

Call for Papers

Memory Studies Association Madrid 2019 - Working Group Witnessing

In December 2016, the film *Austerlitz* directed by Loznitsa was premiered in Germany casting a light on tourists at Sachsenhausen concentration camp memorial. He notes:

This is the place where people were exterminated; this is the place of suffering and grief. And now, I am here. A tourist. With all the typical curiosities of a tourist. Without any notion of what it was like to be a prisoner in the concentration camp having a number, every day waiting for death, clinging to life. I stand here and look at the machinery for the extermination of the human body. Traces of life, sometime ago, long ago, here and now. What am I doing here? What are all these people doing here, moving in groups from one object to another? To try to come to grips with this, I made this film (Loznitsa 2016).

The opinion about tourism at memorial sites/museums is generally a negative one. This criticism stems from the inability to communicate the 'true' horrors of the past to future generations (Reynolds 2016). For instance, Holocaust research is dominated by the thought that the atrocities are unspeakable and consequently, no language can explain the atrocities experienced at these sites and no tourist will ever be able to understand it. Yet Reynolds (2016, p.343) highlights that "tourists are, or at least can be, secondary witnesses to suffering". While the act of witnessing is itself inauthentic, they will actively experience the traces of past suffering and will ultimately leave the site with an enhanced understanding of the committed crimes.

In Memory Studies there is an increasing body of scholarship on the transmission of atrocities to future generations, most notably Hirsch's (2008) concept of Postmemory and Landsberg's (2004) theory of Prosthetic Memory. How exactly however these transmissions of memory to visitors at memorial sites work, is barely known. Furthermore, visitors are predominantly considered within the context of the Nazi past ignoring more recent conflicts and violence. We would therefore like to invite papers that address the themes listed below and consider different conflicts:

- Visitors to memorial sites/museums
- The role of museums/memorial sites in post-conflict societies
- The development of "historical empathy" in museums – museum pedagogy
- The future of memory – how do we present atrocities for future generations?
- The relationship between the local community and the memorial site/museum
- Visitor research methodology at memorial sites
- Exhibition design.

Alongside academics, we would also particularly encourage practitioners and independent researchers who work in this field to submit papers.

Please submit abstracts with no more than 300 words to witnessing2019@gmail.com by 21st September 2018. Please note that we aim to submit panels to the organising committee of the Memory Studies Association by 1st October 2018 and the final decision will depend on this committee.

Kind regards,
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