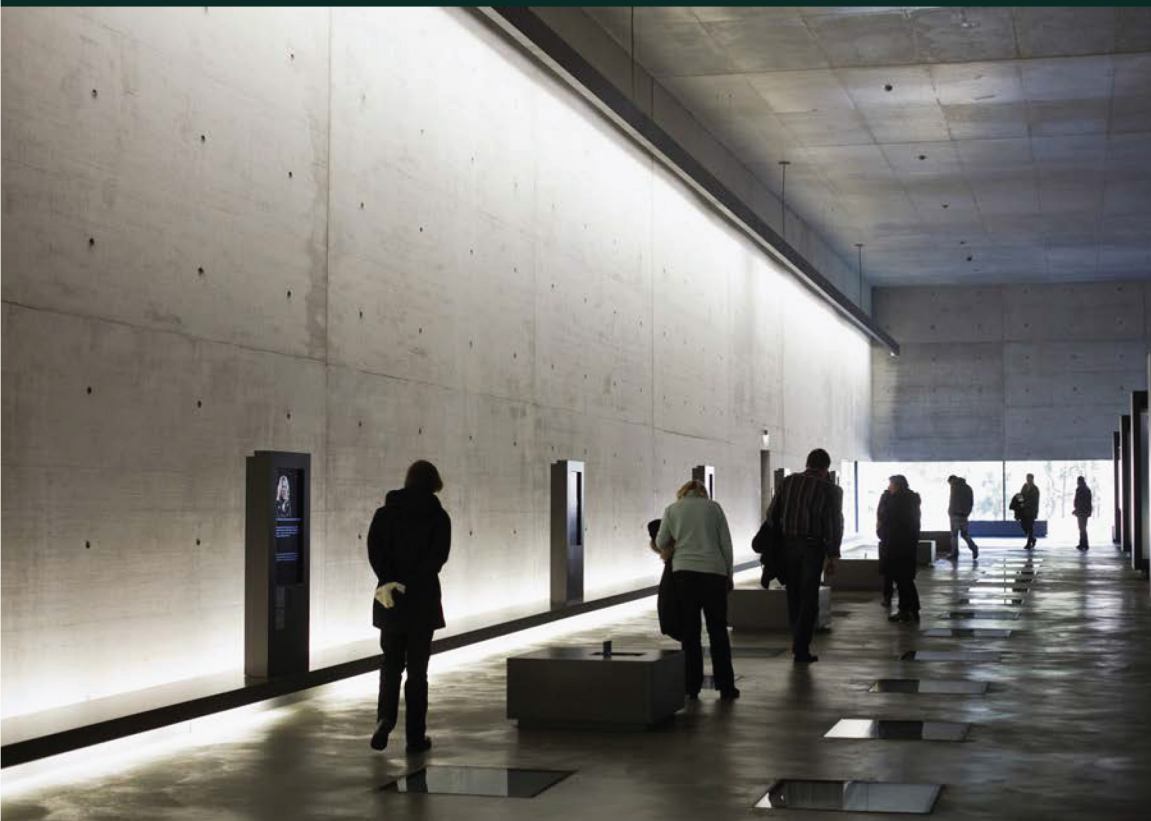


# THE WITNESS AS OBJECT

Video Testimony in  
Memorial Museums



STEFFI DE JONG

MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS · Volume 10



# *The Witness as Object*

# *Museums and Collections*

Editors

**Mary Bouquet**, University College Utrecht, and

**Howard Morphy**, The Australian National University, Canberra

As houses of memory and sources of information about the world, museums function as a dynamic interface between past, present and future. Museum collections are increasingly being recognized as material archives of human creativity and as invaluable resources for interdisciplinary research. Museums provide powerful forums for the expression of ideas and are central to the production of public culture: they may inspire the imagination, generate heated emotions and express conflicting values in their material form and histories. This series explores the potential of museum collections to transform our knowledge of the world, and for exhibitions to influence the way in which we view and inhabit that world. It offers essential reading for those involved in all aspects of the museum sphere: curators, researchers, collectors, students and the visiting public.

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# *The Witness as Object*

Video Testimony in Memorial Museums

STEFFI DE JONG



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- . 2012. 'Who is History? The Use of Autobiographical Accounts in History Museums', in K. Hill (ed.), *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, pp. 295–308.
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# INTRODUCTION

## Museum Visit One: On the Difficulty of Objects Telling Stories

My memory of the fourteen stations which the visitor to Breendonk passes between the entrance and the exit has clouded over in the course of time, or perhaps I could say it was clouding over even on the day when I was in the fort, whether because I did not really want to see what it had to show or because all the outlines seemed to merge in a world illuminated only by a few dim electric bulbs, and cut off for ever from the light of nature. Even now, when I try to remember them ... the darkness does not lift but becomes yet heavier as

I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on. Histories, for instance, like those of the straw mattresses which lay, shadow-like, on the stacked plank beds and which had become thinner and shorter because the chaff in them disintegrated over the years, shrunken – and now, in writing this, I do remember that such an idea occurred to me at the time – as if they were the mortal frames of these who once lay there in that darkness.

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

After his first encounter with the mysterious character Austerlitz, the nameless first-person narrator in W.G. Sebald's homonymous novel visits the concentration-camp memorial Breendonk. What he experiences during his visit is a confrontation with the difficulty of retaining and exhibiting the human life that once existed in a certain place and at a certain time. Even as he looks at them, the things that he sees lose their shape and vanish into darkness because, for him, places and things, as opposed to human beings, have no 'power of memory'. That the places and objects

remain as material witnesses of history is, for Sebald's first-person narrator, less important than the fact that with each human life, a multiplicity of stories disappear. Even his effort to imagine the missing stories ends in an unsatisfactory anthropomorphization of the straw mattresses that, emptied of straw and memories, only look like 'the mortal frames of these who once lay in that darkness', although not like their former users themselves.

What Sebald alludes to here is an inherent dilemma of historical objects and places. Stones and other materials can sometimes survive for thousands of years and consequently they often constitute the only remains of a historical event. 'The situation that initiates the historical object ... cannot be detached from the object, just as the situation cannot be thought about without its objects. That the respective situation belongs to the past does not mean that it is nothing anymore. As a trace, it is present in the old object and is more than nothing', observes the museologist Alexander Klein (2004: 84). However, what does this lingering trace consist of? The straw mattresses in Breendonk testify, because of their loss of straw, to their use by the prisoners of the camp. They can nonetheless tell us very little about the prisoners themselves, their experiences in the camp or their memories of it. Little remains of the former users of an object or the former inhabitants of a place after their death or disappearance. In fact, only in very few cases do we know at all who the users or owners of historical objects, or the inhabitants of a place, were. In the specific case of Breendonk, the situation of imprisonment even precluded every personal property. The standardized objects of everyday use from concentration camps tell us something about the monstrous attempt at deindividualization in the camp, but hardly anything about the individual prisoners themselves.

### **Museum Visit Two: A Museum (Nearly) without Objects**

The Italian city of Turin has had its own Second World War museum since 2003. The museum has been given the slightly lofty title: Museo Diffuso della Resistenza, della Deportazione, della Guerra, dei Diritti e della Libertà ('Widespread' Museum of Resistance, Deportation, the War and Freedom<sup>1</sup> – herein Museo Diffuso). I visit the museum for the first time in January 2009. The main exhibition rooms are located in the cellar of recently renovated eighteenth-century military barracks in the historical centre of Turin. Having entered the museum on the ground floor, I am offered headphones and am then led down a dark, narrow staircase. Through the headphones I hear the voices of people who lived in Turin during the war. In short statements, these people relate how they



**Figure 0.1.** Video testimonies at the Museo Diffuso © Museo Diffuso

experienced those years. An employee of the museum explains to me how to move through the exhibition space: I will be moving along a virtual underground railway system whose stations are called ‘Living Everyday Life’, ‘Life under the Bombings’, ‘Life under the Regime’ and ‘Life during the Occupation’. Films will start at each station if I position myself on a particular spot on the floor. Most of these films are interviews with former inhabitants of Turin who experienced the Second World War. At every station, two such interviews are placed next to each other – one with a man and one with a woman (Figure 0.1). I cannot detect any objects in the first two exhibition rooms.

The employee leads me to a table standing in the middle of the last room (Figure 4.11). Here all the railway lines come together. The table gives me information on designated memorial places in Turin. Again, I receive this information by means of video interviews and extracts from diaries and letters accompanying little films spliced together from pictures and archival footage. On the way to the table, we pass a printing press hidden behind see-through cloth and a plain wooden chair standing isolated in a separate room on a small platform. The employee explains to me that this chair is an execution chair from the Martinetto Sacrarium, a construction offered in 1883 by the City Council to the National Association of Target Shooting in Turin and used from 1943 until the end of the War as an execution ground by the Italian Social Republic (Figure 0.2). With



**Figure 0.2.** The execution chair from the Martinetto Sacrarium at the Museo Diffuso © Museo Diffuso

the – hardly visible – printing press, this execution chair is the only object in the museum.

The Museo Diffuso is thus a museum (nearly) without objects. What the museum exhibits instead are the stories whose disappearance Sebald's first-person narrator laments. On leaving the museum, I wonder whether the Museo Diffuso is a sign that the age-old relationship between museum objects and the stories surrounding them is being turned upside down. Has memory become a museum exhibit? And, if so, how?

### **Video Testimonies as Museum Objects**

The Museo Diffuso is only one example, albeit a radical one, from the many museums that have decided to introduce into their permanent exhibitions videos with extracts from interviews with witnesses of a historical period or event. Needless to say, objects have not been completely relinquished by all museums. Some place the videos prominently in the main



galleries, while others hide them in dark corners or deep inside the data of computer stations. In some museums the stories can only be listened to over audiostations or on audioguides; others show extracts of video interviews. Some show professional-looking, almost artistic films on high-definition television screens, while in others the videos are more amateurish. Some let actors read out interview sequences; others have kept the original recordings.

The trend of making the memories of individuals part of their historical narrative is especially apparent in concentration-camp memorials. If the first-person narrator of *Austerlitz* visited the Breendonk Memorial today, he would be able to listen to the stories of former inmates over an audioguide. If he were to visit the Bergen-Belsen, Neuengamme or Ravensbrück Memorials, he could watch interviews with survivors of the camps on video screens integrated into the permanent exhibitions. Even museums whose appeal is traditionally based on material objects now increasingly use video interviews with witnesses of past events. Apart from exhibiting weapons, medals, uniforms and dioramas, the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History in Brussels also shows videos in which witnesses of the Second World War relate their experiences. The Imperial War Museum in London has produced video interviews for its Holocaust Exhibition. The Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn includes, within its rather overflowing display of historical objects and reconstructions, interview sections with, inter alia, Holocaust survivors and guest workers. In its new exhibition of the two World Wars, the Museum of London exhibits a video with pictures of destroyed cities and recordings from the Museum's oral history project.

The material products of individual memory, such as diaries, paintings or letters, have of course for a long time had their place in museums. What is new about the exhibition of the Museo Diffuso and of the other museums that I have mentioned here is that they integrate the very process of recalling an event and verbalizing it into their representation of history. Thus, the very moment of remembrance and narrated memory have become legitimate objects of display. In this study I will consider the prerequisites and consequences of this introduction of the act of remembering into museums. My primary object of study will be video testimonies: video recordings that capture the act of remembering of witnesses to history. My aim is to analyse how video testimonies are 'musealized', meaning how they are adapted to the rules of the institution museum. The concept of 'Musealisierung' (musealization) was first used by the German philosopher Hermann Lübbe (1983: 9–14). Lübbe used the concept in order to describe how, in modernity, an acceleration of the process of disintegration

has met with an ever-stronger reluctance to throw away objects that no longer have a use-value. For Lübbe, the concept of musealization is not tightly knitted to the institution of the museum, but primarily refers to the object that is conserved. My use of the concept of musealization will be narrower than Lübbe's. I will consider the museum as an institution that has developed its own rules over the last two hundred years. I will use the concept of musealization in order to analyse how video testimonies are made to fit those rules. In other words, to what extent have 'video testimonies' become museum objects?

The exhibition of video testimonies, while also practised in museums and exhibitions with other subject matter (cf. de Jong 2011), was first – and still is – primarily found in exhibitions on the Holocaust and the Second World War. I will therefore concentrate on what Paul Williams (2007) has called 'memorial museums' of the Holocaust and the Second World War, namely on the Museo Diffuso, the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum London, the Holocaust History Museum at Yad Vashem, the Neuengamme Memorial and the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. Williams (2007: 8) defines memorial museums as 'a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind'. Memorial museums combine the function of honouring the dead of the memorial with the functions of 'interpretation, contextualization, and critique' (Williams 2007: 8) of the history museum. 'The coalescing of the two suggests that there is an increasing desire to add both a moral framework to the narration of terrible historical events and more in-depth contextual explanations to commemorative acts', observes Williams (2007: 8).

My main concern in this study will be representation. Klas Grinell (2010: 179) of the Museum of World Cultures in Gothenburg observes that 'the English word representation carries three rather different meanings or aspects (that in for example German is described with three different words)'. Grinell (2010: 179, italics in original) points out that:

To represent can mean to be a representative. In German this aspect is called *vertretung*. For this kind of representation to be legitimate the representative must be selected in a democratic fashion by those represented ...

To represent can also mean to make something present again, to copy or interpret it. This aspect of representation is covered by the German word *darstellung*. It concerns artistic and aesthetic work ...

A representation can also be a mental idea, image or understanding of an object or phenomenon: *vorstellung* in German. This is an epistemological, philosophical and psychological concept. Legitimate mental representations (*vorstellungen*) should correspond with reality, be true.

These three meanings of representation as ‘Vertretung’, ‘Darstellung’ and ‘Vorstellung’ will accompany me through the different chapters of this study. Who or what do video testimonies represent (‘vertreten’)? In what way are video testimonies represented aesthetically (‘darstellen’)? What representations are transmitted through the use of video testimonies in museums (‘vorstellen’)? In my endeavour to answer these questions, I will concentrate on questions of witnessing and testimony, memory, globalization, mediatization and signification as central issues of cultural-memory studies and museum studies.

### **Witnessing: Testimonies as Post-traumatic Evidence**

Although it is difficult to set a date for the integration of the first video testimonies into museums, they only started becoming a frequent phenomenon around the beginning of the new millennium. It might therefore not come as any surprise that the representation of video testimonies in museums received little attention until the late 2000s. However, since the 1990s, there has been heightened academic interest in questions of witnessing and testimony – especially in relation to the Holocaust. These studies can be subdivided into two interrelated and consecutive movements, both arguing that a new witness figure has appeared in the second half of the twentieth century. While the first movement finds this figure to be novel in the very act of witnessing something *in situ*; the second movement concentrates on the act of repeating what has been witnessed *ex post facto*. As we will see, these studies have considerably influenced the ways in which video testimonies are handled by museum professionals and how they are exhibited in museums. I will further reflect on the concepts of ‘witnessing’ and ‘testimony’ in Chapter 1. These concepts will allow me to grasp the theoretical influences on the musealization of video testimonies: how have studies on witnessing and testimony paved the way for the integration of video testimonies in museums? What influence have those studies had on interviewing techniques? And to what extent do exhibition makers respond to those theoretical reflections?

Studies from the first movement have mainly been developed in the milieu of the collaborators of what is today the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (herein the Fortunoff Archive) or by scholars who, explicitly or implicitly, refer to the Archive. They position the figure of the Holocaust survivor as the new paradigmatic witness, and ascribe to it special faculties of witnessing and an unparalleled manner of giving testimony (cf. Chapter 2: pp 57–61). The supposedly unprecedented events of

the Holocaust, and the act of witnessing and experiencing them here form the basis for reflections on trauma and the unprecedented role of being a witness to history. Although not uncontested, the idea that the Holocaust is an event that could not fully be witnessed in situ and that it is consequently beyond the purview of testimony *ex post facto* is one that has been formulated in ever-stronger terms over the last few decades by scholars of this first movement. In these studies, the Holocaust appears as an experience that eludes all attempts at understanding. I will here only refer to its most influential representatives.

In 1992, in his seminal study *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (coauthored with the literary theorist Shoshana Felman), the founder of the Fortunoff Archive, Dori Laub (Felman and Laub 1992: 75), defined the Holocaust as an ‘event without a witness’. For Laub, the nature of the Holocaust was such that there could not be an uninvolved witness. This has in turn led to a situation in which the survivors cannot find an ‘Other’ in themselves anymore, an ‘internal thou’ to whom they could give testimony (Felman and Laub 1992: 82). Laub sees the way out of this incapacity of survivors to bear witness to themselves in his own work as a psychoanalyst and as an interviewer for the Fortunoff Archive helping the survivors to reconstitute their internal ‘thou’. Similar to Laub, his colleague Lawrence L. Langer in *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991) describes video testimonies with Holocaust survivors as a medium without precedent – one that forecloses conventional methods of interpretation. This has for one thing to do with the medium of video testimony, which for Langer has to be strictly delimited from written testimonies: video testimonies, for him, do not make reference to a pre-existing literary canon or stylistic conventions. On the other hand, it has to do with the unprecedented nature of witnessing the Holocaust. For Langer, the memories of the survivors cannot be integrated into a conventional value system, because such a system cannot be reconciled with the full dimensions of the situations to which the victims of persecution and extermination were driven. Langer delineates a moral codex necessary for the interpretation of the Holocaust through the concepts: ‘deep memory’ (the survivors’ attempt to recall their Auschwitz self); ‘anguished memory’ (the witnesses’ disbelief in their own stories and the subsequent need of the interviewers to help them get to grips with their Auschwitz self and find words to express it); ‘humiliated memory’ (‘the [recollection of] an utter distress that shatters all molds designed to contain a unified and irreproachable image of the self’) (Langer 1991: 77); ‘tainted memory’ (the attempt of witnesses and interviewers to introduce the Auschwitz self’s actions in a pre- and post-Holocaust value system); and ‘unheroic

memory' (the survivors' and the interviewers' efforts to come to grips with the impossibility of heroic actions during the Holocaust). Especially the concept of 'deep memory', which Langer has borrowed from Holocaust survivor and writer Charlotte Delbo, is now commonly used to designate Holocaust survivors' traumatization. Delbo opposes 'mémoire profonde' (deep memory) to 'mémoire ordinaire' (common memory). While deep memory 'tries to recall the Auschwitz self as it was then; common memory has a dual function: it restores the self to its normal pre- and postcamp routines but also offers detached portraits from the vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then' (Langer 1991: 6). Our interpretation of video testimonies must therefore, according to Langer, take into consideration both the special circumstances that survivors of persecution and extermination were thrown into, as well as the survivors' inner division and turmoil when trying to recollect and verbalize these circumstances.

In a similar vein and influenced by Dori Laub's works, the German cultural theorist Sigrid Weigel (1999) has argued that in a society and culture that repeatedly tries to rationalize the Holocaust, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors constitute a possible antidote against any attempt to integrate the Holocaust into history. They contain a 'Verstehensrest' (gap in comprehension) that remains after every attempt at understanding has been carried out. For Weigel, any use of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors in a juridical or historiographical context is therefore incompatible with the very nature of the testimonies.

While Laub, Langer and Weigel stress the singularity of Holocaust testimony, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2002) goes one step further: he declares its very impossibility. Agamben observes that those who can give testimony on the Holocaust have never plumbed its depths. For him, the true witnesses were the 'Muselmänner'. 'Muselmann' (Muslim) was the name given by other inmates of Auschwitz to those inmates who, weakened by hunger and maltreatment, apathetically accepted their fate. Agamben argues that all the survivors can do is speak in those true witnesses' stead.

Treating the experience of the Holocaust as unique and inexplicable, these studies also express a wish for how the testimonies of Holocaust survivors should be dealt with: not as historical sources or pieces of evidence in juridical trials, but as singular and incomparable speech acts whose importance lies in the mere act of uttering them.

Scholars of the second movement, rather than concentrating on witnessing the Holocaust, argue that a new memorial culture has appeared. In this new memorial culture, the voice of those who have taken part in events of historical importance not as decision makers, but as the objects

of those decisions is granted an unprecedented importance. Thus, Annette Wieviorka, in what has become a seminal study in the field, discusses the recording of video testimonies as a phenomenon and a marker of what she calls *The Era of the Witness* (1998). Besides Wieviorka, the studies of the second movement are mainly an affair of academics from the German-speaking countries. The interest in the witness to history is here partly triggered by the fear of some historians that they might lose their authoritative position: the saying ‘Der Zeitzeuge ist der größte Feind des Historikers’ (‘The witness to history is the historian’s biggest enemy’) has by now become a winged word.

The topic was fired by the panel ‘Der Zeitzeuge. Annäherung an ein geschichtskulturelles Gegenwartsphänomen’ (‘The Witness to History: Approaching a Phenomenon of Contemporary Public History’) at the German Historians’ Day in 2006, followed up in 2008 with a well-visited conference in Jena with the title ‘Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen nach 1945’ (‘The Birth of the Witness to History after 1945’) (Bollmann 2006; Kellerhoff 2006). The year 2008 also saw the publication of several major studies on witnesses to history in media (Elm 2008; Fischer and Wirtz 2008; Keilbach 2008). The main focus of these studies are the didactic functions of video testimonies in TV documentaries. They thereby also consider witnesses who are not Holocaust survivors. In particular, they criticize the video testimonies in the documentaries of the German TV historian Guido Knopp for *ZDF History* for their lack of differentiating between different witness figures – victims, perpetrators and bystanders – and for the brevity of the statements. More recently, the interest has expanded to other media as well. Michael Bachmann (2010) has studied the aesthetical and discursive strategies in which – fictional and real – witnesses to history are used to legitimize certain narratives about the Holocaust. Other scholars have been looking at the didactic uses of those testimonies (Barricelli 2007, Obens 2014), as well as at their ongoing digitization (Bothe 2012, 2014; Presner 2016; Smith 2016).

One of the earliest studies considering the musealization of video testimonies is the article ‘Lebensgeschichtliche Erinnerungszeugnisse in Museen’ (‘Biographical Testimonies in Museums’) published in 1992 by the German oral historian Alexander von Plato. This article is based on the results of a study group that had been formed with the aim of exploring how to integrate biographical stories into museums and how to develop video testimonies for an exhibition on workers’ history. The study group came to the conclusion that ‘the presentation of extensive biographical stories is possible in special seminars and in other didactic fora, but that it otherwise has to be subdivided into different aspects that can be perceived

by the audience either on their own or as a reconstituted whole' (von Plato 1992: 226). They therefore promote short video clips of three to five minutes. As we will see, their results outline the ways in which video testimonies are actually presented in most museums today. Other early preoccupations with the topic are the British historians Tony Kushner's (2001) and Andrew Hoskins' (2003) respective articles 'Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience: Holocaust Testimony in a Museum Setting' and 'Signs of the Holocaust: Exhibiting Memory in a Mediated Age'. Both analyse the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition.

However, with the increasingly frequent use of video testimonies in exhibitions, the reflection on this use also met with heightened interest. Several conferences looking into the musealization of video testimonies were organized in recent years: the Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation's International Bergen-Belsen Conference on 'Witnessing: Sites of Destruction and the Representation of the Holocaust' (2009), the Federal Institute for Culture and History of the Germans in Eastern Europe's 'Zeitzeugen im Museum' ('Witnesses to History in the Museum') (2011) in Görlitz and the German Museums Association's 'Zeitzeuginnen und Zeitzeugen in Geschichtsmuseen' ('Witnesses to History in History Museums') (2012) in Nuremberg. In October 2013 a special issue on witnesses to history in museums of the historical journal *WerkstattGeschichte* was published.

Studies of the second movement are inspired by the implications of the first movement. Under their empirical analyses lies the normative claim of how things should have been done (better). As we will see, most museums are also highly aware of the ethical implications of exhibiting video testimonies with Holocaust survivors. Often, they try for example not to make the same mistakes pointed out for the case of video testimonies in TV documentaries. Most importantly, the very integration of witnesses to history into memorial museums can be seen as a direct response to the claim of the scholars of the first movement that the voices of the survivors need to be listened to and treated with respect.

## **Memory: Communicative Memory and/as Cultural Memory**

The video testimonies that I analyse show witnesses to history that remember. These video testimonies are in turn represented in the public institution of the memorial museum. An analysis of video testimonies is therefore always an analysis of what has been termed 'individual memory', 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory' – concepts that will allow me

to approach questions like: what happens in the process of remembering in front of a camera? What transitions of memorial contexts have video testimonies undergone over the years? And what happens to the video testimonies once they are put into a museum or an archive?

Memory has, over the last thirty-odd years, received an unprecedented level of attention from scholars of such distinct disciplines as the neurosciences, psychology, psychoanalysis, history, media studies, cultural studies, literary studies, sociology, ethnology and philosophy. The neurosciences, psychology and psychoanalysis are primarily interested in what is generally called individual memory and thus in the question of how individuals remember and forget the past. They have also tried to get to grips with such phenomena as flashbacks, repression or traumatization. I will come back to the findings of these studies in Chapter 3.

The interest of such disciplines as history, media studies, cultural studies, literary studies, ethnology and philosophy in turn is in the way in which groups make sense of the past and try to transmit their interpretations thereof. They tend to speak of ‘collective memory’ or ‘cultural memory’. The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is generally seen as the founding father of memory studies. In the time after the First World War and during the Second World War, Halbwachs wrote three works that came to lay the foundations for modern-day cultural-memory studies: *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1994 [1925]), *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte: Étude de mémoire collective* (2008 [1941]) and *La mémoire collective* (1997 [1950]). The last one of these works was published posthumously after Halbwachs’ death in 1945 in Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Unlike the then-fashionable psychoanalytical studies with their focus on the individual and its subconscious, Maurice Halbwachs upheld the view that truth lies in society (cf. Klein 2000: 127). Anticipating many of the findings of modern-day neurological studies, Halbwachs concluded that we cannot reflect from outside the prism of the social groups that we are living in and that we are surrounded by; it is in relation to the people that we are in contact with every day that we remember. We generally have experiences in the company of other people, so that our memories are connected to those people. According to Halbwachs, even in situations where we are completely alone, we are still thinking of others or imagining them having those experiences with us.

Halbwachs was also the first to make a distinction between what he called ‘*mémoire individuelle*’ (individual memory) and ‘*mémoire collective*’<sup>2</sup> (collective memory). Unlike individual memory, collective memory consists of the memories that are important for a group’s identity, but that are not necessarily based on the experiences of the members of that



group. Like individual memory, collective memory changes over time, some memories being more important for a certain group at a certain point in time than others. It disappears once the relevant group is no longer interested in a certain memory; once the group disperses; or once the members of the group have died. Collective memory and individual memory are of course interrelated. Groups are made up of individuals with their own memories who come to influence the group memory and in turn are influenced by this memory.

Halbwachs' theory of collective memory mainly refers to small groups, his prototype being the family. He mentions the nation as a large group that we are part of, but considers it to be the subject of national history. He acknowledges that history has an influence on our individual memory and even goes so far as to talk of a 'mémoire historique' (historical memory). However, 'if by historical memory we mean the succession of the events which national history remembers, it is not historical memory nor is it its frames that make up the most important part of what we call collective memory' (Halbwachs 1997: 129).

Modern-day cultural-memory studies that began in 1982 with Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Mémoire* and that found their second important theoretical foundation ten years later with Jan Assmann's (1992, 1995) distinction between 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory' have come to be interested in exactly those larger groups that Maurice Halbwachs disregarded. The concept of culture is here, as Astrid Erll (2011: 6) observes, mainly understood in the sense of 'cultures': clearly demarcated memorial groups. The nation has become the main focal point for those studies. Memory, those studies contend, is not only the result of neuronal streams and conversations, but also finds its expression in objects, rituals and ceremonies that are used to form a group identity over several generations.

Thus, for the Egyptologist Jan Assmann (1992), 'communicative memory' is more or less identical to what Halbwachs called 'collective memory'. By conversing about the past, the members of a group form a group identity and create their own individual identities as members of this group. Communicative memory is fluctuating and has a limited time horizon spanning, at most, four generations (eighty to one hundred years). 'Cultural memory', on the other hand, is 'oriented towards benchmarks in the past' (Assmann 1992: 52). Its subject matter is 'events in an absolute past' (Assmann 1992: 56) that a society remembers through mnemonic carriers such as 'texts, dances, pictures and rituals' (Assmann 1992: 53), in this way affirming its collective identity. Communicative memory and cultural memory are linked by what Jan Assmann, with reference to the ethnologist Jan Vansina, calls the 'floating gap' (Assmann 1992: 48), a

time of transition during which communicative memory becomes slowly materialized, ritualized and institutionalized. Both mnemotechnic modes are divided by a 'Zeitstruktur' (temporal structure) (Assmann 1992: 56).

Aleida Assmann, who has adapted Jan Assmann's theory to present-day societies, in particular the post-Second World War and post-Holocaust context, subdivides cultural memory further by distinguishing between the 'archive' and the 'canon'. The archive is the 'cultural reference memory' of a society: 'It is stored and potentially available, but it is not interpreted' (Assmann 2008:103). The canon in turn describes the 'cultural working memory' of a society. For Assmann (2008: 100), the elements of the canon 'are marked by three qualities: selection, value and duration. Selection presupposes decisions and power struggles; ascription of value endows these objects with an aura and a sacrosanct status; duration in cultural memory is the central aim of the procedure'. The exact balance between the archive and the canon is in constant flux. Carriers that were once part of the canon enter the archive until they disappear forever or are rediscovered again, while others that had been hidden in the archive for a long time will suddenly be of interest again and enter the canon.

Assmann herself uses the museum as an example to demonstrate these interactions between the canon and the archive (Assmann 2007a: 56; Assmann 2008: 98). In their exhibitions, museums try to catch the visitors' attention to what is only a minute fraction of their actual collections. The exhibited objects or artworks are part of the canon: they have been meticulously selected by the curator and because they are exhibited, they gain an auratic status. Duration in the sense of the continuous exhibition of the selected objects to the public eye is here generally the goal. In fact, despite many changes in exhibition designs and collections, numerous objects come to mind that have actually managed to keep their spot in the permanent exhibitions since they entered a museum. Beside these hotspot objects, there is a large amount of objects that are kept in the museums' storage rooms. Fluctuation between the storage and the exhibition is of course constant. Exhibits that were once the centre pieces and pride of the museum might end up in storage, while others that for decades had been collecting dust will find their way into the exhibition rooms. What exactly is exhibited depends on the interests of the time and/or the preferences of the curator.

Jan and Aleida Assmann's theories are relevant for this study for two reasons. First, we are now, more than seventy years after the end of the Second World War, supposedly right in the middle – or rather at the end of – the floating gap of the memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War. Second, museums can be considered as one of cultural memory's most

important institutions, and the process of musealization is ultimately the process during which a thing becomes a carrier of cultural memory. This process is exactly what can be observed in the case of video testimonies. In Chapter 3, I will analyse how video testimonies enter the archive. The processes of selection, valorization and preparation of video testimonies for and within the exhibitions – and thus their entrance into the canon of the cultural memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War – will be the subject of Chapters 4 and 5.

However, there are also limitations to Jan and Aleida Assmann's theory. For one thing, the separation between communicative memory and cultural memory by way of a 'temporal structure' or a 'floating gap' seems too schematic. Particularly in the case of the Holocaust, a ritualization and objectification of memory had begun long before the last witnesses of the past had first started to pass away. Prisoners of Auschwitz, for example, drew the first plans for a memorial on the site while the mass murder was ongoing (Hoffmann 1998: 11ff) and the first plans for Yad Vashem date from 1942. Memorial ceremonies on the sites of former concentration camps began right after their liberation. These ceremonies, as well as the first exhibitions, can mostly be traced back to the initiative of survivor associations. The distinction between cultural memory and communicative memory is therefore blurry at best. With Astrid Erll (2005: 114ff), I contend that it is what she calls a 'Zeitbewusstsein' (conscience of time) rather than a 'Zeitstruktur' (structure of time) in the sense of Jan Assmann that demarcates communicative from cultural memory. In other words, whether an event enters cultural memory depends not so much on whether it is really part of an absolute past, but on whether the general feeling is that it is part of an absolute past. This means that an event can be part of both communicative and cultural memory at the same time. As I will show in Chapter 2, orally transmitted memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War became an element of cultural memory early on: since shortly after the end of the War, the memories of witnesses to history have been recorded on audio and then on videotape, autobiographies written shortly after or during the War have become bestsellers, and since the 1980s witnesses to history frequently appear in documentaries.

I argue that with the inclusion of video testimonies into museums, the cultural-memory institution par excellence, the relationship between cultural memory and communicative memory as it is presented by Jan and Aleida Assmann has been turned upside down. As I will show in the following chapters, the musealization of video testimonies is the expression of an avid desire to turn what is perceived to be communicative memory into cultural memory in order for it to be saved for the future. Rather than

cultural memory following on from communicative memory, we find a transformation of communicative memory itself into cultural memory. The communication of the witnesses with the following generations is here not allowed to come to a natural end; instead, there is the hope that, in the form of the reception of video testimonies, it will go on forever. As I will show in Chapter 3, video testimonies are generally presented in such a way as to put in scene their communicative character and to feign communication across the generations.

### **Globalization: Video Testimonies as a Global Assemblage**

As we will see, video testimonies appear in diverse museums without the medium undergoing considerable transformations. Although there are of course differences between the exhibitions, what is more striking are the commonalities concerning both form and content. I therefore consider the musealization of video testimonies as what Stephen J. Collier and Aihwa Ong (2005), *inter alia*, have called a 'global assemblage'. The concept of 'global assemblage' will help me to grasp the ubiquity of video testimonies in memorial museums: what are the commonalities and differences between the video testimonies in museums? And what processes were necessary for video testimonies to become one of the main medial carriers of the memory and history of the Holocaust and the Second World War in memorial museums?

The concept of 'global assemblage' has been adapted to museum and heritage studies by Sharon Macdonald (2009: 186). She argues that heritage has become 'a globally recognized cultural form, made up of heterogeneous practices, technologies and ideas' (Macdonald 2009: 186). Heritage, she observes, is always realized locally, and every museum and every place are therefore unique. However, different museums and memorials are realized in relation to and in delimitation from other museums and memorials. 'What happens locally', she observes, 'does so in multiple interactions with various elsewheres – embodied in people, practices and technologies' (2009: 186). In the analysis of individual cases, differences, but also patterns and analogies, appear. She points out that through the analysis of individual cases, 'we can apprehend the particular mix of human and non-human, conceptual and physical, elements that are involved in constituting a particular assemblage/complex; and we can also identify the processes that contribute to, say, making certain notions or ways of doing things durable or making them capable of extending beyond their locality of origin' (Macdonald 2013: 6).

If video testimonies have become a global assemblage within the larger assemblages of heritage and museums, this can, on the one hand, be explained by a standardization of the cultural memory of the Holocaust. Trying to overcome a national bias, cultural-memory studies have lately tried to move away from the nation as an object of study and instead become more interested in international and postnational constellations, and in the movements of memory between and across national and social boundaries (Rothberg 2009; Assmann and Conrad 2010; Erll 2011; Feindt et al. 2014a, 2014b). The more recent studies in particular try to move away from the memorial group as a focal point towards the competing processes of remembering and their medial representations. The question asked in these studies is not so much how groups remember, but how the objects of cultural-memory travel and are remembered beyond and across conventional boundaries. Feindt et al., for example, observe that memory is entangled both on a synchronic and on a diachronic level. On a synchronic level, each individual is always part of different social frames, which in turn means that different interpretations of the past exist at the same time. On a diachronic level, each memorialization refers to previous memorializations. The authors therefore propose the study of cultural memory along ‘mnemonic signifiers’ and thus the ‘symbolic objectification of acts of remembering’ (Feindt et al. 2014b: 43). The Holocaust can be considered as one such ‘mnemonic signifier’ and video testimonies as one of its carriers. In their seminal study *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2006: 150) observe that the Holocaust has become a ‘global code’ that has been detached from national structures and turned into an epitome of evil and a benchmark against which other crimes against humanity are measured. This globalization, they argue, is emphasized through a more acute focus on individual destinies in the representation of the Holocaust in popular culture (Levy and Sznaider 2006: 133). I argue that the use of the Holocaust as a mnemonic signifier or a global code also finds its expression in memorial museums. As the following chapters will show, there are many similarities between the collection practices and the exhibition techniques of the different museums. A concept like that of the ‘memorial museum’ has in fact been coined in order to catch these similarities and standardizations.

The global use of video testimonies can also be read as a reluctance to decide on a master narrative or a canon for the memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War. Several studies have pointed out that Jan and Aleida Assmann’s idea of homogeneous memorial groups seems out of line both with the enormity of an event like the Holocaust and with the contemporary postnational constellation of the world. Ulrike Jureit (Jureit

and Schneider 2010: 75), for example, asks polemically: ‘The possibility for perpetrators and victims and their offspring to remember as a community in the aftermath of a crime of such unprecedented dimensions as the Holocaust remains unquestioned ... Who is it, sixty years after the end of the war, who is actually involved in constructing a memorial community in front of the mass-graves and in memorials?’ Similarly, Marianne Hirsch (2008: 111) points out that: ‘Both embodied communicative memory and institutionalized cultural/archival memory would be severely impaired by traumatic experiences.’

The introduction of video testimonies into museums and thus the conflation of communicative memory with cultural memory can be considered as a means of marking this impairment of communicative and cultural memory. In fact, since Claude Lanzmann’s seminal documentary *Shoah* (1985), video testimonies have served as an antidote to the so-called ‘Bilderverbot’. Video testimonies are used to represent the nonrepresentable exactly because they are deemed to allow a glimpse of something buried deep inside the witnesses to history – their trauma – without, however, revealing its full depths. As I will show in Chapter 3, especially extraverbal emotional expressions are highlighted in the video testimonies. Those expressions are in turn interpreted as signs of the traumatization of the witnesses to history. In this way, the impairment of communicative memory that is characterized, for example, by the inability to speak of some witnesses to history or by the feeling that words will never be enough ultimately becomes a part of cultural memory – and thus of a master narrative or a canon. By collecting and presenting different video testimonies on the same topic, the museums also try to represent multiperspectivity. Yet, as I will show in the following chapters, their attempt at a heterogenization of cultural memory has its limits: the witnesses to history that are to be interviewed are chosen according to criteria that give preference of some perspectives over others. Rather than being a heterogenization of cultural memory, the transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory thus appears as a homogenization of plurivocality.

### **Mediation: Video Testimonies as Adaptive Media**

Video testimonies are of course recorded on the electronic medium of video. They are further integrated into the analogue medium of the museum. At the museum, they are, as we will see, frequently digitized and incorporated into the digital medium of the internet as part of the museums’ outreach programmes. The concepts of mediation, premediation,

remediation and what I will call intramediation and intermedial relations will be helpful to analyse these movements between different media: what were the precursors of the musealization of video testimonies? In what way is the electronic medium of the video testimony adapted to the analogue medium of the museum? How are the video testimonies juxtaposed in relation to other museum objects? And what medial means are used in order to transmit messages to the museum visitors?

Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009) use the concepts of 'mediation', 'premediation' and 'remediation' in order to study the movements between and across media that serve as carriers of cultural memory. Mediation refers, on the one hand, to the adaption of the contents of cultural memory to certain media technologies and thus of the signified to the signifier. On the other hand, it describes the movements of transmission between those media and their receivers: the individuals who consume the media. Premediation refers to the fact that any content of cultural memory, when being mediated, is influenced by and codified according to already-existing media representations of the same or other events. Remediation describes the travels of contents of memory across different media where each new representation is influenced by previous representations.

Mediation, premediation and remediation will complement the idea of a global assemblage and the concept of representation in the meanings of 'Vertretung', 'Darstellung' and 'Vorstellung'. Mediation serves to describe the process through which something is represented in the sense of 'Darstellung' and thus the act of making an event present and interpreting it. The medial representation of this event, in turn, serves as a representative, a 'Vertreter', of this event. At the same time, the concept of mediation describes the movements of transmission between those representations and the individuals who consume them. This consumption will in turn end up in new mental images – 'Vorstellungen'. Premediation and remediation both influence the 'Darstellung' and the 'Vorstellung' of an event. At the same time, the concepts of mediation, premediation and remediation will be helpful to scrutinize the movements and entanglements between the global and the local, the individual and the communal that global assemblage theory asks us to consider.

Martin Zierold (2008) has observed that 'it is interesting to consider which media from the wide spectrum of available technologies are used for socially relevant occasions for remembrance, which forms of elaborations of remembrance they allow, which are realized, how they are received and used etc.'. Video testimonies are one of the media forms that have become almost tantamount to Holocaust and Second World War memory. Studying the musealization of video testimonies means

analysing, first, how video testimonies became important medial carriers of the cultural memory of the Holocaust. It means analysing the mediation of Holocaust memory in the sense of its adaption by the medium video testimony. Second, it means analysing the movements between this media representation and previous media representations – premediation and remediation. Third, it means studying mediation in the sense of the movements of transmission between the signifier, the video testimonies and the receivers, the museum visitors. Fourth, the integration of video testimonies into the memorial museums has an altering influence on both the medium of video testimonies and that of memorial museums – a phenomenon that we could call intramediation. Finally, in the exhibition space, video testimonies are put into intermedial relations – associations with numerous other media of collective memory such as museum objects, pictures, films and documents, but also museum texts and exhibition design.

### **Signification: Video Testimonies as Signs in Space**

A too narrow focus on the processes of mediation, remediation, premediation and intramediation and intermedial relations tends to fall short on the meanings that are emanated through these processes. When integrated into the exhibition space, video testimonies are put into a spatial and semiotic relationship with other objects. They become what Krzysztof Pomian (1988) has called ‘semiophores’, museum objects that are integrated into a context that they were not in originally and that are imbued with a semiotic meaning. In order to decode the different meanings that are transmitted through the exhibition of video testimonies, I will here apply a semiotic approach to exhibitions: which video testimonies have been selected for the exhibitions (and which ones have not)? What extracts from the video testimonies have been selected and in what way have they been ordered? In what relation do the codes emitted by the video testimonies stand to the codes that are emitted by the other museum objects?

Museum studies has become one of the most buoyant and interdisciplinary academic fields. Theoretical and methodological frameworks that have been chosen for the study of museums range from art theory (Wahnich 2008), to theories of postmodernity (Huysen 1995; Bal 1996; Storrie 2006) and ethnography (Muttenthaler and Wonisch 2006; Macdonald 2009; Gable 2010; Meza Torres 2011), to theatre studies (Hanak-Lettner 2010), to name but a few. By now almost every space of



the museum has been a subject of analysis – including the museum shop (Macdonald 2011) and the cleaning cupboard (Morgan 2011). Semiotic approaches consider the museum exhibition as a culturally saturated space in which signs are encoded, decoded and recoded. Jana Scholze (2010: 124) observes that modern semiotic studies like those of Umberto Eco start with the presupposition ‘that signs do not refer to “something” – be that a thing, a fact or an idea – but that they are references that in turn refer to other signs’. In this sense, meaning is constructed through reference to previously constructed meaning. Applying this insight to museums, Mieke Bal (1996: 3–4) has analysed the act of exposing as an interplay between three ‘persons’: ‘In expositions a “first person”, the exposor, tells a “second person”, the visitor, about a “third person”, the object on display, who does not participate in the conversation.’ It is the first person – a conglomeration of different actors such as curators, designers, historians and writers – that creates the authoritative message that is transmitted through the means of the exposed objects. Through a close reading of the relation between museum texts, the arrangement of the museum objects within space and writings by the exhibitors, Bal analyses the discrepancies between the intended and unintended meanings of an exhibition.

For the present-day museum context, the power that Bal gives to the exposor seems somewhat anachronistic. Many museums have reacted to the criticism of a misbalance of power relations by opening storage rooms, adopting participatory collection strategies and organizing educational events. Nevertheless, it remains true that, in general, the exposors remain invisible to the visitors. In the case of video testimonies, the power of the exposor over the object is from an ethical standpoint particularly challenging. Fiddling around with video testimonies means fiddling around with somebody’s life story. It means taking statements out of the context in which they have been made and putting them into a new one. It means making available to the public certain life stories to the detriment of others.

Building on the work of Bal and other modern semioticians, Jana Scholze (2004: 11; 2010: 139) puts museum objects at the centre of her analysis. She observes that museum objects always refer to more than merely their functional character; they also refer to discourses within and outside of the exhibition arrangement. Each museum object thus emits a plurality of codes. These codes undergo an ordering or hierarchization – some codes will be given priority, while others will be suppressed. ‘Reading’ an exhibition therefore means relating the exhibition to previously known codes. Scholze (2004: 40ff; 2010: 140f) describes the decoding of the different codes of museum objects as ‘denotation’, ‘connotation’

and ‘metacommunication’. Denotation refers to the uncovering of the functional character of a museum object, connotation to its sociocultural embedment and metacommunication to the museum or exhibition context and the intentional acts of the exposers.

However, video testimonies are to some extent special objects. If Bal observes that the ‘third person’, the museum object, is generally silent in the communication between exposers, visitor and object, this does not entirely count for video testimonies. Video testimonies are talking objects that tell the life story of the witnesses to history that they represent – or at least parts thereof. Moreover, video testimonies do not have a primary functionality apart from this communicative function. Rather than depending on the exposers, the processes of denotation and connotation are to a large extent inherent to the medium of video testimony (although visitors do in fact typically have to be told about the video testimonies’ moment and context of recording). The focus of my semiotic analysis of the musealization of video testimonies is therefore on metacommunication. I have not carried out a visitor study.<sup>3</sup> I will thus not be able to assess whether the codes are indeed read in the way that the exhibitors intended. However, I contend that a semiotic analysis of the exhibition of video testimonies will allow me to approximate the many different meanings that are emanated by the exhibitions.

## **The Memorial Museums: Exhibiting Memory**

The museums analysed in this study have been chosen on account of their subject matter and their use of video testimonies as exhibits. The Museo Diffuso has as its main subject matter the local history of the Second World War in Turin. The museum was born out of two ideas: to found a Second World War museum in Turin and to provide the city with a documentation centre on crimes against humanity. The actual museum, which opened in 2003, is a collaboration between the City of Turin, the ‘Comitato di Coordinamento fra le Associazioni della Resistenza del Piemonte’ (the ‘Committee of Coordination between the Resistance Associations of the Piedmont Region’), the ‘Istituto Piemontese per la Storia della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea, Giorgio Agosti’ (the ‘Piemontese Institute of the History of the Resistance and Contemporary Society, Giorgio Agosti’), the ‘Archivio Nazionale Cinematografico della Resistenza’ (the ‘National Cinematographic Archive of the Resistance’), the Department of History of the University of Turin and the Province of Turin. Video testimonies are, as observed above, the main exhibits. As

its full name – Museo Diffuso della Resistenza, della Deportazione, della Guerra, dei Diritti e della Libertà – suggests, peace, tolerance and human rights education are a crucial part of the museum's didactic mission. In a separate space, which will not be considered in this study, the museum organizes temporary exhibitions on issues of crimes against humanity and human rights. The visitor is also invited to visit several memorial sites in the city of Turin. The concept of 'diffuso' that translates to 'widespread' refers to the fact that the museum considers its exhibition to continue outside of its walls and corresponds loosely to the French idea of 'ecomusée'.

The Imperial War Museum in London is a partially government-funded museum that was founded in 1917 with the idea of keeping for the future the experiences of the people involved in the (then ongoing) First World War. With a focus on Britain and the Commonwealth, the Museum today treats the conflicts that have shaken the world since then. So far, the only permanent exhibition in the Imperial War Museum in which video testimonies are used is the Holocaust Exhibition, which opened in 2001.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum is located on Jerusalem's Mount of Remembrance, a hill outside of Jerusalem next to Mount Herzl, the burial place of Theodor Herzl. It is part of the complex of Yad Vashem, Israel's 'Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority', which comprises numerous memorials, archives, a library and a research centre. The so-called 'Yad Vashem law' was signed by the Knesset in 1953 and in 1954 the foundation stone was laid. The present exhibition of the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum opened on 15 March 2005. At over 4,200 square metres in size, it exhibits the history of the Holocaust with a focus on the experiences of the Jewish victims and an extended use of video testimonies.

The Bergen-Belsen Memorial is located on Lüneburg Heath not far from the small German town of Celle. Bergen-Belsen is probably best known for being the place where Anne Frank was murdered. The current exhibition was opened in 2007 in a purpose-built documentation centre. At over 1,500 square metres in size, the exhibition examines the history of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp and the Prisoner of War (POW) camps located on its premises and in its vicinity, as well as that of the Displaced Persons' (DP) Camp opened in the Wehrmacht barracks located a few kilometres from the Concentration Camp after liberation. Video testimonies are one of the main exhibits.

The Neuengamme Memorial is located close to the German city of Hamburg. Neuengamme Concentration Camp was a camp mainly for political prisoners. The memorial hosts several exhibitions located in former camp buildings. The main exhibition, 'Traces of History', opened in 2005

and looks at the history and after-history of Neuengamme Concentration Camp and its satellite camps. Apart from this main exhibition, there are smaller exhibitions on: the SS, slave labour in the brick production and slave labour in the armaments production, as well as on the penal facilities of the city of Hamburg that were located on the premises of the former concentration camp from 1948 until 2006. Video testimonies with former inmates can be watched in the main exhibition and in several of the smaller exhibitions.

The list of museums that I have chosen for this study might seem rather eclectic and heterogeneous at first. Indeed, the national and institutional differences between the different institutions should not be neglected. National or near-national institutions, such as the Imperial War Museum or Yad Vashem, have far more financial resources than a small city museum like the Museo Diffuso. Moreover, while visitors to the Imperial War Museum will be exposed to the Holocaust Exhibition as part of their overall visit, a visit to the Neuengamme Memorial or the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, which are located at some distance from a bigger town or city, needs to be planned in advance. The five case studies also have very different institutional histories. While the Museo Diffuso opened its doors rather recently, an institution like Yad Vashem can look back on nearly sixty years of activity. Conversely, the former concentration camps of Bergen-Belsen and Neuengamme went through a long history of destruction, alternative uses of the sites, and denial and repression of their history, before the current permanent exhibitions were opened.

The different museums are also embedded in very diverse national memorial cultures. While Israel sees itself as the land of the survivors having been born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, Germany, the land of the perpetrators, has to deal with the Holocaust as its negative founding myth. Italian memory is torn between the north, which was occupied during the war, and the south, which was not, and between former fascists and former partisans. As an ironic turn in memorial culture, 25 May, the 'Day of Liberation', is an important national holiday in former fascist Italy. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, fascism never really took hold and Britain never experienced invasion. As a result, the United Kingdom is able to celebrate itself as one of the liberators of Europe.

What is more, of the museums that I have chosen as primary cases for this study, all but the Museo Diffuso have the Holocaust as their main subject matter. In the Museo Diffuso, the Holocaust is presented as part of local history – for example, when the witness to history Giorgina Arian Levi relates how she had to flee to Bolivia with her German-Jewish husband, or when the former resistance fighter Marisa Scala talks about her

return from the Bolzano Concentration Camp. The Holocaust is, however, not the main subject matter of the Museo Diffuso. The Museo Diffuso will therefore occasionally be used as a foil to study the other museums. However, as I will show, the Museo Diffuso also concentrates on the testimonial function of video testimonies.

Finally, the roles and duties of concentration-camp memorials are different from those of other museums. Before being museums, concentration-camp memorials are historical sites as well as massive cemeteries. One of their main functions is to remember the victims who were murdered on the site. Many concentration-camp memorials have only recently adopted the functions of museums. For a long time, they were primarily sites for the memorial ceremonies of the different survivor associations and national delegations. Even today, 'the didactic power of memory, the need for rituals and the sacred nature of the cemeteries should not be undervalued', as Habbo Knoch (2011), at the time director of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, has pointed out. To a certain extent, this is of course also true for an institution like Yad Vashem. Yet, unlike in Yad Vashem, it is the historical site with – or without – its architectural remains that legitimates the existence of a museum on and attracts visitors to those (mostly remote) places.

However, rather than dwell on the differences between the museums, I wish to concentrate on what they have in common. First, all of the museums analysed here are memorial museums. They have both a memorial function of remembering and honouring the dead and a didactic function of transmitting historical knowledge. Second, and even more importantly, all of them use video testimonies in their permanent exhibitions. All of the five museums have, in one way or another, played a pioneering role in the exhibition of video testimonies, and some of them function as important references to other museums for the exhibition of difficult histories. Yad Vashem is, together with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a leading institution for research, but also for the aesthetics of exhibiting the Holocaust. The Imperial War Museum is one of the world's most important institutions for the exhibition of conflict. Its London branch was also one of the first museums to integrate video testimonies into a permanent exhibition. The Neuengamme Memorial has been chosen because it has always had a very biographical focus and was one of the first Western German memorials to carry out a large-scale interview project with survivors. Extracts from survivor testimonies were already on display in the very first exhibitions. Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp – or rather the pictures of its liberation – has been influential on the way in which we imagine the Holocaust today. Bergen-Belsen was the destination of many

death marches. When the British troops entered the camp on 15 April 1945, they found it in the most appalling of conditions: overcrowded with starving, ill and dying people and littered with 10,000 corpses. Many of the pictures of heaps of corpses that come to most people's minds when imagining the Holocaust were taken during or shortly after the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. The new permanent exhibition in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial uses both those pictures and video testimonies in a very revealing way. The Museo Diffuso, although relatively unknown, has been chosen because of its near-exclusive use of video testimonies, which renders it highly amenable to the analysis of the musealization of video testimonies. The five museums can therefore be analysed as pioneers for the exhibition of video testimonies. They set aesthetic and didactic standards that have been taken up by other memorial museums since.

I have spent several days in each of these museums. In addition, I have visited over twenty museums and exhibitions dealing in one way or another with the Second World War and the Holocaust or using video testimonies, such as the Ravensbrück Memorial, the Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn, the Museum of London, the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, the Jewish Museum in London, the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History in Brussels, the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, to which I will make occasional references. While in the museums, I watched as many videos as possible. I wanted to find out how the videos were cut, what lighting techniques were used, whether patterns of interviewing techniques could be made out and whether there were similarities in the ways in which the witnesses to history delivered their testimonies. As for any other visitor in the museums, this was sometimes challenging. Watching videos in a museum is not the same as watching them at home or in an office. I was often distracted by other exhibits or by other visitors. It is also typically impossible to stop or rewind the videos. If I had missed something or wanted to go back to a specific section, I was obliged to wait until the video started over. My close analysis of the exhibitions was complemented by interviews with museum directors, curators and filmmakers. In this way, I was able to learn about the philosophy behind the exhibition, interviewing and filming techniques, unrealized projects and the sources of inspiration for the exhibitions or future plans. In most museums I was received with open arms and more often than not with curiosity or even enthusiasm about my research project. The help and support that I received from the many museum professionals with whom I was in contact during my research was

very often extraordinary. Unfortunately, I was, despite several requests, not granted interviews with museum professionals at Yad Vashem. My analysis of this important institution must therefore be based exclusively on my visit to the memorial, as well as on primary and secondary literature.

## **The Musealization of Video Testimonies**

According to the 2007 definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM 2007):

a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

The three main duties of museums outlined in this definition, namely collecting (e.g. acquiring, conserving and researching), exhibiting and communicating, will guide my study and serve as the headings of its three analytical chapters. In other words, I will analyse under what criteria video testimonies have entered museum collections, how they are exhibited, what messages are communicated through their exhibition and what effect digitization has on these processes. The three categories of collecting, exhibiting and communicating cannot of course be clearly separated from each other. Museums collect in order to exhibit and they exhibit in order to forward certain messages to their audiences. All three categories will therefore be present, to some degree, in all of this study's chapters. When analysing the collection of video testimonies, I will, for example, necessarily have to look at their exhibition and I will not be able to analyse the exhibition of video testimonies without at least alluding to the messages that are communicated.

Chapter 1, 'The Witness to History', will introduce the necessary vocabulary and the necessary definitions for this study. Unlike English, German has a word that specifically denominates people who have witnessed events of historical importance and/or who might give testimony of those events: 'Zeitzeuge'. For the purpose of this study, I subdivide the meaning of the German term 'Zeitzeuge' and propose two analytical concepts: 'witness of the past', denominating a person who has witnessed the past; and 'witness to history', denominating a person who has witnessed the past and gives testimony on it in the present. Furthermore, I will go into the etymology and history of the concept of the witness. With reference to the concept

of the juridical witness and to that of the religious martyr, I will develop a definition of the concept witness to history.

Chapter 2, 'Genealogy', will focus on the premediation of the musealization of video testimonies by outlining the genealogy of the witness to history. I will show how events such as the Eichmann trial and institutions like the Fortunoff Archive or Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (herein Shoah Foundation) have helped to fuel public and academic interest in personal testimony, and to turn the witness to history into an authoritative public figure, a representative of history and a carrier of memory.

In Chapter 3, 'Collecting', I will analyse the process of collecting video testimonies. Collecting is an important function of museums, and a primary prerequisite for a thing to become a museum object is that it has entered a museum's collection. In fact, in many museums, video testimonies could be found in storage rooms before they appeared in the exhibition. I will analyse the ways in which video testimonies are collected and stored and will discuss what it means to record and archive videos in which witnesses to history repeat their memory of an event or a time. I will especially focus on the consequences of recording and collecting video testimonies on the bodies of the witnesses of the past. Collecting video testimonies is not the same as collecting other items. Collecting video testimonies means freezing the memories and bodies of living individuals in time and space. The main research question that this chapter is trying to answer is therefore: what does the act of collecting do with the bodies and memories of individual witnesses of the past.

Chapter 4, 'Exhibiting', is subdivided into two sections: video testimonies and museum objects; and video testimonies as museum objects. In the first section, I will scrutinize the intermedial relations between video testimonies and the other exhibition elements in the museums. I will focus on two types of exhibits that can often be found in Second World War and Holocaust museums: 'everyday' objects and photography, where the term 'everyday' must of course be understood in the widest possible sense of the word. In the second section, I will analyse the techniques that are adopted in order to turn video testimonies into museum objects and thus the processes of intramediation of video testimonies. The concepts of 'authenticity' and 'aura' will serve as a red thread through my analysis in this chapter. Its leading research question will be: how are video testimonies turned into authentic and authenticating and auratic and aurating museum objects, and in what way does the perceived authenticity and aura of video testimonies interact with the perceived authenticity and aura of the other objects in the museums?



In Chapter 5, ‘Communicating’, I will look at the didactic messages that are put forward through the use of video testimonies as exhibits. In so doing, I will be scrutinizing the choice of the particular witnesses to history for the video testimonies in museums. I will also look at the digital outreach programmes of the museums and the consequences of the global distribution of video testimonies on the internet. The guiding concepts for this chapter will be those of ‘secondary witnessing’ (Baer 2000) and ‘tertiary witnessing’ (Wake 2013). These concepts have so far been used exclusively in order to describe the way in which the testimonies of Holocaust survivors should be received by members of the so-called second or third generations (Baer 2000). In my analysis, I will consider how these concepts can be adapted to other groups of witnesses to history. The main research question that this chapter tries to answer is: what kind of secondary and tertiary witnesses do the museums invite their visitors to be?

Video testimonies are one of the most significant carriers of today’s memorial culture and have become a crucial element of memorial museums. From the time when I started doing the research for this study, ever more museums have integrated video testimonies into their exhibitions. It seems by now almost strange to enter a memorial museum and not to find any. Indeed, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the cultural director of Polin, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, which opened in 2015, found herself obliged to justify her choice against the use of video testimonies.<sup>4</sup> However, at least for the historical events under scrutiny here, the time for collecting video testimonies is nearing its end. At the same time, digitization allows the development of new memorial carriers. Several memorial museums and memorial institutions are now developing reconstructions of former concentration camps in virtual reality (Knoch 2017), for example. They are also developing holograms with witnesses to history (de Jong 2015; Körte-Braun 2015; Knoch 2017; cf. Conclusion). It is likely that both holograms and digital reconstructions will soon replace video testimonies in the museums. This study of the musealization of video testimonies should therefore also be read as an inventory of a phase of memorial culture in which my experience of the Museo Diffuso has replaced the experience of the first-person narrator from Austerlitz in the Breendonk Memorial.

## Notes

1. I am here using the translation that the Museo Diffuso uses itself. Quotation marks in the original.

2. Halbwachs is not always very consistent in the use of concepts. In relation to individual memory, he also talks, for example, about ‘*mémoire interne*’ (internal memory), ‘*mémoire personnelle*’ (personal memory) or ‘*mémoire autobiographique*’ (autobiographical memory). Collective memory also goes under the names of ‘*mémoire externe*’ (external memory) and ‘*mémoire historique*’ (historical memory).
3. Visitor studies are still scarce and so far no visitor study concentrating on video testimonies in museums has been carried out. For an analysis of the educational programmes of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Jewish Museum in Berlin, see Dekel (2013) and Bishop-Kendzia (2017); the amount of works on the pedagogical use of video testimonies and witnesses to history is constantly expanding and occupies a considerable amount of shelf space, see for example Simon (2005), Barricelli, Brauer and Wein (2009), Abenhausen et al. (2012) or Obens (2015).
4. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes these comments in the video ‘Our Way of Showing 1000 Years of History’ that can be found on the museum’s website. Retrieved 22 May 2017 from <http://www.polin.pl/en/exhibitions-core-exhibition/our-way-of-showing-1000-years-of-history>.

## *Chapter 1*

# THE WITNESS TO HISTORY

## Conceptual Clarifications

### **The Zeitzeugenbörse in Berlin**

In 1993, senior citizens of Berlin founded a society called ‘Zeitzeugenbörse’.<sup>1</sup> The society is designed to encourage dialogue between the generations. Its primary goal is to make public the memories of its members who, at least during the first years of the society’s existence, mostly belonged to the war generation. The Zeitzeugenbörse administers, inter alia, a database of its members, establishes contacts between these members and public institutions looking for a witness to give testimony on a historical event, and organizes seminars to prepare its members for public appearances. Several similar societies have by now been founded in other German cities. The name of the Zeitzeugenbörse is composed of two words: ‘Zeitzeuge’ and ‘Börse’. ‘Börse’ means stock exchange or, more generally, any kind of exchange market. ‘Zeitzeuge’ is a relatively new concept consisting of the words ‘Zeit’, meaning time, and ‘Zeuge’, meaning witness. In this chapter, I wish to reflect specifically on the concept of ‘Zeitzeuge’ and the ideas connected to it. I will start by analysing the different uses of the concept in German and will then propose two analytical concepts for this study taking up the meanings of the German ‘Zeitzeuge’: ‘witness of the past’ and ‘witness to history’. In the second part of this chapter, I will, with reference to the figures of the juridical witness and the martyr, outline some of the characteristics of the figure of the witness to history.

## Witnesses of the Past, Witnesses to History and Video Testimonies

While Germans use the word ‘Zeitzeuge’, the Dutch talk about ‘tijdgetuiger’, the Norwegians of ‘tidsvitner<sup>2</sup>’ and the Swedes of ‘samtidsvittner’. All three words specifically designate people who have witnessed a time period or an event of historical importance. In German especially, the concept of ‘Zeitzeuge’ is now used frequently in everyday speech. The historian Martin Sabrow (2012: 13) observes that ‘Zeitzeuge’ can be counted amongst those concepts:

that suddenly appear out of nothing, just in order to be integrated into everyday language so quickly, that they appear to have swallowed their own genealogy and seem to transcend history, as if they had always been there and it becomes impossible to imagine what it was like without them.

Sabrow (2012) traces the first uses of the concept back to the mid 1970s. Nowadays, the term has an entry in the German dictionary *Der Duden*, which defines it as ‘sb. who as a contemporary can give testimony on certain occurrences (of historical importance)’. Although the word has been used for objects, such as in the title of Rosmarie Beier-de Haan and Gottfried Korff’s (1992) study *Zeitzeugen: Ausgewählte Objekte aus der Sammlung des Deutschen Historischen Museums (Zeitzeugen: Selected Objects from the Collection of the German Historical Museum)*, it is generally used to designate people.

As the *Duden* definition shows, the German concept ‘Zeitzeuge’ combines the idea of having witnessed something in situ with that of giving testimony *ex post facto*. ‘Zeitzeuge’ can designate an individual who has merely witnessed an event, or the person who both witnesses and gives testimony of this event. Up to this point, no English equivalent has been defined. A literal translation would result in something like ‘time-witness’. For my analysis of the musealization of video testimonies, I will use the concept ‘witness of the past’ when referring to the first meaning of the German ‘Zeitzeuge’. Witnesses of the past are people who have witnessed – in the sense of having seen, heard or experienced – an event of historical importance. Witnesses of the past have ‘been there’ and their bodies are – visibly or invisibly – marked by the events that they witnessed. I will use the concept ‘witness to history’ when referring to the second meaning of the German ‘Zeitzeuge’. Witnesses of the past become witnesses to history once they give testimony of their experiences in a public

space in which their addressees intentionally go beyond the circle of their friends and family. Witnesses to history willingly or unwillingly construct or consolidate a certain narrative of the past – a certain history.

There are numerous fora in which the testimonies of witnesses to history can be made public: talks in front of school classes, talk shows, conferences, TV documentaries, newspaper articles, autobiographies, more recently websites and online platforms such as YouTube or Facebook, and of course museums. The medium for public presentation that I will be analysing here comes in the form of videotapes on which the testimonies of the witnesses to history have been recorded. German studies generally talk of 'Zeitzeugenvideos' (videos of witnesses to history) or 'Videozeugnisse' (video testimonies), while in English we find alongside the concept 'video testimony' that of 'visual history'. The USC Shoah Foundation, for example, calls its archive the 'Visual History Archive'. 'Visual history'<sup>3</sup> used in this sense makes reference to oral history and concentrates on the medium used to record the testimonies. It describes oral historians' use of videotapes instead of audiotapes. The term 'video testimony' on the other hand refers to the content of the videos. It was first used by the collaborators of the Fortunoff Archive. They had, in fact, decided early on to use the term 'testimony' instead of the term 'interview'. Joanne Weiner Rudof (2009: 59–60), one of the collaborators, explains that:

right from the beginning it was clear that the existing vocabulary was not suited to describe the process. The use of words like 'interview' and 'interviewer' would have generated a wrong impression. The founders, looking well ahead, decided on the concept of testimony in order to express more clearly the dimensions of the process.

For the Fortunoff Archive, it is thus the speech act recorded on video that is of importance – an act that they call testimony. The use of the term 'testimony' expresses, first, the idea that the Holocaust survivors who appear in these videos do not only tell their life stories, but that they also testify to the past. The term refers, second, to the 'testimonial' character of the videos. Geoffrey Hartman (1996: 140) of the Fortunoff Archive observes that most of the video testimonies of Holocaust survivors are also 'testimonial videos': the testimonies are also given in the name of the family members and, more generally, the millions who were murdered. If we consider this second meaning, the concept of video testimony could only be used with reference to survivors of catastrophes and massacres. Not all of the videotaped testimonies that I will be analysing in this study are testimonies of Holocaust survivors. I opt for the concept of video testimony

nevertheless. For one thing, by using the concept of video testimony, I want to stress the genealogy of video testimonies as a medium that was first used for recording the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. On the other hand, I wish to underline that video testimonies are always used to testify to a certain narrative of the past – to a certain history – regardless of whether they are based on the testimonies of Holocaust survivors or on those of other witnesses to history. However, before turning to the characteristics of the witness to history, let us turn to those of the paradigmatic witness figure: the juridical witness.

### **The Juridical Witness and the Witness to History**

The etymological origins in Latin and in old Germanic languages of the words denoting both the act of witnessing and the witness can be located in a juridical context. The English word witness goes back to the Old High German ‘gawitzi’, ‘gewizzi’ or ‘gewizze’ and the Middle High German ‘gewizze’, which in turn have developed from the Latin ‘cum’ (together) and ‘scientia’ (knowledge). Witness therefore has the same roots as the English ‘conscience’ and the German ‘Gewissen’ (conscience). The German word ‘Gewissen’ in turn is used to mean in the first instance ‘cognizance’ and in the second instance ‘awareness of that which is proper’, as well as ‘inner consciousness’ (Paul 1992: 262). The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as its first entry a now obsolete meaning for witness: ‘knowledge, understanding, wisdom’. The witness is thus somebody who knows something, but also somebody who is aware of the moral consequences of her or his knowledge. Passing from the abstract to the concrete, the witness used to mean ‘attestation of a fact, event, or statement’ and the ‘evidence given in a court’, as well as ‘the action or condition of being an observer of an event’. The word ‘witness’ was only eventually used to designate a person ‘who gives evidence in relation to matters of fact under inquiry’. Here it first designated the third party present at the signing of a document or a transaction.

The German word for witness, ‘Zeuge’, goes back to the Old High German ‘giziugon’ and the Middle High German ‘ziugen’, meaning ‘producing through technical activity’. The meaning of ‘zeugen’ as giving testimony might go back to this first meaning and denote the act of putting forth facts in court. As with the oldest uses of the Anglo-Saxon witness, the Germanic ‘Zeuge’ used to denote the evidence given in court, the court witness and the third party present at the signing of a contract (Paul 1992: 825–26). The origins of the Anglo-Saxon ‘testimony’ as well as, for example, the French ‘témoin’ or the Italian ‘testimone’ can, according to

Giorgio Agamben (2002: 17), be found in the Latin ‘testis’, signifying ‘the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (\*terstis)’.

Those etymological origins (being an observer, producing knowledge and conscience) find their reflections in the functions of the juridical witness. In fact, reflections on the act of witnessing and of giving testimony generally start with reflections on the roles of the juridical witness (cf. Peters 2001; Assmann 2006: 85–92; Krämer 2008). The philosopher Sibylle Krämer (2008: 228) defines five ideal-type characteristics of the juridical witness: the creation of evidence, perception, the speech act, the audience and trustworthiness.

First, during a trial, the juridical witness provides information that cannot be acquired in another way. She or he produces evidence. The juridical witness allows the victim to obtain justice and the perpetrator to be punished. Ultimately her or his testimony helps to renew a social balance that has been damaged (Krämer 2008: 228–29).

Second, one of the preconditions for becoming a juridical witness is that the person in question has directly perceived the event to which she or he bears testimony, at best without having actively taken part in it. The juridical witness is ideally a neutral recipient of information that she or he reproduces objectively. Any interpretation, judgement or opinion on the event under scrutiny that a witness might utter can damage her or his trustworthiness as a juridical witness (Krämer 2008: 229–30).

Third, juridical witnesses have to put their perceptions into words. Being a witness means performing a speech act, while giving testimony in court is a ritual. The witness is positioned in a witness-stand, facing the judge, who represents the interests of the community under whose auspice the trial takes place, and is flanked by the prosecution and the defence representing in their turn the interests of the accused and the law. The testimony that the witness gives is framed and conditioned by the oath that is foregrounded at the beginning of the act of giving testimony and by the questions of both the defence and the prosecution. It is the ritual of the trial that turns individuals into juridical witnesses and defines their testimony as trustworthy. Being a juridical witness is ultimately a part that has to be performed (Krämer 2008: 231).

Fourth, at the same time as being a speech-act, giving testimony is a ‘listening-act’. Witnesses can only give testimony in front of an audience. A trial is a dialogue and the testimonies of juridical witnesses are conditioned and steered by this dialogue (Krämer 2008: 231–32).

Fifth, a precondition for an individual to be accepted as a juridical witness is that this individual be trusted by the audience at the trial. An

individual who seems untrustworthy – even if she or he might be telling the truth – cannot serve as a juridical witness (Krämer 2008: 232–33).

These five characteristics are archetypal characteristics. They only rarely correspond to the real situation of bearing witness in court. Any testimony is fallible, and this fallibility, as Sibylle Krämer points out, goes back to the very simple fact that juridical witnesses are humans. Humans are not disinterested recipients, but people with feelings and their own sense of judgement who are prone to forget what might be of importance for the resolution of the case under scrutiny. Moreover, since words can be exchanged, but emotions and impressions first need to be put into words in order to be transferable to another person, there is necessarily a gap in correspondence between the testimony given by the witness and the reception of this testimony by those who are listening to the testimony. The figure of the juridical witness is thus caught in a constant dialectic between what Krämer (2008: 238, italics in original) calls its ‘*Subjektstellung*’ (subject character) – the quality of being human – and its ‘*Sach- und Objektstatus*’ (status as an object) – its function as a means towards the resolution of a criminal case.

I have stated that I will use the concept ‘witness to history’ in order to designate individuals who give testimony of a past event in a public space. This space can, of course, also be the courtroom. As I will show in Chapter 2, the Eichmann trial that took place in Jerusalem in 1961 can be considered as the birthplace of the figure of the witness to history. The figure of the witness to history, as I understand it here, takes its legitimacy and many of its characteristics from the juridical witness. In what follows, I will try to give an overview over these characteristics. In doing so, I will follow the five ideal-type characteristics proposed by Krämer and will show how these characteristics are extended and distorted in the case of the witness to history.

Unlike for the juridical witness, it is impossible to define an archetypal case of the witness to history. This is due to the fact that, unlike the juridical witness, the witness to history does not need to fulfil a clear function. The functions of witnesses to history are defined by the settings in which the individual witnesses appear. As we will see, in the particular case of the use of video testimonies in the museum setting, witnesses to history can variably serve as providers of historically relevant information, in order to reinforce the authenticity of other objects in the museums, in order to affect visitors, as a means for moral education or, most frequently, as a combination of all of the above. The multiplicity of functions performed by witnesses to history leads, second, to a proliferation of individuals who could potentially perform the role of witness to history. Individuals who would never be considered for the role of juridical witness can become



witnesses to history. Witnesses to history can be victims, perpetrators or bystanders, members of the population who witnessed crimes but did not intervene (Hilberg 1992). They can have held a leading position or merely have observed certain events. They can have been active or passive, willingly or unwillingly involved. Nevertheless, while being diverse, witnesses to history also share some characteristics.

If the primary function of the juridical witness is evidence production, the primary function of the witness to history is education. Under the heading 'Zeitzeuge werden' (becoming a witness to history), the Zeitzeugenbörse advances the following definition on its website: 'We are all of us witnesses to history because we all have experiences, and collect memories that might enlighten other people.'<sup>4</sup> The role of a witness to history is to give new insights to those who listen to her or his testimony. The educative role of witnesses to history can thereby serve different ends: it can be cognitive, providing the audience with information that they did not have before the encounter; it can be affective, making them respond emotionally in a way in which they have not responded before; it can be an end in itself, making the audience discover historical details that it did not know before; and it can be a means to an end, for example, when this historical knowledge is used in peace and human rights education. Most often, we find a combination of those four functions.

The second characteristic of the juridical witness, her or his physical presence at the event on which they are giving testimony, is intensified for the witness to history. In the case of the juridical witness, hearsay is accepted, although presence in time and space is preferred. In the case of the witness to history, presence in time and space is crucial. In his reflections on the figure of the witness, Geert Gooskens (2011: 155, italics in original) underlines that 'witnesses are *living traces* of the things that they have experienced': '*Through the witness we are not only looking for information on an event, we are rather looking for contact with this event*' (2011: 154, italics in original). The knowledge that witnesses to history provide their audience with always refers to a past event that is inaccessible for the audience. Through contact with the witness to history, the audience also tries to get in contact with the event in question. It is this presence in time and space that distinguishes the witness to history from the expert. As I will show in greater detail in Chapter 4, the witness to history who, unlike the historian, might only know little about the same event's political and historical background is imbued with an aura of authenticity. She or he has the bonus of seemingly knowing what it 'was really like and what it felt like'. Therefore, the closer to the core of the event that the witnesses have been, the more valuable their testimonies are.

Third, as with juridical witnesses, witnesses to history have to put their experiences into words. While for juridical witnesses, the verbalization takes place in the highly institutionalized and ritualized setting of the court, witnesses to history verbalize their experiences in a variety of settings. Their testimonies, while not being completely free from set structures, are therefore less ritualized than the testimonies of juridical witnesses. Unlike in the case of the juridical witness, the subject character (Krämer 2008: 238) of the witness to history is well accepted; it is not only acceptable, but even desirable for witnesses to history to reflect on and to give their own interpretations of what they have experienced. Nevertheless, while giving their testimonies, witnesses to history might make reference to other ritualized or institutionalized forms of narrating, such as court hearings, but also *curricula vitae*, TV interviews or the genre of written autobiographies. The *Zeitzeugenbörse* even develops and provides tools and skills for its members to give testimony in front of different audiences. As I will show in Chapter 3, the genre of video testimony has been standardized and ritualized over the years, and both the interviewers and the interviewees have internalized its rules.

Fourth, similar to the juridical witness, witnesses to history need an audience. It is this audience that turns witnesses of the past into witnesses to history. When the *Zeitzeugenbörse* observes that ‘we are all of us witnesses to history because we all of us have experiences, and collect memories that might enlighten other people’, it only tells half of the story. It is true that we are all of us constantly experiencing things and collecting memories. However, it is only in hindsight that the importance of an experience becomes apparent. In the case of the juridical witness, it is the juridical case under investigation that defines what experiences, and what details thereof, are relevant – which ones the witnesses should have remembered and which ones they might as well have forgotten. In the case of witnesses to history, it is an audience composed of what Marianne Hirsch (2008) has called the ‘generation of postmemory’ – the generation of children and grandchildren of the witnesses of the past – that decides which stories it wants to hear and which ones it finds of little interest. Therefore, while all of us are witnesses of the past, observing and experiencing things, only some of us become witnesses to history: those who meet with an audience interested in their testimony. A story that a witness of the past might consider to be important and interesting might not be received by others as such. Other issues, of which both the witnesses to history and their potential audience know that they are extraordinary, might be silenced for political reasons. Witnesses of the Ukrainian Holodomor or the massacre of Polish intellectuals in Katyn, for example, have only recently met

with a benevolent audience. Other witnesses to history again might only realize the importance or extraordinariness of an experience that they have made if somebody else points them towards it. When Sigmund Kalinski, a Holocaust survivor interviewed by the Shoah Foundation, is asked by the interviewer what he experienced during his time in the ghetto in Bochnia, he, to the surprise of his young interviewer, replies:

What have I experienced ... I have worked in the workshops and was happy and glad that I was at home with my mother. Eh ... that there were again and again ... eh ... let's say excesses of the SS, that was so much my daily bread, that thereon one did not ... it simply was that way.

For the young interviewer, life in the ghetto appears to be the epitome of extraordinariness of which every detail should have been recorded for future generations. He expects a story; Sigmund Kalinski does not have one to tell. We do not usually remember much about what we are doing on a day-to-day basis. For Kalinski, his memory of his time in the ghetto was one of everyday life – though an everyday life in which violence had become normal. It has been remembered – and forgotten – as such.

The audience of witnesses to history in itself can be subdivided into a primary active audience, an intended secondary audience and a real secondary audience. Only very few witnesses of the past give testimony out of their own initiative. In general, they are invited or convinced to do so by the primary active audience. This primary active audience is relatively small and elitist. It consists of interviewers, publishers, museum professionals, oral historians or documentary filmmakers. The primary active audience enters into direct contact with the witnesses and offers them the platforms on which they can narrate their life stories. It is this audience that receives the most complete story. In the case of the production of video testimonies, the primary active audience sees, for example, how the witnesses are acting when the camera is turned off. It might meet the witnesses' family and partners and visit their homes. It is this primary audience that, sometimes in collaboration with the actual witnesses to history and sometimes without them, decides on the parts of the testimonies that will be transmitted to an intended secondary audience and on the form that this transmission will take. In the first instance, the intended secondary audience comprises everybody who could potentially receive the witnesses to history's testimony. The hope of the primary active audience and the witnesses to history is of course generally that as many people as possible will do so, though they might keep access to the testimonies limited. Besides this very large intended secondary audience, a target secondary audience is usually defined. For the case of the presentation of video testimonies in museums,

this target secondary audience might, for example, consist of school classes or of the local population. The real secondary audience consists of the people who actually watch a video testimony, read an autobiography, visit a museum or watch a documentary. This real secondary audience can be very small. Considering the very large amount of video testimonies that have been recorded over recent years, it might be fair to suggest that most of those testimonies will never have an audience that extends beyond the actual interviewees and the camerawomen and cameramen.

In the case of video testimonies in museums – as indeed for most forms of presentation of the testimonies of witnesses to history – it is very difficult to make out the real secondary audience. Even if the number of people visiting a museum over a certain time period were known, it would still be necessary to discover how many of the visitors actually watched the video testimonies. This study is based on the observations of one member of the real secondary audience, albeit probably an unrepresentatively interested and concerned one: me. Using the interviews that I have conducted and conversations that I have had with curators and filmmakers, I will also look at the primary audience's intentions. As we will see more in detail in Chapters 3 and 5, the concepts of 'secondary witness' (Baer 2000; Wake 2013) and 'tertiary witness' (Wake 2013) have been used in order to describe the secondary audiences in the case of testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Both concepts work not only in a descriptive but also in a prescriptive way, stressing that the act of listening to the testimonies of survivors carries with it a moral obligation of actively engaging with those testimonies and passing them on to future generations.

Fifth, as in the case of the juridical witness, trustworthiness plays an important role in the decision of who can give testimony as a witness to history. 'My attitude toward a potential witness often is prior to my attitude toward her testimony', observes the philosopher Avishai Margalit (2002: 180). There are always some witnesses whose testimony we are at best sceptical of and at worst disbelieve: 'Our knowledge forces us to create a hierarchy of witnesses, indeed to create many hierarchies: different people we trust and mistrust with respect to different things' (Margalit 2002: 181). As I have observed above, individuals who would not qualify as juridical witnesses can become witnesses to history. To a certain extent, whether witnesses to history appear as trustworthy or not depends on the setting that they appear in, on the function that they perform and on the audience for their testimony. Nevertheless, a hierarchy of trustworthiness can be observed. Today, on a scale from trustworthiness to untrustworthiness, victims generally come first, bystanders second and perpetrators third (acknowledging, it should be added, pre-existing hierarchies within these

three categories). What is more, those who have been closest to the sphere of action are also those who are considered to provide their audience with the most accurate knowledge. This has not always been the case. As I will show in the next chapter, victims were for a long time considered to be untrustworthy because they were deemed to be too emotionally involved.

To summarize: the testimonies of witnesses to history, whatever their nature, have a didactic goal, the presence in time and place of the witnesses is crucial, the speech act of the testimonies of the witness to history is only loosely defined but makes reference to other public speech acts, and being a witness to history is a role that is accorded by an audience composed of members of the generation of postmemory that decides whose testimony it finds most trustworthy. Over the course of this study, I will look more in detail at these characteristics. In Chapter 3, I will for example analyse the exact nature of the speech act that is the act of giving testimony for video testimonies. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will scrutinize the kind of knowledge that is transmitted with the help of video testimonies in museums and will examine the choices that are made by the primary active audience with respect to how witnesses to history are formally represented in exhibitions.

## **The Martyr and the Witness to History**

Most (but not all) of the video testimonies analysed in this study are video testimonies with Holocaust survivors. Reflections on the acts of witnessing and giving testimony on the Holocaust often make reference to another witness figure as well: the martyr (Derrida 2000; Peters 2001; Agamben 2002; Margalit 2002; Assmann 2006: 85–92; Krämer 2008; Schmidt 2010). ‘Martyr’ (μάρτυς) is the Greek word for witness. In Christian theology, the martyr is the persecuted Christian who testifies to the existence of God with her or his death. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2002: 26ff) observes that the doctrine of martyrdom was invented by the first Church Fathers in order to defend what to some heretics seemed like senseless death. In pointed contrast to the heretic refusal to believe that God can want the death of innocent believers, the Church Fathers referred to Luke 12:8–9 and Matthew 10:32–33: ‘Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven’.

Unlike juridical witnesses, martyrs have not experienced that to which they testify. They testify to a truth that they are convinced of but cannot

personally verify: their belief. While the medium of the juridical witness' testimony is the spoken word, the medium of the martyr's testimony is death. Unlike the juridical witness, the martyr is both victim and witness. She or he is not an uninvolved observer, but the target of violence. The martyr therefore needs a second party to witness her or his martyrdom and to testify to it, as Aleida Assmann observes (2006: 88). Without this secondary witness who interprets the martyr's death as martyrdom – and thus a testimony to God – the martyr's death would remain meaningless. These secondary witnesses<sup>5</sup> are 'by no means an epiphenomenon of martyrdom; it is they who first interpret the religious message, write it down and develop it into a story that serves as the foundation of communities of faith' (Assmann 2006: 88). Martyrdom thus always involves two witness figures: the martyr who testifies to her or his belief by means of her or his death; and the secondary witness who interprets the martyr's death as a religious testimony and passes on its story. The interpretation of the death of an individual as martyrdom in turn is ultimately about giving meaning to what would otherwise be senseless suffering.

The suffering of the victims of the Holocaust has often been interpreted as martyrdom: both the death of the victims and the survival of the survivors have been given a religious, political or didactic meaning. The most obvious interpretation of the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust as martyrdom is probably put forward by Yad Vashem, 'the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' [but not victims'] remembrance authority'. As we will see, according to the museal narrative of Yad Vashem, the martyrdom and heroism of the victims of the Holocaust consisted both in active armed resistance and in upholding Jewish identity in the most adverse conditions. This resistance and sacrifice, which found its continuation in the first war of independence, ultimately led to the creation of the State of Israel.

Also in the circles of political prisoners, suffering and death in the concentration camps has been interpreted as martyrdom. In particular, the official propaganda of socialist regimes represented the murder of those persecuted by the Nazi regime as the heroic death of the anti-fascist resistance fighters (cf. Knigge (1998) for the case of the Buchenwald Memorial). Such interpretations were also shared by associations of former political prisoners in Western European states. Thus, on an audioguide in the Neuengamme Memorial, parts of a speech given by the founder of the 'Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme' Jean-Aimé Dolidier, a trade unionist, can be listened to. Dolidier observes that the prisoners have died in order to free the world from Nazism.

In religious Jewish circles, the attempt to give meaning to suffering had already begun while the persecution was going on. This persecution

was integrated into a longer history of Jewish suffering. In his semi-autobiographical novel *Fatelessness*, Imre Kertész (2004: 20) describes a conversation between the fourteen-year-old first-person narrator György and his uncle shortly before György gets arrested and is ultimately sent to several concentration camps:

‘You too’, he said, ‘are now a part of the shared Jewish fate’, and he then went on to elaborate on that, remarking that this fate was one of ‘unbroken persecution that has lasted for millennia’, which the Jews ‘have to accept with fortitude and self-sacrificing forbearance’, since God has meted it out to them for their past sins, so for that very reason from Him alone could mercy be expected, but until then He in turn expects of us that, in this grave situation, we all stand our ground on the place He has marked out for us ‘in accordance with our strengths and abilities’.

György does not understand the religious meaning that his uncle gives to his suffering. He is confronted with it again later, in Zeitz Concentration Camp, when he observes a group of Latvian orthodox Jews: ‘They can be seen everywhere, at work, while marching or at Appell, rocking rhythmically back and forth as they unflaggingly mutter their prayers to themselves, like some unrepayable debt’ (Kertész 2004: 139). György feels awkward in their presence: ‘as if there had been something not quite right about me, as if I did not quite measure up to the proper ideal, in short as if I were somehow Jewish’ (Kertész 2004: 139).

A modern, more positive interpretation of Jewish suffering as martyrdom has been advanced by the Jewish theologian Daniel Krochmalnik (2007). Krochmalnik puts the Holocaust into a Jewish memorial tradition proposing a Haggadah of the Shoah similar to the Haggadah of Passover. The Haggadah of Passover is a religious text read out during the Passover Seder, the ritual dinner marking the beginning of the Passover feast. With the Haggadah of Passover, the memory of the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt is passed on from one generation to another. In this way, the Jewish commandment ‘to tell your son’ is fulfilled. As a model for a Haggadah of the Shoah, Krochmalnik (2007: 29) proposes the Jewish philosopher Eliezer Berkovitz’s *With God in Hell* (1979), where:

The concentration camp becomes a set and the barracks, the latrines, the whipping post, the gallows and the chimneys become props for the triumph of the eternal people. This play depicts the heroic deeds of the Jewish martyrs who divide and share their bread during famine, who on a fast day gladly relinquish their ration and who, on religious holidays, carry the light into their dark huts. The Germans share the fate of the ancient Egyptians – they are reduced to socage overseers, adamant persecutors and finally victims of a plague sent by God.

In Krochmalnik's proposition of a Haggadah of the Shoah, survival of the Holocaust becomes an act of divine benevolence similar to the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt. However, more than the survival of individual victims, it is for Krochmalnik (2007: 29) the foundation of the State of Israel that appears as a divine wonder. The Jews who managed to observe their religious practices even under the most hostile circumstances become martyrs, observing the Jewish precept to testify to the existence of God. Krochmalnik (2007: 30) acknowledges that his proposition might contradict actual testimonies, but underlines that it 'corresponds to the main concern of Jewish testimony: not the perpetrators, but the victims, the witnesses and justice have the final word'.

The wish to give a meaning to death at the hands of the Nazi mass murderers can also be found in the concepts that have been defined to describe this death: 'Holocaust', 'Shoah' and 'Hurban'. The term 'Holocaust' was originally used in the Bible to describe burnt offerings. Giorgio Agamben (2002: 28, italics in original), who highlights the senselessness of the death of the victims of the Holocaust, argues that, just like the Church Fathers' interpretation of martyrdom as a divine command, the term 'Holocaust' 'arises from [the] unconscious demand to justify a death that is *sine causa* – to give meaning back to what seemed incomprehensible'. The Hebrew 'Shoah' and the Yiddish 'Hurban' take up the religious interpretation of the mass murder of the European Jews as part of a longer history of persecution and divine punishment. 'Shoah' means destruction. Before it came to describe the mass murder of the European Jews, the word 'Shoah' had been used to denominate divine punishment (Agamben 2002: 31). 'Hurban' used to describe the destructions of the temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians and by the Romans. Especially in orthodox Jewish circles, the murder of the European Jews is interpreted as a third Hurban (Young 1993: 249). Rather than being seen as unique and as a civilizational break (Diner 1988), as is often the case in lay circles, the Holocaust is here seen as one event of extreme suffering among others that God has inflicted upon the Jewish people. Shoah and Hurban are therefore normally used in order to refer exclusively to the Jewish victims, whereas Holocaust is often used more generally to designate all of the victims of the Nazi genocide. I will therefore use the concept of 'Holocaust' rather than those of 'Shoah' or 'Hurban' for this study.

Giving a meaning to death is only one strategy that has been adopted to deal with the enormity of the Holocaust. Another strategy has been to give a meaning to survival. Many Holocaust survivors saw and see their testimony as a moral obligation that comes with their survival. Thus, Elie



Wiesel (2006: vii), in the introduction to the latest English-language edition of *Night*, observes:

There are those who tell me that I survived in order to write this text. I am not convinced ... However, having survived, I needed to give some meaning to my survival ... In retrospect, I must confess that I do not know, or no longer know, what I wanted to achieve with my words. I only know that without this testimony, my life as a writer – or my life, period – would not have become what it is: that of a witness who believes he has a moral obligation to try to prevent the enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory.

Similarly, for Primo Levi in *Survival in Auschwitz* (1996: 9), giving testimony – sharing his experiences with others – has been an elementary need: ‘The need to tell our story to “the rest”, to make “the rest” participate in it, had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse.’ Ruth Klüger in *weiter leben* (1994: 142) polemically elects the Germans as the target audience whose conscience she wants to arouse:

For whom do I actually write this? ... I write it for those who do not want to or are not able to feel neither with the perpetrators nor with the victims and for those who think that it is typically unwholesome to read too much about the misdeeds of mankind. I write it for those who think that I emit an insurmountable strangeness. In other words, I write it for Germans.<sup>6</sup>

Survival, these writers suggest, brings with it a moral obligation to give testimony. Even if death might have been meaningless, survival cannot be. Aleida Assmann, with reference to Avishai Margalit (2002: 147ff), therefore even goes so far as to give Holocaust survivors the role of ‘moral witnesses’. For Assmann, the moral witness shares characteristics both with the juridical witness, with the martyr and with what she calls the ‘historical witness’, the messenger in Greek mythology. Like the juridical witness, the moral witness has a mission of truth. This mission is directed against the perpetrators’ attempts to conceal their deeds. Like martyrs, moral witnesses embody the crimes that they have been a victim of. It is their marked bodies that serve as substitutes for the juridical oath. Those marked bodies are in fact of a higher importance than the factual accuracy of their testimony. However, unlike martyrs, moral witnesses do not give testimony through their death, but because of their survival. Unlike the martyr, the moral witness does not announce a positive message, God’s existence, but instead testifies ‘to evil per se, which he experienced himself’ (Assmann 2006: 88). The moral witness combines in herself or himself the characteristics of the martyr and those of the secondary witness to

the martyr or the historical witness (Assmann 2006: 88ff). Through her or his testimony, the moral witness performatively brings about a moral community that does not have a concrete shape or institution (Assmann 2006: 90f). This moral community in turn takes up a discourse that was begun in the courtroom during the trials against the perpetrators, but ‘that can only be worked through in fragments and imperfectly by the means of criminal prosecution’ (Assmann 2006: 90). For Assmann (2006: 91), giving testimony is therefore a moral imperative: ‘Forgetting protects the perpetrators and weakens the victims, which is why remembering in the form of giving testimony has become an ethical obligation and a form of retroactive resistance.’

To create a moral community is, as I will show in the following chapters, one of the most desired goals of the use of video testimonies in exhibitions. Human rights and ethics are now an important part of the didactics of all Holocaust and Second World War exhibitions. One of the main messages that Holocaust and Second World War exhibitions want to communicate is ‘never again’. However, not all Holocaust survivors are ipso facto moral witnesses. If I prefer here to use the concept ‘witness to history’ instead of the concept ‘moral witness’, this is because I believe the concept of ‘moral witness’ does not give full credit to the exact nature and functions of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. First, I understand the concept of ‘moral witness’ to put too much pressure on the individual Holocaust survivor. The interpretation of testimony as an ethical duty puts all of those Holocaust survivors who decided not to give testimony – the majority in fact – into moral debt. If we take Assmann’s concept of the moral witness to its limits, then the decision of Holocaust survivors not to give testimony entails a betrayal of their survival.

Second, I take the concept of ‘moral witness’ to concentrate too much on the agency of the figure of the moral witness and not enough on that of the audience. More than the moral witness creating a moral community, it is the witness’ audience that creates the moral witness. A Holocaust survivor can only issue a moral message if her or his primary audience presents her or his testimony in a way in which the secondary audience can – and does – interpret it from a moral perspective. As we will see, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors also meet with an audience that interprets them as anything but moral messages; for example, video testimonies are used by right-wing extremist groups to transmit revisionism and hate messages.

Finally, the concept of ‘moral witness’ disregards the fact that the functions of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors surpass merely giving moral lessons. With their testimonies, witnesses to history also, and probably most importantly, construct and consolidate a certain narrative of the

past. In fact, as I will show in Chapter 3, although it was always in the back of the interviewers' minds, not all video testimonies with Holocaust survivors were recorded with the primary goal of giving a moral lesson to the secondary audience.

Interpreting death during the Nazi mass murder as martyrdom and/or survival as a moral obligation is ultimately a question of political positioning. It is a question of the starting point for representation. Yad Vashem's insistence on martyrdom and heroism is also a consequence of the fact that the institution puts the fate of the victims into the centre of its representation. As we will see, many Western European museums start their interpretation with the deeds of the perpetrators. The aim is here not so much to show the heroism of the victims, but the enormity and senselessness of the suffering caused by the perpetrators. An interpretation of suffering as martyrdom would call this senselessness into question. The use of video testimonies in all of these museums has an educational function. The witnesses to history are in this way given a moral role. However, this role is not necessarily coterminous with a moral obligation that comes with survival. In the interview projects, the wish of witnesses of the past not to give testimony was unilaterally accepted.

## Conclusion

Although most of the witnesses to history whose video testimonies I will analyse in this study are Holocaust survivors, I will also consider video testimonies with bystanders and members of the local population. The personal experiences and the traces that those experiences have left of course differ from one witness to history to another. The fate of somebody who, like Emilio Jona in the Museo Diffuso, spent the war years as a refugee in a mansion in the countryside can scarcely be compared to that of an Auschwitz survivor. However, this does not mean that the testimonies of both cannot and would not be used in similar ways and that both are part of the global assemblage of the musealization of video testimonies. The concepts of 'witness to history' and 'witness of the past' will allow me to analyse the process of giving testimony of the past and the use of this testimony in a public domain, without – in a first instance – considering the differences in the experiences of the different witnesses. These differences do of course play a role in the actual representation of witnesses to history in exhibitions, but they are secondary to the phenomenon of the musealization of video testimonies that is under scrutiny here. The next chapter will look at how the process of becoming a witness to history has changed

over the years. It will analyse the foundations of the musealization of witnesses to history. Looking at public history and academic scholarship, it will answer the questions why and how witnesses to history have become authoritative representatives of the past.

## Notes

1. The website of the Zeitzeugenbörse can be found at: <http://www.zeitzeugenboerse.de>.
2. Until the 1970s, the term 'sannhetsvitner' (witnesses of truth) was used in Norway. The term 'tidsvitner' is a direct translation from the German 'Zeitzeuge', which was introduced by Helga Arntzen of the Norwegian foundation 'Hvite Busser til Auschwitz', which organizes study tours for schoolchildren to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum (Kverndokk 2011: 156). In 2006, Jakob Lothe and Anette Homlong Storeide published the book *Tidsvitner – Fortellinger fra Auschwitz og Sachsenhausen* (2006), an edited collection of testimonies by survivors of the Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz concentration camps. I thank my colleague Anette Homlong Storeide for this information.
3. Visual history has of course also been used to refer more generally to the use of pictures as sources and as objects of historical research.
4. See: <http://www.zeitzeugenboerse.de/zeitzeugen/werden.html>.
5. As seen before, secondary witnessing has of course also been given a different meaning. In the context of the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, secondary witnessing refers to the ethics of actively listening to those testimonies and passing them on.
6. This part can only be found in the German version of Klüger's autobiography, not in the English translation *Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2003).

## Chapter 2

# GENEALOGY

## The Mediation of the Witness to History as a Carrier of Memory

### *Aghet – Ein Völkermord*

In September 2010, the German TV channel NDR broadcast the documentary *Aghet – Ein Völkermord* (*Aghet – A Genocide*) by Eric Friedler. The documentary received several awards for its innovative way of bringing the history of the Armenian genocide to the small screen. What was it that was considered to be so special about this documentary? Friedler had decided that the most adequate way to represent the genocide was to let witnesses to history speak for themselves. The problem that he was confronted with was of course that there are no living witnesses left of an event that happened such a long time ago. Trying to compensate this shortcoming, he collected written testimonies in German archives. For the documentary, he let well-known German actors such as Martina Gedeck, Hannah Herzsprung, Ulrich Noethen and Gottfried John read them out. At the beginning of the documentary, these actors can be seen entering a grey room and sitting down on a chair surrounded by spots, cameras and a film crew. They are dressed in unobtrusive, black or grey, but modern clothes. The actor's name is shown, followed by the name of the person to whose account they are lending their voice. As soon as the actors start reciting, the camera zooms in on their face, which is positioned in front of a grey background and left in half-shadow. This camera angle will be the one from which the actors will be presented in the documentary from this moment on. From now on, only the names of the witness to history to whom they lend their voices will appear on screen.

The producer of the documentary, Katharina M. Trebitsch, praises the technique used by Friedler for its authenticity: 'We were carrying out "inter-

views with the past” in the present and in this way we reintroduced these witnesses into the present, without having to use historical costumes ... Our technique allowed us to produce intense sequences that gave the viewer the opportunity to relate to and experience what happened at the time directly and first-hand; without being distracted and with the highest possible authenticity’ (Trebitsch 2010).<sup>1</sup> Words that would once have been used for re-enactment and historical drama are applied to what, at first sight, seems a rather boring recitation of text in front of a camera. That it was not perceived as boring by the many critics who praised the documentary for its innovativeness and, one might imagine, also by the majority of viewers, has as much to do with the hitherto unpublished and exciting content of the documents as it has with the way in which a postmodern TV audience has learned to receive information on contemporary history over the last few decades.

Two subtexts underlie the performance of the actor-witnesses in *Aghet – Ein Völkermord*. First, there is the excitement of giving voice to witnesses of the past who had been silenced for a long time. Second, the performance of the actor-witnesses is embedded in legal discourse; it is presented as evidence that the mass murder of the Armenians was in fact a genocide. The testimonies are turned against assertions to the contrary issued by leading Turkish politicians like the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The scene showing the actors entering the grey room is preceded by archive pictures of the Prime Minister saying ‘come and show your evidence, then we will account for our past. I am saying this very openly and clearly’. The location of the documentary then changes to the archives of the German foreign ministry in Berlin. The voiceover commentary observes that the archives store thousands of secret documents that leave no doubt as to the fact that the genocide took place:

In Berlin, in the political archives of the foreign ministry lie thousands of reports, letters and notes – secret documents. They have been collected by the German Reich, an ally of Turkey during the First World War. Those documents had been withheld for a long time in order not to harm Turkey. They leave no doubt about the barbarous genocide. We find reports by German and American diplomats, but also descriptions by Swiss, Danish and Swedish doctors and missionaries, teachers, correspondents and nurses, who lived in Turkey at the beginning of the last century and who wrote down their observations. Records on yellowed paper, whose authors have died decades ago. Ninety-five years after the genocide these declarations can be listened to once again. Actors give a voice to these witnesses to history for the first time since these events occurred.

The declarations of the eyewitnesses are therefore ultimately supposed to incite Prime Minister Erdoğan, and others who deny the genocide, to make amends for the past.

For the time being, *Aghet – Ein Völkermord* appears as the climax of a gradual mediation and authentication of the figure of the witness to history whose roots can be found in Holocaust memory. For the purpose of advancing proof, Friedler re-stages what has become one of the most respected and established means to represent the past: video testimonies. The fake video testimonies in *Aghet – Ein Völkermord* are a remediation of a genre that has itself a long history of premediation, mediation and remediation starting in the immediate postwar years. This chapter will show how over the years conventions from jurisprudence, historiography and TV interviews have come together to form, establish and legitimize video testimonies as historical sources and, especially, as a means of representing the past in so-called public history, the non-academic narration of history.

### **Early Mediations of Memory: Recording Testimonies during and Immediately after the War**

‘The urge to record for eternal memory was literally as strong as the instinct to save one’s life’, observed the Jewish historian Philip Friedman after the war (cited in Smith 2012: 58). Even while the war was going on, the desire to talk and make their experiences public was great amongst those who experienced persecution and repression. Underground archives were kept in several ghettos, the most extensive of which was the Oyneg Shabes archive founded by the historian Emanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw ghetto. It was called Oyneg Shabes (Sabbath Pleasure) because the collaborators met on Saturday afternoons. They collected all possible kinds of material, from official documents to sweet wrappers, but especially numerous diary entries and eyewitness accounts. The interest of the collaborators of the Oyneg Shabes Archive in the most minute details of everyday life in the ghetto went back to the interwar years and the methodology developed by the Yiddish Scientific Institute (YIVO) founded in 1925. Under the leadership of the historian Simon Dubnow, the YIVO studied the everyday lives of the Yiddish communities in Poland, using a methodology very similar to today’s social history or oral history. So-called ‘zamlers’ (collectors) were sent to the communities to collect documents and artefacts and to animate ordinary people to keep diaries or write down their autobiographies. The aim was to save Yiddish folklore and to write a Polish Jewish history that would complement and live up to the national Polish history. Ultimately, the work of the YIVO was supposed to strengthen the identity of the diaspora Jews as a people rather than as a religious community

(Kassow 2007). Only a few collaborators of the Oyneg Shabes Archive survived the war, amongst whom were Hersh Wasser, the secretary of the Archive, and Rachel Auerbach, a writer and journalist who was later to become the first director of Yad Vashem's special bureau for the collection of testimonies (cf. Chapter 3). Under the guidance of Hersh Wasser, one part of the Archive, stored in tin boxes and milk cans, was unearthed on 18 September 1946. A second part of the Archive was found by Polish building workers by chance in 1950. The final part has probably been lost forever.

The work that had been started by the YIVO, by the Oyneg Shabes Archive and by the other ghetto archives was continued after the war by Yiddish historians such as Philip Friedman, Yosef Kermish, Nacham Blumental, Isaiah Trunk and Mark Dworzecki (Smith 2012). Straight after liberation, in August 1944, Friedman founded the Jewish Historical Commission in Lublin, which was later to become the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CJHC) and today is named the Jewish Historical Institute (JHI), located in Warsaw. He served as the director until June 1946 and was followed in this position by Nacham Blumental. Kermish became the founding director of the CJHC archives (Smith 2012: 57). The CJHC started straight away with the collection of documents, songs and personal testimonies. It is here that the Ringelblum Archives are located.

As Mark M. Smith has shown, these Yiddish historians were highly interested in personal testimonies. Friedman, for example, actively contacted survivors and, together with his collaborators, conducted thousands of interviews (Smith 2012: 63). 'Apart from official sources (archives) there are – and these are the very most important – living sources, quivering reality with traces of the "historical process" on their bodies and in their hearts', he observed (cited in Smith 2012: 63). By 1950, Friedman already counted more than 10,000 published books on the Holocaust (Smith 2012: 56).

These historians also actively contributed to the *Yizkor bikher* (black books), memorial books for the lost Jewish communities that were written by the survivors (Smith 2012: 62). The *Yizkor bikher* were mostly the work of Jewish *landmanschaften* and retold the story of their lost communities in a chronological way (Wieviorka 1998: 44ff, Cohen 2012: 189, Roskies 2012: 87f). Special black book committees were created in the United States and in the Soviet Union, which collected eyewitness accounts to be included in the books, while the refugees from the local communities did the same on a smaller scale (Roskies 2012: 87). Over one thousand black books were in this way put together, the first of which, assembled by



the United Emergency Relief Committee, appeared as early as December 1943 after three years of collecting (Roskies 2012: 87).

Already during the war and in the early postwar years, a relatively rich production of diaries, interviews, biographies and memoirs can thus be observed. That many of these writings have fallen into oblivion in the following years has, according to David Cesarani (2012), from whose volume edited together with Eric J. Sundquist most of the examples above have been taken, led to the 'myth of silence' about the postwar memory of the Holocaust. According to this 'myth of silence', the liberation of the camps and the trials against Nazi leaders had led to 'a flurry of attention in 1945–1946', which was then to die down until the Eichmann trial in 1961–62 (Cesarani 2012: 1). Cesarani and the other contributors of the volume certainly demonstrate that the felt need to speak and publish about the endured suffering was much greater in the immediate postwar years than might have appeared to be the case for a long time. However, there were also productions that were not to fall into oblivion or that have received a heightened level of attention in recent years, amongst which are David Boder's interviews and Anne Frank's diary. In 1946, the American psychologist David Boder, about whom we will learn more in Chapter 3, travelled to Europe with a wire recorder in order to carry out interviews with survivors in the DP camps. The play *The Diary of Anne Frank* premiered at the Cort Theatre in New York in 1955 and was to make an icon of Anne Frank and a bestseller of her diary, which had first been published in a small edition in Dutch in 1947 (Loewy 1998).

The wealth of media used to record the memory of individuals as well as the processes of remediation and the intermedial relations these media were put into were thus already at the time extremely rich: during the war, the collaborators of the Oyneg Shabes Archives and, after the war, the historians of the JHI harked back to the methodologies developed by the YIVO when collecting, archiving and researching; personal reports were remediated as parts of black books; a theatre play was to grant a place in the canon of Western literature to the diary written by a young girl who had been murdered in Bergen-Belsen; while psychological and psychotherapeutic methods influenced David Boder's recording of what are amongst the first audio testimonies of Holocaust survivors. As we will see, some of those processes of remediation and those intermedial relations have helped to propel the witness to history to the position of a socially accepted carrier of memory. Nevertheless, it would take until the Eichmann trial for the witness to history to become a media event. It was here that the bodies and voices of the individual witnesses to history were for the first time made the centre of attention.

## **The Eichmann Trial: The Mediation of the Holocaust Survivor as Witness to History**

The aim of the Eichmann trial, which lasted from 1961 to 1962, was as much to prove Adolf Eichmann's involvement in the Nazi mass murder of the Jews of Europe as it was about giving a history lesson to Israel and the world (Wieviorka 2006a: 66). The trial was meant to, and succeeded in, raising public interest not only in the history of the Holocaust, but also in the survivors who were called to testify to this history. It changed the conception of Holocaust survivors as witnesses in a juridical sense and stands at the beginning of a new form of Holocaust historiography. Ultimately, it led to a social recognition of Holocaust survivors as witnesses to history.

Only very few survivors had given testimony during the Nuremberg trials and their main duty was to testify to what had been reconstructed previously with the help of documents (Wieviorka 2006a: 67; Keilbach 2008: 144). By contrast, the Eichmann trial put the survivors centre stage. It was by presenting the survivors and by letting them speak in their own voice that the Israeli population and the world at large were to be made aware of the atrocities that had happened in Europe during the Second World War. In his memoirs, Gideon Hausner, the Attorney General, writes:

It was an imperative for the stability of our youth that they should learn the full truth of what happened, for only through knowledge could understanding and reconciliation with the past be achieved. Our younger generation, absorbed as it was in the building and guarding of a new state had far too little insight into events which ought to be a pivotal point in its education. (cited in Wieviorka 2006a: 68)

The Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared: 'we want the nations of the world to know ... and they should be ashamed' (cited in Arendt 1994: 10). To Hausner, documents alone seemed too cold and dry to have the desired effect. Together with the commissary Michel Goldman, he viewed the witness accounts that had already been collected by Yad Vashem and chose 111 witnesses for the trial. In their choice, Hausner and Goldman were prompted by the director of Yad Vashem's department for testimonies and former collaborator of the Ringelblum Archive, Rachel Auerbach (cf. Chapter 3). Auerbach saw the trial as a chance to 'make the Jewish voice heard' (Cohen 2008: 213). She recommended witnesses to the prosecution and even offered advice on how to analyse the 'phenomenology of extermination' and on the order in which the witnesses should appear (Cohen 2008: 215–16). In their final choice, Hausner and Goldman made

sure to cover the complete history of the Holocaust: every profession and every place of origin were to be represented. The witnesses were supposed to reconstruct the whole horror of the Holocaust and to give its history an aura of authenticity. 'In this way [through the use of a large number of witness accounts], I hope to superimpose on a phantom a dimension of reality', Hausner observed (cited in Wieviorka 2006a: 70).

The witnesses were accorded an unusual amount of time for their testimonies, a fact that was criticized by Hannah Arendt, who observed that while Eichmann himself was interrogated for thirty-three-and-a-half sessions, the interrogations of the witnesses took almost twice as long: sixty-two sessions (Arendt 1994: 223). Moreover, they were given the right to violate almost all postulates of juridical testimony. First, they contributed only little to the accusation. Only a few of them could directly testify to Eichmann's guilt. The majority of them even came from countries that were outside of Eichmann's sphere of influence (Wieviorka 2006a: 86). Second, they were allowed – and even invited – to digress from the main subject matter. Third, their depositions were not meant to be objective, so much so that, after having heard a considerable number of the testimonies, judge Moshe Landau observed: 'Mr. Hausner, we have just heard incredible things, but we have moved away from the purpose of this process in large parts' (cited in Fohrmann 2006: 187). According to Arendt (1994: 225), 'the right of the witness to be irrelevant' was therefore firmly established at the end of the trial.

Hausner's and Ben-Gurion's strategy of bringing the whole horror of the Holocaust to life, and of sentimentalizing the audience in the courtroom, the viewers in front of the TV screens and the listeners of the radio broadcast proved successful. While four cameras had been installed in the courtroom, the international TV stations soon started to request primarily pictures showing the witnesses (Wieviorka 2006a: 83). Members of the audience in the courtroom observed that they forgot about Eichmann when confronted with the witness accounts. 'Suddenly I realized that today I had not once looked into the glass booth. The events being described were larger than he was, although he had been one of those who had made them loom so large', wrote the writer and journalist Haim Gouri (cited in Wieviorka 2006a: 83).

The national and international interest in the witnesses led to the social recognition of the survivor as an authoritative figure with the right to testify to the Nazi mass murder. The Eichmann trial stands at the beginning of the recognition of the bodies and voices of 'ordinary' people as authoritative media for carrying memory and telling history. Suddenly, the Nazi mass murder was not only seen in quantitative terms, as the

millions who had been murdered, but also as a sequence of individual destinies (Wieviorka 2006a: 88). The stories that, especially in Israel, had until then mostly been told behind closed doors were now told in a public sphere. That this sphere was a courtroom is relevant for the subsequent success story of the figure of the witness to history. The survivors at the trial drew their authority to give testimony on the history of the Holocaust from their position as prosecuting witnesses. It was on the basis of this authority that the figure of the survivor witness could develop its subsequent societal authority and recognition in spaces other than the juridical one.

The fact that the witnesses of the Eichmann trial became such iconic figures is further bound up with the high mediation of the trial. Hausner had chosen survivors who had already written down their stories as he was of the opinion that the written accounts would help the survivors to refresh their memory (Wieviorka 1998: 102). The witnesses at the Eichmann trial were not therefore testifying for the first time. Their testimonies were remediations of what they had written before. However, in contrast to the written form, in which testimonies had been made public up until this moment, the audience of the Eichmann trial could observe the very act of remembering.<sup>2</sup> Not only was what the witnesses said of importance, but so were what they looked like and the inflection of their voice while saying it. Most of the witnesses took their role seriously and their depositions were rather uneventful. The importance that the body and voice of the witnesses has been accorded – at least in hindsight – can be demonstrated by one of the more eventful ones: that of the writer Jehiel Dinur, alias K. Zetnik. Jehiel Dinur, author of several books on Auschwitz, fainted during his testimony when his highly poetized monologue on Auschwitz as ‘another planet’ was interrupted by the judges. K. Zetnik’s testimonial was the most ‘bodily’ image of the trial. It is also one of the most frequently shown images of the trial today. As a testimony, K. Zetnik’s abrupt silence has been granted more weight than his words (cf. Felman 2002: 154).

Treating the Eichmann trial as a turning point in the genealogy of the witness to history, the French historian Annette Wieviorka argues that it brought about the ‘*homme mémoire*’ (memory man), ‘an embodiment of memory attesting to the past and to the continuing presence of the past’ (Wieviorka 2006b: 391). Similarly, the German media theorist Judith Keilbach sees in the Eichmann trial the birth of the figure of the ‘*Zeitzeuge*’. ‘*Zeitzeugen*’ are for her those witnesses of the past ‘whose memory is used for a – factual or emotional – constitution of history’ (Keilbach 2008: 141). To the ‘*Zeitzeuge*’, Keilbach juxtaposes the ‘(Zeit)-Zeuge’, the wit-

ness in a juridical sense whose only duty is the resolution of a crime, such as the witnesses at the Nuremberg trials.

Like Wieviorka and Keilbach, I see the Eichmann trial as the moment of origin of a new witness-figure – what I have called the ‘witness to history’. At the Eichmann trial, a juridical convention was used in order to construct a memorial discourse with the aim of establishing the Holocaust as a founding myth of the State of Israel and of giving a history lesson to the world. The witnesses at the Eichmann trial became, in Wieviorka’s sense, carriers of memory and, in Keilbach’s sense, constructors of a historical narrative. At the trial, written accounts were mediated for the depositions of the witnesses, which in turn were used for political ends. In this way, the Eichmann trial also laid the foundations for the acceptance of the testimony of Holocaust survivors outside of the juridical context.

I wish here to come back to Klas Grinell’s (2010: 179) threefold definition of representation as ‘Vertretung’, ‘Darstellung’ and ‘Vorstellung’ outlined in the Introduction. The witnesses at the Eichmann trial were chosen as representatives (‘Vertreter’) of all of the other victims, but also of the history of the Holocaust. They were asked to make this history present again (‘Darstellung’) in the witness stand. As a history lesson, the Eichmann trial was finally meant to evoke in its audience a mental image (‘Vorstellung’) of the Holocaust. The witnesses’ voices and bodies became as much part of their testimony as the content of their utterances. Owing to the broadcasting, the audience of their testimonies extended those present at the trial. The camera angle mostly showed the upper part of the witnesses’ bodies – the lower part being covered by the witness stand – a focus that would become common for representations of witnesses to history on film and in video testimonies.

### **The Fortunoff Archive and the Shoah Foundation: A Systematic Collection of Video Testimonies**

The first project to engage in systematically recording and collecting video testimonies with survivors of the Holocaust was the Fortunoff Archive. The Fortunoff Archive started in 1979 as a small-scale community project based around the realization of a monument to the victims of the Holocaust in New Haven. The original idea was to produce a documentary on the Holocaust for the unveiling of the monument. A trial interview session with Holocaust survivors from New Haven was carried out by the television journalist Laurel F. Vlock and the psychiatrist and child survivor

Dori Laub. 'Vlock and Laub both realized that what they had recorded was extraordinary and that the impact of these stories should be shared', observes Joann Weiner Rudof (2007: 2), who joined the project at a later stage. A local Holocaust Survivors Film Project was therefore founded. In the course of a few years, the project, which in 1987, after a gift to endowment by Alan A. Fortunoff, was renamed the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, grew in importance, size and renown. Affiliated projects were created all over the world and, by now, the Archive has amassed around 4,400 video testimonies.

The literary theorist Geoffrey Hartman, who joined the project at an early stage, gives three reasons for the choice of video over audio. First, the Fortunoff Archive was meant to give their voices and faces back to the victims of the Holocaust who had, until that moment, mostly been represented through atrocious pictures of haggard bodies and heaps of corpses. Its initiators considered that showing the survivors' faces would add 'immediacy and evidentiality' (Hartman 1996: 144) to the testimonies. Second, the videos were recorded with an educational purpose in mind. The founders of the Archive correctly anticipated that future audiences would be audiovisual and chose the visual medium of video over an aural medium (Hartman 1996: 144). Finally, the Fortunoff Archive was partly a reaction to Marvin Chomsky's miniseries *Holocaust*, which was broadcasted in most countries between 1978 and 1979, and which popularized the word 'Holocaust' as a denomination for the Nazi mass murder. *Holocaust* was considered by the collaborators of the Archive – and by many others – as taking their stories away from the survivors. 'Any survivor could tell a story more true and terrible in its detail, more authentic in its depiction', observes Hartman (1996: 143). The choice for video was therefore also a choice to contrast the voices and faces of the real survivors with a fictional and – possibly romanticized – representation of history.

The project set standards for subsequent projects. The Fortunoff Archive has developed archiving and cataloguing techniques for video testimonies and designed one of the first websites with audiovisual content (Rudof 2007). The collaborators of the Fortunoff Archive were also pioneers in the use of video testimonies for Holocaust and tolerance education, and have developed didactic guidelines for those who want to follow their example. Moreover, they have elaborated a psychoanalytically inspired interviewing method combining the methodologies of oral history and therapy sessions. As observed in the Introduction, the theoretical works by the collaborators Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman and Lawrence L. Langer on the role of the interviewer, the act of giving testimony and

the evaluation of the testimonies have influenced practitioners carrying out interviews with Holocaust survivors and theorists of the collective and individual memory of the Holocaust.

Unlike the witnesses at the Eichmann trial, the witnesses who are interviewed by the Fortunoff Archive do not give testimony for a purpose other than that of overcoming their trauma and transmitting their memories to an audience that should learn from them. The interview sessions are partly seen as therapy sessions that are meant to help the survivors reconcile, in Laub's words, 'two worlds – the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is – that are different and will always remain so' (Felman and Laub 1992: 91). For this reason, the survivors should be given the liberty to tell their story as they see fit and for as long as they desire. The interviewer only rarely interferes. In fact, as Noah Shenker (2015: 28) observes, interviewers are dissuaded from bringing their research notes to the interview or taking notes. Her or his role is that of a sympathetic listener who has got a 'duty to listen and to restore a dialogue with people so marked by their experience that total integration into everyday life is a semblance – though a crucial and comforting semblance' (Hartman 1996: 133). However, neither the interviewers nor the subsequent listeners should expect to fully understand the testimonies of the survivors. For the collaborators of the Fortunoff Archive, there exists an insurmountable gap between Holocaust survivors and the people who have not had their experiences. Hartman (1996: 133) observes that 'for us, who were not there, the classical axiom holds that "Nothing human is alien"; for them, "Nothing human is entirely familiar"'. Therefore, the collection of a large amount of video testimonies is secondary to the provision of a platform for the survivors to tell their stories. To keep and represent the individuality of each and every survivor is one of the project's guiding principles.

This is not fully the case for the largest and probably best-known video-testimony project that followed the Fortunoff Archive: the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, today the USC Shoah Foundation – the Institute for Visual History and Education, which was established by Steven Spielberg in 1994. The story goes that, while filming *Schindler's List* (1993), Spielberg was approached by survivors asking him to record their testimony. This experience led him to the idea of creating a foundation that would record the testimonies of Holocaust survivors before it would be too late. Unlike the Fortunoff Archive, the Shoah Foundation started with an ambitious quantitative goal. The Foundation saw its work as a race against time. The aim was to collect, in the course of ten to fifteen years, 50,000 testimonies from all over the world (Jungblut

2005: 509). By 2003, when the collection period ended, 51,700 interviews had been amassed (Jungblut 2005: 517).

Unlike the Fortunoff Archive, the Shoah Foundation operated in a highly standardized way. Wishing to be representative for the whole history of the Shoah, the sample of interviews was supposed to be as diverse and as complete in terms of what concerns individual destinies as possible. A list was made with the most interesting experiences and categories of witnesses, with coordinators being asked to stick to this list. The preserved testimonies were supposed to represent the different angles of the history of the Holocaust both in quantity and diversity. While for the Fortunoff Archive potential interviewees were trained over six weeks, the training sessions of the Shoah Foundation lasted for three to four days and guidelines were set for the structure of the interviews. The average length of the interviews came to between two and two-and-a-half hours (Jungblut 2005: 513ff).

Apart from this desire to represent a relatively complete history of the Holocaust through survivor testimonies, Spielberg also sees the project as a chance for salvation: 'That they survived is a miracle. Through the Shoah Foundation they've had a chance to survive a second time – in a sense, to survive forever', he observes in a documentary that is used as a bonus to the DVD of *Schindler's List* (cited in Bachmann 2010: 43). The scale of the project, Spielberg's name and its (for the layperson) more approachable, quantitative and educational instead of psychoanalytical goal allowed the Shoah Foundation to reach out to a much larger audience than the Fortunoff Archive. Since the collection period ended, the Shoah Foundation has moved its focus more and more towards the use of the collected video testimonies in education and recently started developing testimonies in the form of holograms – a project that I will come back to in the Conclusion. Since then, the Foundation has also carried out interviews with survivors of other genocides. Today, its rather ambitious goal is 'to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry – and the suffering that they cause – through the educational use of the Institute's visual history testimonies' (USC Shoah Foundation: n.d.).

With the Fortunoff Archive, the Shoah Foundation and similar, smaller projects, the medium of the video testimony became established as a means of recording and collecting the memory of survivors of the Shoah and, over time, those of other witnesses to history as well. The idea of foresight now became a major concern for recording video testimonies. Already the first written testimonies were of course recorded with the aim of making sure that the world remembered in order to prevent a disastrous repetition. Through the use of the method of the interview, those who



were not confident or gifted enough to record their memories in writing also got a chance to leave their testimonies for posterity. What is more, with the use of the medium of video, the body of the testimonies became an important element in the transmission of memory to future generations, an aspect that I will return to in more detail in Chapter 3.

Amit Pinchevski (2012: 144f) has argued that the medium of the video testimony can also be considered to be the 'technological unconscious' of the theories developed by Laub, Felman and Langer (cf. Introduction, pp. 7–9), and consequently of the current 'trauma and testimony discourse'. The medium of the video orders time in a linear way; it has the potential to both archive and to broadcast, to make visible the unarticulated, as well as to analyse this unarticulated by stopping and rewinding. 'It is only with an audiovisual medium capable of capturing and reproducing evidence of the fleeting unconscious that a discourse concerned with the unarticulated traumatic past becomes intelligible', Pinchevski (2012: 144f) points out. In other words, it is because of the medium of the video that ideas of the listener's role in working through and recording trauma (Laub), 'deep memory' (Langer) or the transmission of trauma (Felman and Laub) could be generated. In fact, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter, the medium of video produces the testimonies as much as it records them, putting the bodies of the witnesses centre stage and allowing a reception in fragmented form or in slow motion, for example.

The collaborators of video-testimony projects took up techniques of some media while distancing themselves from others. The method of the interview, for example, is inspired by psychoanalysis, autobiographical narratives and the method of oral history. As we will see shortly, the camera angle with a focus on the head and upper body of the video testimonies is very similar to that of TV interviews. It is also fairly similar to the camera angles used for shooting the witnesses at the Eichmann trial. Finally, the video testimonies are meant to contrast fictionalized pictures of the Holocaust (in the case of the Fortunoff Archive, those of *Holocaust*), or to complement to the latter (in the case of the Shoah Foundation, those of *Schindler's List*).

### **Witnesses to History in TV Documentaries: The Witness to History as a Mass Consumable Good**

It was also during the late 1970s and 1980s that witnesses to history began to appear ever more frequently in TV documentaries. The German

historian Frank Bösch (2008: 61) enumerates four cultural and political phenomena that triggered this appearance. First, the upcoming 'direct cinema' or 'cinéma vérité' changed the genre of documentary in general, and that of the documentary of the Second World War and the Holocaust in particular. Second, the appearance of right-wing extremist interpretations of history demanded countervoices. Third, the broadcast of the miniseries *Holocaust* ultimately brought about an interest in more 'authentic' representations of contemporary history. Witnesses to history had already appeared in documentaries such as *De Bezetting*, which was broadcast in the Netherlands in the early 1960s, and in *Das Dritte Reich*, which was shown in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1960/1961, as well as in the documentaries produced around the different trials against Nazi perpetrators. The witnesses who appeared in those early documentaries were often members of the intellectual elite who were reciting preformulated statements (Bösch 2008: 56, Keilbach 2008:147ff). They drew their authority for speaking on the Second World War and the Holocaust in public not only from their position as people who had lived through the events, but also from their socially established status as opinion makers. A large number of 'ordinary' people appeared for the first time in a documentary from the country that was responsible for making people's history, oral history and history workshops popular in Europe: the United Kingdom. Along with statements made by members of the National Socialist elite or individuals who had been close to them, Richard Holmes' BBC documentary *The World at War* (broadcast in 1973) also included those of ordinary soldiers and other ordinary citizens from several European countries (Holmes 2007; Bösch 2008: 61).

In the 1980s and 1990s, then, the appearance of witnesses to history in TV documentaries became ever more frequent. Witnesses to history were now often filmed and interviewed 'on location'. While not being the first one to do so, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* from 1985 was certainly the most influential documentary to concentrate on interviews with witnesses of the Holocaust – victims, perpetrators and bystanders – and to follow survivors back to the locations of their suffering. With its consistent renouncement of archival footage, its investigative documentary style and its use of a mix of psychoanalytical and juridical interview methods, *Shoah* became a model for subsequent documentaries and launched a still-ongoing discussion on the most adequate – and authentic – way to represent the Holocaust, which basically circles around the question whether fictional or even factual representations of the Holocaust are ethical (Krankenhagen 2001: 181ff; Rose 2008).

Since the 1990s, interviews with witnesses to history have been a standard part of TV documentaries on contemporary history. Analysts of video testimonies in TV documentaries give several explanations for this. For one thing, the appearance of private TV and the invention of the quota meant that public TV had to campaign for more viewers. Witnesses to history were one of the means that were chosen to make the subject of contemporary history more appealing (Bösch 2008: 68; Fischer 2008: 37). Moreover, the possibility of preproduction – and thus the possibility to cut out sensitive statements – made possible the appearance of ordinary people in TV talkshows. As a consequence, witnesses to history also began to appear more frequently in TV documentaries (Keilbach 2008: 181ff). What is more, the memorial year of 1995 brought with it a heightened interest in the period of National Socialism (Keilbach 2008: 187). The invention of video finally made it possible to record longer interviews, since there was no longer any need to change film spools, while digitization techniques made archiving and cutting the interviews easier (Keilbach 2008: 189ff).

Over the years, different camera angles and means of representation were tried out. However, *The World at War* already showed the witnesses to history as what is today often called ‘talking heads’. As we have seen with the example of *Aghet – Ein Völkermord*, this is the camera angle that has by now become standard. As in the fake video testimonies of *Aghet – Ein Völkermord*, video testimonies have since the 1990s mostly been filmed in front of a neutral, mostly grey or black background. In accordance with the viewing habits of an audience that has become used to consuming ever-more information in an ever-shorter amount of time, testimonies are now also shortened to a few seconds. Unlike in Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, the focus is currently not so much on the witnesses themselves anymore. Most of the scholars who have studied the use of video testimonies in TV documentaries raise the criticism that frequently the video testimonies merely serve to comment on archival footage or to affirm and authenticate the voiceover commentary (Bösch 2008: 70, Keilbach 2008). Today, video testimonies are also produced specifically for the purpose of using them in multiple documentaries. ZDF History, a section of the public German TV channel ZDF, for example, records all of its interviews using the same aesthetics, so that clips from the interviews can be included in documentaries on different topics.

With their large-scale use in TV documentaries, video testimonies have become mass-consumable goods. The Fortunoff Archive and the Shoah Foundation recorded the testimonies for a large audience as well. However, access to the whole archives is still restricted to selected institutions.

Moreover, while the Fortunoff Archive in particular insists on the uniqueness of the genre of the video testimony and wishes its testimonies to be watched in their entirety, with the popularization of video testimonies in TV documentaries, it has become commonplace to consume the testimonies as short clips and intramediated in the larger visual narrative of the documentary. As we will see in the following chapters, the video testimonies that were developed for the TV documentaries and for the video-testimony projects serve as premediations of the video testimonies used in museums and memorials. The aesthetics as well as the techniques for cutting that were developed here have influenced the use of video testimonies in museums and memorials.

### **Oral History: Ordinary People as Historical Sources**

The video-testimony projects and the inclusion of witnesses in TV documentaries were influenced and accompanied by a sociological and anthropological shift in historiography. Social, cultural and everyday history, which began to appear in the 1960s, started to turn away from a focus on important political figures and events. New research questions asked not so much what had happened, but how what had happened was experienced on the ground. Oral history using interviews with witnesses of the past as a primary source became a commonly used method for answering these new questions. The method has its origins in the United States in the 1930s, where it first served as a substitute for missing written sources. This was in part due to the U.S. archival system, in which the documents of a president's mandate are the president's private property and consequently are not always made publicly available. Second, two communities in the United States, the Native Americans and the slaves, did not leave many written sources, so research on the history of these communities had to rely on the spoken word. Finally, owing to the status of the United States as a country of immigration, documents about the beginnings of U.S. history lay outside of the country, while migration inside the country had only been partially bureaucratized, and detailed documents were often missing (Wierling 2003: 83–84). The earliest interviews in the United States were elite interviews. Ronald J. Grele (2007: 34ff) points out that interviewing in this context was an 'archival practice' with the goal 'to complement the existing written record with information gleaned from interviews and fill in the gaps in that record'. By the 1960s, many universities in the United States had an oral history department and by 1965, there were eighty-nine oral history projects in the country. It was also at this time that the

range of projects increased. ‘The civil rights movement, protests against the Vietnam War, and the feminist movement all raised questions about American history based on deeds of elite white men’, observes Rebecca Sharpless (2007: 14).

In Europe, oral history established itself via the usual gateway for ideas coming from the United States: the United Kingdom. In Europe, as opposed to the United States, oral history had been, since its beginnings, linked to everyday history with the desire to ‘create a history of the everyday lives of those who have heretofore been ignored by historians and thereby produce a “better” history, and to radicalize the practice of history by contesting a “hegemonic” view on agency and power’ (Grele 2007: 37f). Thus, in the United Kingdom, even before the Second World War, the project ‘Mass Observation’, which started in 1937, tried to create an ‘anthropology of ourselves’ (History of Mass Observation: n. d.). However, it would take until the 1980s and 1990s before oral history would become a commonly practised method in Europe.

While traditional historians have been – and some still are – rather sceptical towards this new method, oral history has been a favourite of lay historians since its inception. History workshops, for example, which first appeared in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, researched local and workers’ history. Here, as in the company histories supported by the trade unions, the objects of research were directly involved in the research (Wierling 2003: 89). ‘We begin to be interested in ourselves and the origin of our own living conditions, behaviours, patterns of interpretation and possible courses of action’, observed Lutz Niethammer (1985: 10) in the first comprehensive anthology on the method to appear in German.

With oral history, interviews with witnesses to history became an accepted method of research. In the countries touched by the Second World War, many of the projects have and still do focus on the experiences of the population during the war years or on Holocaust survivors. Over the years, partly because of technological developments, the use of a tape recorder has often been replaced by that of a video camera. As we will see more in detail in the next chapter, many concentration camp memorials started their own oral history projects in the 1990s – and would soon recur to video as a medium. At the beginning, these projects were, unlike the video-testimony projects, still very much focused on extracting factual information. When the memorials started to plan their new exhibitions at the turn of the twenty-first century, oral history was fully recognized as a research method, a biographical focus on the history of the camps had become well established and video testimonies a common means to record

the memories of witnesses to history. The new exhibitions generally took a biographical stance and included at least some oral or video testimonies.

### **Life in the ‘Era of the Witness’: Witnesses to History in Contemporary Popular Culture**

The juridical, political, societal and academic interest in the figure of the witness to history as an authoritative carrier of memory and history led to what Annette Wieviorka had already in 1998 called the ‘era of the witness’. For approximately two decades, no memorial ceremony regarding events of the Second World War and the Holocaust passes without an anxious glance forward to the time when the last witnesses of the past will have passed away. There seems to be a consensus that it is important to listen to, record and preserve the memory of those who experienced the events at first hand. The mimicry of video testimonies in *Aghet – Ein Völkermord* is therefore also an expression of regret that at the time nobody made an effort to record the memories of the survivors of that genocide; considering current memorial practices, this seems almost unimaginable, if not inconsiderate.

The ‘era of the witness’ in which we are living is characterized by two intermeshing movements. On the one hand, we find a heightened self-confidence on the part of those who have experienced the Holocaust and the Second World War at first hand. As Jan Philipp Reemtsma (1997: 23), reflecting on the written accounts of Holocaust survivors, observes: ‘[The author] presupposes that his account will have, or could at least have, a use in the future and he gains from this presupposition energy for life and writing.’ In other words, witnesses to history have become convinced of the extraordinariness of their experiences and the consequent educative value of their biographies. They therefore wish to share with an ever-larger audience the stories that, until recently, they only told a close circle of friends and family. Especially in Germany, declaring oneself to be a witness to history, a ‘Zeitzeuge’, has become an expression of pride. This applies not only or primarily to Holocaust survivors, who often feel guilt for having survived, but more generally to everybody who considers herself or himself to have experienced something extraordinary. Reflecting on his youth in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the German film director Leander Haußmann provokingly declared on the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in the Berlin daily *B.Z.* that he is glad to have been born in the GDR, since: ‘In this way I have become a witness to history (‘Haußmann provoziert am Mauerfall Tag’: 2009).

I have experienced something that many people have not experienced.’ As the cultural theorist Diedrich Diederichsen (2008: 46) has pointed out: ‘[Historical experience] is something, that one is not personally accountable for, but of which one feels oneself to be a proud owner’.

However, this pride of being a witness to history could only develop in an environment that equates historical experience with experience of life, thus granting it pedagogical value. Reemtsma (1997: 23) argues that the act of reading survivor accounts – or, one should add, listening or watching them – has been given ‘a moral and cognitive value beyond aesthetic pleasure’. Since the 1980s, the generation of the children of the victims, perpetrators and bystanders started to research and conserve for the future every possible detail of the Holocaust and the Second World War. An interest in the past was here combined with the desire to learn from this past. This generation is convinced that only by remembering and recording every detail can a repetition of the atrocities of the past be prevented. This phenomenon is both a result and a sign of what Jay Winter has called the ‘memory boom in contemporary historical studies’ (Winter 2001: 52). He explains this contemporary preoccupation with the past through ‘a multiplicity of social, cultural, medical, and economic trends and developments of an eclectic but intersecting kind’ (2001: 53). These include: commemorations and identity politics on both the state and the nonstate levels, an ever-more affluent and educated middle class craving for a ‘history business’, a stronger bond between the different generations made possible because of longer life expectancy, and the recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder.

As a consequence, witnesses to history now pervade all possible kinds of media. To give only a few examples: during the anniversary year of the German invasion of Poland 2009, the German weekly *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published a series entitled ‘Augenzeugen’, in which ordinary people remember the Second World War. In the same year, for the sixtieth anniversary of the Federal Republic of Germany and the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German weekly *Die Zeit* (under the heading ‘Zeitzeugen’) created a platform for prominent witnesses who remembered ‘moments [from post-1945 German history] that have entered collective memory’ (Schabowski 2009: 3). The autobiographies and semi-autobiographical writings by Holocaust survivors such as Jorge Semprún, Primo Levi, Ruth Klüger, Elie Wiesel, Imre Kertész and Charlotte Delbo have by now entered the literary canon. The sheer number of memoirs from the war generation and Holocaust survivors, in addition to witnesses of other events, that are published every year would fill several kilometres of shelf space. Some small publishing houses such as the German publishers

*Zeitgut*<sup>3</sup> or *Wartberg*<sup>4</sup> have even specialized in these kinds of publications. Only few of those books reach a large readership. Those that do are generally published by larger publishing houses and are perceived as especially authentic because of their authors' proximity to the core of historical events or leading political figures. Examples would be the memoirs of Hitler's bodyguard Rochus Misch (2009) or that of Hitler's last secretary, Traudl Junge (2003) – the latter inspiring the German blockbuster movie *Downfall* (2004).

Furthermore, competitions invite young people to carry out interviews with witnesses of the past. In 2009, for the occasion of the German Day for the Victims of National Socialism, and the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January 2010, the Berlin City Parliament invited young people to start a dialogue with the generation of their grandparents and great-grandparents for the competition 'Ich bin Zeuge meiner Zeit'<sup>5</sup> ('I am a Witness of My Time'). Until a few years ago, the German Historical Museum used to organize the annual competition 'Was für ein Leben!' ('What a Life!') that gave awards to interesting and/or exemplary biographies. The people with the 'best' biographies won the production of a documentary of their lives. The great popularity of the internet, along with cheap and easy-to-use digitization technologies, have made testimonies available to an ever-larger audience all over the world. Websites such as *einestages*,<sup>6</sup> run by the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, publish, inter alia, the life stories of prominent and ordinary witnesses to history. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 5, video-testimony projects now have their own websites<sup>7</sup> and/or put the videos on YouTube and other social media websites. Since 2012, the project 'Gedächtnis der Nation' ('Memory of the Nation'), founded by the German TV Historian Guido Knopp and the journalist Hans-Ulrich Jörges, allows anybody to be interviewed and to put their interviews online. With a so-called 'Jahrhundertbus' ('Century Bus'), a mobile recording studio, interviewers travel all over Germany to collect video testimonies for the project's website and YouTube. The website also offers advice to individuals who want to produce their own video testimonies and allows them to upload them on the project's YouTube channel.<sup>8</sup> Finally, by creating Facebook pages and blogs for victims of the Holocaust, even the dead are now brought back to the world of the living and given a voice (Heyer 2010: 12).

Thus, we are living in a time that is unprecedentedly favourable towards the genre of testimony – especially the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. How favourable can be demonstrated by another look back into the past. Early oral history projects, even those with survivors, were mostly about collating enough sources to reconstruct the past. Toni Kushner (2006: 282) quotes Richard Koerber of the Hebrew University in conversation with Eva



Reichmann of the Wiener Library saying in the 1950s ‘if I find only one piece of evidence, it does not mean anything to me; if I have ten records, that is good; but if I have a hundred, then the evidence is conclusive’ (cited in Kushner 2006: 282). A few years later, in 1961, Hannah Arendt (1994: 224) noted about the witnesses present at the Eichmann trial: ‘how much wiser it would have been to resist these pressures altogether ... and to seek out those who had not volunteered!’. For her, the trial provided a platform for people who wanted to distinguish themselves. A case in point for her was K. Zetnik’s blackout, which she interpreted as part of a performance: ‘In response [to Gideon Hausner’s inquiry as to whether he could ask a question], the disappointed witness, probably deeply wounded, fainted and answered no more’ (Arendt 1994: 224). Koerber’s dismissal of the value of the single testimony, as well as Arendt’s assessment of testimony as performance, and her distinction between candid Holocaust survivors and those who according to her merely used the trial to distinguish themselves seem utterly untenable today. As Tony Kushner critically observes: ‘Now ... we seem to have a problem in respecting the ordinariness and the individuality of the survivors, which in turn has been reflected in attitudes towards testimony’ (Kushner 2001:86). Witnesses to history, especially survivors of the Holocaust, have become socially accepted carriers of memory who are treated with awe and respect. What we now often tend to forget is that their wartime experience is not the only thing that defines them.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the genealogy of the witness to history from the war years to the present ‘era of the witness’ is a story of mediation, premediation and remediation. The act of giving testimony has been recorded and transmitted by different media from written memoirs to oral history, depositions in court and video testimonies to the internet. In the process, witnesses of the past who tell their stories in the private sphere have been turned into witnesses to history – people who give testimony on the past in the public sphere. Juridical witnesses have been turned into history teachers, ordinary people into historical documents, and stories of pain and suffering into moral signposts. Witnesses to history are now one of the most important carriers of memory. They have become representatives of the past in the threefold meaning given to the word by Grinell: they are representatives of other witnesses of the past (‘Vertretung’), they make this past present again through their testimonies (‘Darstellung’) and they thereby help their audience to create a mental image of this past (‘Vorstellung’). The extent to

which contemporary audiences are used to receiving historical narratives via the means of video testimonies is exemplified by *Aghet – Ein Völkermord*. Taking up the viewing habits of TV viewers accustomed to short clips from video testimonies, *Aghet – Ein Völkermord* combines the techniques of re-enactment with the perceived authenticity of testimony. In *Aghet – Ein Völkermord*, the fictional comes to appear as the authentic because it makes reference to a genre that has been authenticated over the last few decades.

Their recognition as historical sources by academics, and their recognition as authentic and legitimate carriers of memory by society in general have paved the way for the integration of video testimonies into museums. As we will see, the video testimonies in the museums remediate techniques from evidence given in court, oral history, video-testimony projects and TV documentaries. The next chapter will look specifically at the act of collecting video testimonies. Collecting is the process that brings about what Aleida Assmann has called the canon; it is the first step in the musealization of an object.

## Notes

1. The current website of the documentary is available at: <https://aghet1915.wordpress.com>. I thank Stefanie Schüler-Springorum for bringing my attention to this documentary.
2. The importance of the body in the act of giving testimony is a longstanding tenet of jurisdiction. It is one of the reasons why trials are public. In early trials where the act of interrogation took place in a different space and under the supervision of different people to those giving judgment, the judges were provided with transcriptions of gestures. It was the realization that these protocols could not replace the act of witnessing the testimonial itself that led to the theatricalization of trials in which the dispositions given during interrogation had to be repeated in public (cf. Weitin 2009).
3. The publisher's website can be found at: <http://www.zeitgut.com>.
4. The publisher's website can be found at: <http://www.wartberg-verlag.de>.
5. For further information, see the project's website: <http://www.jugendstiftung.org/infopool/news/3078936.html>.
6. For further information, see: <http://einestages.spiegel.de/page/Home.html>.
7. Examples include: <http://www.videoarchiv-ravensbrueck.de>, <http://www.resistance-archive.org>, <http://metaversa.de/web/projekte/zeitzeuginnen/zeitzeugengeschichte-de/>, <http://www.istoreto.it/> or <http://www.zeitzeugen-portal.de/>.
8. The project website can be found at: <http://www.gedaechtnis-der-nation.de/erleben>.

## Chapter 3

# COLLECTING

## Turning Communicative Memory into Cultural Memory

### The Trespassed Body

At a conference, I heard historians declare that former camp inmates were documents to them ... I expressed my surprise. They replied with a friendly smile: 'Living documents.' I suddenly saw myself transformed into a strange animal caged in a zoo with other rare species. Historians came to examine me, told me to lie down, turned me over and over as you turn the pages of a document, and asked me questions, taking notes here and there ... The term used at the conference seemed to me infinitely shocking. One can go from being a 'former inmate' to a 'witness', then from 'witness' to 'document'. So then, what are we? What am I?  
—A. Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*

These are the words of the survivor Henry Bulawko, cited in Annette Wieviorka's *The Era of the Witness*. Wieviorka (2006: 129) observes that: 'In place of the complaint of not being able to speak upon returning because no one listened, we now see another complaint ... that of being all of a sudden dispossessed – but also exploited and reified in a competition among various specialists, a competition that undeniably is under way.'

Museums are one of the 'specialist' institutions that use – and can potentially misuse – the testimonies of witnesses to history. In this chapter, I will concentrate on the processes that precede the exhibition of video testimonies and thus their exposition to a large audience: recording, editing and collecting. Any item's entrance into a collection is arguably the first step of its musealization, 'a world process that transforms objects that are "living" in arenas of practical use into spheres of static scientific knowledge' (Maranda 2009: 258). In other words, collected items become carriers of cultural memory and part of what Aleida Assmann has called

‘the archive’. It is my aim in this chapter to analyse how this transformation is put in action. I will argue that with the collection of video testimonies, the transmutation of communicative memory into cultural memory has gained a new urgency. The collection of video testimonies signifies the end of a slow transmission from communicative memory to cultural memory. Instead, what we find is the attempt to turn communicative memory itself into cultural memory and, in this way, to keep the dialogue between the generations going ad infinitum.

In the first section of this chapter, ‘Video Testimonies as Collectibles’, I will take a look at the motivations behind the museums’ collection projects. Putting the collection of video testimonies into a larger discussion on collecting objects, I will scrutinize what it means to collect video testimonies in particular. In the second section, ‘Interviewing and Recording’, I will reflect on the methodologies and technologies used for the creation of video testimonies. In my analysis, I will focus particularly on the consequences of recording and collecting on the bodies of the witnesses to history. It is the witnesses’ presence in time and space at the event on which they give testimony that makes them suitable for giving testimony. It is also the witnesses’ bodies, marked with the traces of time, that become carriers of their memory later in the video testimony. In the quote above, Henry Bulawko, afraid of his testimony being manipulated, immediately makes a connection between his mind and his body. Rather than imagining researchers going through a written record of his testimony, misreading sections, crossing out others and tearing out pages, he imagines them encroaching on his body – an image that uncannily reminds one of the medical experiments carried out in concentration camps. In video testimonies, the witness’ body and mind become part of a single medium that serves to preserve the memory of the past for the future. Recording video testimonies ultimately means producing representations of bodies, and collecting video testimonies means collecting those representations.

## **Video Testimonies as Collectibles**

### *Collecting Objects: Negotiating the Relationship between Life and Death*

Studies on collecting have so far mostly concentrated on the collection of things. They have tried to answer questions like: why do people collect? What does it mean to collect and what is the difference between collecting and, for example, accumulating? Although the definitions differ (cf. Pearce

1994), most scholars agree on a couple of points. First, they point out that the act of collecting is intimately linked to questions of ownership and salvation. ‘The critical history of collecting’, writes James Clifford (1988: 121), ‘is concerned with what from the material world specific groups and individuals choose to preserve, value and exchange.’ This history, most scholars point out, is a modern Western history. The theories they use to analyse it are generally also profoundly Western and modern: psychoanalysis and Marxism. Thus, Clifford (1988: 217) considers the notion of the self in modernist Western culture as that of ‘the self as owner: the individual surrounded by accumulated property and goods’. In collecting, he observes, ‘the self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies’ (1988: 128). Like Clifford, Susan Pearce (1999: 26) interprets the practice of collecting as the expression of a ‘European relationship to the material world’, which is characterized by European culture’s ‘willingness to view the world of matter as external and “objective” to the knowing human subject’ and by ‘its concentration on the production of goods which we variously call capitalism or industrialisation’. Mieke Bal, going one step further, sees in collecting the coming together of the concept of fetish as a substitute for the lack of a penis (and a synecdoche for the female body) and the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism as the awarding of a seemingly intrinsic value to commodities. She finds an ‘inevitability of the impulse to collect within a cultural situation that is itself hybridic: a mixture of capitalism and individualism enmeshed with alternative modes of historical and psychological existence’ (Bal 2004: 96). For these writers, there thus exists an intimate link between collecting and possessing: the modern self defines itself through the acts of selecting, acquiring, ordering and classifying objects.

This connection between collecting, possession and the self is also evident in the genealogy of museal collecting in what are generally considered the modern museum’s forerunners: the Renaissance ‘Wunderkammern’, ‘studioli’ and princely galleries. Here, the collected objects were arranged as miniature representations of the world order and as symbols of the princes’ power: ‘The prince in the *studiolo* symbolically claimed dominion over a world that he had represented to himself, with himself positioned at its centre’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 106, italics in original). In the nineteenth century, with the advent of the nation state, collections were no longer intended to represent the world to a single prince; rather, the national culture was to be represented to the citizens of the newly emerging nation states – and to anybody who was to visit that nation state. The Louvre, which opened its doors in 1793, only four years after the storming of the Bastille, is probably the best and most radical example here. What

had previously been the private art collection of the king and the representation of his power now became encoded as the heritage of the newborn nation. A French ministerial paper from Revolutionary France stated:

This museum must demonstrate the nation's great riches ... France must extend its glory through the ages and to all peoples: the national museum will embrace knowledge in all its manifold beauty and will be the admiration of the universe. By embodying these grand ideas, worthy of a free people ... the museum ... will become among the most powerful illustrations of the French Republic (cited in MacClellan 1994: 91–92).

In the Louvre, and in the other national museums that sprang up all around Europe and in the so-called 'new world' in the nineteenth century, the notion of a national culture was demonstrated by the possession of a collection of artefacts. This transformation of the princely collections into public museums went hand in hand with a reorganization of the existing collections. Rather than as a circular repetition of the same, time began to be considered as linear (Anderson 1991: 22ff). Consequently, collections were organized chronologically and according to style schools. Objects of foreign origin were separated from those of supposedly national origin – generally in order to demonstrate the power of the nation in the world and the superiority of the national culture over other cultures (cf. Lidchi 1997; Macdonald 2003: 4).

Thus, collectors, whether groups or individuals, try to save objects from oblivion and through this act define or reassure themselves of their self and/or their culture. In this process, they also invest the objects with new meanings. Through collecting, objects are taken out of the context of use and put into that of signification. They become what the Polish historian Krzysztof Pomian has termed 'semiophores'. Semiophores 'have a *material* and a *semi-otic* aspect' (1986: 58, italics in original). While their material aspect 'consists, as with any other object, in the entirety of [their] physical and external characteristics', their semiotic aspect 'consists mainly of [their] *visible* characteristics in which one can detect a reference to something that is not there at the moment, possibly also to something invisible'. Pomian (1986: 58, italics in original) opposes semiophores to 'choses' (things): 'As opposed to semiophores, *things* do not bear any significations'; they are instead defined by their 'usefulness: the capacity to serve as *means of production* and *consumer items*'. While not all semiophores are museum objects and some semiophores might even be of use, all collected objects are semiophores. By the time of their entry into the collection, at the latest, they have lost their use value. Collected objects are 'radically deprived of any function they might possibly have outside of being collected items', as Mieke Bal (2004: 96) observes.

This deprivation of the objects of their use functions also means that the act of collecting is intimately connected to ideas of death. Susan Pearce (1999: 24), comparing collecting to sacrifice, points out that ‘collection objects have passed from the profane – the secular world of mundane, ordinary commodity – to the sacred, taken to be extraordinary, special and capable of generating reverence ... They are wrenched out of their own true contexts and become dead to their living time and space in order that they may be given an immortality within the collection’. Collecting therefore ‘is one way in which we hope to understand the world around us, and reconcile ourselves to our places within it’. In fact, in the act of collecting, the process of decay – of disappearing into oblivion, of becoming rubbish – is stopped and the items are saved for the future (cf. Thompson 1979). Generally, this effort at resurrection is linked to a revaluation of the object. As part of a collection, an item is often awarded an emotional but also a monetary value far in excess of its original one.

We can thus retain that collecting means taking objects out of a context in which they are used and endowing them with a new value and meaning in the context of the collection. This value and meaning in turn serve to define or reassure the collectors of their selves or cultures. The relationship between collecting, possession, salvation and death reaches a new level of urgency when considering the collection of video testimonies. Here the effort of salvation becomes quite literal. Objects can retain their exterior form for a very long time and might only be rediscovered as collectibles after having been forgotten for a while. However, human memory, like the human body, disappears with an individual’s death. Recording and collecting video testimonies therefore means trying to retain for cultural memory that which is in natural and fast decay.

### *Collecting Video Testimonies: Bodies and Voices in the Archive*

As we have already seen in the last chapter, the collection of first audio and then video testimonies began straight after the war and went through several stages, peaking in the 1990s and the first half of the decade following the turn of the twenty-first century. Over the years, salvation has gradually become one of the main motivations for recording video testimonies.

Nevertheless, salvation has of course never been the only motivation for interviewing witnesses to history and collecting their testimonies. Already the American psychologist David Boder gave six reasons apart from salvation for why he decided to travel to the DP camps in Europe in 1946 in order to carry out interviews with survivors. First, Boder observes that

he followed General Dwight D. Eisenhower's call to American journalists to 'come and see for yourselves'. He (1949: xi) admired Eisenhower for grasping the importance of saving for the future what he witnessed in Europe: 'Eisenhower, preoccupied as he must have been with unprecedented responsibilities, found time to reflect upon the significance of preserving for posterity the impressions and emotions aroused by the sight of thousands of victims dead or dying in the liberated concentration camps in Germany.'

With his project, Boder (1949: xi) wanted, second, to allow the survivors to speak for themselves:

Upon reading Eisenhower's call to the American press, it occurred to me that the magnetic wire recorder, then a new tool which had been developed by the Armour Research Foundation, offered a unique and exact means of recording the experiences of displaced persons. Through the wire recorder the displaced person could relate in his own language and in his own voice the story of his concentration-camp life.

The interview project was, third, meant to complement the mostly silent images that had been taken of the events and locations of the Second World War with the voices of survivors: 'While untold thousands of feet of film had been collected to preserve the visual events of war, practically nothing had been preserved for that other perceptual avenue, the hearing' (Boder 1949: xi; Rosen 2012: 106ff). Fourth, Boder wished to give a history lesson to Americans, educating them on life in the camps and the Nazi mass murder, as well as on the fate of the displaced persons, by presenting them with the voices behind the newsreel pictures (Rosen 2012: 102ff). As a psychologist, Boder (1949: xiv) was, fifth, driven by research interests and wanted 'to gather personal reports in the form of wire recordings for future psychological and anthropological study'. A final motivation appears in the title that Boder chose for one of the publications based on these interviews: *I Did Not Interview the Dead*. 'The verbatim records presented in this book make uneasy reading. And yet they are not the grimmest stories that could be told – I did not interview the dead', Boder (1949: xix) concludes in the introduction to his book. He thus wants the readers and listeners of the interviews to see them as inadequate representatives of the stories that cannot be told by anyone anymore.

The motivations given by Boder – a desire to give the survivors the chance to tell their own story; salvation; the wish to complement the war pictures with the voices of the survivors; the compilation of research data; the provision of educational material; and the desire to remember those who were murdered – can be found in all projects that followed Boder's. As we have seen in the last chapter, both the Fortunoff Archive and the



Shoah Foundation aimed at giving the survivors themselves a voice and to record educational material that can complement (in the case of the Shoah Foundation) or contrast (in the case of the Fortunoff Archive) fictionalized representations of the war and the Holocaust. The Fortunoff Archive further sees its project as therapy and the videos of both projects are viewed and interpreted both by psychologists and by historians. The weighting given to the different motivations of course differs from project to project. It is determined by the sociocultural context in which the project is carried out, the collecting institution and the point in time at which the project takes place, as well as the historical perspective of those who collect.

Although the main collection projects like the Fortunoff Archive and the Shoah Foundation have taken place outside of museums, collecting video testimonies has been an important activity of memorial museums for some time now. It is to the motivations behind these projects, their forerunners and the sociocultural context in which they take place that I want to turn now.

*Yad Vashem: Giving the Victims Names and Faces*

The shadow of the dead that motivated Boder to carry out his project especially looms over the motivations of survivors who give testimony. Giving testimony is in fact often interpreted as a duty following survival. In their testimonies, many survivors refer to a dead relative or a friend who asked them to survive so that they would be able to give testimony. Giving testimony and recording and collecting these testimonies are in this sense also acts of memorialization – of remembering those who cannot give testimony anymore.

This attempt at remembering and at trying to save the vestiges of a lost culture has been one of the main motivations behind the collection of testimonies in Yad Vashem, which has here gone hand in hand with that of the names of those who were murdered. Over the years, the memorial has tried more and more keenly not only to name the victims, but to also give them a face and a story.

Collecting the names of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust has been one of the main functions of Yad Vashem since its foundation. As observed before, the idea for Yad Vashem goes back to 1942. As Anja Kurths (2008), to whose history of Yad Vashem I will primarily refer in the argumentation that follows, observes, the Zionist Mordechai Shenhavi, at the time, proposed plans to establish a memorial park. News of the massacres in Europe had just reached Palestine. Even then, Shenhavi's plan foresaw 'at the centre of the whole project a building or institution

that will contain the names of all Jews who perished or were killed, in whatever country, in connection with the current war and the German hooliganism in their countries' (cited in Kurths 2008: 132). The park was moreover supposed to include 'pavilions devoted to the history of Jewish heroism throughout the generations', 'a symbolic cemetery for those who died in exile', 'a regular cemetery for Palestinian and Disapora Jews', 'a convalescence centre and hostel complex for immigrants' and 'a centre for the study of the history of Zionism', along with hotels, youth hostels, a museum, an archive, several administrative buildings and a children's hostel for Jewish orphans from the war and the pogroms (Kurths 2008: 132). After several years of discussions that revolved particularly around the question of how to define Jewish heroism, the Yad Vashem law was finally signed in 1953. That the initially rather reluctant Knesset agreed to pass the law was *inter alia* due to the emergence of a similar project in Paris, the Tomb of the Unknown Jewish Martyr. The Parisian project also foresaw the collection of the names of those who had been murdered during the Holocaust. Secret meetings took place between the Israeli government and the initiator of the memorial in Paris, Yitchak Scheerson. The outcome of these meetings was that Yad Vashem was granted the exclusive right to collect the names of victims of the Holocaust (Kurths 2008: 140; Chevalier 2012: 57–58). The name 'Yad Vashem' makes reference to Isaiah 56:5: 'And to them will I give in my house and within my walls a memorial and a name (a "yad vashem") ... that shall not be cut off.' The collection of names began in 1955. Until this day so-called 'Pages of Testimony' are used, on which basic information about the victims is recorded. Since 1968, those pages of testimony were deposited in a purposefully built 'Hall of Names' (Kurths 2008: 155). Since 1999, the names are being digitized. At the same time, Yad Vashem launched a new campaign for the collection of more names. While around two million names had been collected by 1999, the number has by now risen to approximately 4.3 million (Wroclawski 2013: 13).

When the new museum opened in 2005, the 'Hall of Names' was moved to the museum complex. It now constitutes the last room of the exhibition. The central part of the present 'Hall of Names' is a ten-metre-high cone. Inside this cone, six hundred photographs of victims that had been sent in with the pages of testimony and that, as the designer Dorit Harel (2010: 93) observes, 'show the faces of the people who once composed the diverse and vibrant Jewish world' are set to a background of pages of testimony. Beneath the cone, a pool of water reflects the photographs and the pages of testimony. Around it, approximately 2.7 million of the 4.3 million pages of testimony that have been collected so far are

deposited in files. Space has been provided for an ultimate target of six million pages. For Harel (2010: 92), the 'Hall of Names' 'is the heart of the museum and perhaps the most moving section of the whole site'. The new 'Hall of Names' is exemplary of a memorial culture in which the individuality of the victims has become the centre of attention: instead of only naming, the cone links faces to names. This development of Yad Vashem's memorial practice is reflected in the caption for the 'Hall of Names', which contrasts with the etymological origin of Yad Vashem of 'giving a name'. The new 'Hall of Names' is introduced with an extract from the poem *Exodus* by Benjamin Fondane: 'I, too, had had a face ... quite simply, a human face!'.<sup>1</sup>

Like in Yad Vashem, writing down or reading out the names of victims has by now become standard practice in memorial ceremonies and part of the exhibitions of many Holocaust museums. So has the exhibition of prewar pictures showing those victims. While anonymous totals of the dead were written onto the first monuments erected in remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust, exhibitions are now increasingly trying to individualize those impersonal figures. In the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, for example, family pictures found in the ruins of the camp after liberation have been exhibited in the former central camp-bath in Auschwitz-Birkenau since 2001.<sup>2</sup> In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a collection of portraits from the so-called Yaffa Eliach Shtetl Collection, taken in the town of Eishishok in today's Lithuania between 1890 and 1941, are exhibited in the centre of the exhibition in what has come to be known as the 'Tower of Faces'. In the Neuengamme Memorial, where the memorial erected in the 1960s merely stated that 5,500 people had died in Neuengamme Concentration Camp, the names and short biographies of victims are now beamed onto the wall in the stairway of the main exhibition. Pictures of victims are presented in the second room of the exhibition, which deals with the different prisoner groups. In the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, stones chiselled with the number of buried bodies were placed in front of the anonymous mass graves that dominate the site of the former concentration camp. The contemporary exhibition presents the death lists of victims who died in the DP camp in Bergen-Belsen (cf. Lustiger Thaler 2008). It also starts with a 'prologue', a film combining video testimonies with survivors and the names and – if available – pictures and short biographies of those who died.

Henri Lustiger Thaler (2008: 198), referring to death lists of the DP camp in Bergen-Belsen, points out that those lists 'have the hard job of narrating evidentiary and substantiated "fact" while in the same instance

gesturing to an inevitable absence within “the memorial” that is beyond numerical validation’. Death lists always refer as much to those who are not recorded on them and to the memories and memorial remains that have been wiped out as they do to those who are recorded on them. Even of those who are recorded on them, they do not show much but the name, which, without a story to tell behind it, risks remaining an empty symbol. Showing pictures of those who died is one means chosen by memorial museums to compensate for this paradoxical ‘anonymity’ of lists of names. Recording testimonies is another one, which has been practised by Yad Vashem almost since its inception.

Even before the Yad Vashem law was signed, Yad Vashem had offices in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv from 1946 and 1947 respectively. By then, the institution had already started to collect documents on the history of the Holocaust and on Jewish communities in Europe. However, due to financial problems and internal conflicts, the collection did proceed rather slowly at the beginning (Cohen 2014). Today, Yad Vashem hosts one of the most extensive archives with documents on the history of the Holocaust. Testimonies, whether produced during the war in the form of diaries or letters or after the war, constitute a large part of those documents. From the beginning, a special bureau for the collection of testimonies was part of the archive. The first director of this bureau was the writer and collaborator of the Ringelblum Archive, Rachel Auerbach. Auerbach was convinced of the importance of testimonies and would dedicate her life to collecting and disseminating them. Before emigrating to Israel, she had already been collecting testimonies for the Central Historical Commission in Warsaw (Cohen 2008: 197). As Boaz Cohen (2008: 199–200) observes, Auerbach saw in the testimonies a means to tell the Jewish version of the history of the Holocaust. The Jewish voice had, according to her, largely been ignored, especially during the trials against war criminals. The testimonies were to constitute a collection for the time when the world would be ready for a Jewish view on history. Already in the late 1950s, she (Cohen 2008: 201) saw her work as a race against time: ‘the witnesses are dying and in a little while those taking their testimony and researchers who belong to the generation of destruction will also die’. Moreover, the testimonies had a psychological role: like the collaborators of the Fortunoff Archive later on, Auerbach thought that the testimonies had ‘a calming and healing influence and help free them [the survivors] from the horrors’ (cited in Cohen 2008: 200). She also considered it of importance for the interviewees to be survivors themselves. For her, her work was a necessary sacrifice: ‘For them [witnesses and their testimonies], I suffered all the time and received with love the suffering and the

pain bound up in them; for them, I neglected my literary work because I saw in this a mission and an obligation and a justification of the fact that I remained alive' (cited in Cohen 2008: 201).

While working for the department, Auerbach developed her own interviewing method, which differed from the one that she had used as an interviewer for the Central Historical Commission in Warsaw, but anticipated the work of institutions like the Fortunoff Archive. She raised the criticism that for the interviews as practised by the historical commissions in Europe, the interviewer would write down, shorten and interrupt the survivor (Cohen 2008: 202). According to her, 'a large part of the story ... would be lost, and, further, a number of unique characteristics of style and linguistic description and other types of description and narration would disappear to a large extent' (cited in Cohen 2008: 202). She was especially critical of the fact that interruptions led to 'wasting and weakening – the tension and emotion, the drama and the excitement, and the literary energy' (cited in Cohen 2008: 202). For Auerbach, the solution to the problem was a tape recorder – something that the administration of Yad Vashem was rather reluctant to provide (Cohen 2008: 202). Auerbach also carried out what she called 'collective testimonies' (cited in Cohen 2008: 203), for which she interviewed several survivors on one topic. This is a practice that the Yad Vashem Archive has been carrying out until this day (Beer 2009: 10).

Until she was forced to retire in 1968, Auerbach was in an almost constant conflict with the directorate. The director, historian and Minister of Education and Culture, Ben-Zion Dinur, who wanted to establish Yad Vashem as a proper research institute, was critical of the rather emotional stance on research of Auerbach and other survivor historians, who considered it to be their and Yad Vashem's duty to commemorate those who had been murdered. Dinur even criticized Auerbach's method as unscholarly (Cohen 2008: 203–13). Auerbach therefore saw the large number of witnesses who appeared at the Eichmann trial, and whom she had helped to choose, as a 'success story and vindication of her world view and research policies' (Cohen 2008: 216).

Until 1965, Auerbach and her team had managed to collect '3000 testimonies, comprising 82,000 folio pages and 600 tapes' (Cohen 2008: 203). In addition, the Archive received testimonies from other collections very early on, amongst which was the collection from David Boder and a collection of testimonies from the Jewish central office in Budapest (Krakowski 1995: 58f). The testimonies were at first also collected because other documents were missing. Shmuel Krakowski (1995: 58), the former director of the Archive, writes:

We were aware of the fact that testimonies were often the only source of information for the occurrences in the ghettos and camps, the operations of many Jewish guerrilla units and underground organizations, for the doings of the 'Righteous Amongst the Nations', namely non-Jews who put their life at risk in order to save the lives of Jews. In some other cases the testimonies are a welcome complement to the information from other sources.

The Yad Vashem Archive has, since 1989, begun to videotape the testimonies. In 1996, Avner Shalev, who has been the chairman of the Yad Vashem directorate since 1993, wrote in his 'Masterplan 2001' that one of the goals for the future of the memorial would be 'the videotaping of survivor testimonies' (Shalev 1996: 4). Since 2005 Yad Vashem cooperates with the Shoah Foundation ('New Visual Centre to Include Shoah Foundation's Testimonies' 2005: 15). The Yad Vashem Archive now houses around 125,000 witness accounts, 11,500 of which were taken since 2003. Since 2006, a team travels to witnesses' homes to also allow those witnesses who cannot come to recording studios to have their testimonies recorded. In this way, Yad Vashem collects around 1,000–1,200 testimonies a year (Tor 2013: 16). Approximately 60% of the testimonies are in video format.<sup>3</sup>

Yad Vashem's interest in video testimonies coincides with the shift towards individual destinies in the institution's memorial and educative activities. Particularly during the politically turbulent 1960s and 1970s, the memorial ceremonies on Yom HaShoah, the official Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day, were imbued with a highly political tenor. Speeches pointed out Israel's need to shed its role of victim and to face its enemies as equals (Haß 2002: 99ff; Kurths 2008: 170ff). This political undertone was shed during the 1980s and by the beginning of the 1990s, the memorial ceremonies started to concentrate on individual destinies. Until the late 1980s, reading out names was a semi-private practice that only took place on cemeteries on a chosen date between Rosh-Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Wieviorka 1998: 51). In 1990, the names of Holocaust victims were read out for the first time during the ceremony for Yom HaShoah. The idea was taken from a demonstration organized in 1989 upon the release of two Nazi War criminals in the Netherlands, during which demonstrators started reading out the names of Dutch victims of the Holocaust in front of the Dutch embassy. In 1995, the number of 'torchlighters' lighting torches in remembrance of the victims of the Shoah on the eve of Yom HaShoah was reduced from twelve to six – a symbolic number representing the six million victims. Since then, the ceremonies have concentrated on the biographies of those individuals (Kurths 2008: 185ff). The torchlighters have been presented in the *Yad Vashem Magazine* and on the internet, and

small video testimonies for each one of them have been produced. It was also during the middle of the 1990s that the memorial, under the new direction of Avner Shalev, started planning the new Holocaust history museum, which would concentrate on the perspective of individuals and on the Jewish fate (Goldstein 2013: 3).

In its educational work, Yad Vashem had always taken into consideration the survivors. Survivors, mostly Jewish partisan fighters, helped with visitor assistance. In the mid 1960s, schools started projects on the vanished Jewish communities in Europe, for which they interviewed survivors (Kurths 2008: 163). However, the focus in these school projects seems to have been more on the communities that have disappeared than on the individual survivors. The survivors' biographies began to be the main part of educational work since the 1990s (Kurths 2008: 193). Since then, Yom HaShoah has often been given a survivor-related topic, such as 'The Voice of the Survivors' in 2010, 'Bearing Witness' in 2007 or 'The Contribution of Holocaust Survivors in the Creation of the State of Israel and Their Integration into Society' in the jubilee year 1998, to give only a few examples, and articles in the *Yad Vashem Magazine* circle mainly around the topics of witnessing and survival.

Thus, in Yad Vashem, the collection of testimonies was triggered by a desire to save what has been left of the destroyed Jewish communities and Jewish culture in Europe. Until very recently, it was not so much the individual victims as such, but rather the general fate of the diaspora Jews that was the centre of attention. While the collection of names was a means of mourning the dead, the collection of testimonies was a means of mourning the destroyed Jewish culture in Europe. The individuality of the victims and survivors found its way into Yad Vashem's memorial activities since the 1990s, when a heightened number of video testimonies were collected that would ultimately be used in the new exhibition. It might be worth pointing out here that Yad Vashem was not a survivor initiative and that survivors were to a large extent left out of the decision-making process. The percentage of survivors in the directorate and the advisory board was minute and, as observed above, the conflicts between survivor historians like Rachel Auerbach and the directorate were fierce. In 1958, Yosef Weitz, a member of Yad Vashem, declared: 'I don't think that the survivors can utter an opinion on Yad Vashem. I cannot imagine that invalids can discuss their own illness. Amongst the survivors, there is no scientist and no researcher' (cited in Kurths 2008: 150).

*The Bergen-Belsen Memorial and the Neuengamme Memorial:  
Video Testimonies as Historical Sources*

Interview projects in concentration-camp memorials typically began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at least in Western Germany. These projects were to a large extent motivated by research interests and the attempt to make public the history of the camp that many at the time would still rather have forgotten. They were the result of a scarcity of remaining sources and new research questions in the 1980s. First, large numbers of documents were often destroyed before the liberation of the camps. Others were, for a long time, kept under restricted accessibility in Eastern European archives. The memory of survivors was often the only available source of information. Neuengamme Concentration Camp, for instance, was completely cleared before the arrival of the British troops – incidentally the only major camp in Germany where this occurred. While the Allied frontline was approaching, the remaining prisoners were executed or deported to other camps. The SS ordered a remaining commando to burn documents, clean the barracks, repaint some of the rooms and get rid of instruments of torture and the gallows (Garbe 2001: 52).

Second, with the appearance of oral history as a research method during the late 1970s and 1980s, new research interests also began to appear in the historiography of concentration camps. For a long time, research on concentration camps had mainly focused on the political and economic functions of the camps and on the ‘resistance fight’ of their inmates (Garbe 1994b: 35). With oral history at their disposal, researchers started to ‘fathom the prisoners’ multi-layered “everyday life”, the inner structures of the camp society, the conditions for survival and the perspectives of the different prisoner groups’ (Garbe 1994b: 35). ‘In order to fathom the perspective of those who suffered under the SS regime, we need a different approach. It is exclusively enshrined in the memory of former prisoners’, observed Detlef Garbe (1994a: 6), the director of the Neuengamme Memorial regarding the memorial’s first major interview project that took place between 1991 and 1993. Similarly, Diana Gring and Karin Theilen (2007: 183), who carried out interviews with survivors of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, argue:

The testimonies complement the insufficient provision of information through documents, they broach aspects, situations and events of the history of the camp as well as of life and survival conditions, on which nothing or only very little is known from other sources. It is indeed only possible to document many aspects of the history of the camp through testimonies, such as for example in the case of the forms of self-assertion adopted by the prisoners. The survivor testimonies allow a precise



reconstruction of the mechanisms and structures of the system of persecution and extermination while they fathom the reality of the concentration camp in all of its details from the perspective of the survivors.

Resources for the projects were at first limited and consequently the number of interview partners was small. They were often chosen according to rather rigidly defined criteria. At the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the first larger interview project took place between 1994 and 1996, when the ethnologist Marva Karrer carried out interviews with fifty-six survivors from Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. In 1999, a video-interview project with 143 survivors of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp was carried out (Gring and Theilen 2007: 173f). The project, which was initially under the control of the external company Memo Media Productions and was financed by the Stiftung Niedersachsen, was later taken over by the Memorial itself. By 2005, around 340 interviews had been amassed (Gring and Theilen 2007: 182). The Memorial continues to conduct interviews to this day – if not as frequently as it once used to. Before these major interview projects, occasional audio testimonies had been recorded with survivors of both the Neuengamme Concentration Camp and the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. The first interviews at the Neuengamme Memorial, conducted during the 1980s, were in fact also a consequence of a need to justify the foundation of a memorial. They were recorded ‘at a time, when there were still doubts that enough material could be found in order to represent the history of the concentration camp’ (Garbe 2001: 57). The interviews were therefore also supposed to show the possibility of a museal representation of the camp’s history.

The first large-scale interview project at the Neuengamme Memorial was carried out between 1991 and 1994. Its example, as described by Ulrike Jureit and Karin Orth (1994), shows how minutely those early interview projects often had to be planned because of a lack of funds. The project started with the collection of the names and addresses of around 1,500 survivors of the camp. Because of the rather small scale of the project, only a fraction of the survivors could be interviewed. Interview partners were therefore selected according to five different criteria. First and most importantly, the number of interview partners from a particular country was intended to represent the number of prisoners in the camp. However, there was also a desire to carry out interviews with prisoner groups on which little was known at the time. Thus, despite the rather small number of prisoners from the respective countries, interviews were carried out with survivors from Norway, Luxembourg and the former Yugoslavia. Second, the group of interviewers was to be diverse and the testimonies were not

only to represent the view of the official survivor organizations. Therefore, the search for survivors also deliberately took place outside of those organizations. Third, since the memories of women had rarely been recorded, a considerable number of women were interviewed. Fourth, an attempt was made to find interview partners who had been in satellite camps and work units of which little was known at the time. Finally, prisoners who had had rather extraordinary experiences were sought out. Thus, the interviewers contacted survivors who had engaged in the self-government of the inmates or who had had to suffer under special circumstances in the camp. Only a feasible number of interview partners were contacted by the interviewers beforehand and 121 audio testimonies were finally carried out (Jureit and Orth 1994: 44ff). Numerous interviews have been recorded at the Neuengamme Memorial since – also in video format – and today around five hundred interviews are deposited in the memorial's archive (Garbe interview 2009).

Over the years, the interviewees and the questions asked during those projects have become ever more diverse. During the first projects, which took place when there was still a lack of concrete information on the different prisoner groups, survivors were mainly asked about living conditions in the camps. Nowadays, the focus is also on the survivors' life before and after the Holocaust. Moreover, a heightened interest in the workings of individual memory has now led to questions about the way in which survivors deal with difficult memories (Garbe interview 2009; Gring interview 2009). More recently, there have been interview projects with: the survivors' or perpetrators' children and grandchildren; people who lived in close proximity to the camps; liberators; and in the case of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, people working in the DP Camp or people who had taken part in the first initiatives of the memorialization of the camp (Gring and Theilen 2007: 174; Garbe interview 2009; Gring interview 2009). All projects have, however, had difficulties recording interviews with survivors from groups that were threatened by discrimination even after liberation, such as so-called 'Asoziale' (asocials), homosexuals, 'Berufsverbrecher' (professional criminals) or women working in the camp brothels. Neither the Neuengamme Memorial nor the Bergen-Belsen Memorial recorded video testimonies in order to exhibit them. However, in both institutions, the videos were soon to be used in the exhibitions. When the planning phase for the new exhibition at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial began, the interview project that had started shortly before was intimately connected to the planning (Gring interview 2009).

Thus, from being subversive attempts at recording and making public the history of the camps, the collection of audio and video testimonies has now

become a well-respected practice of concentration-camp memorials. While the first projects were still structured according to relatively strict criteria, today the felt need to record video testimonies meets with little resistance. Recording and editing video testimonies has become ever cheaper and easier. With the time when no witnesses of the Holocaust will be alive fast approaching, recording video testimonies has also become a salvage effort in concentration-camp memorials. Today recording video testimonies with witnesses to history of the camps is often no longer necessarily linked to concrete research projects, but has become part of the memorials' duties.

*The Imperial War Museum and the Museo Diffuso: Filling Collection Gaps and Recording for Exhibition*

Saving for the future the voices that would otherwise be lost forever is also the main motivation behind the Imperial War Museum's Sound Archive, the museum's collection of audio and video files. Although some sound files had been collected beforehand, the Sound Archive was not established until 1972. Margaret Brooks (email interview 2010), the keeper of the Archive, observes that the Archive covers: 'Britain and the Empire/Commonwealth, but also includes former allies and enemies. As well as the members of the armed forces (at all levels) that you would expect, we're also interested in artists and the anti-war movement and industries and medicine and news reporting and the domestic home front: everything!' Although speeches, poetry and sound effects can also be found, most of the files come from the recordings of the Imperial War Museum's oral history project. The first recordings were made with witnesses of the First World War. The Second World War and the Holocaust entered the collection with the project 'Britain and the Refugee Crisis', which started in 1978. The project was intended to concentrate on the interwar period, but turned out to include the Second World War – with a focus on the Holocaust. Today, the entire Sound Archive holds around 56,000 recorded hours. 'The recording projects never end until there's nobody left alive', writes Brooks (email interview 2010). Unlike the projects in the concentration-camp memorials, the Sound Archive is a pure collection project:

The purpose of our oral history programme has always been to build an archive. This complements the Museum's collections of other personal items such as diaries and letters and family photographs. We are pleased if people wish to use selections from our collection in exhibitions, books, television documentaries, etc. – and the Museum makes money and gets publicity from these external uses – but we have no purpose in collecting beyond trying to cover all aspects of 20th and 21st century conflict and ensuring that we do this before it's too late. (Margaret Brooks email interview 2010)

Recordings from the 'Britain and the Refugee Crisis' project have been used in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, for example, and in the Imperial War Museum's own Holocaust Exhibition. The audio and video testimonies were, however, in the first place not intended as exhibition items – and this is also what distinguishes them from the other personal items that Brooks mentions. While material objects entered the museum's collection with at least the potential to be exhibited, the sound recordings – certainly at first – merely entered the collection in order to complete the museum's archive. They were, to come back to Aleida Assmann's (2008) terminology, intended for the archive and not for the canon. When the museum started to plan its Holocaust exhibition, video testimonies were recorded especially for that purpose.

A similar development can be observed in the Museo Diffuso. Also here, the video testimonies were recorded especially for the exhibition. However, the curators made use of the collection of testimonies available at the archive of Turin's research institute on the resistance movement, the 'Istituto Piemontese per la Storia della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea, Girogio Agosti', which is today housed in the same building as the museum. The latter testimonies were, like the first testimonies in the concentration-camp memorials, primarily recorded for research purposes (Boccalatte interview 2010).

As this overview shows, the collection of video testimonies in memorial museums generally started in the late 1980s and peaked at the turn of the twentieth century. This is the time when, as we have seen in the last chapter, oral history had become an acceptable research method and witnesses to history had started to appear more and more frequently in TV documentaries and in front of school classes. It is the time that Anette Wieviorka (2006) has called the 'era of the witness'. If, as observed before, in collecting, an individual or a community tries to define a culture for itself, then the collection of video testimonies is representative of a culture that has difficulties accepting the slow disappearance of the last survivors of the Holocaust and the approaching end of the 'era of the witness'.

'While periodical forgetting ... is part of societal normality ... this normality has become a moral scandal in the light of the special past of the Holocaust', notes Aleida Assmann (2007b: 2). The fear of what she calls a 'mnemocide' that might follow the genocide haunts many of those engaged in the recording of video testimonies. By recording video testimonies, they therefore try to preserve for the future the memories, bodies and voices of witnesses to history. In other words, collecting video testimonies is the mediocre endeavour to stop the clock and to

turn communicative memory as such into cultural memory. The collections serve as a reassurance that everything has been done to save the memories of the last witnesses to history. In this sense, collecting video testimonies is also the attempt to save for the future the present memorial culture with its focus on the individual and its quasi-sacral treatment of witnesses to history: future generations are supposed to remember in the same way as the current one.

Although giving a voice to the individual witnesses is often given as one of the main motivations for the collections, within the collections the video testimonies also become representatives of larger groups. They stand for: the mass murder of the Jews of Europe as a whole (like in Yad Vashem); the experiences of camp survivors (like in the Bergen-Belsen and the Neuengamme Memorials); the history of a certain camp (also in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and the Neuengamme Memorial); or the experiences of the people living in a certain town at a certain moment in time (like in the Museo Diffuso). The video testimonies become semiophores – they no longer stand exclusively for themselves and often are minutely selected as the most representative ones for their group. No matter how all-encompassing a collection is intended to be, criteria are always developed that define which witnesses to history to include and which ones to exclude, as we have seen with the example of the first collection of the Neuengamme Memorial. Not everybody can represent everything. Even the Shoah Visual History Foundation, arguably the most comprehensive of all the collections of video testimonies, decided to concentrate on the memories of Jewish survivors. Out of a total of 51,700 video testimonies, 48,361 are with Jewish survivors, while, for example, only six of the recorded testimonies are with homosexual survivors and only thirteen are with survivors of eugenics politics. Also within the group of Jewish survivors, criteria of inclusion and exclusion were established. The Foundation had, for example, begun to interview ‘those Jewish individuals who were not Soviet citizens and who fled from German-occupied Poland to Soviet-occupied Poland and were then either deported by the Soviets into the Soviet Union proper, or fled deeper into the USSR’ (Jungblut 2005: 512). After a certain number of such interviews had been recorded, the Foundation decided not to continue and to instead focus on ‘experiences under German and/or Axis occupation’ (Jungblut 2005: 513). Thus, in addition, the collection of the Shoah Foundation, as large and diverse as it is, only represents the views of a certain predefined group of witnesses to history on the Holocaust.

That the video testimonies are part of and representative of a larger whole becomes apparent when visiting the websites of video-testimony

projects such as the Fortunoff Archive or the Shoah Foundation. Here, film stills from the video testimonies are presented as a series. When one clicks on the stills, abstracts from video testimonies can be viewed. In the case of the Shoah Foundation, these abstracts open in a pop-up window behind which the original website with the series of film stills can still be seen. Of course, the collected video testimonies also work on their own and it is doubtful whether many viewers will watch video testimonies as a series. However, most video testimonies would not have been recorded if the aim had not been to set up a collection for a specific purpose. The collection gives the testimonies a further layer of meaning – that of being part of a whole that they individually represent.

I will look further at the inclusion and exclusion of video testimonies in collections and exhibitions in Chapter 5. For the moment, it is necessary to investigate what it means to record video testimonies. If the collection of video testimonies is, as I have argued, the attempt to turn communicative memory itself into cultural memory, this does not mean that what is saved with collections of video testimonies is communicative memory per se. Communicative memory is by definition alive and – mostly – lively; cultural memory is dead and rather static. What is it then that is actually recorded in video testimonies and thereby saved for the future?

## **Interviewing and Recording**

### *Recording Video Testimonies: Freezing and Standardizing Communicative Memory*

Maximilian Preisler (1998: 197), who has carried out several interviews with Holocaust survivors in Germany, describes the recording of video testimonies in the following way:

On the screen we see people who, because it certainly is a very important day for all of them, have dressed very carefully, who have put on a coloured scarf, who have picked a dark jacket and a matching tie, who wear a bola-tie. It is their day, the day on which they give testimony. They know that the public is waiting for them. For now, two interviewers, a log book writer, a camera woman or a camera man are sitting opposite; later, a very large number of people will hopefully hear and see how they remember the past. The imagined audience is present. And what will those future listeners think? For the sake of creating a meaningful narrative, the witnesses might feel under pressure to put coincidences and experiences into a non-existent rational framework.

This sums up many of the parameters that need to be taken into consideration when analysing video testimonies. Recording video testimonies means, on the one hand, recording the orally transmitted memories of witnesses to history. On the other hand, it also means creating those memories. Interview techniques, the situation of the interview and technical choices, such as the camera angle or the background for the interview, have an influence on the end result of the video testimony and the way in which the witnesses to history remember. What is recorded on video testimonies is not a spontaneous conversation, but a highly structured speech act. In other words, in order to become cultural memory, communicative memory undergoes a process of transformation and standardization. In order to analyse this process, it will first be necessary to examine the methods used when interviewing witnesses to history as well as at the workings of individual memory.

*The Narrative Interview: Trying to Extract Individual Memory*

Most oral history interviews use the methods of the so-called narrative, biographical or semi-structured interview. In these interview methods, the witnesses to history are supposed to be given the greatest possible freedom to narrate their testimony in a manner of their choosing. Research conventions require the interviewer to remain neutral. Interviews often start with the interviewee being asked to say her or his name, after which she or he is invited to begin narrating her or his biography. In the first phase of the interview, the interviewer will try to abstain from interrupting the witness. Only in a second phase, when the witness' narration has finished, will the interviewer start asking questions (Jureit 1999; Wierling 2003: 110; Gring and Theilen 2007: 175; Shenker 2015). Again, these questions are meant to guide the witnesses rather than to extract concrete information from them.

This scientific imperative for the interviewer to be neutral has been criticized by the social psychologist Harald Welzer (2000: 53f), who points out that it is based on 'the classical epistemological model of the natural sciences'. Welzer (2000: 53) observes that:

The process of research is devised according to a model that acts on the assumption that with a specific methodology 'data' can be 'extracted' from the biographical context and scientifically 'interpreted'. This model is based on the theory that these data are objective, ergo that they also exist outside scientific evaluation.

This is, as neurological and psychological studies have shown, hardly possible. Individual memory cannot be interpreted as uncorrupted data.

Individual memory is not a one-to-one reflection of the past, but at best a 'representation of past impressions' (Wierling 2003: 96). The processes of 'encoding, saving and recalling' (Erl 2005: 82) impressions is highly complex and selective. What is generally called our memory can be subdivided into ultra-short-term memory, short-term memory and long-term memory. Ultra-short-term memory saves immediate impressions for about twenty seconds. Only those impressions that reach short-term memory stand a chance of entering long-term memory, located in the cerebrum. However, this does not mean that the impressions that enter long-term memory are 'saved' in one concrete place. On the contrary, in the act of recalling an event, millions of neurons (brain cells) interact (Wierling 2003: 95) so that our memory is a 'continuous reactivation of neuronal networks' (Thießen 2008: 610). Furthermore, one can distinguish between: semantic memory, storing concrete information that we learn over the course of our lives and that appears to us as timeless and context-free (such as the information that the world is round); procedural memory, which stores automatisms such as cycling or driving a car; and autobiographical memory, which saves impressions and experiences (Erl 2005: 81ff). All three forms of memory are in contact with each other and influence each other continuously.

Not only is our memory highly selective, it is also dependent on the sociocultural reality in which we are living and on our emotions at the time when we have the experience that we come to remember. Thus, we tend to remember that which comes closest to things we have already experienced. Moreover, repetition will increase the likelihood of something being stored in our long-term memory – a phenomenon generally referred to as 'priming' (Erl 2005: 84). At the same time, in situations that can be considered traumatic, we might remember not so much what happened, but rather what we feared the most (Welzer 2000: 56). Neurological studies have shown that emotions are processed by different cerebral systems than cognitive impulses. Emotional memory is less prone to refashioning and damage than cognitive memory. Over time, our memory of emotions can even intensify, so a fear we once had might incubate (Welzer 2000: 56). The fact that traumatic experiences are insufficiently worked through at an emotional level might further lead to 'repression, dissociation from the experience at the moment of encoding it, as well as involuntary and compulsive reproduction of sensual memory fragments' (Erl 2005: 85). It is interesting to observe that, contrary to those later findings, for a long time many people believed the memories of Holocaust survivors to be maximally accurate specifically because of their traumatic experiences. The theory was that traumatic situations led to so-called 'flash bulb memories',



impressions that had been recorded one-to-one, as if by a photographic camera, they were thus thought to be immune to the influences of outside fashioning (cf. Caruth 2000: 86; Welzer 2000: 55). Thus, Lawrence L. Langer observed that 'there is no need to revive what has never died' (Langer 1991: XV). The fact that Holocaust survivor testimony might not always be as accurate as hoped has by now been accepted even by the most benevolent of interviewers. However, this does not necessarily lead to dismissal, but instead, as Stefan Krankenhagen (2001: 183) has shown, to the idea that a lack of historical accuracy is itself an authenticating characteristic. The memories of Holocaust survivors, of whom we generally presuppose that they must be traumatized, appear as authentic exactly because they are fallible.

What we remember – in the sense of recording impressions in our memory – thus depends on who we are, where we come from and what we felt like at the time of experiencing the event in question. Over time, what we have 'saved' is subject to further distortions. It becomes connected to new experiences and newly acquired information. We also tend to adapt our memory to the sociocultural context in which we are living. Recollection is always a representation of the past cued by the present. This means that popular narratives in the present have an influence on the way in which we remember the past. Adaptation to the circumstances surrounding us might even go so far that we come to remember events we have not directly experienced ourselves. Harald Welzer (2000: 51) cites the psychologist Jean Piaget, who counts amongst one of his first memories nearly being kidnapped on the Champs Élysées and of being heroically defended by his nanny. He remembers the scratches on the face of his nanny, the crowd that formed around them and the tippet and the white cane of the policeman who came to help. When he was fifteen, his nanny, when resigning from the family in order to enter the Salvation Army, confessed that she had only made up the story. Piaget concludes that he must have heard the story while still a child and projected it onto the past in the form of a visual memory. He concludes: 'Thus the story is a memory of a memory, though a false one. Many real memories are probably of the same kind.'

The memory of witnesses to history, no matter what form it takes, will therefore never be a one-to-one reflection of what they experienced. It is always influenced by: the sociocultural situation in which the past is remembered; the character traits of the witness; the mood that she or he is in when giving testimony; her or his cultural background; the topics that are in the media at the time; and numerous other circumstances. Recorded on the medium of the video testimony, this memory is further influenced

by the stylistic conventions of the interview and the context in which it takes place.

*Interviewing: Structuring Communicative Memory*

Deciding on what to say and not to say and adapting the interview to the expectations of the interviewer often starts long before the interview takes place. Generally weeks, maybe months of reflection and preparation will have preceded the interview. Turning up at the interview at all might have required the witnesses to make a considerable effort. Dori Laub (1992: 89f) quotes Menachem S., one of the witnesses to history interviewed for the Fortunoff Archive, who recalls:

My initial reaction was 'NO'. My wife said, 'Why don't you think it over? ... What are you afraid of?' I said, 'I'm scared that everything will come back, my nightmares, and so on...' She said, 'You've been living with this thing for thirty-five years after the war, and you're still afraid. You never talked about it. Why don't you try the other way?' We spent a lot of time talking about it; I began to see the logic. This particular night we went to bed very early in the morning, because we had talked very far into the night, and the next night I had my nightmares again. But this time it was different. It was again the conveyor belt, it was again the rolling presses; it was again the feeling of helplessness and of terrible anxiety. But for the first time in my life, I stopped the conveyor belt. I woke up, still feeling anxious, but the anxiety was turning into a wonderful sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. I got up; for the first time I wasn't disoriented. I knew where I was, I knew what happened ... I feel strongly that it has to do with the fact that I decided to open up.

Many witnesses to history probably go through a similarly difficult time deciding whether they should give testimony, and not all of them take the same decision as Menachem S.. Karen Jungblut (2005: 517) of the Shoah Foundation notes that 'survivors sometimes had registered but when called to do the interview had changed their minds or needed more time to think about it'. Ulrike Jureit and Karin Orth (1994: 48) observe that of the 260 letters of invitation that they sent to survivors of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp, ninety-three were never answered. Some of those letters might have been lost in the mail of course or the witnesses of the past might have moved or passed away, but it is equally probable that others were never answered willingly. Nine survivors refused to give testimony.

Interviews are further inevitably structured according to narrative conventions. If Lawrence L. Langer (1991; see Introduction, pp. 8–9) observes that video testimonies are more spontaneous than written testimonies, that they evade a forced chronology, stylistic devices and editing, this does not necessarily mean that video testimonies represent a more natural or

real form of memory. In her autobiographical graphic novel *I was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, Bernice Eisenstein (2006: 100–1) recalls how her mother gave testimony to the Shoah Foundation:

In 1995 my mother agreed to be taped while answering questions posed by an interviewer, for the Archives of the Holocaust Project, which had been initiated by Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation. Later, she gave me a copy of the video, a tape that I watched, and watched again in order to be able to write my mother's story as she told it.

She sat before me, poised in a chair, and when I heard the precision and directness of her words I was transfixed. She spoke only in English, something I rarely heard my mother do, in the same unfaltering voice of someone who has chosen to speak, a voice I recognized from other documentaries I had seen. There was something in her controlled objectivity that initially caused me to feel distanced, but as I listened to my mother, I discovered the courage she has always possessed. Her story, which she had told me only in pieces when I was growing up, was now sequenced as best her memory would allow. I watched her set the pace with a steady bearing and, with her, I was able to look straight ahead.

As this quote shows, in video testimonies, witnesses to history put their memory in a narrative form they have never put them in before, and they might reveal details of a life story they have not shared in previous conversations with friends and relatives. Frequently, witnesses to history do in fact open up about their past for the first time during the interview. In one of the video testimonies in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial's exhibition, for example, the witness to history tells the interviewer that she never talked about her past to her children because she could not talk to them as she could to the interviewer. For Bernice Eisenstein, watching her mother's video testimony becomes a substitute for the lack of communicative memory between her and her mother.

Narrative conventions structure the interview even in the first phase in which the interviewer gives the interviewee the possibility to tell their story as they see fit. Welzer (2000: 52) points out that an interview is a situation of asymmetrical communication in which one person primarily listens and the other person primarily talks. The person who talks adapts their narrative to what they think their interlocutor might want to hear, but also to the relationship that she or he has with that interlocutor: 'First, we cannot not communicate and ... secondly, we speak in such a way as we think that our interlocutor expects us to talk' (Welzer 2000: 52). Many interviews are preceded by telephone or personal conversations between the interviewer and the witness of the past, and often by pre-interview questionnaires. In this way, the interviewers make clear what they expect of the witnesses to history, and the latter can think about how and what to narrate.

Not all video testimonies follow the imperative of neutrality of narrative interviews. Of the main case studies presented here, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the Neuengamme Memorial and Yad Vashem used the methodology of the narrative interview. In other museums such as the Museo Diffuso and the Imperial War Museum, the exhibition chapters in which the video testimonies were to be integrated had been decided upon before the interviews were carried out. The questions for the interviews were therefore directly geared towards the theme of the specific exhibition chapters. One of the employees of the Museo Diffuso observed that it was very difficult to keep the witnesses to history focused on the question that they were asked (Emiliano Bosi interview 2010) – a statement that is unthinkable for an interviewer following the methodology of the narrative interview. The interviewers of the Shoah Foundation again were at first explicitly requested to spend 20 per cent of the interview on prewar experiences, 60 per cent on the time of the Second World War itself and 20 per cent on postwar experiences. Organizing the interviews in such a schematic way proved, unsurprisingly, to be impossible, and the interviewing technique became more flexible (Jungblut 2005: 516).

Thus, no matter what method is used, no interview is ever completely free of narrative constrictions. Any interview with a Holocaust survivor or a witness of the Second World War will by definition focus on the individual's experiences during the war. Both the interviewer and the interviewee know why the interview is being carried out and what its main subject matter will be. In an interview with a Holocaust survivor, the survivor's pre- or post-Holocaust life is less important than her or his experiences during the Holocaust. This reduction of a survivor's life to her or his Holocaust experiences can be problematic, as Ruth Klüger (2003: 131–32) has observed:

And yet in the eyes of many, Auschwitz is a point of origin for survivors. The name itself has an aura, albeit a negative one, that came with the patina of time, and people who want to say something important about me announce that I have been in Auschwitz. But whatever you may think, I don't hail from Auschwitz, I come from Vienna. Vienna is part of me – that's where I acquired consciousness and acquired language – but Auschwitz was as foreign to me as the moon. Vienna is part of my mind-set, while Auschwitz was a lunatic terra incognita, the memory of which is like a bullet lodged in the soul where no surgery can reach it. Auschwitz was merely a gruesome accident.

Further, unlike the everyday conversations upon which communicative memory is based, interviews have to be carried out within a certain time-frame, and the witness and the interviewer need to stay focused on the

subject matter at hand. Subjects cannot simply be dropped and taken up again at a later date, and the witness and the interviewer cannot hop from one subject to another.

The end result of a video testimony also depends to a large extent on the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. For example, did the interviewer and the interviewee know each other before the interview? Do the interviewer and the interviewee come from similar social strata? Do the interviewer and the interviewee have a similar cultural background? How big is the age gap between the interviewer and the interviewee? Are the interviewer and the interviewee of the same gender? But also, quite simply, do the interviewer and the interviewee like each other? There are some events in our life that we will tell one person and not another, and some that we might only tell a person of the same gender, the same religion or the same national or social background. There is ample evidence of interviews where the chemistry between the interviewer and the interviewee did not work.

What is more, as Maximilian Preisler observes in the quotation given above, once a camera or tape recorder is present, the invisible future audience who might listen to or watch the testimony is present, too. During the recording of a video or audio testimony, witnesses to history might be reluctant to reveal details that they would tell the interviewer with the camera or the tape recorder turned off. Ulrike Jureit and Karin Orth (1994: 51f) of the Neuengamme Memorial observe that there were often conversations before or after the interview, or sometimes group lunches and dinners, during which previous conversations were resumed under different circumstances. Occasionally, interviewees also asked the interviewers to turn off the tape recorder. Four witnesses asked to be anonymized and one witness asked for limited access to his testimony.

However, the narrative of video testimonies is not determined solely by the action and reaction of two or more conversational partners, but also, quite simply, by commonly accepted narrative rules. 'A biographical account might be more determined by the normative requests and cultural criteria for a good story, on the one hand, and the terms and conditions of its performance, on the other hand, than by what the interviewee actually lived through', observes Welzer (2000: 55). Similarly, James Young (1988: 160) argues against Langer's observation that video testimonies are independent of literary conventions: 'these narratives are necessarily as dependent on the myths, figures and ideologies comprising the survivors' world and language as literary testimonies are'. Such conventions can be very straightforward. 'The event is not what happens. The event is that which can be narrated', writes Allen Feldman (cited

in Welzer 2000: 55). The rules of storytelling require a story to have a beginning, a middle and an end, and for all of the events inbetween to contribute to the plot and ultimately lead to its resolution. Life is not a novel and not everything that happens to an individual is logical or meaningful. In testimonies, however, witnesses recount their life in hindsight, a position from which some events will be endowed with a meaning that was not originally present.

How much the sociocultural context in which the testimonies are given impacts on their narration becomes apparent when comparing testimonies given at different moments in time. Thus, Rachel Deblinger (2012: 121) observes that 'David Boder's collection includes numerous references to Jewish violence and revenge, as well as expressions of personal depravity that have been underplayed as Holocaust testimonies became central to a larger historical narrative meant for wide audiences'. Ulrike Jureit (1998: 12ff), on the other hand, has compared two testimonies that the survivor Hans Wassermann gave first in the 1950s and then later in 1993. The testimony given in 1993 is more graphic than the one from the 1950s and makes more use of direct speech. In 1993 Hans Wassermann recounts that there was a 'sweet smell' in the camp when they arrived and that some Dutch Kapos told them at their arrival that they would enter a 'Himmelfahrtskommando' (ascension squad), details that are missing in the 1950s account (Jureit 1998: 12). It seems that over the years, Hans Wassermann has acquired techniques to pique the interest of his audience. What is more, in the testimony from the 1950s, he relates that he was deported to Lublin Extermination Camp, whereas in the testimony from 1993, he talks about Treblinka Extermination Camp. Jureit notes that it is historically more plausible that Hans Wassermann was deported to Lublin/Majdanek Extermination Camp rather than to Treblinka. She traces the change of location in his testimony back to memorial culture and the higher notoriety of Treblinka extermination camp in Europe and the United States at the time. It might have seemed preferable for Hans Wassermann to be a survivor of the notorious Treblinka Extermination Camp than of the less well-known Lublin/Majdanek Extermination Camp.

Finally, just like narrative conventions, the language choice of interviews can also have a constructing effect on the testimonies (cf. Young 1988: 160ff; Stier 2003: 77–79). Many witnesses to history give testimony in a language other than their mother tongue – either because they adapt to the language of the interviewer or, more frequently, because they have lost their mother tongue as a consequence of emigration. In the video testimonies, one can often see them struggling to find words,

or asking their interviewers for advice on the right vocabulary. Language always has an influence on what somebody will narrate and how it will be narrated. In the case of video testimonies, a choice of language other than the mother tongue can allow the witness to keep a distance to their memories. A German or Austrian Jewish survivor who emigrated to the United States and gives testimony in English might be able to detach herself or himself from her or his experiences by not using the language that she or he spoke during the time of her or his persecution – which incidentally was also the language of the perpetrators. At the same time, however, the use of a foreign language might limit the witnesses' ability to express themselves.

Thus, video testimonies are not recordings of an objective, genuine individual memory. They are not even recordings of communicative memory. Communicative memory is based on informal conversations between the members of a society. Video testimonies record, as we have seen, a highly standardized and, to a certain extent, staged conversation. They conserve for the future a special moment in the life of a witness to history. It is the moment when the witness has decided to give testimony on her or his life story to a larger public. They are what Amit Pinchevski (2012: 153, italics in original) calls '*Jetztzeit* caught on tape'. The testimony is influenced by the sociocultural context of the interview and guided by the questions and expectations of the interviewer.<sup>4</sup> For some witnesses to history, the video testimony might even amount to their own fifteen minutes of fame, which might in turn influence the way they act in front of the camera. In this way, communicative memory undergoes a process of transformation for it to become cultural memory. The bits and pieces of life stories told at different points in time are condensed and put into a concise and often seemingly logical narrative. Video testimonies record an artificially constructed conversation. This is not to suggest that communicative memory is more natural or real than what is recorded on video testimonies. Communicative memory, like individual memory, is always influenced by the sociocultural context of its disclosure, by the cultural memory in vogue at the time, by the groups to which both the witness to history and the interlocutor belong, and by the relationship between the concerned parties. However, in contrast to the conversation that is recorded in video testimonies, communicative memory is dispersed in time and space. It fluctuates and typically takes place more or less spontaneously. Video testimonies freeze the present and are the result of a well-prepared conversation between an interviewer and an interviewee. This conversation would look different at any other moment in time and with any other interviewer.

*The Aesthetics of Video Testimonies: Mimicking Communicative Memory and Representing Individual Memory*

However, if what is recorded in video testimonies is a staged, asymmetrical conversation, this is not what is shown in them. Several critics have pointed out that the visual aspects of video testimonies are one of their main assets. Geoffrey Hartman (1996: 140), for example, contrasts video testimonies with film and documentaries. He observes that film is always visible as ‘simulacrum’ and that ‘documentaries too have a way of buffering realistic extremes: they are presented, and the narrator’s patter induces a kind of distance. But in video testimonies ... there is nothing between us and the survivor; nor when the interview gets going, between the survivor and his/her recollections’. Lawrence L. Langer (1991: xii), in contrasting video to written testimonies, argues that:

Writing about Holocaust literature, or even written memoirs, as I have done in my previous works, challenges the imagination through the mediation of a text, raising issues of style and form and tone and figurative language that – I now see – can deflect our attention from the ‘dreadful familiarity’ of the event itself. Nothing, however, distracts us from the immediacy and the intimacy of conducting interviews with former victims (which I have done) or watching them on a screen. Struggling to identify with the voices of the witnesses, who themselves are struggling to discover voices trustworthy enough to tell their whole stories (and not all have the courage or stamina or resources to succeed), I often found myself naked before their nakedness, defenceless in the presence of their vulnerability.

Similarly, James Young (1988: 161) points out that ‘it is not merely a story or narrative being recorded in cinemagraphic and video testimony, but the literal making of it: the painful and deliberate choice of words, selection of details and memories, the effect of these details on the speaker, and then the effect of these details on the narrative itself. We watch as experiences enter speech: that point at which memory is transformed into language, often for the first time’.

For Hartman, Langer and Young, video testimonies thus show an almost untainted, real, individual memory. They see in them the representation of an individual memory as emerging from deep within a person’s soul, ultimately manifesting itself as image and speech. Especially for Hartman and Young, video testimony thus creates a situation in which the viewer enters into direct conversation with the interviewee. It is almost as if the medium was not present. What Hartman, Langer and Young forget is that the medium of video testimony can create immediacy, intimacy and evidentiality as much as it records these qualities. Young (1988: 158) has gone further than others in observing that the medium of film has an ordering



effect on video testimonies: 'In Holocaust video testimony ... at least two levels of narrative intersect: that of the film – its lateral movement, its editing, its juxtaposed images – and that of the survivor's own story, which then becomes a narrative within a narrative.' For him, 'there can be no unmediated testimony in film' (Young 1988: 158). In fact, 'we find that the aim of filmed testimony can never be to document experiences or to present facts as such. But rather it is to document both the witness as he makes his testimony and the understanding and meaning of events generated in the activity of testimony itself' (Young 1988: 159). Similarly, Oren Baruch Stier (2003: 71) argues that the 'framing' of video testimonies has to be taken into consideration, distinguishing 'between the content of the survivor's testimony – the testimony as such – and its context or container – the testimony in the act of its being given, as it is framed'. Young and Stier point out that camera positions or lighting have an impact on the representation of the object on film. Both refrain, however, from going the full length when analysing these technical choices. Stier (2003: 108) even concludes that 'ultimately, we see how the television-screen frame, the borderline separating ... inside from outside, one general frame of reference from another, is really an artificial dividing line. What must happen, what I have argued does happen, is that, from both sides, that frame is broken, violated, disrupted'. For Stier the medium thus disappears ultimately behind the need for secondary witnessing.

Video testimonies show what has been dubbed 'talking heads'. The interviewers are generally left outside of the camera frame. This makes the testimonies seem more like monologues than dialogues. We do not see how the reactions of the interviewer and interviewee mutually influence each other. What we see are the faces and – sometimes – the hands of the witnesses to history. It is rare that the entire body is visible and if this body is visible, it is never a body in movement. Witnesses to history are shown sitting. While projects like the Fortunoff Archive or the Shoah Foundation have, at least at the beginning, filmed their testimonies in an everyday environment (mostly the living room) for the video testimonies presented in museums, a monochromatic, mostly grey or black, background is frequently chosen – a practice that, as has been observed in Chapter 2, can also be found in TV documentaries.

The dark background brings the witnesses to history optically closer to the viewer. Nothing distracts the viewers from the witnesses' facial expressions and they are forced to study all of the twitches and emotions therein (cf. Keilbach (2008: 230) for a similar discussion of the aesthetics of video testimonies in TV documentaries). Those extraverbal expressions are often interpreted as expressions of the trauma of the witnesses to

history, and therefore as the actual story that is visible behind their words. Young (1988: 162) argues that ‘in the testimonial image, we also perceive traces of a story the survivor is not telling; these traces are in his eyes, his movements, his expressions – all of which become part of the overall text of video testimony, suggesting much more than we are hearing or seeing’. Even the knowledge that the survivors’ gestures are being deliberately orchestrated does not necessarily impact on this belief that it is through their gestures that they come closest to their past experiences, as can be seen in the example of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*. One of the most striking scenes in Claude Lanzmann’s documentary shows the Treblinka survivor Abraham Bomba relating how he was forced to cut women’s hair before they were sent to the gas chambers. While Bomba gives his testimony, fighting back tears and struggling for words, he gives a customer in a shop in Holon in Israel a haircut. Lanzmann himself has admitted that this scene was staged. Abraham Bomba had already retired at the time of the interview and Lanzmann had rented the shop on purpose for the interview. Abraham Bomba only mimicked the hair-cutting. Had he really cut this phantom customer’s hair, Lanzmann observes, the man would have been bald by the end of the scene. Yet, Lanzmann (2000: 109) argues, from the moment in which Bomba touches the hair ‘truth becomes palpable, [Bomba] experiences the scene all over again: suddenly knowledge is embodied’. Lanzmann argues that he turned the protagonists of his film, the witnesses to history, into actors. He considers this staging as necessary for putting the survivors into a bodily state fit for ‘their talk to become communication and to gain new dimensions’ (Lanzmann 2000: 113). For him, it is therefore in the inauthenticity of the gestures that the authenticity of testimony lies. Not unlike in Lanzmann’s documentary, in video testimonies, through the focus on the witnesses to history’s faces, the viewers are supposed to get a direct experience of the witnesses’ individual – traumatic – memories.

Moreover, by leaving the interviewer out of the camera frame and zooming in on the faces positioned before a dark background, the producers hope to provide the viewers with an experience of being in an intimate dialogue with the witnesses to history on screen (cf. Stier 2003: 74). In line with Hartman and Young, Diana Gring and Karin Theilen (2007: 177) from the Bergen-Belsen Memorial argue: ‘The interviews are recorded in front of a neutral black background. This is, on the one hand, beneficial for the editing process; on the other hand, the focus, in this way, lies on the witness to history. Recipients can concentrate on the face, the facial expressions and the gestures of the interviewees; this allowed us to mimic a dialogic structure, a “virtual encounter”.’ In some museums, such as the Imperial

War Museum, witnesses were even asked to look directly into the camera instead of, as would be usual in a conversation or a TV interview, at their interviewer (cf. Fischer 2008: 43). The interviewers wanted the witnesses to history's eyeline to match that of the visitor (Barker interview 2009).

As we will see in more detail in Chapter 5, the viewers of video testimonies are supposed to become what has been termed 'secondary witnesses' (Baer 2000) or 'tertiary witnesses' (Wake 2013). These secondary or tertiary witnesses are meant to take on the testimonies of the witnesses to history and to pass them on to future generations. Caroline Wake (2013: 113ff) observes that ideally, the secondary witness is an active and engaged listener who is present in space and time at the moment when the testimony is formulated. Arguing that the viewers of video testimonies are secondary witnesses is in this sense only possible if we consider the mediation of the testimonies not to have had an influence on the testimonies, as Hartman, Langer or Stier do in the quotations given above. For Hartman, Langer or Stier viewing a video testimony is no different from being present while the video testimony took place. Wake (2013: 125), on the other hand, insists that video testimonies are remediations and thus recordings of a live performance. She therefore proposes the concept of 'tertiary witnessing' in addition to that of secondary witnessing. She distinguishes between 'immediate' tertiary witnessing and 'hypermediate' tertiary witnessing. In immediate tertiary witnessing, the viewer tends to forget the medium and has got the feeling that she or he is spatiotemporally present. In hypermediate tertiary witnessing, the medium is blatantly obvious and the viewers feel spatiotemporally distant from the witness to history. Aware of this distance and regretting it might, according to Wake (2013:130f), against all odds, enhance an emotional co-presence in the tertiary witnesses who wish that they had been there at the event of the interview. Hypermediate tertiary witnessing might in this way cause a stronger emotional response than immediate tertiary witnessing. Tertiary witnesses can, Wake observes, shift between immediate and hypermediate witnessing while watching the same video testimony.

It is difficult to say whether, and if so how often, the viewers of the video testimonies in the museums forget the medium. In any case, what the producers of video testimonies try to create is an experience of immediacy. The viewers are supposed to forget that the witnesses to history did not originally talk to them and instead have the impression of being in an intimate conversation with the latter. This should in turn lead to a feeling of emotional co-presence – the viewers are invited to concentrate on the testimonies and to pay particular attention to the witnesses to history's emotional expressions visible in their faces.

Apart from drawing the viewers' attention to the emotional expressions of the witnesses to history and from mimicking a dialogue, the monochromatic background and the focus on the face of the witnesses to history also have another effect: they aesthetically underline that the video testimonies are part of a collection. The witnesses to history are optically decontextualized from the sociocultural context of their present and past life, and the communicative situation of the interview (cf. Bösch (2008: 68) for a similar discussion of video testimonies in TV documentaries). With the exception of the witnesses' clothes and maybe their hair and makeup, no visual sociocultural markers are left in the videos. This choice of the monochromatic background can have a protective effect. In the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, for example, a neutral background was also chosen in order to conceal the entirety of the witnesses' private environment from the public. At the same time, as alluded to above, the monochromatic background also simplifies the postproduction process; for example, it makes cutting the videos and colour correction easier (Gring interview 2009). Be that as it may, the single-coloured background leads to a deindividualization of the witnesses to history who are not shown in their natural environment. The witnesses to history become part of a series; they become collection items.

Thus, in the images shown in video testimonies, the imperative of neutrality criticized by Harald Welzer is in fact reproduced. Video testimonies do not show the interview process upon which they are based. Instead, they put in scene the witnesses to history's bodies as expressions of their innermost feelings and try to mimic an encounter between the viewer and the witness. They represent individual memory while at the same time trying to mimic communicative memory between the viewer and the witness to history. At the same time, video testimonies are standardized to become collection items. Thus, video testimonies are cultural memory in the form of condensed communicative memory in the guise of individual memory.

### *Editing Video Testimonies: Communicative Memory Becomes an Analysable and Manipulable Entity*

Recorded video testimonies quite literally become material objects that can be stored in archives or in the storage rooms of museums. One of the consequences of this materialization is that the videos are prone to distortion and manipulation. They can be watched or listened to more than once, stopped, cut or rewound. What is not possible with our own parents and

grandparents – namely silencing them when they get lost in incoherent remembrance – becomes possible with video testimonies. The stories of the witnesses to history can be (mis)interpreted, commented on or made fun of, without the witness – or the interviewer for that matter – being able to intervene. Recording and collecting video testimonies therefore means turning a living body and a vivacious voice into analysable and potentially manipulable data. The latter effect is further intensified by the widespread practices of editing and digitizing the video testimonies. In Chapter 5 we will look further at the effects of making video testimonies available on the internet. Here I want to analyse what happens before the video testimonies are put online. I will use the digital database of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe as described by Daniel Baranowski (2009) as an example.

*Editing: Turning Video Testimonies into Searchable Data*

At the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, some of the videos of the Fortunoff Archive as well as interviews produced by the Memorial itself are available in a database that is open to the public once a week at the information centre underneath the Memorial. As Daniel Baranowski (2009: 75ff) specifies, before the video testimonies enter this database, they are first transcribed: the oral testimony is transformed into a written text. This means that those who want to consult video testimonies no longer have to follow the horizontal ordering of the video referred to by James Young (1988: 158); they have a searchable text at their disposal and can put extracts from this text next to each other, compare and interpret them. If the interview was carried out in a language other than German, the transcript is translated into German in order to make it available to non-native speakers (Baranowski 2009: 77f). In this way, the testimony is also interpreted for the first time. No matter how hard a translation might try to stay true to the original, translating invariably means removing an original text from the sociocultural context of its production and transposing it into a new one. According to its content, themes and semantics, the text is then subdivided into chapters and subchapters (Baranowski 2009: 78f). In addition, footnotes are added explaining expressions and giving background information to what the witnesses are saying (Baranowski 2009: 80). The testimony is keyworded and summarized, information on the interview situation is collated and an index of themes is put together for each testimony (Baranowski 2009: 81–84). The video testimony is in this way arranged according to a structure that appears logical when watching the interview in hindsight. The original – more or less spontaneous – flow of the interview is broken up and ordered.

Editing and digitizing video testimonies necessarily entails questions of ethics. The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe points out the need to stay true to the testimonies while editing them. In their chapter division, they therefore attempt not to reorganize the testimony according to a linear historical chronology, but to keep the chronology of the testimony (Baranowski 2009: 78). Moreover, viewers can at no point switch off the video to look at the supplementary material exclusively – the video testimony always remains centre stage (Baranowski 2009: 85). Editing the testimonies is further intended to reduce misunderstanding and to allow the viewer to see the video in the context of the interview, as well as the historical context of the witness' memory (Baranowski 2009: 81ff). Todd Presner (2016), analysing the digitization of the video testimonies of the Shoah Foundation, even speaks of a possible 'ethics of the algorithm'. He argues that while digitization might flatten the differences between the different video testimonies, it is exactly in this 'democratization' that the ethics of testimony might lie (Presner 2016: 199). For one thing, the algorithm does not focus on the most-watched video testimonies, but takes all of them into consideration, treating them as equals. The algorithm allows a 'distant reading' (Presner 2016: 198) by generating information from thousands of sources at the same time, and thereby allows insights that a 'close reading' of the videos alone would not. For the future, Presner (2016: 199–202) pleads for a fluctuating algorithmic structure, which would involve multiple indexers and multiple categories and thereby allow an algorithmic reading according to a 'hermeneutic uncertainty' in line with the enormity of the event of the Holocaust.

However, as laudable as the intentions of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe and as astute as Presner's reflections are, editing makes it easier for viewers to choose what to watch or only to watch parts of the testimonies. 'Once digitized, catalogued and indexed, researchers can access information about specific individuals, places and experiences mentioned in the spoken narratives in much the same way that an index permits a reader to find specific information in a book', observes Karen Jungblut (2005: 518) about the editing process at the Shoah Foundation. This in turn bears an uncanny resemblance to Henry Bulawko's vision of becoming a 'living document' cited at the beginning of this chapter. Editing facilitates the use of the utterances of witnesses to history for multiple purposes: it makes it easier for researchers, documentary filmmakers or curators to find exactly those utterances from the testimonies that they need. Through editing, video testimonies are also put into smaller bites that can be reorganized and rearranged to form new narratives and new collections. By subdividing them and adding keywords, the video

testimonies are given further layers of meaning than that of the memory of an individual. Editing is in this way part of the process of turning video testimonies into semiophores. Through editing, at least some of the semiotic meanings that video testimonies are given as collection and exhibition items are defined.

## Conclusion

With regard to the objects that act as carriers of cultural memory, Gerd Krumeich (cited in Thiemeyer 2010: 267ff) differentiates between ‘objets laissés’ and ‘objets souvenirs’. ‘Objets laissés’ are the objects that survived by chance and only after their survival are turned into meaningful bearers of memory. The objects found during archaeological excavations fall into this category. ‘Objets souvenirs’ are objects that were deliberately produced in order to preserve the memory of an event, such as war paintings or annals. Video testimonies occupy a rather peculiar place in this categorization. On the one hand, video testimonies are documents that are deliberately produced in order to preserve the memory of an event. However, unlike ‘objets souvenirs’, video testimonies are produced at a temporal distance to the event in question. Video testimonies are not only carriers of memory, they are memory itself – or rather a representation of the act of remembrance. Recording and collecting video testimonies means not so much saving for the future relics of the past, but rather relics of contemporary communicative memory. In the act of creating those relics, communicative memory is, as I have tried to show in this chapter, transformed so as to make it fit cultural memory. In video testimonies, communicative structures and aesthetics are standardized, and although each video testimony retains the quirks of the individual witness to history, recording and collecting transforms video testimonies into analysable entities that can be serialized.

Through an analysis of the process of collecting, some characteristics of video testimonies as a global assemblage become apparent. Regardless of when and where they were recorded, most video testimonies share similar aesthetics: a camera focus on the face or the hands; lighting that allows the viewer to follow all of the twitches of the witness’ facial expressions; and normally a monochromatic background. Most video testimonies, applying interviewing techniques from oral history and psychoanalysis, also have similar narrative patterns. The same goes for archiving techniques that subdivide the video testimonies into analysable bites. The different collection projects further share similar motivations: a desire to give the survivors

the chance to tell their own story; the wish to complement the real and fictionalized pictures of the war and the Holocaust with the voices of the survivors; the compilation of research data; the provision of educational material; and the desire to remember those who were murdered.

In her reflections on the process of musealization, Lynn Maranda (2009: 257) observes that ‘there is a human desire to transform everything into a knowledge base, thus giving it permanence. This is the human contribution to universal existence. Musealization, therefore, is undertaken to serve and satisfy knowledge, and the museum is the repository for the knowledge of objects’. Through the musealization of video testimonies, a representation of communicative memory is transformed in such a way as to make it analysable, subject to interpretation and usable for different purposes. Extracts from the testimonies can potentially be used to communicate multiple, and possibly contradictory, messages under different circumstances:

The object itself cannot be considered a ‘substitute’, but the intellectual ascriptions which the museum culture has bestowed on it for its functioning in its new cultural milieu, are. The object, through musealization, has become a passive entity which is manipulated to suit any one of a myriad of contrivances in which the museum decides to place it at any particular time. It has, in fact, gone from being singularly purposed (in its original functioning environment) to being multifaceted (in the museum ‘culture’). (Maranda 2009: 256)

Through the musealization of video testimonies, communicative memory has become detached from everyday life and has entered the realm of longevity – with an as yet unpredictable end. Neither the producers of the videos nor the witnesses to history retain full control over what happens to the video testimonies once they have entered the archive. The next chapter will look into some of the ‘myriad of contrivances’ that Maranda alludes to. It will analyse what happens when video testimonies are taken out of the archives and put into the canon, in this case the exhibition space of museums.

## Notes

1. The entire poem reads:  
Remember only that I was innocent  
and, just like you, mortal on that day,  
I, too, had had a face marked by rage, by pity and joy,  
quite simply, a human face!
2. An online version of the exhibit can be found at: <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/before-they-perished/QRNJBGMI?hl=en-GB>.



3. See: <http://www.yadvashem.org/archive/about/our-collections>.
4. As a side note, it is here interesting to observe that David Boder already adopted a technique that he hoped would lead him to neutral, untainted testimonies. In the introduction to his collection of interviews *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, Boder (149: xii-xiii) writes: 'I would limit my stay [in DP shelter houses] to about two days in one place, partly because the narratives would begin to show signs of preparation and lose their spontaneity, and partly because of the desire to record the experiences of individuals in many and dissimilar groups.'

When the selected individual appeared for the interview I would say, "We know very little in America about the things that happened to you in concentration camps. If you want to help us out by contributing information about the fate of the displaced persons, tell your own story. Begin with your name, give your age, and tell where you were when the war started and what has happened to you since."

This introduction was usually enough to start a person off on his story. Within a few minutes he would become oblivious to the microphone before him ...

As is customary in psychological interviews, I would sit behind the person, so that he would not be influenced by the facial expressions of the interviewer. No other persons were permitted in the room where the interview was taking place, and never was the person interviewed permitted to resort to the use of prepared notes.'

## *Chapter 4*

# EXHIBITING

## The Witness to History as a Museum Object

### **Kurt Tucholsky at the First World War Museum in Vincennes**

In 1926, the German author and war veteran Kurt Tucholsky visited the French First World War museum in Vincennes. He looked at pictures painted by war artists and soldiers, at posters, military plates and improvised shoes and clothes made out of newspapers. The ration stamps for sugar made him halt:

There they lie, the worn out, grey things. Isn't that a real piece of history - ? Well, yes, somehow – but then something is missing. It is not the real thing. It was like this – and then again it wasn't. Is this how we will enter posterity? In that case, we will enter it in the wrong way. Something is missing: the horror, the lamentations, the depression, the hopelessness, the senselessness, the boredom, the atmosphere of collective lunacy ... No, posterity will not understand us. Just as we never understood our ancestors. (Tucholsky 1926)

He concludes: 'And after I had seen all this, piece by piece and very slowly and thoroughly, I shook my head and I missed something. What? Us. This is not us. There we are, standing life-sized in the museum and yet it is not us' (Tucholsky 1926). Tucholsky's solution to his dilemma seems macabre. If objects alone cannot adequately represent the horrors of the war, one has to start exhibiting humans:

One should stuff some of those field marshals, journalists, secretaries of state, and army chaplains, perhaps as friendly dummies, as an umbrella stand, say, or with a visiting card box in the mouth, so that for once in their lives they would be good for something – one should put these puppets into the display cabinets and write underneath: FROM GREAT TIMES. Then posterity will stand before them in wonder, regard them and shudder, and understand with pity. (Tucholsky 1926)

Tucholsky's was a sarcastic response to the museum's perceived belittlement of the horror of the war. The museum objects exhibited in Vincennes appeared as empty signs. For him, they could not refer to anything but themselves.

Tucholsky's reaction is not unlike that of W.G. Sebald's first-person narrator during his visit to the Breendonk Memorial cited at the beginning of this study. Although Tucholsky is himself a witness of the past who worries about how his generation will be remembered, while Sebald's first-person narrator laments that he is unable to understand the experiences and sufferings of his predecessors in the concentration camp, both see objects as obstacles in their attempt to get at the 'real thing': the experiences and memories of the people who have lived in the past.

My experience of the visit to the Museo Diffuso was quite the opposite. In one sense, the Museo Diffuso has put into practice what Tucholsky suggested – although in a less macabre way. In the Museo Diffuso, the visitor is confronted with an overflow of stories: that of a soldier, for example, who volunteered to fight on the Russian front because he was interested in Russian culture and who, as soon as he arrived, broke down crying from homesickness; that of a woman who is still touched by the remembrance of discovering that the butter she had finally acquired on the black market had melted when she wanted to fry an egg for her father; or that of a partisan fighter organizing strikes in the factories. In other words, unlike Tucholsky and Sebald's first-person narrator, I learnt a lot about how people felt during the war years. I heard the stories behind the objects, but I did not see the objects themselves. When I asked Luciano Boccalatte (Boccalatte interview 2010) of the 'Istituto Piemontese per la Storia della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea, Girogio Agosti', one of the curators, why the museum exhibits so few objects, he answered:

The object in itself, especially the objects of the Resistenza, are very poor objects. They don't even have ... well ... when I see for example the coat of Louis XIV I can be fascinated by it because it has a splendour all of its own. However, the partisan boot does in fact only speak to me if I completely know its history, if I am totally immersed in this history, if I know everything ... then the object can indeed communicate something to me. For the majority of visitors, this does not happen anymore.

Boccalatte called the choice to use video testimonies in the exhibition 'a quasi-obligatory choice'. In order to illustrate his point, he told me a story. In 1995, on the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Italy, he was involved in the arrangements for an exhibition on the Second World War and the Resistenza. Many citizens donated objects for this purpose.

Luciano Boccalatte was approached by a man whose older brother, a partisan fighter, had died during the first days of hostilities. The man wanted to donate objects that reminded him of his brother. Amongst these objects was a piece of bread that he had taken from his brother's pocket while he lay dead. Luciano Boccalatte told me that he was struck by the fact that the man treated the objects almost as relics. He said that he had problems explaining to the man that the piece of bread might have an emotional value to him, but that it would not communicate anything when placed inside a display case (Boccalatte interview 2010).

Thus, in the Museo Diffuso, the relationship between objects and individual memory has been redefined. Sceptical of objects as adequate means to illustrate the past, the Museo Diffuso uses video testimonies in order to communicate what it was like to live in Turin during the war years. The extreme case of the Museo Diffuso shall in this chapter serve as a starting point for an analysis of the practice of exhibiting video testimonies. In the first section of this chapter, 'Video Testimonies and Museum Objects', I will analyse the correlations between video testimonies and museum objects. In other words, I will look at the intermedial relations between video testimonies and the other exhibits in museums. In the second section, I will consider 'Video Testimonies as Museum Objects'. I will here analyse how video testimonies are adapted to the rules of exhibition. In other words, I will analyse the intramediation of video testimonies. In both sections, I will pay particular attention to the auratisation and authentication of both the video testimonies and the other objects in the museums.

## **Video Testimonies and Museum Objects**

### *The Authenticity of Museum Objects*

The concepts of aura and authenticity are often deployed when referring to museum objects. Both are notoriously difficult to define. The most famous and – at least for cultural studies – the most influential definition of 'aura' goes back to Walter Benjamin. In his essay 'The Artwork at the Time of Mechanical Reproduction', Benjamin (2003 [1939]: 257) defines aura as: 'the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be'. Peter M. Spangenberg (2000: 406ff) observes that for Benjamin, aura is both an 'Erfahrungskategorie' (category of experience) and an 'Objekteigenschaft' (feature inherent to certain objects). First, Benjamin, as a translator of Proust, sees a relationship between aura and 'mémoire

involontaire' (involuntary memory) (Spangenberg 2000: 406–8). In his essay 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', Benjamin (2003 [1940]) observes:

Experience of the aura thus arises from the fact that a response characteristic of human relationships is transposed to the relationship between humans and inanimate or natural objects. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us. This ability corresponds to the data of *mémoire involontaire*.

As a category of experience, aura is thus based on the viewer's anthropomorphization of the object. Aura resides in the viewer imagining a reaction coming from the object.

As a feature inherent to certain objects on the other hand, aura depends on an object's authenticity. Authenticity is for Benjamin (1991 [1939]: 477) based, in turn, on the 'Echtheit' (originality) of an artwork and the fact that it has been produced as part of a tradition.<sup>1</sup> For him (2003 [1939]: 255), the 'Echtheit' (originality) of a thing 'is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it'. He famously argued (2003 [1939]) that 'in the age of technological reproducibility', the aura inherent to the original object is in decline. In the case of photography and especially film, the possibility of reproduction has replaced the original object.

The German cultural theorist Gottfried Korff has adapted Benjamin's theory to museum objects. He considers (2007 [1984]) the museum experience as unique because of the authenticity of museum objects. For him, 'authenticity is the beginning of a special experience of history, that cannot be attained in a cognitive, intellectual or discursive way, but which finds its foundation in the principle of affective impression, of sensual excitement' (2007 [1984]: 121). This experience, according to him (2007 [1984]: 120), can be found in 'the ambivalence innate to the historical relic'. He observes:

The original object does not only bring the past closer to us, it also distances it again – because of the peculiar foreignness inherent in authentic objects. To be close to the object and at the same time far away; to return to the horizon of a past time when looking at an object and at the same time remain firmly grounded in the present – it is this tension that the museal representation of history has to take as its starting point, and it is from this tension that it has to draw its effect. (Korff 2007 [1984]: 120)

Thus, Korff, like Benjamin, considers the object as an agent in a dynamic of action and reaction between viewer and object: the object actively

brings about a special experience in the viewer. Korff (2006 [1984]: 120) sees the aura of an object residing in 'the forgotten human life (das vergessene Menschliche), which can be remembered through the objects'.

For both Korff and Benjamin, aura and authenticity are thus a reality – something that is inherent to objects and can be experienced through interaction with those objects. What they disregard is that the conception of aura and authenticity depend to a large extent on the expectations of the viewer, and that aura and authenticity are the results of a process of legitimation defining the particular object as authentic and hence auratic. I wish to return here to the concept of representation. Unlike Korff and Benjamin, the cultural theorists Elisabeth Mohn, Christian Strub and Geesche Wartemann (1997) have defined 'authenticity as representation'. They argue that 'the problem of authenticity can only appear when, despite the awareness of a principled mimetic difference between representation and the represented, *doubts about the transparency of representation* appear' (Mohn, Strub and Wartemann 1997: 1, italics in original). They define a 'magical authenticity', 'a foil (that is imagined by the respective culture to be its pre-cultural origin)'. This magical authenticity, they argue, is negated every time the problem of authenticity appears and thus every time the means of representation are deemed inadequate for the intended representation. In the case of museum objects, the problem of authenticity appears in the sense that each object could – at least in principle – also be a fake. Most visitors would not, one supposes, note the difference between a fake *Mona Lisa* or a fake Greek vase and the originals. They do, however, expect the objects in the museum to be originals. Museums give their objects what Mohn, Strub and Wartemann (1997: 1) have called an 'authenticity of authority': they are a socially accepted authority that guarantees the authenticity of objects.

However, declaring an object as original is only the first step of its authentication in the museum. The result of this declaration is generally the entrance of the object into the museum's collection. The second step is the actual exhibition of the object. It is through particular exhibition techniques that an object's assigned authenticity is represented. This is achieved by means of its placement in the exhibition room, its juxtaposition with other objects and the use of labels, museum texts, graphs, audioguides or dioramas and thus by the intermedial relations that the object is put into.

For the museum visitors, the problem of authenticity arises where those means of representation do not correspond to their expectations. Walter Benjamin's concept of 'aura' as a category of experience or Gottfried Korff's special museum experience are only possible if the visitors accept the representation of the museum objects as originals and/or as legitimate

representations of the past. In this sense, an original can appear fake and therefore inauthentic, while a fake can conversely seem authentic.

If we consider Klas Grinell's tripartite definition of representation ('Vorstellung', 'Darstellung' and 'Vertretung'), then the codification of a museum object as authentic is based on representation in the senses of 'Vorstellung' and 'Darstellung'. A museum object is labelled as authentic if it appears to correspond to the mental image ('Vorstellung') of an original. The object is further authenticated and auritized through certain exhibition techniques and thus through representations connoted by 'Darstellung'. It is through representation in the sense of 'Darstellung' that the mental image, 'Vorstellung', of an authentic museum object is either created, approved or negated. In what follows, I will show how video testimonies are used as one of objects and the means in this process of creation, approval and negation.

### *The Authenticity of Witnesses to History*

In their definition of the concept of authenticity, Suzanne Knaller and Harro Müller (2005: 40–65) differentiate between 'Objektauthentizität' (object authenticity) and 'Subjektauthentizität' (subject authenticity). While object authenticity refers to the originality and truthfulness-to-tradition of objects described above, subject authenticity describes lack of performance, that is, a lack of representation in the sense of 'Darstellung' in human behaviour. Subject authenticity can, in a Rousseauian sense, be understood as a return to an extrasocietal or presocietal self. It can also, with reference to the eighteenth-century concept of naivety, be defined as 'a trespass of the individual and a return to a place of origin in aesthetical modernity, when the artist finds his or her true self over his or her creative potential and originality' (Knaller and Müller 2005: 45). Subject authenticity, like object authenticity, is dependent on an outside observer who interprets an individual's gestures as being beyond representation.

In the sense of object authenticity, all witnesses to history are authentic representatives of the past because they have been there. The traces that the past has left on their bodies authenticate their testimonies. The witnesses to history's experiences in situ authenticate their testimonies given *ex post facto*. However, nowhere has the idea of authenticity been discussed as fervently as in the context of testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Object authenticity blends here with subject authenticity, and ideas of the juridical witness with those of trauma. Stefan Krankenhagen (2001: 187) observes that survivor testimonies generally serve as 'magical authenticity'

for other representations of the Holocaust: ‘The critical reflex to analyse the strategical, that is ideological, aspect of assertions and receptions of authenticity is missing in what concerns the reception and meta-reception of primary representations of the Holocaust [i.e. survivor testimonies]. A deconstruction of authoritative authenticity is not only missing, its absence is moreover considered to be morally and epistemologically necessary.’ Jürgen Fohrmann (2006: 194–95), in a reflection on the witnesses appearing at the Eichmann trial, puts forward a similar argument: ‘It seemed ... in fact to be sacrilegious to consider this form of survival narrative, this form of giving testimony of the Shoah, as a representation that could not do without prerequisites and without references to other forms of representation, and that necessarily had to use a spectrum of pre-existing modes of representation.’

Both Fohrmann and Krankenhagen thus argue that the representative character (*‘Darstellung’*) of the act of giving testimony of Holocaust survivors is not put into question. The gestures of the survivors are, on the contrary, seen as the epitome of authenticity – as the only possible way to give testimony on the Holocaust. Of course, this does not mean that the testimonies of Holocaust survivors have not met with criticism. As I have pointed out in Chapters 2 and 3, the constructed character of memory has been apparent since the seminal studies of Maurice Halbwachs. Relevant scientific literature has cast further doubt on the historical facticity of survivor testimonies and has pointed out that traumatizing events are also, or perhaps especially, subject to refashioning (cf. Welzer 2000). This has, however, not hindered the reception of the Holocaust survivor as an authentic and authenticating figure. This reception is based on: Holocaust survivors’ victim status; the fact that their testimonies are based on suffering; and the conception of trauma as an uncontrollable memory that resides deep within the witnesses’ psyche.

As I observed in Chapter 1, victims come highest on the scale of trustworthiness of witnesses to history. In contrast to that of perpetrators or bystanders, the trustworthiness of victims is generally not questioned. This trust is further intensified by the fact that Holocaust survivors are survivors of extreme physical and psychological violence. The camp experience is seen as throwing people back to a state before civilization. This idea is, for example, reflected in Giorgio Agamben’s definition of the *Muselmann* as the true witness. Agamben (2002: 82) argues that the *Muselmann* is ‘the non-human who obstinately appears as human’. In the camps, humanity is reduced to ‘bare life’ (Agamben 2002: 69). This reduction should, however, not lead to questioning the humanity of the victims of the Holocaust. On the contrary, Agamben argues that after Auschwitz, the threshold



between what is human and what is nonhuman must be redefined. It is in this very argument of life in the camp as an experience that forces humans to react in a way that might put their humanity into question but still keeps them human that the idea of a subject authenticity of the victims of the camps appears: extreme physical and psychological violence force people to transcend their social roles and throw them back to bare life.

The inhuman conditions that the victims were in thereby tend to underline rather than question their humanity: 'while treacherous happiness is easily suspected to be a masquerade, in pain, man appears as an untainted being that is not bound to any rules of orchestration', observes Helmut Lethen (1996: 221). He points out that the discovery that different cultures have different ways of expressing pain is usually followed by irritation. The individual who has gone through an experience of pain is expected to have left it both traumatized and purified. As Anne Rothe (2011: 20f) observes, modern-day views on suffering see it both as pathological, as something that has to be corrected through therapy, and, in a Christian tradition, as purification. This has brought about a situation in which 'victims are revered as modern-day quasi-saints and suffering is invested with redemptive value and reinterpreted as sacrifice' (Rothe 2011: 20). Victims in this sense not only transcend their humanity at their moment of suffering, they also retain a suprahuman quality after this moment.

In the pathological sense that Rothe refers to, life in the camps and the trauma that ensues is expected to have left on the victims' mind traces that they cannot fully control themselves. Jürgen Fohrmann argues here that:

Since the first testimonies by survivors of the Holocaust, the tension between the need to speak and the inability to speak determines all forms of testimony. It is this tension that repeatedly manifested the 'authenticity' of their speech act by making apparent the traces of the incomprehensible event that they had experienced in such a way that the truth of what was being related was attested to through the mode of utterance of their words (or the impossibility of giving testimony at all). (Fohrmann 2006: 194)

In this sense, it is not so much what the witnesses to history say, but how they say it that determines whether their testimonies are perceived as authentic. As we have seen in the last chapter, especially extraverbal expressions such as the inability to speak, silence and uncontrolled weeping or twitches are interpreted as signs of their traumatization and as their actual authentic testimony. Video testimonies are used to draw their viewers' attention to those expressions. It is worth noting here that the idea of how a traumatized survivor ought to act also depends to a large extent on the expectations of their audience. For some people, it can seem

irritating if a Holocaust survivor does not break into tears or look sad enough while giving testimony (cf. Simon 2005:163; Barricelli, Brauer and Wein 2009: 10).

That the act of giving testimony on the Holocaust can also be faked has been exemplified by the cases of Bruno Dössekker, alias Benjamin Wilkomirski, or Monique DeWael, alias Misha Defonseca (cf. Bannasch and Hammer 2004; Fohrmann 2006: 195; Rothe 2011: 136ff). When Benjamin Wilkomirski published his autobiography *Fragments* on his childhood experiences during the Holocaust, the novel was praised for its authenticity. *Fragments* was later discovered to be a fake and was taken off the market. In the case of Defonseca's memoir, there were doubts over its authenticity even before its publication. These were only resolved after a long lawsuit ten years after the book had actually been published and turned into a film. However, those 'faux memoirs' (LaCapra 2001: 34), rather than leading to scepticism concerning the testimonies of survivors in general, have instead reinforced the view of survivor testimonies as being maximally authentic. Instead of their fake memoirs for example being reinterpreted for their narrative qualities, the writers were cast as traitors who had crossed an ethical line.

### *Video Testimonies and Relics of the Past*

Let us at this point return to the beginning of this chapter and to the concept of object authenticity. There is a blatant discrepancy between Korff's view on objects (described above) and those of Tucholsky and Sebald's first-person narrator (cited in the first pages of this study). Korff sees objects as media through which the forgotten human life can be remembered. Sebald's first-person narrator, having passed through the material remains of the Breendonk Memorial, concludes that 'the world is, as it were, draining itself'. Tucholsky, having walked through the museum in Vincennes, fears that his generation will not be remembered in the right way. Hence, for Korff, objects are cues for memory, while for Sebald's first-person narrator and for Tucholsky, they are symbols of transience.

The contrasted positions of Korff, Sebald's first-person narrator and Tucholsky, point to a dialectic inherent in historical objects. Historical objects are, at the same time, eternal reservoirs of bygone human life, as well as symbols of transience and forgetting. For an object to work as a museum object, it has to be seen as falling either only into the first category or into both. This was, as we have seen, according to Luciano Boccalatte, the curator of the Museo Diffuso, not the case for the piece

of bread brought to him by the former resistance fighter, or of any other object for that matter. At the Museo Diffuso, objects are deemed to be only symbols of transience that have lost their meaning for anybody who has not experienced the stories in which they were involved. Objects that are seen as being without a purpose for present or future generations are, in accordance with Michael Thompson's (1979) rubbish theory, junk and can thus be discarded.

The dialectic characteristic of museum objects leads us to what I will call the different levels of authentication that exist in history museums in general and in Holocaust memorial museums in particular. These levels of authentication can be related to what Jana Scholze, reflecting on the semiotics of museum exhibitions, has called denotation, connotation and metacommunication (see the Introduction, pp. 21–22). The first level, object authentication, applies to the objects shown in the exhibition. As I have pointed out before, the originality of museum objects is authenticated through exhibition techniques. This is especially important for objects that represent the Holocaust. In the case of the Holocaust, transience and forgetting were not merely ordinary phenomena, but the result of brutal murder and the attempt to erase several cultures. The objects in Holocaust museums not only carry the traces of bygone life, they also carry those of the fight for survival, and of extinction. However, these traces are only rarely visible. With regard to the objects presented in memorial museums, Paul Williams (2007: 133) has observed that 'in a sense, it is the story that is the object, insofar as it is not the item itself that is distinctive, but the associated history to which it is attached'. As I will show later on, the interior of a bourgeois study in itself does not reveal that it belonged to a German Jewish family who fled to Palestine. Nor does a pair of woollen gloves disclose that it was knit in Bergen-Belsen. In both cases, the objects would not be worth exhibiting if they did not stem from the household of Jewish refugees or Bergen-Belsen. The furniture of the study would most likely have ended up on the antiques market and the gloves as rubbish. For many of the objects in Holocaust and Second World War Museums, exhibiting them therefore means also representing the extraordinariness of seemingly ordinary objects. Their extraordinariness in turn resides in their status as originals from a certain historical event: the objects have to be authenticated as reservoirs of bygone life. This level of authentication can be related to Scholze's concepts of denotation and connotation: the visitor learns what a given object is, what it was used for and what sociocultural significance it has.

These authenticated objects are exhibited as representatives ('Vertreter') of the history under scrutiny. The particular means of exhibition used in

museums therefore serve to authenticate the historical narrative of the particular museum. I will call this second level the level of narrative authentication. Through exhibition techniques, museums not only authenticate the objects as originals, pointing out the history that they were involved in, they also authenticate them as adequate representatives of this history, while the objects in turn are meant to authenticate the museums' narratives as genuine. Even if the originality of an object is accepted, the way in which a given museum exhibits this object and the narrative that it uses it in can appear as an inadequate – and therefore inauthentic – representation of the past. In the case of Holocaust museums, exhibiting also always means working against revisionism or denial: the authenticated object has to authenticate the history of a genocide that has been belittled or negated altogether.

The third level of authentication, exhibition authentication, applies to the exhibition design itself. Above, I have observed that museums are the guarantors of the originality of museum objects – and therefore apply what Mohn, Strub and Wartemann have called an authenticity of authority. This is only half the truth. The museum's authority as a guarantor of originality is still relevant, it is however also a remnant of modernity. The postmodern museum is aware of its authority and constantly puts it into question. The postmodern museum is therefore better analysed using Mohn, Strub and Wartemann's (1997: 3–4) concepts of the 'authenticity of authorship', 'dilemmatical authenticity' and 'instrumental authenticity'. According to the authenticity of authorship, everything is constructed. The act of authentication here resides in the disclosure of the constructedness of the representation. Dilemmatical authenticity, like authenticity of authority, is based on the idea that there is a 'relationship between the "I" and the "world"' that is beyond representation (Mohn, Strub and Wartemann 1997: 3). At the same time, this idea of a relationship that is beyond representation – and this is the dilemma – can only be broached by using means of representation. According to dilemmatical authenticity, an authentic representation therefore uses means of representation in order to represent the represented as not represented (Mohn, Strub and Wartemann 1997: 3). According to instrumental authenticity as well, there exists a desire for immediacy. However, unlike in the case of dilemmatical authenticity, instrumental authenticity does not try to represent the represented as unrepresented. Instead, Mohn, Strub and Wartemann (1997: 4) differentiate between first-level representations and second-level representations. First-level representations have 'a high acceptance according to the respective cultural standards of representation and are therefore rarely subject to criticism'. Second-level representa-

tions are the ‘interpretations of first level interpretations and have a lower acceptance’. This authenticity is called ‘instrumental’ because it serves the end of differentiating between the material that is to be interpreted by a group according to common cultural standards of representation and the actual interpretation of this material. Contemporary museums generally authenticate their exhibitions according to one of these three concepts of authenticity. However, the first concept, although used by other museums, is rare in memorial museums. Declaring the whole exhibition as a mere construction can be dangerous in the case of a topic like the Holocaust that is subject to denial and revisionism. Instead, the museums legitimize the chosen means of exhibition, through those very means, as the most adequate ones to represent what is represented. The chosen means are either established as socially accepted first-level representations according to the concept of instrumental authenticity or as unrepresented according to the concept of dilemmatical authenticity. Museums also use their very means of exhibition as second-level representations in order to comment on other first-level representations and on their very own exhibitions. As I will show below, exhibition authentication is especially relevant in the case where the chosen means of exhibition or the exhibited objects might not correspond to the expectations of the visitors.

The fourth level of authentication applies to what I would call visitor experience authentication. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 19–23), in an analysis of the means of exhibition of ethnographic objects, has differentiated between two modes of exhibition: in-situ exhibitions and in-context exhibitions. In-context exhibitions ‘use particular techniques of arrangement and explanation to convey ideas’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 21). These techniques range from labels, charts and diagrams to the arrangement of objects in space. In-context exhibitions apply what I have called the first, second and third levels of authentication. They serve to authenticate the object as an original and as a representative of history. At the same time, they legitimize the exhibition design as adequate for what they want to represent. In-situ exhibitions go one step further: ‘in situ approaches to installation enlarge the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social and cultural setting’ (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 20). In-situ exhibitions include dioramas or the re-staging of a particular event in the museum. Although Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to ethnographic objects, her insights can easily be applied to the objects in memorial museums. In in-situ exhibitions, visitors are invited to have authentic experiences – to immerse in history, to in a way become witnesses of the past themselves. These three latter levels of

authentication – narrative authentication, exhibition authentication and visitor experience authentication – can be related to what Jana Scholze has called metacommunication: they are the result of the intentions of the curators and are subject to the sociocultural context of the museums.

In what follows, I will analyse the intermedial relations between video testimonies and objects in these processes of authentication. The examples that I have chosen are not representative of all museums; they illustrate the most common ways in which video testimonies are used in exhibitions. I will consider: the remnants of extermination; personal objects that belonged to witnesses to history; archaeological finds; and the architectural remnants of concentration camps. As has been shown in the previous chapter, video testimonies are frozen human memory; they are communicative memory turned into cultural memory. Introducing video testimonies into museums therefore entails contrasting the vividness of memory with the lifelessness of exhibited objects. As I will show below, video testimonies can serve as crucial elements in all four levels of authentication. Museums also transmit some of the authority that they might otherwise put into question to video testimonies: while the authority of the museums can be put into perspective, that of witnesses to history generally is not. The processes of authentication that I will analyse here are not always straightforward and can sometimes even be turned against themselves; in some cases, authentication on one level may only be realized by putting authenticity on another level into question.

*Mass Murder and Personal Stories: The Heaps of Shoes in the Imperial War Museum and in Yad Vashem*

Objects, or rather heaps of objects, have become important symbols of the Holocaust. The masses of clothes and everyday objects that were taken from the victims upon their arrival in extermination and concentration camps, and that could first be contemplated in the Majdanek and in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorials and Museums, have become icons of the Holocaust. In particular, the practice of exhibiting heaps of shoes has by now been moved from the memorials of extermination camps to Holocaust museums and exhibitions at a distance from the sites of mass murder. In both the Imperial War Museum (see Figure 4.1) and in Yad Vashem, heaps of shoes are not only part of the exhibitions; they are also used to represent these exhibitions in secondary media. The Imperial War Museum uses a photograph of the shoes as the title page for its catalogue of the Holocaust Exhibition (Imperial War Museum 2000) and on its website. Yad Vashem has put a photograph of the display cabinet with the shoes on the title page of its book *Facts and Feelings* (2010), which deals with the design of



**Figure 4.1.** The glass case with the shoes of people deported to Majdanek and other concentration camps in the ‘Final Solution’ exhibition chapter in the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum © Imperial War Museum

the new exhibition. Both the Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem thus seem to consider the heaps of shoes as their most iconic exhibition unit – and probably also as their most easily recognizable one.

However, what does it mean to exhibit these object masses and in particular masses of shoes? The mass murder in the gas chambers is the event of the Holocaust that is deemed to be the most difficult to represent. It is also the one event of the Holocaust that is most prone to revisionism or denial. Extermination is only representable through fragments – through what was left after the attempt to wipe out everything. ‘A marked feature of the memorial museum collection is that it is defined by – or even held hostage to – what the perpetrators in each event produced’, writes Paul Williams (2007: 26). The heaps of shoes are the prototype of a collection produced by the perpetrators. They are a byproduct of industrialized mass murder and are located on the threshold between life outside of the camp and life or – more likely – death inside the camp. Silke Arnold-de Simine observes that one reason why shoes might work so well as ‘trauma “icons”’ (Arnold-de Simine 2013: 80; cf. Landsberg 2004: 133–35; Williams 2007: 29; Hansen-Glucklich 2014: 129–36) is that they ‘are the closest one can get to bodily remains’. Exhibited as heaps rather than as individual objects

connected to a story, the shoes therefore refer more directly to the deeds of the perpetrators than to their former owners. Put differently, the piles of shoes echo Sebald's drained objects rather than Korff's repositories of human life.

Although the heaps of shoes are deemed an adequate means to represent the mass murder, they are therefore ethically not unproblematic: not unlike in the pictures of the heaps of corpses that have come to be equated with the Holocaust, and almost as their murderers would have wanted it, individuals recede into an anonymous mass of victims. Seeing the masses of shoes – and the heap of hair for that matter – in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum is an overwhelming experience. In order to represent the mass killing, they probably work better than any other exhibit. Nevertheless, if they are given too much room, there is the danger that the deeds of the perpetrators will be given precedence over their victims' struggle for life: the exhibited heaps can tell us little about those who wore the shoes. Both the Imperial War Museum and the Yad Vashem Memorial have broken up this exclusive focus on the mass murder by juxtaposing the cabinets with the shoes with testimonies. Here, witnesses tell their very own stories of arrival and survival in the camps. In this way, the 'drained' shoes are, to a certain extent, filled with stories again – if not necessarily their original ones.

The examples from Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum serve to illustrate what I have called the first three levels of authentication: object authentication, narrative authentication and exhibition authentication. The exhibition chapters in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum are in-context exhibition chapters. In both museums, the display case with the heaps of shoes is located in a part of the exhibition dealing with the so-called 'Final Solution'. In the Imperial War Museum, the heart of the exhibition chapter is a plaster model representing arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp. Behind this plaster model is located the horizontal display case with the shoes. Several hearing stations with audio testimonies are located on the opposite wall of the model and the display cabinet. In Yad Vashem, a plaster model of the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Polish artist Jan Stobierski has been placed close to the display case, which is sunk into the floor. Although the room itself does not contain a video testimony, in its proximity, visitors can watch several video testimonies with individual survivors. Both museums also show a blow-up of the now-iconic picture of the railway tracks behind the entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau, as well as 'everyday' objects from the camps and historical photographs. Together, the shoes, the pictures, the plaster models and the video testimonies authenticate each other as original representatives of the past in the sense of object authentication: each



exhibition fragment adds to the other what this one cannot represent. On their own, the shoes cannot illustrate where they come from, but the pictures of crematoria and women waiting in front of the gas chambers in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the plaster models and the testimonies that describe the smell of burnt flesh, smoke and the process of selection help to authenticate the originality of the shoes in the sense of object authentication. The testimonies in their turn are visualized by the photographs, the plaster models and the shoes and so on. The effect that is achieved in this way is that of what Andrew Hoskins (2003: 17) with reference to the same exhibition chapter in the Imperial War Museum has called a “layering” of memory’. Different layers of memory stemming from different times play together in order to authenticate each other.

Let us now move on to narrative authentication. At first sight, the exhibition chapters in the Imperial War Museum and in Yad Vashem seem quite similar. However, one major difference between both sections is that in Yad Vashem, as in the whole exhibition, the visitor can watch video testimonies, while in the Imperial War Museum, the curators decided to use audio stations and not, as in the other exhibition chapters, video testimonies. Moreover, the Imperial War Museum shows the shoes in a horizontal display case that can be seen immediately upon entering the exhibition room. In Yad Vashem, the shoes are located in a display case inlaid into the floor.<sup>2</sup> I argue that these minor differences in the exhibition design serve to authenticate very different exhibition narratives.

In an article on the planning phase of the museum, the chief curator and chairman of Yad Vashem, Avner Shalev (2010), observes that from its beginnings, the present exhibition was intended to concentrate on the Jewish victims’ point of view. Shalev (2010: 11) differentiates between two approaches within Holocaust studies. The first approach focuses on the perpetrators and on their collaborators, and sees them ‘as the only active factors’. The second approach, which Shalev calls the ‘Jerusalem School’, ‘relates to the narrative from the viewpoint of the victim as an individual human being who is a subject of history’ (Shalev 2010: 11). While Shalev might be oversimplifying Holocaust studies here, his differentiation is fruitful for a study of Holocaust museums. In the latter, we find a constant push-pull between a focus on the perspective of the victims and a focus on the deeds of the perpetrators.

Both the Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem communicate a lesson from history. For the Imperial War Museum, this lesson is: ‘never again a new Holocaust!’. The museum communicates this lesson by focusing more acutely on the deeds of the perpetrators than on the experiences of the witnesses. Thus, by choosing audio over video testimonies in the

exhibition sections on the 'Final Solution', the curators wanted to underline the gravity of the history that is being narrated (Bardgett interview 2009). Names and faces remain hidden from the visitors; only voices can be heard. Although the audio testimonies partially fill the shoes with stories again, the witnesses to history themselves cannot be seen and their identity remains unknown. Besides the Auschwitz model, the shoes – as representatives of the deeds of the perpetrators – remain the main visual focal point.

In Yad Vashem, the message of 'Never again!' is given a further dimension: 'Never again us!'. Located in the first Jewish state since the Diaspora, and the country that was to become the new home for a large number of Holocaust survivors, Yad Vashem tries to maintain the remembrance of 'Holocaust martyrs and heroes'. The new museum was designed in such a way as to 'tell the story of the *Shoah* from the perspective of the individual' and to 'emphasize the tragically unique Jewish experience of the Holocaust' (Goldstein 2013: 5). The exhibition in Yad Vashem follows a Zionist narrative according to which the State of Israel was born out of the ashes of the Holocaust. This narrative becomes especially apparent in Moshe Safdie's architecture for the Museum. The museum building consists of a long tunnel passing through the Mount of Remembrance. Visitors see the end of the tunnel when entering the museum. They can, however, only reach this end when moving in a zigzag through the different exhibition chapters, the main corridor being subdivided by what the exhibition designer Dorit Harel (2010: 25) calls 'ruptures': trenches in the floor that serve as introductions to the different exhibition chapters. The tunnel ends with a view over the northern suburbs of Jerusalem that is so striking that hardly any visitor can resist taking a picture. In this way, the city of Jerusalem and the foundation of the State of Israel appear as the ultimate end of the history of the Holocaust. One of the last museum chapters broaches the issue of Holocaust survivors as fighters in the Israeli wars of independence. This narrative is reflected in the exhibition chapter of the 'Final Solution'. Inlaid into the floor, the heaps of shoes are not visible at first sight. Their aesthetics are, at least partly, complemented by the video testimonies that can also be found in their proximity.

The exhibition narratives focusing on the victims in Yad Vashem and respectively on the perpetrators in the Imperial War Museum are thus authenticated by the representation of the witnesses to history in the exhibition chapter on the so-called 'Final Solution'. To return to Gottfried Korff, one could say that the Imperial War Museum points in the first instance to the brutal extermination of human life: the witnesses disappear in this section in favour of audio testimonies and the shoes are given a

prominent position. Yad Vashem more directly juxtaposes human life to this extermination: the shoes are inlaid into the floor and juxtaposed with video testimonies. In the Imperial War Museum, the visitors are invited to draw their lessons from the deeds of the perpetrators that have to be prevented in the future. In Yad Vashem, in turn, visitors are invited to draw their lessons from the survivors who fought for survival – and, according to the exhibition narrative, ultimately for the State of Israel.

Using the heaps of shoes, both museums make use of what Mohn, Strub and Wartemann have called first-level representations: they use a well-established icon of the Holocaust. However, by not letting this symbol stand on its own, by surrounding it with other objects and especially video and audio testimonies, they also comment on this symbol by partly breaking its traditional iconic status as visible in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In both the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the shoes are exhibited in a separate room and stand for themselves. The exhibitions at the Imperial War Museum and at Yad Vashem in turn were designed at a time when the focus in Holocaust exhibitions was moving from a focus on the perpetrators to a focus on the victims.<sup>3</sup> They were thus designed at a time in which new first-level representations for the Holocaust were being established – one of them being video testimonies. This shift is apparent in the way in which both exhibitions exhibit the shoes. Both museums authenticate their exhibitions as first-level representations by resorting to ‘trauma icons’. At the same time, they work as secondary representations to those earlier exhibitions: they comment on earlier uses of ‘trauma icons’ as uncontextualized relics by embedding them in the above-mentioned different layers of memory and juxtaposing them with the voices and faces (in the case of Yad Vashem) of survivors.

#### *Broken Aesthetics: The ‘Room of Dilemmas’ in Yad Vashem*

The first video testimony in Yad Vashem is presented in a room that the curators have called the ‘Room of Dilemmas’. The room disrupts the aesthetics of the previous part of the exhibition. In the exhibition chapter ‘From Equals to Outcasts’, which illustrates anti-semitism and the consequences of the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, history has up until the ‘Room of Dilemmas’ been represented through objects, documents, Nazi propaganda, videos and explanatory museum texts. In the ‘Room of Dilemmas’, the visitor is suddenly standing in a fully furnished, bourgeois study with a massive desk, a piano and a book closet. A menorah on the windowsill shows that the study belongs to a Jewish

household. One could imagine a similar room in a city museum where it might represent the German-Jewish bourgeoisie at the beginning of the twentieth century, or perhaps in a design museum. The furniture of the room belonged to Professor Hermann Zondek, the director of the Municipal Hospital in Berlin and the personal physician of German chancellors Gustav Stresemann and Kurt von Schleicher, who fled to Palestine after the Nazis came into power in Germany (Gutterman and Shalev 2008: 47). His widow, Gerda Zondek, bequeathed the furniture to Yad Vashem (Harel 2010: 70). After the anti-semitic propaganda material and the hateful tirades in the previous part of the exhibition, this room appears almost inviting to the visitor. The furniture is pretty and the atmosphere cosy.

Hermann Zondek's furniture is an example of an exhibition in which the chosen objects cannot either be recognized at first sight as originals or as adequate representatives of the history under scrutiny. It is only through a video testimony in which two witnesses to history talk about the dilemmas of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie after 1933 that the furniture is given its actual predication. The witnesses to history relate that, convinced that they were integrated into German society and in the belief that things would soon change, they often did not truly consider emigration. One of the two witnesses remembers his mother to have said that it was too hot in Palestine to emigrate there. The video testimony therefore authenticates the furniture in the room as original in the sense of object authentication and, more importantly, as a representative of the history of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie in the 1930s – and thus of a world that was brutally destroyed, in the sense of exhibition authentication.

On a fourth level of authentication, that of the experience of the visitors, the video testimony also has a corrective effect. The 'Room of Dilemmas' is an in-situ exhibition in which the emotional lesson given to the visitors is conveyed through the contrast between the video testimonies and the aesthetics of the furniture. The visitor, who might at first have felt at ease in the nice study, is disconcerted by the video testimony. This disconcertion is strengthened through the size and positioning of the video testimony: it is screened above the desk on a space the size of a small cinema screen. The witnesses to history thus speak admonishingly from above the desk to the audience standing beneath. The visitors cannot escape their stories by concentrating only on the furniture. It is thus by breaking the aesthetics of the study that the video testimony authenticates the visitors' experience: in an in-situ exhibition representing the comforts of bourgeois life, the visitor is made to feel the dilemma of leaving this comfort behind and starting a new, possibly less comfortable life somewhere else.

*Personal Stories as Objects: Zofia Zajczyk's Doll in Yad Vashem and Yvonne Koch's Gloves in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial*

The heaps of shoes and Hermann Zondek's study are examples of objects that represent history at large – the shoes the mass murder and the study the fate of the German Jewish bourgeoisie. We will never know the particular stories that each individual shoe was involved in and the video testimonies in Hermann Zondek's study tell their own families' stories, not that of the Zondek family. However, it has become the custom of many museums to represent history through the personal objects of survivors or victims – and consequently through the stories connected to them. Video testimonies appear here as a particularly pertinent means to convey those stories. The Holocaust exhibition in the Jewish Museum in London, for example, is entirely based on the biography of the Holocaust survivor Leon Greenman. The only display case in the museum exhibits objects that were once the property of Greenman, and of his wife and child who were murdered. In a video testimony that is also placed within the display case, Greenman talks, inter alia, about these objects, holding them in his hands.

In Yad Vashem, in an exhibition chapter on the Warsaw Ghetto, a doll that once belonged to the Holocaust survivor Zofia Zajczyk (now Yael Rosner) is placed next to a video testimony in which she talks about her memories relating to this doll. Zofia played with the doll in a cellar in the Warsaw ghetto while her mother smuggled children out of the ghetto. One day, on one of her missions, her mother was injured. She sent a young man back to the ghetto to fetch Zofia. He carried her out of the ghetto in a coal sack. When they had passed the border between the ghetto and the city, Zofia realized that she had forgotten her doll. She pleaded with the young man to go back with her because: 'A mother doesn't leave her little girl behind.' They went back, fetched the doll and left the ghetto again (Gutterman and Shalev 2008: 217). Everything went well.

A similar correlation between a video testimony and an object can be found in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. Here it is a pair of worn-out woollen gloves in yellow, pink and red that is placed next to the testimony of the child survivor Yvonne Koch (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3). The story that Yvonne Koch tells is as emotional as that of Zofia Zajczyk. Yvonne Koch had been deported to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp on her own at the age of eleven. Looking for food in the camp, she met a woman speaking a Slavic language. This woman gave her something to eat. Yvonne Koch went to the woman's barracks every day, seeing whether she was there. She did not always find her, but looking for her became a ritual. One day in January, the woman was waiting for her. She gave Yvonne Koch a pair of gloves that she had knitted from several threads taken



**Figure 4.2.** Yvonne Koch's gloves © Bergen-Belsen Memorial



**Figure 4.3.** Film still from the video testimony with Yvonne Koch from 2003  
© Bergen-Belsen Memorial

from blankets. While she is telling this story, Yvonne Koch handles the gloves. The camera zooms in on her hands: 'I always wore them, always had them on my hands. They always warmed me. And I always thought of this woman. I have such a strong memory of her because she was the first person to be good to me' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 222). Unlike Zofia Zajczyk's story, Yvonne Koch's story ends badly. After the woman had given her the gloves, Yvonne Koch went back to the barracks several times, but did not find her anymore. 'I don't know if she

was shot because somebody had seen that she was looking after me. I cried a lot, and the time when I was given something to eat was also over', she concludes (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 222).

In an article on the use of video testimonies in the exhibition at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the interviewers Diana Gring and Karin Theilen (2007: 197) argue that the juxtaposition of Yvonne Koch's testimony with her gloves has a 'corrective' effect on the aura of the object: 'By connecting the object to a concrete history and a concrete person – thus by contextualising it – it evades the risk of "staging" or "superelevation", which would complicate an approximation to the actual events.' I grant that by embedding it into the witness' biography, the object escapes dissociation from the context of its production and use. At the same time, I contend that both Yvonne Koch's and Yael Rosner's emotional stories, with their almost classical fairytale elements – the orphan looking for food, the adoption by the good foreigner, the metaphorical and literal donation of warmth, the salvation from the zone of danger – add to, rather than prevent, an auratisation of the gloves and the doll.

In fact, in the installations in Yad Vashem and in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the perceived object authenticity of the objects and the perceived subject authenticity of the witnesses to history are put into a relationship of mutual authentication. While they are giving testimony, both Yael Rosner and Yvonne Koch hold the doll and the gloves in their hands. In this way, the video testimonies and the objects melt together. The materiality of the doll and the gloves, with the traces that time has left on them, with the pieces that are missing from the doll's head and the faded colour of the gloves – they all underline the truthfulness of the testimonies. In turn, the originality of the gloves and the doll, their actual presence in time and space during the events, is attested by Yael Rosner's and Yvonne Koch's testimonies. In this way, the video testimonies and the objects authenticate each other as originals. It is because of this truthfulness on a first level of authentication that they can serve as representatives of the larger history of the Holocaust. The authenticity of the stories and objects entails that there must have been others like them.

In Yad Vashem, the doll and the video testimony further serve to authenticate the visitor experience. In the case of Yad Vashem, the past that is represented through the doll, and that Yael Rosner talks about, is further illustrated by the in-situ character of the exhibition chapter 'Between Walls and Fences – The Ghettos' in which the video testimony is located. In this chapter, the curators have rebuilt Leszno Street in the Warsaw Ghetto using original cobble stones. Yael Rosner's video testimony has been placed on the sill of a half-opened window together with the doll and

a red jumper. In the background, visitors can see a picture of what appears to be the interior of a room inside the ghetto. According to Dorit Harel (2010: 42), the exhibition designer, the combination of 'authentic cobblestones of Leszno Street in the Warsaw Ghetto, surrounded by its sights and sounds, authentic artifacts, enlarged film-footage from the period, blown-up photographs, and other multidisciplinary means ... generate an experience that is close to authentic'. In other words, the object that has been authenticated in the sense of 'original' and the witness to history who has been authenticated as 'truthful' are framed by an exhibition chapter designed to impart the experience of being in the past. In accordance with dilemmatic authenticity, Harel wanted to represent the represented as unrepresented through the means of representation.

However, the authentic experience that visitors are supposed to have is, as I will further illustrate through an analysis of the in-situ exhibitions using original railway carriages in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum, never complete. In the sense of the museum experience as it was defined by Korff (2007 [1984]: 120), the visitors are invited to 'return to the horizon of a past time ... and at the same time remain firmly grounded in the present'. Several temporal levels interact in the exhibition chapter. Physically, the doll is located in the present, but it is representative of the past. This past is, in turn, illustrated by the story that Yael Rosner tells in the video testimony that, although it has been recorded in the recent past, still looks so fresh that it appears to belong to the present. The historicity of the doll and the story bring the past to life. At the same time, however, the doll is visibly old and no longer in use, and Yael Rosner tells her story in the video testimony as an aged witness to history. In this way, while inviting visitors to have an 'authentic' experience in the past, the integration of the video testimony into the reconstruction of the Leszno Street also communicates that this past is over. Thus, the message is: the past was horrible, but it led to a good present and a hopefully better future.

This message is further illustrated by the view over the green suburbs of Jerusalem at the end of the visit that stands in harsh contrast to the darkness inside the exhibition space of which the Leszno Street is a part. The affective message of learning from the survivor's struggle that the visitors are supposed to carry away is in Yad Vashem transmitted through a museum experience that is supposed to give them a feeling of the horrors of the past, and at the same time communicates that the world, and especially Israel, have moved on from there. The exhibition design and narrative are in this way authenticated through a de-authentication of the authentic experience of being in the past.



*Experiential History Learning and Memory: The Railway Carriages in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum*

For Alison Landsberg (2004: 129–39), in-situ exhibitions are an integral part of what she calls ‘experiential museums’, museums that combine cognitive with experiential modes in their transmission of historical knowledge. Landsberg bases her observation on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, which opened its doors in 1993, set standards for the musealization of the Holocaust, and quite obviously served as an inspiration for both the Holocaust History Museum in Yad Vashem and the Holocaust Exhibition in the Imperial War Museum. In-situ exhibitions using original objects are an important element of the exhibition design: the visitor walks on cobble stones that come from the Warsaw Ghetto; passes through an original railway carriage; and enters barracks from Auschwitz-Birkenau. The passage through the railway carriage is, in my experience, one of the most emotionally engaging parts of the visit. The interior is dark and, even without any other visitors being in the carriage, feels claustrophobic. A strange stench of dust and old wood adds to the feeling of discomfort. The material reality of the carriage, which appears to have been transported directly from Treblinka Extermination Camp to Washington DC, combined with the thought that it might have been used to carry up to one hundred people to almost certain death, leads to the dominance of the experiential over the cognitive. While they pass through the railway carriage, visitors do not cognitively acquire knowledge; they are supposed to feel. Most importantly, they are supposed to feel uncomfortable (cf. Hansen-Glucklich 2014: 140–42). Landsberg (2004: 132) talks of a ‘seductive tangibility’. According to her, such an experience will lead to what she calls a ‘prosthetic memory’. Prosthetic memory describes the appropriation of a memory that might originally have belonged to a certain individual or group by other individuals, without those individuals forgetting their own identity. Prosthetic memory is transmitted affectively and will, according to Landsberg (2004: 152), ultimately lead to empathy and as a consequence to ethical actions: ‘by bringing people into experiential and meaningful contact with a past through which neither they nor their families actually lived, prosthetic memory opens the door for a new relation to the past, a strategic form of remembering that has ramifications for the politics of the present’. As we will see in Chapter 5, Landsberg’s theory has met with considerable criticism questioning whether it is possible to adopt memory like a prosthesis and whether the desired effects might actually be possible to achieve (Arnold-de Simine 2013: 91f). Here, I wish to compare the exhibit of the railway carriage in the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum to similar exhibits in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum.

Like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum also use original railway carriages that were in use at the time of the Second World War. However, it is not clear whether they were actually used to transport prisoners to concentration and extermination camps. Unlike the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, both Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum have integrated video testimonies into their exhibition chapters.

The train ride to the concentration camps has become a symbol of the Holocaust. Part of the reason for this might be that while historical pictures from inside the extermination camps are largely missing, there are numerous pictures of the departures of victims who knowingly or unknowingly boarded the trains that carried them to their almost certain deaths. The picture of the railway tracks behind the entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau is probably the most iconic picture of the Holocaust and, while few Holocaust movies dare to go into the gas chambers, the train ride is a feature of almost every fictional representation of the Holocaust. Visitors, when confronted with these carriages, are likely – consciously or unconsciously – to remember those real or staged representations of the train rides.

Unlike the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem do not exhibit entire railway carriages. In the Imperial War Museum (Figure 4.4), the visitors walk lengthways through a partially dismantled carriage. Unlike the victims, the visitors enter the carriage not from the side, but from behind. The floor on which the visitors walk is made out of wood, as in a railway carriage, but the roof is at a much higher level. The outer side of the entrance door has been placed on the visitors' left-hand side. Explanatory texts, historical photographs and objects remind the visitors that they are actually in a museum and not in a real carriage. The visitors are thus at the same time inside and outside of the carriage – both participants and outside observers. In the Imperial War Museum, the sensation of being in the past, which the visitor might have experienced, is thus constantly disrupted by the manner in which the carriage is exhibited. It is at the end of the carriage, where the visitors leave, that they can watch a video testimony in which survivors remember the train ride. This video testimony of course serves to authenticate the railway carriage as original and as an adequate representative of history. However, it also has the effect of locating it in the past and of girding the visitors in the present. The video testimony, with its modern aesthetics and stories told in the past tense, helps to distance the visitors from the past and thus serves as a final exhibition technique that offsets full immersion.



**Figure 4.4.** Inside the railway carriage exhibit in the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum © Imperial War Museum

In Yad Vashem, one side of an original railway carriage has been put against a wall of the museum. Also here, unlike in the United States Memorial Museum, the carriage has not been treated like a holy relic. The carriage was purposefully destroyed for the exhibition. ‘To generate an effect of dynamism and movement I had the carriage cut at an angle, as displayed in the gallery’, observes Dorit Harel (2010: 79). In addition, planks have been sewn out, so that the concrete wall behind the carriage is clearly visible. While the Imperial War Museum and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum represent departure and the journey to the camps, Yad Vashem has used the railway carriage to represent arrival. Dorit Harel (2010: 79) observes that she wanted ‘visitors to feel they themselves have just got off the train’. Thus, like in the case of the Leszno Street, Harel wanted to impart an ‘authentic’ experience on the visitors – to make them feel ‘as if’ they were in the past.

However, again, like in the case of the Leszno Street, this feeling is broken through the means of exhibition that Harel has chosen. Not only is the railway carriage damaged, it is also put next to a picture of the railway tracks in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The picture seems familiar and yet puzzling. It looks like the famous historical picture of the entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau shot by Stanisław Mucha in 1945, but it is in colour instead of in black and white. Instead of snow, it shows bright green meadows. A blue parking sign indicates that the picture has only recently been taken. Unlike the famous historical picture of the entrance of Auschwitz-Birkenau by

Mucha – which can be seen on the reverse of the panel – the picture has been shot from outside the camp rather than from the inside. The video testimony for the section has been placed on the floor of the carriage. Like the exhibition of the railway carriage in the Imperial War Museum, the exhibition design invites visitors to take on several positions at the same time. While they are supposed to feel as if they are just getting off the railway carriage, they stand in front of a present-day picture of the outside gate to Auschwitz-Birkenau and look at a carriage designed to simulate movement, on which they also see a video with survivors talking about the past. The visitors are invited to be at once in the past and in the present, observers and participants, tourists and witnesses to history. The modern aesthetics of the video testimony and the past tenses used by the witnesses to history help to disrupt an experience that is supposed to make them feel as if they were part of history themselves: the visitors' experience in the present is corrected by the witnesses' memory of what it felt like at the time.

Andrew Hoskins (2003: 12) has argued that the exhibition in the Imperial War Museum 'creates an experience of an "illusion of simultaneity" of "being there" at points in history as one can "see" events ahead, but more often one can "hear" from ahead and behind'. He criticizes the exhibition's 'presentist perspective' (Hoskins 2003: 15f) for ignoring memory's 'present and "ongoing" interpretation and re-interpretation of the past'. I would argue that rather than inducing the visitor to have a 'presentist' experience, the exhibitions in both the Imperial War Museum and in Yad Vashem constantly disrupt this experience. While the way in which the railway carriage is exhibited in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum invites visitors to immerse themselves emotionally in the past, the modes of exhibition of the railway carriages in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum also inculcate a sense of distance from that past. The railway carriages in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum make clear the link between the past and the present, between communicative and cultural memory. The past, as it is exhibited in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum, is not quite over, but it is also no longer fully there. The railway carriages can never be used again and the entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau shown in Yad Vashem has now become a tourist destination. A real picture of the past, the exhibition design tells visitors, can only be found in the memory of the witnesses of the past, and even there it is no longer complete. In a way, the dismantled railway carriages can be interpreted as reflecting the memory of the witnesses to history in the video testimonies, with all its distortions and gaps. The natural process of remembering and forgetting is represented by the deliberate process of

cutting out pieces and reshuffling others in order to prepare the railway carriages for exhibition.

Above, I have observed that the postmodern museum tends to put its own authority into question. Not unlike in the case of the heaps of shoes, by dismantling original objects before putting them into the museums, both Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum reflect the very process of exhibiting in which objects are taken out of one context and put into the context of the exhibition. The destruction of the object in combination with the video testimonies that are located on the threshold between the 'now' and the 'then' impede a fully 'authentic' experience – and therefore possibly a 'prosthetic memory' as it is understood by Alison Landsberg. In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the visitor, when being inside the carriage, might – at least for a split second – forget that she or he is in a museum. Landsberg (2004: 137) even retells how when seeing smoke in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, she for a moment was afraid of being gassed. It is of course difficult to guess whether other visitors did or would have felt the same as her. Nevertheless, the exhibition in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum allows for immersion. In Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum, on the other hand, we instead find an interplay of authentication and de-authentication on the level of the visitor experience. This interplay in turn is the basis for an authentication of the narrative of the exhibition and the means of exhibition as adequate representatives of the past.

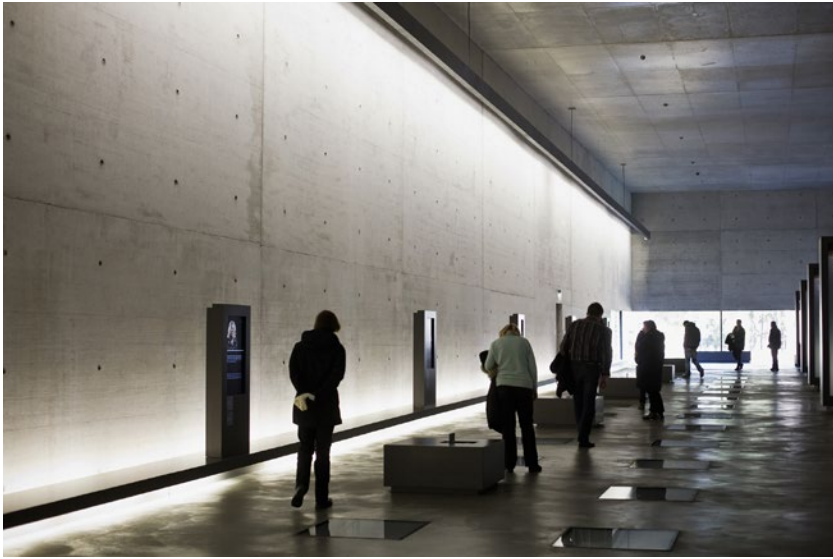
As observed above, Yad Vashem represents the Holocaust as a horrible passage of the Jewish people on the way to Eretz Israel. This narrative is underlined through a constant reminder to the visitors that this past is over – that they are in a museum. Also in the Imperial War Museum, the Holocaust is represented as an event from which we need to draw lessons, but nevertheless as an event in the past. In the final chapter of the exhibition, the museum shows two video screens. On one of those screens, the witnesses to history reflect on their experiences and on how those experiences have marked them. On the other one, pictures of the sites of terror as they can be seen today are shown. In the Imperial War Museum, the remains of the past are therefore shown to exist on an individual level in the psyche of the victims – however, the past itself, as the pictures of the sites of terror show, is undeniably over. In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, on the other hand, the past is represented as continuing in the present. After having visited the Holocaust exhibition, visitors are invited to visit an exhibition on post-Holocaust genocides. Also, in the Imperial War Museum, the visitor can of course visit exhibitions on conflicts that happened after the Holocaust. However,

the exhibitions in the Imperial War Museum appear as separate entities rather than as merging into one another. The experiential character of the exhibition at the United States Memorial Museum can therefore be interpreted as a reflection of its narrative that shows the past as going on in the present – although in a slightly altered form. In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, visitors are invited to feel like victims and draw their lessons from this feeling of helplessness and submission. In both Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum, on the other hand, full immersion, like in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, is prevented.

Moreover, not unlike in the case of the heaps of shoes, both Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum authenticate their exhibition by reflecting on the character of the exhibition as representation and by commenting on an icon of the Holocaust. The railway carriage in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a classic example of a dilemmatic authenticity. Nobody knows whether the carriage was actually used in order to transport Holocaust victims. When the carriage arrived at the museum from Poland, it looked too new and was then restored to what was supposed to be its Second World War look (Hansen-Glucklich 2014: 140; Shenker 2015: 66). In this way, the means of representation were used to represent the carriage as unrepresented. The Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem, on the other hand, unmask the carriages as representation by partially destroying them. A prosthetic memory – if at all possible – is here constantly put into perspective.

*The Emptiness of the Original Site: Archaeological Finds and Video Testimonies in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial*

Visitors to the Bergen-Belsen Memorial typically enter the site of the former concentration camp after having visited the permanent exhibition that is located in a new, massive, bare, grey concrete building. When entering the exhibition, visitors see on their left-hand side, along the wall, ten dark grey steles with inbuilt flatscreens with video testimonies. The witnesses to history in these video testimonies talk about their life before and their journey to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. On the right-hand side, the history of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp and the Prisoners' of War Camps on Lüneburg Heath is illustrated through copies of pictures and documents printed onto dark grey panels, as well as through video testimonies and scattered objects or reproductions. At the end of the building, a glass wall opens onto a view of the area of the former concentration camp dominated by forests and meadows. In front of this glass wall, between the exhibition and the video testimonies, several glass cases have been inlaid



**Figure 4.5.** View of the permanent exhibition at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial with the video testimonies and the archaeological finds on the left-hand side © Helge Krückeberg/Bergen-Belsen Memorial

into the floor. Here, archaeological finds from excavations carried out on the location of the former camp are exhibited (see Figure 4.5).

It is the site itself that is the most important museum object of concentration-camp memorials. However, very often, little about the original site is original. At least in Western Germany, the former concentration camps were, in and after 1945, either left to decay, used for alternative purposes or transformed into graveyards with corresponding landscape architecture. The original camp infrastructure was destroyed or considerably changed, both by the perpetrators before their retreat and by the liberators (Mußmann 2001). In Bergen-Belsen, the original wooden barracks were burnt by the British liberators in their attempt to fight the epidemics that were raging through the camp at its liberation. A total of 14,000 former inmates died even after liberation on 15 April 1945 (Rahe 2001: 82). By October 1945, a little over six months after liberation, Brigadier MacReady of the British military government gave orders to Hinrich Wilhelm Kopf, President of the Hannover province at the time, to present him with an adequate garden design that would turn Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp into a place of remembrance. Ironically, the first architect who was commissioned to come up with a design had been a member of the Nazi Party and the second one, Wilhelm Hübötter, had worked for the SS.

Although, because of discussions about his past, his collaboration in the project ended before its realization in the summer of 1946, the present landscape architecture of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial still harks back to Hübötter's plans. Hübötter had, amongst other things, foreseen the exclusive use of domestic plants (a landscape practice in accordance with the Nazi ideology of blood and soil) and took as his inspiration First World War memorials (Wolschke-Bulmahn 2001; Wiedemann 2010).

The landscape architecture in Bergen-Belsen indeed blends perfectly into the heathland surrounding the memorial. A major part of the area that used to be Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp consists of meadows, forests and the typical plants on Lüneburg Heath. Only the mass graves that – according to Hübötter's plan – are marked by burial mounds, several monuments and single Jewish graves, point to the history of the place. Behind the mass graves, a massive, thirty-metre-high obelisk and a commemorative wall have been erected. Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (2001: 276) hits the mark when he observes that 'for many visitors it is an impressive and moving experience to look from the entrance over the large expanse to the obelisk. The view back from the obelisk is mainly dominated by the aesthetics of the beautiful heather landscape, in which the mass graves, the Jewish monument, and the symbolic gravestones, are easily overlooked'. Only in recent years has a landscape-architecture plan been adopted – one that has seen the opening up of the foundations of the old camp buildings. Signs now illustrate the camp topography (Wiedemann 2010: 216–217). Moreover, an app has been developed, with the help of which visitors can explore the old camp infrastructure in augmented reality (Pacheco et al. 2014).

In judging the landscape architectures at Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Olaf Mußmann (2001: 16) talks of 'elysische Landschaften' (Elysian landscapes) and observes: 'Those places are exclusively dedicated to mourning and eternal peace, but not to reflection on history. This kind of landscape architecture historicises with its negation of the authentic remnants. It assigns the past events to another era.' Mußmann's criticism might be slightly anachronistic in that it judges a past practice of commemoration from the point of view of a present-day memorial culture. However, it remains true that the landscape of what used to be Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp is uncannily idyllic. Or, to come back to Mohn, Strub and Wartemann's problem of authentication, doubts about the transparency of representation appear. The means of representation and what is to be represented do not seem to match at first sight.

The complete absence of 'authentic' in the sense of 'original' buildings at Bergen-Belsen therefore poses the problem of authenticating this place.



One strategy adopted by the curators is the inclusion of video testimonies into the permanent exhibition. The witnesses to history add the historical reflection that Mußmann does not find in the memorial's landscape. They point to the site's forgotten human life – or rather to its past inhuman conditions. Together with the objects and the documents in the museum and the demarcations on the territory, they authenticate the place as original and as a legitimate – if in this case not for everybody an adequate – representative of history.

However, through the way in which the video testimonies are exhibited in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the visitor is also invited to reflect on the intractable void that followed the mass murder, as well as the destruction of the historical buildings after liberation. This is for one thing due to the contrast of video testimonies with archaeological finds. The museum texts accompanying the archaeological finds merely indicate the site of the find itself – no other indication on the objects is given. Indeed, for some of the finds, it is not certain whether they date from the time of the concentration camp or from some other time. In order to show that the finds are 'only a fraction of the relics from the thousands of people imprisoned at this vast site ... some of the floor displays were left empty' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 25). The display cases with the archaeological finds are located in close proximity to the video testimonies. Benches with headphones for video testimonies alternate with the display cases where the archaeological finds are inlaid into the floor. The size of the benches corresponds exactly to the size of the display cases. Nevertheless, the archaeological finds and the video testimonies do not come into contact with each other (Figure 4.6). The archaeological finds are presented as empty objects that, to come back to Sebald's (2001: 23) first-person narrator, show that 'the world is, so to say, draining itself'. Through the direct juxtaposition of the display cases with the archaeological finds with the video testimonies, the stories that the witnesses narrate also appear as exceptions. The finds underline the exemplary character of the video testimonies. Their juxtaposition authenticates an exhibition narrative according to which both are insufficient remains of a large bulk of stories that have either disappeared or have not been told. The video testimonies that are never directly connected to the finds underline their random character.

This presentation of the video testimonies as part of an incomplete series of similar stories is further underlined by the aesthetics of the testimonies and their spatial integration into the exhibition design. The video testimonies in Bergen-Belsen, like most video testimonies, have been filmed in front of a black background and with a focus on the face. Although the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, unlike many other museums, has



**Figure 4.6.** View of the section with the archaeological finds and the video testimonies at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial © Helge Krückeberg/Bergen-Belsen Memorial

added short biographies to the video testimonies and has refrained from dubbing them – thus maintaining a certain individuality of the witnesses to history – all video testimonies are optically the same. In this way, the video testimonies appear as representatives for similar stories. They are placed along the highest wall of the exhibition building. This building can be read as a representation of the history of the place at an aesthetic level. Its big, empty, grey surfaces contribute to an oppressive atmosphere, reproducing the emptiness of the site of the former concentration camp. Placed along the grey wall, the video testimonies appear as highlights that nevertheless nearly disappear into the big grey space. Although they are one of the main focal points for the visitors when entering the exhibition, they are virtually swallowed up by the massive architecture of the documentation centre: the void is more important than they are. Through the architecture and the arrangement of the video testimonies, the exhibition therefore reflects on itself as an insufficient representation. In the sense of Mohn, Strub and Wartemann's instrumental authenticity, the exhibition makes use of first-level representations like pictures, documents and video testimonies. However, the exhibition design itself serves as a second-level representation making apparent the gaps in representation that inevitably appear in any attempt to represent the history of Bergen-Belsen.

*The Complexity of the Place: The 'Walther-Werke' in the Neuengamme Memorial*

Not only the dismantlement of the original buildings can lead to a problem of authentication. Such a problem can also appear when a large part of the original structure is still visible. At Neuengamme Concentration Camp, prisoners were – amongst other things – forced to work in armory production. Part of this production was a workshop from the Carl-Walther GmbH, the so-called 'Walther-Werke'. Today, the red-brick building that housed the workshop hosts the exhibition 'Mobilisation for the Wartime Economy: Concentration Camp Prisoners as Slave Labourers in Armaments Production' (Figure 4.7). The room that the visitor enters is bright. Large windows border three of its walls. On the wall opposite the entrance, two inscriptions read 'FAHRRAD + SCHLÜSSELWERKSTATT' (bicycle + key-workshop) and 'WERKZEUGAUSGABE' (tool store). Some machines and tools such as a double die cutter, a cart, a wheelbarrow, a hammer and a smithy's hearth with the inscription 'Rauchen Verboten' (No smoking) stand in the middle of the room. Here, a video testimony has also been placed (Figure 4.8).

The room, just like the whole memorial, eschews all sense of a concentration camp, or of slave labour, that visitors might bring with them. The rooms of the former barracks in which the main exhibition is located



**Figure 4.7.** View of the building of the former Walther-Werke at the Neuengamme Memorial © Emily Mohney/Neuengamme Memorial

are bright and have white walls. On the site of the former memorial, on a path of red pebble stones that leads, at least during the summer, through sap-green meadows, the names of the capitals of the home countries of Neuengamme Concentration Camp prisoners have been marked with flagging. Beside the path, benches invite the visitor to sit down. 'I expected it to be more shocking – to be a real concentration camp as it is in the movies. But when I walked around it was just buildings', observes a participant of a youth-work camp at the memorial in an introductory film in the lobby of the main exhibition (cited in Eschebach 2008: 40). Most of the other visitors in the film share her opinion.

Neuengamme belongs to that group of concentration camps that were used for alternative purposes after liberation. A reorganization of the buildings had already begun by the time the SS ordered their clearance with the approaching Allied frontline. Further transformations followed when the camp was turned into a prison after it had been handed over to the city of Hamburg in 1948. The old wooden barracks were torn down and prison workshops were installed in the old armoury factories. The so-called 'Schonungsblock' (sparing block), where weakened prisoners were forced to braid by the SS and that, because of its high death rate, used to be called the 'Sterbeblock' (death block), was refurbished for the prison administration. Other blocks were turned into a hospital, a kitchen or storage rooms (Garbe 2001: 51ff). The 'Walther-Werke' became a prison workshop. After the detention centre had been closed, all the prison buildings, except for one wall, were torn down. Today, there are more visible remnants from the topography of the old concentration camp than there are from the detention centres. The fundamentals of the old barracks have been dug out and marked with stones, and the old roll-call ground has been reconstructed. In some of the old barracks and workshops, exhibitions have been installed, while others host the administration of the Memorial.

This absence of clear memorial icons recalling representations of concentration camps in films such as *Schindler's List* or the TV series *Holocaust* poses a challenge. The friendly and bright rooms of the exhibitions may give the impression that everything was not so bad after all. The workshop in the 'Walther-Werke' could at first sight be a room in a museum of labour or industry. Moreover, like the finds in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the exhibited tools and objects eschew complete auraticization and authentication. The museum texts present the origin of the tools from the time of the concentration camp as probable but not certain. The text that accompanies two shovels, for instance, reads: 'Two coal shovels given to the memorial in 2000 by Penal Facility XX. All *probably* date back to the time before 1945'

(my italics). On a first level, the room is therefore authenticated through the documents that are shown, the written eyewitness reports and – especially – through the video testimony in the middle. Here, former slave labourers tell stories about their experiences in the ‘Walther-Werke’.

However, while authenticating the room on the level of object authentication, the video testimony does not fully disrupt the impression communicated by the aesthetics of the room. On the one hand, the stories of the witnesses to history also do not transmit the image of ‘a real concentration camp as it is in the movies’. The majority of the survivors in the video do not tell stories of mistreatment, but rather of – if one compares them to the situation in the camp – humane working conditions. In the workshops at least, it was warm, they relate, and working there gave them a break from the mistreatment at the hands of the SS. On the other hand, the aesthetics of the video testimonies underline an impression of homeliness. Unlike the video testimonies in most museums, the video testimonies in the Neuengamme Memorial were, until a couple of years ago, not shown on flatscreens but on tube televisions. Due to the fact that the Neuengamme Memorial started recording video testimonies comparatively early, before a clear aesthetics for video testimonies had been developed, and that many of the videos have by now reached a considerable age, most of the videos have a rather amateurish character. They have, for example, been shot in the living rooms of the witnesses to history instead of in front of a monochromatic background. The lighting techniques, the camera angle and focus have not been as meticulously planned here as for most video testimonies recorded at a later date.

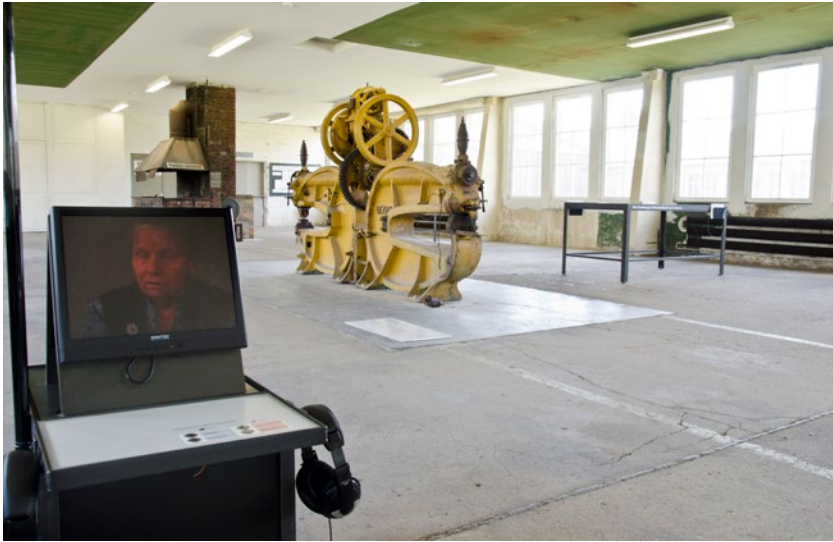
That the video testimonies, and the exhibition design, have a more inviting and homely character than in, say, the documentation centre in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial is not a mere coincidence. In fact, the curators tried to prevent imposing an aesthetics of horror onto the site. The video testimonies are supposed to underline this effect (Garbe interview 2009). The example of the Neuengamme Memorial demonstrates how complex communicating the history of concentration camps can be, especially on the original sites. The Memorial, with all of the distortions that it has received since 1945, can only marginally communicate what the camp was like at the time. It is therefore always overshadowed by preconceptions of the camp derived from sources other than its material remains, as the statement by the participant of the youth camp illustrates. Films play an important role here, but also the pictures and films shot by the Allies at the liberation of the camp – especially, as I will discuss in the next section of this chapter, the heaps of corpses and the pictures of haggard prisoners taken at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

The historian Harold Marcuse (1993) sees two trends in the communication of the history of concentration camps: the idea of the 'sauberes KZ' (clean camp) and the idea of the 'dreckiges KZ' (dirty camp). The first idea goes back to National Socialist propaganda. According to the idea of the 'clean camp', everything was not so bad after all. This idea was deeply ingrained in large parts of the German population, especially in the first decades after the War. The second idea goes back to the pictures of corpses and haggard prisoners that were taken after the liberation of the camps. The mass-mediation of those pictures, along with fictional representations of the Holocaust, has led to the consolidation of the image of the 'dirty camp', so that this image is now the dominant one. However, the idea of the 'dirty camp' is, as Marcuse (1993) points out, one-dimensional:

it does not take into account the temporal and spatial development of the concentration-camp system. The heaps of corpses are understood as the normal condition of the concentration camps since 1933, and the systematic extermination of people through gas as a plan that existed since the 'beginning'. As horrible as the conditions in the German concentration camps were from the first day, the situation in the early 1940s and at the end of the war was the worst, while the use of prisoners in the armaments production brought with it a certain amelioration of the conditions at the beginning. There were also big differences between the different camps: Dachau and Buchenwald offered almost 'advantageous' chances of survival compared to Mauthausen or Flossenbürg, which in turn were outdone in horror by Auschwitz and Majdanek.

In the Neuengamme Memorial, the visitor is obliged to call into question precisely this idea of a 'dirty camp': the Neuengamme Memorial appears clean. Marcuse (1993) himself pleads for a multidimensional representation of the 'dirty camp'. In such a representation, the full complexity of the camp structure and the differences between the different conditions in the respective camps would come into their own.

It is exactly such a multidimensional representation that is communicated effectively through the video testimony in the clean, bright room of the 'Walther-Werke' still showing traces of its post-1945 use. The aesthetics and the content of the video testimony help to construct and underline the exhibition design, which prevents an 'aestheticization of horror' and to authenticate an exhibition narrative that eschews clear answers and constantly makes apparent the different uses of the place before and after 1945. Filmed in their living rooms, the witnesses to history in the Neuengamme Memorial are more clearly individuated than in most other museums. The video testimony underlines the different sociocultural backgrounds of



**Figure 4.8.** View of the ‘Mobilisierung für die Kriegswirtschaft’ exhibition at the Neuengamme Memorial © Emily Mohney/Neuengamme Memorial

the witnesses to history; they appear as ordinary men with different lives and consequentially different communicative and individual memories (cf. Bösch (2008: 68) for a similar argument on video testimonies in TV documentaries). The content of the video testimony in turn legitimates the exhibition aesthetics. The witnesses to history tell stories that do not embellish anything, but nor do they depict conditions as worse than they were. In this sense, the video testimonies help to authenticate the aesthetics of the exhibition design of the Neuengamme Memorial that might otherwise seem inauthentic to many visitors – in the sense that it does not correspond to their expectations.

*Digital Reconstruction of the Site: The Treblinka Exhibit in Yad Vashem*

In some concentration-camp memorials, the problem of the lack of original traces at the original sites has been countered with the introduction of audioguides with testimonies from former prisoners, often read out by actors. This is, for example, the case in the Neuengamme Memorial, the Sachsenhausen Memorial and the Dachau Memorial. In specific spots on the memorial sites, the visitors can listen to what former camp inmates endured in those locations. Also, digital reproductions of the camp are becoming more and more common (Knoch 2017).

Yad Vashem uses a digital reproduction of Treblinka Extermination Camp in its exhibition chapter on the so-called ‘Final Solution’. The

reproduction is linked to, and probably based on, the testimony of a member of the 'Sonderkommando' and thus of the group of prisoners who were forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria. While the witness to history is speaking about the camp and the different stations that the victims had to go through on their way to the gas chambers, the digital model of the camp changes. The visitor is effectively led from one location to another.

The authentication of this reconstruction of Treblinka as an adequate and faithful representation of the past happens through a juridical and a moral discourse carried by the witness to history. The exhibition chapter on Treblinka is placed on the entrance to the 'Final Solution' exhibition chapter. 'For illustrating the world of the extermination camps, the design team had only a few items to work with', writes Dorit Harel (2010: 80). Treblinka Extermination Camp itself was dismantled by the perpetrators as early as 1943. The digital reconstruction of Treblinka is therefore exemplary for the lack of exhibits available to represent the industrialized mass murder. It is mirrored later on in the exhibition chapter by Jan Stobierski's plaster model of the gas chambers in Auschwitz (see the subheading 'Mass Murder and Personal Stories' above). The witness to history in the video testimony that is placed next to the digital reconstruction here takes on the role of a 'moral witness' in the sense suggested by Aleida Assmann (2006: 88ff; see Chapter 1): he has got both a mission of truth and a juridical mission. The member of the 'Sonderkommando' in the video testimony in Yad Vashem acts as a guide – though one that is distanced in time and space from the location that he guides the visitors through. In this way, he repeats the role of survivor witnesses in the trials against concentration-camp guards and so-called 'Funktionshäftlinge' (prisoner functionaries), giving testimony on what had been destroyed and what could not be seen anymore. However, the testimony of the witness to history in Yad Vashem no longer serves a juridical end. Instead, it invites visitors to become morally responsible secondary witnesses to the testimony of the witness to history. This mission is emphasized through the presentation of the video testimony and the digital reconstruction. The videos that contain both the testimony and the digital reconstruction of the camp can be seen on two adjacent walls. On each wall, the video testimony is flanked by two digital reproductions. The visitor is thus surrounded by the video testimonies and the Treblinka reconstructions. He or she 'visits' the camp and listens to the testimony several times simultaneously. This multiple exhibition of both the digital reproduction and the video testimony in turn emphasizes the 'truth' of the witness to history's testimony on the level of object authentication. It also authenticates the



reproduction as an adequate representation of the past for a place where all physical remains have been wiped out. Ironically, therefore, the multiple simultaneous screening of both the video testimony and the reproduction emphasize the absence of remains of the mass extermination at Treblinka.

Authentication, whether on the level of object authentication, narrative authentication, exhibition authentication or visitor experience authentication, is, as the examples above show, always an interplay between exhibition strategies. The supposed authenticity of video testimonies as accurate representations of an untainted memory makes them particularly apt to serve as authenticating means. As we have seen, video testimonies serve to authenticate historical objects as originals and as adequate representatives of history by linking them to the stories that they, in the sense of Sebald's first-person narrator, have been emptied of. That these stories are only in rare cases directly connected to the objects themselves seems only marginally relevant. The individual video testimonies are used to stand in for other, similar stories.

However, while the witnesses to history's gestures and facial expressions are interpreted as untainted expressions of the traces that the past has left on their psyche, the fact that video testimonies show people in modern attire who tell stories about the past, underlines the fact that this past is actually over. While video testimonies appear as authentic representations of the past, they never fully disguise their modern character; they are located on the threshold between the present and the past. In museums, they therefore also serve to negotiate the character of objects as symbols of transience and as remnants of forgotten human life. If Korff observed that the 'authentic' museum experience emanates from the original object that brings the past closer to us but also distances it again, video testimonies intensify this experience. Video testimonies therefore also serve to reflect on exhibitions as representation. Museums like the Imperial War Museum, Yad Vashem, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and the Neuengamme Memorial are self-reflexive exhibitions. In the sense of instrumental authenticity, they authenticate their exhibitions by making apparent their status as representations. The use of video testimonies prevents a full immersion of the visitors in the represented past. At the same time, the particular ways in which the video testimonies are used serve to authenticate the means of exhibition and the exhibition narratives as adequate ways to represent the past. In Yad Vashem, the overwhelming presence of video testimonies puts the focus on the struggle for survival of the victims and underlines a Zionist exhibition narrative according to

which this struggle has ultimately led to a better present in the State of Israel. In the Imperial War Museum, the audio testimonies underline a focus on the deeds of the perpetrators that need to be prevented in the future. In Bergen-Belsen the video testimonies underline an exhibition design that reflects on itself as never being able to represent the past in a sufficient way and an exhibition narrative according to which the exhibits can always only serve as insufficient representatives of the entire story. In the Neuengamme Memorial, the video testimonies, by underlining the multiple layers of the history of the camp, serve to authenticate an exhibition design that, at first sight, might seem inauthentic because it does not correspond to representations of the Holocaust in popular culture and an exhibition narrative that makes apparent the full complexity of the camp structure and its uses after 1945.

Using video testimonies in museums is a new phenomenon. It is also a phenomenon of a time in which museums no longer need objects to be accepted as adequate representations of the past, as the example of the Museo Diffuso shows. As has been shown, witnesses to history can serve as particularly authoritative means to authenticate exhibitions at the same time as they constantly remind the visitors that the museal representation is exactly this – a representation *ex post facto*. The use of witnesses to history is therefore also a phenomenon of the postmodern self-reflexive museum that puts its own authority into question. However, this self-reflexivity does not extend to the video testimonies themselves. None of the museums that I have analysed refers to the video testimonies' character as narrative constructions of individual memory recorded on film. Nowhere does the visitor get information on the interview situation, on the interviewers' background or on the interviewee's current situation. Instead, the witnesses to history's memory are represented as unrepresented – and the video testimonies as 'magical authenticity'.

### *Video Testimonies and Photography and Film*

Film, and especially photographic pictures, have become amongst the most widely used means to represent the Second World War and the Holocaust in museums and exhibitions. The musealization of the Holocaust and the Second World War is part of a visualization that started straight after the war. The same pictures have here been used and reused in multiple different contexts and media – in newspapers, school books, documentaries, history books, exhibitions and art works – and have now become an important part of individual and cultural memory. They have, in historian

Cornelia Brink's (1998) words, become 'Ikonen der Vernichtung' (icons of extermination). The pedagogue Matthias Heyl (2004: 125) lists six pictures that come to everybody's mind when thinking about the Holocaust: the silhouette of the entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau; the signs saying 'Jedem das Seine' ('To Each His Own') and 'Arbeit macht frei' ('Work Sets You Free') on the gates to the camps; the picture of a Jewish boy in the Warsaw ghetto with his hands held up high being driven by armed men; the portrait of Anne Frank looking up from her exercise book; the pictures of heaps of corpses from the liberated camps; the picture of a half-dead survivor in Bergen-Belsen, clothed in rags and stretched out on his back; and the picture of the Sintizza Settela Steinbach with a headscarf looking out of the railway carriage of a deportation train from Westerbork. Indeed, a look at the daily newspapers – especially on the dates of commemoration – or a Google search for 'Auschwitz' or 'Holocaust' is enough to prove that we are constantly surrounded by these same pictures.

Photographs rate amongst the most convincing evidence. We trust our visual senses more than any other. We might mistrust the account of an event until we have seen photographs of it. Although we are aware of the potential to manipulate them, photographs and films still count amongst the most trustworthy sources. Perhaps the main reason why the Allies took pictures and filmed everything upon liberating the camps was that they wanted to be able to give evidence at a later date. The pictures were to prove what seemed unbelievable. In Bergen-Belsen, the British Army Film and Photographic Unit directly placed SS guards, camp physicians, former prisoners and members of the British contingent responsible for the administration of the camp after its liberation in front of mass graves and heaps of corpses, thereby combining oral evidence – or denial and attempts at justification – with visual evidence (Caven 2001; Haggith 2007: 74f).

Photographic pictures and film are generally accepted as a reproduction of reality rather than questioned as a representation ('Darstellung'). That they are the product of both a mechanical device – the camera – and the photographer's interpretation of reality is rarely taken into consideration. Thus, Cornelia Brink (1998: 9) observes: 'Because those pictures are for the most part taken as reality and not as a specific photographic adaptation of reality that needs to be analysed, they are primarily received in an emotional way.' Brink argues that with regard, in particular, to the pictures of the Holocaust, it seems almost a moral obligation not to question them: 'one knows what they are supposed to communicate and to prove, before one has really looked at the pictures' (1998: 9). Paul Williams (2007: 51), analysing the use of photography in museums,

points out that 'although the camera was undeniably present, it is a notable initial paradox that, in the museum context, photographs are typically viewed as interpretive illustrations rather than as objects that existed in the world at the time'. Both Brink and Williams argue for an analysis of the pictures as historical sources and an exhibition that takes their production context into account.

In fact, the use of pictures as icons means that pictures that were taken at one specific moment and for a specific purpose come to represent a whole time period. With regard to the pictures taken by the Allies following the liberation of the camps, Detlef Claussen (1987: 149f), for example, observes that they are part of a false impression, one that:

consists of the illusion that the heaps of corpses are the reality of the concentration camp, whereas they are the result of a development process in the brutal sense of the word. We only see heaps of corpses because the crematoria in overcrowded Bergen-Belsen failed during the chaotic final phase of the Third Reich ... That is the only reason why we see heaps of corpses in the films. During the time that the concentration camps were operating normally, the dead were burned straight away.

The reasons behind why the pictures were taken are often not called into question. Only a few pictures exist of the time of the mass shootings and the time when the camps were actively working. These pictures were taken either as part of propaganda, by soldiers and SS guards as unofficial keepsakes or, very rarely, by inmates with smuggled cameras. The point of view and identity of the photographer in question is an important guide for how those pictures are to be interpreted. Many of the pictures that have today become 'icons of extermination' and that are used to represent the deeds of the perpetrators had at the time been taken as propaganda material representing, for example, the 'degeneration' of the 'Jewish race'. In a worst-case scenario, an uncritical exhibition of these pictures will lead to the reproduction of the gaze of the perpetrators (Brink 1998: 209ff; Heyl 2004: 125).

The problems that can arise when photographs are exhibited without being sufficiently scientifically interpreted became apparent with the exhibition 'Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944' ('War of Annihilation. Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 until 1944') by the Hamburg Social Research Institute, which toured thirty-three German and Austrian cities between 1995 and 1999. The exhibition, which drew almost 900,000 visitors, caused an unexpected stir in Germany. It met with protests and vandalism by right-wing extremist groups. Criticism of – or uncritical indulgence in – the exhibition became a question of positioning oneself either on the left side or on the right

side of the political spectrum. Eventually, charges that the photographs used in the exhibition had been unduly labelled were advanced against the curators. In 1999, the organizers decided to close the exhibition and assigned a commission to revise the use of photographs. The commission came to the conclusion that ‘the photographs had been carelessly sourced and sloppily used’ (Williams 2007: 59; Musial 2011). As a consequence, it developed criteria for the use of photography in museums. The commission recommended: first, that the archive from which a photograph is taken should be clearly stated; second, that the author of a given caption should be named; third, that the date, place and photographer should be specified and the people on the photograph named; and, finally, that the photographs should not be retouched, cropped or blown up (Thiemeyer 2010: 301ff). In 2001, a revised exhibition was opened under the title ‘Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944’ (‘Crimes of the Wehrmacht: Dimensions of the War of Annihilation 1941–1944’). It toured eleven cities in Germany, Luxembourg and Austria.

The closing down of the exhibition ‘Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944’ was the consequence of insufficient scientific precision. As a result of the exhibition, the requirement of being historically and scientifically precise when exhibiting photographs in museums became an important issue. Source criticism is not the only challenge that arises when exhibiting the photographs and films of extermination. In recent years, the question has been raised as to whether pictures of haggard prisoners and heaps of corpses should be used as an educational tool at all.

Photographs from the liberated camps were shown by the Allies as part of the re-education programmes in Germany. The pictures were, and often still are, uncritically used as an admonition for the future. Brink observes:

Hardly anybody who published the pictures at the time [i.e. during the 1960s] in order to educate people about the crimes – not even the concentration-camp survivors – doubted that they would cause spontaneous horror of the deed, repugnance against the perpetrators and compassion with the victims. The general expectation was that the pictures would admonish their viewers, that what was shown therein was never to happen again. (Brink 1998: 203)

Since the mid 1980s, more and more memorials in Western Germany have become public institutions. As a consequence, questions about the didactics of history in general, and contemporary history in particular, have been discussed with ever more fervour. As a result of these discussions, the exhibition of pictures from the liberated camps has become a question

of ethics. In Germany, deprecatory words like ‘Leichenbergpädagogik’ (pedagogics of heaps of corpses) and ‘Schockpädagogik’ (shock pedagogics) are used in discussions to describe the undertheorized use of the pictures in historical education. Brink (1998: 204ff) discerns two positions in these discussions. One of them takes the victims shown on the pictures as the starting point for its reflections. This position asks questions like: is it morally justifiable to show the victims in the moment of their worst humiliation? Would the people in the pictures have wanted to be shown emaciated, dirty, in rags, half-naked, at the moment of being tortured or publicly exposed? And is it consequently voyeuristic to look at these pictures? The second position takes the targets of the pictures as their starting point. The questions that are asked here are: should people be forced to look at the pictures? Does the shock that these pictures necessarily evokes in the viewer have the intended effect? Might it not rather invite the viewers to look away, to try to distance themselves from the events and to locate them in a past that is long gone? Or might the viewers even be fascinated by the brutality shown on the pictures? And with the media’s overwhelming and neverending portrayal of pictures of atrocities, is it still possible to shock anybody anymore? Will the pictures meet with mere indifference? Thus, if with museum objects we found a dialectic between their function as bearers of forgotten human life and their function as symbols of transience, we find in the photographs and films of atrocities a push and pull between their function as historical sources and as evidence, their use as admonitions for the future and the voyeurism that might entail.

Another element that needs to be considered when analysing the exhibition of pictures of extermination is the ‘aura’ of the pictures. Unlike what Walter Benjamin (who wrote at a time when the use of film and photography was still in its early stages) anticipated, the ‘age of mechanical reproduction’ has not led to a loss of aura. On the contrary, historical photography and film are currently received as highly auratic (Huysen 2000: 30). Although they might in theory be reproducible in mass form, the negatives of photographs have often been lost, with the consequence that the first prints are now traded as originals. A sepia-brown colouring, the lack of sharpness and perforated edges are now recognized as signs that encode a picture as a historical source. Techniques of reproduction make it possible to emphasize the traces that time has left on the pictures and – in turn – to auraticize the pictures still further. What is more, photographs of the Holocaust represent the victims at a moment of extreme suffering that, as we have seen, has been interpreted as forcing humans to breach the borders of humanity into martyrdom – an almost sacred act. These pictures have also often been taken under the most adverse conditions. That

they exist at all – or survived the war – is a wonder in itself. The status of the pictures as a miraculous relic, combined with their representation of suffering, make the pictures appear as auratic remains of the past. Again, reproduction techniques permit the subject matter of the pictures to be further emphasized by, for example, zooming into a scene of torture or execution, or by blowing up a picture to super-sized dimensions. It is this auratic status of the pictures that makes them a particularly apt educational tool in exhibitions, and might explain the frequency of their use as such. Pictures of extermination can be used both as historical sources and as means to emotionalize the visitors.

It is not my aim here to resolve whether photographs should be used in Holocaust exhibitions or not – although I tend to be sympathetic to the critics of education-through-shock and I believe that anybody who exhibits pictures of victims of any genocide or mass murder should at least consider the dignity of the victims and ask themselves what would be the least humiliating way of exhibiting them, without at the same time belittling the crimes that were committed. What I want to analyse here are the methods for the exhibition of photographs chosen in the different exhibitions, and especially the interaction between video testimonies and photographs and film footage.

Unlike objects that have survived the ages and on which traces of forgotten human life might, or might not, be detected, photographs and film appear as a direct reproduction of the past – as the frozen remains of human life that would otherwise have been forgotten. By looking at a historical picture or at historical film footage, we have the feeling of looking into the past – of seeing what it was like. Unlike video testimonies that appear as authentic representations of the past, but still as representations *ex post facto*, pictures appear as authentic because we tend to forget that they are representations.

Reflecting on the massive use of the pictures from the liberated camps, James Young (1988: 163) observes that:

of all the obscenities inflicted upon Jews during the period of the Holocaust, one of the most perverse may have been the calculated displacement of a millennium-old civilization by what David Roskies has called ‘an enormous freak show of atrocity victims’. Unfortunately, the inassimilable images of the wretched dead and survivors have become for many in America not only the sum of European Jewish civilization but also the sum of knowledge about the Holocaust and its survivors. Too often the point of departure for the ‘popular study’ of the Holocaust begins and ends with these images alone, the unmitigated horror at the end of Jewish history in continental Europe, not the conditions of history, politics, culture, and mind – or the rich history of European Jewry – that preceded it.

Young sees video testimonies as a corrective to the dehumanization and deindividualization of the victims, committed by the perpetrators and perpetuated by the mass-medial use of the pictures of humiliation:

By showing us whole human beings, however inwardly scarred they are, the video tapes rehumanize the survivors, and in so doing, rehumanize the murdered victims as well. Instead of static black-and-white images of hollow-eyed victims, we find the survivors as they are now, which suggests to us the humanity of all the victims before the war. Both victims and survivors are thus relocated in the human community, which simultaneously rehumanizes and reindividuates them. (Young 1988: 163)

In museums, video testimonies are in fact constantly put in relation to pictures and film footage. As the following analysis will show, video testimonies can have a corrective effect on the overwhelming aura of the pictures of extermination. However, in most museums, the testimonies are dominated by the aura of the pictures. Pictures are presented as the most authentic evidence, and therefore also as the most adequate means to represent the events.

*Pictorial Evidence and Survivor Testimony: The Blow-ups in the Imperial War Museum and in Yad Vashem*

Despite the criteria developed by the commission that revised the 'Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944' exhibition, an ever-stronger call for treating photography and film as historical sources (cf. Barnouw 1996; Brink 1998; Knoch 2001; Sontag 2003; Heyl 2004; Thiemeyer 2010) and the moral and moralizing discussions on the use of pictures of extermination, most museums still use film and photography rather uncritically as emotionalizing reproductions of the reality of the time. The video testimonies can rarely compete with the overwhelming effect of the pictures. In both the Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem, blown-up pictures with men and women being humiliated, haggard prisoners and heaps of corpses are shown in ample numbers. Many of these pictures have by now attained iconic status: the young Jewish man sitting on his knees in front of a mass grave looking into the camera before he is shot, an *Einsatztruppen* soldier holding a gun to his head and numerous soldiers behind him watching this happen; the picture of the boy holding up his hands in the Warsaw ghetto (referred to by Heyl); the picture of a woman carrying a child on an open field with an *Einsatztruppen* soldier behind her pointing a gun; the bulldozer pushing heaps of corpses in the liberated Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, to give only a few examples. Dorit Harel (2010: 53) justifies her use of the



pictures in Yad Vashem by claiming that ‘one means of building collective memory is through iconic photographs that are familiar to everyone and have become the foundations of a nation’s development’. For Harel, in addition to having an illustrative character, the pictures in Yad Vashem are therefore a means towards turning the (Israeli) visitors of Yad Vashem into a memorial community. The easily recognizable pictures work as cues for a process of national memorialization that also takes place outside the walls of the museum.

In both Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum, the pictures are juxtaposed with video testimonies. However, the corrective effect that Young wishes for is only marginally successful. Of course, the video testimonies rehumanize the humiliated subjects on the pictures by linking them to ‘real people’. In Yad Vashem some of the video testimonies are beamed as oversized images onto walls and screens. Visitors will therefore, in addition to the blown-up photos, be repeatedly confronted with the larger-than-life faces of survivors. In both Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum, the sound of the videos is played into the open room. Even the visitor who is not consciously watching the videos will therefore hear extracts from the testimonies while looking at the blown-up photos – and the other exhibits for that matter.

Nevertheless, of the different visual layers in the Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem, the photographs constitute the first layer: the video testimonies appear as subsidiary to the blown-up photographs, which affect the visitors after one look at them. Video testimonies must be approached and watched over a longer period of time in order for their messages to have an effect on visitors. Incidentally, few visitors take the time to do so. In Yad Vashem, for example, a video testimony is shown right next to a blow-up of the picture of the survivor in Bergen-Belsen (referred to by Heyl) and a video showing the liberation of the concentration camps. The picture and the video have the size of smaller cinema screens and are shown at some height above the visitor’s head on two adjacent walls. The video testimony is placed below on a small flat screen in the angle between the walls with the picture and the video. When entering the room, the visitor first sees the picture and the video with the historical footage. Only afterwards will she or he – possibly – approach the video testimony. The video testimonies therefore offer supplementary information to the evidence provided by the pictures – not the other way round.

The strong affective impact of the combination of testimonies and pictures becomes particularly apparent in the Imperial War Museum, when audio testimonies instead of video testimonies are used in the section on the ‘Final Solution’. In order to be able to listen properly to one of

the testimonies in which witnesses to history talk about their experiences in the camps, the visitor must face the picture of a prisoner who committed suicide by running into the electrical wires. The combination of the picture and the video testimony has an affective impact on the visitor that could not be achieved with testimony alone; the static picture illustrates what we dare not imagine. However, since the witness to history remains invisible, the potential rehumanization that Young advocates does not take place.

*Estranged Pictures and Stories: The Inclusion of Film Footage and Photographs in Video Testimonies*

'Footage and stills reinforcing the testimony can and should be integrated into filmed testimonies', writes Dorit Harel (2010: 55). The addition of archival photographs and film footage to video testimonies is frequent in museums. However, the footage that is used is rarely commented on. Rather, it appears as illustration – or indeed 'reinforcement' – of what the witnesses are talking about. It authenticates the witnesses' testimony, although what is shown in the pictures does not often bear any direct relation to the testimonies themselves. In the Imperial War Museum, uncommented historical footage has been placed inbetween the video testimonies. It often shows events that the witnesses have never been part of and places where the witnesses have never set foot.

A similar correlation of video testimonies with archival footage can be found in the Museo Diffuso. The films on the table at the end of the exhibition combine archival footage with the voices of witnesses. The correlation between the pictures and what the witnesses are saying is striking. While the visitor listens, for example, to the testimony of a woman who was part of the resistance movement, who relates smuggling leaflets to factory workers in her handbag, the visitor sees two films depicting exactly what the witness is talking about. The first film shows a woman who collects leaflets in a basement, puts them into her handbag and leaves the basement. The second film shows a small bus that passes through a roadblock in front of a factory, followed by a shot showing the workers of the factory. At no point does one come to know who has shot the images and whether they are footage of real events or whether they are staged (at least the film showing the smuggling of leaflets looks staged). Both the footage and the testimony have clearly been chosen because they fit well. The video testimonies authenticate and auratize the archival footage, and vice versa, exactly because they prevent a critical evaluation of both the testimony and the pictures. In this way, both the testimony and the footage are authenticated as originals and as adequate representations of the past.

*Corrected Messages: Video Testimonies and Pictures in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial*

Of the exhibitions that I have visited, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial is the only one that has – almost – consistently adopted the criteria developed by the commission that revised the exhibition ‘Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944’. The Bergen-Belsen Memorial does not present the originals of documents and photos in its exhibition, a decision that can be explained by: the difficulty of preserving original photographic prints and documents in an exhibition; the fact that a great number of the photographs in the exhibition are stored in archives outside of the memorial; and security issues. Instead, copies of the original photographic prints have been printed onto exhibition panels. The photos and documents have been slightly enlarged, but not excessively blown up. The pictures are further shown with their original degree of brightness and with the original captions.

The memorial has acquired, for example, two collections of a series of photographs that were taken by the soldier Franz Josef Z. between August and December 1941 in the Prisoners-of-War-Camp Oerbke. The pictures were subsequently distributed amongst his comrades (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 86f). The Memorial exhibits these pictures as collections. This means that if one picture appeared in both collections, it has been reproduced twice on the exhibition panels and if captions were scribbled onto the pictures, the reverse of the photographs has been printed on the panels as well. These captions are generally even more shocking than the very pictures that show haggard, sometimes half-naked, prisoners, prisoners in provisory bullpens made out of raw wood and netting wire, and caves that the prisoners dug into the earth for protection because they were initially kept on an open field. The captions go from the blandly descriptive – ‘Here we see dead and half-dead people being taken out of their dens’, ‘Life at the camp’ or ‘Special detention cells for “runaways”’. They have to stay in these day and night for three weeks on very little food’ – to the openly sarcastic and racist – ‘Russki kaput’, ‘The development of architectural art II’ or ‘He was probably going to delouse himself. But he’s already only skin and bone’ (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 86–87). By seeing the pictures in their original state and by reading the captions on the back, the visitors can establish contact with their very first intended audience – who we know are responsible for these horrifying scenes. In other words, the visitors are invited to receive these pictures in the context in which they have been taken and to judge them as the product of the gaze of the perpetrators and not as value-free representations of life in the camp.

What is possible with the pictures taken by Franz Josef Z. is, however, not possible in all cases. Also, the exhibition chapter ‘Hunger Rations’ is

illustrated by pictures taken by German soldiers. The chapter deals with the insufficient provision of food for the Soviet prisoners of war in the camps on Lüneburg Heath between 1939 and 1945. On the pictures, visitors see large stockpots, loaves of bread being distributed and prisoners with soup plates. What the pictures do not show is what the section is actually about: hunger. The photographs show food instead of its absence. What hunger might mean is transmitted only through two extracts from written records by prisoners, and especially through the video testimony placed next to the section. Only here do visitors learn that ‘people started to eat grass’, that ‘people ate belts too’ and that hunger was ‘worse than physical pain’, that it was ‘complete hopelessness’ (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 62–63). The video testimonies unmask the representative character of photographs. Photographs can only ever show what is present, but not what is absent. The video testimonies have in this case the effect of de-authenticating the pictures; they illustrate that there are many more layers to the past than pictures can show.

Unlike the other museums analysed here, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial has not integrated any film footage into its video testimonies. The overwhelming film footage of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen that shocked the world at the time, and that still serves as the principal icon of a concentration camp, is shown in a separate tower. Similarly, the photographs taken by SS guards, Wehrmacht soldiers and liberators – although juxtaposed with video testimonies – are nevertheless presented at some distance from them, and the sound of the testimonies can only be listened to through headphones. The photographs and the video testimonies are in this way shown as two different sources that have to be distinguished from each other.

Only a few photographs are included with the video testimonies. They show portraits of the witnesses to history before their deportation to the camps. In this way, a bridge between the present and the past is established. We usually recognize witnesses to history today as old people reflecting on their past. The portraits from before the war show young men and women with hopes for the future – hopes that were often brutally destroyed by the war and their imprisonment. In the introductory film to the exhibition, video testimonies of survivors who remember the time before the war are combined with pictures and short biographies of men and women who died in the camps on Lüneburg Heath. This film, which is screened onto a wall, can be seen again from the second floor at the end of the exhibition. The exhibition closes with a video testimony in which the witnesses to history reflect on their life after liberation. In this way, the exhibition, with its many pictures of corpses and haggard victims, is framed by the portraits of healthy-looking men and women. The effect of the numerous pictures

of haggard prisoners and corpses in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial is in this way attenuated. The witnesses to history have the last word and the video testimonies the final visual impact on the visitors. This is a similar effect to the one arrived at in the Imperial War Museum, which, as we have seen, although giving the upper hand to the pictures in the exhibition, also uses a combination of video testimonies and pictures of concentration and extermination camp memorials in its last exhibition room.

Susan Sontag (2003: 26) has observed that photographs are ‘both objective record and personal testimony, both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality’. The same could of course be said for film. With regard to the exhibition of film and photography in memorial museums, Sontag’s first characteristic is, as I have shown, usually taken for granted, whereas the second is often overlooked. Film footage and photographs can be counted amongst the most affective exhibits. Museums with a moral mission, in particular, prefer to communicate to their visitors ‘see, this is what happened’ rather than ‘see, this is how what happened was represented by one person at a particular moment in time’. One explanation for the frequent lack of contextualization could be a fear that too much contextualization entails the danger of relativizing the deeds of the perpetrators. Showing the heaps of corpses found in Bergen-Belsen after liberation has an immediate effect on the visitors that an explanation of the historical framing of those pictures might destroy.

However, as I have shown with the example of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, video testimonies can have a corrective function on the pictures, and not only because, as James Young observes, they oppose ‘real people’ to the corpses and living skeletons on the photographs and films. Video testimonies can also oppose living memory to the photographic representation of the past. As the example of the ‘hunger rations’ section at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial shows, they can expose the character of the pictures as representation rather than reproduction of reality.

Turning this argument around, the pictures could also potentially unmask the constructed character of communicative memory – and thereby the supposed authenticity of the video testimonies. However, this effect is hardly ever achieved or, one might suspect, intended through the contrast of video testimonies with photography and film. In museums such as the Imperial War Museum or Yad Vashem, pictures are presented as the primary evidence of the past and as auratic icons, whereas the video testimonies provide further information and serve to authenticate the pictures as originals and as adequate representations of the past. In the Museo Diffuso, the correspondence between the testimonies and pictures

is so tight that no difference seems to exist between the ‘reality’ shown on the pictures and the ‘reality’ of the testimonies. In this way, the films and photographs, but also the video testimonies, come to stand as representatives of the ‘reality of war’ or ‘the reality of the Holocaust’, rather than their representative character being addressed.

## **Video Testimonies as Museum Objects**

In this chapter, video testimonies have so far been analysed in terms of their contrast and interplay with the other main exhibits in the museums: material remains, photography and film. I have, rather enthusiastically, treated video testimonies as the remains of human life that have not yet been forgotten and that can potentially fill drained objects. As the previous chapter has already adumbrated, this is of course only part of the truth. For one thing, video testimonies are of course no direct remains of the past. They are audiovisual representations of the act of remembering. Moreover, every medium that is exhibited must necessarily be adapted to the rules of exhibition, becoming, as it were, a museum object. These rules of exhibition are of course not static. The introduction of video testimonies into museums has also necessarily changed the self-understanding of museums and the way in which they are perceived and received by visitors today. By now, it seems almost surprising not to find video testimonies in memorial museums. That said, every act of exhibiting is always linked to questions of representation, aesthetics, spatiality and timing. Video testimonies, when being put into the exhibition space, cannot be shown in the same way as in the setting of the private home, the archive or the cinema. In the following section, I will therefore analyse video testimonies as museum objects. As I will show, several techniques are used in order to turn video testimonies into museum exhibits. These techniques, in turn, serve to make video testimonies resemble traditional museum objects. Hence, if in the last section I have been concentrating on intermedial relations, I will here concentrate on intramediation – on the effect that musealization has on the medium of the video testimony.

### *Production versus Conservation: The Aesthetics and Aestheticization of Video Testimonies*

In general, the state in which objects enter an exhibition is supposed to be their final state. Museum objects are treated in such a way as to keep their

present state for the longest possible time – at best forever. Yet this does not mean that museum objects enter the exhibition galleries in the state they entered a museum's collection. Generally, a process of conservation and restoration precedes the exhibition of an object. This process serves to highlight certain features of an object to the detriment of others and consequently favours certain readings over others. Conservators might, for example, try to bring an object as close to the state in which they expect it to have been used. Thus, pieces will be glued together in order to reconstruct a Greek vase. Curators might equally highlight traces of use or destruction. This is especially the case in Holocaust or Second World War Museums, where objects represent in the first place the destructive powers of war and genocide. The railway carriage in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum mentioned earlier would be an example of this practice.

When I asked museum professionals whether they considered video testimonies to be museum objects, some of them answered that the exhibition of video testimonies, unlike that of objects, is preceded by a pure production process and that they would therefore not consider video testimonies as museum objects (Bardgett interview 2009; Barker interview 2009). However, as I have shown in Chapter 2, not unlike the processes of restoration and conservation, it is exactly this production process that serves to conserve the witnesses to history's bodies for the future. The medium of film further allows for the witnesses' bodies and faces to be put into the right light; highlighting some features to the detriment of others. The aesthetical choices for the video testimonies, 'talking heads' on a monochromatic background, serve to emphasize the emotional expressions of witnesses to history as external signs of the internal traces that the past has left.

That is not all. The camera angle also puts into the spotlight the witnesses' aged bodies, with their age spots and wrinkles. If Gottfried Korff (2006: 120) argues that the aura of museum objects is made up of the 'forgotten human life that can be remembered through the objects', witnesses to history are endowed with an aura because they are the human life that has not yet disappeared. Video testimonies are, as morbid as this may sound, conserved remains of human life in decay – and in this they are not entirely unlike the mounted bodies that Tucholsky wished to see in the museum in Vincennes. The focus of the camera on the face and – sometimes – on the hands emphasizes exactly those body parts on which time has left its most obvious traces and that remain uncovered by clothing that could reveal the moment when the video was recorded. In the case of traditional museum objects, it is their material aspects that create

a link between the past and the present. In the case of video testimonies, it is the witnesses' bodies that create this link. The witnesses' aged bodies serve to authenticate the testimonies. If nothing else, they prove that the past has existed and that the witnesses to history have existed in the past. Stories can be made up, but the traces that the past has left on their bodies cannot be hidden. This bodily authentication can sometimes, unwillingly, take extreme and tragic forms. Thus, in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, one of the witnesses to history has a disfigured face as a consequence of mistreatment in the camp. In the video testimony, she relates how she lost part of her nose when she was kicked by a guard onto a heap of bricks for carrying two instead of the requested three bricks. It is in this context interesting to observe that the tattooed numbers on forearms – the most iconic trace left by the perpetrators on the bodies of certain victims – have to my knowledge not been put in scene in the video testimonies in museums.

For an analysis of video testimonies as museum objects, it is also significant that the image of video testimonies is fairly static, at least when compared to most filmed images. What differentiates museums from other media is the physical effort that the recipient, the visitor, has to make in order to experience the exhibition. 'The visitors are unique amongst the recipients of culture and art, because their reception is linked to their own physical movement', observes Werner Hanak-Lettner (2011: 106), for example. In exhibitions we find a discrepancy between the inaction of the museum objects and the movement of the visitors. The introduction of video into museums turns this relationship between visitors and exhibits upside down. The visitor remains static, whereas the video decides the pace and movement of information provision. Films are often shown in separate rooms from the main exhibition for good reason as visitors can sit down and concentrate. Video testimonies are a toned-down version of film. By showing a minimum of movement and framing the witnesses to histories' faces, video testimonies allow – and even demand – a certain degree of agency on the part of the visitors. Guided by lighting techniques and camera angles, visitors are encouraged to read the witnesses' faces and to find traces of the past in those faces. In this way, the static image of the video testimonies adds to an auraticization of the testimonies. I have observed that the aura of historical photographs can be enhanced through reproduction techniques that highlight parts of the pictures. The blown-up photos in the Imperial War Museum and in Yad Vashem work as icons that dominate the video testimonies, not least because they are static and therefore have an immediate and direct effect on the visitors. By minimizing movement in the video testimonies, by depicting them more



as photographs than film, this auratization of historical photographs also finds its expression in video testimonies – though not to the same extent.

*The Most Interesting and the Most Eloquent: Choosing and Shortening Video Testimonies for Exhibition*

In his novel *City of Thieves*, David Benioff (2008: 4) describes an interview session that his narrator David, a writer collecting material for his new novel, carries out with his grandfather, a survivor of the siege of Leningrad. ‘A few hours in the morning, breaking for lunch, then again in the afternoon – my grandfather, a man who hated to speak more than two consecutive sentences in mixed company ... filled minicassette after minicassette with his words’, David observes and concludes: ‘Too many words for one book – truth might be stranger than fiction, but it needs a better editor.’ It rarely happens that interviews for video testimonies are carried out over several days. Nevertheless, most video testimonies last several hours. As anybody who has watched full-length video testimonies will be able to confirm, those hours can be very long for the viewer. As exciting or tragic as their lives might have been, many people are just not very good storytellers. In museums, however, the witnesses to history in the video testimonies generally tell interesting stories, and they tell their stories well.

The museum professionals that I have interviewed observed that questions of dramaturgy and storytelling played an important role in the choice of the video testimonies that were to enter the museums’ exhibitions (Barker interview 2009; Bardgett interview 2009; Gring interview 2009; Kinter interview 2009; Bocalatte interview 2010). When the curators at the Imperial War Museum, for example, selected the Holocaust survivors whose autobiographical accounts were to be presented in the Holocaust Exhibition, they went to the museum’s ‘Sound Archive’ and noted ‘those whose stories were especially well told, or who were special for some historical reason’ (Bardgett n.d.). The selected survivors were interviewed again in front of a camera. Annie Dodds, who together with James Barker carried out the interviews, observes that even during the interviews, she tried to produce the most suitable clips for the exhibition: ‘What we wanted above all was for [the witnesses] to try and remember what it really felt like then, when they were young ... and we did try to steer them towards this – away from the purely factual account’ (cited in Kushner 2001: 91f). She confesses that her interviewing technique compromised cohesion, but ‘it did not matter to us, as the editing process would enable us to sort that out, and we were never going to follow one person’s story through’

(cited in Kushner 2001: 92). Thus, not unlike Claude Lanzmann, who turned the witnesses to history in his documentary into actors in order to authenticate their memory, Annie Dodds tried to collect the images and the statements that would seem most authentic for the exhibition through her interview technique.

As I have shown in Chapter 3, unlike in the Imperial War Museum or the Museo Diffuso, video testimonies are not always expressly produced for exhibition. If this is the case, the clips that are going to enter the exhibition are meticulously selected from a larger collection. The best and most representative video testimonies are chosen, and of those testimonies, the best or most representative sections. The chosen video testimonies are meant to be representative ('Vertretung') of the larger group of witnesses to history. They are meant to represent the past in such a way that it becomes present again ('Darstellung') and, in this way, they are meant to evoke a mental image of this past in the visitors ('Vorstellung'). As in the case of other objects in a museum's collection, only a minority finds its way into the exhibition rooms, while the majority remains in the archive. What differentiates video testimonies from most other exhibits is that the capacity of film to evolve over time, instead of merely being present in space, makes it possible to defragment the future exhibits. With video testimonies, it is not only possible to select the particular testimonies that will be exhibited, but also their particular parts. Hardly ever is an entire video testimony presented in the exhibition. It is through this process of selecting the clips for the exhibition that video testimonies – or at least extracts – become part of the canon. They are actively chosen as carriers of memory in order to construct a particular narrative of the past – a particular history.

The practice of pushing witnesses to history towards providing clips that will be suitable for the exhibition, or of shortening video testimonies, raises ethical problems. For example, they run counter to the Fortunoff Archive's idea that witnesses should be allowed to tell their stories how they see fit and for as long as they wish, and that video testimonies should be watched in their entirety. The curators of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin have therefore decided not to show video testimonies in the main exhibition space, even though theirs is one of the most biographical Holocaust exhibitions in existence. Extracts from diaries and letters of victims written at the time are presented and family histories of Holocaust victims have been reconstructed with great attention to detail. However, the video testimonies are shown in a separate room. Daniel Baranowski (2009: 10) of the Memorial's video-testimony archive explains: 'we abstained from including extracts of the interviews with witnesses to history; those testimonies of complex biographies should not be used as

mere illustrations of the topics in the exhibition and thereby lose their character as sources in their own right'. By not exhibiting the video testimonies in the main exhibition, the curators want to invite the visitors to experience the testimonies in their entirety, according to the principles of the Fortunoff Archive. Whether this goal will be reached remains to be seen. The habitus we adopt when visiting a museum is a different one from that of doing research in an archive. Not least of all, we usually set aside much less time for a museum visit than for research in the archive. My rather brief observation of the visitors in the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe suggests that, in fact, visitors do not spend much time in this separate room or at least not more than they do in any of the other exhibition rooms. They do not watch the video testimonies in their entirety either.<sup>4</sup>

The exhibition of video testimonies thus always entails a dilemma between ethical considerations concerning the dignity of the witnesses to history and didactic considerations that take the particularities of the transmission of knowledge in museums into consideration. Already the very first visitor studies carried out at the Pennsylvania Museum in the 1920s came to the conclusion that museum visitors spent on average three seconds in front of each artwork (Wasson 2015: 616). For the majority of objects in an exhibition, a glance is usually enough to get at least an idea of what an object looks like and what it might represent. Video testimonies, however, need to be watched in order for their meaning to reveal itself. The gaze of the museum visitor is different from that of the cinemagoer or the TV watcher, and most museum visitors are not willing to sit for long hours in front of a screen. Deciding to exhibit video testimonies therefore means negotiating how far the viewing habits of the visitors and the laws of exhibition should be given precedence over the ethics of the testimonies of the witnesses to history. In order for them to work as exhibits, video testimonies need to be shortened, cut and edited – a process that in turn takes the agency and control of their testimonies away from the witnesses to history, and entails changing the original structure of their testimonies and statements. At the same time, the shortening of video testimonies and the choice of the most adequate sections for the exhibition might be the most truthful – if not the only – way to present the testimonies of witnesses to history in museums. Hardly any museum visitor will watch a video testimony of a length of two hours, but they will consume at least some of the easily digestible bites that are presented to them. In this way, at least parts of certain video testimonies will be consumed by a larger audience that might not have watched them in the first place. And maybe, just maybe, some visitors will be induced by the clips that they have seen to watch the full-length testimonies.

Curators are generally aware of the ethical obligations they have towards witnesses to history. Suzanne Bardgett (n.d.) of the Imperial War Museum, for example, writes of how relieved she was by the positive response of the witnesses to history to the video testimonies for the exhibition: ‘To our intense relief, the survivors liked the way their testimonies had been used and understood the reasons for their “fragmentation”.’ Other museums try to underline the particularities of the genre of video testimony, as well as the ethical and moral choices made by curators through the way in which they exhibit the testimonies. The Bergen-Belsen Memorial, for example, provides cards with the biographies of the witnesses to history for all of the video testimonies. Moreover, the Memorial has abstained from dubbing the testimonies, which would replace the witness’ voice with that of somebody else – as is, for example, common practice in the Neuengamme Memorial. Finally, the Memorial has chosen not only to present what they call ‘topical video points’, but also ‘biographical video points’. The ‘topical video points’ are composed of extracts from different video testimonies. They deal with specific topics. The ‘biographical video points’, which are the video testimonies that have been placed along the left-hand wall mentioned earlier, focus on individual testimonies. They are introduced by biographical details. In order to highlight the curators’ editing influence on testimonies, cuts have been made visible by separating two abstracts with a black screen. Unlike the ‘topical video points’, the ‘biographical video points’ invite the visitors to concentrate on the individuality of the witnesses to history and on their biography – or at least the part that is shown in the exhibition.

Selecting clips from video testimonies generally follows on from the initial collection of video testimonies. If recording video testimonies means turning individual and communicative memory into analysable and manipulable entities, collating video testimonies for an exhibition means analysing video testimonies and manipulating them. It means preparing the memorial carriers of the archive to be memorial carriers of the canon. In this process, the control over the video testimonies is taken away from the witnesses to history and passed on to the curators or a production company. No matter how truthful curators will try to stay to the biographies of the witnesses to history and to their narratives, as soon as video testimonies are exhibited in a museum, they become a means to transmit a specific historical narrative and a specific memorial culture. In Chapter 5, I will look more deeply into the particularities of this dramaturgy of video testimonies and into the messages that are transmitted by virtue of this dramaturgy. As unfortunate as it might seem, selecting clips and shortening might be indispensable for exhibiting video testimonies in

museums. The process of musealization is inevitably a process of choosing from a larger sample. Of the huge bulk of remains of the past that could be saved for the future, only a small amount is selected for the archive and of those only very few will become part of the canon. Exhibiting video testimonies therefore means making a compromise between considerations of video testimonies as ethically fragile sources and the requirements of museum visitors – a compromise that the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe wished to avoid.

*Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Museum Objects: Video Testimonies as Sources and Museum Text*

Amongst the things that can be found in an exhibition, Roger Fayet (2007: 24ff) distinguishes between primary museum objects, secondary museum objects and tertiary museum objects. In the case of history museums, primary museum objects are the historical objects, documents and photographs shown in the exhibitions. In general, it is the primary museum objects that draw visitors to museums. They are the items on which Korff finds the traces of forgotten human life, and in which Tucholsky and Sebald see symbols of transience. Secondary museum objects are the ‘models, replicas, reconstructions or visual representations as well as textual information’ (Fayet 2007: 26) that are placed next to the objects and that the exposers use to signal their intended reading of the objects. Tertiary museum objects are those that are not part of a museum’s collections and that have no epistemological relevance for its exhibitions, such as CCTV cameras, signs for emergency exits, or fire extinguishers (Fayet 2007: 27). Video testimonies are special in the sense that they constantly shift between a consideration of them as primary museum objects and their use as secondary museum objects.

As we have just seen, unlike most other exhibits, video testimonies have been produced at a temporal distance from the events presented in the museums, and they combine visual and textual codes of communication. The witnesses to history have, like museum objects, been shaped by the time of which they give testimony. Unlike museum objects, but like the curators and historians who produce the secondary museum objects, they can also reflect on this time. These characteristics of video testimonies, their production at a temporal distance to the events and the witnesses to history’s ability to reflect make them appropriate for use as secondary museum objects for other primary museum objects, as illustrated by Zofia Zajczyk’s doll and Yvonne Koch’s gloves. In all museums,

video testimonies serve as comments and explanations for other exhibits. However, they are not merely this. Indeed, as I will show below, whether video testimonies are presented more as primary or more as secondary museum objects depends to a large extent on the way in which they are integrated into the exhibition.

We have seen that the Museo Diffuso does without museum objects and instead uses video testimonies as its main exhibits. Even the film footage and the photographs that are presented appear as subsidiary to the video testimonies. There is only one museum text – a barely readable timeline of the Second World War in Italy and in the world. As a combination of primary and secondary museum objects, the video testimonies here serve both as the main narrative and as authenticating comments to the film footage and photographs shown in the exhibition. Similar observations can be made in terms of Yad Vashem, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and the Neuengamme Memorial, although the video testimonies are of course here contrasted with other exhibits. In Yad Vashem, it is hard to count the testimonies, let alone watch all of them. The exhibition in Yad Vashem is crowded – maybe even overcrowded. Countless objects, photographs, paintings, films – and video testimonies – fill the exhibition galleries. The video testimonies are here mostly presented on equal footing to other objects. In one instance, curators have even placed a video testimony inside a display cabinet together with other objects. Dorit Harel (2010: 40), the exhibition designer, has criticized the practice of exhibiting as many objects as possible: ‘The museological experience and ability of visitors to grasp and internalize the exhibits fell victim to the curating team’s indefatigable desire to display as many artefacts and texts as possible. That, to the best of my professional understanding, was a mistake, reflected in the proverb “grasp all, lose all”.’ In fact, in most rooms, it is only after a second look that the visitor spots that one of the pictures on a wall is a video testimony and not another historical photograph. One of the problems of the exhibition in Yad Vashem is that video testimonies tend to disappear in a conglomeration of things. In a way, what is specific about the testimonies – their individuality, their contrast with the historical objects and photographs – gets lost in stimulus satiation.

Walking through the exhibitions of the Bergen-Belsen (Figure 4.9) and the Neuengamme Memorials again feels at times like walking through a demonstration of the work of a historian. The different exhibits are presented as sources of equal value. This also counts for the video testimonies. ‘Because of the way in which the media stations are integrated in space, form and content, the testimonies appear as equally valid sources next to the other sources in the form of documents, text, pictures and



**Figure 4.9.** View of the permanent exhibition of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial  
© Helge Krückeberg/Bergen-Belsen Memorial

exhibits', write the documentary filmmakers Diana Gring and Karin Theilen (2007: 194) who are responsible for the video testimonies in the exhibition at the Bergen Belsen Memorial. Visitors are invited to reconstruct the history of the camp by combining the different sources – photographs, documents, objects and video testimonies. They are guided in this by the museum texts and by explanations of how to read the different documents. Text passages from documents are, for example, highlighted, and the different sections of index cards for the prisoners of war in the camps are marked and explained. Also, the video testimonies in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial are, as we have seen, accompanied by more supplementary information than in other museums, including the date and location of the interview and its original length. The video testimonies are placed as prominently as, if not more prominently than, the other exhibits. The first thing that the visitor sees when entering the exhibition is the introductory film, which is collated from several video testimonies. The view from the entrance of the exhibition is dominated by the 'biographical video points' placed along the left-hand wall. However, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial's presentation of video testimonies as sources in their own right is limited to the content of the video testimonies. Like other museums, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial does not fully elaborate its critical evaluation of the video testimonies. While the Memorial is, as

we have seen, very meticulous in the historical contextualization of the photographs that it exhibits, it does not extend this preoccupation with details to its video testimonies.

For the Neuengamme Memorial, video testimonies have, as we have seen, played an important role in the research work of the museum from very early on. Even if it has taken until the present exhibition for video testimonies to become major exhibition elements, the Memorial's first exhibitions were already marked by a biographical approach, for which extracts from the interviews were included in the museum texts. However, almost paradoxically, the video testimonies in the exhibition are not placed as centrally as they could have been. The second room of the exhibition, for example, deals with the different prisoner groups. Here, the visitor can consult red memory books with documents, photographs and biographical information on prisoners, some of whom survived and some of whom died (Figure 4.10). The tables with the books are positioned in the centre of the exhibition space. On the left, along the wall, less prominently positioned, there are several television screens with video testimonies sometimes given by the same prisoners as those presented in the books. In the Neuengamme Memorial, the video testimonies, while being treated as a historical source equal to other museum objects, therefore tend to appear as secondary rather than primary museum objects.



**Figure 4.10.** View of the 'Häftlingsgruppen' exhibition chapter in the 'Zeitspuren' permanent exhibition at the Neuengamme Memorial © Emily Mohney/ Neuengamme Memorial



In the Imperial War Museum, the exhibition makers were at first sceptical of the introduction of video testimonies into the Holocaust Exhibition. Tony Kushner (2001: 91) lists four arguments that were forwarded by the museum against the use of video testimonies:

First, it was feared that in an information heavy exhibition it would overload the main narrative, which would be led by artefacts, photographs and text. Second, there was concern that it would give the impression that survival was the norm. Third, the disjuncture between the 'now' of the survivor faces and the 'then' of the artefacts would confuse the visitor as the rest of the material in the exhibition was almost exclusively contemporary. Fourth, that the appearance of the survivors would 'date' and could look out of time – neither then or now – to future generations.

The original plan had been to use audio stations – a practice that the museum had already undertaken in some of its other exhibitions. It was the two documentary filmmakers, Annie Dodds and James Barker of 'October Films' (employed by the museum for the production of audio testimonies), who eventually convinced the exhibition makers to use video testimonies instead (Barker interview 2009). Today, the video testimonies are the element of the exhibition that its makers appear to be most proud of. Incidentally, they have published several articles exclusively on this subject (Bardgett 2005, 2007; Dodds 2005). Nevertheless, in the main exhibition, the video testimonies hardly ever compete with the other main exhibits. The website for the Holocaust Exhibition stated until recently that:

photographs, documents, newspapers, artefacts, posters and film track the history of this persecution and genocide with toys, diaries, photograph albums, storybooks and hand-made mementos revealing people's efforts to survive. Testimonies from 18 survivors bring a moving and haunting perspective.<sup>5</sup>

The testimonies are thus not placed on the same level as other objects in the exhibition; they do not 'track the history', but only 'bring ... a haunting perspective'. Within the exhibition, the testimonies are indeed subordinated – or perhaps supra-ordinated – to the main exhibits. Spatially, they are often placed above or beside other exhibits, so that they are only consumed – or ignored – by the visitors once they have looked at the other exhibits. A case in point is probably the chapter with the train carriage described above. The video testimony at the end of the train carriage is easily passed over. No benches allow the visitor to sit down and watch the video testimony at her or his leisure. Moreover, the video testimony is placed on the visitors' left-hand side, whereas in order to follow the exhibition path, visitors have to turn right, where the large plaster model of the arrival in Auschwitz serves as a further visual point of attraction. The most centrally placed video

testimony in the Imperial War Museum is the one in the exhibition chapter on the ghettos, which is also, with a length of around ten minutes, the longest one. The video testimony has here been placed in the middle of the room, whereas the main object, a cart used to carry corpses in the Warsaw ghetto, is placed in a nook on the right. Several benches invite visitors to sit down and watch the testimony. I agree with Tony Kushner (2001: 92), who with regard to this video testimony comments that:

it is rare for the face of the survivor to last more than fifteen seconds before it is replaced by contemporary film footage relating to the images and events described by the survivors. The film often returns to the survivor for the key intense moment when the pain of separation from loved ones, or witnessing their murder, is described.

In other words, in the Imperial War Museum, objects, photography and film stand for factuality, whereas the video and occasional audio testimonies stand for emotion. While the exhibition starts with a video testimony in which witnesses to history remember their life before the war and ends with a video testimony in which they reflect on their memories of the Holocaust; within the exhibition, the video testimonies are shown separately and at some distance to the other exhibits. The video testimonies are secondary museum objects rather than primary ones. They offer a supplementary narrative to the main exhibition narrative, which might also work without them.

Presenting video testimonies as supplementary to other exhibits is in fact the most common way for them to be exhibited in museums. The Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn, for example, a museum dealing with the postwar history of the Federal Republic of Germany, has recently changed its main exhibition to add more video testimonies. Nevertheless, these video testimonies, for example, with witnesses of the uprising of 16 and 17 June 1953 in East Germany, with guest workers, but also with Holocaust survivors, are shown on small screens. The screens are easily overlooked and the testimonies have an average length of thirty seconds. They do not add anything other than a personal note to the main narrative. At the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History in Brussels, some video testimonies are shown in a niche next to the Second World War section of the museum. In the video testimonies, Belgian citizens talk about their experiences during the war. In order to see the videos, the visitor has to leave the main exhibition route. The video testimonies are consequently easily missed. The Haus der Geschichte and the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History in Brussels are typical of most museums. If museums decide to

introduce video testimonies into their exhibitions, they still often show them on a few screens hidden in dark corners.

Although video testimonies are thus, as we have seen, adapted to the laws of exhibition and thereby, to a certain extent, transformed into museum objects, they are rarely treated as equal to the other museum objects in the exhibitions. This is a circumstance lamented by many of the museum professionals that I interviewed, especially those who had been involved in producing the video testimonies. I was often told about disagreements between the curators or producers of the videos, who wanted to place them centrally, and the exhibition designers, who tried to banish the video testimonies into corners and refused to provide space for chairs or benches that would make it easier for the visitors to contemplate them (Barker interview 2009; Gring interview 2009; Kinter interview 2009).

Video testimonies are never just secondary museum objects, but in many museums, they are presented as second-class primary museum objects – as an attempt to bring some emotion into an otherwise factual exhibition. It is of course this characteristic of video testimonies to be both auratic museum objects and comments on other objects that makes them especially apt as means of authentication on the four levels analysed at the beginning of this chapter. To what degree video testimonies are used as primary or secondary museum objects ultimately depends on the exhibition designers' and curators' view as to whether they can be considered primary museum objects at all. These views find their expression in curatorial and design choices. Thus, while in the Museo Diffuso the video testimonies clearly are primary museum objects, in Yad Vashem they are presented as primary museum objects that disappear in a conglomeration of other exhibits, in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial as historical sources on an equal footing with the other objects, in the Neuengamme Memorial as less prominently placed historical sources, and in the Imperial War Museum as secondary museum objects. The use of video testimonies as primary or secondary objects further underlines the detachment of the testimonies from the witnesses to history. It is not necessarily the witnesses to history's biographies that are central anymore; these stories also become comments on other exhibits.

### *Underlining an Aestheticization of Horror: Exhibition Design*

Since video testimonies can be expressly produced for exhibitions, they can also be used as design elements – or at least be adapted to the overall design of the exhibition. Of the museums that I have analysed, the one that has gone furthest in its use of video testimonies as design

elements is Yad Vashem. In Yad Vashem, the video testimonies do not merely underline the overall exhibition design, which is dominated by grey concrete walls, dim lighting and dark hues. The video testimonies are also occasionally arranged in such a way as to appear like semi-artistic installations. One example of this is the video section on Treblinka mentioned earlier. Another example is the installation representing the killing squads in Eastern Europe. The installation is entitled 'All the roads ... lead to Ponary'. Ponary is a forest around ten kilometres south of Vilnius where, between July 1941 and July 1944, tens of thousands of people were shot and buried (Gutterman and Shalev 2008: 130–31). In Yad Vashem, the killing in Ponary is represented by a pit in the floor. Behind the pit, pictures illustrating the killing are screened on the wall. On the left-hand side hangs a picture of the forest. In front of the pit, three screens show two video testimonies with a man and a woman. The screens are inlaid in a grey wall that reaches to about the visitor's hip. The same picture is screened simultaneously on all three screens, so the same witness can be seen three times over. This multiplication of the image of the video testimony contrasts with the emptiness of the pit. In the real Ponary forest, the pit was – as the visitor learns – filled with corpses: one of the witnesses to history in the video testimonies recounts the story of how he woke up on top of a heap of corpses after the bullet that was supposed to kill him had missed its target. Thus, the contrast of the three videos with the empty pit makes apparent the exception of survival.

A similar use of video testimonies as design elements like in Yad Vashem is still rare. Nevertheless, everywhere video testimonies serve to underline the overall exhibition design. It is the design of an exhibition – the disposition of the different elements in space, the colours, the type of glass cases that are used and the architecture of the building – that give visitors their first impressions of an exhibition. Recent exhibitions on the Second World War and the Holocaust tend to adopt what I would call an 'aestheticization of horror'. Dim lights, black or grey shades and large spaces of bare concrete dominate the exhibition design. The main exhibition of the Museo Diffuso, for example, is located in the cellar of an old palazzo (Figure 4.11). The exhibition rooms are dimly lit and muffled sounds can be heard constantly. The video testimonies on the dark shiny steles with their black backgrounds add to the exhibition's gloomy aesthetics. If one does not stand directly in front of them, the steles almost disappear in the darkness of the cellar. In the Imperial War Museum, the video testimonies, which mostly have a grey background, have been inlaid into the mostly greyish exhibition walls. In the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, as observed above, the monochromatic dark background and the grey steles



**Figure 4.11.** View of the exhibition at the Museo Diffuso © Museo Diffuso

also reproduce the dominant hue of the exhibition – grey – while in the Neuengamme Memorial, as we have seen, the video testimonies underline the exhibition aesthetics that eschew an aestheticization of horror. Thus, while video testimonies are not tertiary museum objects as defined by Fayet, they nevertheless serve a tertiary function in museums: they are used as design elements that influence the visitors' response even before they start watching them.

## Conclusion

If collecting is the first step towards the musealization of video testimonies – turning them into memorial carriers of the archive – exhibiting video testimonies entails making them part of the canon. It means selecting

from a large pool those video testimonies that are going to be part of an exhibition and preparing them so as to make them fit for being exhibited. Video testimonies are thereby turned into authenticating museum objects.

In this chapter I have scrutinized the techniques that are used in order to do so and have analysed the dynamics that video testimonies enter into with other museum objects. I have analysed the arrangement of video testimonies in the exhibitions and the aesthetical choices that are taken in order to make them fit for being exhibited; in other words, I have analysed how video testimonies are represented in the sense of 'Darstellung'. I have looked at their intramediation into museums and at how they are put into intermedial relations with other objects. It is the aesthetics of the video testimonies described in Chapter 2 that permit their use as museum objects. While the process of restoring and conserving material objects serves to underline certain features of an object, the production process of video testimonies does the same for video testimonies. The camera focus is placed on the face that is filmed in front of a mostly monochromatically black or grey background, thereby putting the part of the body that has been most marked by time at the centre of attention. Markers of the time when the video testimony was recorded, such as clothing or room interiors, remain hidden: the videos are given a timeless character. The fact that video testimonies show a relatively static image further adds to the auratization of the testimonies and makes them fit for exhibition in the main galleries. Moreover, the exhibition of video testimonies demands that the most aesthetically and narratively appealing testimonies be selected from the overall collection, that those testimonies be shortened and that their best parts be chosen for the exhibition. Consequently, the video testimonies presented in exhibitions are rarely longer than ten minutes. This process of musealization also turns video testimonies into representatives in the sense of 'Vertretung': they stand for other victims of the Holocaust and other similar stories.

With this process of selection and shortening, the agency over the video testimonies is passed on from the witnesses to history to the exhibition makers. As we have seen in the introduction, Mieke Bal (1996: 3–4) analyses the act of exposing as an interplay between three 'persons': the exposor, the visitor and the object on display. She underlines the power of the exposor whom she wishes to '[become] once again visible' (Bal 1996: 5). In the case of video testimonies, the power of the curator over the object is from an ethical standpoint particularly challenging. Exhibiting video testimonies means having to consider

the requirements of the visitors and therefore – to a certain extent – relinquishing the ethical considerations of the dignity of the life and testimonies of witnesses to history. Not all museums wish to make this choice, as we have seen with the example of the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe. Moreover, contrary to Bal's wish, none of the museums makes the production process and the role of the interviewers apparent. None reflects on the nature of memory. So far, the accuracy with which objects and documents are exhibited in most museums has not touched video testimonies. The latter are presented uncommented as untainted reflections of the past.

Video testimonies occupy a strange position alongside material objects. Material objects are constantly torn between their characteristic as symbols of transience and their function for remembering forgotten human life. Video testimonies can be considered as the human life that has not as yet been forgotten, but they are not active communicative memory either. As I have observed in Chapter 3, they are cultural memory in the form of condensed communicative memory, in the guise of individual memory. They can therefore refill drained objects with stories, but they can also help to underline the distortions and changes that time has left on objects and places. In relation to photographs and film, they can both enhance the authenticating messages of those photographs and correct those messages by referring to what is not represented on the pictures. Thus, video testimonies can both authenticate and de-authenticate, auratize and de-auratize.

The case studies above make clear the similarities and differences between the different museums. All museums select clips, cut and shorten entire video testimonies. Moreover, most of the museums use similar aesthetics for their video testimonies – aesthetics that, as has been shown in Chapter 2, are also used in TV documentaries. Of the museums analysed here, only the Neuengamme Memorial does not use a monochromatic background. In all of the museums, the video testimonies are – to a certain extent – presented as a combination of primary and secondary museum objects. They are also used in order to underline the museums' exhibition design. It is these commonalities that underline the character of video testimonies as a global assemblage that – and here the differences come into play – is always realized locally. Thus, in Yad Vashem, where the exhibition narrative concentrates on the survivors, the video testimonies are used as primary museum objects that contrast human life and survival with the exhibits that represent extermination, such as the shoes or the digital reconstruction of Treblinka. In the Imperial War Museum, where the focus is more on the deeds of the perpetrators, the testimonies are instead used as secondary museum

objects that emphasize destruction and extermination. In Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum, video testimonies disrupt the authenticating power of in-situ exhibitions, whereas in the museums located on the sites of former concentration camps, they fill the empty site with stories and at the same time underline that those places have changed. In all museums, video testimonies are therefore aesthetically similar, whereas their particular uses differ. It is on these uses that I will further concentrate in Chapter 5: which witnesses to history are chosen to be museum exhibits? What are witnesses to history as museum exhibits allowed to say and what messages are communicated to the visitors in this way?

## Notes

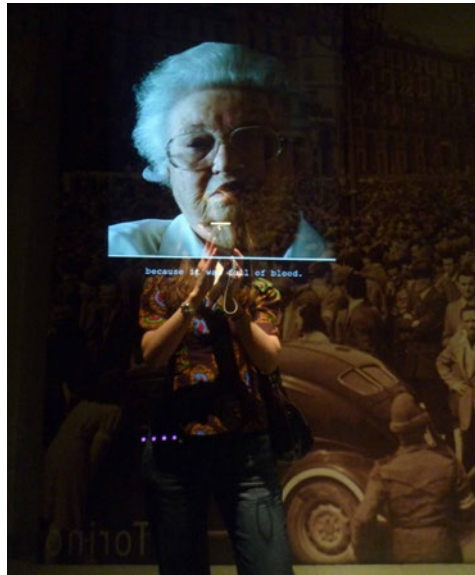
1. Unfortunately, English-language translations do not distinguish between 'Echtheit' (originality) and 'Authentizität' (authenticity); both are translated as 'authenticity'.
2. Also in Yad Vashem, there was at first the plan to exhibit the shoes in a horizontal display case, 'scattered among barbed-wire fences', as Dorit Harel (2010: 83) observes. This option was however rejected for being too 'revolutionary'.
3. The United States Memorial Museum is located right at the threshold of this shift and can be seen as having engendered it. Although showing the point of view of the victims and survivors was a major issue during the planning phase of the museum, the final exhibition still relies heavily on already-established icons of the Holocaust – as exemplified by the heap of shoes. The point of view of the victims enters the exhibition through an audio installation with 'Voices from Auschwitz' and at the very end of the permanent exhibition where the documentary 'Testimony' spliced together from extracts from video testimonies is screened in an amphitheatre (Shenker 2015: 56–111).
4. Noah Shenker (2015: 79 and 92–95) describes similar procedures for the choice of witnesses to history for the 'Voices from Auschwitz' and the 'Testimony' installations at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He speaks of an approach 'often akin to film or television casting' (Shenker 2015: 93).
5. The website of the exhibition is: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-london/the-holocaust-exhibition>.



## Chapter 5

# COMMUNICATING

## Witnesses to History as Didactic Tools



**Figure 5.1.** The mirror-image in one of the steles with video testimonies at the Museo Diffuso © Steffi de Jong

### The Visitor's Mirror Image

During one of my visits to the Museo Diffuso, I took a picture that shows a reflection of me in one of the steles with the video testimonies. Apart from myself, the stele also mirrors a sepia-brown photograph of a street view (see Figure 5.1). My head is not as well reflected as the rest of my

body. It is at the height of the video testimony and it is covered by the head of the witness to history on the testimony. The picture illustrates the way in which the Museo Diffuso wishes its video testimonies to be received by visitors. The exhibition makers talk of a 'morphing effect' between the visitor and the witness to history (Bosi interview 2010). The term 'morphing' usually describes the digitally programmed changeover of one portrait into another, made famous by the video clip for the Michael Jackson song 'Black or White'. In the Museo Diffuso the exhibition makers have tried to create an effect in which the visitors visually merge with the witnesses to history. When the visitors look into the mirror of the black stele, they see their body with a face that has partly become that of the witness to history. The face of the witness to history on the video testimony is oversized, so it covers the whole face of the visitor. The sound only works properly if the visitor stands upright and looks directly at the witness to history.

Museums have an educational mission, and this is even more the case for Holocaust and Second World War museums than other museums. The Museo Diffuso wants its visitors to have changed by the end of their visit. In lieu of a visitor book, the Museo invites visitors to write down their thoughts about the exhibition on Post-it notes glued onto a wall. On its website, it publishes pictures of these Post-it notes. Most of them praise the partisans for having fought for freedom or point out the need to continue the fight against injustice. 'I have been overwhelmed by the Resistenza and the will of the partisans against the fascist regime', reads one of them. Another one states: 'Let's defend our constitution!' On a third one, somebody has written: 'We should never stop, we have to continue fighting for freedom. A big thank you to all the partisans that have helped us to reach this freedom.' What the Post-its demonstrate is the way in which the Museo Diffuso wishes its visitors to leave the exhibition – as different people from those who entered: more aware of the war history of Turin, but also more responsible towards their environment, more tolerant and more politically interested. For many of the visitors, this seems to work, at least up to the wall with the Post-its. This transformation is, as the mirror image demonstrates, to take place via identification with the witnesses to history: the visitors are invited partly to take on the identities of the witnesses to history for the time that they watch the testimonies.

As in the Museo Diffuso, most museums invite visitors to relate to witnesses to history. Video testimonies are didactic tools that can be used by museums both to transmit educational messages and to affect their visitors. In this chapter, I will analyse the messages that are transmitted

with the help of video testimonies and the means that are used in order to transmit those messages. I will focus on the ideas of secondary and tertiary witnessing. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the concept of secondary or tertiary witnessing was first used with reference to the testimonies of Holocaust survivors. It describes how the testimonies of survivors are and should be received by later generations. I will here extend this concept and reflect on how it can be used with reference to witnesses other than Holocaust survivors. The primary question for this chapter will therefore be: what kind of secondary or tertiary witnesses are visitors invited to be in the respective museums? This question entails asking which groups and which individuals are actually chosen to give testimony. I will therefore scrutinize who is chosen as a witness to history – and consequently who is not. In the last section, I will move outside of the walls of the museums and will analyse the effects of making video testimonies available online.

## **The Didactics of Museums**

Education has been one of the most important functions of museums since the appearance of the first public museums with the foundation of the British Museum in 1753 and the opening up of the galleries of the Louvre in 1793 (cf. Bennett 1995; Rees Leahy 2012). In the nineteenth-century age of nationalism, museums became a means to educate the masses on how to become responsible citizens in the newly created nation states. This education was, on the one hand, linked to the objects shown in the museums. National museums like the British Museum or the Louvre exhibited artefacts that were considered to be the nation's most important artworks, as well as conquests from abroad. In this way, they presented to their visitors both the nation's heritage and its military and political strength in the world. The British Museum in London, for example, became home to a collection of Egyptian artefacts that Napoleon had brought to France from his military campaigns and that Britain in turn had claimed as booty (Vedder 2005: 161). The most common way to order objects in those museums was teleological. The newly formed nation state appeared as the climax of history. Visitors, as citizens, were invited to consider the nation state as a logical consequence of historical events (cf. Anderson 1983).

But education also happened on a more subtle, less obvious, but even more pertinent level. According to Tony Bennett, the nineteenth-century 'exhibitionary complex', the system of museums, exhibitions and fairs

that popped up at the time, served not only to make the crowds more knowledgeable about ‘their’ history and culture, but also to discipline them. Bennett (1999: 334–35) argues:

The exhibitionary complex was also a response to the problem of order, but one which worked differently in seeking to transform that problem into one of culture – a question of winning hearts and minds as well as the disciplining and training of bodies ... through the provision of object lessons in power – the power to command and arrange things and bodies for public display – they sought to allow the people, and en masse rather than individually, to know rather than be known, to become subjects rather than the objects of knowledge. Yet, ideally, they sought also to allow the people to know and thence to regulate themselves; to become, in seeing themselves from the side of power, both the subjects and the objects of knowledge, knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves as (ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation.

Thus, the architecture of museums and exhibition halls forced visitors not only to look at the objects, but also at themselves. Many museums had galleries from which the visitors could contemplate the museums’ architectural structure; the way in which objects were ordered; as well as the other visitors in the museum. The museal structure was panoptic. It allowed visitors to get an overview of their own history and culture and, at the same time, it urged them to be disciplined (Bennett 1999: 341; Macdonald 2003: 4). Particularly in Britain, the need to organize fairs, open up galleries to the public and found museums was often considered a necessity in educating the working classes to become proper and orderly citizens of the nation state (Bennett 1999: 344ff). Museums moulded people into adopting bourgeois codes of behaviour such as speaking in low voices, walking slowly and demurely, and not touching the exhibited objects (Rees Leahy 2012). How much this behaviour has been internalized by visitors since it was introduced in the nineteenth century can be exemplified by the fact that hands-on exhibitions are now required to point out that exhibits can be touched. Equally, any exhibition that presents history in a nonteleological, nonlinear manner tends to have to explain its choice.

The messages that are transmitted by exhibitions and the means to transmit these messages have of course evolved over time. Many museums do still communicate blatantly nationalist messages, but in an ever-greater number of museums, messages of tolerance, multiculturalism, respect for the Other, and human rights have been added to or replaced those purely nationalist messages. A large number of national museums no longer wish their local visitors to leave the museum as good citizens of the nation state,

or their foreign visitors to be impressed by their respective national cultures; they want all of them to leave the museum as responsible global citizens.

At the same time, although interactivity has always been a concern for museums (Griffiths 2004, 2008), it is probably fair to say that since the new museology (Vergo 1989) and the appearance of digital media in museums, interactivity as a didactic tool has reached a new level. Many museums do not just exhibit objects anymore; they ask their visitors actively to engage with those objects. Steven Conn has recently even provokingly asked: ‘Do museums still need objects?’ (Conn 2010). The example of the Museo Diffuso shows that museums can be founded without any intention of exhibiting objects, now or in the future. Like in the Museo Diffuso, it is now often ideas and the wish to educate – rather than the existence of a collection or the wish to collect – that leads to the foundation of museums. Thus, when the – now failed – project of a national history museum in the Netherlands was launched in 2006, it was launched as a consequence of the realization that the Dutch did not know enough about their own history. There was, however, no plan as to where the collection for the museum would come from. Early plans for the museum even foresaw a museum without objects (van Hasselt 2008).

Video testimonies are one of these new tools that museums use in order to communicate specific educative messages to their visitors. As has been shown in Chapter 4, video testimonies can be presented as primary museum objects, as comments to those primary museum objects or as design elements. This possibility of using video testimonies for multiple purposes also makes them particularly apt to transmit multiple messages.

## **The Didactics of Memorial Museums**

As observed in the Introduction, memorial museums combine the function of honouring the dead of the memorial with that of providing the contextual explanations common to history museums (Williams 2007: 8). The particular messages that are communicated of course differ from case to case. Nevertheless, three main didactic messages can be discerned. First, memorial museums provide their visitors with historical knowledge of a period, an event or a place. Visitors should ideally leave the exhibition with a deeper historical knowledge than when they entered it. Second, as memorial institutions, memorial museums are about remembering and mourning the dead. They generally have a rather solemn tone. This solemnity becomes especially apparent when, as in the case of the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition, the exhibition is part of a larger museum

complex. The Holocaust Exhibition is located on the last floor of the Imperial War Museum, far away from the gloss of weapons, boats, planes and uniforms on the previous floors. The visitor has to pass a guard when entering the exhibition, who asks them to switch off their mobile phones and informs them that, unlike in most of the Museum's other exhibitions, they are not allowed to take pictures. Children are not allowed in the space. Inside the exhibition, it is quieter than in any other part of the museum, and the exhibition aesthetics are purer and more minimalistic. Third, the transmission of the supposedly global values of human rights has come to play a particularly important role in memorial museums. In the case of the Museo Diffuso, its full name – the Widespread Museum of the Resistance, Deportation, the War, Rights and Freedom – makes it apparent that the message is as much about the Second World War in Turin as it is about democracy, tolerance, freedom and human rights. Avner Shalev, the director of Yad Vashem, again observed at the museum's opening that 'it is Yad Vashem's hope that the compassion generated by the new Holocaust History Museum will give visitors a more meaningful experience, raising their personal commitment to higher moral values today and in the future' (Goldstein 2005: 7). This third didactic message of memorial museums underlies the first and the second messages and is transmitted via those messages.

The combination of critical evaluation of a historical event, commemoration and the transmission of norms and values is nowhere as vital as in the case of memorial museums located on the sites of mass suffering, such as concentration camps. With the imminent disappearance of the last witnesses of the past, as well as a heightened perception of the need to learn from the past, the educational role of concentration-camp memorials – and hence their function as museums – has become ever more important. While, especially in Western Germany, they were for a long time first and foremost the location of commemorations, concentration-camp memorials are now, as the former director of the Ravensbrück memorial, Sigrid Jakobeit (2002: 22), observes, 'national sites of memory in Europe with historical, museological, pedagogical and especially humane duties'. That video testimonies are increasingly inserted into the exhibitions of these memorials is also a consequence of this extension of duties. The witnesses of the past that used to gather around the monuments on the occasion of memorial ceremonies have, on the verge of their disappearance, passed from a pure memorial space into a museal and openly didactic one.

## Secondary and Tertiary Witnessing

As we have seen in Chapter 2, Dori Laub has argued that it is the listener who allows the narration of the trauma of a Holocaust survivor in the first place. According to Laub (Felman and Laub 1992: 57–58), the listener should act as an interested counterpart and partly take on the survivor's trauma:

the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his function as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that its henceforth impossible witnessing can indeed take place. The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past. The listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony.

As was alluded to in Chapter 3, Ulrich Baer (2000) has defined this second-generation reception of survivor testimony as 'sekundäre Zeugenschaft' (secondary witnessing).<sup>1</sup> For Baer, secondary witnessing does not merely describe the way in which survivor testimonies are received by a second generation; rather, it is a normative concept that determines how the testimonies of Holocaust survivors should be received. Baer (2000: 11), like Laub, considers the act of secondary witnessing as a moral and ethical duty. First, it is only through secondary witnessing that the witnesses' testimonies become possible: 'For the truth of the extreme traumatic experience to be revealed, the eyewitnesses need some kind of audience that can be conceived as secondary witnesses, as witnesses through imagination, as "witnesses of memory" ... When the original witnesses want to talk, their burden has to be shared'. Second, the secondary witnesses not only have to listen to the testimonies, they also have to evaluate them critically and pass them on to future generations. For Baer, a critical evaluation of the testimonies does not cast doubt on their genuineness; rather, it is a necessity in order for the testimonies to survive the test of time. Critical evaluation therefore assures that testimonies do not end up in the archive, but become part of the canon (Assmann 2006: 54). Baer (2000: 19) observes:

If the testimonies are left to themselves in the name of a sacrosanct authenticity, they will disappear in an avalanche of documents. History does not tell itself on

its own, and the testimonies that radically put into question our conception of culture, language and humanity, and that bring us to the verge of what is knowable and conceivable, are everything but self-evident. The testimonies of the survivors require critical and creative replies.

The secondary witness is therefore not merely an active witness to the survivors' testimonies, in a way, she or he also becomes a second-generation witness to history. She or he gives testimony on the survivors' testimonies. For Baer (2000: 18), secondary witnessing is thus also about taking responsibility for the present and the future: 'If we leave testimony to the victims themselves, we are missing the chance to look at the suffering of others in connection to our own history and to become aware of our own role and responsibility in this history and in the present.' In this sense, secondary witnessing also means learning from history. It means evaluating the present and planning the future in relation to the past.

While they invite the listeners to relate to the survivors, both Baer and Laub rule out a full identification with the victims. Laub (Felman and Laub 1992: 58) observes that 'while overlapping, to a degree, with the experiences of the victim, he [the listener] nonetheless does not become the victim – he preserves his own separate place, position and perspective; a battleground for forces raging in himself, to which he has to pay attention and respect if he is to properly carry out his task'. Baer (2000: 18) specifies that secondary witnessing 'is not about identifying with the victims. With the attempt of identification, the brutal assault to the identity of the victims that characterizes the traumatic experience is passed over and misconceived in favour of a psychological satisfaction of the listener through a projection of the self on others'. Thus, while the listeners should relate to the survivors, partly absorb their trauma and pass it on, they should not imagine themselves as survivors. While the designers of the Museo Diffuso imagined a morphing between visitor and witness to history, Baer and Laub promote transference in the psychoanalytical sense. The listeners are supposed partly to absorb the witnesses' trauma, help the witnesses work through their trauma and transmit their testimony to future generations. They will thereby – according to Baer – become more responsible citizens.<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter 3, Caroline Wake has criticized the concept of secondary witnessing for ignoring the mediation of video testimonies and has therefore proposed the concepts of hypermediate and immediate tertiary witnessing. Like Laub and Baer, Wake underlines the moral need of an emotional engagement with the witnesses to history. The medium of the video testimony might even facilitate this process. First, Wake argues, the video testimony 'witnesses for the witness'. It thereby takes away 'the



burden of repetition' from the primary witnesses who do not have to repeat their stories in front of new audiences (Wake 2013: 132). Second, the video testimony allows the spectators to act out 'ethically ambiguous responses' and work through them without putting more distress on the witnesses to history. Third, it allows the viewers to practise listening and to rehearse to become secondary witnesses (Wake 2013: 133). The exhibition of video testimonies in museums could be considered as favourable, especially in respect to the latter two ethical functions of video testimonies. However, as we will see, museums leave their viewers only marginal spaces of individual interpretation. Moreover, while the medium of video testimony might help to take away the burden of giving testimony again from the primary witness, it also allows their testimonies to be cut, reassembled and moulded into a narrative that they were not originally part of. In this way, it allows the curators to guide the responses of the visitors and to define the conclusions that they draw from them.

The idea of secondary witnessing has also been criticized for naively presupposing the existence of a homogeneous memorial community. Thus, Ulrike Jureit (Jureit and Schneider 2010: 87) observes that the concept of secondary witnessing has the potential to evoke in the secondary witnesses the feeling that they are the direct inheritors of the survivors' memories: 'This concept of secondary witnessing, when it is not used as an analytical instrument for the interpretation of current speaker positions, stands for a generational strategy of self-accreditation, that sees itself in a hereditary relationship to the Holocaust survivors and that derives interpretive authority from them.' For Jureit (Jureit and Schneider 2010: 86ff), the moral obligation that Baer defines for secondary witnessing – the need to listen to testimonies, pass them on and interpret them so as to learn from them for the present and future – has been converted into a feeling of moral superiority by those who consider themselves secondary witnesses: they come to see themselves as the direct inheritors of the survivors.

Jureit (Jureit and Schneider 2010: 86ff), who concentrates on the German memorial context, observes that many of those who assume the role of secondary witnesses to Holocaust survivors are the direct descendants of the perpetrators, or at least of the bystanders (Hilberg 1992), the majority of the population who watched or tried to ignore what was happening. Jureit suggests that by identifying with the witnesses, those who see themselves as secondary witnesses avoid memories that are more difficult to accept: the memories of their own families who either participated in the crime or at least did not intervene. For Jureit and Schneider (2010: 11), German memorial culture is defined by identification with the victims, which in turn leads to what they call an 'Erlösungsversprechen'

(promise of redemption), based on the idea that ‘whoever remembers the massive German crimes candidly and intensively enough can hope for conciliation or even redemption from hereditary guilt’. They propose a different memorial culture that would ask questions that have rarely been addressed so far, such as ‘what was deemed good about National Socialism?’ (Jureit and Schneider 2010: 16). They therefore argue for the inclusion of uncomfortable memories in the cultural memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War.

It is not only in Germany that the idea of secondary witnessing begs the question of whom exactly we can, and should, be secondary witnesses to. Will it be possible to become a secondary witness to perpetrators, for example? And even if we concentrate on the victims, is it possible to be a secondary witness to somebody with a completely different sociocultural background from our own? What about morally challenging memories? What about the memories of survivors who stole food from others or who denounced their friends in order to save their own lives? The public presentation of video testimonies in museums considerably increases the number of potential witnesses to the witnesses to history’s testimonies. In what follows, I will analyse the groups of witnesses to history that are chosen for the video testimonies and will scrutinize the types of secondary – or rather tertiary – witnessing that visitors are invited to enact in the different museums.

### *Victims*

By far the largest number of video testimonies in Holocaust museums involve victims. If the introduction of video testimonies into museums is about giving a voice back to the victims, it is also, following the idea of secondary and tertiary witnessing, about passing on their memories to visitors. It is about not forgetting – ever. This memorial goal is accompanied by several secondary didactic messages. Video testimonies with victims, while being used to induce visitors to become immediate tertiary witnesses, are also used to give them lessons in history and morals, and to affect them emotionally.

### *Tertiary Witnessing and Teaching History*

As I have observed in Chapter 4, victim testimonies are generally represented in two forms in museums: as ‘biographical video points’ concentrating on the biography of an individual witness; and as ‘topical video points’ illustrating a specific topic. Topical video points are

more frequently used than biographical video points. The Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem, for example, only use topical video points.

Topical video points provide the visitors with historical information. Most commonly, they are used as sources that communicate what cannot be represented by other objects: experiences or feelings. Recurring themes in the video testimonies with victims are hunger, fear, loss, mistreatment, torture and death. Thus, in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, where liberation is represented through the pictures taken by the British liberators of emaciated prisoners sitting between heaps of corpses, the topical video point 'Liberation' adds the views of the liberated to those of the liberators. Some of the testimonies are merely descriptive, giving additional information to what can be seen in the pictures. Thus, one witness remembers: 'Then loudspeakers were driven around the camp, and they told us in several languages, "You're free now, but you can't leave the camp, the war isn't over yet. You'll all get food and water. Stay calm. You can go wherever you please inside the camp, but you mustn't leave the camp. The war isn't over yet"' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 254). Other testimonies are more personal. They illustrate what it was like to be emaciated and half-dead:

We realized that the end was near, because the SS men and the SS women were walking around wearing white armbands and a white flag of surrender was hanging over the camp. So we knew that it was coming to an end. But we also knew that we couldn't last much longer. I knew that I was losing strength by the hour. (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 254)

Another survivor remembers:

I went out and someone pointed at a tank near the entrance to the camp, and they said it was a British tank. But it didn't get through to me anymore, it didn't seem to make any difference. My mind was so weakened and exhausted, it just didn't make any difference. I knew my mother was dying, I knew I couldn't last much longer. (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 254)

However, the historical messages forwarded with the help of topical video points are not limited to personalized topical knowledge. Curators are generally careful to arrange extracts in such a way as to instruct visitors on how to interpret the historical information they are confronted with. In this way, they forward one particular historical narrative to the detriment of others. In the case of the topical video point 'Liberation', for example, the curators have arranged the extracts in such a way as to prevent liberation from appearing as closure or as a happy ending. Instead,

liberation is exhibited as part of the whole tragedy of the Holocaust. The Bergen-Belsen Memorial's representation of liberation here echoes the Fortunoff Archive's and especially Lawrence L. Langer's treatment of video testimonies as what Noah Shenker has called 'anti-redemptive' (cf. 2015: Shenker 23–26, 52–55). Only one survivor remembers euphoric outbursts by the prisoners: 'The people were terribly excited when the word "freedom" came through the loudspeaker. The tanks were accompanied by a jeep with a loudspeaker. They said that from that point on, we were under the protection of the Anglo-American troops. Everyone was free. Everyone shouted "Hurrah!" The trees could hear how happy the people were' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 255). This positive statement is immediately corrected by another, more desperate one. One witness remembers:

I looked to the right, I looked to the left and I thought, 'We're free to do what? To die?' We're free, but what does that mean, being free? We're lying on the ground, without food, without water, in a state you can't describe. It's impossible to describe it! How are we free? What does that mean, being free? Free to do what? (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 255)

The next witnesses recall not being able to react at all because of their weakness: 'I was lying on my bed; I was very weak by then. Then I heard somebody say, "Free, free! English! Australian! Soldier! English!"' – 'When the English arrived, they lifted me up, one held me here and one down there. I was only skin and bone – I weighed 29 kilos. You may not believe it, but my shoulder would have fit through this' – 'I couldn't be happy about it, I just couldn't. It was incomprehensible. You lived in a daze. I didn't really register it at all. Also, my sister was dying. I tried to do something for her, but she couldn't eat anymore' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 255). The very last statement in the video testimony summarizes the previous ones and closes the video testimony on a negative note, one that suggests that liberation was not the end of suffering: 'There was no euphoria. We knew we were liberated, but somehow I couldn't perceive that this was the end. I was, for want of a better word, in a stupor. I knew what was going on, but I couldn't perceive it. And I was lethargic, I didn't laugh or smile, I couldn't be happy' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 255).

As a general rule, the last statements in the video testimonies in museums have been chosen very carefully. It is those sentences that, one expects, will stay with the visitors for a long time, and it is with those sentences that the curators advance their most important messages. In the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the negative last statement in the topical

video point 'Liberation' is taken up and pursued in the following topical video points. Thus, the following video point 'Living on between Loss and New Beginnings', which treats life in the Displaced Persons Camp, ends with the sentence: 'The next stage for us was to get our strength back, to transform our previous life into a new one, to start to build our own life with commitment and with the will to get back to society' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 331). The last topical video point in the exhibition, 'Emigration', ends with the following words:

We were willing to go any place. They were looking for seamstresses in Australia, we registered to go to Australia. They were looking for farmhands in Canada, we registered to go to Canada. Wherever they were recruiting, we always were willing to go, as long as we'd get out of there. Because staying in Germany was a strain on us every day. (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 363)

The last sentences of the topical video points 'Living on between Loss and New Beginnings' and 'Emigration' suggest that the struggle for life was not over after liberation, but, on the contrary, continued in the Displaced Persons Camp. The curators leave the visitors with a criticism of postwar German politics and, in this way, invite them to take responsibility for the past.

In contrast to topical video points, biographical video points concentrate on the biographies of individual survivors. Although the complete testimonies on which they are based have been heavily edited and reduced to a few minutes, biographical video points nevertheless come closest to the idea of secondary and tertiary witnessing as advanced by Laub, Baer or Wake. With biographical video points, visitors are invited to concentrate on the experiences of one single witness. Interestingly, all of the biographical video points in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and most of those in the Neuengamme Memorial do not concentrate not on the witnesses' experience in the camp, but on their journey to the respective camps. The videos end with their arrival at the camp. The biographical video points are used to present the victims as active individuals – for example, when a partisan fighter remembers her contribution to the Warsaw Uprising – or to illustrate the suffering that preceded the suffering in the camp – for example, when a witness to history recalls life in the ghetto or the death march.

In addition, also here, we find a concern with history education. The individual witnesses to history who are chosen for the exhibitions often critically reflect on their experiences. Thus, in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Wanda Broszkowska-Piklikiewicz (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation

2010: 120), who fought in the Warsaw Uprising, puts into perspective the Polish wartime propaganda:

The love of our country, its traditions, its history, the entire patriotic education, all that had a much higher significance than politics. This is our home country – back then people didn't talk about the defence of the home country yet – that started later, during the occupation. I believe that all children of the Polish intelligentsia received such a deeply patriotic education. People were taught that the home country was the most important thing in the world.

Of course we knew that Hitler had come to power, that the Kristallnacht had happened. We knew about all of these terrible things, even if nobody suspected that this was only the beginning of this horrible catastrophe in Europe. What I heard as a child was that the Germans had nothing to eat, just their stew, that their tanks were made out of cardboard and so on. There would be no war. 'We won't give up a single button!', that was the slogan our leadership had given out. And then they came on their motorcycles, dressed like creatures from another planet that you see on television. That was terrifying, the clash between the propaganda and the reality. They were strong, impressive, crushing.

Through Wanda Broszkowska-Piklikiewicz's testimony, the visitors themselves are induced to reflect on propaganda and patriotism in general. They are invited to evaluate the past and the present critically. Broszkowska-Piklikiewicz is not primarily presented as a heroic resistance fighter; in the testimony she does not talk much about what she did during the Warsaw Uprising. Instead, she appears as somebody who has learned from life.

Other stories in the biographical video points invite the visitors to reflect on their decisions in everyday life. Giuseppe Cigognetti, for example (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 108), a former Italian prisoner of war, remembers:

When we arrived in Fallingbosten camp, there was a street lined with apple trees, and apples were lying on the ground. But woe betide anyone who picked up an apple ... There was an older woman with a child, and she spit at us. That really affected me, that a woman, a mother, would see this column of prisoners going by and pretend to spit at us ... There were apples all over the ground. We were very hungry, but because of the guards, we couldn't pick up a single apple.

In contrast to Giuseppe Cigognetti, Catherine Morgan (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 229), who arrived in Bergen-Belsen on a death march, remembers acts of humanity in the most hostile circumstances:

And then I recall vividly we went across either a huge lake or a huge river. And it was frozen, but we didn't know how thick the ice was. So again the 'brave' soldiers took a few of us and sent us ahead to see if the ice was strong enough to

hold us. When we came back, they marched us across. This was when I had the one and only nice encounter I remember. I understood later that he must have been a Wehrmacht soldier, because he was elderly. I was obsessed with cleanliness despite the fact that I was starved. Hunger wasn't the first issue. I was forever washing myself in the snow and trying to keep myself as 'near' as I could. And he observed me and called out to me, saying, 'Come here, young girl, you'll see that one day you'll look beautiful. You'll comb your hair and do yourself up nicely.' And I was always dreaming of a hot bath and how nice it would be. But that was the only good word I ever heard. It stayed with me all those years, I'll always remember that.

Both Giuseppe Cigognetti and Catherine Morgan's testimonies present the visitors with a range of responses to inhumane situations. They invite them to evaluate what they would have done themselves, and thereby to reflect critically on and draw lessons from the past. Would they have offered an apple to the prisoners or have spat at them? Would they have comforted the young prisoner or have despised her?

Both topical video points and biographical video points are thus crafted in such a way as to transmit knowledge on particular historical events to the visitors, while at the same time instructing them on how to interpret those events. Through the choice of extracts for the video testimonies, through the arrangement of those extracts and through the choice of last sentences, curators forward certain historical narratives and certain interpretations of the past to the detriment of others. The narrative of the topical video point 'Liberation', for example, would change considerably if the euphoric statement of the witness to history remembering that 'the trees could hear how happy the people were' was chosen as its last statement instead of the one of the witness to history who remembers that she 'couldn't be happy' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 255). Liberation would then have appeared as a happy ending.

### *Tertiary Witnessing and Moral Education*

Apart from being used in order to give history lessons, many of the video testimonies are also designed to give moral lessons to the visitors. Many museums show video testimonies in which victims reflect on their life after the Holocaust, typically at the end of their exhibitions. These final video testimonies allow the visitors to take into consideration a victim's entire life and to consider the traces that the past has left on their psyche. It is also with these last video testimonies that the curators forward the most poignant didactic messages.

Thus, one of the survivors in the final video testimony in the Imperial War Museum observes that she is often asked how she has been able to

forgive, given that she has German friends. 'Forgive? I forgive nothing!', she observes. Another survivor, Rudy Kennedy, observes that he 'has an animal instinct for nasty people'. He mistrusts people instantly. It is his experiences during the Holocaust that have given him this instinct, he says. With these and similar statements, visitors are encouraged to reflect on the issues of forgiving and leaving behind the past, but also on the traces that the past has left on the survivors.

In the final video testimony in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Rudolf Weiß (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 372), who had been persecuted as a 'gipsy', talks about the discrimination that he has had to face until this day:

The worst thing is all this discrimination. The people here, in this building, are good friends of ours, but as soon as we go elsewhere, it's over. Then there's trouble. And the things they ... 'Look, there are Gypsies. Watch out they don't steal anything.'

I've often wanted to say, 'Now look out. I've been experiencing this for such a long time...' But it seems it's impossible to get rid of it in Germany. My father suffered it, I've suffered it, and now my children suffer as well.

It happens again and again that people remind us of it. But we haven't done anything. We have all these problems because of it, it's impossible! Here in this building and around it, it's alright. But in Minden, there are people who've always been against us. I don't know why that is, whether it's inbred or something like that, I don't know. I couldn't tell.

With this extract from Rudolf Weiß's testimony, the Holocaust is put into a larger historical perspective, and the xenophobia and prejudices that led to mass murder are presented as phenomena that have endured to this day. Visitors are encouraged to reflect on discrimination in their own society and to remember that the circumstances leading to the Holocaust have not been entirely overcome.

In a second extract from the final video testimony in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Henrietta Kelly (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 372) reflects on the legacy of the Holocaust for herself and for the world in general:

It didn't happen in another lifetime or to somebody else, it happened to me in my childhood. I always react as a true refugee. I'm in contact with other survivors in London, and I see in them what I know is mine. They don't see it in me, because I sound so English. They can't believe it with me. Well, some do, but on the whole, people don't really understand it at all. I don't blame them, because I sound like an Englishwoman, don't I? I couldn't be more [English], but I'm not. I'm a foreign woman, and what happened to me shouldn't happen. But presumably it happens to others everywhere in the world now. Perhaps not with such careful planning. It's



the planning that makes it different, the clever, high-tech ability, which was put to such a rotten use. But of course people are being tortured, maimed and damaged all over the world in this day. We all know it, don't we?

Through the choice of Henrietta Kelly's testimony, the curators address several questions that have been the subject of discussion in Holocaust memory and Holocaust studies since the end of the war. Like most of the witnesses to history in the topical video point 'Liberation', Kelly refrains from presenting liberation as closure. As integrated into British culture as she might seem, she continues to feel like a foreigner and a refugee. The extract also allows the curators to address the issue of learning from the Holocaust. For Kelly, no lessons have been drawn. Genocides are still happening every day without anybody intervening. However, while addressing this issue, she insists on the difference of the Holocaust from other genocides and therefore on its uniqueness. On leaving the exhibition, visitors are invited to reflect on their own actions and the human suffering that is going on in the world, without, however, questioning the unique character of the Holocaust. Kelly's testimony therefore allowed the curators to stress the need to learn from the Holocaust and at the same time to emphasize the topos of the Holocaust as a civilizational break (Diner 1988).

Some of the clips for the video testimonies in the final exhibition chapters explicitly invite visitors to become tertiary witnesses. 'Nobody has learned. Maybe a testimony like mine is to be a warning for future generations', says the survivor Kitty Hart in the Imperial War Museum. Another survivor observes: 'I have survived in order to give testimony.' In the final video testimony in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Rudy Kennedy (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 373) reflects on the postwar years and his difficulty in finding an audience for his stories:

I didn't talk to people because they would not believe me. They couldn't believe me. Nobody can believe what really went on. Nobody asked me. They said, 'Oh, you were in a camp!', and changed the subject. For 50 years, nobody asked me, 'What happened to you? Where were you? How was it?' Even from the Jews here. They couldn't cope with it.

Well, [my children] thought I had some tattoo which went wrong, I don't know. I told my children that it was my telephone number until my oldest daughter said, 'Dad, we checked it out, there's no such telephone number. What is it?' And eventually I told them.

This extract from Rudy Kennedy's testimony, while inviting visitors to become tertiary witnesses, also casts into doubt the possibility of verbalizing the experience of the Holocaust and of initiating a dialogue with people who have not had the same experiences.

As with Kennedy's testimony, the incomprehensibility – both for the victims themselves and for the visitors – of that which is being narrated and the difficulty of finding the right words are underlined in many video testimonies. The witnesses to history frequently break off sentences, search for metaphors or observe that they cannot find the words to describe what they have seen. Thus, in a topical video point entitled 'Mass Death' in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, one witness to history stops talking because she does not want to, or cannot, verbalize what she is about to say – namely that the starved prisoners started to drink urine: 'But there was no water. There was no water. Not to mention food. There was nothing at all. But water! Water! That was terrible! To be without water ... The girls drank ... *Excuse me*' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 234, my italics). Another survivor reflects on the impossibility of describing hunger: 'Hunger is something – it's impossible to comprehend. *It's impossible to understand!* In Bergen-Belsen I saw with my own eyes: a man was sitting there and he took flesh from a dead person, from what was still there, so that he could eat it' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 234, my italics). 'We died like ... *I can't even tell you.* And lice! Millions of lice! Millions!' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 235, my italics) recalls a third one. Apart from breaking off sentences, witnesses to history also frequently resort to metaphor. In the Imperial War Museum's audio stations in the chapter on the 'Final Solution' and Auschwitz for example, several of the witnesses to history observe that on their arrival they thought that they had come to a 'mad house' or a 'lunatic asylum'. The repetition of words, the pauses, the metaphors and the recurring observations that what is being recalled cannot be put into words underline the horror of the situation and the difficulty of comprehending the Holocaust. In accordance with the theory of secondary witnessing, a complete identification with the witnesses to history is in those video testimonies suppressed. Since it seems impossible to find words for what has happened, the visitors are here invited to become witnesses to this incomprehensibility.

### *Tertiary Witnessing and Emotionalization*

In Chapter 2, I observed that one of the strongest criticisms of how video testimonies are used in TV documentaries is that they are cut to short statements of a few seconds and that 'objectivity is increasingly replaced by emotionality' (Keilbach 2008: 141); that video testimonies are, in Frank Bösch's (2008: 67) words, reduced to an 'MTV-format'. Tony Kushner (2001: 92), analysing the use of video testimonies in the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, has used a similar argument: 'it has

become a trope of Holocaust documentary tradition when the camera zooms in on the crying survivor at the critical moment in narrating loss'. It is true that in museums, crying survivors can occasionally be seen, but museums do not seem deliberately to choose extracts in which survivors break into tears. The statements that witnesses to history give in the video testimonies in museums are also generally longer than the ones in TV documentaries, and a dramatic musical score or a dramatizing voiceover commentator are missing.

Nevertheless, also in the video testimonies in museums, visitors are encouraged to engage emotionally with the witnesses to history. Incidentally, the stories that are chosen, while being the most interesting ones, are also the most graphic and therefore affecting ones, as the following examples show: 'Naked corpses ... And all I did was look for my mother. I could remember that my mother had black hair. So I went to the corpses and looked at their heads to see if my mother happened to be among them. But I never found her', remembers Yvonne Koch (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 235) in the topical video point 'Mass Death' in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. In the Imperial War Museum, the survivor Roman Halter talks about how his best friend Karl Eschner turned away from him, joined the SS and finally denounced and mistreated him. Another witness remembers hiding her engagement ring underneath her tongue, hoping that it would not be found during the check-up before entering the camp – thereby risking her life. In a third testimony, a survivor recalls an SS woman taking a toad and throwing it to the floor, declaring: 'This is what I would like to do to all of you.' The emotional effect of these extracts is intensified by the fact that the extracts are excised from entire testimonies and set alongside other, similarly graphic and emotionalizing ones. What visitors are left with in the video testimonies in museums is the 'best of', so to speak – a series of the most emotionally engaging clips.

An affective result is also created through the arrangement of the different extracts. The video testimonies in the museums often end in emotional climax: with the death or deportation of loved ones. Thus, in the Imperial War Museum, the video testimony on the ghettos closes with a witness remembering how her brother volunteered to be deported instead of his mother. The mother refused. The witness pleaded with her to agree, saying that she could live without a brother, but that she could not live without a mother. The end of the story is left open. The visitors never get to know what happened either to the mother or to the brother. Similarly, in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the biographical video point with Esther Reiss (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 203), who recalls her life in

the Lodz ghetto, ends with the deportation of her mother and her two siblings:

The Germans came and fired shots into the air. Everyone had to get out, my mother, my two sisters, my brother and I – critically ill. They took my brother and sister out of the yard to the truck. I pulled my mother to my side as they had not taken me, but the policeman dragged her away. I said that it was better for a mother to be there if her children were being taken away. No one could imagine where they were going.

I thought that it would be better for the children if my mother stayed with the two others. I went upstairs, collected their rucksacks and gave them to them. I said, ‘Mother, perhaps we’ll come too’. I meant my sister and I. Mother said, ‘Children, stay at home until we return’. And they were taken away on the truck and my sister and I stayed behind.

Comments in writing at the end of the testimony tell the visitor that ‘Esther Reiss’s mother and her two younger siblings were deported to the Chełmno extermination camp and murdered’.

The secondary witness is, as observed above, supposed to ‘feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels’ (Felman and Laub 1992: 57). However, the idea of secondary witnessing as proposed by Baer or Laub foresees that the secondary witness will watch the whole testimony and follow the survivor through her or his experiences. Entire testimonies can be tedious and long. In museums, the video testimonies are arranged in such a way as to facilitate the visitors’ emotional engagement. To come back to Dori Laub, the visitors are presented with the moments of ‘dread and conflicts’, but not with everything inbetween. The visitors become tertiary witnesses to meticulously selected and mediated extracts of the video testimonies.

*Representing ‘The Millions Who Simply Disappeared’ But Remaining Close to the Visitors*

Like other museum objects, video testimonies are representative (‘Vertretung’) of a larger entity. As we have seen, in Holocaust museums this entity is in the first place all of the victims of the Holocaust who are not and cannot be part of the exhibition. ‘Very few people had to speak on behalf of the millions who simply disappeared. We had to universalise their experiences while at the same time retaining the intimate and personal’, observes interviewer Annie Dodds about the video testimonies in the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition (cited in Kushner 2001: 91). In the Imperial War Museum, this universal value of the testimonies is underlined by the way in which the video testimonies are exhibited. The

names of the witnesses to history are often only shown at the beginning of the video testimonies, and in the chapter on Auschwitz and the so-called 'Final Solution', both the names and the faces eventually remain hidden from the visitors. It was with surprise that, after having finished the exhibition, the curators realized that it was possible to follow certain individual witnesses' biographies over the course of the exhibition (Barker interview 2009). In the Imperial War Museum, the biographies were never meant to stand for themselves alone. Indeed, in many extracts, the witnesses to history speak in the first-person plural rather than in the first-person singular. When I made the curators aware of this and asked whether it was a curatorial choice to use the clips with this feature, Suzanne Bardgett observed that it had happened by chance. For her, the use of the first-person plural can be explained by the fact that many survivors always talk in the name of the other victims and those who went through the experiences with them (Bardgett interview 2009). Whatever the explanation for the use of the first-person plural might be, it underlines the representative ('Vertretung') function of the video testimonies.

In most museums, the representative function of the witnesses to history for 'the millions who simply disappeared' is underlined by the presentation of a diversity of experiences and sociocultural backgrounds. To speak in museum terms: one specimen from each subgroup of the larger whole is included in the exhibition. In the Imperial War Museum, this diversity is particularly underlined in the very first video testimony, which is presented in the lobby. Here, the witnesses to history talk about their prewar lives. Testimonies of upbringing in a poor family follow those of upbringing in a rich family; those of happy childhoods those of difficult ones; witnesses to history with a religious background speak after witnesses with a secular background; and Jewish witnesses have been put next to a Jehovah's witness. One of the motivations behind the exhibition of video testimonies in the Imperial War Museum was to show that the victims of the Holocaust were ordinary people. Annie Dodds knew from a survey of British schoolchildren's attitudes towards Jewish victims of Nazi persecution that many children had come to the conclusion that the victims themselves had done something to deserve their fate (Barker interview 2009). The opening video of the exhibition disrupts a potentially stereotyped view of the victims of the Holocaust as 'the Jews'. However, the diversity shown at the beginning gradually disappears over the course of the exhibition, when the witnesses' experiences become merely examples of a common theme. This has the unfortunate effect that the narrative of the exhibition follows the rationale of persecution for racial reasons: a diverse group of ordinary people was

rendered equal according to racist laws and turned into a homogenous victim group.

In concentration-camp memorials, diversity is often represented as national diversity. In the second room of the Neuengamme Memorial, 'Different Groups of Prisoners', the prisoners are grouped according to their country of origin. By classifying the victims in this way, memorials avoid National Socialist classifications and thus a second codification of the survivors according to the reasons for their persecution. Although prisoners were often ordered by nationality in the camps, they were not persecuted because of their nationality, but for racist and political reasons. A classification by nationality also assumes the characteristics of the memorialization of concentration-camp victims that, since the first ceremonies, has consisted in the different nations remembering 'their' victims. However, classification by nationality also tends to homogenize differences within the different national groups. The experiences of a German political dissident and a German Jew before, during and after the war were very different. These differences only become apparent when the visitor watches the video testimonies. Moreover, after the war, many victims migrated to countries that were far away from the ones they were originally from, so that their nationalities have changed over the years. This migrant identity of the witnesses to history is rarely taken into consideration when classifying the video testimonies – although it is of course frequently alluded to in the video testimonies themselves. By classifying them according to national groups, the survivors are therefore often made representative of a subgroup that might not be representable – and, one imagines, a given witness might not want to be representative of.

Although the museums try to represent the diversity of the victims, their depiction generally tends towards homogenization. Both physically and with respect to their sociocultural background, the witnesses to history often resemble the museums' main target audience. It was, for example, a criterion for the selection of witnesses to history in the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum that they spoke English. In fact, most of them are British residents. Considering that the majority of Holocaust survivors did not migrate to the United Kingdom and that most of them have not been socialized in British culture, this is therefore a fairly unrepresentative sample. Not only have the witnesses to history here been socialized in Britain, all of them physically resemble ordinary British people. None of the witnesses wears a kippah, the small round hat worn by religious Jewish men, for example, and none of them has a long beard or payots, the side-locks typical of strictly orthodox

Jewish men. Although most of the witnesses to history in the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition are Jews, none of them can be optically recognized as such. According to the wish of the exhibition makers, the witnesses to history in the video testimonies in the Imperial War Museum appear as very ordinary indeed. Despite the fact that all of them are immigrants and some of them speak with a strong accent, they are people who the majority of British visitors will relate to without a problem. Similarly, in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, where the majority of the witnesses to history are Jewish, none of the witnesses can optically be recognized as such.

The witnesses to history in the Imperial War Museum and in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial contrast with those in Yad Vashem. In Yad Vashem, some of the witnesses to history on the video testimonies – though not the majority – wear a kippah or are otherwise recognizable as Jews. Some of them also give testimony on holding Jewish rituals in the most hostile of circumstances. Shmuel Daitch Ben Menachem, for example, recalls blowing the shofar, the horn blown on Jewish New Year Rosh Hashanah, in the Kovno ghetto. Religious subjects are rarely approached in the other museums that I have analysed here.

The diversity of witnesses to history in the museums mirrors the visitors to the museums – and for that matter the people on the streets in the respective cities. While orthodox Jews and men wearing a kippah characterize the street picture in Jerusalem, they are far less common in London or in Germany. However, Yad Vashem has also been criticized for its lack of ultra-orthodox testimony. Meir Wikler (2012), in an article in the Israeli Daily Newspaper *Haaretz*, has observed that while 'according to some experts 50%–70% of those murdered by the Nazis, were "traditionally religious Jews" ... in the rooms of Yad Vashem only one of the 50–60 video monitors playing taped testimonies of Holocaust survivors shows a Haredi Jew'. This video testimony, Wikler argues, was only introduced after criticism was raised that Yad Vashem's representation of Holocaust victims was one-sided. Wikler (2012) observes that 'by choosing to record and display taped testimonies of mostly secular Jews, Yad Vashem is giving a distorted picture of the religious affiliations of the survivors'. Yad Vashem has contested Wikler's accusations (Rosenberg 2012). However, although it is true that there is more religious content in the video testimonies in Yad Vashem than in other museums, it also remains true that the large majority of video testimonies in Yad Vashem do not show strictly orthodox Jews.

The majority of Jewish victims of the Holocaust came from Eastern Europe, particularly Poland (cf. Hilberg 1985: 1201ff). Many of them

were religious or orthodox Jews from the Jewish quarters in the bigger cities and from the so-called 'shtetls'. Several explanations can be advanced for why this group is only rarely represented in museums. First, religious Jews were the largest victim group and there are consequently fewer survivors who can be interviewed. According to an estimation by Raul Hilberg (1985: 1212f) around 3,000,000 Jews of an original population of 3,351,000 in Poland were murdered, for example. Second, strictly orthodox Jewish communities tend to be fairly secluded communities. For interviewers coming from outside of these communities, it can be difficult to approach survivors and to convince them to be interviewed. Yad Vashem for example launched a special campaign to collect video testimonies with strictly orthodox Jews together with the strictly orthodox Ginzach Kiddush Hachem Archive (Goldstein 2007: 4) Third – and I contend that this might be the most important reason for not using video testimonies with orthodox Jews – the Holocaust is, as I have observed in Chapter 1, interpreted as 'Hurban' by many orthodox Jews; as one attempt in a series of attempts to destroy the Jewish people. This interpretation is neither compatible with the main academic interpretation of the Holocaust as a unique event, or as a 'civilisational break' (Diner 1988) in Western academia, nor with the Zionist narrative according to which the State of Israel has risen out of the ashes of the Holocaust as presented in Yad Vashem. Thus, by leaving out the testimonies of strictly orthodox Jews, museums leave out the extremist voices – the voices that do not fit into the narrative of the exhibitions and/or that might disturb visitors.

Interestingly, while orthodox Jews are largely absent from the video testimonies in exhibitions, they are amply represented in historical photographs depicting prewar Jewish life, and life in the ghettos, in, for example, Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum. Thus, in the lobby of the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, visitors can watch a video representing prewar Jewish life. In the video, which is inter alia underlain with Klezmer music, the visitors see men in long black coats, with black hats and thick beards. In the pictures in the exhibition and in the opening film, Jewry appears as something exotic whose disappearance has to be lamented; it is folklorized. Unlike the Jewish survivors in the video testimonies, prewar Jews are presented as extraordinary rather than ordinary; as quite unlike the visitors to the Museum. Both in the Imperial War Museum and in Yad Vashem, the contrast between the video testimonies and the historical pictures suggests that orthodox communities disappeared during the war. They are presented as the Jewish culture that was destroyed, while the video testimonies depict present-day Jewish life as secular.



*Exhibiting Ethically Challenging Testimonies*

In her autobiography *Landscapes of Memory*, Ruth Klüger (2003: 70) relates the following incident:

I sit in the student cafeteria with some advanced Ph.D. candidates, and one reports how in Jerusalem he made the acquaintance of an old Hungarian Jew who was a survivor of Auschwitz, and yet this man cursed the Arabs and held them all in contempt. How can someone who comes from Auschwitz talk like that? the German asks. I get into the act and argue, perhaps more hotly than need be. What did he expect? Auschwitz was no instructional institution, like the University of Göttingen, which he attends. You learned nothing there, and least of all humanity and tolerance. Absolutely nothing good came out of the concentration camps, I hear myself saying, with my voice rising, and he expects catharsis, purgation, the sort of thing you go to the theatre for? They were the most useless, pointless establishments imaginable. That is the one thing to remember about them if you know nothing else.

As this extract suggests, having been in a concentration camp might not have made all survivors more humane or tolerant. On the contrary, the inhumane conditions in the concentration camps pushed some victims towards decisions that, judging from hindsight, can seem ethically challenging. Primo Levi (1988: 36) has described the camp as a 'grey zone' in which the difference between good and bad became blurred. He observes that 'it is naïve, absurd, and historically false to believe that an infernal system such as National Socialism sanctifies its victims: on the contrary, it degrades them, it makes them resemble itself, and this all the more when they are available, blank, and lacking a political or moral armature' (1988: 40). He writes that in the majority of cases, the behaviour of concentration-camp prisoners ranged from collaboration to 'immoral' behaviour dictated by 'a daily struggle against hunger, cold, fatigue, and blows in which the room for choices (especially moral choices) was reduced to zero' (1988: 50).

However, in the video testimonies in Holocaust museums, survivors are generally presented as morally unimpeachable. The survivors that are shown in most Holocaust museums are shown as innocent, suffering individuals. In the video testimonies, the survivors talk about their prewar and wartime life, the inhumane conditions on the train journey to the camp and the horror in the camp, torture, mass death and slave labour. Stories of solidarity and mutual help can also often be found. In memorial museums, the transmission of the values of human rights and democracy generally happens through the provision of negative examples. By showing the worst, repetition – it is hoped – will be prevented. Survivor testimony therefore has the function of repudiating the deeds of the perpetrators. Stories that might potentially compromise the image of the innocent victim are generally left out.

There were, first, the so-called 'Funktionshäftlinge' (prisoner functionaries), those prisoners who were given administrative duties by the SS, or chosen for the supervision of forced labour, such as the 'Blockälteste' (block eldest) or *Kapos*, and who, more often than not, abused their positions and actively participated in torture and mass murder. Levi (1988: 40) observes that while they were the minority in the camps, privileged prisoners were the majority of those who survived. Prisoner functionaries, however, are largely absent from the video testimonies in Holocaust museums. Nevertheless, they are occasionally represented through the memory of other survivors. In one of the audio testimonies in the Imperial War Museum, for example, one witness remembers the welcoming speech by a block eldest, who observed: 'You have come here to die. I myself will quite happily kill a few of you.' Another one observes that the worst killing was done by the *Kapos*. The Neuengamme Memorial again presents several prisoner functionaries in the memorial books with prisoner biographies.

There are, second, the stories of having stolen food, denunciation or lack of support for other prisoners in order to secure one's own survival. Of the museums that I visited, only Yad Vashem has included stories of deeds that, in hindsight, might seem morally questionable. 'I had entered a jungle and in a jungle only predators survive', observes one survivor in Yad Vashem about his arrival in the concentration camp. The writer Roman Frister, on the other hand, tells the story of how one day he discovered his cap had been stolen. He knew that without a cap, he would not survive the morning's roll-call. During the night, he stole some other prisoner's cap and in the morning appeared at the roll-call, knowing full well that somebody else would be shot instead of and because of him.<sup>3</sup> In a second video testimony, Roman Frister recalls not helping his father up when he fell on one occasion, thereby guaranteeing himself survival. He still feels guilty about this incident, he says. Yad Vashem has also included a video testimony with Jewish partisan fighters who relate how they shot people, burnt whole villages and blew up a train, and thus how they performed deeds that from the point of view of somebody who is not in the situation of war could appear criminal.

Yad Vashem further presents stories that might seem ethically challenging not because of what the survivors did, but because of how they reacted emotionally. Thus, Rita Weiss recalls being struck by the beauty of the notorious camp doctor Josef Mengele:

and then suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder, turning me around. It was Mengele. He was very handsome, like a movie star. His beauty was beyond description: So

well – groomed with such a finely detailed face – if you saw his pictures you know. My sister whispers to me in Hungarian: ‘Say you are 19.’ He looks at me, mesmerizes me, as one does a snake, and I’m simply speechless, I say nothing. And then he says: ‘What are you doing here?’, kicks me and I fly to the right.<sup>4</sup>

It does not take much imagination to read this tale as a tale of sexual attraction as well as one tale of fear.

The stories in Yad Vashem depict the survivors as far from innocent. Roman Frister paid for his life with that of others, maybe even with that of his father. The partisans actively killed other people. Rita Weiss, in a situation that will mean life or death, is struck by the beauty of the man she should despise most. Yet, at the same time, these stories show the victims as individuals who are actively fighting for their survival and who therefore took decisions and reacted in ways that for those who have never been in the situation, might seem morally questionable.

It is certainly no coincidence that this darker side of survival is presented in Yad Vashem rather than in the European museums. Unlike German Holocaust museums, Yad Vashem does not have to look back on a long history of denial or repression. Unlike the Imperial War Museum, it does not have to present the survivors as ‘ordinary’. What is more, to an Israeli audience, stories of partisan action such as burning villages and shooting potentially innocent people might not seem as morally compromising as they do to some European audiences. As has been observed already, the main message advanced by most museums that I have analysed is: ‘never again!’. This ‘never again’ is ultimately a message of peace. In most Western European museums, armed conflict is presented as an insufficient method for solving conflicts – or at least as the last resort. In Yad Vashem, the main message is ‘never again us’. This ‘never again us’ explicitly includes armed resistance. Yad Vashem was founded in order to remember and honour especially those European Jews who took part in the resistance movements. The foundation of Yad Vashem was preceded by long discussions on how heroism should be defined: as armed resistance alone or also as the attempt to keep one’s dignity and observe Jewish rituals in the most inhumane conditions (Haß 2002: 93ff; Kurths 2008: 140ff)? The dilemma was never fully resolved and is still visible in the denomination of Yad Vashem as ‘the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority’. The current exhibition in the Holocaust History Museum still has a very large and extensive chapter on Jewish resistance and partisan fighters when compared to other Holocaust museums. The partisan fight is here directly linked to the war of independence. The last chapter of the exhibition stresses that many of the fighters in the war of independence were Holocaust survivors.

Thus, Yad Vashem counters the image of passive victims simply enduring their fate by showing them as active and fighting individuals.

However, the exhibition also presents the victims' attempts to keep their dignity in the most hostile of conditions as a form of heroism. Many video testimonies deal with and stress the daily struggle for survival in the ghettos and in the camps. Roman Frister, for instance, also tells a story of torture:

In winter I stole an empty paper cement sack and used it as an undershirt beneath my inmate's uniform because it was very cold. The Nazis discovered it. And I was forced to stand between two barbed fences for 8 hours. It was winter and the temperature was minus 10 or 12 degrees. I wore a thin summer inmate uniform. I stood there and knew that I had seen people who couldn't stand there for two hours and would touch the electric barbed-wire fences in front of them and behind them just to end their suffering. I tried with all my strength to keep a clear mind. I remember that at first I thought about my childhood experiences. Then I tried to play chess in my mind. Later, I remembered how when I was five years old, I used to climb into my father's warm bed in the morning. After some time I needed to urinate. I fought my bladder because I thought that this is proof that I'm still in control, still a human being. But of course, I didn't succeed. At first it was a great relief, because the hot urine that poured down my legs warmed them. But after exactly two minutes the urine turned into ice. I only remember that when the time passed and the Nazi came for me, I innocently asked him what time it was and he innocently said 2 a.m. Suddenly he realized ... that he had answered an inmate, a Jew, a subhuman, which was beneath his dignity. He did it instinctively. He got angry and slapped me twice. That's when I knew that I was alive.<sup>5</sup>

With these and other similar stories, Yad Vashem points out that whatever morally questionable decisions some witnesses might have taken, it was ultimately the circumstances that forced them to take those decisions. Presenting only the stories in which the survivors appear as innocent victims might indeed mean leaving out part of the truth. Ultimately, it might entail reducing survivors to their status as victims and not presenting them as fully active individuals with positive and negative character traits.

The video testimonies with victims are thus used in order to give history lessons to the visitors and in order to transmit moral lessons that should be drawn from the Holocaust. These lessons are transmitted by making the visitors engage emotionally with survivors. In order to do this, curators choose extracts from video testimonies that are in accordance with the general narrative and didactic goals of the exhibition, and that allow visitors to relate easily to the survivors. In the majority of museums, extremist voices or survivor testimony that might compromise the view of the innocent victim are avoided, while the chosen extracts depict suffering graphically.

These extracts are arranged in such a way as to engage the visitors emotionally and to advance certain interpretations of historical events and certain moral messages to the detriment of others. These narratives – as well as the messages that are advanced through them – might not always be in accordance with the desires of the witnesses to history themselves. The above-mentioned survivor of Bergen-Belsen, who remembers that the trees could hear how happy people were at liberation, probably prefers to remember liberation as a happy ending. The topical video point in which his testimony has been integrated presents his memory as questionable at least. By choosing and arranging extracts from complete video testimonies for the exhibition, the curators construct their very own narratives and interpretations of the events. The way in which testimonies are presented in the museums also means that the individuality of the witnesses to history must take a back seat – even in the ‘biographical video points’. The visitors are not invited to become tertiary witnesses to the individual survivors themselves; they are invited to become tertiary witnesses to the narrative that the curators constructed.

By framing witnesses to history in such a way as to place their eyeline on the eyeline of the visitors, by highlighting emotional responses, by choosing the most affective extracts from the entire video testimonies and by choosing individuals that visitors can easily relate to, curators clearly entice visitors to have an emphatic engagement with the survivors. In her reflections on memorial museums, Silke Arnold-de Simine, criticizing Alison Landsberg’s idea of a prosthetic memory, observes that awakening empathy in the visitors is one of memorial museums’ most important goals. Referring to Berys Gaut, she differentiates between ‘affective identification (in which we imagine a feeling), empathy (in which we actually feel *with* someone) and sympathy (in which we feel *for* someone and care for their well-being)’ (Arnold-de Simine 2013: 111).

Empathy has been rated positively as a response to survivor testimonies and trauma. Thus, Dominick LaCapra defines an ‘emphatic unsettlement’ (2001: 41) that should be the basis of receiving survivor testimonies. For him, ‘empathy may be understood in terms of attending to, even trying, in limited ways to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others. Empathy may also be seen as counteracting victimization, including self-victimization. It involves affectivity as a crucial aspect of understanding’ (2001: 40). He sees empathy as a counterforce to ‘identification’, which he defines as ‘the unmediated fusion of self and other in which the otherness or alterity of the other is not recognized and respected’ (2001: 27). Similarly, Jill Bennett (2005: 10) defines empathy as ‘grounded not in affinity (feeling for another insofar as we can imagine

being that other) but on a feeling for another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible'. For Alison Landsberg again, empathy is a crucial element to her idea of prosthetic memory. She defines empathy as 'not an emotional self-pitying identification with victims but a way of both feeling for and feeling different from the subject of inquiry' (Landsberg 2004: 135). In this, sense, empathy is in line with Laub and Baer's concept of secondary witnessing: the viewers of testimonies have a moral obligation towards the witnesses, but they do not become the witnesses. For LaCapra and Bennett at least, empathy is prescriptive: with the concept of empathy – and a very specific definition thereof – they define how testimonies should be received.

However, such an emphatic response cannot be secured from the visitors, nor might the consequences be those that are wished for. In fact, Arnold-de Simine (2013: 121ff) sees a danger in the focus on empathy as a means to educate the visitors to become better citizens. For one thing, she argues, in museums, empathy is based on the idea of a mirroring of feelings or of 'two persons reacting with the same emotions to the same situation' (Arnold-de Simine 2013: 121). Empathy makes reference to the idea of the supposed equality of all human beings – and especially on a transcultural and timeless equality of how they feel and express those feelings. Empathy therefore 'does not help to understand that people in a very different historical or cultural context from my own might have very different experiences and that these experiences depend on the way that they are treated due to their sex, class or "race"' (Arnold-de Simine 2013: 123). A too acute focus on empathy, she observes, can foreclose systemic and historical explanations. Similarly, Elke Heckner (2008: 78) argues that 'encouraging identification across ethnic and racial lines without addressing the inherent risks of appropriation seems a questionable pedagogical device'. As we have seen above and as Sheila Watson (2015: 289) has also observed, museums rarely contextualize the emotional responses of witnesses to history or 'place them in a historical context that recognizes that the language of emotion changes over time as do the ways in which it can be expressed'. In fact, people are more likely to be emphatic with people of their own ethnic group (Arnold-de Simine 2013: 121). Indeed, as we have seen, museums seem reluctant to include video testimonies with victim groups that are unlike their main target audience. Further, it is easier to feel emphatic with some feelings than with others (Arnold-de Simine 2013: 123). Again, as exemplified above, museums do indeed leave out ethically challenging testimonies.

Most importantly perhaps, empathy does not necessarily entail moral actions, nor does lack of empathy entail cruelty (Arnold-de Simine

2013: 121). Some people with Asperger's syndrome or autism, for example, are unable to feel empathy, but they are not acting cruelly as a consequence. Similarly, perpetrators can feel empathy and still commit cruel acts (Arnold-de Simone 2013: 121). A story that is too drastic might further lead to the opposite effect to the one that the curators desired: 'cognitive realization that helping would require a big sacrifice on the part of the witness might dampen the empathy someone feels' (Arnold-de Simone 2013: 111). Viewers could even turn to blaming the victims themselves for the situation that they are in so as to relieve their own distress (Arnold-de Simone 2013: 112).

Empathy as defined by LaCapra or Bennett arguably requires some training and a clear idea of how to approach the testimonies. Such an idea cannot necessarily be expected from most visitors. With their choices of video testimonies and the extracts from those video testimonies, the curators facilitated a potential identification with the victims. This identification might, as Arnold-de Simone (2013: 123) observes, prevent visitors from considering their own involvement in a discriminatory system. If we take the examples above of the comforting SS man or the woman who spat at the prisoners, it is, for example, more likely that visitors will imagine themselves reacting in the 'morally correct' way rather than seeing themselves in the role of the evil perpetrator or the sadistic bystander. In the worst-case scenario, an excess of empathy might even lead to what Arnold-de Simone (2013: 59) calls 'traumatic nostalgia' or 'dark nostalgia', the wish to have experienced a traumatic event oneself. This wish, in turn, is only possible because of a safe temporal distance from the events in question. As I have observed elsewhere, such a feeling of 'dark nostalgia' can in fact be extracted from the comments posted under the video testimonies and other posts with a biographical content that are found on the social media sites of memorial museums (de Jong 2015) – for example, when users ask for a victim's concentration-camp number in order to get a memorial tattoo. Trying to induce empathy in the visitors is therefore a challenging means to educate them – the right degree of distance and identification cannot be secured, nor will the outcome necessarily be that of 'raising [visitors'] personal commitment to higher moral values today and in the future', as the director of Yad Vashem, Avner Shalev hopes (Goldstein 2005: 7).

### *Perpetrators*

In 2011, the social psychologist Harald Welzer published a polemical article in the *Gedenkstättenrundbrief*, a journal dedicated to all possible questions

regarding the politics and didactics of memorials. In his article, Welzer argues that German memorial culture, particularly for the younger generations, has become shallow. According to him, German memorial culture concentrates too much on remembrance of the victims and a perceived need to fight forgetting. However, he observes, Holocaust memory has reached a point where the importance of remembering the Holocaust and of commemorating the victims is no longer called into question. Younger generations do not remember a time when the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust were repudiated and repressed. Not unlike Schneider and Jureit in their criticism of the idea of secondary witnessing, Welzer (2011) argues for a 'modernisation of the praxis of communicating history'. For one thing, he observes, German memorial culture concentrates too much on single perpetrator groups and not enough on the question of how a modern Western society was, in a short time, able to turn into what he calls an 'Ausgrenzungsgesellschaft', a society based on social exclusion. He therefore argues that 'the objectives of memory culture should ... not centre on the monumentalised horror of the extermination camps, but on the unspectacular, everyday life of a society that became ever more criminal, or rather that changed the normative codes of what is desirable and objectionable, good and bad, proper and criminal' (2011). Modern didactics of history, he writes, should explain that 'under certain circumstances not only the bad people decide to adopt inhuman behaviour, but also the good ones' (2011). He foresees a new type of museum for the communication of human rights and active citizenship as developed by Dana Giesecke, based on the model of science centres, such as the Klimahaus in Bremerhaven (Welzer and Giesecke 2012). Such centres should also, and especially, include positive examples of active citizenship:

If learning from history should have a sense, then that it should lead to the development of a sensibility for the potentials of contemporary constellations that can lead to good or to bad ends and to an ability to differentiate between the options that will lead to humane conditions and those that will lead to inhumane ones. It is clear that the development of such a sensibility cannot centre on negative history alone, but also has to include examples of successful and happy cohabitate. (Welzer 2011)

At least within the *Gedenkstättenrundbrief*, Welzer's article provoked both discussion and angry responses. Ulrike Schrader and Norbert Reichling (2011) of the Arbeitskreis NS-Gedenkstätten und Erinnerungsorte in Nordrhein-Westfalen e.V.' (Working Team Memorials of National Socialism and Sites of Memory in North-Rhine Westphalia) accuse Welzer of depicting a memorial culture that has long been overcome: 'One or



two generational changes have led to ever more relaxed didactics that have abdicated moral imperatives and contributed to discursive, interactive and experimental means of communication, that are free from the nervous “concernment” and eagerness to persuade of the 1970s and 1980s.’ Similarly, Habbo Knoch (2011), who was then director of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, accuses Welzer of a lack of differentiation. Knoch observes that Welzer does not take into consideration the heterogeneity, spatial diffusion or grassroots character of German memorial culture. Knoch himself pleads for a historically differentiated process of learning from history. For him, Welzer’s concept of an ‘Ausgrenzungsgesellschaft’ is too general and all-embracing, and does not consider the complexity of German wartime society. However, he grants that Welzer is right in observing that ‘ways have to be found in order to strengthen the relevance of historical learning for a complex present and future’ and suggests that memorials should concentrate more on rights as a ‘central medium of modern societies’ (Knoch 2011).

I grant that Welzer’s overall disavowal of German memorial culture disregards its complexity. Moreover, Welzer’s proposal for interactive learning centres might, if not executed very thoughtfully, run the risk of being kitsch. However, Welzer is right in observing that most memorials and Holocaust museums – not merely those in Germany – shy away from presenting the multiple layers of individual and collective responsibility. Identification or empathy with the perpetrators, as is promoted in the case of victims, is here prevented. Most museums do not show testimonies with perpetrators, for example. Perpetrators are part of the exhibitions of course, but unlike the victims, they are not given a voice.

*(Not) Exhibiting Perpetrator Video Testimonies*

Of the museums that I have analysed, the only one that has introduced a testimony with an SS guard is the Neuengamme Memorial. The testimony is an audio rather than a video testimony. In order to protect her family, the female SS guard asked that only her initials U.E. be used. According to her own narrative, U.E. was sent to guard a prisoner transport from one camp to another only once. Her testimony exemplifies the challenges that can arise when using perpetrator testimonies in exhibitions. For one thing, U.E. puts her actions into perspective and gives the impression that she regrets what she has done. She recalls an SS man telling her that the step between guard and prisoner is a very small one; if she and her colleagues did not want to guard the prisoners, she might very well end up on the other side. Reflecting on this event, U.E. observes that she sometimes wonders whether she took the right decision; whether a step to the other

side would not have been the better step to take. She thus presents her decision as quasi-obligatory. Refusing to carry out the task given to her appears in her testimony as a sacrifice – one that with a safe temporal distance from the events she thinks that she should have taken. However, besides this moment of reflection, the testimony is predominantly apologetic. For around half of the testimony, U.E. does not talk about her job as an SS guard, but about her problems getting the time she spent in prison after the war recognized for her pension. She refuses to consider her own acts as criminal and underlines that she was ‘dienstverpflichtet’ (conscripted) and therefore had no option than to do what was asked of her. She recalls giving food to the prisoners, and the prisoners pleading for her and her colleagues to stay with them. Therefore, she does not understand why people keep accusing her of having done a bad deed. The testimony ends with the words: ‘Well, they were not mistreated. Not in any way. But I do not want to trivialise anything either. It was bitter and hard.’ She does not specify for whom it was bitter and hard.

Judith Keilbach (2003: 163), who has analysed the representation of witnesses to history in German TV documentaries, observes that testimonies by perpetrators often end in concealment or extenuation, which, she argues, can be explained in several ways:

As a form of self-suggestion which, in the perpetrators’ memory, turns lies into truth; as a missing conception of the unlawfulness of their own acts in which their deeds are not considered as criminal acts, but, for example, rationally explained; or – and this is especially the case for ‘public’ statements in front of a camera – out of fear of prosecution.

The testimony by the SS guard at the Neuengamme Memorial demonstrates these sorts of behaviour exactly. U.E. does not consider her own deeds as criminal acts. Through her testimony, she asks for compassion and understanding.

The challenge involved in giving voice to perpetrators by presenting their testimonies is of course that they appear human – exactly the effect that is sought in the depiction of victims. The black-and-white depiction of early exhibitions, in which guards were bloodthirsty torturers and prisoners innocent, helpless sufferers, will no longer always be possible. Many grey areas inbetween the two might appear. As was already shown in Chapter 4 in relation to the video testimony in the Walther Werke, the Neuengamme Memorial does not shy away from presenting those grey areas, and it is in this context that U.E.’s testimony needs to be interpreted. In its exhibition on the SS (of which the audio testimony with U.E. is a part), audio and video, as well as written, testimonies with survivors present an inside

view on life in the camp and the relationship between prisoners and the SS. Most of these testimonies speak of terrible deeds, but occasionally positive memories appear. Thus, on an audio station close to that with the interview with U.E., several survivors remember J. Hille, the commander of the satellite camp Oberheide, who tried to hide and save two children, but was ultimately forced to send them to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, where they were probably murdered. Of course, such stories, like the memory of the SS guard U.E. described above, carry the danger that visitors take away the impression that everything was not so bad after all. In the Neuengamme Memorial, such an interpretation is foreclosed by the exhibition surrounding the testimony. Above the table with the audio station, extracts from testimonies by former prisoners remembering torture and mistreatment are, for example, beamed onto the wall. When listening to the audio testimony, the visitor will also see those testimonies. The testimonies on the wall indicate that U.E.'s testimony should be received with a grain of scepticism or at least put into perspective.

While most of the museums that I have visited have decided against the inclusion of video testimonies from perpetrators, most of the exhibition makers that I interviewed observed that maybe this decision should be reconsidered (Barker interview 2009; Garbe interview 2009; Gring interview 2009). James Barker of the Imperial War Museum even went so far as to observe that while the victims' right to have their say must be the priority for all museum exhibitions dealing with the Holocaust, the absence of a meaningful discussion of the motivation and behaviour of the perpetrators at a personal level makes any attempt to understand the subject as a whole incomplete (Barker interview 2009).

Barker's observation demonstrates how mainstream and socially accepted victim testimonies have become. This has not always been the case. In the same vein as re-education programmes in Germany, early Holocaust exhibitions foregrounded the deeds of the perpetrators. Habbo Knoch (2009: 205), for example, observes that the early Holocaust exhibitions of the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by 'a rather appellative and documentary-testimonial style, that tried to induce emotional responses and to transmit selective information, inter alia, through the use of blow-ups of photographic pictures. The diversity of victim groups ... were not at all or only marginally part of the public representation of the Holocaust'. The absence of perpetrator testimonies and the prevalence of victim testimonies in the present exhibitions can in this sense also be explained by the fact that the present exhibitions are reactions to those early exhibitions. Although the perpetrators were of course not given a say in those early exhibitions, the focus was here on their deeds. Now, this

focus on the perpetrators has been complemented by the memory of those deeds by the victims.

Another explanation for the lack of video testimonies with perpetrators is that it can be difficult to convince them to be interviewed by the staff of a concentration-camp memorial or a Holocaust museum, and particularly to obtain consent for the exhibition of their video testimony. Staff of both the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and the Neuengamme Memorial observed that they found it challenging to get in contact with perpetrators (Garbe interview 2009, Gring interview 2009). However, Diana Gring (Gring interview 2009) of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial underlined that the efforts made to this end were rather marginal. Only one interview with a former female SS guard was carried out by the Memorial. Gring observed that had there been more video testimonies with perpetrators, their inclusion into the exhibition would have been an option; however, the single status of the video raised questions of representativeness. It is interesting to contrast the museums with TV documentaries where ample testimonies with perpetrators can be found (Bösch 2008; Keilbach 2008). Unlike in museums, the directors of TV documentaries seem to be willing to represent perpetrators and the perpetrators seem to agree to be interviewed.

While video testimonies are missing, in most museums, the perpetrators appear on black-and-white pictures from the archives showing them in their SS uniforms or as the accused in pictures from their trials. The pictures locate the perpetrators far away in history – and thus also far away from the realm of the visitor. Quite unlike the victims on the video testimonies, who look like the visitors' grandfathers and grandmothers, the perpetrators look as if they belonged to another world. Most museums further tend to give preference to high-ranking SS officials. Thus, in both the Imperial War Museum and in Yad Vashem, famous members of the SS elite are presented through black boxes with their portraits and their biographies.

Authors who have reflected on the benefits of identification or empathy with perpetrators have referred to Kaja Silverman's distinction between 'idiopathic identification' and 'heteropathic identification' (Silverman 1992: 205; van Alphen 2002: 178ff; Pettitt 2017: 134ff). Idiopathic identification can be compared to Silke Arnold-de Simine's (as opposed to LaCarpa, Bennett or Landsberg's) understanding of empathy as a mirroring of feeling: 'idiopathic identification involves a process in which the self appropriates the thoughts and feelings of the other, internalising them as one's own' (Pettitt 2017: 135). In idiopathic identification, 'one takes the other into the self, on the basis of a (projected) likeness, so that the other becomes or becomes like the self' (van Alphen 2002: 178). In heteropathic

identification, on the other hand, ‘the self-enacting of the identification takes the risk of temporarily and partially becoming (like) the other’ (van Alphen 2002: 178). Here, ‘the self ... is externalised at the site of the other’ (Pettitt 2017: 136). We could argue that what is promoted through the camera frame and the chosen extracts of video testimonies with victims is a form of ‘idiopathic identification’ – although a form of ‘heteropathic identification’ is of course what is desired by theorists like Baer, Laub, LaCapra, Bennett or Simon.

An emphatic engagement with perpetrators is certainly no less problematic than an emphatic engagement with victims. However, the problem with an exclusive identification with the victims, Ernst van Alphen (2002: 178), argues, is that:

although useful to realise how horrible the Holocaust was, it is also a way of reassuring visitors about their fundamental innocence. To put the case strongly: this reassurance is unwarranted, and unhelpful in achieving the ultimate goal of Holocaust education to prevent history from repeating itself. Victimhood cannot control the future. In contrast, soliciting partial and temporary identification with the perpetrators contributes to an awareness of the ease with which one slides into a measure of complicity.

Both Pettitt and van Alphen argue that heteropathic identification would allow such an identification while still providing a safe distance from the Other.

Van Alphen’s reflections are geared towards contemporary art, while Joanne Pettitt’s are geared towards literature. Both argue that art, and respectively literature, allow for a safe fictional space in which an emphatic identification with perpetrators can be acted out. This begs the question whether heteropathic identification with real perpetrators might be possible at all – or even desirable. It will be impossible here to answer the first question. Pettitt (2017: 4), for example, observes that because of the cultural representation of the SS as the epitome of evil, we are likely to immediately reject the discourse of a perpetrator in literature. If this might be the case for literature, it is likely that it would as much or even more be the case for real perpetrator testimonies. As witnesses, perpetrators lack trustworthiness. As in literature or art, the emotional engagement of the visitors with real perpetrator testimonies in exhibitions would of course depend on the means of their representation. At the moment, the museums present visitors with individuals who appear far removed in time and to whom visitors will find it difficult – and one imagines undesirable – to relate to. In this way, the museums fail to address the complex questions of delinquency. They do not ask what was deemed good about National

Socialism and how a society of exclusion came about, the questions proposed by Jureit and Schneider, Welzer or van Alphen as a foundation for a new memorial culture. In order to address these questions, it might be worth representing the perpetrators as equally human as the victims, as – to use Christopher Browning’s (1992) famous phrase – ‘ordinary men’. This might involve showing them as people who – like the survivors – had a life after the Holocaust and who reflect on their life from hindsight. The medium of the exhibition would certainly allow for a framing of those testimonies that would allow for an emphatic engagement, while still keeping a critical distance in the sense of heteropathic identification. What is more, such a juxtaposition of perpetrator testimonies to victim testimonies might be one way to prevent a possible overidentification with the victims.

### *Giving the Word to the Second Generation*

As the only museum to have included a testimony with a perpetrator in its exhibition, the Neuengamme Memorial is also the only museum to address the legacy of the SS for subsequent generations. At the end of its exhibition on the SS, the Neuengamme Memorial presents a video testimony with the children and grandchildren of former SS men.<sup>6</sup> The museum text accompanying the video reads:

Only few children of perpetrators start looking for the traces that their parents left. They are too afraid to find out what deeds their father was responsible for as a member of the SS. Researching their family history is easier for those who have never met their father or their grandfather. The greater distance makes it easier for grandchildren to look into the history of their family under National Socialism. Almost all families of perpetrators have in common that the time of National Socialism and the behaviour of relatives was not talked about.

Indeed, none of the interviewees in the video testimony in the Neuengamme Memorial ever met her or his father or grandfather. All of them relate that in their families, the SS membership of their relatives was hushed up. Some interviewees started to do research on their respective relatives when triggered by some crucial experiences in their personal lives: for one, it was the birth of his son; for another, a visit to Auschwitz; while a third witness became aware of his family history when he decided not to do military service and his mother told him that she had some documents about his father that he could hand in to the *Bundeswehr* so that he would be exempted from the service. They point out that it would have been more difficult for them to do the research if they had known their fathers or grandfathers personally. One of the witnesses, Heiko Tessmann, the grandson of the commandant at the police-prison Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel,

stresses that the media only focuses on the SS elite, while small families remain in the shadow. He therefore founded the association *Rückgrat e. V.* (Backbone – in German the term is also used as a metaphor for courage) for the purpose of learning from history, through which he has distributed a CD-ROM with documentation on his grand-father.

The video testimony with the children and grandchildren of SS men in the Neuengamme Memorial exemplifies the challenges of coming to terms with a difficult family history. It also shows a possible means for framing perpetrator testimonies. Not unlike the final video testimonies with victims, the video testimony serves to give visitors a lesson in morals. The relatives of the perpetrators appear as role models for the visitors. They exemplify the way in which the past should be dealt with. With the video testimony of the relatives, visitors, and especially German visitors, are invited to take responsibility for their past.

Thus, while visitors are invited to relate to the testimonies of victims and to become tertiary witnesses to their suffering, such a relationship is prevented in the case of perpetrator testimonies. In contrast to victims, museums create an abyss between visitors and perpetrators: the perpetrators are presented as historical figures, whereas the victims are presented as individuals living amongst us. Therefore, as observed and criticized by Jureit and Schneider and Welzer, Holocaust museums concentrate on victims and bypass more complex questions of delinquency. Visitors are encouraged to convey to the future the memories of those who suffered, not of those who were the cause of this suffering.

### *Bystanders*

While video testimonies with perpetrators can hardly ever be found in museums, concentration-camp memorials such as Bergen-Belsen or Neuengamme now often include video testimonies with bystanders (Hilberg 1992) – locals who lived close to the camps. Such testimonies serve to illustrate the close connection between the local population and the camp. Especially in Germany, they serve to show that people knew – and that they knew more than they were (and are) willing to reveal at first; they serve to counter the denial that was prevalent amongst Germans in the first decades after the War. In this way, they also serve to show visitors how they should have acted – or rather how they should not have acted. As in the case of victim testimonies, curators create new narratives and guide the visitors' interpretation of the video testimonies through the way

in which they order the different statements and through the aesthetic presentation of the witnesses to history.

### *Showing Different Layers of Delinquency*

Unlike direct relatives, residents have a less direct and less personal relationship with the perpetrators – and might therefore, one imagines, be less afraid to speak out. Unlike the perpetrators themselves, they have less need to conceal certain events or to excuse themselves. Neither perpetrators nor victims, bystanders have been in the situation in which most visitors to the museum probably would have been. They would therefore be the perfect means to approach the more difficult questions concerning the time of National Socialism. However, the museums analysed here shy away from going the full length in this respect.

In both the Bergen-Belsen and Neuengamme Memorials, the bystanders who are presented in the video testimonies were mostly children or teenagers at the time of the war. Whatever they might have done, they are therefore excused by their age. Sneaking to the camp to watch the prisoners fighting over an apple, as one of the bystanders remembers in the video testimony ‘Locals Remember the Bergen-Belsen and Wietzendorf POW Camps (1941/1942)’ at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, appears like an act of youthful folly for somebody who was not older than fifteen; the same behaviour would appear sadistic in a grown-up. In the Neuengamme Memorial, one of the video testimonies with residents can be found in the exhibition on the SS.<sup>7</sup> Here, a witness who was a young skipper on a canal barge at the time remembers doing business with the camp – until he decided he did not want to see such misery anymore. Another witness recalls having seen a prisoner being beaten to death with a shovel. Other residents relate having passed prisoner columns on an almost daily basis and even entering the camp – for which a ticket was issued. Some remember having been afraid of the SS; others recall a rather untroubled relationship. One witness observes that many residents had family connections to the SS and that one of his relatives was married to an SS guard. The young age of the bystanders in the video testimonies of course serves to counter the argument advanced by many members of the German population in the postwar years that they knew nothing or that they ignored the brutality of life in the camps: if children managed to go to the camp and see how prisoners were murdered, grown-ups must certainly have known more. At the same time, the focus on children averts the eyes from grown-ups – and thus from individuals who would be more like the majority of visitors.

Even young bystanders of course occasionally attempt to excuse their deeds. The dramaturgy of the video testimonies with bystanders is



therefore meticulously constructed so as to correct apologetic testimonies and to stress denunciatory ones, as exemplified by the video testimony 'Locals Remember the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp'. This video testimony contains extracts from the testimonies of six residents. It starts with a section on what and how much the locals actually knew about the concentration camp. The first four bystanders observe that they knew very little – not even what a concentration camp really was. 'A concentration camp – well, what is that? And then they said, Bergen-Belsen, there's a concentration camp there. We didn't know, we really didn't', remembers Horst W. (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 266). Marianne Z. (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 266) relates: 'All we knew was that they had to go to the camp. But what kind of people they were and all that ... You did not dare to ask any questions.' Paul J. (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 266) remembers: 'A concentration camp – I thought it was something where people were being reeducated or something like that. But that it was so miserable there ... What it meant, concentration camp...' 'Well, concentration camp ... It was not until 1944, when all the prisoners started arriving, that the term actually meant anything to you', observes Horst L. (Lower Saxony Memorial Foundation 2010: 266). This first section of the video testimony closes with a statement by Ilse L. that puts all of these previous testimonies into perspective: 'Well, you won't find a single person in the village who hadn't heard something, from somebody else, about the terrible things that were going on near here.' By choosing this last sentence for the staged discussion of knowledge about the camp, the curators reveal the statements by the previous witnesses to be at least somewhat disingenuous. If Ilse L. had heard something, why hadn't the other bystanders?

Not only are statements by different witnesses used to correct other statements and to forward certain messages, but the curators also arrange statements by the same witness in such a way as to correct apologetic ones with others in which the witnesses reveal their involvement. Thus, a second statement by Marianne Z., who in the beginning claimed that 'You didn't dare to ask', has been placed straight after Ilse L.'s statement. In this second statement, Marianne Z. observes: 'All the prisoners arrived at the ramp by train. At the ramp, they were unloaded and were then marched to the camp. A lot of them were very weak, and so, every now and then, you'd find a dead body here or there' (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 266). The second extract from the testimony of Marianne Z. suggests that she actually knew much more than she was at first willing to reveal. Even if she 'didn't dare to ask', she knew that people were unloaded at the ramp and every now and then saw a corpse on the street.

The video testimony closes with two general statements on the war years that could not be more contradictory. The first extract, by Marianne Z. (Lower Saxony Memorial Foundation 2010: 267), is conciliatory: ‘Yes, that’s the way it is. We were very, very scared, too, as I keep saying. I don’t even really know what we were so scared of, but we were frightened.’ The second extract, by Günter P. (Lower Saxony Memorial Foundation 2010: 267), corrects this extract by pointing out the moral duties that humans supposedly have towards other humans:

I actually find it unbelievable that people can behave in such a way, that something like that can go on. And not just the one side, all sides. Just looking on can also be a crime, or rather morally reprehensible, let’s put it that way. You don’t even have to commit these acts yourself. It’s bad enough if you just look away.

This final statement leaves the visitors with the ultimate moral lesson. It presents them with the idea that, as Harald Welzer (2011) has observed, ‘under certain circumstances not only the bad people decide to adopt inhuman behaviour, but also the good ones’. Moving from denial and apology to accusation, the video testimony with the bystanders of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial runs through the German postwar discourse on guilt and responsibility. With the video testimony, the curators forward their interpretation on this discourse: residents to the camps knew at least something and should consequently feel guilty for not having intervened. Ultimately, visitors are induced to reflect on their own actions; they are invited to become active citizens. However, unlike in the case of the victim testimonies, visitors are not directly induced to feel empathy. Instead, they are asked to judge their deeds – but not necessarily those of the people who appear in the video testimonies. They are induced to judge the grown-ups who made them believe that all prisoners were ‘criminals who nailed the tongues of German children on the table’ or that who was in a concentration camp belonged there, as two of the witnesses to history in the video testimony in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial remember (Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation 2010: 266).

### *The Aesthetical Representation of Bystanders*

That the museums rule out full identification with the bystanders is underlined through their aesthetical representation, which differs from that of victims. Neither the Neuengamme Memorial nor the Bergen-Belsen Memorial represent the video testimonies with residents using biographical video points, for example. While individual biographies and individuality have at least some importance in the case of victim testimonies, bystander testimonies tend to be mere tools for moral and historical educa-

tion. In the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, where the biographical video points are introduced with biographical details and where visitors are invited to read biographical cards about the victims, no such cards are presented for the testimonies of residents. The latter are also not named with their full name; only the initial letter is used for their surname. Both practices can be explained by the need to protect the residents. They do, however, also suggest that bystander testimonies should be received differently from victim testimonies – with more emotional distance.

In the Neuengamme Memorial, many of the interviews with residents – in contrast to those of the victims – have not been filmed with witnesses sitting down in a room and with a camera angle showing only the face or upper part of their body. Some of them have been carried out outside, at the locations that feature in the bystanders' testimony. Video recordings of the surroundings accompany the interviews. Unlike in the victim testimonies, the interviewer can occasionally be heard and sometimes the microphone held up to the witnesses appears in the camera frame. The aesthetics of the video testimonies with residents in the Neuengamme Memorial resemble those of investigative journalism. Instead of being emphatic listeners or mock therapists, the interviewers here take on the juridical role of interrogating bystanders or that of a merciless journalist on a quest to find out the truth.

Although they do not present video testimonies with perpetrators, to a certain extent, curators do therefore address the complex question of delinquency with the help of video testimonies with bystanders. With the video testimonies with bystanders, a certain form of tertiary witnessing – or maybe heteropathic identification – is encouraged. This form of tertiary witnessing is different from the tertiary witnessing that is encouraged in the case of victim testimonies. Rather than being about trauma, it is about guilt. With the bystander video testimonies, museums present to visitors courses of action chosen by 'ordinary' people under criminal circumstances. Unlike the case of the victims, visitors are not invited to take on the memory of the bystanders; instead, they are invited to confront themselves and thereby question their own actions. Such a confrontation is facilitated through the relative youth of most of the witnesses to history during the war, and therefore their innocence. Because of their age, none of them can be held accountable for doing something deeply morally questionable. None of them remembers having done something wrong themselves. Museums therefore do not present visitors with actual negative figures to relate to. Questioning the delinquency of the population happens by proxy – through the memory of innocent children.

### *The Local Population at War*

Not being a Holocaust Museum, the Museo Diffuso has as its main subject matter the experiences of the local population during the war. This population cannot as clearly be divided into victims, perpetrators and bystanders, as can the witnesses of the Holocaust. Having been a victim of bombing is not the same as having been a victim of genocide, and having supported the fascist government is not the same as having taken an active part in mass murder. Nevertheless, the didactic function that I have analysed for the video testimonies in Holocaust museums can also be observed in the Museo Diffuso, including: the transmission of historical and moral lessons; an unwillingness to present witnesses to history who might seem foreign or ethically challenging to visitors; and a reluctance to present perpetrator testimonies.

First, in its selection of witnesses to history for the exhibition, the Museo Diffuso tries to represent the diversity of the citizens of Turin during the war years. Most of the video testimonies are therefore arranged according to pairs that contrast because of the gender of the witnesses to history, and because of their wartime experiences and their sociocultural background. Thus, a factory worker has been put next to a soldier who fought at the Eastern Front; a female partisan fighting in the mountains has been put next to a male partisan fighting in the resistance in city factories; and a fascist enthusiast has been put next to the socialist teacher who fled to Bolivia with her German-Jewish husband. However, all of the witnesses are Italian and all of them are citizens of Turin. Both the enemy and the liberator remain invisible.

Second, a majority of the witnesses to history at the Museo Diffuso were active in the partisan movement and are to some extent local celebrities in postwar Turin. Bianca Guidetti Serra, for example, is a well-known left-wing lawyer, a local politician and a former member of the Italian Parliament, who took part in several important postwar trials. Maria Gaudenzi in Angelino has been active in the trade union movement, and Adriano Vitelli, who was a political prisoner during the war, was a member of the 'Giunta Popolare di Torino', the first postwar government in Turin. Their role as local citizens actively fighting for the right cause during and after the war places the witnesses to history in a morally superior position to the ordinary visitor – they are role models.

A considerable amount of time in many of the video testimonies is in fact set aside for reflections on the past and on the present. Bianca Giudetti Serra, who gives testimony on how she felt when she, as a woman, was

allowed to vote for the first time in the Italian constitutional referendum in 1946, spends around half of her testimony talking about democracy in general, the low turnout at elections and referenda today, and the need to inform people about society's grievances. Around two of the four-and-a-half minutes of Maria Gaudenzi in Angelino's testimony are dedicated to a comparison of the rights and working conditions of workers today, during the war and in the immediate postwar period. Her testimony finishes with her relating how she had to return to work in a sweets factory only a few days after she had given birth to her son and then how she had to take him to work with her. She concludes this story – and the whole testimony – with the sentence: 'That's why everything is so fantastic now'.<sup>8</sup> By comparing the past to the present, Bianca Giudetti Serra and Maria Gaudenzi in Angelino teach the visitors to be grateful for what they have and to become active citizens.

Other witnesses to history reflect on the wrongs of the past, thus providing guidance for the future. Marisa Scala, a partisan fighter who had been imprisoned in the Bolzano Concentration Camp, is critical of the fact that there were not a thousand ambulances ready to pick up the camp survivors and that many of them were left to die in provisory hospitals. Reflecting on the prisoners who died in the camps, she observes: 'I said to myself, their death was meaningless. It did not change anything in this country. It did not arouse solidarity or spirit of freedom. I felt like a prisoner again. This country needs centuries to change, years are not enough. We did not succeed in changing it, because it needs something greater.' The testimony finishes with Scala recalling how the politician and former partisan fighter Ugo La Malfa told her: 'Do not hope too much, be content with what you see.'<sup>9</sup>

In her analysis of the video testimonies at the Museo Diffuso, Birga U. Meyer (2014: 307), while acknowledging a tendency of the museum to use the witnesses to history as educators, observes that all the video testimonies in the Museo Diffuso are treated equally and that they therefore are not imbued with a moral authority: 'Everyone is able to speak. The expository agent presents a participant and then offers that participant's narrative to the ideal visitor, but does not imbue it with moral authority. Thus, the visitor is not expected to identify with the testimony, but can form her own opinion about it.' I would argue on the contrary that in the Museo Diffuso, visitors are instructed by people who have learned from life and who, according to the museum's narrative, have mostly taken the right decisions during their lifetime. The visitors are invited to 'morphé' with the witnesses to history and thereby identify with them, but nevertheless remain inferior to them. In fact, in the mirror of the steles with the

video testimonies, the head of the witness to history is bigger than the head of the visitor.

This moral superiority of the witnesses to history at the Museo Diffuso is, third, underlined by a certain innocence and moral flawlessness that they have in common. None of the witnesses to history remembers having taken an active part in violence. In the video testimonies, the war appears to be an enormous tragedy for which nobody seems to be directly responsible. It consists of bombs launched for reasons no one dwells on, along with nights in air-raid shelters, factory strikes, evacuations, emigration and of course partisans fighting against a poorly defined enemy that is sometimes German and sometimes Italian fascist. Even when violence is directly addressed, it is put into perspective and distanced from the individual witnesses to history who talk about it. Cesare Alvazzi Del Frate, a partisan fighter, remembers the purges that took place in the immediate aftermath of the War. He observes, however, that these purges did not start with the partisans and certainly not those in his regiment. Moreover, he argues that contemporary historical research on the partisan movement is misleading:

I understand that after all we went through, people had selfish impulses like sex and arrogance, but I don't understand why they went so far. I am embarrassed when I remember those moments ... When we arrived in Turin we saw many horrible things. There were many bodies floating on the river Po. One should know the reasons and grievances, which lay behind each episode of violence. The current attempt to put all the blame on the partisans is totally misleading and wrong. Nobody knows the circumstances which prompted this aggressiveness. We must treat differently those who fought for freedom on the liberators' side and those who fought to defend and spread Nazism with all its horrors.<sup>10</sup>

Enzo Petti and Matilde Di Pietrantonio, two partisan fighters, stress that they always treated their prisoners very well. Enzo Petti remembers taking good care of a German prisoner of war. He concludes that maybe they – the partisans – were not as cruel to their prisoners as vice versa. Matilde Di Pietrantonio's speciality was to take hostages. She stresses that apart from the moment in which the prisoners were arrested, there was no use of violence; she also stresses that for her, it is a relief to know that she did not kill anybody.

It is especially revealing to consider here the testimony of Mario Giacometti, the only witness to history in the Museo Diffuso with a positive memory of the time of fascism. The video testimony with Giacometti starts with the information that he was born in 1927 and was thus only thirteen years old when the war started; all through the video testimony,

his youth is underlined. In his nostalgic memories, the fascist years appear like one long chain of community events and feasts in which the party and the fascist ideology played only a marginal role:

My memories from childhood weren't at all unpleasant. We went to play in the parish youth club. On Sundays, if you went to Mass, you got a ticket to go to the movies in the afternoon. In September there was the Grapes Festival. For the so-called Fascist Epiphany we received presents. We were satisfied and happy ... Life was very simple, but we were happier than now that we have got everything. There was no party. There was nothing of that kind.<sup>11</sup>

His time with the Balilla, the Italian fascist youth organization, seems to have been the best time of his life:

I was Balilla ... There were simple Balillas, but I was in the Alpine troops. I had the hat, the boots and the woollen socks. I felt like a real soldier. It was all so well organized. We went on mountain trips. For every trip we went on, we got marks. When we reached a certain mark, we got an eagle. The first one was red, the second silver, the third golden. They were kind to us. I could not wait to go on a trip. They gave us an education and brought us to church. I was in the alpine troops, but there were sailors too. They had built a ship on the river Po where they could exercise, like real cadets do. Some Balillas drove gliders. There also were mounted Balillas. This made many boys very proud.

In Mario Giacometti's testimony, fascism brought exciting times rather than a dangerous ideology. The testimony then abruptly moves from the recollection of these times to the beginning of the war and the bombing of Turin:

I remember when the war began. A few days before, some women were saying: 'We'll never enter the war.' We heard about the famous speech Mussolini delivered on June 10. I went to Corso Verona where there was a radio in a bar and I listened to the famous speech. I was 13 years old. This happened on the 10th. On the 11th Turin was bombed. Some said it was the French. Then the war began and things went as you already know. We had continuous air raids. The most violent was on July 13, 1943. While before September 8 the air raids occurred at night, after they took place in the daytime. On that day we saw the planes that had bombed. They aimed at Cavoretto by mistake. They wanted to bomb Fiat Lingotto but missed the target. The workers left Lingotto seeking refuge on the hill and were killed.

Both parts of the testimony – the part on Turin during fascism and the part on the bombing – seem disconnected. No link is made between the Balilla that Mario Giacometti has such good memories of and the bombs that destroyed Turin. While in the first part of his testimony, Giacometti

appears as a slightly naïve and, because of his age, innocent boy, in the second part, he becomes a victim suffering from the Allied bombing like everybody else. The first part of his testimony concentrates on his personal experience; it is mostly narrated in the first-person singular. Fascism is represented as having brought him personal gratification. The last part of his testimony is narrated in the plural: war becomes here a communal tragedy of which the death of the workers of Fiat Lingotto in the last sentence is symptomatic.

Enzo Petti, the partisan fighter, was born in 1926. He is thus only a year older than Mario Giacometti. Yet, his young age is not commented on in his testimony. Hence, the tendency to fall prey to indoctrination is represented as dependent on age, but being part of the resistance is not. It appears normal for Mario Giacometti to enjoy his time with the Balilla without questioning it, but it does not appear extraordinary that Enzo Petti joined the partisans at the age of only fifteen. Thus, Giacometti, the only witness to history in the Museo Diffuso who is not presented as a role model, is not equally presented negatively either. Not unlike in the case of the bystander testimonies in the Bergen-Belsen and the Neuengamme Memorials, in the only video testimony in which the Museo Diffuso depicts a form of consent with fascism, this consent is presented as bewitchment by fascist propaganda and not as a matter of personal choice.

Unlike Holocaust museums, which present their visitors either with victims whose memory they are invited to pass on or with bystanders who serve as negative examples of the past, the Museo Diffuso presents a majority of positive examples to follow. Even concentration-camp survivors such as Marisa Scala are not primarily shown as victims, but rather as partisans and active citizens. The Museo Diffuso clearly wishes for its visitors to feel an idiopathic identification. The visitors are invited to see themselves reflected in the witnesses to history, morphe with them and in this way to become better, more responsible citizens. As in Holocaust museums, negative examples are largely left out of the exhibition narrative. None of the witnesses to history remembers having taken an active part in violence. In the stories that most of the witnesses to history tell, the Germans are the ones that they – the partisans – were fighting against; the Allies were the ones who launched the bombs and destroyed the city. The historical narrative of the museum is ultimately one in which the partisans, with their campaigns of organizing strikes in the factories, taking hostages and printing clandestine flyers, liberate both Italy and the city. War is denounced in the Museo Diffuso, but not explained.



## Digital Outreach: Communicating Outside of the Museums' Walls

The communication between museums and their visitors does not stop at the walls of the museums. All of the museums that I have analysed here offer educational outreach programmes and use websites, social media and other online platforms to disseminate their messages. Video testimonies are often a part of those programmes. If in the previous section of this chapter I have given precedence to the message(s) over the medium, it is in this section that I will return to the medium and, more specifically, to remediation and the intermedial relations of video testimonies once they are put online.

Reaching out to those people who are incapable or unlikely to come to the museum has been an important part of museums' activities for a long time. As Haidee Wasson has shown, already in the 1910s and 1920s, museums were criticized for not adapting to the new media landscape and for not reaching all strata of society. Amongst those visitors who actually came to the museums, a so-called 'museum fatigue' was diagnosed (Wasson 2015: 607, 616). The museums' reaction – Wasson concentrates here mainly on the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City – was to collaborate with radio stations, newspapers and TV stations, and to produce educational films. In this way, their collection could be presented in schools and to people who might otherwise not have had access to them or wished to see them in the first place.

The criticism that museums are somewhat dusty, old fashioned and reluctant to adapt to new media is one that has accompanied all of museums' developments and subsequent changes. The integration of video testimonies into memorial museums should also be seen as a reaction to these criticisms – a reaction that was taken to the extreme by the Museo Diffuso with its near-complete relinquishment of material remains. Now, as then, museums extend their physical space by using media that allow them to transmit their educational messages across time and space (cf. Henning 2015: xxxvi). Reaching an ever-larger segment of the (global) population is of course particularly relevant for memorial museums, which see it as their duty to guarantee that the past will not be forgotten and that have incorporated human rights education into their agenda. The Museo Diffuso, by adding the adjective 'diffuso' (widespread), even highlights this agenda in its name. The most 'widespread' medium today is of course the internet.

As observed in Chapter 3, most projects have by now digitized their collections of video testimonies. Digitization appears as a potential solution to the inevitable decay of film rolls, videocassettes and audiotapes. It is an

attempt to make the video testimonies last for the longest possible time – at best forever. The Shoah Foundation, for example, claims that in order ‘to ensure that the world’s largest database of genocide testimony lives in perpetuity, the Institute has created a digital collections management technology that is so cutting edge USC now uses it to accommodate a wide array of clients eager to preserve their aging media’.<sup>12</sup> While the digitization was going on, a bar on the Foundation’s website showed the percentage of videos that had been digitized up to that point. Perpetuity is a very long time of course and it is likely that the collaborators of the Shoah Foundation are also aware that their endeavour is more wishful thinking than a feasible aim – no matter how cutting-edge their technology might be. After all, digitization might even accelerate the decay of video testimonies. Software changes rapidly and has to be updated continually. Nobody can guarantee that future generations will be as interested in (or obsessed with) the memories of witnesses to history as this one and that they will continue putting money and manpower into their preservation. Already today, accessing the content of old computers is a challenge – nobody can guarantee that the knowledge to access the digitized video testimonies will forever be transmitted from one generation to another (cf. Huyssen 2000: 35).

Digitization potentially facilitates the integration of video testimonies into the World Wide Web. Scholars of the digitization of memory generally observe that while cultural memory has always been undergoing processes of mediation, remediation and premediation, in the internet age, these processes are accelerating. Memory, they point out, is ever more caught up in networks that blur the characteristics ‘between the totalizing and the contextual, the permanent and the ephemeral, the archive and narrative’ (Hoskins 2009: 93). In order to grasp this phenomenon, Andrew Hoskins (2003: 7; 2009: 95; 2011: 269) has coined a whole array of concepts: ‘new memory’, ‘connective memory’, ‘digital network memory’, ‘on-the-fly memory’ and ‘metamemory’. This ‘new memory’, he argues, puts into question the traditional idea of the archive as a permanent storage space. Rather than being characterized by a distinction between active and passive memory, the archive and the canon, in the sense of Aleida Assmann, present-day cultural memory is subjected to ‘the continuous networked present of the Web and other digital media through which memory and technology co-evolve’ (Hoskins 2009: 101). A similar idea is expressed by Anna Reading (2011: 242), who uses the concept of ‘global memory’, a combination of the words ‘global’, ‘digital’ and ‘bit’. ‘Global memory’, she argues, ‘refers in terms of memory to the synergetic combination of the social and political dynamic of globalization with digitization’. In the present networked, digital age, these scholars point out, memory will always be

caught up in a web of similar and competing memory sites. Not only does the World Wide Web make it possible to reach an ever-greater proportion of the global population, it also allows those people to actively engage with its contents – a phenomenon that is generally caught by the concept of ‘prosumer’. However, what these studies tend to play down is that having access to a technology does not necessarily mean using it – both on the side of the institutions that digitize and on that of the potential ‘prosumers’.

Of the five museums analysed here, Yad Vashem is the only one that uses the internet to make video testimonies available on a grand scale. It publishes them on its website, on its YouTube channel, on Facebook, on Twitter and on Pinterest. However, even Yad Vashem is far from making its whole collection or entire video testimonies available. This counts for the online presentation of the video testimonies of all of the museums: if they make video testimonies available, they merely present extracts – often much fewer than are shown in the exhibitions themselves. Even the USC Shoah Foundation, certainly the most digitally oriented of the video-testimony archives, only offers 58 full-length testimonies online. Apart from Yad Vashem, the Museo Diffuso and the Neuengamme Memorial have made their video testimonies available online. Out of these, the Museo Diffuso is the only one that uses social media for the dissemination of video testimonies. On its website, the museum presents video testimonies under the heading of ‘Luoghi della Memoria’ (‘Sites of Memory’). These video testimonies can also be found on the museum’s YouTube channel. However, the reception is marginal. Posted on 1 October 2013, none of them has been watched more than 209 times as of May 2017 and none of them has been commented on. The museum further collaborates with the ‘Memoro’ project, a website founded in Turin that allows registered users to post video testimonies on an online platform.<sup>13</sup> Here the museum has made available the excerpts of the video testimonies that it shows in its exhibition as well as newer video testimonies that the museum has registered since. The Neuengamme Memorial, on its website launched in 2015, has made its whole exhibition available online. On the museum’s webpage, the main exhibition text, followed by a picture of the exhibition unit, is presented. With a click on an icon, a pop-up window with a digitized picture of a museum object, an arrangement of digitized photographs or a video testimony will appear. The online visitor can in this way digitally ‘walk’ through the actual exhibition. The Imperial War Museum has made available some of its audio testimonies but none of its video testimonies with Holocaust survivors in its online collection. On its YouTube channel, it has published only a few – and newer – video testimonies with witnesses to history of the Second World War, for example, with war veterans who

survived the evacuation of Dunkirk. On the website of the Holocaust Exhibition, the visitor can listen to audio testimonies with Holocaust survivors and, since January 2017, can watch one video testimony published on Holocaust Memorial Day. The Bergen-Belsen Memorial has – so far – not made any of its video testimonies available online.

Thus, although there are by now probably more extracts of video testimonies online than anybody might wish to watch during their lifetime, the percentage is still small compared to the actual sizes of the collections. In order to watch the full video testimonies, visitors still need to get in contact with the institutions and in general they still actually have to go there in person. To most museums, the opportunities that the internet offers seem to appear as a threat rather than as an opportunity. The integration into the World Wide Web means, on the one hand, making the testimonies available to an ever-larger audience, which for many projects is exactly the original aim of their production. Stephen Smith (2016: 215), director of the USC Shoah Foundation, even argues that ‘it is commonly understood that the subjects, in giving their life history, expected that it would be preserved in perpetuity; therefore, it is entirely ethical to digitize and provide digital preservation since it is the expectation of the subjects. It is also commonly understood that survivors wanted people of all walks of life to watch their histories’. On the other hand, an integration of the video testimonies into the World Wide Web intensifies the process of detaching the individual witnesses to history from their testimonies. This raises the question of the ‘ethics of access’ (Smith 2016: 215). If the witnesses to history, to a certain extent, relinquish control over what happens to their testimonies once they are recorded, the curator gives up control once the video testimonies are put online. Suddenly, everybody with access to the internet is potentially able to tinker with them. Even Steven Smith (2016: 215) therefore pleads for only giving access to ‘responsible and clearly defined user groups’; however, without specifying who should belong to these groups.

What then are the actual consequences of putting the video testimonies online? Alina Bothe (2012: 9), analysing the impact of digitization on video testimonies, argues that watching them becomes an activity that takes place in the ‘inter of the virtual archive’. This ‘inter’ refers to space, interpersonal contact and time. For one thing, the viewer watches the video testimonies in a virtual space that cannot be explored sensually, but that is still real. Second, the meeting of the viewer and the witness in this space is based on a virtual meeting, which nevertheless has a direct emotional impact on the viewer. Finally, the video testimonies, produced in the past, are instantaneously available, but can be interrupted and repeated. I

do not agree with Bothe that this 'inter' is necessarily a phenomenon of digitization – after all, interpersonal relationships or temporality are no more clearly definable if the video testimonies are watched in an archive or in a museum. However, Bothe is right in pointing out that the reception of video testimonies changes in that the spaces in which they are consumed change. This has less to do with the fact that the viewers do not have to enter an actual archive – here they would watch the video testimonies on a screen – but with the ever-faster and pluralized process of remediation that the video testimonies undergo. Published online, the video testimonies can now be watched on numerous platforms and on numerous devices from the laptop to the tablet to the mobile phone. They can further be streamed from one device to another. Each one of these devices shows the videos in a different format. The prosumers can often even choose between different formats on the same device and thus whether they want to watch a video as a thumbnail, integrated into the layout of YouTube or Facebook or on a full screen, for example. As the example of Yad Vashem shows, institutions can post the same video on numerous platforms.

The integration of the video testimonies into the internet also renders them physically portable. Everybody can carry the videos around with them and watch them in any possible space – from the living room to the train to the public bathroom. This mass exposure of video testimonies brings with it several anxieties, as Amit Pinchevski (2011: 261) points out. The fear is that, on the one hand, the video testimonies might lose their effect. On the other hand, that they might lead to an 'over-identification with the victim' (Pinchevski 2011: 261). Identification does in fact occur rather frequently, as an analysis of the comments of the most popular video testimonies for each year on Yad Vashem's YouTube channel shows.<sup>14</sup> Many of the comments that are posted here are emphatic or praise the survivors. For example, many commentators point out that although they 'cannot know' or 'cannot imagine' what the witness to history went through, they feel with them. Many of them point out that they were crying while watching the video testimony. Some of them try to find a connection to the survivors – such as a birthday shared with an important day in the survivor's life, the same surname or a connection between their own family's history and that of the witness to history. However, a tendency towards over-identification with the victims can especially be found in comments that are geared towards the perpetrators. The latter are equated with 'Hitler' and 'Mengele' and are stylized as pure evil. Many commentators express that they 'hate' the Nazis. Thus, while they empathize with the victims, they fiercely reject any connection to the perpetrators.

The integration of video testimonies into the World Wide Web also leads to what Pinchevski has called their ‘transduplication’: ‘Digital copies are equally manipulatable and utterly interchangeable (file, image, audio, video)’ (Pinchevski 2011: 254). This entails the danger of sending the video testimonies right into the arms of revisionists and Holocaust deniers. Digitized video testimonies with their many historical errors and the distortions that human memory imposes on reality can seem like a god-send to those looking for easily refutable statements to ‘prove’ that the Holocaust never happened. The World Wide Web is in fact one of the favourite media of revisionists who endorse freedom of speech as the internet’s ideology (Nachreiner 2013: 11). It is here that they feel they find a platform to communicate with each other and with an interested public that is otherwise denied to them. Indeed, even a quick search on YouTube shows that manipulated video testimonies are used for the dissemination of so-called ‘hate speech’. However, such videos are neither frequent, nor are they necessarily a consequence of making the video testimonies freely available online. In the video ‘The Last Days of the Big Lie’, which was posted in 2011, for example, Steven Spielberg’s documentary *The Last Days* from 1999 is ‘deconstructed’ by a Holocaust denier who has obviously taken the DVD of the documentary as his basis.

One of the most easily available – and therefore also most-feared – functions of websites like YouTube that are available to Holocaust deniers and revisionists is the comment function. The Fortunoff Archive has therefore suppressed this function on its channel. Yad Vashem allows it. Anti-semitic comments or so-called hate speech does occur. However, such comments are rather the exception than the rule and they are mostly taken up by other commentators who either try to set the records straight or, more frequently, start insulting the commentator in question.

What is more striking than the few hate comments is the absolute lack of comments and responses to commentators’ queries from Yad Vashem itself. Many of the commentators express their incomprehension that something like the Holocaust could have happened or post rather risqué explanations for the rise of National Socialism and genocide. In fact, the comments posted underneath the video testimonies online can be read as what Roger Simon and Claudia Eppert (2005: 58ff) have called ‘shadow texts’. In ‘shadow texts’, the witnesses to the survivor’s testimonies express their questions towards the testimonies that they have seen, examples of which are as follows:

How could anyone do this to other human beings? How could such horror really happen? Why the Jews? Didn’t the Jews realize what was going on? Why didn’t more Jewish people take action to protect themselves? Why did people in the rest

of the world let these events happen? Could it happen again, could it happen to me? What would have happened to me? Would I have survived? Collaborated? Resisted? (Simon 2005: 59)

It is exactly these questions, with the exception of the second to last, or attempts at answers to those questions that appear most frequently in the comments underneath the video testimonies. Working through such shadow texts is, according to Simon and Eppert (2005: 53, 61), an important means for creating a 'community of memory' able to meet the 'ethical and epistemological responsibilities' of witnessing trauma. They use the classroom as an example for such a community. However, the classroom is never a fully democratic space. At the very least, the teacher here takes on the role of moderating the discussion. It is exactly this role of a moderator that is missing in the case of the video testimonies posted by Yad Vashem. Rather than taking the opportunity and responding to hate comments or setting historical facts straight, the institution lets the dialogue between the commentators go on without intervening. The communication between Yad Vashem and other YouTube users is limited to the institution posting further videos. In those videos, Yad Vashem instructs educators to use video testimonies in their classrooms,<sup>15</sup> for example, or informs them about historical events. Yad Vashem's YouTube channel therefore appears as a mere transposition of exhibition didactics. Like in the exhibition, where the dialogue with most visitors stops with the exhibition design and the exhibition texts, the dialogue with the online visitors stops with making the video testimonies available online. As I have shown elsewhere (de Jong 2015), this is also the case for the Facebook posts of Yad Vashem and other museums. If the institutions answer users' comments, they do so in order to give practical information on opening hours or the date of a particular event in their institution – never to get into a dialogue with their online visitors.

It needs to be pointed out here that, while the most watched video testimony by Yad Vashem, which was posted in 2009, had reached 599,354 views by November 2015, many of the video testimonies hardly reach a couple of hundred views and the number of comments hardly ever reaches a hundred. Considering that Yad Vashem had 900,000 visits in 2014 alone, the numbers seem marginal (Yad Vashem 2014: 6). The extension of the space of the museums is therefore nothing more than that – an extension of this space, alas in a reduced form. It is not properly used neither by the online visitors nor by the institutions. Rather than using the potentialities of online platforms and communicating with their online visitors, museums merely use them as a one-way means to provide information. Most of them only post limited information online. So far, memorial museums

seem to have more confidence in the genuine goodwill and willingness to learn of their exhibition visitors than in that of their online visitors.

## Conclusion

Video testimonies are thus used for transmitting the three main didactic goals of memorial museums: to ensure that the past will be remembered; to forward historical knowledge; and to forward the values and norms of democratic Western societies. In order to reach these goals visitors are induced to adopt different forms of tertiary witnessing in relation to different witness groups. Thus, visitors are invited to be empathetic with the victims. They are encouraged to take on the memory of their suffering and to pass it on to future generations. In order to facilitate empathy, the exhibition makers choose the most graphic parts of the stories and witnesses to history that the visitors can easily relate to. Perpetrator testimonies are ruled out, whereas bystander testimonies are presented in such a way that the visitors, rather than being invited to feel with them, evaluate their statements at a distance.

Through the arrangement of the different extracts, the museums create their own narratives about the past and instruct the visitors on how to interpret this knowledge. The ultimate goal is that visitors will evaluate the past and become active citizens in the present. In the Museo Diffuso, the witnesses to history, who were mostly partisan fighters, serve as role models for the visitors who are supposed to leave the museum convinced by the values of freedom and human rights. In the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the Neuengamme Memorial, the Imperial War Museum and Yad Vashem, the video testimonies are used to forward lessons that can be drawn from the Holocaust. These lessons can be summarized by the slogan 'never again'. They range from a renunciation of xenophobia, taking responsibility for the genocides happening today and abdication of war to becoming interested students of the past. As opposed to the other museums studied here, in Yad Vashem, the lesson of 'never again' is primarily a lesson of 'never again us'. Unlike in most other Holocaust museums, violence is not ruled out as a matter of principle, but is rather accepted as a means of defence. The witnesses to history are here also presented as less morally flawless than in other museums. Interestingly, although the internet would allow the museums to disseminate these messages to an even larger audience, they still only marginally use its potentials. Only a few video testimonies are posted online, and if they are posted, the peculiarities and opportunities of the platforms are hardly ever taken into consideration.



Let us come back to the concept of representation here. The witnesses to history that are chosen for the exhibitions are chosen so as to be representative ('Vertretung') of all of the victims. The extracts for the different video testimonies are arranged in such a way as to make present a particular interpretation of the past ('Darstellung'). Through this arrangement, the visitors are invited to create a particular mental image of the past ('Vorstellung'). However, while they are used as educational tools in museums, the museums do not educate the visitors on how to read and receive the medium of video testimony. As observed in the Introduction and in Chapter 3, the workings of memory, and the influence of interviewing techniques on the testimonies of witnesses to history, are eagerly discussed in academic circles but, so far, these discussions are not reflected in the representation of video testimonies in museums. No museum, for example, instructs its visitors on the workings of individual and communicative memory. No museum reflects on the interview situation and the influence that the dialogic form of the interview has on the testimony of the witnesses to history. On the contrary, the interviewer generally remains inaudible, and the abstracts from the different testimonies are often arranged in such a way that they seem to respond to each other. Instead of representing the dialogue between the interviewer and witness to history, a new dialogue between the different witnesses to history is constructed. Similarly, the post-production process, with its highly edited selection of extracts taken from entire video testimonies, is rarely made apparent. The Bergen-Belsen Memorial has marked cuts with the help of black screens, but it remains questionable whether most visitors will realize this after watching the videos for the first time. In the Museo Diffuso, it is only after having watched videos several times that video cuts (sometimes within the same sentence) are apparent. What museums try to induce in their visitors is 'immediate tertiary witnessing' – they are to forget the medium and feel as if they were directly talking to the witnesses to history, as if they were secondary witnesses. I have argued in Chapter 3 that video testimonies are recorded as cultural memory in the form of condensed communicative memory in the guise of individual memory. In the exhibitions as well as online, the medium of the video testimony is never put into question. The witnesses' testimony is presented as being without outside influence.

## Notes

1. 'Secondary witnessing' has become one of those concepts that are used so frequently that its origins are difficult to make out. Baer (2000) refers *inter alia*

- to the writings of Hartman (1996), who does not use it, at least in the text referred to by Baer and Langer (1991), who has used the concept of ‘witnesses to memory’. Hartman (2000) himself, in a later article than the one referred to by Baer sees its origins in Langer (1991) and des Pres (1976). Stier (2003) finds the origins in LaCapra (2001) who again makes reference to Langer (1991). Arnold-de Simine, who has written a whole chapter on the topic uses the concept without defining its origin – although in a later chapter she refers to LaCapra (2001). Also Wake (2003), who finds the origins of the concept in the writings of Felman and Laub (1992), does not provide a genealogy.
2. The literature of secondary witnessing is constantly expanding. For example, similar reflections have been forwarded by: Langer 1991; Caruth 1995; Hartman 1996; Weigel 1999; Stier 2003; Simon 2005; Hirsch 2012.
  3. Roman Frister has also published his autobiography under the title *The Cap: The Price of a Life*. On YouTube, a short film based on the story can be found here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Um\\_sqtPMCM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Um_sqtPMCM).
  4. The full video testimony can be found at: <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/remembrance/multimedia.asp#!prettyPhoto/104>.
  5. The full video testimony can be found at: <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/remembrance/multimedia.asp#!prettyPhoto/132>.
  6. The video testimony can be found at: <http://neuengamme-ausstellungen.info/media/ngmedia/browse/4/15#videostation>.
  7. The video testimony can be found at: <http://neuengamme-ausstellungen.info/media/ngmedia/browse/4/14#videostation>.
  8. The Museo Diffuso has subtitled its video testimonies. Although the subtitles often shorten the testimonies and, in my opinion, do not always translate the original very accurately, I will use these subtitles here when quoting from video testimonies. The video testimony with Maria Gaudenzi in Angelino’s testimony can be found at: [http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/In-citt%C3%A0\\_5735.html](http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/In-citt%C3%A0_5735.html).
  9. The video testimony with Marisa Scala can be found at: [http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/Tornare-dai-lager\\_5737.html](http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/Tornare-dai-lager_5737.html).
  10. The video testimony with Cesare Alvazzi Del Frate can be found at: [http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/Epurazioni\\_5741.html](http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/Epurazioni_5741.html).
  11. The video testimony with Mario Giacometti can be found at: [http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/Il-consenso\\_5739.html](http://museodiffusodellaresistenza.memoro.org/it/Il-consenso_5739.html).
  12. The website can be found at: <https://sfi.usc.edu/about>.
  13. The website can be found at: <http://museodiffusotorino.memoro.org/it/cercatore.php?ID=4196>.
  14. I carried out this survey on 12 November 2015 and again on 13 May 2017. The categories that I made out are: comments expressing empathy, comments pointing out how bad the Nazis were, comments trying to explain National Socialism or the Holocaust, comments expressing their incomprehension at what happened, comments pointing out the importance of having testimonies and of remembering, comments with a religious content, comments pointing out that nothing has changed, comments in which the

commentators attack or criticize other commentators, comments praising the survivor, comments trying to explain the deeds of the survivor, comments pointing out that the victims did not die in vain, commentators thanking the institution or the witness, comments in which the commentators point out that they met the survivor in the video testimony or another survivor or that they visited a memorial institution, comments pointing out that the survivor has passed away, comments in which the commentators refer to their own family's history, philosemitic comments, anti-semitic or anti-zionist comments, and comments in which the commentators advertise their own websites or clips. I analysed the comments underneath the following video testimonies: 'Surviving the Holocaust – Yaakov Hollanders Story', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PHPd67kYp0>; 'Twin Holocaust Survivors Describe Arriving in Auschwitz', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWJy jAYyF8E>; 'Holocaust Survivor Testimonies: Selection in Auschwitz', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNpl83-rXKM>; 'Saved by Oscar Schindler: Testimony of Holocaust Survivor Sol Urbach', [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFpLP9\\_sXdo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFpLP9_sXdo); 'Fanny Rozelaar and Betty Mayer – The Nazi Rise and its Effect on the Lives of Jews in Germany', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbu8cqBdNtg>; 'The Vel D'Hiv Roundup', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRN15hAspJE&t=87s>; 'Holocaust Survivor Testimony: Rita Kraus', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPs2NaCtVEU>; 'Holocaust Survivor Testimony: Shela Altaraz', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcRq7ZMHvsU&t=1s>; 'Holocaust Survivor Testimony: Lonia Rozenhoch', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RoSx8WNldE>; 'Babi Yar Massacre', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyfx9jL1ymI>. Categorizing prosumer comments can of course be a highly arbitrary business. However, I came to a similar conclusion here as when analysing the comments underneath the most popular Facebook posts of Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in June 2015 (de Jong 2015). I also came to a similar conclusion as Alina Bothe (2012b) in her analysis of the comments posted under the video testimonies on the Shoah Foundation's YouTube channel.

15. The video can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLj1tRCohZq828tEiZo2fAdbBylR0UtDOM&v=vGx-8oMuOsk>.

# CONCLUSION



**Figure 6.1.** Group picture of the twenty-seven Europeans in 'It's Our History!'  
© Museum of Europe

## The Musealization of the Witness

Between October 2007 and May 2008, on the occasion of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Rome Treaties, the Brussels-based non-profit organization Museum of Europe staged the exhibition 'It's Our History!'.<sup>1</sup> Originally designed as the opening exhibition for a bigger museum of European history, it was on display in a slightly altered form under the title 'Europa – To nasza historia' in Wrocław<sup>2</sup> during the summer of 2009. Its subject was the history of European integration from 1945 to 2007 (cf. Charléty 2006; Mazé 2008; de Jong 2011; Kaiser, Krankenhagen and Poehls 2014).

As indicated by the title 'It's Our History!', it was the Museum of Europe's aim to show the history of European integration as a history from below – a history of Europe's citizens. The exhibition started in the lobby with an introductory 'manifesto' stating that 'the History, with a capital H, of European construction is inextricable from our own personal history, that of each European citizen. It is not the reserve of those who govern us'.<sup>3</sup> This concern for a history of the people was realized in the use of '27 ordinary citizens from the 27 countries of the European Union' (Museum of Europe 2009: 23) who told episodes from their life stories in video tes-

timonies distributed throughout the exhibition. Here, the Estonian Anto Raukas, for example, related his participation in the so-called ‘Phosphorite War’; the Spaniard Juan Fernandez Aller remembered Tejero’s coup d’état in 1981; and the Czech Ludvik Hlavacek recalled how he signed ‘Charter 77’.

If video testimonies can still most frequently be found in Holocaust and Second World War Museums, their presence in the ‘It’s Our History!’ exhibition shows that they are now also used to represent positive histories such as that of European integration. If the musealization of video testimonies is, as I have argued, a global assemblage, then their presence in the exhibition ‘It’s Our History!’ is a sign of this. Although the exhibition did of course have a very different focus than exhibitions in memorial museums analysed here, similar patterns could be observed. I will therefore here use ‘It’s Our History!’ to retrace the main findings of this study.

### *Collecting*

‘My own life story has reached a climax when I myself became an object in Europe’s history’, observes Andreja Rither, one of the twenty-seven witnesses to history in a blog that the Museum of Europe published alongside the exhibition ‘It’s Our History!’<sup>4</sup> Turning life stories into objects of history is, as we have seen, the main aim behind the practices of recording and collecting video testimonies. Recording and collecting video testimonies means trying to preserve for eternity a memory based on communication – and with this memory, the bodies of witnesses to history. Andreja Rither is a museum professional. She was the Slovenian Minister of Culture and is the former director of the Museum of Contemporary History in Celje. In her video testimony, she is filmed walking through a flea market and choosing objects for her museum. Andreja Rither’s video testimony represents collecting: the collecting that she herself carries out, saving objects from the rubble of Europe’s past, as well as the work carried out by the collaborators of the Museum of Europe when they chose her and the other twenty-seven Europeans for the exhibition.

Unlike museums such as the Neuengamme Memorial, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, or Yad Vashem, the Museum of Europe could not fall back on a collection of prerecorded video testimonies. There is, as yet, no equivalent of the Fortunoff Archive or the Shoah Foundation for the history of the EU.<sup>5</sup> Even the project of the Museum of Europe ended with the collection of the twenty-seven video testimonies. The video testimonies were thus meant as part of the canon of European history right from the beginning.

However, not unlike projects that collect testimonies of Holocaust survivors, the video testimonies of the twenty-seven were recorded in order to give voice to the people, in opposition to the official statements of the politicians. Andreja Rither and the other twenty-six Europeans were presented for the first time in the second room of the exhibition. Here, a group picture showing them in elegant attire covered a whole wall (Figure C.1). In its educational guide, the Museum of Europe compared this picture to the so-called ‘family pictures’ taken of the heads of state at EU summits (Museum of Europe 2007: 2). By remediating official pictures of heads of state, the Museum of Europe put the twenty-seven Europeans’ life stories on the same level as the official documents of EU history and made them representatives (‘Vertreter’) of this history.

The aesthetics of the video testimonies in ‘It’s Our History!’ did not fully follow the scheme of a monochromatic background and a focus on the face that I have observed in the case of most video testimonies. Although the group picture of the twenty-seven Europeans had a black background, in the individual video testimonies, the witnesses to history were shown walking through their home towns, surrounded by their friends and colleagues. Even here, however, the interviewer remained hidden and the focus was often on the face or the upper part of the witnesses’ bodies. With the group picture and the video testimonies, the Museum of Europe illustrated the EU’s motto ‘Unity in diversity’. Unity came to the fore in the group picture, diversity in the individual video testimonies representing (‘vertreten’) the individual stories of common Europeans and that of the countries that they come from.

### *Exhibiting*

Each video testimony in ‘It’s Our History!’ was accompanied by an object – either a personal one or one that was in some way connected to the history of the country of a given witness. Thus, next to the Hungarian Gyula Csics’ video testimony, one could see the diary he kept during the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, when he was only twelve (Figure C.2). In the video testimony, Csics could be seen flicking through the pages of this diary, an exhibit not unlike Zofia Zajczyk’s doll in Yad Vashem and Yvonne Koch’s gloves in the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. As with the examples from Yad Vashem and the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the visitors were encouraged to believe in Csics’ testimony because they saw the diary, while the diary itself proved the genuineness of the testimony. The video testimony and the object authenticated each other.



**Figure 6.2.** The video testimony with Gyula Csics in the ‘It’s Our History!’ exhibition © Museum of Europe

As in Yad Vashem and the Imperial War Museum, ‘It’s Our History!’ also included several reconstructions of interiors and exteriors. One of those reconstructions was a Sabena DC-6, the plane used to fly Belgian nationals out of the Congo after the country’s independence. Like the railway carriages in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum, the Sabena DC-6 had been cut up at angles. On the plane, visitors could hear audio testimonies with Belgian witnesses of the decolonization of the Congo. The audio testimonies in the Sabena DC-6 made apparent the effects of decolonization on Belgian nationals. At the same time, the combination of testimonies and the reconstruction located the events in the past. Not unlike in Yad Vashem and in the Imperial War Museum, the visitors’ experience was in this way both authenticated and de-authenticated. Bringing the events of the past to the fore through reconstruction and personal stories, the exhibition also helped to authenticate the teleological exhibition narrative that showed the history of Europe as culminating in the European integration process, as well as the exhibition unit as an adequate representation of this narrative. Finally, the Museum of Europe also added historical film footage of, for example, the fall of the Berlin Wall or the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu to the video testimonies.

Also in ‘It’s Our History!’, the video testimonies were therefore used both as primary and as secondary museum objects. They functioned on

the four levels of authentication defined in Chapter 4: they helped to authenticate other objects; the teleological narrative that concentrated on showing how the European integration process lead to an EU in which all Europeans can happily live together; the exhibition aesthetics that concentrated on both official documents and popular culture; and the visitors' experience of reliving the different stages of the integration process while at the same time locating them in the past.

### *Communicating*

Although the witnesses to history in 'It's Our History!' were supposed to represent 'ordinary Europeans', they had, in fact, rather extraordinary stories to tell. They had been active in the resistance against the regimes in Eastern and Central European states and were actively involved in 'building Europe' (Shore 2000). Wolfram Kaiser (2011: 393) has observed that the twenty-seven witnesses to history in 'It's Our History!' 'clearly appear to have been neatly selected and arranged so as to cover most of the EU's objectives and policies' and that they 'predominantly come from well-educated middle- and upper-middle class professionals; in other words, from more transnationally socialized and oriented elites who profit most socio-economically and culturally from European integration'. In fact, the diversity shown in 'It's Our History!' was predominantly national diversity. As in the memorial museums analysed in this study, witnesses to history were omitted if they were likely to compromise the exhibition narrative or seemed foreign to the exhibition's main target audience – precisely those well-educated white middle and upper-middle-class professionals that are represented by the twenty-seven Europeans. The individual video testimonies were put together in such a way that each one of them ended with a reflection on the EU. Although small criticisms could occasionally be heard, most of the witnesses – clearly prompted by the interviewers – praised the European integration process.

Thus, not unlike in the Museo Diffuso, all of the witnesses to history were presented as role models for visitors. The most symptomatic example of this was Roger Lavis and Philip Cozette, the representatives of France and the United Kingdom. Lavis and Cozette had their fifteen minutes of EU fame when they shook hands at the junction of the construction sites in the Channel Tunnel between Calais and Dover. In their testimony, the manual work that represents the beginning of the European integration process in the coal and steel factories, and the fictional bridges on the euro banknotes that join European countries, come together in a concrete act of



tearing down natural frontiers between the peoples of Europe. This was of course long before any talks of a possible or an actual 'Brexit'.

In 'It's Our History!', the patterns of the musealization of video testimonies that I have analysed in Holocaust and Second World War museums are once again apparent. First, the video testimonies of the twenty-seven Europeans were collected as representatives of larger entities: the history of the EU, that of all of the peoples of Europe, as well as that of the individual countries that they came from. Second, the video testimonies with the twenty-seven were used as a combination of primary and secondary museum objects and were put into a relationship of mutual authentication with other exhibits. Third, the video testimonies were used in order to communicate the history of European integration as a history that improved the lives of the European people. The visitors were to leave the exhibition as good EU citizens. For this purpose, they were presented with individuals that they could easily identify with.

### **Extending Communication into the Future**

As the example of 'It's Our History!' shows, the time span between a historical event and recording and exhibiting video testimonies is becoming shorter and shorter. While it took thirty-five years for the first video testimonies with Holocaust survivors to be recorded and another twenty years for them to be used in museums, video testimonies are now often recorded only a couple of years or even weeks after the events they describe and they have become a favourite tool in museums and exhibitions on contemporary history. To give only a few examples other than the exhibition "It's Our History!": not unlike the Museo Diffuso, the Villa Schöningen, a museum on the history of the Glienicker Brücke, the border between East and West Berlin that served as a spot to exchange captured spies, has recorded video testimonies as its main exhibition element. The Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland exhibits video testimonies with witnesses to history of several important events in Germany's history. Like the Museum of Europe, the Visitors' Centre of the European Parliament in Brussels shows video testimonies with European citizens, while the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk exhibits video testimonies with witnesses of the Polish resistance against communism.

This proliferation of video testimonies in museums on contemporary history not only relates to the fact that better and cheaper technology has made recording and exhibiting them easier. After all, we would not need to use this technology for the purpose of recording and exhibiting video

testimonies. For the moment, the musealization of video testimonies is the climax of a long history of mediation and remediation of the figure of the witness to history, which started with the Eichmann trial and has led to what Annette Wieviorka has called 'the era of the witness'. Over the years, remembering individuals were turned into legitimate carriers of cultural memory and legitimate historiographical sources. The fear of losing the last witnesses of events that are considered as important has now touched other events than the Holocaust and the Second World War as well: our present-day memorial culture has problems accepting the natural disappearance of communicative memory.

The introduction of video testimonies into museums signifies a change in: memorial culture; the reception and use of testimony; the conception of what a museum object can be; as well as the museum experience itself. For one, the transition from communicative memory to cultural memory (Assmann 1992) is being subverted. As we have seen, with the musealization of video testimonies, a media representation of communicative memory has become part of cultural memory.

Second, in the museums, video testimonies become what Krzysztof Pomian has called 'semiophores'. They enter the realm of salvation and of signification. As exhibition items, video testimonies are fragmented and put together in such a way as to communicate different didactic messages. In museums, the functionalization of video testimonies that started in TV documentaries is taken to a new level. While the viewers of TV documentaries have to follow the pace of the documentary, in museums the video testimonies can be viewed over and over again. While TV documentaries are broadcast once or twice, as museum objects, video testimonies are presented over a long period of time. They have become integral elements of an institution that has been specifically created to salvage vestiges of the past for the future and that imbues them time and again with new messages and new data.

Third, the introduction of communicative memory into the realm of cultural memory signifies a transformation of the conception of what constitutes a museum object. The remnants of the past that museums salvage have tended so far to be material vestiges or photography and film. They have either been 'objets laissés' or 'objets souvenirs' (Thiemeyer 2010: 267ff). Video testimonies are what we could call 'objets mémoires'. Like objets souvenirs, video testimonies are produced in order to remember an event. Unlike objets souvenirs, which are produced in the moment, video testimonies are produced at a temporal distance from the events that they are intended to memorialize. Video testimonies are souvenirs of past events, but they are also representations of our present-day memorial culture.

Fourth, the musealization of video testimonies has therefore also transformed the institution museum. Museums have the function of remembering the past. Thus far, they have done so by exhibiting silent objects that are given signification with reference to the didactic goals of the museum. With video testimonies, the present has entered museums. The witnesses to history in the video testimonies look like the visitors' parents and grandparents. The museum objects that have been taken out of everyday use and introduced into the realm of signification are now linked with the present memory of those objects and the time that they come from.

However, video testimonies will be the 'objets laissés' of a present-day memorial culture. Video is a medium that ages quickly and video testimonies that have been recorded during the 1990s already look old. In twenty years' time, all video testimonies that are being recorded today will inevitably suffer the same fate. It remains to be seen what will happen to them once they no longer show representations of people remembering in the present, but rather representations of people remembering in the past.

In fact, that moment might already have come: together with the USC Institute for Creative Technologies, the USC Shoah Foundation has developed a hologram of a Holocaust survivor. The prototype of the project shows the survivor Pinchas Gutter who has been interviewed during three hours while being filmed by seven high-speed cameras (de Jong 2015; Körte-Braun 2015; Knoch 2017). During the interview, answers to one hundred questions of which the director of the Shoah Foundation, Stephen Smith, thinks that they will still be asked in one hundred years, were recorded (Maio, Traum and Debevec 2012). Around ten to twelve technologically even more refined holograms are planned for the future. In collaboration with the USC Institute for Creative Technologies and the USC Shoah Foundation, a similar project, The Forever Project, is being carried out at the National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Laxton (Sherwood 2016).<sup>6</sup> The holograms show the witnesses to history sitting in a chair and can be projected into a room. Visitors can directly ask them questions.

The motivations for recording and exhibiting holograms are comparable to the motivations advanced for recording and exhibiting video testimonies. Thus, the National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Laxton has recently published a trailer in the style of a Hollywood fantasy movie to raise further funds for its project.<sup>7</sup> A voice-over can be heard saying:

For the longest part of the century, they have lived quietly amongst us. Men and women sharing their powers. The power to move, inspire, guide and teach. The power to open eyes. Transform lives. Change their future. The power to build a

better, kinder, safer world. Ordinary men and women with extraordinary strengths. If only they also had the power of immortality. Now, through the power of 3D technology, we can all keep their stories alive. Because these are the men and women who know the truth about mankind. A truth that needs to live forever. Truth Forever.

The newest project of the USC Institute for Creative Technologies combines the hologram with Pinchas Gutter with a digital reconstruction of Majdanek Extermination Camp. This installation is shown in a set that consists of a bed of gravel covered with mirrors. The set designer David Korins ('The Incredible, Urgent Power of Remembering the Holocaust in VR' 2017) wanted:

for the space to reflect its environment and also each person's reaction: There are so many emotional onramps that people have with regard to this subject matter that I think I would be presumptuous to try and prescribe ... My hope is that the kind of environment we've created allows for anyone's attachment to history, whether it's incredibly specific or it's just a vague idea, can have a place to live.

Thus, for the moment, the trend seems to go in the direction of making the feigned communication between witnesses to history and visitors seem ever more realistic, as well as to create immersive digital spaces for the visitors. While with the first video testimonies, the hope was that they would be particularly appealing to an audiovisual audience, in the case of the holograms, the hope is that they will be particularly appealing to a future digital audience. Like the video testimonies once were, the holograms now seem particularly apt to reproduce the dialogic structure of communicative memory (Maio, Traum and Debevec 2012). Like in the case of video testimonies, the medium is to disappear behind representation and the viewers are supposed to become 'immediate tertiary witnesses'. Like the video testimonies, the holograms are supposed to transpose the witnesses to history into a future that is defined as 'forever'. As in the case of the video testimonies, the witnesses to history are given an educative function – they are even endowed with the special power of being able to secure world peace. Hence, while the media change, the desire to save communicative memory for the future is still met with ever more urgency.

## Notes

1. The exhibition was on show from 26 October 2007 to 12 May 2008 in the Brussels exhibition space Tour et Taxis.

2. The exhibition was on display in the Hala Stulecia from 1 May 2009 until 5 August 2009. The Polish 'To Nasza Historia' is a direct translation of 'It's Our History'.
3. This is the wording that was used in the Wrocław version of the exhibition. The museum texts were altered considerably for the exhibition in Wrocław; when referring to the museum texts, I will here refer to the Wrocław version of the exhibition.
4. The blog is not available anymore. It could be found at: <http://blog.expo-europe.be/andreja-rither-museologue-et-piece-de-musee>.
5. However, the European University Institute is carrying out several oral history projects with politicians, diplomats and executive officials, as well as individuals working at the European State Agency: <http://www.eui.eu/HAEU/EN/OralHistory.asp>.
6. The project website can be found at: <https://www.nationalholocaustcentre.net/interactive>.
7. The trailer can be found at: <http://www.foreverproject.co.uk>.



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