

History and Memory in Digital Archives

Scholarly Uses and Misuses

A Workshop organized by

Selma LEYDESDORFF
(Univ. Amsterdam/
Transitions Center)
& Atina GROSSMANN
(Cooper Union)

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May 6, 2011 | 2.00 PM - 5.30 PM

This workshop intends to propose a critical evaluation of the large audio and visual data bases on the Holocaust that have been created over the last decades and the various initiatives to connect digitalized archives. While the assumption is that the work being done is important and enables future scholars to make use of these sources, the variety of storing, indexing, interviewing, interactions, and intersubjectivities involved is endless, and therefore we want to examine the ways we will be able to work with those archives in a scholarly way.

with Marion KAPLAN (NYU), chair; Noah SHENKER (McMaster University, Canada); Denis PESCHANSKI (CNRS / Transitions Center), Dori LAUB (Yale), Atina GROSSMANN (Cooper Union), Selma LEYDESDORFF (Univ. Amsterdam/Transitions Center).

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4 Washington Square North, New York, NY 10003 | 1st floor | conference room

Program

Chair: Marion Kaplan: Professor of Judaic Studies NYU Skirball Professor of Modern Jewish History; Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies

2:00 - 2:30 PM

Noah Shenker (McMaster): *Libraries, Archives, Connections and Storing.*

2:30-3:00 PM

Denis Peschanski (CNRS/UMI Transitions): *Recent Initiatives to Connect Archives: the Matrice Project (Memory and Memorialization: Representing Trauma and Wars).*

3:00-3:20 PM

Dori Laub (Yale): *The Fortunoff Archives: What Was Expected When it Started and How Can People Use it?*

3:20-3:40 PM

Questions and Discussion chaired by Marion Kaplan (NYU)

**3:40- 4:10 PM
break**

4:10-4:30 PM

Atina Grossmann (Cooper Union): *Video Recordings and their Impacts on our Memory and our Understanding of the Holocaust.*

4:30-4:45 PM

Selma Leydesdorff (Amsterdam/UMI Transitions): *The Sobibor Project and the Ways to Use the Archives.*

4:45-5:15 PM

General Discussion

Participants

■ Noah SHENKER is the recipient of a Charles H. Revson Fellowship for Archival Research at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies within the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and he is currently a postdoctoral fellow at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. He is currently completing work on his book entitled "Embodied Memory: The Formations of Holocaust Testimony." In 2009, he contributed a chapter drawing from selections of that research to the edited Routledge volume *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*. His talk will address the myriad, often taken for granted ways that audiovisual testimonies, especially those of the Holocaust, are mediated by the institutional histories and practices of their respective archives. It will emphasize that testimonies should not be understood as raw sources but as mediated and embodied texts shaped by the encounter between witnesses and their interviewers, as well as the institutional and technical practices marking the testimony process. Issues ranging from the depth and nature of interview questions, the framing and position of the camera, the personal encounter between interviewer and interviewee, the curatorial and programming preferences of the institutions in question, to name a few considerations, all impact how testimony is molded at the moment not only of production but also of distribution and reception. It is only by understanding their workings and contexts that scholars, students, and archivists can move beyond the monumental scope of these holdings and put them into constructive research, teaching, and social practice.

■ Denis PESCHANSKI is a CNRS Senior Researcher (Centre d'histoire sociale du XXe siècle, CNRS et Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and at the Transitions UMI CNRS NYU). He is leading the Memory and Memorialization program with Edward Berenson (NYU) for the Transitions UMI (CNRS/NYU). He is the chairman of the academic council of the Mémorial de Caen, of the academic council of Camp of Rive-saltes Memorial Museum; he is member of the Oradour Museum ethical committee. He is the author of several books and films on war memory. On April 2009, the research project he leads, together with Edward Berenson (NYU), Cliff Chanin (9/11 Memorial & Museum at the WTC), and S. Grimaldi (Mémorial de Caen) was awarded a 240 000\$ grant in 2009 by the FACE and PUF Franco-American Foundations and a 2,7 Millions euro grant in 2011 from the French Ministry of Research (Great Loan operation). His project is a partnership between NYU, the CNRS, the Mémorial de Caen and the 9/11 Memorial & Museum at the WTC. His 2011 project intends to research the possibilities of digitalizing and connecting archives on the Holocaust. While presenting the project he will talk about the ideas behind it.

■ Dori LAUB is a practicing psychoanalyst, and is also the author of the major work on Narratives and Memory. Co-founder and Director, Holocaust Survivors' Film Project New Haven, CT and Co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies Yale University. He will speak on why he started this project, his ideas on the use by later generations.

■ Atina GROSSMANN has worked extensively with memoir, diary, and oral history sources in her research on Jewish experience and memory during and after World War II and the Shoah. Her current project, developed out of unanswered questions about the highly diverse wartime trajectories of the Jewish sur-

vivors discussed in her book *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton 2007) focuses on "Transnational Jewish Refugee Stories: Soviet Central Asia, Iran, and India as Sites of Relief and Refuge for European Jews during World War II." She has not, however (so far!), used, video testimonies and is therefore all the more interested in the ways that accounts filmed and edited decades later both reveal and obfuscate the story of the survivors who provide them and the many more victims who cannot offer such witness. How will these clips of elderly women and men recounting traumatic memories of their youth appear to new generations of researchers, especially as we reach the proverbial biological limit of living memory of the Holocaust? How does the now standard international presentation of videotaped excerpts alongside other exhibits in Holocaust museums and memorial sites inform and distort our understanding of how the Final Solution unfolded and who is defined as a "survivor"? What is missing from this particular archive?

■ Selma LEYDESDORFF is a well known oral historian, she is professor of Oral History and Culture in Amsterdam. She published widely on trauma interviews. At the moment her main work is on a project called "The long Shadow of Sobibor" for which she interviewed survivors and Co-plaintiffs around the present Demjanjuk trial. She has also worked extensively on the genocide of Srebrenica (her book is forthcoming at Indiana Un. Press). At this moment she is visiting scholar at The Memory and Memorialization project NYU/CNRS.