

Summary of the doctoral thesis *Transformations of Testimony in the Digital Age. Digitization in the USC Shoah Foundation's Dimensions in Testimony project*, written under the supervision of Prof. Roma Sendyka

The doctoral thesis is the result of several years of research under the 'Transformation of the Holocaust Testimony in the Digital Age' grant funded by the National Science Center in Poland (2020/37/N/HS2/00210). The dissertation is designed as an analytical and interpretive case study leading to the proposal of a complex and multi-faceted analysis of the object of research, the USC Shoah Foundation's Dimensions in Testimony project. I attempted to show how the various theories in the field of memory studies, Holocaust studies, museum studies, performance studies, digital humanities, and anthropologically-oriented research can help to answer a number of questions and issues which are raised within my research.

In a time when different measures are designed and applied to extend the physical presence of survivors, the primary aim of the project is to explore and analyze the new strategy of 'Holocaust witnessing' in the digital age. The gradual passing of the generation that witnessed the Holocaust prompts us to explore new ways of representation, consolidation, and memorialization of survivors, and the historical events standing behind them. Thus, in the introduction, I attempt to show how there has been a shift from hard data regarding this time in global history, into a new way of experience, immersion into history, and a new perceptual way of knowing. In this part, I present the landscape of digital Holocaust projects, especially those related to the survivors, that were created after 2000.

In the first chapter, I introduce and discuss the key object of the proposed study - the above-mentioned Shoah Foundation's project against the background of other contemporary digital initiatives regarding the Holocaust. The purpose is to discuss the interactive question and

answer project used in the narrative of the Holocaust as a collection of interactive biographies (Smith 2021) – the new way of narrating Holocaust history to the public. In particular, I emphasize what an interactive biography is and I attempt to develop its definition and propose alternative terms. The main assumption of the study is that these recording of survivors is an original response to the huge technological development and allow the audience for interactive contact with the Holocaust survivor that no recording or data storage medium before could do, and they result from the desire to maintain the undoubtedly valuable relationship between the teller and the listener, which is increasingly weakening as a result of the passing of the last witnesses and, consequently, the end of the period that Annette Wieviorka called the “era of the witness”. In this part of the dissertation, I trace the history of the project's creation, how it is implemented from the technical side (recording technologies and display methods), what its interactive character is, and what setting it requires. I also consider interactive biographies as an example of human-machine communication.

Second chapter reflect on the position of the Holocaust survivor in the digital age: Who is testifying? How is the situation of testifying changing? How is the survivor self-articulated in digital culture? What does the digital extension entail epistemologically? Without anchoring in a real witness who can prove truthfulness, will this recording also be a reliable source of historical knowledge in several dozen years? I analyze how interactive biography acts as a tool for prolonging a survivor's existence. I consider interactive biography as: 1. A prosthetic object (Grosz, McLuhan); 2. Implant (Golka); 3. Placeholder; 4. A medium of the prosthetic memory (Landsberg). On the one hand, it might be understood as a prosthetic subject: a technological extension of human physical presence in a new technical form, and on the other as a tool for communicating history. Bearing in mind what Marianne Hirsch wrote in the context of post-memory about the sense of spatial and temporal distance of successive generations from traumatic events, I consider how survivors' interactive biographies can be considered as objects of post-memory (Hirsch) "saving"(?) witnesses and their stories for future generations. In addition, I will analyze how such a virtual autobiographical identity narrative allows the survivor to externalize the experience and transfer memory to the recipients of his testimony, and I put into reflection the ethical issues regarding the "use" of such recordings of survivors. Thus, I focus on interactive biography as a new way of coding and transmitting memory and experiencing the past, a modern prosthesis of the survivor's memory, wondering in conclusion whether it can be perceived as a new archive of memory.

Chapter third is focused on the consideration of interactive biography as a museum object. Contemporary museum institutions, including Holocaust museums, seek various ways to improve and deepen the visitor's experience. I explore the role of museums as a site of memory transfer and discuss how curatorial strategies might promote this kind of new presentation of testimony and the figure of the survivor itself. An important question will also be how interactive testimony engages museum visitors, and finally how this project shapes the future of the museumization of testimony? Following various strategies for including testimonies in the Holocaust museum's permanent exhibitions, I look at ways of presenting these new visual objects in various exhibition spaces. The theoretical basis for the scientific considerations carried out here will be primarily the research of Anna Ziębińska-Witek, Maria Kobielska, Steffi de Jong, Anne Reading, and Noah Shenker.

The fourth chapter is closely related to the previous one and is entirely based on the author's field research in the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Educational Center in Skokie, during which I conducted interviews with institution employees, participatory observations, and audience research. In this chapter, I analyze the role of a specific institution in the development and evolution of the project created by the Shoah Foundation. I present the biography of one of the survivors recorded as part of the project and analyze in detail how her interactive biography works in practice. Based on observations and surveys, I wonder how a survivor's digital interactive image affects reception reactions. I am wondering, what makes this project unique and extraordinary, the value of public engagement. And what is the role of emotions in this historical storytelling? While considering whether an interactive biography can be described as an empathetic machine.

In the last chapter, which is a summary of the diagnoses proposed in individual chapters, I try to demonstrate the opportunities and threats arising from the implementation of the USC Shoah Foundation's Dimensions in Testimony project. In particular, I present ethical dilemmas related to various aspects of the project, and I try to show the now and the future opportunities related to the development of the project.