

BUT IS IT HISTORY?:

An exploration of the methodological
underpinnings of oral history.

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The field of oral history includes almost all forms of verbal testimony and information given by human beings in the course of their lives, either through the direct intervention of the historian or researcher, in the form of an interview, or through the recording of oral tradition. In the past years, the concept of oral history and archives has been expanded to encompass "aural" material: recordings of conventions, speeches, news broadcasts, dictated correspondence, sound recordings from environments wherein a human presence has been felt, as diverse as factory work environments and natural environments soon to be developed in industry.¹ A distinction exists between the first category of documentation and the second. Oral history, the subject of this paper, requires the direct intervention of the researcher and historian in the creation of the historical source: the individual to be interviewed or the folk narrator or reporter giving a fixed testimony. In this sense, they are secondary documents of a peculiar kind. And as such, because of the direct intervention of the historian, oral history engenders a series of raging debates which cover the broadest imaginable range of Western historiography.

Aural history on the other hand, is at present, a more formal and archival category.² In essence, it is a recognition that the communications of the modern world are shifting away from

written documentation towards audio/visual and cybernetic forms, and that the historians of the present and future will require such documentation for their research work. As with any primary document, tests of provenance and authenticity will need to be made. The question which oral historians seem most prone to ask and be asked of their work is, "But is it history?" In fact, an examination of oral history reveals that not only is it history, but it represents all of the major methodologies of historical analysis in Western historiography.

This paper presents a discussion of the question "Is oral history history?" approached from a number of directions. This suggested relationship and presence in each of the dominant currents of Western historical thought will be first demonstrated by an empirical overview of oral history's generation by varied currents in specific national situations: those of Britain, the United States, Europe, and Canada.³ The relationship of oral history to the dominant historiography of each nation will be noted.

Secondly, oral historiography will be subjected to examination within a set of generic categories developed from Jan Vansina's definition of historicity which he has, in turn, developed from an overview of the elements comprising a theory of history. These are: Time (Chronology); Development (Causality); and, Truth (What is historical fact?).⁴ These three areas cover definitions as old as Greek historiography and as new as interdisciplinarity and quantification.⁵

The third step will be to define the central currents of historical thought in reference to these categories and then place the four types of oral history: elite study, folklore, journalism, and "history from the bottom up" into these categories.

This examination will demonstrate the extent to which oral history

is a method within the various historiographic trends, used in varied ways to meet their specific analytic and research demands. It will demonstrate the degree to which oral history raises specific methodological problems or places itself in an ambiguous position as a historical resource.

The use of oral sources for historical purposes is hardly a new idea. Before there were literate cultures, there were ones in which oral tradition played the central role in recording political and social structures. Jan Vansina in Oral Tradition, has derived the following typology of oral traditions in oral cultures: formulae (titles, slogans, didactic formulae, clues to facts, ritual formulae); poetry (artistic works, official poetry, historical poetry, personal poems, panegyric poems, religious poems); lists (placenames from migrations, personal names, and geneologies); tales (general history, local history, family history, didactic myths, aetiological myths, artistic tales, personal recollections); rumour; commentaries; legal precedents; and, explanations of fixed (traditional) forms.⁶ These categories served different functions within the societies from which they originated.⁷ Forms of oral tradition depend on the nature of social and political structures and degree of stability. The more developed structures maintained far more varied and lasting forms of oral tradition because of the intervention of formal state institutions in their preservation, the use of highly ritualized text and forms of presentation to insure accuracy over time.⁸ In oral cultures, oral tradition held and holds the centerpiece in the maintenance of a culture: it is that culture's history.

The development of civic society and a specialized division of labour with emphasis placed on the inventory and preservation of ruling

class property and lineage pushed oral tradition out of the centre of political and social life. As a culture became literate, a functional division occurred. Literacy was limited to state and religious officials (archivists and priests) but dominated civic and religious life, the two structures where oral tradition had been most stable and consistent over time.⁹ Oral tradition remained the dominant form of communication in cultural and social life amongst those in the bottom layers of society. The forms it maintained were generally "free" forms rather than the "fixed" forms which had characterized official history texts.¹⁰ This meant that less historical accuracy and more evolution became a characteristic of such traditions, especially when exposed to new cultural influences. When oral traditions such as the Greek were transformed into literature, their content was adopted to represent the values of the accompanying social order, just as they were again altered by later Christian historians.¹¹

Oral tradition existed in the first instance as an historical record inside a culture. The second instance of this process was the interest exhibited by historians outside the culture in this culture's traditions. From the beginning, an interest existed in this use of oral tradition (by the Roman historians for example) and the use of eyewitness (first person accounts) of events in historical writings: "They (traditions) are known to be the basis of many written sources too, especially those of classical antiquity and of the early Middle Ages."¹² Paul Thompson, in the Voice of the Past, suggests that as the prestige of oral tradition declined in relations to social institutions, the "radicality" of its historiography increased.¹³ This was in part because it was identified with dominated cultures trying to maintain a consciousness of their origins and distinctness.

By 300 AD, Thompson suggests that written documents formed the substance of historical writing although some authors such as Bede in the 6th Century AD used eyewitness accounts because of their alternative viewpoints on events. Eighteenth century history was often written in the first person as a subjective analysis of events but writers such as Voltaire denounced the use of folkloric traditions as representing a romanticization of the past.¹⁴ This perspective intensified with the industrial revolution and the impact of scientific methodologies and concepts of progress and modernization in historiography: oral traditions were seen as relics with no bearing on contemporary society.¹⁵ However, 19th century conditions led to a new use of oral history as eyewitness accounts were used by reformers to argue for social change, through the living and suffering voices of the workshop, cottonfields, and cottonmills.¹⁶

These general features of historiographic interest in oral sources were manifested in varied ways within developing national contexts during the modern period. Individual working class eyewitness accounts and life history transcribed for the working class press or for moral religious tracts developed in 19th century Britain as did the use of oral testimony by reformers (the Blue Books and Royal Commissions). Engels used evidence from testimonies collected in his travel through England as well as from the Blue Books to argue against the destructive effects of the industrial revolution. Henry Mayhew, a British socialist, used shorthand to record working class experience and unemployment. Beatrice Webb and the Cooperative Movement also made use of oral testimony.¹⁷ From the beginning, British labour historiography developed hand in hand with a powerful labour movement and the use of working class testimony.¹⁸ A schism existed between academic documentary historians and radical labour historians despite their common middle class origins.¹⁹

A new direction in the use of oral evidence developed in the early 20th Century as the final erosion of stable agricultural communities and increased national cultural consciousness combined, motivating the collection of folklore materials. The Irish Folklore Institute, later Commission, founded by the Irish government in the 1920's at the initiative of Professor Seamus Delargy, collected folklore.²⁰ He spent his summers with Sean O'Conaill, an old Irish monoglot speaker, and realized that there were "hundreds like Sean O'Conaill still surviving, and that their material could only be saved from the 'archives of the graves' by an organization equipped to do the job on a large scale."²⁰ The old monoglot speakers had lost their audiences, and would declaim to themselves so as not to abandon the tradition. Through Delargy's efforts, these declamations met the company of the folklorist's notepad and later taperecorder.

Iorwerth Cyfeiliog Peate of the University of Wales studied the "y werin" (common people) of Wales, establishing massive archives at the National Museum of Wales and then at the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagan.²¹

Both directions of early British oral history were based on working people's history. Oral history ~~was~~ traditionally identified with renegade labour history and its accompanying reform traditions while the study of agrarian "prior" culture focused on work and cultural activity as expressed in folklore. Neither traditions ~~were~~ ^{was} concerned with elites. Both focused on daily life experience not institutions. These traditions continued merging into the British documentary realist movement of the depression and the war.

With the post-war entrenchment of documentary history, fewer oral history efforts were published although some significant texts include Lark Rise to Candle Ford (Flora Thompson, 1940's) and A Cornish Waif's

Story (Al Rowse).²²

A major new impact on the British oral history movement came through the general neo-Marxist reorientation of social history which swept British historiography in the early 1960's.²³ This focused labour history on the daily lives of workers in and outside of the workplace and away from structural analyses of their political and union institutions. The earlier concern with working conditions reinforced this direction, as did the methodological contributions of the social sciences. Paul Thompson initiated the Oral History Association in 1969.²⁴ The BBC Sound Archives undertook area studies and the British Institute of Sound Studies continued the collection of oral history, as did the History Workshops (labour history) and the Women's Institutes. Community and local history projects were initiated by the Workers Educational Association to explore class roots in communities, with the research carried out by community members.²⁵

The existence of a social democratic government for many years, the strong British class traditions and continued inequalities created an environment favourable to a socialist perspective in British oral historiography.

One of the most significant contributions to oral historiography to emerge from the European tradition has been made by folklorists. Jan Vansina, using a comparative method of analysis, wrote Oral Tradition, a pioneering effort in analyzing oral tradition as an historical source, organizing oral history according to typologies and setting up strict research and evaluative methods. Vansina's work comes out of the legacies of European colonialism as a direct product of the uneven distribution of academic facilities and material resources between neo-colonies and colonies and their dominating nations, thus allowing the central historiographic role in these countries to be delegated to members of the colonizing culture. Vansina, a Belgian, studied the

Belgian colonies and their cultures. "The sources I have chiefly relied upon are those which I myself collected in Belgian colonial territory, among the Kuba of the Kasai (Congo) and in Rwanda and Burundi."²⁶ This has resulted in methodologies which are forced to straddle the contradiction of cultural alienation, on one hand turning to interdisciplinary techniques of analysis of oral traditions and acting as a conduit of nonWestern concepts of history and on the other hand attempting to impose and tailor their research to fit Western models of historical criticism.

American oral history comes out of similar colonial roots. Oral techniques were used by anthropologists and journalists collecting data on indigenous peoples.²⁷ A second current of oral tradition was the study of Black culture and history. There had been a continued reliance on oral transmission, despite changes in content, amongst Black Americans, in part because slavery legally denied all access to literacy.²⁸ American advocates of social change used narrated examples of Black oppression under slavery to press for social reform or as ammunition against the South during the Civil War.²⁹

A tradition of slave narratives emerged in the United States told by freed Blacks and fugitives often with the aid of abolitionist forces or by historians from the antebellum south who used Black narratives to defend a paternalistic vision of slavery.³⁰ With the resolution of the Civil War which was more concerned with modernizing the American economy than freeing the Blacks, narrative tradition in historical writing all but disappeared. The wave of reaction against World War I racism and radicalization in the wake of the Russian Revolution inspired renewed American interest in oral literature. In the 1920's, Fisk University began to gather ex-slaves' narratives realizing that most of the survivors of slavery would soon be dead.³¹

! yup

As well, American labour reformers in urban centres used eye-witness testimony as did the working class press. The real revival of interest in oral traditions developed in the 1930's with the massive radicalization caused by the Depression. The American radicalization was deeply tinged with historical American mixing-pot populism which emphasized a desire to identify cultural roots and American unity in diversity. Although the initial contributions came from Communist writers in the realist tradition (which defined realism as capturing the essence of a phenomenon, not merely describing its surface appearance), it soon generalized into the New Deal programmes employing young, unemployed Americans who were sent out by the Federal Writers Project to document American rural life and its folkways. This included the testimony of 2,194 slaves in 18 states. The interviewers were too often white and racist themselves and clear editorial standards were not enforced, but the narratives are increasingly being seen as a wellspring of material on slavery.³²

The experience of the War and the Cold War cut off this embryonic documentary tradition as the American Left focused on survival (leaving its own oral documentary record through the acrid files of the McCarthy hearings). Academic folklore study emerged in the 1950's stripped of its left-wing identification, still concerned with ethnicity, and influenced by other social science disciplines.³³ The folklorists were relatively marginalized.

The oral history movement in the U.S. within the biographical/auto-biographical tradition in political historiography emerged in the 1940's. It developed primarily as an archival resource as Alan Nevins of Columbia University tried to come to terms with the replacement of written documents of a personal nature by electronic communication as a cultural byproduct of the growth of mass media. Thus, as telephone

replaced letters and tapes replaced written documents, the pace of modern living deprived many famous men of the opportunity to record their memoirs or leave written records of their achievements:

I worked for years as a newspaperman in New York, and it really pained me sometimes, to see the obituary pages of the New York Times....Year by year, they ("famous personages") died and I said to myself, as I saw the obituary columns, "What memories that man carries with him into total oblivion and how completely they are lost."³⁴

American historiography with its empirical focus on important events and leaders would be deprived of the raw material of its creation unless a new form of documentation was developed, appropriate to modern times.

The invention of the portable tape recorder resolved this dilemma. It also created conditions in which diverse life situations could be documented with verbatim accuracy while freeing the interviewer to interact with the interviewee. It allowed interviews to occur in a person's home environment which recorded the emotional quality of their words. The role of the interviewer was to prompt, fill in and challenge inaccuracies but primarily, to act as a catalyst to an autobiographical effort. Context interviews could also be made with those close to a famous individual, to allow for future autobiography. Columbia concentrated on the famous, but they also collected some individual life histories from the lower echelons of the social scale, generally outside of a social context.³⁵

The Columbia project destroyed original tapes, transcribing all of them into transcript form, and thus continuing in the documentary history tradition giving the interview the authority of a written source. Research preparation for interviews and thorough footnoting of transcripts was strongly encouraged. From the beginning, a strong concern for fact-finding and cross referencing of data was apparent in the American

movement.

American oral historiography was not only influenced by the electronic media and dominant historiographic trends but also by the growth of post-war social sciences, particularly sociology and psychology (Talcott Parvson's structural functionalism and Freudianism). The Columbia model was used by many univeristy archives such as Wayne State (labour) and private foundations to begin their own programmes.

During the 1960's a new oral history movement began ^{to} focus [^] on the major concerns of these radicalizations: ethnicity, cultural oppression, community organization, women and social mobility.³⁶ The Oral History Association was founded in 1966 and brought together professional oral historians.³⁷ The orientation of the American Left ~~away~~ from class analysis and the working class as a revolutionary force and the rejection of Marxism by the New Left, led the majority of radicalizing young American academics to a reapplication of traditional social science and empirical analysis to new areas of concern and discussion.³⁸ Class analysis in particular was obscured. Change occurred primarily in research techniques and subject matter.

An emphasis on community and oppressed minority control and participant/observer methods in social research led to a movement away from projects such as the Columbia model and into community-based projects. Quantification techniques were introduced recently for in-depth study of interview data. The majority of studies in the last years have been "from the bottom up" in subject matter. Inter-disciplinarity, that is, multi-disciplined analysis of single interviews, became an increasingly popular direction.³⁹ A tendency to prefer empirical and in-depth studies continued. This was less the case in areas where broad bodies of research information existed such as with the slaves narratives.

Unlike the Marxist traditions of British labour history, American labour studies focused on trade unionism and collective bargaining, the institutional history of labour economy. John R. Commons of the Wisconsin school pioneered this work which tended to generalize about the consciousness of the American working class based on an acceptance of a congruence of the "pure and simple" philosophy of the labour movement and the daily lives of the workers.⁴⁰ Post-war labour historians began to look at more complex motivations of behaviour including shopfloor, community and ethnic studies. Freidlander's classic study of the United Auto Workers is an example of the in-depth use of labour oral history techniques within labour history.⁴¹

The identification of oral history with the study of radicalizing groups in society and the integration of community-based and at times anti-academic models into the methods of study (for example, a rejection of documentary and media primary sources for their apparent bias) led to strong differentiation amongst American oral historians.⁴²

A characterization of both the American and British schools of radical oral history has been a view of the interview subject not as an object of inquiry but as an active participant in the research.⁴³ Oral history is increasingly seen as a collective enterprise requiring the intervention of the interviewee as much if not more than the historian. Oral history has become increasingly popular as a teaching tool to help build a concept of historicity among students as well as links between schools and the communities in which they are located. The Foxfire books are the clearest examples of this process.⁴⁴

An additional American trend has been the development of semi-journalistic accounts of historical events. These oral histories are geared to the mass market. The experiences which they focus on are of great importance to many people in society (e.g., World War II, the

depression, and slavery). A popular narrative style does not necessarily defy an analytical method and the book Roots is based on a series of clearly defined postulates within the body of the work that represent a developed interpretation of slavery. Alex Haley, the author, spent eight years researching the book.⁴⁵ However, such works raise genuine historiographic questions especially when no sources or footnoting is done. A central concern of current American oral history criticism is the need to establish standards of quality in the face of the community-based and popular oral history explosion.⁴⁶ In summary, American oral history has been characterized by a focus on individual and in-depth study; a use of psychology in analyzing data; and, a strong concern for the facts. The dominant ideological trend in it has been populist.

Canadian oral history has fallen outside of the traditional areas of academic concern, concentrating either on broadcasting production or community and non-academic research. Rather than the American emphasis on the transcript, most Canadian work has focused on the tape itself. Because of this, Canadian work has focused on some particularly innovative areas of analysis such as the World Soundscape's emphasis on linguistic structure and sound quality and the impact of sound environments on human activity.⁴⁷

The oral tradition in Canada in the 19th century came from two central directions according to Russell Hann in the introduction to the Great War and Canadian Society.⁴⁸ A rich sense of local diversity existed and was fostered by the development of a local press. In particular, this centered on humorous folk characters and dialects through funny papers such as the Grip. Such locally based culture was wiped out with the economic developments at the end of the century and a combination of centralized presses and syndicated humour columns

soon dominated local culture as well. At the same time, a standardized "King's English" was pressed and worked specifically against folk and local idioms in the education system.

The other source of Canadian oral traditions echoed those in Britain and the U.S. as labour reformers sought evidence from workers for Royal Commissions. Again, the injustices of the working class experience was documented by an alien class. The 19th century reopened an interest in romantic folk traits which had been earlier rejected because of rationalism. Native and Quebecois culture were studied through the Royal Ontario Museum. This process focused on classifying archetypes, a method which was unable to show the relationship of these cultures to the dominate industrial society. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in the 1930's and 1940's initiated sound recordings in the Cariboo (1941) through its Vancouver studios.⁴⁹

In the post-war period, the CBC continued to act as a force for oral documentation such as Imbert Orchard's recordings about British Columbia history. He was the author of From The Mountains to the Sea which detailed the reminiscences of the pioneer generation in the province. The CBC continued to produce short, fifteen minute sound documentaries. In 1974, the Provincial Archives of B.C., in exchange for Imbert Orchard's recordings, set up a sound archives programme including oral reminiscences, tradition, events (primary), and radio broadcasts.⁵⁰ Both the Public Archives of Canada and York University's Political Science Department hold extensive recordings.⁵¹ The broadcast orientation of Canadian oral history has also resulted in a style of writing characterized by Barry Broadfoot and James Grey which is cast along a popular journalistic model. In Broadfoot's work, for example, through his failure to develop any backup research; to footnote; and, to give sources, respondent's names, or identify a

means of checking his material⁵², his work is discredited as accurate historical documentation.

Having examined the history of oral history in the most productive nations, we can derive a set of types of historiography which dominate the general category of oral history. These are autobiography/biography, folklore, social history, and journalism. The object of oral biography or autobiography is an exploration of the life history of an individual. It may simply mean recording and literally transcribing an interview or series of interviews. A focus of this work has been on political leadership and structure. Biographies are now being developed about individuals from particular social groupings. The biography/autobiography is generally characterized by a focus on the achievements and events in a person's life, her/his goals and ideas, and an analysis of personality. Similar methods have been applied to focused monographs about events or institutions which examine the views and actions of leaders in particular situations as well as the goals of the organization. Perhaps this is the best definition of oral history in these terms:

What do you get from aural history, if it's done rigorously and done in accordance with scholarly canons? It seems to me you get four things potentially. Anecdotes. You get a damn good story from interviews and if you can demonstrate that it's a revealing anecdote and a true one, it can make a manuscript come alive. You can sometimes bring clarity to complicated material. Sometimes you simply can't make head or tail out of the documents and someone who worked with them and remembers the way things happened can bring clarity into your mind and into your narrative. You can use it to corroborate other evidence. And you can, I think, get your most valuable descriptions of a man's personality. The person you're interviewing can also tell you about other people and that's valuable for a historian.⁵³

The object of folkloric study is culture. Folklorists divide between those who simply collect folklore and those who seek a social and historic meaning in cultural documents through analysis.⁵⁴ For folkloric

historians, the emphasis is on a study of the totality of social organization in oral societies since no separation exists between "culture" and social and political function, as with advanced capitalist society where art is isolated from political life. Culture in oral societies has a direct function in economic and political activity in maintaining oral societies on the level of material life. Oral literature varies from a full documentation of social structures to parallel accounts of written documents such as Indian interpretations of treaties to specifically local and aesthetic documents like folktales and songs.

[The following ^{where?} is a brief summary of folklorists' attitudes.] Folklore scholarship has developed over many years a deep regard for the truth of the spoken word. While the folklorist admits that oral tradition may, at times, distort factual detail, he sees in oral evidence a cultural, social, or psychological turn.⁵⁵

X Oral history in Canada, the U.S., and Britain has taken the form of "elite" history. The focus is on a popular presentation of the content of material not on interpretations. Little concern is given to historical accuracy or comparative documentation. These are the most dubious of all of the writings which are considered to be oral history. In Barry Broadfoot's words:

I don't consider myself a historian. I really consider myself a chronicler. Ten Lost Years is an extension of my 29 years of journalism across the country with newspapers and wire services.

But even Broadfoot is unclear for he later states:

I believe that Ten Lost Years was the first book of aural history done in Canada.⁵⁶

X "History from the bottom up" is a broad topic area with conflicting definitions. One author defined it as anything but political history but this is, in fact, inaccurate because social historians examine political behaviour (E.P. Thompson, Paul Thompson).

X Social history is an approach to history and its area of focus is on the everyday lives of the people as organized by social class, race, ethnicity, sex, age, and so on. In particular, social history has concentrated on those at the bottom (or relatively so) and on aggregates through the intensive use of quantification. As well, importance is placed on thorough description of experience and on analyses which can explain how historical processes occur. Various schools of social history analysis exist. Marxism and structuralism are dominant with increasing intersection between the two. Emphasis on the formation of consciousness is a central element of oral social history. Berkhoffer defines social history in these words:

The social interpretation of history places ideas, events and behaviour as well as institutions in the larger context of the overall social system. Politics, economics, diplomacy, and intellectual trends are all explained and connected through their nexus in specific social systems and preferably in relation to the workings of the overall society.⁵⁷

These categories of oral history can now be submitted to a rigorous examination within a framework of central questions raised in Western historiography.

Your organization is confusing here. Expect it will be sorted out.

Jan Vansina in Oral Tradition states that a society's concepts of Time, Development and Truth are the philosophical underpinning of all historical worldviews or methods. These reflect the ways in which societies idealize themselves, explaining their present existence through their past.

These concepts seem to provide an acceptable model with which to examine oral history. "Time" locates human experience inside a process of events, it posits the need to link events together, whether in linear sequence or cycles, or in short or long term. "Time" as a concept, by linking events inevitably demands an explanation of these linkages, generating the second concept, "Development". These explanations of causality require the historian to choose between different information, to emphasize some events, factors, or structures over others, or to describe a broad framework of links to provide a definition of historical "Truth", in both a discrete and composite sense. Whether positivist, empiricist, materialist or metaphysical a universal theorization of human reality as situated in time emerges. This form of knowledge is 'history'.

Not surprisingly, historians most concerned with accurate reconstruction have focused on this issue. But, Marxists grappling to comprehend the "laws" of a given period and the concept of determination, also rely on precise chronologies.⁵⁸ The folklorists have been the most open to accepting new notions of time and chronology into historiographic study precisely

because they are dealing with cultures which differ greatly in these notions from our own.

One way in which the empiricist historians have dealt with the apparent contradictions in historical memory is to recognize problems with chronology and suggest that other sources be used to verify, or develop time sequences in narratives.

The American Oral History Association has given some thought to the issue of time concepts in memory through consultation with psychologists and psychiatrists.⁵⁹ John Neuenschwander, addressing the OHA explained that entire life histories are not stored in memory, most longterm remembrance takes place through reconstructing schemes and organizing experiences into them. He suggests that little is known about memory processes and he urges that oral historians employ a certain amount of skepticism.⁶⁰

As well, some oral historians have adapted new time concepts which flow logically from their experiences with interview subjects' time memories. As with memory analysis the influence of psychology in American life has permitted a recognition of individual processes of cognition, including those in relation to time. Bernard Ostrey thus comments in "The Illusion of Understanding: Making the Ambiguous Intelligible", on the ways in which oral history challenges a neat and linear picture of social reality.⁶¹ Millar refers to experiences of events as a

"tapestry".⁶² Others recognized the fact that events are often more central to individuals than those seen in political life and that these form personal chronologies (for example the death of a family member). With the application of psychology to oral history patterns of rhythm and time frame particular to individuals can be read. These can be tested against others of a similar age group to develop a sense of time references in the human lifecycle, or to derive an understanding of culturally important events in time outside of political structures.⁶³

Many authors believe that it is the historians task to create the sense of chronology and sequence in a work, using the material developed through interviews (with or without additional documentation). Biographical and autobiographical histories and monographs with their focus on individuals who have made their mark on political and social life, or on particular events, focus on linear time models. However, there are alternate ways in which authors do this.

In some biographies, interviews are organized around key events to form a sense of chronology, while retaining a pastiche of varying viewpoints towards events and historical "actors". This is the method used by Peter Stursberg in the Diefenbaker Years.⁶⁴ A second method, used in Huey Long is to present a linear narrative based on reconstructing the individual's career. Quotes are drawn from interviews to illustrate particular developments. The third method chooses

one event and studies it in depth. After a brief introductory history, layers of description are added from various vantage points to allow readers to experience the event in as close a manner to actuality as possible, but from a variety of views. This is the method employed in Watts: The Aftermath by Paul Bullock.⁶⁵ There is a limited sense of chronology with such a method, but a deep sense of experience.

The question of historical retrospectivity is central in the debate on time accuracy: the recognition exists that the perspective of the present is imposed on the past shaping the opinions of the subject. As well, the researcher is asking questions from inside the present of the past. Thus an inbuilt bias towards the interpretation of the past not in its own terms but in the terms of the present is built into oral history. This is of particular concern to oral historians who wish to explore the past on its own terms for its own sake.

Other historians argue that all history is retrospective and that the problems with retrospective bias and bias in documents created as a product of historical activity are fundamentally similar. Others such as Wiikie, in Elitelore recognize the existence of this retrospectivity but argue that events only have meaning when seen from the present, and that the strength of oral history lies in its inclusion of the historical subject in the act of retrospection as well as the historian. Thus we can develop a sense of the impact of events on the individual's life over time.⁶⁶

Others suggest the use of different forms of questions and criticism to distinguish between the factual experience of the past and the interpretation of the present.⁶⁷ Some argue to avoid all but descriptive questions, so as to eliminate the present bias, others to phase questions of opinion in ways in which to differentiate memories of past experiences and present ~~p~~rospectives on experiences.

The debate on retrospection has been useful in allowing historians to question "modernization" theories which assume a linear economic development & related rational evolution of thinking. Through comparative analysis of attitudes, a differentiation can be made between changing and unchanging views on subjects over time.

Folklorists raise two issues in relation to time which have had a serious impact on all oral historians. These are non-Western time models and the concept of lifecycle time.

Three types of time concepts characterize oral societies: ecological time, based on "natural phenomena which appear at certain moments and regulate human activity"; sociological time, in which "a recurrent feature of the social system serves as a point of reference for time-reckoning". He continues:

Time is then divided into periods corresponding to the splitting up of human beings into various social or political groups since the time of the first man. Consequently time is measured by, and in relation to, the structural

relations actually obtaining between these groups. ...But it often happens that this chronology based on social structure does not stretch very far back into the past.⁶⁸

It is then that the third type of time measurement is developed: that of periods, and "the calendar based on social structure only applies to the last period." For some cultures, there is a mythical and then a historical period, for others, the two exist side by side.

Vansina also stated that the three forms of time measurement generally coexist. Sociological time is distorting, and in particular, there is a telescoping in relation to mythological time, for example, "ancestors who are not founders of lineages are omitted (in genealogical tables) because they are of no importance in explaining the relationships between the various existing social groups..."⁶⁹ Thus time concepts have a direct bearing on Western concepts of historical accuracy. Vansina suggests that the lack of longterm ecological measurements has resulted in historical inaccuracies, in developing chronological perspectives on African cultures.

Vansina argues for an interdisciplinary (comparative) resolution to some of these problems of time accuracy, through the use of archeological dating.⁷⁰ Other folklorists, less concerned with accuracy, are more concerned with analyzing these concepts in terms of their overall meaning for cultural life and social organization.⁷¹

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The second area in which there have been useful contributions by folklorists, is in developing a concept of life-cycle time. Montell suggests that the lifecycle defines the content of reoccurring mythologies, such as those dealing with physical changes through aging.⁷²

"History from the bottom up" oral historians show similar concern with the issue of memory. Paul Thompson in The Voice of the Past suggests that long-term memory has specific qualities of clarity of recall which move beyond ordinary memory, in part because the psychological process of aging in this society clears the way for a period of musing and consideration of the past.⁷³ He too questions an accurate chronological time recall, stating that while long-term memory may be clearer, short-term is more confused, thus creating an inaccurate chronology. As well discrete incidents are remembered, some of greater weight than others and links are not necessarily constructed between events.

Peter Friedlander in The Emergence of a UAW Local 1936-1939 speaks of the importance of specificity in the historian's study, which requires an understanding of chronology. His book based primarily on the memory of Kord, the union ^{local's} president, ? attempts to identify the dynamics in the development and consciousness of the local. He was impressed by the intensity and detail of Kord's memory, which he believes was a result of the depth of his involvement within the local and the importance of

these events to him. Nevertheless:

Memory does not provide us with the kind of pinpoint accuracy found in documentary evidence. Kord's margin of error in the precontract period, he estimates, is of the order of several days to two weeks. How important such a margin of error is depends on how well Kord can recall the dramatic sequence of events not only in terms of order, but also in terms of the tempo and dynamic of development.⁷⁴

Although Friedlander found Kord's memory to be fairly accurate, he used a system of cross-checking to test the chronology, asking him about details again and again to sort out contradictions.

Friedlander uses "thick description", to penetrate and build up all of the layers of experience and determinants around a series of events. For this purpose, time memory was important: less in a long-term chronological sense, then in a short-term intensive sense. Other authors of oral social history have suggested that the kind of impressionistic accuracy which develops around subjectively important events, as opposed to a life story, in which events carry extremely different weights, make short-term oral studies more accurate.

New Social historians of the Marxist school have also integrated the concept of life cycle time into their work. The heavy emphasis placed on biological functions for women which are determined by the human lifecycle and which in turn determine women's position in relation to family and work have made lifecycle oral history a feminist priority. Oral history

interviews taken over a woman's life, or through focusing on key questions to women from different generations in the same family, have been developed to gather such data, (such as experiences of childbirth).⁷⁵

A second central concept in Western historiography is development, or: what is change and why does it occur? Concerns in oral history around this issue seem to centre on the use of oral history material. Writers from differing schools have used oral evidence to prove continuity over time (as with many of the elitist biographical schools) or to explore the dynamics of change on an intensely personal level. Folklorists at some points have used criteria of stability of social structure as a precondition for undertaking a study of a culture's traditions and in this sense may have preselected certain findings from their studies. *sure*

The consistent element of the oral history method is that its building blocks are interviews with individuals (even in group situations). Thus, oral historiography has dealt with, on some level, the individual in relation to historical or social processes, whether the latter are defined empirically or through structural definitions. This issue is resolved in a variety of ways: ranging from an idealist focus on the individual as social force, to a search for comparative elements through quantification. Folklorists, dealing with fixed testimony, receive the collective image of a culture, but even so, they do so

through the vehicle of a living personality, an individual within the culture, but with a specific personality.

Oral historians writing about individuals and their lives have focused on several lines of development. The life history of the individual and their changing (or unchanging) world-view, the activity of the individual and their impact on the world around them, the relationship between a specific social or cultural milieu and the individuals within it. Peter Friedlander in The Emergence A UAW Local 1936-1939 suggests that most studies treat social groups as individuals:

Historical formations, such as unions or political parties, are seen to be the consequences of the collective will of some sections of society, for all practical purposes, moreover, that section is conceived of as an individual and the problem is then to explain the institutional formation as the outcome of a rational process within the consciousness of this quasi individual. In essence, a historical formation is reduced to being the utilitarian consequence of wilful behaviour on the part of a rational individual.⁷⁶

The dialectic between individual and group is lost. Groups are either reduced to one non-dynamic personality (either in the form of the leader's ideology or through treating the group as one rational individual), and thus denying the complex processes and determinant forces inside the group, or else individuated out into its component individual personalities, making incomprehensible a concept of collective interest or activity.

Wilkie in Elitelore provides a method for the systematic study of individual members of strategic elites (those controlling the apparatus^{us} of society). The elite as a group control the mass of people below them and are in turn controlled by the leadership of the elite. Social activity is hierarchically determined, he believes. Elitelore comprises the set of beliefs developed by a leader to rationalize and motivate their decisive activity to themselves and those they manipulate:

no such word

Since the elite lead and the non-elite follow, life is viewed from differing perspectives. Whereas the latter develop lore which allows them to make sense of situations beyond their control, the former develop a special lore to justify their attempts to control society.⁷⁷

In this concept, individual activity is determinant. This activity is a manifestation of a set of individual beliefs, fundamentally unchanged over time, but pragmatically limited by available information. Thus ideological concepts are not always realizable in practice.

The function of elitelore and such oral biography is to develop a rounded view of political structure (government) seen as the dominant force in modern society, from the viewpoint of its leadership. Thus, changes in governments and their respective programmes can be analyzed. Studies such as Huey Long, the Stursberg studies of Pearson and Diefenbaker, Columbia's studies, etc., all focus attention on the arena of political change.

Elitelore suggests the need to examine leaderships as a group, to determine comparative differences between their views and thus personalities as well as similarities. These studies would pinpoint determinant historical individuals whose ideas changed the course of intellectual history. Lyle Brown suggests that through such a process "a sociology of knowledge" (i.e. the determination of intellectual ideas) would evolve through an indepth concept of how great men's ideas change and are structured.⁷⁸ Additional in-depth use of "Q-sort" Psychological tests are urged by Wilkie to develop a conception of leadership personality structures.⁷⁹

Individual and monographic study can lead to an identification of continuity in identity, for example within a corporate body, or institution. Thus William Moss describes the use of oral history to demonstrate ways in which corporate leaderships have maintained consistent policies over time, and the subsequent educational use of such material. In fact, by focusing on unchanging areas, or ideas in isolation from structural changes, a static identity concept can emerge.

Not all biographers ignore social context. Harry Williams in Huey Long specifically states that Long was a product of his conditions.⁸⁰ In this instance individual activity is seen as coming empirically out of a set of particular conditions, which act to form an individual personality. The methodology is empirical but a sense of cause and development through events is developed. As well, the narrative is constructed

from many layers of people affected by Long's actions, from sheriffs to programme recipients to colleagues to family. Many levels of determination of an individual's activities are exposed, rather than an examination of ideas in isolation. In William's study changed conditions eventually lead to Long's assassination.

A democratization in oral history has certainly occurred in the area of monographic and biographical focus. Not only political but social institutions, are studied, as are events or behaviours among non-elite groups and leaderships on many levels of an institution. Alice Hoffman, a labor historian, defines her focus as 'elite' study, but with a recognition that leaderships are present at all levels, including the rank and file. She looks at these groups in relation to the process of change and development in an institution.

A debate exists as to whether the slave narratives are reliable because the slaves gave their testimony at a time when the institution of slavery was already in the process of significant changes. Thus, the historiographic concept emerges that events must be studied in their unchanged or most characteristic state.⁸¹ Although this concern would tend to suggest that there is a static quality to certain stages of history, it does not negate change, although not making it the focus of historical study. The reasons which would make material

gathered at a time of change nonrepresentative are not explored, nor are the motor forces of change (if any) inside a static period relative to one of transformation.

A series of varied views of change process are delineated by these historians: some focus on stasis, others on causal links between progressive events within a focused study and others yet on individual activity, as a process of development. Causality is not systematically defined.

Folklorists have been challenged by some historians who discard folkloric evidence as historical because they come from cultures (rural, stable or oral) which had concepts of process and determination at great variance with Western historiography.⁸² This is an instance in which the cultural position of the historian relative to the culture studied can be determinant in allowing a sharp recognition of difference. Some folklorists have tended to concentrate on relativity, judging a society's concepts of development according to our own; others on explaining these concepts of development within the structure of the society under study.

Two tendencies have existed in dealing with the issue of historic development: one has been to theorize and focus on stability within "prior" cultures, the second to examine changes within a culture through the evidence contained in its oral traditions and/or folklore.⁸³ As well, some like Levine examine changes inside the content of the oral material, tracing a

history of culture (form, content), others the changes in content relative to social organization (Montell).

Vansina outlines an alternate view of development, comparing African cultures to Western. He says that none of the societies which he has dealt with attempt to establish causality between events, hold a concept of progress, or define systematic reasons for changes. In his use of their traditions however, he systematically analyses their historic development, by applying Western historiographic concepts (progression, development of hierarchical states etc). ~~Indiginous~~ concepts of development can "distort" historical accuracy in this view.⁸⁴

Societies explain themselves in terms of events from the past, but often do not link these together to form a chain of development. Causality is often located in mythological, non-human interventions. For others, history is cyclical, with dynasties running their courses and beginning again. Other cultures see society as static, consisting of tableaux.

Both Montell and Vansina note that oral traditions are not only built on the processes of society but on the events in the human life cycle. Thus two levels of determination exist.

Many folklorists see their goal as analyzing historical process and change and using folk traditions as maps to do so, because they represent either the only available historical documents from a society, or the only documents which deal with

a culture in its own terms as an active historical entity. Montell in the Saga of Coe Ridge uses his study to prove the validity of oral tradition in developing the history of a region. His focus is on, "an explanation of the common man and the things that make him move and change.." ⁸⁵ The Coe Ridge Community develops through the interaction of economic, geographic and social processes, resulting in changed economic activity and self-image amongst its members. Montell, uses comparative sources to supplement his use of folk history and test its accuracy. His fundamental theses is that sudden economic development, geographic limits on agriculture and self-sufficiency in combination with the hostility of the surrounding community created a narrowing of options for the Coe Ridge inhabitants transforming a cooperative community, into a criminal community which eventually collapsed. ⁸⁶

Other folklorists have emphasized the importance of change in the functions of oral tradition. Some see folklore in literate societies as playing a distinct role from that of oral societies, where the function is to document the political structure and social relations. In literate societies folktales are event oriented, focusing on anomalies or changes in society, as well as idealizations of social values within and in reaction to these processes of change. ⁸⁷

Kenny for example, sees oral traditions as representing records of assimilation between groups whose histories connect,

thus acting as a map of change. Traditions identify sources of change in the culture. For Haring, for example, differences in present day attitudes to a folktale and the story content informs us of a culture's attitude towards its own past. Folklorists focus on broad social process, while historians ~~on~~ for specific moments of discrepancies.⁸⁸

Many of the writers examining the folklore of the Slave South warn users of the ^{position} situatedness of the exslaves in relation to Depression society. The attitudes expressed often represent not a nostalgia for slavery but a bitterness about the injustices of freedom developed over a 65 year post-bellum period. Studies such as Levine's trace the development of Black culture over time thus locating elements of change and continuity. The study however, emphasizes content not context of change. Levine in Black Culture and Consciousness suggests that there is a continuity between African traditions and folkloric themes and Afro-American ones, although some themes have disappeared, while others have been emphasized. For example, the notion of the animal trickster is shared by both cultures. He concludes that the cause of this change must be the particularity of American conditions. American social historians using this material, demonstrate precisely this.⁸⁹

George Ewart Evans, an English historian who concentrates on agricultural and stable cultures in the East Anglia area of England emphasizes stability in social structure, language

and work methods over time, despite industrialization through traditions continuing in memory if not practice. In "I Am a Taperecorder: Oral History", he describes how he became convinced that the men and women he was talking to in the Suffolk countryside were "really survivors of a long historical sequence"⁹⁰ much longer than their lifetime. Evans believes that work methods, social structure, dialect and implements held continuity as far back as Roman times. There is, he believes not one unified history but rather many histories", in other words parallel structures, economics and processes coexisting in the same society, even locale.⁹¹ He has been accused of highlighting essentially marginalized tendencies in a period of massive change and giving them undue historical weight and tenacity.⁹² A sense of the attitude of his interview subjects to the changes around them is deemphasized in Evans' work, despite his open nostalgia for the past.

The issue of the individual relative to change is an important issue for folklorists, despite their concentration on cultural process as a whole. Vansina relays the role of individual personality as mediating the storytelling style and, for "free" texts, interpretation of traditions. Thus, a storyteller will change a tradition or interpret it.⁹³ In this instance we are really discussing tradition-bearers acting as historians by interpreting a historical process. Other folklorists concentrate on studying the transmission process,

seeing this as a map of social interaction and a view of the individual in society. Thus there is a concern with identifying the function of a tradition: is it told to a subgroup in the community, to specific individuals; does status define knowledgeability?

Journalistic historians vary greatly in their attitudes towards change. Studs Terkel's main concern in Hard Times was the process of human memory over time and through the impact of different social conditions. He states: "This is a memory book".⁹⁴ He compares the information that teenagers in the late 1960s have retained about the Depression with people's recollections of their Depression experiences. The weakness of the book lies in its uses as a literal record of experience rather than as a discussion of the ways in which a society judges its history relative to the present. As Michael Frisch states, the book explores the ways in which people acted against accepting a recognition of change and the need for change in the face of the total collapse of the economic and social structure. He interprets it as a record of human weakness.⁹⁵

Other writers have seen the book as a testimony to the United States' strength and the ability of ordinary people to hold onto unchanging human values in the face of great odds. The vagueness results from a lack of interpretation of data, or location of speakers relative to their instrumentality in

society.

Other journalistic accounts of change vary in the extent to which they deal with historical process. Many of these books, represent popularized versions of the dominant historiography of the area. Thus Ten Lost Years provides sweeping narrative statements from a cross-section of unlocated individuals. This does not deal with causality in any way, but rather describes in detail the ways that the Depression acted on some lives of some people. Were they representative? There are no criteria provided with ~~thich~~ to judge this.

The subject matter of Roots is effectively the process of cultural change, assimilation and resistance within conditions of domination. It is an important book, because it represents a growing attempt of large groups in society to sort out their ethnic and class roots and rejects a concept of historical process based on the uniform assimilation of individuals into a society without conflict. In this sense, oral history links directly in its relevance to a current social process.⁹⁶

Haley follows on this theme of instrumentality within historical process: He suggests that the motor force in slave society was the struggle to maintain and construct a Black culture and sense of self. He describes the members of each generation of his family continuing to be conscious of their heritage despite increasing assimilation. He places a large emphasis on the role and development of individuals in this process and

their struggle to be instrumental in the face of not controlling their own life situations. His book emphasizes the importance of both the African and American slave heritage.

The Romance of American Communism is a classic "idealist" work of history.⁹⁷ In it the motivation for human political activity is a set of universal human values outside of history (including the attempt to break free of all political structure ; psychological factors and the force of ideas.) Rather than describing the content of the politics and activity of Communist party members in relation to their emotional experience, the author concentrates on psychological motivation alone, the search for self-identity and liberation within and through the authority structure of the party. The decision to leave the party is above all the revelations of Stalin's crimes by Khrushchev, thus a psycho-ideological disillusion with the father-figure, rather than the actions of the Soviet Union in invading Hungary in the same year, or the effects of McCarthyism.

The exploration of the nature and forces of social change is the context of oral history from the bottom up. Authors emphasize various methods of analysis and data collection, from depth study to cross-sectional analysis, for the purpose of examining social processes. Theorization varies in these studies from structuralist to Marxist to a combination of empirical study with theoretical generalizations. The question of the relationship between thought and practice is the focus for

writers such as Paul Thompson and Eugene Genovese , while Friedlander examines the formation and activity of collectivities within a larger whole. Many authors concentrate on the dynamic between material conditions and ideological beliefs about reality which are often in disjunction.

Peter Friedlander in The Emergence of A UAW Local defines history as a process.⁹⁸ He suggests that bourgeois history represents the emergence and contradictions of specific structures within a particular set of social relations of production. Through the breakdown of the ancient regimes in Southern Eastern Europe and the expansion of the world market there was a wave of social mobility which transformed the previous village structure. He believes that this process leads to specific structures on personality and culture within the North American immigrant working class and their offspring. Rather than study the goal orientation of trade unions as institutions, assuming their internal rationality, he locates the external forces shaping the behaviour of various groups inside the union (work place, community, religion) and the impact of their interaction over time in the development of the union.

Friedlander uses oral history to demonstrate the contradictory ways in which human behaviour changes structures, and the ways in which the same behaviour can create a consciousness which contradicts the new structural reality. The

workers in his UAW local create a highly selected and dominant leadership and a bureaucratic structure at the same time as the organizing process creates strong feelings of equality and good will amongst the workers throughout the organizing process and the militant conflicts with the employer. While it is human activity that is instrumental, nevertheless this activity is rooted in material conditions which in turn structure the consciousness of historical actors.

The outcome of historical process is manifested on a variety of levels, but is critically different than the original conditions which created the process:

The dialectic of the formation of a historical structure results in an object that owes its origins to a number of factors but which is itself more than the sum total of these factors.⁹⁹

The purpose of Friedlander's study is to identify and analyze the nature of class, the emergence of leadership and the process of formation of institutions, all elements which are defined only through a process or change. This is the function of historical study made specific:

The formal abstract task of history sui generis is therefore to formulate a conception of the structure of a specific historical praxis, a praxis which originated within a social personality and in relation to which the individual becomes an object of study rather than a presupposition.¹⁰⁰

In other words, individual behaviour is only comprehensible relative to the group's,

In developing such a meticulous analysis of social process, Friedlander set the preconditions for comparative work at a further stage in social history.¹⁰¹ For example, David Brody develops a comparison of rank and file militancy in periods of union formation as opposed to those of stable, already established union structures, using American (CIO) and British (Clydeside) examples. The object of the first set of militancy is against the employer, the second against both employer and union bureaucracy.

The Great War in Canadian Society, while using a less complex methodology, also examines historical process. The book sets out to disprove, through the use of oral history the claims of documentary history that the mass of Canadians favoured WWI and served loyally to attain victory for Canada. The focus of the book is the process of change, in both consciousness of the war and of Canada, and the conditions forming this consciousness. The war acted as a catalyst, accelerating processes which were long under way, and breaking through barriers to those processes. This resulted in heightened labour, and anti-war sentiment, but the war itself did not transform Canadian society.¹⁰² The use of broad cross-sectional interviews makes this analysis possible.

In his survey oral history the Edwardians Thompson applies oral history to social analysis.¹⁰³ The centres of the major

spheres of inequality in Edwardian times; (class structures, urban vs rural life, sexes and ages) asks to what extent changes in these areas were wrought through conscious activity and examines the concrete evidence of changes (in the areas of sustenance, the family and social class). Based on this study, he identifies stability and change, and the forces of transformation (unions, political organization women's rights, escapism). Thompson applies quantification to his 500 oral interviews, thus permitting generalizations to be drawn, describing his line of analysis as the particular to the general.

Thompson suggests that his extensive demographic analysis challenges linear models of social development:

Durkheim and Toennies, like the modernization theorists assumed a consistent trend from the allegedly stable unspecialized and close-knit societies of the past, personal and family centred to an anonymous industrial urban world of specialized organization decision by impartial criteria and constant change. But with the passing of time much of their empirical basis has been undermined.¹⁰⁴

As well, he states that understanding why changes don't happen is as important as understanding why they do.

"We have assumed throughout our presentation that social changes are caused by the conjuncture of a multiplicity of factors both external and internal: primary, demographic, social, political, ideological and so on."¹⁰⁵

He rejects notions such as those of Dahrendorf, which posit a containment theory in which working class organization auto-

matically leads to institutionalization through a share of power. He bases his conclusions on the trade union activity of the Edwardians for example the Clyde movement for rank and file democracy. Thompson concludes that within some spheres, working class people made certain conscious choices to improve their life situations.

David Brody in "The Old Labor History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class" suggests that the indepth focus of many new social historians, while a correct method, makes generalizations about social processes almost impossible.¹⁰⁶ However, he advocates the value of indepth studies is their ability to pinpoint the many causes of events, suggesting that general studies run the risk of reductionism.

Ronald Grele carries this direction further, and attacks oral historiography in terms of its weaknesses in revealing the forces at play in society. Firstly, he suggests that the trend of oral historiography has moved from analyzing the tensions within social organization, to examining the ways in which people survived these tensions, to a chauvinism about the specific surviving cultural group and its achievements. This is rooted in a lack of class analysis and theoretical development, and a reliance on emperical studies which outline the existence of ethnicity in American society, but completely fail to analyse the interaction of ethnicity and class. These studies are characterized by an adaption by historians to the biases of subjects. Grele also believes that

oral history reveals more about current than past processes. As well, oral history makes people "anthropologically strange: he suggests, isolating the individual by its very nature as the focus of history rather than the group.¹⁰⁷ This is a contradiction in a method which often seeks to rupture from seeing great individuals as causal.

Harriven, further suggests that ordinary individuals find it difficult to link their lives to historical process, which had no direct meaning for them. Thus oral history interviews can have an individuating dynamic. The solution for this is to help the individual reconstruct the environment where they did experience historical process (the workplace). This suggests a concept (like the lifecycle) of parallel historical processes within different spheres of social existence.

Several American Marxist authors examine the effects of material conditions on consciousness. Genovese in Roll, Jordon, Roll explores the ways in which white paternalism mediates the formation of a culture of resistance amongst enslaved Blacks.¹⁰⁸ Genovese uses Marxist methods to define the class position of slaves. He applies Gramsci's concept of 'class hegemony' in an analysis of Southern white control over slave society:

The idea of "hegemony" which since Gramsci has become central to Western Marxism implies class antagonisms, but it also implies, for a given historical epoch, the ability of a particular class to contain these antagonisms on a terrain in which its legitimacy is not dangerously questioned... The slaveholders as a socio-

economic class shaped the legal system to their interests. The most advanced fraction of the slaveholder - those who most clearly perceived the interests and needs of the class as a whole - steadily worked to make their class more conscious of its nature, spirit and destiny. In the process it created a world-view appropriate to a slaveholders' regime.¹⁰⁹

This ideology was paternalism.

The slaves, despite their creation of a semi-autonomous identity, could not escape the intrusion of this ideology into their world-view, because of their position of dependency. They faced both physical repression and ideological control. Genovese continues:

The slaves impaled their masters on the central point of slaveholding hegemonic ideology - the dependency relationship...Gratitude implies equality. The slaveholders had committed the blunder of assuming that it would be forthcoming from a people who had had an acceptance of inequality literally whipped into them... If the master had a duty to provide for his people and to behave like a decent human being, then his duty had to become the slave's right. Where the masters preferred to translate their own self-defined duties into privileges for their people - an utter absurdity the illogic of which the most servile slave could see through - the slaves understood duties to be duties... The slaves acceptance of paternalism,..., signalled acceptance of an imposed white domination within which they drew their own lines, asserted rights and preserved their self-respect.¹¹⁰

The slaves were torn between two consciousnesses in the struggle for self-consciousness; between two political hegemonies

In Gramsci's terms, they had to wage a prolonged, embittered struggle with themselves as well as with their oppressors to "feel their strength" and to become con-

scious of their responsibility and value". It was not that the slaves did not act as men. Rather, it was that they could not group their collective strength as a people and act like political men.¹¹¹

Genovese makes use of the oral literature of slavery to argue a complex logic of the experience inside class society of the oppressed. He explores the "superstructure" (in particular, the law) as a set of material practices, which repressed attempts by slaves to organize or define themselves autonomously. It is the contradictory content, in part inside the literature itself, that permits a picture of slave society in such complexity, to develop.

Paul D. Escott in Slavery Remembered uses a different method of analysis.¹¹² He believes that the slaves developed a fully autonomous culture and one not tainted by white paternalism. Rather than acceptance, paternalist attitudes in the narratives are described as tactics of resistance and self-protection either with white interviewers or masters. Escott challenges the notion that white culture was paternalistic or integrative, rather seeing slavery primarily as a form of economic exploitation wherein paternalism could not be afforded. When paternalism was expressed, it was for an outside white audience critical of slavery not as an adaption or an attempt to control black culture. The conditions limiting slave revolt and later equality were white racism and resulting violence. Escott uses quantitative analysis to make his points, generalizing out of the slave narratives, which he corrects against interview bias, as his central source. Although both authors

make extensive use of the slave narratives, Genovese uses additional documentary evidence of white society. Both agree on the existence of a Black culture, but its meaning is in dispute, and both differ radically, despite their Marxist methods of analysis, on the structures of determination.

The concept of historical "truth" is perhaps the most contentious question in oral history. The concern with facts is linked with the importance of defining an approximation of what really happened in a historical process or instance. Almost all Western historians accept a concept of historical truth against which evidence is tested.¹¹³

It is here that the most violent attacks against oral history as a method have been levelled. Since the early 20th century documentary historians have debated with folklorists and social historians over the value of oral evidence. Historians such as Hockett in The Critical Method in Research and Writing have unequivocally defined history as "the written record of past or current events".¹¹⁴ Robert Lowie in 1917, expressed this critique of oral evidence:

"Indian tradition is historically worthless because the occurrences, possibly real, which it retains, are of no historical significance, and because it fails to record or record accurately, the most monumentous happenings".¹¹⁵

This comment provides us with a working concept of historical

truth: that which actually occurs in its most accurate rendition and that which is most important to history. Lowie goes on to discount the probability of folkloric evidence representing actual events, questioning the memories and intellectual abilities of oral peoples.

Other writers who are less blatantly culturally chauvinist in their outlook raise other critical problems with historical truth, suggesting that oral documents offer a view of cultural standards but no view at all of actual facts. Historical accuracy cannot be tested because of the lack of chronology, lack of clear tests or provenance, and the ways that biases appear to be blatantly represented in the choice of facts presented by the interview subject or folktale. A more modern version of Lowie's criticism can be found in Barbara Tuchmann's attack on Oral History in Radcliffe Quarterly, in which she suggests that oral history is the collection of useless trivia.¹¹⁶ Again a definition of historical truth is implicit in this, one of not only accuracy, but what is important. Tuchmann's own bias is political and elite history.

The concern with truth in oral testimony is often expressed by the American Oral History Association.¹¹⁷ Discussion focuses on the reliability of the interview subject and whether the material evolved through the interview process represents that which is most important in the historical process, or

a partial view of truth.

Some authors concentrate on the notion that oral history can only reach an approximation of the truth. Firstly, it is a record made after the fact, and historical truth is contained within the actuality of an event. Michael Frisch states in relation to Hard Times:

...The basic historicity of the interviews - the degree to which they involve historical statements rather than, or in addition to, historical evidence - was barely alluded to... Thus oral history enables us according to this view, to see history, as more or less direct and unmediated experience, rather than as the abstracted and ordered rendering of objective historical intelligence 118

or in Allen Nevin's words:

"The merit of oral history is not that it entails this or that political stance, but that it leads historians to an awareness that their activity is inevitably pursued within a social context and with political implications".119

Truth is the event not the reconstruction of the event after the experience, that is historical interpretation, according to Bernard Ostry in his article "Making the Ambiguous Intelligible".¹²⁰ This reflects a more general view of historical research which suggests that all history is only the closest representation of reality made from the available data.

Oral history's accuracy is also questioned because of the fallible nature of human memory. While many authors express

confidence in the spontaneous memory process to retrieve at least some facts, all express concern that interview subjects forget details. Psychological research tends to partially back such opinion.¹²¹ A contradictory view exists as well, that it is this retrospective process of selection which refines out the most significant facts and events and the truth of history.

Others see oral history as a secondary source which must be carefully cross-checked because of built-in bias. James E. Sargent warns that "both the interviewer and interviewee can be biased and there is no neat set of rules or guidelines about interviewing."¹²² The Columbia project has always urged the treatment of oral history as any other document and its subjection to rigorous comparative tests. This at times has been viewed as a relegation of oral history to a subordinate position as a historical source. Some researches feel that Columbia's attitude negates the special interactive process which represents the strength and also bias of oral history texts.

Many historians believe that the truth of the text can be tested. The concept of testing the oral text like any other opens up the use of quantitative and comparative methods in oral history. Many historians who argue for comparison also argue for the rejection of texts which are not either typical

or true according to documentary standards. A more skeptical attitude to all documentation, and the suggestion that all creating agencies reflect bias allows authors to better identify distortion and analyze its causes, a process at times as important as the primary research itself. This comparative process also relates to the concept of the "kernel of truth", that is that there is a reality inside a set of oral documents which can be established through comparason of texts to develop an approximation of reality.¹²³

Greatly opposing views seem to exist about the integrity of interviewers: Sargent, suggests that politicians in particular, conscious of manipulating a public image, may choose "reverse role-playing" in the interview, distorting the effect of their interview. A sort of skepticism seems to exist about all personal narrative, assuming that it's self-seeking and therefore biased. This may relate to Judeo-Christian concepts of morality, and to a division between public (objective, official) and private (unregulated, emotional) which affects attitudes to sources. Some historians call oral history "second chance" history; implying that interview subjects rewrite their lives for the record, distorting reality.¹²⁴

The majority of historians, in fact, tend to give their interviewers the benefit of the doubt. The interview process itself is designed to establish rapport and identification and trust, and often there are no sources with which to compare data. One oral historian suggests that interviewers accept

95% of given data as "facts". As well she believes that error is seldom intentioned. ¹²⁵

Some elite historians count on the intellectual sophistication of their subjects, their response to critical questions and the interviewing skills of the researcher to draw out their subject and the truth about their actions and mythos. An assumption of integrity amongst the powerful accompanies this attitude.

The schism between private and public also leads to a concentration on the personal psychological truths of a narrative of self-perception and belief "not necessarily founded in truth". Lyle Brown in "Methods and Approaches in Oral History: Interviewing Latin American Elites" states, "we must remember that what men think happens to them is as important as what actually happens".¹²⁶ The logic behind the Wilkies' conception of Elitelore derives from this discrepancy. A Report at the 12th Annual Colloquium of the OHA stated,

Recognizing the inconsistencies in elitists' interpretation of events and the contradictions between their oral testimonies and written documents, the Wilkies concluded that if the "truth" were to be known, it is essential to know the myth of the leader.¹²⁷

Repeating this theme, Fontana defines "self-image" as culture.¹²⁸ These definitions strongly challenge Lowie's definitions. There is an assumption of subjective truth and

opinion. Harriven refers to oral history as "inner truth", as the most effective means to research personal experience and feeling. People are likely to expose information in an interview situation which would never be disclosed in other documents.¹²⁹

As well as psychological truth, authors suggest that different vantage points offer variants of the truth. The value of oral history is seen in its ability to provide this cross-section of visions, challenging a reductive notion of reality. Meaning is seen as important as facts in a statement. (Mintz)¹³⁰

Perhaps the most sophisticated notions of historical truth are those which suggest that truth exists on different levels. The conclusion is derived empirically, through examining oral history material and various interpretation exist" some differentiating the "truths" of everyday experience and those of "important" event; another between the intellectual perception of fact and the intuitive of emotion.¹³¹ Thus such non-factual accounts, or untruths can reveal important facts about cultural archetypes. James Grey gives this example:

I went into Saskatchewan to do some research on my Booze book and I ran into at least a dozen people in Eastern Saskatchewan who described to me how they had seen Harry Bronfman driving booze from Yorkton to the border in his black Studebaker. They described how that black Studebaker was cut down, the route he took and everything. They were there and they saw it happen, yet my investigation proves beyond all question of doubt that Harry

Bronfman never owned a black Studebaker and never drove a load of booze anywhere in his whole life.¹³²

The evidence tells worlds about attitudes to the Bronfman family, entrepreneurial capitalism, Prohibition on the Prairies and on and on.

It is the folklorists who have most directly challenged the concept of an actual truth or reality, from a variety of directions. Haring at the Second Annual Oral History Colloquium stated that historical facts are unimportant.¹³³ What counts in the oral history process is the interview itself and what it reveals about the society under study. Folklorists, he believes, concentrate not on facts but on changes in societies as read through their culture. The "structure of context" that is, the interview context is most important. A formalist concept of folklore emphasizes the structure of the text itself which is under examination, not its historic generation and context. The text, it is thought when read reveals the truth about a given culture's social organization and ideology.¹³⁴

Most folklorists do accept a concept of historic truth: one which includes chronology. Vansina provides a definition of historical truth severely limited by the sources available to the historian. Historians choose between hypotheses preferring the hypothesis which appears to be most accurately related to probabilities arrived at through comparison of data.¹³⁵ As well, Vansina has developed a hierarchy of folkloric sources which parallels those which are trusted by documentary his-

torians of literate cultures.¹³⁶ The function of a narrative and its related forms are judged according to their relative importance in the society and the relative degree of regulation of their content because of this. Some texts, official versions for political purposes, will be accurately preserved, but are often untrue as to the events they represent. While others, created primarily for the purpose of preserving history will more closely approximate the events. "Fixed" forms are more accurate than "free" forms which are more subject to the personality of the informer.¹³⁷ Personal texts, eyewitness accounts and rumours are the least trustworthy he believes. Truth can thus be established from folkloric documents using rigorous historiographic comparison. Some elements, like provenance are of less importance than the function of a text, in oral cultures. Vansina develops a complex set of guide lines to determine historical truth and function in relation to oral traditions; guidelines which can be applied to oral history as well.

Vansina also deals with the issue of historical truth inside the content of the texts as representing their culture's concept of historical process. These concepts set guidelines against which the Western historian can judge accuracy. Vansina suggests that the concept of "truth" influences all traditions in that all that is considered untrue (and unimportant)

is edited out conforming history to cultural "ideals". This is not dissimilar from the methods of some Western historians. "Truth" concepts range from that which is consensus or the majority view; that defined by the authority of certain sources (the ancestors); physical evidence of events; actual transmission by ancestors; to accepting parallel truths when testimonies contradict. Generally, oral cultures tend to reserve critical judgement on historical texts while applying it to daily living situations.¹³⁸ Vansina believes that the best way to study ideal types in a society is to examine historical traditions. These ideals can change with conditions. A concept of relative historical truth is then established.

Books such as Ten Lost Years and Roots have been questioned as histories primarily because they refuse the readers any means of testing their historical accuracy beyond belief in the author and the power of the statements they quote. Given the level of concern within oral history writing about reality as opposed to representations of reality, this is a problem with these books. Interviewees are often anonymous and are imbued with a fictional quality.

Various attitudes exist amongst oral historians "from the bottom up" on the question of truth. Some believe that "truth"

in history is to be found amongst those without power, rather than institutional and political sources which are ideologically biased and manipulate reality, imposing a false view of events onto people.¹³⁹ Testing oral testimony against documentary sources is rejected with the view that such tests will only leave those testimonies in accordance with official sources and exclude those which are critical. As well, the belief that there are vast areas of truth which are untapped by traditional sources is a correlative of this idea. For example, the history of women or the family, which are outside of public life and documentation except in anomalous forms (juvenile court and welfare records for example of women who have broken into non-traditional areas and become famous).

"Women's history takes place as much in private as in public places - more often in kitchens, bedrooms, prisons, schools, brothels and hospitals than palaces, government chambers or on battle fields."¹⁴⁰

For Marxist social historians the emphasis is on analyzing data to establish truth through generalization. At the same time there is an increasing emphasis on indepth studies to grasp the complex layers which determine reality. Truth is seen as a set of laws of motion and change in a society, not facts in isolation of processes. It is in moments of change that the determining elements of a specific process are revealed. Oral history is seen as important to studies of change because of

its ability to probe the process of change, group identity and consciousness as the result of social experience.

Friedlander sees historical truth in activity not in ideas. He believes that oral history allows for an indepth study of praxis: in the areas of family, sexuality, work activity and interpersonal work behaviour. He defines fact:

It is important to know that facts are man-made in this manner: They can only emerge and have meaning within a cultural (that is, linguistic) framework... Going further, what is important is not the manifest result as such, but the totality of the process that produces the "fact".¹⁴¹

Other Marxists emphasize two interacting levels of truth: the material base and ideological superstructure: one determining behaviour and the other, in turn activity. The British school has emphasized a thorough description of material life, using depth interviewing techniques to deal with such issues as real wages, and their determination by cultural standards: struggle.

Authors such as Winn, studying Latin American workers, argue for depth studies of consciousness formation based on the evolution of particular working class institutions within day to day reality. He details the changes in consciousness of Chilean workers over time while analyzing current divisions in consciousness within a given workplace revealing "truth" as an historical formation.¹⁴² Authors like Paul Thompson who

strongly favor comparative methods, do so for two reasons: to test for facts in a situation by comparing testimony; and to conflict interpretations or "truths" i.e. the choice of historical facts to create a "truth" based on specific interests.¹⁴³ Some historians, such as Storm-Clark place the burden of analysis of their experience on the subjects, not on the historian. The contention that interviewers must not impose their perspective onto the subject stems from a belief that interviewees tell the truth. A sense of self-criticism and consciousness is assumed.

Along with this notion of the non-interventive interview process is a belief that questions must be published and that only minimal editing should occur. Interestingly, this concept is shared by both radical historians and conservative retrieval-oriented oral historians. Presenting the facts, without analysis, is in this instance seen as more representative of "truth". This consciousness of the interview process has been developed quite differently by other social historians, suggesting that the interview process can be read as expressing the true nature of social attitudes and interaction.

The application of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics to taped interviews is advocated by Grele as a means of developing layers of meaning and determination from the interview. This is in a sense, an ultimate expression of truth as multi-dimensioned meaning in history.¹⁴⁴

The concept of the critical interview is particularly popular with social historians such as Friedlander. As historians most concerned with change and the relevance of the past to the present some historians take the risk of imposing current frameworks in the form of questions onto the past. The critical interview is approached in two ways. The first develops "thick" description to develop factual information about life processes (work process, health care etc.). This material can then be analyzed by the historian outside the interview process, (by quantification for example) or else, the historian can next ask a series of interpretative questions of the subject, about their perceptions of events and experiences. In particular, an effort is made not to load the questions too heavily, to avoid the subject providing the anticipated response to a question. Some interviews are done in stages, working out of the descriptive categories which the interviewees use to generate critical categories. For example, rather than asking a subject about union rights, one might ask for a description of responses of various people in a work place to an event which was earlier described. Certain formulations now in use, which might be known to the subject, when tested against the past, can be used to demonstrate the absence or consistency of certain forms of consciousness. Generally, interviewers favor using different approaches to similar questions to develop comparative data and tests of accuracy and personal opinion.

The four types of oral history writing have been submitted to a comparative test to develop an overview of their specific qualities in reference to three central historical questions: the concepts of time, development, and truth. Jan Vansina suggests that these three elements combine to create an "ideal" view of a culture, a historical theory, which he calls a method.

This, then, defines the next step in establishing whether oral history is history: to submit its own generic categories and their attitudes towards history to a test against the dominant historical methodologies in use today. These categories in turn can be taken from the article, "Social History as Lived and Written" by James A. Henretta, which despite its focus on social history defines three general methodologies. As with oral history, the specific questions of social history have engendered differing responses which move beyond the initial issues. The three sets of responses are empirical/phenomenological, annaliste/structuralist, and Marxist/materialist. Each is identified with dominant trends in national historiographies with allegiances similar to those in oral history.

The first category which Henretta describes is the French annaliste/structuralist school. This method is differentiated from others in three ways:

First there was the use of quantification "to reduce the area of incomprehension by rigorous statistical analysis". Second, the Annalistes sought to grasp the "totality" and the "vital cohesion of any historical period" by delineating all of its structures. Finally, these French historians inclined to a "social determinism", a belief that "history is at least partially determined by forces which are external to men".¹⁴⁵

Time in history is organized through historical periodization; determination occurs through the mediation of specific structures; truth can be grasped through the mind grasping a view of a social role but

discovered only through indepth examination of a specific problem, examined from different perspectives, using categories as analytic tools.

Three forms of time periodization are used and linked directly to the determinant structures of a given society. These are long-term geographic or environmental time, medium-term time, cycles of economic and social life, and short-term instances of the individual act or event (political acts of traditional history). "The three dimensions of existence: geographic, social, and political, are not interrelated but simply stand beside each other 'each in itself an essay in general explanation'."¹⁴⁶ Time frames and structures parallel each other mediating human activity. Thus determination is established. Events are placed in time but time can be simultaneously chronological, cyclical, and instantaneous.

The focus on determinant structures led to an in-depth exploration of these structures and an attempt at understanding their specific features. A differentiation occurred between social structure and material reality. Patterns in history existed: actual categories inside geographic, socio-economic and political time were to be generated from a particular study itself and specifically located features and structural factors interacted to determine historical process.

The perspective of the Annalistes was fundamentally positivist. Rather than empiricist denial of causality beyond the links of apparent events, there was a concept of discoverable laws which existed below the surface. These laws were often linked to functionality with an acknowledgment that appearance did not necessarily explain the role of specific social features, rather their placement within a structural reality did.

Human action, although the object of historical study, could only occur within a limited range of motion. The individual was not the central historical actor. Instead, the "collective psychology" of

which he or she was a part,^{was} rooted in the group identification of the individual. The Annalistes, while searching for links between structures, were limited in discovering these links because they emphasized the difference and disassociation of the three central structures as well as a systematic failure to link event, conjuncture, and structure, the three overall patterns in time. What was identified was a complex pattern of determination with no dominant level of determination providing a map for the activity of the collective. Rather, the effect is one of passivity. Henretta continues:

Whether geographic, biological or cultural, the structures of the Annalistes imprison the individual "within a destiny" in which he himself has had little hand. History reveals a record of forced accommodation, for every choice is made within terms inherited from the past.¹⁴⁷

The discovery of historical truth as defined within a particular period or located problem was the goal of Annaliste history. Early Annalistes such as Bloch examined the literature of an age to discover the "intellectual and psychological climate of an age."¹⁴⁸ The later shift to quantification techniques took place in order to examine "various aspects of the past in their own terms."¹⁴⁹ In this there is a definition of discoverable but also of the relativity of this historic truth according to the specific social reality in which it was produced. Bloch specifically spoke of the utility of applying present categories and questions to the past as a comparative guide.

The emphasis on exploring structures led to a focus on exact chronology and textual criticism, on testing the provenance of written documents. A skeptical attitude was suggested towards historical data which could allow for the recognition and exploration of falsification of reality when presented. The Annalistes strongly believed that a historic truth could only be discovered through analysis, not through

merely describing the surface. Systematic comparative methods within and between categories was important as a method of testing material and of generalizing. The Annalistes rejected a historiography which raised the official document to the highest position as a source. Their goal was to establish the patterns of every day life and to do this they argued the need to use many sources: statistical data, oral testimony, personal and commercial documents, and geographical evidence among others. From these varied sources, an approximation of the structures of reality could emerge. As well, interdisciplinary approaches to analysis were argued in order to uncover the different planes of structures (linguistic, geographic, and anthropological were emphasized).

The Annalistes/structuralist methodology has had its biggest impact on folklorists such as Vansina whose background is in historical anthropology and linguistics. A feature of folkloric study has been a consistent international emphasis with good communication between British and European folklorists in particular.

These areas are consistent with Annaliste/structuralist thinking: the acceptance of varied time schemes (ecological, sociological, and periodization) as historical and the concept of lifecycle time. As with the Annalistes, culture is seen as an important map of the whole culture. There is a focus on broad structuralist analyses. Long-term unchanging structures are analyzed as well as changes. Generalizations are drawn from in-depth study and detail using data comparison. This concern with thorough description is also characteristically Annaliste. In Oral Tradition, Vansina suggests that geographic boundaries, levels of political development, and economic/social function define the use of oral tradition.

Montell in the Saga of Coe Ridge, applies a classically Annaliste method to his book. He develops an analysis of Coe Ridge based on an

examination of its geographic, economic and social structure, and cultural location and the impact of these changes in these spheres on the lives of its inhabitants. He then compares the conclusions drawn from the folk history of the area to these details and locates their historical validity. An overall picture of the forces shaping the lives of the inhabitants emerges.

Folklorists are also influenced by structural/functionalism and empirical methods. For example, Vansina suggests that history is, at best, hypothetical. The recognition of different cultures; concepts of truth; the notion that such values are historically specific; the division between cultural and self-image and reality and the analysis of this division; the admission of non-documentary evidence as historically vital; the use of interdisciplinary methodologies (in particular anthropology and linguistics) to analyze data; the concentration on analysis to understand a different culture, are all features which seem to indicate the importance of Annaliste/structuralist methods to folklorists.

The second category described by Henretta is Marxist historiography. Marxists' writings are characterized by four propositions according to Montell:

The first analytic principle stated that the productive system is of crucial importance in the life of a society and the second asserts that the social relations of production are manifest in class divisions. The third Marxist axiom posits change and contradiction as fundamental features of social reality and explains historical change in terms of the dialectical process first specified by Hegel. The final proposition insists that capitalist social relations alienate men and women from both their labour and their inherent selves.¹⁵⁰

The concept of change assumes time frame and the notion of contradiction suggests complex layerings of reality within and between specific instances. Time is located in phases or epochs which are defined by the

level of the productive forces, an inherently sociological definition is used to articulate chronology. This chronology is essentially developmental or progressive. Marx describes the growing complexity of civil society with each new mode of production. As well, the dialectic suggests that phases grow out of each other and again, this implies a progression. However, the mediation of sociological time sequences as defined by overall social and economic organization means that the progression is not automatic but the conscious intervention of human activity is need to move society into the next phase.

As well as a progressive concept of time, Marx discusses cyclical time phases within each epoch. Thus, capital goes through a cycle of production and circulation (reproduction) which results in the progressive concentration of capital. Real wages rise and capitalists attempt to drive them down, resulting in a fall of real wages. Whether cyclical or linear, Marxist time concepts are based in material processes, they do not have meaning outside of human life. The concept of the "moment" is also important to Marxist analysis. Each "moment" can be analyzed by identifying the dialectical interaction of social forces specific to it. Moments connected through causal analysis form historical process. Precision in describing the historical moment is important to Marxist history because of its focus on providing a guide to instrumentality in the present. Thus, Marxist history is always self-conscious in connecting the past to the present.

For Marxist historians, development is rooted in material processes as defined by Henretta. Marx adopted Hegel's concept of conflicting categories (social forces) working through to higher stages but renounced Hegel's determinism. Material being determines consciousness but consciousness acts back to transform material reality. The goal of historical development was the liberation of society from hierarchical relations

and material want. This could only be accomplished by the negation of the highest stage of class society: capitalism. Only this society could produce the class which represented in majority the exploited and whose relationship to productive work would allow it, once conscious of its historical destiny to wrest control of production from the exploiters to establish a new civil society---one in which the separation between production and control of production through the state was dissolved and democratized.

Development, then, had a specific goal, causality was rooted in the interplay of antagonistic forces and mediated by human consciousness. The analysis of this conscious activity requires an understanding of the formation of individuals as members of social groups.

Recent Marxist historiography has concerned itself with two areas in the past years. The first has been a detailed discussion of the conditions of material life and the specificity of forces within these conditions. E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class is this type of work. The second area of concern has been that of consciousness formation. Class is examined as "a configuration of economic interests, a semi-autonomous culture and a particular world outlook."¹⁵¹

Marxism has adapted to some of the features of late capitalism and the influences of other methods of social analysis to develop more sophisticated formulations about the relationship between ideological structure and social reality. Marxist authors often disagree as to determination, that is, which structure or relation is central to the outcome of a particular moment. Ideology is now seen as "causal explanation derived from social experience rather than from religious or philosophical ratiocination."¹⁵² This allows for less of a separation to be made between superstructure and material base. Instead,

a discussion of a "field of mutually if unevenly determining forces", or a historical bloc, Gramsci's concept in which material forces are the concern and ideologies the form, takes its place. Other Marxists focus on the point of intersection of base and superstructure. These concerns are strongly represented in oral social history.

These concepts imply a notion of historical truth which has at least two levels, that of the material forces and that of the ideas explaining the ways in which these material forces act. "Reality" is structured on two planes, that of appearance and that of essence, the actual dynamics below the surface. A concept of discoverable is implied, but this truth can only be found through conscious activity. Analysis is essential to finding meaning in history. The methods necessary for such analysis assume the need for generalization from data and broad comparative study. This relates directly to a notion of a global imperialist epoch.

Oral historians concerned with "history from the bottom up" have consistently applied Marxist methodology to their studies. This has been especially true in England but is the case in the United States and Canada at the present time as well. Local and labour historians have studied the development of the working class as an active political and social force over time. Such studies include Paul Thompson's work, that of the Workers Educational Association, the Lynd's work on rank and file movements in the United States. The emphasis in Friedlander's and Thompson's studies are the conditions of change in consciousness and activity. Studies of industrialization and shifts in work process (Storm-Clark, Winn, Hann, et al) deal with dialectical change. A cyclical notion of time has been adopted and applied to the personal evidence which oral history gathers.

Studies such as Freidlander's, Genovese's, Escott's, Winn's and the community and areas studies of social historians all seek an understanding of the process of development and ideology using oral evidence to disclose both empirical data and attitudes to process, locating specific groups in time and historical process. These studies focus on the dynamics of conflict.

The issue of historical truth in oral social history generally is resolved along Marxist lines as well by examining data for its essential or descriptive features and looking below the surface for ideological perspective. Authors outline their concern for analysis of oral data and often write analytically, concerned less with presenting a narrative in the voices of individuals interviewed than using the raw material to theorize about their social group. Social historians have been the strongest advocates of quantification. As well, these historians are moving to in-depth studies of particular situations to augment the more general historical work that has been done. Oral history is a tool for this work because of its detail and situatedness.

Much recent oral social history uses the methods arrived at in Henretta's conclusion. That is, in the isolation of an historical problem or instance which has a limited frame, the application of Marxist and structuralist methods of analysis and the organization of the text through a chronological development using the voices of the historical subjects themselves. The use of interdisciplinary and comparative methodology then allows generalization or comparison between such limited focus studies.

The final category of analysis is empiricism/phenomenology. The pragmatic nature of American culture, the lack of labour and class conflict traditions and the dominant position of the United

States as a nation have led to an accepting empiricism which rejects the need to search below the surface of reality for structural explanations of social process. Henretta describes this position:

When American born historians raise the "facts" to a position of ultimate authority, they assume a distinct epistemological position - an empiricist approach based on three interrelated propositions: that human reason has limited power to understand the world; that models or frameworks can comprehend only the immediate data to which they apply; and, that there are no fundamental patterns to human life. These conclusions lead to a premise that each historical case has to be treated on its own, a unique collection of specific conditions or events. The most general result that can be obtained is a hypothesis but this must be treated with respect to each new case.¹⁵⁴

Empiricist methods developed out of a tradition of Western historical work which reacted against metaphysical concepts or external methods of analysis being placed onto human experience. The methods of science were adopted instead based on focused research on an isolated problem. Writers such as Dilthey suggested that while general law might apply to physical science, only pragmatic laws could be derived from human study. In this sense, general positivist laws were rejected. The emphasis on the facts also brings an emphasis on time as it appears to unfold to empiricism. The rejection of overall process analysis and a focus on events can create a sense of stasis. Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. suggests that the focus on the "episode makes all connections to a single point in time":

Dynamic as such a story may be, it fails to treat many such points over time---many paradigmatic episodes in succession---the quintessential *historie problematique*. Just as the *Annalistes* abandoned the interconnections among *duress* partly because causal connection are more difficult to assert today, so too in its own way, the paradigmatic episode avoids the ultimate complexity of causal relationships across long periods of time in favour of the easier (but no less interesting or demanding) task of establishing connections through the focus of an analytical moment.¹⁵⁵

The examination of the moment or limited set of processes is connected to a concern with the experience of the individual, with individual thought and development. In particular, the mediation of empiricism by psychology as suggested by Henretta has allowed for a less linear or static time sequence, one geared to the individual's tempo. Empiricism allows for the adaption of time models which are appropriate to the given question of discussion. The decision not to explore development seems to assume somehow the timeless and uncritical quality to the present period.

Empiricism leads to two models of historical work. One can be, as Ranke suggests, a sleuth piecing together the facts of the historical instance, or one can hypothesize within a limited frame. The second method requires that links be established between events to describe causality. Within this model, hypotheses can be derived based on the specific data under study.

Henretta suggests that the empiricist school has dealt with the personal aspects of human development;

In particular, the empiricist perspective has encouraged the careful examination of the personal experience of human actors, their values, goals, and behaviour.¹⁵⁶

Behaviour is studied from the perspective of its functional or practical consequences for the particular individual. This is by nature, a pragmatic approach. "This epistemology takes as its point of departure the 'pure phenomena' of the individual's act of 'perceiving, judging, experiencing, and willing'." Thus thought becomes realized as activity. We then conclude with a view of reality which is pragmatic, hypothetical and based on the surface appearance of phenomena.

For empiricist historians, the issue of factual accuracy is supreme and methodologies focus on establishing historical accuracy not applying reason and analysis to historical problems. The reduction of all truth

to surface phenomena has been mediated by the impact of psychological theory and sociology. The first suggests that there is a systematic truth of human feeling and thought and the second social structures which play specific functions in society. Psychological truth allows empiricist studies to demonstrate two levels of truth and the discrepancies between human actions and perceptions. Sociological truth integrates positivist analyses of general laws of human motion within a progressive line of development into historical interpretation.

Truth can be defined as the set of facts which the empirical historian decides is closest to a hypothesized reality. Two categories of oral historians share the empiricist epistemological position, elite and journalist historians. Elite oral historians focus on the discrete and individual experience within a limited time frame. Studies like Huey Long, the Kennedy oral history collection, the Columbia project, the Wilkie's study of Mexican elites in the 20th century, and numerous other monographs all emphasize the discrete moment, individual development and experience. Moss and others stress continuity. Some journalist historians describe more general time processes representing periods of change but previous conditions are not analyzed to explain the development of the period under analysis and experience is presented as raw data.

The focus of elite oral study is the role of the historical individual within history, in particular, the influence and development of (usually his) ideas. Psychological and phenomenological explanations prevail. The interest in oral history lies in the subjective quality of its expression, the ability to capture the individual in some essential way, more than in its ability to represent the truth of historically unrepressed social layers.

Oral history allows a richer set of facts to be used, it is seen by empiricist historians as a supplement to the written record or as a central source which has specific uses (for example, constructing a personality and people's reactions to a personality). Studies by Lyle Brown, Jack Granatstein, Milton Meltzer, Bernard Ostrey, William R. Rundell Jr., James Sargent, William Wyatt, Peter Stursberg and Harry Williams all use an empirical method.

Some social historians in the United States use the combined methods of psychology, sociology and history described in this section. Studies cited in this essay which follow this model are Watts: The Aftermath, edited by Paul Bullock; To Be An Indian: An Oral History, edited by Joseph Cash and Herbert T. Hoover; Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community, by Martin Duberman.

Let me now briefly list the questions which appear to be specific to all oral history in my second section. These are differences between subjective time frames and the course of objective events; the retrospective character of oral history; its limits as data to a specific historical period, one when change was occurring; the individual nature of its content and method of generation; its subjectivity; the inaccuracy, non-developmental quality, and selectivity of human memory; the collaborative equality of the document which includes the historian directly in the generation of source materials.

This study indicates that these questions are all resolved in different ways through the interventions of particular historical methodologies. This answers the question "But is it history?" in the following terms: "Yes, it is history. All kinds of history." It is an historical source and one which raises some generic questions. But these are seen as carrying varied degrees of importance and are met by differing conclusions by different schools of thought. The

very fact of oral history's use by each of these dominant historical currents confirms its historicity and its potential as a source.

FOOTNOTES

1. Derek Reimer of the Provincial Archives of B.C. developed this typology of aural materials, in an address to an Archives Methodologies class at Simon Fraser University, November 15, 1979.
2. Archives, in part in response to the extensive debates in historiographic attitudes to oral sources as well as the expense of transcription are moving increasingly towards "aural" archives collections and away from "oral".
3. The three geographic areas which have developed oral history research are England, North America and colonial areas studied by European and American historians. Canada is included because oral history has been used increasingly here and it is useful for Canadian scholars to know the debates; and because Canadian sources are cited
4. Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition; Translated by H.M. Wright. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965. p.99
5. Sources of concepts of history include Ronald J. Grele's "A Surmisable Variety: Interdisciplinarity and Oral Tradition", American Quarterly, XXVII, 27, 1975 and James T. Shotwell's The Story of Ancient History.
6. Vansina , p. 144
7. Vansina, p. 77
8. Vansina, p. 31, 155
9. See The Saga of Coe Ridge by William Lynwood Montell and articles such as "The Relation of Oral History to Social Structure in South Ntaza, Kenya" by Michael G. Kenny in Africa, 47, #3, 1977.
10. Vansina defines free texts as ones in which a basic story is relayed through a chain of testimony. Narrators develop and change aspects of the text over time to meet the needs of their audiences and according to their personalities. Free texts deal with personal histories and areas outside of official jurisdiction. Fixed texts "are learned by heart and transmitted as they stand...the very words of the poem belong to the tradition." p. 23. Fixed testimonies are more likely to be transmitted under controlled situations which through social stigma prohibit and punish memory failure or inaccuracy. This ritualized process occurs because these fixed forms generally represent official history used to inculcate a society's values.
11. Montell, p. xi
12. Vansina, p. xi
13. Paul Thompson, Voice of the Past. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977.
14. Thompson.
15. Russell Hann in The Great War and Canadian Society states: "In their work, modernization appeared to transform gradually the old rural customs, superstitions and speech patterns. The preoccupation with transition gives their work a simplified and ahistorical view of the role of culture in society: culture, however, is not an artifact which evaporates in the natural process of modernization. p. 19.

16. Thompson.
17. Thompson. Also David Lance's "Oral History in Britain". Oral History Review, 1977, and George Ewart Evans' The Days That We Have Seen.
18. E.P, Thompson. "History From Below". Times Literary Supplement, #3345, April 7, 1966.
19. Thompson.
20. Evans, p. 21
21. Evans, p. 22
22. Maynard John. "Community Writing", The Local Historian, 13, #5, June, 1979.
23. Thompson, E.P.
24. Evans. p.20
25. Thompson, Paul.
26. Vansina. p. xii
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