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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HISTORY WORKSHOP

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HISTORY AND THE LANGUAGES OF HISTORY IN THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW: WHO ANSWERS WHOSE QUESTIONS AND WHY.

> The same goes for the media: They speak, or something is spoken there, but in such a way as to exclude any response anywhere. That is why the only revolution in this domain - indeed, the revolution everywhere; the revolution tout court - lies in restoring the possibility of response. But such a simple possibility presupposes an upheaval in the entire existing structure of the media.
>
> Jean Baudrillard, For A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, p. 170.

Questions of memory, consciousness and meaning in the oral history interview, of necessity, focus on two interrelated methodological issues: the role of the historian/interviewer in the creation of the document he or she is then called upon to interpret, and the creation of that document within a particular historical and social space and within a particular historical tradition. (Grele, 1985, ChIV; Frisch, 1979, Friedlander, 1975; Passerini, 1984; Schrager, 1983; Portelli, 1981) Most such analysis has highlighted the potential of the oral history process to change our conceptions of the traditional task of the historian, but, for the most part, we have been silent about the ways in which our own disciplinary discourse, its assumptions and its context, influences that process. Our concern may be, as we tell oursleves, to map that area described by Alice Harris (Envelopes of Sound, pp. 6-7) "where memory, myth, ideology, language and historical cognition interact in a dialectical transformation of the word into a historical arti-

fact," but we have not been particularly concerned about how our own professional discourse may set the template for that map.

Thus, for all their unquestioned brilliance, works based upon oral histories have veered between the poles of an enthusiastic populism where the historian disappears in the name of giving voice to "the people" and a traditional conception of "objective" historiography where the historian/author assumes a privleged position as interpreter of the interpretations of those he or she interviews. All God's Dangers by Theordore Rosengarten (1974), a lovely book, exemplifies the first pole. Like A Family: The Making of A Southern Cotton Mill World by Jacquelyn Hall et. al (1988), the second. Both books are obviously sympathetic to the democratic impulses contained in the oral history process, but they do not reveal to us the hidden interaction between the participants to the interview which makes that democratic impulse a reality. Therefore they do not, in the end, challenge methodological assumptions and professional practices that are less than democratic.

The problem of how to represent the interaction between the fieldworker and his or her informants is, obviously, not a problem limited to the oral history interview (Glassie, 1985; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Tedlock, 1979: Caplan, 1988) but it takes on a particular cultural meaning within the traditional debate within the historical profession over

historical "objectivity" (Novick, 1988) and the ways in which those traditional attitudes have been used to answer questions raised by the movements of the Sixties, especially the civil rights movement and the women's movement, about the ideological assumptions of a history which ignored people whose past falls outside of the discourse of those who hold and exercise power. To open that discourse it is first necessary for us to realize how we, as historians, are bounded and limited by it.

Elsewhere (Grele, 1975) I proposed that we examine the oral history interview as a "conversational narrative" jointly created by the interviewer and the interviewee which contains an interrelated set of structures which define it as an object of study. The first set is the literary, grammatical or linguistic structure uniting each word (sign) to every other. The second is the set of relationships established between interviewer and interviewee within the interview setting, the social structure of the interview. The third is the ideological structure of the historical narrative as it emerges through the conversation between interviewer and interviewee and the conversation of each of them with the larger cultural or historical traditions to which and through which they are speaking. This last set of relationships will reveal to us the political field of the interview within which the interview is embedded, what Krisitn Langellier has termed the "political praxis" of the personal narrative.(1989)

Langellier claims that ,

> All personal narratives have a political function in that they produce a certain way of seeing the world which privleges certain interests (stories and meanings) over others, regardless of whether or not they contain explicit political content. The unmasking of ideology in the personal narrative requires an analysis of deep structure and meanings, within a discursive field of multiple texts and participants. . . . Telling personal narratives may legitimate dominant meanings or may resist dominant meanings in a transformation of meanings. The analysis of the enabling or constraining power of personal experience stories must consider the politics of their concrete and embodied performance rather than the texts isolated from contexts, or stories apart from discourse. (p. 271)

This notion of ideology as a socially structured system of meaning (Geertz, 1964) and, "the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups in a fragmented social life," (Jameson, 1981) allows us to contextualize the narration within a set of larger social forces. To Langellier, it is a way in which one can relate the political praxis of the narrative to what Jameson calls the discovery of the absolute horizon of reading and interpretation, or to Foucault's concept of a discursive field. Discourse in this sense is not, ". . . . a mere formalization of knowledge, its aim is the control and manipulation of knowledge, the body politic and, ultimately (although Foucault is evasive about this) the state." (Said, 1983, p. 188) "It is at once the object of struggle and the tool by which the struggle is conducted." (p. 216)

Because personal narratives (and the oral history interview is

a personal narrative no matter how loose its structure may appear) are an occassion for the struggle for meaning and the control of interpretation as well as identity formation, they are deeply embedded in ideologies. Since ideologies represent the world as particular classes, factions, interests wish that world to be, they exist in conflict with one another depending upon the group consciousness of their spokespeople. Thus an examination of the interview setting as an arena for the contesting of interpretation and therefore ideology will reveal to us how the political praxis of the history is manipulated. The fact is, that in most cases, the oral history interview is completed. The struggle inherent in the situation is managed to the satisfaction, more or less, of each of the partners. That completion would indicate that, despite a struggle for the assigning of meaning to apsects of the narrative, or the struggle for interpretative power, the partners feel that their conversations with one another and their conversation for the record have allowed each of them to legitimate the exercise of power over that interpretation and to legitimate the dominant meanings or to resist those meanings.

The situation in which this tension is most easily managed, a situation in which one of the partners simply overwhelms the other and no conflict over interpretation occurs, is, for reasons discussed elsewhere (Grele, 1985, Ch. VIII) an incomplete conversation. it contains none of the reciprocity which allows for response and denies to each partner the

the right to challenge the subjectivity of the interpretation and thereby reifies the ideology of one partner. To understand the ways in which political praxis emerges in the interview we need a vision of the interview which encompasses the conflict inherent in the situation and links that conflict with the ways in which meaning is structured through the conflict itself.

The most sophisticated such analysis, and the most intensive examiniation of the ways in which conflict is managed in the oral history interview, is the work of Eva McMahan. (1989) Concerned with many of the same issues as Langellier, McMahan focuses her analysis solely on the oral history interview as a form of personal story telling, and solely on elite interviewing in order to eliminate as many ideological variables as possible. (see below, p.) Her aim is to integrate the discussion of conversational analysis, social processes, and narrative formation with the concepts of philosophical hermeneutics as developed by Hans-George Gadamer. In particular, she is interested in three aspects of hermeneutic theory and how they apply to the interview: the performance of the interview within the universe of linguistic possibilities which mark the historicity of the human experience, the fact that the interpretation of historical phenomena is always guided by the biases that an interpreter has at a specific moment of time [ideology], and the contention that the act of interpretation must always be concerned not with the intended meaning, but what the intended meaning is about [deep structure] (Pp. 3-4)

McMahan defines the oral history interview as a situation of potential conflict which, through a series of conversational transformations and social strategies, both parties cooperate to convert into a situation of contrariety, a situation in which, for purposes of conducting the interview, they agree to disagree. Using the work of Alfred Shutz and Joseph Kocklemas on the nature of intersubjectivity, and the ways in which people structure their worlds, McMahan lays the basis for a consideration of what Gadamer calls the "hermeneutic conversation", and how it can be realized in the oral history interview. The hermeneutic conversation is a conversation in which the horizons of both partners (in this case the interviewer and the interviewee) are altered by appropriation of each other's text through a process of equal and active reciprocity. (Linge, 1976) Its realization in the oral history interview is made possible by the situation of contrariety.

With these considerations in mind, McMahan analizes a set of oral history interviews to ascertain the transformations involved in the process, and how they contribute to or deter the development of hermeneutic conversation. In this manner, she argues, we can understand the oral history interview as a communicative event, and the rules for making it such an event; ie, an event in which actual communication takes place, where one has restored the possibility of response. We can also judge the usefulness of various strategies in producing such an event.

McMahan's analysis is an important step in the recognition of the ways in which ideology determines political praxis in the interview. She shows the intersubjective nature of the historical meaning and interpretation which emerges in the interview, and the dialectical manner in which it is produced. She is also able to illustrate how that interpretation is in fact the creation of social reality through the interplay of the historical views of both partners to the interview, and how the basic conflict over interpretation is mediated. In addition, whether intentional or not, her analysis has decidedly democratic overtones. Focused as it is on those interview situations in which both partners participate, in fact, privleging them, her analysis recognizes the necessity for participation and response on the part of both partners to the conversation. The view of the interview as an open set of transformations allows us to use the interview to move our understanding forward while not closing off the possibility of future interpretation. Much of what she says about the nature of conversation,and the ways in which meaning is achieved through talk,resonates with the deepest dreams of participatory democracy and free speech movements.

Her analysis, however, stops short of a consideration of the interview itself as political praxis, in the sense of the term as used by Langellier. While offering the possibility of such considerations, McMahan's interest is not in narrative as a way of approaching the political unconscious or as a system of actual power relations. To move to that deeper structural level it is necessary that we layer McMahan's theories with

with considerations of the political agendas of the partners in an oral history interview.

In the oral history interview as contrasted to, let us say, the consciousness raising group (Langellier's main example) the political situation is defined by the professional ideology of the historian/interviewer and the public ideology of the interviewee and the interplay between them and finds its expression in language in the conflict between two distinct views of what narrative is or should be, for historical understanding, each reflecting a differing view of the role of language in the culture. The arena in which these conflicting views of narrative discourse are best seen is in the hidden conversations between the interviewer, interviewee and the social world in which the interview takes place; ie, their conversations with and their meanings within the wider discourse of future users or readers (interpreters) of the interview.

Throughout her analysis of the oral history interview, McMahan notes the existence of this outside audience of potential users, but does not devote particular attention to the ways in which its existence influences the development of the hermeneutic conversation in the interview. The existence of that audience is, however, critical because it raises the level of ideological discourse beyond the immediate situation of the interview, and is, in effect, the audience for which the ideology is articulated. The interview itself is the vehicle for the integration of self and group identity and the audience is the group with which the partners

seek to forge an identity. Ideologies, because they are located in the social world, no matter how complex that location, speak to some sense of solidarity with other members of a particular class or group (Jameson, p. 290) and in the oral history interview it is that class or group for which the historian serves as mediator to whom the the interviewee speaks. The question is, to what group for whom the interviewee serves as mediator, is the historian speaking?

The particular public political positions of the interviewer/historian and the interviewee are often easily revealed. Differences of class, race and gender, in a social world conscious of the ways in which they are expressed, are often exposed as varying imperatives in the interview. In some cases, the social differences are so deep that the ideological conflict can never be healed. In other cases, agreement is so great there is little conflict. In most, however, the political agendas of both partners are fairly muted and emerge only with analysis.

But even then the conflcit is often more subtle, especially when covered or obscured by the seeming inoccuous rules of historical questioning. "[E]veryone working in a field," Edward Said has argued (1981, p. 181) "by a process of acculturation, accepts certain guild standards by which the new and the not-new are recognizable. These standards are far from absolute, just as they are far from being fully conscious. They can be very harshly applied, nevertheless, particularly when the guild's corporate sense feels itself under attack." These standards, what

Foucault (1970)
has called the discourse of the disciplines, form the unstated ideological vision of the historian. In most interviews they are hegemonic; even the most cantankerous or ideologically distant interviewee will often look to the interviewer/historian for confirmation and guidance as to whether the information being conveyed and the interpretations being offered are the type desired by the historian. In most cases it is agreed that the oral history interview will follow the rules of historical construction as laid down by the historical profession and interpreted by the historian. Such agreement obscures the ideological potency of the " professional" stance, and is an important part of the way in which decisions are made about who has the right to talk about what. Such power relations are potentially magnified in interviews with non-hegemonic populations or when they are interwoven with questions of class race or gender. (Anderson, et. al., 1987, Jefferson, 1984)
Keeping in mind the ways in which professional standards mask ideological issues, it is instructive to layer McMahan's use of particular interview segments in her discussion of hermeneutic conversation to try to uncover more of the political praxis of the interview. This particular layering may, in some sense, be unfair to McMahan since the examples I want to turn to are excerpts taken from interviews I conducted. When McMahan used them she did not have the advantage of my own recollections of the interviewing situation and my thoughts about the political ambience of them. By this layering I do not mean to imply that her analysis is flawed -- indeed, I hope to show that she did

find through her formal analysis certain problems that, because she did not have the data, could not be discussed in a political language. By this layering I hope to indicate the ways in which the professional attitudes of the historian become a matter of concern for the historical meaning of the what the conversation is about. (Mishler, 1986)

In the first case, McMahan quotes from an interview I conducted as part of the research for my doctoral thesis. The particular interview was with a former New Jersey congressman who had also played a role in the politics of the Democratic party in New Jersey when those politics revolved around the unseating of long time boss Frank Hague. The prupose of the interview was to gather information for a thesis describing the development of "urban liberalism" in that particular congressional district. The dissertation was being directed by J. Joseph Huthmacher from whose work the concept of urban liberalism was derived. McMahan uses this excerpt to show a pattern of requests for confirmation and clarification and how those requests are used to forward the conversation.

> R: Those years were years of intensive battles within the labor movement over the issue of Communism and anti-Communism? [Request for Confirmation]
>
> E: Yes. [Grant]
>
> R: Did that have any effect in the district? [Request for clarification]

E: I was not able to perceive that it had any appreciable effect in that respect. There was, of course, the battle within the electrical worker's union at that time but it seems to me that perhaps both factions then supported the party. [Grant]

R: You were active in the formation of the ADA? [Request for confirmation]

E: Yes. [Grant]

McMahan's formal analysis, it strikes me, is on target and it does explain the ways in which we both managed the conversation and struggled to interpret the event under discussion. Despite this, McMahan senses that this segment failed to allow each of us to appropriate the perspective of the other, and thus did not yield hermeneutic conversation. I would argue that while the formal analysis may reveal this failure, it is only the political analysis that can explain it. As the interviewer, I was aware that the interview was to be read by my thesis committee (or at least some of the members of the committee), and that it was most certainly was going to be read by Huthmacher with whom I had had some disagreements about the adequacy of "urban liberalism" as an explanatory theory for the politics of the New Deal Democratic party. On one level it was necessary for me to indicate to the members of my committee that I had asked the pertinent questions of my interviewee, that I had asked them in a manner consistent with the profession's view of "historical objectivity", and that I exhibited a competent grasp of the day to day events of the politics of that district at the time under discussion. On the other, I had to use those techniques to raise questions about the general interpretative framework of the most powerful member

of that committee, who, in all fairnes retained a remarkably even sense of humor about the situation, yet, was not about to let my own historical interpretation go unquestioned.

In essence, in the excerpt under investigation, I had decided (and I assume the members of my committee agreed since none of them raised a question) that the full story of the development of a liberal ideology within the Democratic party in New Jersey at that time necessitated a line of questioning about the role of the CIO in the development of that ideology, and the role of the Communist party in the development of the ideology of the CIO. An examination of the transcript, and McMahan's evidence indicates that the congressman agreed to the legitmacy of that line of questioning. There was nothing in the set of questions decided upon by both interviewer and interviewee that would disturb the hegemonic discourse about the development of liberalism in the Democratic party in the 1930s and 1940s.

However, as a critic from the left, I was also interested in establishing that the Communist party, or members of that party, played some role, through a more or less class conscious politics, in the development of the ideology of liberalism, a role not admitted by the concept of 'urban liberalism'. I was also interested in discovering the ways in which anti-Communism became a part of liberal ideology, and how tensions over this issue within the labor movement and the Democratic party helped define 'urban liberalism' by excluding a class conscious politics.

The Congressman obviously disagreed with this agenda and interpretation, by arguing that the split in the labor movement over this issue had no effect since both factions continued to support the Democratic party. Stymied by this denial, and having no other evidence to support my case, I attempted to get at the issue of anti-Communism through a discussion of his membership in the Americans for Democratic Action, which at the time was a spearhead of anti-Communism among liberals within the Democratic party.

On the positive side, this exchange did give me some indication of the congressman's vision of the relationship between the labor movement and the Democratic party. On the negative side, however, it did lead me to ask three questions of the whole effort; was he evading the issue? was he ever in a position to participate in any of the debates over this issue? or, could it be the case that the ideological debate among liberals over the issue of anti-Communism took place in another arena and that the local political level might not be the best place to search for evidence of its existence or effect? In any case, for our discussion, while on the formal level the excerpt shows a series of negotiations and responses, on the political level the conflicting views of the past and its meaning continued to discourage interpretative agreement. We could agree about the rules of the game, but not what the intended meaning was about. It is this impasse which McMahan sensed, but was unable to fully explain.

A second example is McMahan's use of an interview I did while

working for the John F. Kennedy Library with Kennedy's first advisor on mental health and retardation. To McMahan, the excerpt, which is too long to quote here, is an example of topic management; which it certainly is. Again, however, some discussion of the interplay between professional concerns and historical interpretation, when interwoven with her formal analysis helps us to explain and appropriate the text more fully. Serendipity determined my participation in the interview. I happened to be going to California, where the interviewee lived, on a job interview and the timing was convenient. The interviewee had had a long and distinguished career in medicine and was at that time being interviewed on that career by the UCLA Oral History Program (the transcript when completed ran to more than 2500 pages). His tenure at the Kennedy White House was brief and marked a small part of his career. Since I was somewhat unprepared to discuss the details of mental health policy and he had some difficulty recalling specifics of his brief tenure, we agreed, tacitly, that the interview would be conducted at a fairly abstract interpretative level mixed with any anecdotes or stories he happened to remember. In this sense, the most interesting part of the interview was the firts five minutes when we both assessed the situation and came to this conclusion.

In the excerpt cited by McMahan, the concerns in my mind revolved around the close watch that members of the Kennedy administration exercised over the actions of the advisory council and its chairman. Others had told us that there was some concern

on the part of the President and members of his family over the appointment becasue of the fact that one of the Kennedy sisters had been designated as mentally retarded, and because the family was unsure of the opinions of this particular advisor on a number of questions dealing with the care of mentally retarded young people. My aim in the interview was to discover whether or not this concern had been expressed directly and if so, how he dealt with that concern. I also wanted his recollections of the effect that the rather limited range of activities allowed him and the council by the White House from the time of his appointment unitl the organization of a very successful White House conference on mental health and retardation, had upon his own career. I have no idea of how he interpreted my line of questioning, but his response was to frame the answer in terms of the usual limits a Republican might face within a Democratic administration. I am still unsure, after all these years as to the meaning of that explanation. Can it be accepted at face value? Was it a way to mask his hurt at being treated with such suspicion? What the exchange does show is how easily questions can be handled within the ideological discourse of American politics and party allegiences, despite the fact that most historians would tend to minimize the effect of those allegiences.

The point here is not to go through each interview excerpt used by McMahan to add information that only an interviewer would know and thereby divert attention from the strengths of that analysis. This layering has been undertaken to point out that

questions of form are not prior to questions of ideology and that questions of ideology are not prior to questions of form. They emerge together in the dialectical relationships in the interview, and in the interaction between the partners in the interview as they explore the historical worlds in which each is embedded. For a successful hermeneutic analysis of an oral history interview these worlds and the ways in which they shape and determine the languages of the interview must be grasped.

The inherent unfairness of my use of these interviews, built as it is upon McMahan's use of the same material points up a major issue for all fieldworkers, or anyone interested in discovering the generation of meaning in an interview encounter. The issue is what Paul Rabinow (1988, p. 253) has called, "corridor talk": the gossip about a fieldworker's field experiences which is, " an important component of a person's reputation, and the material he or she uses [but] which is hardly ever written about 'seriously'". The fact that we do not usually incorporate such 'gossip' into our analyses of the question at hand obscures the internal and external dialogue of the interview. It also adds to the view,"widely held and generally reinforced by conventional fieldwork guides or manuals, that individuals can conduct fieldwork involving people studying people without being people". (Georges and Jones, 1980, p.153) In oral history fieldwork the situation is compounded by the initial archival assumption that the interviewer is simply a vessel through which information is conveyed to a larger audience of researchers,

and by the fact that fieldworkers rarely, if ever, keep the kind of detailed fieldwork notes or journals kept by anthropologists and folklorists. While many critics may wax poetic about the disappearing author, in this situation that disappearance leads to the dilemna posed earlier in our discussion of Rosengarten and the North Carolina collective, We are denied the necessary information which would allow us to uncover the political praxis of the interview and thus unable to decipher the ideological contest over, and the context of, the interpretations being presented. In the first case we are asked to believe that a folk ideology emerges spontaneously through experience but are never told why that happens or why it should be privleged over any other ideology. In the second we are denied the view of people grappling with the contradictions within their own historical visions and thus the view of them as fully active participants not only in their histories but in the search for meaning in that history. Our response to such works is therefore necessarily limited and the public discourse over its meaning is limited.

There are, of course, many examples of texts in which the fieldworker tells of his or her involvement in the creation of the documents upon which the text is based, and what that means for the interpretation being offered. Worker in the Cane (1974) by Sidney Mintz is an example of how a sympathetic fieldworker can handle the problem within a more or less traditional sense of text. Sherna Gluck's Rosie the Riveter Revisited (1987) is an example of how personal concerns and feminist ideology can be

mobilized to reveal the interplay between the historical views of interviewer and interviewees. Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community (1972) which is in many ways sui generis is an attempt to fully develop what Dennis Tedlock (1978) has called the dialogical nature of the text while consciously attempting to break the bounds of the professional historian's ideology.

Worker in the Cane is essentially a life history of Don Taso, a Puerto Rican sugar worker. It is a compilation of some of Taso's written autobiography and extensive interviews conducted over a number of years. The material has been arranged by Mintz in chronological order, but the discussion has been reproduced in almost verbatim fashion in order to preserve the narrative. But Mintz is not confused about the ambiguity in the life history over the narrative roles of the informant and the researcher and is careful to note the continuing social division of labor, as Martine Burgos (1988) would term it, within the emerging narrative. He is also careful to outline for the reader his growing friendship with Taso and notes how that friendship became a limiting factor in the developemnt of the life history when Taso became unwilling to openly discuss his conversion to a form of pentacostal Protestantism which he knew Mintz viewed with a certain "sourness" (p. 5) Thus the personal and political boundaries of the cultural tension became objects of investigation themselves, and examples of the social relations of production which so fascinate Mintz in the full life history. In structuring the text Mintz incorporates his questions into it so that we can

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see the question to which the answer is given. More importantly, Mintz recognizes the differing life views within the fieldwork situation without privleging either. By so doing he is able to place Taso's life story within the larger structure of the history of Puerto Rico and the history of sugar production in the Caribbean world. By highlighting his own participation in the creation of the text and his own disquiet about aspects of Taso's life, Mintz allows to Taso an independence of position and mien denied in a text which does not express such conflict. It is also a bridge to larger questions about the ways in which the world created by Taso is changing, and an insight into the conditions of that change. It thus unites the narrative with the events under discussion through the use of both biographies.

Gluck's work is much more personal. While Mintz still retains a certain distance and perspective, Gluck consciously attempts to bridge the gap between herself as professional and her informants as story tellers. Essentially a compilation of edited interview segments, Rosie the Riveter Revisited tells the stories of several women who worked in the aircraft industry in the Los Angeles area during World War II. The book is infused with the ideology of feminism, in particular the notion of the necessity to merge the personal and the political. Gluck prefaces each account with commentary on her own impressions of the woman being interviewed, the role of the interviewing process in the life of the woman who is telling her story, and the story telling abilities of the particular informant. One of the exceptional

aspects of the crafting of the book is that after Gluck had recorded and transcribed the interviews she then returned to the people interviewed to jointly edit the final text. This allowed them a certain shared power over the ways in which they were presented to the larger public. Unfortunately, Gluck does not tell us in what ways this helped shape the interpretation of the experiences under study. This procedure, however, did allow Gluck to escape from the tendency to reify the moment of production or presentation as the only moment in which meaning is expressed in a continuing dialogue. Her attempt to bring herself into the text and share with her informants the shaping of the text derives from a deeply ethical sense of her responsibilities to those she interviewed which is at odds with a view of them as solely informants. "I tell my students," she writes, " that we are giving something evry important back to the people we interview. Yet, at times, I worry that we may, to some degree, be exploiting those we interview." (pp. 26-27)

The most radical example of the attempt to transcend the usual limits of the definitions of personal and professional relations established by the disciplinary ideology is Duberman's Black Mountain. Roundly criticized when it was published in 1973 -- Paul Conkin (1973) called it "embarassing," "pretentious," "the very epitome of bad taste " --most reviewers missed the brilliance of what Duberman had done. It is an extraordinary example of how a historian who is aware of the subjectivity of the historical enterprise, and the ways in which muuliple agendas create multiple meanings in an interview, creates a text which attempts to contain and exhibit those varies and contradictory

meanings. If the meaning of words, ultimately, depends upon the concrete situation in which they are spoken, how does the historian craft his or her presentation to show the fullness of those concrete situations and the full range of contradictions within them while still adhering to the conventions of his or her calling. If these conventions dictate that the historian should not appear in the text, Duberman's answer is that he cannot. (p. 13)

To Duberman, the history of Black Mountain, an experimental college in North Carolina which attracted to its staff and student body a remarkable group of intellectuals and artists, is contested territory. And he is deeply involved for personal and political reasons in that contestation. Thus, throughout the work, Duberman steps aside to meditate upon the progress of the work. He consciously breaks his narrative in order to add his own impressions of its form and emergence to it. In the process he creates a new text and brings into the open his own personal history, his political attitudes, his sexual orientation, in short, all of his "prejudices". He then at some length, discusses the ways in whcih they have become part of his work. Oddly enough. this very subjectivity, his own consciousness of his own prejudices and their effects on the prejudices of others, transforms them into objects of study, and the initial objects of study, the people who made the history of Black Mountain, become the subjects of the analysis.

Fully conscious of the ways in which Black Mountain is a confrontation with the normal standards of professional discourse, Duberman tells us in his introduction that he had to put the work

aside for a number of years because he found that his early work did not catch the range of commentary and interaction he desired. Returning to it, he returned with the aim of breaking through the disciplinary boundaries. The difficulty of the task is noted in the following excerpt from his journal which he cites in the book.

> My Journal, Monday, August 3, 1970: The data is taking over again. Or rather, my compulsiveness about being totally accurate and inclusive. I start letting myself go [but] get deflected into incorporating . . . material into earlier sections; mostly additional citations to footnotes rather than changing interpretations -- just the kind of silly "iceberg" scholarship . . . that I rhetorically scorn. By the time I come back to the question that had started to excite me, I'm laden with repetative information to other people's reactions to other issues. How can I explore theirs and mine simultaneously? I don't want to evade or distort their views, but I don't want fidelity to theirs to take over, to obliterate mine. . . . It's an example of how destructive so called "professional training" can be; it initiates you into, and confirms the rightness of techniques previously used by others. Yet, there aren't any techniques, only personalities. (pp. 89-90)

Duberman is not an oral historian. He is a historian who has conducted a series of interviews as part of a research project. But, his insights into the nature of the process and the difficulty of representing the excitement of fieldwork and the promise of the interview within the traditional forms of historical narrative are brilliant. His attempt to try to represent that process in his book in such a way that he remains true to the circumstances of the creation of the information he is using, offers us an important commentary upon our work. That he cannot fully resolve the contradictions should not surprise us. His achievement is that he has laid bare the contradictions involved

in the usual assumptions about authority and power in historical presentation.

In the following excerpt of an interview from Black Mountain, chosen at random, and not a very good one, we can see the contradiction. And because the excerpt is so typical of many which we find in our own work we can see our own contradictions as well. This particular segment is from an interview Duberman conducted with David Weinrib, a sculptor, in which Duberman asked Weinrib to describe a musical event mounted by John Cage at Black Mountain, an event which became a part of the folklore of the college.

Weinrib: There were a lot of people looking at clocks. And there was a podium. I mean a lectern, and Cage was at it . . .. It was to the side . . . . And he started to lecture . . . . He read it. And as he was reading it things started to happen. But he just kept reading, as I remember, all evening.

Duberman: What was the content. Do you remember?

Weinrib: I don't remember. Except there was -- there was some quotations from Meister Eckhart . . . I don't remember much else about the content. It was cut into very often. But he just kept reading. And there was a number of things that happened. And there was Rauschenberg with an old Gramaphone that he'd dug up. And every now and then . . . he'd wind it up and play this section of an old record . . .

Duberman: What was he playing?

Weinrib: Just old hokey records, as I remember.

Duberman: Old popular records?

Weinrib: Old records. I'm sure he bought them with the machine. 1920s. 1930s. Then Cunningham danced around the whole area.

Duberman: Around this core of chairs?

Weinrib: Yes, danced and --

Duberman: Were there aisles in between?

Weinrib: No. I remember we all sort of sat together.

Duberman: In the center?

Etc, etc. (p. 354)

What Duberman is doing here is simply an exaggerated version of what I was doing when I interviewed the congressman quoted earlier, what Mintz did in a much more subdued fashion, and what Gluck must have done in the interviewing sessions but edited out of the published presentation. In his concern for analysis, he has destroyed the story as story. Because we feel we have some commitment to the documentary impulse, we cannot allow the narrative to wander too far, to become too complicated, before we intervene to ascertain the context of the events under discussion, the actual time of their occurance and the details of each. The oral history is a narrative and also an analysis. The analysis of the narrator is embedded in the story he or she tells, the analysis of the historian is embedded in the questions asked. Those questions break the narrative with analysis. If the oral history is a conversational narrative, the conversation is often at odds with the drive for narrative. The ideological conflict takes the form of the basic conflict of the interview.

While we destroy story as story, our interviewees will move quickly to restore that narrativity. "Where was I?" they ask, and go on with their telling. Our role in building the narrative is

crucial. Yet, the manner in which we attempt to build it, to add detail to it, to force memory to its limit, is by the destruction of the very narrativity of the narrative. We do not treat it as an unfolding story in which we are being swept along, but as an object of analysis and deconstruction. The production of real narrative, in which narrative schemes govern the construction of the testimony, is rare in oral history, and the reason is that the interviewer refuses to allow it to develop.

Oral history interviewing is part of the historical enterprise. Thus the historian/interviewer is trapped in the language, practices and ideology of the profession. That ideology, most baldly stated by David Hackett Fischer (1970) is that history is not story telling but problem solving. Historians work in the everyday public language of the culture and have never, despite many noble or ignoble attempts, devised a specialized language for themselves. Yet, within the profession a sharp distinction is often drawn between analytic history and narrative history, and between narrative and analysis within a particular historical work. (Hexter, 1971, pp. 29-43) This distinction, Warren Susman argues (1964) is deeply embedded in the profession and expresses our differing views of a usable past. Since it is in the realm of language that we find the location of the basic ideological conflict in the interview these distinctions become crucial. The language of history used by the interviewer is the language of analysis. Its form is the question. The language of history used by the interviewee is the language of narrative.

Its form is the story. Each has a teleology operating within it. (Gadamer, 1976, p. 13) Thus if we can understand the ways in which these conflicting languages of history ebb and flow within the interview we can understand the ways in which each partner, beneath the quise of politeness, is contesting for control of the interview, and thus control of the interpretation. We can see the political praxis of the interview.

This contest, of course, is often unstated. Based as it is in our acculturated mode of asking quesions or of telling stories we fail to recognize its political nature. But when placed in an arena of contradiction and contrariety its ideological nature is revealed. In this manner we see the ways in which interviewer and interviewee conspire to legitimate dominant meanings, or delegitimate them, or confront each other in ideological disputation. In either case, the interplay between these languages allows to to discover the fit between both interviewer and interviewee and the world as they experience it. (Langellier, p. 271)

Alessandro Portelli has argued that, "[t]o tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time." (1981) But in an interview we force the story into time, to contextualize it and thereby disarm the storyteller. The consequences of this situation are ambiguous. Do we, thereby, as Ricoeur would have it, aid in the emplotment of the incident into a unified and complete story (1958) Do we thus aid in the creation of a more coherent structure to the life story being told? Or are we undermining the possibility of self presentation and forcing the story into

well worn paths? In situations where we are interviewing people who speak within the dominant or hegemonic discourse, the use of the language of analysis allows us to question that discourse, to contest the ideology, to explore the contradictions inherent in it, to discover its social roots -- to demystify it. In situations where we are interviewing people who are attempting to break through the bounds of the hegemonic discourse, or people whose dissent is not clearly articulated because they are rarely given the opportunity to respond, our analytic stance can undermine their confidence in their ability to tell the tale, to configure their world. We can thereby reinforce the dominant discourse just by doing what we usually do. The power we exercise to contest interpretation is not only interpretative. It is social and political.

Obviously, this dilemna is not limited to oral history. Feminist scholars in many disciplines have raised similar issues about male and female language and how that language is a reflection of social power. (Caplan, pp. 15-16) It is a variant of issues now being raised in the attack on critical legal studies for use of a language which is the language of professionally trained white males and the drive to include other discourses, mostly narrative, in those studies. (Crenshaw, 1988) The question to be faced is whether or not the return of narrativity is to be as welcome among hegemonic classes, and equally privleged. (Wilkie, 1973)

The question of power in the interview is more complex than

social form or conversational dominance. The languages of history, analytic or narrative, are the languages through which we as historians and our interviewees as citizens, filter our experiences, thereby defining them, and through which we express our own world views and ideologies. The tension that emerges reflects deeper social tensions and thus the question of sharing power in the interview is simply one form of the question of sharing power in the social order. We are caught in a bind. If we intervene in the building of the narrative, we intrude oursleves and our ideology into the process. If we do not, we abnegate our responsibility as critics of mystification.

There may be no satisfactory answer to this contradiction, although differing solutions have been proposed. Some fieldworkers, in anthropology in particular, have argued that no solution is possible when the fieldworker studies other cultures and they should withdraw from that work. Others would withdraw the power of interpretation from the fieldworker altogether, as if that were possible. Renato Rosaldo has proposed that we seek the possibility of a final narrative as an "analytic narrative" (1980, p.89.)Engaged scholars might argue, as does Jameson that, ' ideological struggle is not first and foremost, " a matter of moral choice but of taking sides in a struggle between embattled groups." (p. 290) Thus the decision to encourage or discourage narrative, to intervene in the storytelling, would rest upon one's desire to butress or undermine the class position that is being articulated. Rabinow (pp. 256-58, 261) has outlined four

different postures, each with its own problematic. "But", he adds, "the problem is precisely to decide if it is actually suitable to place onself within a 'we' in order to assert the principles one recognizes and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather, necessary to make the future formation of a 'we' possible."

As intellect workers, as Althusser would call us, we are aware of the ways in which our work is ideological and therefore plays a role in the subjective forms of class, racial and gender conflict or subjegation. Perhaps, the best we can do at this moment of time is to open the arena of discourse -- to use our ability to create cultural documents and interpret them -- to manipulate history, and to allow others to manipulate history in such a way that the fullest most expressive, the most contradictory texts are created. In this way we open the possibility that future interpreters will find new meanings in the experiences being discussed and thereby a new discourse.

Such a view of future use opens us, of course, to the conflicts over utopia inherent in every narrative and every ideology, but it also offers the possibility of speaking beyond the limits of our professional or public discourse and formulating a new discourse for a new world.

FOOTNOTES

1. For an interesting variant of this thesis, see, Anguera (1988).

2. For an analysis of the research interview and the relations between informant and researcher, see, Mishler (1986)

3. There is a growing literature on the ways in which narrative is created and manipulated within the life history. See for example, Burgos (1988) and Roos (1989) for relevant citations to work in this field.

4. Recent debates over the ways in which various theories of deconstruction have affected the historical profession have done nothing to break the narrative/analysis discourse. See for example Harlan (1989) and Appleby (1989).

5. Porblems that we cannot undertake to examine here. See Noam Chomsky's critique of Foucault in Language and Responsibility (1979)

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