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Interest in how Holocaust survivors recount their experiences has burgeoned in the last thirty years. Published memoirs and literary fiction have been increasingly supplemented (if not supplanted) by electronically captured images of now elderly survivors reengaging with a past many may have preferred to forget. The exponential growth in what Annette Wieviorka terms “audiovisual” testimonies,\(^1\) has proved to be a mixed blessing; as Björn Krondorfer points out in the concluding chapter in this volume, trying to work through hours and hours of video can be an overwhelming task. When confronted by tens of thousands of individual stories, scholars need to develop innovative approaches and theoretical insights that can best take advantage of the possibilities new media offer.

Of particular relevance to the themes that emerge in subsequent chapters is Aleida Assmann’s analytic distinction between video archives as physical repositories that store information, and the

process of actively engaging with and transforming the material these archives hold:

The archive is pure potential, a possible source of information, nothing more. It is dependent on others to actualize and realize this potential, to transform it from the status of virtual information to that of palpable objects that can be transmitted and received by future individuals, who in witnessing the witnesses, will themselves learn and know and remember. The archive, then, has a double function: to store testimonies as virtual information and to restore them as communicated and re-embodied knowledge (emphasis in the original).2

By focusing on the historicity of survivor accounts of Holocaust experience, the ethical implications of telling, and the inter- and transgenerational impact of Holocaust videotestimony on “victim” and “perpetrator” descendants alike, research into the videotestimony collection held by the JHMRC has actively “animated” the archive and, in the process, has also challenged existing scholarly paradigms, most notably those that question the very possibility of recounting the Holocaust. Indeed, while much of the scholarly literature relating to Holocaust representation has emerged in the context of the study of individual written texts, many of which have now justifiably become part of the literary canon, the proliferation of community-solicited videotestimonies, dialogically structured by an interviewer, yet unedited and unpolished in form, raises fresh questions about the extent to which the “democratisation” of memory in “the age of the witness” demands a rethinking of established lines of inquiry into Holocaust representation. What happens when the impetus, previously provided by an individual’s desire to tell in carefully crafted words, is replaced by society’s demand to question and collect, with scant regard to the respondent’s talent with words?

Following a consideration of major discussion points surrounding literary accounts of the Holocaust, this chapter outlines how the application of oral history techniques has transformed the

capture and preservation of Holocaust memory, before moving to a specific consideration of issues relating to the study of video-testimonies held in the JHMRC.

THE HOLOCAUST REMEMBERED IN LITERARY ACCOUNTS

Almost every discussion about Holocaust literature and its artistic representation takes as its starting point the now oft-quoted injunction by Jewish refugee and philosopher Theodor Adorno. Having read Paul Celan’s mesmerising Todesfuge, he issued in 1949 what was perceived by many writers and commentators as a warning about the danger of fiction and its attendant aesthetic beauty drawing attention from the brutal realities. He famously declaimed that “[to] write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”³ This apparent prohibition on fictionalising the Holocaust was in fact a direct plea to writers to approach the subject with absolute care and moral responsibility – put simply, to ensure that pleasure not be extracted from the pain of the victims. Lamentably, a considerable number of texts overlook his later refinement and re-thinking of his stance, where he virtually acknowledged that it was only in art that anguish could be expressed without being undone by it. Stirred by Celan’s oeuvre, which originally led to his earlier fear, Adorno wrote, “[p]erennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems.”⁴ In the same book Adorno recognises that the sheer magnitude of the actual pain will not tolerate forgetting and as such demands that art give it voice.

Adorno’s initial position reflected the feeling among survivors and scholars who encouraged silence given the inadequacy of language to depict the concentrationary universe. Philosopher Hannah Arendt, author of Eichmann in Jerusalem (based on her observation of the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel), ventured the observation that only eyewitness accounts could be considered authentic, and that literature could not genuinely transcribe the terrors of the camps specifically because industrialised killing resided

"outside life and death."⁵ Noted cultural scholar George Steiner’s examination of the role of language in the aftermath of the Holocaust concludes that German language was manipulated and marshalled to conceive and justify mass murder. Steiner frames the problem facing all survivors when he asks whether “there is a human form of language adequate to the conceptualization and understanding of Auschwitz ... whether the limits of language do not fall short of the limits of the Shoah experience.”⁶ Correspondingly, survivor and author Charlotte Delbo shares Steiner’s concern, acutely aware that the unparalleled nature of the Holocaust and the absence of any comparable event could make language and memory unreliable. In his undisputed masterpiece Survival in Auschwitz, Primo Levi tells of his shock when he encountered the camps, stressing the insufficiency of words: “[o]ur language lacks words to express this offense, this demolition.”⁷ Yet, despite the corruption of the language by the Nazis, for Steiner, and for survivors, it continued to serve as the locus of memory. The challenge, as A. Alvarez cogently puts it, is to identify a vocabulary for a society that was denuded of values “with its meticulously con­trolled lunacy and bureaucracy of suffering.”⁸

While Elie Wiesel concedes the struggle of the writer who feels inadequate in transmitting the unimaginable hell that they have survived, he admonishes those who would advocate silence. For Wiesel, silence would not only betray the memory of the dead, but would add to the dilution and trivialisation of the unprecedented catastrophe.⁹ Although he welcomes writing about the Holocaust,

⁸ A. Alvarez, “The Literature of the Holocaust,” Commentary 38 (1964): 67. In Chapter 5 of this volume, Michele Langfield observes that the problem of finding adequate language to describe their experiences continues to unsettle those giving Holocaust videotestimonies. See also Chapter 3 in this volume.
Wiesel believes that it was only those who experienced "Planet Auschwitz" who could enter the gates of the inferno. Wiesel finds the braiding of the terms literature and Holocaust not only paradoxical but impossible, arguing that "[a] novel about Auschwitz is not a novel, or else it is not about Auschwitz. The very attempt to write such a novel is blasphemy."\(^{10}\)

Critic Alvin Rosenfeld, who has continually legitimised the emergence and importance of memorialising the Holocaust through the prism of creative literature, remarks that the distance between "even the most extreme imagining and human occurrences" has ended, and that this change has necessitated a new literary mechanism and form.\(^{11}\) For Rosenfeld, coming to grips artistically with the inconceivable reasserts faith in the human spirit. Even so, Rosenfeld insists that any engagement must adhere to historical veracity. Likewise, Lawrence Langer observes that literature furnishes us with the only proper avenue to render the indescribable accessible to the human mind and heart.\(^{12}\) He argues that works of the imagination should not surrender to a redemptive pathway which shields the recipient from confronting the fundamental monstrosity, but rather to a "discourse of ruin" which avoids escapism from brutality and dehumanisation.\(^{13}\)

The recent stream of Holocaust books reminds us that, as Daniel Schwartz avers, Holocaust writing has become a genre "with its own archetypes and its own cultural continuity,"\(^{14}\) and those viewing Holocaust videotestimonies may sometimes recognise instances of respondents drawing on images from literary writing when

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describing their personal experiences. In various ways, the Holocaust novel destabilises and blurs the conventional boundaries of autobiography, conflating the categories of the memoir and histori­ricised narrative. Like videotestimonies, novels written about the Holocaust are reconstructed from fragmented memories. They are, however, refracted through individual vantage points to a far greater extent than videotestimonies, shaped by the demands of community projects and mediated by the interviewer. Survivor narratives are hallmarked by revelatory shards of filtered hindsight in which their scribes attempt to locate words that speak of people and places long ago vanished. Such narratives, to borrow Rosenfeld’s words, represent a “poetics of expiration,” in which the witnesses battle against the problematics of articulating the incomprehensible.15 Holocaust testimony, in whatever medium, confronts the dilemma of finding the right registers to connect meaningfully with past trauma and encode it.16 Given that any testimony is reliant upon language, the question of emplotment and the adequacy of language surface as points of inquiry and intense debate.

To be sure, retelling the past, especially in Israel, has proved enormously difficult since most Jews who either perished in occupied Europe or survived, were viewed by native Israelis as passive weaklings who were led to their death like “sheep to the slaughter” and never offered resistance to their Nazi interlocutors. Instead of affording the survivors the respite they so craved, as well as the opportunity for some psychological relief, the state and its native born dealt the survivors a crushing blow, crippling any opportunity they sought to foster positive self-images away from the damaged self-esteem of the past. It followed that the Sabras, fresh from a precarious victory, placed a psychological distance between themselves and the remnant of the Diaspora, whom they condemned as representing all that the new Israeli must shun.17 It was not uncommon at that time for jokes to circulate, such as “How

15 Rosenfeld, A Double Dying, 2. Although Chapter 2 of this volume suggests that there is a tendency to undervalue the historicity of videotestimony.
16 For traumatic telling refer to Chapter 5 in this volume.
many Jews can you fit into an ashtray?” Young Israelis ridiculed the survivors and referred to them as Sabon (soap).18

Yet besides the insults and insensitive remarks hurled at the survivors for their apparent passivity, their silence can be ascribed to several other causes. First, since many felt guilty for staying alive and distrusted their own memories of a universe so incongruous with standard human experience, they found there was no way they could open a dialogue with other Israelis, whose human experience was far removed from theirs. Secondly, most survivors felt that the hellfire they were subjected to was far too personal to share, especially with those Israelis who were unsympathetic to their pain. (Or, as discussed in Chapter 7 of this volume in relation to survivor refugees to the United States and Australia, even where survivors communicated their stories immediately on arrival, these were greeted with indifference or disbelief by often well-meaning observers who felt that refugees’ first imperative was to shape new lives.) Not wanting to be viewed as different, the newcomers appeared to choose silence as a means of healing and forgetting.19 Ahron Appelfeld recalls how the accusatory questions from the native Israelis thrust at members of his generation drew them into a life of deep denial and stillness:

So we learned silence. It was not easy to keep silent. But it was a good way out for all of us. For what, when all is said and done, was there to tell ... There was a desire to forget, to bury the bitter memories deep in the bedrock of the soul, in a place where no stranger’s eyes, not even our own, could get to them ... How many years did that violent repression continue? Every year it changed colours, and covered another region of life. The moment a memory or a scrap of memory was about to float upwards we would combat it as one does battle with evil spirits.20

18 Ibid., 19.
19 Ibid., 166-9. Hass, a survivor child and psychologist who conducted interviews with many survivors, reports that most suppressed their traumas as they learned, “[t]hat sympathy or compensation would not be forthcoming from others, who appeared uninterested in their Holocaust past,” 4.
The pulling down of the walls of silence in recent years can be also attributed, as Ahron Megged notes, to the survivors' overriding of the guilt and shame they felt for staying alive, and their willingness to talk to others about the cruelty and hellfire they endured.\textsuperscript{21}

Postwar writing, especially the heartfelt and moving accounts penned by survivors such as Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Ahron Appelfeld, and Nelly Sachs greatly contributed to the development and acceptance of a Holocaust literary canon as a unique and worthy branch of literature demanding serious study. Moreover, the unquestionable, and often obsessive interest by the media and the public in the offerings of Holocaust literature, as well as the ever multiplying number of stories-of-genocide that were being published, alleviated some survivors' dread that the memory of their traumatic past would dissipate. One may suggest, as Dominick LaCapra notes, that the writers under discussion understand the nature of this writing:

The Shoah calls for a response that does not deny its traumatic nature or cover it over through a "fetishistic" or redemptive narrative that makes believe it did not occur or compensates too readily for it ... what is necessary is a discourse of trauma that itself undergoes – and indicates that one undergoes – a process of at least muted trauma insofar as one has tried to understand events and empathise with victims.\textsuperscript{22}

Any author who chooses to write after the Holocaust about the Holocaust will inevitably consider the adequacy of the literary frameworks and criteria that were available before, but now may seem to transgress the limits and violate the truth of the historical event. Perhaps, if we are to employ Jean-Francois Lyotard's metaphor of the Holocaust as an earthquake that has obliterated all tools of measurement, we must acquiesce that the event has shattered humanity's commonsense and foundations and along with

\textsuperscript{21} Ahron Megged, "I Was Not There," in Comprehending the Holocaust: Historical and Literary Research, ed. Asher Cohen, Yoav Gelber, and Charlotte Wardi (Frankfurt-am-Main/New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 98.

\textsuperscript{22} Dominick LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 220-1.
it conventional instruments of figuration. Since this recalcitrant reality is at the heart of our situation, the principal questions before us are these: How can an author appropriate the Holocaust for his aesthetic aims? And what modes of description can be generated to fit this design?

Salient to this discussion is Hayden White’s formula of historical interpretation which insistently questions the headlong pursuit of a single version record and the demand that Holocaust narratives represent reality as it was. According to White’s realignment of the historical compass and redefinition of the traditional frames of reference, the very nature of narrative requires the writer to make a choice among the abundance of fictional forms available, including and excluding certain technical emplotting devices, language and ideological markers. Bearing a startling resemblance to postmodern poetics, White argues that there is no one objective standard superior to another, that any critical faculty engaged with assessing the reality of any given instance is a frail vessel that can be kept or glossed over. Unlike previous commentators, White’s discourse does away with the requirements of authentic representation of the Holocaust, a constraint on imaginative storytelling that was exercised by those Holocaust writers who felt obligated to remain faithful to the factual record.

In asking whether the “Final Solution” and its evils imposed absolute limits on writers of fiction, White argues that “unless a historical story is presented as a literal presentation of real events, we cannot criticize it as being either true or untrue to the facts of the matter.” He continues: “the kind of anomalies, enigmas and dead ends met with in discussions of the representation of the Holocaust are the result of a conception of discourse that owes too much to a realism that is inadequate to the representation of events, such as

the Holocaust." Put differently, White allows for the train of literary expression to traverse many stations on its journey of exploration and negates an overall account of the Holocaust. In summary, he states:

Our notion of what constitutes realistic representation must be revised to take account of experiences that are unique to our century and for older modes of representation have proved inadequate ... the best way to represent the Holocaust and the experience of it may well be by a kind of "intransitive writing" which lays no claim to the kind of realism aspired by the nineteenth century historians and writers.

After a seemingly prolonged silence, literary engagement with Holocaust has entered what Hartman terms "a period of obsession" – an overwhelming confrontation that has denied closure of this dark moment, declaiming explicitly that memory and its preservation have not dimmed. Gerald Jacobs writes, "[w]ith distance, too has come a willingness to engage the creative imagination with that same period of history in order to search for meaning, warning of consolation."

Hanna Yaoz agrees, believing that Holocaust literature (which she terms trans-historical) with its symbolic representation of superhuman evil does not negate historical verity but rather adds to it. Indeed, Megged, himself a Holocaust novelist, finds the incredible preoccupation with the Holocaust in recent years to be an "unpredicted phenomenon."

26 Ibid., 52. On this matter, see also Perry Anderson, "On Emplotment: Two Kinds of Ruin," in Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution", ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 54-65. However, where aesthetic considerations are less important, as in the case of unedited videotestimonies collected as part of an oral history archive, are claims to realism challenged in the same way?
30 Megged, "I Was Not There," 97.
Alice L. Eckardt explicates the significance of remembering through literature:

Memory and knowledge of the awful, the terrifying, or the shameful, can be a positive force in redeeming the future, even the past can never be redeemed. It can motivate a community to seek out the origins of the attitudes and actions of which it is now both ashamed and afraid. It can redirect the concerns of a people to encompass those who were heretofore excluded from thought unworthy of concern.\(^{31}\)

Fundamental issues of accuracy – how words, which had lost their semblance of normality in the extremes of the Holocaust, cohere with popular fictional treatments of the Holocaust – carry a special importance in this field of inquiry. In this connection, it is noteworthy to refer to Berel Lang's opening statement on the ethical considerations at play when one examines the representation of evil in imaginative writing: “It seems obvious to me that anything written now about the Nazi genocide against the Jews that is not primarily documentary, that does not uncover new information about the history of that singular event, requires special justification.”\(^{32}\) Indeed, questions of ethics remain at the forefront of inquiry, when survivor interviewees are asked to document their experiences, as many chapters in this volume indicate.

Hermeneutical studies of Holocaust fiction, or “literary historiography” as it has been termed,\(^{33}\) have not only zeroed in on semiotic analysis of poetic strategies and configurations of the form in which the genocide is represented – but have turned their gaze to how these interpretations may affect the understanding of the Holocaust by subsequent generations. It may not be unfair to assert


that the fictions of the imaginative writer have taken centre stage in current Holocaust discourse, whereby, despite the voluminous historical research amassed, it is the "novelist's crucible," as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi maintains, that is shaping future Holocaust images rather than the "historian's anvil." Gabriel Josipovici concurs, "(h)istorians are becoming more and more aware of this and recognising that writers of fiction have an important role to play here, giving voice to the partial and uncertain." As a matter of fact, Hartman argues that, increasingly, aggregated Jewish memory of the Holocaust is in decline, that a breach between history and narrative has occurred. Hartman feels, though, that novels, quietly obeying their own logic and truths, unrestrained within the boundaries of ritual and practice, are able to penetrate the surface attitude and investigate our deepest truths sometimes hidden by the historicity of the past: "We have learned that stories cannot be abbreviated by an intellectual method, or foreclosed by spiritual hindsight." Novelists produce meaning by connecting and linking details, in the context of Holocaust anguish; fiction communicates and broadens the Jewish experience in the most deepening and painfully particular way. Rosen cautions against turning away from engagement with the Holocaust despite the obstacles strewn along that journey, urging writers and readers alike to open up a space in their consciousness to the "second life" that stirs in our soul when we encounter the intense images of that event:

[Entering into a state of being that for whatever reasons makes porous those membranes through which empathy passes, or deep memory with its peculiar "thereness," so that we can move as far as it is given to us to do so, into the pain and hence the meaning of the Holocaust – that, too, is a kind of memorial.]

37 Ibid.
It has been argued that, despite the critical and testimonial surfeit overhanging the Holocaust and the relentless sword-thrusting by historians, there is yet to appear a redeeming text comparable to the Kabala. In many ways, a sensitive and intelligent novel of the Holocaust can offer a band of golden rays for those numbed by the businesslike ideology or historical documentation, by granting an open space for independent and meaningful thought about the nightmare. In the meantime, literary fiction acts as a surrogate, fugitive piece. 39

**HOLOCAUST VIDEOTESTIMONY**

Although apparently lacking the interpretive richness offered by literary texts, as manifestations par excellence of “the era of the witness,” Holocaust audiovisual histories have been increasingly collected since the 1970s. 40 Like literary accounts, audiovisual testimonies provide irreplaceable evidence of Holocaust experience; however the audiovisual medium and the oral history techniques used to solicit survivor stories, raise methodological difficulties beyond those generally encountered in creating and interpreting Holocaust literary texts. While both share common concerns with the role of memory and “postmemory,” 41 oral historians particularly problematise the relationship between individual life histories and


broader historical and political events, the reliability of retrospective evidence and the mediating role of the interviewer. In response, researchers have developed techniques of “narrative inquiry” to identify discursive conventions that shape meaning in oral histories in general, and Holocaust oral testimony in particular. The formal structure of oral history – its reliance on first-person storytelling – can also affect what is being told and how it can be understood.


The medium through which oral history is recorded and more widely communicated - the transition from conventions of transcription of interview notes or recordings to written format that provides direct access to videorecording - has transformed the field of oral history.\textsuperscript{45} Not only, as James Young notes, does its capacity to capture the process of remembering as it occurs distinguish video-from literary testimony,\textsuperscript{46} but, according to Todd Brewster, in video recordings the performance of the respondent fundamentally affects how their story is understood:

I was struck by how often there was a marked difference between the written word (here, a transcript) and the footage of the same interview - essentially because words and pictures (or, more accurate in this case, "performed words") communicate so differently. A subject might say something compelling and vivid and, let us even say, true - but without affect, its impact could be lost upon a viewer. Similarly, a subject may have a manner that informs deeply, even genuinely, while his words by themselves say little.\textsuperscript{47}

Significantly, how respondents act out their story can enhance or diminish its sense of authenticity. Thus, by creating the impression that one has access to the "authentic" experience of someone who was there, audiovisual history appears to create a "portal" to another world.\textsuperscript{48} Put another way that draws on Assmann's insights


\textsuperscript{46} James E. Young, "Holocaust Video and Cinemagraphic Testimony: Documenting the Witness," in \textit{Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation}, ed. James E Young (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988). As observed above, curiously Langer pays little attention to the effects of the medium of video.

\textsuperscript{47} Todd Brewster, "Remembrance (More or Less) of Things Past," \textit{Civilization} 6, no. 4 (1999): 76.

into the role of video archive, the performative dimension has the effect of "re-embodying" memory. 49

Arguably, Holocaust oral history constitutes a sub-category of oral history that, while closely related to the field of traumatic memory, raises its own peculiar methodological issues. 50 Pioneering researcher and child survivor Dori Laub notes that Holocaust memory performs a critical testimonial function that like other acts of traumatic memory involves witnessing on both a factual level (such as in court proceedings where the "facts" of the crime are corroborated and the guilty identified), 51 and at a psychological level (which can prove especially problematic). 52 For Holocaust survivors the value of remembering can be highly ambivalent because it continually reminds them of the "absence" of so many others. 53 Worse still, so long as the horror of what occurred remains unimaginable, even to those directly affected, respondents frequently question their capacity to remember or describe their experiences in any meaningful detail and this is reflected in the often agonised process of telling. 54 It is therefore not surprising that re-searchers drawing on the holdings of major collections of Holocaust audiovisual tes-


timony, most notably the Fortunoff collection at Yale University, have tended to focus on survivors’ psychological struggle to remember, developing sophisticated theoretical strategies to account for the apparent unreliability of memory as a source of “factual” information.

Somewhat perversely, given the considerable resources invested in the collection of Holocaust videotestimony, scholars have until recently neglected videotestimonies as historical sources in themselves. Thus, in her otherwise perceptive analysis of Holocaust testimony, Assmann (following Laub) asserts “survivors as witnesses do not, as a rule, add to our knowledge of factual history.” Similarly, Langer’s approach exemplifies a tendency to treat the Holocaust as an ineffable phenomenon, detached from, if not beyond, history. While immensely revealing of the psychological pain suffered by survivors, his in-depth analyses appear to operate in a historical vacuum. In particular, scholars including Gary Weissman, Michael Rothberg and Alan Mintz criticise Langer’s failure to acknowledge the multiplicity and diversity of Holocaust experience. In response to such tendencies to reify the Holocaust,

55 Most notably the Shoah Visual History Foundation was established by Stephen Spielberg in 1994 and has collected over 52,000 videotestimonies. Now located at the University of Southern California, its potential as a historical resource is now beginning to be realised. Historian Christopher Browning is using about eighty to write a history of three Nazi camps located in Starachowice, Poland. Because so little evidence of the camps has survived Browning comments: “Without this collection of testimonies, we had no history of these camps,” Goldie Blumenstyk, “Holocaust Stories Move to Academe. (Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation),” The Chronicle of Higher Education 52, no. 11 (2005): A2.


57 For instance Langer, Holocaust Testimonies. This influential study examines the videotestimonies from the Fortunoff collection from a thematic and psychoanalytic perspective, as do Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Testimony: Crises in Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York/London: Routledge, 1994).

Rothberg has coined the term "traumatic realism" as a means of reengaging with the historicity of Holocaust experience; a term that balances acknowledgment of the problematic nature of representation against the recognition that traumatic realism "nevertheless cannot free itself from the claims of mimesis, and it remains committed to a project of historical cognition through the mediation of culture."\(^{59}\)

Zoë Waxmann contrasts the tendency to reduce the Holocaust to a "singular" concept with the "realist" aspirations of original testifiers to the Holocaust, the contemporary diarists who saw their reason for writing as the recording of what was "really" happening in the face of Nazi attempts to obscure the "truth."\(^{60}\) A recent study of Jewish Sonderkommandos in Auschwitz,\(^{61}\) based partially on interviews with some of the few survivors of this squad, as well as their memoirs, further underscores the value of, to quote Katharina von Kellenbach in Chapter 3, "resisting simplification." By indicating how the divisions created among prisoners by language, religious practice, nationality, class and culture impeded the development of a common identity, let alone organised resistance, the study demonstrates how Holocaust testimonies not only provide evidence of the complexity of Holocaust experience, but also of the imperative that events be understood within a nuanced historical context.\(^{62}\)

Decades later, the spectre of Holocaust denial gave significant impetus to the establishment of the JHMRC testimony collection especially Weissman's criticism of Langer's reification of Holocaust experience.

\(^{59}\) Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*.


\(^{61}\) The Sonderkommandos, Special Detachments, were made up of Jewish forced labourers whose task was to assist in the disposal of bodies from the gas chambers. Jews working in the Sonderkommandos generally survived only a few months before themselves being murdered.

where it was assumed that survivors’ accounts would provide irrefutable evidence that the Holocaust occurred.

VIDEOTESTIMONIES HELD IN THE JHMRC, MELBOURNE, AND BEYOND

The JHMRC in Melbourne holds a significant collection of over 1300 Holocaust videotestimonies – the study of which has provided the impetus for much of the research for this book. The testimonies project began with audio tapes in 1987, progressing to video in 1992. The JHMRC provides a safe and intimate space for survivors to tell their personal life stories in their own ways and their own time. They are guided, as sensitively as possible, by trained interviewers whose aim is to piece together a picture of the lost worlds of prewar Jewish communities in Europe and to document the individual experiences of survivors in escaping from or living through the Holocaust. They hope that the testimonies will serve to counter denial of the Holocaust and provide a legacy for their children, grandchildren and future generations. Copies are sent to Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, providing an invaluable visual archive for research, one which in a few years’ time will be impossible to replicate.63

Mainly drawing on accounts by Holocaust survivors who settled in Melbourne from throughout Europe, the JHMRC notes twenty-five countries of birth on its list of respondents’ biographical details. While, as indicated earlier, it could not rival the extensive holdings of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, the JHMRC’s videotestimony collection documents a remarkable variety of experiences of “everyday life and death” under Nazi persecution, in a multitude of situations and across the vast geographical area affected by the Nazi assault on Jewish existence. In addition, their stories of emigration to Australia constitute a significant resource for those researching post-second world war settlement history in Australia.

For the contributors to this volume who undertook the first systematic academic study of videotestimonies held in the JHMRC collection, awareness of the sheer diversity of experiences being recounted and of the failure of scholars investigating Holocaust audiovisual testimony collections to consider seriously the historicity of what was being told, prompted the question of whether analysis of the socio-cultural factors shaping the Holocaust experience could enhance an understanding of the Holocaust as an historical event. Have the particular backgrounds of survivors – their national identification and/or country of residence, religious practice, social class, age and gender – affected their experiences of persecution and the telling of those experiences? And if so, how?


Engagement with the particular stories recounted in the JHMRC videotestimonies also highlights the ethical conundrums faced by Jews seeking to retain integrity in the context of extermination and those, including direct descendants of perpetrators, attempting, retrospectively, to question the applicability of universal ethical categories. Moreover, as the founders of the JHMRC videotestimony collection hoped, captured Holocaust memory reverberates into the future by facilitating intergenerational transfer of knowledge and awareness, although the nature and effect of this transfer remains problematic. Indeed, if one conclusion can be drawn from the study of Holocaust testimony, it is that the ethics and impact of remembering the Holocaust cannot be taken for granted.

In the following chapter “Holocaust Testimony/‘Testimonio’? An Exploration”, Pam Maclean takes the discussion of the nature of Holocaust testimony further. Debates surrounding the nature of Holocaust testimony and the Latin American genre of “testimonio”


See Chapter 8 in this volume.

For the latter point see Chapter 9 in this volume.
are explored with a view to synthesising divergent approaches to testimonial literature. Both forms of testimony raise fundamental questions relating to the authenticity and historicity of witnessing but from different perspectives. Whereas discussion of "testimonio" focuses on the witness and representation of "real" traumatic events whose primary objective is the mobilisation of the oppressed, analysis of Holocaust testimony has emphasised the incomprehensibility of representation and problems of individual healing, frequently paying scant attention to the actual events being described. Without reverting to simplistic realism the chapter argues that an awareness of engagement of "testimonio" with the "real" can reorient current understandings of Holocaust testimonies towards a greater consciousness of the historicity of these accounts.

Katharina von Kellenbach’s chapter, "Resisting Simplification: Gender Analysis, the Ethic of Care, and the Holocaust," maps the controversy surrounding gender analysis in the context of the Holocaust. The scholarly scrutiny of gendered behaviour and experiences among victims, bystanders and perpetrators remains contentious. Nevertheless, the assumption of the gendered presence of an "ethic of care" that is rooted in women’s biological ability to bear and rear children as well as their traditional task of making a home for men and children remains widespread. Survivor testimonies seem to indicate that women’s peculiar life skills and virtues continued to inform their experience and response to the Nazi assault on Jewish life. These issues are considered within the framework of Melissa Raphael's The Female Face of God in Auschwitz which reconstructs the "ethic of care" as the cornerstone of a Jewish feminist reconstruction of God after Auschwitz. In conclusion, the chapter considers women’s "ethic of care" from the perspective of German gentile women whose love and care for their husbands supported genocide and evil.

Donna-Lee Frieze’s chapter, "The Death of the Suffering Other: responding to Holocaust Survivors through the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas," follows. In an attempt chronologically to map the traumatic events of the Holocaust, many survivor video-testimonies in fact fracture sequential narratives with the memory of the death of non-survivors. Through Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical concepts of suffering, the face and the Other, this
chapter examines the survivor's reawakened fear for the dying non-survivor. In Levinasian terms, "the fear for the death of the Other" often dislocates the attempt - by interviewer and interviewee - to sequence the narrative. This chapter argues that the recurring themes of "useless suffering" and the death of the Other are central to understanding how Holocaust survivor videotestimonies create a schism in narrative coherence.

European Jews who survived the Holocaust were unusual and, as many survivors themselves argue, extremely lucky. In "'The Hurt will never go away': Survival Strategies and Ways of Coping in Holocaust Videotestimonies," Michele Langfield shows that decades later, after years of silence, survivors have at last begun to convey the long-term impact of their experiences through autobiographies, memoirs, documentaries, oral interviews and videotestimonies. This chapter explores the various ways in which particular survivors explain their coping strategies during the Holocaust and in later life, and what they see in retrospect as contributing to their survival. The enormous variety of their responses resists generalisation and questions the applicability of some of the existing arguments in the historiography. It is evident, however, that in breaking their silence, survivors consistently dwell on why and how they survived. This is partly because most retain an overwhelming sense of guilt. They still cannot explain, or justify to themselves, why they lived and so many others did not.

The fate of those whom the Nazis labelled "Mischlinge" - that is, people who had a Jewish parent or grandparent but who in most cases were raised as Christians - has largely been overlooked by historians. This is in part because Mischlinge were generally treated less harshly than their Jewish relatives, and in many cases they were reluctant after the war to recall the suffering and privation to which they had been subjected. In reality Nazi policy and practice concerning Mischlinge were inconsistent; there were competing and contradictory views at all levels of the state and indeed among the German population. Peter Monteath in "'Mischlinge' in Holocaust Videotestimony" provides an overview of the evolution of the Nazi state's treatment of Mischlinge, before turning to videotestimony to examine the subjective experience of those who over many years
confronted the consequences of an identity which was imposed on them in the Nazi period and which remained with them in the decades that followed.

By comparing and contrasting the experiences of Jews born in Germany and Poland, Pam Maclean and Michele Langfield in “Caught between Dreams and Nightmares: Refugees and Migrants to Australia recall the Holocaust in Videotestimonies” discuss how Jewish victims of Nazi persecution who subsequently migrated to Australia reflect on their lives, before, during and after the Holocaust. They ask how in their videotestimonies migrants’ memories of Nazi persecution intersect with their experiences of migration. Were the dreams associated with resettlement overcome by the nightmares generated at the hands of Nazi-initiated suffering? Although it is impossible to generalise, they argue that for German Jews Kristallnacht dominated their accounts, as did memories of their journeys from Europe. Those who lived in Australia during the war resented the hostility displayed towards refugees. The Polish interviewees survived much more prolonged and diverse genocidal treatment and this is reflected in their accounts, which dwell far less on their migration to Australia than on their suffering in the face of extermination.

Although many institutions have focused on collecting and digitising videotestimonies, little research has been conducted in the area of viewer response in general and third-generation responses in particular. Amelia Klein’s chapter, “Connecting the Generations: Grandchildren’s Responses to Holocaust Videotestimonies,” reveals that viewing Holocaust videotestimony can facilitate intergenerational dialogue and enable the third generation to better understand their grandparents’ Holocaust survival experiences. Central to the analysis is Dan Bar-On’s development of the “working-through” process for the third generation. Klein argues that Holocaust videotestimony can connect the generations by inspiring communication between survivors and their grandchildren as well as between the second and third generations. Interviews with grandchildren whose survivor grandparents did not record videotestimonies reveal a different intergenerational communication process. Klein concludes that developing programs to dis-
cuss viewer responses are important initiatives for Holocaust centres and communal organisations to consider.

Testimonies of Holocaust survivors have been recorded and stored in the United States, in Israel, in European nations and also in Australia. Historical and pedagogical reasons, as well as the fear of forgetting memory, are presented to validate these efforts. Given the accumulated quantity of archived testimonies, it becomes necessary to raise new questions. In the last chapter, "Whose Memory is it anyway? Reflections on Remembering, Preserving and Forgetting," Björn Krondorfer queries popular wisdom by investigating two commonly held assumptions about remembering and forgetting: first, that remembering the Holocaust is a moral good while forgetting is its antithesis, and hence morally indefensible; second, that Holocaust testimonies refer primarily to victim and survivor testimonies, thus sidestepping the problems associated with testimonies of perpetrators and their accomplices. Both assumptions – about the ethics of forgetting and perpetrator testimonies – need to be re-evaluated. Rather than eluding questions of complicity and culpability in perpetrator societies, the chapter calls attention to view "forgetting" less as the ugly twin of remembering and more as its necessary companion.

As indicated earlier, the extent to which videotestimonies should be understood within socio-cultural frameworks has underpinned much of the research on which this collection is based. Contributors have drawn on diverse academic fields: Holocaust history throughout Europe; refugee and immigration history; oral-, particularly, videohistory; gender analysis, trans- and inter-generational communication and the theory and ethics of testimony. The collection overall makes a number of significant advances in the area of Holocaust interpretation. Thus, while constituting the first systematic project based on the JHMRC's extensive videotestimony archive, analysis is conceptualised within broader theoretical frameworks. It contributes a new perspective to understanding the backgrounds of a group of refugees and Australian immigrants who arrived immediately before and after the Second World War. It examines the postwar implications of the Holocaust and suggests how trauma continues to influence people's lives decades after it was first experienced. It throws light on intergenerational testimony and memory,
and the relationship between Jewish and German memory. Finally, the emphasis on the socio-cultural positioning opens up a largely neglected analytical perspective for understanding Holocaust testimony.