



Holocaust Memory Revisited. The Hugo Valentin Centre, Uppsala University; The Department of History, Stockholm University, 21.03.2013-23.03.2013.

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Holocaust Memory Revisited

The Holocaust occupies a firm position in the collective memory of the 21st century, even on a global scale. Art and popular culture have been important in raising this widespread awareness. However, our relationship with the past does not remain static. With fewer and fewer survivors alive and commemoration through new media, such as the internet, the transmission of Holocaust memory takes new shapes. Thus, research about the genocide of the European Jews stands ahead of several challenges – as well as possibilities – which were acknowledged during the conference “Holocaust Memory Revisited” in Uppsala. A central question was how references to the Holocaust are made in European art and popular culture since the 1990s onward, and what these tell us of its relevance for contemporary societies in a new memorial landscape.

Already in the welcome note, the German ambassador to Sweden, HARALD KINDERMANN, touched upon a theme capturing many of the central aspects discussed. Stating that in a future absence of survivors, younger generations will need new ways to access the Holocaust since it is still an ongoing process, which is *there*, not *then*. He claimed that art will be of great importance in opening our hearts in order to understand our past.

Accordingly, ERNST VAN ALPHEN (Leiden) highlighted the last decades’ intensified interest in art mediating the Holocaust in the first keynote lecture, addressing the fact that postwar generations only have indirect access to the genocide. Many memorials have been es-

tablished since the 1990s, often digitally in order to keep memory alive and for educational purposes. Several new memorials are based upon the format of lists, which is a respected but also problematic commemoration practice. It highlights every individual victim, but on the other hand, it may produce uncanny associations to listing methods used by Nazi perpetrators themselves. A paradoxical effect of seemingly endless lists is that they become less specific in their referentiality. Thus, they rather function metaphorically, becoming symbols for all who died. The project van Alphen mentioned attempted to make memory more specific again by adding photographs of victims.

Clearly, tensions might occur between how individual victims of the Holocaust can be commemorated in relation to the event as a whole. The first panel partly dealt with such problems. PNINA ROSENBERG (Haifa) shed light upon an often neglected issue, the Kindertransport. Memorials of rescued and deported Jewish children have lately been established all over Europe, especially in railway stations, and are often marked by a tension in making the private lives of these children public. Another example of commemorating the Holocaust is Yad Vashem in Israel, described by RACHEL PERRY (Tel Aviv) as a palace of memory. Taking Michal Rovner’s artwork as her case study, Perry pointed out difficulties in dealing with the memory. Rovner has contributed to making Yad Vashem a living landscape, where memory is interpreted as visual and spatial. The past is brought into life at the same time as one can look out over Jerusalem. The effects of the Holocaust as an ongoing process are

thus made visible â it is rather there, than then. Still, many memorials are characterized by their distance to the actual crime scenes. This issue was analyzed by JÄRGEN LUND (Trondheim), comparing pictures by photographer Werner Zellien from Villa Wannsee, taken in 1988, with his pictures from UtÄya in Norway. Keeping the obvious differences between the Holocaust and UtÄya in mind, he underlined it is worthwhile to dwell upon these two projects in order to explore what happens with vision when facing places connected to such atrocities.

In the second panel, further questions were raised about how Holocaust memory is reinterpreted and renegotiated in museums and memorials. STEPHANIE ROTEM (Tel Aviv) discussed how the architectural design of European Holocaust museums have found their way into political arenas and tend to function as subversive powers. In a case study of Greece, ANNA MARIA DROUMPOUKI (Athens) addressed the problem of integrating the memory of the Holocaust into an already existing national memorial landscape, which has given birth to a âcontestâ with antique marble ruins. Even though the Greek memorialization of the Holocaust has made progress at last, the case showed how commemoration practices tend to be both inclusive and exclusive. This is also the case in the memorial landscape of central Berlin, which was highlighted by IMKE GIRSSMANN (Oldenburg). Since memorials can be found almost everywhere there, they give birth to competing desires of different victim groups and discussions of victim hierarchies as well as tensions between individual and collective commemoration. Another aspect was pointed out by TRACY JEAN ROSENBERG (Frankfurt/Main), who argued that, traditionally, memorials used to be firmly divided into sacred and profane spheres, but that their setting in Berlinâs metropolitan environment place them somewhere in between. Thereby, the borders of the profane and the sacred are tested in this dynamic memorial landscape. And as the city changes, the history has to be told differently as well.

The second keynote lecture, given by SILKE WENK (Oldenburg), underlined the importance of looking closer at images of the Holocaust. They are continually used and do have an afterlife. A pictorial repertoire in constant motion shapes our memory, not least for later generations, whose mediated (rather than direct) memories may be labeled âpostmemoryâ, to employ Marianne Hirschâs well-known concept. This also universalizes the Holocaust as a metaphor, which gives birth to many challenges and risks that the reality of the historical event is forgotten. Wenk pointed out that commemoration is

marked by an ambivalence, not least made visible by often used ironic strategies in dealing with Holocaust memory.

Another aspect of Holocaust commemoration, emphasized lately, is its transnational dimensions, discussed in panel three. GINTARE MALINAUSKAITE (Berlin) highlighted transnational phenomena within the field of Lithuanian national collective memory, paying special attention to Jewish filmmaking as a therapeutic culture. National spaces are no longer closed in our global age, since memories are migrating. However, it is important to not neglect national peculiarities. LARISSA ALLWORK (Northampton) also focused on Lithuania, analyzing problems of remembrance efforts, visible both during the Soviet period and the post-Communist era. In another case study, CHRISTIAN KARNER (Nottingham) explored discursive features of recent representations and invocations of the Holocaust, made by the small Jewish community of Austria. As in several other presentations, special attention was given to the growing distance between the Holocaust and current forms of commemoration.

The conference also posed questions about limits of Holocaust representation. By focusing on Uwe Bollâs film *Auschwitz*, ELIZABETH WARD (Leeds) concluded that repetitions of cinematic set pieces and interfilmic references tend to fix our interpretation of the past. Therefore, she stressed the importance of being aware of how films are used for commemoration in popular culture. Another problem, underlined by NETTY GIBSON (Tasmania), was how perpetrators may be depicted, both in her own artworks and more generally. The perspective of perpetrators has not been sufficiently elaborated by earlier research. However, a shift is going on, even though Gibson noted it might be provocative to work with such perspectives. RUTH SHERIDAN (Sydney) gave a further example of this, while discussing the novel and film *The Reader*, which, she claimed, sympathizes with perpetrators and got a very ambivalent reception. Another film, *Life is Beautiful*, also highlights interesting problems in representing atrocities of the Holocaust. This was analyzed by GUIDO VITTIELO (Rome), pointing out how a rhetorics of the sublime, seemingly inspired by Immanuel Kant and Caspar David Friedrich, has been used in order to approach this incomprehensible past. However, sublime elements may be disturbing â something one has to escape in order to see the individual victim.

The themes of panel five mirrored new preconditions

for commemoration, typical for the last two decades and brought ahead by the internet. MAREK KAZMIERCZAK (Poznan) highlighted how Twitter has become a platform for ideological confrontations and discourses that goes beyond traditional ways of communicating about the past. He also noted that the Holocaust often functions metaphorically on Twitter, ceasing to be a specific historical reference. However, EVA PFANZELTER (Innsbruck) claimed that research has avoided how internet works for history and collective memory, even though it arose as a new, central memorial site at the end of the 1990s. Not surprisingly, even this commemoration practice is shaped by the politics of the day. In connection to new media, TILL HILMAR (Vienna) also analyzed patterns of visitors' photos, made at Auschwitz, where visitors often attempt to draw moral lessons. The pictures contain shared sources of meaning and borrowed modes of expression. In this way, photography is used in order to communicate, rather than just freezing time.

The important role of art in commemorating the Holocaust was underlined by the perspectives given in panel six. ELIZABETH BRYANT (Florida) highlighted the art of Mirosław Balka, in which he has explored Poland's complicated history. His seemingly banal pictures demand a trained eye and challenge our traditional perceptions and stereotypes of the Holocaust. JACOB LUND (Aarhus) emphasized that artistic representations are becoming more acute when witnesses are passing away. More and more, we have to remember the Holocaust through mediations. The past is not simply there, but must be articulated. However, words fix memory and can thereby block ways of understanding it. Through the work of Esther Shalev-Gerz, Lund showed how also silence can be an important artistic strategy. It may force us to reach a deeper understanding, beyond words. Another strategy of art is to create defamiliarizing effects, which force viewers to critically question what they are seeing, as DIANA POPESCU (Southampton) illustrated by looking at examples of provocative Holocaust art. Such representations make our viewing of Holocaust images more difficult, but perhaps more meaningful. Similar aspects were discussed in the last panel, where CHRISTINE GUNDERMANN (Berlin) gave an overview of Holocaust comics. While rationalizing and stereotyping the past, they are still used more and more in education. A perhaps unexpected take on the Holocaust was then presented by JAN BOROWICZ (Warsaw), showcasing how Jews have been depicted as zombies in a Polish novel. Perhaps, this points out to a more general problem in Polish commemoration, where Jewish

victims will continue to haunt current generations until they are given a proper resting place, integrated in the national memory?

Several interesting workshops were organized. Article drafts, which had been submitted in advance, were discussed in smaller groups and might be included in a planned publication. Special parts of the conference program also consisted in lectures and workshops with artists and practitioners, dealing with the Holocaust. Artist ANNA BERGLIND (Linköping) spoke about her light installations, inspired by her mother's experiences from Bergen-Belsen. Not least, she attempted to capture the fluid character of memories. ALEXANDER FREUDENTHAL (Stockholm) provided a composer's view on the Holocaust, highlighting the problems of avoiding kitsch and trying to make the music remain positive. In addition, HELENE BERG (Stockholm) presented her CD-ROM, "The Children in Theresienstadt" (2002), which enabled children to learn about the Holocaust in a flexible way, hopefully making education more engaging.

As several presentations elucidated during the conference, art and popular culture are of great importance when the Holocaust is to be commemorated in the 21st century. In the absence of survivors, memory must be mediated. However, memorial landscape and technologies are constantly shifting, not least in urban areas as well as digitally. Artists often feel a need to activate our relationships to the past, for example by developing both provocative and ironic strategies. Memory must be kept alive, and we must therefore be aware of how we are approaching a past whose meaning is continuously renegotiated. It is complicated to highlight individual and collective aspects simultaneously. A good deal can be gained by treating the Holocaust as a universal metaphor, but then it risks losing its historical specificity. By focusing on such problems and peculiar circumstances of later decades, the conference emphasized the need of renewed research on the topics above. Once and again, the memory of the Holocaust has to be revisited.

Conference Overview:

Welcome Note and Opening Remarks

Diana Popescu, University of Southampton (organizer)

Tanja Schult, The Hugo Valentin Centre Uppsala (organizer)

Tomislav Dulic, Director of the Hugo Valentin Centre, Uppsala University

Harald Kindermann, German Ambassador to Sweden

Keynote Lecture

Ernst van Alphen: List Mania

Panel one: Memorials. Intersections between Individual and Public Memories of the Holocaust

Pnina Rosenberg: Publicly Private. Kindertransport Memorials

Rachel Perry: Holocaust Hospitality?

Jürgen Lund: Distance to the Crime Scene. The Addressive Specificity of Abstraction

Panel two: Reinterpretations and Renegotiations. Holocaust Museums and Memorials in Europe

Stephanie Rotem: Architecture in the Political Arena. The Design of European Holocaust Museums

Anna Maria Droumpouki: The Shaping of Holocaust Memory in Greece. Revisiting Memorials and their Public History

Imke Girssmann: "As if one of the slabs of the Holocaust Memorial had walked across the street at night..." Commemoration and Representation of Different Victim Groups in the Centre of Berlin

Tracy Jean Rosenberg: On the Borders of the Sacred and the Profane. Contemporary Memorials in Berlin

Workshop one

Simona Slanicka: Children as Popularizing Coping Figures. "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas" (novel 2006/film 2008)

Teresa Lazzaro: The Butterfly Project and Teaching Teenagers about Bullenhuser Damm. A Unique Experience in a Comprehensive School in Italy

Aleksandra Kubica: Public receptions of "Poklosie" the Jewish Other in the Polish National Narrative

Lecture and workshop

Anna Berglind: Talking to Lethe. The Trauma of the Holocaust - Perception, Suppression, Oblivion

Keynote Lecture

Silke Wenk: Beyond (Self)Victimisation and Heroism? Ironic Strategies in Commemorative Practice

Panel three: National and Transnational Narratives of the Holocaust

Gintare Malinauskaite: Documenting the Holocaust in Lithuania. cinematic Memories of the Lithuanian-

Jewish Diaspora

Christian Karner: Spanning the "Ethics" and "Morality" of Memory. Representations and References to the Holocaust in Austria's Contemporary Jewish Community

Larissa Allwork: Recent Approaches to the Holocaust Memory Work. Lithuania and the British at the Turn of the Millennium

Panel four: Interrogations of the Limits of Holocaust Representation

Netty Gibson: Betraying the Holocaust? An Investigation of the Nazi Perpetrator in European Contemporary Visual Art Practice

Ruth Sheridan: Sympathy with the Perpetrators. Assessing Ideology in "Der Vorleser"/"The Reader"

Guido Vittielo: The New Rhetorics of the Sublime. From Iconoclasm to "Todes-Kitsch"

Elizabeth Ward: Telling it as it was, Telling it as it is. Uwe Boll's "Auschwitz" (2012)

Panel five: Twitter and the World Wide Web. Shifts in Memory Discourses and Politics

Marek Kazmierczak: Tweeting about the Past. Changes in the Collective Imagination about the Holocaust in the Social Media

Till Hilmar: Between Media Memory and the Historicity of the Site. Visitors' Photography at Auschwitz

Eva Pfanzelter: Holocaust Related Websites between Media Discourse, Politics of Memory and Politicking

Workshop two

Karianne Ommundsen: "Disturbing Laughter". Arthur Zmijewski's Video "Berek" (1999)

Tanja Schult: To Go or Not To Go? Contemporary Artists and Auschwitz

Lecture and workshop

Alexander Freudenthal: Silence by Music. A Composer's View on the Holocaust

Panel six: The Holocaust in the European Artistic Imagination

Elizabeth Bryant: Miroslaw Balka. Representing the Unrepresentable?

Jacob Lund: The Act of Remembering in the Work of Esther Shalev-Gerz

Diana Popescu: The Defamiliarizing Effect in Art about the Holocaust European Public Responses

Teaching about the Holocaust through Art

Helene Berg: "The Children in Theresienstadt". An Educational CD-ROM

Panel seven: Holocaust Laughter and Holocaust Politics

Christine Gundermann: Between Worship of Saints and Fascination for Evil. Comics about the Holocaust and the Second World War as Entertainment and Education

Jan Borowicz: Holocaust Zombies. "The Night of the Living Jews" and Holocaust Memory in Poland

Workshop three

Ingrid Lewis: The Redemption of Nazi Women in Film. "Downfall" and "The Reader"

Stefanie Rauch: Perpetrators of the Holocaust in Feature Films. A Reception Study of British Responses to Recent Films

Anne Hed n: Victims and Perpetrators in Roman Polanski's "Universe"

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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