to the impact of plant closures on workers' lives via interviews with powerhouse workers in 1984-85 when South Fremantle Power Station was decommissioned as well as with former Mills & Ware biscuit factory employees.⁴⁶ UnionsWA's support for the work of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (Perth branch) has assisted two further oral history collections: the Midland Railway Workshops (200 hours of audio record) and the East Perth Power Station (170 hours of audio record).⁴⁷

Oral history has facilitated a broadening of labour history's focus from the organised labour movement and the Labor Party to an exploration of people's working lives, aiming to introduce workers' voices into workplace histories which had previously been confined to machines and managers. This shift is evident in successive issues of the Perth-based journal *Papers in Labour History* since its commencement in 1988. Geoff Harcourt's account of grain handlers' work culture at North Fremantle is one excellent example.⁴⁸ Janis Bailey and Di McAtee's compilation of activists' voices during the drama of the Third Wave Campaign in 1997 is a highlight of the journal's history.⁴⁹

With the growth of the feminist movement and women's liberation in the 1970s, women's recollections began to find a larger place in Western Australian history through the use of oral history. Jan Carter's *Nothing to Spare* (1981) was among the earliest products of a feminist engagement with women's oral history.⁵⁰ Carter gathered the recollections of fifteen women who grew up prior to the Great War to explore women's lives in the early decades of the twentieth century. While these stories are powerful in their individuality they were also used to identify more general patterns in women's lives and to reflect on the opportunities and constraints women have experienced. Carter wrote of her fifteen interviewees: 'I hope they are pleased with the contribution they have made in reflecting on the lives of Australian women in times past'.⁵¹ A social worker by training, she found messages for younger women in the connectedness of the older women's lives. As well she pointed critically to

44 30 oral histories, interviewer Stuart Reid, Trades and Labor Council Oral History Project, OH2052-OH2078 and OH3188, Batty Library. For an insight into the workings of this project see Stuart Reid, 'The Trades and Labour [sic] Council's Oral History Project', *Papers in Labour History*, no. 3, May 1989, pp. 61-71.

45 Peko-Wallsend-Robe River, 41 cassettes, interviewer Stuart Reid, OI2305/1-41, Batty Library.

46 Powerhouse Lives, 20 oral histories, interviewer Stuart Reid, OH2275/1-20, Batty Library. Mills & Ware interviews held by Western Australian Museum.

47 Midland Railway Workshops oral history collection of interviews has been deposited in the Batty Library and the Midland Local Studies Library. East Perth Power Station oral history collection will be deposited in the Batty Library and the Town of Vincent Local Studies Library.

48 Geoff Harcourt, 'Circle-men, Untouchables and Seagulls. The development of a work culture at North Fremantle', *Papers in Labour History*, no. 9, June 1992, pp. 78-99. [Part publication of History Honours dissertation, Murdoch University, 1992.]

49 Janis Bailey and Di McAtee (eds), *The Workers' Embassy Scrapbook*. *Papers in Labour History*, no. 20, August 1998.

50 Jan Carter, *Nothing to Spare. Recollections of Australian Pioneering Women*, Ringwood, 1981.

51 *ibid.*, Preface.

Ethical Imperatives in Oral History Practice

major failures in contemporary society's treatment of its old and frail.⁵² Young feminist historians in the early 1980s, such as Gail Reekie and Christine Owen, took up oral history to tell 'herstory'.⁵³

The 1980s and early 1990s produced a great deal of oral history which either explicitly or implicitly called for a re-thinking of history. Adding the voices of those previously 'hidden from history' – Indigenous people, workers, women, migrants⁵⁴ and individual ethnic groups⁵⁵ – to the historical record was intended as a transforming practice, correcting past historical partiality as well as contributing to social change in the present. Oral historians working on these topics mostly saw their work helping to right historical wrongs; in fact, righting society's moral order. Kathleen Blee in early 1990s USA pointed to 'romantic assumptions' about their subjects among this group of historians, and perhaps this was the case.⁵⁶ They identified, often strongly and emotionally, with the groups they were interviewing. For these historians themselves, however, their cause was moral not romantic.

Oral historians' ethical responsibility to history

Whether they were intent on uncovering 'hidden histories' or 'filling the gaps' or putting 'living flesh on the bare bones of official history'⁵⁷ most oral historians saw a primary ethical obligation to truth in history. Those academically and professionally trained, who understood the intellectual discipline within which they worked, felt this obligation mostly strongly. The Oral History Association in the USA wrote in its first 'Goals and Guidelines', formulated in 1968, that 'all interviews [should] be conducted in a spirit of objectivity and scholarly integrity'.⁵⁸ While the Association recognised that oral historians entered into 'a moral relationship' with informants and stated that informants should be fully informed about the project, the process and their rights, this obligation was an operational one to facilitate the best outcome in the form of the best possible historical record.⁵⁹ The Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA) took the same view although nothing was spelt out explicitly.

52 *ibid.*, Retrospective, pp. 210-25.

53 Gail Reekie, 'Women's Responses to War Work in Western Australia 1942-1946' and Christine Owen, 'The Politics of Experience: Women in the Western Australian Clothing Trade, 1950-1970', in Patricia Crawford (ed.), *Studies in Western Australian History*, vol. 7, Dec. 1983, pp. 46-67 & 68-78. [Part-publication of History Honours dissertations, Murdoch University, 1982 and 1983 respectively.]

54 For instance, Maryon Allbrook (ed.), *Journeys of Hope: Six Stories of Family Migration to Western Australia 1937-1968*, Wembley, 1994.

55 For instance, Richard and Michal Bosworth, *Fremantle's Italy*, Rome, 1994.

56 Kathleen Blee, 'Evidence, Empathy and Ethics', *Journal of American History*, vol. 80, no. 2, 1993, pp. 596-606, reprinted in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, London, 1998, 2006, ch. 25.

57 OHAA (WA Branch), *Oral History News*, vol. 1, no. 1, Aug. 1981.

58 'Goals and Guidelines of Oral History Association' (1968), Appendix C, in William W. Moss, *Oral History Program Manual*, New York, 1974.

59 Moss, *Oral History Program Manual*, pp. 12-14. Also Willa K Baum, *Oral History for the Local Historical Society*, Nashville, 1971; section entitled 'Ethics in Oral History'.

Interviewees v
a basic profes
were primarily
information w

The academ
early 1980s is
engaged the h
unreliability of
interviewers. C
(objective) hist
dispassionate, i
the face of it, th
criticism conce
be underminin
history had col

Oral history
Thomson has c
approaches to
the 1960s-1980s
historical recor
Certainties had
to be a matter o
component, foc
interviewees. T
marked the last
individual right

Regulating eth

Explicit attentio
until the mid-19
Australia in 197
of equipment.⁶⁴

60 For example, 'P
at the first Oral I

61 Patrick O'Farrel
and 'Oral Sourc
Thomson, 'Unre
Historical Contro

62 Alistair Thomson
34, no. 1, 2007, F

63 Paul Thompson,
Jaclyn Jeffrey anc
Experience, Lanha

64 OHAAWA, *News*
Battye Library.

Interviewees were to be treated correctly – with honesty, care and respect – as a basic professional and human courtesy. They were fellow humans but they were primarily sources of historical information and the quality of the extracted information was the central concern.⁶⁰

The academic debate which surged around oral history in the late 1970s and early 1980s is well known. Powerful voices told oral historians that their work engaged the heart but not the head, threatening historical truth through the unreliability of memory, the sheer inventions of interviewees and the biases of interviewers. Oral history's subjectivity condemned it; it would replace valid (objective) history with (emotive) myth, critics said.⁶¹ Intellectual distance and dispassionate, authoritative judgement were essential to proper scholarship. On the face of it, this attack was a critique of a research method but the underlying criticism concerned professional ethics: oral historians were seen by critics to be undermining history itself. Two views of historians' ethical responsibility to history had collided. The critics lost the battle.

Oral history continued to flourish but not without significant change. Alistair Thomson has categorised this change as a paradigm shift to post-positivist approaches to memory and subjectivity.⁶² The moral drive characteristic of the 1960s-1980s decades to collect people's recollections and thus redress the historical record by telling another truth had opened up the relativist debate. Certainties had eroded and excavating the truth from below no longer seemed to be a matter of simple 'recovery'.⁶³ This intellectual shift had a strong ethical component, focussing attention on the distinct interests and perspectives of interviewees. The social and cultural process of individualisation, which has marked the last several decades, has strengthened the new focus. Interviewees' individual rights have been explicitly identified, codified and protected.

Regulating ethical practice

Explicit attention to ethical practice in oral history did not begin in Australia until the mid-1980s. Initially the OHAA, established in Australia and Western Australia in 1978, focused on training in basic oral history method and use of equipment.⁶⁴ Jan Carter's critical report on the International Oral History

60 For example, 'Panel on Interviewing', in Joan Campbell (ed.), *Oral History 74: papers presented at the first Oral History Conference, 1 March 1974*, Bundoora, 1974.

61 Patrick O'Farrell, 'Oral history: facts and fiction', *Quadrant*, vol. 23, no. 148, 1979, pp. 4-8; and 'Oral Sources: Use and Abuse', *Oral History Association Journal*, no. 5, 1982/83. Alistair Thomson, 'Unreliable memories? The use and abuse of oral history', in William Lamont (ed.) *Historical Controversies and Historians*, London and Philadelphia, 1998, ch. 3.

62 Alistair Thomson, 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2007, pp. 53-7.

63 Paul Thompson, 'Believe It or Not: Rethinking the Historical Interpretation of Memory' in Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall (eds), *Memory and History. Essays in Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, Lanham Maryland and London, 1994, pp. 1-16.

64 OHAAWA, *News and Notes, 1981-1987*; and collection of material relating to OHAA, PR9598, Battye Library.

Conference held in October 1980 in Amsterdam suggests that the early oral history scene contained much that was intellectually dismal. 'There is more to the method of oral history than running amok with a tape recorder amongst the working classes,' she protested.⁶⁵ NSW historian Heather Goodall, writing of her own experience in Aboriginal oral history, has recalled the 'naive optimism' and 'naive enthusiasm' of the 1970s, the belief that oral history would provide unproblematic access to people's pasts.⁶⁶ Some interviewers, particularly those trained in other social science disciplines, were aware of their own mediation of the past and the separate interests of their storytellers but most oral historians assumed the transparency of recovered histories as well as an identity of interest with their interviewees.

It was not until the close of 1993 that the OHAA adopted 'Guidelines for Ethical Practice' although the idea had first been raised as early as 1981.⁶⁷ These Guidelines, which remain unchanged today, detailed the interviewer's responsibilities 'to protect the rights of the interviewee' by fully explaining the interview's purpose and procedures, ensuring confidentiality until an agreement to do otherwise was signed, providing an opportunity for the interviewee to review, correct or withdraw material from the interview, and specifying conditions for use of the interview, ensuring an opportunity for the interviewee to review, correct or withdraw material from the interview, and preserving the interview for the future.⁶⁸ In pointing to the delayed adoption of these Guidelines I am not implying that oral history practice in Australia was generally unethical with regard to its treatment of informants until the mid-1990s; rather that explication of ethical practice was late arriving. What this delay does suggest is that interviewing practices remained both uneven in quality and non-reflexive for a long time.

In 1986 – a critical year in the regulation of ethical practice in oral history in Australia – Federal government-funded social science and behavioural research was brought under the aegis of the National Health and Medical Research Council's code of ethical conduct in human research. The code protected human rights in research involving humans and had developed from the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki which, in turn, grew from 1947 Nuremberg Code.⁶⁹ This extension regulated oral history research carried out within universities (and all other bodies undertaking federally funded research) through the establishment of institutional human research ethics committees responsible to the Australian Health Research Ethics Committee.⁷⁰ The institutional committees, which differ

65 OHAAWA, *News and Notes*, March 1981, p. 4.

66 Heather Goodall, 'Writing a Life with Isabel Flick: An Exploration in Cross-cultural Collaboration', *The Public Historian*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2005, pp. 65-82.

67 *Play back: articles, news and notes from the Oral History Association of Australia (WA Branch)*, vol. 13, no. 3, Aug. 1993. *Oral History Newsletter OHAA*, vol. 3, no. 4 and vol. 4, no. 1, Aug. 1981.

68 Website of the Oral History Association of Australia, <http://www.ohaa.net.au/> [accessed May 2008].

69 World Medical Organisation, 'Declaration of Helsinki', *British Medical Journal*, 7 Dec.1996, 313 (7070), pp.1448-9.

70 'History of ethics and ethical review of human research in Australia', National Health and Medical Research Council, <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/ethics/human/ahec/history/index.htm> [accessed May 2008].

bureaucratical involving inte of that researc Human Resea pages) in 2007 committees im Research Cour Committee ha: with Australia it has ratified. ethical practice in this period.⁷

The primary welfare and the under the regi itself and that beneficent treat human beings.

Such respec determine o than this. It or no auton: helping peop

Implementing t practice as muc – the research w participants is 1 project are fully is obtained fron time is made cle and participant: project's compl research are con the interviewee consent form sig signed off, the p securely. In star

71 For full text of Health and Med May 2008].

72 Clifford G. Chri Yvonna S. Linco New Delhi, 200

73 National Statem

74 National Statem

bureaucratically from institution to institution, yet all new and ongoing research involving interactions with people; oral history research being only a fragment of that research. A fully developed National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, issued in 1999 and revised and expanded (from 67 to 107 pages) in 2007, sets out the principles and guidelines which the institutional committees implement.⁷¹ Joint authorship by the National Health and Medical Research Council, Australia Research Council and Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee has widened the reach of regulation. The Statement is consistent with Australia's obligations under the international human rights instruments it has ratified. It is therefore unsurprising that this codification of professional ethical practice corresponds to protocols established around much of the world in this period.⁷²

The primary purpose of the government's regulatory regime is to protect 'the welfare and the rights of participants in research'.⁷³ Ethical conduct in research under the regime requires that any research must have merit and integrity in itself and that participants receive justice (both distributive and procedural), beneficent treatment (maximising benefit and minimising harm) and respect as human beings. The 2007 Statement explained what respect entails.

Such respect includes recognising the value of human autonomy – the capacity to determine one's own life and make one's own decisions. But respect goes further than this. It also involves providing for the protection of those with diminished or no autonomy, as well as empowering them where possible and protecting and helping people wherever it would be wrong not to do so.⁷⁴

Implementing these values in the field of oral history has not changed good practice as much as standardised and mounted surveillance on it to check that – the research will make some useful contribution to knowledge; contact with participants is respectful and formalised; the purposes and outcomes of any project are fully disclosed; informed consent, either qualified or unqualified, is obtained from participants; their entitlement to withdraw consent at any time is made clear to them; risks are explicitly assessed and actively managed; and participants are kept informed of progress and outcomes through to the project's completion. This framework ensures that the mechanics of ethical research are complied with: an introductory letter sent, a reminder issued to the interviewee of his/her rights prior to the interview's commencement, a consent form signed, the transcript returned for vetting, the finalised transcript signed off, the project's progress reported to participants and the data stored securely. In standardising oral history practice, regulation has benefited it

71 For full text of the statements and further information, see the ethics section of the National Health and Medical Research Council website, <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/index.htm> [accessed May 2008].

72 Clifford G. Christians, 'Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, second edn, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 133-55.

73 National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 1999, p. 13.

74 National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007, p. 11.

despite some bureaucratic entanglements that have frustrated researchers from time to time.

The regulatory regime accelerated the ethical shift, which was already occurring among oral historians, towards a new emphasis on individual rights and entitlements. Understanding grew that what the historian (and the history discipline) wants is not necessarily what the interviewee wants as an individual or sometimes as group member. Implementing this understanding has become an ethical challenge for the oral historian to handle reflexively in each case. The historian's primary responsibility has moved from a duty to the history discipline to the needs and rights of the interviewee.

Oral history as helping strategy

The use of oral history as helping strategy reflects the shift in focus to the needs and wishes of the interviewee. After hearing and reading the testimonies of hundreds of Aboriginal people, the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997) concluded that:

... the primary need is to enable people to tell their stories, to have them recorded appropriately and to enable the survivors to receive counselling and compensation. The experience of the Shoah Foundation and of this Inquiry is that giving testimony, while extraordinarily painful for most, is often the beginning of the healing process.⁷⁵

Alice Nannup said something similar towards the end of her life when she told Lauren Marsh and Steve Kinnane, and thus all of us, her story of removal, survival and return.

I think writing this book has been really good for me, like medicine of a different kind. In many ways it has given me a new lease of life, and I think it's been important to get all my stories down into one book. That way my family, and their family, and so on, will always have them.⁷⁶

Here Alice Nannup integrated her own individual healing with preserving her story for the future, a two-pronged outcome.

While it is not new to use oral history to help participants, as Joanna Bornat's well-known British work on reminiscence activity among old (mostly institutionalised) people reminds us, it has become an increasingly popular strategy among health professionals.⁷⁷ For instance, the influential physician and professor of medicine at Columbia University, Rita Charon, advocates narrative medicine as a clinical medical practice. 'Honoring the stories of illness' by careful and extended clinical listening is her vision for better health care.⁷⁸ There is

⁷⁵ *Bringing Them Home*, 'The Inquiry Process', ch. 1.

⁷⁶ Nannup, Marsh, Kinnane, *When The Pelican Laughed*, p. 217.

⁷⁷ Joanna Bornat, 'Oral history as a social movement. Reminiscence and older people', *Oral History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1989, reprinted in *The Oral History Reader*, ch. 16.

⁷⁸ Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine. Honoring the Stories of Illness*, New York, 2008.

a gap, however oral historians, warily in this a honoured place Historians who repression, was the territory of

At Murdoch encouragement University of W which will cre any way by ask goals: first, to p personal asbest awareness of as our health. Mia mesothelioma v families' and th from ignorance. something out o One fibre. Who knowledge put c project coalesce, message. In help impending deat integrates with i helping process.

Oral history as

Many oral histor with informants between oral hist the currently do shared in the pr of the product.⁸²

⁷⁹ Members of M Phillips, Chris S Gail Phillips, 'A:

⁸⁰ Margaret Page, University.

⁸¹ Ted Grant, inter University.

⁸² Michael Frisch, Albany, 1990. Fo 2003.

a gap, however, between the purposes and skills of health professionals and oral historians, and the latter, aware of professional limitations, generally tread warily in this area for fear of doing harm. Nonetheless trauma studies have an honoured place in the annals of oral history through Holocaust remembrances. Historians who research topics such as social discrimination or exclusion; repression, war or terror; accident, disease or death constantly venture into the territory of memory, trauma and grief.

At Murdoch University a group of us – journalists and historian – with encouragement and assistance from asbestos-disease medical researchers at the University of Western Australia have embarked on an Asbestos Stories project which will create a website where people whose lives have been touched in any way by asbestos can tell their stories.⁷⁹ The website has two fundamental goals: first, to provide an opportunity (and thus to empower) all those with a personal asbestos story to tell that story publicly; and, second, to enhance public awareness of asbestos' ubiquity in our environment and its deadly danger to our health. Mia Lindgren has interviewed several people terminally ill with mesothelioma who have wanted to tell their asbestos story. They talk of their families' and their own lack of knowledge, and the suffering that has resulted from ignorance. They want people to know of the danger. 'I hope you've got something out of it that's going to help,' Margaret Page concluded.⁸⁰ 'One breath. One fibre. Who knows? ... Asbestos is a time bomb ... There needs to be more knowledge put out there,' Ted Grant insisted.⁸¹ In this way the two goals of the project coalesce, people's personal stories becoming a powerful public health message. In helping themselves cope with fear, illness and – in some cases – impending death they are also trying to help others. A self-help/healing project integrates with a social/collective project. Oral history lies at the core of this helping process.

Oral history as collaborative work

Many oral historians have moved much further down the path of collaboration with informants than regulation requires. The concept of 'shared authority' between oral historian and informant, articulated by Michael Frisch, encapsulates the currently dominant view of the process of oral history: that authority is shared in the process of co-creating the interview and in shared authorship of the product.⁸² A challenging concept to put into practice, it is seen most

⁷⁹ Members of Murdoch University's Asbestos Stories project team are Mia Lindgren, Gail Phillips, Chris Smyth and Lenore Layman. For details of the project, see Mia Lindgren and Gail Phillips, 'Asbestos Stories Project', *Papers in Labour History*, no. 27, June 2008.

⁸⁰ Margaret Page, interviewer Mia Lindgren, 4 April 2008, Asbestos Stories project, Murdoch University.

⁸¹ Ted Grant, interviewer Mia Lindgren, 11 March 2008, Asbestos Stories project, Murdoch University.

⁸² Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, Albany, 1990. For the ongoing impact of Frisch's work, see *Oral History Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2003.

commonly at work in autobiographical texts. Its challenges (and rewards) are well-illustrated in Heather Goodall's account of 'Writing a Life with Isabel Flick: An Exploration in Cross-cultural Collaboration'.⁸³ She describes a long, demanding, rewarding engagement and friendship, which began in the 1970s and produced an autobiography in 2004. Tensions that have commonly circled around issues of appropriation and ownership of information in Aboriginal oral history were allayed by past common activism and friendship but, in other regards, their collaboration raised questions of approaches to research, textual comprehensibility and readability, the story to be told and the extent to which analysis of it was appropriate. Such cross-cultural projects, done well, demand long years of engagement. For instance, Mary Anne Jebb worked 'intensively' for two years with Morndi Munro to produce his story.⁸⁴ And this was only after she had become 'a useful Gardia' by living for some years in Derby as a doctoral student working with her informants.⁸⁵ That this research has resulted in both the publication of her major history of the north Kimberley pastoral frontier and ongoing work with Mowanjum people at the Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre indicates the diverse outcomes of successful collaboration.⁸⁶

Shared authority in group oral history work is in some ways an even more challenging prospect than autobiographical collaboration. It was facilitated in the case of producing a history of the Campaign against Nuclear Energy and the People for Nuclear Disarmament (WA) by the seasoned activism of that group of people, with decades of experience in planning and action behind them.⁸⁷ They knew their goal: to produce a popular form of history which would be freely available and call younger people to political activism for social good: 'We hope that future generations of activists facing their own political and social battles, may be further motivated by the stories of what can be achieved against overwhelming odds,' they wrote.⁸⁸ This goal was not so different from the goal of early oral history activists but the balance of authority in the project had shifted away from the dominance of the historian. A small number of activists co-ordinated by Dave Worth obtained grants, advised historians Barbara Kearns and Leonie Stella on collecting the oral histories, scoured archives, and worked with Barbara Kearns as she compiled the history. *Stepping Out for Peace* (2004) is a colourful and lively publication combining oral history with a rich array of visuals and excerpts from archival records. It was distributed free to secondary schools. The project was one of shared authority throughout, a process appropriately signed on the title page by acknowledging Barbara Kearns'

83 Goodall, 'Writing a Life with Isabel Flick'. Also Isabel Flick and Heather Goodall, *Isabel Flick: the many lives of an extraordinary Aboriginal woman*, Crows Nest, 2004.

84 Morndi Munro, *Emerarra: A Man of Merarra*, edited by Mary Anne Jebb, Broome, 1996, p. 6.

85 Mary Anne Jebb, "'Gardia coming": collecting and interpreting Aboriginal oral sources', Murdoch University, 1991, p. 8, Battye Library.

86 Mary Anne Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare: a history of white bosses and Aboriginal pastoral workers*, Nedlands, 2002.

87 *Stepping Out for Peace: history of CANE and PND (WA)*, compiled by Barbara Kearns, Maylands, 2004.

88 *Stepping Out for Peace*, p. 6.

significant contr
histories formed
drove the projec

Collaborator
dissipates, but i
Midland Railwa
funding via Au
collaboration w
Wall project an
history informan
two former pov
engineer), both
Its industry par
Australia (WA),
technological his
and domestic co
recollections to l
interviewees' int
to see East Per
is the reason th
attended a picni
the powerhouse.
most of them ve
project for bring

Situational and

The national req
or by precept ei
standardised. Bo
consent, non-dec
These procedures
individual judge
conduct is more
right spirit, out c
As the 'right sp
historian continu
judgement varies
personalities and

89 Patrick Bertola &
Railway Worksho

90 Neil Byrne and l
the management

91 The East Perth F

92 National Statem

significant contribution as compiler and listing the fourteen activists whose oral histories formed the framework of the history and whose ongoing commitment drove the project from start to finish.

Collaboration and shared authority of the intense kind described above dissipates, but is not necessarily lost, in larger projects. In the case of both the Midland Railway Workshops project and the East Perth Power Station project funding via Australian Research Council Linkage grants secured ongoing collaboration with 'industry partners'. At Midland, open days, the Workers' Wall project and the development of an interpretive centre continued oral history informants' connection with the project.⁸⁹ A committee of three, including two former powerhouse workers (apprentice/tradesperson and professional engineer), both now retired, manage the East Perth Power Station project.⁹⁰ Its industry partners include the Engineering Heritage Panel of Engineers Australia (WA), which is taking the leading role in developing the powerhouse's technological history on the project's website. Interviews with 125 former workers and domestic consumers of electricity will enable workers' and consumers' recollections to be incorporated on the website through audio excerpts. While interviewees' interest in ongoing engagement with the project varies, all wish to see East Perth Power Station instated in Western Australian history, which is the reason they decided to collaborate with the project. Many informants attended a picnic and exhibition day organised in 2007 on the riverbank near the powerhouse. Some brought in their old hand-made tools for display. What most of them valued was the reunion with old workmates and thanked the project for bringing this about.⁹¹ Collaboration takes many forms.

Situational and interpretive ethical practices

The national regulatory regime and OHAA guidelines either contractually or by precept ensure that the mechanics of oral history practice have been standardised. Both follow the basic professional ethical principles of informed consent, non-deception, protection of privacy and accuracy in use of information. These procedures, however, have not eliminated the need for an oral historian's individual judgement. The 2007 National Statement explains that 'ethical conduct is more than simply doing the right thing. It involves acting in the right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one's fellow creatures'.⁹² As the 'right spirit' is not susceptible to definition or regulation, the oral historian continues to exercise personal ethical judgement. And inevitably this judgement varies, sometimes sharply, among oral historians because of differing personalities and ideologies; more generally, it depends on the moral order by

89 Patrick Bertola and Bobbie Oliver (eds), *The Workshops. A History of the Midland Government Railway Workshops*, Crawley, 2006.

90 Neil Byrne and Lindsay Tweedie with Lenore Layman, co-ordinator of the project, constitute the management group.

91 The East Perth Power Station project is due for completion in 2010.

92 National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007, Preamble p. 3.

Ethical Imperatives in Oral History Practice

which individuals live. The place of human relationships in that moral order is particularly pertinent for the oral historian. Differences occur both in situational ethics, arising in personal interactions with informants, and in interpretive ethics, arising in the use of a person's collected information.

Instantaneous situational judgement is needed in interviewing. The curly question of how much, if at all, to try to ensure that an interviewee speaks about a particular topic is a key example of the operation of situational ethics. Stuart Reid wrote of 'coaxing' his trade union interviewees to talk.⁹³ It seems an unproblematic verb, as does 'encouraging' and maybe 'probing', but what of 'pushing'? American oral historians Tracy K'Meyer and A. Glenn Crothers have recently published a long article in *Oral History Review* in which they discuss their 'reluctant narrator' whom they 'pushed' to 'talk about topics we considered more important than she did'. They decided to press 'beyond taboos', and ignored her reluctance to speak.⁹⁴ The life history they were interested in telling, one of racial identity, was not the one their narrator wanted to tell. They justify their actions, pointing out that in the end their narrator came to their point of view. Did they go too far and ethically fail to respect their informant? It seems to me that their situational judgement was wrong despite the fact that their narrator did not complain of it or end the relationship. While the use of follow-up questions is simply good practice for every oral historian, the line between such questions and intrusion or manipulation is a matter for individual situational judgement.

In a recent interview with a former power station worker I was confronted by an informant's unwillingness to discuss a memory triggered by one of my questions.

And did you see or were you close to any accidents while you were at the power station?
I was, mm.

And what was that?

This [workmate] I was talking about, he got quite burnt very badly in an incident in the buzz bar section of the power station at East Perth.

Do you remember what happened?

I do.

I haven't heard about this. Would you like to tell me?

No.

No. All right, okay. And is he still alive?

I would think not.

Not. He would be...

He was a fairly mature aged man when I knew him.

So we won't discuss the details of it because you don't want to but it sounds as though it's burnt into your mind?

Oh yes.

And painful to think about? Or not what you want to talk about?

I just don't want to talk about it.

93 Reid, 'The TLC's Oral History Project', p. 61.

94 Tracy E. K'Meyer and A. Glenn Crothers, "If I See Some of This in Writing, I'm Going to Shoot You": Reluctant Narrators, Taboo Topics, and the Ethical Dilemmas of the Oral Historian', *Oral History Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2007, pp. 71-93; particularly pp. 90-3.

Yes, that's fine.
Okay.

I did want to he know nothing ex (as shown in the increasingly clear I did not persist f it was only decei that, even if I pre project, I would f here. Had my in with my explana

K'Meyer and professional resp historically signi the end (enlargin person to comp. concern' for an i in situational etl matter of choosi K'Meyer and C sharply, which i

Historians als historian is lightl voice and author for readability, v way can the sp these questions projects, such as

In the quest fr with the questic constructing a c both emerge an project, virtuall most expansive and maintenanc wished to plac of wartime nav as 'a people pla and a culture c around these tc power station's in the war effor

95 K'Meyer and

Yes, that's fine.
Okay.

I did want to hear the details of this serious workplace injury about which I know nothing except that some such event occurred. I asked several questions (as shown in the extract) to see if I could open up the subject but it became increasingly clear that my informant really did not want to talk about the matter. I did not persist for two reasons, the first ethical and the second pragmatic. First, it was only decent to desist in the face of his reluctance; and, second, I judged that, even if I pressed on to explain why the information was important for the project, I would fail. Informants exercise agency, often decisively, as was the case here. Had my informant been a little less clear-minded and had I pressed on with my explanation of need I believe I would have entered unethical territory.

K'Meyer and Crothers argue that 'ethics do not require abdicating the professional responsibility to use our training to produce the most complete and historically significant document possible'.⁹⁵ This seems to me an argument that the end (enlarging the historical record) justifies the means (forcing an unwilling person to comply). It is ethically anachronistic in subordinating 'respect and concern' for an informant to an impersonal professional responsibility. Choices in situational ethics which oral historians confront, however, are not an easy matter of choosing alternatives but lie on a continuum of ethical choice. The K'Meyer and Crothers example, being extreme, simply focuses the question sharply, which is why I have cited it.

Historians also exercise interpretive ethical judgement. Even where an oral historian is lightly editing an oral history, committed to preserving the informant's voice and authorship, judgement is required: exactly what mediation is necessary for readability, what cuts are needed to achieve appropriate length and in what way can the speaker's intentions be conveyed most authentically. None of these questions is easily answered as writers collaborating on autobiographical projects, such as Goodall and Jebb, remind us.

In the quest for meaning, oral historians examining multiple narratives grapple with the question of how to represent this plurality, the multiple voices, while constructing a coherent interpretation to engage an intended audience. Patterns both emerge and are shaped. In the example of the East Perth Power Station project, virtually all the 75 former workers who have been interviewed were most expansive in talking of their work in the successful generation of electricity and maintenance of the station. Those who are old enough to remember also wished to place on record the role of the station's skilled workers in repair of wartime naval shipping. Because most of them remember the powerhouse as 'a people place' they also emphasised training, skill, memorable characters and a culture of cooperative work relations. Informants could see questions around these topics contributing to the history they believe should be told: the power station's crucial role in Perth's electricity supply over 60 years, its role in the war effort, its successful apprenticeship training and its positive human

⁹⁵ K'Meyer and Crothers, "If I See Some of This in Writing, I'm Going to Shoot You", p. 91.

relations of work. An ethical obligation to informants demands that these topics be developed strongly and positively in the project's overall interpretation. Informants also told what they remember of the environmental ill-effects of the coal-fired power station without hesitation but this was not a topic which they instigated or highlighted. They often had little to say in answer to questions about the physical conditions of work – the heat, noise, dust, dirt, steam – and how they felt about those conditions. Conditions were as they were; it was work. It wasn't really worth going on about. Many were even less sure about the worth of questions concerning workplace jokes and storytelling, penalties and sackings, or the making of foreigners (private jobs done in work time). Nonetheless these latter topics, low in most informants' priorities, require interpretive inclusion if the project is to have historical integrity. At this most basic level the project aims for an ethical interpretation of the power station's history.

The project's website will enable memories of work to speak from different workplaces at the power station, by using audio excerpts from interviews – the coal handling plant, boiler house and turbine floor, control room, various maintenance workshops (mechanical fitting, electrical fitting, instrument repair, boilermaking, blacksmithing, carpentry), the laboratory and office. In this way multiple voices will be heard and some sense of the diversity of working life on the site realised. But interpretation is never complete – the voices of short term workers and labourers will be almost absent while those of the long term and skilled will dominate. Doing justice to everyone's stories is never possible.

When moving to interpretation historians shift, in part at least, from the insider realm – how an informant sees things – to an outsider, analytical perspective. Interpretation challenges oral historians to ask how and why different understandings of the past are produced. The process can situate the historian uncomfortably between the remembered truths of informants and current scholarly interpretations and historiographic thinking. Reflecting on collaborative community history projects using oral history, the experienced American oral historian Linda Shopes warns that the different understandings of 'scholars' and 'local people' cannot be fully resolved.

While there are fine examples of the process working well, at times negotiated history can be unsatisfactory to all parties – too critical and de-localized for community members, too uncritical and narrow for scholars. The tension points to a deeper issue: the essential disjunction between professional history and history as it is popularly understood.⁹⁶

This is a pessimistic conclusion but one which rightly warns of the often difficult intellectual and ethical judgements required of historians interpreting oral sources.

Historians use oral evidence in analytical frameworks which some interviewees do not recognise or accept, often in which issues of class, gender, ethnicity or sexuality are made the central focus. Scholarly articles are written

⁹⁶ Linda Shopes, 'Oral history and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities', *Journal of American History*, vol. 89, no. 2, Sept. 2002, pp. 588-99.

on silences, a oral interview dissecting do redolent of vi will subsequer rather that th gap. Alistair T for informants responsibility be negotiated historians we

Amplification

Alessandro Po oral history p means:

the specific : to publicati the knowled own and sh

Here Portelli h practice, beyon their library de history is ethic community is '1 He was thinkir which he was v

Memory acc make – whic also of what to memory a

In the power st interviewees co workplace, whic

⁹⁷ Alistair Thoms *American Histor*

⁹⁸ Alessandro Por Oral History', in ch. 4, p. 69.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

on silences, avoidance, resistance and other forms of unwitting testimony in oral interviews. Mythic constructs in memory are explored. Accustomed to dissecting documentary sources, historians tackle oral evidence in a manner redolent of vivisection. Informants frequently do not realise how their stories will subsequently be used. This is not to argue that informants have been misled; rather that the 'disjunction' Shopes identifies is most often a communication gap. Alistair Thomson points out that scholarly analysis can be disempowering for informants and that, on occasions, oral historians must choose between their responsibility to informants or to history. Such 'dilemmas', he argues, have to be negotiated even if the process is 'challenging and even painful'.⁹⁷ As oral historians we pick our individual way through this ethical minefield.

Amplification and restitution

Alessandro Portelli offers some comfort in arguing that the final step in ethical oral history practice is amplification and restitution. Amplification for him means:

the specific restitution that we can make as professional intellectuals who have access to publications and other media. Rather than merely returning to the community the knowledge it already has, we repay and supplement it with knowledge of our own and share it with the portions of the world that we are able to reach.⁹⁸

Here Portelli highlights the importance of public outcomes for oral history practice, beyond the return of audio records and transcripts to informants and their library deposit. Enabling people's stories to enter public and academic history is ethical restitution. He concludes that restitution in an evolving community is 'less the restitution of identity than the memory of difference'.⁹⁹ He was thinking specifically of a working class industrial community with which he was working as it de-industrialised.

Memory accompanies change, but also resists the changes we do not choose to make – which goes back to oral history as an art not only of what happened but also of what did not happen, what could or should have happened. It goes back to memory as alternative.¹⁰⁰

In the power station workers' oral histories, for instance, a large number of interviewees contrast workplaces today unfavourably with the powerhouse workplace, which closed in 1981. 'It was a great place to work', was one coal

97 Alistair Thomson, 'Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History', *Journal of American History*, vol. 85, no. 2, Sept. 1998, pp. 591-2.

98 Alessandro Portelli, 'Tryin' to Gather a Little Knowledge. Some Thoughts on the Ethics of Oral History', in *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, Madison, 1997, ch. 4, p. 69.

99 *ibid.*, p. 70.

100 *ibid.*

handler's comment replicated many times. These memories signal what many workplaces have lost in the last thirty years – work organisation which allows and facilitates some worker autonomy, social interaction and mutual support; workplace trust and manageable pressures; light supervision and limited management. These are not nostalgic or romantic memories of some fabulous golden age, they are a practical alternative to current employment practices. As a final step in ethical oral history practice, restitution makes visible what society has lost as well as what we have gained.

Conclusion

Oral history practice in Western Australia from the 1960s has been firmly linked to international trends, and its continuities and changes have paralleled those occurring elsewhere. The first State Archivist and Battye Librarian Mollie Lukis' overseas travel, others' attendances at early international oral history conferences, early and active national involvement as well as academic networks have ensured that oral history in Western Australia has not been parochial nor its ethical trajectory over time exceptional.

The moral imperative to collect and archive old people's recollections, and to record the memories of groups previously 'hidden from history', has been ever-present. Oral history's use in redressing the historical record and in advocacy to right historical wrongs, begun in the 1960s-1970s, fuelled interviewing with Aboriginal people, workers, women and specific ethnic groups. This advocacy continues, as does the use of memoir and autobiography (based on oral interviewing) to humanise and individualise historical discrimination and suffering. Belief in uncovering the real truth about the past through ordinary people's transparent recollections has been lost however, displaced by the understanding that memories are subjectively shaped and are expressed in particular ways in situational dialogue with the oral historian.

Understandings of what constitutes ethical practice in oral history have shifted significantly over time, from a primary responsibility to historical truth to a duty to the individual interviewee, and from the oral historian's overriding authority to the primacy of the interviewee's rights and needs. At the same time confidence in an identity of interest between informant and historian has been replaced by the recognition that informants have interests distinct from those of interviewers. Development of a mandatory, regulatory code and associational guidelines has standardised basic ethical practice so that, on one level, it has become a set of procedures and responsibilities which can be understood and implemented without too much difficulty or disagreement. At a deeper ethical level many complex questions in situational and interpretive ethics remain to confront the oral historian.

Oral History Empowerment

Jan Gothara

Ethical considerations for a project, which is a syndrome (hereafter DS, I mean, on the also seeking first individuals with has attracted some my own practice lived with DS for informant in this the implicated re

Until recently disability in Western as disability has difference.¹ The will be based largely over a number of family and community post school option migration. I am of Western Australia funding or community sees its role, rather than advocating the book will be

1 Errol Cocks, *Construction of I* in this area. *The Needs, Opinions, Research*, Perth, people with Do