**MESA 83**

**TABLE 83**

**Medios e historia oral. Parte 3**

*Media and Oral History Part 3*

---

**Chair**

*Miren Llona* [Spain]

---

*Alistair Scott Thomson* [Australia]:

“Innovative Approaches to Documenting and Presenting Oral History.”

---

*Nicole Curby and Michelle Rayner* [Australia]:

“Innovative Approaches to Radio Oral History”

---

*Stephen Sloan* [US]:

“Oral History and the Information Revolution.”
Innovative Approaches to Documenting and Presenting Oral History.

Alistair Scott Thomson
(Australia):

Resumen: Realizando una gran escala nacional proyecto de historia oral, en el que participaron 9 investigadores, 29 entrevistadores, y 300 entrevistados repartidos a lo largo de un vasto país, y producir, interpretar y presentar alrededor de 1500 horas de búsqueda online digital entrevistas de audio - ha planteado importantes creativos, interpretativa y desafíos éticos, lo que ha llevado a introducir innovaciones metodológicas. Esta presentación se centra en cómo estamos documentando las entrevistas y presentar y su interpretación a través de la escritura en formatos en línea que integran material auditivo. Considero: el foro de debate en línea a través de la cual los entrevistadores comparten su cuenta de cada entrevista; el tiempo búsqueda los resúmenes que están vinculadas a la grabación de audio para cada entrevista; el ZOTERO base de datos que utiliza para acceder a buscar y compartir el material generado por el proyecto; un libro de historia oral que combina texto y audio; y los problemas éticos surgidos en cada etapa.

Abstract: Conducting a large scale national oral history project – involving 9 researchers, 29 interviewers and 300 interviewees spread across a vast nation, and producing, interpreting and presenting around 1500 hours of digitally searchable online audio interviews – has posed significant creative, interpretative and ethical challenges, and has required methodological innovation. This presentation focuses on how we are documenting our interviews and presenting and interpreting them through writing in online formats that integrate aural material. I consider: the online discussion forum though which interviewers share their account of each interview; the searchable timed summaries which are linked to the audio recording for each interview; the ZOTERO database we use to access, search and share the material generated by the project; an aural history book which will combine text and audio; and the ethical issues encountered at each stage.
**BACKGROUND TO THEMATIC PANEL**

Australian Generations is one of Australia’s most ambitious oral history projects. Historians from two universities, and from the National Library of Australia and ABC Radio National, are conducting oral history interviews with 300 Australians born between 1930 and 1990. We will produce writings (including an e-book with audio links), a radio series and an online audio archive comprising 1500 hours of digitally searchable audio interviews. Our panel will explore methodological challenges and innovations in the interpretation and presentation of oral history through a large scale national oral history project. The panel comprises three presentations:

**Presentation 1: ABC Radio National ’Australian Generations’ radio program broadcast**

**Presentation 2: Digital Aural History: Innovative Approaches to Documenting and Presenting Oral History** (Alistair Thomson)

**Presentation 3: Innovative Approaches to Radio Oral History** (Nicole Curby and Michelle Rayner)

Relevant sub-theme: New Ways to Share our Dialogue with the Public

---

**Digital Aural History: Innovative Approaches to Documenting and Presenting Oral History**

Alistair Thomson

In this paper I review the digital technologies we are using in one large Australian oral history project, and reflect on how these technologies are deepening both interpretative possibilities and ethical challenges. Following Stephen High’s contentions that ‘oral historians have been so focussed on the making of the interview that we have spent remarkably little time thinking about what to do with the audio or video recordings once they are made’, and that ‘the most exciting possibilities’ created by the digital revolution are emerging ‘after the interview’, I focus here not on the creation or content of our interviews but rather on how we are documenting interviews and presenting oral history. Though I’m the project leader, I am definitely not the technical expert, so in these reflections I’m also trying to understand in non-technical ways the implications of new digital technologies for oral history.

---

**THE AUSTRALIAN GENERATIONS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Between 2011 and 2014 the Australian Generations Oral History Project has recorded life history interviews with 300 Australian residents, comprising about 50 interviews with people born in each decade from the 1930s to the 1980s (plus a sprinkling born in the 1920s). Each interview averages five hours and is usually recorded over two sessions. The project is a partnership between university historians and oral historians in the National Library of Australia and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Radio National. Both the National Library and Radio National work primarily with audio recordings, so our interviews are recorded as digital audio files which are archived in the Library and accessible according to the conditions of use form signed by each interviewee. All up, the project is costing about one million Australian dollars, including cash and in kind contributions from the partners and a grant from the Australian Research Council.

Our primary aim is to produce a major archive of life histories by so-called ‘ordinary Australians’, complementing a similar project initiated in the late 1970s which recorded Australians born between the 1890s and 1930s, and counter-balancing the National Library’s usual collection focus on elite Australians.

---


The historians in the project are using the interviews to explore themes in twentieth-century Australian social history including, for example, transformations in family life, the meanings of place in a mobile century, the creation of a multicultural nation within the space of a lifetime, and the impacts of technological innovation on every aspect of everyday life. We are exploring how members of any one birth cohort – such as men and women born in the 1930s - experienced such changes through their lives and make sense of them in their remembering today, and we are comparing the experience of different birth cohorts, such as the way men and women born in the 1920s, 1950s and 1980s have taken to parenthood. Alongside our interest in social history, we are using the interviews to investigate the nature and processes of remembering in the 2000s, and to interrogate assumptions implicit within generational labels such as ‘baby boomer’, ‘Gen X’ and ‘Gen Y’. The project team will be presenting the interviews and our findings through books, articles and radio programs, and we hope that future researchers will make other uses of the archive and will ask questions of these interviews that we cannot imagine. Even as the interview stage finishes (in mid-2014), we are seeing how a large collection of life history interviews, not focussed on specific research topics, can illuminate significant and sometimes unexpected historical issues. For example, we have been struck by the revelation of widespread mental health problems in Australian families, at all ages and across all periods and social groups. In the 2010s people are able to relate stories about mental ill-health that might previously have been stigmatised and silenced.

There are nine members of the core project team, comprising five university historians, the head of Oral History and Folklore at the National Library and the Executive Producer of the Radio National ‘Hindsight’ history program, a doctoral student and a project officer who coordinates a complex affair. Most of the project team have conducted interviews for the project, and we have employed another twenty experienced professional oral history interviewers spread around a vast country. The interviewers have attended training about the life history methodology and the digital recording, documentation and communication technologies employed in the project. Our life history approach to interviews is different to the topic-based method of most academic oral history projects. We have been challenged by the difficult stories and powerful emotions evoked in intimate life stories, and we have struggled at times to combine a primary focus on the story that a person wants to tell with our aim to encourage narrators to move beyond a rehearsed draft of their story and consider the historical contexts and themes that their stories evoke. As Nicole and Michelle show in their panel paper, long life history interviews are difficult for radio producers to use.

Our 300 interviewees are all, by choice and necessity, willing narrators who believe their life and story have some value. The first question we usually ask is, ‘why did you offer to be interviewed for this project?’ The answers are many and varied, but two linked, common threads are a belief that their own story is worth recording, and a sense that the stories of ‘ordinary Australians’ should be part of the historical record. Perhaps not surprisingly, we could have quickly filled the 300 quota with the types of people – most obviously, middle-aged, middle-class, well-educated, white women – who feel comfortable with this type of autobiographical expression. From the start we advertised widely and sought expressions of interest from diverse Australians, and we selected and excluded to ensure diversity. We interviewed less than half of the 674 people who expressed an interest, and though our sample does not pretend to be representative, and includes some under-representation (most obviously, migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds who came to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s), it is diverse in terms of age (about 50 for each birth decade), gender (just under half are men), region (roughly proportionate to the spread of people between metropolitan, regional and remote Australia, and to the population proportions of each state and territory); race (indigenous Australians are represented); ethnicity (just under a third of interviewees were born overseas, from many different countries, and we have conducted a small number of interviews in languages other than English); sexuality and disability. Social class is perhaps the hardest indicator to judge, not least because of class mobility across the century, but education is one indicator

5 http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/australian-generations/the-interviewers/
6 Curby, ‘Confession and Catharsis’. 
and we have worked hard to include people with different class backgrounds and educational achievements.

**CONTEXT AND COMMUNICATION: THE ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM**

With a team of 29 people interviewing across a large country, we knew we needed ways to share interview experience and support our interviewers. We also knew that contextual information about each interview – What was the location like and how did that affect the recording? How was the interview relationship? What worked or didn’t work? What historical themes did this interview illuminate? – would be invaluable as we came to work with the interviews for radio documentaries and historical writing. More than that, future researchers would thank us for providing such contextual information. The literature about secondary analysis of oral history interviews emphasises ‘the importance of summaries and supporting literature attached to interviews to assist with accessibility and contextualisation, envisioning the archive as an ongoing process, whereby original and subsequent researchers ensure its legacy’.7

So we created an online discussion forum, using Google Sites, on a Workspace linked to the project website which could only be accessed by project interviewers and members of an advisory group. We urged each interviewer to make a posting to the forum after every interview, telling us about their experience of the interview, sharing any concerns that might need feedback or support, and summarising what they saw as the strength and weaknesses of the interview. We realised early on that these postings (and responses from team members) were necessarily frank and uncensored, and so we decided that the project team would only use the postings in publications if the parties could be effectively anonymised, and that although the complete collection of forum postings would be archived with the interviews they would be closed for a sufficient time period to avoid upset (probably 50 years). That will be frustrating for other researchers in the next half-century, but in the long term the archive will be enriched.

Not every interviewer produced a posting for every interview, so the postings are incomplete, and they are, of course only the interviewer’s account of the occasion (listening to interviews after reading the forum postings I noticed dynamics that complicated or contradicted the interviewer’s account). We decided to also invite each interviewee to complete and return a feedback form with ‘any comments or reflections about your experience of the interview’, or any comments or suggestions about the project. This written feedback (from only 34 interviewees to date - we will make one more request for feedback) will be archived subject to any conditions imposed by the interviewee. The feedback is mostly very positive about both the interview and the project, and people have added information and stories that they forgot to record, or which was triggered after the interview. Perhaps more valuable, and certainly more numerous and detailed, are responses to the final question in most interviews about the experience of being interviewed, which include thoughtful reflections about remembering in an interview relationship.

A downside of a large project with many interviewers, each with his or her distinctive interview style and qualities, is that it can be difficult for a user to know how each interview account was shaped within a particular relationship. Used together, our collection of interviewer and interviewee reflections about the interview offer a two-sided perspective which will help researchers make better sense of how the interview context and relationship impacted the recorded account. And because these accounts are digital and word searchable (subject to access conditions), a researcher can search within and across the postings and feedback to find interviews that speak to particular topics.

**TIMED SUMMARIES LINKED TO DIGITAL AUDIO**

In recent years oral history archives and projects around the world have been experimenting with technologies and processes that produce either an interview timed summary or a verbatim transcript that is directly linked to the digital audio recording, and which can be used online or at the archive subject to

---

the conditions agreed by an interviewee. The great advantage of both outcomes is that the link to the recorded sound makes it much easier for a researcher to navigate through a recording and hear the aural meanings. Many archives are now favouring the timed summary, which is cheaper to produce than a transcript and significantly reduces the cost of documenting an interview, but also because oral history archivists know that time-limited researchers often prefer to use a transcript and do not listen to the recording.

The National Library of Australia has developed its own technology and processes to produce a timed summary or transcript linked to each new recording (they are also ‘backfilling’ old recordings with one or other form of audio-linked digital documentation). The Australian Generations Project opted for timed summaries. We knew that employing a large number of interviewers to record 300 interviews would be expensive, and decided we could not afford (or rather our funders would not afford) transcription, which would have doubled the cost of the project.

For the most part, our timed summaries are produced by the interviewer, who is paid upon completion of each interview and timed summary. The interviewer is familiar with both the sound and content of the interview, and is usually the best person to produce the summary. Using online software provided by the Library, the interviewer types up the main points of the interview in consecutive timed chunks, which are typically between one and five minutes in duration and match discrete parcels of narrative. They also type keywords into a column in the timed summary linked to the same time-coded chunk.

The draft timed summary is submitted online, checked by the Australian Generations project officer (some are sent back for improvement) and then sent on to technicians in the Library who link the start of each time-coded chunk to the start of that section of the recording. Interviews with consent for online open access are then placed in the Library’s online collection. A researcher will find the interview through the Library catalogue or the Australian Generations website, or if they do an online search using words that appears in the timed summary. The researcher can go to the beginning of the interview, or to any time-coded section of the interview, once he or she has clicked an ‘end user licence agreement’ to accept certain obligations, ‘including the duty to observe the legal and moral rights of the person who provided the oral history, and of the Library’.

It’s not a perfect documentation process, and we could have done it better with more time and resources and with the hindsight of experience. Some timed summaries are better than others in terms of the quality, detail and accuracy of the text, and the project officer only had very limited time to check and suggest improvements. The keywords evolved as each interviewer created a timed summary and thought about appropriate words. We suggested some terms that might be useful, but in retrospect we might have provided a longer list of options (with explanations) to ensure that less obvious topics were not missed and to improve consistency between the timed summaries by different interviewers. Just as the transcript is only ever a textual translation of an interview recording, the timed summary is no more than a finding aid to material within the interview, and an easy way to find and listen to the interviews, or sections of interviews, that are of most interest.

Of course I miss the transcript. I grew up in a pre-digital textual world in which I learnt and honed the skills of scanning text for relevance and meaning. I can usually find relevant material in an interview quicker with a transcript than with a timed summary, and when I write with oral history I still need to use or create whole or partial interview transcripts. In fact, the Australian Generations is transcribing a small

---


9 This link will take you to Australian Generation interviews that are accessible online through the National Library catalogue: http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/SearchHome?lookfor=my_parent%20%22(AuCNL)%22%20%22(access_type:All%20online%22)
proportion of the interviews (upwards of 50) which we expect to use in an anthology and in journal articles. For all its cost and flaws, the transcript still has its uses, depending on how you want to use an interview, and what you want to make with it. And yet, there is no doubt that because we don’t have transcripts for most of the interviews we are listening carefully to how people tell their stories, and picking up the aural nuance and complexity that is missing in any transcript. The timed-summaries linked to digital audio are ensuring we engage with the orality of oral history.

THE ETHICS OF ONLINE AND SEARCHABLE AUDIO RECORDINGS

In recent years oral historians have thought long and hard about the ethical implications of placing digitally searchable interviews online so that anyone, anywhere, for ever can easily find and use any part of an interview. The rules and guidance provided by university ethics review boards are of limited use for oral history projects whose interviewees want their story on the record and do not wish to be anonymous. In a recent essay about the ‘State of Oral History Ethics in the Digital Age’, Mary Larson offers timely advice about ethical quandaries and how to ‘steer clear of the rocks’. As Larson writes, ‘some of the more complex ethical issues [...] are driven largely by individual and institutional consciences rather than by hard-and-fast written guidelines. These dilemmas tend to be more situational in nature, and they include privacy concerns, responsibility to narrators, and accountability to communities in the new digital era.’

New technologies dramatically enhance our capacity to achieve one of oral history’s foundational aims, to record undocumented lives and make that record available for historical research - thus enhancing historical understanding and perhaps contributing to social change. But easy online access intensifies the risks that interviews will be misused, and that people might be hurt in some way by what is said in a recording.

The best starting point is, as it always has been, informed consent, except that nowadays a prospective interviewee needs to be informed about future uses that are hard to imagine and difficult to control. The Australian Generations Project applies an adapted version of standard National Library consent procedures and forms. Indeed, one of the advantages of partnering with an archive is that from the outset our project has been required – as all projects should – to consider issues about archiving, consent and access, and to reflect on how the archival decisions we make might impact upon the interviews we collect.

Our consent form offers a number of options, and the main features can be summarised as follows. First, an interviewee can decide to close the interview for a specified time period. This doesn’t happen very often (14 to date, just under two per cent), but it is our fallback position when the interviewee agrees that their story includes material that is likely to be damaging or inflammatory, and would not record the story at all unless it can be closed. The whole interview will be closed because neither the project nor the Library has the resources to close only part of an interview. It can’t be closed for ever, because the Library is not prepared to invest in recording and preserving a record that will never be used. Most oral history projects record older adults, for whom a closure period might be the relatively short remainder of the interviewee’s lifetime, or for 30 or even 50 years. For our project, with the youngest interviewees born in 1989, the closure might take longer.

Second, at the other extreme, an interviewee can decide that the interview should be accessible via the library in any form, including online, subject only to the user accepting the ‘end user licence agreement’ (about three-quarters have agreed to immediate online access). Third, the interviewee can decide that although the interview will appear on the online Library catalogue, the recording and linked timed summary can only be accessed, searched and used at the Library in Canberra subject to their written permission. There is no anonymity option for use at the Library or online, as the Library rightly accepts that anonymity is not a viable option where timed summary and audio are both accessible. An adaptation of the release form by our project provides an option for the interviewee to agree to anonymised and

---

unidentifiable use of the interview material by the project research team only, including use of interviews that are currently closed to other researchers (through this mechanism, the project team will work with all but 15 of the closed interviews).

Even reasonably clear consent options involve ethical dilemmas and tricky decisions. During an interview the interviewee makes conscious and unconscious choices about what to reveal and what not to reveal. Some will have already decided that a personal or family secret will stay secret, sometimes the secret is revealed by accident, and sometimes the process of remembering intimate experiences, and the trust and confidence developed with an empathetic interviewer, will lead to unplanned revelations: about an adopted child, a family schism or inappropriate behaviour. Sometimes the interviewee decides that now is the time to tell, and even speaks directly to family members through the recording:

Russell Elliot: 'Tom (sigh). Interesting, interesting. Watch out Tom, here it comes. [laughing]'
Nicole Curby (interviewer, also laughing): 'You’d better be mindful, they might listen back to this.'
Russell Elliot: ‘That’s very true but, ah, no....’

Family scars shadow many people’s lives, and every interview is a tussle between self-censorship and frankness, between the desire to tell one’s own story and a concern not to hurt others, especially close family and friends. Each person makes their own decision about disclosure, informed by the nature of the story and guided by personal character, but we have been struck by generational patterns of reticence and revelation. Older Australians are often more wary of spilling the beans, even about what seem to be slight indiscretions or fall-outs from long ago. Younger Australians can be surprisingly, even shockingly, frank in disclosing the painful, intimate details of their lives and relationships – though they are usually careful to impose access restrictions on the most sensitive material. The autobiographical show and tell of social media does seem to be shifting the boundaries of revelation in oral history.

Split-second decisions during the interview are followed by on-going decisions after the interview. If someone wants to tell a story, but does not want it accessible while named people are still alive, we encourage them to record the story but then close the interview for a specified period. That’s a tough call, especially with borderline issues and uncertain sensitivities. For our project, the most difficult ethical challenges involve narrators who want the world to hear a story which we suspect may cause upset to others and perhaps trigger legal action. Often these are stories about domestic violence or sexual abuse. The interviewee may want the alleged perpetrator – a relative, an ex-husband or perhaps a clergyman – to be identified, and opts for open, online access to the interview. We’ve developed a red light system to deal with such scenarios. Where possible we identify interview extracts of concern from interviewer forum postings and timed summaries (this is not foolproof and some slip through the net). The project officer and I check such extracts to see if they might be legally actionable (for defamation, or because they reveal illegal activity) or might cause significant hurt or offence. On a spreadsheet we list each extract as either green (access should be as specified by the interviewee), red (interview should not be online – because an indiscretion will be too easily discovered by an online searcher – or it should be closed in the archive for a specified period), or amber (the Curator of Oral History and Folklore at the National Library should check the extract and make the final call). Like all ethical dilemmas these are not straightforward decisions. We are torn between competing ethical responsibilities: to the narrator who wants his or her story on the record; to another identifiable person who might be damaged by the revelation; to a legal system that might want to use an interview as evidence (after the Boston College law case in the United States we know that closure in an archive cannot stop a subpoena for evidence); and to historical understanding. We’re aware that important historical evidence, about fraught aspects of family life and relations in particular, may not be recorded in some interviews, or will be closed to other researchers for an extended period.

12 See Larson, ‘Steering Clear of the Rocks’. 
AN ORAL HISTORY DATABASE: USING ZOTERO

From the start, Australian Generations needed a database that would enable the research team to store, manage, share, search and interpret a large and complex oral history archive. We opted for the ZOTERO software created by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University in Virginia, USA. ZOTERO is online and free (though we pay a small amount for extra storage capacity), it is reasonably secure and robust, and because it was created by and for historians it suits historical research.13

Our successive project officers Kate James and Anisa Puri created an Australian Generations Group Library in ZOTERO which is password-accessible online by the research team. The most important part of the Group Library is a folder containing all the interview material. This folder comprises a sub-folder for each interview which includes all the material related to that interview: pdf files of the Expression of Interest form, the timed summary and / or transcript, the interviewer forum posting and the interviewee feedback form; photographs taken at the interview (a head shot and a shot of the interviewee in situ); and a link to the audio and linked timed summary. We are adding notes by members of the research team about each interview, so that our interpretations of the interviews are shared and accessible within the team, and the database develops layers of interpretative material. The Group Library also includes other material generated by project members, such as notes on secondary literature, notes on research topics, and writings by team members.

The ZOTERO database is word searchable, so a team member can search all items for material related to a particular topic. Of course the effectiveness of a search is limited by the usefulness of a keyword. Variations on ‘adopt’ work well to bring up references to adoption, but variations on ‘father’ generate multiple links in every interview and are not very helpful. Not surprisingly, we find relevant material most quickly from interviews we know best because we did them – and we can then tell colleagues working on other topics about material relevant to their research. In the end, our most effective research requires careful listening to whole interviews or to large chunks of interviews, but the knowledge shared within the project and facilitated by the database can save time by directing us to the useful material.

At the end of the project we will archive the Australian Generations ZOTERO database with the interviews at the National Library. Because the database includes sensitive material, it will be closed to other researchers for a period (30 or 50 years). The Library is working on technology and processes that in due course will allow researchers to use the database online, alongside the interviews, and to draw upon and perhaps even add to the interpretative layers in the database. Over time, the Australian Generations archive might grow organically, as researchers ask new questions of the material and provide new interpretations.

MAKING AURAL HISTORY

We are experimenting with different media to showcase and interpret the Australian Generations interviews. Several radio programs – which Nicole and Michelle will discuss in their panel paper – have been broadcast on ABC Radio National and can be podcast online.14 We are producing an Australian Generations theme issue of the journal Australian Historical Studies, and plan to include hotlinks in the online articles to interview audio extracts on the National Library website, as Siobhán McHugh did in her 2012 Oral History Review article, ‘The Affective Power of Sound’.15 As McHugh argues, when we listen to an interview we can hear something of the emotional ‘affect’ of both the narrated event and of the story-telling itself, which may not come through in a transcript. The listener can make their own sense of the meanings of sound and affect, which might complicate or even contradict the historian’s interpretation. Just as important, as we shift our attention to listening we think more carefully about how people listen to and hear oral history. What grabs our attention? Does it have to be a short sound bite? What do we gain (or

13 For software developed or adapted by oral historians, see Zembrzycki, ‘Bringing stories to life’; Rehberger, ‘Getting Oral History Online’; Boyd, ‘OHMS’.
lose) when we can hear but not see the narrator? Considering questions like these about aurality will help us develop approaches to the curation of oral history – on radio or websites, for example – that facilitate active engagement and learning.14

We are experimenting with an Australian Generations aural book. This will be an anthology in two parts, edited by Anisa Puri and myself. The first part will comprise about 12 edited life histories, two from each birth decade. The second part will comprise shorter extracts from all the interviews arranged by thematic topics (for example: childhood, home and housing, migration and mobility, faith and belief, intimate relationships) and intended to highlight both patterns and diversity in Australian lives and history across the past century. The book will be published simultaneously as a paperback and as an e-book, and hotlinks in the e-book to the online interviews will enable readers to become listeners who will hear the interview extracts as they read.

An aural book poses several challenges. First, only interviews that are available online will be aurally-accessible via the e-book. Our introductions to each section of the book will be informed by our knowledge of the closed interviews but we will not be able to reference or play those interviews. We may decide to use extracts from interviews that are available in the Canberra archive but not online, and in these cases will sacrifice aurality because the content of the interview is especially important.

Second, the text of an interview in the book will not exactly match the audio recording of the interview. A verbatim transcript is never a perfect match, and a transcript edited for publication varies even more from the aural original. As Linda Shopes argues, in her excellent guide to editing oral history transcripts for publication, such transcripts need to be edited for clarity and coherence, often quite radically, while retaining the words and meanings of the speaker.17 When readers of the Australian Generations e-book hotlink to an interview recording, they will hear an account that is different to the one they are reading, and they will face other technical issues. Because the interview recordings are accessible through timed summary chunks, the e-book reader will always be taken to the start of an audio chunk (the reader / listener will have the advantage of viewing the timed summary while listening, and thus being able to navigate through an interview as they wish). And to access the interviews the prospective listener will need to click and agree to the National Library’s end user agreement. As editors we’ll have to explain these distinctive and unfamiliar features of our aural book, and guide and smooth the passage from text to voice.

We hope that listeners to the e-book will extend beyond their usual reading experience. They might, for example, link to a short thematic extract and then be captivated by the story and carry on listening to more of the interview. They might hear things in a story that are not apparent in the transcript. A college or school student might follow our suggestions for further interview listening on a topic, and find other material by searching the archive, and thus develop their own research project (for example, about the experience of youth culture across time and place).

Finally, in a book of this scale there will be limits to any sharing of authority between editors and interviewees. We will not be able to check back with hundreds of people about interview extracts that we wish to use, and will need to be guided by our own discretion and by the forms consenting to use of an interview in research and publication. We will need to contact the twelve people whose life stories we feature in the first section of the book, show them the edited transcripts, make suggested corrections that we agree and negotiate extracts about which we don’t agree. That will take time, care and compromise.18 We probably won’t be able to use some of the most challenging or painful stories, either because they are closed by the interviewee or by the Library, or because they might be just too sharp for the narrator or for other cast members of their life story performance.19 In our introduction we’ll need to write about the

types of stories that are still not easy to tell or to publish. While relishing the historical value of the stories we can share and hear we’ll also need to consider the meanings and consequences of silence.
Innovative Approaches to Radio Oral History.

Nicole Curby and Michelle Rayner
(Australia):

Abstract: Oral history lends itself perfectly to the medium of radio. Unlike print media, radio allows for an appreciation of the aural qualities of the interview that a transcription will never capture: the nuances of voice, laughter, pacing and pauses, for instance. Radio reaches a broad audience and offers a unique way of hearing, relating to, and interpreting recorded stories.

Despite the accessibility and longstanding presence of radio, academic historians have largely engaged with oral history through written text. Surprisingly, the research around oral history and radio is in its infancy.

Both broadcast media and academic history offer divergent possibilities and inherent constraints in dealing with oral history interview material. Academic history might allow more space for the dissection and interrogation of the interview, its historical context, omissions and silences, and the interview dynamics. The immersive, intimate nature of the audio medium, and its capacity to trigger the creative imagination, makes it a powerful method for evoking and exploring the past – and offers an entirely different way of engaging with recorded oral history. The aurality of the medium conveys the veracity of lived experience and highlights emotional impact. However the way in which people remember and narrate their lives can lack context and accuracy, and often assumes a shared historical, social and cultural memory that is best understood when supported by analysis and critical interpretation. The contrasting forms of radio and academic inquiry combine in a rich, complimentary partnership.

However there are also inherent challenges and tensions in working across two divergent forms, not least of which is the interview format itself. While the life story approach taken in the Australian Generations project involves long, broad, open ended, and often meandering life history interviews which require patience to sift through, their breadth and volume presents academic historians with invaluable primary source 'data', and a multitude of possibilities for research. But the pragmatic and more tightly focused approach to making history in the broadcast media demands a much more sharply determined interview, with tightly framed questions, that can distill the story in a descriptive, entertaining, and succinct manner. The audio documentary would also combine oral history interview with other aural 'tools' – academic analysis, recorded atmospheres, sound effects, historic dramatization, music – all of which combine to illuminate the oral memory.

This paper draws on the experience of producing radio with the Australian Generations Oral History project, and reflects on what we have learned from this industry-university partnership. It aims to open up a dialogue between academic historians and public historians working in the media.
Oral History and the Information Revolution.

Stephen Sloan
(US):

Resumen: El impacto de los medios digitales en la historia oral es amplia y de largo alcance. En relativamente poco tiempo, las nuevas tecnologías han revolucionado innumerables aspectos de la obra de la historia, desde la creación por vía oral, a la preservación, el uso - y planteó una multitud de debates entre los historiadores orales sobre el impacto de las nuevas tecnologías en la práctica de la historia oral. Lo que también se necesita es un discurso sobre la naturaleza de la historia oral en el medio de este cambio dramático. En la revolución provocada por la introducción y la rápida evolución de la era digital, ¿cuál es el lugar de la historia oral como la información en este nuevo entorno? Como profesor muy conocido y consultor administrativo Peter Drucker declaró en 1999, la primera fase de la revolución de la TI (Tecnología de la Información) se centró en la “T” en lugar del “yo” En el nuevo milenio, Drucker argumentaba, los más urgentes pregunta que hay que tratar es la naturaleza de la información en sí misma: “¿ Cuál es el significado de la información y su propósito? ” Durante esta conversación, yo diría que los historiadores orales tienen que seguir el mismo camino. Ha sido importante para examinar el aspecto tecnológico de esta revolución, pero ¿qué pasa con el significado y propósito de la historia oral como parte de este nuevo panorama de la información?

Abstract: The impact of digital media on oral history is wide and far-reaching. In a relatively short time, new technologies have revolutionized countless aspects of the work of oral history—from creation, to preservation, to use—and raised a multitude of discussions among oral historians on the impact of new technologies on oral history practice. What is also needed is a discourse on the nature of oral history in the midst of this dramatic change. In the revolution brought about by the introduction and rapid evolution of the digital age, what is the place of oral history as information in that new environment? As well-known professor and management consultant Peter Drucker declared in 1999, the first phase of the IT (Information Technology) revolution was focused on the “T” rather than the “I.” In the new millennium, Drucker argued, the most pressing question that must be dealt with is the nature of information itself: “What is the MEANING of information and its PURPOSE?” For this conversation, I would argue that oral historians need to follow the same path. It has been important to examine the technological aspect of this revolution, but what about the meaning and purpose of oral history as part of this new information landscape?