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## Out of the Past

### Simon Wiesenthal's 'Hunt' for Nazis as a Form of Collective Testimony

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#### Abstract

The article examines Simon Wiesenthal's life-long preoccupation with the Holocaust, by using Paul Ricœur's discussion of the two modes of dealing with the past – those of 'memory' and 'history' respectively – as a point of departure. Nevertheless, the article aims to approach the varying forms and expressions of this preoccupation in an integrated fashion, analysing it as different means of achieving one and the same purpose: giving a public 'collective testimony' of the Holocaust. Departing from Wiesenthal's own experiences, as well as testimonies of how the events of the Holocaust affected his own larger family, and testimonies of events taking place in his original Heimat – the area of Eastern Galicia that he stemmed from – Wiesenthal's work in collecting testimonies of Nazi crimes gradually aggregated into a special form of 'collective testimony' of the Holocaust.

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“Simon Wiesenthal ist eine Person, die aus der Vergangenheit kommt”, observed Anton Pelinka at the historian's conference organised by the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) in Vienna to honour Simon Wiesenthal on his ninetyth birthday in 1998. Pelinka characterised Wiesenthal as “ein positiver Störfaktor” in Austrian politics and society and described him as a trailblazer of the belatedly developed field of Holocaust studies in Austria. Besides Pelinka, several prominent Austrian historians at the conference – such as Gerhard Botz and Winfried Garscha – expressed their views on the important and pioneering role played by Wiesenthal in working through the Nazi past in Austria.<sup>1</sup> This assessment by the historical profession of Wiesenthal's importance for the understanding of Austrian complicity in the crimes of Nazism and specifically the Holocaust encompassed a recognition of Wiesenthal's contribution to historiography. In this article, I will examine more closely the special quality of Wiesenthal's contribution to working through the past with the help of the interrelated concepts of 'history' and 'memory'.

Under the impression of the rise of 'memory' as a mode of relating to the past, Paul Ricœur let his late magnum opus *Memory, History, Forgetting* develop into a philosophical and historical inquiry into the competing forms of relating to the past constituted by 'history' and 'memory' respectively. To Ricœur, these two main, discernible forms of dealing with the past intertwine; they influence and shape one another more than the representatives of the respective traditions of 'memory' and 'history' would like to admit. Historians, or operators of the “historiographical process” (to use Ricœur's preferred term), view themselves as facilitating a corrective to unreli-

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<sup>1</sup> Anton Pelinka, Simon Wiesenthal und die österreichische Innenpolitik. Referat im Rahmen der Tagung *Österreichs Umgang mit der NS-Täterschaft* anlässlich des 90. Geburtstages von Simon Wiesenthal, Wien, 2/3 Dezember 1998, available online: [https://www.doew.at/cms/download/5kmjc/pelinka\\_wiesenthal.pdf](https://www.doew.at/cms/download/5kmjc/pelinka_wiesenthal.pdf) (29 September 2019). See also the documentation and correspondence concerning the conference in Nachlass Wiesenthal, Simon Wiesenthal Archive (SWA), II.1 (A-VIII.32).

able memory, sifting and critically weighing testimonies and creating hard ‘documentary evidence’, which is then used to ‘explain/understand’ the past and to ‘represent’ it in narrative form. Representatives of the tradition of studying memory, on the other hand, tend to view the historiographical process as ‘perverting’ or even ‘poisoning’ the process of creating a collective memory. The latter is grounded in testimonies, which are accepted in social groups, developing over social memory in smaller groups and are, eventually, through commemorative practices, extended into a collective memory of a whole society.<sup>2</sup> However, the most important aspect of Ricœur’s philosophical deliberations for my present aims is that he firmly points out ‘testimony’ as the structural element linking ‘memory’ and ‘history’.<sup>3</sup> Simon Wiesenthal basically spent his life collecting testimonies of the Holocaust and using them – in many different ways – to keep the memory of these events alive. In doing so, he developed modes of relating the past that can be fruitfully discussed through Ricœur’s reflections on ‘memory’ and ‘history’, but cannot be limited to one or the other.

Wiesenthal’s preoccupation with the Nazi period in Austria was originally and outwardly a quest to bring Nazi criminals to justice.<sup>4</sup> His main endeavour was to document the crimes of Nazism and to support the judicial system in finding Nazi criminals and in the preparation of cases, mainly by locating witnesses and collecting testimonies – hence his public persona as a ‘Nazi hunter’. Wiesenthal’s public role in this capacity was firmly established by the Eichmann trial in 1961, when he published his first and timely major book, *Ich jagte Eichmann*, and presented it at a press conference in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> The book detailed his almost manic obsession with finding Adolf Eichmann and reads like a blueprint for his wider project of tracing Nazi criminals. This career had begun already in the spring of 1945 after Wiesenthal’s liberation from the Mauthausen concentration camp near Linz, when he volunteered to help the American occupation authorities to track down war criminals. It then received a new urgency when he founded a Documentation Centre in Linz in 1947 together with other Holocaust survivors. In 1954, he closed this Centre, because he found the work futile during the most intensive early phase of the Cold War, when the former Allies were competing to integrate Germans and former Nazis into their respective camps and when most of the survivors had left Europe.<sup>6</sup> However, in connection with the Eichmann trial, Wiesenthal judged that the winds were changing and that it would now again be possible to bring Nazi criminals to justice.<sup>7</sup> Wiesenthal developed an almost unbelievable energy and momentum in his endeav-

2 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago/London 2004. Ricœur’s book is an enquiry into two main ways of relating to the past and their interactions and points of conflict. When he approaches our own time, he especially addresses the interaction and fusion of these two approaches. In the last two decades, historians have increasingly engaged in memory studies, which has served to further intensify these interactions. See for instance the reflections on this in Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention*, Munich 2013.

3 Ricœur, *Memory*, 21, 160-166.

4 Wiesenthal always insisted on the term “Nazi criminals”, because the crimes were rooted in that ideology and movement. Wiesenthal deemed the term “war criminals” too unspecific (besides being a term that was restricted to crimes committed during the war years 1939–1945). See for instance: Simon Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us. The Simon Wiesenthal Memoirs*. Edited and with an introductory profile by Joseph Wechsberg, New York/Toronto/London/Sydney 1967, 6; and Maria Sporrer/Herbert Steiner (ed.), *Simon Wiesenthal. Ein unbequemer Zeitgenosse*, Vienna/Munich/Zurich 1992, 145.

5 Simon Wiesenthal, *Ich jagte Eichmann. Tatsachenbericht*, Gütersloh 1961. The press conference took place on 2 February 1961, during the buildup of public attention before the beginning of the trial on 11 April. See also: Hella Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal. A Life in Search of Justice*, London 1996, 148-149.

6 See: Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp, in: Karl B. Schnelting (ed.), *Jüdische Lebenswege. Nahum Goldmann, Simon Wiesenthal, H. G. Adler*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, 71-153, here 84.

7 See: Simon Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache. Erinnerungen*, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin 1988, 206.

ours during the 1960s. He opened a new Documentation Centre in Vienna in 1961,<sup>8</sup> which soon achieved international recognition, not least by the concerned authorities in several countries who viewed it as a valuable institution in the work to apprehend and bring Nazi criminals to justice.

### 'History'. "Eine Dissertation in SS-Wissenschaften"

Importantly, already at the start of his career, when he founded the Documentation Centre in Linz in 1947, Wiesenthal prominently mentioned as one aim of his centre "the general documentation of the events [of the Holocaust]".<sup>9</sup> This remained a central aim and appeared again in the founding documents of his second Documentation Centre in Vienna in 1961, where one of the three main purposes of the centre was presented as the "collection of documentation for the later writing of history".<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, when Wiesenthal closed his first Documentation Centre in 1954, he sent its archive to the research and educational facility Yad Vashem in Israel to further this same aim – according to Wiesenthal, "more than a tonne of documents" was deposited there.<sup>11</sup> When the Simon Wiesenthal Center was founded in Los Angeles in 1977, Wiesenthal was hoping that this would turn into an important Holocaust research centre, and subsequently he made plans – which were never realised – to house at least parts of the archive of his new Documentation Centre there.<sup>12</sup> As he was approaching the end of his life and gradually ceasing to operate his Documentation Centre in Vienna, Wiesenthal used his remaining years to further his idea of creating a research institute in his hometown, where his archive could be housed and used as the basis for research on issues such as racism, antisemitism, Nazism, the Holocaust, and related subjects. In 2009, four years after Wiesenthal's death, the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies was founded.<sup>13</sup> During my own recent fellowship at this institute, I could observe first-hand how historians worked with Wiesenthal's archive on different types of projects – focussing on the subjects that Wiesenthal himself pursued (such as Nazism and the Holocaust) as well as dealing with Wiesenthal himself and his role in the aftermath of these events. Wiesenthal was thus able to realize the part of his undertaking that was historiographically oriented.

However, late in his life, when Wiesenthal was asked whether his engagement in furthering historical research went beyond documentation and whether he viewed himself as a historian, his answer was: "Ich bin ein Rechercheur – ich finde Tatsachen – nichts anderes!"<sup>14</sup> Earlier in his career, he had been more confident when he wrote in 1961 that the documentation he had collected and the knowledge he had acquired

8 At first, it operated as a branch of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG), the Jewish community organization in Vienna, but in 1963 a ferociously independent-minded Wiesenthal severed the connection with the IKG and founded his own archive as a branch of his political grouping in the IKG, the Bund jüdischer Verfolgter des Naziregimes (BjVN). The centre's formal name was hereafter Dokumentationszentrum des Bundes jüdischer Verfolgter des Naziregimes. See the documentation in SWA, I.1., File "IKG".

9 Sporrer/Steiner, Simon Wiesenthal, 88. See also: Wiesenthal, *Ich jagte Eichmann*, 58.

10 SWA, I.5., Bericht über die Tätigkeit des jüdischen Dokumentationszentrums für die Zeit 1. Oktober 1961 – 31. März 1962, 1.

11 Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp, 92. The holdings of the archive of the Linz Documentation Centre are now publicly available on the homepage of the Yad Vashem Archive under collection signature M.9 (Yad Vashem Archive [YVA]/Simon Wiesenthal Collection [SWC]/Jewish Historical Documentation Center, Linz [JHDCL]), <http://www.yadvashem.org/> (29 September 2019).

12 Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp, 146.

13 See: Institute Profile, <https://vwi.ac.at/index.php/en/institute/institute-profile> (29 September 2019).

14 See the interview in the documentary film *I Have Never Forgotten You. The Life and Legacy of Simon Wiesenthal* (directed by Richard Trank, 2007), Chapter 6, 89:00.

made him well equipped to write “eine Dissertation in SS-Wissenschaften”<sup>15</sup> – and I believe the doyen of Austrian historiography of the Nazi period, Gerhard Botz, would agree, since, at the conference mentioned at the beginning of this article, Botz made the most far-reaching assessment of Wiesenthal’s importance as a historian.<sup>16</sup> Botz argued for a belated recognition of Wiesenthal as “a historian of Austria’s Nazi past”, lamenting the disparaging attitude of Austrian contemporary historians towards Wiesenthal’s achievement. Botz admitted that Wiesenthal’s own writings were not just historical works, but always had a judicial dimension as well as being “vergangenheitspolitisch orientiert”. Nevertheless, Botz discerned the important contribution Wiesenthal had made on the level of developing new ideas and theories, concepts and perspectives, and, while drawing on established facts (which he partly through quite traditional archival work had dug out himself), he had proposed a novel conception of the history of Austrian National Socialism. However, this contribution was not presented in historiographical guise, but instead as a memorandum to the Chancellor of Austria (and at a press conference and as an article in his own journal, *Der Ausweg*) in 1966, which highlighted the high percentage of Austrian Nazis among those who perpetrated the Holocaust. Botz acknowledged the hybrid quality of the memorandum, known as *Das Österreich-Memorandum*, or by its full title *Schuld und Sühne der NS-Täter aus Österreich*.<sup>17</sup> The *Austrian Memorandum* succinctly but with plenty of detail delineated the substantial Austrian complicity in the Holocaust – especially the many Austrian Nazis in leading functions – at the same time as it, in part two, criticised the Austrian state’s deplorable record of bringing these Austrian criminals to justice and recommending a rectification of this record. Botz found a preliminary version of the memorandum in Wiesenthal’s own archive,<sup>18</sup> which he dated to the early 1950s. This early version contains so many of the qualities of the later published version that Botz extended his argument even farther, observing that Wiesenthal at this early point in time already must be seen as a real pioneer in the study of Nazi crimes and the Holocaust, his sketch predating even the path-breaking study of Raul Hilberg by several years.

Botz highlighted part one of the memorandum in particular, arguing that Wiesenthal was historiographically at least twenty years ahead of his time when it came to the knowledge and level of discussion of the historical profession. Wiesenthal

15 Wiesenthal, *Ich jagte Eichmann*, 232. Wiesenthal here (in 1961) recalled a conversation he had in 1950, when he described his studies in the years 1945–1950 as enabling him to write a dissertation in “SS-Wissenschaften”. See further below for more detail.

16 Gerhard Botz’ presentation at the conference *Österreichs Umgang mit der NS-Täterschaft* (see note 1) was later published as *Simon Wiesenthals Beitrag zur Aufarbeitung der Geschichte des österreichischen Nationalsozialismus. Sein (fast) vergessenes “Memorandum” zur “Beitiligung von Österreichern an Nazi-Verbrechen” und die “österreichische Täter-These”*, in: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (ed.), *Forschungen zum Nationalsozialismus und dessen Nachwirkungen in Österreich*. Festschrift für Brigitte Bailer, Vienna 2012, available online: [https://www.doew.at/cms/download/0067/bb\\_botz.pdf](https://www.doew.at/cms/download/0067/bb_botz.pdf) (25 October 2019). The fact that this article was only published 14 years after the conference took place in 1998 has arguably delayed its effect on Austrian historiography. I believe the line of thought pursued by Botz here merits renewed consideration.

17 The memorandum and material in connection with it, such as documents regarding the press conference held on 2 November 1966 in Vienna as well as press reactions, are held in in SWA, I., File “Österreich 03” and is available online: [https://www.doew.at/cms/download/bvfro/bb\\_memorandum.pdf](https://www.doew.at/cms/download/bvfro/bb_memorandum.pdf) (25 October 2019). It was also published in the periodical of the Documentation Centre of the BJVN, *Der Ausweg*, *Jüdische Zeitschrift für Aufklärung und Abwehr*, 4 (1966) 5, 1–8. See also the follow-up on the domestic and international public reactions to the memorandum in: *Der Ausweg* 4 (1966) 6, 1–7, and in following issues, e.g. *Der Ausweg* 5 (1967) 2, 1–2. See also: Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 164–165.

18 This document, entitled *Die Verantwortung d. Österreicher für den Judenmord in Europa*, lies in Wiesenthal’s documentation archive on Nazi crimes, see: SWA, I., File “Österreich 02”. I believe this document constitutes the sketch for what Wiesenthal in 1961 about ten years after writing it in passing labelled his “Dissertation in SS-Wissenschaften” (see footnote 15).

posed completely new questions of the historical record, which were in clear opposition to the conventional wisdom of Austria as the 'first victim' of Nazi Germany at the time. Wiesenthal attempted to structure and analyse Austrian Nazi history, implicitly presenting a 'research programme' that still remains valid today (as Botz maintained in 2012) and attempted to offer answers to many of the questions posed in this research programme, answers which in some cases are accepted knowledge today, and in other cases constitute strongly controversial issues in Austrian contemporary history. Following Ricœur, one could say that Wiesenthal's input to the historiographical process in the working out of Austria's Nazi past seems to lay primarily in the second phase of that process: in the creation of models and perspectives for explaining/understanding that past.

I would like to add that the characteristics of a historian were also present in Wiesenthal's project in the phases of documentation and representation, especially in the first of these. Wiesenthal was particularly adept at digging out new documents in archives and finding new witnesses and collecting their testimonies. He did this primarily for the purpose of judicial trials but, as mentioned above, he also had in mind the documentation of these events for future historians as an integrated part of his 'research programme', if we can call it that. 1947 seems to have been the starting point for Wiesenthal's historical schooling. At this time, he was invited to Nuremberg in connection with the War Crimes Tribunal going on there and was allowed to work in the archive of the Nuremberg Trials. This spell of archival work appears to me as a baptism of fire of the archival researcher/historian Wiesenthal. In his book *Ich jagte Eichmann*, he recounted the intensity with which he delved into the protocols, testimonies, and documentation of the ongoing trials against Nazi war criminals. He emphasises – and one can almost hear the hunger in his voice – how much he *learned* during those weeks in Nuremberg.<sup>19</sup> He narrated this experience as part of the red-hot prose in which he recounted his obsession with Eichmann, but I believe this almost manic preoccupation with finding and compiling information on this specific Nazi criminal may be regarded as a template for how Wiesenthal worked on any case. Dipping into a number of the many hundred case files in Wiesenthal's archive gave me the sense that this kind of archival and documentary research was a normal part of his 'research process', always trying his utmost and going to extreme lengths to find the decisive document or witness in order to clinch the case at hand.

Furthermore, the hard school of the many Nazi trials he was involved in taught him the importance of documentation. The testimonies, both written and oral, needed to be precise in their information of times, places, and persons reliably identified.<sup>20</sup> Later in his career, he could appear hardnosed when dismissing testimonies, which he clearly believed were true, but that he recognised would be much too vague or unspecific to stand up to the critical scrutiny of seasoned defence lawyers.<sup>21</sup> I think that this schooling is also visible in parts of Wiesenthal's writing that may not meet the demands of the historical profession as historical representation, but that are factually very precise and reliable in the details of the historical events recounted. Such

19 Wiesenthal was in Nuremberg twice in 1947 and apparently at least once in 1948. On his experience in Nuremberg, see primarily: Wiesenthal, *Ich jagte Eichmann*, 67-70, but also Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp, 91, and Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 116. On a similar experience in Dachau in 1947, see: Sporer/Steiner, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 65.

20 This learning process is highly visible in Wiesenthal's voluminous correspondence with different courts in Germany and Austria, in which the state attorneys and judges often stressed to Wiesenthal the importance of accuracy and reliability in testimonies, often in wording very similar as that Wiesenthal himself used when writing about this learning process later.

21 See for instance the anecdote relayed by Joseph Wechsberg in Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us*, 7.

fragments of historical prose appear in many of Wiesenthal's writings. They appear in the descriptions of his own experience of the Holocaust as well as in the background sections of the case descriptions of individual Nazi criminals in his three main books about his life and career.<sup>22</sup> Yet they also appear in the historical background, the construction of the plot, and the description of 'the setting' – for instance in the reconstruction of conversations of high ranking SS officers involved in 'Operation Reinhard' overheard by his protagonists – in his (ostensibly) fictional works (more of which below). Here Wiesenthal's schooling in the judicial processes evidently paid off handsomely in qualities also sought after in the practice of historiography; Wiesenthal's historical writings were based on high-quality "documentary evidence", as Ricœur termed it. Nevertheless, a reviewer of one of Wiesenthal's works of documentary fiction (a "Tatsachenroman", as he called it) lauded this quality in Wiesenthal's work as follows:

"hier [schreibt] ein Mann, der mit der Thematik verbunden und vertraut ist, wie kaum ein anderer. [...] Hier geht es dem Autor nicht nur darum, einen Roman vorzulegen, sondern hier findet der Leser ein Werk mit vielen Dimensionen. [...] Der Romancier Wiesenthal erzählt, der Historiker Wiesenthal ergänzt."<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, in the focal point of Wiesenthal's documentary fiction, the intimate link between 'history' and 'memory' in his preoccupation with the past becomes discernible.

### 'Memory': Collecting Testimonies – Giving Collective Testimony?

According to Ricœur, 'testimony' is the structural link between 'memory' and 'history', constituting the starting point both for the historiographical process and the process of memory evolving into collective forms. Testimony builds on its capacity to assert the factual reality of the reported event as well as on the certification of authenticity based on the experience of the speaker/author, in the sense of: I was there, believe me. If you do not believe me, ask someone else (who was there).<sup>24</sup> However, as part of the historiographical process,

"testimony does not run its course with the constitution of archives; it reappears at the end of the epistemological inquiry at the level of representation of the past through narrative, rhetorical devices, and images. Moreover, in some contemporary forms of deposition arising from the mass atrocities of the twentieth century, it resists not only explication and representation, but even its being placed into some archival reserve, to the point of maintaining itself at the margins of historiography and of throwing doubt on its intention to be truthful."<sup>25</sup>

This is one of the junctures that Ricœur identified, in which the historiographical process and the process of memory intersect and disturb one another at different points.

22 These being Wiesenthal, *Ich jagte Eichmann*; Wiesenthal, *The Murders Among Us*; and Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache*. On these books and their place in Wiesenthal's literary production, see more below.

23 Cited in Carmen Hofbauer, *Simon Wiesenthal als Publizist*, (Dissertation), Salzburg 2002, 177. Wiesenthal collected reviews and press material in connection with his books, see: SWA, II.1/A-II (in the respective files of his different publications).

24 Ricœur, *Memory*, 163-166.

25 *Ibid.*, 161.

A special quality of Wiesenthal's project was quite clearly that he had himself lived through the events he was later involved in researching and giving different forms of representation – he came out of that past, as Pelinka noted. Wiesenthal was overrun by the Nazi murder machinery in late June 1941. His home in Lwów (Lemberg; today Lviv) lay in the Soviet zone of occupied Poland in the years 1939–1941. Although Wiesenthal, as a member of the professional and intellectual classes, suffered from Soviet rule,<sup>26</sup> it was only with the arrival of Nazi German troops and their Ukrainian auxiliary units in Lwów in the days following 30 June 1941 that he was sucked into the events that later become known as the Holocaust. The story of his almost four-year traversal of Nazi-ruled Eastern Europe is an integrated part (in different ways) of his writings, reappearing in fragments in many of the case reports on Nazi criminals in his books, since Wiesenthal had personal knowledge of quite a few of those same Nazi criminals that he later sought to bring to justice.<sup>27</sup>

When Wiesenthal made his original list of 91 Nazi criminals, which he gave to the American occupation authorities in the spring of 1945, he based it on his own recent experience in Nazi-occupied Europe. Wiesenthal maintained that he had observed and made lists of Nazi criminals during the whole period of the Holocaust, which were however lost in the escalating chaos of his life during these years. Nevertheless, after his liberation from the Mauthausen concentration camp, he reconstructed much of this information from memory. This original list, which launched Wiesenthal's career as a 'Nazi hunter', consisted exclusively of Nazi criminals whose crimes he had himself witnessed.<sup>28</sup> This important role of Wiesenthal's personal memory as the basis of his coming quest is visible in the focus given in his investigations of Nazi criminals – especially in the early phase, but also in the overall structure of his life project as it evolved over several decades.

One salient aspect of Wiesenthal's investigations is that they at heart demonstrate a close link to his own personal past. In the cover letter appended to his original "Mauthausen list", one argument Wiesenthal gave to persuade the Americans to take him into their service was that his whole family and many close relatives had been murdered by the Nazis (at this time he did not yet know that his wife Cyla had survived). He felt that it was his duty to do what he could in helping with descriptions of the crimes and the identification of the criminals.<sup>29</sup> Just as the many witnesses interviewed in his Documentation Centre in Linz in the late 1940s related their own personal experiences when they gave testimony of Nazi crimes, Wiesenthal himself – in his overarching role supervising and directing this endeavour – was guided by his personal experiences. From early on, he engaged with crimes that had been committed in areas where he himself had lived, both in Lemberg (to use Wiesenthal's preferred name for this city) where he had been living and working when the Holocaust began, in his hometown

<sup>26</sup> Wiesenthal was a university-educated engineer and worked as an architect. He stemmed from a well-to-do middle-class family.

<sup>27</sup> For Wiesenthal's life story, see his three autobiographical books: Wiesenthal, *Ich jagte Eichmann*; Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us*; and Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache*. See also his two main biographies: Tom Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal. The Life and Legends*, London 2010, and Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*.

<sup>28</sup> Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 85–86.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Buczacz (today Buchach), and in Galicia more broadly.<sup>30</sup> Although he did not personally experience the events of the Holocaust at all of these locations, his interest in them seems to have emerged from the fact that this was Wiesenthal's own life world, his original 'Heimat' – he knew these places and he knew many people who had come from them. Buczacz in particular, where many of his relatives were murdered in recurring systematic mass executions of the Jewish population of the town between 1941 and 1944<sup>31</sup> or deported to nearby Belzec to be exterminated, held a special place in Wiesenthal's investigations.<sup>32</sup> In the summer of 1945, he already began interviewing refugees from Buczacz who were passing through Linz, repeatedly hearing the name of one specific Nazi murderer when he asked what they could report about the fate of his family there.<sup>33</sup> Much later, he would write in letters connected to court cases that he felt a special commitment to the issue at hand because he was born in Buczacz and many of his relatives had been murdered there.<sup>34</sup> Wiesenthal also focussed his research on a number of SS men who had been active in Buczacz during the mass executions, working throughout the 1960s and early 1970s and more sporadically up to 1979 trying to trace the Nazi criminals who had taken part in these crimes and helping to gather information and evidence against them. In one letter from 1964, Wiesenthal emphasised that he had been searching for one specific Nazi criminal "for twenty years".<sup>35</sup> In other cases, he emphasised that the Nazi criminal in question had almost certainly murdered certain individual members of Wiesenthal's family.<sup>36</sup> In one letter, he stated that this same Nazi criminal "hat rein zufällig meine gesamte in Buczacz lebende Familie ermordet. Ich war zu dieser Zeit nicht dort, ansonsten wäre ich auch nicht mehr unter den Lebenden."<sup>37</sup> After their reunion in 1945, Simon and his wife Cyla together drew up a list of 89 relatives who had perished in the Holocaust.<sup>38</sup> It is difficult to imagine the Nazi mass murder coming much closer than this. Wiesenthal's biographer Tom Segev took such information as evidence that Wiesenthal's motives for his Nazi-hunting were personal. "Wiesenthal devoted a considerable amount of time to Nazis who had mistreated him personally, including those who had been active in Buczacz and Lvov", Segev wrote while considering Wiesenthal's interest in the SS man who had commanded his work gang in the Płaszów concentration camp, which I think is a much too narrow and individualized way of approaching the matter.<sup>39</sup>

30 See: Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us*, 269-283. This orientation is also visible in Wiesenthal's archive of Nazi crimes and criminals, where "Buczacz", "Lemberg", and "Galizien" constitute large files stemming from Wiesenthal's special interest in these areas. SWA, I.1. Wiesenthal also served as a witness in a number of trials of crimes committed in these locations. This mode of procedure was not uncommon among Holocaust survivors who worked on documenting Nazi crimes during the early post-war period. See for instance: Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*, New York 2012, and Katharina Stengel, Hermann Langbein. *Ein Auschwitz-Überlebender in den Erinnerungspolitischen Konflikten der Nachkriegszeit*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2012.

31 On the fate of Buczacz during these years, see: Omer Bartov, *Anatomy of a Genocide. The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz*, New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/New Dehli 2018.

32 See: SWA, I.1., File "Buczacz".

33 Wiesenthal was interviewed by the Israeli police about his knowledge of crimes in Buczacz, see: the protocol from 24 August 1965 in SWA, I.1., File "Buczacz". Wiesenthal's Linz archive also contains much material in connection with Nazi crimes committed in Buczacz (see: YVA/SWC/JHDCL/M.9).

34 See for instance: the letter to Landgericht Saarbrücken, Untersuchungsrichter Hasslocher, from 18 June 1960, who had contacted him about information concerning crimes committed in Galicia during the war. SWA, I.1., File "Buczacz".

35 See the letter of thanks to an informant from 21 July 1964 as well as the letter to State Attorney Sighting in Stuttgart from 26 August 1963, SWA, I.1., File "Buczacz".

36 See the protocol referenced in footnote 33, SWA, I.1., File "Buczacz".

37 See the letter to Kurt Feichtlbauer, the editor of the Austrian daily *Kurier*, from 11 September 1973, SWA, I.1., File "Buczacz".

38 See for instance: Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 73.

39 Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 108 (and similarly on 193).

This dimension of Wiesenthal's interest is also, to some extent, traceable through his traversal of the Nazi killing fields in Eastern and Central Europe. In a much later TV interview, Wiesenthal stood in his office with the map of the Nazi concentration camp 'universe' behind him – a map that he saw every day – and he traced with his finger his own traversal of that universe.<sup>40</sup> His experiences on this trip also made their mark on Wiesenthal's project. A strong focus on Nazi criminals active in the Płaszów concentration camp near Cracow, where he spent a period in the autumn of 1944 during the evacuation westwards of the remnants of the Eastern European concentration camp system, is for instance evident in his project.<sup>41</sup> The Nazi criminals of his last station, Mauthausen, were also accorded special attention, especially during the early years.<sup>42</sup>

I would argue that the moving image of Wiesenthal running his finger over the map of the Nazi concentration camp system constitutes a glimpse into Wiesenthal's own memory work, which he conducted practically throughout his life. He often repeated the story, with some relish, that his wife Cyla, probably with some desperation, once commented: "I am not married to a man. I am married to thousands, or maybe millions of dead."<sup>43</sup> Wiesenthal's archive may be viewed as an extension of his own memory of the Holocaust. The documentation he collected there began in his own experience and extended outwards through the many testimonies he collected, the many witnesses he heard or corresponded with over the decades, and the documentation gathered from the Nazi authorities, through which he viewed the same events from the other side, gradually extending into an aggregated memory. Discernible in his own writings, as well as in reports of people who met him or worked in his Documentation Centre for longer or shorter periods, is a picture of how Wiesenthal lived in a universe of memories documented in his archive. It shows how he spent days rummaging through old files, linking together old and new information, to divulge how sessions with witnesses/victims turned into crying parties, when the memories they both recalled merged in a common memory of unspeakable events that had irrevocably shaped their lives.<sup>44</sup> Just as was demonstrated through the memory feat of taking down a surprisingly reliable list of 91 Nazi criminals from memory in 1945, Wiesenthal seems to have kept a large amount of the information he gathered over the years in his memory, with the help of certain memory devices, foremost his archive, but also the map on his wall, which he could resort to when his memory could not handle the mass of information. Tom Segev viewed this as the tragedy of Wiesenthal's life: that he remained chained to the Holocaust for the

40 See: *I Have Never Forgotten You*, Chapter 2, 24:00.

41 For instance, there are files on the camp commander Amon Göth and the camp medical doctor Karl Babor in Wiesenthal's archive, SWA, I.1. Wiesenthal's original "Mauthausen list" had a strong focus on the Płaszów camp. Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 85. According to Wiesenthal, he had been examined by Dr. Babor in Płaszów and had first-hand experience of his crimes, which he made into one of his most penetrating published case files. See: Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us*, 225-237; Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 85-86, and Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 108.

42 See for instance: Sporrer/Steiner, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 65. There is also a fairly large "Mauthausen" file in SWA, I.1., but most of Wiesenthal's material in connection with this early preoccupation with the crimes committed in the Mauthausen concentration camp lies in the Linz archive, YVA/SWC/JHDCL/M.9.

43 See for instance: Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 93, and *Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp*, 126.

44 See for instance: Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache*, 38-39; Wiesenthal, *The Murderers are Among Us*, 6-7; *Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp*, 76; Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 3, 85; and Sporrer/Steiner, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 20, 65. See also the literary rendering of such a meeting of victims of the Holocaust in *Simon Wiesenthal, Max und Helen. Ein Tatsachenroman*, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin 1981 (particularly the long nighttime talk between "Wiesenthal" and "Max" about the events they experienced).

rest of his life.<sup>45</sup> I would suggest that it is possible to view the matter in a more positive light, although there clearly was a price to pay for using oneself as a ‘memory amplifier’, as Wiesenthal undoubtedly did.

The several trials on Nazi crimes perpetrated in Galicia and especially in Lemberg in which Wiesenthal was involved as a researcher or witness may be viewed as a focal point for discerning this quality of Wiesenthal’s endeavour. The trials of Nazi crimes committed in Lemberg, the place where Wiesenthal and his wife and mother experienced the onslaught of the Nazi murder machinery in the years 1941–1944, are especially interesting.<sup>46</sup> In the mid-1960s, during one of these trials, Wiesenthal was working on his second autobiographical book, *The Murderers Among Us*. Here, he expressed great expectations of this trial as a main opportunity to work through the Nazi crime complex that he had experienced first-hand. He even viewed it as an important follow-up to the Eichmann trial a few years before and hoped that this trial also would help to keep the events of the Holocaust alive in public memory. As in so many other cases, the outcome of the trial did not meet Wiesenthal’s expectations. However, the most interesting part is how Wiesenthal so close to the trial recounted his experience of acting as a witness at this specific trial. In his book, he related what he told the judges about the quality of his testimony:

“I couldn’t make a mistake about a major crime that I’ve seen with my own eyes [...]. When one sees a friend killed before his own eyes he doesn’t forget it. But I wouldn’t be so sure when minor details are concerned. In such cases I cannot always distinguish between what I’ve seen myself and what I’ve heard from others who were also there, and it is possible that their stories fuse with my own memories.”<sup>47</sup>

In the mass of documents and testimonies lying in the archive of Wiesenthal’s early Documentation Centre in Linz, there are also a few testimonies labelled “collective testimony”.<sup>48</sup> They constitute written group testimonies about Nazi atrocities that occurred at a certain location and a certain point in time, and are co-signed by several witnesses. These testimonies give an ‘aggregated’ picture about a certain event or chain of events, a context within which individual testimonies can be assessed. Turning the other way, one can also see that such a collective testimony is a step on the way to aggregated forms of memory, the social memory of a group (for instance Holocaust survivors from Lemberg), and can eventually merge into the collective memory of a society. When Wiesenthal said that he may have “fused” other’s “stories” with his “own memory” while giving testimony, this seems to me to be a very good description of Wiesenthal’s larger project of collecting testimonies, integrating them in his own self, and making them known publicly through different

45 Segev, Simon Wiesenthal, 404. Segev elaborated on this tragedy of Wiesenthal’s life in an interview in the Austrian daily *Der Standard*, 7 September 2010, 6, saying that Wiesenthal “war ein völliger Sklave der Vergangenheit”.

46 On Wiesenthal’s involvement in trials concerning Nazi crimes in Lemberg, see for instance: Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us*, 257, 272-274; Sporrer/Steiner, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 36-38; and Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp, 76-77. See also the files labelled “Lemberg” and “Galicia” in SWA, I.1. The “Lemberg” file is one of the single largest files in the entire archive, containing both material in connection with Nazi crime trials as well as material having to do with commemoration of the events that took place there (see Files: “Lemberg 01-15”). Wiesenthal’s mother was taken away on 23 August 1942 and most probably murdered at Belzec shortly afterwards. Cyla was able to leave Lemberg in 1943 and hide out in Warsaw but later ended up again in a Nazi forced labour camp until the end of the war. Wiesenthal himself remained in Lemberg and its vicinity until the summer of 1944, when he was ‘evacuated’ westwards together with the small remainder of prisoners in the Janowska camp.

47 Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us*, 257. He told this story many times later, with some variation of emphasis. See also: Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp, 76-77.

48 See for instance: YVA/SWC/JHDCL/M.9-788.

media. When he said that he was in some cases influenced by what he heard from others who were also there, he seemed to already have been in the process of embedding his own testimony in a mass of testimonies, which together authenticate and give weight to the individual testimony in the way suggested by Ricœur (if you don't believe me, ask someone else who was also there). Indeed, I would like to suggest that Wiesenthal's endeavour, viewed from a certain angle, may be understood as giving collective testimony of the events of the Holocaust.

Wiesenthal's testimony was given in many different media, which placed different formal demands on the narrative form of the testimony. Wiesenthal recognised from an early stage that the immensity of the crimes of Nazism made real retribution impossible. Instead, he settled for a pragmatic programme: It was important to keep bringing Nazi criminals to justice for two reasons, he often repeated. First, in order to keep the memory of these events alive in the public and for coming generations, and second, in order to make the remaining free Nazi criminals feel that they would never be safe from ultimate retribution – and ultimately as a warning to future murderers.<sup>49</sup> For these reasons, Nazi criminal trials remained at the top of Wiesenthal's list of 'public work' for his cause of keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, after the Eichmann trial, his main aim was to arrange a "second Eichmann trial", meaning another trial that would receive a lot of public attention and further his dual aim. The trial on Nazi crimes in Lemberg mentioned above was only one of several cases he worked on during the 1960s that he hoped would become a "second Eichmann trial".<sup>51</sup>

A second form of public work was the recurring press conferences Wiesenthal held, often with the intention of pushing judicial authorities or politicians into acting on a certain case, but, as often, with the wider aim of spreading knowledge of the crimes of Nazism and the Holocaust among the public. In this category of public work, one could also include the many 'campaigns' Wiesenthal orchestrated throughout his career, for instance sending out mass letters to followers asking them to put pressure on decision makers, while simultaneously publishing campaign brochures consisting of a selection of the letters, or himself sending mass letters directly to decision makers of a certain type. As Chancellor of Austria, Bruno Kreisky became the target of the first sub-type in 1970 and 1975 respectively regarding the issue of the Nazi background of his ministers or designated coalition partners. Elected politicians both in Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany became targets of the second sub-type regarding the issue of lifting the statute of limitations for murder in 1964–1966, 1969, and 1979, in order to ensure that Nazi crimes could still be prosecuted after these dates. The presentation of the *Austrian Memorandum* in 1966

49 See: Segev, Simon Wiesenthal, 110; Sporrer/Steiner, Simon Wiesenthal, 147-148; and Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, 8-9.

50 I have tentatively identified five forms of public work in Wiesenthal's project: 1) Nazi criminal trials 2) public campaigns and press conferences, 3) literary work, 4) films, and 5) public commemoration. I will address the first three here.

51 Wiesenthal himself highlighted the case of Hermann Höfle, SS-Gruppenführer Odilo Globocnik's chief of staff in the SS and Police District of Lublin, as his designated "second Eichmann trial". Höfle had a key role in the coordination of 'Operation Reinhard'. He committed suicide in his cell before the trial against him started. See: Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache*, 336-342. The closest that Wiesenthal ever came to a "second Eichmann trial" was probably the extradition from Brazil and sentencing in Germany of Franz Stangl in 1967–1969. Stangl had been one of the main operatives in 'Operation Reinhard' as commander of the extermination camps at Sobibor and Treblinka. On Wiesenthal's work on this case, see: Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, 178-185. On Stangl, see also the classic work that can, indirectly, be viewed as part of the 'public effect' of Wiesenthal's search for Stangl, Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness. From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder*, London 1974.

to the Austrian chancellor was an important example of Wiesenthal's many actions of this general type.<sup>52</sup>

Wiesenthal's enlistment of a large number of public intellectuals and statesmen in his *Sunflower* project, which in literary form raised the basic moral question of the possibility of forgiving crimes such as those committed by the Nazis, constitutes the bridge to the third form of public work:<sup>53</sup> the representation of his collective testimony in literary form. He wrote two types of books, which are however much more closely related than they may appear.<sup>54</sup> The first type consists of his three main autobiographical books, the main content of which is his own public life story and case stories from his work in finding Nazi criminals, namely *Ich jagte Eichmann* (1961), *The Murderers Among Us* (1967), and *Recht, nicht Rache* (1988). While the first of these was written by Wiesenthal himself and is a very illuminating document for understanding Wiesenthal's motivations and the origins of his work, the two latter books turn more in the direction of storytelling, recounting a number of the most important case files of his career inside a loose frame of his own life story. The latter are in both cases presented by the editor of the respective book, in the first case Joseph Wechsberg and in the second Peter Michael Lingens. In the foreword to *Recht, nicht Rache*, which is subtitled "Erinnerungen", Wiesenthal explicates how he wanted most of all to document all of the many hundred case files he had worked upon over the years. However, as this was impractical in book format, he had instead settled for a selection of "exemplary" cases.<sup>55</sup> It was surely very difficult for Wiesenthal to restrain himself and to choose a selection of memories out of the overflowing 'collective memory' he was carrying around within himself by this time. Nevertheless, his choice of exemplary cases may be understood as a distillation of a small number of symbolic narratives from the mass of testimonies to carry his collective testimony and to throw light upon different aspects of the crimes that he did not want the world to forget about.

The second type of book Wiesenthal wrote within this form of public work consisted of his "Tatsachenromane". In these books, one can observe how the process of modulating personal experience and testimonies collected into symbolic narratives was quickened by literary freedom.<sup>56</sup> Not that Wiesenthal invented much in his stories. With a familiarity of Wiesenthal's writings and life story, one can easily see how much he drew from his own experience. These books are to differing degrees and in different ways fictive works about the experience of the Holocaust as seen from various perspec-

52 This is a huge subject. For some reflections, see: Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, 164-167, 207-211; Sporrer/Steiner, Simon Wiesenthal, 152-167; and Segev, Simon Wiesenthal, 189-193. See also: SWA, I.I., Files "Verjährung 01-16", and Simon Wiesenthal (ed.), *Verjährung? 200 Persönlichkeiten des öffentlichen Lebens sagen Nein. Eine Dokumentation*, Frankfurt am Main 1965. Specifically on the Kreisky issue, see: Segev, Simon Wiesenthal, 241-254, 272-291; Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, 246-272; Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache*, 354-374; and Wiesenthal's campaign brochure: Wladyslaw Grabowski (ed.), *Angriff auf das Dokumentationszentrum des BJVN und die Reaktion aus aller Welt*, Vienna 1970. Material on this affair and the subsequent public conflict between Wiesenthal and Kreisky in 1975 can be found in SWA, I.I., Files "Kreisky 01-08" and "Peter 01-08", as well as in the Bruno Kreisky Archiv, Nachlass Bruno Kreisky, I.4 "Gerichtsakten", boxes 9-14 (previously labelled "Wiesenthal I-VI").

53 See: Simon Wiesenthal, *Die Sonnenblume. Von Schuld und Vergebung*, Hamburg 1970. The book was published in numerous languages and editions. See: Hofbauer, *Simon Wiesenthal als Publizist*, 156-163, and Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 76-80.

54 See: Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 217-228; Hofbauer, *Simon Wiesenthal als Publizist*, passim; Irene Etzersdorfer, *James Bond oder Don Quichotte. Simon Wiesenthals Kampf gegen Lüge und Verdrängung*, Vienna 1992, 143-163.

55 Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache*, 7.

56 The most probing treatment of Wiesenthal's fictional works that I have come across is Etzersdorfer, *James Bond*, 143-163. See especially the reflections on 151-152. See also: Pick, *Simon Wiesenthal*, 226-228.

tives and mixed with historic/didactic matter.<sup>57</sup> In *Kryzstyna oder die Tragödie des polnischen Widerstandes* (1986), Wiesenthal interlaced his fictive story about a Christian Polish woman working (and dying) for the Polish resistance with whole chapters of historical prose giving the factual background to the events depicted in the novel proper. However, the fictive story of the novel also turned out to have a real background in a testimony Wiesenthal received in connection with a trial he was involved in many years before he wrote the book. In *Max und Helen* (1981), in which the fictive and factual elements of the narrative are more integrated, one of the (fictive) characters is named “Wiesenthal” and is a famous “Nazi hunter”. This story, which has great moral depth, also appears to be drawn from a case file that Wiesenthal could never close due to the extremely delicate interlacing in the case between Jews and Nazis, who had been closely involved with one another inside the power hierarchies of the Nazi murder machinery and who survived and built up new lives in post-war Europe.

In many ways, it does not seem very fruitful to treat these two genres of books in Wiesenthal’s oeuvre separately, since both tell symbolic narratives about the Holocaust and make a case for including these narratives in the collective memory of post-war Europe. Wiesenthal had already contributed to giving collective testimony of the events of the Holocaust in the courts of Germany and Austria when he worked on his cases. Yet in these instances, the medium demanded sticking close to the facts of the cases. In his literary works, Wiesenthal was liberated from such constraints and could tell his symbolic stories in a more freehanded way – albeit with a gradual shift from his autobiographical works to his works of fiction. However, that Wiesenthal did not manage to keep his stories straight has been a recurring point of criticism. One of his biographers, Tom Segev, has grappled closely with the issue of the relative unreliability of Wiesenthal’s stories of his own life and actions. In his biography, Segev himself often questioned Wiesenthal’s own story of his life in a way that resembles critics who have tried to prove that Wiesenthal was a fake and a liar.<sup>58</sup> However, in several interviews that Segev gave following the publication of his biography in 2010, he professed to having worked through so many of the different narratives Wiesenthal gave of his life and of different case histories that he had come to the conclusion that Wiesenthal did not lie or consciously distort his life story.<sup>59</sup> Even if Segev found many factual mistakes and stories that were varied continuously, sometimes apparently adapted to the current forum of their delivery, he nevertheless concluded that Wiesenthal’s stories were essentially true. He moreover came to the very interesting conclusion that:

“The list of lies is long and is in the book [Segev’s biography]. But he is not a liar. A liar is someone who reaps benefits from his lies. Wiesenthal believed that what he said was true. He adopts events and stories and insists that they are his.”<sup>60</sup>

57 Wiesenthal, *Max und Helen*. Ein Tatsachenroman, Berlin 1981, Simon Wiesenthal, *Kryzstyna oder die Tragödie des polnischen Widerstandes*, Munich 1986, and Simon Wiesenthal, *Flucht vor dem Schicksal*, Munich 1988. They were all published in several languages and in many different countries. See: Hofbauer, *Simon Wiesenthal als Publizist*, 151-155, 168-178.

58 There are several such works, one of the most prominent being Eli M. Rosenbaum (with William Hoffer), *Betrayal. The Untold Story of the Kurt Waldheim Investigation and Cover-Up*, New York 1993. Wiesenthal generated conflict and repeatedly garnered negative attention from people he had offended. Eli Rosenbaum wrote his book in anger over Wiesenthal’s failure to support the international campaign against Kurt Waldheim. Segev’s purpose is, however, clearly critically historical.

59 See the interviews in the Austrian daily *Der Standard*, 7 September 2010, 6, and in the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, 8 September 2010, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5111271> (25 October 2019).

60 Cited in Dalia Karpel, *Hunting Simon Wiesenthal*. Review of Tom Segev, *Simon Wiesenthal. The Life and Legends*, including an interview with the author, in *Haaretz*, 8 September 2010.

However, I would not use the word “lie” to describe the continuous variation through which Wiesenthal elaborated his symbolic narratives. I would say that this was a form that evolved due to the overarching character of Wiesenthal’s project of giving collective testimony. When he wove his own experience into the testimonies of others, he also affected his own individual testimony and memory by fusing it with other experiences. As long as he could keep the format of each specific medium that a given story was expressed in, this was not a problem. Nevertheless, I think Segev may be wrong on at least one count in the above quote: Wiesenthal may not have reaped any benefit from his “lies” in any conventional sense, but his collective testimony did. In his judicial work, Wiesenthal was always meticulous in following the rules of the game, because there was no benefit in enhancing stories in court. In his recollection of the Lemberg trial, Wiesenthal asserted that the judges were impressed by his reasoning about the quality of his testimony, that they appreciated the separation he made between things that he was absolutely sure of and others where he was unsure whether they were self-experienced or stemmed from another testimony of the same event. He asserted that this led his testimony to be assessed as more reliable.<sup>61</sup> In the fictional narratives, on the other hand, there was a benefit in enhancing stories and fusing his own memories with the testimonies of others and with documentation found in archives or in court cases. This was also completely unproblematic in that medium. Where it became problematic was in his autobiographical narratives and in other public representations of his life story, in which he sometimes (as Segev persuasively documented) let the narrative character of his collective testimony take precedence over its factual accuracy.

## Conclusion

In a sense, Wiesenthal embodied the process of memory as described by Ricœur. When Wiesenthal took upon himself the task of giving collective testimony, as I have discussed here, he transferred into his own self the process of memory. It ranged from his own personal memory, through giving testimony and assembling and fusing his testimony with other testimonies into a collective testimony – an endeavour that was supported and extended through the documentation he had collected in his archive – to, finally, attempting to make this collective testimony run into and shape collective memory.

As noted above, Ricœur observed how a testimony may return to haunt the historiographical process in its later stage of ‘representation’, maintaining itself on the margins of the historiographical process, even throwing doubt upon its intentions of being truthful. He further elaborated this aspect, noting that “the testimonies of those who survived the extermination camps of the Shoah” tend to provoke “a kind of short-circuit” of the historiographical process, leading the testimony, in its core unassimilated to critical documentation and models of explanation/understanding, straight into the phase of representation, causing a veritable crisis of historical understanding.<sup>62</sup> However, Botz has taught us to see that Wiesenthal did indeed make a real and extremely well informed historiographical effort to dress his findings in a

<sup>61</sup> See note 47.

<sup>62</sup> See: Ricœur, *Memory*, 161, 163-166, 175-181, and 497-498. Ricœur developed this line of thought while reflecting on the debate on the Holocaust and “the limits of representation” published in Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, Cambridge, MA 1992. See: Ricœur, *Memory*, 248-261.

model of explanation/understanding. It is conceivable that Wiesenthal's thesis of the guilt of Austrians in the Holocaust – presented in the *Austrian Memorandum* in 1966 – was rejected by the historical profession in Austria precisely because it was taken as a questioning of the profession's intentions of being truthful. Whatever the case may be, Botz demonstrated that the Austrian historical profession in the 1960s (and for at least another two decades) was spectacularly poorly equipped to receive this attempt at historical explanation/understanding and to assimilate it into a critical scholarly discussion. Therefore, I suggest, the powerful, historiographically invested form in which Wiesenthal's collective testimony was presented in the *Austrian Memorandum* merely served to amplify the alienating effect that Ricœur identified. It led an extremely strong current of testimony, like a bolt out of the past, straight into the political centre of Austria, and through the public presentation of the memorandum and the public response and debate that ensued, further into Austrian collective memory.

Concerning the effects of Wiesenthal's action on collective memory, it is useful to turn to Ricœur's argument that "sensus communis" is an important part of the process of assimilating a testimony into collective memory. For acceptance, it is important that the testimony can be placed within a collective frame of reference, a commonly recognised past. For instance, a testimony needs to be divested of its 'foreignness' in order to be accepted; there must be a possibility of identification of the members of the community concerned with the testimony.<sup>63</sup> That Austrian collective memory was not yet ready to accept Wiesenthal's collective testimony became apparent some years later. In 1975, Wiesenthal orchestrated yet another of his many public campaigns, making public that Friedrich Peter, the leader of the small far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), who was the designated coalition partner to social democratic Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, had been a member of an SS-Einsatzgruppe on the eastern front during the Second World War and had most probably partaken in the murderous activities of that unit. As usual, Wiesenthal went about things in a thorough manner, making contact with the President of Austria, Rudolf Kirchschläger, holding a press conference, giving interviews, and organising yet another mail campaign targeting Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky. The escalation of the conflict was not only Wiesenthal's fault, as Kreisky reacted furiously, among many other things publicly letting Wiesenthal know that – I am now dressing Kreisky's words in Ricœur's language – "You say we should believe you, because you were there. I don't believe you, because I have spoken to others who were there, and they say you were a Gestapo agent."<sup>64</sup> Kreisky (on very weak grounds) harshly rejected Wiesenthal's collective testimony. In an opinion poll taken in Austria at the time, 83 per cent of the respondents answered that they

63 Ricœur, *Memory*, 165-166, footnote 24 on 530-531, and 175-176. Ricœur mainly considered the quality of foreignness of Holocaust testimonies in themselves, but I believe one can turn this issue around and consider it in terms of the conditioning of a collective memory making it unable to assimilate even a factually based and well-argued presentation of a (collective) testimony. The foreignness would in that case emanate more from the conditioning of the collective memory than from the quality of the testimony. Ricœur did also look into this aspect, discussing it as a case of "manipulated memory" (Ricœur, *Memory*, 80-86, 448-452), where political institutions present an official history, which is "publicly learned and celebrated", here 85. For instance, I believe this to be case with Wiesenthal's testimony and Austrian collective memory during the post-war era, which is an issue at the heart of my ongoing investigation into the subject of history and memory in the Second Austrian Republic.

64 On the conflict between Wiesenthal and Kreisky in 1975, see: Ingrid Böhler, "Wenn die Juden ein Volk sind, so ist es ein mieses Volk". Die Kreisky-Peter-Wiesenthal-Affäre 1975, in: Michael Gehler/Hubert Sickinger (ed.), *Politische Skandale und Affären in Österreich. Von Mayerling bis Waldheim*, Vienna 1995, 502-531, as well as the references in footnote 52 above.

believed Kreisky, while only three per cent answered that they believed Wiesenthal.<sup>65</sup>

Wiesenthal later wrote that the following six weeks were the worst in his life since the end of the war, that he felt that he was being treated like a leper by the Austrian public, and that he was considering emigrating from “his new Heimat”.<sup>66</sup> The long-term effect of this public conflict was in practical terms to put an end to Wiesenthal’s commitment to his cause within Austria.<sup>67</sup> Instead, he focussed on spreading his collective testimony internationally, where he was highly visible and received numerous awards and honorary doctorates for his work during the 1970s and 1980s. The first official recognition Wiesenthal received in Austria came when he was awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna in 1989. At the ceremony, the Chancellor of Austria Franz Vranitzky held a speech in which he focussed on Wiesenthal’s work during the preceding decades as a crucial endeavour in the creation of a future Austrian collective identity, building on a true recognition of Austria’s past.<sup>68</sup> Vranitzky’s appraisal of the importance of such recognition appears to have reached its completion two years later, when he made the important public admission in parliament of the guilt of many Austrians for the crimes of Nazism and specifically those of the Holocaust.<sup>69</sup> In the 1990s, Wiesenthal was even given official support for his initiative of building a Holocaust memorial at a central location in Vienna. In October 2000, only a few years before his death, he held a speech at the unveiling of this memorial, the design and placing of which he had closely monitored and defended in public.<sup>70</sup> Except for when he spoke, Wiesenthal needed to sit throughout the ceremony, too old and fragile to stand for a prolonged period. On one of the pictures taken, the President of Austria Thomas Klestil is standing behind Wiesenthal’s chair, like a guard of honour.<sup>71</sup> In his last years, Wiesenthal’s collective testimony was indeed received and accepted with great acclaim by official Austria, and this recognition is set in stone at the Judenplatz in Vienna. However, its acceptance as part of Austrian collective memory is still an undecided issue.

65 See the interview with Peter Michael Lingers in *I Have Never Forgotten You*, Chapter 5, 65:00.

66 Wiesenthal, *Recht, nicht Rache*, 366.

67 I believe this is physically visible in the Simon Wiesenthal Archive, where the files dealing with his project of having his testimony spread and received in the Austrian public reveals a curious gap in the years 1976–1986. See: SWA, I.I., Files “Österreich 01-06”.

68 See: Eva Choung-Fux (ed.), *Vergessen gibt es nicht. Eine Dokumentation der Akademischen Feier am 27. April 1989 in der Säulenhalle des Österreichischen Museums für angewandte Kunst anlässlich der Verleihung der Ehrenmitgliedschaft der Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Wien an Simon Wiesenthal*, Vienna 1989, 33–35.

69 See: Stenographisches Protokoll. 35. Sitzung des Nationalrates der Republik Österreich. XVIII. Gesetzgebungsperiode. Montag, 8. 7. 1991, 3279–3283. Pick, Simon Wiesenthal, 311–312, quotes a letter from Vranitzky to Wiesenthal saying that his “numerous useful discussions” with Wiesenthal had contributed to the government’s new posture and the declaration of Austrian responsibility for the events of the Holocaust.

70 See: Simon Wiesenthal (ed.), *Projekt: Judenplatz Wien. Zur Konstruktion von Erinnerung*, Vienna 2000. See also the traces of Wiesenthal’s endeavours to realise the memorial in SWA, II., C-II.1-3.

71 See the photographs of the ceremony in SWA, II., C-II.2.

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