

Photographs from the Camps of the Nazi Regime

Veranstalter: Hildegard Frübis, Centrum für Jüdische Studien, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz

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The Conference „Photographs from the Camps of the Nazi Regime“, organized by HILDEGARD FRÜBIS (Graz, Berlin), took place at the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Graz from November 10th to 11th 2016. Overall, this international conference (in which established scholars as well as early career researchers participated in) aimed at the medium photographs and the multiple possibilities of usage and different intentions. What do photographs taken by different actors show and what is not shown? In delving into selected photographs or series and collections, relations between the photographer and the scene or portrayed person(s) were rethought, discussed and material aspects as well as the praxis of distribution and preservation were stressed.

Hildegard Frübis opened the conference and emphasized the importance of looking at different agendas behind the photographs and to relate them to their contexts of origin. She raised questions such as: Can these images serve as „evidence“, as true representations of the events they were depicting? What significance did the photographs have for the self-understanding of the Nazi regime? And what is „the afterlife of the photographs“ in the process of memory after 1945, and how can we approach it?

The first panel addressed photography and representations of the NS Regime. STEFAN HÖRDLER (Weimar) illustrated that analyzing different albums together improves the understanding of the complexity of the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Exemplifying the different impression that can be gained on the mass murder of Hungarian Jews between May and July in the Lilli Jacob-album and in the Höcker-album, Hördler also illustrated the gap between written sources

and photographic material concerning the question of involved perpetrators.

ALFONS ADAMS (Prag) presentation introduced a collection of 32.000 pictures of the Sudetenländische Treibstoffwerk AG, a Czech cooperation that was incorporated into the „Reichswerke Hermann Göring“. This huge bulk of photographs was made by three professional photographers, who were employed to document the development of working processes and the industry, which was transformed into the labor camp due to shortage of workers. The presentation showed that the photographs not solely documented working processes but also included an „ethnographical“ study and thus documented the intermingling of Prisoners of War (PoWs) with the society of the nearby village.

The afternoon sessions, which were moderated by CLARA OBERLE (San Diego) provided interdisciplinary perspectives of the visual representation of the Inmate's Body. ELISE PETIT (Paris) questioned, what official photographs tell about music and the destructive process in the Nazi camps. She exemplified the Nazis usage of the photographs of music performances in camps, especially their interrelation within acts of violence and murdering. VERONIKA SPRINGMANN (Oldenburg / Berlin) provided a postmodern case study of the representation of sports and exercises for legitimizing violence in the Concentration Camps of the NS Regime from 1933 onwards. The presentation showed that already very early reports of 1933 aimed at creating an „ideal image“, that should represent the usage of „sport“ as (re-)educational measure and for militarizing the excluded persons. Springmann demonstrated that the images which were constructed in this way introduced viewing (visual ?) patterns with a highly disciplinary measure. LUKAS MEISSEL (Haifa) presented a part of his PhD project which delves into portrait photographs taken by the 'Erkennungsdienst' in the Mauthausen concentration camp. Meissel distinguished between different categories in which those photographs can be classified. He stressed the category of „violence and death“ and pointed out that the photographs, which document „unnatural deaths“, were set to document correct proceeding of the Nazis in

the Camps. SANDRA STARKE (Berlin) traced back the emergence, function and meaning of Lynching Photography, namely the complex context of emergence, dissemination and agenda(s) behind the so called „Baumhängen“ pictures. In delving into the origins of the source she was able to demonstrate the multilayered construction and afterlife in exhibitions of these photographs.

JANINA STRUK (London) was the keynote speaker of the evening and provided an overview on different contexts in which photographs were used in exhibitions to produce evidence. Struk indicated and questioned the complex relation of photographs as evidence. Her lecture mainly focused on three categories of photographs of the camps: Those taken by resistance movements, by the allied forces and by the Nazis. She challenged the questions of why each of these photographs were taken, which perspective they open on the camps and highlighted that all these different perspectives were turned into the construction of a visual collective memory and illustrated on examples from early exhibitions in incorporations in different contexts. Taking up several examples (Höcker album, Lilly Jacob-album etc.) she questioned if there could be a correct interpretation and thus a reference to „evidence“ and draw the conclusion that an explaining text and context is needed to understand the photographs.

The fourth panel focused especially on Jasenovac Concentration Camp and the discourse on it of „truth and lies“. ANDRIANA BENČIĆ (Jasenovac) give a talk on mid 1945 pictures of the bombed Jasenovac Concentration Camp made by the Croatian State Admission for the Investigation of Crimes. LJILJANA RADONIC (Wien) analyzed the presentations and representations of the (Jasenovac) photographs in Post-Communist Memorial Museums „from Tallin to Jasenovac“, especially focusing on Jasenovac Memorial Museum in which solely photographs taken by perpetrators are displayed. In her talk she compared the representation of the Holocaust with the representation and dealing with victims of Socialism and highlighted that personalizing approaches do not represent all victim groups similar.

The afternoon sessions of the second confe-

rence day were entitled „Photography as Medium of Self-Assertion“. AGNIESZKA PUFELSKA (Berlin) chaired these panels which included different perspectives from documenting to witnessing. ANDREA GENEST (Berlin) referred to Inmate Photography from the Women's Concentration Camp Ravensbrück. The presentation based on five photographs taken secretly by victims. The women prisoners shown on them were victims of medical experiments. Genest pointed out that these pictures not solely witness the brutality and terror the victims faced but also illustrated broader range of political experience. TANJA KINZEL (Berlin) talked about portraits of Jewish Photographers from the Lodz Ghetto, who were forced to work as photographers for the Nazi administration. Kinzel regarded the pictures as ego-documents and suggested a multilayered interpretation of the motifs. PAWEŁ MICHNA (Posen) aimed at analyzing iconography of Modernity in Albums from Lodz Ghetto, especially through the example of „an album in an album“ of the hygienic and health department. In this album, differently arranged collages should preserve photographs which were done for documentary reasons for the Nazi administration.

MIRIAM ARANI (Frankfurt am Main) compared Gisele Freund's examination on photography in the 1920s and 1930s with photographs done by her contemporary Hilmar Pabel. Arani exemplified photographs of the Ghetto of Lublin which were published in the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung and their usage as policy. Her talk illustrated the interweaving of Hilmar Pabel's within the Nazi Regime, and thus reconstructed the appearance of photographs in one of the most printed German newspapers.

STEPHAN MATYUS (Mauthausen / Wien) illustrated the liberation of Mauthausen Concentration Camp through the photographic perspective of the Inmate Francisco Boix and drafted the emerging of new self-assertions through acting as photographer.

The last session of the conference delved into Motifs and their narrative(s). MARIA SCHINDELEGGER (München) spoke about the different usages of „Stacheldraht“ (Barbed Wire) functioning as border, as element

of special division, as item defining and creating an insight and an outside view as well as the agendas behind those different motifs. The presentation was based on an analysis of photographs of the Buchenwald Concentration Camp and highlighted the importance of regarding the positions and roles of the persons who are involved in the emerging of a photograph – that posing in front or behind this (former) border mainly contributed to narratives. Hence, Schindelegger concluded, that the Barbed Wire as (former) border was restaged and reinterpreted on the photographs.

RUTH PEREZ-CHAVES (Madrid) provided a talk on the usage of photographs and the phenomenon of photography in the latest Oscar winning film „Son of Saul“ (by László Nemes, 2015). She especially focused on the implementation of archival photographic material in one scene and the incorporation of it following a motif of a „story behind the pictures“ in the narrative of the film.

The conference impressively demonstrated the importance of regarding all actors who are included in the production of photographs – and not to forget to consider the person behind the lens. Moreover, the various case studies and examples from exhibitions pointed out that we, as viewers of photographs in publications, films or museums should always be aware of what the displayed photographs intend to tell about the holocaust and – probably even more important – what is not told and/or shown. The conference was able to discuss various and complex perspectives from different fields and opened up a bulk of new questions which will be included in the publication of the conference papers, which is planned for 2017.

Conference Overview:

Photography and Representations of the NS Regime

Opening: Hildegard Frübis (Graz/Berlin)

Stefan Hördler (Weimar): Auschwitz and the Nazi Concentration Camps through the Lens of the SS: Perpetrator Photography and Self-perception

Alfons Adam (Prag): „Für uns arbeitet ganz Europa“. National Socialist Forced Labor in

the Photographic Archives of the Sudetenländische Treibstoffwerke AG Brüx

Disciplining the Inmate's Body
Chair: Clara Oberle (San Diego)

Elise Petit (Paris): What Do Official Photographs Tell us about Music and Destructive Processes in the Nazi Camps

Veronika Springmann (Oldenburg / Berlin): Inmate Sports and Exercise in Early Nazi Concentration Camps as a Visual Strategy for Legitimizing Violence

Disciplining the Inmate's Body (II)
Chair: Andrea Genest (Berlin)

Lukas Meissel (Haifa): Perpetrator Photography. The Motifs of the Erkennungsdienst [Photographic Identification Department] at Mauthausen Concentration Camp.

Sandra Starke (Berlin): „...davon kann man sich kein Bild machen.“ Emergence, Function, and Meaning of Lynching Photography („Baumhängen“-Photographie)
Keynote

Janina Struk (London): Photography in the Camps: The Origin and Authority of the Evidence

Photography from Jasenovac Concentration Camp: The Discourse on Truth or Lies
Chair: Clara Oberle (San Diego)

Andriana Bencic (Jasenovac): Photographs Never Lie? – Jasenovac Concentration Camp 1941-1945

Ljiljana Radonić (Wien): Visualizing Perpetrators and Victims in Post-Communist Memorial Museums from Tallinn to Jasenovac

Photography as Medium of Self-Assertion (I)
Chair: Agnieszka Pufelska (Lüneburg)

Andrea Genest (Berlin): Photography as Witness. Inmate Photography from the Women's Concentration Camp Ravensbrück

Tanja Kinzel (Berlin): Documenting, to Leave Testimony. Portraits by Jewish Photographers from the Lodz Ghetto

Pawel Michna (Posen): Hygiene and Propaganda. Iconography of Modernity in Albums from the Łódź Ghetto

Photography as Medium of Self Assertion (II)

Chair: Agnieszka Pufelska (Lüneburg)

Miriam Arani (Frankfurt am Main): For a „FREUNDlichen“ [friendly] view on Jewish Lublin

Stephan Matyus (Mauthausen / Wien): The Liberation of Mauthausen through the Photographic Perspective of one Inmate: Francisco Boix

Motifs and their Narrative

Chair: Hildegard Frübis (Graz / Berlin)

Maria Schindelegger (München): Shifting Borders. The Motif of the Barbed Wire in Photographs of Liberated Buchenwald Concentration Camp

Ruth Perez-Chaves (Madrid): „... just takes one simple look, to imagine this extermination industry at work...“: The Use of Historical Photographic Material from 1944 in the Film „Son of Saul“ (László Nemes, 2015)

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