

Chapter 2

GENEALOGY

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

Aghet – Ein Völkermord

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oral History: Ordinary People as Historical Sources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, competitions invite young people to carry out interviews with witnesses of the past. In 2009, for the occasion of the German Day for the Victims of National Socialism, and the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January 2010, the Berlin City Parliament invited young people to start a dialogue with the generation of their grandparents and great-grandparents for the competition 'Ich bin Zeuge meiner Zeit'⁵ ('I am a Witness of My Time'). Until a few years ago, the German Historical Museum used to organize the annual competition 'Was für ein Leben!' ('What a Life!') that gave awards to interesting and/or exemplary biographies. The people with the 'best' biographies won the production of a documentary of their lives. The great popularity of the internet, along with cheap and easy-to-use digitization technologies, have made testimonies available to an ever-larger audience all over the world. Websites such as *einestages*,⁶ run by the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, publish, inter alia, the life stories of prominent and ordinary witnesses to history. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 5, video-testimony projects now have their own websites⁷ and/or put the videos on YouTube and other social media websites. Since 2012, the project 'Gedächtnis der Nation' ('Memory of the Nation'), founded by the German TV Historian Guido Knopp and the journalist Hans-Ulrich Jörges, allows anybody to be interviewed and to put their interviews online. With a so-called 'Jahrhundertbus' ('Century Bus'), a mobile recording studio, interviewers travel all over Germany to collect video testimonies for the project's website and YouTube. The website also offers advice to individuals who want to produce their own video testimonies and allows them to upload them on the project's YouTube channel.⁸ Finally, by creating Facebook pages and blogs for victims of the Holocaust, even the dead are now brought back to the world of the living and given a voice (Heyer 2010: 12).

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

Notes

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