

Transtestimonial Holocaust Memory between the analytical and the immersive – a case study of European and US witness projects in the digital age (working title)

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In my doctoral project, I examine recent European and US witness projects that engage with two essential challenges of contemporary Holocaust memory. On the one hand, the imminent disappearance of the last witnesses has prompted efforts to reinterpret and reevaluate the relationship between contemporary memory culture and Holocaust testimony. On the other hand, these revaluations engage with new digital technologies with the purpose of keeping Holocaust testimony alive for future generations. They create a paradoxical presence of the witnesses at a time of their disappearing, framing them as agents of authenticity and authority in an increasingly digitalised memory landscape. Institutions of national standing, such as the Austrian National Theatre, the USC Shoah Foundation and the German public broadcasting station WDR, have initiated projects that engage performatively with the role of testimony for contemporary Holocaust memory, allowing memory culture to reflect on its own memory-making processes and transcending the limits of testimony as a historic source towards a metanemonic space.

I ask what ethical and aesthetic implications arise when performing Holocaust testimony as a political, historical and artistic source. To what extent is the paradoxical presence of the witnesses employed to negotiate concepts of physical locatedness in the digital age? What is the role of the witnesses' body in such negotiations? How do contemporary national projects negotiate transnational and transgenerational memory concepts, with a particular focus on preexisting perpetrator and victim categories? How do metanemonic projects employ ritual, empathetic or analytical approaches to testimony? Drawing on testimony studies (Laub, Felman, LaCapra), cultural memory studies (Rothberg, Erll, Reading), theories of performativity (Fischer-Lichte, Lehmann) and sociological theories of collective bodies (Butler, Hallensleben), I develop the concept of *transtestimony*, a transdisciplinary approach to testimony, which addresses the ethical and aesthetic elements of contemporary performative engagements with Holocaust testimony. I argue that the paradoxical presence of the witnesses' imminent absence becomes a liminal space where collective and individual performative engagements with cultural memory cross, overlap, merge or collide. The focus of my thesis, therefore, does not lie on the physical presence of the witnesses as mere embodiments of a traumatic past. Instead, it emphasises the precarious conditions of testimony that allow the projects to produce and disintegrate survivors as *witnesses*, implicate and reject the audience as transgenerational witnesses and transcends testimony as a historical source.