

**THE DIGITAL HOLOCAUST MEMORY PROJECT  
SUSSEX WEIDENFELD INSTITUTE OF JEWISH  
STUDIES**

# **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIGITALLY RECORDING, RECIRCULATING, AND REMIXING HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY**

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# FOREWORD

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Testimony has always raised ethical issues, especially in relation to questions of provenance, integrity, ownership, and authenticity. Nevertheless, it has become one of the most powerful sources for Holocaust education. Meeting a Holocaust survivor in-person has been a particular tenet of educational experiences. Looking forward, we face dual challenges: (1) the decline in numbers of living witnesses to the Holocaust, (2) the increasing prevalence of digital technologies. It has been somewhat taken for granted that the latter offers solutions for dealing with the former.

Media technologies have been integral to the dissemination of Holocaust testimony since the 1940s. From the attempts to smuggle out material evidence of witnessing atrocities on photographic film to the scraps of paper and writing implements used to document experiences and wishes for the future, from the Oneg Shabbat archives of the Warsaw Ghetto to the 'Scrolls of Auschwitz'. It is however in the immediate post-war period with Boder's wire recordings that spoken testimony of events after the fact began to be recorded at scale. Some survivors later chose to publish their testimonies in memoir form. Then, in 1979, the Holocaust Survivors Film Project launched which developed into the Fortunoff Archives at Yale University. At Yale, audio-video testimonies were captured on tape, which not only preserved the speech patterns alongside narrative content of testimonies, but gestures and body language also. In moments of silence, viewers of testimony could now see the testimony-giver's body, any emotional reaction, and their gaze. There was a range of academic writing (from Lawrence Langer to Georges Agamben and Jean-François Lyotard) that addressed the significance of these 'silences', in different ways.

With video then digital interventions in testimony recording, there has been increasingly attention given to the visual elements of testimonial narratives. This has been particularly demonstrated by the projects of the USC Shoah Foundation.

Starting in a similar vein to Fortunoff, with audio-visual testimonies, the Foundation (initially established by the profits for Schindler's List (1994)), has since turned its attention to interactive interfaces (iWitness) use of machine learning (Dimensions in Testimony) and virtual reality ('Lola' and 'The Last Goodbye') and 360-degree on-location testimonies to explore the affordances that emerging technologies can offer for the sustainability of testimony into the future. Whilst of course, historical concerns about testimony will always remain, digital technologies introduce new possibilities and challenges, which needs to be better understood across the sector.

This report serves as an important first step in this work. It was created as part of the research project 'Participatory Workshops - Co-Designing Standards for Digital Interventions in Holocaust Memory and Education', which is one thread of the larger Digital Holocaust Memory Project at the University of Sussex.

The participatory workshops have focused on six themes, each of which brought together a different range of expertise to discuss current challenges and consider possible recommendations for the future. The themes were:

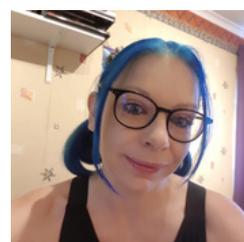
- AI and machine learning
- Digitising material evidence
- Recording, recirculating and remixing testimony
- Social media
- Virtual memoryscapes
- Computer games

In this report, you will find the recommendations and a suggestion of who could bear responsibility to take each of these on; a summary of the workshop discussions; and a list of the participants who contributed to this work. There will also be a complementary action plan published alongside this report. The recommendations and discussion presented here summarise participant opinions, which might not reflect the opinions of project leads or any individual participant in full, or all participants in consensus. Whilst we have offered participants the opportunity to review and discuss the development of these guidelines, we have tried to retain differing perspectives rather than suggest there was homogeneity in opinion. The discussion presented is an aggregation of professional opinions informed by a diverse range of experiences and expertise. We present ideas collectively, rather than attributing specific points to participants. All participants are, however, acknowledged as contributors to this report.

This document does not claim to be the last word on digitally recording, recirculating, and remixing Holocaust testimony, rather we recognise that this is very much the beginning of a longer conversation. We hope that the immediate recommendations suggested in these guidelines will help organisations and individuals to prioritise the work needed to work effectively with Holocaust testimony in digital spaces.

*Dr Victoria Grace Walden*

Project Lead



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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For each of the recommendations we outline here, we also suggest who could take responsibility for this work. They are addressed at a wide range of stakeholders from the tech industry to Holocaust organisations, academic researchers to funding agencies. Where a recommendation is part of the project team's next steps action plan, we have noted 'Project Leads'.

01

## 01 — Project Leads

Create a space for the sharing of institutional 'good practice' compiling points from this discussion with examples collated from a wider survey, and a workshop focused on sharing practice to be published alongside these recommendations to include metadata writing, future-proofing consent forms, and approaching a digitising/digitalisation project from scratch.

02

## 02 — Project Leads

Create a hub to maintain contact between institutions and academics where methodologies and contacts can be shared to enable research that takes the institutional context, digital specificities, and media landscape into consideration. Create a space within the hub for the discussion of best practices for academics and practitioners about the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches for analysing traumatic testimonies in different cultural contexts.

**03**

### **03 — Legal Sector, Project Leads, Holocaust Organisations**

Involve organisations managing sensitive testimony collections in the development of data protection legislation which might have implications for the functionality of archives. Complementary to this is the need for an accessible hub, from which organisations can determine legal responsibilities in different regions and work together cross-sector to find solutions to potential barriers.

**04**

### **04 — Project Leads**

Establish a technological working group with a focus on how machine learning and other computational techniques could be used to enhance learning experiences with digital testimonies without undermining testimonies' integrity and compromising the ethical considerations related to their use.

**05**

### **05 — Funding Bodies, Project Leads**

Encourage academic research on the significance of 'listening' in relation to digital testimony addressing the imbalance of attention given to visual-orientated testimonies over audio ones.

06

## 06 — Project Leads

Develop digital, trauma, and historical literacies programmes both within Holocaust organisations and schools/universities, and that could be embedded in circulated content online to encourage responsible user engagement with and use of digital testimonies. This could be in the form of guidelines shared from a landing page, created by a number of stakeholders across the world – a singular source that small and large organisations can easily share rather than re-creating the wheel.

07

## 07 — Holocaust Organisations

Avoid setting absolute rules about what is/is not appropriate for the reuse of their testimonies by others. We recommend the creation of working groups within institutions that bring together institutional representatives with members of the below groups focused on co-creation of guidelines to support:

- Testimony givers
- 'NextGen' (descendants) of testimony givers in creating their own family films
- Professional filmmakers
- General users

(It is also recommended that any such guidelines have a substantial promotion plan to support the widest uptake)

**If you are interested in working towards any of these recommendations, we would welcome you to contact Project Lead Dr Victoria Grace Walden ([v.walden@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:v.walden@sussex.ac.uk)) with the Subject Line: Digital Testimony Recommendations. We are keen to track the impact of the report after publication, support ongoing work in this area, and may also be able to put you in contact with other organisations interested in similar actions to support collaborative work.**

# DISCUSSION SUMMARY

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The following pages summarise the workshop discussions which informed our recommendations. Each sub-section identifies one of the priorities agreed by participants at the beginning of workshop 1 (see the methodology that follows this section for more details on our approach).

## 1. (De)contextualisation

Across all discussions, the issue of context was highlighted. It was noted that testimony is situated in a variety of (sometimes overlapping) contexts, each of which matters because it gives any testimony specific cultural meaning and value. These contexts include:

- **Educational / presentation:** how the testimony is situated in terms of its use today, for example the lesson plan or museum experience in which it is embedded. Testimony rarely sits in isolation from a wider learning experience.
- **Historical:** both the time to which the testimony refers and the people, places, language, discourse and politics of that era, and the time in which it was recorded, which also inflects cultural norms of that period on what is said and how it is narrated. It was noted that some survivors have re-recorded their testimony at different times and each recoding has been distinct. Jürgen Matthäus' book '[Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimonies and its Transformations](#)' (2009) was highlighted as particularly useful literature on this topic as well as Sharon Kangisser Cohen's '[Testimony and Time: Holocaust Survivors Remember](#)' (2014).
- **Technological:** the format matters and can create illusionary senses of human interaction whilst providing real interactions with computer systems. The role of technology needs to be explained especially to young users.
- **Personal (life history):** testimony is both an individual's own story about their past, and also a presentation of how they wish to narrativise that past.

- **Traumatic:** the recognition that testimonies are not objective narratives about the past, but are narratives shaped by trauma. As the temporal distance from the narrated events expands, trauma can have varying effects on memory and the narrative told.
  - **Chronological:** historically, the tendency has been to record testimonies as linear narratives, with each event situated in relation to what happens before and after it.
  - **Archival:** the methodologies of the institution, organisation, or individuals responsible for recording a testimony shape it. Furthermore, for archivists, the provenance of the testimony as authentic archival object is important.
- Considering the significance of such contexts, concerns were raised about the ease with which **testimonies can be decontextualised digitally**. Some digital projects compile a number of snippets from different testimonies to allow users to compare a range of different people's experiences of the same site or event. Many still retain access to the full testimony as originally recorded though.

Examples of projects that offer rearrangements of testimony include:

USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive - users can listen to testimonies in full, but can also use search by keywords in segments to explore other testimonies on a shared theme amongst other functions. The Shoah Foundation has also created a video editor on its IWitness platform, which allows users to edit snippets of testimonies into a coherent narrative of their own.

Danish Jews in Theresienstadt – The Topography of Memories - situates snippets of testimonies in a number of locations in Theresienstadt.

YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum - in its first iteration, enabled a user to engage with Beba Epstein's testimony through a series of curated chapters that could be selected in a linear or non-linear fashion.

Online platforms increasingly offer the opportunity to present testimonies in 'snippets' (such as sharing content on social media), **editable clips** (see: IWitness), or as **interactive biographies** driven by users' questions. There are notable differences between the two existing major interactive biography projects. The Forever Project, National Holocaust Museum, UK starts with a **linear testimony** followed by a **moderated opportunity to ask questions**. Whereas The Dimensions in Testimony Project, USC Shoah Foundation, US in most contexts offers a brief introduction to the individual, but is primarily **led by the users' questions**. The role of a moderator (or not) varies across the different contexts in which it has been presented.

When snippets of testimony are posted on social media by institutions, they can be **re-shared, edited and re-contextualised** in ways beyond the organisations' control and monitoring. Some work has been done to explore how **blockchain technologies** to both protect the integrity of the digital files storing testimony recordings and to trace when they are edited online, but these are not widely used and there remain ethical questions (criminal and environmental) about complicity with such technologies and support for cryptocurrency mining (although this only applies to public blockchain, not private) and cost implications. A simpler approach, however, is to maintain **good practice in recording metadata** so that details are always available within the shared content or when using **digital watermarks**. Concerns were not just raised about the general public using (and possibly misusing) testimony however, it was also noted that **professional filmmakers and relatives of testimony** givers frequently want to create their own productions using material from existing collections. There is some hesitancy about this from organisations with guardianship responsibilities over testimonies, who would like to **shape guidelines to support ethical reuse of these narratives**. There was a sense that relatives of survivors could find such support helpful, but as guidelines and not dictates on how they should use the stories of their families.

Another issue raised was the extent to which the **traumatic dimensions** of testimonies are recognised with **digitising processes** and **viewing or remixing digitised/ digitalised testimonies**. Testimonies about the Holocaust shrouded in trauma can be narrated by people experiencing varying symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (although not always, and often this has not been formally diagnosed). Traumatic narratives are by their very nature **fragmentary, misremembered, and symbolic and imaginary in places**. They can include 'screen memories' and also may change over time as temporal distance from the traumatic events widens and as testimony givers do their own historical research, situating their memories within a wider discourse about the past – trying to understand its meaning. **Traumatic narratives then, as with testimony and oral history more widely, are in themselves never the 'original' representation of an event per se, but they are also complex texts to comprehend.**

#### Definitions:

Digitised refers to the transferring of non-digital testimonies into digital formats.

Digitalised refers more broadly to digital interventions which could include creating snippets, recording, or editing for VR or games formats

However, it was acknowledged that listening to an entire testimony from beginning to end enables the listener to hear not only the content, but traumatic expressions, such as stuttering, silences, shifting emotions, changes in body language (in audio-visual recordings), and flittering between temporal planes. Nevertheless, it was noted that within the context of research, cleaning testimony of some of these interruptions could improve usability for those interested in the contents of the story specifically, although it would detract from provenance and would be less useful to those interested in studying the oral history format or trauma. As we have seen with the examples previously discussed, the modularity of digital platforms could offer the opportunity to provide different versions of the same testimony for distinct use cases.

Despite acknowledgements of moderation and multiply options of presentation in digital spaces, there still remains some scepticism about the 'snippet format'. It was noted that this may take agency away from the individual sharing their testimony as author/ narrator of their own distinct experience of the past. Individual life history becomes enmeshed into a wider historical telling of events. It was recognised that most people's encounters with Holocaust education are limited (museum visits are often only 3-4 hours in total, time given in schools can be equitable or less), thus on the one hand, having exposure to only one survivor's story might risk that narrative becoming metonymic of 'the Holocaust' in its totality (similarly as Auschwitz has become in public discourse for the Holocaust), on the other hand, a 'snippet' approach risks a lack of understanding about the different issues that shape the range of experiences of the various individuals (such as gender, class, nationality, the historical moment at which they were deported, under what circumstances they fled, where they fled to, etc.). Concerns were raised about what happens when clips are explored in these ways out of context. One example was that some testimony givers say things that may seem problematic (e.g., racist) by today's standard. Such comments may be contextualised within the testimony in less problematic ways or more readable within their historical context. Decontextualising such remarks may create an unfair impression of the individual and encourage users to judge them in ways that seem contradictory to the educational aims of testimony projects.

There was further discussion about the shift in agency from the testimony giver to the user/ listener, which coincides with the increasingly recognised move from the 'era of the witness' to the 'era of the user' (Hogervorst 2019). While we can think about the shift to 'the user' as passing over control, we must also think critically about the framing of the experience and the user's ability to navigate

the testimony via a digital platform. In other words, it was felt important to acknowledge the affordances as well as the limits of interaction which govern the rules of engagement and how they might (in)directly preserve a form of survivor agency. Beyond this binary of testimony giver/ user, we might also define the current moment as the 'era of the platform'. As media scholars like Mark Andrejevic (2016) remind us, there are 'invisible' forms of 'participation' we engage in when we contribute data that is published and disseminated by digital platforms - commercial and non-commercial. We must also carefully consider the **agency of the platforms and the organisations** who create and maintain them, as well as the **community of users** they attract. **We should be careful of suggesting that the agency of 'witnesses' is simply replaced by that of users then in the so-called digital age.** It might be more accurate to say that their voices come into relation with others (within corporations as well as users); corporate values, aims and ambitions; and algorithmic and other technological logics when they circulate in digital spaces.

Given that testimony givers have and continue to adapt their narratives to relate to the contemporary context, some participants felt that digitised recordings of testimonies prevent this – **freezing their narrative-telling in a specific context, unable to be edited by them.** This is however inevitable with any recordings of testimonies – **analogue or digital**, and arguably the precedence for collecting, storing, and disseminating their narratives outweighs concerns that they won't be able to have agency in editing them after their deaths. There was concern raised however that given some testimony givers have already recorded various versions of their narrative that users may not necessarily understand the reasons for such discrepancies. Whilst historians skilled in reading oral history/audio-visual testimony will have a better understanding, there will be increasing need to support engagement with digital Holocaust materials for general users. **Digital, trauma, and historical literacies training** can support users in this area and help them to distinguish between the appropriate ways to question the reliability of testimony in an educational context versus the inappropriate (which could lead to doubts about the actualities of the Holocaust and feed into distortion and denial). These literacies programmes could more easily be embedded into institutional and school/ university activities than shared with general users online – **reaching this larger public is the bigger challenge.**

There is a need to make people more aware that all history is about how we make sense of the past and regarding testimony this includes what survivors know/knew, how their feelings changed about the past over time, and what they think their audiences knows and wants to know.

The misuse of Holocaust narratives in Russian propaganda campaigns since the Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022) also highlighted for participants that **digital media can be used to distort this past for political means**. Whilst sharing testimony snippets online might not encourage any immediate denial, distortion, or misappropriation (although sometimes it can), we cannot predict how decontextualised content is used in the future. The era of Web 2.0 has been celebrated as enabling a more **virulent 'participatory culture', which decentralises experts and rearranges societal power relations**. Nevertheless, the discussion about misappropriation in propaganda emphasised the **urgency and value of expert voices contextualising historical content**.

A particular issue raised regarding technological context was an example in which a young user having seen one of the interactive testimony projects (of a survivor who has passed away) asked if she could speak to her deceased father in this way. Whilst companies like StoryFile (the CEOs of which have been leaders in digital Holocaust memory practices) are working to make such requests possible (by encouraging everyday people to record their own 'interactive biographies' before their death), their projects still rely on recording an individual when they were alive. The limitations (and possibilities) of technologies need to be explained to users, particularly those assumed to be 'digital natives' (a highly contested term in media studies). **Those who have grown up in digital ubiquity may be less likely to adopt a critical eye on technologies than others.**

One suggestion was that **foregrounding the interface** rather than masking it might help support users' understanding of the technological encounter with testimony. There was a sense that many users are overtly aware of the technological dimensions of their encounters with digital testimony. Ongoing research by Victoria Grace Walden, as well as the PhD theses of Kate Marrison (Digital Witnessing: Towards Holocaust Memory Practice in a Digital Age, 2021, University of Leeds) and Sanna Stegmaier (forthcoming, PhD, Kings College, London) note how **disruptions, breakdowns, and 'blips' can become part of the witnessing experience in various ways and increase the interest of users, respectively**.

It was generally accepted that no organisation or group of institutions can ever attempt to tell the whole story of the Holocaust, even in the age of 'big data', where so much information can be made available and processed. Thus, it is important that all organisations focus on achievable and realistic aims.

Given the issues related to decontextualisation, **responsible management** of testimony is needed. However, questions were raised about who owns testimony and who has the right to define how it is managed. This includes issues related to who has the right to determine who should be allowed substantial access to testimonies, and what is considered (in)appropriate uses of testimonies.

These issues raise questions about the **purpose and value(s) of testimony** in the close and the distant future.

- How can meaningful relationships be created between 'experts' and 'users' that encourage ethical engagement with and use of testimonies in digital spaces?
- How might the individual life history retain its importance or gain even more value when survivors are no longer with us?
- Do we need to discuss the context and categorisation of testimony as it is reshaped in, by and through the digital? Especially in terms of descents of survivors and their ability to speak 'on behalf of' their parents or to their own unique experiences?

In this context, it was noted that both the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and Holocaust Educational Trust in the UK are developing guidelines and recommendations around the use of **second-generation testimony** in the classroom. Such a temporal shift, then, calls for new ways of thinking about how survivor voices can shape a longitudinal interest in their past beyond their lifetime.

## 2. Transparency and Methodologies

Before embarking on (expensive) digitalisation projects, it was emphasised that organisations must determine what they are for. Is it for analytical ends? For research purposes? Or public facing? Is the aim to preserve or to educate, or both? Such questions will help shape digitalisation projects with **clear visions, aims and objectives**, which can inform not only **digitising or digital recording methodologies**, but also the **interface, platform, promotion, and complementary content developed**. Digitising and digitalisation of testimony were described as '**not simply about the translation and transmission of content into a different and new state [but] a complete transformation**'.

Some representatives of archives expressed that they feel irritated that due recognition is not given when their testimonies are shared. They would appreciate **acknowledgement of the archive**, which would also offer a first step towards transparency when testimonies are reused (i.e. this would allow viewers/users to look further into the archive's methodologies).

Most archives share their **methodologies** in varying level of detail although these are not always easy to find. Accompanying testimony collections with videos of curators discussing their decisions would be one way to be more transparent to users. Although, in the digitising material evidence workshop it was noted that organisations that have done substantial work to this effect have found users rarely engage with these efforts. Furthermore, there was some frustration that academics write theories about testimonies without speaking to the archivists and studying their methodologies. **These theories often have the power to shape future developments in the field, which is problematic if methodologies and institutional contexts are not properly researched.**

The **effect and ethics of the methodologies** themselves were also raised, particularly regarding who is chosen to participate in these projects. What implications does the method for selecting interviewees have for how the history of the event is communicated? Newer technologies especially are recording survivors much further after the event than earlier projects did, so the demographic of the survivors they record (in terms of age at the time of the Holocaust) is much younger. Also, do these new forms of digital testimony give particular prominence to those who are good public speakers, even 'professional' survivor speakers, to provide users/listeners with coherent narratives? How are such decisions in conflict with the recognition above that trauma narratives are often messy and not necessarily well-structured and coherent and the suggestion that this may in fact be affective in certain experiential user contexts.

Further discussion questioned the effect of the scheduling and time demands of recording new forms of digital testimony, such as interactive biographies, which usually require approximately five days of shooting. Aside from the demands on mental and physical health of such projects, the impact of when particular questions are asked was noted. For example, the interactive testimony projects require testimony givers to be asked a series of 'frequently asked questions' that might be irrelevant to their story, when asked towards the end of a shooting day, these have caused testimony givers to be irritated and to provide sarcastic responses. One example was the question 'were there toys in the camp?' being asked at the end of a long filming day.

### 3. Ethical and Legal Responsibilities

The issue of **consent** stimulated lively debate about the conflicts between legal and ethical responsibilities, and the **ambiguities of existing law**. Organisations with guardianship of testimony collections tend to ask for **'general copyright'** consent, which legally allows them to use recorded testimonies as they wish. Nevertheless, many institutions have specifically added a separate tick box regarding social media, suggesting this digital arena in particular is considered to have distinct risks. It was recognised that testimony givers, often keen to share their stories, are not always fully aware of the consequences of what 'general copyright' could mean – indeed none of us know for certain what digital futures might hold. Some examples of good practice shared included discussing the copyright agreement in detail face-to-face with the testimony givers.

In most cases, organisations tend to adopt ethical practices that go beyond their legal duties. For example, some show any new 'products' they create from recordings to survivors and family members (the latter particularly when the testimony givers are deceased). Other examples (see chapter by USC Shoah Foundation colleagues, 2021) include survivors and their families in the pre-production and production stages, allowing them to familiarise with the technologies concerned so they can get a sense of what the final 'product' will be like. Such projects become increasingly useful with the **agile, modular, and iterative approaches of digital projects**, in contrast to traditional linear testimony recordings.

Nevertheless, there is generally an assumption that people who provide their testimony to an archive want it to be **disseminated as widely as possible**. Institutions have a responsibility to consider what this means in terms of the extent to which the testimony – as the individual's personal narrative as told by them – can be recontextualised and remixed. There was some concern raised about the **Third Generation's keenness to create TikTok videos** from their ancestors' testimonies – the aesthetics and editing of TikTok videos was recognised as distinct from traditions of filmmaking with which archivists are more familiar. Social media in general, not just TikTok, raise particular issues for consent – both the testimony giver and recording organisation lose control when a testimony is recirculated in what several participants referred to as **'out in the wild'**. Neither can necessarily predict what will happen to that testimony, how it will be repackaged and recirculated, and when/if it will reappear.

Some testimony givers have stated that they do not want their testimonies included in specific contexts, including particular new museums, the plans for which they disapprove. This raises issues about whether this refusal retains its significance in the long-term: what if the museum's ethos changes? Who gets to judge if/when that testimony could then be included? Would there be any value in asking testimony givers to identify how they perceive the value/use of their testimony without being institutionally or technologically determinist? (i.e., rather than ask if they are happy for it to be on social media, ask whether they are okay for the testimony to be shared in spaces in which other users can recontextualise it). **There is a need to think more carefully about how we can reconcile the wishes of testimony givers with the capacities of new emerging and future technologies, some of which are difficult to forecast.**

The distinctions in legal frameworks across the world were also noted, with GDPR having a major impact on organisations based in the European Union. Colleagues applying and teaching GDPR though find it unclear. Some institutions have sought legal advice and received different feedback from each legal representative – it seems even the legal field finds **data legislation ambiguous**. However, representatives from beyond this context expressed little knowledge of the implications of the EU regulations. **Supranational, national, and regional legislations raise new challenges for Holocaust organisations**, especially if they are disseminating testimonies in globally accessible online spaces, sharing materials with international partners, and/or recording, recirculating or remixing content which includes reference to or features an individual with a different national citizenship to the institution. Legally, testimony is data, thus there seems to be an urgent need for clear guidance on where different legislations are complementary and where they clash. Exercising caution through lack of understanding (or due to the ambiguities within the law itself) risks doing nothing.

Regarding GDPR, it was noted that 'consent' has a very specific legal definition that has significant (adverse) implications for archivists. As a result of which, The British Library no longer refer to 'consent' on their documentation and copyright forms and the [Oral History Society](#) advises against using it as the legal basis for processing oral history. Notably, this is different to the concept of 'informed consent' which oral historians have been discussing for decades. There is a need to have a more in-depth conversation about how this intersects with the ethics of Holocaust testimony, including points raised above about the consent of others mentioned in testimony, the rights of family members to discuss what can happen with a recording, and the ethics of ownership.

One issue discussed in this respect was the question about whether children of testimony givers should have the right to decide what happens with their parent's recording once they are deceased. Institutions cannot guarantee that the children's wishes match their parents. It can also be difficult to find their relatives. Whilst some survivors and their families are very active in the Holocaust memory and education community, others are not. There is a risk of creating **new canons** of whose stories are recirculated and reused if essential consent from family members becomes standardised. Another issue raised specifically was that consent and agency do not only refer to the testimony giver. Those mentioned in the testimony, from people named as perpetrators who have never been charged as such (and descendants of the accused) to the inclusion of other victims, especially when narratives potentially defame character or involve particularly traumatic events, such as sexual violence.

An approach to 'Archival Consent' discussed by Julie Botnick in the Los Angeles Collective was raised as she explores notions of ownership, consent, and agency in relation to institutionally held collections and collection-based decisions. She suggests revising traditional power structures that favour the institution and management roles by reframing collection related question to be based upon consent. Her example is rather than "do we own this?", the question can be framed "should we have this?", encouraging discussion and a focus on ethics that moves away from reiterating institutional narratives of exclusive ownership. Pivotal to this engagement model, affirmative consent requires a continual discussion for reaffirmation and negotiation of action across the **life cycle of interactions**, consent is not a one-time agreement.

Further issues were raised about the consequences of mass digitisation of testimonies regarding the increase of data and thus also data analysis involved in this, which has also encouraged distinctly computational ways to understand testimony and other historical sources **as data through quantitative rather than qualitative lens**. The aims and objectives of mass digitisation need to be considered carefully. On the one hand, there are examples of grassroots testimony collecting projects with **fragile analogue recordings at risk of loss**, with no paperwork attached to them that would comply with today's GDPR regulations which both highlights the urgency to digitise whilst raising access issues. On the other hand, mass digitisation programmes need to be designed with potential use in mind, i.e., interface, searchability, complementary educational or contextualising materials, and hyperlinks to related sources.

## 4. Narrativising the Past and Representation

The notion of a **testimony canon** defining public understanding of the Holocaust is not new. Anne Frank's diary – a material testimony by a victim – is exemplary of the ability for one personal narrative to be remade, remediated, and recirculated in a multitude of formats for decades. Anne Frank's diary also highlights the problem of such **iconicity**, as the part of her life that is recorded in the diary does not include her experiences in Westerbork, Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen, including her death in the latter just a short period before liberation.

Digital interventions in testimony collections, however, raise new issues regarding how canons for the future may be formed. Whilst [Todd Presner \(2017\)](#) has argued that the **algorithmic base of information retrieval systems (IRS) used in digital archives can offer the opportunity for new forms of listening**, which can draw attention to lesser known testimonies (in the USC Shoah Foundation's [Visual History Archive](#)), algorithms that inform publicly available online IRSs tend to be informed by a combination of advertisers, popular content, machine learning predictions of potentially trending material based on aggregation of user interests, and other institutional priorities (including experimentations on behavioural change, such as controversially performed by Facebook and Cambridge Analytica). Google and YouTube searches, and social media algorithms can play a major role in defining what stories circulate frequently and which fall into the ether. Such **corporations wield responsibility for the future shape of Holocaust memory and education**, and how they curate - this is largely beyond the control of Holocaust organisations and the descendants of testimony givers.

Some of these issues, however, are at least partially within these organisations' control. For instance another factor shaping new canons lies in who is able to be involved in re-recording projects, such as the 360-degree on-location testimonies (USC Shoah Foundation) and the interactive testimony projects (USC's Dimensions in Testimony, and the National Holocaust Centre's Forever Project). These lengthy filming processes can necessitate extensive travel and long filming days, which only a few survivors can manage. A further issue is in language – especially online, English language testimonies tend to be the most popular as English has become the unofficial language of the global internet.

## 5. Listening

One pertinent issue raised was the **visual bias of testimonies** in digital formats that are orientated for the public. Whilst there are some examples of organisations prioritising audio content (e.g., Centropa), the visual is foregrounded on social media, and in VR and AR apps. To what extent does this prioritising of the visual continue a focus on the well-researched visual cues of discomfort and trauma (personal dimensions of narrativising)? What is prioritised in the visuals – the survivor's body or does their voice accompany other imagery? Are the audio/ visual cues of discomfort and trauma edited out? Are there alternative non-visual technologies or options that prioritise sound? Can listening be a form of consumption? In thinking more critically about audio content, participants questioned the distinctions between 'hearing' and 'listening'. What does it actually mean to listen to Holocaust survivors, and how is the opportunity to do so being reshaped and potentially expanded in the digital?

**Audio can be a powerful way to narrate landscapes which have minimal or no traces of their former traumatic pasts.** For example, listening posts have been incorporated into physical sites, such as the Harwich Kindertransport bench and at the former site of the Westerbork transit camp. In this context, Tanya Schult has written about the impact of the [audio-walk at Gusen](#). She argues the sound becomes a '**multi-vocal memory patchwork**' within an otherwise '**invisible landscape**'. Another example raised is a **distant listening model** being developed by the Hebrew University, which allows 'listening' to a multitude of testimonial narratives using algorithmic models that trace the narrative arc of each individual testimony, identifying prototypical testimonies and diverging narratives, paving the way for recovering silenced or untold experiences.

Some organisations have found that there are increasing requests for **subtitles** on video testimonies shared on social media (and elsewhere online). It should also be noted that this is a legal requirement in the United Kingdom for any public organisation. Subtitles introduce reading back into audio-visual testimony (which was usually reserved for written testimony only). Beyond **widening accessibility** to audio-visual content, subtitles are increasingly becoming a norm so that people can engage with audio-visual content on mobile devices without headphones. In the context of testimony, they may also support **usability**, as listeners can see the words in their native language and older recordings do not have great sound quality, so content can be better understood. What do subtitles add or detract from the audio-visual testimony? Can listening encourage intimacy?

How does listening to testimony alongside augmented or virtual reality content shape the user experience? One example raised was The Liberation AR app produced for the Dachau Memorial Site, which enables visitors to superimpose archival photographs over the present-day memorial site whilst listening to (an actor's impersonation of) testimony. This raised questions about the **authenticity of voice** – is impersonation by actors useful (especially for those who are underrepresented)? Or should testimony only be transmitted digitally if it retains the voice of the original testimony giver?

Just as the visual is being prioritised in productions and circulations of digital testimony, it also retains a hierarchical position in academic literature about media in general, and Holocaust representation more broadly. We must not forget the significance of listening.

# METHODOLOGY

This report was formulated through a participatory workshop series, shaped by the following activities:

Participants were invited to introduce themselves and offer a brief position statement before the 1st workshop in the Padlet tool. Participants were encouraged to view each other's statements in advance of session 1.

In the 1st 2-hour workshop, participants were asked to agree on priority topics. Then they were divided into 'expertise' groups to explore these topics. Then into 'mixed' groups to share their ideas.

In each group, at least one of the project leads took on the role of minuter. These minutes were then thematically analysed and organised into a draft of the discussion section of this report. The themes were not imposed on the minutes, rather they emerged from the priorities selected by participants in the discussions.

The draft report was then circulated to participants before workshop 2.

In a 1.5-hour workshop, participants were then asked to provide feedback on the document to ensure it fully captured everyone's contributions.

The final document was circulated for review before dissemination.

As much as possible, recruitment for the workshop focused on seeking a wide variety of different expertise in relation to both Holocaust memory and education, and the storing of and creative use of testimony more generally, with some participants knowledgeable about both and others more about one than the other.

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**Please do get in touch if you would like to contribute to actioning any of the recommendations in this report.**

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