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Oral History Archives: collection and preservation of life stories

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“Catturale le storie” is a research project of *Laboratorio di Storia Sociale - Memoria del quotidiano* (Rimini Campus - University of Bologna). During the course of Social History professor Paolo Sorcinelli asks students to develop a "life story" on the basis of the common knowledge established during the academic year. The person interviewed, is identified through an initial meeting with the interviewer, may be a relative or friend of the interviewer and he is informed in advance that his testimony will be made public. During the interview is not used a pre-established questionnaire; the witness is allow to speak freely and is stimulated and guided by specific questions only when needed. Oral sources are always the result of the relationship between two persons, of a joint work in which take part together informant and researcher [Portelli 2006, 160], from this relationship depends largely the outcome of the interview. Some respondents limit their story to a very specific historical moment of their lives (e.g. war), while others prefer to follow a chronological order, starting describing from the family of origin and childhood up to the present day. Some are self-confident to the interview and retrace their lives without any instructions, others do not remember some of their experiences and need to be asked with precise questions. This could happen apart their age and so we can understand as the oral source is by its nature extremely complex to be collected; It requires a substantial commitment from the interviewer which should attend the tale of the witness in a meaningful, creative, informative and timely manner. In fact, the interviewer is both an archivist and historical, collects and sets the conversation, but at the same time arouses, solicits and directs it [Contini e Martini 1993, 14]. For the interview unpredictability it is impossible to determine in advance the outcome and that is why it is always a new "learning experience" [Portelli 2007, 79].

The "life story" is recorded through analog or digital equipment and it is stored on a DVD to make the audiovisual document more accessible and easier for the preservation inside the source material fond of reference. In fact, together the development of technology and the lowering of the costs, increased the media through which we can do recordering: from the most common DV, DVD and internal memory cameras to PC webcam and mobile phone. For this reasons is important to make first the guidelines known to those who will make the filming for the best preservation of both physical media and information recorded [Cavallari 2008, 293-302]. The data transfer are however carried out without any manipulation of the information on the original video. Although the recording of the interview may influence the outcome of the testimony in different ways, it has advantages regarding the interviewer, the

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interviewed as well as future researchers; indeed the recording, as well to fix the details of the interview gives other very important information to the researcher: allows to contextualize the image on the place where the interview take place and allows also to interview several people simultaneously, identifying speakers [Contini e Martini 1993, 23-27]. In addition, it gives the possibility to future researchers to control the use that was made of the testimony, it will also ensure the use when the witnesses will have disappeared [Ravesi 2007, 11-14]. All this with the understanding that the relationship of the historian with the past is always subject to second thoughts and adjustments [Sorcinelli 2009, 6], as for the historian will be almost impossible to be 'objective', as interpretation of the sources is conditioned by the ideas and elaboration methods derived from his social environment, education, and belonging [Sorcinelli 2009, 1].

Video recording is accompanied by a "interview form" which contains information concerning the interviewed and the environment where it was made, to contextualize the ambit where the life story has been taken. In addition to witness personal data the interviewer writes in the form the following information: place, date and duration of the interview, the language used and his name. To give more detailed information regarding the level of relationship between the interview subjects is also noted the mode of making contact with the respondent and the presence of possible mediators. In some cases other persons participate at the conversation, for example often are family members, sons, consorts or even acquaintances, who can intervene in various ways and which are indicated in the form in order to facilitate consultation to the sound document. Other necessary information are the description of the environment where the interview was carried out and the observation on the relationship with the person interviewed.

While telling their "life story", some witness, show family album photographs, or pictures on the room walls. These can help the interviewee in various ways, for example, directing the tale, focusing his memory on certain moments, events, people that otherwise would not have remembered [Contini e Martini 1993, 25-27]. Those photographs are often filmed with the camera and in addition are also digitized, recorded to CD and given to the Laboratory along with DVD recording at the end of the work.

Then the interviewer makes a transcript of all "life story", as possible belonging to the original, and indicates in the "interview form" the criteria used for his writing. Together with the transcript is also made a summary of the testimony, which will allow the researcher to identify the prevailing topics of the interview. Both transcripts summaries are kept in print and digital in the *Laboratorio di storia sociale*. The two papers taken from the interview, however, must be considered as aids, as simplifications of the analysis that still has to be done on the original document [Contini e Martini 1993, 130].

The interview form, the summary and the transcript, along with any photographs or other material (books, newspaper articles, etc.) are part of the critical and informative apparatus of interview, and together with its video recording, are catalogued and placed. Each audio-visual DVD has an identification progressive number (N° DVD) and the academic year. The same code is assigned to the printed material (the interview form, the summary and the transcript), to the CD with the files, and to other supplied material (pictures, books etc...). The audiovisual recordings are then catalogued in an Excel file where there are also reported the data as in the interview form and the classification code; This allows a quickly association between the information obtained from the interview and the oral sources related to that. The prints of these tables form a single paper catalogue that makes possible the search within the audiovisual archive. To date are catalogued and kept 479 interviews, for a total of 590 hours of audiovisual recordings.

The project "Archivio delle voci" is born to make more accessible the records kept in the *Laboratorio di storia sociale* (www.laboratoriodistoriasociale.eu). The different research projects developed by the Laboratory since 2005 can be seen on the website dedicated to it (www.archiviodellevoci.eu/home.html); within individual research projects can be found

interviewees form, a short summary of their "life story", some photographs of family albums and several minutes of recordings. On the website a search panel tool makes faster and targeted the consultation of the archive, based on the thematic interests of the researcher. Imago online (www.imago.rimini.unibo.it/default.htm) is another important project of the *Laboratorio di storia sociale*. The research, begun in 2004 in the Rimini Campus, intends to set up a data-base of unpublished images taken from family album. The images collected and included in its database are now 23.000 and are constantly updated.

Various research projects have led to two books, *Lascerei respirare le colline*¹ and *Capitani d'impresa*² and also two multimedia DVD *Eravamo i peggio trattati*³ e *Memorie al femminile*⁴. *Lascerei respirare le colline* is a story of collective memory of a village situated on the Marche hills where 120 inhabitants have spoken of themselves and their lives. *Capitani d'impresa* instead reconstructs the existential and professional story of a representative group of entrepreneurs who were active in the industrial development of the province of Pesaro and Urbino after the Second World War. In the DVD *Eravamo i peggio trattati* an interned talks about his experience in Nazi concentration camps, while *Memorie al femminile* collects fourteen stories of women born between 1915 and 1958. From July will also be available an online report titled "*Catturare le storie*", in which will be published extracts from the interviews collected by the students over the years.

The intensive work of publishing and cataloguing done in the laboratory, proceeds together with other new projects.

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² Gorgolini L. e Costantini M. (a cura di), (2010), *Capitani d'impresa*, Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

³ Gorgolini L. (2008), *Eravamo i peggio trattati*, [DVD video].

⁴ Calanca D. (2008), *Memorie al femminile*, [DVD video].

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