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## ORAL HISTORY IN MUSEUMS AND EDUCATION

### WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY?

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### Η ΠΡΟΦΟΡΙΚΗ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΣΤΑ ΜΟΥΣΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ ΠΟΥ ΒΡΙΣΚΟΜΑΣΤΕ ΣΗΜΕΡΑ;

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#### ABSTRACT

Gazi and Nakou offer a detailed overview of the use of oral history in museums from the 1950s to the present, and discuss basic issues concerning its application in education -both formal (in schools and universities) and informal (as in museums). Using a variety of international examples, they discuss how museums gradually moved away from a traditional view of oral history as a mere supplement to traditional exhibits to innovative contemporary uses which aim at active community participation and engagement, and exploit digital technology to its fullest, in order to offer poignant experiences. Furthermore, the authors argue that the use of oral history in all types of education -as in museums- may potentially aid the gradual deconstruction of conventional historical, social, cultural and political

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preconceptions that still exist in many societies, especially in the area of traditional approaches to (history) education and historical representations.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η Γκαζή και η Νάκου παρέχουν μία επισκόπηση της αξιοποίησης της προφορικής ιστορίας σε μουσεία από το 1950 έως σήμερα, και συζητούν βασικά ζητήματα που αφορούν την προφορική ιστορία στην εκπαίδευση - τόσο στις τυπικές μορφές της (π.χ. σε σχολεία και πανεπιστήμια) όσο και σε άτυπες μορφές (όπως στα μουσεία). Χρησιμοποιώντας παραδείγματα από το διεθνές περιβάλλον, αναλύουν πώς τα μουσεία σταδιακά απομακρύνθηκαν από παραδοσιακές προσεγγίσεις της προφορικής ιστορίας, που τη θεωρούσαν ως ένα απλό συμπληρωματικό στοιχείο των μουσειακών εκθέσεων, προς σύγχρονους τρόπους αξιοποίησής της, που αποσκοπούν στην ενεργή συμμετοχή και εμπλοκή των κοινωνικών ομάδων και των ατόμων που συγκροτούν το κοινό τους και αξιοποιούν τη σύγχρονη ψηφιακή τεχνολογία για να παρέχουν έντονες συναισθηματικές εμπειρίες. Οι συγγραφείς υποστηρίζουν ότι η αξιοποίηση της προφορικής ιστορίας στην εκπαίδευση -όπως και στα μουσεία- μπορεί δυνάμει να συμβάλλει στην σταδιακή αποδόμηση συμβατικών ιστορικών, κοινωνικών, πολιτισμικών και πολιτικών προκαταλήψεων που ακόμα επιβιώνουν σε πολλές κοινωνίες, ειδικότερα στην περιοχή των παραδοσιακών προσεγγίσεων της (ιστορικής) εκπαίδευσης και των ιστορικών αναπαραστάσεων.

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## Introduction

One of the great contributions of oral history to the study and understanding of the past is its *public* character: oral testimonies are now applied in a variety of public contexts from the more predictable to the most unexpected (Perks & Thomson 2006: 357). Indeed, oral history seems to be everywhere: From university courses through to museum exhibitions and community workshops to high school initiatives and educational activities of all sorts, oral history has been in vogue for at least three decades now.<sup>1</sup> A long time has passed since 1948 when oral history was introduced at Columbia University or even since the late 70s when oral history first entered museums. What was seen initially as supplementary to official, ‘serious’ history or as experimental work has long since been established as a core element of museum exhibitions, educational programmes and community outreach.

What have we learned from this process, and how might we better exploit this knowledge to open up new ways in the application of oral history in a variety of both formal and informal educational settings?

This paper discusses trends, challenges and limitations in the application of oral history in museums and education, in order to explore future possibilities and indicate ways to the future. It is intended as a critical reflection on the field rather than an exhaustive account of recent developments. In this respect, it does not reiterate the advantages of oral history nor does it address practical issues such as the technology of sound and the various media of presentation, unless if they have revolutionized the use of oral history in the fields discussed here.

## Why oral history?

Oral history’s main contribution to opening up new ways in understanding the past - and human experience in general - may be summarized as follows:

- the emergence of hitherto suspended, hidden or silent voices (or what is generally known as “history from below”) and the subsequent inclusion into the historical record of various groups of people who were regularly missing from official history;
- the turn from history as a fact to history as lived *experience*;
- the introduction of the oral account as an equal partner of the written record;
- the shift from the stringency of “historic fact” to the elusiveness of memory; and,
- the transition from the solidity of *one* truth to the ambiguity of polyvocality.

The oral history historian is not after objective “truth” (history as it “happened” or history as recorded officially); rather s/he is interested in how historic facts were *experienced* by different people, what they *meant* to them, and how they related to their own lives. What oral history really offers is an understanding of history as a diverse, troubled, at times heavily contested, yet rich, multi-nuanced and extremely varied human experience. And, if this seems alarming or even undesirable to proponents of more orthodox approaches to the past, let us here remind that, as Portelli (2006) has clearly asserted, all that which “makes oral history different”, that is orality, subjectivity, partiality, the (in)credibility of memory, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, should be seen as strengths rather than weaknesses.

One important aspect is that oral history is not just about making histories or simply making *different* histories; in many cases it is about empowering individuals through the process of remembering, recalling and even reinterpreting the past. In this respect, oral history is becoming practically indispensable in contemporary museums’ increasing effort to develop a more inclusive approach and initiate a multisided, true dialogue with their diverse audiences.

It has been argued that in order to become spaces for negotiation, museums “must renounce those homogenizing and discriminating values which are still very closely connected to their role in legitimating specific identities” (Delgado 2009: 9). Indeed, it is the responsibility of museums as significant cultural agents to create a space (the museum/the exhibition) where people will be able to negotiate difference and diversity and learn to deal with conflict. Oral history’s polyvocality may offer a great service in this direction. After all, it “is people who bring the value and consequence to objects and collections; as a result, if a museum cannot forge associations with people it will have no meaning” (Crooke 2007: 131).

At the same time, oral history has greatly appealed to many researchers and educators, working in both formal and informal education, and has led to important developments at both a theoretical and a practical level as many of the articles presented in this volume clearly attest (see, for example, Chapman & Edwards; McCully). Museum education, in particular, has proved a very fertile ground on which to apply oral history as a tool to revealing the complexity and polyvocality of the past and gaining a deeper understanding of human experience at large (see, for example, Yurita in this volume). These issues are elaborated in the second part of this paper. Let us begin with museums.

## Oral history in museums: An outline

In the early days it was assumed that oral history may function as a *supplementary* source of historical information to be used in traditional ways. With curators firmly asserting the primacy of the object, it was all too natural to see oral history as peripheral. Consequently, oral history was at first introduced in museum exhibitions<sup>2</sup> as an auxiliary source providing illustrative contextual information: Oral testimonies were often used to document exhibited objects -usually in the form of written captions (a practice that has survived to this date). Sometimes, oral testimonies were also inserted into a main exhibition narrative in order to reveal different voices, but this was still being seen as a marginal element.

Gradually it became evident that oral history provided a way to communicate with the past more straightforwardly, and had the power of engaging the public in what could be described as “direct experience”. This led to the incorporation of oral testimonies as a vital element in many museum exhibitions.<sup>3</sup>

With time, oral testimonies started being employed as primary exhibits themselves, even at the expense of objects.<sup>4</sup> Underlying these efforts was not only an understanding of oral history’s enlivening power, but -more importantly- an increasing recognition that oral history may illuminate whole dimensions of human experience which are not expressed in material terms and provide a vital way of preserving, validating and presenting the voices of people who might not be represented through objects (Perks 2004).

All this marked the beginning of a completely new understanding of museums as dynamic agents in empowering people and increasing their sense of identity and belonging. As a result, some museums initiated oral history projects with local ethnic or other minority groups in order to fill relevant gaps in their collections. Many museums started documenting objects in their collections through oral history and reminiscence work as it was increasingly recognised that collecting material culture without intangible culture was just not sensible. Furthermore, museums used individual life stories in order to contextualise objects in their exhibitions. Exhibitions such as *The People’s Story* in Edinburgh or Croydon Museum Service’s *Lifetimes* gallery, for instance, were hugely popular because they gave their respective community a sense of belonging and identity.

In the 80s and 90s oral history was commonly seen as a way of making museums more inclusive and more relevant to the various audiences they addressed. In this direction, many museums have further exploited oral history as an expansion area for museum education (e.g. for educational projects, school visits, resource packs and publications; see the section *Oral history in museum education*, below).

Today “it’s impossible to imagine a new museum being planned without a significant oral history component” (Mulhearn 2008: 28). More importantly, oral history is no longer seen as merely complementary. Rather, it is commonly deployed in exhibitions as a significant part of an all-inclusive –yet not necessarily cohesive– narrative in which a plethora of interpretive media (objects, digital exhibits, oral testimonies, photographs etc.) are interwoven in order to broaden the visitor’s understanding.<sup>5</sup> Oral history’s potential in eliciting feelings of empathy is increasingly appreciated as a powerful tool in museums which tackle issues of ‘difficult heritage’ and uneasy memories such as the House of Terror in Budapest, where oral testimonies constitute a central interpretative medium targeted at creating a powerful and long lasting emotional experience.

Traditionally, oral history has been associated with social history, but other types of museums have increasingly been adopting it. Some stimulating examples come from museums of art which employ oral history as part of wider artistic projects.<sup>6</sup> Artistic exploration of oral memory has also led to the production of “memoryscapes”,<sup>7</sup> usually in the form of soundscapes created through the insertion of various oral memories into specific parts of a city’s fabric.<sup>8</sup>

The rapid advances of digital technology have changed radically the way museums use oral history both in their exhibitions and online. First, filmed oral histories have largely replaced audio.<sup>9</sup> Second, a growing number of museums are now making oral history collections available on the web. Such online collections may come as a supplement to a museum’s exhibitions or they may stand alone as archives to be explored independently.

Apart from opening up new ways for innovative uses of oral history, technology has further revolutionized the idea of participation and involvement as people can now record their own histories remotely.<sup>10</sup> In the same way, many museums are now including a ‘Share a memory’ feature on their website where visitors can add personal memories inspired by the museum objects or as part of wider research projects. The online archives<sup>11</sup> created in this way are a valuable resource for research, memory work and public participation at large.

Technology has further facilitated international cooperation involving oral history. Recently, for example, the Arab American National Museum in Washington DC has joined forces with the Children’s Museum Jordan on an environmental project aimed at raising awareness on consumption practices, waste and their impact on the environment. As part of the project, children aged 12-14 years from both countries are interviewing elder family members about changes in consumption and waste habits over the years. The interviews are then posted and shared on “Watch your waste e-museum”, a joint, bilingual, online platform which acts as a sharing portal, relying on stories from people in both countries.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, it seems that one of the main results of the widespread development of oral history is an extraordinary rise of digital storytelling projects (see Bazley & Graham 2012). Underlying such projects is a belief that everybody has a story to tell, and these personal stories are a way of gaining deeper insight into a place's history.<sup>13</sup>

### Oral history in museums: Critical questions

The use of oral history in museums has for years been hailed as having a liberating influence. By allowing different voices to be heard, museums address their visitors more directly and stimulate emotional engagement. By offering multiple viewpoints, rather than the single voice of the curator, museums further help their audiences to recognize that the past may be interpreted in different ways (Ritchie 2003: 242). Yet, no matter how progressive and refreshing all this may seem, the 'democratic' character of oral history has not remained unquestioned. Griffiths (1989: 51) was one of the first to argue that instead of giving "history back to the people in their own words" as originally claimed by the proponents of oral history, in reality it is still the curator who controls the process by deciding which oral memories are "useful information" to be processed, edited, and presented. So, instead of "transforming the social relations of research", he contends, "oral history in museums has reinforced the power relations within it".

Although things have changed dramatically since the time of Griffiths' criticism, there is no doubt that museums continue to hold an advantageous position in oral history projects, and are still taking decisions on behalf of their audience. In reality, "giving 'power to the people'" must be understood as an effort to "providing a knowledgeable framework from which to develop social history in partnership with communities" (Carnegie 2006: 73). The Museum of London's *London Voices*<sup>14</sup> and *Belonging: Voices of London's refugees*,<sup>15</sup> for example, were just two highly successful efforts in this direction.

Despite these programmes' popularity and success, the fundamental questions "who talks" in oral history, "what s/he is saying" and "for whom" continue to trouble the oral history community, and it is the responsibility of the oral historian or the museum curator to carefully try to understand the particular circumstances of oral histories' production. First, it is important to remember that life stories as comprehensive and coherent oral narratives do "not exist in nature" (Portelli 1998: 24). Rather, they are situated dialogues between two interlocutors, the interviewer, who poses the questions, and the interviewee, who narrates. Since narrative is at the core of oral history, in order to grasp the meaning of its accounts as personal stories, exhibitions or artwork, how these narratives are created and circulated within specific contexts is significant (*cf.* Sandino 2013). The original context is usually domestic and intimate,

and the narrator is typically addressing just one person, the interviewer. Normally, the interviewees are not fully cognizant that they may also be addressing a wider, possibly international, audience or even posterity (see Perks & Thomson 2006: 335).

Second, there is the question of how to render “what was essentially a personal, intimate and one-to-one communication to a form which is impersonal, public and one-to-many” (Read 2003: 414), like a museum exhibition or an educational activity. And, third, how does one deal with the ethical considerations resulting from the change of context? As Conroy-Baker (2000: 37) points out, “a good empathetic interview is conducted like a conversation ... and people may say more than they intended or thought”. But when their memories are eventually presented in an open, public context, some participants in interviews may be annoyed and sometimes ask for withdrawal of their material.<sup>16</sup>

It is also important to realize that oral history always operates as an act of interpretation. The use of oral history in museums, in particular, entails “a double interpretive operation” (Sandino 2013: 10) as the story eventually presented -an exhibition, an audio installation, etc.- is not the same as the story initially told. As a result of this “double interpretive operation”, the final story presented tends to acquire a variety of meanings and connotations which are, in turn, reinterpreted by the visitor as part of a larger narrative. Of course this is an issue common to all exhibition making; because of the highly evocative nature of oral testimonies, however, special care should be given to an as much balanced use of oral history as possible within a museum exhibition context.

This is particularly critical when contrasting views are presented; even more so, when views that challenge established orthodoxies are at stake. How, for instance, can museums deal with oral stories which diverge or even openly challenge official history? The *Contested Frontiers* exhibition at the National Museum of Australia is an illustrative and often cited example. Zarmati (in this volume), for instance, discusses how the Museum responded to criticisms of its use of oral history, and how it used this negativity in a positive way to educate the public, particularly school students, not only about Australia’s frontier conflict, but about the problems of using oral history as a source of evidence in museums.

Contested views of the past arising from an exploration of oral sources are an issue also encountered in education in the more typical sense. The next two sections discuss the challenges and the limitations of using oral history in both formal and informal educational settings.



## Oral history and formal education

The rise of oral history in education has been particularly evident in English speaking countries, mainly in the UK and USA, where ground-breaking, pioneer work in the fields of social history and oral history prepared the ground for the introduction of oral history in education. It is not coincidental, for example, that oral history educational practices in England were initiated in the 60s in relation to the *New History* movement (see McCully, in this volume).

Even in these countries, however, the use of oral history in education, especially in school education, has not been widespread and without problems. Resistance normally comes from politicians supporting traditional approaches to history education which target primarily at reproducing a monolithic national narrative (see Ashby & Edwards 2010; Stearns 2010). Moreover, in many countries, as in Greece, contemporary approaches to history education face strong social and political opposition that does not allow school history to follow changes occurring in the field of history, and to keep abreast of important theoretical and research developments in the field of history education in particular. School history education in a number of countries seems to be seized by conservative ideas and decisions.

And yet, even in countries with long tradition and experience in the application of oral history in education, its potential and limitations are constantly been discussed, especially in relation to the terms under which oral history is applied, educational methods used, targets set, and outcomes expected (see Chapman & Edwards, and Suh, Butler & Yaco, in this volume).

In other countries, like Greece, initiatives in using oral history in education mainly emerged in the last two decades, mostly as a result of teachers' enthusiasm, without any real formal (e.g. state) support. In these cases, oral history educational projects tend to be caught in a controversial wavering between spontaneous enthusiasm and sceptical hesitancy.

Contemporary approaches to history education perceive oral history not as a procedure of handling oral narratives that enforce the dominant historical narrative, but as a procedure of approaching the past in the present, on the basis of everyday people's remembrances (and students' historical questions in this context). The ultimate aim is to develop critical historical thinking, knowledge and understanding among the students, as well as skills in using, checking and interpreting sources that potentially can enable them to better orientate themselves in the present and be prepared for the future (Lee 2011). All this provides an educational and historical context in which the dominant historical narrative retreats under the weight of accepting alternative histories and interpretations. Moreover, by recognising different and changing identities that are constructed through a lifelong dynamic process of

self-knowing in relation to the “others”, the concept of one, monolithic and static, national identity breaks to pieces (see Smith, in this volume).

Therefore, the use of oral history in education, and especially in history education, demands a deep understanding of both the complex interrelations between memory and history, and the dynamic emotional and social parameters of memory in contrast to the rationalistic background of history, which aims not to represent the lived past but to produce knowledge about it (Liakos 2007).

It is evident that oral history, as a process that wishes to give voice to all and mainly those who traditionally did not have a voice -everyday people, women, children, workers, unemployed, refugees, marginal social groups, ethnic and cultural minorities- is a democratic process (if not a left process) that could not but support students’ right to produce their own discourse, instead of leading them to reproduce dominant narratives.

In turn, the use of oral history in education relates to the freedom of educators in planning and selecting educational practices related to their students’ interests, milieu and origin, the use of time etc. Unfortunately, oral history projects are usually allotted a relatively short time within standard school programmes. This reflects a general trend of undervaluing theoretical subjects, like history, in the educational programmes of many (if not all) western countries, in favour of the study of language, mathematics and physics; that is, subjects much better fitting to ‘useful’ notions of education.

Current questioning also relates to the different philosophy and targets of oral history projects, some of which are discussed in this volume (see Chapman & Edwards, McCully, and Suh, Butler & Yaco, in this volume). In any case, it is crucial to keep both the context and the educational targets crystal clear and to be able to recognize the subtle distinctions between theoretical and practical issues, so that the educational procedure and its ethics, might serve the expected learning outcomes in the best way.

Once more, the significance of future teachers’ education, together with in-service teachers’ relevant training, lies at the very centre of this discussion, as a prerequisite that could enable teachers, in their turn, to support their students’ right to construct their own discourse.

As Abatzoglou (2015) argues, these practices do have broad and deep implications for education, since they enable the process of constructing one’s self in dialogue with the others. Hence, our responsibility as educators is great.

## Oral history and museum education

Museums, as an informal educational environment, are ideally placed to allow the planning of educational projects that go beyond school mentality, even in cases in which they address school groups, or are planned by teachers.

Museum education may use contemporary approaches and methods, which have the potential to address the plurality of past and present societies, and to ponder on crucial social, cultural and historical issues that trouble present-day societies. In this way, it can open up a channel of communication between formal school education and contemporary reality, or realities; a route that may lead to a reconsideration of its practices and perspectives.

Moreover, museum education plays a significant role in museums' communication with different and diverse audiences, apart from school groups. In many museums, the "Department of Education" is now called "Department of Education and Public Programmes" or "Learning Department". These changes reflect a significant transformation in the way in which the educational role of museums is understood: From the *museum as educator* to the *museum as facilitator of learning*. In this sense, visitors, both as members of different groups and as active subjects, can use the museum to construct knowledge and experiences according to their own questions, needs and expectations.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2007) has proposed a series of Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) that can guide the planning of contemporary museum educational projects: *Knowledge and Understanding / Skills / Attitudes and Values / Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity / Activity, Behaviour and Progression*. We can thus plan museum educational activities that help us to use each museum's dominant narrative according to one or more of the above mentioned GLOs.

More precisely, and as far as the use of oral history in museum educational projects is concerned, we can plan programmes that aim to cultivate *Knowledge and Understanding* while at the same time favouring the development of historical *Skills* (such as handling oral narratives as historical sources and interpreting them as historical evidence), so that subjects can potentially realise the complexity of the issues involved in doing history (see Zarmati, and Bartow-Melia & Mieri, in this volume).

The *Attitudes and Values* and the *Activity, Behaviour and Progression* GLOs, in particular, seem especially suited to the use of oral history in museum education: relevant educational activities may act as transformative processes, through which both subjects and groups are aided to go beyond previous preconceptions, possible

anti-social attitudes and assumptions, and thus change their behaviour (see Yurita, in this volume).

The *Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity* GLO, on the other hand, may be seen as the chief target of most, if not all, contemporary museum educational activities. This GLO distinguishes museum education from traditional formal education practices, since the construction of knowledge (and of any other educational process) may only lead to best outcomes if it is realised in a context of enjoyment, and if it provokes creativity by opening up new routes for expressing emotions, ideas and questions. This basic GLO can facilitate the subjects' activity, so that from museum visitors or spectators and/or listeners of displayed oral narratives they can be transformed into interlocutors, producers of ideas and prototype discourse that, potentially, could enrich the relevant exhibitions with new materials and new oral histories. This active and productive involvement in the way exhibitions are formed and transformed could open up new networks of communication between the museum and its audiences.

In this new context of communication, museum education cannot only help different groups to approach the museum world; it can also facilitate the revision of museums' physiognomy, and their role as social and cultural institutions, through breaking up with the paradigm of traditional canons and "the connoisseurial model of the museum" that many museums have historically assumed (Dewdney, Diposa & Wallsh 2013: 26).

On the whole, the placement of audiences at the centre of museums' concern tends to change their status and role: from an indifferent general public, to special visitors groups; from visitors to spectators, listeners and consumers; and, then, to interlocutors and producers of concepts (see Zarmati, in this volume). Museums can now function not as the single source of a narrative that addresses a broad and indifferent public, but as a place that *facilitates* a multi-level and multi-directional net of communication among several sources.

This net of multi-level and multi-directional communication further relates to the net of contemporary migrant flow that is involved in reinforcing the multicultural physiognomy of present-day societies (see Bartow-Melia & Mieri, in this volume). The use of oral history in museum education can thus facilitate the understanding of these multi-directional, social and cultural flows, and serve the current need for in-depth multicultural communication and dialogue (see Smith, in this volume). In this way, oral history may assist in the erosion of many stereotypical socio-cultural, historical and political assumptions that still exist today, especially in the field of traditional approaches to formal education.

## Concluding remarks

Oral history is at heart a “deeply social practice connecting past and present” (Hamilton & Shopes 2008: viii). Oral history may lead to the creation of a new generation of conscious museum visitors as well as a new generation of critically thinking subjects (see, for example, Yurita, in this volume).

Museums, as cultural and social institutions, have started exploring the broader educational potential of oral history as a powerful tool for helping the public to discover new ways of seeing, understanding and representing our world, and of self-knowing in relation to the ‘others’ (see, for example, McCully, in this volume). Of course, museums are not alone in this, as oral history is now emerging in both formal and informal educational settings.

Overall, however, it seems that museums tend to be more daring in using oral history for representing social and cultural plurality, and for addressing crucial or controversial cultural, social, political and historical issues, than formal education institutions, and especially schools, where the use of oral history relates to the prevailing in each country ideas about the nation and society at large.

The way forward should be to allow more space and time for the use of oral history as a tool for enhancing reflective thinking in both typical and non-typical educational settings. However, oral history projects may be truly beneficial to all those involved only if they are guided by a deep understanding of the challenges and the limitations presented by the use of oral history, as well as the issues at stake within each context. Successful examples show that this may be achieved through serious commitment and familiarisation with both the theory of oral history and its application in a variety of settings.

A final point on terminology. As a result of the success of oral history the meaning of the term “oral history” has been diluted so that almost any interview conducted with an individual may be labelled “oral history” (Abrams 2010: 2). It is thus imperative to draw some lines, and to try to distinguish between a simple oral testimony used parenthetically, and a structured oral history programme as part of a broader research project with specific goals and methodology.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a good account of oral history's development see Abrams (2010: 1-17) and Ritchie (2011), who further discusses the intellectual milieu which nurtured the rise of oral history.

<sup>2</sup> For the rise of oral history in US museums see Chew (2002). See also Perks (2004).

<sup>3</sup> In 1987, for instance, "A more perfect union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution" at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, was one of the first exhibitions to incorporate oral testimonies as an integral part of both the exhibition narrative and its design. Four interactive, interview-based programmes (accessed through laserdiscs), were designed "to bring the emotional reality of personal experience" (Thomas 2008: 91) through the words of Japanese Americans who lived through internment during World War II. At the same time, oral testimonies supplemented the written record and made the objects on display come alive.

<sup>4</sup> In the mid 90s the Frankton Junction exhibition in New Zealand provided an excellent example of a highly successful exhibition structured solely around storytelling and sound (Green 2006). Similarly, the 2004 *Women talk*, a sonic installation exploring the life stories of 80 women from 1918 to the present, was the first exhibition at The Museum of London which did not employ objects as exhibits.

<sup>5</sup> Successful examples of this strategy from the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York to the District Six Museum in Cape Town abound. For example, many of the exhibits at Ellis Island Immigration Museum incorporate extracts from interviews conducted with immigrants who had been processed there, along with personnel who worked on the site, while District Six Museum is mainly based on oral testimonies of ex-residents of the area.

<sup>6</sup> A few years ago, for instance, the Tate Britain presented recorded interviews with Lucian Freud's sitters as part of his retrospective, while the digital multimedia tour of the Tate Modern now includes oral testimonies of significant artists like Joseph Boys or Louise Bourgeois on their work.

<sup>7</sup> For the concept of *memoryscape* in relation to oral memory see Butler (2013).



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<sup>8</sup> The Museum of London's highly successful project *Linked*, for example, involved the installation of acoustic guides across a 4-mile itinerary in eastern London (see Butler & Miller 2006).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the use of filmed testimonies at the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London (Bardgett 2004).

<sup>10</sup> The Japanese American Museum in Washington DC, for example, has launched the *Remembrance Project*, a pioneering web site featuring the stories of World War II internment camp detainees. Central to the project is the possibility of online visitors to record their own stories or the story of a relative as a tribute of honour to those affected by the Japanese American World War II experience ( <http://www.remembrance-project.org/> . See also Ameri 2012).

<sup>11</sup> For example, as part of the National Museum's of American History in Washington DC *Bracero Program*, an online archive was designed in order to create a new model for collaborative documentation online. The online archive, which has made available over 400 oral history interviews, offers materials for a variety of users, including researchers, teachers, and students. Online visitors can add and share their own stories of labour and migration on the site (Bertow-Melia & Mieri, in this volume).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.sekrabemuseum.org/en>

<sup>13</sup> *Bristol Stories*, for instance, was a creative digital storytelling project aimed at involving the public in the development of content for the new Museum of Bristol. The content, made by amateurs -not by curators or academics- demonstrates how the experiences of the people of Bristol have contributed to the rich cultural tapestry of the city. All the stories featured in *Bristol Stories* have been devised and made by local people using computers, photographs and personal archives such as home movies, family documents or objects with a special meaning or significance ( <http://www.bristolstories.org> ).

<sup>14</sup> *London Voices* was a triennial programme (2001-2004) specifically designed to engage diverse groups of Londoners through various oral history projects, including displays, audio installations, digital platforms etc. (Day, Mahal, Speight & Swift 2004; Day 2006).

<sup>15</sup> *Belonging*, presented in 2006-2007, gave voice to refugees living in London who recorded their personal stories and were actively involved in setting up an exhibition based on some 150 oral stories of refugees from around the world (Day 2009).

<sup>16</sup> No doubt, the availability of oral history material on site or online raises serious ethical considerations which necessitate the adoption of specific ethical procedures. It is normally made clear to interviewees that their interview may possibly be accessible online and most museums would only put oral testimonies online when they have a signed agreement by the interviewee involved. Even though, many museums now have a "take down" policy on their website so that interviewees can contact them, if they are unhappy with online access.

