

Reflections on Images of the Holocaust in Central and Eastern Europe

07 December 2022

(Hungarian-English international conference)

PROGRAMME

- 9:00 – 9:15** Registration
- 9:15 – 9:25** **Welcome:** András Zima (Holocaust Memorial Center, Director)
- 9:25 – 9:30** **Opening remarks:** Karel Berkhoff (Co-director, European Holocaust Research Infra structure and Senior Researcher, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies)
- 9:30 – 10:10** **Keynote:** Janina Struk (Independent scholar)
Reflections and Interpretations on photographs taken during the Holocaust
- 10:10 – 10:20** Questions and discussion

PANEL I. TRADITIONS & NARRATIVES: PHOTOGRAPHING THE HOLOCAUST.

CHAIR: LÁSZLÓ CSŐSZ

- 10:20 – 10:40** Maaty Frenkelzon (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem)
Between Photography and Ideology: Soviet Photography on the Eastern Front during World War II
- 10:40 – 11:00** András Lénárt (Holocaust Memorial Center, Budapest)
Photos of the forced labour service in Hungary
- 11:00 – 11:20** Questions and discussion
- 11:20 – 11:40** Coffee break

PANEL II. PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSIONS: USING HOLOCAUST PHOTOS.

CHAIR: CHRISTOPH KREUTZMÜLLER

- 11:40 – 12:00** Tom Haward (University College London)
To see or not to see? The ethics of viewing Holocaust photography
- 12:00 – 12:20** Hedvig Turai (International Business School, Budapest)
Holocaust photos: Uses, misuses, hijacking in exhibition contexts
- 12:20 – 12:40** Adrian Cioflâncă (Wilhelm Filderman Center for the Study of Jewish History in Romania, Bucharest)
Exhibiting mass-killings: The public use of atrocity photos in Romania during and after WWII
- 12:40 – 13:00** Questions and discussion

13:00 – 14:20 Lunch break

PANEL III. DECONSTRUCTION & RECONSTRUCTIONS: PROBING NARRATIVES.

CHAIR: ANDRÁS LÉNÁRT

- 14:20 – 14:40** Christoph Kreutzmüller (Project #Last Seen)
Traces of the Deportations from the West in the East
- 14:40 – 15:00** Tal Bruttman (Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah)
Warsaw 1943: An SS narrative for a Jewish uprising
- 15:00 – 15:20** Ramona Bechauf (Göttingen University)
Handling the Sonderkommando Photographs. A Praxeological Approach to Historical Photographs
- 15:20 – 15:40** Questions and discussion
- 15:40 – 15:50** **Closing remarks:** András Lénárt and Christoph Kreutzmüller
- 9:30 – 10:20** **Keynote address: Janina Struk (Independent scholar) Reflections and Interpretations photographs taken during the Holocaust.**

Photographs were taken by all protagonists during the Holocaust in different circumstances and for different motivations.

The Nazis required evidence of their crimes for official uses; German soldier-tourists wanted 'trophy' snapshots of war; in the ghettos, some photographers worked for the *Judenrat*, taking propaganda pictures, while others took clandestine images as resistance - some did both.

Photojournalists selected predictable photographs for publication; individual people took photographs as witnesses. The underground resistance took images, and acquired all others that they could, to get the message out to the world.

Underpinning the motives of all protagonists was a belief in the truth of the image, that photographs told the truth was paramount.

Eighty years later, when that belief is no longer so strongly held, how should we define this mass of widely differing photographs? Such is their diversity that we might ask whether we can regard them as a cohesive entity at all. Are they a genre, a collection, a category, or something else? And what compels us to continue to attempt to define and interpret images that remain within the realms of ambiguity?

If we now accept the principle that the meaning of every photographic image is determined by the context in which it is found, is it possible to establish a definitive meaning to any? If not, then what are the implications of the repetitive use of these images for the historiography of the Holocaust? Janina Struk is author of *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence*; (2004), *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War* (2011) and is writing a book on *Photography and Resistance*, to be published 2023/24.

SECTION I. TRADITIONS & NARRATIVES: PHOTOGRAPHING THE HOLOCAUST.

CHAIR: LÁSZLÓ CSŐSZ

10:20 – 10:40 **Maaty Frenkelzon (Researcher in Yad Vashem photo archive)**
Between Photography and Ideology: Soviet Photography on the Eastern Front during World War II.

In the lecture, I would like to talk about the special form in which the events of Holocaust were photographed and documented in the Soviet Union, and how this form of documentation differs in essence from the „Western” documentation, which has become more canonical.

In order to understand the roots of Soviet photography, I will first talk about the relationship between Soviet ideology and the role of visual expression fitted into it. Following this, I will talk about the classic division between avant-garde photography (and art in general) in the Soviet Union, and the social realist turn of the 1930s. The two approaches were different strategies to portray reality, and as a result influenced its visual representation. Through the understanding of the similarities and differences between these approaches, I will try to present the photographs of the Holocaust in the Soviet space, the meaning they tried to convey through them, and the form of memory they proposed. Contrary to the popular view, which emphasizes the socio-realistic canon of Soviet photography, I will try to show how avant-garde-projected practicalities continued to exist, and substantially influence Soviet photography during the war in general, and the documentation of the Holocaust in particular.

To conclude, I will show the difference between the documentation of the Holocaust through the lens of Soviet photography, and the documentation of the Holocaust made by the Western Allies, and how these differences affected (and continue to affect) the way the Holocaust is perceived and represented today in museums, motion pictures, and collective memory in general. Finally, I will raise further possibilities of Holocaust memory that are offered through the usage of Soviet style of photography.

10:40 – 11:00 **András Lénárt (historian, HDKE)**
Photos of the forced labor service in Hungary

From 1939, Jewish soldiers and officers were banned from armed service. As a form of discrimination and humiliation, they were assigned to labour service. Initially, conscripts were allowed to carry a camera with them to take photographs of their lives in the camps to share with their families.

In my presentation, I want to emphasize the importance of correctly interpreting historical photos, specifically photos of the Holocaust that don't depict the brutality of the situation. Without the obvious signs of discrimination or intimidation, it's only context that can offer us a well-grounded understanding of the scenes.

To the historian of the pictorial evidence of the Holocaust they serve as a reminder of the obligation to go beyond the smiles and contextualize and carefully interpret these rare photographic sources.

SECTION II. PRESENTATIONS & DISCUSSIONS: USING HOLOCAUST PHOTOS.

CHAIR: CHRISTOPH KREUTZMÜLLER

11:40 – 12:00 **Tom Haward (University College London Centre for Holocaust Education) ,**
To see or not to see? The ethics of viewing Holocaust photography'

Abstract: Photographs of the Holocaust are readily accessible. In a matter of seconds Google can show you a range of different images: some may be helpful and intriguing, others upsetting and raising a range of ethical issues. This short illustrated presentation will encourage you to reflect on the ethics of viewing such images, especially in educational and public spaces. What role should choice and consent play? What is it specifically about photographs as a medium that raises ethical questions? Should atrocity images ever have a place in the classroom? Does it matter who has taken photographs of the Holocaust, and why? Such questions have been wrestled with ever since the Holocaust. This sessions tries to guide you through some of the complexity and ethical choices that might be considered when you next see photographs of the Holocaust.

12:00 - 12:20 **Hedvig Turai (Art Historian, International Business School Budapest)**
Holocaust photos – Uses, misuses, hijacking in exhibition contexts

Pictures do not speak for themselves. Photography cannot be understood and interpreted based on exclusively what we see in the picture. We need to know more about what happens outside of the frame, when and, where, who took it, what it is that we cannot see. Moreover, it is the contexts how these photographs are used that give meaning to the photos. This is especially difficult to realize and accept in connection with holocaust photography. I would like to examine the use of holocaust photography in exhibition contexts, temporary and permanent exhibitions in historical museums, museums of communism, holocaust museums, as well as in art exhibitions with a special accent on contemporary art, illustrated with a few recent contemporary examples in Hungary. My examples include the Hungarian National Museum, the Jewish Museum, the House of Terror, temporary exhibitions commemorating the holocaust, Budapest History Museum (1994), The Hidden Holocaust (2004), The numerus clausus and the girls (2021), etc.

12:20 – 12:40 **Adrian Cioflanca (Wilhelm Filderman Center for the Study of Jewish History in Romania) Exhibiting mass-killings: the public use of atrocity photos in Romania during and after WWII**

During the Second World War, in Romania, as in most of Europe, it was forbidden to take photos inside localities or near the frontline without special approval. Despite this, numerous photos documenting the violence against Jews were taken and hundreds of them are preserved in archives to this day – in Romania, Israel, United States, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, etc. The uncontrollable factor was the German army. Wehrmacht and SS issued similar prohibition against spontaneous photos and specifically interdicted photographing executions, but in numerous cases German soldiers felt free to ignore the rules. Inside Romania, a number of German military scorned the local jurisdiction and took hundreds of photos during the Bucharest and Iași Pogroms (January / June 1941). Some of these photos were collected by Jewish leaders and a few were smuggled out of Romania to be shown in Western chancelleries and press. For example, photos from the two pogroms were presented to the State Department in Washington and published in the American press, in the autumn of 1941. As a response, Ion Antonescu's regime launched a hunt of atrocity photographs and published, in its propaganda outlets, images of Soviet atrocities for which Jews were blamed. Exhumations of NKVD victims were organized in Chişinău, Cetatea Albă, Odessa, between 1941-1943, in order to demonstrate that the anti-Jewish violence was justified, and photos of these exhumations were showed in anticommunist and antisemitic exhibitions. After the war, what was prohibited during the war became public and instrumental, and vice versa. Exhumations of Holocaust victims and photos of atrocities were used in political and juridical indictments against fascist perpetrators. Two types of discourses emerged: one focusing on Jewish victims, the other one universalizing victimhood and distorting the significance of photos. The communist regime sponsored the second version and this had a long-term effect on the post-war memory and historiography.

14:20 - 14:40 **Christoph Kreutzmüller (Historian, Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz) Traces of the Deportations from the West in the East**

Deportations were a trans-European phenomenon; a transport that left Marseille in February 1943 and went via Drancy through Germany to German occupied Poland, eventually arriving in Sobibor death camp. Among the 782 deportees, there were 86 Greek, 26 Polish, 13 German and 7 Czech Jews. Yet, deportations were usually photographed upon departure. There is only little pictorial evidence of the journey or the arrival of deportation trains from the West in the East. This is the starting point of this paper, which aims to collect and contextualise the pictorial traces of the deportations from Western in Eastern Europe.

15:00 - 15:20 **Ramona Bechauf („Exhibiting Knowledge| Knowledge in Exhibitions” Doctoral Research Group, Göttingen University (Germany) Handling the Sonderkommando Photographs. A Praxeological Approach to Historical Photographs**

How can we learn about the circumstances and (historical) contexts a picture was taken in, its purpose or intended use? As historians we are trained to search archives for clues while art historians take a closer look at material and aesthetics. Both approaches are fundamental and invaluable. But what if – after closely reading both photographs and archival documents – we’re still no closer to answering those questions?

I’d like to propose to add, what I call a “praxeological approach”. In my talk I’d like to present how I came closer to answering basic questions about the series of the *Sonderkommando Photographs* by “excavating” the *tacit knowledge* imbedded in the practice of picture taking with the historical camera. The series consists of the only known photographs of the mass murder within the Auschwitz concentration camp. They were taken clandestinely by unknown members of the *Sonderkommando*. Although they’re ubiquitous, we still know little about them.

In researching the *Sonderkommando Photographs*, I found that they could have been taken by only two types of cameras: A box camera or a fold-in-camera. Having taken pictures with various models of both camera types, I can add to answering the questions above. While handling the camera I found that the size of the camera made it impossible to hide it under a jacket, let alone shoot through a widened buttonhole. These and other findings make it obvious that the picture taking couldn’t have been a one-man-operation but required a group.

Finding out more about the circumstances and context of the *Sonderkommando Photographs* they become exhibits that can tell various stories about the Holocaust, Jewish as well as Polish resistance both inside the camp and beyond. Which leads to the next set of questions: How can we showcase the multivocality of photographs within an exhibition space?

