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Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

Authoring Lives

What distinguishes autobiography from other literary genres is the purported coalescence of author, voice, and subject: speaking in the first person, I recount the story of myself. The confession, memoir, autobiography, and life history, all of them species of self-authoring, achieve this coalescence in ways that historically have presupposed different concepts of the self and of the life course and changing conventions for constituting them. After viewing autobiography in this context, I turn to life history as a species of ethnographic writing with its own textual strategies. Rhetorical uses of the first person and rhetorical claims of authorship inform the discussion of how the authority of the text is established. There follows a consideration of folkloristic approaches to life history and personal narrative—as a way of understanding the performer and context of folklore, as a genre of verbal art, and as a feminist project. Reminiscence as a developmental task provides the framework for the concluding discussion of indigenous forms of life review, particularly as materialized in objects.

Self, life course, cohort, career

Marcel Mauss distinguishes among role, person, personality, character, and self, notions that are both culturally and historically specific. On the basis of naming traditions, ceremonials, exchanges of objects, iconography, life histories, theological statements, and legal provisions, Mauss suggests an historical sequence in the emergence of concepts of personhood, which has been summarized as follows:

A revolution then occurred in ancient Rome, when the “role”—the “mask” or *persona*—was made the locus of general rights and duties as legal “person” and a citizen of the state. To this more abstract “person” was

later added the notion of an inner conscience and inner life, chiefly through Christianity. And this notion of person, now bearing a conscience and a civic identity, became the foundation of modern political, social and legal institutions. (Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985:vii-viii)

Within this historical sequence, the Christian notion of person has been identified as a precipitating factor in the development of autobiography. Augustine's *Confessions*, often cited as the earliest bona fide autobiography, was made possible by "the rule requiring confession of sins [which] gives to self-examination a character at once systematic and necessary" (Gusdorf, in Olney 1980:33). John Freccero suggests further that Augustine's *Confessions* are based on the theme of conversion (from paganism to Christianity, from sinner to saint). The theological implications of conversion are "death of the self as character and resurrection of the self as author." As such, the *Confessions* "present for the first time the literary self-creation of an individual seen both as object and subject" and the interplay between "the self that was, whose story is narrated, and the self that is, who narrates the story." In this respect, the *Confessions* is paradigmatic for autobiography as a genre (Freccero 1986:16,17,20).

John F. Benton, who distinguishes between introspection and self-awareness, argues that a shift occurred in twelfth-century Europe from a preoccupation with shame to a concern with guilt. Guilt, which implied intention and choice, required the examination of conscience. Introspection was thus institutionalized through confession and penance, and interiority was understood as a journey "toward the self for the sake of God" (Benton 1982:271,285). The earliest form of autobiography is, according to such views, the history of the soul.¹

That such narratives are gendered is demonstrated by historian Carolyn Bynum in her work on the uses and meanings of food to medieval women. Bynum suggests that life stories structured around a crisis or turning point are a specifically male mode of self-authoring. She demonstrates that the life stories of medieval religious women, even when authored by men, exhibit continuities with earlier vocations and show women investing their ordinary experiences with complex symbolic meaning (Bynum 1987:25). Food, in all of its symbolic complexity, emerges as a particularly female preoccupation, not only in the lives of religious women, but also in the accounts of those lives. Bynum thus suggests that both the structure and the symbolic organization of life stories are gendered.

How the self is authored is also closely related to changing conceptions of the life course. According to historian Tamara Hareven:

As early as the late eighteenth century, however, American society had gradually begun at least to acknowledge the existence of various stages in life and to develop a corresponding series of institutions to deal with them. As we have seen, it “discovered” childhood in the first half of the nineteenth century and “invented” adolescence toward the end of it, both emerging into public consciousness as a result of social crises associated with those age groups in a manner similar to the emergence of old age later on. However, despite the growing awareness of childhood, adolescence, and youth as pre-adult stages, no clear boundaries for adulthood in America emerged until much later, when interest in the “middle years” as a distinct segment of adult life arose out of the need to differentiate the social and psychological problems of “middle” from “old” age. (Hareven 1976:15)

The life course and its division into stages are thus highly variable processes historically and across cultures. We can therefore expect a distinctive type of autobiography from American nineteenth-century communities “in which the life course was compressed into a shorter and more homogeneous span” and stages were not so clearly articulated as they are today (Hareven 1976:18).

However the life course is conceived, an actual life is lived out in a distinct historical moment and raises the question: “How does one correlate individual time and historical time—that is, the synchronization of individual development with historical change?” (Hareven 1976:14). The notion of cohort is a first step. Those who were born at the same time and share the experience of being at the same life cycle stage during a particular historical epoch form a cohort: “the social experience of each cohort is influenced not only by the external conditions of its own time but also by the cumulative experience of its earlier stages in life” (Hareven 1976: 16–17). Autobiography is a particularly revealing document for studying what might be called cohort awareness, the point where the individual life and the historical moment converge. Such an approach foregrounds the social nature of memory as a collaborative project.²

Yet another refinement may be found in the concept of career. Career offers an alternative to the more normative notions of *life course*, the typical stages through which all members of a particular society expect to pass; to *cohort*, those who share an ethos because they lived through the same historical experiences during the same stage of the life course; and to *role*, as anthropologists have studied it in relation to the life cycle. With the growing interest in socialization during the 1920s and 1930s, Margaret Mead and her colleagues examined life cycle stages with special reference to the sequence of roles through which an individual could expect to pass during the developmental cycle. Ulf Hannerz argues that, while this approach to role may suffice for the study of small societies (I would

disagree with him on this point), complex societies require a different approach: "The key concept in our perspective toward fluidity in social life is career; not in the everyday sense of more or less rapid, more or less linear upward occupational change, which is only one kind, but, to try a general definition, the sequential organization of life situations" (Hannerz 1980:270).

The essential question becomes not, what are the stages of the life cycle or through what roles can individuals expect to pass during the life course, but, according to Hannerz, what is the repertoire of roles and their social distribution over time. Framed in this way, the researcher is confronted with the problem, rather than the assumption, of predictability, and must question the degree to which personal control is exercised. Hannerz is trying to signal a major shift in perspective on the nature of social life, by pointing to "the difference between seeing people as anonymous and conformist personnel, dutifully enacting one role at a time, and seeing them as individuals with minds of their own, trying to bend social organization to suit their own circumstances and purposes." With this shift, Hannerz offers a contingent, rather than normative, view of social life: "It does matter to the social order who the incumbents of roles are, where they have been before, and where they may be at some later time, because they are people with memories and plans" (Hannerz 1980:271). And we might add, these plans are not to be reduced to preformulated cultural scripts.

Though life history is potentially important as evidence of the contingency of social life and how it is constructed in retrospect, the more we understand about autobiographical processes, the harder it is to make inferences about the life itself. Georges Gusdorf notes that the presupposition in autobiography of "logical coherence and rationalization" gives the impression that he who directs the present narrative controlled the life it represents. He continues: "Autobiography is condemned to substitute endlessly the completely formed for that which is in the process of being formed" (Gusdorf, in Olney 1980:41). Life history compounds the problem because, in contrast with autobiography, which assumes an autonomous process, life history, as the term is used here, is a collaboration between an informant and a researcher. The agenda is generally set by the researcher, who also edits and rearranges the account. Memory complicates the process still further. New studies are relating what we remember to our place in the life course when we are remembering: "Memory is selective not only for certain kinds of events but also for certain periods. The middle years in particular tend to fade. People at age seventy remember more from their twenties than from middle age and those at fifty focus on their teens" (Goleman 1987:C1).

Therefore, as a tool for understanding the nature of careers and how choices are made, personal histories, whether in the form of autobiography or life history, are problematic because the account proceeds retrospectively in light of known outcomes, whereas life choices are made in the moment, prospectively, without knowledge of the outcomes. Louis Renza makes the point that “instances of tension between the act and the object of signification are unequally distributed throughout the narrative” (Renza 1980:271). While inhibiting incentives to infer actual lives from accounts of them, this tension encourages a view of personal history more in the context of imaginative than descriptive modes of writing (272), a point also noted by folklorists (Botkin 1958, Tilton 1980). Indeed, folklorists have long been attentive to the generic nature of biographical and autobiographical accounts, suggesting that narrative formulas have a tendency to override the contingencies of particular lives (Taylor 1964).

Self-authoring: inscriptions on the threshold of disappearance

The emergence of life history in anthropology and folklore replicates in several respects the historical and metaphysical preconditions for autobiography as a literary genre.³ For Michael Sprinker (1980:326), autobiography arises historically when “subject, self, and author” are conceptualized as “independent sovereignties.” For Georges Gusdorf, the “metaphysical preconditions” are to be found in the experience of discontinuity:

The man who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future; he has become more aware of differences than of similarities; given the constant change, given the uncertainty of events and of men, he believes it a valuable thing to fix his own image so that he can be certain it will not disappear like all things in this world. . . . The appearance of autobiography implies a new spiritual revolution: the artist and the model coincide, the historian tackles himself as object. (Gusdorf, in Olney 1980:30-31)

If a hallmark of anthropology and folklore is the trope of inscribing culture on the threshold of its disappearance, then ethnography, like autobiography, squarely confronts the challenge of discontinuity. What James Clifford (1988:115) characterizes as the “pastoral allegory of cultural loss and textual rescue” can be expressed in many ways—conventional ethnographies, collections of texts and artifacts, photographs and film, and last but not least, personal documents. Furthermore, the sources of discontinuity are many: extreme old age, the loss of loved ones, illness, or political upheaval, colonialization, immigration, incarceration, catas-

trophe, or the ethnographic encounter itself. The disorienting experience of culture shock when Westerners encounter non-Western societies, long a source of fascination and an essential rite of passage for American anthropologists, has given rise to other species of personal documents—the fieldwork account, and its predecessor, the travel memoir.

At issue are the mode of confrontation and the uses to which it is put. Older forms of ethnography employed their own textual conventions to deny time, suppress the presence of the ethnographer, and reify culture.⁴ Autobiography and other types of personal documents use their own conventions to express the awareness “that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future” (Gusdorf, in Olney 1980:30). Indeed, life history may well be the quintessential product of the fieldwork transaction: ironically, the researcher offers his subject a distinctly Western mode for reflecting on the cultural encounter and constituting the history of his life in order that the Western reader might have an inside view. Though life history is not an indigenous activity, there are native modes of transforming experience, of retrospection, and of self-integration, topics that will be addressed below.

All ethnographic and folkloristic data gathering presents the problem of *cultural fragments and textual integration*. When one is an eyewitness to events, there is the option of describing what one has seen and experienced. But when working only with the *report* of someone else who saw and experienced events, the account has been in a sense “preauthored.” Such accounts, while removed from the events they report, are close to the person speaking. As a result, salvage ethnographers have often experienced the vividness of the person who speaks and the immediacy of his account of an otherwise inaccessible past as discrepant with the situation in which the account is elicited. It stands to reason that those who did fieldwork in what they viewed as flourishing societies should describe what they saw, while scholars working among indigenous populations long after European contact should so often have reported what they heard.

American anthropology came of age at the turn of the century, when the mainstay of the field was salvage ethnography of Native Americans who had lived in contact with Europeans for many years. As a result, students of Franz Boas documented “memory culture” more than they did life as it was lived in their midst, and they depended heavily on interviews. Not surprisingly, American anthropologists also pioneered in using life history as an alternative to third-person ethnographic description. Even when ethnographic data had not been elicited in the form of a life history, Elsie Clews Parsons and Edward Sapir supported

the idea that anthropologists “create life histories of individuals, based on their field experiences.” Sapir even published the life story of a fictional Nootka trader (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985:4).

Several factors, heuristic and theoretical, contributed to a shift from “key informants” as sources of raw material for the anthropologist’s ethnographic synthesis to a concern with the person speaking. Heuristically, American anthropologists quickly found that they could achieve greater coherence and vividness in accounts organized autobiographically than in the format of a classical ethnography that was pieced together largely from interview material. If the anthropologist could not experience a culture that had, in his view, all but disappeared, he could experience the person who remembered how things were. And the life history made it possible to convey a sense of that experience. The life history was thus not only a way to structure ethnographic interviews, but also a heuristic device for integrating fragmentary material gathered in studies of “culture at a distance” and a literary genre for capturing the vividness of the living speaker.

Theoretically, the life history played a special role, first in studies of the relation between personality and culture, and second, in investigations of acculturation. More than any other approach, the personality and culture school was attracted to the life history, inspired in part by psychoanalytic case histories based on elicitation of childhood memories. Concerned with how cultural practices contribute to the formation of personality, Melville Herskovits, Cora Dubois, and Beatrice and John Whiting, among others, elicited extensive autobiographical accounts of childhood to explore the nature of socialization and of primary enculturation. The life history method was then extended to deal with secondary enculturation, or the experience of culture contact and acculturation. Since the experience of culture contact was critical in creating the heightened awareness so important to the reflexivity of life history, it is not surprising that anthropologists should also use life history to capture the experience of culture contact and change, a useful supplement to the surveys and tabulations of traits lost, gained, or preserved in the acculturation transaction. Drawing not only on this tradition, but also on a long-standing folkloristic interest in the artfulness of folk autobiography, folklorists such as Linda Dégh (1975) also gathered and analyzed immigrant life histories.

The compelling literary quality of so many life histories was not lost on anthropologists and folklorists, particularly those working in the 1930s, the heyday of social documentary in America. Scholars were all too aware of the dry and faceless character of kinship charts, folktale annota-

tions, typologies of pottery styles, and normative accounts of social organization. The life history offered not only literary appeal but also certain rhetorical possibilities suited to new research paradigms and political sensibilities.

The life history was well suited to the mandate to study culture from the insider's perspective and to show how the larger social and cultural pattern was actually experienced in the life of an individual. Through the *rhetoric of the first person*, life history created the illusion that nothing stood between the reader and the subject, that one was in the presence of a culture authoring its own text. As such, life histories offered the ultimate in "ethnographic realism," that is, the illusion of no ethnographic mediation (Marcus and Cushman 1982). The master trope—the "absence of the authorizing subject from the text"—established the authority of the account (Sprinker 1980:323). In conventional ethnographies, this absence is achieved through the use of the third person. In conventional life histories, the voice of the informant masks the presence of the scholar.

The political implications of a technique that ostensibly empowered the subject by letting him speak for himself were particularly clear during the Depression, when social activists used various modes of social documentary, and particularly case histories and first person accounts, to defend, and to mobilize help for, the disadvantaged by appealing to the emotions of the more fortunate (Stott 1973). For John Dollard and others, "worker narratives" let "the common man speak for himself" and expressed the democratic ethos of letting all the people be heard, a sentiment shared by folklorists.⁵ While Dollard stressed the importance of conveying "the emotional pattern of life," Lloyd Warner wanted to communicate "a vivid sense of the research experience and the social phenomena studied" (Stott 1973:143,153). These two objectives, which reveal the dual nature of ethnographic biography, are reactions against the dehumanizing effects of reducing vivid human documents to cold statistical analysis. In the language of the period, the "life study method" was descriptive, documentary, and literary, and was contrasted with the statistical, quantitative, and scientific mode of research. Indeed, life history was so deeply valued as a form of documentary that one writer, who documented his home town, went so far as to declare, "I myself am a document" (Stott 1973:7).

Noting that first-person accounts during the 1930s were known as worker narratives, folk writing, folk-say, folk history, folk literature, vernacular literature, notes from a diary, letters from America, personal experiences, or documents, Stott points out that the interest in such first-person accounts is related to the radical journalism of the period, the

rise of the proletarian novel, and the pulp confession (1973:191). Chicago sociologist Robert Ezra Park began his career as a journalist. His colleague Ernest Burgess argued for publishing verbatim the first-person accounts of men who would not otherwise write autobiographies and reacted against the tendency on the part of social scientists and journalists alike to rework and, in some cases, to fictionalize the material. Through first-person accounts, whether verbatim or fictionalized, the reader would enter into the inner experiences of men they would otherwise never know. Since assertions of authenticity are a rhetorical strategy for establishing the authority of the text, these texts are best analyzed in terms of authorship and polyvocal discourse.

Life histories engage in a *rhetoric of authorship* that is riddled with ironies. Consider the implications of listing the name of the researcher on the title page and spine of the book, but embedding the name of the narrator of the life history in the title of the book. First, there is a tension between the designation of the researcher as author and the silence of the researcher in the actual texts of conventional life histories. This arrangement allows the researcher to claim the responsibilities of authorship while engaging in the rhetoric of the narrator as author of his own life. Second, this arrangement signifies that the researcher is quoting his informant, that quotation is a form of authorship, that the text is one long quotation, and that we are hearing two voices in one, or, more precisely, one voice through another. Such an arrangement defines as author the person who quotes rather than the person who is quoted.⁶ Though the life history is a collaboration, the division of responsibility, as reflected in the attribution of authorship and the holding of the copyright, maintains Michel Foucault's distinction between "the author as subject, as one who authorizes, gives authority to, is responsible for a text," and the author as the signature on the cover (Sprinker 1980:322). Presenting the text as a quotation by a researcher is, among other things, a technique for lending to that text the imprimatur of scholarship. The text is thereby rendered authoritative simultaneously as a personal document and as a scientific document.

Sensitivity to such issues has stimulated anthropologists to analyze the conventions of ethnographic writing and to engage in *ethnographic experiments with polyvocal texts*. Use of the first person, both for the anthropologist and for his subject, is important because it serves as a constant reminder that the text is being authored. The result, in the most often cited cases of Vincent Crapanzano's *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (1980) and Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (1981), is "embodied" accounts, in which the speakers are plural

and identifiable. They reflect on the process of coming to understand their situation, they comment on their interaction, and they accept the limitations, the “partiality” of what can be known and presented. The result is defined as a collaboration, and the process of working together is hopefully more of a constitutive than of an extractive nature. The final result, the text, may take various forms, but the hallmark of these efforts is the inclusion of the participants’ reflexions on the collaborative process of making the text. The more radical examples, such as *Tuhami*, resist the temptation to present a seamless well-formed narrative, in favor of an alternation between Tuhami’s accounts and Crapanzano’s commentaries on them, and the acceptance of contradictions and incredible episodes that are included even when they resist assimilation. Others, like *Nisa*, follow the more traditional model of framing the subject’s story with the ethnographer’s comments. Even though these ethnographic experiments in life history carry on an older tradition of using such material either to explore personality or as a more vivid and responsible way of describing culture, what distinguishes them from many earlier efforts is the self-consciousness with which they are undertaken and the critique they offer of ethnographic conventions. The interviewer neither disappears nor coalesces with his subject.

Folkloristic contributions: performer, genre, oral history

What the ethnography is to the anthropologist, the collection is to the folklorist. For most of the history of the field, little has been known about the narrators or the circumstances of collection. At the extreme of normative folkloristics, even the verbatim text was too contingent to be of value in itself; reduced to a skeletal plot, such texts could be assimilated more easily into the system of enduring tale types and motifs. Though many folklorists have long recognized the importance of life history material as a basis for relating the biography of the performer to his or her repertoire and style, they have been slower to analyze personal documents as phenomena in their own right.

As early as the 1860s, Paul Nikolayevich Rybnikov, and shortly thereafter, Alexander Fyodorovich Hilferding, stimulated recognition of the importance of documenting the individual performer and arranging the collected material by informant. Half a century later, Mark Asadowskij prefaced his pioneering study of one narrator and her repertoire with a history of Russian folkloristic interest in the individual performer.⁷ Though his monograph *Eine sibirische Märchenerzählerin* (1926) goes beyond the general fieldwork requirement to provide biographical information as context, Asadowskij was not interested in personal history per se, but in an enlarged notion of the tale:

It is obvious during the recreation of the tale which takes place with each new telling, that personal experience and the narrator's own personality are of great importance, and that the coloration of the tale and the characteristic presentation of many local details are very dependent on these. (Asadowskij 1926, Dow translation:38-39)

The problematic for Asadowskij was to relate what he called "personal" elements both to the poetics of the folktale and to local tradition. Accordingly, his interest in the storyteller Natal'ia Osipovna Vinokurova was less biographical and more in terms of her personality, and his study focussed less on her reminiscences per se and more on how her personal experiences shaped how she narrated traditional tales. Nonetheless, Asadowski did offer an important alternative to the study of tale texts, types, and motifs as entities relatively independent of the tellers.

Since then, guides for fieldworkers in folklore have stressed the importance of "personal history documents," though even as late as 1964 such materials were still valued primarily for the light they could shed on the "many factors which go into the making of a traditional performer" (Goldstein 1964:121). American folklorists had approached folklore biographically from at least as early as 1936, the date that John and Alan Lomax published their monograph on the Afro-American musician Lead Belly. And since then, biographical and autobiographical studies of traditional singers, and to a lesser extent narrators, have continued to appear with increasing frequency.⁸ These studies have used biography to contextualize particular folksongs and tales, to explore the process by which individuals acquire and shape traditional material and form their own repertoire and style, to trace the impact of their personal experiences and personality on their performances, and to deal with the problem of meaning. Some present what might be termed the "career" of the tradition bearer, and as Goldstein suggests, such life histories can illuminate how stellar performers are formed. But folklorists have yet to produce critical reassessments of their uses of personal narrative, comparable to anthropological surveys of the subject.⁹

Just as the normative thrust of sociology and anthropology inhibited interest in the life history, the concern with traditionality delayed and eventually shaped folkloristic attention to personal narrative per se. Among the most important and earliest contributions—for example, the work of Carl von Sydow—are those that analyze processes of legend formation and the relations among belief, experience, and personal narratives.¹⁰ Overwhelmingly, however, the problematic has focused on whether or not this material is "folklore", and how it is to be character-

ized with respect to terminology and genre.¹¹ Among the terms proposed for capturing ever finer distinctions are memorate, proto-memorate, *Sage*, *Minnesage*, *Geschichte*, legend, tall tale, local character anecdote, family saga, and gossip.¹² Ironically, many folklorists have worked hard to demonstrate that the essential features of personal narrative are inconsequential—namely, the first-person character of the account, the recourse to experience, and the claims to the uniqueness of the events presented. They have tried to demonstrate the traditionality of personal narrative *despite* the presence of such features and to justify the study of personal histories by demonstrating that they conform to known patterns. Paradoxically, folklorists have tended to focus on what is *not* personal about personal narratives.

With the development of the ethnography of communication approach to verbal art, folkloristic attention has shifted away from problems of typology, terminology, and traditionality to the analysis of discourse. William Labov (1972) elicited narratives from individuals who came close to death as a basis for analyzing how experience is recapitulated in language. He and Joshua Waletzky (1967) specify precisely how experience is transformed by narrative and how narrative is constituted in language. This analysis is extended by Katharine Young (1987), who uses a phenomenological perspective to examine not only the collaborative nature of storytelling in social life, but also the “worlds” and “realms” constituted by narrative and their relations to experience. Rather than assuming a clear distinction between personal narratives and traditional tales, Young examines the presumption of referentiality: “The traditional move in narrative theory has been to locate the difference between the fictive and the real in the constitution of the Taleworld: imaginary realms yield fictions; real ones yield true stories. This move is confounded by two difficulties: one, the sense in which realities do not yield true stories; and the other, the sense in which imaginary realms do not yield fictions” (Young 1987:186–87). Amy Shuman (1987) goes even further in blurring traditional boundaries by contesting the absolute distinction between written and spoken texts and including both in her study of how urban adolescents work out the relationships between events and narratives.¹³ Shuman’s work suggests important new directions for the study of personal narrative by recasting the problematic: “Conversational narrative demands that we focus on context as well as on text, and on the relationship between narrative and event—not as a matter of referentiality but as a matter of relationships between speakers and listeners and, correspondingly, between the story world and the storytelling situation” (193).

Whereas folklorists typically stress the traditionality of stories about personal experiences, the oral historian values the material for the light it can shed on actual events from the perspective of those who were close to them. In oral history, the “person” in personal narrative becomes a *witness*, rather than a subject in his own right, even to the extent that he himself figured in the events narrated. The American folklorist who pioneered the use of personal narrative for the purposes of oral history is Benjamin Botkin, and the landmark volume is his *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (1945), a collection of ex-slave narratives. The light that personal narrative could shed on history, what he called “history from the bottom up,” was but one of Botkin’s concerns. As president of the Joint Committee on Folk Arts of the WPA (Works Progress Administration), Botkin was explicit on several important points: first, he saw interviews as a collaboration between the “folk and the student of folklore”; second, the primary audience for the results of this collaboration was the public; and third, he was profoundly optimistic about the potential of folklore to make the world a better place.

Working during the 1930s in the context of the New Deal and Popular Front, Botkin rejected what he viewed as academic purism and embraced an eclectic and inclusive approach to folklore. Recognizing the tension between art and research, “between folklore as a creative expression and folklore as a cultural record,” Botkin advocated what he called creative and re-creative interpretation to bring printed texts to life for their readers (Botkin 1958:195). To distinguish his approach from that of the academics, he coined the word “folk-say.” Taking a liberal approach to preparing interview material for publication, he stated that “all stories must be narrated as told by an informant *or as they might be told orally*, with all the flavor of talk and all the native art of casual narration belonging to the natural story-teller” (Botkin 1946:256–57, emphasis added). The appeal of these genres to the general reader was in their sincerity and apparent lack of literary pretensions, an effect that had to be created in the translation of speech to print.

As a result, Botkin was open not only to first-person narratives, but also to material that Richard M. Dorson and others would reject as fakelore, literary reworkings, and popular culture. At the core of the controversy was the nature of the folklore text. Whereas the academic folklorists argued for a pure separation between the verbatim transcript of an oral tale and the words of the folklorist, Botkin made the case for a coalescence of voices, and in *Lay My Burden Down*, for the disappearance of the folklorist altogether: “The best results are obtained when a good informant and a good interviewer get together and the narrative is the product of the conscious or unconscious collaboration of the two, or

when the interviewer succeeds in eliminating himself entirely and the reader is brought face to face with an informant" (Botkin 1945:xii-xiii). Alternatively, the folklorist becomes the subject he represents: he tries to "live the life of the people he writes about. . . . So that when he writes about them he becomes not merely an interpreter but a voice—their voice, which is now his own" (Botkin 1938, quoted in Hirsch 1987:19-20). However noble the goal, these claims expose a certain naiveté about the nature of appropriation and how it is effected through literary conventions.

In the decades following World War II, during the struggle to establish folklore as a discipline within the American university, Botkin's approach was harshly criticized as irresponsible popularization. Richard M. Dorson led the attack.¹⁴ Since then, folklorists have refined their approach to oral history, as evidenced by the work of Lynwood Montell, and, in the case of Henry Glassie's *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, they have shifted the groundrules for reporting on a community, its way of life, and the stories it tells.

Though life history has emerged in the last few years within folklore research as material in its own right, particularly in studies of immigrant communities and ethnicity, it still figures only marginally in such standard folklore texts as *Handbook of American Folklore* (Dorson 1983). Linda Dégh writes that "immigrant life history is an important product of folklore creation that belongs to the category of folk prose genres," and with this statement puts aside, and rightly so, the split between personal narrative as a traditional folk genre and personal narrative as a source of historical and other information.¹⁵ In contrast, personal narrative has assumed a central role in two new areas of folklore study—women's folklore, and folklore and aging. In both cases, it is precisely the personal quality of reminiscence that is valued, and the autobiographical is discovered not only in verbal narrative but also in objects. The discussion that follows focuses on these recent developments in the study of folklore.

Oral history has been embraced as a distinctly feminist project and, in the process, accorded a privileged status in studies of women and folklore:

Women's oral history . . . is a feminist encounter, even if the interviewer is not herself a feminist. It is the creation of a new type of material on women; it is the validation of women's experiences; it is the communication among women of different generations; it is the discovery of our own roots and the development of a continuity which has been denied us in traditional historical accounts. (Gluck 1977:5)

As early as the thirties, Botkin and his contemporaries had been making the case for oral history as a way to empower the marginalized, give voice to the silent, and democratize the making of history. Using such terminology as the common man, the worker, the people, the folk, the bottom, the ex-slave, they defined their subjects in terms of class and race, but not gender.

It was not until the seventies that oral history was claimed for specifically feminist purposes. Besides redressing the exclusion of women from historical accounts, folklorists and oral historians affirmed the solidarity of ordinary women by stressing the commonalities in women's experiences in the oral histories they collected and egalitarian collaboration in the research process. By affirming the right of any woman to interview any other women, whether or not the interviewer was professionally trained, they challenged the academic hierarchy and its authoritarian monopoly on history. Women doing oral history was to be an inclusive, broadly based, and empowering process by, for, and about women. They also declared the importance of the everyday lives of ordinary women as an historical subject, and celebrated its intensely personal, intimate, and domestic character. They valorized the female subject and her subjectivity, in all its plurality, and legitimated the often episodic, anecdotal, intimate, and diffuse character of women's personal narratives (see Gluck 1977).

Given that "all forms of radical thought inevitably remain mortgaged to the very historical categories they seek to transcend" (Moi 1985:88), the feminist appropriation of oral history may be seen as a reaction to establishment history. Feminist folklorists and oral historians rejected the establishment's emphasis on professional expertise, exclusivity, and hierarchy, the isolation of individual researchers working alone, the focus on the public lives of heroic individuals (usually men), and the value afforded coherent narratives that progress in an orderly chronological fashion using an impersonal, authoritative style (see Jelinek 1980, Babcock 1987).

Reminiscence as a developmental task

Reminiscence, though of special importance to those with long lives to review, is a developmental task pursued throughout the life course. Key points in the life cycle may precipitate collaborative reminiscence. Guests at a birthday, anniversary, graduation, reunion, or other rite of passage often share their recollections of the person honored, whether in the form of speeches, poems, songs, photographs, or a quilt or commemorative scrapbook. A serious illness, incarceration, war, loss of a loved one, immigration, or brush with death can intensify the sense of personal

mortality at any age and bring on vivid autobiographical reflection. Despite the ubiquity of reminiscence, scholars have tended to focus on its role among the elderly. This emphasis arises not only from the prominence of reminiscence among those advanced in years, but also from the relatively recent development of scholarly interest in the aging process itself.

The shift of attention in anthropology from the first years of life to old age, from the early development of personality, socialization, and primary enculturation to the integration of the self at the end of life, has brought an added, and somewhat different, interest in life history. Firstly, aging is seen as a developmental process. Secondly, reminiscence is valued not only for what it can tell us about culture, but also as a phenomenon in its own right, a process in the present, and a vital developmental task in later life.¹⁶ Two directions may be distinguished, though they are interrelated, particularly in the work of the late Barbara Myerhoff. The first may be designated gerontological and indicates the development in anthropology and folkloristics of a special concern with the aging process and the culture of the elderly. The second direction represents a distinctive contribution of folklorists to an understanding of the expressive life of the elderly—indigenous forms of life review.

Anthropological work on aging during the last two decades has shifted from the cross-cultural comparisons of Leo W. Simmons's classic *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* to a concern with the distinctive subcultures of the elderly in complex societies, where the extended life span and other factors have helped to produce colonies of older persons. As folklorists have shifted their attention from antiquarian survivals to the process of creating tradition, they too have come to realize that the elderly are more than custodians of heritage. They are people in their own right, active in the present, and experts on what this period in the life cycle is all about. They are not only witnesses to what once was, they are also individuals with a profound need to be witnessed.

Where anthropologists and folklorists converge is in their mutual interest in the life review, not as a thing apart, but as a moment in the life that it recounts and a major developmental task. The elderly have suffered from conflicting views on reminiscence. Is the inner experience of reviewing one's life in old age an aspect of the pathology of advanced years or a therapeutic and culturally important part of aging? Myerhoff's answer is persuasive:

To experience the Self as a stable continuous being through time, across continents and epochs, despite dramatic physical changes, is especially important to the old, burdened with such vast and disparate memories.

Reminiscence is no mere escapist desire to live in the past, as some claim: rather it should be regarded as a major developmental task for the elderly, resulting in the integration that will allow them to age well and die well. (1978:222)

Though life histories may be elicited at any point in the life course, the elderly have been prime subjects, both because of their tendency and need to reminisce and because their early memories so compel our interest.

Indigenous forms of life review

Most recently, folklorists have been exploring indigenous forms, processes, and occasions of life review. *The Grand Generation: Memory, Mastery, Legacy*, an exhibition and book, breaks new ground by revealing the wide variety of ways that elderly individuals recover earlier experiences. Mary Hufford, Marjorie Hunt, and Steven Zeitlin point to the need for ethnographic studies of reminiscence. Such work makes clear that life history as we know it from published monographs is for the most part an artifact of the ethnographic encounter. Indigenous modes of life review rarely take the form of a comprehensive monologue; more often they are interactive, collaborative, and an ongoing process in social life that intensifies with advancing age. Though language is central to the process, many other media are used to encapsulate the experience of a lifetime, trigger reminiscence, and guide its path. The process may be a profoundly interior one, solitary and meditative, or, intensely social and interactive. The result is not necessarily comprehensive, or narrative in an extended sense, or chronological. More likely, the outcome is partial, associative, and quotidian.

In the case of Mrs. Ray Faust, who left Poland for New York in 1920, the shock of the Holocaust precipitated a heightened sense of discontinuity and intensified her desire to paint what she remembered from the early part of her life. Not only was her childhood gone, but now the communities themselves had been destroyed. Mrs. Faust is quite explicit: "I am painting a life that is lost when I am painting Jewish life" (quoted in Pleskin 1978:20). The scenes of her home, the market, the house of study, and annual holidays and life cycle celebrations focus on the enduring and recurrent, rather than on the unique, moments in her childhood. These "chapters of her life," as she calls them, fill every nook and cranny of her apartment. In this way she saturates her immediate environment with images of her own fashioning and makes discrete moments in the past simultaneously present.

Like Mrs. Faust, Bella Chagall also confines her memoir to her childhood years in Vitebsk, Russia, and organizes it *not* chronologically from

her birth, but according to the sequence of annual holidays. In their “struggle to recover a whole and undamaged world upon which time has no hold” (Ionesco, in de Beauvoir 1972:419), Ray Faust and Bella Chagall have chosen to focus on the enduring, recurrent, and collective aspects of their childhoods, rather than on unique events that shaped or changed the direction of their individual lives. In both cases, the individual recedes, as Bella Chagall and Ray Faust present themselves in their works as a child witness to a way of life, rather than as the protagonist of a life’s journey. Though these childhood experiences in East European towns occupy about a quarter of a lifetime, they expand to fill almost the totality of the memoir.¹⁷

Ray Faust and Bella Chagall understand that one way to transcend the limits of linear, biographical time is to focus on what is enduring and recurrent, on what is paradigmatic about their remembered past. Like the salvage anthropologist, they too inscribe culture on the threshold of its disappearance; they even go so far as to appropriate the ethnographic mode as the vehicle for their life review.¹⁸ They derive a sense of enlarged time and significance through forging links between their individual lives and a larger whole, in this case, a lost way of life.

Many other examples could be cited. Vincent Ancona, a Sicilian living in New York, recreates scenes of his childhood out of telephone wire. Joseph Sciorra reports: “Describing the activities he portrays in wire, Ancona often uses the Italian word *tramontato*, which can be translated as ‘faded,’ ‘vanished,’ ‘outmoded,’ or ‘forgotten’” (1985:52). Speaking of the baskets he used to weave out of cane, palm, willow, and olive branches, Ancona adds: “After the war, other materials were introduced to make these things. Plastic destroyed everything. This art is dead. This doesn’t exist anymore, even in Sicily where it was born. Now, only the old people know of these things” (49). This statement vividly conveys what might be called cohort awareness and exemplifies the *projects* referred to by Jean Paul Sartre: “One does not possess one’s past as one possesses a thing one can hold in one’s hand, inspecting every side of it; in order to possess it I must bind it to existence by a project” (quoted by Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin 1987:41).

Though in the history of folkloristics biography has served primarily to illuminate folklore, recent work has reversed the relationship to show the extent to which folklore can serve as a primary medium for recovering a life. Traditional singers appreciate the powerful associations of songs with the circumstances of their acquisition and performance because they so vividly remember learning their songs from particular individuals and performing them in specific contexts. The songs continue to

carry these associations over the years and to evoke memories each time they are performed. Though folklorists have utilized reminiscence to illuminate the songs, they have yet to understand how music shapes memory.

Repertoires, whether of songs, tales, or other expressive forms, are examples of accumulations made over a lifetime. Their powers of evocation derive from the associations that accumulate with them. One elderly man who participated in the *minyán* (prayer quorum) of a Philadelphia synagogue had this to say about the *kaddish* (prayer for the dead):

Last week after I recited the *kaddish* for my father, for some reason I was reminded of the time I recited *kaddish* for him at the *kotel* (Western Wall in Jerusalem) soon after the Yom Kippur War. Then my mind raced back to the time just after my *bar mitzvah* (confirmation at age thirteen) to my father's first *yortsayt* (anniversary of death) and I was wearing my corduroy knickers and was in a little *shtibl* (house of prayer) in South Philadelphia. My thoughts wandered back even more to my father reciting *kaddish* for his father in Belz, Bessarabia. In no kind of order at all I thought of my brother's description of the *minyán* he organized of G.I.'s in May 1945, so that they could recite *kaddish* for a pile of corpses in Dachau. Then I remember a *minyán* of Jews in Russia secretly reciting a *kaddish* for a fellow Jew. Do you think I'm *meshuge* [crazy]? But I felt as if I were in all those places with all those Jews myself. (Segal 1979:23)

This account reveals how aware individuals can be of the extraordinary power of a prayer, or other expressive forms, to call up in paradigmatic fashion memories of the many contexts in which a prayer or song has been performed.

The same holds for artifacts, a topic generally neglected in studies of the expressive life of the elderly.¹⁹ In the words of Marcel Proust, "The past is hidden . . . beyond the reach of the intellect—in some material object." But folklorists, though they have long studied how people make things, have yet to explore how people save, collect, and arrange their possessions in ways that are profoundly meaningful through the life span. Clues to the significance of this subject, particularly in relation to memory, are suggested by Hannah Arendt:

The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and will remember, and second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfillment and which makes it, indeed, as the Greeks held, the mother of all things, the living activities of

action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they had never been. (1958:95)

Distinctions among types of objects, their relations to the past, and the ensembles they form can illuminate the interaction among objects, memory, and the life review process.²⁰

Ironically, folklorists have typically studied precisely the kinds of subjects immortalized by the elderly in their memory projects—folkways of a bygone era—but have had difficulty assimilating the memory objects themselves. Strictly speaking, these artifacts fail to meet the criteria of traditionality associated with folk art. They are too “personal.” Mrs. Mohamed did not learn to stitch pictures from her mother. Mr. Ancona did not learn to weave wire scenes from his father. They, and others like them, proudly take credit for their personal discovery of a medium and form for recasting their lives. They have forged distinctly individual solutions to common needs: in the process they affirm the creative potential in the expressive culture of the elderly and the centrality of life review to this period in the life course. From such indigenous modes of life review, folklorists have much to learn about the social construction of the self through time and the transformation of experience through materials readily at hand.

Similarly, a critical consideration of our assumptions about life history, personal narrative, and oral history could illuminate our discursive practices as folklorists and ethnographers and the rhetorical basis for the authority we assert in our texts. Such insights have the potential to reshape the boundaries of our discipline.

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NOTES

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1. Cross-cultural differences in notions of personhood are suggested by McKim Marriott, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism," in *Transaction and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior*, edited by Bruce Kapferer, 109–41 (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), in his studies of the Indian caste system: "Persons—single actors—are not thought in South Asia to be 'individual,' that is, indivisible, bounded units, as they are in much of Western social and psychological theory as well as in common sense. Instead, it appears that persons are generally thought by South Asians to be 'dividual' or divisible. To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances. . . ."

2. Benjamin Botkin, while working in the thirties on the Federal Writers Project, worked with the notion of life history as "a bridge between individual and group or community history" (Botkin 1958:197). French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who died during the Holocaust, and Roger Bastide, who extended his ideas, offer the notion of collective memory "as a system of interrelating individual memories," internalized and at work, even when one is alone (Wachtel 1986:215). More recently, Samuel Schrager (1983) has advocated "experience narrative" as a term that mediates between the individualistic emphasis of "personal narrative" and group emphasis of "folk history" ("What is Social in Social History?" *International Journal of Oral History* 4/2:76–98).

3. The history of the use of personal documents in the social sciences has been surveyed on numerous occasions over the last fifty years. See Gordon Allport, *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science* (New York: Social Science Research Council, Bulletin 49, 1942); Dollard 1935; Louis Gottschalk, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Robert Angell, editors, *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology* (New York: Social Science Research Council, Bulletin 53, 1945); L. L. Langness, *The Life History in Anthropological Science* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); L. L. Langness and Gelya Frank, *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography* (Novato, Cal.: Chandler & Sharp, 1981); Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method* (Contemporary Social Science Research Series. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983); William McKinley Runyan, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Watson and Watson-Franke 1985.

4. These conventions are outlined by Marcus and Cushman (1982) and include: third-person narration; a normative and generic style in which individuals are not named and the emphasis is on that which is typical or representative; a denial of time and the creation of an ahistorical ethnographic present; the placement of information about the particulars of fieldwork in a preface or afterword; the use of the technical language of anthropology, which marks the

text as “scientific”; and claims that the account represents the insiders’ view. This style is an example of what may be characterized as “totalizing discourse.”

5. Benjamin Botkin, for example, viewed slave narratives as a weapon, as “autobiographical propaganda,” and as “non-violent slave revolt” (1945:ix).

6. This approach to the attribution of authorship is situated historically by Michel Foucault in “What is an author?” The author “as a ‘real person,’ that is, as a thinking and morally active subject responsible for the text, arose in Western culture . . . as a result of certain economic and social responsibilities connected with the production and dissemination of texts” during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (608). In essence, the anthropologist has assumed the economic and social responsibilities of authorship so defined, even while encouraging his subject to author his own texts.

7. See also Dégh 1969:45–63.

8. Though the history of this approach in American folkloristics remains to be examined, for pioneering American examples, see, among others, Mody Boatright’s “The Family Saga,” in Mody Boatright, Robert B. Downs, and John T. Flanagan, *The Family Saga and Other Phases of American Folklore* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958); Linda Dégh, *Märchen, Erzähler und Erzähl-gemeinschaft dargestellt an der ungarischen Volksüberlieferung* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag GmbH., 1962), translated most recently as *Folktales and Society: Storytelling in a Hungarian Peasant Community* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Roger D. Abrahams, ed., *A Singer and Her Songs: Alameda Riddle’s Book of Ballads* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970); Edward D. Ives and David D. Smith, eds., “Fleetwood Pride 1864–1960: The Autobiography of a Maine Woodsman,” *Northeast Folklore* 9 (1967); Edward D. Ives, *Lawrence Doyle: The Farmer-Poet of Prince Edward Island: A Study in Local Songmaking* (Orono: University of Maine Studies No. 92, 1971); and Jeff Todd Titon, *From Blues to Pop: The Autobiography of Leonard “Baby Doo” Caston* (JEMF Special Series, no. 4, Los Angeles: John B. Edwards Memorial Foundation, 1974). See Richard Dorson, “Folktale Performers” in Dorson 1983:287–300, who makes the case for a focus on the performer, and Francis A. de Caro, *Women and Folklore: A Bibliographic Survey* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 15–18, for biographically oriented studies of female performers. European scholars have long contributed to this approach: see, for example, Hermann Bausinger, “Strukturen des alltäglichen Erzählens,” *Fabula* 1(1958):239–54, and “Alltägliches Erzählen” in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (vol. 1, no. 2, columns 323–30).

9. That situation is changing as evidenced by Titon 1980; by Barbro Klein, “A Dialogue in Writing: A Study of the Holdings of a Swedish Folklife Archive” (paper presented at the meeting of the American Folklore Society, Baltimore, October 1986); and in the “Symposium on the Life Story” in Alan Jabbour and James Hardin, editors, 154–73, *Folklife Annual 1986* (Washington, D.C.: American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, 1987).

10. Important contributions since then include Lauri Honko, “Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 1/2(1964):5–19, and the many studies by Linda Dégh.

11. For surveys of the literature, see Juha Pentikäinen, "Grenzproblemen zwischen Memorat und Sage," *Temenos* 3(1968):136-67; Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "The Memorat and the Proto-memorat," *Journal of American Folklore* 87(1974):225-39; and Sandra K. D. Stahl, "The Oral Personal Narrative in its Generic Context," *Fabula* 18/1-2(1977):18-39.

12. Mody Boatright, who contributed the notion of family saga (see note 8, above), and more recently, Amy Kotkin and Steven Zeitlin, "In the Family Tradition" in Dorson 1983, 90-99, make the case specifically for family folklore, much of it reminiscence and often of interest to oral historians.

13. According to Shuman, "the oral personal narrative may be considered the quintessential contrast to the decontextualized written text. In addition, the personal narrative may be considered the least standardizable type of text in terms of authenticity (the text demands uniqueness), and yet may be formulaic in terms of following a familiar scenario for the presentation of similar stories" (1987:192). See also Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies in Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

14. The above discussion is indebted to the recent reassessments of Botkin's work by Hirsch 1987; Ronna Lee Widner, "Lore for the Folk: Benjamin A. Botkin and the Development of Folklore Scholarship in America," *New York Folklore* 12/3-4(1986):1-22; Bruce Jackson, "Ben Botkin," *New York Folklore* 12/3-4 (1986):23-32; and Stott 1973. See Dorson 1957 for his standards for collecting and publishing folklore.

15. For a discussion of immigrant narrative, see my articles, "Culture Shock and Narrative Creativity" in *Folklore in the Modern World*, edited by Richard M. Dorson, 109-22 (Hague: Mouton, 1978), and "Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore" in Dorson 1983:39-47. The *International Journal of Oral History*, by stimulating important theoretical and methodological discussions, has turned attention back to the nature of personal narrative as a first-person account. See Françoise Morin, "Anthropological Praxis and Life History," *International Journal of Oral History* 3/1(1982):5-30; and Alessandro Portelli, "The Time of My Life: Functions of Time in Oral History," *International Journal of Oral History* 2/3(1981):162-80.

16. There are also non-developmental approaches, most recently, efforts towards an "anthropology of experience." This approach is in part a reaction to the many analyses of culture that have explored structure, function, and meaning but not the nature and quality of experience itself. See Victor W. Turner and Edward Bruner, eds., *The Anthropology of Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

17. In Bella Chagall's case there is the added interest in literary experimentation, particularly with use of language to evoke the sensuousness of lived experience offered as if it were immediately present. I am indebted to Jeffrey Shandler for this insight.

18. See Barbara Myerhoff, "'Life Not Death in Venice': Its Second Life" in Turner and Bruner, 1986:261-86 for an analysis of a mural painted by the elderly Jews she studied in Venice, California.

19. Recent attempts to address this topic include E. Sherman and E. S. Newman, "The Meaning of Cherished Personal Possessions for the Elderly," *Journal of Aging and Personal Development* 8/2(1977-78): 181-92; Adele Wiseman, *Old Woman at Play* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1978); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Simon Bronner, *Chain Carvers: Old Men Crafting Meaning* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985); Brenda Danet and Tamar Katriel, "No Two Alike: Play and Aesthetics in Collecting," *Play and Culture* 2/3(1989):253-77; and Hufford, Hunt, and Zeitlin (1987).

20. In a companion piece, "Objects of Memory: Material Culture as Life Review" in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader*, edited by Elliott Oring, 278-85 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1989) that explores the variety of ways that people materialize memory, I distinguish among objects that are saved, collected, or made as follows. *Material companions* to a life are objects that have aged with their owners, accumulating meaning in the process. *Souvenirs* and *mementos* are deliberately saved with the anticipation that at a later time they will recall the present moment. *Memory objects*, such as the paintings of Mrs. Faust, are created long after the events they commemorate. *Collectibles* are objects that figure in ensembles of objects, carrying with them both a history prior to their acquisition and the story of how they were acquired. As Walter Benjamin, an avid book collector, suggested, "the systematic collection of objects can be a mode of structuring memory" (Danet and Katriel (1989); see note 19, above). I also consider *ensembles*, including the loosely assembled collection, carefully arranged tableau, new synthetic object, or entire environment. Recipe notebooks, rag rugs, quilts, and collections of miniatures are among the many tangible ways that lives are gathered together and reviewed. Similarly, miniatures and models, and their arrangement in tableaux, offer still other possibilities for life review. Models are appealing not only because the objects they miniaturize may no longer exist or may be too expensive and large to collect, but also because the process of making models is a way of crafting memory.

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