At the core of every Holocaust institution, whether it be a museum or an archive is remembrance and memorializing. This mission is often fulfilled through community outreach and education, and is a process that requires the participation of the public. The advent of the Internet has given these institutions a new tool through which to perpetrate memorializing. Through studying the websites of Yad Vashem, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance, The Fortunoff Video Archive, and The Shoah Foundation, we can see and better understand how the Internet can be used for Holocaust Memorializing. The results of studying these sites show that these institutions are using tools like YouTube to extend the reach of their video testimonies and user content generated databases to collect names and information about victims of the Shoah. Other historical repositories can improve their access and outreach by observing Holocaust institutions.

Headings:

- Holocaust
- Yad Vashem
- Holocaust History Museum
- Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies
- Simon Wiesenthal Center
- Museum of Tolerance
- Shoah Foundation Institute
VIRTUAL REMEMBRANCE: HOLOCAUST INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR WEBSITES

by
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**Introduction**

Education is at the heart of memorializing the Holocaust, whether it is carried out through institutions or individually. Holocaust institutions, such as museums and archives, are tasked with preserving the memory of the Holocaust and disseminating information about its events and consequences. These institutions, museums, archives, and research foundations, usually have an assortment of materials including art, primary documentation and recorded testimonies of survivors; the diversity of materials exclude these institutions from being pegged as exclusively an archive or place for exhibit. The varieties of materials also pose challenges for presentation, preservation and access. At the core of each of these institutions is a mission of education and outreach, which thus informs their decisions and has resulted in some remarkable web tools. These institutions also exist to collect and share materials related to the Holocaust, so that people will continue to know of its horrors and in hopes that this knowledge will prevent future atrocities. No Holocaust institution exists for the single purpose of housing Holocaust related artifacts and documents, as they all also endeavor to make their information and documents accessible to the public. The Internet has provided them with new and innovative tools through which to educate and reach the public.

Holocaust institutions have used a variety of tools to enhance their web presence and resources available to patrons. Online resources can be as mundane as a searchable catalog of the institution’s resources or as dynamic as videos and
interactive databases. In some cases the website is intended as a supplement to patrons’ visits, and in others as a research tool for those who cannot visit the physical site. Holocaust archives have been at the forefront of the remarkable trend of public participation in the archival process. The use of interactive tools and social networking extends their reach beyond sites like YouTube. Many of their websites have databases that allow users to add information about the artifacts, mostly notably Yad Vashem’s name database, in collaboration with Google. Holocaust memorializing and the creation of these collections has always been an interactive process, heavily relying on the participation and content generated by the public. The web simply offers a new dimension and tool to the process of remembrance.

This paper will explore five Holocaust institutions of varying sizes and collections. These are Yad Vashem, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance, The Yale University Fortunoff Video Archives, and the Shoah Foundation. While there are many other Holocaust museums and archives, these five seem to have the most interesting and innovative online presences and therefore can shed light on how Holocaust institutions are and can use the Internet to their advantage. Further, they are also important, internationally respected, institutions and house notable and significant collections. Museums are included in this study of archival resources, because Holocaust museums usually have large archival holdings that are incorporated into the exhibits and are also made accessible to researchers; it is often hard to say where the museum ends and the archives starts. As will be explored below, each of these institutions is working towards making Holocaust education more interactive and
accessible, while trying to [word is missing here] its archival resources into the process.

In order to select the sites for my final evaluation, I used a series of questions to assess a variety of Holocaust-related historical repositories. I wanted to know about the breadth of the site’s offerings, transparency of purpose and creator, interactive features, intended audience, and other significant features. Most importantly, though, was detecting clear intention to make material available online or to enhance the experience of the physical institution through a website. There are many Holocaust archives and museums around the world, ranging from large national and educational repositories to local and private collections. My research has suggested that the size of the institution is not the only factor determining web presence. Rather, it is dependent on the intuitions’ commitment to its web content and endowment (though, money is becoming increasingly less important, with the increase in free and low-cost web solutions). Some of the sites I chose to cut, such as the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany, were eliminated even though their online archival databases of names are impressive, simply because a similar one, that of Yad Vashem, has a stronger web presence and is currently working to increase its offerings. The five institutions presented here are by no means the best or only sites worth exploring, they simply offer interesting reflections on the subject of Holocaust institutions and the use of the Internet.

Holocaust archives are not the only historical repositories to have interactive websites and impressive web content, so what makes them distinctive and worthy of our attention? The process of Holocaust memorializing, whether it is from the Jewish
community or other groups who wish to highlight human-rights issues, is a collaborative and interactive process. It requires the participation not only of the victims in generating content, but also input from the general population in order to keep the memory alive. It has evolved to become a community history process. Furthermore, the heavy reliance upon video testimonies raises special preservation needs and exhibition issues that are not found in such large volume with regard to other historical events. These aspects, the collaborative history and community involvement and reliance upon film, makes the Holocaust a unique archival and museum study. There is no other historical event present in the archival and museum world that poses these same challenges and opportunities. The nature of the events, the variety of documentation, and process of memorializing facilitate the varied ways that Holocaust educational and archival materials have developed. While one may be able to find other events that are similar, the process will be on a much smaller scale, and not international in its scope. Through exploring Holocaust institutions we can learn about improving access and engaging audiences with history.

**Literature Review**

Most of the literature on Holocaust archives focuses on the relationship between archival materials and memory. The authors ponder on how testimonies, in particular, affect memory and transmission of the Holocaust. Little attention is given to archival practices in mediating and shaping this process. Archives, whether digital, traditional, or at museums, are the keepers of these memories. Without the formal archive, in some form, the Holocaust archive would loss its structure and
accessibility. While documentaries such as *Shoah* (1985), and the increased presence of web content offer alternatives means of distributing and sharing the memories, the traditional repository remains the center for preservation and distribution. The importance of sharing the memories and documentation of Holocaust in order to ensure memorializing is often overlooked in the literature, treating the process of memory and archives as a symbiotic and passive interaction. Not only is the dissemination of materials not passive, the presence of the Internet gives institutions another tools through which to spread the memory of the Shoah. A failure to utilize web tools is a failure to fulfill the primary purpose of Holocaust institutions -- remembrance.

Despite the abundance of literature on archival access, it continues to be an unresolved problem. Rapidly changing technologies and limited resources are only part of the challenge. “Access is a primary mission, not an incidental result,” Prelinger writes in his 2009 article, “Points of Origin: Discovering Ourselves through Access” (p. 171). Use justifies archives. Prelinger notes that archivists often lack the authority to make big decisions that would improve access, or that those in positions of authority lack the imagination necessary to work around budget constraints. Funds are no longer an excuse, according to Prelinger, who recommends relocating funds, partnering with other institutions or simply using inexpensive or free tools. Further, access is tied to preservation, and digital access is another way to preserve materials. Some archivists may shrink away from tools like YouTube and other new media and social network tools, because they may be perceived as a hodgepodge of odd videos or because of fear that their use results in a relinquishing of the control of the
archivists (Prelinger, 2009). As the Fortunoff Archive’s use of YouTube will show later in this paper, this is far from the truth. Access is an issue of supreme importance to archives, and, in the case of Holocausts archives, helps them to fulfill their mission.

Holocaust remembrance and testimonies focusing on the survivors and victims are so ubiquitous that it is easy to forget that these had to emerge from the once unknown masses of people who were a part of that tragedy. Initially, the histories of the Holocaust written in the 1950s focused on the perpetrators rather than the victims. Oral testimonies were collected as a last resort in legal proceedings against war criminals. Prior to that, memoirs and testimonies were collected and circulated on a local scale in the 1940s, and were not intended for audiences outside of the Jewish community (Kushner, 2001). The early testimonies focused on the geographic aspect of the destruction, and there was little interest in and concern for the experience of individuals. A transformation occurred in the late 20th century, and testimonies of individuals became an essential part of understanding the events of the Holocaust as a moral arena of human behavior. In recent years, the rush to record the memories of the survivors has resulted in neglecting reflection on the purpose of collecting. The true value of the testimonies lies not in their content, but in the uniqueness of each individual experience and the rejection of silence that plagued Holocaust victims for so too long (Kushner, 2001).

There are over a million pages of archival material pertaining to the Holocaust in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. As a result, the National Archives has become an international center for the study of the Holocaust. Perpetrators of atrocities produced the vast majority of the documents found in the archives, but there
are also documents of observers and victims, among which are The Nuremberg Trial records, along with over 18,000 documents. The finding aid for the collection was a joint endeavor with Yad Vashem (Jerusalem) and Yivo (New York). Mendelsohn wrote in his 1980 article, “The Holocaust: Rescue and Relief Documentation in the National Archives,” that the majority of the papers and research citing documents from the National Archives were drawn from the documents of the perpetrators. Mendelsohn notes that there are many other important documents in the collection that do not receive the proper attention. He is particularly concerned with the lack of attention given to documents on rescue attempts, and transforms his article into an extended finding aid to those documents. He details parts of the collection as well as pointing future researchers to the appropriate finding aids.

The extent of the records is too exhaustive for Mendelsohn to detail in his article, but he hopes that drawing attention to these records will lead researchers to other holdings in the collection. He concludes that,

In addition to articles such as this one, which introduces researchers to the holdings of a particular archives, a more comprehensive finding aid must be produced. Only the cooperation of all the archives that hold pertinent records can accomplish such an objective by pooling their resources to produce a computer-assisted index of finding aids as the first step in this direction. Such an index would greatly facilitate shedding light on some unknown territory and could become the forerunner of a general index to records on the Holocaust; it would help us also to move to a better understanding of the Holocaust (1980, p. 249).

The problem being addressed by Mendelsohn is a pre-Internet problem. With the availability of archive and museum OPACs, researchers are likely able to find more records than ever before. However, an online catalog and collection can still distort the institution’s holdings and favor certain portions. When creating websites for
archives and museums, the creators are choosing to highlight certain parts of the collection. It will be worth observing if a greater web presence and more content available online (primary and secondary) has improved the use of archives and the diversity of Holocaust scholarship. Further, the majority of interest in Holocaust materials, currently, seems to be focused on testimonies.

Artistic expressions are an important part of Holocaust memorializing, and are commonly found in Holocaust institutions. Artists have produced criticism of Holocaust archives and their role in the process of memorializing. While artistic commentary ranges from the peculiar to the prosperous, it is worthy of some consideration. Archives occupy a privileged position in the canon of Holocaust remembrance, in that their document holdings, testimonies and other autobiographical accounts, and historical records, are considered the most reliable and consequently the most valued Holocaust sources (Van Alphen, 2009). In his instillation pieces, the artist Christian Boltanski draws the connection between the systemization of the Nazis and the organization of archives. Similarly, the artist Ydessa Hendeles also offers commentary by highlighting in his work the cold and disjointed context of archives and museums. While these interpretations may seem to be reactionary, archivists and curators would do well to reflect on the purposes and methodologies of what they do. “Although Holocaust archives are also seen as memorials of the Holocaust, the memories stored in it are ultimately judged on the basis of what we learn from them, that is, how useful they are” (Van Alphen, 2009, p. 151). Van Alphen, in his 2009 article, “Visual archives and the Holocaust: Christian Boltanski, Ydessa Hendeles and Peter Forgacs,” points out that after a testimony is recorded, it
is categorized and filed away. Categories like geographic region and religious beliefs are assigned to each testimony, and the human factor is reduced to labels and metadata. Categories do not have to be dehumanizing, nor do archives have to be cold distant repositories. The websites of the institutions to be examined illustrate how archival collections can be used to engage patrons and move beyond boxes and labels. Video testimonies, in particular, highlight the life and movement of Holocaust remembrance.

Archives can be mediators of reconciliation in the case of serious criminal acts. Holocaust archives confront the same challenges of representations as other repositories dealing with genocide. Archival records are essential to persecuting criminals of wide scale crimes against humanity, and the prosecution and punishment of these criminals is an important part of reconciliation (Adami, 2007). Prior to 1945, there was no generally-accepted standard for prosecuting perpetrators of war crimes and genocide. The prosecution of Nazis after World War II was essential to establishing the precedents that led to the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its record keeping system. Creating sound record keeping systems is necessary for avoiding historical revisionism, and having an unshakable document base is necessary for prosecution and the pursuit of justice (Adami, 2007). Human-rights archives, like the ICC’s International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), have added to the learning about this process and as the international justice system continues to amass records that have been essential in prosecuting criminals involved in the Yugoslavia and Rwanda conflicts.

There are five main areas that are closely associated with human rights archives and they are broadly defined as historical accountability, retaining
memory of the victims and survivors, support prosecution, document the extremes of repression and chronicling how the individual had power against the state (Adami, 2007, p. 217).

The archival practices of “living” archives that collect testimonies, like the ICTR, can help shed understanding on Holocaust archives, just as Holocaust archives have helped establish standards and precedence for human-rights archives. Video testimonies, like those taken for the Nuremberg Trial, can have lasting value, not only to scholars and future generations, but also in providing nuance that is often missing from written records. They allow the past to continue to speak, long after the individuals are gone (Adami, 2007). Archives play an important role in the judicial system, which can endure long after the events themselves have passed.

Archival records are often used in the Holocaust education process. How the Holocaust is taught is the product of what information is available and what social norms and trends are applied to the subject at that time. Educators are limited by what information is available to them as well as by the current standards as to what are the socially acceptable forms of presenting the history of the Holocaust. Particularly on the subject of the Holocaust, knowledge is not neutral and is subject to interpretation (Stevick & Gross, 2010). Further, educators have a tendency to oversimplify the Holocaust, as the context and the motivation are often too complex to be explained in a short period of time (Stevick & Gross, 2010). Archival materials have the potential to remedy these issues. Over-reliance on archival documents and testimonies can result in presenting an account without context, whereas presenting the archival materials within the historical context is likely to enhance the student’s knowledge and understanding. When preparing a website, museums and archives
have the opportunity to influence the educational trends of the Holocaust; they have the potential to improve the quality of education and expand the scholarship of students across the globe.

The documentation of the Holocaust takes on many forms, and is sometimes unconventional and unexpected. Those who lived through that period in the ghettos of European cities sometimes created their own archives by preserving documents and reels of film in milk canisters that were later uncovered from mass graves. However, we are more familiar with video testimonies and memoirs of the survivors produced after the events of WWII. For example, Lanzmann’s 1985 film *Shoah*, entirely composed of Holocaust survivor testimonies, brings into question the nature of the archive, by removing archival footage from its archive context. Friedman suggests in his 2007 article, “The Anti-Archive? Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* and the Dilemma of Holocaust Representation,” that Lanzmann has created the anti-archive. Most importantly, the film offers a new interpretation of a document and how a document can be used.

If the memory of the Holocaust is to hold meaning for future generations…and if this memory will necessarily be formed through encounters with textual and visual representations (and thus dependant on the archive), the capacity of the archive to hold both the evidence of the event and its expressive responses become central to the task of working through traumatic history (Friedman, 2007, p. 113).

Holocausts archives and museums expanding through the Internet further this opportunity to edit and give context, and in the process, the document attains new life and meaning. The unusual nature of film documentation necessitates that the purpose of archives and other cultural repositories be brought into question. Further, modern technology, with both the opportunities and complications that it presents, brings the
nature of our interactions with and our assumptions about archives and their access into a new era.

Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) and Lanzmann’s *Shoah* changed the way that collective memory of the Holocaust was discussed and perceived. They changed the nature of the document in the context of remembrance (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2009). The transformation occurred by introducing the authority of witness testimony as a vital part of the process of Holocaust memorializing and scholarship. Testimonies have become such an integral part of Holocaust remembrance and education that today we barely pause to question their role or origin. I attended high school in Israel where every year for Holocaust Remembrance Day a Holocaust survivor would speak to my school. I never questioned the tradition; it seemed only natural to use available resources. If one lives near Philadelphia, would they not take a field trip to Independence Hall when learning about the American Revolution? In the same way, these first-hand accounts were like a historical visit, but the memory is transmitted through a first-hand account and not through the historic site.

The Internet has allowed for virtual field trips. The sites discussed in this paper, Yad Vashem, United States Holocaust Memorial, The Museum of Tolerance, The Fortunoff Video Archives, and The Shoah Foundation, have all worked towards improving access and extending their educational efforts to the Internet. Some of the questions that guided my search were: What content of the institution is available online (Videos, primary documentation, primary photos, objects, educational materials)? What languages is the site available in? Is it transparent/clear who the
creator of the content is? Is there a searchable database and or an OPAC? How much information about the institution is available? Does the site set forth a statement of purpose? When was the site created? When was it last updated? How often is it updated? Overall, what is the quality of the content? What is the extent and breadth of its offerings? Is there any way to contact and or interact with the institutions? And, how does it field visitor questions? Using these questions to evaluate the sites, I selected the five and then proceeded to analyze their websites as educational and memorial tools. My findings suggest that Holocausts institutions are using the Internet to expand their educational efforts, and, at times, are doing so in innovative and engaging ways.

**Yad Vashem**

Yad Vashem (hand and name) was established in Jerusalem, Israel in 1953. The institution was created as part of a Kneset (Israel’s parliament) resolution to foster remembrance of the Shoah (Hebrew term for the Holocaust). The institution’s mission has four aspects: commemoration, documentation, research and education. It is now the world’s largest repository of Holocaust documents. Yet Yad Vashem is more than an archive or a museum; it aims to be a living memorial to the victims of the Holocaust by giving them names and voices. The physical complex combines art and historical documents to create an experience for the visitors. Its archives, the largest of its kind, has “…125 million pages of documentary evidence, films, and 420,000 photographs, as well as more than 100,000 survivor testimonies…” (Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, 2011,
The Library collects publications related to the Holocaust, holding more than 112,000 titles in 50 languages.

The process of remembering and memorializing the Holocaust has changed over time, and the transformation of Yad Vashem illustrates the development of historical interpretation trends (Goldman, 2006). Like other similar institutions, Yad Vashem combines architectural features, landscaping and art installations to facilitate the experience of Shoah memorializing. The Museum is a not a static site, allowing each generation to memorialize the Holocaust as it sees fit. While Yad Vashem now stands as a revered national center for remembrance of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust, the development of a national dialogue about the horrors of the Holocaust was a painful process. For a time, the nation of Israel suffered a collective case of voluntary amnesia and rejection of the Holocaust. It was not socially acceptable, in the early days of the State of Israel, to speak of the Holocaust, and many Jews who were not from Europe even approached the subject with some skepticism. In 1953 the Knesset passed the Yad Vashem Law, creating the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority tasked with collecting materials related to the Holocaust (2011, http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/institute/publications.asp). The Museum, thus, became a national and, eventually, international center for catharsis and remembrance.

The first phase of artistic installations in the 1950s glorified the Jewish warrior, as a rejection of victimization (Goldman, 2006). Over time, the narrative developed, national identity transformed, and so did the art at Yad Vashem. In 1970s
and 1980s the topic of the Holocaust was more openly discussed in public forums. The memorials became more abstract, as can be seen in Moshe Safdie’s Children’s Memorial, 1997; a hall of mirrors, endlessly reflecting five lights (Goldman, 2006). These changes reflect an engagement with some of the more conceptual aspects of the Holocausts, such as trying to comprehend such an insurmountable evil. There was a significant transition of Holocaust remembrance from the private to the public, which reached its fruition in the 1990s (Goldman, 2006). The increased availability of the Internet has helped more public displays of Holocaust remembrance to continue to grow and flourish.

Websites offer an opportunity for virtual remembrance. Memorializing should not be limited to the physical spaces that have been designated for remembrance, and can be anywhere where the Internet is available. In an effort to fulfill its mandate, Yad Vashem began collecting the names of Holocaust victims in 1954. Yad Vashem estimates that it currently holds 3.8 million names. The Central Database of Shoah Victim’s Names went online in 2004, after the digitization process started in the 1990s. The Database is dependent upon user-generated content. Users, individuals or institutions, can either add Pages of Testimony (new entry) or add content to existing entries through feedback forms (figures 1-4). The new content is then sent for review by Yad Vashem staff for historical accuracy before being added to the Central Database. The Database also includes Stories Behind the Names, an educational feature that allows searchers to explore the individual entries more in-depth, by linking to documents relevant to historical and geographic information in the entry. Yad Vashem also offers articles and video tutorials on using the Database,
talks about the importance of remembrance, and a guide for launching a community outreach program to encourage others to participate in adding to the Database.

In 2009, Yad Vashem teamed up with Google to make the database searchable from Google’s search engine. The first step was the creation of a YouTube channel. The Database stage began with,

…[A]bout 130,000 photographs in full resolution, stored on a Google server, with the option for users to add commentary, including historical backgrounds and personal family stories. The long-term goal is to include Yad Vashem’s larger archive of millions of documents, including survivor testimonials, diaries, letters and manuscripts (Kraft, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/world/middleeast/13holocaust.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=yad%20vashem&st=cse).

During the digitization process, photos were “…scanned using optical character recognition, which identifies any text in the pictures, making it searchable” (Kraft, 2011). The database can be searched Latin, Hebrew and Cyrillic characters, however the research results are returned in English. Making the website and the database internationally accessible on all levels is a work in progress.

In addition to the remarkable names Database, which offers a primary research tools to visitors of the website, Yad Vashem also has selections from its Archives available online. The photo archives cross-posts with the Database, since 130,000 of its 214,000 photos are related to entries in the Database (figure 5). Some 130,000 photos are available to search and view separately from the Database. The archives are an essential part not only of the displays of the museum, but also in creating the digital content. Without the photo archives, the content of the Database would not be as comprehensive. Further, the text-recognizing scanner allows data to be pulled from the archival photos and made accessible to the Database users.
Technology and archival materials are wedded to create an interactive memorial. The archives and the Database participate in creating the ultimate in new media and elevating its potential beyond social networking to historical remembrance.

The living memory of the Holocaust is rapidly disappearing, and efforts have been underway for at least a decade to preserve these memories. Orally transmitting memory from person to person is unreliable, and therefore mechanical forms are implemented to preserve the memory in the original voice. For this process to be successful, a culture of memory transmitting must be created. Video archives of survivors’ testimonies constitute one such culture.

Mass cultural technologies… are making available not simply technologies of memory to replace living memory, but strategies and arenas within which an alternative living memory gets produced in those who did not live through the event (Landsberg, 1997, p. 66).

These “prosthetic memories,” circulated through mass culture, alter the holder’s relationship to the past and future. Therefore, the repositories become transformative and transferential sites, granting access to knowledge that cannot be acquired through study but only experience (Landsberg, 1997, 66). This is met with a growing trend towards “experience” history, which can be facilitated and achieved through mass media (Landsberg, 1997). By this it is meant that museums are utilizing resources like video testimonies to facilitate in the users experience of first-hand history and historical emersion. Through the memories of the survivors, the patron can feel that her or she was there.

Video testimonies can be used in creating historical immersion experiences, which produce emotions “…knowledge, responsibility and empathy,” while maintaining authenticity (Landsberg, 1997, p. 75). Much attention is given to the
experience of viewing testimonies in museum settings (using them in displays) and in archives, but how is the experience changed or mediated by the web? Increasingly, archives are making a portion of their testimonies available for viewing online. The videos can be embedded in the archive’s site, thus controlling the surrounding. Sites like YouTube are often used to host the content. The Fortunoff archive, for example, makes its videos available through YouTube, thus removing the formality of the archive’s site (image 8). Using sites like YouTube can have the effect of making the experience more casual for the user, which can have mixed results. Some patrons may appreciate having some of the tension dissipated by the informal environment, while others may feel uncomfortable confronting such a heavy topic in the same place where he just watched a rock music video. The Fortunoff archive has made some efforts to control the environment, by disabling comments and confining the Fortunoff videos to the playlist kept within the Yale University channel. Creating its own YouTube channel is also a way for an archive to maintain control of its content, since, while journeying off into the World Wide Web, the metadata that was added by the institution will not be separated from the video. By posting its videos itself, the Fortunoff archives ensure that its digital videos available on the Internet can be traced back to the institution with ease. Nonetheless, it seems that, overall, the benefits of posting videos on YouTube outweigh any negative effects of the informal and social environment.
The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., which was inaugurated in 1993, was created by an Act of Congress to perpetuate the living memory of the Holocaust and memorialize its victims. The Museum is a public-private initiative, aiming to teach “…millions of people each year about the dangers of unchecked hatred and the need to prevent genocide” (United State Holocaust Memorial Museum, http://www.ushmm.org/museum/about/). The Museum has a variety of materials on its website to target diverse audiences including resources for educators, professional researchers, students, and the general public. In addition to the museum, the institution also has a library and archives, which mostly consist of donated items from individuals (rather than from collectors or governments). The archives are not limited to documents, but also include art and artifacts pertaining to World War II and the Holocaust and its victims. In addition to offering education on the Holocaust, the Museum also seeks to increase awareness of genocide.

The architect of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, James Freed, expounds upon how much thought was put into creating the physical space of the museum in his article “The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.” A great deal of thought was put into both unifying and disjointing the museum from its surroundings in downtown Washington, D.C. The building needed to fit seamlessly with the landscape, but also separate the visitors from their modern urban setting and create a unique experience (Feed, 1989). Creating an experience for the visitors is important, as it transforms the museum from a mere informational session. Freed said that, “It [the museum] is not meant to be an architectural walk, or a walk through
memory, or an exposition of emotion… I want to leave it open as a resonator of emotions” (Freed, 1989, p. 73). The Museum, like others of its kind, is an experience and this experience can be carried beyond the walls of the building.

The website can become an integral part of the experience of visiting the museum and so it must also be carefully curated. In an institution the size of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, creating a website or an exhibit is always a collaborative process, where many people contribute. There may be an “architect” of the website, envisioning how it will develop, but many people are involved in the process of putting the actual content together. At the same time, it is important to maintain the voices of the victims of the Holocaust. The US Holocaust Memorial’s website is not as transparent as others about its creators or the process behind the content. This, though, is in keeping with the sense that the products of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial are the result of a collaborative effort.

The website offers a feature called “Curators’ Corner,” which features short slide shows with audio commentary highlighting different aspects of the collection narrated by archivist and curators (figures 9-10). This feature fosters a sense of transparency and can make the visitor to the site feel more connected to the archival and preservation process. The archives consist of more than 42 million pages of records, which can be searched through the online catalog. Finding aids and guides are also available through the website (figures 11-12). These sorts of features are integral to creating the interactive aspects of the website. Even though the library and most of the archival materials are not available online, being able to access a glimpse
of them allows the visitor sitting far-away to feel more connected to the institution and the process of learning and discovery.

The website is as much of a learning tool as it is a portal for information about the institution and its resources. The institution’s outreach efforts are not limited to U.S. citizens or those that can visit the physical facility. Its website is available in French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Turkish, Portuguese (Brazil), Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Greek, Indonesian, and Chinese. It also offers a Holocaust encyclopedia and online exhibits. In order to help place the Holocaust into its geographic context, the museum is in the process of creating an interactive map using Google Earth and Maps (figure 13). The point of these materials is to offer comprehensive and reliable Holocaust information to people in locations that may not have access to unbiased Holocaust literature and resources. As in other institutions we have explored, the Museum’s mission and experience does not need to end where its grounds stop.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center and Museum of Tolerance

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is a Jewish human rights organization based in Los Angeles, California. Its branch projects include the Museum of Tolerance, with its flagship site opened in 1993 in Los Angeles, with another one in New York City and a third planned for Jerusalem; and the production company Moriah Films. The Museum of Tolerance (MOT) “…is a human rights laboratory and educational center dedicated to challenging visitors to understand the Holocaust in both historic and contemporary contexts and confront all forms of prejudice and discrimination in our world today” (The Museum of Tolerance, 2011,
http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.4866027/k.88E8/Our_History_and_Vision.htm). It is hoped that through the museum experience, visitors will not only be reminded of the past but also moved to action to prevent future atrocities (2011,
http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.4866027/k.88E8/Our_History_and_Vision.htm). The organization is in the process of developing a virtual museum.

Each branch of the organization has its own site, with supporting materials and features. The sites are designed to supplement visitors’ trips to the MOT, and not as stand-alone educational resource tools. The Action Lab allows visitors to continue to think and interact with their experiences after leaving the MOT (figures 14-15). From this page, visitors can express their thoughts on tolerance or learn about local projects for encouraging tolerance in their communities. Those interested in the Jewish world or tolerance related issues in current events, can also visit the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s website where they can watch videos and read articles on these subjects. The Center also has a library and archives, which are open to the public and include a circulating collection. For those who cannot visit the archives in person, there are the digital archives. The keyword searchable catalog returns digital images and detailed descriptions of the items in the archives (figures 16-17). From the records, patrons can request the image and, in the case of photographs, add names if they recognize the subject (figure 17). This sort of virtual collaborative metadata and information gathering is seen in other Holocaust archives, and seems to be an integral part of the archival process.
As we have seen, websites and interactive media exhibits are increasingly becoming integral parts of museums, particularly Holocaust museums where extensive website have been created with exhaustive resources. London’s Science Museum Curator, Suzanne Keene, has argued that web interfaces, particularly with museums, will make knowledge more important than the collections themselves. Keene contends, “People will be able, so to speak, to help themselves to the information that the collections embody without mediation or interpretation” (Reading, 2003, p. 67-8). Anna Reading explored the role of digital media in constructing the social memory of the Holocaust. Internationally, Holocaust museums draw large groups, mostly of students, and serve as institutions of community learning and remembrance (Reading, 2003). Reading also found that the most popular Holocaust websites are those that are agencies of museums and other publicly-recognized repositories, suggesting that the public prefers information with some appearance of authority (Reading, 2003).

Reading conducted research using the Los Angeles Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance and its Multi-media Learning Center (MMLC), (installed in 2002) which is accessible to both visitors to the museum and to anyone with Internet access. The intention, in addition to making history more interactive, is to extend the learning process beyond the walls of the museum. Reading found that, while the MMLC is very popular outside, the museum visitors in the museum exhibited reluctance in approaching and interacting with the MMLC stations. In addition to using the stations in groups, Reading noted that there was gender divide as to how the stations were used. Males preferred images, and females preferred text (Reading,
Logging-on to the website from home, after a visit to the museum, Reading observed, is like a souvenir of the visit; it allows the museum patron to revisit the experience (Reading, 2003). MOT is currently working towards creating an online museum, which would be an extension of the MMLC project.

The Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University

The Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University is the product of a 1979 grassroots project by the Holocaust Survivors Film Project, based out of New Haven, Connecticut. The collections were transferred to Yale University in 1981. The archive contains more than 4,400 testimonies, and the number continues to grow, as part of an ongoing oral history project with 37 affiliates around the world.

Testimonies are cataloged and indexed according to geographic locations and topics discussed during the interview. With over 10,000 hours of video, and interviews ranging from half an hour to over 40 hours in length, preservation and access are both difficult and critical issues, especially because so much of the collection is on volatile media technology such as VHS videotapes. Funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation have allowed for the restoration and reformatting of 2,761 videos, as well as the testing of a robotic preservation system. Currently, plans are underway to migrate the entire collection to digital formats, both for preservation and access (Yale University Library, 2009, http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/about/index.html).

The study of the video testimonies in the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University by the psychologist Robert Kraft (2006)
examined the value of Holocaust testimonies for the study of trauma and memory. He found that these testimonies offer a unique opportunity for researchers because they constitute “…remembering for the purpose of remembering” (Kraft, 2006, p. 312). Further, the subject is not distracted by the scientist, and has had 40-years to reflect upon the event. Of significance to social historical memory is the observation that, “…many survivors are more likely to reveal guarded information to prepared stranger than to friends or even family” (Kraft, 2006, 312). Relationships are important for living memory, and video testimonies offer an expansion of this relationship.

This article illustrates the importance of Holocaust testimonies for the discipline of archives. The creation of these video testimonies provides the survivors or witnesses an opportunity to share their stories in a controlled environment. The conditions under which the video was filmed are not of immediate importance to the archivist, who should be occupied with making decisions about access and how that will influence the use of the materials. Increasingly, the Fortunoff videos are being made available online, removing their use from the controlled environment of the archive.

Edited videos can be viewed online through the Yale University YouTube Channel (figure 8). The programs are in three categories: thematically organized, single-witness, and short testimony excerpts. The 16 available videos run from 12 minutes to an hour and a half in length, totaling 8 hours of content. The selections are frequently updated; for example, a visit to the page on March 7, 2011, showed that it had been updated 3 weeks earlier. Further, having visited the YouTube channel
several months before, I can attest that the selection has changed, and that videos are no longer presented in multiple parts but as single videos. Clearly, this is a constant work in progress. The YouTube Channel’s flexibility and ease of revision therefore demonstrate its advantages over the tradition archive, in addition to reaching a wider audience and providing external storage of video content. Other advantages include keeping count of the number of views of each individual video as well as total views for the Channel, and allowing users to subscribe to the Channel so that they can be notified whenever the content is updated. While the University may be able to offer such services internally, offering them through YouTube gives the user a greater sense of control and makes the process feel more social.

Although the YouTube Channel offers many advantages to the archive, the choice to offer edited content deserves some attention. It’s not uncommon to think of archives as authentic historical documentation, presented as it was intended. Museums, on the other hand, are accepted as curated experiences, presenting a certain view or aspect of history. However, archives are not “pure” or untouched historical repositories. Decisions are made by the creator and the archivist to collect, preserve and arrange the documents in a specific order. Holocaust testimonies, whether they come to us in a documentary or through a museum exhibit, have most likely been edited or present only a small segment of an otherwise lengthy testimony. Considering that many of the testimonies are very long, it would be impractical or difficult to place entire multi-hour testimonies on YouTube. At present, if one were to navigate to the YouTube channel by some mechanism other than through the Fortunoff website, the viewer would not know for certain that the selections are
edited. While it may be that the average online viewer would guess that the videos were edited or represented a selection of a larger collection, especially since the general public is accustomed to receiving its Holocaust testimonies in edited form, this notion may never occur to all of those watching the videos. When offering these archival sources to the general public, it helps to offer additional explanatory educational materials.

**The University of Southern California Shoah Foundation**

The University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute began collecting video testimonies in 1994, and now has more than 52,000 interviews in its collection. It recently began a massive project to digitize this large collection which provides a good example of state-of-the-art preservation of film collections. Acknowledging that its holding of videotapes would become increasingly likely to deteriorate and corrupted over-time, the project is a time-sensitive one if the tapes are going to be preserved for future generations. For this reason, in 2007 the Shoah Foundation began transporting videos from its East Coast storage location to its facilities on the University of Southern California campus (USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, 2011, http://college.usc.edu/vhi/preservation/). Progress towards completion of the digitization can be followed on the Foundation’s homepage (figure 18). The videos are being digitized using Sun Microsystems (now Oracle America), which utilizes robots to digitize the collection and add metadata. Sam Gutman, Chief Technology Officer, explained, “Our Group is responsible for the technology to collect, catalog,
preserve, and access all the testimonies collected by the Institute for Tolerance Education...” (2010, http://college.usc.edu/vhi/preservation/). The Sun-based architecture is composed of a storage system and server, which can hold 135 terabytes. The server allows the Institute to share its digital collections with other institutes around the world through the Internet, without shipping or risking damage to the original videos.

Access is at the heart of the Institute’s mission. Kim Simon, Interim Executive Director, said, “The fact that the preservation is so state-of-the-art allows us to optimize what we’re doing educationally, and allows us to optimize what we’re doing from an access perspective” (2010, http://college.usc.edu/vhi/preservation/). The Institute offers offsite access to its collections to other institutions, with Internet2. Additional access and streaming of materials is offered to private individuals for a fee. Families can also purchase a DVD or VHS of a family member’s testimony (figure 19). The digitization project is not only making more of the Institute’s content widely available, but also accessible at faster rates. According to Amy Beisel, Associated Director, Academic Outreach and Research, the videos are of interest not just to students of the Holocaust and 20th century, but also to the field of visual literacy and media studies (2010, http://college.usc.edu/vhi/preservation/). The archives appeal to a variety of people, and also are of interest from a technical perspective because of their exceptionally innovative facilities.

The Shoah Foundation operates differently from other research and archival institutions in that its main purpose is to provide materials to researchers in off-site locations. It is unclear whether this mode of operation existed from inception of the
Foundation, or whether it evolved overtime. Either way, its operational policies, most notably its preservation methods, revolve around its efforts to make the collections more accessible and available to researchers around the world. Like other Holocaust institutions, the Shoah Foundation is constantly trying to improve its access. Not every institution has the resources of the Shoah Foundation or can secure a grant to fund such a massive project. Also, the type of materials (digital, print, etc.) can also influence access decisions. The presence of a large amount of video testimonies in the Holocaust pantheon of materials presents the institutions with challenges that are mostly faced by broadcasting and film archives. Holocaust archives are committed, though, to offering access, and therefore have taken the opportunity or the challenge of trying innovative ways to make their materials available to the public.

**Conclusions**

These Holocaust institutions’ websites have many similarities and differences. The similarities stem from their commitment to memorializing the Holocaust and ensuring access to their materials. The differences are largely the result of diverse institutional practices and functions. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Yad Vashem’s websites are most similar in terms of their scopes and contents. This can largely be attributed to the fact that they are institutions of comparable size that were both created under government directives. They both offer extensive online educational resources as well as some access to their archival materials. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial has more branch projects, like the Steven Spielberg film collection and other resources devoted to genocide awareness and prevention in
general, whereas Yad Vashem’s collections and offerings are more focused. Yad Vashem’s most notable online feature, the name Database, is not unique in the Holocaust web efforts, but it is the only one of its size and in collaboration with Google. The Database, being dependent on user generated content, is similar to other Holocaust archival collections.

Collaboration and community involvement are fundamental processes in Holocaust memorializing. This involvement is not limited to visiting the institutions and holding commemorative ceremonies; the institutions also ask the public to become involved in the archival process. This approach sprang out of need, because those affected by the Holocaust can authoritatively provide information about the victims. Online archives allow patrons to get involved in the archival process by allowing patrons to add information about photographs and other primary documents. Holocaust institutions are as much a community recovery process as they are places to preserve the memories and artifacts of the event. These sorts of community driven archival initiatives give voice to the victims, and, like the video testimonies, can empower the survivors.

A common item in the Holocaust institutions is the video testimony. Each of the institutions explored here has a collection of video testimonies, and in the case of the Fortunoff Video Archive, it is the archive’s entire holdings. Video testimonies have generated interesting studies and musing on the importance of memory. Only recently, though, has a great deal of attention been given to the preservation of and access to these videos. Both the Fortunoff Archive and the Shoah Foundation are currently undertaking full collection preservation and digitization projects that will
make more of their content available online. Furthermore, Fortunoff and Yad Vashem have both utilized YouTube to distribute their testimonies. Virtual exhibits, but particularly embedded testimonies, raise questions about the effects of the environment on the user’s experience.

Each of these websites can be viewed as a carefully curated museum or archive. From the colors to the fonts, everything has been selected in order to ensure ease of use and a professional and authoritative looking website. The MOT’s website is intended to be used as a supplement to a visit, whereas the Shoah Foundation’s website is designed knowing that most users of its archival content will be doing so remotely. These sorts of factors will play into decisions for designing and selecting content for the websites. Just as these institutions’ websites reflect how patrons are expected to interact with the physical location, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Yad Vashem’s websites reflect their commitment to outreach and education. These websites aim to be authoritative sources of information about the Holocaust. The institution’s access mission ultimately informs the online content.

Without access, an archive might as well be a climate controlled storage locker. Holocaust repositories have a social contract with the victims of the Holocaust to ensure access and preservation of its materials. Preserving and sharing the memories of the Holocaust are their reasons for existing. The process of memorializing the Holocaust is not only the responsibility of institutions and requires the participation of the public. These Holocaust institutions have used the Internet to engage the public in the process of memorializing, both through education and involvement in the archival process. Websites have proved to be an excellent tool for
Holocaust memorializing, and Holocaust institutions are using them efficiently and innovatively.

The missions of all of these institutions, in addition to keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive, include the goal that the patrons will be moved to action as a result of the experiences and knowledge they gain from their visits to the facility or website. The lesson: “Never again!” makes the importance of the proper preservation and management of these collections vital, not only to the institutions discussed above, but to all of humanity.
Figures

Figure 1. Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victim’s Names main page. Retrieved from: http://www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/IY_HON_Welcome
Figures 4. Form for submitting new entries to the Yad Vashem Database. Retrieved from: http://www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/lut/p/.cmd/cs/.ce/7_0_A/.s/7_0_FQ/_s.7_0_A/7_0_FQ

Figure 5. Yad Vashem’s Photo Archive. Retrieved from: http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/en-us/4691357-container.html
Figure 6. Yad Vashem’s online library catalog. Retrieved from: http://www6.yadvashem.org/library/listResult.do?language=en

Figure 7. Yad Vashem’s YouTube channel. Retrieved from: http://www.youtube.com/user/YadVashem
Figure 8. Fortunoff’s YouTube playlist. Retrieved from: http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=E129969D102584DD&search_query=fortunoff
**Major Activities**

**Preservation:**
We have developed a digital preservation system to preserve the testimonies in perpetuity, for the benefit of future generations. Learn about our preservation effort.

**Our Progress so far...**

![Progress Bar]

- 141,877 tapes out of 235,203 transferred
- 32,001 interviews out of 51,740

**Access:**
We encourage universities, museums, and other institutions around the world to make the Visual History Archive available, so that many more people can conduct research in the database and view testimony. Find an access site near you.

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**Figure 18.** Shoah Foundation progress towards digitization, available on the homepage. Retrieved from: http://college.usc.edu/vhi/

**Figure 19.** Shoah Foundation Testimony Clip Viewer. Retrieved from: http://college.usc.edu/vhi/clipviewer/
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