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## MICROPHONE, VIDEOTAPE, DATABASE: REFLECTIONS ON A MEDIA HISTORY OF THE HISTORICAL WITNESS <sup>1</sup>

Historical witnesses are shaped by a whole constellation of forces: history, certainly, but also by the media landscape which is running parallel to it. The advent of the witness presupposes the specific historical composition of political, social, historical-cultural and gerontological aspects, in which media also play a central role. Media are a necessary prerequisite for recording memories; a specific media environment is needed to process and distribute interviews, and media events are often what trigger memories and the desire to bear witness. In works of recent years, witnesses have been primarily discussed in terms of their methodological value as facilitating a study of history, or in the context of historical culture, memory discourse and trauma research (Pollak 1988; Felman/Laub 1992; Jureit 1999; Cohen 2014; Shenker 2015). This essay, however, considers the ways in which media, in its own right, has shaped historical witnesses. Considering that depictions of witnesses in films and television (and the historical-political implications of these depictions) have been previously analyzed in depth (Keilbach 2003a, 2003b, 2007; Bösch 2008), this essay will assume a rather different angle: an initial attempt at a media history of witnesses that looks at the relevance of media constellations from the advent to the evolution of the figure of the historical witness. The following outline is limited to audio and audio-visual media, therefore bypassing written testimonies, though without intending to minimize their importance. Using four examples of different audio and audio-visual testimony recordings of former concentration camp prisoners, <sup>2</sup> the essay will seek to clarify the relationship between historical witnesses and media dispositives. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, the main argument put

forward in this essay is that the media-based immediacy of the testimonies grants the witnesses authenticity as well as an affective power. Thereby, this ‘immediacy’ contributes significantly to contouring the figure of the historical witness.

### Standing microphone

Film – along with photography – was the medium the Allies turned to in order to document the horrific scenes they found in the concentration camps (Brink 1998; Zelizer 1998). It is no surprise, therefore, that the testimonies of the first eyewitness were also captured on film. For example, interview scenes can be found in both *Memory of the Camps* (UK 1945), an unfinished film produced by the British Ministry of Information, for which Alfred Hitchcock briefly worked as an advisor, and *Nazi Concentration Camps* (George Stevens, USA 1945), which was presented as evidence at the Nuremberg Trials (Douglas 1995). Sound recordings such as these were the exception, however, because they were technically difficult to produce, and the format of the interview was not yet established in documentary films. In what follows I will look more closely at the dispositive structure of the recording apparatus. As we will see, the technical conditions for recording sound on film resulted in a specific type of testimony.

A variety of witnesses are interviewed in both films. Where *Memory of the Camps* includes brief statements made by members of the British Army who emphasize the incomprehensibility of the events in the camps, *Nazi Concentration Camps* features two former concentration camp prisoners who speak about their own experiences prior to the liberation. The two survivors describe events and situations they experienced first-hand, so their statements are considerably different than those of the liberators. For example, Jack H. Taylor, a US Navy lieutenant who was captured by the Gestapo in Austria in 1944, says that he was hit many times during his arrest and was then interned in the Mauthausen concentration and extermination camp, “where we have been starving, beaten and killed.” He shows the dog tags of two of his American comrades who were murdered in the gas chamber, and upon

request he lists the different ways in which people were killed in the camp. The use of the pronouns “I” and “we” make it clear that he is talking about his own experiences.

The second testimony takes on a less personal narrative: a female doctor who is not introduced by name and who was interned in Bergen-Belsen describes the sanitary conditions in the camp. She talks about the lack of food and medicine, and provides an account of lethal injections and medical experiments on the prisoners. Her German testimony is translated into English by the male voice of the film’s voice-over. The translation is spoken over the doctor’s statement, making her words largely unintelligible. The wording of her testimony is changed as well: all grammatical indicators of her personal involvement are erased, transforming her first-hand account into a neutral description of a situation. An example of this is while she describes the cruelty of the SS men in a medically urgent situation in terms of “*man wollte uns keine Medikamente geben*” (“they didn’t want to give us any medicine”), the voice-over translates this as “no medicines were available,” and when she says “*man hat mit uns Experimente gemacht*” (“they did experiments on us”), the voice-over says “she adds that various medical experiments were done on the prisoners.”<sup>14</sup>

The films shot in the liberated concentration camps were usually without sound as most cameras in use at the time were not capable of recording sound.<sup>15</sup> The audio track for documentary films (voice-over commentary, music and ambience sound) would be recorded in a studio and added to the footage later. This explains not only the silence that is commonly found in documentaries when footage from the liberated camps is used – which often feels like shocked muteness in the face of the terrible scenes – but also the sparse statements from witnesses. In order to capture their testimony, it was necessary to have both a special camera that could record audio signals (an optical or magnetic soundtrack) and a suitable microphone which was placed in front of the witnesses.

The effects of these apparatuses are clearly manifested in the form and content of the testimonies. In the case of the two mentioned films, the witnesses

are not conversational partners in an interview situation; rather, they are giving public statements. They are placed in front of a carefully selected background and are required to speak into a microphone, with the frontal placement of the sound equipment forcing them to look directly into the camera. In the film *Nazi Concentration Camps*, the witnesses also play a representative role in that, for the audio recording, the two former prisoners who make statements are positioned in front of their fellow prisoners, who stand behind them as if in a group photo. Considering this placement, it is no surprise that the two prisoners frequently use the plural form (“we were starving,” etc.) and speak on behalf of the prisoners collectively. At the same time, such an arrangement, which resembles that of a public speech, places expectations on the speakers which they attempt to fulfill – either by making a little joke, as Jack H. Taylor does at the start of his testimony when he says “I’m from Hollywood,” and then adds, “believe it or not, this is the first time I have ever been in the movies,” or by trying to mention as many different situations and incidents in the camps as possible in a compressed form. Even the formal words of thanks to the Allied soldiers at the end of the testimonies can ultimately be attributed to the public speaking situation. It is obvious that such a situation is conducive neither to the type of intimate descriptions of feelings that we find in films with witnesses today, nor to the kind of precise depiction of historical events that historians often require from eyewitnesses. As mentioned earlier, these sound recordings are exceptions. It is still not clear whether this was because the technical effort made it difficult to conduct interviews, or because filmed testimony of Holocaust survivors seemed no longer necessary once legal proceedings were underway. But even though such interviews soon stopped being filmed, they still took place – just with the help of another medium.

#### Wire recorder

David Boder, a psychology professor at Illinois Institute of Technology, bemoaned the lack of witness accounts in the media early on.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the rarity of recorded interviews, as described above, he stated:

I could not have helped observing that while untold thousands of feet of film had been collected to preserve the visual events of war, practically nothing had been preserved for that other perceptual avenue, the hearing. (Boder 1949: xii)

While the newspapers and cinema screens were filled with photos and films showing the visible evidence of the events in the camps, Boder was interested in the aspects that were not conveyed through pictures: the speech of the victims and their personal experiences. This interest was undoubtedly a result of Boder's field of work, as he had studied the psychology of language since the mid-1920s.<sup>17</sup>

In the summer of 1946, Boder travelled to Europe to conduct interviews with former concentration camp prisoners in various DP camps. In his luggage he had a wire recorder and 200 carbon spools. This apparatus, a predecessor to the tape recorder which could record sound, had been developed a few years earlier by Boder's colleague Marvin Camras at the Illinois Institute of Technology. The device was based on a magnetic recording technique that used a fine wire wound in a spool as sound storage. For Boder, the wire recorder was the ideal medium for making the past experiences of his interlocutors accessible to others:

The magnetic wire recorder [...] offered a unique and exact means of recording the experiences of displaced persons. Through the wire recorder the displaced person could relate in his own language and in his own voice the story of his concentration camp life. (Boder 1949: xi)

Immediacy played an important role in Boder's project. It was critical to Boder that the witnesses be able to use their mother tongue so that they could formulate their testimony "authentically," without being hindered by the limits of their foreign language skills. In addition to overcoming language barriers, Boder tried to make the recording equipment inconspicuous, and avoided influencing his interviewees through his own reactions—which meant that, in keeping with the traditional psychoanalytic setting, he sat behind them (Rosen 2010: 175). Considering this effort to ensure immediacy, it

is no surprise that no one else was allowed to be in the room during the interviews and no preparatory notes were made beforehand. Furthermore, Boder always spent no more than a few days in each camp, which he explained was in part due to the fact that, if he would stay much longer, "the narratives would begin to show signs of preparation and lose their spontaneity" (Boder 1949: xii).

He chose his interviewees by dining with a group of displaced persons in the evening and then asking for volunteers for his project. In doing so, he made it clear that he was interested not in exceptional experiences but rather in "average stories." "I wanted the rank and file experience," he explained in retrospect, reflecting on his concern for recording representative experiences. The wire recorder was accorded special meaning during these first encounters with the witnesses:

After the meal I would ask [the DP's] to sing and, with their knowledge, I recorded the songs. When I played these back, the wonder of hearing their own voices recorded was boundless. (Boder 1949: xii)

With this 'ethnologist's trick' not only did he garner attention and authority among his hosts, he was also able to explain the connection between the apparatus and his project and convince them of its usefulness. By exposing his conversational partners to the recording device prior to the interview, he ensured there was less distraction during the interview itself.

At the start of the interviews, Boder would explain that people in the USA wanted to know more about the experiences in the concentration camps, and that the personal account of his interlocutor would help paint a clearer picture of this. He would then ask his interviewees to briefly introduce themselves and suggest that they use the outbreak of the war as a starting point for describing the course of their lives. He frequently intervened during these descriptions in order to steer the interview in a certain direction by asking specific questions or encouraging the interviewee to keep speaking. This basic constellation resulted in a specific type of testimony which revolved around

information concerning individuals and their life stories. The interviewees listed places, activities and family members. Emotional moments, by contrast, are rare in these interviews. In the seven transcribed interviews that Boder published in 1949 under the title of *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, there are occasional hints that the interviewees were fighting back tears or found it difficult to keep speaking, despite the fact that Boder's questions were in no way designed to elicit these reactions. On the contrary, he always directed the conversation back to the factual level or tried to adopt an optimistic outlook by, for example, asking the displaced persons about their future plans near the end of the interview.

During the first year following the liberation of the concentration camps, the emotional aspect of the survivors played a secondary role in Boder's interviews. Instead, conversations were primarily meant to take stock of the situation. The aim was to gain an overview of events, ascertain the whereabouts of family members and provide information about the fate of acquaintances whose relatives might be searching for them. The displaced persons did not describe in detail the horrific situations they had faced, nor did Boder ask them to recall their thoughts and feelings. But the interviews involved emotional moments nonetheless, a fact that Boder felt needed to be explained in the foreword to his book: he emphasized that his interviewees had not had access to books, radio broadcasts or religious services for many years, and that they often could not even converse with their fellow prisoners in their mother tongue. He went on to say:

It is no wonder that their language habits show evidence of trauma. Moreover, the emotional states aroused by the recollection of episodes of such unparalleled stress definitely contributes to the peculiar verbal structure and the discrepancies in time and place found on occasion in the narratives. (Boder 1949: xiv)

Indeed, David Boder's initial work in Europe was born of an interest in the psychology of language. However, while it was the linguistic characteristics of traumatic experiences that had first attracted his attention, once faced

with the reality recounted by the survivors Boder's focus appears to have shifted away from linguistics and trauma for a while. After returning to the USA, Boder became occupied with transcribing the interviews and publishing them,<sup>18</sup> his goal being to make the interviews easily accessible, rather than making a linguistic study of them.<sup>19</sup>

However, in the transition from sound recordings to writing, the interviews lost the very dimension that the wire recorder had so clearly accentuated: neither the quality of the voice nor the immediacy, speed, fleetingness or duration of the testimonies could be captured in writing. Hesitations, emphases and moments of silence were lost in the transcription. Nonetheless, in reading the transcribed interviews, their original media constellation shows through: the testimonies are not summarized but are reproduced in full. The interplay of questions and answers is captured, as are incomplete or grammatically incorrect sentences, unintelligible words and moments in which the conversational partners interrupt one other. While these features indicate that the published texts are based on spoken language, the content makes it clear that the interviews were neither held in public nor did they address a wider audience. The wire recorder created a conversational situation where it was possible to describe personal things without having to present oneself to others.

The interviews languished in obscurity for a long time. Wire recording technology soon became obsolete, and the transcribed interviews were considered too personal by historians and too reportorial by psychologists, so neither historians nor trauma researchers made use of them. The fact that David Boder's interviews are now receiving more attention is in part due to the fact that copies of the audio recordings were found several years ago, and in part due to the cultural significance attributed to this discovery. In its own right, the weight attributed to the discovery of Boder's recordings is not only down to the renewed interest in the narratives of Holocaust survivors; more than that, it has a lot to do with the current state of media technologies: the 118 sound documents have been digitized, classified and added to a database, where they can now be easily accessed online.

### Two-inch magnetic tape / television

While survivor testimonies were largely ignored in the early post-war years, this situation changed in 1961, with the start of the Eichmann trial. The trial in Jerusalem marked what would later become an understanding of the genocide that had taken place as the Holocaust. Moreover, it established remembrance as a constitutive moment of Jewish identity and contributed to an understanding of the Holocaust as a discrete event (Levy/Sznaider 2006: 120ff). At the same time, the trial brought forth the “advent of the witness” (Wieviorka 2006: 56ff). The creation of the witness as such was made possible by increasingly globalized media and news networks, as well as by the establishment of a new media technology: the two-inch magnetic tape recording. Holocaust survivors had testified as witnesses in previous Nazi trials, but the status of their testimonies changed dramatically with the Eichmann trial. While they had previously been called to the witness stand primarily to verify trial-related evidence, their function in the Eichmann trial was to bring history to life. Ultimately, the purpose of the trial was not only to convict Adolf Eichmann for his Nazi crimes, but also to bring about a concrete understanding of the historical events.<sup>10</sup> To this end, a hundred and ten Holocaust survivors were called to take the stand as “background witnesses,” whose testimony helped paint a picture of the course and scope of the genocide. However, their descriptions rarely contributed to ascertaining the truth behind the charges against Adolf Eichmann, as the witnesses frequently spoke about events they had experienced in countries and concentration camps outside of Eichmann’s sphere of influence.<sup>11</sup> The Holocaust survivors who testified in the Eichmann trial did so not as legal witnesses, but as *historical* witnesses.

Along with this shift, the trial turned a spotlight on the experiential dimension of events. In contrast to the abstract facts about railway timetables or numbers of deportations – data gleaned from the written evidence in the Eichmann trial – these witnesses talked about personal experiences. Attorney General Gideon Hausner had chosen the witnesses based on the testimonies they had previously given to the Yad Vashem memorial (Yad Vashem had

been collecting accounts from Holocaust survivors, first in written form and later on audio tape, as early as 1946, before the memorial’s official founding).<sup>12</sup> On the witness stand, the survivors were told to precisely describe “every horrifying detail of the atrocities they had endured” (Segev 1991: 347). The memory of the horrors they had been subjected to often emotionally overwhelmed the witnesses.<sup>13</sup> Their detailed descriptions also provoked the imagination of the listeners, some of whom fainted in the courtroom. This emotional effect can be attributed not only to the intensity of the situations described, but also to the physical presence of the witnesses and the immediacy of their oral accounts, giving their words particular power.

The Eichmann trial changed the status of Holocaust memories, and gained tremendous value through the authorization of legal discourse. Annette Wieviorka, in *The Era of the Witness* (2006), writes that the Eichmann trial “freed the victims to speak,” while simultaneously creating a “social demand for testimonies” (Wieviorka 2006: 87). Recordings of the survivors’ testimonies circulated on the radio, in films and on television, and the immediacy of these media was particularly suited for emphasizing the emotionality of the accounts. At the same time, more and more survivors who wanted to tell their stories stepped forward over the course of the trial. This creation, circulation and reproduction of witness testimonies was, on the one hand, associated with the historical-political and identity-related goals of the Eichmann trial, but on the other can also be traced back to the specific media constellation that drew attention to the witnesses in the first place.

The Eichmann trial can be considered to have been a global media event, publicized in the press and, most importantly, through television (Dayan/Katz 1992). Even before the trial began in Jerusalem, the *New York Times* predicted that it would attract special attention “because what will be one of history’s most celebrated trials will be the first to be televised on home screens around the world” (Jack Gould in: *The New York Times*, October 4, 1961, quoted in Shandler 1999: 91). The “globalization” of television alluded to here started in the 1960s, when news broadcasts, political programs and documentaries began, with increasing numbers, to cover events happening beyond

national borders. Satellite technology was an important prerequisite for this, making it possible to transmit television signals between stations that were far apart. The first television satellite was launched into space in the summer of 1962, but even before it began operating television broadcasters were testing the possibilities of this new technology – and the Eichmann trial was the ideal test case.

At the time of the Eichmann trial, television did not yet exist in Israel,<sup>14</sup> and so numerous television stations from different countries requested permission to set up their own cameras in the courtroom to produce footage themselves. There was not enough space to accommodate cameras from every interested country, so the Israeli government contracted Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation to produce and distribute footage of the Eichmann trial. Capital Cities, which at the time was still a small company with just a handful of television stations scattered across the USA, documented the trial on a non-profit basis.<sup>15</sup> The director was Leo Hurwitz, who had produced political documentaries in the 1930s and 1940s (i.e. *Heart of Spain*, *Native Land*, *Strange Victory*) and later worked anonymously (as he had been placed on McCarthy’s blacklist) for the CBS culture magazine, *Omnibus*.

What made the trial documentation special was the fact that Capital Cities did not record on film, but instead used video tapes: a relatively new technology that reduced the production and distribution time significantly. Video tape recording had been introduced in the second half of the 1950s, when the American television networks began to record live transmissions on two-inch magnetic tape during broadcast so that the recordings could be replayed at the same local time in different time zones. Capital Cities adopted this technology for the Eichmann trial: four video cameras were set up in the courtroom, and their footage was mixed “live” under the direction of Leo Hurwitz. The resulting end signal was not broadcast live, however, but was instead recorded on two-inch magnetic tape.<sup>16</sup> These recordings were then used to compile videotapes with selected scenes from each day. These tapes were flown to London and New York for further distribution to all television stations that covered the proceedings (Shandler 1999: 93ff; Lindeperg/Wie-

viorka 2015). So while the Eichmann trial was not broadcast live, the short production time for the coverage – resulting from the combination of video technology and rapid transport – approximated the immediate television reports that would soon be made possible by satellite technology.

This (approximated) temporal immediacy was entangled in a peculiar way with both the characteristics of the medium of television and with the unique aspects of the legal proceedings. As a medium received at the home front, television encourages an attitude from the viewer that could be described as intimate toward people on the screen, and the serial structure of television supports this sense of familiarity. The television coverage of the Eichmann trial put an additional emphasis on this intimate relationship, because in no other medium were feelings so clearly expressed and so immediately accessible as in the televised testimonies of the emotionally affected witnesses. In this respect, the Eichmann trial can be seen as having made it possible for the specific properties and potential of television to unfold.

In addition to its live character, it was this intimacy that differentiated television from other media. Therein it is no surprise that particular attention was paid to the emotional witness testimonies when television stations compiled their reports. At the same time, this unusual intimacy with “authentic” people and the spectacle of emotions (which stood in contrast to Eichmann’s emotional impassivity), sparked a demand among viewers for more witness testimonies. Annette Wieviorka has described the social dimension of this demand (Wieviorka 2006: 87), but in addition I want to stress its media component: the circulation of witness testimonies predicated the interest in witnesses that followed the Eichmann trial. This circulation was initiated and intensified by television, not least due to the prompt coverage and intimacy of the testimonies that emphasized the properties of television as a medium.

### Video recorder

While media institutions such as television networks and the “propaganda departments” of the Allies were the first to produce, distribute and popularize the figure of the (historical) witness, it was a grass-roots movement that

gave the figure of the witness another dimension: at the end of the 1970s in New Haven, Connecticut, the Holocaust Survivors Film Project was founded.<sup>17</sup> From the perspective of social and media history alike, it is no coincidence that this project was founded at this point in time. In the USA, issues dealing with certain communities and identity politics were at the forefront of society, and “Jewish identity” was being shaped by the shared experience of the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> In the meanwhile, historical interest in the Holocaust had grown steadily in the 1970s, a development reflected in the USA by a growing number of seminars and university courses on the subject (Novick 2000: 188). In the spring of 1978, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel, US President Jimmy Carter announced that a commission would be founded to plan a memorial for the victims of the Holocaust – another event that pointed to the growing awareness of the Holocaust in American society. This is the historical-cultural context in which the four-part television mini-series *Holocaust* (NBC) was produced, broadcast in April of 1978, and often described as the trigger for wider public engagement with the Holocaust (Shandler 1999; Knilli/Zielinski 1982).

Alongside the growing cultural relevance of the Holocaust, it was above all the establishment of a new media technology that made the Holocaust Survivors Film Project possible. From the mid-1970s on, video recorders – previously used exclusively in television production – became available on the consumer market.<sup>19</sup> It was soon possible to buy video cameras which enabled “amateurs” to produce video recordings. This “new” recording process had an advantage over the small-gauge film that amateurs had worked with up until that point, as it was both cheaper and easier to use. Unlike film, video technology also made it possible to record over a longer time without interruption, not an irrelevant addition when it comes to creating an intimate, intensive interview situation.

The Holocaust Survivors Film Project took advantage of this new technology. The two project initiators were journalist Laurel Vlock, who had interviewed Holocaust survivors for a television documentary about Yom HaShoah and experienced the intensity of such discussions first hand,<sup>20</sup> and psychoana-

lyst (and child survivor) Dori Laub. Both felt that the new medium was particularly suited for giving the survivors the opportunity to bear witness to events that they had likely not spoken of for decades. Conducting the video interviews gave survivors a voice (much like David Boder’s wire recordings), as well as a physical identity, whereby this visual aspect in particular was important to the reception of the recordings. As argued by James E. Young in *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narratives and the Consequences of Interpretation* (1988), the videos, “by showing us whole human beings, however inwardly scarred they are,” work to “rehumanize the survivors, and in so doing, rehumanize the murdered victims as well” (Young 1988: 163).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, they make visible the process of “the entry of memory into language, the search for the right words” (Young 1988: 160) as well as that of “not telling a story” and “the choice of whether to go on or not” (Young 1988: 161). In this respect, the recordings do not document the experiences of the survivors; however, the visual component enables the viewer to perceive the act of bearing witness. It is thereby no surprise that video interviews prompted a deeper reflection on both the events described and the very process of remembering and bearing witness (Langer 1991; Young 1988; Jureit 1999).

The interviews for the Holocaust Survivors Film Project were generally not conducted in the homes of the Holocaust survivors but in other spaces that had been set up as a “studio.” Next to the interviewer there was always at least one other person present to operate the video camera, made necessary due to the close-up shots, which required one to move the camera in order to follow the movements of the interlocutors, keeping them in frame. Despite the unfamiliar environment and the obvious presence of the camera, which might be expected to cause a certain sense of irritation or reticence, many of the testimonies are remarkably open and intimate. This can be attributed above all to the nature of the interview: the interviewers rarely interrupt the survivors’ accounts in an attempt to steer their testimony in a particular direction, and do not insist on a chronological narrative or information about particular individuals, as David Boder did. Instead, the aim of the Holocaust Survivors Film Project was to give the survivors – whose stories no one had

wanted to hear, or who had remained silent for a long time – a chance to talk about their experiences. Thereby the video interviews had not only a historiographical, but also a significantly therapeutic function: an approach that can be traced back in part to the psychoanalytic expertise of Dori Laub, who had previously treated numerous Holocaust survivors and their children.

Although the Holocaust Survivors Film Project used an interview method that involved as little intervention as possible, the interviewers still played a key role in the production of the testimony. Dori Laub explained this paradox in referring to the trauma of the survivors, who themselves questioned the credibility of the fragmentary memories and flashbacks that haunted them, and who also feared having to relive the events they remembered. The Holocaust survivors were all the more unsure of the factuality of events because the Holocaust was an event without witnesses (Laub 1992). It was not just the lack of “neutral” observers, the silence of the perpetrator witnesses and the systematic murder of victim witnesses that would make testimony impossible, but above all it was the structure of the event itself:

What precisely made a Holocaust out of the event is the unique way in which, during the historical occurrence, the event produced no witnesses. Not only, in effect, did the Nazis try to exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims. (Laub 1992: 80)

The perfidiousness of the Nazis’ extermination policy, according to Dori Laub, could be found in their ability to make the victims doubt the reality of their experiences. In order for the act of bearing witness to be possible, an empathetic listener is required: that is, a person who can help the victim bring to mind the traumatic experiences and who can confirm the factuality of the unbelievable events (Laub 1992). Video interviews, according to Dori Laub, are comparable in function to an empathetic listener. They “provide a listener to trauma” that activates the memory and creates the possibility of re-externalizing the event (Laub 1992: 70). The (video) camera is therein cen-

tral to the therapeutic process that is always implicit in the interviews for the Holocaust Survivors Film Project.

The interviewees who emerge from this concept of the interview are not historical witnesses who (can) contribute significantly to the reconstruction of historical facts. Their statements are often incoherent, associative and full of breaks, gaps and repetitions.<sup>122</sup> They usually do not bring forth any facts relevant to historical scholarship, as the memories of Holocaust survivors often cannot stand up to historical scrutiny. For example, Dori Laub describes the testimony of an eyewitness to the uprising in Auschwitz. In it, the witness vividly recalls the explosion of four chimneys (Laub 1992: 59ff). In fact, only one of the four chimneys was actually blown up. Although the historical facts are not correct in the testimony – meaning that the memory is empirically “false” – Laub stresses the historical truth of this account by interpreting it as a way of testifying that resists and “[bursts] open the very frame of Auschwitz” (Laub 1992: 62). The witnesses in the Holocaust Survivors Film Project primarily offer an insight into the process of remembering and creating meaning; the videos themselves “might, therefore, be thought of as helping to create, after the fact, the missing Holocaust witness, in opening up the historical conceivability (the retrospective condition of possibility), of the Holocaust witness” (Laub 1992: 85).

While the video camera may trigger a process of remembering on the part of the witnesses, the recordings also have a special effect on the viewers. The camera not only captures the testimony of the survivors, it enables us to see their emotional involvement. The witnesses’ search for words, their gestures and facial expressions all highlight the immediacy of the process of remembering, and can elicit a special kind of affective sympathy in the viewer. The close-ups in particular, James Young argues, “affect us viscerally, evoking, parasympathetic responses over which viewers have little control” (Young 1988: 163). It is this ability to create a sense of unmediated affectedness that makes the interviews so powerful, and so attractive to cinema and television. Considering the power of this medium, it is no surprise that the video interviews were used in other contexts as well. As early as 1980, a television docu-

mentary produced by Laurel Vlock with the name of *Forever Yesterday* (1980) used excerpts from the interviews that had been conducted for the Holocaust Survivors Film Project.<sup>123</sup> Interviews with (historical) witnesses are now a permanent fixture in films and television shows about the Nazi era, although the emotional moments during the process of remembering increasingly feel formulaic. This, too, can be considered a media-based (though not media-specific) effect, as oftentimes the format of witness testimonies from films and television shows shapes the behavior of the historical witnesses who speak out today.

#### (A glimpse at) Databases

While the proliferation of video cameras as a consumer technology facilitated the emergence of video testimonies, it is moreover the large-scale collection of these testimonies that has shaped their current pervasiveness. Today the Shoah Foundation holds the largest collection of Holocaust testimonies. The initiative was started by Steven Spielberg in 1994, after Holocaust survivors working as extras on the film set of *Schindler's List* expressed their desire to report on their own experiences in the camps. The foundation aimed at collecting at least 50,000 testimonies within five years.<sup>124</sup> Between 1994 and 1999, nearly 52,000 interviews with Holocaust survivors and witnesses were recorded in fifty-six countries and in thirty-two languages. From a media studies perspective, this sheer number brings up new questions relating to databases, storage capacities and data compression. Unlike the above-mentioned media constellations, these technologies do not affect the creation of testimonies, but they do regulate their searchability and accessibility.

For the Shoah Foundation, with its goal of 50,000 interviews, the importance of a database was clear from the outset. In order to make the interviews' content searchable, a cataloguing and indexing system was developed. This so-called Testimony Catalogue lists personal information (name, place of birth, family, religion), relevant places (ghettos, camps) and general experiences (hiding, resistance, flight, forced marches), all information taken from questionnaires filled out by the interviewees in preparation for the interview. The

testimonies are additionally indexed with the help of a thesaurus comprising 50,000 terms. During the indexing process, the video recordings are divided into one-minute segments, which are then assigned one or more relevant terms by a historical content analyst or indexer. Using a keyword search, and through the search terms' links to the time codes, thematic passages from the interviews can be called up to the precise minute.

In order for the database to function, the keywords need to be standardized. This means that the indexing thesaurus can only exist in one language. Since the thesaurus of the Shoah Foundation's database is composed of English terms, every interview that was not conducted in English but in another language had to be transferred into English keywords. It is only through this translation that any witness testimony can be found at all. The prerequisite for access to the archive of 52,000 interviews in thirty-two languages is thus the use and knowledge of its standard language, English.

As the logic of the database is based on segmentation, it favors users who do not view entire testimonies but only fragments of them. During the analog era, videotapes required linear playback, which stands in sharp contrast with the ability to search fragments of interviews by means of keywords. This implies a change in attitude when watching the testimonies. There is a difference between inserting a videocassette into a VCR, and preparing to watch a video about which one only knows that it will contain the testimony of a Holocaust survivor, and clicking a keyword that triggers a brief interview excerpt. In the latter case, one is surely less likely to listen intently in the way that viewers are often thought to do when faced with Holocaust survivor testimony.

James Young argues that video testimonies show "whole human beings" (Young 1988: 163). Given the interviews' segmentation to make them searchable in the first place, and in light of the possibility of accessing only fragments, this statement is questionable. In the digital age, Holocaust testimonies are changing once again. They are prevailing as sound bites in films and on television, or are available as searchable segments to be streamed by a computer. Just as wire and videotape recorders facilitated certain forms of Holocaust testimonies, it is being able to afford a particular media technology that is

transforming them once again. Therefore, to get a better understanding of these testimonies and their changing nature, it is necessary to study not only their political, social and cultural context but also the media-technological conditions and constellations that made their recording, use and dissemination possible in the first place.

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- 1 This article is a translation of “Mikrofon, Videotape, Database. Überlegungen zu einer Mediengeschichte der Zeitzeugen” in: Martin Sabrow/Norbert Frei (eds.) *Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen*, Göttingen 2012, originally published in 2010. Newer research literature is added in the footnotes where possible. Thanks to Yael van der Wouden for helping me revise the paper.
- 2 The preliminary nature of this outline also means that it foregoes a more precise definition of different types of “witnesses”, something that is necessary, however, in terms of both their rhetoric and the different forms of knowledge that they produce.
- 3 A media history such as this was foreshadowed by Louis M. Starr, who pointed out that interviews with witnesses which, at the end of the 1940s, were still being transcribed on the basis of notes, without wire or tape recorders, did not continue to be systematically conducted in the same way; cf. Starr 1980: 31.
- 4 While mentioning the profession of the two witnesses highlights their credibility, a gender-specific hierarchization of the statements is also apparent.
- 5 Regarding the history of the sound film camera, cf. Winston 1996.
- 6 For more about David Boder see Rosen 2010.
- 7 Cf. the article he published in 1940: “The Adjective-Verb Quotient: A Contribution to the Psychology of Language” in: *Psychological Record*, 3 (1939/40), pp. 310–343.
- 8 Boder describes his transcription procedure as follows: “By the use of two Peirce Wire Recorders with stop and start controls I listened on one machine to the original, sentence by sentence, and then dictated the English translations on the other machine. Typists then transcribed the material from the translated recordings” (Boder 1949: xiii).
- 9 Nonetheless, he did continue to study the psychology of language. To this end, he interviewed not only Holocaust survivors but also victims of the floods in Kansas City in

1951 in order to compare the effects of different traumatic experiences (Rosen 2009).

- 10 Regarding the historical-political importance of the trial, see for example Wieviorka 2006; Segev 1991; Zuckermann 1998; Yablonka 2004.
- 11 Hannah Arendt addresses this “right of the witnesses to be irrelevant” in her report on the Eichmann trial, pinpointing one of the main legal criticisms of the witness testimony, which relates above all to the interpretation of the rules of procedure (allowing “background witnesses” who do not address the matter at hand). Cf. Arendt 2006 [1963]: 225.
- 12 Annette Wieviorka says that there was “a veritable casting call” for witnesses, and she points out that the selection obeyed a “double imperative, historical and sociological”, in as much as Hausner ensured that there were accounts from all territories occupied by the Nazis and that witnesses from all social strata were represented; cf. Wieviorka 2006: 71, 73.
- 13 These statements therefore deviate from the juridical concept of testimony, which is based on rational and not emotionally led statements. Regarding the problem of juridical testimony in relation to the Holocaust, cf. Weigel 2000.
- 14 Television broadcasting started only in the late 1960s. For a discussion of the debates before television was introduced see Oren 2004.
- 15 The footage was sold to 38 countries, with the three American networks alone paying \$50,000 each for a daily, hour-long compilation of the events on each day of the trial. The proceeds from these sales were then donated to a charitable Israeli organisation; cf. Shandler 1999: 91; Douglas 2004.
- 16 However, a closed-circuit system that was set up in a neighbouring building allowed some hundred viewers to see a live broadcast; cf. Shandler 1999: 90f. Because the copyright situation was unclear, the videotapes were initially divided up between the New York production company and the Israeli client; from 1977, all of the videos were stored in poor conditions in the archives of Jerusalem University. In the mid-1990s, filmmaker Eyal Sivan started to research, catalogue, restore and digitally copy the tapes for his film *The Specialist*; cf. Sivan 2000. Today the trial can be watched on YouTube.
- 17 The Holocaust Survivors Film Project led to the creation of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies which has been housed at Yale University since 1981. The foundation of the film project has often been described as a direct response to the television series *Holocaust*, a fictional account which, according to Geoffrey Hartman, was considered by many survivors to present “a sanitized and distorted version of what they had suffered”; cf. Hartman 1996: 21.
- 18 Regarding the integration of Jewish survivors into US society and the shift in the significance of the Holocaust, cf. Novick 2000.
- 19 Regarding the history of the video recorder, cf. Wasser 2001; Zielinski 1985; Newman 2014.
- 20 Cf. the short profile of Laurel Vlock on the homepage of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies: <http://web.library.yale.edu/testimonies/about/founders>, accessed on 18 December 2015.

- 21 Young’s argument here relates to the ethical question of whether certain forms of representation reproduce the dehumanization of the victims.
- 22 Regarding the linguistic characteristics of the testimonies, cf. Young 1988.
- 23 Interviews with Holocaust survivors were found in earlier television shows as well, e.g. *Mendel Schainfelds zweite Reise nach Deutschland* (Hans-Dieter Grabe, ZDF 1972) or *Geschiedenis van een Plek* (Hans Verhagen and Armando, VPRO 1978), a Dutch documentary about the Amersfoort concentration camp, which was kindly brought to my attention by Andreas Schneider. The systematic recording of interviews provides very different resources for the production of films, however. This is especially apparent in the use of interviews from the archive of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, from which a total of eleven films have been made.
- 24 To achieve this, the Shoah Foundation hired 1,000 videographers and trained 2,300 interviewers who interviewed witnesses in 56 countries and 32 languages.

Sylvie Lindeperg

## JUDICIAL TRUTH AND CINEMATOGRAPHIC TRUTH – FILMED COURTROOM TESTIMONIES: THE CASE OF THE EICHMANN TRIAL

The Eichmann trial can be considered to be the first major collection of survivor testimonies filmed. Annette Wieviorka has shown that it marked what she terms the “advent of the witness” (Wieviorka 2006). It also established the advent of filmed eyewitness testimony.

The Eichmann trial was the first trial ever recorded entirely on video. It was filmed by the American documentary filmmaker Leo Hurwitz for a New York company called Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation, with the aim of providing images to TV networks around the world. The technical feat and formal devices entailed in the filming contributed to shaping the event and giving it wide media coverage outside of Israel. The footage also helped fix a mental image of the trial, filtered by the nature and processes specific to the medium, and build the memory of the Jewish genocide.

I shall analyze the following two phases: the filming of the trial, which I studied together with Annette Wieviorka <sup>1</sup>; and the uses that were made of the images, which played the role of a matrix in terms of remembrance and on a cinematographic level as well.

### 1. The role of the witness on the judicial stage.

In the Eichmann trial, in contrast to the Nuremberg trial, witnesses played a major role. In Nuremberg, prosecutor Justice Jackson had decided to base the accusation mostly on written documents, which were deemed more reliable. Witnesses did testify and some of them had a lasting impact – such as Marie-Claude Vailland-Couturier, whose testimony was partially filmed. But they were not called to the stand to give an account of history. They were