Myerhoff's "Third Voice": Ideology and Genre in Ethnographic Narrative

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Marc Kaminsky

> . . . an "ethno-person," the third person who is born by virtue of the collusion between interlocutor and subject.
> Barbara Myerhoff, "Surviving Stories: Reflections on *Number Our Days*"

> "A life made up entirely from the imagination."
> Shmuel, speaking to Barbara Myerhoff of *shtetl* life, in *Number Our Days*

Prefatory Note

This text is a revised part of an introduction to *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling and Growing Older* (1992),[1] a volume of the most important ethnographic essays that Barbara Myerhoff wrote between 1968 and her death in 1985. This was a period when she "repatriated" her work and undertook ground-breaking studies of the cultural creativity of elderly Yiddish-speaking Jews. Her work, and particularly her ethnographic narrative *Number Our Days*, has been accorded canonical status across a range of disciplines. In pages that memorably evoke the "structure of feeling" of Yiddish immigrant life, Myerhoff retails the life histories of elderly working-class Jews as a wholesale allegory of Americanization. The myth of the "one-generation proletariat" is conflated with the Eriksonian "ages of man" and Victor Turner's theory of ritual to produce a narrative of upward mobility through the realms of the spirit and the psyche and, through the professional success of the immigrant's children or grandchildren, the realm of the social as well. In this writing, Myerhoff persuasively represents and analyzes the oppositional character of the "elders'" cultural productions, and at the same time occludes its social and historical sources.[2] She captures the tangy "flavor" of Jewish socialist culture, but drains it of its ideologically "alien" and contestatory character. Nothing the old people do is construed in terms of politics; everything they do is construed under the concept of "definitional ceremonies" and thereby credited to the account of spirituality and existential self-affirmation. Myerhoff's "third voice" brings the voice(s) of Jewish socialism under the monologizing regime of anthropological authority, even as it seeks to initiate a break with disciplinary conformism.

This text offers a critique of Myerhoff's writing practice as part of its larger

task: to break open one of the monuments that mainstream documentary writing has erected over the grave in which it has buried the socialist generations of East European Jewish immigrants, so that our own continuing dialogue with usable traditions of struggle can go on—a task undertaken in the Benjaminian conviction that "even the dead" are not safe from the social knowledges that validate the reigning myths and reproduce the governing social relations.

In writing *Number Our Days*, Myerhoff reworked three of her ethnographic essays of the mid-1970s as chapters. In these matching essays and chapters, she produced completed texts describing the "same" cultural performances in different genres. There are conspicuous differences between the essays and chapters, crucial differences whose meaning can be specified in relation to their form-and-content unity. We can say that the "same" content is refashioned in the different texts; or we can say each text fashions its content to accord with its different interpretation of the ritual. Clifford Geertz, who has hardly forsaken the notion of a social reality indisputably *there* beyond all attempts to capture it in texts, nonetheless stresses that anthropological writings are fictive; and, wordsmith that he is, he reminds us that fiction is derived from the Latin for "something made, something fashioned." For him, ethnographies are like novels in that both are acts of the literary imagination, constructions of actor-oriented descriptions. But finally, for Geertz, the line between science and art, though "undrawable," is not to be crossed, and Myerhoff evidently crosses it. For Geertz, the "fictive" character is intrinsic to the ethnographic narrative as interpretative discourses. The boundary between actors and events that are (ethnographically) represented as actually the case, and those that are represented as belonging to the Imaginary, is to be steadfastly maintained. In Myerhoff's texts the quality of "fictiveness" infiltrates the empirical materials. But this "fictionalizing" adheres to conventions of realism in the novel which, in turn, refract and communicate our culture.[3]

The "novelistic" practice of *Number Our Days* problematized ethnographic writing for Myerhoff, and she turned to the essay to work on this issue. The essays that she produced after *Number Our Days* are saturated with this problematic, which she explored and masked under the sign of reflexivity (1982, 1986, 1988; Myerhoff and Ruby 1980). But in the notion of "the third voice" she directly acknowledged and conceptualized what had hitherto been a hidden (forbidden) linguistic zone of pleasure and struggle in her writing practice. This notion emerges, in retrospect, as one of the key formulations of Myerhoff's final years. Yet it nowhere appears in her published writings. And to my knowledge it was offered only once, and fleetingly: in a panel discussion on "Storytelling, Cultural Transmission, and Symbolic Immortality" at the 1983 meeting of the Gerontological Society of America. She presented it as the answer to a burning question: How does the ethnographer edit the informant's utterances?

This is, finally, not one question, but several interrelated ones. And it is not, finally, a technical (and therefore limited) question, to be construed solely in terms of the textual relations between anthropologist and subject. It became, for Myerhoff, a burning question because real social relationships were at stake. Yet the relationship between anthropologist and subject was mystified—sentimentalized—in the commentary that contextualized and led up to the question. These remarks rested upon a prior unification of her heterogeneous audience into a collective moral community. Her argument ran as follows: the psychologists and social workers, the social scientists and social historians who constituted her gerontological audience are all professionally engaged in taking life histories from old people. What are "we," as the guardians and keepers of their symbolic immortality, to do with the warehouse of words "we" collect? Editing, here, becomes "soulwork." And gerontologists of various disciplines, whether they take oral histories or case histories, carry the responsibility of preserving endangered traditions and the remembrance of mortal old people.

Thus Myerhoff conflated the roles of caregiver and producer of knowledge. Pervading the argument is the economic metaphor of limited resources that has increasingly governed gerontological discourse since the early Reagan years. Constrained to cut, how are "we" to go on providing the necessary services? The old people's words (and needs) exceed the space (and time) we have at hand for them. We must, to "salvage" them, practice the art of textual triage. This frames the asking of the technical question. What is repressed, in the pathos of the argument and its assumed description of the legitimating necessity for cuts, is the question of power. What kind of power is the anthropologist assuming over the informant's word? And to what end? In *Number Our Days*, Myerhoff as author, as sole owner and proprietor of the ethnographic text she produces, addresses the question of editing "verbatim materials" as follows:

> As often as possible, I have included verbatim materials, heavily edited and selected, inevitably, but sufficient to allow the reader some direct participation. I have tried to allow many individuals to emerge in their fullness and distinctiveness rather than presenting a completely generalized picture of group life. . . . The format of this book is designed to meet several purposes. In addition to wanting to speak within it as a participant, and wishing to preserve particular individuals, I wanted to render the elders' speech. Many verbatim statements are included. (1982:30–31)

This is fascinating: the pull between monologic and dialogic principles is intense. The result is a compromise: the informant's utterance, reduced to the status of raw empirical materials, is "heavily edited and selected, inevitably." The author as social scientist assumes a stance of authority whose basis she does not feel compelled to articulate: she speaks in the name of scientific knowledge, which deploys the raw materials in the direction of elucidating a concept, and in the name of writerly craft, which eliminates surplus verbiage

for the sake of textual efficiency. These scientific and aesthetic assumptions remain unacknowledged, but they are active in the text as conventionalist values that Myerhoff and her "immanent reader" hold in common. These values and their status as assumptions are evoked by the cavalier gesture of the adverb "inevitably." Questionable matters of text production are thereby ushered under the rule of (unspecified) Law(s) (of genre and scientific method).

But there is a feeling for the life of dialogue at work in this passage, counteracting the centripetal pull of anthropological authority. Here, the verbatimness of the "elders' speech," no longer construed as raw materials, is highly valued. Two different reasons are offered for this valuation. First, it is assumed that the fullness and distinctiveness of the individual can emerge only through his or her concrete word, directly engaged. Second, it is assumed that only through dialogic contact can all parties concerned—writer, reader, and informant—participate in the text. Insofar as the writer is seeking to promote this participatory interaction, she is interested in a dialogized text. But the dialogical participation proposed by this text is rather one-sided and must be distinguished from the dialogic principle theorized by Bakhtin and taken up by the "new ethnography." Here, the anthropological author retains totalizing control over the discourse. Although she is interested in a more "participatory" text, this has largely to do with her desire "to speak within it as a participant." This shift is not accompanied by an equivalent and balancing transfer of observational power to the subject of the participant-observer method. "I wanted to render the elders' speech." The author retains monologizing authority to frame—in both senses—the speech of the other, who is not granted the right of comeback: the discursive space in which to evaluate the anthropologist's renderings.

The initial answer to the "editorial" question that Myerhoff offers in *Number Our Days* not only finesses the problems of text production with which she has begun to struggle, it also mystifies the writing practice that she developed in this book. The burden she was left with, then, was to develop a concept of ethnography-as-text that simultaneously described and legitimated her actual practice. The notion of the third voice was an attempt to do just that. At the panel on storytelling, she read the transcripts of a number of stories that she had collected from Holocaust survivors, refuseniks, Hasidim, and others in the Fairfax neighborhood of Los Angeles, wondered aloud about what one is to do with all that material, and then commented that these "tales from Fairfax are to be written in the third voice, which is neither the voice of the informant nor the voice of the interviewer, but the voice of their collaboration."

This statement, for all its suggestiveness, is too slight in itself to warrant critique and analysis. It acquires substantiality, however, in relation to Myerhoff's (unfinished) oeuvre, to her project of initiating new forms of ethnographic writing, and to the considerable influence her emphasis on narrative and "reflexivity" had on (some of) her colleagues. The statement, then, has to

be contextualized in terms of the ongoing project it seeks to make possible as well as its historical moment in disciplinary ideology and knowledge production.

The immediate spur that led to the notion of the third voice was the writing problem Myerhoff had posed for herself in working through "the Fairfax project." Here, she sought to develop the artistic and storytelling side of her practice as an ethnographer. She wished to find a way of editing the personal narratives that she had collected, so that everything she knew about them would be invisibly embedded in the tale, through the editing: the tale would be presented without the overt discourse of the interpreting anthropologist. Buber's *Tales of the Early Hasidic Masters* was, for her, an inspiration and a model of this sort of covert operation. The notion of the third voice was formulated in her attempt to work through the problem of jettisoning explicit anthropological discourse and saturating the narrative discourse of the informant with the disciplinary knowledge of the author-editor. Neither the antignostic bias of Buber's secularizing and romanticizing interpretations, nor, more crucially, the scientific validity of "what she knew" and the legitimacy of fusing her knowledge with her informant's discourse had been problematized for her.

This nonrecognition of the way in which even experimental compositional forms can implement a discourse of domination exposes the (liberal) ideological blinders that framed her field of vision, but this blind spot also marks the intersection of her disciplinary worldview and a particular moment in time. Myerhoff's ignorance of discourse theory situates her in her professional place—she was formed as a "symbolic anthropologist" in the school(s) of Turner and Geertz—and in her time, when these "master" voices had not been challenged in strong critiques. In 1983, the critical essays of Clifford, Marcus, and other initiators of "the new ethnography" had just begun to appear. However, it wasn't until the mid-1980s (that is, after Myerhoff's death), with the appearance of works such as *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* and *Writing Culture*, that the appropriation of Raymond Williams, Bakhtin, Foucault, and Derrida by anthropology was widely known and debated. Myerhoff, then, was struggling with her own writing project as well as the knowledge of her violations of the conventions of ethnographic realism in her previous work—violations that made the general "crisis of representation in the human sciences" a personally lived crisis for her—during the prehistory of the textualist movement.

In the early 1980s, her work moves toward a scrimmage line that has not yet taken shape as a disciplinary struggle. She is a "middle" figure, between the old and the new, a writer of culture in whom destabilizing elements of "the new" begin to make an appearance, but in secret—in transgressions carried out with a mixture of creative élan and anxiety, under the cover of a law of genre to which the writer is no longer willing to adhere.

Viewed from within its own context, the notion of the third voice is a pro-

found and momentous suggestion, an open break with conventional anthropological discourse: it is intended to give full weight (and honor) to the voice of the informant, which is at once elevated and transfigured by being conceptualized (presented) as the voice of the storyteller, a venerable and wise "elder." The notion of the third voice formulates a writing project and points to a development that is moving away from monologism, toward dialogism. It marks a decisive shift in position away from the monologically framed contact among speakers that Myerhoff described in *Number Our Days*, toward a concept of writing culture that is constituted by the collaborative relationship between interviewer and informant. This formulation not only describes a category of discourse that is double-voiced, but also seeks to legitimate double-voiced discourse as a valid mode of representation in the human sciences.

Myerhoff's work, in retrospect, has begun to appear important to "textualist" colleagues who, in her lifetime, respected her but at the same time tended to view her as "lightweight or media-oriented—a Margaret Mead figure." Thus, George Marcus, after reading the late essays collected in *Remembered Lives*, wrote (in a letter) that Myerhoff's work represents "a pioneering effort to change the manner of anthropological writing and, with it, the manner of anthropological research." Any nuanced evaluation of Myerhoff's work has to recognize this contribution but then go beyond this context and offer a critique "that comes from elsewhere." Before offering an extended analysis of Myerhoff's "third voice," I want briefly to miniaturize the theoretical purview from which its limitations become evident.

Compare Myerhoff's formulation with the way in which Bakhtin introduces the concept of double-voiced discourse in his study of Dostoyevsky (1984:189):

> But the author may also make use of someone else's discourse for his own purposes, by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own. Such a discourse, in keeping with its task, must be perceived as belonging to someone else. In one discourse, two semantic positions appear, two voices. . . . Here we move on to the characteristics of the third type of discourse [i.e., double-voiced discourse].

Myerhoff's formulation emphasizes the fusion of the two voices into an abstracted third voice in which their distinct semantic intentions are erased. In Bakhtin, who is ever conscious of the power relations among speaking voices that enter into contact, the boundary marking the separation between different semantic intentions is never obliterated in double-voiced discourse. The liquidation of this difference, in Bakhtin, marks the destruction of the dialogic context and its passage into monologism. Although Myerhoff's third voice moves into the discursive terrain that Bakhtin recognizes as double-voiced, her formulation evades the whole problem of the relationship between her discourse and "somebody else's discourse," thus rendering it wildly inappropriate to ask

the question that the caterpillar poses to Alice, concerning the meaning of words: the question of who shall be master. The key term in Myerhoff's formulation, "collaboration," mystifies the fact that in her attempt to conceptualize her writing practice, ultimate semantic authority resides with the anthropological author and that in actuality the informant who yields her words to the interviewer neither collaborates in text production nor knows what turns her words will be given in the author's hands.

The subordination of the informant's voice under the shaping intention of the interviewer-author is implemented under the conceptual screen provided by an idea of collaboration that is psychologically saturated with the "symbiotic relationships" that were normative and adaptive in East European Jewish culture (Kaminsky 1992a) and ideologically saturated with the class-denying ideal of the liberal consensus.

In the notion of the third voice, the immediate technical question (of editing an informant's utterance) is subsumed under a concept that theorizes the interrelation between the text and a social process: the ongoing structured and informal dialogue between ethnographer and subject. This is, then, a complex notion. In discussing its significance, I want to take up the following points: the use of the third voice as a principle of editing texts; the link between text production and the informant interview; the specific form that the third voice takes in Myerhoff's writing; and the problem of the interrelation between textual and social relations in the transmission of culture.

The notion of the third voice proposes a principle for editing utterance that is grounded in the dialogue between the informant and anthropologist. It authorizes a departure from the verbatim transcript, but it balances this license against a principle of constraint. Implicit in the editorial license that this notion provides there is a theory of discourse that can be amplified in the following (Bakhtinian) terms. The ethnographer's editorial intervention must adhere to the process of the interview: that is, it must textualize communicative elements such as intonation and gesture that are as much a part of the utterance as the spoken word. And it can incorporate into the text additions, revisions, restructurings, and clarifications that adhere to and articulate the process and meaning of the informant's utterance. These criteria are intrinsic to Myerhoff's notion of the third voice. In teaching the life-history method, she made the latter intervention explicit in a form that pointed toward a more genuinely dialogical text than she herself produced in her writing. Her students were asked to return to their informants, read back their life-history texts, and incorporate any clarifications and revisions that the informant offered.

In the notion of the third voice, Myerhoff describes a discursive strategy that makes it possible for an ethnographic text to tell a theoretically sophisticated tale in the voice of a "naive" or native storyteller. A text of this type—and *Number Our Days* abounds in this hidden genre—dialogizes what the ethnographer knows and what the informant said. Here, however, full and gen-

uine dialogic relations remain undeveloped. A text fully constituted by dialogic discourse would give the informant equal evaluative access to what the ethnographer said. Only in Myerhoff's dialogues with Shmuel does this mutual refraction of the other's word occur; hence, the astonishing richness and power of these passages, which nonetheless do not accomplish a decisive break with a monological intention: they serve as thesis-advancing argumentation.

The strength of the notion of the third voice is that it views the informant's information as utterance, not as inert data that is insensible to the categorical blade of the ethnographer's knowledge. That is, the "data" are generated in and through a lived process of face-to-face dialogue. This fact is finally what the notion of the third voice appeals to, by way of legitimating Myerhoff's "editorial" practices.

Framing the issue in terms of "editing" seeks to contain and minimize what is at stake here. Ethnographic text production, and not an element of it, is at issue. Myerhoff grounds the legitimacy of her writerly practice in the process of ethnographic research: in the dialogic character of the participant-observation method. Myerhoff grasped that the informant's utterances were constructed by the interview situation. In Bakhtin, this realization is construed as the co-creation of the utterance by the speaker and the listener, and it is analyzed in terms of the principle that speech is oriented toward the listener. In Myerhoff's essayistic reflections on this question, the coproduction of the ethnographic dialogue is construed under a formalist theory of communication. Based on this view, the difficulty and complexity of the dialogical process are at once schematically flattened and mystified under a (formalist) bipolar opposition between "the natural" and "the artificial." Commenting on the "permanent ethno-dialogue" that ethnographer-filmmaker Jean Rouch calls "shared anthropology," Myerhoff and Ruby write:

> Rouch does not go to the extreme of calling his subject an "ethno-person," but it would not be unreasonable to do so. The anthropologist and the subject of study together construct an interpretation of a cultural feature, an understanding of the interpreter that would not have come into existence naturally. The study is an artifice and resembles nothing but itself, a collusion of two viewpoints meeting in a middle terrain, created by the artificial circumstances of the foreigner's visit and project. (1980:20)

Along with its depoliticization of "the circumstances of the foreigner's visit," this is a rhetorical attempt to transvalue "the artificial," by conflating it with scientific research and making it a category of "the experimental": set-apart conditions created in pursuit of scientific truth. Repudiated empiricism has lapsed back into the argument, subliminally, as a source of value. This critique, in fact, has never finally broken with empiricism. The real confusion is between the "laboratory conditions" set up by the pursuit of knowledge in the natural sciences, and the (mystified) social conditions (of colonialism) which are the "laboratory" of research in this field of the human sciences. "Artifice,"

in this passage, covers the different and contradictory senses of "the experimental" (as the method of the natural sciences) and "the social" in a single term. This can be readily demonstrated by replacing this bad abstraction with the senses it covers: "The study is an [*experiment*] and resembles nothing but itself, . . . created by the [*social*] circumstances of the foreigner's visit and project."

This passage is significantly reworked in Myerhoff's last essay, which was drafted contemporaneously with her panel presentation on the third voice. Here the conventional dichotomy of "the artificial" and the "natural"—a rhetorical move that views science under an aesthetic category—continues to organize the thought, but this motif is developed and amplified differently. Referring to the heightened reflexive consciousness that ethnographic films can produce in their subjects, Myerhoff writes that "the same process can be observed in interviewing":

> When one takes a very long, careful life history of another person, complex changes occur between subject and object. Inventions and distortions emerge; neither party remains the same. A new creation is constituted when two points of view are engaged in examining one life. The new creation has its own integrity but should not be mistaken for the spontaneous, unframed life-as-lived person who existed before the interview began. This could be called an "ethnoperson," the third person who is born by virtue of the collusion between the interlocutor and subject. (1988:281)

Here, life is construed as "the natural," and not as a process that is socially constructed. This is then set off against the "inventions and distortions" that are implicitly legitimated as a concomitant of research in the interpretive human sciences. What is significant here is the emphasis on "a new creation" that has "its own integrity."

The argument, while resonating with artistic and psychological overtones—i.e., both parties are changed in unspecified ways—has moved decidedly to moral grounds. But Myerhoff confesses the duress under which she writes in an astounding moral oxymoron: "by virtue of collusion." Collusion is the telltale word in both statements, and gives away Myerhoff's conflicted position, between the norms of empiricism and the "new creation" she has produced and seeks to theorize. In this word, a collaborative relation is charged with secret purpose, secret knowledge, and secret guilt. Collusion is a "secret agreement for fraudulent or treacherous purposes; a conspiracy"; collusive practices are "fraudulently contrived" (*Random House College Dictionary*). Myerhoff did not use the word without an awareness of its moral intonation; she was playing off the morally suspect character of the contrivance against the "virtue" and "integrity" of "the new creation." The brilliance of this passage lies in its double-voicedness: it sets two evaluations of the "new creation" side by side and does not blend them, but allows them antagonistically to confront each other. And yet this brilliance is used, finally, as a way of finessing the

great problem of textuality that she was living and working through. What we get, rather than a direct engagement with the issues that were vexing not only to her but were soon to emerge as a major debate in the human sciences, is an indirect confession.

Myerhoff's confession, her own "collusive" knowledge, was subsumed under the critique of empiricism. The indicting gesture made by these texts brings the ethnographic dialogue, construed as an instrument of empiricist research, under suspicion. But Myerhoff, characteristically, described and lived through the dialogue between anthropologist and informant in two distinct ways: under two different tropes or symbol systems. As an interview between social scientist and informant, it had an "artificial" character, separated from "natural" dialogues. But this face-to-face encounter between herself and an old person was also what might be called "a storytelling relationship." This term evokes a very different sort of meeting. It exceeds the boundaries and roles of social science research. It is represented and lived through with great (moral) intensity as a communication between the figures of the teller and the listener.

This second "face" of "ethno-dialogue," not as research interview but as a social relationship between a listener and a teller, is the aspect of Myerhoff's work that intersects with Bakhtin. The profound emphasis that Myerhoff gives to what, in a talk, she once called "the pathos of the absent listener" is encountered, in Bakhtin, as the suffering brought about by "nonrecognition" and the absence of a "watchful listener" (Bakhtin 1984:288; Todorov 1984:110–11). In both, the attention of the listener is understood as a social necessity, ultimately continuous with maternal nurturance; it carries the same force as "mirroring" does in contemporary object relations theory: wholeness and self-knowledge are contingent upon it (see "Life History among the Elderly" 1980:115–17; "Life Not Death in Venice" 1988:267).

The role of the listener was at the center of Myerhoff's practice as an ethnographer. There were moments, as I listened to her speak, when this appeared to me to be the still center of her restless thought—it isn't—by virtue of what she founded upon it: not only scientific knowledge, but "our" entire development, the wholeness and self-knowledge that she conversationally described as "growing a soul." The listener not only gave the old people abundant supplies of fine attention, for which they were starving, but in the process was changed. Such listening was the gate through which the stranded and rootless anthropologist entered the cycle of generations, so that she could say (as Adrienne Rich triumphantly discovers at the end of a poem on immigrant grandparents) "I, too, live in history."

No concept in Myerhoff's work was more profoundly lived through, as a scientific practice and as an ethical stance, than that of the role of the listener. Here I must cast a glance at her life and mention two things: that Myerhoff had a genius for listening, and that this gift, which grew through her cultivation of

it, was inseparable from her "hunger" to listen ("A Crack in the Mirror" 1980:30–31; 1982:239–41). She experienced listening as something akin to soul-flight: a period of grace, when she was granted the gift of leaving her own life to travel in another's. She claimed for anthropology what Milosz claims for poetry (in "Ars Poetica?"):

> The purpose of poetry is to remind us
> how difficult it is to remain just one person,
> our house is open, there are no keys in the door,
> and invisible guests come and go at will.

Myerhoff's love of poetry is articulated in this passage: the poet who mattered most for her was Rilke, whose vigilant listening for the "angels" (of invisibility) was for her the image of a sacralization of a secular vocation. This spoke to the side of her aspiration that was moved, not by the production of scientific knowledge, or by academic success, but by an experience she attained only in and through listening to the other: membership in a spiritual community that lifted her beyond the clock time in which she normally lived.

Myerhoff's gift as a listener had to do with communicating this sense of possible transcendence to others: for communicating the desire and inspiration with which she received the other's utterances. This "listening" had an extraordinarily powerful impact upon informants, students, colleagues, and friends. Deena Metzger, her lifelong friend, said that in the circle of Myerhoff's gaze, each person felt that he or she was "the most beloved." Immersed in this full and unusually intense attentiveness, received by a listener who offered herself as a "partner in security" (Grotowski's image of the ideal auditor before whom the actor can take all risks and go utterly naked); met, moreover, by someone whose steadiness of attention by turns offered the speaker a supple, accepting, lucid, brilliant auditor, Myerhoff's interlocutors felt free to think and feel through dimensions of their experience that they had not owned or connected before. She was often present at the saying-aloud for the first time of something long lived with, subliminally. The interview felt emancipatory. The gathered material registered the sense of discovery. What sometimes felt like wisdom literature resulted. This is nowhere more the case than in the late tales she collected in Fairfax.

Myerhoff, as an ethnographic writer, sought to "do" two different things with her experience of the storytelling relationship. She made the medium of the storytelling relationship an object of inquiry. In essays such as "Life History among the Elderly," she describes attention as a valuable but socially unrecognized form of work (usually performed by women, without compensation). In *Number Our Days*, she tells stories that exceed their status as exempla of anthropological concepts. The notion of the third voice, as I have emphasized, was directly linked to Myerhoff's desire to expand and develop the storytelling side of her writing practice. This intention intertwined artistic aspira-

tion and a sense of moral commitment to the role of listener. As she conceived it, the third voice would emancipate subordinated storytelling from the regime of anthropological discourse. Here, compositional forms were abstracted from actual speakers, so that what was to be emancipated, in the projected *Tales from Fairfax*, was a linguistic zone of storytelling, which, in Myerhoff's formalist view, thereby emancipated the informant from the stylistically oppressive word of academic discourse. These are the formalist terms in which she tried to work through her commitment to personal narrative. But compositional forms in and of themselves cannot be "sites" of emancipation. Bakhtin stressed that the dialogicality of a given discourse is not determined by this or that compositional form, but by the "dialogic angle or relationship" between the two voices that come into contact in the discourse. Within the sphere of the third voice, the anthropologist kicked off the traces of professional discipline, but the informant remained subordinated.

The notion of the third voice, then, is itself an instance of double-voiced discourse: it answers back the internalized voice of empiricism, which challenges the moral and scientific legitimacy of Myerhoff's writing practice. In its contention with empiricism, the link that this notion makes between the writing and the listening, between text production and research interview, is axial. The high ethical character and scientific respectability of the informant interview are thereby transferred to a writing practice that (for Myerhoff) is still untheorized and, therefore, questionable. The notion of the third voice is a seed of theory—and theory justifies as it explains—which, decoded and writ large, argues the following:

The (oral and textualized) tale is at all points a social construct, produced in and through dialogic relations. The co-creation of the tale begins in the telling and carries through into the writing. Myerhoff is implicitly presenting a major idea that is made explicit in the cultural theory of Bakhtin and Raymond Williams: the notion of the third voice is founded upon a communication model of cultural creativity. In the communicative arena of the storytelling relationship, the listener overtly and covertly coproduces the teller's utterance. The gestures, intonations, and verbal interventions of the listener have profound significance in shaping the teller's discourse, which is subtly modified from within by its orientation to the listener.

Myerhoff's notion of the third voice moves in the direction of Bakhtin in that it carries over the relationship between teller and listener from "life" to writing. The process of communication at work in the formation of discourse is, in this view, no longer separated into "natural" and "artificial" categories. Discourse in speaking and discourse in writing are understood as a culturally formed social process. The categories of "the artificial" and "the natural" are themselves "artificial," that is, constructed to separate what is a social process of communication through and through.

The crucial move made by the notion of the third voice is that it grounds the

collaborative author's interventions in the process of communication between teller and listener; this notion construes the author as listener who continues, "on paper," a process that is initiated in face-to-face dialogue. Text and talk are inseparable. Positing the continuity of the role of the listener in the role of the ethnographic writer is, in the first instance, a biographical matter: the same person carries through these connected roles. But in the last instance, this link is a matter of discursive practice. Just as the listener/interviewer, in overt as well as uncontrollable and incalculable ways, shapes the dialogue, so the listener-as-author, engaged in the act of editing the transcript and writing the ethnographic text, now hears and sees the "meaning" of the utterance, and can intervene to help articulate this coproduced meaning more "clearly." Just as a concurring or clarifying word is inserted into the dialogue, so the writer-as-listener offers her suggestive or interpretative word into the co-created discourse.

This brings us to Myerhoff's actual writing practice in *Number Our Days*. She "inevitably" shaped the transcript in ways that felt, in the writing, "natural" to her. This went beyond omitting and restructuring elements of the utterance. And it went beyond framing utterances in her strong interpretation of them. It meant subtle, nearly invisible acts of clarification and interpretation that were made by infiltrating the utterance and lodging her own distinct word within it, manipulating it from within. This writing practice, which is typical of nineteenth-century novelistic discourse, was described by Bakhtin in the famous discourse typology that he presented in the Dostoyevsky book (chapter 5). In his cogent elucidation of Bakhtin's discourse typology, McClellan distinguishes double-voiced from single-voiced (monologic) discourse as follows:

> In monologic discourse the author's relationship to another's discourse is defined by these two essential characteristics: the boundaries of another's discourse are clearly marked but the objectified discourse is subjected to the direct dominance and control of authorial intention. This is not the case with double-voiced or dialogic discourse.
>
> An essential characteristic of Bakhtin's definition of double-voiced discourse resides in the fact that such discourse in addition to its orientation toward a referential object, is oriented as well toward another's utterance. In comparison, monologic or single-voiced discourse, is oriented primarily toward its object of reference and contains a single dominating intention. On the other hand, double-voiced discourse has two semantic intentions, or two "voices" residing and conflicting in the utterance. The second intention, the authorial "voice" infiltrates the utterance from within redirecting but not obliterating the original intention. One way of doing this is to conventionalize the utterance creating a distance between the two voices. (1985:38–39)

In the Dostoyevsky book, Bakhtin lays out a typology of various kinds of double-voiced discourse. The specific type of Bakhtinian double-voiced discourse that corresponds to Myerhoff's notion of the third voice and that offers ana-

lytic access to her hidden writing practice in *Number Our Days* is "narrator's narration."

Bakhtin distinguishes the narration of a narrator from authorial narration. The former is "a compositional substitute for the author's word." He defines narrator's narration as follows:

> Someone else's verbal manner is utilized by the author as a point of view, as a position indispensable for him for carrying out the story. . . . But the narrator's discourse can never become purely objectified, even when he himself is one of the characters and takes upon himself only part of the narration. His importance to the author, after all, lies not only in his individual and typical manner of thinking, experiencing, and speaking, but above all in his manner of seeing and portraying: in this lies his direct function as a narrator replacing the author. Therefore the author's attitude, as in stylization, penetrates inside the narrator's discourse, rendering it to a greater or lesser degree conventional. . . . [Narrator's narration] is a refraction of the author's intention through the words of a narrator; discourse here is double-voiced. (1984:190–91)

Shmuel's utterances, more than those of any other character-narrator in *Number Our Days*, are used by Myerhoff in this way; but narrator's narration is characteristic of the "elder's speech" throughout the book.

Discourse in *Number Our Days*, unlike discourse in the scholarly essays, is oriented toward three different social groups with which the author is affiliated and in conflict. These are (1) an educated middle-class audience, to whom Myerhoff speaks in a conversational style that easily mixes erudition and novelistic narrative; (2) colleagues in the social sciences, who are (so to speak) positioned above this middle range of discourse, in a balcony reserved for the jury of her peers, to whom she gestures and before whom she feels accountable; and, finally, (3) the informants themselves, who are literate and whom she cannot entirely exclude from the company of her readers. These three different groups have different (and fluctuating) relations with the author as narrator (Myerhoff) and as character (the "lady professor, Babrushka"). All this makes for the rhetorical complexity of this work, which combines monologic discourse with two kinds of double-voiced discourse: hidden polemic (both the author's and the elder's), which determines the form of key "definitional ceremonies" (Myerhoff 1986; Kaminsky 1992b) and narrator's narration.

In this second kind of discourse, the author's narrative and evaluative intention are carried forward in the socially alien voice of a character. It is to be found wherever the author's focusing, reaccentuating, clarifying word takes up residence inside the character's utterance. Hannah's word for the tyrannical Center ritual-maker and president—"zealot"—is imported from Myerhoff's discourse (1980:85, 95). Moshe's descriptive term for a traveling group of gypsies or circus performances—"carnival"—emigrates also from Myerhoff's lexicon of privileged terms (1980:85, 83). When Heschel, in a moral tale that Myerhoff frequently quoted and republished, says that "you get a clarification"

(1980:197); and when Shmuel, in the midst of the most tragic utterance in the book, conventionalizes and tags his memories of *shtetl* life with epistemological constructionalism, "[a] life made up entirely from the imagination," we hear Myerhoff's key words: the accent of the author's voice penetrates the character's utterance, saturating it with her knowledge, rendering it an example of her conceptual truth. Only as independent testimony do these little and big stories have value to her. They are offered in her book as evidence that demonstrates the validity of her interpretative moves and of her conceptual foundations.

It is impossible to know the extent to which Myerhoff engaged in the art of infiltrating the other's utterance, and depositing her authorial word inside the others' speech, so that it would speak her authorial truth without thereby erasing the others' social language. Was this "tampering with the evidence" or enlisting her writerly gifts to make legitimate interpretative moves, from within the utterance? That Myerhoff did not specify, in *Number Our Days*, what form her "editing" had taken may be read as a sign of her intimidation in the face of the power of empiricist norms. All of her subsequent work shows that she was moving toward acknowledging, thinking through, and legitimating the "liberties" and innovations of *Number Our Days*. In summary, it is possible to specify the difference between *Number Our Days* and the ethnographic essays by the former's free and pervasive use of double-voiced discourse, particularly narrator's narration. As a veiled practice, this is unquestionably problematic, both scientifically and ideologically. Yet it arises out of the process of the "scientific imagination" that is engaged in anthropological fieldwork and writing. As such, it can be argued that this writing practice is defensible as an act of interpretation: of entering the "experience-near" language of the informant and marking it with the "experience-distant" term that translates (conventionalizes) the unfamiliar speech for American middle-class reception (cf. Geertz 1983:56–59).

Myerhoff's authorial word enters the other's utterance from the lived subject position of the listener, that is, as if it were a gift of loving attention. This reaccentuating word seeks to translate the "greenhorn" voice of the Yiddish-speaking old person for the educated (and potentially condescending) auditor. In so doing, this mirroring word assimilates the elder's utterances to conventional discourse, rendering the speech more capable of commanding the respect of respectable persons, while it concurrently makes the truth that Myerhoff has discerned therein more recognizable to her educated, middle-class readers. This appropriation of the other's speech is a transformation that makes it "audible" to an audience that has classified this "broken English" as lower-class and ignorant. Myerhoff retains (and, in her acts of ventriloquism, exaggerates) Yiddish syntax, which, in its disturbance of the normal English syntactical patterns, creates a whiplash effect of immense (sardonic) emphasis.

But she loads up these sidewinding sentences with educated diction. What she thereby "restores" to the old people's talk is the intelligence and self-knowledge that the Yiddish-English utterance, for a prejudiced or socially distant reader, would lack.

This is done respectfully, tactfully, with great artistry and in profound allegiance with her subjects, whose "wisdom" she is promoting. Yet this lessening of the linguistic distance between the Yiddish-speaking old people and her middle-class audience, while it is a mark of Myerhoff's actual respect for the old people, is also a way of subordinating their difference and instituting a subjugating discourse that overrides theirs. The difference between the informants' and the dominant discourse—a linguistic zone that bears the audible traces of their politically engaged cultural history—is (ideologically) neutralized. At every point in Myerhoff's practice, we encounter the discursive effects of her position as liberal intermediary between antagonistic positions.

In the book, this contradiction is narrated as "the generation gap." Myerhoff avoids the banal term, but relies upon the conventional wisdom of the thought, as a crucial subplot in the making of the master narrative of the book. This is the narrative that turns informants, and especially very old informants, into the most recent addition to the great hall of nearly extinct tribes, the latest version of "the last of the Mohegans." It inserts the anthropologist into the process of cultural transmission as an essential, and salvific, protagonist. And it accounts for the practice of "salvage ethnology" (1980:150–51). Shmuel, after hearing Myerhoff's cunning and charming defense of this "work" (i.e., both the research and the book she is writing), responds: "It isn't science. It isn't history. It isn't art. You are cooking here a *tsimmes* from all these things you pick up. A carrot here, a prune there, in it goes" (1980:150–51). And this is something of a set-up: it allows Myerhoff to make a brilliant defense of "salvage ethnology" that melds it, as a Geertzian blurred genre, with the old people's creation of culture through bricolage.

The textual authority of the ethnographer/editor is implicitly being legitimated by the master narrative of salvage. In this narrative, the anthropologist is compelled to rescue precious cultural artifacts (practices, discourses, social wisdom) of a vanishing tribe that modernization has doomed. History, in Myerhoff's book, is personified by the immigrant's upwardly-mobile children; the neglect of an uncaring society is primarily represented as the distance and indifference of the old people's children. This latter claim, crucial for Myerhoff's position in *Number Our Days*, is simplified and exaggerated. It leaves out the historical process that has produced the contemporary isolation of old people. This complex process is constituted by a division of labor that has standardized age-segmentation throughout the life cycle and increased the segregation between "life stages" (Rosenmayr 1982:19–20), and by the transfer of functions connected with caring for the elderly from the family to the welfare

state. The "incompleteness," the "ambiguity and failure" of this transfer (Hareven 1982:3–4) have produced political controversy at the level of policy and "gaps in service" within an everyday life dependent on welfare agencies; it has been lived through as generational conflict. Because of her "imaginative identification" with the old people's disappointed—often shocked—expectation of being directly cared for by their children in old age, Myerhoff totalized her depiction of the difficult and often-conflicted involvement of the second generation with their parents and with the culture of Yiddish.

In her project of salvage, Myerhoff (an assimilated Jew with no knowledge of Yiddish) assumes the role of cultural next of kin which, by extension, gives her property rights over the informant's words. She can dispose of them in what she believes to be the best interests of the treasure entrusted to her keeping. She is called upon to transmit Yiddishkeit to succeeding generations because the actual children of these "elders" have discarded the precious legacy that was, but no longer is, theirs. The topic of the panel discussion at which Myerhoff proposed the notion of the third voice turns out to have been more than a pretext and an occasion: "cultural transmission and symbolic immortality" are the lived historical context that, for Myerhoff, compel the ethnographer to learn to speak and write in the third voice. The "elders," whom history and their children's neglect have robbed of successors, need the redemptive salvager of culture as their (female) Kaddish and as the sole responsible guardian and keeper of their legacy. In this master narrative, the textual relations between author/editor and informant are moralized in terms of a specific set of social relations: the property rights acquired by the true heir and successor. Here, the text is a warehouse of words in which everything is left in, even the items that the anthropologist can make nothing of; these "bits and pieces" are salvaged for future interpretation (1980:150–51). This image of the text as collection of cultural bric-a-brac has little in common with the counterimage of an efficient, heavily edited, and selected text except this: both internally legitimate the ethnographer's authorial control over the empirical materials contained therein, and both construe the elder's speech as raw materials to be processed by the ethnographer. Both of the text's opposing self-representations legitimate the author's authority.

The essays that Myerhoff wrote after the mid-1970s are haunted by the "transgressions" and discoveries of *Number Our Days*. The work on reflexivity, in which ethnographic writing is taken up as a problem, can only be fully grasped when it is read "against" *Number Our Days*: the essays seek to work through (describe and legitimate) the exhilarating, but secret, innovation of narrator's narration. The most dynamic aspect of the essays on reflexivity constitutes a veiled confession of a hidden practice. In key passages on "exaggeration" (1980:66, 111; "Surviving Stories" 1988b:285) and in the bad faith written into the word "collusion," which is used in these texts as a telling

alternative to "collaboration," Myerhoff is moving through confession toward a working through of the principle of double-voiced discourse that she enunciated, once and briefly, in the notion of the third voice.

As the foregoing discussion makes evident, the genealogy of Myerhoff's notion of the third voice can be traced through her late essays on reflexive genres, through a series of constructionalist terms that owe their immediate origin to Rouch's "ethno-dialogue," move through Myerhoff's and Ruby's "ethno-person," and are subsequently amplified—personified—as "the third person who is born" via the "ethno-dialogue." Given the inseparable link between the third voice and the work on reflexivity, and given the influence of the published work, it is crucial to carry through this critique on the terrain of reflexivity.

The third voice marks a departure in compositional form, but as double-voiced discourse it proceeds along the same plane as Myerhoff's reflexive narratives. The self-effacement of the anthropologist in tales told in the third voice, and the foregrounding of the positioned and positioning anthropologist in reflexive narratives, are not as different as they appear: both reproduce the same set of dialogic relationships, and both conceal the actual process of text production, the former in a text that effaces the activity of the anthropologist, the latter in a text that presents a self-portrait of her "consciousness of her consciousness," that "doubles the mirrors." Both forms are founded upon the principle—which receives direct or indirect representation—that the life of dialogue is at the heart of anthropological investigation. However, neither form takes shape in and through a full and genuine dialogicality. To state their interrelation genealogically, the dialogic limitations of the work on reflexivity were carried over and structured the notion of the third voice. These limitations can be briefly specified in two ways.

First, the informant in relation to whom the ethnographer coproduces cultural interpretation does not emerge in this writing as a full dialogic partner, a speaking subject who offers distinct, different, and contesting interpretations. What is thereby erased, in this conventionalizing discourse, is the political culture of the old people and, specifically, the actual source(s) of the creative processes that Myerhoff describes and celebrates, which were embedded in the culture of Jewish socialism. The formal experimentalism to which reflexive genres are committed does not, in itself, liberate them from the mechanisms of textual repression that more conventional genres of ethnographic realism employ. These, too, are texts in which lost histories are buried under a discourse of subjugation or domination. But reflexivity can also be used, as Marcus and Fischer point out in a fine, extended discussion of "the dialogic roots of ethnographic knowledge," to open the writing to dialogicality. They interrelate the constructionalist emphasis on the motifs of creativity and reflexivity

with the move toward construing the ethnographic subject as a fellow author in and of the text:

> The view of culture as a flexible construction of the creative faculties encourages ethnographers to expose their procedures of representation, make them self-conscious as writers, and ultimately suggests to them the possibility of including other authorial voices (those of the subjects) in the texts. (1986:125)

The other limitation in Myerhoff's theorization of reflexivity is the absence of what Bakhtin calls "the immanent reader," that is, the listener projected by the discourse, the imaginary auditor in relation to whom the author positions herself and orients her discourse. This problem is strikingly evident in Myerhoff's and Ruby's use of a communication model that has three key terms: producer/process/product. This is actually a media-based model of transmission (a one-way sending which posits the other as passive consumer), and not of communication (a two-way dialogue in which the other in determinate ways coproduces the content in relation to the author/speaker). In the essays on reflexive genres, the other and otherness are cited (Myerhoff and Metzger 1980:111; Myerhoff and Ruby 1980:5), but the other remains at the borders of text production, as the actual recipient of the transmitted content. The other as an active voice or concrete subject position within the text is not specified.

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Notes

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2. One sign of the repression that (inconsistently) reigns over this writing: although the "elders" whom Myerhoff studied identified themselves as socialists, communists, or "progressives" throughout their lives, these terms and nearly all signs of their continuing political engagement are erased from her ethnographic essays. Having come to the task of editing her papers knowing only Myerhoff herself—fierce in her commitment to the old people she worked with—and *Number Our Days*, the "novelized" ethnography in which the old people's politics does appear (albeit in descriptions that separate and devalue this area of activity, which saturated all aspects of Yiddish immigrant culture), I was angered to find that in her academic work she had so capitulated to "conformism" as to purge her text of that embarrassing word, socialism—and the whole social formation that had been crucial to the culture and identity of the "elders" whose fighting spirit she celebrated. In the present text, that anger—quite personal, in that these dead are my own, the Bundist grandparents in whose household I was culturally formed—is muted, transformed into a specifying analy-

sis, so that the anthropologists and gerontologists to whom my introduction is addressed will not be able to dismiss my critique out of hand with some remark about the grinding of ideological axes. And, in fact, I have set out to make Myerhoff's constituency see that, in depoliticizing and reenchanting "the culture of aging" (there is no such thing), Myerhoff's "beyond-ideology" writing, far from burying the ideological hatchet, hacks the social process that constituted the actual culture and life histories of East European Jewish immigrants into line with the worldview of middle-class Judaism.

3. In the introduction to *Remembered Lives*, I document Myerhoff's novelization of ethnographic narrative and offer an analysis which shows that her fashioning and refashioning of empirical materials adheres to conventions that are at once constraints of genre and ideology. The evidence and argument that I offer can be miniaturized here by briefly contrasting her essay "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page" (1977) with the chapter of the same name in *Number Our Days* (1982). Typical of the discrepancies between the formal ethnographic essay and the novelistic chapter is that, in the description of the graduation ritual offered in the former, "the diplomas were distributed by the rabbi"; in the latter, the dominant individual in the group, "Kominsky, began to pass out the diplomas." Such differences of detail—of "fact"—point to the different conceptions of subject and agency that these different narratives present. The ethnographic essay describes a collective subject and a collective action: here, secular ritual is a "collective act of imagination," which is planned and implemented in a contentious social process involving "the [senior] Center director, several of the graduating [elderly] students, and the teacher of the class, Kominsky" (1977:206). In the novelistic chapter, the planning and implementing that was the work of many hands is ascribed to one master hand; the collective subject virtually disappears in a narrative that aggrandizes the role of a self-aggrandizing individual. In its parts and as a whole cultural product, the ritual is drained of sociality: effects attained by the whole group using all its resources become the narrative property of a single extraordinary individual. In summary: the move to a writing that dramatizes the individual at the expense of the social process is embedded in the shift from the ethnographic essay to the novelistic chapter. A different conception of realism determines the form and content of the ethnographic essay: it is a realism arising out of a commitment to theory and to foregrounding theory, and it is a realism with respect to the complexity and the dialogic messiness of the social process in and through which large-scale rituals (and other cultural performances) are created.