



**PRESERVING  
SURVIVORS'  
MEMORIES**

Digital Testimony Collections about Nazi Persecution  
History, Education and Media

## **International Conference of the Foundation EVZ and Freie Universität Berlin in cooperation with USC Shoah Foundation. The Institute for Visual History and Education**

**20 – 22 November 2012, Berlin**

Against the background of the generation shift, preserving the memories of survivors of National Socialist persecution and anchoring them in the cultural memory of the 21st century is a central challenge of our present times and a subject of international discussion. In this transition phase and in the course of the headlong technical developments in the field of computer and communication technologies, high expectations are linked to the digital collections of audio and video interviews with survivors. The conference offers an opportunity to draw the debates on digital techniques of preserving eyewitness interviews, access, and new forms of passing the material on together in an international context.

### **REMEMBRANCE OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PERSECUTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

The past decades have seen the development of numerous extensive collections of interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust, forced labour and other National Socialist mass crimes. The audio and video interviews with persecutees of the National Socialist regime show the experienced-history perspective of those who underwent and suffered the National Socialist persecution and destruction policy. Like no other medium, they document the impressive act of oral history in the spirit of a “testimony perception”. The progressive accessibility of digital resources is unlocking a hitherto unknown potential for presentation, use and reception of these interview collections. At the same time, the introduction and use of non-linear media, leads to fundamental reorientations in handling the audio-visual sources and archives that represent major challenges to research, education and the media on an international level.

### **POST-1945 CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY**

In the meantime the audio-visual documentation of persecution experiences is increasingly being taken up by projects documenting post-1945 crimes and genocides. For example Oral History projects on the genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia are being produced. Interviews with victims of Stalinist terror are being conducted in the former Eastern Bloc states. Trans-national exchange of experience and transfer of knowledge taking the respective specific historical backgrounds into account appears to be both expedient and necessary.

### **SUBJECT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

The objective of the conference is to share experiences among an international and interdisciplinary group of experts concerning the status of current developments in digital testimony collections on National Socialist persecution and corresponding audio-visual history repositories by examining the three thematic complexes set out below and to discuss prospects for the future. A fundamental question for consideration will be the extent to which the novum of digital social participation and the accompanying pluralisation in history debate will change the perception of the history of National Socialist persecution and the picture of the persecutees of National Socialism. Furthermore, selected projects on post-1945 human rights crimes will be taken into account and discussed on a comparative basis.

## THEMATIC COMPLEXES

Alongside introductory lectures and input talks, the focus of the conference will be on exchanges in parallel workshops on the following three thematic complexes.

### A. AUDIO AND VIDEO INTERVIEWS AS A DIGITAL SOURCE IN THE E-HUMANITIES

In digital archives, eyewitness reports constitute multimedia content enriched with metadata. What methodology is used to produce and develop digital archive material – starting from the interview? This section will examine forms of documenting digital Oral History with regard to the deployment of promising metadata and the use of links, intelligent search mechanisms and navigation models. The possibilities of inter-operability with bibliographic information systems and other infrastructures of the e-Humanities are to be discussed. Beyond the use for research and the virtual working environments required for this, it would be good to know in what media and cross-media formats audio-visual interviews can address a broader target group and what aspects must be considered in this connection. Furthermore, the question of whether and how a broader community can be involved in the spirit of the “social web” in producing, enriching, developing and annotating eyewitness reports should be discussed.

### B. EDUCATION

The didactic potential of audio and video interviews opens up a large number of new opportunities for history education. This applies for both schools and corresponding offerings at history exhibitions and memorial sites. The education section will therefore ask what methodological approaches and didactic targets have been developed for coming to terms with audio-visual sources. Are there already theories concerning didactics of oral history? How are the individual experience biographies contextualised in history? What role do emotions on the part of students play when dealing with the interviews? To what extent are the different education products moulded by the respective national narratives and different relationships to National Socialism? What opportunities do the new web technologies of a Web2.0 open up and what risks are associated with this? Can digital interview archives promote problem-based learning in the subject of history?

### C. VISUAL MEDIA, WEBSITES, TV AND FILM

The enormous sphere of activity of Public History is also displayed with regard to digital eyewitness interview collections that are increasingly being presented in the media. There are extensive eyewitness portals on the Internet operated by civil society initiatives, academic research facilities, as well as television and radio broadcasting stations. In the same way video-taped eyewitness interviews in both documentaries and feature films represent an element of bringing historical events to life today. This section will discuss whether specifically cinematic or media-driven forms of presentation of video-taped eyewitness interviews are developing in the area of visual media. Fields of particular interest here are: I. How are the specific potentials of film and digital media for generating emotion and exerting influence deployed for aesthetic, narrative and cognitive addressing of the spectator, for example with close-ups etc. II. How do the new production and montage of already archived eyewitness interviews prefigure even discourses on the future perception of history for the medium of film? III. Should the role of the biographic narrative form and its translation into film and history accounts be examined?

## ORGANISERS AND PARTNERS IN COOPERATION

The conference is being initiated by three institutions with international fields of work in the areas of remembrance culture, historical video archives and developments of digital media technologies for research and teaching.

### FOUNDATION EVZ

The Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”, Berlin, has documented the history of forced labour under National Socialism with new sources of history-based experience and events and make presented these to the public by promoting an international life history interview project with former forced labourers in connection with a historical-documentary travelling exhibition.

**[www.stiftung-evz.de](http://www.stiftung-evz.de)**

### FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN, CENTER FOR DIGITAL SYSTEMS (CEDIS)

The Center for Digital Systems at Freie Universität Berlin develops multimedia historical archives, such as e.g. “Forced Labour 1939–1945: Memories and History” and makes them available for research, teaching and school classes. Special priority areas here are the academic treatment of the interviews, their integration into user-kindly web working environments and the development of digital teaching and learning materials.

**[www.cedis.fu-berlin.de](http://www.cedis.fu-berlin.de)**

### USC SHOAH FOUNDATION. THE INSTITUTE FOR VISUAL HISTORY AND EDUCATION

The USC Shoah Foundation is the Institute for Visual History and Education of the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. It has built up the world’s largest interview archive – the Visual History Archive which contains 52,000 video interviews that were recorded in 32 languages and 56 countries. The USC Shoah Foundation has an extensive network of international partner organisations that use the interviews in education and research.

**[www.dornsife.usc.edu/vhi](http://www.dornsife.usc.edu/vhi)**

## CONFERENCE MANAGEMENT

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