

## 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.'