

## CONFERENCE:

Convergences: Fifth Annual Conference of the Memory Studies Association

July 5-9, 2021

## PANEL:

Relational Memories

July 9, 2021, 10:00 – 12:00 CET

## ABSTRACTS:

**Irina Tcherneva (CERCEC-EHESS, Paris):**

### ***Soviet Cameras Documenting the Nazi Crimes (1941-1947)***

The VHH project aggregates film footage of the Holocaust that is currently dispersed across archival institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia and other former Soviet Republics. This contribution will focus on Soviet film footage, which is little known internationally. The work of our Cinésov research team in 2014-2015 consisted of identifying and presenting some of these exemplars in the exhibition *Filming the War: The Holocaust through a Soviet lens (1941-1946)* at the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris. The VHH project enables a broadening of research and the identification of hitherto unknown images.

Introducing these images into research requires analysis that situates them chronologically and geographically, as well as in relation to the victims that they show. This contribution will present the procedures of contextualization that inscribe these images into a micro-history of the documentation of Nazi crimes by the Soviets. I will describe the research undertaken in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus and the efforts made in reconstructing the preservation and circulation of the images in various institutions, territories and editions. This is the only way to trace the origins of the films, to reconstruct the most complete versions, and to understand the logic of their selection by Soviet professionals. The film materials currently described as raw footage are in reality archival artifacts.

I will also discuss the methods used to interrogate the film stock through textual materials in the cameramen's archival files. This latter corpus is a key element in detecting losses, discarded images and filming orders by various power institutions. This procedure allows



a precise identification, image by image, denoting their circulation, which had blurred geographical landmarks. An analysis of memoirs and investigative documents on Nazi crimes by local commissions, as well as a confrontation with sets of photographs taken in the same places, makes it possible to approach the problem of selecting information at the time of filming.

**Fabian Schmidt (Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF, Potsdam):**

### ***Selectivity and Image Migration***

The paper focusses on the criterion of selectivity during the formation of remembrances, specifically with selectivity and the migration of memories within the visual histories of the Holocaust. Selectivity in remembrances as discussed by Sebald and Weyand<sup>1</sup> is supposed to define modes of handing down and appropriation as much as of “disappropriation” of memories and so far has not been in the focus of memory studies. Selectivity can take on various forms, beyond simple repression, such as omitting parts of a memory passed on as described by Harald Welzer in his well-known study “Opa war kein Nazi”<sup>2</sup> (Granddad wasn’t a Nazi), where the formation of family remembrances is scrutinised. However, on the level of public remembrances and especially in connection with imageries, selectivity seems to operate in more complex patterns. Especially in contexts where parts of a historical narrative have to be suppressed or reinterpreted collectively, the borders of remembrances are affirmed with the help of denominators that signify the status of certain images or memories.

Along three examples of the re-use of archive footage this paper tries to make tangible the meaning of selectivity for image migration. The use and non-use of liberation footage in documentaries in the 1990s is the first example for selectivity which deals with the emergence of new relations due to the suppression of old ones.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the history of the photograph “vom Baumhängen” in Buchenwald is reconstructed as example for a conditional handing down. The third example deals with AI recognition of similarity in online reverse-image searches. Modes of selection and limitation are reconstructed, ethical implications considered.

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<sup>1</sup> For selectivity as a function of remembrances see Sebald, Gerd and Jan Weyand. 2011. Zur Formierung sozialer Gedächtnisse. In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie Jg. 40, Heft 3, p.180.

<sup>2</sup> Welzer, Harald. 2002. Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis. Fischer: Frankfurt am Main.

<sup>3</sup> See Debarati Sanyal. 2015. Memory and Complicity. Fordham University Press, NY, p.99ff.

**Lital Henig (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem):**

***Relating Visual Past and Present in the Digital Age: Towards a "Taxonomy of Relations" for Visual Analysis and Textual Annotation***

How do digitized historical images relate to each other as well as to their later, popular culture manifestations? Deriving from an extensive visual analysis of a wide corpus of images that refer to liberation, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem team suggests a taxonomy of relations for the annotation and visual analysis of image relations. As an overall principle, the taxonomy of relations can be regarded as a kind of a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980): a tool that maps the ways images change from one thing to another. It describes their process of metamorphosis as an anti-genealogical process, non-hierarchical tool, which leads to various, multilayered, and multilinked, relations between images. As such, the taxonomy of relations is a tool for image annotation and analysis, which considers not only the changeability of images, but the various readings of them. With these attributes, we claim that the taxonomy of relations progresses our understanding of the visual history of the Holocaust in the digital age: a visual history that is shaped by the convergence of old and new media, deals with digital and digitized media objects, and is affected by users' constant participation and co-creation.

**Noga Stiassny (Hebrew University of Jerusalem):**

***Visual Relations / Relational Memories***

Memory scholars tend to refer to the artist as a "maker of memory". But what if the image makes the memory no less than the artist does? Following Martha Langford's suggestion to adopt a "methodology of memoriography" as part of art history scholarship, Stiassny's presentation discusses the need to consider both visual relations and relational memories when constructing a memoriography of the Holocaust.

**Ingo Zechner (Ludwig Botzmann Institute for Digital History):**

***Annotating and linking – Establishing relations in the Visual History of the Holocaust Media Management and Search Infrastructure***

The VHH project develops and applies digital technologies to explore, recreate and create relational memories. Introducing a new generation of digital asset management systems (DAMs), the Visual History of the Holocaust Media Management and Search Infrastructure (VHH-MMSI) provides both a digital repository and a comprehensive set of digital tools to analyze its content.

This presentation expands on the key concepts of the technologies, techniques and practices involved: the VHH project's understanding of advanced digitization that makes data and metadata scalable and traceable; the adaption and implementation of a relational data model and controlled vocabularies; the verbalization of digitized moving images through automated and manual time-based annotation; the linking of digitized films with photographs, texts and other media types; the mapping of different data sets to each other and to the time and space of their origin.

Relational memories transcend individual as well as collective memory and remembrance. The VHH-MMSI encourages its users to engage in an analysis of this impersonal dimension that constitutes significant parts of our relation to the past, the present, and the future. At the same time, it contributes to this depersonalization by employing standardization procedures and machine learning technologies. This inherent tension between a humanist and a post-human approach seems to be characteristic for Digital Humanities in general and will also be addressed in this presentation.