

INTRODUCTION

Museum Visit One: On the Difficulty of Objects Telling Stories

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

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

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

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

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

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

Museum Visit Two: A Museum (Nearly) without Objects

The Italian city of Turin has had its own Second World War museum since 2003. The museum has been given the slightly lofty title: Museo Diffuso della Resistenza, della Deportazione, della Guerra, dei Diritti e della Libertà ('Widespread' Museum of Resistance, Deportation, the War and Freedom¹ – herein Museo Diffuso). I visit the museum for the first time in January 2009. The main exhibition rooms are located in the cellar of recently renovated eighteenth-century military barracks in the historical centre of Turin. Having entered the museum on the ground floor, I am offered headphones and am then led down a dark, narrow staircase. Through the headphones I hear the voices of people who lived in Turin during the war. In short statements, these people relate how they



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

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

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



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

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

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

Video Testimonies as Museum Objects

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Witnessing: Testimonies as Post-traumatic Evidence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Memory: Communicative Memory and/as Cultural Memory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Globalization: Video Testimonies as a Global Assemblage

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mediation: Video Testimonies as Adaptive Media

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

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

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

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

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

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

Signification: Video Testimonies as Signs in Space

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Memorial Museums: Exhibiting Memory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Musealization of Video Testimonies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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