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ON ORAL HISTORY AND THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING: NOTES FROM THE UKRAINIAN CANADA

In this paper, by revisiting a particular case of investigator/informant interaction in the context of oral historical research amongst the Ukrainians on the Canadian prairies, I examine the possible impact of Ukrainian Canadian oral historians on the construction of meaning of cultural practices within communities of their research¹. Oral historical research is necessarily collaborative. Therefore, oral historians – by conducting their queries into people's pasts – are both contributing to and therefore responsible for stories they are seeking to collect, record, and disseminate. Ultimately, they participate in the construction of meanings assigned to stories by the informants. Consequently, contemporary oral historians should be keenly aware of the effects of their own involvement in the interviewing process on the results of their investigations. The awareness of collaborative nature of oral historical research – and of the fact that participants' memories and recollections can often be affected by the researcher's own interests – will provide the researchers with better critical perspective on social phenomena they are investigating and will allow for their more careful interpretation.

Such awareness is especially necessary in the context of ethnic communities' self-examination on north-American continent, as in the case of Ukrainian Canadian scholarship involved in the study of the Ukrainian Canadian history and culture. Similarly to other ethnic groups, Ukrainian Canadians' self-explorations, especially in the past, have been commonly driven by particular political agendas competing within their ethnic community and by the perceived necessity to promote their ethnicity against the background of the dominating mainstream culture(s). Hence in their studies, the community historians have been routinely emphasizing community's progressively successful development and adaptation to the host-land, recounting various «Ukrainian» contributions to Canada, reciting the examples of economic success, and insisting on cultural perseverance and demographic continuity. To formulate such a history of community's progressive successes in Canada has been one of the fundamental tasks of the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic scholarship. This project eventually led to the formation of a new system of cultural beliefs and ethnic myths on which many generations of Ukrainian Canadians were raised. Interestingly, this process of generating new meanings and interpretations of history has long involved the element of oral historical research.

Oral testimonies in the Ukrainian Canadian history

Ukrainian Canadians began to seek oral testimonies of the Ukrainian Canadian settlers experiences soon after establishing themselves on the prairies as successful

¹ Paper originally presented at Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association of Slavists, May 2002, Toronto, Canada.

ethnic/immigrant communities (in the second/third decade of the 20th century). Such explorations of history long preceded the establishment of mainstream academic research centers focusing on Canadian Ukrainica. On one end, the original efforts at recording oral testimonies of people's lives were aimed at documenting «true» experiences of the Ukrainians in Canada. On the other end, the efforts to record the Ukrainian Canadian community beginnings also testified to community's aspirations to lay out their own claims to Canada and the Canadian nation building. The most immediate source of information on how the original immigrants settled and succeeded in their lives were settlers themselves with their personal memories and experiences. Since this history had to represent the Ukrainians to the rest of Canada it could not accommodate weaknesses and failures. As an outcome, early Ukrainian Canadian oral historical research in its precursory stage of collecting oral testimonies of the early years in Canada, sought to emphasize a particular pattern – of perseverance and stamina – in the Ukrainians' adaptations to the life on the prairies. Though within the pan-Canadian context it was indeed the history of ethnic minority, at the level of Ukrainian Canadian community it was not history of the margins, but the mainstream history.

Early Ukrainian Canadian community educators have strongly sensed the need to seek and record the original stories from the first settlers for these stories were the stories of the beginning of the Ukrainian history on Canada. For example, Ivan Bobersky and Michael Ewanchuk's work² in this direction, amongst others, had a long lasting effect on the Ukrainian Canadians understandings of their history. Ivan Bobersky's³ early efforts to record and publicize the immigration stories of the first officially recognized Ukrainian immigrants to Canada insured that the Ukrainian Canadians would have first-hand accounts of Vasyl Eleniak's and Ivan Pylypiw's arrival to Canada recorded⁴. Collected by him oral testimonies of the first official Ukrainian immigrants to Canada have been routinely cited in numerous publications throughout the rest of the 20 century⁵. The author of sixteen books on Canadian

² Bobersky, Ivan. «Yak pershykh dwokh ukrayintsiw zayikhalo do Kanady» // Kanadiiskyi Farmer. Winnipeg: Kanadiiskyi Farmer, 1937. Pp. 122–133; Ewanchuk, Michael. Fonds, No. TC 105, Audiorecordings. University of Manitoba Archives.

³ Ivan Bobersky (1873–1947), a teacher, was sent to Canada in 1920 by the government-in-exile of the Western Ukrainian National Republic to act as its plenipotentiary. When that government ceased to exist, Bobersky stayed in Canada and became involved in various Ukrainian organizations as a community activist. He left Canada for Yugoslavia in 1932.

⁴ First published in the *Almanac of the Canadian Farmer for the Year 1937*, under the title «Yak pershykh dwokh ukrayintsiw zayikhalo do Kanady» (Winnipeg: Kanadiiskyi Farmer, 1937. P. 122–133).

⁵ Another educator, Vasyl Czumer includes Bobersky's interview in his unpublished memoirs *Spomyny pro perezhyvannia pershykh ukrains'kykh pereselentsiv v Kanadi*, eventually translated into English by Louis T. Laychuk and published as William A. Chumer. (Recollections about the Life of the First Ukrainian Settlers in Canada. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1981. P. 12–22). The interview was republished on numerous occasions in various Ukrainian Canadian media, and also included, somewhat abbreviated, amongst other in; Piniuta, Harry. *Land of Pain, Land of Promise: first person accounts by Ukrainian pioneers, 1891–1914*. Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, 1978. P. 27–35.

Ucrainica, Michael Ewanchuk⁶ is another example of a well known community historian in the Ukrainian Canadian community. His contribution to the field of oral historical research goes back to the 1930s when he, interested in the history of early Ukrainian Canadian settlements began conducting series of interviews with the Ukrainian seniors and then writing down their oral testimonies (now stored in the University of Manitoba's archives. Throughout history, various Ukrainian Canadian anniversaries also inspired the collection of oral testimonies of early Ukrainian immigrants. Round anniversaries, such as the 50th anniversary of the Ukrainian history in Canada celebrated in 1941 (and which began with the arrival to Canada of Pylypiw/Eleniak duo in 1891), provided useful occasions to mark and celebrate the Ukrainian history of Canada and especially the local history of various Ukrainian communities. On such occasions, Ukrainian Canadian newspapers and various organizations routinely profiled established local Ukrainians, the original settlers, as examples of the Ukrainian success to Canada.

The need to present Ukrainian Canadian settlements as successful communities throughout history was also strongly felt at the local level. In postwar (WW2) years and especially throughout the 1970s and 1980s when local histories began to be produced in masses, the elderly Ukrainians – especially those respected in their communities for their life achievements – came into focus again. The projects of creating public local histories continually relied on personal family stories and individuals' memories. Local history – for the most part a product of community historians – could not have been ever written without memories and oral testimonies collected from the local old-timers by their family members. For example, a local history book of the Ukrainian town of Mundare, east central Alberta, produced in 1980, details stories of 297 local families. These stories occupy the chapter «Family biographies» and run across 400 pages, while the nine other chapters on public, spiritual and business institutions of the town take up only 170 pages⁷. Each family history presented in this book followed a particular path of celebrating the family's perseverance and continuity against the background of all kinds of hardships. The stories were the stories of survival. Mundare history book is not unique in its composition, but rather archetypical.

Community based local history projects were undertaken by the members of the same communities, that is, by the practitioners of culture under the study and not its outside researchers. Such community-driven research hardly ever involved a sustained effort to subtract the historical «truth» from memory. It also never relied on critical examination of (a) its medium of redistribution, that is the orality of stories, and (b) its effects on the outcoming message. Rarely a professional social scientist trained in the methods of qualitative analysis and oral historical research was involved in compiling local oral history books. Of course, when put into perspective, this is not surprising. Modern sensitivities to orality of culture and oral history did not enter north-American // Canadian academic discursive circuits until the seven-

⁶ Michael Ewanchuk (1908-2004), Manitoba born and raised educator, teacher, administrator, who after retirement turned into a prolific Ukrainian Canadian historian.

⁷ *Memories of Mundare: A History of Mundare and Districts*. Edmonton: Mundare Historical Society, Friesen Printers, 1980.

ties and the eighties, when the very discipline of oral history itself was still in the stage of its formation in the academic milieu of North America⁸.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s oral historical research began to be utilized, in one way or another, by the professional researchers, either the academics at the universities or journalists and writers pursuing research on Ukrainian Canadians. While in the past in its initial stage, oral testimonies were employed to emphasize suffering, survival and perseverance as universal experiences of the Ukrainian settlers in the first half of the 20th century, and thus served the mainstream Ukrainian Canadian history supporting its story of «noble» pioneer origins, today's oral historical research more and more seeks differences in and diversity of the Ukrainian Canadian experience.

While it was on its way to become a legitimate academic subject, oral history as the means of accessing information brought fame to some Canadian writers. Myrna Kostash's most influential book, *All Baba's Children*⁹ owes its success amongst other reasons to the simple fact that it is based on numerous testimonies and the voices of many small town folks who described to Myrna in numerous interviews their lives and experiences. Not a professional anthropologist, the writer moved into the small community in rural Alberta and spent a year collecting interviews with the locals and eventually compiling their stories in a book format. The stories have been presented in such frank tones that the resulting powerful narrative polarized the Ukrainian Canadian readership. Some embraced the book (absorbing its message critically), while others rejected it as important contribution to the community cultural life for its daring effort to open up for the discussion the prohibited topics in the Ukrainian Canadian history – amongst those as illiteracy, women abuse, and violence of the early settlers¹⁰. Kostash's project in some ways signaled the new turn in oral historical research amongst the Ukrainian Canadians towards documenting history in all its variety of forms and reflections. Today, in Canada there are several, institutionalized academic oral historical research initiatives dealing with the Ukrainian history or culture.

In the academic milieu, oral historical research on Ukrainian Canadians branched off from two distinct academic traditions in Canadian academia. On one end, Ukrainian Canadian oral history as method owes to the fields of folklore studies, ethnology, and anthropology, and on the other end, oral history as a critical inquiry into marginalized experiences of the Ukrainian Canadians stems from the discipline of history. Prior to its incorporation as a critical discipline with its own philosophy and method of research oral historical method was regularly employed by folklore scholars

⁸ Although on the American continent, the first organized oral history project was started by Allan Nevins, Columbia University, New York in 1948, oral history as a discipline did not emerge until the mid to late 1970s when enough critical material has been produced on both European and American continents. The late seventies witnessed the first International Conference on Oral history, held in Essex, England (1979), and founding of the International Journal of Oral History (from 1980) (Perk, Robert, and Thomson, Alice. Introduction // *The Oral History Reader*. / Eds. Robert Perk and Alice Thomson. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. P. 3). In Canada, the first issue of the national periodical in oral history, now called *Forum*, came out in 1975.

⁹ Kostash, Myrna. *All of Baba's Children*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1977.

¹⁰ Ibid.

interested in the Ukrainian Canadian vernacular culture¹¹. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, oral historical method helped the Canadian Museum of Civilization as well as its long term principle folklore curator Robert Klymasz, to realize numerous projects many of which deal with the Ukrainian Canadian vernacular culture¹². Community supported, Ukrainian Canadian folk studies scholarship soon followed the suite with the establishment of the Ukrainian folklore program at the University of Alberta in 1989. Students and professors of this program began systematic research into vernacular culture on the prairies using oral history as one of their primary methods of research¹³. On the other end, the development of oral history as a discipline of its own owes a lot to the ongoing «democratization» of historical research in western academia. Over the last twenty five years or so, Canadian historians not only began to produce more research on marginal communities, ethnic minorities or aboriginal groups (this has been done before of course), but this research also began to advocate for legitimization of the marginal groups' perspectives and visions on their own history and their relationships with the mainstream society. In Eastern Canada, amongst the Ukrainian Canadian scholars, much work in a similar direction has been coordinated by the Toronto based Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Center (UCRDC) which began its work in the late 1980ies.

A general «academic» divide seem to exist in Ukrainian Canada between the country's east where the research is typically more Ukraine-oriented and the west, where the researchers more concerned with the Canadian chapter of the Ukrainian history Moved from below. Thus, in the East, in its oral history projects, UCRDC is mostly focused on those under-researched aspects of Ukrainian history that are perceived as shared by both, the Ukrainian Canadians (especially in Eastern Canada) and the Ukrainians in Ukraine¹⁴. This includes such topics as the famines of the first

¹¹ One must mention that the vernacular culture of the Ukrainian Canadians enjoyed a sustained academic interest throughout the whole history of the Ukrainians in Canada. By now, Ukrainian Canadian folklore studies is an established and well reputed area of scholarship in Canada. While I will be referring throughout this paper to some selected publications by the Ukrainian Canadian folklorists, this paper does not review the state of folklore scholarship in Canada. Only those projects by the Ukrainian Canadian folklore scholars are mentioned here that employed *oral history* as a method of accessing information about particular past events, current cultural practices, and people's personal experiences.

¹² *Klymasz, Robert B.* An Introduction to Ukrainian-Canadian Immigrant Folksong Cycle. // National Museums of Canada Bulletin. No. 234, Folklore Series. No. 8. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1970; *Klymasz, Robert B.* The Ukrainian Winter Folksong Cycle in Canada. National Museums of Canada Bulletin. No. 236. Folklore Series. No. 9. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1970; *Klymasz, Robert B.* Folk Narrative Among Ukrainian-Canadians in Western Canada. // National Museum of Man, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies Paper No. 4. Mercury Series. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1973; *Klymasz, Robert B.* Ukrainian Folklore in Canada. New York: Arno Press, 1980; *Klymasz, Robert B.* Svieto: Celebrating Ukrainian-Canadian Ritual in East Central Alberta Through the Generations // Historic Sites Service, Alberta Culture & Multiculturalism, Occasional Paper No. 21. Edmonton: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism Historical Research Division. 1992.

¹³ Much of their research can be currently accessed online through the Ukrainian Folklore Archives collection, <http://www.museums.ualberta.ca/dig/search/ukrn/>.

¹⁴ UCRDC's archival collection was initially established in 1988, though some projects such as «Oral history of the Famine 1932–33» were produced earlier (interviews were conducted in 1981–1988, according to the UCRDC website).

half of the 20th century, and the experiences of the Displaced Persons (DP) immigration. Both topics fared less in the official historiography of the 20th century. The famine of 1932-33 has not been adequately acknowledged by the world community and the history of DP immigration has been plagued by the complex nature of displaced persons' political loyalties and inclinations throughout the World War II. The Center's efforts at documenting these histories significantly contributes to the ongoing lobbying amongst the Ukrainian historians and activists worldwide to (a) recognize the famine as man-made genocide against the Ukrainian people and (b) provide full and balanced perspective on the DP history which would stimulate a better understanding of this history by non-Ukrainians. UCRDC also cooperates with the oral history scholars in Ukraine providing example of close post-independence collaboration between Ukraine and Ukrainian Canadian scholars in the area of oral historical research¹⁵.

In the West, where the Ukrainian culture grew into a highly unique version of the Ukrainian culture compared to the Ukrainian culture of eastern Canada and especially of Ukraine, oral historical research is employed to document the uniqueness of Western Canadian Ukrainianness. In the 1970s and 1980s, in Western Canada the Ukrainian Canadians initiated several significant projects on recording local expressions of Ukrainianness in Western Canada. Their goals were to document, record and examine the Ukrainian vernacular culture which established itself on the Canadian prairies with the arrival of the first Ukrainian settlers from the rural areas of Western Ukraine. Oral evidence was once again the most crucial source of information on many topics, ranging from the Ukrainian Canadian folk narratives collected in the Ukrainian settlements¹⁶, Ukrainian folk dancing¹⁷, folk healing¹⁸, music¹⁹, to the questions of Ukrainian lifestyle and vernacular architecture, now profiled and re-enacted in the interpretive open air museum «Ukrainian Village» founded in 1971 near Edmonton, Alberta²⁰.

¹⁵ Andrij Kudla Wynnyckyj. Director of «Living History» laboratory in Lviv details his work. // *The Ukrainian Weekly*. 1996. November 3. No. 44. Vol. LXIV (<http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/1996/449622.shtml>).

¹⁶ Klymasz, Robert B. *Ukrainian Folklore in Canada*. New York: Arno Press, 1980.

¹⁷ Nahachewsky, Andriy. *The Kolomyika: change and diversity in Canadian Ukrainian folk dance*. (Volumes I and II). Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, Ph. D Thesis, 1991; *Nahachewsky, Andriy. Recreational Dance of Ukrainian Canadians*. Kyiv: Rodovid, 2001.

¹⁸ Hanchuk, Rena Jeanne. *The Word and Wax: A Medical Folk Ritual among Ukrainians in Alberta*. / *Canadian Series in Ukrainian ethnology*, Vol. 2. Edmonton: Huculak chair of Ukrainian culture and ethnography, 1999.

¹⁹ Cherwick, Brian Anthony. *Polkas on the prairies: Ukrainian music and the construction of identity*. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, Ph.D. thesis, 1999.

²⁰ See publications produced by the Historic Sites Service, Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism (*Chorniaw, Cathy*. *Commerce in the Country: A Land Use and Structural History of the Luzan Grocery Store* // Historic Sites Service, Alberta Culture & Multiculturalism, Occasional Paper No. 17. Edmonton: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism Historical Research Division, 1989; *Hohol, Demjan*. *The Grekul House: Land Use and Structural History* // *Ibid*. No. 14. Edmonton, 1985; *Klymasz, Robert B*. *Sviato: Celebrating Ukrainian-Canadian Ritual in East Central Alberta Through the Generations* // *Ibid*. No. 21. Edmonton, 1992; *Lesoway, Marie*. *Out Of The Peasant Mold: A Structural History Of The M. Hawreliak Home in Shandro, Alberta*. // *Ibid*. No. 15. Edmonton, 1989; *Maryn, Sonia*. *The Chernochan Machine Shed: A Land Use and Structural His-*

Most recent examples of oral historical research into specifically Ukrainian Canadian prairie culture come from the Universities of Alberta and of Saskatchewan. The Ukrainian Folklore Centre at the University of Alberta is the largest agent in the field of oral historical research in Western Canada. Its groundbreaking «Malanka Millennium Project» for example tackled the unique and widespread phenomenon of Malanka celebrations on the Canadian Prairies. Conducted over the course of a two-week period in 2001 and coordinated by Brian Cherwick and Andriy Nahachewsky, Malanka project yielded rich and important data describing thirty two local community celebrations of Malanka in Alberta and their interpretations by the organizers and participants. While the main goal was to document the distribution and ritual organization of Malanka community celebrations, the researchers have supplemented video-recording of events with the collection of oral testimonies on local history of the ritual of Malanka. The same centre has recently undertaken large-scale multicultural and multistage oral history project «Local Culture and Diversity on the Prairies» coordinated by Andriy Nahachewsky, the Director of the Ukrainian Folklore Centre. The primary research questions asked by the project coordinators tackle the question of lived and practiced Canadian identities and seek to identify the variety of its forms: «How did people from diverse backgrounds interact, adapt and “become prairie Canadians” in the first half of the 20th century? What was the relationship between cultural inheritance and local community participation? How did they express their various identities on the local community level? What factors affected any regional variation in such communities as they evolved over time?»²¹. In addition to studying specifically the Ukrainian Canadian local cultures, this project also looks into other ethnic groups on the prairies.

University of Saskatchewan's Prairie Centre for the study of the Ukrainian Heritage is another academic research unit undertaking research in a similar direction. In 2002-03 PCUH launched Oral History Project on Sociocultural Change, Identity, and Ethnic Interrelations: Ukrainian Canadians in the Prairie Provinces, two phased research project on the Ukrainian Canadian culture of Saskatchewan, coordinated by the anthropologist Natalia Shostak and the psychologist Theresa Zolner. The objective of this research initiative was to document the historical and biographical experiences of Ukrainian Canadians in the contexts of socioeconomic changes of the second half of the 20th century, to document their contribution to the development of the Prairies, and to record their attitudes towards cultural plurality of Western Canada. The research team of four conducted 140 interviews throughout the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan which are being currently transcribed and archived. In addition, in 2004, PCUH initiated and held an international symposium on orality

tory // Ibid. No. 12. Edmonton, 1985; *Maryn, Sonia*. The Chernochan Machine Shed: Ukrainian Farm Practices In East Central Alberta (narrative history). // Ibid. No. 13. Edmonton, 1985; *Melnycky, Peter*. Shelter, Feed, And Dray: A Structural History Of The Radway Livery Barn // Ibid. No. 18. Edmonton, 1989; *Nahachewsky, Andriy*. Ukrainian Dug-Out Dwellings in East-Central Alberta: A Structure and Land Use Report // Ibid. No. 11. March 1985. Edmonton, 1985. Selected interviews, also used for some of these publications, are available from the Ukrainian Heritage Village website, <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/ukrainian/interviewslow.htm>.

²¹ For further information visit http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~ukrfolk/Local_Cultureweb/Description2.htm.

and oral history during which scholars from four countries discussed the operational modes of orality in different historical times and debated the means of accessing orality as a medium of communication. A collection of articles written by the symposium contributors, and including four contributions on oral history in the context of the Ukrainian studies, are currently being edited at the University of Saskatchewan.

It may be claimed that despite the long term presence of many elements of oral historical method in the academic and community explorations of the Ukrainian Canadian history, oral history as critical theory and a discipline of its own is yet to find its way into the Ukrainian Canadian academic milieu. While a number of very important academic projects concerning Ukrainian historical and cultural experience in Canada have been underway in Canada, oral historical research is still in its transitional stage from data accumulation to data systematization and interpretation. UCRDC has to be credited for their pioneering work in this direction²².

In Canada, slow rebirth of oral history into a discipline of its own also followed the adoption of the official policy of multiculturalism by the Canadian government in 1971. Early oral history work of Canadian oral historians reflected growing awareness of mainstream Canada of its cultural diversity²³. With time, oral historical research in Canada also benefited from the exploration of intersections of orality and native history by native studies scholars who long ago recognized the power of oral narrative and subjectivity in representations of history as pursued by the aboriginal communities²⁴. For the Ukrainians, one of the outcomes of the officially adopted policy on Canada's cultural, or ethnic, plurality has been indeed the democratization of their historical self-exploration, now allowing more room for exploring all variety and diversity of experiences and not simply maintaining «The Story of A People, One and for All». With the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism, which the Canadian Ukrainians spearheaded and actively campaigned for, the need for continually validating themselves in the eyes of the rest of Canada subdued. Time came to search for deeper meanings of their diverse and not always so smooth history. In the academic milieu, in response to the humanities and social sciences turn to self-reflexivity and criticism in the 1980s, time also came to reflect upon the methodology of research and explore the impact and the meanings of methods employed in the historical and ethnological research.

To what degree oral historical research amongst the Ukrainian Canadians contributes to ongoing re-evaluations and redefinitions of the Ukrainian experience in Canada? Since the narratives produced by the academics are commonly seen as authoritative, the results of oral historical research have a strong potential to affect people's interpretations and meanings of cultural phenomena under investigation. Yet, it is not just the results of oral historical research that can bring about change in meaning, but the very practice of this research. That is, the way oral historians con-

²² UCRDC oral history projects data has been used for exhibits, documentaries and subsequent publications (<http://www.interlog.com/~ucrdc/>).

²³ See for example, *Forum's* table of contents (<http://oral-history.ncf.ca/forum.html#Forum>).

²⁴ See for example works by Julie Cruikshank, who looked into the applications of oral historical research in the context of Canadian aboriginal cultures (*Cruikshank, Julie. Oral Tradition and Oral History: reviewing some issues // Canadian Historical Review. Vol. 75. 1994. No. 3. P. 403-418.*

duct their enquiries into a particular phenomenon has direct implications for the meanings attached to this phenomenon by the community where it is practiced. In the light of a sustained academic attention to their life experiences and cultural practices, the informants are given an opportunity to re-evaluate their life experiences and cultural practices and assign them new meanings. Andriy Nahachewsky is perhaps the first Ukrainian Canadian oral historian to address the issue of methodological challenges in oral history work, questioning various factors that may influence the interview process and as a result the out-coming narratives²⁵. Yet, it is not only a particular story of a single informant that gets affected by the interview format, interviewer and interviewee interaction, their personalities and respective positions in the society. Ultimately, the community's understandings of its stories as well as community's understandings of its cultural practices become subject to re-evaluation in the context of growing academic interest to its members' lives.

Thus, oral history not only has the potential to change meanings of cultural phenomena at the level of its interpretation, but the meanings of a cultural phenomenon at the level of its practice. In other words, oral history, owing to the collaborative nature of its research and direct engagement with the bearers of cultural tradition and collective memory, has all the potential to change the meanings of history for those who want to learn it and the meanings of culture for those who continue to practice it, and the researchers should be highly aware of this. To illustrate this point, let me turn to the case from my own fieldwork in which complex and intricate relationship between oral historical method and the production of meaning comes to a foreground. Below, in the context of my research on Malanka celebrations in the province of Alberta as a part of Malanka Millennium Project organized by the University of Alberta, I detail how the meanings assigned to a cultural phenomenon by the practitioners of culture get modified as a result of the prolonged interaction between the professional researcher and a cultural practitioner.

Researching Malanka in East Central Alberta: tradition and contemporary meanings

January 13th 2001, another long, cold, and starry winter prairie night. Sounds of music are breaking through the walls of a small town community hall, the smell of garlicky food is creeping out of the building through the doors and windows, and people are shuffling in and out through never closing doors. It is close to midnight and Malanka is reaching its apex. Inside the building in the midst of the festive hubbub of music, dance, drinking and laughs, the moment comes. The mummers, dressed up in costumes, disguised under their masks, each personifying a certain character, are rushing into the midst of dancing crowd, disrupting the long going feast of music to the great satisfaction of the awaiting public. 15 different personages, from a folkloric world of Ukrainians, one by one, are dashing in, reaching for the hands of guests here and there, shuffling them into the midst of seemingly chaotic but yet carefully thought through commotion. The whirl of emotions spins out

²⁵ *Nahachewsky, Andriy*. Local Culture and Diversity on the Prairies: Methodological Challenges in Oral History Project. Paper presented at the international symposium «Orality and Literacy in Contemporary Scholarship», University of Saskatchewan, October 2004.

and the crowd warms itself up to the occasion, cheering malankari, or malanka mummers, by clapping, laughing, pointing their fingers at the characters in the effort to identify them, pulling out photo cameras and videos to catch the excitement of the moment. I am in the midst of this commotion, first with photo camera, then with video camera, then with photo camera again, confusing and perhaps intriguing people over my persona of a «researcher from the University». But the crowd of guests just gives in into this annually anticipated thrill of Andrew Malanka, the best Malanka in the area, as I was reminded more than once during the evening (fieldnotes, January 14, 2001).

These experiences of Andrew Malanka came to my life courtesy of Ukrainian Folklore Program at the University of Alberta, which in January 2001 organized the documentation of thirty two local Malanka celebrations in East Central Alberta. In the Ukrainian Canadian milieu, today the word Malanka is most commonly associated with the festive community celebrations of what is known in Canada as a «Ukrainian New Year's». In the prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, these celebrations are quite popular both in small Ukrainian Canadian towns and in larger urban centers and are attended by the Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians alike. The celebrations are organized around January 13th which, according to the Julian calendar would have been the new year's eve. In a small town like Andrew, a community hall would be reserved by one or another active cultural organization or, more commonly these days, by a church association. A cooking committee of a cultural association or a women's league from a local church would prepare an extended Ukrainian meal for the occasion, though nowadays these celebrations begin more and more to rely on professional catering service. The tickets would be sold in advance through friends, neighbours, extended family networks, local businesses, and would be advertised by word of mouth or via local media. The evening itself would involve the large meal served at its beginning followed by the dance and entertainment. A local popular band would be invited to play throughout the evening to provide music for the Ukrainian dancing. Local cultural groups, such as children's dance groups and seniors' Ukrainian choirs would perform throughout the evening. In some instances, around the midnight, the Malanka skit would be presented as in the case of Malanka celebrations in the town of Andrew. Andrew Malanka skit is reminiscent of the Ukrainian New Year's old ritual of mummers' house to house visitations (*malankuvannia*) brought to Canada from the respective villages of Western Ukraine from where the early Ukrainian settlers arrived. In the case of Andrew celebrations, the Malanka ritual came from the region of Bukovyna.

University of Alberta's Malanka Millennium Project had the goal of documenting the tradition of Malanka celebrations at a particular slice of time. The time for the project was also inspired by the overall North-American intellectual agitation surrounding the celebrations of the year 2000, when millennium-related academic reflections on cultural achievements proliferated in various contexts. Against this background, the academics' effort to document the Ukrainian culture on the prairies offered another angle and the air of significance to local interpretations of Malanka by the communities where the project was conducted (local participants demonstrated high interest in the academic efforts everywhere I went with this project). In addition, the researchers were to collect as much oral evidence on the proliferation

of the Malanka tradition as it was possible. Video recording, interviewing as well as participant observation were the main methods of research during the project. As a part of the research team of eleven other researchers of that program, I have gone to thoroughly document two Malanka performances that season, with Andrew Malanka being one of the two events. The goal was to collect as much visual and other material as possible to document the variety of the Malanka tradition on the Canadian prairies, as it was being celebrated on the eve of a new millennium²⁶.

The contemporary meaning as assigned by the cultural practitioners to this cultural event once a calendar ritual of Ukraine's countryside, is what I began to question while talking with many Malanka night participants and especially while conducting interviews with the principal organizer of Andrew Malanka. Here, I would like to look at not as much as the meaning itself, as rather its construction. Meaning is necessarily a cultural and social construct and to each of us things we witness and experience may be of different meaning depending on our social and cultural backgrounds. Meaning is also constructed in communication and in accordance to individual abilities of the informants to remember, re-tell, and re-assemble the past in a particular narrative form. In the context of oral historical research the way meanings will be re-assigned to the phenomena in question also depends on the ability of the researcher to ask for, to understand, and to absorb, and eventually interpret oral testimonies and other observed actions. This concerns both the researchers and the informants, for both parties in dialogue are in position to re-assign the meanings to the phenomena in question. With this in mind, I argue that while we, the modern oral historians are searching for the folks' interpretations of their pasts and cultural practices, in a long run, through our interaction and sustained enquiries into peoples lives and practices, we inevitably affect our informants' own interpretations of those.

It is true that as oral historians we are often somewhat blinded with the understanding of ourselves as discoverers, treasure hunters, and the collectors of the field material. The transactions between us the researchers and them the researched in most instances of our professional involvements remained to be seen in the same giving/receiving terms. We continue to utilize the verb 'collecting oral histories' as we were once collecting folklore, as if oral testimonies or person's reflections on his/her culture that we collect exist independently of human interaction, exchange, and communication.

It is after talking for several evenings with Mr. Peter Wirstiuk, Andrew Malanka long term organizer, interpreter, coach, coordinator and researcher-in-his-own-way, and even more importantly, after endless hours of transcribing our interview tapes, did I come back again to the illusory nature of these assumptions about informant/researcher relationship. Spending hours and hours on deciphering thoughts, phrases, and words spelled out by Peter in the context of our several long conversations, many a time I stumbled over the question of whether we can see the relationship between the researcher/informant in giving/receiving terms and who in fact was responsible for the construction of the meaning of a researched event in times of modern reflexivity.

²⁶ One subsequent analysis of the collected data was offered in the M.A. thesis by Andriy Chernevych (*Chernevych, Andriy*. Malanka through the back door: Ukrainian New Year's Eve celebration in east central Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, 2002).

But is it legitimate to assume that in times of what Giddens calls modern reflexivity²⁷ the researchers' role is limited only to this active digging of what already «exists» in the field? Is it legitimate to assume that in today's modernized world the meanings of either vernacular culture or personal involvement in it are being constructed by the practitioners of the tradition outside of their contacts with others and the researchers among them? Do these practitioners just share their meanings with the researcher? We should be aware that the matter of our involvement with our informants is communicative and dialogical, in truly Bakhtinian terms. Perhaps the meanings of tradition and the person's involvement in it are being constantly reconstructed in the exchange between the researcher and the researched, on the spot, so to speak? Through interviews, conversations, and other interaction, we both enter the field of a dialogue. In these circumstances we not only collect data and record the meaning of it, but these meanings are formulated in the dialogue between the researchers and the researched.

In quite a few cases of modern fieldwork experience, what we might think we record in our diaries as emic – that is people's own – interpretations of their culture, is neither strictly emic, nor it is strictly etic description, that is, outsiders' or researchers' descriptions of people's culture. When we approach our informants with questions about their cultural practices we are inevitably disturbing the equilibrium of their usual reflexivity. By showing our interest in their culture, and we often do this emphatically, we often prompt our practitioners to reflect upon their traditions in a very different manner than they might otherwise do. Thus, the conversation with the researcher affects the emic construction of meaning of the tradition. No matter how carefully we, the researchers will be avoiding supplying our informants with vocabulary and concepts, the etic interpretations and the meaning of the tradition is being formulated and reformulated in the dialogue in respond to etic interest in it.

When the two of us, Peter and I, ventured into a series of deep and prolonged conversations about Malanka, its old practices and current meanings, we both found ourselves not just digging out the old facts, but questioning the meanings of this cultural phenomenon. Our engaged dialogue offered Peter an opportunity to revisit the ritual of Andrew Malanka celebrations. Peter was reevaluating the meanings of this event not only for me, the researcher, but for himself as well. Below, I provide some selected segments of our exchange to illustrate the impact of a sustained enquiry and of a dialogue on Peter's personal visions of Malanka. Peter was very intrigued by my interest in his long-term involvement with Andrew Malanka and he

²⁷ *Modern reflexivity* is a notion introduced by British sociologist and philosopher Anthony Giddens (1991). In Anthony Giddens' understanding, the reflexivity of modernity relies to a great degree on the «externalization» of specialized knowledge and its later dispersion within the everyday domain. In modern times, specialists' knowledge on any subject matter may become public knowledge. When such specialized knowledge is published and circulated, it also becomes publicized and endowed with authority. Presented in the form of books and other media it not only *reports* on aspects of social life, it also routinely *organizes* and *alters* them (Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. P. 14).

engaged himself in our conversations with the highest degree of seriousness. We met three times after the event²⁸.

In his sixties (at the time of our meetings), a local old-timer, and a grandchild of Ukrainian settlers who came to Canada in 1906, Peter has been behind the local communal celebrations of Malanka since he remembers it. Remarkably, the tradition of Malanka celebrations appears to be a continuous one in this Canadian small village of Andrew (population 485 in 2001)²⁹. In Peter's lifetime Malanka transformed – sometime in the seventies – from once a traditional ritual of house-to-house visitations (like in the old country, Peter would add), into a modern community event, held annually on the grounds of a large local community hall. This institutionalizing of Malanka also provided new framework for participating in the mummery's skit. Within the new format of the event, Peter grew to become the ritual's main specialist, taking upon himself full responsibility for its organization and especially, as Peter puts it, for the meaning assigned to Malanka in his community and beyond. Modern Malankas became public and open to everybody in the community (instead of being confined to the Ukrainian homes only). Malankas began to serve as an identity marker of local public Ukrainianness. Conscious community activists often prompted to mention in their public reflections on this event, that Malanka's continuity in the region is a reflection of cultural perseverance of the Ukrainians³⁰. Peter's role of a Malanka organizer and almost like a performance copyright's holder made him long time ago to formulate his own views on the importance of this event.

In 2001, after 50 years in Malanka business a University research project came to town to document his legacy. How possible it was for Peter to subject his vision of Malanka to yet another round of re-interpretation in the context of this attention? From year to year Peter has been explaining to his troupe what Malanka is about. The acts of every mummer in the performed skit – the number of performers changed from year to year – have been carefully transcribed, explained, and rehearsed. The script of the ritual has been typed up years ago. These days, photocopies of these original transcriptions are being circulated amongst the participants during the rehearsals. In other words, both Peter's own memories and interpretations of Malanka have been sealed in writing for expediency in communicating these meanings to the skit performers recruited for the show on a yearly basis. Yet, by the end of our prolonged conversations, Peter provided me with a somewhat different perspective on Malanka comparing to the initial stage of our engagement.

²⁸ Throughout the paper, Peter's voice is interspersed with mine, for he has been as much a co author of my writing this paper, as I was a co-author of his meaning-making during our interviews. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to demonstrate that in modern world emic understandings of the importance of people's traditions may be co-authored by participants and researchers together and that we, as folklorists, ethnographers, are often equally responsible for the construction of the meanings of the folkloric events we study.

²⁹ Canada Census 2001.

³⁰ Though I was not pursuing this, in my conversations with Peter it became clear, that most of characters, if not all, found in Andrew *Malanka* throughout the years were present in local performances in the past and not adopted from external media sources, such as newspaper and internet articles on *Malanka* know-how. This attributes to the longevity and originality of Andrew *Malanka*.

Looking back at our exchange, I wonder at what point Peter moved beyond his once established pattern of reflecting on Malanka? Could it be the questions I was asking? Was it a particular turn in our conversation that provoked the change? Or the change was brought about by the very nature of our practitioner/researcher interactions? I have been attempting to be as minimal and non-suggestive with my questions as one should be when one is after the informant's viewpoint on the phenomenon under study. Our conversations, though overall navigated by me, were carried into directions of Peter's choice. It was Peter who occasionally would make a sharp turn in a conversation rather than me. And if any changes in his thought were provoked by such shifts, they were not directly imposed by me-the-researcher.

Our conversations touched upon many issues. Having explained the goals of the project, I invited Peter to reflect on his involvement in the ritual and describe Andrew Malanka celebrations in his own terms. Realizing the importance of documenting this tradition, Peter attempted to recollect as much detail as possible. At the same time, these recollections were compressed without chronological accuracy, into an action-packed memoir. The resulting presentation of the past came about as a free flowing story-filled oral narrative. He spoke of many past Malanka mishaps and did so with much joy. The narrative was flowing and well-patched.

Asking for the description of a particular event in the chain of similar events is one of the probed ways in oral historical research of reconstructing historical timeline of the phenomenon under study. Hence, I asked Peter to describe his first Malanka.

N. Do you remember your first Malanka?

P. Absolutely.

N. Can you tell me about it?

P. I was dressed as a goat.

N. As a goat?!

P. As a goat. I was dressed as a goat. I was the youngest one then. At that time, if I recall correctly I must have been 14 years of age. All the rest of them were over thirty, forty and some were in mid forties. [Peter contrasts himself to others]. And we walked from house to house. Fortunately, it was very mild evening. It was not too cold.

N. What other characters were performing during that year?

P. I was a Goat, I was a Policeman, I was Malanka [Here, Peter moved beyond one year event].

N. And that first year?

P. The first year I was a Goat.

For Peter, to respond to a question on his first participation in Malanka proved to be a difficult task. He continually opted out to lump the past years together, used the present tense or conditional future tense to describe the events, compared now and then, and did not differentiate between the years. All these oral narrative techniques are usual in storytelling events. Comic incidents of various years were regularly brought into the conversation. When cited, they were described in simple past tense:

P. Ok, first of all, we come in, we don't walk to the house, first of all we stood by the window, the nearest window, closest to the kitchen, where you saw life. There is

life in the house. So you haul it from the outside «Pane hospodariu, pozvolite zamalankuvaty» (Master of the house, please allow us to perform «malanka»). And from the house they haul, «Mozhna, mozhna!» (Yes, please). They properly pull the curtain open and wave «yes».

N. A-ha!

P. Occasionally, occasionally, some home you'd be invited into the house to carol, or to sing in a house [Peter's tone here is one of lecturing]. But nine times out of ten, in the beginning, in my beginning days, we were singing outside. It was that, particularly first year, it was very mild. But in one year, I am sure it was about thirty below, but we still were walking that. That was may be a third year.

N. So the group would go from house to house, and what would you sing?

P. We would sing that regular Malanka song. [...] And we used to going, ... singing outside, when we were singing outside the last verse, «Oy hupa hupa, tut hroshei kupa. [thinks] My tut nochuiem, bo hroschi chuiem». Ok, so when we are saying start to sing that last words, the Malanka would open the door and dash in, because the door were unlocked by that time. And the Malanka would dash in, and there is the Malanka sweeping in the house, and cleaning, and naturally if there is, if it clean in the house, she made a mess. If there was a mess in the house, the Malanka makes sure it is cleaned up a little bit. So, everything was being done negative, or opposite, if you want it put in that way [Here, Peter, provides his interpretation of actions' meanings].

Then, of course, the Did would come in, and Did would come in with this big torba and he was a beggar [Peter places an emphasis here]. He makes sure he would stack his head into the «panty» (local dialect, an unfinished storing and cooling area in the basement, «pidval» in Ukrainian). Today we have a fridge, than there would be no fridge. Holubtsi, a pot of holubtsi would be in the panty, so he gets into the pot of holubtsi and take some kind of a bag, or anything, and put it there, may say a cup full of holubtsi, may be he will take some meat, if there is wheat in the container, he'd grab that container, put that container of wheat on the table, and he'd be setting the table, and [pause] «pryimaie hostia».

And the Malanka would be there, really really tryin', to clean up the place fast.

...

And then of course the Bear will be snooping around, see may be there is a bottle of whiskey under the bed some place, or in the panty.

N. So that was the Bear's job to find...

P. [corrects Natalia] ...snooping, snooping. You know how the bear would always crawl into the garbage can? This is exactly what happens. [His interruption here is indicative of Peter's effort to «teach» me the right way of Malanka, and of how settled he is in his own way of sharing these stories].

N. So did he open up jars and...

P. Right, right. In the inside, in the later years, after we, [corrects himself] after I had more practice ... I would believe, there must have been eight of us, with two vehicles. We are driving already with vehicles, there roads were better, a little, not quite as they are today, but much better than in my beginning days. We came just north of Andrew, one place, older house, they had it for a cool place to keep potatoes and jars and staff like that, they have a cut-out hole in the floor, two feet by two feet,

we call it selier, we used to call it in Ukrainian selier [last syllabus is stressed, compare to cellar, NS]. And the man had wine, he was gonna treat us, after we would give a performance, he was going to treat us. While one of ... in fact, the Suzie's dad, he was a Bear in that particular year. So while the owner of the house went into the basement, into the cellar, he's got that whole gallon of wine an imperial gallon, not a metrical gallon, her put it on the side just on the floor and he still went back in for something else. In the meantime, he went into the farther end. While he went into the other end, our Bear, dressed as a Bear picked us this gallon and he jumped back into the cellar and stood on the side, because there was no power. It was just old basement... And the man downstairs was there with the candle. That's all what he has got for light. In the meantime, while he hid on the side, he, the host of the house got out of the cellar, closed the lid and that's it. Closed the lid, got outside, looked around and asked «A de galion?» (And where is the gallon?) Well, we had a Policeman in our troupe. We had a Policeman, he got after the Policeman to find a gallon of wine. Policeman is looking around, he saw for that gallon jumped back with the Bear into the cellar, but nobody knew about it.

N. laughs.

P. Nobody admitted that. So, the host of the house started looking for the gallon. He got upset about it. All over the sudden, this lid opens in the floor. And out comes out the Bear. Out of the cellar, and he lies on the floor and he reaches out down below, he pulls out this gallon and says «A vy pane hospodariu tsioho galiona shukaiete mozhe?» (Are you, Master of the House, looking for this gallon, by any chance?)

N. laughs.

P. And these are things that were done. We had a Cow one year, a steer. [...] Steer, whatever you call it, but with horns, horns are sticking out like rats. So, before we walked into a house, this guy that was dressed as a cow, we went to the stack of straw. There was a stack of straw, close by the house, he knew that. So he went to this stack of straw, stuck his head in, picked up a whole bunch of straw on the, on the horns. His head was all covered with straw, you can imagine. He walks into this house, ... he looks like, with all this straw on him. And this lady see him, «nay nay nay nay, look what he is doing, look at all the mess that he is making, look at the mess he is making» [Peter's voice is in high pitch, to imitate the lady's voice]. That cow just shakes his head and that straw just flies off the head.

N. laughs. That was a different year, right?

P. That was a different year.

For the most part of our exchanges, I let Peter follow his memory path. Malanka pranks and jokes constituted the core thread of Peter's reminiscences, around which my questions seeking some further clarification were organized. My occasional questions were quickly dealt with, shuffled aside with the very short response, while the story continued. It was clear to me that he has shared his memories of early Malankas with others before. Thus, in our initial stage of communication, I was the receiver of the message which was tried out before. In this sense, I did the regular job of an oral historian, that is I collected the stories spelt out in front of me. Throughout our conversations Peter never managed to pin down the happenings to dates, no matter how I tried to remind him to link the events to years. Given his long term involvement

with the rite of Malanka presentations in the community, his remembering of the past did not suggest dissecting it into precise periods. All the individual Malanka outings in the process of his outlining the importance of these celebrations became fused in his memory into one rite of Malanka.

Yet, our conversations significantly differed from other conversations on Malanka Peter may have had before. In our case, I was the enquiring party, her was the storyteller. I was the one to initiate and carefully navigate our exchange over the course of several meetings. In other circumstances, Peter might have had more control over what and how he wanted to say when talking of Malanka. Importantly, our deliberation on the ritual was extended and sustained, and constituted a part of the larger University run project and this certainly had had a profound effect on Peter's own reflections on and the re-evaluations of the meanings of Malanka. No matter how much I was trying to be just another person in our conversation, I doubt Peter ever forgot that I was representing an authoritative academic body, the University. All these factors provoked further search for meaning in Peter's case. After sharing with the researcher his previously voiced descriptions of past Malanka happenings, Peter, closer to the end of our encounter turned to ritual interpretation. This happened in the context of our discussion about the incorporation of Malanka into a community-wide event.

Together with Peter we walked through the past to figure out the changes in the celebrations. Many changes have been made to the ritual itself since Malanka «moved» into the Community Centre:

N. So, coming back to those early days, which characters developed over the years?

P. Which ones were added on?

N. Yes.

P. Malanka was the original. The Old Year was a new thing to come on. The Old Year and the New Year, those two were added on. But the New Year, they used to call it Chyrchuk. [...] Then it turned already. The younger generation when they came in, the younger generation meaning after me, they said, why do you what to use that word for nobody knows what it means. And not many knew that Ukrainian word at that time. Therefore, the person, or the character, or the name of the character was changed into New Year.

N. And how did they called it originally?

P. Chyrchuk, chyrchuk. And it was a, kinda, young boy. Dressed up like a Cossack. And now, New Year now is dressed up in more like a child, you want a young child, young looking dainty, dressed up neatly, quiet, in a bonnet. May be a girl will be dressed up in a nice ... skirt, or something. This has started since we have gone into a community center.

N. So, that was an addition, the New Year?

P. Right, the Old Year and the New Year have been already added since it came into the community centre.

N. And when did it come to the community centre? If you remember?

P. Well, approximately? Ok, I will give you a rough sketch, we have come here in Andrew, it was at least 10 years, or more, it was at least 15 years. So, I would say,

as of today, I would date it back at least 25 years, this is when the Old Year came in, the New Year came in, the soldier on the horse came in, already in the community centre.

Did and Baba was an original tradition, that was still in the old country, Hutsul and Hutsulka, it was still a country thing. «And koly tsi hutsuly», Hutsul and Hutsulka, when violin put in that first little note, first tune, Hutsul and Hutsulka would dance a genuine to Hutsulka, not a Kolomyika, ok? So I have not seen anybody dancing Hutsulka for years, years! Especially since Sadomsky orchestra has stopped playing there is nobody, there is no parts that can play a true Hutsulka. Therefore that is the thing of the past. The Bride and Groom is an addition, since it came to the community centre, and then again, it was not from the very beginning. It may come may be in a third year, when they started. Ukrainian Boy and Ukrainian Girl? Well, something like the Cossacks, like a Kozak, Ukrainian Boy and the Ukrainian Girl. [...] Ok, Gypsy is the old thing, but it was not, it was not every year. There was years, that we didn't have it on the farm, for the reason that Gypsy is usually dressed in more dainty cloth, which means thin cloth, and in the winter time this was impossible. The Jew yes, that was a regular thing, the Policeman, it was an original. This gives you an idea.

To my questions why such additions were made, Peter responded most commonly with comments that adding characters allowed for more participants and that people in the community typically did not want to be «negative» characters. Also, as an organizer, he had easier time convincing someone to be a human character, rather than an animal such as bear or cow. He touched upon how people in his community began forgetting throughout the years the symbolism of animal characters and how they become less and less fluent in the Ukrainian language in which the performance he insisted should have been held. Listening to our conversation over again and studying the annual charts of Malanka participants which Peter started in 1997, I noticed that the recently added characters were progressively less representative of traditional Malanka as practiced once in rural Bukovyna but more of a modern Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity with its heavy emphasis on the visual aspects of the Ukrainian culture such as Ukrainian costume and dancing, for the continuity of which Ukrainian Canadian youth is held responsible. Hence we have more young characters representing just this mix, the Bride and Groom, and the new addition, the Ukrainian Boy and the Ukrainian Girl. Peter's printed descriptions of these characters' acting indicate a progressive move towards a multigenerational cast, with Gido and Baba being «elderly couple», Hutsul and Hutsulka a middle-aged one, Bride and Groom as «youth about to marry» and the Ukrainian boy and girl as teens who are «studying the success of the bride and grooms marriage»³¹. Such layout indicates the organizers effort to make Malanka more appealing to the English speaking youth, according to Peter. Also staging such intergenerational interactivity speaks of Andrew community's claim to its own historic continuity in their locale.

Having covered these changes, Peter's moved on to discuss how Malanka shall be understood by today's generations. Given the prominence of pranks and mishaps

³¹ *Wirsiuk, Peter*. Malanka Role descriptions (leaflet prepared for and distributed during Malanka in Andrew, Alberta, January 13th 2001).

in the local version of Malanka ritual, one of the most important issues for Peter was the question of comparability of Malanka and Halloween. During our second interview we touched upon this subject. At this stage of our conversation, Peter limited himself to just a brief comparison of behavior performed during Malanka and Halloween. Again the message is conveyed with the help of a story:

P. A lot of people have mistaken Malanka for Halloween Night. There is total misconception on that. Because we had in fact, several years back, people approached me and asked, what's this Malanka, they had no idea what Malanka is. So when they looked at all these masks [...] Hey that's Ukrainian Halloween night! This is definitely wrong, absolutely wrong!

N. Aha. What's the difference, in your opinion between Halloween and Ukrainian Malanka?

P. Halloween, you go and do mischief, ok? During the Halloween night. Even crime is committed. Which is improper to commit crime, but it has been done. We were on a farm, we had a lot of damage done, for us, which other kids were doing the Halloween night. But with Malanka, you don't do that. You do mischief which is non-harmful. Like you see, do the opposite. if it dirty in the house you clean the house, if it is clean in the house you make a little of a mess. Do not upset anything. One year, many many years back, I should mention, we were riding already with a team of horses and the sleigh, one guy got a little roudy. Walked in the house, the house was small, people were heating with a wood heater. The heater in the middle of a house. And he's got a little bit roudy, he upset the heater, pushed it over, and with the fire in the heater we were just about to have a fire in the house. Luckily there no liner or maple floor or rug or something like that. So, that tells you something, that every year, when I get these people together, before they come down from the upstairs [refers to the rehearsal room in the community hall, which is above the hall], the main emphasis, you make sure that you do not upset one brick. You are not allowed to upset. You must act politely, foolish, but not to hurt anybody. Sometimes they grab a shoe of you, they grab you to dance, and they'll swing you, and the floor is slippery and you are most likely to fall. Definitely, that's no for the Malanka. You must act human, but within reason.

N. I see, I see. Khm.

This observation concluded our second meeting. Couple more weeks later, when I came back to Andrew for the third time, I have been presented with a very different kind of Peter's reflection on Malanka. This particular time, it was not me who pulled out the tape-recorder in hopes to catch another gem in a free flowing conversation. This time Peter was the first to put the tape-recorder on the table. He was not going to record our conversation though. He wanted me to listen to the tape of his own observations on ritual's meaning which he recorded while I was away. Peter asked me to add this tape to the University archives collection, pointing out that only the last tape – the one he created – correctly represented his opinion on the meaning of Malanka. On this tape, Peter's opinion was expressed in a very different discursive manner, which excluded stories as useful methods of presenting a point. Peter also thought of another important reason why Halloween differs from Malanka, emphasiz-

ing Malanka's religious origins³². The manner in which he chose to present his thoughts was obviously inspired by our previous conversations:

First, it must be clarified that misconception of the meaning of Malanka January 13th every year and that of Halloween night October 31 every year. The two events are totally different in meaning. And even though both have disguised or masked characters they cannot be considered or respected as same or similar. The Malanka is biggest on the spiritual background and the performing characters must, and I emphasize, must behave somewhat politely, evidently, not cause harm to anyone, no damage, or disturbance, and is solely based on clean comical entertainment. The other night, the Halloween night event October 31 of every year, has no spiritual or religious meaning or connection or background whatsoever. And as everyone knows this evening is loaded with goofs, spooks, foolishness, and even deliberate damage or harm in some. In some instances it has been proven that damage had been done in the past, hopefully never will happen again. At the very least, minor hicks are most likely expected. Anyone calling Malanka night calling Malanka night just another Ukrainian Halloween night is only admitting how little they know or understand, or would like to learn about the meaning of Malanka. I hope this is the clarification once and forever!

Talking to a researcher from the University made Peter to reflect on Malanka in a different way. From the very beginning of our encounter, Peter was concerned with the idea of his opinions to be preserved in the University archives. For as much as he was happy with the idea that his opinions and voice will be deposited in the University Archives, he was very much concerned how «proper» his presentation of Andrew Malanka was. Inspired by our previous conversations, by our third encounter, Peter felt the need to revise his reflections on Malanka and went as far as to compose the above message «for future researchers, so people would know the exact meaning of Malanka» as he would say. Interestingly he still remained concerned with how «correct» were his interpretations of Malanka.

It is obvious that Peter's vision of Malanka had sharpened as a result of our conversation. During our early conversations, his reflections of Malanka were communicated through storytelling. Peter's specific stories meant to illustrate the point he was making. My enquiry into his passion of 50 years made him think about the meaning of Malanka in a different way. His subsequent self-recorded and self-narrated reflections of local Malanka are presented in a different narrative style, and include Peter's philosophizing over the meaning of Malanka. A result is both extended conceptualization and the absence of storytelling in his self-recorded narrative.

As a person who committed to this tradition 50 years of his life, Peter had witnessed various stages of Malanka ritual in his community, from early house to house visitations without even the horse carriage, to the modern-day community-organized fundraising event. With Malanka increasingly becoming a public event for both in-

³² Both rituals, Halloween and Malanka, are rooted in pre-Christian and Christian beliefs and the rites of both traditionally relied on ritual travesty. In Andrew for example, the element ritual travesty was still observable, in Malanka's case trying to either clean the house if it was messy or mess it up if it was tidy.

siders and outsiders, Peter has been concerned about the loss of the original meaning of Malanka to Andrew people. Yet, this elaboration on the meaning of Malanka to Andrew people presented above has been continually re-edited in the process of our long conversations. Firstly, it was in the context of academics' interest in his work as modern ritual coordinator that he felt the need to promote his vision of Malanka. Hence, teaching/lecturing style was often employed in our conversations. Secondly, our sustained and prolonged exchange on Malanka over the course of several weeks gave Peter an opportunity to reflect on his own involvement into Malanka tradition in a new way. And thirdly, it was in a dialogue that Peter had the chance to re-edit and express his ideas in a structured, coherent and self-reflective way. His recording presents a different form of narrative characterized by coherence and fluidity. There is a clear beginning of the thought, its development and an emphatic conclusion. Peter thought of and became convinced that Malanka mummary drama is spiritual and religious in its core and Halloween is not. His self-recording easily conveys his conviction that Ukrainian culture is unique and of higher spiritual quality when compared to the culture of the mainstream Canada. This idea was not presented in our conversations before.

Peter's self-recording presents unique case of our informants' reflexivity modern style. The recollections of Andrew Malanka are taped in clear voice; their narrative structure speaks of the time Peter spent on preparing for this recording. Although he claimed he has done it from the heart, some of his self-recording relied on the written material Peter prepared for the occasion. Coming back to the question that the researchers as interviewers unwillingly participate in meaning construction through their involvement with the informants, I can say that in case of my dealing with Peter, our conversations had influenced and educated both of us. Peter's self-recording would not have taken place if it would not be for my curiosity and my enquiry about his involvement in this local cultural ritual. My enquiry into Andrew Malanka would not have been extended if it was not for his superior local knowledge of this tradition.

Therefore, as a researcher, I have to be aware that in fact, Peter as a bearer of his culture did not provide me with the ready interpretations of the meanings for everything that was happening on the stage during the evening of Malanka in Andrew. What I recorded and what Peter recorded are not exactly emic reflections of «natives' viewpoint» on subject matter. At the same time, Peter's vision was archived as his and rightly so. Future researchers though should be careful in their readings of Peter's stories and be aware of the complex origin of opinions expressed by Peter on all tapes.

Conclusions

In this paper, following a brief outline of the role oral testimonies played in the Ukrainian Canadians' representations of their history, I looked at one instance of oral historical research to discuss the question of responsibility the researchers have over the testimonies they seek from their informants. The nature of oral history is highly communicative and this affects the meanings assigned to the cultural phenomena by its practitioners. The particular case of the collection of oral history data

illustrates the important implications the modern institutional practices of oral historical research may have on the Ukrainian Canadians' understandings and interpretations of their own history. Of course, single case study does not allow one to claim that every communication between the researcher and the interviewee will result in the shift of meaning on behalf of the informant. Yet every encounter between the researcher and the researched is an open stage for meanings negotiation. The case study profiled here illustrates the possible impact oral historians may have on the construction of meaning of cultural practices within the communities of their research³³.

Thus, on one end, oral history research affects the meanings of the past at the level of its interpretation by the researchers. On the level of the community research, «ethnic» researchers as insiders are commonly subject to various competing ideologies within their own community. Various and often competing ideological agendas inevitably affect the kind of material oral historians would go after while in the field. For example, in the past, the effort was directed at creating a historical narrative of Ukrainians' progressive successes in Canada. When the master narrative was formed, the curious, the rebellious and the University educated turned to explore the least known aspects of this history, again «collecting» personal reflections of these margins.

On the other end, oral history research can also affect the meanings of a cultural phenomenon at the level of its practice. *Malanka* project illustrates this issue well. On one level, the goal of the Ukrainian folklore program at the University of Alberta was to promote Ukrainian culture on the Canadian prairies by recording the cultural tradition as is, in a particular moment of its practicing. Correspondingly, the project was to collect already existing interpretations and document the established meanings of these celebrations. On the other level, the academic involvement into Andrew community had triggered local re-evaluations of meanings of a tradition under study. Thus, the researchers instead of collecting already «existing interpretations», in the process of their sustained engagement with their informants, contributed to the re-evaluation of local meanings and interpretations of cultural phenomena under study. In other words, oral history, owing to its collaborative nature, has all the potential to change the meanings of history for those who want to learn it and the meanings of culture for those who continue to practice it, and the researchers should be highly aware of this.

Наталія ШОСТАК

**Про усну історію та творення сенсів:
нотатки з української Канади**

У своїй статті я аналізую вплив усноісторичних досліджень на конструювання сенсів культурних практик всередині спільнот, де проводяться такі дослідження, на конкретному прикладі взаємодії дослідник/інформатор в контексті усноісторичних студій серед

³³ It would be useful to return to the community of Andrew to observe *Malanka* festivities and to try to register new changes which may have been introduced in the ritual since 2001 interviews. The author has an intention to do so in the future

українців Канади. Сучасні усні історики мусять чітко усвідомлювати ефект їхньої власної заангажованості в процес збирання інтерв'ю на результати їхніх пошуків. Звертаючися зі своїми питаннями до людського минулого, усні історики спричиняються до і несуть відповідальність за історії, які прагнуть зібрати, записати й поширювати. Усвідомлення цього особливо необхідне в контексті самопізнання етнічних спільнот північноамериканського континенту. Подібно до інших етнічних груп, самопис українських канадців, особливо в минулому, зазвичай стимулювався певними політичними течіями, що змагалися всередині їхньої етнічної спільноти, й переконаннями у необхідності зміцнення власної ідентичності супроти панівних культур.