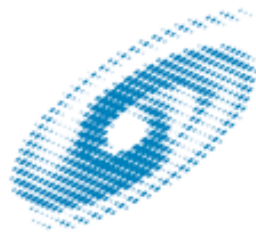


Toward Cross-Accessibility Of Geographically-Distributed Holocaust Oral History Collections



SCHOOL OF INFORMATION
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Beth St. Jean
SI Mailbox #249
SI 615

April 20, 2005

That is why I interview many and have them tell their story. So from the little that I get from everyone, the mosaic, a total picture can be assembled. Now you understand my purpose. Why I want to collect two-hundred spools of these interviews because nobody can tell the whole story. (Boder, 1946)

1.0 Introduction

Oral history collections contain audiotaped and/or videotaped interviews with people who provide a first-hand account of the events that they have experienced. These collections provide access to source material that is unlikely to be found elsewhere. Each individual who contributes his memories and perceptions to these collections provides unique pieces to many different historical puzzles. The fact that oral history collections are scattered across the globe makes it very difficult for scholars (and others) to bring these disparate pieces together to try to corroborate them and to connect them into more complete pictures.

Digital libraries, however, offer us the opportunity to not only make these collections more readily available, but also to make them interconnected in such a way that we facilitate cross-corroboration and the piecing together of these puzzles. I have termed this interconnectedness “cross-accessibility”. By “cross-accessibility”, I mean seamless accessibility. By making all Holocaust oral history collections cross-accessible, we would be providing users with the ability not only to perform federated searching across all such collections simultaneously, but also to instantly link from a keyword or phrase within one interview to a semantically similar keyword or phrase in another interview (which perhaps is part of an entirely different collection).

In this paper, I will first set forth some ideas about why making Holocaust oral history collections cross-accessible is important. I will then discuss the wide variety of users and uses of oral history collections (in general) and their implications for determining useful access points and for enhancing system design. I will also mention some of the strengths and weaknesses of using material found in these collections as sources. Next, I will focus specifically on Holocaust oral history collections and discuss some of the more major collections that have been made available online. I will then look at whether any efforts have been made toward making these and other similar collections cross-accessible. Finally, I will look at some of the issues that arise when trying to achieve cross-accessibility and present a model of the steps that we need to take and the challenges that we must meet in order to reach this goal.

2.0 Why is Cross-Accessibility important?

Why is it important that we use these new technologies to provide users with direct access to and between Holocaust oral history collections? Currently, there are many repositories

of oral history collections across the United States (as well as elsewhere in the world). The content of these repositories is often unique and non-overlapping. Many of these repositories are little-known and, hence, little-used. By building a digital library that enables people to not only access these collections from wherever they are located but also to use federated search engines and inter-collection hyperlinks to find connections between the testimonies of various people, we are enabling people to make full use of these resources. Scholars who know about such resources but who are reluctant to use them may be more willing to do so with such increased accessibility. They will not have to take one person's word for anything – they can easily use some testimonies to corroborate others. Additionally, the increased accessibility of these collections may attract scholars who have not known about these resources.

In discussing the usability of Holocaust oral history collections, Hilberg (2001, p. 185) states that the following propositions should be kept in mind: (1) Any source may be significant; (2) Sources that are different are not interchangeable; and (3) Every source is possibly a piece of a larger puzzle. By providing access to all Holocaust oral histories within one digital library, we will be heeding these propositions. We will be enabling people to access every interview of every person that has been interviewed and we will be greatly facilitating the pattern-finding and puzzle-making processes for future users.

In 1988, Raul Hilberg (a Holocaust historiographer) stated, “The new generation will have the task of integration. The Holocaust has to be brought back to be woven into the seamless web of history” (Ringelheim, 1992, p. xv). In order to achieve this, we need to take Hilberg's statement quite literally and use the technology available and the relatively new concept of “digital library” to provide people with access within and between interviews that live in geographically dispersed collections. We now have the technology at our disposal that will enable us to provide seamless access to these collections on the Web.

What about the costs of achieving cross-accessibility? Although it remains uncertain who will bear the costs of this project, it will be worth whatever costs are incurred. As Hilberg (2001) states in his discussion of the current state of Holocaust research, “Yet the reality of the events is elusive, as it must be, and the unremitting effort continues for the small incremental gains, no matter what their cost, lest all be relinquished and forgotten” (p. 204).

3.0 Oral History Collections

How does oral history differ from other forms of testimony? Hilberg (2001) distinguishes oral history from legal testimony, interviews of specific persons, and memoir literature. He states, “Oral history is a collection of open-ended accounts from witnesses, with a view to preservation and possible use at a later time by other persons” (p. 44). Unlike legal testimony and interviews of specific persons, oral histories are not gathered for one specific purpose. Unlike memoirs, oral histories are not stand-alone documents. Oral histories,

therefore, are open as to purpose and use and are meant to exist as part of a relevant collection. Many different people from many different professions use oral history collections for a wide variety of purposes. These users and their purposes for using this type of collection suggest the types of information that should serve as access points and provide several important implications for system design. The unique content of oral history collections confers both advantages and disadvantages on those who use them.

3.1 Oral History Collections: Users and Uses and their Implications for Useful Access Points and Enhanced System Design

Oral history collections are used for many different purposes. A few years ago, some members of the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland conducted a study to determine who uses oral history collections and for what purposes. The point of this study was to use these findings to inform system design. These researchers conducted discussions with the curators of several different oral history collections, including the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the British Library's National Sound Archives, and Project Jukebox at the University of Alaska (Fairbanks). They also analyzed approximately 600 access requests that were submitted to the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (Soergel, et al., 2002, pp. 2-5).

These researchers found that users of oral history collections represent a very wide variety of professions, including: Actors, Anthropologists, Art Historians, Artists, Authors, Film Directors, Historians, Human Rights Advocates, Journalists, Law Enforcement personnel, Linguists, Museum Curators, Nurses, Philosophers, Political Scientists, Psychologists, Scientists, Social Workers, Students, and Teachers. In addition, many users are simply people who have some personal interest in the material (Soergel, et al., 2002).

These researchers also found that these users' access to oral history collections contributed to the creation of many different end products, such as literary works, public presentations, research papers, and educational resources. Additionally, sometimes data from oral history collections was gathered to be used as evidence in legal proceedings (Soergel, et al., 2002, p.11).

I obtained additional information about who uses Holocaust oral history collections last Fall, when I interviewed Feiga Weiss, the Head Librarian at the Holocaust Memorial Center Library-Archive in Farmington Hills. I asked her to describe the primary users of their oral history collection (the John J. Mames Oral History Department). She stated that most users access their collection in order to conduct genealogical and/or scholarly research. However, she also stated that a considerable number of general members of the public use it to try to discover what has happened to family members and/or family assets and/or to try to get in touch with someone with whom they have lost contact. Additionally, she mentioned that court personnel

use it from time to time in order to try to locate eyewitnesses to assist in the prosecution of Nazi criminals. (F. Weiss, personal interview, October 24, 2004).

Based on their findings, Soergel, et al. provide specific suggestions for what types of information should be offered to users as access points and for how systems can be designed for maximal usability. They found that users want to access testimonies based on the following criteria: Name of person, organization, place, type of place, time (or time period), event, subject, and various testimony characteristics, such as language, format, and appropriate age-level of audience. They also compiled a somewhat lengthy list of descriptors that users would find helpful. Most of these descriptors are ones that you might expect (such as courage, guilt, heroism, indifference, revenge, and tolerance); however, some are quite surprising (such as singing and prisoner orchestras).

Soergel et al. (2002) also offered four specific recommendations for the design of electronic systems which people will use to access oral history collections (pp. 14-16). First, they state that testimonies should be embedded within a relevant context. They point out that this can be done in many ways and they provide the following examples: (a) Provide links from people, places, and events brought up in interviews to relevant information about these people, places, and events (such as photographs and/or government documents); (b) Provide links from within interviews to other relevant documents; (c) Provide links to museum objects that are specifically mentioned by interviewees; and (d) Provide links to written records that are relevant to the subjects brought up in the interviews. The second recommendation offered by Soergel et al. is that users be able to search by the name of a person and/or place and then easily navigate to each occurrence of these terms within the relevant interview(s). The third recommendation offered by Soergel, et al. is the implementation of a “user-enhanced catalog”. This entails allowing users to participate in collaborative cataloging. They suggest that users’ classifications of these materials be saved (in addition to the official catalog compiled by the owner of the collection) so that they can be accessed by other users seeking materials on a similar theme. The final recommendation offered by Soergel, et al. is that users be allowed to retrieve passages that specifically mention travel from one location to another. They point out that implementing this recommendation would require that the system “understand” which words describe movement from one place to another.

These are excellent recommendations as they would enable users to easily link to related information from within an interview and to more easily find what they are looking for in a computerized Holocaust oral history collection. However, the idea of cross-accessibility between different interviews is something that they don’t mention. Implementing cross-accessibility in addition to these recommendations will further enhance users’ ability to link to related content and to locate the information they are seeking.

Although improving users’ ability to access the content of Holocaust oral history collections is of great importance, we must first investigate the advantages and disadvantages of

using such content as source material. This content offers users specific advantages because of its highly personal nature, because of the fact that it doesn't face the same constraints as written materials, and because it's "alive"; however, using this type of collection may not provide users with the information that they are looking for and may leave them open to outside criticism.

3.2 Oral History Collections: Strengths and Weaknesses

The unique character of the content of oral testimonies provides both advantages and disadvantages to users. When witnesses provide oral testimonies, they are providing information not only on events, but also on their perceptions of and reactions to these events and the effects of these events on their lives. The information that they provide is necessarily both subjective and biased. Depending on the user's purpose for accessing these testimonies, these characteristics can be either helpful or detrimental. Oral history collections give voice to people who otherwise might never be heard. In most cases, they provide access to information that would otherwise be lost forever.

However, using oral histories as sources has some major disadvantages, as well. Scholars may decline to use oral history collections, except as a last resort, due to difficulties they encounter in locating and accessing them and/or due to the subjective nature and fallibility of human memory. Ringelheim (1992) states, "... scholars, on the whole, have been reluctant to use survivor testimonies in their work. The tendency has been to dismiss such accounts as emotional outpourings which rarely offer illuminating information" (pp. xv-xvi). However, Ringelheim goes on to state her belief that scholars feel this way only because they don't actually know what type of content is in these testimonies. She points out that scholars' lack of information about this type of collection reflects the unfortunate difficulties they have encountered in locating, learning about, and accessing these collections.

Ringelheim supports her contentions by providing an example of this phenomenon. The Institute for Research in History sponsored a conference on women and the Holocaust in 1983. Both scholars and survivors were invited. Discussions between scholars and survivors resulted in the conclusion that survivor testimony is "... an under-utilized and under-valued resource" (Ringelheim, 1992, p. xvi). So when scholars actually had the opportunity to find out what type of information might be in these collections, they were able to recognize its value.

Another concern when using the content in oral history collections is the fact that this type of content is severely limited in several respects. Many oral testimonies are interviews. The questions used in these interviews can direct testimony toward particular topics and can severely curtail what the interviewee is permitted to talk about. Interviewers may have their own agendas and may set out to find out very specific information or to prove a particular point. Additionally, interviewees decide (either on their own or in response to interview questions)

what is important enough to talk about. Unfortunately, users of oral history collections are limited both by what interviewers chose to ask and what interviewees chose to talk about.

Three other reasons that scholars (and others) may be reluctant to use Holocaust oral testimonies are delineated by Raul Hilberg (2001, p. 48). He points out that those who survived the Holocaust are not representative of all Holocaust victims. Similarly, those who offer their testimonies are not representative of all people who survived the Holocaust. And the content of each of these testimonies is not representative of all of the speaker's experiences.

Although oral histories are sometimes problematic to use as source documents, they may be all that is available on a particular topic. As long as the user keeps in mind these potential limitations, using oral history collections can be quite informative and enlightening. These testimonies can provide missing pieces of puzzles that have remained uncompleted for generations. Fortunately, the accessibility of these collections is improving somewhat as some efforts are being made to place some of the content of some of these collections online.

4.0 Collections Available Online

There are many Holocaust oral history collections that are available to some extent on the Internet. However, these collections vary as to the nature of the content that has been made available and as to the ways in which users may access them. On some sites, full-text transcriptions, as well as both audio and video files, have been made available for some of the interviews they own. Other sites only offer brief summaries or synopses of the interviews that are available in their physical collection. Still others provide only a catalog for people to browse or search in order to see whether there is anything in the collection of interest to them. Below, I have described the content and accessibility of some of the more major Holocaust oral history collections that have some component available online.

4.1 Collections Available Online: Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (<http://www.vhf.org>)

The Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation was founded in 1994 by the filmmaker Steven Spielberg (Soergel, et al., 2002, p. 2). After the movie "Schindler's List" was released, many Holocaust survivors contacted Steven Spielberg because they wanted to share their stories with him. Spielberg decided to start the Visual History Foundation so that these survivors could share their stories and so that their stories could be preserved for the future and used to "teach about the horrors of intolerance" (Gustman, et al., 2002, p.1). The Foundation has videotaped interviews with almost 52,000 Holocaust survivors and witnesses in 56 different countries. The videotaped interviews span 32 different languages. Trained volunteers and Foundation staff members conducted these interviews ("Collecting Testimonies Worldwide,"

2004). However, the quality of these interviews has been questioned. For example, Hilberg (2001) states, "Some fifty thousand people were interviewed, but neither by their contemporaries nor by experts. The questioners could have been grandchildren of the witnesses, and the hasty preparation of the staff was not always sufficient for an adequate familiarity with the subject" (p. 47).

Although a few brief testimony excerpts can be accessed based on theme (Pre-War, Hiding, Ghettos, Camps, Liberation, and Post-War), most of the interviews are not available online ("Shoah Foundation Online Testimony Viewer," 2004). In order to view the videotaped interviews, users must visit the Tapper Research and Testing Center at the Foundation's offices in Los Angeles. However, the Foundation's Testimony Catalogue can be accessed directly on the Internet. The Testimony Catalogue enables users to browse entries for most of the collection (49,256 of the interviews) or to search these entries based on the following fields: First name, First initial of last name, Date of birth, City of Birth, and Country of Birth of interviewee; State, Country, Language, and Length of Interview, and the code assigned to the interview by the Foundation. Due to privacy and security concerns, last names are not made available over the Internet. The actual Testimony Catalogue entries have a bit more information in them than just the content of the searchable fields. They also include information such as the interviewee's Religious Identities (Prewar and Postwar), the names of the Ghettos and Camps in which he or she lived, indications of whether the interviewee had gone into hiding (and if so, where) and whether the interviewee was a member of the underground resistance (and if so, which groups), who the interviewee was liberated by and where, and indications of whether the interviewee fled from Nazi-controlled territory and whether the interviewee was part of a forced death march ("Shoah Foundation Testimony Catalogue," 2004).

Although the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation collection contains an enormous amount of information, very little of it can be accessed over the Internet. [However, we (the University of Michigan community) now have access. On March 21, 2005, the University of Michigan announced that the University Library has partnered with the Survivors of the Shoah Foundation in order to provide us with access to this entire digital archive. Unfortunately, though, we cannot access this archive unless we are physically located on the campus. (See <http://www.umich.edu/news/index.html?Releases/2005/Mar05/r032105a> and/or <http://www.lib.umich.edu/newnow/svha/>)].

4.2 Collections Available Online: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Collection (<http://www.ushmm.org>)

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in Washington, DC in April of 1993 ("Frequently Asked Questions," 2005). The Museum houses many different collections, including a large oral history collection that contains more than 7,000 interviews. 4,500 of these interviews are on videotape and the remaining 2,500 are on audiotape. Although the majority of

these interviews were collected from external sources, more than 1,600 of them were conducted by the Museum's Oral History Branch.

Although small segments of a few selected interviews of this collection can be viewed online, most of these interviews can only be accessed by visiting the Archives Branch of the Museum in Washington, DC. However, researchers can purchase audiotapes, videotapes, and transcripts of interviews (if the interviewees have not placed restrictions on access to their interviews) via e-mail or telephone ("Oral History," n.d.). The Museum's Library and Archives Online Catalog can be used to search the holdings in this collection. There are very limited search fields offered, such as Keyword, Author, Title, Library of Congress Subject Heading, and Call Number. However, users can set some additional limits on their search results, such as the language, location, and format of the item and the place where the item was published ("Library and Archives," n.d.).

The accessibility of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Collection online is severely limited. Unless a researcher knows exactly what he or she is looking for, it will be difficult to locate anything. The ability to browse the contents of the collection is not provided. Additionally, like the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has placed very little of the content of their oral history collection online.

4.3 Collections Available Online: Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies **(<http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/>)**

The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies opened in 1982, the year after they received the videotaped interviews produced by the Holocaust Survivors Film Project. It is part of the Manuscripts and Archives department of the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University ("Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies," 2002). This Archive contains more than 4,200 videotaped interviews of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. The Archive works with 37 organizations in North America, South America, Europe, and Israel in order to obtain these testimonies. Each of these organizations receives a copy of each videotaped interview ("About the Archive," 2001).

The Archive makes audio and video excerpts for a few selected interviewees available on their website. For each interviewee, some written material (such as a short biography of the interviewee and some quotes from his or her interview) are also provided. However, most interviews are not made available online. The Archive website does offer links to two electronic databases that contain catalog records for each of these interviews. One of these databases (Eureka) is just for people located on the Yale campus and the other (Orbis) is for the general public. Using the Orbis database, users can perform searches for information such as geographic names and/or for major subjects mentioned during the interview. Unfortunately, searching is not

full-text. It is limited to cataloging descriptors that have been assigned and to brief summaries that have been prepared for each interview. Neither the Archive website nor the Orbis database enable users to browse through the contents of the collection (“Catalog and Research Guide,” 2002).

4.4 Collections Available Online: Voice/Vision: Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive (<http://holocaust.umd.umich.edu/>)

The Voice/Vision: Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive was begun by Dr. Sid Bolkosky, Professor of History at University of Michigan-Dearborn, in 1981. He has interviewed almost 180 Holocaust Survivors. These interviews have all been either audiotaped or videotaped. Additionally, many of these interviews have been transcribed and cataloging entries have been made in both OCLC (Online Computer Library Catalog) and in the online catalog of the University of Michigan-Dearborn’s Mardigian Library (“Voice/Vision Main Page,” n.d.).

Anyone who wishes to use the materials in the Voice/Vision collection may use interlibrary loan to borrow the audiotaped and videotaped versions of these interviews, as well as their accompanying transcripts (if available) (“Voice/Vision Main Page,” n.d.). So far, records for 71 of these interviews have been added to the Mardigian Library online catalog. Users can reach these records directly from the Voice/Vision website by clicking on “Borrowing Materials” from the main page and then clicking on “list of all the interviews”. Users can search and/or browse these records in order to determine which interviews they would like to borrow. Additionally, by clicking on “Interviews” from the main page, users can browse through a list of approximately 50 of these interviews. This list includes a brief summary for each of these interviews and includes a link to both a complete transcript and an online audio version for nearly all of these interviews. The Voice/Vision: Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive is well on its way to providing complete online access to its entire collection.

4.5 Collections Available Online: Voices of the Holocaust (<http://voices.iit.edu/index.html>)

Voices of the Holocaust is a project of the Illinois Institute of Technology. In 1946, Dr. David Boder, a Psychology Professor at IIT, traveled to Europe to interview Holocaust survivors. He made wire recordings of the 109 interviews that he conducted and deposited copies of them with the Library of Congress. These recordings are the only interviews of Holocaust survivors made during this early time period. He also subsequently produced transcripts (in English) of the contents of 70 of these interviews. The interview transcripts sat unused in the archives of IIT’s Paul V. Galvin Library for many decades before old volumes containing the transcripts were rediscovered by library staff in 1998. The transcripts were not able to be scanned (as they were mimeograph copies) and IIT library staff donated many hours of their own time to retype the

transcripts so that they could be made available on the project website (Marziali, 2003). Thus, this unique collection was brought from nearly complete inaccessibility to nearly ubiquitous accessibility.

Currently, the Voices of the Holocaust website is still under construction. However, the Interview Archive webpage already provides access to some information on nearly all 70 of the interviews that Boder had transcribed. Links to notes, summaries, profiles, and full-text transcripts are provided in most cases. Links to actual audio content are provided for about 20% of the interviews (“Interview Archive”, n.d.). Additionally, the webpage entitled “Profiles” enables users to click on a specific interview place, religion, gender, or interview language to bring up a list of interviewees that fit that description (“Profiles,” n.d.). In addition to enabling users to browse the site content in the aforementioned ways, the Voices of the Holocaust website also enables users to perform keyword searches. Search terms can be limited to specific fields (e.g. interviews, summaries, notes, or profiles) as well (“Search,” n.d.). Although this collection is quite small, IIT has made it easily accessible by putting a good deal of its content online and by offering users multiple ways to search and navigate through it. [To listen to a radio program that provides more information about Dr. Boder and the interviews that he conducted, go to the “This American Life” archive at <http://www.thislife.org/> and navigate to Episode 197: “Before It Had a Name” (10/26/2001)]

Most of the five collections I discussed above offer Internet users access to relatively little of the content they actually own. And for the content that they do provide, most don’t make it easy for users to find what they are looking for. There are many, many Holocaust oral history collections across the world containing many, many hours of interviews; however, very little of this content is being made available to Internet users. However, some efforts have been made to make these collections known and their content available. Some people/organizations have tried to compile directories of these collections. Additionally, some organizations/companies have begun to aggregate oral history content (some of which is Holocaust-related).

5.0 Efforts toward Cross-Accessibility

Very few efforts toward cross-accessibility have been made by the curators of these Holocaust oral history collections. For example, only three of the five collections described above actually provide links to other Holocaust-related materials. And, unfortunately, two of these three fail to indicate which of the resources they link to contain oral histories. The Voices of the Holocaust collection is the only one of the five collections I described earlier that provides links specifically to other Holocaust oral history collections.

The curators of most of these collections are justifiably most concerned with making their own collections known and accessible. There are a few directories that list subsets of these collections, such as the two editions of Joan Ringelheim’s book ([A Catalogue of Audio and](#)

Video Collections of Holocaust Testimony) and the member directory compiled by the Association of Holocaust Organizations (<http://www.chgs.umn.edu/aho/members.html>).

However, for these resources to reach their full potential, we need to not only gather information on the existence of these collections, but also establish some degree of cross-accessibility among the content bases of these collections. Fortunately, a few projects have begun to address the challenge of linking geographically dispersed oral history collections. Some examples of this type of project include The National Gallery of the Spoken Word's Historical Voices (<http://www.historicalvoices.org/>) and Alexander Street Press' Oral History Online (<http://alexanderstreet.com/products/orhi.htm>). Additionally, some libraries and museums have compiled pathfinders that help people to find Holocaust-related resources on the Internet.

5.1 Efforts Toward Cross-Accessibility: Directories: Joan Ringelheim's A Catalogue of Audio and Video Collections of Holocaust Testimony

Joan Ringelheim, who is now Director of the Department of Oral History at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (see: <http://www.humanityinaction.org/news/october.html>), authored two editions of a book in which she describes several of the Holocaust oral history collections that are housed in museums and archives across the United States. She states that she undertook this project because she realized that "... there was a startling paucity of information about the eyewitness data that already existed around the country" (Ringelheim, 1992, p. xvi). She first compiled a list of relevant repositories and projects and then developed a comprehensive questionnaire to request detailed information about the content of each of these collections. Thirty-seven repositories responded; however, many of them were unable to provide sufficient detail about the content of their collection. Ringelheim used these questionnaires to prepare the 1st edition of her book, which was published in 1986.

Toward the end of 1989, she sent out questionnaires to more than 70 repositories in order to update her book. Forty-three repositories responded – 8 of them were repositories that did not participate the first time around and 2 of the repositories that had participated the first time failed to respond. Sixteen of the repositories that had participated the first time around sent in new information this time around; however, the information provided still lacked some of the details that Ringelheim sought to capture. She states, "Although there is certainly more information in this catalogue than in the 1st edition, it remains true that the primary goal of most repositories is the collection of testimony rather than processing and analyzing of the collection" (Ringelheim, 1992, p. xviii).

In the 2nd edition of her book, Ringelheim tried to provide the following details about each repository: (1) Name, Address, and Telephone Number of the repository; (2) Contact Names; (3) Hours that the repository is open; (4) Who is allowed to access the collection; (5)

Type of Collection (Audio or Video or Both); (6) Extent to which transcripts have been prepared; (7) Whether a guide to the collection is available; (8) Information about the interviewing process used by the repository; (9) Summary of Collection (Total Number of Interviewees broken out by various categories such as male/female and Jews/Gentiles/Liberators/Rescuers); (10) Experiences of Interviewees (such as nation of birth, religious identification, and camps they lived in); (11) List of other groups represented; (12) Description of additional Holocaust material held by the repository; and (13) Additional comments provided by the archivist or director.

Although this book includes incredibly useful details about many of the Holocaust oral history collections in the United States, it is now sadly out of date. At the time that it was published (1992), only three of the 43 participating repositories stated that they had computerized their collections (Ringelheim, 1992, p. xviii). And, as one would expect, the book contains no details about whether (or the extent to which) these collections are accessible over the Internet.

5.2 Efforts Toward Cross-Accessibility: Directories: Association of Holocaust Organizations' Geographical Index of Members and Affiliated Members

The Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO) was established in 1985 as "... a network of organizations and individuals for the advancement of Holocaust programming, awareness, education and research" ("About AHO," 2003). This organization holds annual conventions and a winter seminar at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It also maintains a listserv for its members and produces a directory of its members. A list of the members (including links to the members' websites) is available for free on the AHO website (<http://www.chgs.umn.edu/aho/members.html>). AHO also provides a more detailed paper version of its member directory for free to anyone who asks for it ("About AHO," 2003). Currently, the AHO has approximately 160 members in the United States and approximately 40 non-U.S. members ("AHO Members," 2003). These members include repositories which hold oral history collections as well as those who do not. However, the paper version of the member directory indicates which of its members hold such collections. Unfortunately, though, you need to read the directory entry for each of its members in order to discern this information. So in order to compile a list of AHO members that own oral history collections, you would need to read every entry in AHO's 228-page directory.

Both Ringelheim's directory (both editions) and AHO's directory fail to provide us with a complete, easy-to-access list of all Holocaust oral history collections in the world (or even just those in the U.S.!). Ringelheim's directory contains only U.S. collections and is quite incomplete. AHO's directory, while much closer to being comprehensive, is not really in a usable format for this purpose. Going beyond these directories, a few organizations/companies

have undertaken the challenge of aggregating the actual content of multiple oral history collections (not all of it Holocaust-related, however).

5.3 Efforts Toward Cross-Accessibility: Content Aggregators: Historical Voices

Historical Voices is a project that is funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of the Digital Library Initiative II. The home of Historical Voices is Michigan State University's MATRIX: The Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online (<http://matrix.msu.edu/>). The focus of MATRIX is to apply new technologies to both teaching and research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. MATRIX is actively involved in research on the development of digital libraries and in the creation and maintenance of online resources ("Historical Voices – About," n.d.).

The primary goal of Historical Voices is to create online exhibits and educational curricula that center around audio files. Historical Voices is working with many content partners (including University of Michigan-Flint, Northwestern University, Chicago Historical Society, and the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) and the West African Research Center (WARC) in Dakar, Senegal, and the University of Capetown, University of the Western Cape and the University of Durban, Westville in South Africa) and several research partners (including the Speech Processing Lab and the Speech and Audiology Department of the Michigan State University, the Center for Speech and Language Research at the University of Colorado, and the Oral History Association) in order "to create a federated archives and trans-institutional resources" ("Historical Voices – About," n.d.).

Historical Voices is planning to develop content partnerships with many more institutions across the U.S. They are aiming to build the first large-scale repository of 20th century audio collections. This repository will be made available online and will be fully searchable. Historical Voices explains why they are building this repository:

A substantial portion of our cultural heritage from the 20th century is recorded in enormous collections of spoken-word materials. Yet much of it may be lost or remain hidden away in archives and private collections, making the voices inaccessible to students, teachers, scholars, and the general public.
("Historical Voices," n.d.)

In order to build this repository, Historical Voices will need to overcome a wide variety of technological challenges. They state that they will work with other institutions in order to develop a widely applicable metadata format. They also will establish best practices for the digitization of sound, create a structure for the digital archiving of multimedia content, design and build tools to produce and present multimedia content (such as the linking of sound files and

transcripts), and design alternative Web interfaces that will better meet users' needs. ("Historical Voices," n.d.)

Historical Voices is pioneering the way in building bridges between geographically distributed oral history collections. Although they have not yet formed a collection of Holocaust oral histories, they are paving the way for such a trans-institutional collection to be built. While Historical Voices appears to be planning to offer its content for free, there are other oral history content aggregation projects that are being carried out under a for-profit motive. Alexander Street Press is an example of a company that is compiling content from multiple oral history collections in the hopes of making a profit.

5.4 Efforts Toward Cross-Accessibility: Content Aggregators: Alexander Street Press' Oral History Online

The aim of Alexander Street Press' Oral History Online project is to index all of the "important" oral histories that are available in English on the Web or in an archive somewhere in the world. They are using semantic indexing to create in-depth bibliographic records for every interview, collection, and repository that they catalog. Although this index is still under construction, it already points to thousands of collections, many of which include not only full-text transcripts, but also audio and/or video files. The full-text of all of the oral histories that they have indexed and all associated content can be searched using a single query ("Alexander Street Press – Oral History Index," 2004).

In describing why they are working on the Oral History Online collection, Alexander Street Press states,

This kind of material has not been accessible to a wide audience. Most existing indexes reference oral history only as a broad collection category. The rare finding aid that does point to specific collections lacks controlled vocabularies and is not electronic. As a result, there has been no easy way for scholars to find materials related to their research ("Alexander Street Press – Oral History Index," 2004).

Although Alexander Street Press clearly understands the problem created by geographically distributed oral history collections and is working to remedy it, its Oral History Online project has a major drawback. Unfortunately, the full content of the Oral History Online project can only be accessed if you purchase an annual subscription. However, a list of the nearly 2,000 collections that are included in the Oral History Online project can be accessed for free at: http://alexanderstreet2.com/oralhist/new_site/ohd.htm. A quick search of this list for the term "Holocaust" indicates that this project includes 12 relevant collections. Among these are collections owned by the National Sound Archive of the British Library, Gratz College,

Holocaust Memorial Center (in Farmington Hills, MI), the Remember Organization, Tulane University, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, University of California (Santa Barbara), University of Connecticut, University of Michigan (Dearborn), the Urban School of San Francisco, and the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University.

Like the compilation of Holocaust oral history collection directories, the aggregation of Holocaust oral history collections is, so far, woefully incomplete. Hopefully, additional organizations will take up this important challenge. Some organizations have tried to make it easier for users to find Holocaust-related materials on the web by creating pathfinders, which are compilations of links to potentially useful and relevant materials.

5.5 Efforts Toward Cross-Accessibility: Holocaust-Related Pathfinders on the Internet

Some libraries and museums have created pathfinders that help point users in the direction of holocaust-related material on the Internet. Some examples of these are the University of Toronto Libraries' "Academic Guide to Jewish History" (<http://link.library.utoronto.ca/jewishhistory/getItems.cfm/majorCatID=9>) and the Holocaust Memorial Center's collection of links (<http://www.holocaustcenter.org/WebResearch/?goto=9>). These two pathfinders are particularly useful because the links on them are broken into sections based on type of content. Using pathfinders like these, Internet users can link only to the specific content that they are seeking (such as oral histories and interviews). There are many substantive pathfinders on the Internet with limited usefulness due to this failure to separate links based on content type. Some examples are the "Holocaust Links" pages of the Holocaust History Project (<http://www.holocaust-history.org/links/>) and of the Holocaust Museum Houston (http://www.hmh.org/ed_holocaust_links.asp).

Although the directories, content aggregations, and pathfinders I have mentioned above are better than nothing, I believe that, even collectively, they point users to only a very small part of the Holocaust oral history collections that are scattered across the globe.

6.0 How can we achieve cross-accessibility?

So far, we have not achieved cross-accessibility among existing Holocaust oral history collections. However, the technological advances of the past decade and the relatively recent concept of a digital library can help us to achieve this. We have not recognized nor harnessed the power of digital libraries. As Soergel (2002) puts it, "When engine-driven vehicles were first introduced, they were built in the shape of a horse-drawn carriage and indeed were called 'horseless carriage'; we must move on to the modern automobile" (p.1). Clearly, we cannot hope to realize the potential of digital libraries by simply thinking of them as digital counterparts to traditional libraries. Digital libraries free us from many restrictions that are imposed by paper-

based sources. We should develop an entirely new vision of what we would like digital libraries to be and then work toward it.

In order to make Holocaust oral history collections cross-accessible, we need to build a model that incorporates methods for achieving all of the following:

1. Come up with a business model that will sustain these collections and the establishment and maintenance of cross-accessibility between them;
2. Prepare the content of Holocaust oral history collections so that we have the capability of achieving cross-accessibility;
3. Design information retrieval systems and user interfaces that are capable of capitalizing on this cross-accessibility;
4. Protect the privacy rights of the witnesses who have provided these testimonies and the intellectual property rights of the repositories that own the actual tapes.

It is evident that we will face some rather large challenges in order to achieve cross-accessibility among these collections. I have outlined below some proposals of how we might be able to meet each of these challenges.

6.1 How Can We Achieve Cross-Accessibility?: Business Models

Before we can even begin an undertaking of this magnitude, we must figure out how we will pay to create, maintain, and preserve the fruits of our labors. Who would be willing to pay for this?

One possibility is that we could locate public funding sources and/or private foundations that would be willing to pay for this project. Gill and Miller (2002) define “cultural content” as “... resources that help to capture our cultural memory and preserve the human record for future generations” (p. 2). Clearly, the content of oral history collections fits within this definition. Gill and Miller state that the following public sector organizations are funding some projects to digitize cultural content: The Joint Information Systems Committee of the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils in the UK; the Federal Government’s Canadian Digital Cultural Content Initiative in Canada; and several state and federal government agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services in the United States. The obvious advantage to procuring public funding sources and/or private foundations is that they have access to more monetary resources than individual users. The disadvantage is that such funding is often not guaranteed indefinitely.

Another way to fund this endeavor is to determine some way of charging users reasonable prices to access this content. Earlier in this paper, we looked at many of the different users who access these collections and at the uses they make of the information they find within. Users ranged from students and scholars to Film Directors and Journalists. Clearly, different users have differing levels of incentive and ability to pay for immensely improved access to these collections. The uses that they make of this collection range from educational resources and research papers to literary works and public presentations. We could apply some form of tiered pricing. We could charge users some nominal fee that is small enough that we limit the number of potential users that we are excluding. We could then impose an additional charge on users who ultimately make a profit from works that they are able to create because they had access to these collections. We could base this additional charge on the amount of profits that they subsequently realize. The advantage of having users pay for access to this collection is that we would have an ongoing support base; however, the disadvantage is that we could be excluding some people from accessing this content, despite the fact that each additional user will cost us close to nothing to support.

Ideally, we would create a business model that incorporates some combination of both of these proposals. As in all business models, it is better that we maximize the number of funding sources that we are able to obtain a commitment from. Public sector and private foundation funding could be used to help offset the large fee we would need to charge users if they were the only source of support for these collections. Whatever business model we choose, we need to try to not exclude people from using these collections simply because of their inability to pay.

6.2 How Can We Achieve Cross-Accessibility?: Content Preparation and Design of Information Retrieval Systems

Unfortunately, preparing all of the content of all Holocaust oral history collections for cross-accessibility is a huge and costly undertaking. However, the outcomes of some recent technological research may help to make this a do-able project. Both the MALACH (Multilingual Access to Large spoken ArCHives) project and the functionality provided by the combination of the Open Archive Initiative (OAI) metadata harvesting model and the Search/Retrieve Webservice (SRW/U) are providing results that look promising.

The huge collection of video histories built by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (VHF) is being used as a testbed by a consortium of the VHF, the Center for Language and Speech Processing at the IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center, the Center for Language and Speech Processing at Johns Hopkins University, and the College of Information Studies and the Institute for Advanced Computer Studies at the University of Maryland. This consortium is collaborating on the MALACH project. They are working on designing and testing technologies that will help to automate this conversion process. For example, they are working on automatic speech recognition to produce computer-readable transcriptions and on

automation of classification, segmentation, and summarization processes and creation of database and retrieval technology in order to facilitate retrieval. (Gustman, et al., 2002 and Franz, et al., n.d.). Although the challenges facing this consortium are daunting, their research efforts offer promise for the possibility of achieving cross-accessibility some day. Although their efforts are currently focused on the VHF collection, Gustman, et al. (2002) states, “The ultimate goal is not only to improve access to the Shoah Foundation collection but to develop a set of tools that will be useful for other oral history collections and audio materials generally” (p. 1).

The Open Archive Initiative (OAI) is a major effort underway to help solve problems of interoperability among distributed archives. Digital libraries are limited to providing access to only local content because of incompatibilities between the metadata used by different content providers. However, OAI has come up with a model that will enable users to search across many different collections at once. This model includes two kinds of players – data providers (the archives themselves) and service providers (digital libraries).

Many archives are (or soon will be) OAI-compliant. To be OAI-compliant, archives must add an OAI layer to their metadata. OAI uses unqualified Dublin Core as the default for its metadata. Service providers can harvest metadata from OAI-compliant data providers (Liu, et al., 2001). Search/Retrieve Webservice (SRW/U) is a recently released service that provides a search interface to the metadata harvested under the OAI model (Sanderson, et al., 2005). The combination of these two technologies enables users to perform federated searches across OAI-compliant distributed archives.

6.3 How Can We Achieve Cross-Accessibility?: Privacy and Intellectual Property Rights

Our model for achieving cross-accessibility among Holocaust oral history collections would not be complete without consideration of the vital issues of privacy and intellectual property rights. We need to figure out ways to safeguard the privacy rights of those who gave their testimonies conditionally and ways to protect the intellectual property rights of those who conducted the interview and of the repositories who currently own the interviews. Generally speaking, at the time that a survivor gives an interview, he/she is asked to sign a release that states that their interviews can be used for educational purposes (F. Weiss, personal interview, October 24, 2004). However, sometimes interviewees request that pieces of their interviews not be disclosed or that access to their interviews be limited to particular audiences only. As Gustman, et al. (2002) state, “. . . a survivor may ask that his or her testimony not be shown in some countries for safety reasons or that some personal data in the testimony be protected” (p. 9). When making such interviews available within the context of a cross-accessible digital library, measures must be instituted to provide the protections that have been specifically requested by interviewees. Additionally, repositories’ acceptable use policies must be taken into account as well.

Another class of rights that must be protected is the intellectual property rights of the creators and owners of these interviews. Repositories may not be willing to “donate” their interviews to a digital library and to participate in a scheme of cross-accessibility. Or they may be willing to do so, but only if they are provided with strong assurances that the provenance of these interviews will be correctly maintained and consistently provided to future users. Additionally, some repositories may want some form of recompense to help them to cover their ongoing expenses to maintain and preserve their physical collection. However, I believe that the directors and other personnel of most of these archives hold global accessibility to be one of their most important responsibilities toward both the interviewees and society as a whole and, thus, will do everything in their power to ensure it.

7.0 Conclusion

Holocaust oral history collections are used by people of many different professions for many different purposes. Studying these users and uses enables us to better design the information systems that will deliver this content and to discern the points of access that will be the most useful. Although users face both advantages and challenges in using the content of these collections, the content is worth making widely accessible and preserving, if only because of its unique and irreplaceable nature.

Currently, there are many Holocaust oral history collections that are available to some degree on the Internet. The extent to which these collections are accessible online varies widely. I looked at the websites of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Collection, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Voice/Vision: Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, and Voices of the Holocaust. Most of these websites provide access to a very small subset of the content of their collections.

Some efforts have been made to compile directories of Holocaust oral history collections; however few efforts have been made toward cross-accessibility. Even the collections that are available online provide few, if any, ties to other such collections. Historical Voices is working on gathering many separate audio collections into one repository and providing federated search capabilities across these collections; however, to date, they have not incorporated any of the Holocaust oral history collections. Alexander Street Press has created a commercial product (“Oral History Online”) that offers users full-text access to the contents of many different oral history collections, as well as federated searching across these collections. However, they currently only include 12 Holocaust oral history collections in this product. Some museums and libraries have developed pathfinders to help users find Holocaust-related content online; however, these pathfinders often fail to differentiate between oral history content and other types of content. To date, efforts at cross-accessibility have been slapdash and insufficient.

There is so much more that we can and should do to work toward achieving cross-accessibility between geographically distributed Holocaust oral history collections. Making Holocaust oral histories cross-accessible will greatly enhance the visibility, usability, and usefulness of these collections. The feasibility of cross-accessibility is greatly enhanced by the relatively new technology that is being developed to assist in the construction and maintenance of digital libraries. Although we face some major technological and non-technological challenges in achieving these goals, there is no reason that we cannot overcome them. The relatively new idea of a digital library provides the perfect framework for our endeavor. We can design this digital library to meet the needs and support the goals of the users of this type of collection. Within this environment, we can provide users with the ability to perform federated searching across all of the collections that we have brought together under the umbrella of the digital library. Additionally, we can enable users to link to semantically-related content within and among the testimonies of all of these different collections. In creating this digital library, we will be rescuing many of these oral histories from their current state of near complete obscurity and enabling them to achieve the intents of the many people who provided us with their personal testimonies.

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