Beyond the witness: the layering of historical testimonies on British television

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> The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas [suggests]…that the witness' speech is one that, by its very definition, transcends the witness who is but its medium, the medium of realization of the testimony...By virtue of the fact that the testimony is *addressed* to others, the witness…is the vehicle of an occurrence, a reality, a stance or a dimension *beyond himself* [sic]. (Shoshana Felman, 1995, p.15)

This chapter provides an account of the use of eyewitness, and other, testimony as part of the textual operations of British history programming from the 1970s to the present, and attempts to relate it to broader issues of, and developments within, historical and personal remembrance, particularly the use of photography. Presenter and eyewitness are familiar televisual tropes that cross many genres, and in history programmes eyewitnesses may be seen to have auratic power, in the sense that they are individuals, standing for a form of authenticity. This is problematized, though, because they must also bear witness for others; some of their authority derives from speaking for an entire group (Gray, 1997, p.100), and as the quotation above suggests, this transcends the individual witness.[i]

Deleted: indeed,

Indeed, although many historians, particularly those researching events and experiences for which there is a paucity of documentary evidence, such as the lives of working-class women (see e.g. ???), or which necessitate the inclusion of voices of survivors, such as

historical accounts of the Holocaust (see e.g. Friedländer …) argue for the scholarly and political significance of oral history, which is rarely used as the sole historical source as, like other forms of historical evidence, it is not without its limitations which must be taken into account by scholars. However, others have rejected its apparent reliance upon individual memories outright, perhaps most notably the Oxford historian and television personality A. J. P. Taylor, who condemned the then nascent field of oral historical work as (???). In this chapter I do not seek to evaluate the usefulness of oral testimony any further; however it is my aim here to consider it as a *fait accompli* and to analyse its use as a specific method of historical research within televised history programming, alongside other, most recent ways of including individual testimony.

However, when we see a person affected by their memories, it may affect us too, because their experience appears authentic, and particular to them, although they may be one of many. The testifier, and their account, has been mass reproduced, but the individual experience of both testifier and audience member is unique. It is necessary to consider, then, how such individuals may 'speak for a particular group' whilst they also 'reach out to us all.' (Winter, 2006, p.242)

In addition, even if they do not share the same physical space, the testifier appears in the audience's home. Thus the intimate mode of television in the domestic context, although part of a mass medium, is personal and participatory; a space where 'lost storytellers, priests, wise men and elders are restored to cultural visibility and to oral primacy'. (Fiske and Hartley, 2003, pp 64-5; 86; 100) Arguably, in TV

history this takes the form of authoritative male presenters (Bell and Gray, 2007), but also of eyewitness testimony. Photographs have become increasingly significant in this respect during the past four decades, and are often used alongside testimony, allowing eyewitnesses and audience members to engage in different ways – onscreen and at home - with the past. Using historians' and media professionals' insights, the development over time of techniques used to engage viewers will be considered, as will the roles that 'prosthetic memory' and the 'layering' of testimonies might play when surviving eyewitnesses to major events of the 20th century are few, and photographs placing them or their families in a particular historical era encourage them, and us, to reflect on both past and present.

Early examples: *The World at War* and *Timewatch*

Factual history programming has been broadcast in the UK since the 1950s. The televised lectures of Oxford historian A.J.P. Taylor (Oliver, 2003-6) were joined in the 1960s by documentaries using footage and oral testimony, including the BBC's 26-part series *The Great War* (BBC 1964). Described as 'a new benchmark for history programmes', (Hanna, 2007, p.91) its developments in historical methodology, including the use of oral history, led the series' researchers to believe they were 'recording people for history' (p.96). A decade later, modeled on a similar footage and testimony combination, *The World at War* (Thames TV 1974) successfully refined the format (Downing, 2004, p.10; Darlow, 2005, p.141). From the start of the project in April 1971, the key ingredients were 'the image and the word, newsreel and eyewitness interview', and where there were no images, interviews alone were used, except for one of the final episodes, 'Reckoning',

which allowed historians to appear onscreen. (Isaacs in Holmes, 2007, p.viii; Isaacs, 2006, pp157-8)

Considering in particular the episode 'Genocide', broadcast in March 1974, it is evident that the way in which eyewitness testimony is used allows the audience to perceive links to broader media coverage of the Holocaust, including war crime tribunals. For example, former Waffen-SS Colonel General Karl Wolff describes his wartime career, and we see a photograph of him with Himmler: he is identified as 'one of the cogs in the machine' (Isaacs, 2006, p.143); neither a thug nor a psychopath, and representative of many more. Wolff's ties to the Nazi leadership as Chief of Staff to Himmler are proven by the image shown, and indeed he had been imprisoned in the 1960s for his involvement in the deportation of Jews to Treblinka. (Holmes, 2007, p.28) This contrasts with the way in which the testimony of Holocaust survivor Rivka Yosilevska is used: we see photographs of atrocities but none of Rivka herself. She speaks for those who cannot, and thus pictures of groups of people, rather than of Rivka as a young woman, are used. By giving testimony about the deaths of her family, Rivka is a key witness, paralleling the role of Holocaust survivors in the trials of leading Nazis, which received international coverage.[ii] Although Dori Laub reminds us that testimony 'does not have to adhere to the rule of evidence relevant to juridical testimony' (2009, p.142), the episode's maker Michael Darlow confirms the influence of the Eichmann trial, which had brought new evidence and witnesses forward, including some of those in the episode. (2005, p.144) Jay Winter suggests that such witnesses, alongside prosecutors and judges, created 'a new theatre of historical remembrance': war crime tribunals. (2006, p.7)

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Using his definition of historical remembrance - something which draws on both history and memory and uses both documented narratives and eyewitness accounts - it is possible to view the episode, and even the series as a whole, as forms of remembrance, in which photographs play an important role. As Marita Sturken asserts, '[i]t is extraordinary to consider the degree to which the still photograph has been so central to scholarship on memory, and the role that the photograph continues to play in concepts of memory'. (2008, p.75) Televised accounts have utilised this, alongside testimony, for at least three decades.

The BBC *Timewatch* strand (1981-date) from its inception has used testimony, and the 'event-television' episode 'Battle for Berlin' (1985), marking the 40th anniversary of VE Day, included a number of conflicting voices: German, British, Russian; civilian and military; all of which raise questions about the relationship between historical testimony and political expediency at the time of filming. Major Anna Nikolena, for example, addresses the camera from her living room and justifies the brutality of Soviet troops, whilst a German civilian describes the rape and murder of her female neighbours. In addition, the then presenter-led format of *Timewatch* allowed journalist Charles Wheeler to act as both narrator and eyewitness, moving between a first person memory and third person account of the events, and making direct references to the political situation in Berlin in the present. Like *The World at War*, photographs were used, for example to place Ludvig von Hammerstein, who had been involved in a plot to kill Hitler, in Berlin in 1945. A photograph of him as a young man in uniform is shown, and then he is seen in the present, giving testimony.

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Photographs were used in a similar way in newspapers of the same decade; Barbie Zelizer sees the use of contemporary photographs of an eyewitness alongside earlier images as 'accentuat[ing] the passage of time to readers' (1998, p.177) and contemporising narratives about past eras especially, it might be added, as the chronological gap between 'then' and 'now' widened.

This technique grew more common in the 1990s: if, as Stella Bruzzi asserts, documentary acknowledges 'that the "document" at its heart is open to reassessment', this is borne out by developments apparent in later history series. (2000, p.12) As she suggests, reassessment is not always of the 'truth' of the documents or records shown, but may be of the 'way in which we are invited to access [them]…through representation or interpretation', including the presence, or absence, of testimony. Corelli Barnett's criticism of the 1996 BBC/KCET series *1914-1918* for its use of historians rather than eyewitnesses (1997) suggests that by the 1990s, eyewitness testimony had become an expected and authenticating element of history series which reached its zenith with *People's Century*.

People's Century and subaltern history

As one documentary maker interviewed as part of this research asserted, testimony personalises historical events, allowing them to be better understood by an audience:

> [H]istory is about people…and I think that's what television can
> do quite well; the identification factor. And of course the usual
> format now is that you zoom in to a personal story…then you

can broaden. So it's always the small droplet which is a mirror of the big society. (Interview R)

This technique is used to great effect in *People's Century*, the 26-episode series broadcast from September 1995 on the BBC and PBS, which includes footage or photographs of the events discussed; sometimes of the eyewitnesses interviewed. It allows access to subaltern history, or in some cases, the testimony of the oppressed. The executive producer of *People's Century* stressed that 'no pundits, no academics appear on camera', which according to the PBS website was unique and was certainly used as a selling point. The first episode is introduced by the narrator as 'the story of those turbulent changes, told by the people themselves.' It was also the last sustained series of testimony-based history in the UK in the 1990s, despite the success of series produced by the British-based 'Testimony Films' from 1992 onwards, until a recent revival.[iii] (Humphries, 2008) *People's Century*, heralded as part of the BBC's 'Millennium effort', (Briggs, 1997) was overshadowed by *A History of Britain*, which epitomised the late-1990s return to presenter-led history.

An example from *People's Century*, demonstrating the potential of such series to provide testimony of those otherwise rarely heard or seen, is Birenda Kaur's account of India in the 1940s in the episode 'Freedom Now'. The schoolgirl whose photograph we see will, we know, grow up to be the older woman remembering independence onscreen; this is a form of Roland Barthes' punctum, used to introduce her testimony. As a photograph's punctum may be a poignant accident (Barthes, 1980, p. 27), so the use of a photograph alongside a personal account of a well-known event may provide the same

effect, and through it she is given authority. Despite a lack of such testimony in history programming, the series, and this technique in particular, allow an Indian woman to be heard alongside other postcolonial voices. Her experiences dovetail with footage of Gandhi and Nehru, and as she describes staying up late for independence, we can place her memories in a national, historical context.[iv] The boast that the series has 'no pundits or academics' is intended to suggest unmediated access to the past, although editing, selection and narrative mean that, at best, the sections of interviews shown are authentic, albeit out of context.

The sustained use of footage or photographs of those appearing onscreen has been seen as a key element differentiating *People's Century* from earlier series. (Bruzzi, 2000, p.34) It 'constructs a bridge between personal history…and the official history of the historical image'. Anonymous individuals in footage are reinstated into the official record, demonstrating that 'archive functions as the substantiation of memory.' (ibid.) This was used in later series to great effect, and shall be discussed shortly. Although this may seem an attempt to gain a bigger audience by enlisting 'human interest', it is important for viewers to understand the individuality of those interviewed. Photographs enable us to place the person, and their account, in the period: a form of Barthes' punctum. A lack of photographs may lead to the opposite; in the words of a woman whose grandmother was murdered in the Holocaust, 'it's as if she didn't exist.'[v] Other sources might also have this resonance, suggesting that an interview in a history programme may be both particular, and a testimony. The punctum disturbs us, an account may

haunt us, but we may not know why. One reason may be the age of

many of the testifiers: the accounts of older people, accompanying

footage and photographs, have 'the very tension of History', as

Barthes thought of photographs taken before he was born. (1980,

p.65) As he suggested of a photograph of a slave market, 'there was a

certainty that such a thing had existed…the historian was no longer

the mediator, slavery was given without mediation'. (p.80) John Urry

similarly includes photographs among 'diverse artefacts' that provoke

memories, or in the case of a television audience, affective responses,

often 'unpredictable and disruptive'; a bodily reaction which may

precede empathy in the case of more recent history programming.

(Urry, 1996, p.50; Hirsch, 2008, p.117)

Auschwitz and the spectral punctum

Other examinations of the use of photography in order to provoke

affective responses include Petra Rau's analysis of Rachel Seiffert's

novel _The Dark Room_ (2001), set in Germany during and after the

Second World War. Rau identifies the 'spectral punctum' in the

photographs described in the work: 'a subjective affect caused by

something that the image does not record but that nonetheless

conditions its reading as traumatic, a negative supplement signifying

loss or absence.' (2006, p.295) Seiffert, she suggests, is thus

exploring the limitations of photography, which is 'habitually entrusted

with aiding our access to that past.' (p.296) Comparable

representations on television include the 2005 series _Auschwitz_, a

British-US co-production to mark the 60th anniversary of liberation.

One of its most significant developments is an extension of testimony

to include not only accounts of the experiences of those no longer

alive, as *World at War* did, but also to enable them to be distinguished from all other victims; the absence of individualism in Holocaust photographs, as they are often used, is acknowledged. As Susan Sontag suggests when looking at such images, we 'should feel obliged to think about what it means to look at them, about the capacity actually to assimilate what they show.' (Sontag cited in Rau, 2006, p.307) Perhaps in response to such comments, *Auschwitz* concludes with the testimony of Hungarian-American artist and Birkenau survivor Alice Lok Cahana. A photograph of women and children is shown, a summary of the numbers of murdered is heard, and the camera pans over one woman and her children in particular. One of them holds her hand and looks directly at the camera and through it to us, the audience: a punctum in Barthes' sense. We then hear Alice's testimony:

> In this photograph I recognise my aunt, her name is Yolanda Wolstein [camera focuses on Yolanda] and her four little children [on two of their faces], Ervin, eight years old; Dory, ten years old [pans to Dory]; Judith, six years old, and Naomi, the little baby [pans to the baby in Yolanda's arms], two years old. It's such an incredible shattering feeling, [we see Alice in her home] to recognise somebody you love, to see how they looked minutes before they entered the crematorium.[vi]

This takes barely a minute but it is extremely powerful, combining factual information with the affect described by Rau: their movement to their deaths is unseen, but not, to us, unknown. As Bruzzi asserts of *People's Century*, (2000, p.34) *Auschwitz* too retains the notion that historical footage, and in this case photographs, possess inherent

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meaning. Certainly, those filmed responding to images find them meaningful, and this response, as much as the images or footage, allows us to acknowledge the identities of previously anonymised individuals.[vii] This is comparable to Marianne Hirsch's analysis of the graphic novel *Maus*, in which Art Spiegelman re-works a well-known image of liberated prisoners in Buchenwald to include his own father, making it part of his family album. (2008, p.112) Perhaps unsurprisingly, after writing and producing *Auschwitz*, Laurence Rees noted that 'the voices I heard loudest were those of the people we could not interview'. (2005, p.23)

Alternative sites of testimony: *The Trench* and *Mitchell & Kenyon*

In recent years the declining number of eyewitnesses to the major events of the 20th century has been recognised as potentially problematic for television, not least because the presenter-historian and the 'archive and eyewitnesses' format have dominated for many years. (Downing, 2004, p.10) Increasing chronological distance from events may require 'rapprochement to counteract its effects and give it emotional resonance.' (Nora, 1996, p.13) The longing Pierre Nora describes for the affective and the physical; 'the feel of mud on our boots' (ibid.) has led to alternative forms of testimony or of witnessing. For example, the BBC2 2002 series *The Trench* allowed Great War soldiers' descendents to reenact elements of life in the trenches, whilst they also 'stood in' for their ancestors by reading out their grandfathers' and great-grandfathers' letters home. The ethical necessity of remembering traumatic events was supported by re-enactment and testimony of behalf of their ancestors. (Bell, 2009)

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As Alison Landsberg reminds us, Michel de Certeau asserts that in such situations 'Memory produces in a place that does not belong to it' (1997, p.63). Whilst, Landsberg goes on to suggest, the film *Schindler's List* attempts to transfer 'authentic living memory from the body of a survivor to an individual who has no "authentic" link to this particular historical past' (p.64), *The Trench* attempted to transfer the memory of those who died to volunteers with a familial and regional link to Great War soldiers. This 'alternative living memory…produced in those who did not live through the event' (pp 65-6) is necessary if events are to be remembered, and, she suggests, has potential 'to produce empathy and social responsibility' transcending race, class and gender (p.21; Saxton, 2008, p.45) Although some series rely on the auratic power of remaining eyewitnesses, for example *The Last Tommy* (BBC 2005), which claimed of those interviewed '[t]heir deaths will cut forever our last connection to the distant [archive] image', the use of reenactment points to programme makers' aspirations to find, as veterans die, a way to achieve insight and affective connection still.

Different forms of testimony are also apparent in 'found footage' series, such as *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon* (2005), which used rediscovered footage of life in Britain, filmed in the 1890s and 1900s. The series focuses both on the footage, and on descendants of those filmed, who are shown watching clips and then responding to them. In the episode 'Saints and Sinners', we see an advertisement placed in the *Manchester Evening News* asking for 'descendants' to contact the BBC. As Fiske and Hartley suggest, viewers, including the descendents, respond in terms 'meaningful for themselves personally.' (2003, p.87) Later, an elderly man, Reg Jelves, describes his father

George, shown on a temperance march in 1901; descendants are often shown providing genealogical and more general information about the family members shown. They can give further details, commenting on specific attributes: Reg mentions his father's cheeky grin, as a boy, captured on film. This seems, for him, to be a form of punctum; the point at which an original source in history, before his time, has a particular disturbing resonance, and enables empathy with those living at the time, such as his father, other boys at Ardwick Industrial School, and their families. When shown records from the school, detailing boys' young ages, he reflects on the hard life experienced by working-class people of that generation: 'I'm glad I wasn't there.' It is possible, by triggering such memories and reflections, to approach the prosthetic memory described by Landsberg. To authenticate Reg's comments, a photograph of Reg and George together completes 'their' story. James Bennett's analysis of the 2004 BBC series *D-Day* similarly recognizes different generations' roles in maintaining a memory of historical events. He considers how interactive television has made testimony widely accessible, whilst TV coverage allowed grandchildren to appear alongside their grandfathers; '[d]igital immigrants and natives… entwined in "bringing the past to life"'. (2008, p.284)

Alternative sites of testimony: the album and the encyclopaedia
Related to the layering of testimonies in programmes such as these is the developing importance of family history and testimonies to the representation of the past. An example which illustrates this particularly well is the hugely successful BBC (BBC2 2004/BBC1 2005-date) series *Who do you think you are?* An innovative format

discussed at greater length within this collection by Amy Holdsworth, it popularises history by combining celebrity with family history, and with 6.5 million viewers it has gained the largest audiences for popular history programming in the UK in recent years. Undoubtedly it relies upon, in part, what Hirsch terms 'the power of the *idea* of family …forms of mutual *recognition* that define family images and narratives' and which she also recognises in some museum displays. (2008, p.113) The format has been sold to Australia, Canada, Poland and the USA and it is possible to argue that, using Friederike Eigler's account of surging interest in family narratives in literature, such series offer the opportunity to recapture '20th century collective and individual histories…at the beginning of a century where a more integrated Europe faces new challenges.' (2005, p.17)

Furthermore, Hirsch's recent analysis highlights the significance of the role of the family 'as a space of transmission' to the 'second generation' after the Holocaust in particular, for whom photographs in particular act as 'a primary medium of transgenerational transmission of trauma.' (2008, p.103) As author and comedian David Baddiel remarks in the first series (BBC2 2004), his is a 'family history of immigration and refugeeism [so] you're never entirely sure how you ended up here.' In the following scene, he and his daughter are described as 'descendents of the German Jews who fled the Nazis', and we see him and his brothers as children, as he describes childhood visits to his grandfather, and his 'strong emotional connection to his memory.' Reminiscent of Rau's 'spectral punctum', he remarks that a photograph of his grandparents shows them 'when they were happy …before it all started to go very badly wrong.' We are

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all too aware of the crimes being planned against those pictured, and this is the spectral punctum for us, an audience who do not know those involved, but develop empathy for them. Unlike actual images of an atrocity, as discussed by Hirsch or Sontag, these pictures are poignant because of what they do not show. As Irit Dekel suggests of a photographic installation at the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, such images, originally taken as part of everyday life, call for viewers to imagine those depicted '*not* behind barbed wire or in a heap of dead bodies.' (2009, p.81) Instead, we are disturbed by the 'presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny'. (Bazin in Langford, 2008, p.28)

To begin his 'search for answers' David visits his parents, and his mother shows him photographs inherited on his grandmother's death. Unlike their use in other series to provide evidence for the assertions of eyewitnesses or narrator, here they prompt contributions from family members appearing onscreen, and this technique is not unlike that used by oral history researchers, who sometimes use photograph albums as a source of discussion and elaboration.[viii] Such images, as David concludes, can, though, 'raise as many questions as they answer', particularly regarding Arno, his great uncle. Seen both as an adult and a child, this (as we discover) victim of Nazism is given a place within a family, despite being one of many who did not live long enough to have children. A lack of information about Arno, David says, evokes 'a sense of poignancy', also evoked in the audience by the use of photographs. Although Arno cannot give testimony, his family can, and this lack of information testifies to the fate of millions more. A sense of dislocation and loss pervades the episode, as does the

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testimony of those present, on behalf of those absent. As Hirsch suggests, such photographs 'that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects…function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world.' (2008, p.115)

Through the family's testimony, both of their own lives and the information they can bring about absent members of their family, the programme's narrator can give a more complete account. Often accompanying graphics depicting a family tree, with photographs of the individuals reproduced above their names, this provides the overall 'story', bringing together the testimonies, both spoken and written, in order to speak of the experiences of those who did not live to tell them. Although this is done in all episodes, so it is particularly poignant when those described died prematurely, within the lifetime of family members seen onscreen. The use of photographs in the series is hardly surprising, as family images relate the celebrities to the audience; like them, we have family snapshots, but their photos, like ours, have a place in a bigger picture. It seems, though, that in later series, those involved have been more aware of the series' tropes, and perhaps the programme makers themselves were keen to develop their use of photographic material, their comments reflect current issues of history and remembrance to a greater extent. For example, talkshow host Jerry Springer is filmed with his sister Evelyn, discussing the significance of 'faded pictures' of his German Jewish family, murdered in the Holocaust. Most families preserve photographs, and family albums in which they are kept have been seen by scholars as a site of 'cross-generational exchange', reorganizing the ways in which we remember. (Chalfen in Langford,

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2008, p.4) Even for those who do not share Springer's family history, his assertion that 'we all have these faded pictures' brings the audience into the fold, underscoring the need for awareness when only photographs survive; removing the album 'from a private situation to the public sphere', in this case a television programme, 'does not deprive it of a context, but substitutes one set of viewing conditions for another.' (Langford, 2008, p.18) Indeed, survivors' children have commented upon the role of television in encouraging their parents to discuss their experiences, through extant family albums: beforehand, as one wrote, 'I...did not ask why most of the people pictured…were dead.' (Clarke in Langford, 2008, p.156)

Through family photographs, Springer speaks for a particular group, but in so doing communicates to us all. Indeed, as one viewer commented, 'When I was a child my mum worked for a lovely Jewish family who'd fled the holocuaust (sic) - amazing to think how close to us historically it is.'[ix] Another reflected that 'It really is just mindblowing when you can't help but have emotional transference and image them being your own grandparents.'[x] The account of the Holocaust given in the episodes does include details of the likely fates of both men's families, and therefore the audience's response 'becomes subject to ethical scrutiny' in Vivian Sobchack's analysis (in Saxton, 2008, p.76). Perhaps this explains the need felt by some viewers, when commenting on the series, to emphasize their distress, but also their empathy for those depicted and their own ties – real, distant or imagined - to the Holocaust. The spectral punctum is the fate the viewer's grandparents did not share, but it can be considered, all the same. In the same conversation, Evelyn also refers to their parents'

refusal to discuss their experiences. Considered by scholars and

survivors' families for decades, *Maus* and Gabriele Rosenthal's

interviews with victims and perpetrators are landmarks, but the effect

on families has been little acknowledged on television. To do so, on

primetime BBC1, may be considered a breakthrough.[xi] Indeed, when

Jerry is shown evidence of his mother's refugee status, he remarks:

'This is not just family history, this is world history.'

Given Vanessa Agnew's assertion (2007) that several series, in

Germany and the UK, demonstrate a turn to 'affective history' by

emphasizing individual experience and daily life, Harald Welzer's

analysis of the ways individuals experience affective and cognitive

memories separately, for which he uses the metaphors 'family album'

and 'encyclopaedia', seems particularly appropriate (quoted in Eigler,

2005, p.21). Both appear on the bookshelf in households, although

individuals are often aware of family history, but not of how this relates

to broader historical events. Both forms of memory appear in the

series, which reconciles the personal, family album view of the past,

often using photographs as a starting point, with broader, often

traumatic, historical knowledge. This makes such events

comprehensible to a wider audience whilst making the archival

research necessary to historical research more visible. One viewer's

comments encapsulate this: 'For all of the teaching and programmes

about the Holocaust, nothing ever hits home like a personal story like

the one shown.'[xii] It is similar, then, to developments described by

scholars from other European nations which acknowledge 'the

historical, political, familial and individual forces that complicate or

preclude facile notions of identity and continuity'. (Eigler, 2005, p.27;

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see e.g. Iğsiz 2008) Television is particularly well-suited to the combination of personal, collective and national histories and memories, bringing what might otherwise be viewed as alien and inconceivable events into living rooms, whilst offering some of the skills necessary to carry out research.

Reenactment as testimony; testimony as reenactment

In 1936 the Oxford philosopher of history R.G. Collingwood asserted that to understand historical experience the historian should not conceive of the past as 'a dead past', but instead as a 'living past', and wrote of the need for a historian to perform mental reenactment in order to fully understand this. (1992, p.158) Although this is an audacious claim, it is used by scholars such as Agnew to justify the use of physical reenactment in series such as *The Trench*. (Corner 2003; Agnew 2007) Despite, then, the claims of some historians that TV history cannot or will not 'do' complexity, reenactment may demonstrate an alternative way of making historical meaning, and makes mental reenactment public. This is apparent in *Who do you think you are?*: celebrities visit geographical sites linked to their ancestors and often demonstrate a need to empathise with them. After learning of his Protestant Irish ancestor Thomas Walker's role in the suppression of the United Irishmen's 1798 rebellion, television presenter Graham Norton reflects on the implications this has for his sense of his own Irish identity. (Series 3, 2007) He comments that when

> you discover that your ancestors were on the side that history
> and time has decided was the wrong side, it means that you've

got to stop…and imagine what their lives were like, why they

made the choices they did.

Arguably, this is mental reenactment, and an attempt to understand

why someone acted as they did. Norton follows this with prosthetic

memory; he seeks to give testimony about Walker's actions, from

Walker's perspective:

[A]s far as he knew he was on God's side, hopefully he was

just a decent man caught in a difficult situation, who believed

he was doing the right thing.

Like *The Trench*, this is an example of mental, and to some degree

physical, reenactment and testimony. Through the use of such

techniques, it is apparent that familial but also regional, religious and

ethnic identities are contemplated, alongside their resonance in the

present. Unsurprisingly, this move from national histories, alongside

the problematizing of simplistic notions of identity, has led to the

creation of alternative sites of shared, but disparate, memories on the

internet. One such site is the weblog dedicated to Harry Lamin by his

grandson Bill, who in early 2007 began to put Harry's letters from

France and Italy online, in chronological order, 90 years after they

were written (http://www.wwar1.blogspot.com). The letters are Harry's

testimony and, furthermore, the comments board allows people from

many nations to share their family's experiences in this or other

conflicts, and global responses to national conflicts, whilst in a more

active way the 'World is Witness' project of the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum seeks responses from across the world

to eyewitness testimony and photographs of current humanitarian

crises.[xiii] Such sites transcend national boundaries and even

chronology through their focus on shared experiences and responses, and may form part of the 'new sociations' identified by Urry (1996, p.59), which offer new sites for identity-testing, including those suggested here. Thus the testimony already outlined illustrates broader concerns, especially apparent since the mid-1990s.

In conclusion, then, different ways of representing testimony demonstrate changes in the representation of the past on television and other media, which have also arguably broadened what testimony about a historical event might include. The role of testimony as a staple ingredient in many history documentaries has led to a need, in recent years, to supplement the accounts of veterans and survivors with the written accounts of the deceased or the testimony of living descendents, those addressed by the 'first degree' testimony of their parents or grandparents. Although lack of direct experience may mean younger generations cannot appreciate the *full* magnitude of events, the continuity of testimony through television and other media suggests that they are seeking to do so.[xiv] Levinas asserted that the witness is the medium of realization of the testimony, and the related role of television as a mass medium in disseminating testimony beyond national and generational boundaries is increasingly significant. In order to achieve this, photographs are often used to engage the audience, who may experience a response in the manner of Barthes' punctum, or in the case of absent eyewitnesses spoken for by others, the 'spectral punctum' described by Rau. The internet, in particular, offers opportunities to identify viewers' responses, often in terms of the experiences of their own families. These often suggest that, in recent years, the experiences of one's ancestors at regional or

even global level may be used to understand national histories better, and this has been reflected and encouraged by British television. Not only a pragmatic response to the increasing scarcity of eyewitnesses, this mirrors developments in wider historiography, and the search for alternative ways of understanding the past, in order to make informed decisions about the present.

Endnotes

[i] Also, in the academy, there has been an increased desire to grant a voice to the marginalized; many historians have sought to demonstrate that their experiences allow them to speak for those who cannot. (Hollow, 2009, pp 48-9) However, Joan Ringelheim asserts that the experiences of individuals vary 'even if they were in the same place at the same time.' (cited in Hardman, 2000, p.2)

[ii] See

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/WarCrimetoc.html for details. Transcripts are available in Holmes, 2007, pp 322-4.

[iii] This included the re-broadcasting of individual episodes of *People's Century* on BBC4 in November 2008 and January 2009.

[iv] See also MacDonald, 1998, pp 114-5 on the use of testimony and footage in another episode.

[v] Nicola Diamond in *Jews* (BBC4 2008) episode 2 'The Next Generation' (25/06/08)

[vi] A transcript is available at:

http://www.pbs.org/auschwitz/about/transcripts_6.html date accessed 13 June 2009.

[vii] For an additional example, see Monica Magyarosy's *Reunion* (Channel 4 2007), on the reunion of the Katz-Jedlicki family of survivors and their descendants, at which photographs of relatives, living and dead, were a focal point.

[viii] For example the work of the National Life Stories: Living Memory of the Jewish Community project recorded 1988-2000, available from the British Library: http://sounds.bl.uk/ date accessed 13 June 2009.

[ix] Digital Spy Forum:

http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=872852&page=8 date accessed 13 June 2009.

[x] Digital Spy Forum:

http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=872852&page=9 date accessed 13 June 2009.

[xi] According to BARB, www.barb.co.uk, the *Jews* episode on the Holocaust, broadcast 25/06/08, had an audience of 250,000. David

Baddiel's episode of *WDYTYA?* (BBC2 23/11/04) reached 4.6m; Jerry

Springer's (BBC1 27/8/08) 6.5m.

[xii] See

http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=872852&page=
8 date accessed 13 June 2009.

[xiii] See http://wwar1comments.blogspot.com/ and

http://blogs.ushmm.org/WorldIsWitness/ date accessed 30 June 2009.

[xiv] See the Living Memory of the Jewish Community project, including

an interview with Holocaust survivor Victor Trevor:

http://sounds.bl.uk/File.aspx?item=021I-C0410X0065XX-ZZZZA0.pdf

date accessed 13 June 2009. Although in 1989 he stated that: 'I must

accept that the younger generation today can't quite take it in in the

way that people who actually experienced it', later generations

continue to testify on behalf of parents and grandparents.

Teleography

1914-1918 BBC/KCET 1996, VHS availability.

Auschwitz: the Nazis and the Final Solution 'Liberation and Revenge'

BBC/KCET 2005, DVD available in the BBC Shop.

The Great War BBC 1964, DVD available in the BBC Shop.

The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon 'Saints and Sinners' BBC

2005, DVD available in the online BBC Shop.

People's Century 'Freedom Now' BBC/PBS 1995, VHS availability.

Timewatch 'Battle for Berlin' BBC 1985, for off-air recordings see

www.copac.ac.uk

The Trench BBC2 2002, for off-air recordings see www.copac.ac.uk

Who do you think you are? David Baddiel, Jerry Springer and Graham Norton episodes, BBC1/2 2004-date, DVD available in the BBC Shop.

The World at War 'Genocide' Thames TV 1973, DVD available from various retailers.

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