The Internet as a Tool for Communicating Life Stories: a New Challenge for 'Memory Institutions'

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ABSTRACT

This paper arguesthat life stories and other personal biographical accounts should be considered as significant manifestations of the intangible cultural heritage. It addresses the consequences for 'memory institutions', i.e. museums, libraries, archives and similar bodies, in relation to the protection and safeguarding of this heritage. First, the main challenges that these institutions have to face in order to protect this special kind of heritage are considered. Second, there is consideration of the main changes caused by the introduction of new information communication technologies (ICTs) into the cultural heritage world, and specifically, the effect of ICT developments on the institutions responsible for autobiographical memoirs are examined.

Life Stories as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Heritage has traditionally been regarded primarily as something passed down from our cultural ancestors, which present society has an obligation to conserve and then transmit on to future generations. This idea, deeply entrenched not just in people's imaginations, but also in much national legislation and regulations and in international agreements, has been dominated by the material and objective dimensions of culture, in which the heritage item was very often regarded as the visualisation of the power and life of the dominant cultural, political and economic classes.

With the emergence, and now the consolidation, of the concept of an important intangible cultural heritage to be considered and supported alongside the physical or tangible heritage, the concept of cultural identity has become systematically linked to that of this dynamic and living heritage. Therefore, we need to understand that the process of identifying heritage is a way of adding value to a series of items, transforming them into symbols of their community. We must also understand cultural identity as the result of a collective historic experience in all fields (economic, political, social and cultural) which generates a set of shared values and attitudes. Therefore, this wider

concept of heritage is both linked to the concept of identity and to the acknowledgement of cultural diversity[1]. Also, any process of heritage identification has a political content, as it allows certain characteristics of groups to be visualised and accentuated, and making some invisible, and silencing or distorting others.

The 2003 UNESCO *Intangible Heritage Convention* defines the Intangible Cultural Heritage as the:

...means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.[2]

Though perhaps not explicit in the text, the life stories of ordinary people which explain situations, events, experiences or actions carried out by the protagonists, and variously known as oral sources, testimonies, life histories or memoirs according to the academic

discipline, clearly fall within the Convention's definition as *--expressions, knowledge, ... transmitted from generation to generation --*

Life stories are so important, and can justifiably be considered significant manifestations of the heritage, because they form part of a much more complex construct related to the collective memory of a particular community or human group and are part of their identity mechanisms. Within contemporary museology therefore, as well as within modern library and archive practice, personal memoirs and reminiscences of all kinds are now recognised as forming a significant part of the intangible cultural heritage, within which the individual experience forms a part of the common and shared memories that make up the identity of a community, whether this is identified in social, ethnic or even gender terms.

Important contemporary examples of such significant memories and life stories will include those of immigrants: not only memories of their country of origin, but also their account of how the receiving country treated them. Other examples include the memories of the industrial workers who not only conserve memories of past modes of production, the associated ways of life, and more generally, of a world that is now in decline or has totally disappeared. Within the political sphere, there is great value in the memories of women and their achieving of full rights in civil life, of accounts featuring the traumatic memories of exiled people and of survivors of war, genocide or dictatorship, and of any other trauma which a particular community has suffered. However, this viewpoint is by no means universally accepted as yet, and a large part of the museum, library and archive communities can still be reticent about including this kind of original heritage evidence in exhibitions, publications and other discourses.

If we accept that memories are legitimate, indeed in many cases important, manifestations of heritage, and that such life stories include accounts of both traumatic and non-traumatic experiences, we will recognise that the conserving and presenting of these may have consequences reaching beyond the heritage framework into other areas, such as politics and economics. Examples include stories of survivors of the Holocaust, of reprisals after the Spanish Civil War or of the recent genocide in the Balkans. All three examples of such narratives have an evidential component which has been used socially as a source of political protest, and which has allowed the opening (or reopening in some cases) of legal processes with very important political and economic consequences.

Over the past few years many professionals across a range of disciplines have been calling for the explicit recognition of personal stories as one of the categories which is recognised as a significant part of the intangible cultural heritage. While it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to amend the text of the *Intangible Heritage Convention* itself because of the legal and administrative problems this would entail, it would be, comparatively, very easy to recognise narrations linked to life experience within the Operational Guidelines that are to be drawn up, and regularly reviewed, under the provisions of the *Convention*.

For example, the director of the Museum of the History of Immigration of Catalonia, Spain, Ms. Imma Boj, says:

> *Because there is no sense without knowing who had it drawn up, why they had it drawn up, if they were paid fairly or unfairly, that is, the whole context is what will really give us the piece, and the value that this piece has as heritage. What is heritage? Heritage is something that explains and helps us to understand who we are and what our identity is. Therefore, for us, it is very important that it is heritage and not something else, it is not folklore. This man danced. How did he dance, what do those dance steps explain, but also why is he dancing? I don't want the dance explained, rather why he is dancing.*[3]

The significance of such personal memories, whether oral in the case of those still alive, or written or otherwise recorded, can play an important part in developing the total historical memory in this section, as the Spanish anthropologist Victoria Quintero Moron recognises in relation to the losing side in the Spanish Civil War:

> *In this development of new meanings, people are opening up to the idea of designating the narrations and memoirs of the protagonists of the repression of the Franco regime as heritage, of converting the memory into a cultural item (or its representation in a database or interpretation centre.)*[4]

A Challenge to Traditional Cultural Institutions

However, incorporating intangible evidence such as personal memoirs into the wider heritage dialogue challenges established heritage institutions and traditions and calls for quite fundamental transformations, some which are analysed below.

Though so far the emergence on the scene of the concept of intangible cultural heritage has had only limited effects on the established cultural scene, it has the potential to have a considerable effect over the longer term on the world of museums, libraries and archives. Following some other recent researchers, we have adopted the expression 'Memory Institutions' or the acronym ALM Sector (ALM = Archives, Libraries and Museums) to refer to all kinds of institution with responsibilities for different aspects of the cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, of the community they serve, including personal memoirs, oral history and similar cultural manifestations. The term 'Memory Institution', which originated in the English-speaking world over the past decade or so, now has a fairly wide range of references, and is used to cover not only museums but also a wide spectrum of other institutions and organisations which carry out actions for the conservation of heritage.

These, along with related kinds of bodies, have in recent years been collectively termed by some specialists, especially those researching the information sciences 'Memory Institutions', This term was apparently coined by Hjerppe in 1994 as a collective term to cover a range of cultural heritage institutions, including libraries, museums, archives, monuments, sites and places, botanical gardens, zoological gardens and all other kinds

of collecting institutions. The expression became more widely used after its inclusion by Lorcan Dempsey in a study dated 2000 for the European Union, which defined it as follows:

> Memory institution. We have no term in routine use which includes libraries, archives and museums. Again, for conciseness, we sometimes use cultural institutions and memory institutions in this inclusive sense.)[5]

However, the expression does not seem to have been widely adopted outside a fairly narrow field, mainly discussions of metadata, particularly in relation to new media, within information science. In the first place, there are difficulties in applying traditional museum, library or archive techniques to the preservation, documentation and communication of the intangible. To conceive of a traditional exhibition presenting non-material heritage tears down all the established theories about how heritage should be presented in museums and similar institutions. Also, the intangible heritage is something that is living and in constant evolution, and this makes things extraordinarily difficult. In an interview for this research the Director of the Museum of the History of Immigration of Catalonia told us:

> We have no reference models because [these] have not yet reached the discourse of intangible heritage. Therefore, you explain intangible heritage through a column, and you hear the story on some headphones? Is that enough? This story is covered by the documents people contribute, but is that enough? We just don't know. The truth is that we have talked to some museologists, and each one has very different ideas about the subject, with the result that it is very complex, very complicated.?[6]

The second reason is conceptual. Other than a very small number of museums specifically created under these criteria, such as the Museum of the History of Immigration of Catalonia, the Museu da Pessoa (Museum of the Person) in Brazil[7], and a few others, museums generally, particularly those in thematic areas such as science, technology, national and local history, or the fine and applied arts, do not usually include such autobiographical stories in their collections or exhibitions [8].

The majority of museums that are today actively working with life stories basically belong to two types. The first are some progressive ethnographic and social history museums which have an anthropological concept of culture, and hence consider part of their mission as being to protect cultural diversity and social inclusion. ICOM has a specialist International Committee that covers this kind of institution and its staff, namely ICME - the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Ethnography [9].

The second category is the so-called Memorial Museum, which has been created with the aim of bringing recognition and belated justice to the victims of a particular conflict or State-organised or sanctioned injustice (wars, genocides, armed conflicts etc.) Traditionally these have been included within the category of history or biographical museum, although many have specific characteristics related to places and physical spaces with a strong symbolic charge because of their historical transcendence (e.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau, the former Nazi concentration and extermination camp of 1940-1945 in Poland). In 2001 a further specialist international committee was established within ICOM for this category of museum: ICMEMO - International Committee of Memorial Museums in Remembrance of the Victims of Public Crimes[10].

Though these two types of museums, and other memory institutions such as libraries and archives that are documenting similar personal stories and memories, work with a similar type of material, they are conceptually very different. In fact, more and more memory institutions are appearing to deal with subjects that cannot directly fit into either of these two categories. A hybridisation is occurring involving what is really a conceptual change from a focus on the object to a focus on the person: in other words from matter to knowledge, which is presenting new challenges and allows new audiences to be reached. The role and functions of many traditional memory institutions is therefore being transformed.

Firstly, traditional institutions can join the emerging new heritage philosophy and trends and take an active role in the collection, conservation and fixing of personal narrations by means of recording and transcription of the stories. This requires the adoption of what are now well-

established methodologies and technologies: for example in written form such as biographies, diaries and reminiscences, or as audio or video recordings, with or without transcription on to paper or digital text. However, the process of materialising the intangible cultural heritage in this way transforms it and risks distancing it from its dynamic nature.

Secondly, the memory institution's role as an interpreter of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of the objects must remain fundamental, allowing the contextualisation and diffusion of the material it looks after in greater depth, and its diffusion. Thirdly, a museum or similar body that seeks to care for such manifestations of the intangible heritage modifies its own role by doing so, and becomes a guardian and protector of such resources and a heritage mediator.

This mediation can be at different levels. On one level, all memory institutions can be regarded as acting as mediators between information and knowledge, coding or classifying the heritage object (documenting, contextualising, fixing) so as to be able to show the full range of its cultural meanings, a process that we will call 'heritage interpretation'. At a second level, memory institutions can act as mediators between a particular living experience and the 'product' (recording, written text etc.) that is communicated to a public which will not necessarily share the experiences and memories. On a third level, a memory institutions can exercise a mediating function as an activator of memory and a promoter of local identities. It is in this dimension that memory institutions achieve a definite social function, particularly in relation to the intangible cultural heritage.

It can be argued that the emergence of such concepts, and the adoption by their countries of international obligations under measures such as the 2003 UNESCO *Convention on the Intangible Heritage* and the 2005 UNESCO *Cultural Diversity Convention*, obliges memory institutions to rethink the profile and the tasks of their professional personnel. Some reflections on the necessary reform of the museum profession already exist: see for example the arguments of Boylan in the first volume of this *Journal*[11]. Conferences and congresses on the implications of this widening concept of heritage have been organised over recent years within ICOM by its International Committee for the Training of

Personnel (ICTOP)[12], International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM)[13] and the International Committee for Conservation(ICOM-CC)[14]. In fact, ICTOP has updated the long-established ICOM *Curricula Guidelines* recognizing that training for professionals needs to be broadened to explicitly cover managing the intangible heritage, arguing in the preamble that:

> The new ICOM initiative encouraging museums to become places responsible for safeguarding and transmitting intangible heritage has set in motion changes that will significantly affect traditional institutional roles and procedures. The initiative will require museum personnel to possess new and different knowledge, skills and attitudes, just as its corollary, staff training and professional development offerings and programs, will be obliged to revise their content and methodology.[15]

Communicating Intangible Heritage On-line

At the same time we need to bear in mind the equally far-reaching effects of the progressive introduction of the new Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the field of cultural heritage including museums. These profound transformations are not only influencing museographic discourses, particularly those relating to museum communication and education, but are also affecting the very essence of established museology, giving rise to a new field of specialisation that is being termed 'Cybermuseology'. To quote museologist Dominique Langlais:

> The communication and interaction possibilities offered by the Web to layer information and to allow the exploration of multiple meanings are only starting to be exploited. In this context, cybermuseology is known as a practice that is knowledge-driven rather than object-driven, and its main goal is to disseminate knowledge using the interaction possibilities of ICTs.[16]

Within this new environment, the widespread adoption of ICTs by the heritage world provides innovative opportunities to overcome many of the problems caused by the apparently ephemeral and mutable nature of the intangible heritage. It is dangerous to over-state the case at this comparatively early stage in such developments,

but it seems very likely that the use of the Internet in this kind of project allows us to achieve some important milestones, as summarised in the following three subsections of this paper.

Fixing and preserving memories

As regards the best way to fix memories, there are two radically opposing standpoints. The first argues that it must be the professional-expert him/herself who obtains, codifies and classifies the memories, in order to guarantee the rigour and coherence of the process. The alternative view is that this expert intervention strips the memories of their nature as valid intangible heritage and risks manipulating them. The anthropologist, Jack Goody, believes that:

--- the code used by someone outside of the studied society imposes particular cognitive and mental structures on the subject using it. Therefore the codification process is neither neutral nor objective.[17]

Dominique Langlais is of the same opinion:

A virtual museum is a construction, a code in itself, which is encoded technically by the website developer and socially by the curator --- Just like in a traditional museum, curators are responsible for what is included, and what is excluded from a body of knowledge. The source of control is pyramidal and represents the dominant ideology about a certain body of knowledge.[18]

To avoid such a risk, some museologists consider that the personal narrative or biography should be presented without any later elaboration, though others think that the mere fact of recording it pre-configures how it will be shown, so if there is any damage it has already been done by the mere process of recording the intangible tradition. Speaking from the point of view of the memories of Holocaust survivors, Ringelheim and Ellis argue:

Oral history is not a refined record. A memoir is very refined. There's something very raw about oral history, which I think also makes it compelling. Although memoirs are very compelling, the refinement of writing and the editing of writing are very different to what you see on the screen or hear when you listen to an oral history?[19]

However, other authors claim that the codification process is precisely what allows society to interpret a narrative correctly. The leading cultural studies analyst, Stuart Hall, in his widely quoted and discussed 1980 article on semiotic analysis, *Encoding/Decoding* (*Codage/decodage* in the 1994 French version) argues that:

--- the process of encoding a message, through cultural discourse (which can be supported by any media) will rely on codes that are accepted and recognised in any given society. The combination of those operations leads or allows us to articulate the social and cultural map of the conditions of the process of knowledge [production][20]

Nevertheless, fixing memories through interviews and later digitalisation (whether of text transcripts or of the original audio or video recording) greatly improves the preservation of life stories. Although it is true that collecting the memoirs at a certain moment 'freezes' them in time, something that arguably contradicts their mutable character, the same is true in relation to many manifestations of heritage: it is only the collecting and fixing of them that ensures their longer-term conservation and dissemination.

Therefore, one of the greatest allies to the preservation of, and easy access to, both life and other stories and the databases which index them, is the recent remarkable advance in the use of ICTs in relation to such information. It is true that we must bear in mind that rapid technological evolution may mean that the actual systems of recording and playback etc. used are likely to become obsolete quite quickly, and this presents problems. However, it is certainly true that while the originals should be preserved so far as possible, recorded testimonies are much better safeguarded if they are copied to a more robust modern media than they usually are in their original formats which are subject to the hazards of mould, damp and the decomposition of the paper or vinyl tape, etc.. Establishing databases to index and retrieve recordings and their content also requires the creation of a taxonomy of classifications which allows relationships to be created in the kinds of multi-space networks required for retrieval and use within social,

historical, technological, geographical and cultural contexts and different disciplines.

As an example of best practice, for example, over the past thirty years or more the Venezuelan National Library, in Caracas, has built up a major national archive of sound, cine, television, video and digital recordings running to several shelf-kilometres with items up to a hundred years or so old, preserved in an almost bewildering range of physical (and more recently computer) formats. However, in order to process and manage this material the Library has, almost by accident, had to build up a substantial 'living museum' of many dozens of types of historic technical equipment, restored and maintained in full working order by a team of engineers and technicians, so that the original archive material can be played back in its original format and then be copied onto modern media for conservation and communication purposes.

From 2004 on, with the emergence of the Web 2.0 concept, the forty years old or more system of classification and categorisation of content by keywords or 'tags' assigned by the staff, has been extended beyond its original specialised areas of computer programming or digital print text formatting. These new classifications are characterised by being shared social actions that aim to provide new ways of accessing museum, library or archive collections in an associative manner. One good example of the use of social tagging in this context is the project *Katrina's Jewish Voices* (http://katrina.jwa.org/) from the The Jewish Women's Archive in collaboration with the Center for History and New Media. Through the contributions of individuals and organizations nationwide, the project is creating a virtual archive of stories, images, and reflections about the New Orleans and Gulf Coast Jewish communities before and after Hurricane Katrina.

These new approaches do not rely on any kind of pre-determined protocol or indexation and so there is no kind of terminological control. One weakness of this approach is that the search results obtained are subjective, and hence can be unreliable. On the positive side, however, what this kind of classification can contribute is a high level of participation amongst users, as Canadian museologist and ITC pioneer, Jennifer Trant, argues:
    Social Tagging (the collective assignment of

keywords to resources) and its resulting Folksonomy (the assemblage of concepts expressed in such a co-operatively developed system of classification) offer ways for (art) museums to engage with their communities and to understand what users of on-line museum collections see as important.[21]

Despite such risks, however, it is clear that the digitalisation and cataloguing of personal narratives and other records has to be seen as a basic tool for their conservation and communication.

Creating networks

A second characteristic of the Internet which we would like to highlight, is its role as an instrument which favours the creation of networks and synergies between the different agents. These networks can be of diverse types. In the first place, the Internet allows the creation of institutional networks, and the creation of complex projects which involve the partnership of different memory institutions. This is very significant, above all in projects which have a common thematic nexus, even if the institutions are located in different countries. The cooperation between [24] different migration museums round the world through the Migration Museums Network[22] is one good example of this. Another is the creation of on-line video archives of interviews, like that of the Shoah Foundation at the University of Southern California which has done projects with survivors of the Holocaust,[23] the on-line *Conversations* of the International Museum of Women,[24] or the network set up by four personal life story museums in Brazil, Portugal, the USA and Canada.[25]

It is not only institutional networks that are greatly facilitated by the Internet. Social networks are developing rapidly at both individual and community level between diverse groups, such as indigenous peoples, older generations recording their life experiences, extended families interested in their own genealogy, family history and family memories, and people interested in accessing memories of particular issues or events that they themselves do not remember. In respect of all this, it may be helpful to think of intergenerational networks where the memory institution acts as an intermediary between generations with significantly different life experiences. As Ms. Imma Boj put it in our interview:

*We want interviewing to be done by a broad range
of people. While scientific work is done by
anthropologists, there are also tasks carried out
by people interviewing each other: schoolchildren
interviewing their grandparents, elderly people
explaining their history on the Internet or in IT
Rooms for the Elderly.[26]*

Such networks may bring together a wide range of institutions and community groups. For example, the current *Moving Here: 200 Years of Migration to England Project*, partly funded by the National Lottery, has over 30 Web partner organisations. These include major national institutions such as the British Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Museum of London, other local government museums, libraries and archives, both large and small, from across the country, and voluntary organisations, such as the Black Cultural Archives and the London Jewish Museum.

Moving Here explores, records and illustrates why people came to England over the last 200 years and what their experiences were and continue to be. It offers free access, for personal and educational use, to an online catalogue of versions of original material related to migration history from local, regional and national archives, libraries and museums, and to many original documents from these sources. In addition, *Moving Here* gives every visitor to its website the opportunity to publish their own experience of migration. These contributions are grouped under 19 themes, including politics, arts, sport, military service, women's lives and celebrations. Currently (April 2008), in addition to a huge amount of material provided by the partner organizations, there are 1032 personal narratives of the experience of, or reaction to, inward migration.

Moving Here aims to overcome barriers to the direct involvement of minority ethnic groups in recording and documenting their own history of migration, and to

ensure this history is passed on to the next generation through schools. The promoters considered that it was crucial to work with minority ethnic groups to ensure that the voices of different immigrants were heard.[27] The project is continuing to develop, with partnerships with a further 16 local organisations organised through four of England's government-funded 'Regional Hubs' for museum, library and archive co-operation and development, plus the National Museums Liverpool.[28]

Through such digital networks, museums and other memory institutions are using the Internet as a mechanism for social inclusion and promoting the visibility of disadvantaged communities and groups who do not have access to the traditional media. Many of the oral recording projects promoted by such memory institutions explicitly stress their wish to give a 'voice' to those who do not generally have one. Thus, such institutions are serving as a space where all kinds of personal narratives as well as actions of protest can be hosted, thus helping to overcome the digital division between the economically underprivileged and those with greater resources. Writing of the *Mediterranean Voices* project funded through the European Union's EuroMed Heritage II interview-based ITC oral history programme, Margaret Hart Robertson explained that:

*[Mediterranean Voices] was an attempt to let
'muted' voices be heard, the voices of the ordinary
people, talking about how they make sense of
their past and their present. It was an attempt to
consolidate the intangible heritage of who we are
and where we come from, the 'roots' and the
'routes' [of the migrants and their migrations] in
order to fortify local self-esteem and help others
understand the 'true' historical memory of the
places involved, as opposed to what is said or left
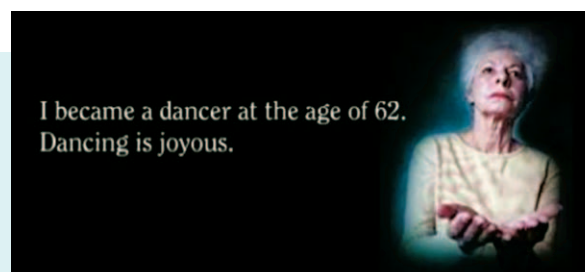unsaid in the official history books.[29]*

I became a dancer at the age of 62.
Dancing is joyous.

Figure 1
Diagram showing part of the UK's *Moving Here -200 Years of Migration* Network.

When taken to its highest level, as in the case of traumatic memories, such intangible heritage narratives can help create a favourable climate for the recognition, among civil society generally, of the justice of claims and complaints from minority communities. In such cases the memory institution can play an important role in giving visibility to activist movements that in turn can promote genuine social transformation. As Harriet Deacon puts it:

In South Africa one of the main forms of Intangible Heritage celebrated at a national level, as a cornerstone of the move to build post-apartheid national identities, is the oral memory of experiences under Apartheid governments (1948-1994). These stories range across ethnic and national boundaries, and across a number of self-defined communities (exiles, political prisoners, activists, local communities etc.).[30]

Improving access to Intangible Cultural Heritage through ICT

In the same way, the Internet can assist in the democratisation of heritage in a more general way through providing an alternative access to a new public, who, because of their education or difficulties of geographical distance are, or at least feel, excluded from traditional museum, library and archive resources. Although this can apply to any kind of heritage, in the case of autobiographical memoirs such opportunities are especially valuable, since otherwise the great majority of this type of testimony is to be found in archives which, though supposedly open to all, are, in practice, often only accessed by a very limited public: those both able to visit them in terms of location, and with the specialised knowledge that may be needed to read and interpret the documents.

In contrast with this, the possibility of consulting memoirs on line, and their use in virtual exhibitions and teaching resources, means that access is very wide - indeed worldwide in geographical terms - and is available at all times of the day or night, not just when the establishment institutions are open to the public. Nevertheless, such democratisation is not automatic, and it is necessary to bear in mind that the availability and cost of access to the Internet varies enormously from place to place. Both the well-recognised phenomenon of digital exclusion for financial or other access reasons, and the control of networks by power groups (including governments in some cases) can be a significant impediment in providing free access to information.

Despite all this, the digitalisation of memoirs on the Internet leads to the globalising of heritage, while offering at the same time a clear local, or community, group identity. Personal memoirs, as life stories anchored in a specific time and place, typically have a strong local component, but nevertheless their dissemination on the Internet leads to trans-national and mimetic processes in which points of contact and spaces of empathy arise when the viewer or reader is faced with accounts of experiences that are different, though, perhaps surprisingly, are found to share many common features. Thus, while built around the individual stories of the Holocaust, the total collection of narrations by its survivors have been widely adopted as a model for how other, perhaps very different, narratives and memoirs of the period can be presented. Above all perhaps, it is the Holocaust that has penetrated the collective imagination of the second half of the 20th century most completely, making this a model for other very different narrations.

The ethnic cleansing of the Balkans during the 1990s finds parallels with the 1940s Shoah of the Jewish people. In the same way, the migration experiences of the new arrivals from Sub-Saharan countries to the Spanish coasts in the past few years are mirrored by those of emigrants to Latin America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. There is not just a globalisation of knowledge, but also of life experiences, which results in the creation of new narratives.

In these, the narrative models can be applied to different experiences, and may well combine elements of a diverse nature: hypertexts, images, audio, video, animations etc.. This multiplicity of elements results in new ways of interpreting and disseminating the cultural heritage, particularly the intangible cultural heritage, that is more interactive, more accessible, more didactic than that of the traditional museographic discourse based on exhibiting objects accompanied by contextualizing explanations. This transformation allows the protagonists themselves to make the listener accomplices in their own story through their voices and their gestures. One particularly good example of this is the on-line exhibition *Life after the Holocaust* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

(http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/life_after_ holocaust)

This site employs cutting edge approaches to non-linear storytelling, borrowing techniques and best practices from print and exhibition design as well as video and audio production. The content is organized into three levels; each level was intended to appeal to a vast variety of user types and help guide users deeper into the content.

The first level allows users to see the content organized by theme. The second level allows the users to delve deeper into the themes. Each theme level includes 30-60 second audio segments related to the themes. The third level, which included the 30-minute interview, was also equipped with an album containing photographs given by each of the survivors profiled. These interviews were also made available in a downloadable mp3 format. The mp3s serve as take-aways from the site and make it easier for users to experience the content on portable audio devices[32].

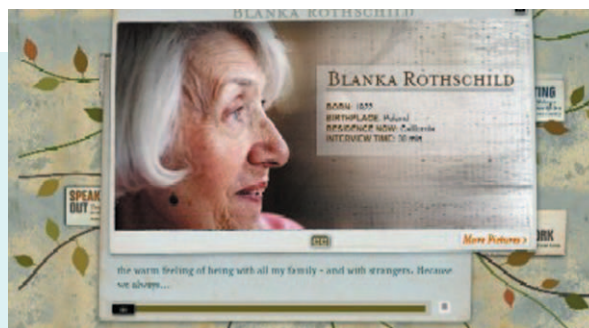*ICT uses: problems and advantages*

One of the basic issues on which there is a lack of unanimity among institutions is the extent to which there is a need to provide full Internet access to the institution's collections, in this case to the personal testimonies and narratives. For various reasons, most professionals are reluctant to allow completely unrestricted consultation of their collections, usually offering only partial and controlled access. Most libraries, and a growing number of archive repositories, now offer at least on line consultation of the catalogues of their collections. Among museums, the most common solution is to offer on line only fragments of interviews or other personal narratives in transcription, audio or video,

and generally primarily as illustrations of the discourse of a particular exhibition or programme.

The main reasons for concern and restrictions on access are ethical and practical. There can be genuine problems with regard to privacy, since testimonies may deal with very personal and sensitive subjects and include named, or otherwise easily identifiable, people (such as other members of the family) who may not have been consulted about the interview or recording. Institutions have often dealt with this problem by allowing open access to the catalogue and to fragments of the testimonies, while reserving access to the full narrative to people who visit the institution in person. A second ethical reason is that an interview that has been recorded for a particular purpose and under specific conditions, with the consent of the interviewee for that specific purpose, could easily be manipulated and used in a quite different way without the subject of the recording having any possibility of controlling this new interpretation of their narrative.

A third ethical aspect to be considered is that the Internet allows the posting of interviews that pre-date the construction of the digital project, so again there has been no explicit permission from the witness to post the interview on the Internet at all. In this case, the narrator's basic rights, especially the right to decide the level of access to their words, is violated. (Who was his/her testimony meant for: researchers? official bodies? the general public?) Similarly, an interview taken out of context may become simply a virtual object. Finally, and not the least of the main ethical problems for institutions arising from digitalisation and free access to their collections via the Internet, is the ease with which any kind of document or file can be copied and re-published without any kind of control, whether of its veracity, ethics or reliability.

Figure 2
Screen-shot from the on-line exhibition *Life after the Holocaust* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which combines texts, images, audio and video files, with animations in Macromedia Flash. <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/life_after_holocaust>

There are also significant management problems in relation to providing wide public access. Firstly, despite the truly remarkable fall in the cost of digitising existing collections over recent years, the cost is still regarded, rightly or wrongly, by many memory institutions as expensive enough to dissuade many museums from placing their collections on line. Secondly, and linked with the first point, there is often a serious lack of staff available for digitising, classifying and entering data, or of the money needed to hire an external agency to do the work.

Finally, there can be copyright and other legal problems (or high charges for reproduction permissions) when an institution proposes to upload onto Internet-based services recently-published material which is still in copyright, databases created by other institutions or copies of unpublished archive documents. Even so, although this is not yet normal practice, it is still worth considering publishing at least some examples of personal interviews and memories (with due consents of course) on the institution's web site, in addition to simply giving access to the information to visitors who come in person.[33] Even where a visit will ultimately be necessary, preliminary work on search engines will then allow users to identify material relevant to their interests in advance of their visit, potentially saving hours of searching.

At the present time it is still desirable for the interviews to be tagged and codified, but the increasing sophistication of the main search engines, such as Google, is beginning to make 'free text' searching without this a practicable longer-term solution. An alternative possibility, where for whatever reason something cannot be copied to the institution's own web site, is to create hyperlinks to the original quotation on another site, enabling the user to check the source of any academic work and guarantee rigour in its use.

A third element to be considered is that the Internet allows the user of oral history to hear the real voice. As soon as an interview is transcribed it loses the tone of voice, accent, intonation and all the other signs that accompany and contextualise the testimony. Having direct access to recordings enables the preservation of all this sound information that is inevitably lost in transcription. Furthermore, the use of sound archives allows for the conveyance of emotions, making the testimony more appealing, convincing, and accessible to

the visitor than would be achieved through merely reading its transcription.

Conclusions

The incorporation of sound and visual archives into cybermuseographical discourse creates new narratives that combine a range of elements: hypertexts, images, audio, video, animations etc.. This very multiplicity of elements combines to create a new way of interpreting and disseminating heritage that is more interactive, accessible and didactic. The traditional museographical discourse based on the exhibition of objects, accompanied by text and graphic explanations, is transformed. Thus, it is the protagonists themselves, through their own voices and gestures, who involve us in their history.

The increasingly widespread adoption of Internet-based communication by the heritage world has opened up a wide range of both challenges and new opportunities for memory institutions: already many museums, libraries and archives around the world receive far more 'virtual' visits than the number of visitors coming in person through their doors. The potential is especially strong for working with manifestations of the intangible cultural heritage, since the very nature of the Internet favours the use of diverse techniques for conserving and disseminating supporting information about heritage.

In this context, life stories and similar personal accounts and reminiscences can be considered a significant category of the intangible cultural heritage and the communication of these via the Internet presents both a challenge and an opportunity for memory institutions of all kinds, and can help to build closer links between museums, libraries and archives and their local communities. The Internet is thus creating a new role for memory institutions within the Information Society of the 21st century, helping to ensure they remain important, first rate, social and educational agents into the foreseeable future. ✠

NOTES

1. Carrera Diaz, G. 2005. *La evoluci¢n del Patrimonio (inter) Cultural: pol¡ticas culturales para la diversidad. in Patrimonio inmaterial y Gesti¢n de la Diversidad,* PH Cuadernos, 17. Sevilla: Junta de Andalucia, Consejeria de Cultura, IAPH, p.18.

2. Article 2(1) of the *Intangible Heritage Convention* of 2003.

3. Interview carried out on (05/02/2007) with Ms. Imma Boj, Director of the Museum of the History of Immigration of Catalonia, as part of the fieldwork carried out for this PhD research.

4. Quintero Moron, V. 2005. 'El patrimonio intangible como instrumento para la diversidad cultural: una alternativa possible' in *Patrimonio inmaterial y Gesti¢n de la Diversidad*, PH Cuadernos, 17. Sevilla: Junta de Andalucia, Consejer¡a de Cultura, IAPH. p. 80.

5. Hjerppe, R. 1994. 'A Framework for the Description of Generalized Documents' in *Advances in Knowledge Organization*, 4, pp. 173-180; Lorcan D. 2000. *Scientific, Industrial, and Cultural Heritage: a shared approach: a research framework for digital libraries, museums and archives*, research paper for the European Commission's Information Society Directorate General, Ariadne, Issue 22. http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue22/dempsey/intro.html The term has also been adopted by e.g. Gorman G.E. and Shep, S. J. (editors), 2006. *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*, London, Facet.

6. See footnote 3.

7. For the Museum of the History of Immigration of Catalonia see http.//www.mhic.net/; for the Museu da Pessoa, Brazil, see http://www.museudapessoa.net.

8. As a typical example we would mention the National Museum of Science and Technology of Catalonia, (mNACTEC: http://www.mnactec.cat). This conserves all kinds of artefacts related to industrialisation and mechanised working processes, but does not have any programme of oral heritage recording or of presenting the stories, experiences and knowledge of those who worked the machines, or more widely in the industries.

9. http://icom.museum/international/icme.html or http://museumsnett.no/icme/

10. http://www.gedenkstaettenforum.de:8080/icom or http://icom.museum/international/icmemo.htm

11. Boylan, P.J. 2006. The Intangible Heritage: a Challenge and an Opportunity for Museums and Museum Professional Training. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, vol. 1, pp. 53 - 65.

12. For example, the ICOM-ICTOP programme during the 2004 ICOM General Conference held in Seoul, examined the professional training implications of conserving and disseminating intangible cultural heritage.

13. At the 26th Annual Symposium of ICOFOM which took place between 4 and 6 October 2004 in Seoul, South Korea, the ICOFOM theme was 'Museology and Intangible Heritage'. See ICOFOM *Bulletin* No. 37: this is available on-line at: http://www.lrz-muenchen.de/~iims/icofom/newsletter37-span.pdf

14. At the General Conference in Seoul 2004, the ICOM-CC organised a specific session entitled 'Preserving the Intangible: Sustaining the Material and the Symbolic'.

15. *ICOM Curricula Guidelines for Museum Professional Development*, available on-line at: http://museumstudies.si.edu/ICOM-ICTOP/index.htm

16. Langlais, D. 2005. *Cybermuseology and intangible cultural heritage*,Intersection conference 2005, York University, Toronto. pp 73-74: available on line at: http://www.yorku.ca/topia/docs/conference/Langlais.pdf

17. Goody, J. 2004. 'La Transcripción del Patrimonio Oral' in *Museum International*. Nos. 221-222 (May 2004).

18. Langlais, op.cit. p.75.

19. Ringelheim, J.and Ellis, N. 2004. Life after the Holocaust. *Stories of Holocaust Survivors after the War*.
(http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/life_after_holocaust/transcript.pdf)

20. Hall, S. 1980. 'Encoding/decoding' pp. 128 - 138 in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 1972-79, London: Hutchinson, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, pp. 128-138. French version: Hall, S. 1994. 'Codage/decodage', *Réseaux* 68, pp. 29-39.

21. Trant, J. 2006. 'Exploring the potential for social tagging and folksonomy in art museums: Proof of concept', *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*, Vol 12, No 1, June 2006.
(http://www.archimuse.com/papers/steve-nrhm-0605preprint.pdf)

22. Migration Museums Network. (http://www.migrationmuseums.org/)

23. Shoah Foundation Institute, University of Southern California. (http://college.usc.edu/vhi/)

24. International Museum of Women (http://www.imow.org)

25. Network of Museums of the Person: Brazil (http://www.museudapessoa.net),Portugal (http://www.museu-da-pessoa.net), Indiana (US) (http://www.bloomington.in.us/~mop-i/index), Montreal (http://www.museedelapersonne.ca)

26. See footnote 3.

27. *Moving Here: 200 Years of Migration to England* (www.movinghere.org.uk)

28. The partner bodies are MLA Yorkshire, West Midlands Museums Hub, East Midlands Museums Hub, London Museums Hub and the National Museums, Liverpool.

29. *Hart Robertson, M. 2006. 'The Difficulties of Interpreting Mediterranean Voices: Exhibiting Intangibles using New Technologies' in International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 1, pp. 27 - 34. URL (http://www.nfm.go.kr/downfile/ijih_w11_volumes/2006_chapter02.pdf)

30. Deacon, H. 2005. 'Legal and financial instruments for safeguarding our intangible heritage' in *ICOMOS Scientific Symposium: Place-memory-meaning: preserving intangible values in monuments and sites*, Paris, ICOMOS, pp. 349-385; also on-line at (http://www.international.icomos.org/victoriafalls2003/papers/C3-2%20-%20Deacon.pdf)

31. Some of these ideas come from the website *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web* (http://historymatters.gmu.edu/) developed by the American Social History Project/Center for Media & Learning, City University of New York, and the Center for History and New Media, George Mason University which bring together educational resources for the practice of history.

32. For more on this case study see: Goldblum, J., O'Dowd, A., and Sym, T. 2007. "Considerations and Strategies for Creating Interactive Narratives". On-line at *Museums & the Web 2007*. San Francisco. US (http://www.archimuse.com/mw2007/papers/goldblum/goldblum.html)

33. On the relative numbers of 'virtual' versus 'on site' visitors to museums, see for example Hawkey, R. 2004. *Learning with Digital Technologies in Museums*, London:,Futurelab Report 9. To give just one example, in 2006-7 the Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford, England, received 97,066 visitors through the front door, but 14.6 million 'virtual visits' by 500,700 different people (identified through analysing the IP addresses of the website users), see the Museum's 2006-7 *Annual Report*. (http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/about/eAnnualReport06-07.pdf)