

FROM THE ERA OF THE WITNESS TO DIGITAL REMEMBRANCE

New Media, Holocaust Sites and Changing Memory Practices

Abstracts (Talks and Keynote)

Commodified Trauma? Commercial Video Games as Holocaust Memory Agents *Ella Banyan, M.A.; Dr. Noam Tirosh (Ben Gurion University of the Negev)*

This research examines the potency of video games as memory agents, considering their popularity and unique affordances. Video games provide an immersive first-person experience, offering a sense of agency and choice that foster a deep connection with the avatar and, in turn, promotes empathy. The medium therefore holds significant potential in the context of evolving educational methodologies and the construction of cultural memory.

This study analyzes three existing games using a distinctive methodology that examines cultural memory as a process: interviewing their creators, analyzing their content, and estimating their impact on end-users through the review of online discourse. The findings indicate that Holocaust representation in video games is influenced by economic considerations and marketing strategies, shaping how history is mediated. By doing so, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how video games can facilitate memory experiences and promote empathy in the realm of digital Holocaust remembrance.

Playing “Call of Duty” with a survivor; Themes in Zikaron BaSalon’s “Fighting to Remember

Michal Yevilevich-Katz, M.A.; Prof. Rebecca Kook (Ben Gurion University of the Negev)

This presentation is part of a larger PhD dissertation that sets out to examine memory narratives that are constructed and designed in the context of collaborative projects between nonprofit organizations specializing in Holocaust commemoration and education, and for-profit corporations. In my dissertation I argue that these for-profit corporations function as new memory agents with as yet unrecognized values, interests and goals. Moreover, I suggest that these values interests and goals are often in conflict with those of Holocaust educators and nonprofits commemorative organizations. In this presentation I explore digital video content made for “Fighting to Remember”, a collaboration between the highly popular Israeli non for-profit organization Zikaron BaSalon and advertising company McCann. I present and analyze five recurring themes: accessibility, inaccessibility, childhood, family, and storytelling.

Virtual Witnessing: Emotional Remembrance through Interactions with AI-based, Virtual Testimonies of Holocaust Survivors

Berit Zimmerling, M.A. (University of Tübingen)

This paper explores the emotional dimensions of interacting with virtual testimonies of Holocaust survivors, and how these interactions generate a form of “virtual witnessing”. In response to the passing of the last Holocaust survivors, the USC Shoah Foundation initiated the ‘Dimensions in Testimony’ project, which uses AI-based virtual images of witnesses to preserve interactive, personal and emotional access to history. Drawing on ethnographic research into the production and presentation of the testimonies at exhibitions as well as visitors’ experiences of interacting with them, the paper analyzes the settings, affordances and agencies of human and non-human actors, and how these shape the conversation-like interactions. The research shows how the new technology enables socio-technical emotional practices that stabilize established witnessing routines, while also producing frictions and emotional ambivalences that modify memory practices.

Filmed Survivor Testimony: Between Holocaust Memory and 7 October 2023
Dr. Roni Mikel Arieli, Prof. Jackie Feldman (Ben Gurion University of the Negev)

Following Hamas's 7 October 2023 attacks, Israel witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of filmed survivor testimonies. Many initiatives explicitly drew on the legacy of Holocaust testimony—its institutions, methods, and moral authority—while adapting to a radically different media environment marked by real-time self-documentation, platform circulation, and intense political polarization. This lecture examines how Holocaust memory shapes contemporary testimonial practices after mass violence, and how new technologies transform what “witnessing” can mean.

We analyze four case studies: Edut 710; the Yad Vashem–National Library initiative; the USC Shoah Foundation's collection; and the interactive AI-based testimonies *Survived to Tell*. Methodologically, the lecture combines close readings of each project's public-facing platforms (mission statements, interview prompts, formats of access) with interviews with initiative leaders and interviewers.

Comparing these frameworks highlights key tensions: archive versus advocacy, therapy versus commemoration, openness versus curation, and institutional caution versus digital speed. We pay particular attention to the temporal shift from decades-later Holocaust interviews to near-immediate testimonies after 7 October, asking how proximity to trauma reshapes narrative form, ethical risk, and the possibility of “working through.” We argue that these projects do not merely document trauma but actively construct its public meaning, mobilizing Holocaust-derived authority while generating new testimonial regimes in which private grief, education, and political struggle increasingly overlap.

What is Digital Holocaust Memory? Beyond ‘Eras’ and Towards A Model of Entanglement

Prof. Victoria Grace Richardson-Walden (University of Sussex)

Holocaust Studies is a discipline predominantly, although not exclusively, shaped by the field of History. It is perhaps no surprise therefore that we have come to think about memory of the Holocaust in terms of ‘eras’. In this keynote lecture, I critically examine the discourse on ‘era of the witness’, ‘era of the user’, ‘era of platformization’ and the more recent ‘era of the content creator’. I argue that none of these do service to the complex media ecology in which Holocaust memory is produced.

Instead, I offer ‘entanglement’ as an alternative lens through which to delve deep and wide, temporally and spatially, culturally and technologically, into the phenomenon of digital Holocaust memory particularly, and indeed Holocaust memory more broadly. I do this through the work of theoretical quantum physicist and critical posthumanist Karen Barad. Their work opens up not only to complexity and relationality, but as theory concerned with the fundamentals of reality, also presents challenging questions for Holocaust memory regarding issues of representation and authenticity. Contrary to concerns about ‘representation’ based on models of ‘reflection’, Barad argues that we should view meaning-making, and ‘memory’ as performativity, through models of ‘diffraction’.

This talk will introduce what such a methodology might look like in a Holocaust memory context, and how the lens of entanglement encourages us to embrace this moment as one of critical reflection about the extent to which many of the concerns in our field still stand the test of time.

Holocaust Memory in Israeli Discourses of Dissent ***Prof. em. Tamar Katriel (University of Haifa, Israel)***

In this paper, I bring into conversation two strands in the collective memory of the Twentieth Century – the memory of the Holocaust and soldiers' testimonial legacy of their martial experiences in various battlefields. I do so by attending to Holocaust-related imagery and language in dissenting Israeli soldiers' testimonies about their military assignments. I argue that in appealing to Holocaust memory to make sense of their current positioning, soldier-witnesses come to reject the victim/perpetrator binary, viewing themselves as 'implicated subjects', whether as victimized-victimizers or as bystanders. At times, their soldierly experiences trigger new reflections about the legacy of the Holocaust as it figures in Israeli schooling and public culture. Remembering that the marginalized testimonies of post-WWI disillusioned soldiers, and the early suppressed testimonies of Holocaust survivors, have by now become part of contemporary public culture, I argue that the largely disparaged soldier-witnesses of today are fully deserving of attention as well.

Distributed Consciousness: Young Generations in the Transitional Landscape of Holocaust Remembrance ***Dr. Ann-Kathrin McLean (Royal Roads University, Canada)***

In contemporary memory culture, pedagogical and public engagements with antisemitism and Holocaust history are increasingly shaped by digital technologies and immersive media. While today's modes of transmission differ from those of past decades, the fundamental purpose of Holocaust remembrance remains constant: to cultivate sustained, conscious engagement with the past through meaningful acts of memory rather than solely through institutional or rigid political directives.

In this presentation, McLean illustrates how culturally diverse members of Gen Y are reshaping conversations around Holocaust remembrance in the twenty-first century. Each generation must relearn and renegotiate the practices through which remembrance is expressed, yet the essential element that endures is the transgenerational movement of consciousness—carried across time, space, and increasingly, digital platforms. This talk explores how younger generations navigate between collective and cultural forms of memory within an ever-expanding, largely unregulated, and often politically polarized digital landscape, and considers the implications of this shift for future pedagogies of Holocaust education.

From Index to Inquiry: Thirty Years of Digital Holocaust Testimony ***Karen Jungblut (Digitale Erinnerungswerkstatt)***

Digital approaches to Holocaust testimony emerged in the mid 1990s, when the central challenge was making video testimonies searchable without reducing them to transcripts. At the USC Shoah Foundation, the development of the Visual History Archive meant working in uncharted territory, as video-based access to large scale testimony collections and the indexing of survivor testimony were met with sustained skepticism concerning fragmentation, narrative integrity, and ethical misuse. Early indexing systems therefore developed around a core tension between enabling discovery and preserving the testimonial encounter as an unfragmented audiovisual experience.

As technical possibilities expanded, access extended beyond specific sites and enabled new forms of engagement, including immersive on-site documentation and conversational survivor testimonies. These developments evolved through institutional experimentation, collaboration with survivors, and ongoing ethical negotiation, reshaping both production practices and modes of user engagement.

Zikaron BaSalon- A journey in time. Living room Commemoration Quests. **Shai Levi (Zikaron BaSalon Germany)**

Zikaron BaSalon is a global grassroots movement reimagining the way we remember the Shoah. Rooted in the legacy of Holocaust survivors, it creates intimate gatherings in a home-like atmosphere spaces that invite listening, dialogue, and human connection. These living rooms become sites of remembrance not only for Jewish history, but for humanity as a whole. Built on principles of open access, free participation, and open-source sharing, Zikaron BaSalon continues to grow organically. Individuals, communities, movements, and organizations around the world are adopting its rituals. What began as an initiative is becoming a tradition—one that evolves while remaining deeply anchored in memory.

At the heart of Zikaron BaSalon is a deep awareness of time.

There is urgency: the precious, narrowing window in which younger generations can still meet Holocaust survivors in person—people who are willing and eager to share their life journeys, not only their trauma but their resilience, values, and humanity.

At the same time, there is responsibility toward the future. Zikaron BaSalon invests in training descendants, educators, and commemoration torch-holders to carry forward the biographies of survivors and victims. Through them, stories are not frozen in the past but continue to be told, embodied, and reinterpreted across generations.

By working simultaneously across timelines, past testimony, present encounter, and future transmission- Zikaron BaSalon offers a living model for Shoah remembrance. One that does not rely solely on institutions or ceremonies, but on people, relationships, and shared responsibility for memory. In this way, Zikaron BaSalon gives us a glimpse of the future of Holocaust commemoration: intimate, participatory, adaptable, and deeply human.

Designing Games That Tackle Politics Head-On **Shalev Moran (Independent Games Designer)**

Veteran game designer Shalev Moran will offer a quick review of several videogame projects he took part in, and how each of them tackles charged political and historical topics through presentation, narrative, mechanics, and even through the context of their public release.

“Pomegranates” and “The Third Dimension” tackle the destruction of Gaza and Apartheid South Africa respectively. “Wolfenstache” is a satire of WW2 historical revisionism, and “Gerda: A Flame In Winter” deals with life under Nazi occupation.

These titles vary from each other in genre, tone, subject and style – but each of them demonstrates how the unique properties of the videogame medium can be used to address the darker sides of history with humor, nuance, and a very human touch.

Hidden Codes and Re:think - Critical Engagement through Mobile Games **Céline Wendelgaß (Educational Center Anne Frank)**

In a digitalized world, non-formal education must also explore new approaches in order to address its target groups more specifically. With the two mobile games “Hidden Codes” and “Re:think”, the Anne Frank Educational Center has developed two products that focus on different topics while deliberately addressing specific target groups and being developed together with them.

In a collaborative process, pedagogical principles were brought together with the immersive gaming experience as well as the wishes and needs of the target groups. “Hidden Codes” deals with right-wing and Islamist radicalization, while “Re:think” takes a playful approach to topics such as migration, discrimination, and diversity.

How can serious political issues be meaningfully integrated into games without oversimplifying them or making the game unplayable?

Project Presentations

“Frag nach!” (“Just ask!”) by *German Exile Archive 1933–1945 of the German National Library*

The presentation introduces a project by the German Exile Archive 1933–1945 of the German National Library, developed in collaboration with the USC Shoah Foundation. It focuses on digital, interactive testimonies that offer new ways of engaging with history. The project features the testimonies of Kurt Salomon Maier and Inge Auerbacher, who experienced persecution, disenfranchisement, deportation, and exile as children during the Nazi regime. Through digital technology, audiences can interact with the eyewitnesses, creating an immersive and participatory learning experience. The presentation outlines the key stages of research, interviewing, and software development, while emphasizing the importance of preserving eyewitness accounts for future generations. Supported by graphic narratives and interactive elements, the project encourages reflection on exile, the Holocaust, and broader questions of memory, identity, and responsibility.

Application „Immersive Jewish Frankfurt“ by *Jewish Museum Frankfurt* Teaching Jewish History through Conversations with Fictional, AI-Driven Characters

It is the year 1864, and Jewish emancipation in Frankfurt has just become reality. Take a walk through the Judengasse and speak to five AI-driven characters: Josef Löwy, Henriette Bamberger, Ella Spiegel, Maximilian Jacoby, and Moritz Demmel. Ask them about their lives, their aspirations, and their fears—and consider how their situation relates to your own.

This session offers a behind-the-scenes look at the design of a fictional open world grounded in historical research within the project Immersive Jewish Frankfurt. How can AI-supported digital tools be used to create an engaging, immersive environment that remains as historically accurate as possible—while deliberately avoiding clichés, antisemitic tropes, counterfactual assumptions, and oversimplifications of 19th-century Jewish history?

Participants are invited to test a prototype of the application and to discuss the ethical boundaries of conversational AI in digital memory culture. What are the non-negotiable guardrails? How does the digital remembrance of 19th-century Jewish life relate to other fields of memory culture, including digital Holocaust memorial practices?

Detailed introductions during the Open Space at 16:30 and 17:15

“Frankfurt History App” by *Historisches Museum Frankfurt*

This app serves as a digital city guide, bringing Frankfurt's history to life in a series of themed audio tours. Users learn about the places, events and people that have shaped the city and can visit the historical sites in person and/or on the digital map. There are several themes, e.g. Frankfurt and National Socialism, New Frankfurt, Feminist Frankfurt and information in easy-to-read language. [Detailed info](#)

“Zeitzeugenschaft? Ein Erinnerungslabor” by *Historisches Museum Frankfurt*

What makes stories about the past relevant to the present? In this participatory exhibition, 25 people living in Frankfurt have created eleven contributions on this topic. At the same time, the travelling exhibition ‘The End of Testimony?’ by the Jewish Museum Hohenems and the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial was on display. Its theme is video interviews with survivors of the Shoah. Their memories are preserved in writing or in video interviews. How do we want to deal with this legacy in the future? [Detailed info](#)

App “RE:think” by *Bildungsstätte Anne Frank*

Our mobile games *Hidden Codes* and *Re:think* focus on different topics. *Hidden Codes* centers on the prevention of (online) radicalization, while *Re:think* is dedicated to raising awareness about discrimination, migration, and civic courage. Both are aimed at young people as their target group and were developed in collaboration with them.

“Virtual Reconstructions” by *TU Darmstadt*

Since 1994, synagogues that were destroyed during the Nazi era have been virtually reconstructed at TU Darmstadt. The project aims to highlight the cultural loss, contribute to the remembrance of the Shoah, and take a stand against antisemitism. By using new digital media such as virtual reality, the hope is to spark young people’s curiosity and encourage them to engage with history. [Detailed info](#)

“CHAPTER App” by *Ludwig Uhland Institut for Historical and Cultural Anthropology, University of Tübingen*

The CHAPTER app was developed by the academic research project ‘Challenging Populist Truth-Making in Europe’ as a digital tool that allows young visitors to learn more about populism. It is tailored towards three European museums and takes users to different objects in the exhibitions to critically examine how populism fuels polarization in our society. Amongst other contested topics, Poland’s difficult past during WWII is central to the app. The app employs interactive and digital tasks to challenge and recognize populist strategies.