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Honors Thesis Proposal

January 27th, 2020 will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Despite this landmark date, troubling statistics have emerged from around the globe on the subject of Holocaust knowledge and remembrance. 64% of adults polled in the United Kingdom were not aware of how many Jews were murdered.¹ A poll of 7,000 European adults indicated that they knew “just a little” about the Holocaust.² Only a handful of states in the U.S. require students to learn about the Holocaust and other historical genocides.³ Noting these starting facts, many descendants, educators, and world leaders have voiced their concern on how to educate younger generations about the horrors of the past. As the number of remaining survivors dwindle, direct connections to lives and stories fade into distant memory. What do we do when all the survivors are gone?

On his article regarding the topic of the aesthetics of Holocaust memory, Kansteiner notes that current memory culture must confront two powerful and irreversible trends (2014). First, those with firsthand experience and connections to the events of the Holocaust are disappearing. Second, the linear media trends of prior decades are being replaced by interactive digital networks. As we move from a memorial to “postmemorial” generations, the focus deviates from direct testimony and toward new and creative ways that incorporate survivor

¹ Francesca, Paris. “Survivors Mark Holocaust Remembrance Day on 74th Anniversary of Auschwitz Liberation,” NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/27/689162207/survivors-mark-holocaust-remembrance-day-on-74th-anniversary-of-auschwitz-libera>, (January 27, 2019)

² Ruiz-Grossman, Sarah. “A Third of People in Major European Countries Know Little or Nothing About the Holocaust,” Huffington Post, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/holocaust-antisemitism-survey-europe-cnn_n_5bfef9bfe4b0e254c9270726?ncid=engmodushpimg00000004, (November 28, 2018)

³ Zubrzycki, Jackie. “Michigan, Rhode Island to Require Education About Genocide in Schools,” Education Week, https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2016/06/states_move_to_require_educati.html, (June 29, 2016)

accounts. With startling advancements in technological innovation throughout the past few decades, educational institutions are constantly utilizing new methods in order to create immersive learning experiences. It is here that I consider the broader question of my research: How is technology used to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive?

Formal narratives, such as the ones found in history texts, historical films, biographies, documentaries, and archives are generally accepted representations of Holocaust victims (Commane and Potton 2019). Traditionally, educational sites have acted as keepers of history, incorporating these narratives into their exhibits. When visiting a modern Holocaust museum, one will see a variety of objects on display which allow a visitor to view historical moments in a present-day context. Diaries, personal belongings, and clothing are encased under glass, intimate reminders of the individuals who experienced the horrific events of the Holocaust directly. The objects of their lives are meant to establish a connection between victim and visitor, providing a window to a life lived decades ago. Witness testimony and interviews can also act as artifacts of history, and are transmitted directly to museum visitors through video or sound displays. Like physical artifacts, witness testimony establishes the significance of past events, ideally preserving them for eternity.

While this archived knowledge is invaluable, educational institutions must contend with a harsh reality. How will younger generations relate to a past that they have no direct connection to? Witness testimony must be reimagined and renegotiated within the institutions themselves, as well as with society as a whole. With this in mind, I would also like to examine how institutional power structures influence the relationship between technology, memory, and the body. How will I do this? Here, I introduce one of the most innovative technological projects of the decade: The Holocaust survivor hologram. Developed as a joint venture by USC Institute for Creative

Technologies and the USC Shoah Foundation, *New Dimensions in Testimony* is a digital experience created for the purpose of invoking an emotional connection with younger generations (Zalewska 2016). Utilizing state-of-the-art technology, a survivor's body, movements, and speech are captured digitally in a three-dimensional holographic interface, which records their likeness exactly. The holograms are then able to be exhibited in museums and schools, creating the ability for an audience to have a simulated conversation with a survivor who is not physically present. The hologram provides a key point for my analysis, in which the interplay between Holocaust memory and technology can be researched.

For my study, I will be utilizing a qualitative approach, in which I will be exploring my research questions and the relationship between technology, the body, and Holocaust memory. I will be gathering and analyzing a range of empirical materials from numerous cultural environments, including written works, testimony, and museums. Ideally, my sites of research will include the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center and the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum. These two museums have been instrumental in incorporating new technologies into their Holocaust education sector, and thus are prime locations for exhibit observation and analysis. Both institutions contain the "New Dimensions is Testimony" hologram exhibit, which will be a crucial aspect of research. I have amassed numerous articles, interview transcriptions, and books for my research, and will continue to collect literature pertaining to my topic. These are five examples of articles that I have read over this summer, and will be consulting for my paper:

Artstein, R.; Traum, D.; Alexander, O.; Leuski, A.; Jones, A.; Georgila, K.; Debevec, P.; Swartout, W.; Maio, H.; and Smith, S. 2014. Time-Offset Interaction with a Holocaust Survivor. *IUI'14*: 163 – 168.

Frosh, Paul. 2018. “The mouse, the screen, and the Holocaust witness: Interface aesthetics and moral response,” *New Media & Society* 20(1): 351 – 368.

Kansteiner, Wulf. 2014. “Genocide Memory, Digital Cultures, and the Aesthetization of Violence,” *Memory Studies* 7(4): 403-408.

Reading, Anna. 2003. “Digital Interactivity in Public Memory Institutions: the uses of new technologies in Holocaust Museums,” *Media, Culture, & Society* 25(1): 67- 85.

Zalewska, Maria. 2016. “Holography, Historical Indexicality, and the Holocaust,” *Spectator* 36(1): 25-32.

Works Cited in Proposal:

Commane, Gemma and Rebekah Potton. 2019. “Instagram and Auschwitz: a critical assessment of the impact social media has on Holocaust representation,” *Holocaust Studies* 25(1-2): 158-181.

Kansteiner, Wulf. 2014. “Genocide Memory, Digital Cultures, and the Aesthetization of Violence,” *Memory Studies* 7(4): 403-408.

Zalewska, Maria. 2016. “Holography, Historical Indexicality, and the Holocaust,” *Spectator* 36(1): 25-32.