

IMAGE, HISTORY AND MEMORY

Genealogies of Memory in Central and Eastern Europe

Akademia Sztuk Pięknych
Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie 37/39
Warszawa
www.enrs.eu/genealogies

the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk (2017). Placing them in the context of the Polish “museum boom” (in particular of a prominent pattern created by the Warsaw Rising Museum, 2004) and of general politics of memory in which they participate, she will sketch answers to the questions of diverse ways of installing photographs in exhibitions (i.e. reproducing vs. exhibiting as historical objects); types of photographs (portraits, group photos, landscapes; black-and-white and colour) included in exhibitions and their possible uses; photograph as an instrument for creating bonds; photographs as tools for making the past and present tangible; photographs as means of shocking; the variety of meanings they gain in the context of exhibitions; persuasion (and/or manipulation) made via photographic images in the investigated museums.

Maria Kobielska earned her PhD in Literary Studies from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 2014. She teaches Cultural Studies, Poetics and Theory of Literature in the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. She is a member of the Research Center for Memory Cultures since its beginning in 2014. Her research interests include contemporary Polish literature and culture in the perspective of memory, past and politics. Kobielska is the author of a monograph on the poetry of Jerzy Ficowski and many articles; she has recently published a book on the Polish memory culture in the 21st century (*Polska kultura pamięci w XXI wieku: dominanty. Zbrodnia katyńska, powstanie warszawskie i stan wojenny*, IBL PAN, 2016).

Robbert-Jan Adriaansen (Netherlands), *Smiling in Auschwitz.*

The Semiotics of Instagram Selfies at Holocaust Memorial Sites

In January 2017, the Israeli artist and commentator Shahak Shapira created a digital project called “Yolocaust”. Shapira took pictures from social media websites showing people posing or taking selfies at ‘dark tourism’ sites, such as the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin or at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, and projected these people onto real archival footage of the Holocaust. The project mocked and satirised the culture of taking smiling, relaxing and otherwise ‘inappropriate’ photos at Holocaust memorial sites. Shapira’s project was praised around the globe as it challenged a practice commentators had already been dismissing for several years as the epitome of a narcissistic, ignorant, and even sacrilegious attitude of the younger generation towards the historical reality of the Holocaust.

This presentation discusses this widely criticised, but rarely analysed phenomenon by semiotically analysing some 150 self-portrait or posed photographs taken at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which have been posted publicly on the world’s leading photo-sharing platform Instagram. It argues that social media platforms such as Instagram are semiotic systems based on user interaction and that ‘Holocaust selfies’ should not be read as static representations of historical memory, but as expressions of what Jos de Mul called ‘ludic identity’. As social media platforms are playing fields in which different types of self are mobilised and posited dynamically, conventional maxims of communication and (historical) representation – such as truth and clarity – are often postponed, which may be interpreted as a threat to historical consciousness. However, Adriaansen’s analysis shows that the majority of “Auschwitz selfies” are used to define the poster’s relationship to a particular memory *culture*, rather than to define the individual’s relationship to the events or to the contents of a particular memory themselves. It is only by confusing these two relationships that critics such as Shapira dismiss selfie culture altogether.

Robbert-Jan Adriaansen is an Assistant Professor in the Theory of History and Historical Culture at Erasmus University Rotterdam. His research focuses on conceptions of history and historical time, in the past and in the present. In 2015 he published the monograph *The Rhythm of Eternity: The German Youth Movement and the Experience of the Past, 1900-1933* (Berghahn, 2015). He is currently working on two projects about the representation of violent pasts in contemporary historical culture, focusing on representations on Instagram and in historical re-enactments.

Commentary: Katarzyna Bojarska (Poland)

Katarzyna Bojarska is an assistant professor in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in the Department of Late Modernity Literature and Culture. Author of numerous articles and translations interested in the relations of art, literature, history and psychoanalysis. Author of a book *Wydarzenia po Wydarzeniu: Białoszewski – Richter – Spiegelman*