

Conference “<https://digitalmemoryonthenet>”

Abstract: Open, but place-bound: The “Sprechen trotz allem/Speaking in spite of all” video archive

at the Place of Information

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I. The video archive as part of the permanent exhibition

The video archive of the Foundation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is not available online, but is part of the permanent exhibition at the Place of Information beneath the Field of Stelae. The principles of the overall concept were taken into account here too:

- The intention is to narrate individual life stories (“Give the victims a face”)
- The geographical dimension of the Holocaust is to be made clear

II. History of the project

The project came into being in 2004 out of a co-operation with the “Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies” of Yale University (access only for persons who can prove a research interest).

830 interviews in twelve different languages (most of them in German or English) were handed over to the Foundation for analysis and presentation within the exhibition.

Developmental steps:

- Digitalisation
- Since 2005: Design and programming of database and terminal presentation
- From January 2008: Systematic analysis → Status to date: 140 “finished” interviews
- September 2008: Official opening of the video archive at Place of Information
- Continuous integration of interviews from other stocks: Archiv der Erinnerung (Potsdam), Dokumentationszentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma (Heidelberg), Visual History Archive (Los Angeles), Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ahlem
→ also interviews with members of other victim groups
- Since May 2009: Conducting of the Foundation’s own interviews → so far: 31
- Privileged analysis → so far: 19
- Planning: 40 interviews with survivors from large Jewish communities in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe up to July 2013

III. Working steps

When conducting our interviews we follow the method of the “Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies.” The aspiration is to conduct a personal history interview, no factual report on the period of persecution. There is no catalogue of questions that is worked through – the witness decides himself or herself what he or she wants to describe or not.

1. Conducting an interview

- Presentation of the institution and of the project, process of personal acquaintance (4-6 weeks run-up)
- Place and duration of recording determined by the witness
- Pre-interview: one day before the interview; tour of exhibition if desired
- Interview: unlimited duration

Afterwards:

- The interviewee receives “author” rights, only transfers to us the right to show the interview in the exhibition and in the wider Foundation context (exhibition projects and similar)
- Sending of the films and the materials compiled by us
- Maintain contact → Importance of people for the Foundation

2. Editing an interview

Analysis of the interview, averaging around two hours long, follows in a multi-step process with the aim of making individual experience visible in the general context of the Holocaust, therefore: What is told? And how is it told? The texts compiled by us are meant to be easy to understand and dispense with specialist terminology as far as possible: later users are generally not experts. Our project team’s advantage: all “editors” are experienced in pedagogical work at the Memorial.

Working steps:

- Transcription / translation
- Time marking
- Table of contents / table of topics
- Tagging
- Biography
- Summary / overview
- Context description
- Proofreading

3. Publishing the interview

The fully edited interview is unlocked at the terminal presentation and can thus be viewed by Place of Information visitors on each following Sunday. There, visitors can either watch an interview played on the big screen or search in the database for places, names or events, or to have an interviewed suggested to them.

Dramaturgically the video archive can be found at the end of the exhibition tour in the seminar rooms used during the week by the pedagogic department, which were redesigned specifically for the opening of the video archive. Attention is paid to a peaceful and concentrated atmosphere.

4. Putting to pedagogical use

As an out-of-school place of learning, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe offers a whole range of pedagogic formats on the Memorial itself and on the history of the Holocaust. The possibility of integrating contemporary witness interviews with work with young people is increasingly being made use of in the process:

- Since 2008: Project days (every Monday between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., free of charge for Berlin schools)

- Since 2010: “Introduction to the video archive” (duration: 1 ½ hours, can be reserved on various topics)
- From 2011: Workshop on the persecution of Sinti and Roma
- Further projects by the Foundation (youth website, exhibition projects, publications among other things)
- Scientific research (possible any time after prior registration at the office)