Public History Workshop: Oral History

HIST 485C/2 Section AA / HIST 670R/ HIST 870R
Thursdays 18h00-20h30 Fall 2013

Instructor – Steven High, Professor
Steven.high@concordia.ca
Office Hours: Thursdays 2 pm-4:00 pm

Required Readings

Mapping Memories: Participatory Media, Place-Based Stories & Refugee Youth. Montreal: Concordia University, 2011/12. [$25 from cohds] All of the proceeds from the book/DVD go directly to a scholarship fund that has been set up for the youth involved.


For the other readings, articles can be found via the library’s electronic databases. Book chapters are on reserve. I have another copy available at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) during lab hours.

COHDS LAB HOURS, FALL 2013

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<td>Lab hours</td>
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<td>17h-21h</td>
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Method of Evaluation:

Individual Participation 35%
Variations Audio Timeliner Assignment [Oct 3] 5%
Book Review (Portelli) [Grad Students – Oct 17] [additional 10%]
Oral History Project
- Proposal for Research Ethics Review [Sept 19] Pass/Fail
- Short Reflection “blog” after each interview [part of participation mark]
- Transcription and Reflection [Oct 31] 10%
- Stories Matter Database and Reflection [Nov 14] 10%
- Research Paper/ Research Creation Project [Dec 11] 35%
- Archiving of your Project [Dec 15] 5%

1. Individual Participation 35%
You are expected to attend and participate in the scheduled seminars. You are asked to read and take notes on assigned articles. IMPORTANT NOTE: Undergraduate members of the class will be required to read 3 full-length articles or book chapters per week; master’s students 4; and
doctoral students. A successful seminar depends upon the participation of everyone. You should come prepared to discuss the articles thoughtfully. You are also required to share a written interview reflection within 24 hours with the rest of the class in our ‘basecamp’ online environment. Each missed seminar represents one-twelfth of your mark for this component.

2. Variations Audio Timeliner Assignment. 5% (Deadline: October 3).
Oral historians often say that we can learn from the form and structure of oral narratives as well as the historical content of what is said. This oral and written assignment is designed to push you to listen to the interviews for these underlying logics. You will be assigned an existing audio recording from the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. Your job is to use the Variations tool at http://variations.sourceforge.net/vat/ to analyze an aspect of its form and structure such as emotion, silence, stance, and so forth. Don’t try to do everything – go deep! For a short online tutorial on how to use this software go to: http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/projects/variations3/demos/timeline.html

3. Book Review (Deadline: October 17): +10% [Grad Students Only]
The graduate students in the class are asked to write a book review of Alessandro Portelli’s They Say in Harlan County. Approach this assignment as you would a book review for a scholarly journal, in terms of form and content. Identify which journal your review is written “for”, as this will make your intended audience more concrete.

Individually or in small groups of no more than three, you are asked to design and implement an oral history project. In the process, each class member is required to conduct two substantive life story interviews. The topic of research and how you approach this assignment is open – but you must get a “green light” from the professor in September. You are free to choose the subject of your choice.

Each research project needs to apply to the department’s Ethics Officer for approval to conduct oral history interviews. No research with human subjects can be undertaken before the project has been approved. You will need to fill out the student application forms (available on the Departmental website) and submit a consent form, an interview guide and a one page project proposal outlining how you intend to approach the research project. What is your project? Who do you intend to interview (not names, but more generally)? How will you find them? YOU MUST GET A GREEN LIGHT FROM THE INSTRUCTOR BEFORE SUBMITTING.

   Step 2: Interview Blog and Debriefing (ongoing): Participation Mark
Within 24 hours after each interview session, you will write a short interview “blog” on the experience reflecting on what you heard and how you approached the interview. What would you do differently next time? Some class time will also be set aside for round-table debriefing sessions so you can report orally on your encounter.

   Step 3: Interview Transcript and Reflection (Deadline: October 31): 10%
You will interview two people using digital audio or video equipment, you will transcribe one - download the interviews using Adobe Premier Elements and burn the interviews onto DVDs/CD-Roms (2 copies). The Centre is equipped with Audacity and Express
Scribe transcription software and foot pedals, though you may load this open source software onto your own computer and sign-out a pedal for home use. You will then transcribe the interview that you feel is the most important to your project and write a 2 page commentary on how you approached the transcript and why.

**Step 4: Stories Matter Database and Reflection (Deadline: November 14): 10%**
Using a second (non-transcribed) interview, you will develop a simple searchable database using Stories Matter software (available at [http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/](http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/)). I would recommend using the natural breaks for questions and answers for clipping. All students will receive a one hour workshop in Stories Matter software. You will then write a 2 page commentary about how you approached database building and why.

**Step 5: Final Project (Deadline: Thursday December 11): 35%**

**Option 1: Research Paper**
Students choosing this option must write a substantial research paper based on the deep listening of the interviews as well as other secondary sources. The length requirements of the paper are 21-25 pages for undergraduate students, 26-29 pages for MA students, and 30-33 pages for doctoral students. All papers must include a photocopy of each completed consent forms. Go deep in your analysis!

**Option 2: Research Paper and Magazine Article or Online Blog**
Students choosing this option must write a substantial research paper based on the deep listening of the interviews as well as other secondary sources. The length requirements of the paper are 18-22 pages for undergraduate students, 23-26 pages for MA students, and 28-31 pages for doctoral students. In addition you are required to write a 300-500 word article for a magazine like *Quebec Heritage* or an online blog. All papers must include a photocopy of each completed consent forms. Go deep in your analysis!

**Option 3: “Research Creation” Project**
Students choosing this option will develop a substantial public history outcome based on the deep listening of the oral narratives. Possible outcomes might include a website, an online digital story, a sound walk or online memoryscape, a Korsakow cinema database, an exhibit, graphic novel, a script for a play, or another outcome that engages with the public in a substantive way. The possibilities are endless. You will be assessed on the basis of content, the achievement of your goals, creativity, and your success in “going public”. You will also be asked to submit an extended commentary that reflects on the process (undergrads: 7-8 pages; master’s students: 10-11 pages; doctoral students 12-14 pages). You must include a photocopy of completed consent forms. Be creative!

To see how others have approached both options, you might consult [http://storytelling.concordia.ca/memoryscapes/](http://storytelling.concordia.ca/memoryscapes/) or [www.postindustrialmontreal.ca](http://www.postindustrialmontreal.ca).
Step 6: Archiving Your Project 5% (Deadline: Monday December 15).
You and your interviewees are encouraged to donate the interviews as well as your
project materials (paper, transcripts, consent forms, etc) to the Centre for Oral History
and Digital Storytelling or another public archive as a permanent contribution to oral
history. Keep in mind the kind of project context that will give future listeners needed
information. For those unable to do this, or opt not to (not a problem!), you should write a
3 page reflection on the pros and cons of secondary analysis of oral history interviews.

Late Penalty
A late penalty of 5% per work day will be deducted from written assignments.

Weekly Schedule

REMINDER: Undergraduate members of the class will be required to read 3 full length articles
or book chapters per week; Master’s students read 4; and Doctoral students read 5. In addition,
graduate students have to read and report on Alessandro Portelli’s classic They Say in Harlan
County.

Readings are available at: LD – Library Database; LR – Library Reserve; C - COHDS

Part I: Methodology and Ethics

Week 1 (September 5): WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?

Required Readings (everybody reads – library/cohds)
Trastulli. Also available in The Oral History Reader (1st and 2nd Editions). LR/C

Alessandro Portelli, “The Death of Luigi Trastulli” in The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other

Other Readings (choose from the following):
James, Daniel. “Listening in the Cold: The Practice of Oral History in an Argentine
Meatpacking Community.” in The Oral History Reader (Second Edition) (London:
Routledge, 2006), 83-101. Also available as a chapter in Daniel James’ wonderful book - Dona
Maria’s Story. LR/C

Cruikshank, Julie. The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory.


**Week 2 (September 12): ORAL HISTORY ETHICS**

**Required Readings:**

High, Steven. *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Authority in Practice* (Introduction). I will send the PDF.


**Suggested Readings:**


**WEEK 3* (September 19): THE INTERVIEW**

*Deadline to submit ethics packages to professor.*

**Required Readings:**
Henry Greenspan and Sidney Bolkosky, “When is an Interview an Interview? Notes from Listening to Holocaust Survivors,” *Poetics Today* 27, 2 (Summer 2006), 431-449. LD

High, Steven. *Oral History at the Crossroads* (Chapter 1 - Interviewing Survivors). PDF.

**Suggested Readings:**


Leclerc, Jean-François. “Memory Clinics to Enrich Common Heritage.” *Our Diverse Cities* 7 (Spring 2010): 98-102. INTERNET


**WEEK 4 (September 26): After the Interview: Database-Building or Transcription?**

**Required Reading**


High, Steven. “Telling Stories: A Reflection on Oral History and New Media,” *Oral History* 38 (Spring 2010), 101-112. [or Sharing Stories, chapter 7 in *Oral History at the Crossroads*] LD

**Other Readings:**


**Part II: Interpreting Oral History**

**WEEK 5 (October 3): Positionality, Reflexivity and Power**

*Deadline for Variations Audio Timeline Assignment*
Required Reading:


Suggested Readings:


High, Steven. *Oral History at the Crossroads* (Chapter 4 – Regenerative Possibilities; or Chapter 5 – Remembering Haiti). PDF TO SEND

**Week 6 (October 10): PLACE-BASED STORYTELLING**

*Field Trip (if weather permits) – Lachine Canal Audio Walk* ([www.postindustrialmontreal.ca](http://www.postindustrialmontreal.ca)). *Meet at the beginning point of the walk.*

Required Readings:


Additional Readings:


Mapping Memories: Participatory Media, Place-Based Stories & Refugee Youth (Montreal: Concordia University, 2011/12), any chapter not included in Week 8. LR/C

WEEK 7 (October 17): SHARING AUTHORITY IN ORAL HISTORY

Required Reading
Stacey Zembrzycki, “Sharing Authority with Baba,” Journal of Canadian Studies 43, 1 (Hiver 2009), 219-238. LD


Steven High, Oral History at the Crossroads (Chapter 10 “Blurred Boundaries”). PDF

Suggested Readings:


Ndejuru, Lisa “Preface” and Steven High, “Introduction,” in Special Issue on “Sharing Authority” in Journal of Canadian Studies 43, 1 (Hiver 2009), 5-34. LD/C

WEEK 8 (October 24): Aboriginal Oral History/Tradition

*Deadline for Graduate Student Book Reviews

[PUBLIC LECTURE: Bruce Miller, author of Oral History on Trial]

Required Reading:


Suggested Readings:

WEEK 9 (October 31): DEEP LISTENING
*Deadline for transcription of one interview.

Required Reading:


Other Reading
Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History* (Westport: Praeger, 2010), introduction/last chapter. LR/C


Zembrzycki, Stacey, and Steven High. “‘When I Was Your Age’: Bearing Witness in Holocaust Education in Montreal.” *Canadian Historical Review* 93, 3 (2012): 408-35. LD


WEEK 10 (November 7): ORAL HISTORY AND PERFORMANCE.
GUEST – TED Little, Department of Theatre
Required Readings:
Little, Edward, ed. “Oral History and Performance.” Special Twin Issues of *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 9, 1-2 (2011). Especially Bhagwati, Attarian/Van Fossen, Sajnani. [these are shorter articles so read 1 extra for ‘3’ – grad students can read more as ‘additional’].

Additional Readings:


WEEK 11 (November 14): PARTICIPATORY MEDIA AND ORAL HISTORY

*Deadline for database of another interview*

ROUND TABLE ON ORAL HISTORY AND THE VISUAL ARTS (guests)

Required Readings:
*Mapping Memories: Participatory Media, Place-Based Stories & Refugee Youth* (Montreal: Concordia University, 2011/12), 3 chapters. LR/C

Other Readings:
*Mapping Memories: Participatory Media, Place-Based Stories & Refugee Youth* (Montreal: Concordia University, 2011/12), other chapters. LR/C

WEEK 12 (November 21): DIGITAL CURATION AND AUDIO VISUALIZATION

Required Readings:
Murray, Annie and Jared Wiercinski, “Looking at archival sound: Enhancing the listening experience in a spoken word archive,” *First Monday* 17, 4 (April 2012). ONLINE.

*Mapping Memories: Participatory Media, Place-Based Stories & Refugee Youth* (Montreal: Concordia University, 2011/12), any chapters you have yet to read. LR/C

Suggested Readings:


**WEEK 13 (November 28): SECONDARY ANALYSIS AND ARCHIVING**

**Required Readings:**

Mauthner, Natasha. “Are research data a common resource?” *feminists @ law* 2, 2 (2012), ONLINE

**Other Readings:**

Irwin, Sarah and Mandy Winterton, “Qualitative Secondary Analysis and Social Explanation,” *Sociological Research Online* 17, 2 (2012), ONLINE

