Malach Center for Visual History

Compendium of papers

of the Prague Visual History and Digital Humanities Conference 2025

PRAVIDCO 2000

The Malach Center for Visual History is celebrating its fifteenth anniversary with the second edition of the Prague Visual History and Digital Humanities Conference (PRAVIDCO 2025). This conference reflects the Center's mission, acting as a nexus for scholars focused on the intersection of technology, humanities, and social sciences in contemporary interdisciplinary research.

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on its 15th Anniversary:

Compendium of Papers of the Prague Visual History and Digital Humanities Conference 2025

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Introduction

JIŘÍ KOCIÁN AND JAKUB MLYNÁŘ

The second Prague Visual History and Digital Humanities Conference (PRAVIDCO) taking place on January 23 and 24, 2025, provides us with the opportunity to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Malach Centre for Visual History (CVHM) at the Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Mathematics and Physics. Established in 2009, CVHM became the third European access point to the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive, with a mission to make memories of genocides available to the public in the Czech Republic and beyond. From its inception, CVHM has been a hub for interdisciplinary collaboration, bridging social sciences, humanities, computer science, computational linguistics, and machine translation. Nevertheless, across all its activities – scientific, educational, and outreach – the ethical dimension of Holocaust testimonies and their broader cultural and societal significance has always been paramount.

Over the past 15 years, our world has undergone significant changes. Social transformations have reshaped our methodologies and expanded our research horizons. The shift from traditional, in-person interactions to a more distributed work model facilitated by the expansion of communication technology has enabled us to collaborate with scholars and institutions worldwide, breaking down geographical barriers and fostering a more inclusive academic community. The transformation from a focus on Holocaust and genocide studies

to the broader field of digital humanities has allowed us to leverage advanced storage and analytical technologies, such as digital archives and data analysis tools, to uncover new insights and perspectives. This shift has enriched our understanding of historical events and their contemporary implications, making our work more relevant and impactful in today's digital age.

Giving consideration to the 5 years which passed since the previous PRAVIDCO volume we were reminded of the dynamic nature of the world around us and the need for constant readiness to tackle upcoming challenges. Little did we know at the closing of the Malach 10th anniversary conference in January 2020 how much the COVID pandemic, which was to break out globally in less than two months after, would change our lives during the following years. An unprecedented experience for our contemporary societies and us as individuals had a drastic impact on human interaction and therefore also the modus operandi of our Centre as we knew it up until then. We very closely observed the shift towards digital communication, digital information production, sharing and consumption while deepening online interconnectedness and tried to do our best to provide our research and educational services online while remaining open for our users during the given narrow windows of opportunity. We stayed in close contact with researchers who confronted the limitations of the time with steadfast writing as manifested in several books recently published by Karin Roginer Hofmeister, Kateřina Králová and Hana Kubátová, which materialized precisely during this period and are presented during the 2025 conference. Other long-term collaborators such as Ildikó Barna and Martin Šmok continued their multifaceted

research activities and agreed to present their work at the current PRAVIDCO instalment again as well.

During the moments we were finally shaking off the direct effects of the pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine drastically transformed the notion of security in Europe and undermined the international order in our part of the world in a fashion not seen since the end of the Cold War. Since February 2022, we have witnessed an "opportunity" for oral history to apply itself in documenting the horrors of the invasion, and the fates of individuals, families and communities. It became an imperative of Ukrainian academia and beyond to collect testimonies of war crimes, forced movements of people and daily life in a situation of shifted normality as is the case of our colleague Natalia Otrishchenko, who participated in the 10th Anniversary conference and in 2025 brings her account of the last 3 years of collecting testimonies. It is also worth mentioning that the Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics (ÚFAL) has swiftly leveraged its own know-how for the Czech-Ukrainian Translator[1] produced in a community-driven manner with the aim to assist the war refugees to the Czech Republic. At the moment of writing this introduction, the war in Ukraine still continues, while the academic community has been confronted with new arising challenges, among them the October 7 attacks and the subsequent military actions in the Gaza strip, which have stirred a heated debate and are another matter for documentation and its preservation.

[1] U4U. (2022). "Ufal for Ukraine". https://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/ufal-ukraine

Simultaneously the global public has been confronted with the proliferation of generative AI, which brought a set of opportunities and challenges and ushered in a new era of access to such technology in daily life and academic work as well. The field of Natural language processing has fully embraced the generational shift to transformer-based technology, and we worked closely with our colleagues at ÚFAL and other institutions to develop new methods of interview transcriptions and annotation to bring the oral history source closer to the researchers. These efforts also manifested in collaboration with our colleagues at the Department of Cybernetics of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen[2] or the Centre's participation in the Horizon Europe MEMORISE project[3] led by the University of South Denmark.

These new AI-related phenomena are not just mere tools; they bring a more profound impact on the research community as they change the everyday world in which we live our professional lives. As part of it, there is also a unique opportunity to explore interactions with AI-based technologies that have recently entered the field of oral history. As an example, "Dimensions in Testimony" is a technology created by the USC Shoah Foundation as a system enabling conversational interactions with recordings of a real person's narratives[4]. As an educational tool, it allows students to talk in English with a conversational agent embodying an on-screen digital representation of a Holocaust survivor, preserving the life story

[2] For more information see: https://www.kky.zcu.cz/en
[3] For more information see: https://memorise.sdu.dk/
[4] For more information see: https://sfi.usc.edu/dit

beyond the human being. Not surprisingly, within the field of Holocaust memory and Jewish studies, some scholars have received DiT positively, while others recommend critical caution. Situations consisting of such "human–AI" interaction allow us to understand the intertwining of language and collective memory in situated action involving cutting-edge technological devices.

With the open call for papers for the PRAVIDCO 2025, we managed to attract contributions from both well-known colleagues of the Malach Centre, and those who are newly joining our research community. This volume provides us with an opportunity to present their research in a printed and digital open-source format, and we are glad we can utilize our platform to disseminate original and interesting research that very well reflects the experiences and advancements in our field described above. The first part of the volume presents different approaches to visual sources, which are often narratives siu generis or at least an important accompaniment of narratives shared in oral or written form: Simon Walsh delved into cartoons by German-speaking internees in wartime Australia; the team composed of Thea Christoffersen, Annika Tidemand Jensen, Chris Hall, Christofer Meinecke and Stefan Jänicke connected to the MEMORISE project Holocaust prisoner artworks with ML-based object recognition; Ernest Huk, Valentyn Shkriba and Shivam Sen focused on Memes as a case of Ukrainian digital participatory culture resisting the Russian invasion. The second section of the book is dedicated to various dimensions of narratives shared through language: Klára Kosová approaches metaphors as sources of imaginary governance in the case of Bulgaria; Jakub Mlynář discusses paralinguistic aspects of video-interviewing in

his paper dealing with the acts of pointing as a resource for narrative; Tereza Juhászová brings forth narratives of Roma about their presence in the Czechoslovak borderlands; Christopher Brückner and Pavel Pecina, present challenges and solution to ML-based automated semantic tagging of VHA interviews, carried out for the MEMORISE project. The last paper by Miky Výborný, in which he presents the story of concentration camp guard Irma Grese, is an example of citizen science carried out with the help of video interviews available at the Malach Centre.

At last, we would like to thank all those who contributed to the rich life of the Malach Centre for Visual History and left an indelible mark on its evolution and activities over the last 15 years: the initiator of the Malach Centre and director of LINDA/CLARIAH-CZ Prof. Jan Hajič, Prof. Eva Hajičová for the interconnecting of the Centre with partners in Europe through CLARIN, ÚFAL director Prof. Barbora Vidová Hladká, and former director Prof. Markéta Lopatková for the continuous support of our home institution; our colleagues coordinating the Centre's activities, dr. Petra Hoffmannová who has been the most stable and reassuring presence within the Centre's team uninterruptedly since its opening, dr. Karin Roginer Hofmeister and Kateřina Fuksová who are currently carrying out most of the Centre's work, as well as the former coordinator Tereza Juhászová; our developers Pavel Obdržálek and David Nápravník; Klára Kosová and Klára Smitková from C4DHI for their long-term collaboration and co-organizing PRAVIDCO 2025; and our interns Adéla Vašků, Alexandra Patiño Castro, Grygorii Maliukov, Jonas Bakkeli Eide, Natanael Güttner, Maria

Dimoupoulou, Jarmila Šebková, Hans Zdravko Harmens and Kristýna Plecitá who have been a positive and memorable presence during the periods they have spent at our Centre.

We hope you will enjoy reading this volume and wish for another productive 5 years of our Centre's existence.

Surviving, Resisting, and Remembering Through Creative Practice: Cartoons by German-speaking Internees in Wartime Australia

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Introduction

During World War I and II, hundreds and thousands of people were incarcerated in internment camps worldwide. Though not as well known, Australia too established internment camps during both World Wars. My focus here is on the largest and most prominent group among Australia's wartime internees, those incarcerated by Australian authorities by dint of their presumed German origin or heritage. As a former British colony, Australia achieved independence through federation in 1901, though it was not until after WWII that Australian passports identified their holders as Australian citizens and not merely British subjects. As arguably Britain's closest wartime ally, Australian legislation (War Precautions Act 1914 and the even more far-reaching National Security Act 1939) mirrored foreign policy choices made in the 'mother country'. Both World Wars witnessed the rapid establishment and expansion of internment camps on Australian soil intended for those identified as 'German enemy aliens'. This was a deliberately broad categorisation functionally erasing distinctions among sub-groups – during both WWI and II, for example, internment camps in Australia housed both naturalised Australians of

German heritage together with internees rounded up abroad (especially Asia) and transported to the continent.

To glance even cursorily at the historical and archival record is to be struck by the frequency and intensity of which daily life was subject to specifically visual representation in the form of drawings or more specifically cartoons, comics and caricatures, designations I use interchangeably here. As part of a wider ongoing project with colleagues in Media Studies at the University of Adelaide, over a hundred such Australian internment drawings have been gathered so far, our visual sources drawn from university library, museum and online archives, as well as published books about life in Australia's wartime internment camps. In introducing the reader to a sample of this visual material, this paper reflects on its overlooked documentary and historical value, in doing so drawing on historical research on the camps and contemporary scholarship within POW Studies and Comic Studies.

The neglect of internee drawings

When it comes to writing the history of WWI and WWII Australia, of which its domestic policy forms a significant component, the drawings gathered represent an under-theorised if not overlooked source. This circumstance reflects a broader neglect in the secondary literature of cartoons, comics and caricatures as wartime medium and document. One reason is that they are less tangible and more ephemeral than more conventional sources such as photographs, diary accounts or other written sources on the official record, all of which enjoy superior epistemological status. Drawings produced by

internees are contrastingly often dismissed, whether explicitly or implicitly, as low art, less the product of inspired reflection than of boredom.

In reclaiming the value of drawings by German-speaking internees in Australian wartime camps, we might begin with the cartoon below. It stems from the so-called 'German Concentration Camp' or G.C.C. set close to Sydney, New South Wales by Australia's WWI government under Billy Hughes (used unselfconsciously, the appellation didn't assume its present-day connotations until its gruesome inversion under Hitler Germany). By 1916 the G.C.C. had become WWI Australia's largest internment camp, housing close to 5000 male internees identified as holding significant national, ideological, linguistic or cultural connections with and to the "German enemy".

Figure 1. Detail from C. Friedrich's WWI comic "von morgens frueh bis abends spaet", Kampspiegel-Monatshefte (25. August 1918). Image courtesy of the National Library of Australia, http:// nla.gov.au/nla.obj-25844222.

These 2-panels are extracted from a larger 8-panel word-image work appearing as a sort of comic strip in the G.C.C. 's internee-produced camp magazine. It was drawn by an internee artist, C. Friedrich, about whom little is known, other that he was from Bavaria and interned in the G.C.C. in September 1915. As suggested by the title given to the entire series, 'von morgens frueh bis abends spaet', it portrays a typical day in the life of the camp. In the above panel spanning early evening until lights out, we are confronted by a host of camp activities – dinner, newspaper reading, cinema, theatre etc. – acted out through a variety of archetypal camp characters drawn in caricature. Although the overall tone is light-hearted, spreading as well to the accompanying verse text, Friedrich does not avoid thematising the privations of internment. To this end, "Liverpooler Schnee" is an inside reference to the Australian dust that plagued the internees day and night (the camp buildings, including the sleeping quarters, were not well insulated), filtered ironically here through the "European" phenomenon of snow. In its entirety, the comic acts as a kind of condensed and economical looping mobius strip of the repetitive life within camp borders, a circular life that is denied narrative progression.

Cartoons, POW creativity and counter-narrative

From this first gloss of Friedrich's cartoon, it should be apparent that it cannot be easily written off as low art, its form and content arising arbitrarily under the sign of boredom. To be sure, it appears to serve utilitarian ends, but in doing so as figures marching through successive stages of daily routine in the camp, it arguably paints a more immediate and richly condensed

snapshot of camp life than any photograph or written account. In short, the cartoon achieves its aims along particularly inventive, humorous and creative means.

In his recent history of Australia's wartime internment camps, Peter Monteath points to the "remarkable…extent which prisoners were able to channel their energies into creative activities." (2018, 70). Indeed, the conceptual lens of creativity is one through which German-speaking internee cartoons and caricatures can be productively approached. The overlooked importance of creativity and creative artistic practice among internee and POW populations has recently been explored by scholars, for example in the interdisciplinary volume Cultural Heritage and Prisoners of War: Creativity Behind Barbed Wire, which, though looking at wartime Europe, North America and Asia, unfortunately (albeit characteristically) omits consideration of internment creativity in Australia. Positioning themselves within the field of POW Studies, the editors of that volume note in their introduction that creative practice (a term they define broadly) was ubiquitous among POW populations and that "this creativity is a rich vein of information which allows the researcher an insight into the experiences, perceptions and emotions of life behind barbed wire." (Carr and Mytum 2012, 2). In what follows, I will draw on some of the broad research questions or themes that emerge from the above volume, demonstrating their coalescence around a conceptual lens that might be placed in productive dialogue with these wartime drawings from Australian internment.

One central claim made on behalf of POW/internment creativity is that it generated important counter-narratives of captivity.

Camp cartoons and caricatures were, in this regard, ideal creative products: availing themselves of subversive humour, internee cartoonists were able to narrate engaging stories about camp life, stories which frequently complicated or contradicted the official view of things as seen from the captor perspective. Immediately linking these general claims to the specific WWI cartoon shown above, its reference to "die Sun" tells us that G.C.C. Internees were provided British newspapers, and were therefore nominally up-to-date with wartime events, but that they doubted the veracity of the information conveyed to them. In directly thematising the internees pushing back against that presented to them as the official discourse, Friedrich playfully creates a second layer of counter-narrative.

In this fleeting detail from Friedrich's cartoon what's at stake is how the War and its course is being described from afar by the British press, who also speak on behalf of the Australian authorities. But these internment cartoons can also be contrasted (visually) with official representations of camp life made by Australian authorities. A prominent example was provided by an illustrated diary of the WWI internment camps, put together in 1919 by Edmond Samuels, an Australian guard who worked at the G.C.C. In the diary, Samuels takes every opportunity to laud the treatment of G.C.C. prisoners and ignores the possibility of physical or psychological disturbance through enforced captivity. Published at the end of the War as a 55-booklet, it circulated in the general public and was reviewed very favourably by an Australian press likely sensing its status as a kind of anticipatory damage control document.

Figure 2. The cover of Edmond Samuels's *An Illustrated Diary of Australian Internment Camps* (1919). Image courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales, https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74VMyLG3wjOM.

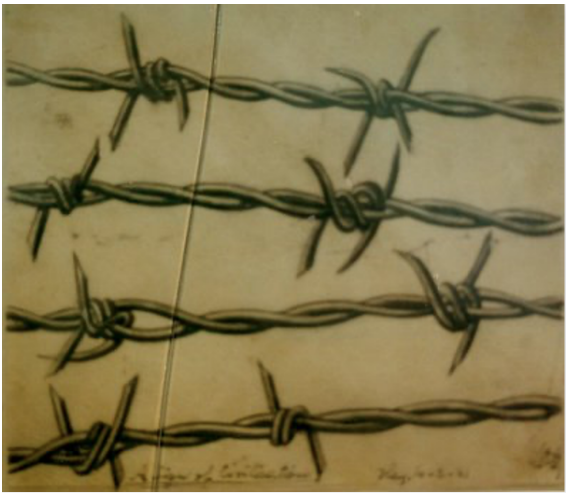
Figure 3. WWI cartoon from C. Friedrich's *Reise-Abenteur eines braven Deutschen im Lande der Kangaroo*. Image courtesy of the University of Adelaide, https://connect.adelaide.edu.au/nodes/view/28134.

Echoing the rosy picture painted within the diary's pages, the cover illustration is drawn in no-nonsense manner with clean and orderly lines. Barbed wire forms a grid across the entire cover, but its gravity is diffused by what the eye is drawn to through its centre, a group of internees in seemingly leisurely, hands-in-pockets repose. Drawn at the front of the picture are a guard and internee: although it is clear where the power lies – the guard is standing erect on the right side of the fence, whereas the internee is slightly slouched – they appear to be in relaxed enough conversation, the tennis racket tucked under the internee's arm a further indication that life in the G.C.C. was pretty good.

The diary's cover can be productively contrasted with a further cartoon by G.C.C internee C. Friedrich. Unlike his 'von morgens frueh bis abends spaet' comic printed in the camp newspaper, Friedrich's above cartoon circulated privately in the camp in a printed booklet forming part of a series playfully entitled Reise-Abenteuer eines braven Deutschen im Lande der Kangaroo in which he brings to life the routines, passions he and other G.C.C. internees experience (in total there are five booklets, each containing 12 cartoons, meaning that the above is one of 60 cartoons Frieddrich produced for the entire series). I will return to the above cartoon later; what I want to emphasise here is the contrast with the cover drawing from Samuels' diary. Crouched hard against the ranging fence, his pipe falling unceremoniously to the ground, the haphazardly sketched prisoner in Friedrich's cartoon is appraising a sign which aggressively bids him remove himself, a message reinforced in the subsequent signs and repeated a fourth time in Friedrich's accompanying verse, which

also frames the barbed wire as an ominous physical presence "voll Stachel und Spitzen". Here the interaction between internee and guard is of a different order: the latter lurks at safe distance on the other side of the fence using only the 'flashing' blade of his bayonet to converse optically with the internee.

Friedrich's cartoon, though humorous, paints a far less rosy picture of camp life than in Samuels' official account pictorially condensed in the front cover. The pictorial subversion of the official record represented by Samuels' sanitised account is acuter still in drawings made 20 or so years later in World War II, during which Australia's system of internment was larger and more complex than World War I, a circumstance reflecting the greater complexity and variety of internees (more on this immediately below). Preserved in the museum collection of one of WWII Australia's largest internment camps in Tatura, Victoria, are the following drawings by Emil Wittenberg:



Figures 4 and 5. WWII cartoons from Emil Wittenberg. Images courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Australia.

In Wittenberg's initial rendering, the Tartura internees are drawn as a ghostly-faced dense collective who Wittenberg literally places in the background (in den Hintergrund gestellt) provided by the barbed wire, as if to accentuate the harsh reality of enforced imprisonment. Though similarly located, a second drawing dispenses with the prisoners altogether: they disappear along with their palely coloured humanity, and camp life is reduced to an ominous close-up of the barbed wire. The especially bleak note Wittenberg strikes in these WWII drawings requires brief contextualisation.

Though also a German-speaking internee, Wittenberg was actually Jewish, from Vienna. He belonged to group of over 2,5000 mainly Austrian-Jewish refugees who, by the outbreak of the War, had made their way to Britain, from where they were foolishly classified as "enemy aliens" following the fall of France in 1940 and deported on the HMT Dunera to Australia,

whereupon they were placed (at least initially) in internment camps such as Tartura. The group included a large number of highly educated individuals, including academics, artists and musicians, many of whom remained in Australia beyond the War and enriched Australia's intellectual and cultural life. Referred to today in Australia as the 'Dunera Boys', their story stands as a reminder of the paranoia of war and the mistreatment of refugees, even by democratic governments, while also highlighting the resilience of such displaced populations. To this day, the Dunera cohort represents "the most egregious conflation of enemy aliens and refugees during the Second World War" perpetuated by Britain and Australia (Bashford & Strange 2002, p. 520).

Facilitating survival: the existential value of cartoons

Among the drawings by Dunera internees of which my colleagues and I have collected to date, several depict or otherwise thematise the lengthy voyage which sealed their double displacement. Outside of the obvious trauma stemming from forcible removal to the other side of the world, it is well established that the Dunera internees were subject to brutal and humiliating treatment by the British guards, beginning with them depriving internees of their money and other valuables. The drawing below by Fritz Schonbach (sometimes spelled Schönbach) depicts a particularly difficult moment from the voyage, in his words how the guards on board "chased us around the ship with bayonets" (Schonbach, 1996).

Figure 6. WWII cartoon by Fritz Schonbach. Image courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Australia.

Schonbach's retrospective caption is taken from a three-hour oral history interview he gave toward the end of his to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Tracing his journey from Vienna to England as refugee, and from there to Australia as interned enemy alien eventually released and making his way in the world as naturalised Australian who eventually relocated to the US, Schonbach's account of how his drawings on board arose affirm that POW creativity was often an improvised and ephemeral affair. With all writing and drawing materials were withheld from internees, Schonbach, as he relates it, used a smuggled pencil snub to doodle "crude caricatures" (Schonbach, 1996) on the exposed edges of oblong boards pressed into service

as a chess set completed by pieces fashioned from bits of stale bread.

Requiring imagination and ingenuity, the improvised caricatures did not survive the trip, but as creative products of captivity, they more than served their purpose. Noting their immediate resonance, Schonbach, again speaking in retrospect, remarks as follows: "I understand that some people were really, really cheered up by this [drawing of cartoons]" on board. They made the rounds. They were passed around"; or, as he similarly states it elsewhere: "...those drawings were really-- it was quite amazing. And if you ask anybody who was on my part of the ship, they really helped the morale" (Schonbach, 1996).

In Schonbach's retelling, the chessboard caricatures arise against the odds out of an inner compulsion to meet an equally urgent communal need. We might regard what he drew on board as the creative transmutation of traumatic experience into material form without regard to their further history. His account of how his initial drawings in captivity arose powerfully affirms the claim that, in raising spirits and boosting morale, creative practice among POW populations is frequently a matter of existential need, "…a prerequisite…for enduring and surviving captivity" (Carr and Mytum, 2012, p. 3). Being creative is therapeutic, facilitating survival by raising spirits and boosting morale. The opportunity for self-expression is the opportunity to write one's life, rather than be subsumed into a dehumanising regime of detention, where self-determination is thwarted, the future is far out of reach, and names are replaced with numbers.

Recording experience (for posterity)

Understood here both physically and in its emotional/psychological dimensions, survival, as Schonbach's remarks indicate, encompassed both internee artist and audience alike. In generalising from his account, we might postulate that drawing, as an exemplary form of creative practice, formed a way of life in captivity, that it was an interactive practice premised on a network of relations spreading from artist to fellow internees.

This network of relations, I want to suggest here, also involved some form of (imagined) external audience, a point which can be elaborated via a brief sketch of Schonbach's artistic trajectory in internment. Buoyed by the extremely positive reception of his cartoons on board the HMT Dunera, and presumably prompted by scores of new and exotic sights and experiences, Schonbach, once interned on Australian soil, continued to draw energetically and enthusiastically. His themes included "the first days in camp, the problems we had in camp" (Schonbach, 1996) as shown, for example in the humorous sketch below involving a pun on the Dunera boys' humanitarian 'case' brought before the Australian authorities, who eventually realised and responded to the terrible blunder that had been made. A further drawing Schonbach made from within internment was part of a series around a striking pictorial motif Schonbach later recalled as "very graphic, very distinct" according to which he" imagined myself a bird, and I flew over the camp and had these bird's-eye views of the camp" (Schonbach, 1996).

Figures 7 and 8. WWII cartoons from Fritz Schonbach. Images courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Australia.

As Schonbach further notes in his interview, from within Australian internment, he also turned time and again in his work to the traumatic voyage – in fact, and as may have already been deduced from above, the voyage scenes were drawn after Schonbach and his fellow internees had made landfall in Australia. As our emerging collection attests, the voyage served as a common retrospective theme and object for all Dunera artists during the period of their Australian internment. On one level, this was unsurprising. Assuming their place alongside the drawings arising out of and prompted by immediate internment experiences in Australia, the retrospective thematisation of the voyage was subsumed into the attempt by artists to process and share their present hardship. As noted in respect to Schonbach's HMT Dunera caricatures, his work exemplifies how creative practice among POWs was governed by an urgent shared

psychological and therapeutic impulse that arose in response to trauma and which trumped any considerations of preservation.

I also want to suggest that the habitual return to the voyage was shaped by an impulse, much noted by internees, to record and document events and experiences not only for each other, but also for posterity. Discussing what and why he drew in internment, Schonbach notes that "[t]here was no permanent record. And I started providing a record of what had happened, how we had been interned, and what happened on the ship." (Schonbach 1996) The notion of a 'permanent record' ultimately points beyond an internal audience galvanised by common experience to an imagined external audience of posterity. To return to the G.C.C. of WWI Australia, the same double impulse is rhetorically present in the founding issue of the organ which later carried C.Friedrich's 'von heute frueh bis abends spaet', the Kamp-Spiegel, an ambitious undertaking eventually running to some 1800 pages. In programmatic remarks made on the first pages of the magazine's debut edition, founding editor Ludwig Schroeder sounded the magazine's primary aim, that of "holding up a mirror to" that is "providing a faithful image ['getreues Bild'] of life" in the camp. If, in so doing, the magazine will "mediate and connect" ['vermittelnd wirken'], this goal can also be understood as pointing toward a delayed audience extending far beyond the camp. (Schroeder, 1916)

Speaking out of two different World Wars, Schonbach and Schroeder gesture toward a wish to record and document for posterity that has often been expressed by wartime internee populations more generally. Scholars have typically sought to locate that 'record' in oral testimony or in written accounts, such

as provided here by Schonbach and Schroeder; but in announcing and using the above desire to launch his (discursive-literary) project the latter twice reaches for a visual metaphor, a congenial figure of speech suggestive of the unique potential creative drawing possessed in times of war for recording, documenting and witnessing.

Mediating and complicating national identity

Like internee publications more generally, the Kamp-Spiegel was itself a creative undertaking of considerable scope and ambition. The programmatic desire to 'vermittelnd wirken' expressed on its behalf by Schroeder points to a further important aspect of creative artistic practice in captivity: that it was a crucial way of mediating camp identities, whether subtly encoded or clearly manifest. A particularly productive line of line of examining these drawings is through the lens of national identity. The mobilisation around and retreat into the nation state formed the very logic by which both World Wars were fought, and in WWII, especially, this mobilisation/retreat assumed explicitly racial contours. Much of what we have collected so far under the rubric of internment art is distinguished by a willingness to interrogate collective ways of belonging premised on patriotism, national identity and race. It was an interrogation at the service of the deeper counter-narrative.

Figure 9. WWII cartoon from Robert Hofmann. Image courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Australia

The above drawing by Dunera internee artist Robert Hofmann strikingly, if tragically, directs the viewer's attention to precisely what is at stake. (That Hofmann was significantly older than his fellow Austrian-Jewish internees may well account for a cartoon in full possession of the calamitous situation.) In portraying the Jewish internee, Hofmann avails himself of a trope of monstrous nationalism according to which the perceived enemy is reduced to an individual monster whose racially projected threat must be kept at bay. Particularly jarring in Hofmann's drawing is the absurd and contradictory double punishment being meted out. In falling for the Jew as stooped, long-bearded and bug-eyed monster, an image central to Nazi propaganda, the British soldier

outs himself as equally racist while simultaneously using the the figure's laughably distorted features of evidence of him colluding with Hitler's regime, i.e. the German enemy. If both the visual caricature and the textual accusation are therefore blatantly inaccurate depictions of Hofmann and his fellow Jewish internees, they accurately reflect how internment camps of all kinds are premised on national imaginaries that they simultaneously negate. When all is said and done, Hofmann's cartoon seems to ask its viewer: if we are neither the inhuman monsters imagined by the Nazis, nor the 'enemy aliens' imagined by the British, how do you see us?

To return to the Reise-Abenteur cartoons originating in Australia's WWI German Concentration Camp and drawn by C. Friedrich, in several of his cartoons (as below) the internees appear as an indivisible 'German' collective:

Figures 10 and 11. WWI cartoons from C. Friedrich's *Reise-Abenteur eines braven Deutschen im Lande der Kangaroo*. Image courtesy of the University of Adelaide, https://connect.adelaide.edu.au/nodes/view/28134.

Such cartoons buy (albeit playfully) into the us-versus-them logic of a patriotic and belligerent nationalism, Friedrich's overarching mode is more one of resisting, subverting and complicating the logic of a homogenous, pan-German enemy by which internees found themselves incarcerated. This is an interrogation of national identity that is enacted in word as much as image and which is turned inward as much as outward.

Consider again the fence sign in Friedrich's cartoon (discussed above) under which a cowering internee stands. "Ne budite blizu ograde" ['do not approach the fence', the sign addresses him not in English or German, but rather as a Croatian speaker. We can take a step back here by observing that the cartoon appears to

reference a horrific incident in Holsworthy, whereby the internee Tome Grubelic was shot and killed in 1917 as he attempted to escape detention. As an ethnic Croatian, Grubelic belonged to an administratively awkward sub-population of the camp regarded as 'Austrians', given that Croatians were subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Wholly ignoring the political alliance between Croatia and the Allies, this was a categorical sleight of hand by which Croatian (and Serbian) speaking internees could, after all, be subsumed under the generalised 'German enemy alien', given that the Empire was politically and linguistically aligned with the Central Powers.

Friedrich's accompanying German-language commentary (sprinkled with English) offers a plurality of potentially relevant significations in the context of national identity. The barbed wire separates Grubelic's avatar from the free Australian territory beyond the camp, but filtered through "teures Heiligtum", a term resonant with deep cultural and pan-German national significance, Grubelic is likewise forcibly cut off from the "precious/sacred sanctuary" the term ironically suggests might be provided by a German national identity. The intermingling of (standard) green and (idiomatic) blue beans is a clear enough signal to native German speakers (though perhaps not the censor) that the price for attempting to reach the fertile soil beyond is to be showered in bullets (i.e. blaue Bohnen).

Here, as in other cartoons, Friedrich takes advantage of the comic form's natural affinity for simultaneous multi-language display, drawing out the complex and contrasting ways that language shapes cultures and identities. If the cartoons mix English with German, throwing in the odd phrase in Croatian or Serbian,

several also use German dialect as further stylistic markers of regional alliances. Faithfully representing the multiple, often competing national and regional identities prevailing in the camp, these polylinguistic interventions neatly demonstrate that there was, in fact, no uniform or neatly contained 'German' in the G.C.C. Moreover, his use of multilingual puns further works to undercut the nation of the nationalist German identity which both the German state and the G.C.C. itself were premised upon. At the same time they reflect back on Australia's own shifting identity, reminding us that The Commonwealth of Australia, established in 1901, was still a relatively new entity.

Schonbach as Švejk

Grubelic's tragic WWI fate, kept alive through a caricature drawn by a fellow internee from Bavaria, serves as a reminder that the simplified national categories ascribed to internees had to do with the plain bureaucracy of officialdom and very little with the individual biographies of the internees themselves, much less with recognising or honouring the complex demographics they collectively traced. Often simplified as a Jewish cohort hailing primarily from Vienna, the WWII Dunera boys also included stateless refugees from Czechoslovakia. Having fled Hitler's expansion, their invalidated passports soon rendered them "enemy Germans" in the eyes of British authorities. Although he grew up in Vienna, Fritz Schonbach's grandparents on his mother's side were from Moravia. Moreover, as a refugee in London he was on friendly terms with a fellow Jew from Czechoslovakia, a circumstance that, when

reported to the authorities by a hostile landlady, resulted in increased external scrutiny leading to his arrest.

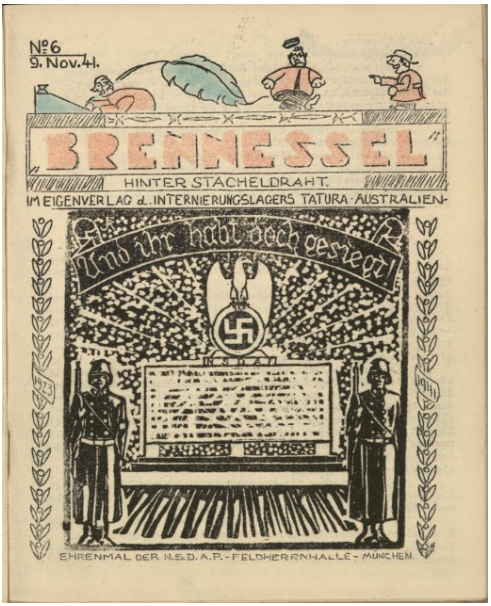
Figures 12 and 13. Caricatures by Schonbach depicting his arrest; and (right) the same avatar depicted on board the *HMT Dunera*.

At any rate, in a series of caricatures, two of which are shown above, Schonbach inventively, and to brilliantly layered effect, draws on his Czech background. In depicting the moment of his arrest in London, Schonbach has his rotundly stylisted avatar declaring in bemused fashion to the arresting officer '...But I am a Czech, Pané Detectiv'. In a subsequent drawing, now located on board the H.M.T. Dunera, this avatar steps forth as none other than 'Schwejk' from Jaroslav Hašek's unfinished but enormously popular Fortunes of the Good Soldier Švejk in the Great War (1921-23). Translator Mark Corner has noted that "if one were determined to find some message" in the Good Soldier, "it would surely be that if you adopt Švejkian optimism and impervious loutishness, even war can be a fun game." (2012, 202) Schonbach uses this character, an iconic figure of Czech literature and today a symbol for Czechness over the past century, to imagine himself boldly and blithely brushing off, if not thumbing his nose entirely, at the trauma and humiliation onboard the ship. On another level, the reference allows Schonbach to reassert the Moravian/Czech side of his identity, but also to underscore the cultural and literary ties between Vienna/Austria and the Czech territories that, at the outbreak of the last war, still belonged to its crumbling empire.

Pro-Nazi internment drawings

Many German civilians interned in Australia were not of Jewish descent, brought from Axis enclaves around the world gained by Allied forces. And unlike among G.C.C. internees from WWI, access to printing facilities among WWII internees appeared to be a German POW specificity. Among the items we have

uncovered is the clandestine magazine Brennessel, which was illegally printed in the Tartura camp over 9 months spanning 1941 and 1942. Produced by convinced National Socialists – the cover was adorned with the swastika – it features forms of visual narrative aligned with the overtly physiognomic style of Nazi iconography. The discovery of this clandestine newspaper, whose pro-Nazi message was also conveyed through visual-verbal means that overlap with broader internment drawings is a reminder that, although autographics lends itself to urgent and existential self-expression and working through of trauma among the disempowered, it is also a mode that can marshalled for dubious and self-serving ends.



Figures 11 and 12: WWII Cover illustration from internment magazine *Brennessel* (9 November 1941) and excerpt with illustrated poem from same edition. Image courtesy of the National Library of Australia https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2656505900

Comic Studies: Autographics and Documentary Comics

This paper has directed the reader's attention toward a selection of cartoons, caricatures and drawings produced by German-speaking internees in Australia. They stand in place for a more varied body of visual work produced by those interned in WWI and WWI Australia (our collection also includes cartoons by Italian and Japanese artists interned on Australian soil). In fact, this yet-to-be-precisely identified creative-aesthetic form ultimately appears to encompass a century of autobiographical

visual depictions made from within wartime internment on an international stage, within which the specifically Australian story extends well beyond WWII, taking in as it must work produced in contemporary Australian displacement camps (e.g. the harrowing 2016 cartoon collection Eaten Fish drawn and assembled by Ali Dorani, an Iranian refugee interned in offshore detention alongside thousands of others). However wide the lens might be calibrated, by more narrowly focussing here on cartoons produced in WWI and WWII Australia by German-speaking internees I have argued that those cartoons are exemplary of the kind of creative artistic practice which recent scholars have placed at the very centre of the POW/internee experience.

Although I can only touch upon this briefly here, the claims I have tentatively made on behalf of these cartoons surely belong to broader and self-consciously 'modern' forms of visual narratives and to the evolving scholarly conversations they have inspired within Comic Studies and allied fields. One immediate benefit from a more explicit locating of this material within Comic Studies would be to attain greater classificatory precision. Cartoon, caricature, comic, graphic novel – whatever nomenclature one tentatively settles on for the individual works being collected, it is already clear that the manner and form by which they depict internment and its travails prefigure more contemporary comics and graphic discussed under the banner of autographics. Coined by Gillian Whitlock (2006), autographics blend the visual and textual to relate the autobiographical or personal, especially as manifest in situations of displacement or marginalisation.

More broadly, these wartime cartoons from Australian internment appear to corroborate what scholars have claimed on behalf of autographics, namely that they facilitate unique, documentary looks into the experiences of their creators. It is clear that they deserve a place in a longer tradition of wartime verbal-visual art outlined by Hilary Chute in her groundbreaking 2016 study Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form. As I have done here through the lens of creativity, Chute articulates a unique wartime space for drawings, comics and other visual-verbal art over and against writing and photography. In the traumatic face of wartime events and experiences, these forms were united by a shared resolution to see (Chute's introductory chapter is entitled 'Seeing New'), witness and document, aims realised through an inventive textual practice generative of "new idioms and practices of expression" (2016, p. 7). Although Chute's ultimate focus is on representations of WWII in documentary comics, it is a form that, like the internee cartoons considered here, engages drawing in a way that restores it to what Art Spiegelman has defined as its earlier, pre-camera function: "commemorating, witnessing, and recording of information." (2011, p. 49)

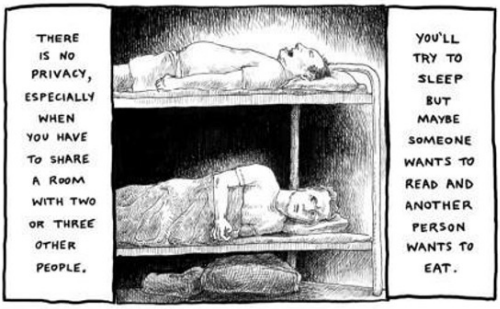


Figure 13. A panel from "Villawood: Notes from an Immigration Detention Centre"/Still Alive showing the sleeping conditions in the detention centre. Safdar Ahmed (2015). Image courtesy of Safdar Ahmed and The Shipping News, https://medium.com/shipping-news/villawood-9698183e114c.

Figure 14. WWI cartoon panel from C.Friedrich's *Reise-Abenteur*. Image courtesy of the University of Adelaide, https://connect.adelaide.edu.au/nodes/view/28135

I would like to close by drawing attention to a much more recent cartoon drawn on Australian soil. Pictured above on the left, it is

taken from Still Alive,a 2021 graphic novel by Australian artist Safdar Ahmed. Placing the cartoon side-by-side with one of Friedrich's from the WWI G.C.C. acts as a prompt for some concluding observations. Firstly, we are reminded that Australian internment of foreigners is not a practice confined historically to the extreme edges of war. Subtitled Notes from Australia's Immigration Detention System, Safdar's graphic novel tells the story of his volunteer work facilitating arts and workshops for people held in an immigration detention centre in Villawood, NSW. Villawood forms part of what the Australian Human Rights Commission labels "one of the strictest detention regimes in the world" (AHRC, 2023). Since 1992, Australia has pursued a policy of mandatory attention by which any non-citizen (including asylum-seekers) arriving in Australia without a valid visa must be detained.

It has been convincingly argued that this system signals a structural, historical and political extension of Australia's wartime internment of individuals regarded as enemy aliens. Both have to do with the detention of individuals, most often non-citizens, whose incarceration is justified by non-specific security concerns rather than proven criminal acts, a practice blurring distinctions between "people who present….a serious threat to national security, and those whose ethnicity rendered them suspect." (Bashford & Strange 2002, p. 520) From this vantage point, the two drawings belong to a longer history of creative visual narrative testifying from within to ongoing legacies of displacement camps in Australia.Villawood Detention Centre is in fact only a five-minute drive from the WWI internment camp in which Friedrich was confined. Separated,

then, by over a hundred years but arising only a handful of kilometres apart, the two cartoons each comment wryly on the less-than-ideal sleeping arrangements imposed upon internees by Australian authorities. And ultimately, the comparative approach taken here with respect to the Australian context strongly suggests that the creation and dissemination of visual narrative constitutes an instinctive and existential response to internment invariably manifesting itself among displaced internee/POW populations more generally.

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Quantitative Analysis of Objects in Prisoner Artworks

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Introduction

Standing as one of the darkest chapters in human history, the need to preserve and present the memory of the Holocaust is still of vital importance today – not only for remembering and honouring the victims but also for the education of future generations, as the people able to testify to these brutalities are getting fewer and fewer. For years, the testimonies of the Holocaust have been focused primarily on oral and textual testimonies. However, the visual testimonies, though underexplored, also stand as a powerful medium for Holocaust remembrance. During the Holocaust, victims of Nazi persecution, including artists and others, used their creativity to document their experiences and hold on to their humanity under brutal conditions. Creating art in concentration camps, ghettos, or while in hiding was both an act of resistance and a means of survival despite the severe risks (Johnson, 2023). These artworks serve as visual testimonies, similar to written accounts, capturing daily struggles, moments of humanity, and resistance against Nazi persecution.

Artists like Leo Haas sought to document the horrors of the Holocaust, holding perpetrators accountable while also capturing moments of dignity (Yad Vashem, 2024). After the war, Holocaust survivors continued creating art to honour the victims. For instance, Mia Fendler Immerman, a child survivor, painted portraits of her family members who died during the Holocaust and, by doing so, preserved their memory (Beauregard, 2018). Lili Andrieux and Esther Lurie, represented in our collection, focused on female experiences under these conditions. Andrieux – an example shown in Figure 1 – highlighted the struggles of maintaining femininity in degrading environments (Presiado, 2016), while Lurie depicted the physical and emotional toll of the camps on women, emphasising their resilience (Presiado 2016). These artworks not only document suffering but also honour the resilience of the human spirit.

Figure 1: Prisoner artwork example by Lili Andrieux: "Women Washing Themselves (Version I)". Image courtesy: USHMM, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1092304.

Only a few projects use this rich source of visual testimonies in digital tools to educate about the experiences of victims of Nazi persecution. One notable exception is the Art Dachau project, where artworks by prisoners accompany a written narrative based on multiple written sources (Fink et al., 2024). The Horizon Europe MEMORISE project (MEMORISE, 2024), which aims to use digital technologies to capture, preserve, and present the memories and testimonies of Holocaust victims to the public in new and engaging formats, also has recognised this gap. On the one hand, the project creates 3D models based on a few prisoner artworks to create immersive experiences that tell stories about concentration camp life (Hall et al., 2024). With this paper, on the other hand, MEMORISE explores distant viewing (Arnold & Tilton, 2019) methods to quantitatively analyse prisoner artwork collections, bearing on recent advancements in machine learning that have created new ways to explore and investigate artworks. Using simultaneously object detection for identifying, locating, and classifying objects within an image and visualisation techniques, we provide quantitative and qualitative insights into artworks. This approach enhances the analysis of the artwork and stimulates a deeper engagement with it.

Our project focuses explicitly on applying object detection models to Holocaust-related artworks to create an intuitive and interactive interface. However, this aim and framing of our activity raises the question: is it actually possible to use object detection on artworks and get reliable results? While artworks present unique challenges, such as varying styles, abstract elements, and intricate details, advances in machine learning have made it more possible. By identifying and classifying

objects within these artworks and utilising visualisation tools, we aim to create an interface that can uncover and analyse quantitative patterns within the art collection. Furthermore, our goal is to create an interface that not only provides a quantitative analysis of the artworks but also offers a qualitative exploration, enabling a more intuitive and engaging interaction with the art.

Related work

Our project relates to previous methods and techniques for object recognition in visual material and the design of visualisations to analyse cultural heritage collections. Some related works combine both areas, inspiring the development of our dashboard for artwork exploration.

Object detection

Focusing on the advancements in applying deep learning methods with visual arts, Castellano and Vessio (2021) highlight the new opportunities for analysing and understanding art. These new opportunities enable the development of automatic tools that can make art more accessible. The authors focus on different models for recognising and localising objects in artwork, such as R-CNN, Fast R-CNN, Faster RCNN, and YOLO. They define The R-CNN models as region proposal-based methods and the YOLO framework as a regression-based method. These two differ in performance, as region proposal-based methods usually perform better, whereas regression-based methods are faster - but with a lower accuracy. However, cross-depiction remains a problem for all object detection models, as models trained on real photographs need to generalise across

different visual representations. The cross-depiction problem refers to the significant drop in performance that object detection models experience when applied to datasets of other visual representations, as presented in ”Cross-depiction problem: Recognition and synthesis of photographs and artwork” by Hall et al. (2015). In practice, this means that object detection models encounter challenges when attempting to recognise objects across different depictive styles, as the style employed for the model training is very realistic. When tasked with detecting, the model might easily detect a cat in a photograph, but it might not be able to do so in a painting. To address this problem, the authors suggest incorporating spatial and structural information when training object detection models.

Visualisation

In recent years, the development of visualisations of cultural heritage, mainly through interactive digital museums, has gained momentum due to the continuous digitisation of cultural heritage artefacts (Windhager et al., 2019). These visualisations enhance public engagement and educational opportunities within the arts. The following works described may not directly address the visualisation of Holocaust artwork - or Holocaust-related themes. However, they provide a good foundation for making considerations and decisions during the design process of our interface.

To accommodate users’ complex information needs, Whitelaw (2015) proposes “generous interfaces” to promote exploration and engagement by providing rich and easy-to-navigate representations of digital collections. These interfaces often use

graphs, grids, dynamic filters, and colour palettes to offer multiple perspectives.

Bludau et al. (2021) focus on visualisations highlighting the relationships between individual items in cultural collections. The authors developed an interface that provides both an overview of the collection and detailed relational perspectives, such as a vertical timeline, genre-based organisation, and a social relations diagram. This approach to visualisation allows users to explore items based on metadata, content, and temporal context, which enhances engagement through diverse perspectives.

Crissaff et al. (2018) developed ARiES (ARt Image Exploration Space), a user-centred interface designed to help art historians explore, analyse and organise extensive image collections. It includes tools for image manipulation, annotation, grouping, comparison, and metadata exploration, developed in close cooperation with domain experts' feedback.

Dumas et al. (2014) explored a tangible user interface for interacting with ArtVis, a visualisation tool for exploring a collection of around 28,000 European artworks. ArtVis offers three components - Explore, Analyze, and Browse. It uses various visualisation techniques like map-based views, time sliders, stacked area charts and fisheye distortion to promote user engagement.

A recent survey on storytelling for heritage on Nazi persecution (Meffert et al., 2024) gives an overview of narrative visualisations that made it their aim to support users in exploring and understanding complex themes like the Holocaust. One of the reviewed projects is the ARt-tool project “ARt. Dachau Concentration Camp in Drawings and Paintings” (Fink et al.,

2024). It combines augmented reality and digital art visualisation to enhance user experience and thus contribute to the Holocaust remembrance. It links historical drawings and paintings to their actual locations at the Dachau memorial site through an app and a web tour with a 3D model that visually explores the site's history.

These projects demonstrate the potential of innovative interfaces to enhance user engagement and exploration in digital cultural collections by integrating diverse perspectives and interaction techniques.

Object detection, visualisation and Artwork

Among the initiatives which combine the approaches mentioned above, we can name Meinicke et al. (2022), who present a virtual museum experience that uses interactive visualisations and machine learning to analyse and explore digitised artworks from the extensive WikiArt dataset containing over 200k images with diverse metadata. By detecting objects within the photos, the system establishes relationships and comparisons across artworks, which enables users to filter by artist style and detected objects. This approach enriches user engagement by revealing underlying connections and enhancing understanding of historical and cultural contexts.

Another example is the SMKExplorer (Meyer et al., 2024), a visualisation interface developed by the IT University of Denmark and the SMK - National Gallery of Denmark. It addresses the cross-depiction problem in art exploration using machine learning models like Contrastive language-image pretraining (CLIP) and grounded language-image pretraining

(>GLIP). With customised labels from IconClass, the tool allows users to explore over 109,145 detected objects in 6,477 paintings, offering thematic browsing, metadata exploration, and generative AI (DALL-E 2) for creating new images. While users found the interface intuitive and engaging, they noted challenges with mislabeling, emphasising the need for careful label selection.

Applying state-of-the-art models for object detection may lead to insufficient results when dealing with collections of paintings in styles and themes that deviate from the models' training materials. To label a collection of medieval art, Meinecke et al. (2024) developed a semi-automated annotation framework that combines machine learning with human input to increase the quality of object detection results.

These two projects illustrate how digital cultural heritage is still evolving as technology evolves to foster a deeper understanding of the arts. They encourage the users to gain insight, understand, and learn more about the artwork at hand. Drawing from these experiences, our project aims to create an interactive visualisation interface for exploring Holocaust artwork, encouraging learning and reflection on this historical context.

Methodology

The solution proposed in our project included several steps, as depicted in Figure 2.

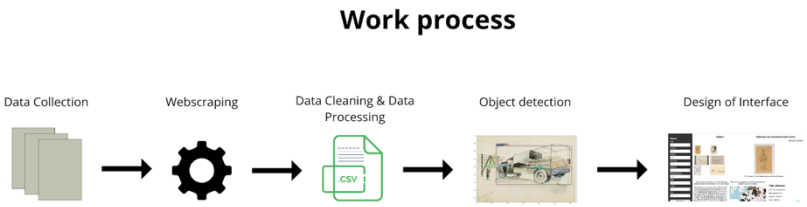


Figure 2: Methodological overview of the project steps from creating the artwork collection to exploring it through the dashboard.

Data collection, web scraping and cleaning

The primary objective of this project was to collect an extensive collection of Holocaust artwork, which includes art created before, during, and after the Holocaust. Since no single database contains all Holocaust artwork, we utilise web scraping to collect artwork and its metadata from various online sources.

Web scraping involves extracting large amounts of data from websites through scripts and encompasses three stages: fetching, extraction, and transformation (Broucke & Baesens, 2018). The script accesses the target website using the HTTP protocol in the fetching stage. The extraction stage involves retrieving the desired data using HTML parsing libraries and regular expressions (Broucke & Baesens, 2018). Finally, the transformation stage converts the data into a structured format suitable for storage or presentation.

For our project, we collected data from three main databases: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) (2024), Joods Cultureel Kwartier (Joods) (Quarter, 2024), and NIOD Beeldbank (NIOD) (2024). These sources provide diverse collections of Holocaust artwork along with relevant metadata.

After collecting the images and metadata, we cleaned the data to ensure its quality. This procedure involved manually reviewing images to remove non-artworks and using a script to match images with their corresponding entries in a CSV file. We used Gemini 2 (2024), a duplicate finder for MacOS, to remove duplicate images that may have been downloaded from multiple sources, which left us with 1,939 unique items.

We further cleaned the CSV file by reorganising specific data into the correct columns and verifying the results manually. Additionally, we used the GeoPy library to geocode locations mentioned in the "Location" column, adding latitude and longitude information to visualise the geographical spread of the artwork's creation.

Object detection

Object detection is a fundamental task in computer vision that involves identifying and locating multiple objects within an image (Michelelucci, 2019). It goes beyond simple image classification by determining what objects are present and drawing bounding boxes around them, enabling the model to understand spatial relationships within images (Michelucci, 2019). Deep learning models, particularly convolutional neural networks (CNNs), have significantly advanced object detection

but still face challenges known as the cross-depiction problem (Hall et al., 2015).

For our project, we chose the Faster R-CNN model (Ren et al., 2016) from TensorFlow, trained on Open Images V4 with ImageNet pre-trained Inception ResNet V2 as the feature extractor (Google, 2024). We selected this model for several reasons: it prioritises accuracy over speed, which aligns with our project's goals (Castellano & Vessio, 2021); it detected more object classes compared to the YOLOv8 framework during our tests; and it was easier to adjust according to our requirements. The post-processing settings were to display a maximum of 20 bounding boxes to avoid overcrowding and a minimum confidence score of 0.2 to filter low-confidence detections. We stored the detected object information in a CSV file for later use in our interface.

This process resulted in 19,377 detected objects across 1,939 images, providing users an extensive overview of the artwork contents. While the model can detect up to 100 objects per image, this may lead to some misdetections, such as a violin being identified as a shotgun by the model. These mistakes can have mixed effects: they may spark curiosity and new interpretations but can also cause confusion and detract from the artwork's intended message. By limiting the number of visualised objects to 20 with a confidence score of 20%, we aimed to balance the richness of exploration with usability. We show representative examples in Figures 3 and 4.

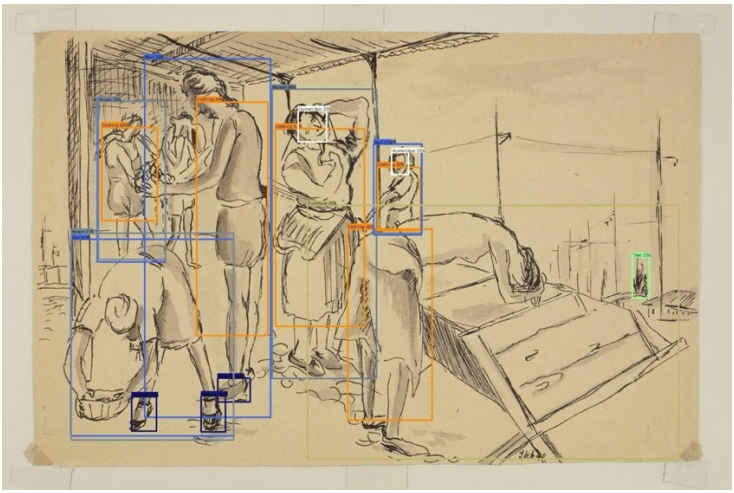


Figure 3: Detected objects with a confidence score of at least 20%: Clothing (orange), Person/Man/Woman (blue), white (human face), tree (green), furniture (dark green).

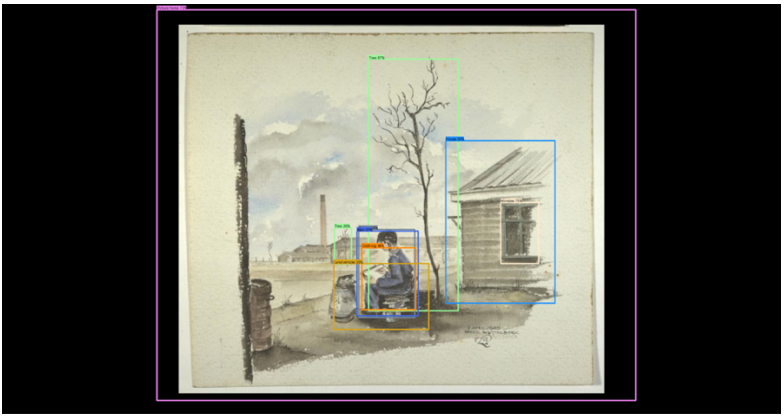


Figure 4: Detected objects in a painting by Werner Löwenhardt (1945). Image courtesy: Jewish Cultural Quarter, https://data.jck.nl/page/aggregation/jhm-museum/M010956. Detected objects with a confidence score of at least 20%: Clothing (orange), Person/Man (blue), window (beige), green (tree), and house (light blue). One false positive is a land vehicle (brown), and a few important objects have not been detected, e.g., the chimney.

Dashboard Interface Design

The design and implementation of our interface drew significant inspiration from existing work on visualisation, particularly those that highlight effective elements of interactive visualisations (Bludau et al., 2021; Crissaff et al., 2018; Dumas et al., 2014; Meinecke et al., 2022; Whitelaw, 2015; Windhager et al., 2019). A key objective for our interface is to promote user interaction and engagement with the Holocaust artwork collection, aligning with the ideas of Windhager et al. (2019). Whitelaw's concept of a "Generous Interface" also influenced our approach, and he advocates for a more exploratory and browsable interface rather than relying on precise search queries (2015). Thus, our interface design aims to provide an interactive and intuitive exploration without requiring specific searches.

To achieve a comprehensive overview of the Holocaust artwork collection, we combined quantitative and qualitative visualisation techniques, such as filtering and zooming capabilities. Providing filtering options is also emphasised by Meinicke et al. (2022) to promote user engagement. As is the case by Meinicke et al. (2022) and Meyer et al. (2024), we designed our interface to allow users to explore artworks through the detected objects in the Holocaust artwork collection.

These design considerations have enabled us to create an interface that not only displays the Holocaust artwork collection but also encourages exploration and engagement. By allowing users to interact with and gain insights from the collection in multiple ways, the interface provides an engaging user experience.

Development of the interface

Our interface design evolved through several sketches (see Figure 5), each aimed at enhancing user interaction and exploration of the Holocaust artwork collection. The initial design was a single-page application where all components—such as a geographical map, image display, and gallery overview—were visible without scrolling. Early concepts included making detected objects in images interactive to explore relationships between artworks. However, the initial layout lacked effective filtering options and did not optimise component placement.

The second sketch addressed these issues by adding a sidebar with filters for better control and exploration, allowing users to search through different metadata. This change made the interface more interactive and suited for exploration. The layout was adjusted to place the gallery and image display next to each other, creating a more logical flow. We added a word cloud to visualise the frequency of detected objects and considered how best to use a timeline, eventually grouping it with filters.

In the final sketch, we refined the layout further by grouping the word cloud and map with the filters, as they all serve a similar purpose of updating the gallery. The timeline was replaced with a dropdown filter to save space and focus on the artwork. We also added a feature to toggle bounding boxes around detected objects to avoid visual clutter, giving users more control over their experience. These changes aimed to create an interface that is intuitive, interactive, and encourages engagement with the collection.

Figure 5: Iterative design of the concept in three stages (final sketch at the bottom).

Implementation and results

Similarly to the design sketches, the dashboard implementation also brought forth three prototypes (see Figure 6). The final

version allows users to explore the artwork collection through various interactive components. The sidebar enables users to refine their search using filters built with dropdowns that dynamically update the gallery. The gallery displays images in a grid, ensuring proper aspect ratios and updates based on user interactions with the filters, the word cloud, and the map.

The image display area shows a selected image, along with the option to toggle detected objects, which are pre-drawn bounding boxes. While the initial plan was to allow object-click interactions for further exploration, this feature was deferred to future work. A word cloud component visualises frequently detected objects in the artwork collection. The size of the words indicates how often does an object appear in the art collection. Upon selecting a word, a filter is applied that only displays the artworks which contain the selected object. The map visualises the geographical locations of the artworks, enabling users to filter images based on their locations by clicking on the markers. The marker sizes represent the number of images from each location, and the colours represent different types of locations. The infobox provides detailed information about the selected artwork, such as the title, artist, year, and location. After choosing an image, the infobox updates to display relevant metadata.

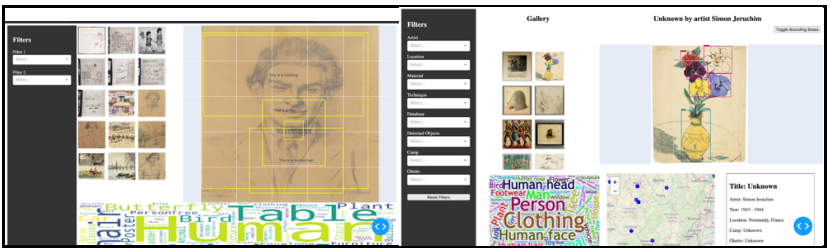


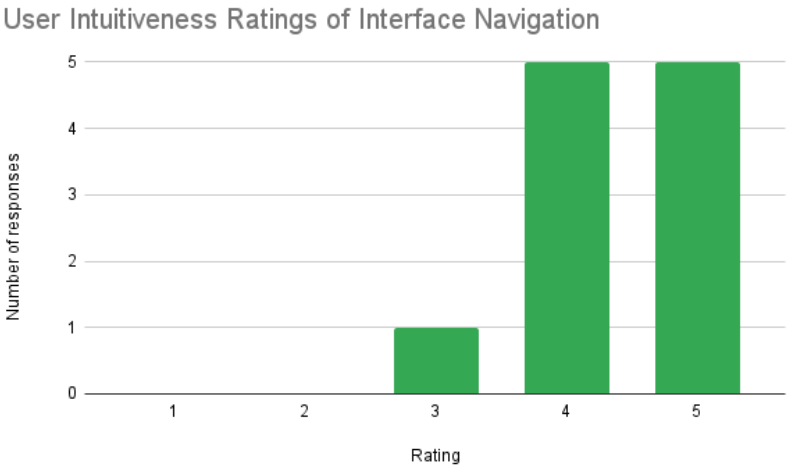
Figure 6: Iterative dashboard development in three versions (final version at the bottom).

Upon entering the interface, the users see a randomised gallery of 12 artworks. The first image in the gallery is automatically displayed, and copyright information links to the source database. Below the gallery, one can find the visualisations, including the word cloud and map, which encourage exploration of the collection. Clicking on objects in the word cloud or locations on the map updates the gallery, with a reminder of the user's selection displayed. Sidebar filter selections are shown directly in the dropdowns. The image display also allows toggling between original images and those with detected object overlays. Next to the toggle button is the artwork information button, which displays an infobox with relevant data.

Evaluation

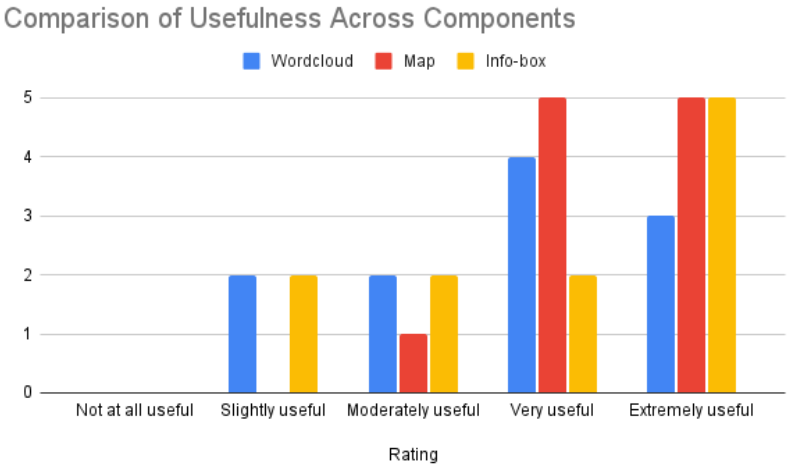
We presented the project results to a group of domain experts, who provided feedback after a brief demonstration of the

interface. The expert group covered the domains of computer science, history, communication, and media, while a few have also done work related to NIOD beeldbank and the camps Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen. Overall, the experts found the interface intuitive, with 10 out of 11 rating its usability at 4 or 5 out of 5. This suggests that the interface's layout and design were successful in making it user-friendly and easy to navigate. They also appreciated the interface's potential for quantitative analysis, particularly its ability to detect objects in artworks, and highlighted the value of the "Show Detected Objects" feature, which allows users to toggle the visibility of colored bounding boxes for better exploration of the art pieces.



Regarding the evaluation of the different components, the map achieved the best score, with 10 out of 11 experts rating it as "Very useful" or "Extremely useful." The map's ability to provide a quick overview of artwork locations was praised, with some experts suggesting its integration into larger platforms. The

word cloud was also received positively, but some evaluators suggested improvements, such as allowing users to manipulate the word cloud based on time periods or adding a keyword dropdown list. Others recommended calibrating the word cloud towards the most-used search terms, or even considering its removal. The infobox generated the most polarized feedback, with some experts finding it only moderately useful, while others considered it extremely valuable. None of the visualisation components were deemed redundant, but improvements were recommended to enhance their effectiveness.



General suggestions for the interface included refining the layout by adjusting the spacing between components, providing clearer visual structure, and possibly rethinking the placement of elements to improve the presentation. Overall, the feedback was positive and provided insights for future enhancements to the interface. We will further explore the suggestions received to elevate the interface to its full potential.

Future Work

While our prototype still needs improvements, the feedback from domain experts has provided valuable insights. Some minor reworks will target the interface initialisation and overall interface design to ensure better user workflow and improve its intuitiveness. We aimed to add interactivity to the image display by allowing users to click on detected objects to update the gallery. For now, the image display and the visualization of the detected objects are limited to alternating between displaying the artwork with or without pre-drawn boxes around the objects.

Though we could not implement this feature, adding filtering options based on object types or relevance could improve usability. The word cloud was generally well-received, but experts suggested adding filters for detected objects based on year or location. Highlighting detected objects in the word cloud to match selected images would improve interactivity and stimulate further exploration of the whole dataset.

Object detection revealed 19,377 objects across 1,939 Holocaust artworks, but some misdetections impacted the user engagement. Training a custom model to focus on Holocaust-related objects like barracks or barbed-wire fences could address this issue. Though we lacked time and resources to train such a model, doing so in the future would improve interactivity and improve the potential to interconnect artworks with textual testimonies.

Conclusion

We have collected an extensive dataset of Holocaust artwork and its metadata through web scraping of the databases of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Joods Cultureel Kwartier, and NIOD Beeldbank. This resulted in a collection of 1,939 pieces of Holocaust art. By utilizing the Faster R-CNN object detection model, we produced a database of 19,377 detected objects within the artwork collection. While this process was relatively successful as for the amount of detected objects, it produced a number of misdetections, which highlights the challenge of applying such a method to a varied collection in terms of artistic styles.

We have developed an interactive interface consisting of various visualisation components to present our findings through the object detection process and to create an interface for quantitative and qualitative analysis of Holocaust artworks. This interface consists of a sidebar with numerous filters, a gallery showing a randomised selection from the (filtered) artwork collection, and an image display. In this image display, there is an option to show or hide the bounding boxes around the detection objects, a word cloud visualising the most frequently detected objects, a map visualising the locations of origin of the artwork, and a togglable infobox providing detailed information about the artworks.

The interface has been designed with the goal of being intuitive, engaging, and valuable for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. We submitted the interface to a group of domain experts for evaluation, who provided valuable feedback. The majority of

the evaluators found it intuitive and user-friendly, particularly appreciating the object toggle function and the map visualisation. Suggestions for further improvements aimed mainly at the word cloud and the overall layout of the interface, which we plan to implement in the upcoming phase of the project.

In conclusion, this project demonstrates the potential of combining digital technology with Holocaust art to encourage remembrance and education. Positive feedback confirms the interface's value and potential, and we aim to refine it further to benefit experts and the general public for educational purposes.

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Meme, the Force: Ukrainian Digital Participatory Culture Resisting the Russian Invasion

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Introduction

On May 20, 2022, on the official internet representation of the President of Ukraine, a citizen named Oleksii Matviiev (2022) submitted a bold and peculiar proposal: the removal of the monument to the Russian empress Catherine II in Odesa, a figure historically associated with the destruction of the Ukrainian Cossacks. This idea, which had been circulating for years, gained renewed urgency after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In an unexpected twist, Matviiev suggested replacing the statue with a monument to Billy Herrington—a gay adult film actor and internet meme icon associated with the homoerotic Japanese "gachi" subculture, see Baudinette (2016).

Matviiev, a lifelong resident of Odesa, explained in an interview that his idea was partly inspired by a similar 2021 petition to the Zaporizhzhia city council, which proposed renaming a street in honour of Herrington (Zubar & Hlushkova, 2022). That petition, which gathered the required 750 signatures in just three days, sparked a frenzy among Russian propagandists, who misrepresented the joke as evidence of societal decline. Matviiev saw humour as a powerful way to expose the absurdity of

colonial symbols in Ukraine and draw attention to the larger issue of decolonisation. Although the initial text of his petition was written as a joke and shared with friends, it quickly gained momentum on social media, ultimately receiving over 25,000 signatures and prompting a response from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The proposal raises larger questions about the evolving role of memes in public discourse and their ability to provoke serious societal debates. How did a humorous petition gain such widespread support and political attention? And what does this phenomenon reveal about the power of internet humour to reshape cultural narratives, particularly in the context of war? The petition also reflects broader societal shifts, including growing public acceptance of LGBT+ individuals (Nash Svit, 2022; Shulhat, 2023) and the destigmatisation of certain cultural taboos (Graham-Harrison & Mazhulin, 2023). As Matviiev noted, the proposal's value lay less in the specific figure of Herrington and more in its challenge to the idea of honouring colonial oppressors, highlighting that "anything would be better than a monument to a tyrant and oppressor." (Zubar & Hlushkova, 2022)

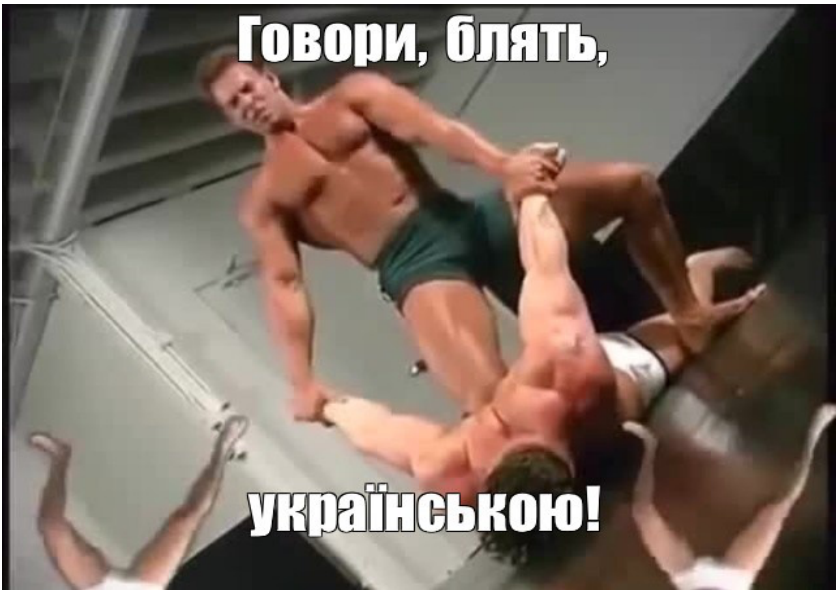

Figure 1. (translation): For f**k's sake, speak in Ukrainian. Telegram Private Group Chat. Downloaded on 8.12.2024

Since Russia's full-scale invasion, humour has emerged as a defining element of Ukraine's cultural resistance and information warfare. Campaigns like "Saint Javelin" or digitally mobilised networks like "NAFO" exemplify how memes can foster solidarity, transforming cultural symbols into actionable support for military and humanitarian efforts (Arraf, 2022; Gilbert, 2024). Memes permeate daily life in Ukraine, serving as both a psychological coping mechanism and a rallying point for national identity during moments of profound adversity (Kurovska, 2024).Ukrainian meme creators have harnessed social media not only to spread messages of resistance and hope but also to counter Russian propaganda aimed at inciting hatred and division, using humour as a powerful weapon in the ongoing information war (Opryshchenko & Sergatskova, 2022;

Bilousenko & Korinieva, 2022). Our study further examines the unique ways memes function within the Ukrainian digital participatory culture, setting the stage for a closer analysis of their transformative role in shaping narratives, identities, and resilience amid ongoing war.

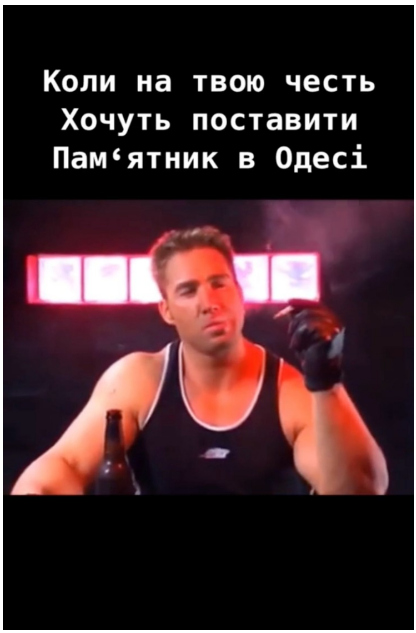

Figure 2. (translation): When they want to put a monument in your honour in Odesa. https://www.tiktok.com/@ilovebavovna/video/7121052814389939461 Downloaded on 8.12.2024

Meme, the Armament: Theoretical framework

In contemporary literature, internet memes are recognised as new media artefacts created through the interaction of key features of new media, such as participation, amateur culture, networks, and virality (Cannizzaro, 2016). They typically take the form of images or GIFs embedded with text, though

catchphrases, viral jokes, and popular themes are also sometimes classified as memes (Marino, 2015). Memes hold particular cultural significance as artefacts native to the digital age. They are frequently used for essential discursive practices, such as storytelling and social or political commentary (Miltner, 2018). Through these practices, memes help negotiate norms and collective identities, playing acritical role in shaping these groups (Gal et al., 2016). Humorous memes, in particular, are often used to disparage out-group members, functioning as a tool to strengthen in-group cohesion within the framework of self-categorisation theory (Abrams & Hogg, 2010; Procházka, 2016). Memes also serve as tools for the social regulation of emotions, with humour providing a vital coping mechanism for anxiety and stress, which contributes to both physical and psychological well-being (Akram et al., 2021).

From the viral and networked characteristics of the digital media architecture, individual memes gain their meaning from pre-established senses of the various symbols used to form it through the mechanisms of intertextuality (Laineste & Voolaid, 2016). For example, an image of a child clenching his fist was widely used to make a wide collection of memes often referred to as success kid memes. The viral image became quickly recognised as a symbol to convey success or achievement by a large variety of internet users exposed to the memes. Another example is the use of images of the hated character from the Harry Potter novels, Umbridge, attached with text to express wickedness or hatred of certain objects. Such memes significantly derive their meaning (at least initially) from its constituent parts and rely on people recognising the reference to the Harry Potter characters for it to

be decipherable. In this way, memes are a potent tool for the function of framing (Scheufele, 1999).

Framing involves selecting specific aspects of reality to promote a particular interpretation, moral evaluation, or recommendation. For instance, the decision to sign up as an organ donor may be framed by emphasising either the opting-in or the opting-out option. Studies show that even subtle changes in framing can significantly affect attitudes toward the subject (Perloff, 2016, p. 348–351). While memes often derive meaning from references to earlier texts, images, or themes, framing events or objects within and across social structures, their impact is amplified by the agency of social actors involved in their creation and transmission. Jenkins' (2013) concept of participatory culture underpins this dynamic, highlighting the active engagement of individuals and communities in shaping and circulating media content. Castells (2015) builds on this foundation by emphasising how the internet enables autonomous organisation, while Marino (2015) expands the discussion by examining the "spreadability" of media, emphasising how users actively remix and share content. These interconnected theories illuminate the role of participatory dynamics in memes as they circulate daily across platforms, edited, remixed, posted, and shared by individuals engaging in self-expression, community building, and entertainment (Leiser, 2022). These practices converge or compete to shape the lenses through which we interpret reality, influencing our opinions, beliefs, and attitudes.

The Russo-Ukrainian war highlights the transformative role of memes in memetic warfare—a term introduced to military

discourse by Jeff Giesea (2017)—showcasing their ability to influence narratives and public opinion. Russia strategically utilises memes to exploit the negative aspects of digital participatory culture, employing them as psychological tools to disseminate propaganda, destabilise opponents, shape global narratives, sow confusion, create divisions, and undermine institutional trust (Pilipets & Geboers, 2024; Savchuk & Myroniuk, 2024). With the advent of generative AI, this weaponisation of memes is poised to escalate, as AI-driven tools enable the mass production of persuasive, tailored disinformation that blends seamlessly into authentic discourse, making detection and counteraction increasingly challenging (Irving, 2024). Analyses rooted in defence-related policy research reveal how Russian covert intelligence operations capitalise on memes' rapid dissemination to alter perceptions and destabilise political and social systems (Giesea, 2017).

Ukraine's information resistance campaigns were initiated by collaborative networks of socially mobilised digital participants, with governmental actors subsequently catching up (Tokariuk, 2023: 10–14). This coordinated approach uses social media to maintain accurate information and counteract Russian propaganda, showcasing how memes have become integral to Ukraine's defence strategy, bolstering resistance and resilience in the information war (Munk, 2024). Research employing diverse methodologies underscores how Ukrainians harness memes as positive tools of cultural resilience and national identity. A qualitative study of Ukrainian Reddit users illustrates how memes uplift morale and foster solidarity (Kreps et al., 2023). Linguistic analyses of popular online platforms reveal the

semantic techniques used to shape narratives (Bondarenko, 2024). Studies in communication and political science explore memes' roles in countering Russian disinformation and reflecting societal dynamics during the ongoing war, beginning with the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas (Tokariuk, 2023). Cross-national visual discourse analyses demonstrate how memes contribute to collective memory and identity, juxtaposing Ukraine's symbolic resistance with Russia's use of memes to suppress and incite violence against autonomy-seeking groups (Mozolevska, 2024). These findings highlight memes' potential to challenge propaganda, unify audiences, and reinforce cultural and national identity under wartime pressures.

Figure 3. (translation): Hey, Harry. Can you say something in Parseltongue (snake language)?/ Of course I can: 'Russian warship, go f**k yourself!'. https://focus.ua/uk/voennye-novosti/508998-ukraincy-sozdayut-memy-o-vojne Downloaded on 8.12.2024

Despite the growing body of research, a significant gap remains in understanding how memes function in extreme or distant

Ukrainian environments, such as among soldiers at the frontline or displaced Ukrainian refugees abroad. Existing studies provide valuable insights into the role of memes within media outlets and government strategies, but their presence in the lives of Ukrainians directly affected by the war remains underexplored. Prior research often draws on data from anonymous social media platforms or media outlet audiences and creators, focusing on memes in the broader war context rather than their role in specific events or among distinct social groups. This comparative study addresses this gap by examining how memes function during the 2023 counteroffensive, providing an analysis of their use as tools of expression agency, identity, and resistance among queer soldiers and student refugees. It also investigates the limitations of memes, including the potential backlash from insensitive meme creation or sharing, while considering other visual genres of digital participatory culture that reflect these vulnerabilities, underscoring their dual role as instruments of resilience and sources of vulnerability in violent environments.

Meme, the Text: Methodology

This research employs an academic, exploratory, qualitative, and inductive approach. The theoretical population comprises Ukrainian young adults aged 18–35, chosen for their distinct engagement with social media and the evolving media governance in Ukraine. A 2022 survey by Internews (2022) shows that social media are the most popular medium for this age group, while news outlets dominate among those aged 35–45, and television is the primary medium for individuals aged 46 and older. The focus on this demographic also reflects significant

changes in media regulation following the Russian invasion. The Ukrainian government consolidated major TV channels into the state-supervised United News telethon (Koshiw, 2022) and introduced a media law to regulate online news outlets (Patil, 2022). Social media platforms remain largely unsupervised, leaving younger demographics with minimal policy oversight.

One reason for the lack of state regulation over social media, as highlighted in the literature, is that these platforms are based abroad. After the Ukrainian government blocked Russian social networks in 2017 (Luhn, 2017), users migrated to platforms such as Meta and Alphabet-owned networks, Twitter (now X), Telegram, and TikTok. These platforms, with their gatekeeping and moderation powers combined with profit-driven models, have faced scandals over the spread of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda during elections, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. A recent European Commission (2023, p. 40-43) report concludes that pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns on these platforms reached massive audiences, with billions of content views and hundreds of millions of engagements. Understanding how Ukrainian cultural resilience manifests on social media is crucial. It provides an opportunity to explore sociopolitical issues such as content moderation, resistance to targeted algorithms, mass mobilisation against adversarial narratives, and the boundaries of free speech.

The war has significantly reshaped Ukrainian demographics. The IOM (2024: 3) reports nearly

3.7 million internally displaced people in Ukraine and over 6 million refugees in Europe. The exact number of Ukrainians

under occupation, killed, or deported to Russia is unknown. Around one million Ukrainians are serving in the military (Shepeleva, 2022), making conventional probability sampling very challenging. We addressed this by using convenience sampling and creating two Instagram profile samples. The first sample includes profiles of former participants in Charles University's Freemover program for displaced Ukrainian students (primarily aged 18–25). The second focuses on Ukrainian Armed Forces personnel affiliated with the Ukrainian LGBT+ Military and Veterans for Equal Rights NGO (mostly aged 25–35). Two authors were volunteers supporting Freemover program students from the early days of the invasion, providing direct insights into this group. One author is also writing a thesis on the Ukrainian LGBT+ community in the Armed Forces, offering a deeper understanding of this sample.

We selected Instagram profiles as sampling units based on two main considerations. A 2021 study identified Instagram as the most frequently used social network among Ukrainians aged 16–35, with 64% of users favouring it, compared to Facebook at 61% (IRI, 2021). We adopted a digital ethnographic approach to create an anonymised dataset of memes shared on participants' Instagram Stories. Stories were chosen due to their role as an established mode of digital transmission. Vice described Stories as enabling "an onslaught of memes" (Jones, 2019). Data collection started on 5 June 2023, aligning with the launch of Ukraine's counteroffensive (Harding, 2023), and ended on 31 July 2023, when the offensive slowed due to extensive Russian minefields (Bigg, 2023).

During data collection, we saved only digital units in our dataset that aligned with Marino's (2015: 49-50) original definition of memes. He conceptualises memes as *texts* in the semiotic sense, referring to analysable, meaningful objects. Internet memes are defined not as texts that simply spread virally but as the viral spread of the *practice* of modifying a text and producing new texts from it. According to Marino, memes are characterised by eight key features:

1. They are texts in the broader semiotic sense, encompassing any analysable sign system.
2. They belong to different expressive substances (e.g., images, videos, or multimodal compositions) and are usually syncretic.
3. They derive from intervention on pre-existing texts, involving processes such as segmentation, modification, re-creation, and resemantisation.
4. They follow rules of pertinence and good formation, exhibiting formal or procedural schemas inherent to their structure.
5. They are collectively assigned and recognised as effective, driven by the presence of a 'striking element.'
6. They exhibit a playful spirit, whether humorous, parodic, or satirical.
7. They are typically anonymous, with the creator's identity often unknown.
8. They diffuse through repetitive, adaptive, and participative modalities, involving sharing, remixing, and imitation.

We analysed the final dataset using an adapted version of the visual content analysis design developed by Hrůzová and Zápotocký (2021), originally employed to examine images used by Czech Facebook users to diminish migrants. Their framework included variables such as composition, visual motif, intertextuality, rhetoric, genre, and image text relationships. For our purposes, we modified this approach to better capture the specific qualities of internet memes. Since most memes fall within the joke genre and often utilise multimedia formats, we retained the variables of intertextuality and rhetoric. We also introduced new variables: the meme's format (image or video), the source of report, and its central theme. This adjusted framework allowed us to maintain analytical precision while acknowledging the unique, participatory nature of memetic content.

Meme, the […]: Discussion

In our sample, memes primarily served as concise storytelling tools, shaping and framing narratives about the counteroffensive and its broader implications. They distilled complex events into accessible visuals, often using irony and absurdity to highlight key developments. The Wagner Mutiny memes depicted the chaos of the event as a symbolic turning point, framing it as both an external spectacle and a reflection of Russian instability. By repurposing cultural symbols, such as *"The Simpsons"*(№14, 22, 26) or *"Swan Lake"* (№16, 19, 24, 31), these memes conveyed deeper meaning while engaging audiences with humour and familiarity. The *Swan Lake* meme specifically references the Soviet-era tradition of broadcasting the *Swan Lake* ballet on state

television during moments of political crisis, such as the 1991 coup. By invoking this imagery, the meme satirises Russia's attempts to distract from internal turmoil while drawing a historical parallel between past and present instability.

Figure 4. Meme №19

The *"Tinder It's a Match"* meme (№62) creatively reframes the Ukrainian attack on the Crimean Bridge As a humorous yet symbolic success. By combining the image of a naval drone and the damaged bridge within Tinder's "match" format, the meme blends levity with strategic commentary. This juxtaposition of a casual dating interface with a significant military event reflects the absurdity of Russian imperial ambition while celebrating Ukrainian ingenuity. It transforms a high-stakes operation into a culturally relatable moment of triumph, offering Ukrainian audiences a sense of agency and morale while resonating with a wider digital audience. Together, these memes provide sharp,

satirical framing of critical events, reinforcing collective perceptions of progress and unity through shared humour.

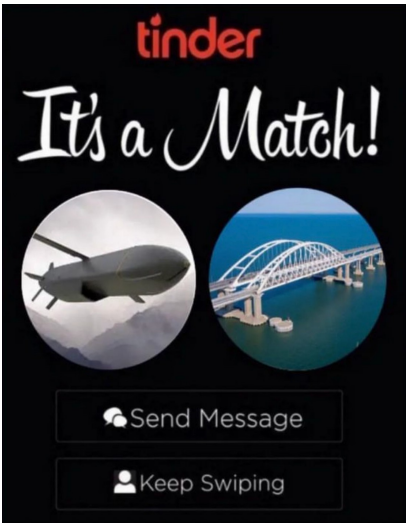

Figure 5. Meme №62

Memes provide a form of collective coping by transforming trauma, frustration, and hardship into digestible, often humorous narratives. During the counteroffensive, soldiers' memes addressing mental health reflect the emotional toll of war. The meme (№80) featuring antidepressants confused about their purpose humorously highlights struggles with mental health support, offering solidarity through dark humour. Likewise, the *"wrecking ball of traumatic events"* (№79) illustrates the relentless stress of war, capturing the fragility of emotional stability while validating shared exhaustion. Memes like the skull-faced soldier (№70) combine stoic resolve with grim satire, reflecting soldiers' ability to endure chaos while expressing unspoken frustrations.

Figure 6. Meme №79 (translation): Life (the smiley character)/ "My progress in improving my mental state" (the busy character)/ "Another traumatic event" (the wrecking ball)

Memes also serve as outlets for anger and collective rage. The meme depicting Russia as a lamenting aggressor (№49) channels fury into ridicule, exposing the absurdity of the invader's victimised rhetoric. The *"Four Horsemen"* meme (№67) reframes Russian destruction with symbolic imagery, mocking chaos and devastation. The *"life under invasion"* meme (№78) uses absurd juxtaposition to transform grim realities into humour, disarming despair with laughter. By blending satire, irony, and visual storytelling, these memes allow individuals to process overwhelming emotions, reclaim agency over trauma, and maintain a sense of psychological resilience in wartime.

Figure 7. Meme №67

Audio-based memes, a rising form of cultural expression driven by TikTok's sound features, have proven uniquely potent in narrating and framing events within the Ukrainian counteroffensive. These memes transcend the limitations of static images and captions by combining recognisable audio cues with visual content to create emotionally resonant narratives. The concept of "brainfeel," as described by Charlotte Shane (2022), captures the visceral impact of these sounds—moments of novelty and familiarity that trigger an immediate, addictive response in audiences. In the Ukrainian context, TikTok-originated audio memes are repurposed and reposted on Instagram, gaining further traction among broader audiences.

These "brainfeels" challenge Marino's *anonymity* principle of memes, where the origins of content remain obscure. TikTok's sound feature allows users to trace the origins of viral "brainfeel"

sounds, attributing them to their creators. A TikTok pairing a distorted version of Rihanna's *Where Have You Been* with a caption about the Kakhovka Dam explosion critiques global priorities. While the world focused on billionaires trapped in the Titanic submarine, one of the largest dam floods in human history was largely ignored (№11). A video (№3) showing the aftermath of shelling in Voronezh uses an audio clip from Yurii Velykyi's viral sketch—"Fine, we bomb Ukraine from Crimea, but why bomb us back?"—to mock Russia's indignation at Ukrainian counter strikes. Pairing absurd or recognisable sounds with surreal visuals, these memes provide sharp critique, linking creators, content, and audiences in a direct and traceable way.

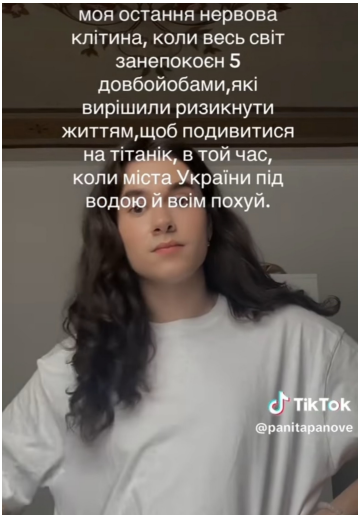

Figure 8. Meme №11 (translation): "My last nerve cell when the whole world is worried about 5 idiots who decided to risk their lives to see the Titanic, while Ukrainian cities are underwater and no one cares."

The asymmetry between soldiers and students in shared content revealed differing approaches to digital communication. Soldiers employed memes as a means of bonding, crafting humorous and intertextual content to process trauma and cultivate a sense of camaraderie within the military community. A soldier's reposted critique highlights the limits of wartime humour for those who lack personal experience of the horrors of the frontline:"The counteroffensive is not funny memes about Russian Vanyas, joyful posts about a shark, or amusing pictures of Kherson watermelons. It's reclaimed land soaked in blood, sweat, and sacrifice." This perspective underscores the ubiquity of memes while acknowledging their limitations in capturing the profound gravity of war. As Ukrainian comedian Hanna Kochehura noted, humour must respect societal red lines: "It's fine to joke about your pain, but never someone else's." (Kotubei- Herutska, 2024)

Students navigated wartime societal boundaries by focusing their meme-sharing on external affairs and avoiding communicating internal struggles through humour. Memes like Serhii Sternenko's ironic "flashmob" remark (№16) and Jan Lipavský's tweet about Crimean vacation (№18) reflect this preference for external commentary. The "Barbie doesn't shake hands with terrorists" meme (№76), referencing Ukrainian fencer Olha Kharlan's defiance against a Russian opponent, shows how global trends were adapted for political messaging. For internal developments, students relied on serious explainers in English from platforms like @united24.media and @kyivindependent_official, often paired with visuals of destruction in Ukraine to frame Russia's atrocities. This strategy balanced global outreach with ethical storytelling, reflecting a

context-sensitive approach to mobilised digital participation during the war.

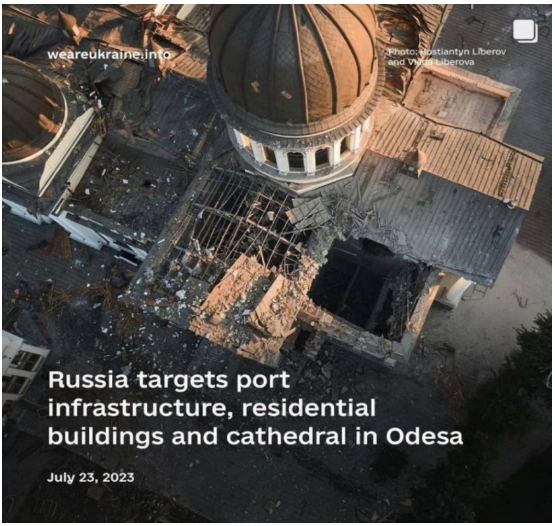

Figure 9. An explainer shared by a student following Russia's missile strike on Odesa on July 23, 2023, @weareukraine.info.

Memes in the queer soldiers' sample subverted traditional masculinity and heteronormativity by incorporating pornographic references, homoerotic undertones, and innuendos. The "the military will make him straight" (№2) meme humorously challenges assumptions about the hyper- masculine military, depicting playful intimacy between soldiers. Captions like "the army will make a man out of you" (№82) use homoerotic visuals and satire to critique societal expectations of manhood, exposing the contradictions in traditional notions of masculinity.

Soldiers' memes referencing sexuality also connected humour with wartime realities. The meme "– On the face or stomach? –

On Monobank" (№81) ties a provocative innuendo to Ukraine's widely used online donation platform, turning intimacy into a practical fundraising appeal. The Tinder-style meme "well, it depends on how much you feel like f****ing" (№6) injects linguistic playfulness into language politics, reflecting the Ukrainian process of decolonisation while presenting identity as an intimate and deliberate choice. Others, like the "traditional values" (№34) meme, expose moral hypocrisy of homophobia and corruption, blending satire with social critique. By fusing humour, sexuality, and subversion, these memes challenge rigid social norms and reframe intimacy as a means of both resistance and coping during wartime.

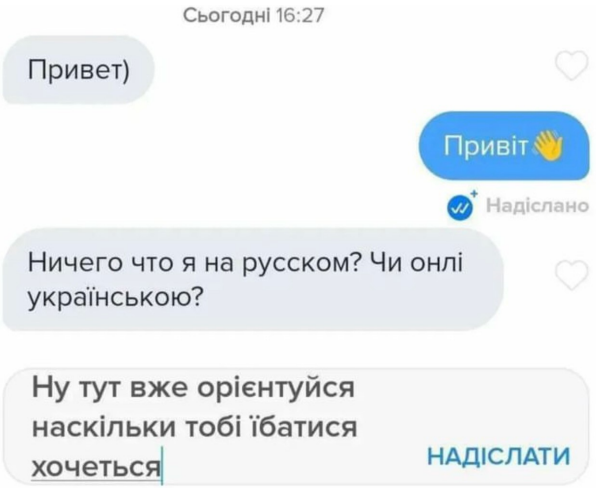

Figure 10. Meme №6 (translation): Hi :) (in Russian)/ Hi (in Ukrainian)/ Is it okay that I'm writing in Russian? Or only Ukrainian?/ Well, it depends on how much you feel like f****ing. (In Ukrainian)

Memes shared among soldiers became potent tools for social mobilisation, turning frustration and urgency into collective action. The *"once the combat payments come in, we'll pitch in for a thermal imager… there's no other choice"* meme (№66) highlights the harsh reality of grassroots fundraising for essential military equipment, contrasting soldiers' desperate personal contributions with large-scale civil infrastructure investments. The *"funding culture during the war is just as important"* meme (№71) critiques resource allocation, sparking debate between prioritising immediate military needs for the nation's survival and preserving cultural investments. By framing economic dilemmas with sharp social commentary, these memes try to mobilise Ukrainian society under shared wartime priorities.

Figure 11. Meme №71 (translation): A civilian (upper half): "Funding culture during the war is just as important as allocating funds for military drones!"/ Russian soldier(lower half): "Yeah, you've made

some decent TV shows. Not exactly 'Bandits of Saint Petersburg' of course… Now get to the basement!"

The *"economic frontline baby"* meme (№9) underscores societal expectations that mobilisation must include everyone, from officials to ordinary citizens, reflecting demands for fairness and equal participation in the war effort. It channels widespread calls for justice, where no one remains exempt from contributing to Ukraine's survival. The *"moment of pain"* meme (№1) critiques outdated military tactics, blending dark humour with a pointed demand for reform that resonates with soldiers' frustrations. These memes amplify frontline societal grievances, transforming individual frustrations into collective mobilisation. By blending humour with social critique, they foster solidarity and reinforce shared narratives of resilience and equity during war.

Figure 12. Meme №66 (translation): Once the combat payments come in, we'll pitch in for a thermal imager… there's no other choice

The shared memes, despite originating from individuals who do not know each other, form a coherent and complementary narrative that reflects the collective experience of war. Students often use memes to bridge communication gaps, translating events in Ukraine into relatable content for their host communities. Soldiers highlight internal issues, transforming their struggles and combat realities into humour to communicate experiences that would otherwise remain unspoken. This organic alignment demonstrates how memes function as tools to express trauma, frustration, and resilience, providing both therapeutic relief and a shared understanding among creators and audiences.

Most of the memes bear clear signs of amateur production, created by participants of Ukraine's mobilised digital culture rather than professional or government-driven efforts. Their diverse origins, spanning various social platforms, highlight an unfiltered and decentralised curatorship. This authenticity offers a rare glimpse into the intimate hopes and worries of individuals, who might otherwise feel uncomfortable expressing such sentiments openly. The cohesive yet spontaneous and emotionally driven current of these memes underscores their role as a unique, grassroots-driven digital participation tool, amplifying shared cultural narratives of war without much contradiction.

Meme, the Quest: Conclusion

This study shows how meme digital culture during wartime Ukraine exemplifies a participatory media environment, where individuals are not passive receivers but active curators shaping

the narrative of their own lived experiences. In these networked digital spheres, young Ukrainians— from soldiers at the frontline to students scattered abroad—engage in spontaneous, bottom-up content transmission. The meme creators remix pre-existing material, transforming raw fragments of cultural memory into layered, meaningful texts. The resulting circulation of these memes does not rely on traditional gatekeepers; instead, it thrives on collaborative interpretation and emotional engagement.

Within this environment, humour and intertextual references function as potent tools of boundary-making and group identity formation. By using familiar images, catchphrases, and narrative tropes, meme creators highlight collective suffering and resilience, satirise the aggressor, and champion underrepresented voices. This process—akin to a decentralised form of narrative framing—helps Ukrainians impose a semblance of order and moral coherence on chaotic wartime events. In the struggle against propaganda and disinformation, these playful yet pointed images and phrases act as cultural armaments, shaping public moods and interpretations through memetic warfare.

The emotional dimension of these digital texts is crucial. Memes often blend absurdity, irony, and dark humour, allowing their creators and audiences to manage stress, dispel fear, and maintain psychological stamina. Rather than trivialising trauma, humour becomes a coping strategy that counters despair with shared laughter. In turn, subversive memes destabilise rigid norms, making room for marginalised perspectives, such as those of queer soldiers challenging conventional notions of

masculinity. This inclusiveness signals the adaptability of participatory cultures, as they continuously reshape communal values to reflect the complexity of lived experience.

Yet the same qualities that give memes their power—speed, anonymity, and malleability—also introduce new ethical dilemmas. Rapid circulation and remixing can dilute the gravity of horror, leading to oversimplifications or unintended harm. The rise of artificial intelligence tools for content generation and manipulation adds another layer of uncertainty. Still, even as these challenges complicate the digital landscape, the creative, polyphonic voices of Ukrainian meme- makers show how everyday cultural production can both mirror and influence shifting understandings of war, identity, and resilience.

AI Statement: During the preparation of this work, the authors used GPT-4o to translate, proofread, paraphrase, and stylistically improve the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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The Case for Metaphors in Public Discourse. Imaginary of Bulgarian Governance through the Prism of Metaphors[1]

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Introduction

In 2020, for the third time in ten years, Bulgarian citizens went massively out on the streets to demand better governance. United by the common antipathy towards the way how the country is governed, they called for an end to the spread of political corruption and, ultimately, for the end of the model by which the country had been governed (Damyanova, 2023). The popular unrest of 2020-21 did not unleash out of the blue. Tensions in society have been growing for some time due to a number of socio-economic and political reasons, among which alleged intertwined relations between political, business and media elites and the judiciary were among the most accentuated (Spirova, 2021). What led to the immediate eruption of the large-scale protests that lasted almost one year was a Prosecution's raid into the Bulgarian Presidency and the subsequent detention of two advisors of the president (Detev, 2020). Immediately after the raids became public, thousands gathered in front of the

[1] This text is part of the dissertation that is to be defended in spring 2025.

Presidency in support of the president, who came out to the protestors, thanked them for their support while urging them to "throw the mafia out of the executive branch", take part in the "battle for … dignity, children, future", and to "fight against Sarais who want to eat the country". Consequently, large-scale protests erupted around the country, alleging corruption and oligarchic rule, with "mafia out" and battle and war frames becoming somewhat slogans of the protests ('Prosecutors' Raids on Offices of Bulgarian Presidential Aides Spark Protests', 2020).

The idea of Bulgarian citizens taking part in a battle is, in itself, metaphorical as it entails the perception of two opposing forces with a somewhat clear distinction between us, common people, citizens, "good" and the enemy, political and business elites, "evil". The important role played by metaphors in both our thought and communication has been voiced by scholars for some time, considering the rhetorical affordances they can yield. To use the words of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), "[M]etaphors may create realities for us. … A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action" (1980, p. 156). In other words, metaphors are powerful tools with the potential to frame reality in a certain way and, as such, to affect the ways how we perceive it. This ability of metaphors to shape our perceptions of reality is particularly evident in both political and media discourse, which often makes use of metaphors for pragmatic reasons. As pointed out by Musolff (2016), metaphors serve as a means "to express an evaluation on the topic, to make an emotional and persuasive appeal, and/or to reassure the public that a perceived threat or problem fits into familiar experience patterns and can be dealt

with by familiar problem-solving strategies" (p. 4). This framing power of metaphors has attracted the attention of scholars in recent years (Bougher, 2012; Burgers, 2016; Godioli & Pedrazzini, 2019; Musolff, 2016; Thibodeau et al., 2019), with particular attention paid to framing of economic, political and social crisis in Europe (Valdivia, 2019). Crucial notions in this respect are that of *metaphor scenario*, denoting a figurative "mini-narrative" generated by the given metaphor (Musolff, 2016), and *regimes of metaphors* which allow the metaphors to be "narratively enacted, made visible and experienced" (Valdivia, 2019, p. 293). Thus, by studying metaphors, we can gain important insight into the underlying set of beliefs, values, and thinking patterns that facilitate the configuration of citizens' ideological and moral matrix.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the feasibility of the study of metaphorical configuration of text, in any of its typologies and its mediations. It does so by providing an overview of disciplinary development of study of metaphors and offering a novel analytical framework for studying recurrent thinking patterns in societal narratives. In addition to this, it gives an illustrative example of the utilization of such an approach on the case of the metaphorical configuration of a bad governance narrative in Bulgarian news media debate.

The Role of Metaphors in Communication

The proposal that metaphors are ubiquitous in both our thought and communication has been voiced by philosophers and rhetoricians for decades. Yet the significance of metaphors had attracted great attention from the 1980s on with the rise of

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), more particularly with the publication of the seminal book *Metaphor We Live By*, co-authored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Lakoff and Johnson (1980a) provided linguistic evidence to support the claim that the human conceptual system is, to a great extent, metaphorical in nature in a way that it makes use of linguistic metaphors and conceptual metaphors in everyday thought and language. According to them, conceptual metaphors consist of a set of mappings between two domains of experiences that are represented in the mind as mental frames. The domain of experience that is used for comprehension of another one (source domain) is typically better known, more experienced and physical, while the domain that is being comprehended (target domain) is more abstract and less known. Our understanding of argument, for instance, is shaped by our perception of war as exemplified in statements such as "You must defend your argument" and "Everyone likes winning an argument". Here, the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR structures the way how we think about arguing, i.e. it is a verbal battle, and what we do when we argue, i.e. we aim to be the one who wins.

Metaphor is thus deeply connected to our conceptual system as it allows us "to integrate the target topic into a set of familiar concepts and assumptions and structure it from a particular viewpoint" (Musolff, 2016, p. 11). Worth noting is that conceptual metaphor differs from linguistic metaphor in that it is an abstract cognitive frame with a certain degree of universality. Linguistic metaphors, on the other hand, often vary across different languages. They both are, nevertheless, intertwined in a way that linguistic metaphors are guided by conceptual metaphors. More

precisely, several linguistic metaphors are often built on one conceptual metaphor (Gibbs, 2017a). For example, the two sentences "We have to protect the future of our home" and "Bulgaria is our home" are guided by the conceptual metaphor NATION AS FAMILY. In both sentences, the country is compared to a home without further specification, yet it gives a sense of a familiar space shared by one family that metaphorically refers to all Bulgarians.

One difficulty that has arisen with the initial presentation of CMT was that there is not always a complete overlap between a source and target domain, and thus, not all metaphorical mappings make sense (Gibbs, 2017a; Kövecses, 2008). A possible solution to this was offered by John Grady (1997) who argued that a strong correlation in our everyday experience that arises from the body's sensorimotor system leads to the creation of primary metaphors that are potentially universal. His idea is that we should distinguish between primary metaphors that are grounded in our direct (embodied) experience and complex metaphors that consist of several primary metaphors. Taking Grady's illustrative examples of primary metaphors PERSISTING IS REMAINING ERECT, STRUCTURE IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE and INTERRELATED IS INTERWOVEN, we can combine them in various ways to get different metaphorical complexes. For instance, combining PERSISTING IS REMAINING ERECT and STRUCTURE IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE gives rise to a conceptual metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS that motivates the presumption that theories need a solid ground and can collapse without implying that theories need windows. At the same time, the

combination of STRUCTURE IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE and INTERRELATED IS INTERWOVEN provides for different metaphorical compound – THEORIES ARE FABRICS – that implies that theories can be intertwined together without motivating inferences such as that theories are colourful in a way that fabrics have colours (Gibbs, 2017a).

Although this notion of primary metaphors proposes a critical account of why certain metaphorical expressions might occur and others do not, it does not provide an explanation for why certain words and not others are metaphorically used (Gibbs, 2017a). One possible answer to this is provided by Kövecses (2005, 2008, 2010, 2016, 2020a, 2020b) who argues that embodied experience is not the only determinant of the metaphorical formation and interpretation. By demonstrating that the universal human emotion, such as happiness, anger, love, and so forth, can manifest itself differently across cultures, he points to the fact that humans are not shaped solely by their biological features but also by the cultures in which they live. Which metaphors are used in a particular situation results from the dual pressure of both the potentially universal bodily experience and various contextual factors, i.e. situational, discourse, bodily, and conceptual-cognitive (Kövecses, 2020a). To put it differently, the choice of metaphors is, to a large degree, the result of "the priming effect of contextual factors in real situations of discourse on the human mind to establish metaphors" (Kövecses, 2016: 49). Thus, instead of insisting on the universality of conceptual metaphors, he suggests considering that one metaphor can be mediated differently in different contexts.

If primary metaphors are grounded in bodily experience, yet their utilisation in natural situations depends on context, it remains unclear how the process of metaphorical conceptualisation in real communication takes shape. How can one and the same source domain, such as BUILDING in the "common European house" metaphor, form the basis for different and sometimes contradictory target inferences? Musolff (2006, 2016, 2017) problematises this by arguing that there exists another cognitive level that allows metaphors to frame reality – the metaphor scenario:

> "A scenario is a set of assumptions made by competent members of a discourse community about the prototypical elements of a concept, that is, participants, 'dramatic' story lines and default outcomes, as well as ethical evaluations of these elements, which are connected to the social attitudes and emotional stances that are prevalent in the respective discourse community. " (Musolff, 2016: 30)

More generally, metaphor scenarios capture a broad range of people's beliefs, experiences, and knowledge regarding different source domains. In this way, the concepts of the source domain are organised into metaphor scenarios or mini-narratives through and depending on which our understanding of reality can be shaped. By using a corpus of British and German public debates on the European Union, Musolff (2006) provides an example of LOVE-MARRIAGE scenario that motivated the media to use metaphors such as "Franco-German marriage", "honeymoon in the EU" or "birth of a single European currency". More particularly, he shows that while British media commented on the apparent "marriage problems" of the "Franco-German couple" triumphantly as a chance that this would lead to the

"breakup", the German press presented the "Franco-German marriage problems" as something that must be overcome at all costs to demonstrate "a partnership destiny". Musolff (2006) stresses that these differences in the exploitation of LOVE-MARRIAGE scenario reflect the differences in British and German political stances towards European integration. Therefore, it is at the level of metaphor scenarios that the meaning is processed as they allow the speaker to employ them to build narrative frames for the conceptualisation of specific societal issues.

Musolff's insights closely relate to what Kövecses (2020b) writes about mental spaces in his *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*. More particularly, he proposes that metaphorical conceptualisation takes place at four levels of schematicity hierarchy: image schema, domain, frame and mental space. The image schema corresponds to the universal aspects of embodiment. We use them when we face an object or situation, hence, they are our first guides in conceptualising experience. The domain and frame level relates to the supraindividual level that reflects how a given culture mediates decontextualised metaphor. Finally, mental spaces are highly specific conceptual structures occurring in a particular communicative situation. As such, they are influenced by a variety of different contextual factors, including the intentions of the speaker. In brief, the first three levels form a structure that provides us with the conceptual ground for meaning in general and in language in particular on which we build further when we use language in real communicative situations. To use the words of Kövecses:

> "…metaphor that is used in a specific communicative situation as part of a mental space, or scene, will activate the frame structure to which it is linked, which will, in turn, activate the domain on which the frame is a part, and the activation will reach the image schema that conceptually supports the frame"

Assuming that mental spaces or metaphor scenarios process meaning, it is at this level that political preferences, normative assumptions, attitudes and beliefs of a particular discursive community could be discerned. Yet, what remains unclear is why and how speakers produce particular metaphors in specific discourse situations or, to put it simply, why some metaphors are more prominent than others. To explain this, Valdivia (2019, 2020) proposes that there exists an upper cognitive level above the metaphor scenario and theorises the notion of a regime of metaphors which allows the metaphors to be "narratively enacted, made visible and experienced" (Valdivia, 2019, p. 293). It is at this level that the conceptual frames are hierarchically organised so that the cross-cultural differences in metaphorical expression collapse into symbolic systems that inform broader worldviews. He exemplifies this by pointing to the post-war regimes of metaphor on the European Union such as EUROPEAN UNION AS A BUILDING, EUROPEAN UNION AS A FAMILY or STATE MEMBERS AS FRIENDS that has been recently challenged by the populist metaphorical conceptualisation under the regime of metaphor EUROPEAN UNION AS A CORRUPTED BODY, EUROPEAN UNION AS IMBALANCE and EUROPEAN UNION AS A COMPANY. Once the regime of metaphor is activated and becomes visible, so the

argument goes, it further enacts and orientates the configuration of the last cognitive level – the cultural narrative.

Regarding the cultural narrative, Valdivia defines it as "the moral and aesthetic coded symbolic matrix-in-the-making which orientates behaviour and signifies the imaginary relationship between an individual (and/or [virtual] community) and her (his/their) material conditions of existence in a given historical-spatial context" (p. 287). In other words, cultural narratives form both the cognitive and performative ground of social interactions. They can impose a meaning of reality and, thus, orientate our behaviour (Valdivia, 2019, 2020). To use the words of Jansma (2021), "cultural narratives are the fictions we believe ourselves to be, and in the name of which significant political and societal decisions are taken" (2021, p. 85). In her study of populist use of culture, Jansma (2021) provides an example of the populist cultural narrative that activates positive feelings about the Self and negative feelings about the Other, which largely defines and confirms conceptualisation of the European Union as corrupted body, its members as rivals (cf. Valdivia, 2019) or arrival of refugees as a threat or danger for Western civilisation.

To sum up, my point is that considering conceptual metaphor in a larger framework of cognitive operation can overcome the shortcomings of the initial version of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The inclusion of the additional layers of metaphor scenarios, regimes of metaphors and cultural narratives broadens the study of language use by considering both linguistic and conceptual metaphor as process-in-the-making. Taking into account all the levels of cognitive operations, this framework can further clarify why some metaphors are more

prevalent than others and helps us understand how scenarios, regimes and narratives conditions choice of source domains used to frame target concepts. Under this vein, the metaphorical configuration of a text or speech is important for understanding of the psycho-emotional activation of set of affordances of interpretation and of worldviews that operate under certain political, historical or social conditions.

The Case of Bad Governance Narrative in Bulgarian Media Debates

In order to illustrate what I have explained and proposed so far, this section will present the metaphorical conceptualization orbiting around Bulgarian governance during the large-scale protests of 2020 and 2021 as it took place in Bulgarian national newspapers. For my study, I followed a research design based on the data collection, via Nexis-Uni, of an original corpus of the press articles from six major Bulgarian national newspapers: *168 Chasa*, *24 Chasa*, *Dnevnik*, *Kapital*, *OFF News*, and *Focus News.* The text corpus was created based on words that were among the most accentuated during the protests. More particularly, I searched for the terms "Мафия" (mafia), "корупция" (corruption) within the scope of nine months after the protest began, that is between 9 July 2020 and 16 April 2021. This yielded a database of 1 291 newspaper articles. In order to get an accurate corpus, the data was manually cleaned to exclude any reprints and duplications. The final set included 833 newspaper articles.

Given, on the one hand, the high complexity of the data and, on the other hand, the complex and novel theoretical perspective, I followed a mixed-method approach from a grounded theory

perspective. The selected newspaper articles that constitute the corpus were analysed through several rounds of close reading and coding, integrating NVivo coding software. In general, the process of different rounds of coding provided insights in the layered construction of societal narrative of bad governance. To be concrete, the initial round of coding revealed the linguistic metaphors which were then categorized into metaphor scenarios during the focused coding stage. The next (axial) coding identified in the news articles several regimes of metaphor which corresponds to broader worldviews. Finally, theoretical coding allows for exploring the articulation of given cultural narrative.

A thorough analysis of the corpus text led to the identification of 1 893 metaphors related to Bulgarian governance. These were further subdivided into 102 metaphor scenarios or mini-narratives. The thorough analysis of the corpus next led to the identification of 20 regimes of metaphors that established a hierarchy of conceptual frames, which facilitated the mobilization of a given cultural narrative of bad governance. For instance, the qualification of Boyko Borisov as "playing skits" was identified as departing from the primary conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS THEATRE. This primary conceptual metaphor was further classified as operating with a metaphorical scenario based on the narrative coordinates of the SPECTACLE. The conceptual metaphor allows one to grasp more complex or abstract phenomena (in the target domain, in this case, Boyko Borisov) using more simple or concrete terms (the source domain, in this case, playing skits). The metaphor scenario or mini-narrative SPECTACLE used for the target domain of Prime Minister Borisov thus frames Boyko Borisov as someone

performing or taking part in a play. More precisely, the metaphorical expression “Borisov is playing skits” figuratively suggests that Bulgarian politics is anything but a spectacle intended for the satisfaction of the audience. The articulation of this mini-narrative further gave rise to and activated two regimes of metaphors: GOVERNANCE-DEPENDENCE, GOVERNANCE-NONTRANSPARENCY. At this level, the properties were generated so that the cultural narrative of bad governance was configurated as a mode of becoming. To put it differently, once these regimes became visible, the cultural narrative of bad governance acquire a necessary cognitive validation to crystallize in public discourse, in this case in media debates.

To be more specific about the metaphoricity around Bulgarian governance, Figure 1 reports the seven most frequent metaphor scenarios contrasted to the calculated average of the remaining 95 metaphor scenarios. The bars represent the number of appearances per metaphor scenario. The "REST (average)" bar indicates the average frequency of the remaining metaphor scenarios in the corpus. The metaphor scenarios that stand out in the corpus because of their frequency are FIGHTING, AUTOCRACY, WAR, DISRUPTION, DISASTER, INVESTMENT, ENDLESS PATH, and SICKNESS. As observable, these metaphor scenarios refer to unpleasant conditions caused by violent or malicious action, disturbing situations or harmful conditions. This is particularly noticing in FIGHTING scenario that was used primarily for framing 1) Bulgarian citizens as "warriors" that are under intense pressure from the governing elites that try "to instil fear so that it [citizenry] can be passive

and not fighting for change", 2) Bulgarian Socialist Party as someone who is "fighting for the rule of law", "has waged a fight against oligarchy", and seeks to "combat the corruption", but also as someone who "fights over power" "with the rightists" and "attacks the democratic principles of Bulgaria", and 3) prime minister Borisov as "fighting for a better future", while simultaneously picturing him as the "attacker of democracy" whose main aim is to "loot the state". Worth emphasizing is AUTOCRACY scenario that framed Bulgaria as being a kingdom, Boyko Borisov as car, governance actors as voivodes and royal family. Indeed, metaphors such as "there are derebeis in some places", "we must resist the Sarais who rule our country", "they chose to be part of Sultan's court" clearly illustrate the analogy between the current quite abstract processes of governance and, at first glance more familiar and easier to be understood, the way how the state was governed under the Ottoman Empire. Interesting to look at is also metaphor scenario of SICKNESS that, in most cases, builds on the personification of both democracy and Bulgaria when they are portrayed as sick or ill persons ("it is a cancer patient") that needs acute treatment or medicine. Noteworthy is that it also entailed the portrayal of assumed causes of such a poor condition by describing, for example, Boyko Borisov as the "virus that has infected our entire country", and governance in general as a disease ("vital organs are affected by the disease") or corruption as "the chronic disease".

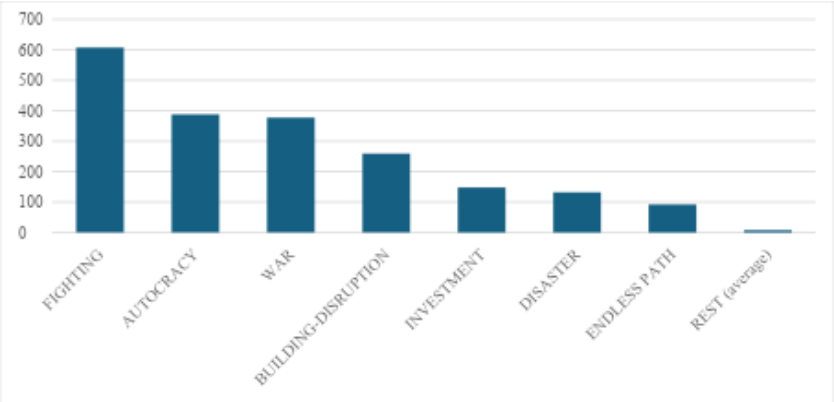

Figure 1. Statistical distribution of scenarios in the corpus

As shown above, metaphor scenarios were used in different contexts, referring to different target domains (e.g. SICKNESS scenario for Bulgaria, democracy or Boyko Borisov) and having various connotations (e.g. FIGHTING metaphor scenario). Implied in this is that certain metaphor scenarios that are prevalent in society, such as FIGHTING, can draw on different logic depending on who is fighting against whom or for what. For example, incumbents fight to stay in power ("fight for survival"), citizens fight against the ruling elite ("waging a fight against GERB") or fight for democracy ("warriors of the democratic soul"), or the protests are portrayed as "fight between the left and right". Similarly, a SICKNESS scenario can provide a rather negative picture of a particular target domain, such as when governance is portrayed as a serious disease ("the malicious way of governing spreads as cancer") while, at the same time, it can contribute to the evocation of compassion and pity towards certain target domains, such as Bulgaria, that is framed as being seriously ill.

In order to explain this, I argue that metaphor scenarios should be considered in a broader perspective as a part of regimes of metaphors. Figure 2 reports the seven most frequent metaphor scenarios contrasted with the six most frequent regimes of metaphors (GOVERNANCE-DEPENDANCE, GOVERNANCE-NONTRASPARENCY, GOVERNANCE-ABUSEMENT, BULGARIA-DISORDERED, BULGARIA-BEHIND, BULGARIA-UNDEMOCRACY). Figure 2 illustrates that regimes of metaphor do not consist of a unique set of metaphor scenarios but rather build on the combination of various sets of mini-narratives giving the particular regimes specificity. For example, within the GOVERNANCE-DEPENDANCE regime, the FIGHTING and AUTOCRACY metaphor scenarios are more recurrent than those of other regimes, highlighting both the conflicting and non-democratic nature of governing. This regime thus holds that governance processes concern (physical) fights between the governance actors and actors aiming to take part in them and that governance consists of anything but processes involving actors representing various segments of society. The scenario that is unique for this regime is MONSTER-ANIMAL (not in the Figure), which allows to shape the idea that governance actors are dangerous, behaving in rather unpredictable ways or even difficult to be replaced ("there is a mastodon against us with a lot of power"). The BG-UNDEMOCRACY regime paints a somewhat similar picture, which is emphasized by the AUTOCRACY and WAR metaphor scenarios. This suggests that the Bulgarian form of governing is not democratic but that governing is limited to a small group of people that has almost unlimited power while also implying that Bulgaria is affected by

continuous battles between different actors and, consequently, is as if in a war mode. This picture is further complemented by the WOUND and SICKNESS metaphor scenarios (not in the Figure) that both build on the personification of Bulgaria as being seriously wounded ("if this continues, our country will perish") and sick. Looking more closely at the BG-DISORDERED regime, the INVESTMENT mini-narrative followed by FIGHTING and DISRUPTION scenarios are frequently used. This regime thus reflects the unfree and non-democratic character of the country by pointing to the fact that Bulgarian politics is supposed to be seen as a good investment for wealthy men to secure their wealth. In a more abstract sense, the Bulgarian state as a whole is considered to be an article for purchase that is at the centre of fights between various political, economic and social actors, as emphasized by the FIGHTING scenario. Worth mentioning is the WORTHLESS scenario (not in the Figure) that is unique for this regime. This scenario is used to conceive the message that when looking from the international level, Bulgaria is an unimportant player with whom anybody can do whatever he wants ("they wipe the bottom with us").

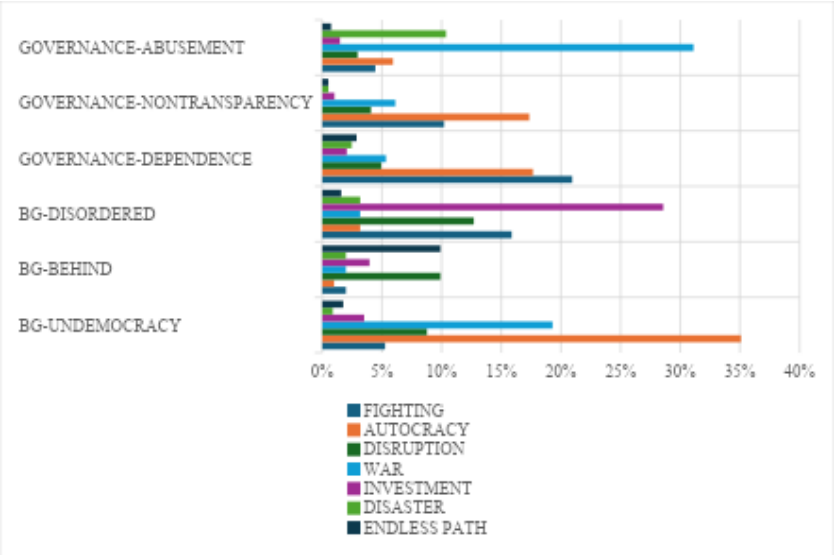

Figure 2. The most frequent metaphor scenario per the most frequent regimes of metaphors

Important to emphasize, however, is that a close look at Figure 2 reveals that all the most frequent metaphor scenarios appear in the most frequent regimes, suggesting that they are intertwined. More interestingly, the three most recurrent scenarios – FIGHTING, WAR and AUTOCRACY – make the constitutive elements of these regimes. At this point, noteworthy is the central argument of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that presupposes the existence of cognitive links between metaphor and conceptual thinking and the assumptions of Valdivia (2019) and Jansma (2021) that different regimes of metaphors may actually have a lot in common in terms of ideas and worldviews. As mentioned, the data reveals that AUTOCRACY, WAR and FIGHTING metaphor scenarios are the most frequent within all regimes. The DISRUPTION scenario is also omnipresent. Although, as has been noted earlier, these scenarios may slightly

differ in terms of their interpretation according to the regimes to which they belong, they do share underlying characteristics. In particular, FIGHTING and WAR scenarios are built on confrontational logic, and the DISRUPTION scenario draws on the idea of preventing or interrupting something from working in the usual way. In fact, all these mini-narratives evoke the image of an insecure, unstable or even threatening situation and, as such, facilitate the blame allocation and contribute to the activation of widespread us-them dichotomies in thinking patterns about the way the country is governed. Similarly, the metaphor scenario AUTOCRACY adds to the creation of sense of the wickedness of governance, further contributing to the mobilization of cleavage between us (common people) and them (the ruling elite).

Conclusion

This main aim of this paper was to make case for the study of metaphorical configurations of text, in any of its form and mediation. The disciplinary development of metaphors, from conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and critical metaphor theory (Musolff 2016) to metaphor field loop theory (Valdivia 2019), has been enlightening, especially for three reasons. First, it has shown that constructing worldviews is part of complex processes rather than "by-products of ideological causality" (Valdivia, 2019, p. 292). Second, it has explained that metaphors have the potential to generate alternative intellectual horizons for social change or renewal if they are narratively enacted at the regime level. Third, it has provided a solid ground for the studies of metaphors in methodological terms,

considering especially the new data-processing tools. Building on that, this paper argues that metaphors are not a final stage of conceptual thinking but rather they are in constant interaction with metaphor scenarios, regimes of metaphors and cultural narratives, configuring and reconfiguring public discourse and thought. Therefore, it seems plausible to consider conceptual metaphor in a larger framework of cognitive operations consisting of at least four layers: conceptual metaphor, metaphor scenarios, regimes of metaphors and cultural narratives.

To illustrate my point, I presented a metaphorical configuration orbiting around Bulgarian governance as present in Bulgarian news media in 2020 and 2021. The thorough analysis of the media articles led to the identification of 1 893 conceptual metaphors, further subdivided into 102 metaphor scenarios and 20 regimes of metaphors. A detailed look at the use of metaphors in the corpus revealed that despite each regime being composed of the various sets of metaphor scenarios or mini-narratives, that give the particular regime its specificity, all the most frequent metaphors scenarios were firmly present in the identified regimes. This great overlap of the constitutive scenarios thus points to the fact that the regimes have lot in common in terms of basic ideas and worldviews. This means that there exists a close link between the regimes on the conceptual level. The choice of metaphor is not a random process, but some metaphors are simply more attractive to us as they share an underlying logic. This was especially the case with the metaphor scenarios FIGHTING, WAR, AUTOCRACY, DISRUPTION and SICKNESS. Besides, the analysis points to the importance of the regimes of metaphor because it is exactly at this level that the

properties are generated so that the cultural narrative of bad governance acquire a necessary cognitive validation to crystallize in public discourse, in this case in media debates.

This particular finding can set a basis for further research on how certain regimes of metaphors circulate and become more prevalent and prominent than others in public discourse and the potential of these regimes to (re-)shape the citizens view and interpretation of political world. In order to gain more insights into these phenomena, it is desirable the quantitative methods for detecting and analysing metaphors in larger corpora, for which, to begin with, the coded data for this work could be used very well.

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Space, Hands and Gaze: Pointing as a Resource for Narrative

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Introduction

Attempts to operationalize the notion of "collective memory" frequently acknowledge that it is deeply tied to language and narrative (Mlynář, 2014). The link between memory and space is also often emphasized. Respecifying "social memory studies" (Olick & Robbins, 1998), this paper offers an empirical inquiry into the relationship between memory, space and narrative that is informed by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Garfinkel, 1967, 2002; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007) and grounded in video-based interactionist analysis (Mondada, 2018) of three interviews from the USC Shoah Foundation's *Visual History Archive*. In particular, I examine the pointing practices narrators use to provide a link between the surrounding space and their ongoing talk within the culturally established structure of oral history.

First, I will briefly review the theoretical insights into the relationship of space, language and memory, explaining how this conceptual triad can be repurposed through an inductive analysis of oral history video materials. Next, after introducing the analysed data, I will focus on two forms of pointing that

narrators routinely employ as part and parcel of their situated talk within oral history interviews conducted at the sites of remembered events: pointing with the gaze and pointing with a hand. I will conclude the paper by discussing the results in the context of interactionist studies of pointing, arguing that a hand is used for pointing when a particular aspect or feature of the surroundings needs to be precisely specified, while gaze is used in reference to the surroundings in a more general manner. I also show that, in the analysed materials, pointing is routinely followed by movements of the camera (panning, zooming etc.), which seems to take the pointing as an instruction for shifting the frame. Taking the camera movements into account, I analytically relate memory work in oral history interviews to the fundamental feature of the interview's production as an object intended for a future "overhearing audience" (Heritage, 1985).

Language, space and memory

For the founding theoretical figures of social memory studies, such as Maurice Halbwachs (1980, 1992) and Jan Assmann (1995, 2011), the relevance of language to collective memory is profound and taken for granted. At the beginning of the 20th century, Halbwachs' pioneering research in sociology of memory pointed to the importance of language as a system of shared symbols, stating that "verbal conventions constitute what is at the same time the most elementary and the most stable framework of collective memory" (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 45). In the latter period of his work, he further argued that our interpretation and knowledge of past events emerge from linguistic interactions with others. "[W]e can find in society all

the necessary information for reconstructing certain parts of our past represented in an incomplete and indefinite manner, or even considered completely gone from memory," states Halbwachs (1980, p. 76). He observes that "[w]hen we accidentally meet persons who have participated in [the] same events, co-actors or witnesses, or when we are told or otherwise discover something about such past happenings", these materials from other persons are commonly used to "fill in apparent gaps in [our] memory" (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 76–77). Several decades later, Assmann (1995) developed Halbwachs' ideas and incorporated everyday language into his own theory through the concept of "communicative memory" (contrasted with "cultural memory"). According to Assmann, communicative memory consists solely of everyday communication and lacks broader cultural frames, time-persistence or foundations in tradition or conventions. Communicative memory is unspecialized, thematically unstable, disorganized, informal and contingent. In contrast to cultural memory, the roles of narrator and listener are interchangeable and not institutionalized. Finally, communicative memory involves a limited and floating temporal horizon of approximately 80–100 years. Communicative memory is not fixed to a certain moment in history: any temporal fixation requires cultural formation, which already indicates the transition from communicative to cultural memory (Assmann, 2011, p. 34–44).

In addition to the relationship of memory and language (incarnated, for instance, in oral history interviews), another relevant aspect is the link between memory and space. "Memory needs places and tends toward spatialization," asserts Assmann

(2011, p. 25), once again building on the foundations laid by Halbwachs, who argued that "every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework" (1980, p. 139), since it is space that provides stability and preserves the past. Halbwachs called for a social scientific study of places and spaces of memory, proclaiming: "It is to space – the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination – that we must turn our attention" (Halbwachs, 1980, p. 140). This suggestion was later developed by other scholars in a number of research initiatives (e.g., Crinson, 2005), most notably in Pierre Nora's conception of "sites of memory" (Nora, 1989). Nora and his followers focused primarily on places that are created as "reservoirs of memory" by being assigned meanings derived from a shared historical past. More generally, ascribed social meaning is the criterion for distinguishing between places and spaces, as proposed by theorists of contemporary urban life in capturing the apparent absence of meaning in many urban locations. Public *places* are locations that are socially meaningful, while public *spaces* lack symbolic value and seem to be semantically void (Jacobsen & Chatterjee, 2001). Furthermore, public spaces (such as shopping malls or airport concourses) often have features of non-places, being physically embedded in urban areas, but lacking social meaning (Augé, 1995). Social interaction in such non-places tends to take the form of civil inattention, where strangers in close proximity acknowledge each other's presence without imposing (Goffman, 1971), and non-places also seem to be related to "social forgetting" (Augé, 2004; Connerton, 2009) as they do not preserve particular elements of a common past.

The link between memory and space is also developed in recent work on "embodied memory" (Fuchs, 2016; Ianì, 2019; Macken et al., 2016), which highlights the central role of the body in social interactions (see Meyer, Streeck & Scott Jordan, 2017). In the perspective relevant to the present study, the body is not seen as an "outer" surface on which "inner" memory processes are expressed. Remembering and forgetting, commonly understood as mental processes taking place inside the head or in the mind, at the same time routinely figure in social interactions as unproblematically identifiable categories of activities (e.g., "I can't remember now," "Did you forget that?"). As such, they are also a resource used by interaction participants to carry out an activity or to highlight different social identities, for example when a speaker does not recall a person's name and turns to others present who might have the knowledge because they share certain experiences with him (Goodwin, 1987). Memory is therefore rearticulated as "a technique of the body involving senses and practical skills" (Diasio, 2013, p. 389). It is publicly produced in and as the embodied work of remembering, which may entail sharing narratives about the past, collaborative remembering or bodily practices such as pointing gestures that routinely accompany these social activities, which will be the focus of the analysis below.

Drawing on this theoretical background while also moving beyond it, I am aiming to offer one possible way to "respecify" (Garfinkel, 1991) social memory studies, particularly the link between space, body and memory in narrative. According to Sormani's (2014) apt formulation, the task of Garfinkelian respecification is "to recover the local production of social order

in and as its manifest expression prior to any theoretical rendition or 'misplaced abstraction' of its produced orderliness and technical specifics" (p. 1). Respecification is a procedure that takes aspects of social reality and social structure, understood as objective phenomena, as they already first manifest in the ordinary activities of members of society, and in the production of such activities as routinely comprehensible and recognizable for the practical purposes at hand. Following this direction, I take the notion of social memory as referring to supra- and inter-individual phenomena, although not using it as a "mere metaphor" (criticized, e.g., by Funkenstein, 1989; Gedi & Elam, 1996). My inquiry is oriented by a theoretical preference for "the notion of memory as a describable set of operations by which a previous meaningful experience is reproduced or re-presented to the notion of a memory as a container" (Garfinkel 2008[1952], p. 159). For such a conception of memory, remembering cannot be located inside an individual. Rather, memory is conceived of as a thoroughly intersubjective phenomenon, and it is therefore constituted in and through concerted social action. Respecifying social memory studies rests on placing memory *outside* an individual's skull, as has already been hinted about the "strong notion" of collective memory (Olick, 2007; Wertsch, 2008). I try to take this suggestion seriously with all ensuing epistemological and empirical consequences. Hence, I focus on the *practices of remembering* or on the *structures of memory*, asking, e.g., what makes "remembering" recognizable as a unique social activity? And how is remembering made recognizable as a remembering of "something"? In short, my purpose in this paper is to study the methodical details of producing "the remembered past"

(Lukacs, 2009) as a commonly shared social object, *in situ* and in real time, through spatially structured and locally situated embodied conduct. As one of the recurrent details of organized conduct, pointing as a resource for narrative within videotaped oral history interviews is my particular focus, especially with regard to how it is tied not only to the local production of memory while the interview is being conducted as an audio-visual material, but also to the accountability of the embodied narrative as used by various audiences who later access the recorded interview for their own purposes (see Mlynář, 2022).

Materials

This paper is grounded in an analysis of three recordings from the USC Shoah Foundation's *Visual History Archive* (VHA; http://vha.usc.edu). VHA provides online access to nearly 55,000 interviews with survivors and witnesses of genocides, particularly of the Holocaust. The interviews have so far been conducted in 62 countries and recorded in 41 languages. On average, each testimony is between two and three hours long and discusses the interviewee's life story chronologically in its entirety with a focus on the genocide. Most of the interviews completed to date were conducted between 1994 and 2000. In addition to conventional oral histories, in which the camera focuses on the narrator in an interior environment (such as an office or an apartment), several hundred of the VHA interviews also contain "location video footage". This is a separate segment following the interview itself and mostly takes "the form of a walking tour conducted by the interviewee", as defined in the VHA thesaurus. This paper's findings are based on an

examination of three interviews in the Czech language that include 75 minutes of on-site footage. They are briefly presented in Table 1.

Interview VHA ID number and interviewee initials	**Date of interview**	**Total length of interview**	**Length of location video footage**
A. H., ID 10325	February 29, 1996	2 hours 11 minutes	19 minutes
J. J., ID 14021	April 29, 1996	3 hours 35 minutes	24 minutes
T. K., ID 4106	July 19, 1995	2 hours 38 minutes	30 minutes

Table 1. An overview of the analysed material.

Analysis

Spatial surroundings are incorporated into the spoken narrative in various ways. I will refer to one such way as *captioning* (see Figure 1), where the speaker produces commentary to illustrate what can be seen in the frame; another way may be referred to as *positioning* (see Figure 2), where the speaker produces an account of the location while on camera, at the site. There may also be other ways, but their detailed analysis remains outside of the scope of this paper.

Figure 1. "Captioning" as a practice for incorporating the spatial surroundings into the spoken narrative. Example from VHA interview ID 14021.

Figure 2. "Positioning" as a practice for incorporating the spatial surroundings into the spoken narrative. Example from VHA interview ID 4106.

Although the above-mentioned practices merit detailed analysis, here I am only providing them for context. The remainder of this text focuses specifically on *pointing*, another recurrent practice for incorporating the current spatial environment or its features into the ongoing talk. While captioning includes only the

narrator's voice commenting on the visible scene, and positioning involves the static bodies of the narrator and other participants as the spatial locus to which the locational utterances refer, pointing consists of culturally established movements of the narrator's body, including "the hand as a sensory actor" (Goodwin, 2018, p. 381) that contributes to a practical segmentation of the interactional environment. Previous research has shown that pointing with a hand as a way of "performing knowledge" (Knoblauch, 2008) often co-occurs with deictic utterances and induces the attending recipients to shift their attention to the referent of the pointing, defining relevant objects and establishing mutual orientation (De Stefani & Mondada, 2014; Mondada, 2014; Olbertz-Siitonen & Piirainen-Marsh, 2021). Pointing can involve currently present and directly perceivable objects as well as remembered or otherwise imagined entities (Stukenbrock, 2014). Indeed, it is "an action that can only be successfully performed by tying the act of pointing to the construals of entities and events provided by other meaning-making resources" (Goodwin, 2018, p. 335). Pointing gestures are therefore closely coordinated with ongoing talk, perhaps inevitably (Blythe et al., 2016), and do not involve just the pointing hand, but rather "form one part of a whole gamut of bodily activities – gaze, posture and so forth – which both segments and is segmented by the emergent talk" (Hindmarsh & Heath, 2000, p. 1875). The production of pointing also typically requires the participants' bodies to be properly positioned and can be delayed until the required configuration is achieved (Mondada, 2014), especially in mobile configurations with participants on the move (De Stefani & Deppermann, 2021),

underscoring the fact that pointing is a public practice that "cannot be explained by studying the body in isolation, but must be seen vis-à-vis shifting backgrounds of settings and situated language practices that are themselves structured by activities and semiotic resources" (Goodwin, 2003, p. 239). Expanding on the state of the art, in the following two subsections, I focus on two specific practices that feature prominently in the examined materials: *pointing with the gaze* and *pointing with a hand* (see Figure 3 for preliminary examples, both to be analysed in more detail below).

Figure 3. "Pointing with the gaze" (top) and "pointing with a hand" (bottom) as practices for incorporating the spatial surroundings into the spoken narrative. Examples from VHA interviews ID 10325 (A. H.) and 4106 (T. K.).

4.1 Pointing with the gaze

Pointing with the gaze is a practice that consists of directing one's gaze at a specific object or a segment of the surrounding area. In addition to the movement of the eyes, it may also include movements of the head and a turning of the upper torso or even a reorienting of the whole body. Consider Extract 1, taken from VHA interview ID 10325, which exemplifies one way of pointing with the gaze. The "location footage" is conducted with A. H. at Prague's Charles Square, in a courtyard of the building that was the site of a former Nazi prison. For nearly two minutes before the excerpt begins, he has already been providing a narrative account of the role this building played in his life story.

1 **eh:: (0.4) °kd-° tady: eeh tady na Karlově námě&%stí#(0.3)&(0.4)#jsme**
uh:: (0.4) wh- here: eeh here on Charles Square (0.7) we
&%turns to his right-->
&looks at ground----------& &shifts gaze
#fig4 #fig5


4

5

6

2 **byli %(.) .hh (0.4) několik měsíců >asi tři měsíce @(.) e::hh:**
were (.) .hh for a couple months about three months (.) u::hh:
-->% @speaker out of camera frame-->
3 **žalářováni (0.5)# votuď jsme (0.4) byli (.) převezeni (0.4) na: několik**
jailed (0.5) from here we (0.4) were (.) transported (0.4) fo:r a few
#fig6
4 **(.) dní take na P-$ do Pankrácké věznice,**
(.) days also to P- to Pankratz prison,
-->$

Extract 1 (VHA ID 10325; tape 5; 02:32–02:52)

While talking about the jail at Charles Square in Prague, in lines 1 and 2, narrator A. H. briefly "looks around", first at the ground

between him, the interviewer and the camera operator, and then at one of the buildings surrounding the courtyard. His gaze direction can be treated as a pointing gesture due to its precise temporal coordination with simultaneously produced speech. The horizontal movement of his head and the turning of his upper torso, followed by the reorienting of his whole body to his right (see Figures 4 and 5), are marked by pauses in speech. Only part of the telling, specifically "we were" (in Czech: "jsme byli"), is uttered while the narrator is not facing the camera, and the two words are preceded and followed by brief but noticeable pauses. In line 2, after "were" (in Czech: "byli") and an audible inbreath, A. H. turns back to face the camera, while the camera itself starts panning left and slightly upward, i.e., in the previous direction of his gaze (see Figure 6). The camera operator makes a slow pan to the left and then back to the right, while the speaker is outside of the camera frame for the entire portion of the speech transcribed in line 3, and parts of lines 2 and 4. Subsequently, the narrator becomes the centre of the camera's focus again, as it zooms in on his upper torso, and his telling subsequently continues after the end of the first excerpt.

The second excerpt below provides a rendering of a slightly different way of pointing with the gaze. T. K. (VHA interview ID 4106) is conducting a guided tour for the film crew and the viewers through the town of Theresienstadt (Terezín in Czech), which is a former Jewish ghetto established by the Nazis (for details, see e.g. Hájková, 2020). Before the excerpt begins, the interviewer has asked about the building and whether it is indeed similar to the times – about 50 years earlier – when the narrator lived there as a child with his mother.

1 je. (.) skutečně jsme ve dvoře (0.5) domu el čtyrysta patnáct, kde jsem
it is. (.) indeed we are in the yard (0.5) of house L415, where I
2 s maminkou asi vod ledna (.) nevim přesně ale mys'im vod ledna čtyrycet
was with mom from about january (.) I dunno but I think from january
3 čtyry bydlel (.)#$.hh °asi v° $#>ta'y v prvnim< patře$ v jednom:#$ (0.5)
forty four lived (.) .hh °ab't in° here on the first floor in one: (0.5)
$turns left- $looks upward, upnods--$looks down-$
#fig7 #fig8 #fig9


7

8

9

4 pokoji (.) .hhh a: (.) °mmm° ten dvůr vy$padal# (.) hh d- dost podobně
room (.) .hhh a:nd (.) °mmm° the yard looked (.) hh q- quite similar to
$looks right, nods-->
#fig10
5 jak te:d$(.) vim akorát že$tady taky#běhaly krysy,$byla tu$latrína která
now (.) I only know that rats were running here, there was a latrine
-->$looks ahead------$looks left, turns left-$.....$looks ahead
#fig11


10

11

12

6 #tu dnes není ale ta tu byla (.) .hh p't'že zá$chody (.) @tady byl jeden
that is not here anymore but was here (.) .hh b'c'se toilets (.) there
#fig12 $looks left and up, nods
@speaker out of
cam. frame-->>
7 záchod pro celej barák a přeci jenom tam bydlelo jánevim sedumdesát lidí
was one for the whole house and there was I dunno seventy people so
8 tak prostě to by nestačilo tak tady byla latrína dole .hh
simply that wouldn't be enough so there was a latrine here downstairs .h

Extract 2 (VHA ID 4106; tape 5; 11:42–12:11)

Answering the interviewer's question, T. K. expands on the topic by positioning himself and the other interview participants ("indeed we are in the yard (0.5) of house L415") in relation to the narrated past. In line 3, he performs the first pointing with the gaze, turning his head and upper torso to his left, directing his gaze upward and making a slight nod with his chin (see

Figure 8). As in the previous excerpt, the turning is accompanied by a pause, an inbreath and a quiet particle of an unfinished utterance. While pointing with the gaze, he then restarts it with "here on the first floor" ("tady v prvnim patře" in Czech), after which he already starts looking back down. This strip of interaction is particularly interesting for the use of an "upnod" – or what Williams (2017, p. 568) calls "head pointing" –, which was not employed in the previous excerpt. While he proffers the pointing in line 3, his speech becomes slightly faster and is precisely timed with his head and eye movements. Other instances of pointing with the gaze can also be found in subsequent lines (4, 5 and 6) – e.g., looking right and left –, although these times they are rather akin to "looking around", which is also illustrated by Extract 1. The way talk is produced in line 5 illustrates Goodwin's point that speech "both elaborates and is elaborated by the act of pointing" (2003, p. 2019). Noticeably, then, in line 6, the camera starts panning (see the change of composition in Figure 12, documenting that the camera is already moving to the right and upward) in a direction suggested by the first upnod pointing (in line 3), rather than by the subsequent gaze pointings produced in later lines. The movement of the camera thus seems slightly delayed when compared to the similar event in Extract 1; however, in both cases, the speaker eventually gets out of the frame, while the camera operator makes a slow panning shot of the surrounding buildings.

In summary, pointing with the gaze appears to be produced in deictic reference to the currently inhabited place, which consists of the space occupied by the bodies of the participants and their

surroundings. The word "here" ("tady" in Czech) occurs in both excerpts. In Extract 1, it is uttered shortly before the actual pointing with the gaze commences, but it is accompanied by an initial shift of gaze to the ground. In Extract 2, it is uttered precisely when the upnod and a brief look up is produced. Furthermore, in the second extract, the word "here" is once again used and accompanied by a simultaneous pointing with the gaze in line 5 (Figure 11). It therefore seems that pointing with the gaze indexically establishes *this place* as the "here" of the ongoing narrative.

4.2 Pointing with a hand

Pointing with a hand is a practice that consists of directing one's gaze at a specific object or a segment of the surrounding area, and simultaneously producing a culturally established pointing gesture. In addition to the movement of the eyes, head and upper part of the torso, or even reorienting the whole body, it includes a lifting or stretching of an arm and an extending of the index finger from a closed fist. Consider Extract 3, which is also taken from the VHA interview ID 4106. In response to the interviewer's question (see Figure 3), T. K. produces the following conduct:

1 #já %jsem bydlel támle v tom% rohu# (.) .hh v tom prvnim patře
I was living over there in that corner (.) .hh on the first floor
%.....%points with index finger-->
#fig13 #fig14


13

14

15

2 %#sou vidět takový%#bílý %#dveře.%>tak ta%m #byla $taková místnost
you can see that white door. >so there was a room over there
->%open palm-%....%fist--%thrust-%,,,,,,,% *$speaker out of camera frame*
#fig15 #fig16 #fig17 #fig18


16

17

18

3 .hhhh (.) která hhh byla veliká já bych řek tak asi osm metrů
.hhhh (.) which hhh was large I would say about eight meters
4 široká (0.4) takovejch možná (1.2) osmnáct dvacet metrů
wide (0.4) and maybe some (1.2) eighteen twenty meters
5 dlouhá .hh
long .hh

Extract 3 (VHA ID 4106; tape 5; 08:51–09:06)

In line 1, synchronously with his spoken response to the interviewer's question, T. K. turns to his left and starts producing a pointing hand gesture, which is completed as he utters "corner" ("rohu" in Czech; see Figure 14); as Hindmarsh and Heath have put it, the "whole body conspires to indicate the relevant object" (2000, p. 1863). The first part of the utterance in line 1 is highly indexical, incorporating "there" and "that" in close temporal proximity. After an inbreath, the narrator maintains the outstretched position of his left arm, producing what Enfield et al. (2007) call "B-points", i.e., pointing that is

related to information that is situationally foregrounded (p. 1722). At the same time, the related "domain of scrutiny" (Goodwin, 2000) – i.e., a specific spot where the addressee should look to find the pointed-at target – is established and specified in real time through simultaneous talk, while the pointing gesture is held. There is a shift in grammar from the present tense to past tense; first the place is specified ("that white door"), and next, a narrative account is provided that relates to the place ("there was a room . . ."). Moreover, in line 2, the narrator transforms the hand gesture from pointing with an index finger to pointing with his whole hand, his palm open, as he utters "on the first floor". Subsequently, he bends his left arm slightly, closing his palm into a fist (Figure 16), and then outstretches his arm quickly while simultaneously opening his palm again (Figure 17) in a movement glossable as a "thrust" (somewhat similar to the throwing of a small invisible object). Note that at this precise moment, the camera operator starts panning the camera to the right and upward, in the direction of the pointing. Toward the end of line 2, while T. K. continues to provide more talk, he disappears from the camera frame; however, we can still see him in Figure 18 as he completes the pointing by bringing his left arm down and possibly putting his hand back into his pocket. For the rest of the excerpt, as T. K. continues his narration, the camera locates and focuses on the white door on the first floor that has been specified in lines 1 and 2.

In the final example, Extract 4, we join the narrator J. J. (VHA ID 14021) as he stands at the gate of the upper castle in Panenské Břežany, which was occupied by prominent Nazi officer K. H. Frank during World War II. The excerpt begins after

approximately 30 seconds of the narrator's positioning talk in the filmed scene, which is also the beginning of the location footage tape; no question from the interviewer precedes J. J.'s turn in line 1:

1 **zde#(0.5)+(0.6)#+je horní +zámek v#tomto+ horním zámku sídlila**
here (1.1) is upper castle in this upper castle was settled the
>>turn L-+.....+LH points+turn R-------+
#fig19 #fig20 #fig21


19

20

21

2 **rodina Karla Hermanna Franka (1.2) kdo byl Karl Hermann Frank**
family of Karl Hermann Frank (1.2) who was Karl Hermann Frank
3 **(0.3) ehh (dv-) byl to člověk který byl jedným z čelních**
(0.3) ehh (dv-) he was a man who was one of the head
4 **představitelů henleinovského hnutí (.) .hh a který potom**
representatives of the Henlein movement (.) .hh and who later
5 **za odměnu v případě protektorátu se stal státním sekretářem**
as an honor in the case of protectorate became chief secretary
6 **(0.6) +v dolním# z+á$mku:+ .hh ehhh#$**
(0.6) in the lower castle: .hh ehhh
+.....+RH points+
$cam pans left--$cam stops panning
#fig22 #fig23


22

23

24

7 **byl usídlen hh# takzvaný zastupující Reichsprotektor in Böhmen**
was settled hh so-called Deputy Reichsprotektor in Böhmen …
#fig24
8 **und Mähren (.).hh Reinhard Heydrich**

Extract 4 (VHA ID 14021; tape 8; 01:14–01:45)

Compared to Extract 3, both pointings with a hand (in lines 1 and 6) are relatively short. In line 1, J. J. employs a practice that could be glossed as "turn-and-point": prefaced by "here" (in Czech

"zde", which is a more formal synonym of "tady" used in Extracts 1 and 2), he turns his upper torso to the left and points briefly with his left hand to the building visible behind him (see Figure 20). The visibility of the building behind the speaker and in the camera frame might have to do with the choice of "here" (rather than "there"), incorporating the visually available elements of the space into the narrative location. The camera pans slightly right and zooms out to produce a shot that shows the entire castle gate (compare Figures 19 and 21). While facing away from the camera, J. J. continues his turn by labelling the building the "upper castle". Subsequently, he proffers an account of the castle's significance in the context of World War II by linking it to a particular person (K. H. Frank), who is also briefly characterized. In terms of its content, Extract 4 contains rather impersonal historical commentary related to the visible scenery; Extract 3, in contrast, layers the narrator's own life story on the surrounding environment.

In line 6 of Extract 4 (see Figure 22), after a pause, we witness another manual "small point" (Enfield et al., 2007). This time, it is produced by the narrator's right arm, which he briefly lifts. Simultaneously, as in line 1, J. J. provides a label that is complementary to the first one – "lower castle". The two words are intonationally emphasized, and moreover, separated by the following inbreath and hesitation marker. Interestingly, the categorial contrast between the "upper" and "lower" castle is also embodied by the contrasting use of the left (line 1) and right (line 6) hands, while the latter gesture also retrospectively gives sense to the former. As we can see in Figures 22–24, the second pointing engenders a slight panning movement of the camera in

the direction of the pointing, which is however then suspended as the camera pans back to the speaker, albeit not achieving the exact previous visual arrangement (compare the narrator's position in Figures 24 and 21). It might be seen as an ongoing repair on the part of the camera operator, initially responding to the pointing gesture by moving the camera, but then halting the movement as the referent of the pointing gesture is not visible from this particular place (the lower castle is actually two kilometers away from the upper castle), and the camera could therefore not directly show the relevant pointed-to object to the audience in a way similar to, e.g., Extract 1.

In summary, pointing with a hand (compared to the use of gaze) seems to be produced for incorporating *another place* specified as a location of past events. It literally "points out" something in the currently inhabited environment – a "highly structured cultural entity" (Goodwin, 2003, p. 218) – and indexically establishes that object as a "there" for the narrative. In Extract 1, we could see the narrator using the Czech word "támhle" ("over there"); in Extract 2, the narrator indeed uses the word "zde", which corresponds to English "here", but the subsequent turn-and-point specifies that in fact the place is not precisely the current location, but the location visible behind the speaker. With these insights in mind, I will now discuss the broader implications of my analysis of pointing with the gaze and pointing with a hand in oral history location footage materials.

Concluding discussion

Location footage in audiovisual oral history interviews is a perspicuous site (Garfinkel, 2002) for an investigation of the

relationship between memory, narrative and space, looking at "*histories put to work* in cultural activity" (Rose, 1964, p. 9; original emphasis). Featured prominently in the audiovisual materials from the VHA, this paper took pointing as its phenomenon of interest. In particular, I have demonstrated how narrators use pointing with the gaze and pointing with a hand as two distinct practices for incorporating the surrounding spatial environment into the ongoing spoken narrative about the past.

Pointing is a fundamental human communicative practice (Kita, 2003) and humans are similarly well-suited to interpret gaze direction (see Hadjikhani et al., 2008). As Bühler suggested in his classic treatment of deixis, in addition to pointing to presently perceivable phenomena, people can also point to "imagined objects" belonging to "remembered or imagined situations" (2011, p. 149–150). Indeed, there is a primacy of the here-and-now, and narrators are "grounded in the immediate space of perception", using "the surrounding space as a resource to evoke, anchor and imaginatively integrate absent phenomena within the actual space of perception" (Stukenbrock, 2014, p. 89). The distinction between directly perceivable and imagined referents brings up the question posed by Haviland: "When he points . . . how do we know whether he is pointing or referring in the 'here and now' or the then-and-there?" (1996, p. 302)

We may answer this question by attending not only to the speech produced in synchrony and precisely timed with the pointing, but also in oral history interview footage by focusing on the work of the camera. The interactional work achieved by pointing with a hand and pointing with the gaze during situated narration has been specified by examining what happens next. In the analysed

recordings, both gaze pointing and hand pointing practices are routinely followed by panning and zooming of the camera, which seems to take the pointing as an *instruction*. The narrator's pointing seems to be seen by the coparticipants as a request to perform a pan to the pointed-to object, and the gesture thus serves to virtually direct the camera work. This can indicate that in co-presence, pointing invites the listeners to look at something relevant to the telling (see Mondada, 2014, p. 114ff). One of the camera operator's tasks thus seems to be to allow the viewers visual access to relevant features of the environment in real time, as progressively specified in the narrator's ongoing talk and bodily conduct. As proposed by Goodwin, "the participants' visible orientation provides a guide for what should be included within the frame of the video image" (2018, p. 194). We saw in Extract 4 that this can also lead to brief mistakes and reorientations of camera movements. With regard to narrative practices, it seems that pointing with a hand is used to establish a (present) locus of attention that is then used as a narrative resource; while eyes are used to point to the surroundings as the "background" of the current narrative. Finally, a procedural rule operative in these interactional sequences could thus be formulated: a hand is used for pointing when a particular aspect or feature of the surroundings "over there" has to be specified more precisely (alongside the ongoing talk), overcoming the possible indexical uncertainty of deictic utterances, while eyes are used for pointing in reference to the surroundings in general, inviting the listener to join the speaker in having a look around and thus perhaps "seeing the past in the present" (Post, 2015).

One aim of this paper was to respecify social memory studies by zooming in on the "locally witnessable, technical, work-site details" (Garfinkel, 2022, p. 22) of one of the social settings where remembering's work is done, i.e., the oral history interview and its accompanying location footage, in which the narrator gives a guided tour of a place connected to her or his life story. Bringing about "a more dynamic, performative and intersubjective understanding of memory" (Diasio, 2013, p. 400), I show how the narrator incorporates the surrounding space into the ongoing narrative about the past being talked about. Meanwhile, I also demonstrate that it would be a mistake to consider solely the work done by the narrator: an oral history interview is an interactional achievement (see Mlynář, 2020) and the local participants in the "location footage" together collaborate to record it as an intelligible object for future viewers. Part of the recording's intelligibility consists of making clearly discernible the scenic spatial features being talked about, which is the specific work of the camera operator – absent from the frame but producing in its entirety "the historian's view" that "makes the activity accountable as a testimony's narrative, focusing on the speaker alone" (Mondada, 2006, p. 63). My analysis therefore underscores how Holocaust memory is produced in the "re-membering dynamic" of the interview (Bartesaghi & Bowen, 2009), and indicates how people establish, maintain and contest "the past" in interaction (see Lynch & Bogen, 1996). Social memory studies thus become the study of the practical production and maintenance of memory and remembering as interactional resources. In similar contexts, this has been discussed with regard to the analytical focus on "the practical

and interactional production, reading, and establishment of documentary details" (Lynch, 2009, p. 98), with sustained attention to the work of members tasked with "making history" and "explicating the practical actions … through which versions of past events are worked up, worked on and eventually 'settled'" (Whittle & Wilson, 2015, p. 58).

To conclude, by focusing on bodily incorporation of surroundings into an ongoing narrative, my contribution enriches our understanding of pointing and situates narrative practices firmly in their material and temporal settings. I put forward a typology for incorporating space into spoken narration, using the example of oral histories and their particular form of location video footage. I have shown that narrators comment on space, locate themselves in it and point out various aspects of it. Examining pointing in particular, I have distinguished its two forms – pointing with the gaze and pointing with a hand. Both practices appear to perform similar interactional work (manifested in the camera's movements). Nevertheless, pointing with the gaze rather refers to the "here" of the narrative, generally incorporating the currently inhabited space, while pointing with a hand is used to define a narrative "there", specifying more precisely a concrete element of the spatial surroundings. Rather than being a cognitive or mental construct, I argue that structure of memory should be approached as a thoroughly social phenomenon, achieved through observable, embodied, and spatio-temporally organized activities. Thus, elaborating on pointing as a situated practice that is inherently "interstitial" – involving speech, bodily conduct, gaze and aspects of the surrounding space (Goodwin,

2003, p. 238) –, this paper pointed to a way to transcend the memory and narrative studies' scarcely reflected logocentrism and respecify some of its core topics as embodied details of witnessable work of people remembering and narrating in real time and space.

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Appendix

Notation of speech (based on Jefferson, 2004)

[ ]	Overlapping talk
(.)	Micro-pause
(2.1)	Pause in seconds
.	Final intonation
>yes<	Notably faster talk
<no>	Notably slower talk
(kuk)	Estimated hearing
( )	Inaudible segment
a::	Vocal prolongation
ge-	Cut-off
↑	Higher pitch
=	Rapid continuation
.hh/hh	Inhalation and exhalation
.nh	Nasal inhalation
n(h)o	Laughter particle within word
NO	Louder volume
<u>not</u>	Emphasis

Notation of embodied action (based on Mondada, 2018)

* *	Two symbols delimit descriptions (one symbol per
% %	participant) synchronized with talk.
$-->	Described action continues across subsequent lines

-->$	until the same symbol is reached.
fig	Indication of video screenshot displayed as figure.
#	Exact position of screenshot within the turn.

Negotiations of Belonging: Roma in the Czechoslovak Borderlands During the First Half of the 20th Century

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Milan T. was born in 193x in Wustling, a part of Nižný Medzev, a small town in eastern Slovakia.[1] It was a street lined with rows of houses that ran along a stream, which is now called Opustený—abandoned in Slovak. When Milan T. was growing up, the street was inhabited by people who spoke different languages. The local dialect of German was predominant, but Hungarian and to some extent Slovak, the official language of the state, were also spoken. Another language that could be heard here was Romani, the mother tongue of Milan T. Soon, however, he had to leave his birthplace by the "abandoned" stream. This happened just as he was coming of school age, during the Second World War. As a Roma, a member of a community that was not supposed to live among others, he had to move out of his home and out of the town.[2]

[1] This study was supported by the Charles University Grant Agency (GA UK), grant no. 242323. Institute of International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University.

[2] Interview with Juraj T. (*195x), recorded by the author on September 27, 2022, in Medzev, in Slovak (author's personal archive). While recording the interviews, I obtained the narrators' consent to use their personal information. However, I decided to pseudonymize all narrators I interviewed and quoted in this article.

During the Second World War, the forced displacement of the Roma was carried out throughout the territory of the Slovak state, and Nižný Medzev was no exception (Sadílková, 2020, p. 193; Hübschmannová, 2005; Nečas, 1994). The regional newspapers presented the displacement of the Roma from the center of the town in words of disgust. They emphasized that this was an achievement of the local authorities at great expense, mainly financial, for the benefit of the non-Romani population:

> "Until recently, if you had to go from Nižný Medzev to Vyšný Medzev, you had to pass the Gypsy village, which was close to the road. It was neither pleasant nor comfortable to see and hear there. These days, the problems are over. Both communes have spent a lot of money to build shelters for the Gypsies in remote places, where they now live a less visible existence. The old Gypsy settlement, however, was razed to the ground."[3]

The hateful tone of the article was in line with the media discourse of the time. The message of the text was fully consistent with the rhetoric of the period about those who did not fit into the ideology of the Slovak state, whether they were Roma, as in this case, or Jews, Czechs, or political opponents. The Roma were just one of many groups, whether based on language or political beliefs, that were not supposed to belong to the state community (Kubátová & Vrzgulová, 2023).

In line with this, Roma were to be evicted from their homes in towns and villages so that they would have "a less visible existence," as the newspapers put it. Thus, Milan T. had to move out of town, away from the centre where all the amenities were

[3] "Aus den Zipser Gründen: Ober-Metzenseifen", *Karpathen-Post*, 8 August 1942.

located, to the place where the Roma settlement still exists today.[4] Milan T.'s son, Juraj (*195x), recalled his family's memories of being resettled to the settlement called Parapišl:

> "When those laws came out that they had to evict the Roma from the town, I would say that they more or less hid us here, huh? And let's say that Vyšný Medzev put his people who belonged to Vyšný in the direction of the Golden Valley, towards the river, and Nižný put them here in Parapišl. […] Nižný Medzev made it, I would say, so much more human than in Vyšný."[5]

In this interview, Juraj T. devoted a lot of space to the history of his family during the Second World War. The topic of migration came up repeatedly, whether it was the story of his father, who had to move to Parapišl as a child, or that of his maternal grandmother, who moved to Košice during the war, but returned to the Roma settlement in Nižný Medzev after the war. Juraj T. would comment upon: "But she was such a strong patriot that she didn't stay there. She came back."[6] With these words, Juraj T. emphasized how important it was for his grandmother, who had been widowed during the war with five children, to return to the

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[4] It is commonly referred to as Parapišl, a term that reflects the heritage of this multilingual region. Most likely, the name of this area, where the Roma settlement is located, comes from the German word Pfarrerbüschel (Priest's Forest), written in the local German dialect as Parapüschl, transliterated into Slovak as Parapišl. See "Die Herkunft der Deutschen in Dobschau", Karpathen-Post, 21 March 1936. For the history of Roma settlements in southeast Slovakia, see Helena Sadílková, "Resettling the Settlement. From Recent History of a Romani Settlement in South-eastern Slovakia," in *Festschrift for Lev Cherenkov*, ed. Kirill Kozhanov and Dieter Halwachs (Graz: Grazer Romani Publikationen, 2017), 339–351.

[5] Interview with Juraj T. (*195x), recorded by the author on September 27, 2022, in Medzev, in Slovak (author's personal archive).

[6] Interview with Juraj T. (*195x), recorded by the author on September 27, 2022, in Medzev, in Slovak (author's personal archive).

town and the local community. He also focused several times on the issue of local multilingualism, mentioning that his grandmother spoke Romani as well as the local German dialect and Hungarian. Although Juraj T. often referred to the non-Roma as a coherent "majority," he also underscored the role of the respective languages spoken in the town and the repeated changes in their prioritization by the authorities, be it during the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or Czechoslovakia. His testimony showed that the question of who is the outsider and who is the privileged one in the circumstances of the multilingual small town repeatedly shifted across linguistic or social boundaries.

In order to shed light on the constant negotiations about who belonged to the local community and who deserved to be excluded, this paper provides a glimpse into a small town, Nižný Medzev, in the periphery of Slovakia.[7] The history of the multilingual community of Nižný Medzev is undoubtedly part of the history of the situational and multi-layered process of negotiations about who belongs to the majority or the minority, who is the insider and who the outsider (Elias, 1994; Pažout & Portman, 2018). In this sense, the aim of this paper is to bring to the forefront various perspectives on the negotiation of social positions in the small town. As such, this paper understands belonging as a struggle for both social and spatial togetherness, creating a sense of being "at home" (Scheffel, 2015). Through

[7] I use the name of the town "Nižný Medzev" (also known as "Unter-Metzenseifen" in German, "Alsó-Meczenzéf" in Hungarian), which was used from the interwar period until 1960. During this period, it had the status of a village, although it was generally considered a town because of its social services, developed industry, and institutions such.

these lenses, it intends to contribute to the growing body of literature that focuses on the position of Roma within the hierarchies of local socio-economic relations (Ort, 2021, 2022).

By offering multifaceted views from actors with different linguistic and social backgrounds, this paper underscores the fluid social processes that took place in close-knit societies. It focuses on the experiences and perspectives of those whose voices were rarely heard, to those who played a decisive role in shaping the policies imposed from above (Frankl, 2021). By zooming in on the life in the smalltown from the perspective of the Romani-speaking residents and their town neighbours, be they those who spoke the local German dialect or Hungarian and were largely persecuted for it in the postwar period, or those who spoke Slovak and were privileged by the higher authorities, I want to refine the view of Roma as "eternal outsiders" (Šotola et al., 2018). The aim is to address the possibilities and limits of all actors, including the Roma inhabitants of the settlement, in shaping the reality on the ground (Ort, 2022b).

In order to trace the multifaceted negotiations of social status and belonging, this paper draws on a variety of sources. In an effort to bring Romani voices to the forefront of the analysis, I recorded oral history interviews with contemporary residents of the settlement. In particular, the interviews capture their contemporary view of the settlement, but also provide hints about transmitted family memories of life there, as well as waves of migration within the town and even to the more remote areas

of Czechoslovakia.[8] The source base of the recorded articles also includes testimonies of non-Roma inhabitants of the area. In parallel with the interviews I recorded, I broadened the scope of my research by analysing personal testimonies stored in visual history archives, which I was able to access thanks to the Malach Center for Visual History at Charles University, in particular the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University.

Besides oral testimonies, this paper relies on local, regional, and state-level archival documents, supplemented by newspaper articles. This material, however, is to a large extent problematic, as it contains mainly the narrative produced by non-Roma, and itself carries two problem areas. First, as the newspaper article quoted above shows, these sources often produce a narrative full of stereotypes and hatred towards Roma. Second, even in cases where the authors, including Romani officials, aimed to change state attitudes toward Roma, they fall into a narrative of victimization of Roma communities that often simplifies them as uniform and does not accept any possibility of their independent action. Nevertheless, I consider these sources relevant to the study of the positioning of Roma and non-Roma in the society and their manoeuvring within state and locally enforced policies.

This paper builds on the theoretical assumptions of Critical Romani Studies in terms of recognizing intersectionality while analysing diverse communities, including Roma. Although the terms "Roma" and "non-Roma" were used in the introduction,

[8] On the family memories and personal testimonies see, for example, Kateřina Králová, "Silenced Memories and Network Dynamics in Holocaust Testimonies The Matalon Family and the Case of Greece", *S: I. M. O. N.* 9, no. 2 (2022), 51–66.

suggesting a clear demarcation of established groups, the aim of this paper is to approach the local community of Nižný Medzev as a whole, emphasizing the nuances of belonging as well as the fluid and unstable boundaries between the marginalized and the privileged (Ort, 2022b, p. 24-29). In this paper, however, the term "non-Roma" is still used as a synonym for what Juraj T. called "majority" in the quoted interview. It refers to the perception of social relations as seen by both Roma and non-Roma, which this paper seeks to explore and refine.[9]

Positioning Roma on the Eve of the Second World War

In 1936, typhus spread in Nižný Medzev and attracted the attention of Slovak-language regional newspapers. An article about typhus in the small town began with the sentence "A young Gypsy fell ill," but continued with a general description of the local situation. The article was devoted to the group of sick people and characterized them as "mostly Gypsies and workers who earn their daily bread only day in and day out [and] the village of Nižný Medzev takes care of their meals."[10]This short report in a Slovak newspaper, lumping together local poor German-speaking workers and Roma, gave a rather sober account of the epidemic among the poorer strata of the local population. Not so in the German-language newspaper, which reported:

[9] In addition to the use of the terms "Roma" and "non-Roma," the term "Gypsy" will appear throughout the paper in cases where it is used in the primary sources. For a discussion of the use of the term "Gypsy" in primary sources, see Pavel Baloun, *"Metla našeho venkova!": kriminalizace Romů od první republiky až po prvotní fázi protektorátu (1918–1941)* (Praha: Scriptorium, 2022), 11–14.

[10] "Skvrnitý týf v Medzeve a na okolí", *Slovenský východ*, 6 May 1936.

> "The Gypsy quarter in Metzenseifen, which had been closed for almost a month because of the danger of spreading typhus, was reopened on May 14. The Gypsies, however, are not too happy about their freedom; they seem to have enjoyed their 'captivity' quite a bit. This work-shy rabble would soon get used to being 'fed.'"[11]

The article was clearly filled with hateful anti-Roma rhetoric, and the epidemic was not perceived as a widespread disease among the lower classes as a result of poverty but rather as a deliberate behaviour on the part of the entire Roma population to eat at the expense of the community and non-Roma residents. The discourse on Roma, which was closely linked to the lower strata of the non-Roma population, also revolved around political lines, as their worldview, according to local officials, was "in line with that of the lower strata of local agricultural workers, most of whom are communist-oriented."[12]Interestingly, in addition to becoming part of the political-ideological dispute, the Roma people were also caught up in the national strife that escalated in Czechoslovakia during the late 1930s. A German-language newspaper had repeatedly published articles that perceived the Roma community as a tool in the hands of the Slovaks to achieve their national goals in a predominantly German community. For instance, they described local efforts to establish a Slovak kindergarten:

> "The municipality of Obermetzenseifen [Vyšný Medzev] does not have enough Slovak children to establish its own

[11] "Untermetzenseifen", *Karpathen-Post,* 6 June 1937.

[12] Muzeum romské kultury, Fond písemného materiálu, Sbírka četnického materiálu z pozůstalosti Aloise Stibureka, Velitelství četnického oddělení Moldava nad Bodvou, „Cikáni, potulné tlupy a tuláci – pozorování", 10 July 1932.

> kindergarten [...] and therefore it is easy to imagine that others will have to 'help out.' After all, we know from Obermetzenseifen that the Gypsy children there have to fill the Slovak class."[13]

Similarly, the victimization of German speakers by other communities appeared repeatedly in German-language newspapers. The rhetoric in the press became even more heated in the context of the domestic and foreign political crisis in Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s. In an article from late 1938, emphasis was placed on the local German-speaking poor. What is interesting about the article is who was identified as being responsible for the poverty of the locals. In capital letters, the report emphasized that the culprits, "hand in hand," were "the Commune, the Hungarians [Magyaronen] and the Gypsies."[14] The Roma, one of the most vulnerable groups in the town, threatened by deep poverty and disease, were, in the newspaper's words, seen as one of those responsible for the suffering of the local poor German-speaking community. However, the local German-speakers often regarded the Roma as largely embedded into the town's milieu. In their published memoirs, the German-speaking residents reflected on the Roma neighbours in the town as follows:

> "There was a third nation who were our neighbors: the Gypsies. They had their settlement between Ober- and Unter-Metzenseifen, at the end of Wustling street. They were more or less loosely integrated into the life of the

[13] "Ein Angriff auf die deutschen Kindergärten der beiden Metzenseifen?" *Karpathen-Post,* 24 April 1937.
[14] "Das deutsche Bekenntnis der Zips", *Deutsche Stimmen*, 17 December 1938.

> community through their services as musicians and workers."

In this article, the author reflected on the relationship between German speakers and Roma living in the same area. In doing so, he underscored the language use of the inhabitants of the same street who grew up with different mother tongues, stressing that the German speakers talked "with the Gypsies in their mother tongue" as well as the Roma mastered the local German dialect" (Kauer et al., 1986, p. 318-319).

These memories, written many years later, convey mainly the paternalistic narrative, and they are many times filled with notions of otherness, inscribing on the Roma the attributions of laziness, foxiness, and thievery. However, they also convey the notions of everyday contact between local German speakers and Roma, thus denying the narrative of total exclusion or ignorance between the communities, as highlighted from time to time by the hateful articles in the contemporary press. These accounts often emphasize an idealized perspective of the coexistence of the non-Roma and Roma populations before the outbreak of the Second World War. The war, however, largely shifted and sharpened the boundaries of who belonged to the community of the small town and who was excluded.

Local Roma community during the Second World War

After the outbreak of the Second World War, Romani communities faced harsh discriminatory measures. Despite the fact that the Roma were subjected to the exclusive policies of the Czechoslovak state codified in interwar legislation, anti-Roma measures escalated significantly during the war, affecting all

Roma communities, even in peripheral regions such as the small town of Nižný Medzev. After 1939, the town found itself on the territory of the Slovak state, where—in contrast to the Czech lands, where the vast majority of Roma faced deportation to concentration camps and perished—a large number of Roma survived the war despite various restrictive policies (Sadílková, 20220, p. 192-193; Nečas, 1999, p. 8; Nečas, 1999b). Although the story of the persecution of the Roma in wartime Slovakia by official and paramilitary forces, as well as internment in labour camps, is difficult to reconstruct, the experiences of the Roma during the war are often reflected in the interviews with the members of the Romani communities, such as those in Nižný Medzev.[15]

One of these experiences is the fate of the family of Juraj T., whose family story opened this article. Juraj T.'s account of his family's experiences during the Second World War reflects a series of discriminatory policies against the Roma population. Several members of Juraj T.'s family were detained in the labour camps that had been set up throughout Slovakia since 1941, where members of the Roma and Jewish communities had been interned (Jurová, 1993, p. 14-15; Mann, 2015, p. 9). Juraj T. told the story of his uncle and his companion: "They were in this labour camp during the Second World War, and some of us were there. They escaped from there somehow. At night they walked, during the day they slept." However, Juraj T. underscored that: "Not a single Roma from Medzev ended up in a concentration

[15] Compare with Milena Hübschmannová "'*Po židoch cigáni.*'" See also "Testimonies of Roma and Sinti", Testimonies of Roma and Sinti Database, accessed 2 November 2024, https://www.romatestimonies.com/.

camp, they were in these labour camps, but not a single Roma was taken to a concentration camp."[16]

In addition to their placement in labour camps, Juraj T.'s relatives were also affected by the forced eviction from their homes to the outskirts of the town as encoded in a 1943 legislation.[17] However, most of them managed to survive the war, still being in a close contact with the non-Roma who remained in the town as underscored by Juraj T.:

> "And back then, during the war, the Germans, how the population helped those Roma, hm? I mean, if they needed to eat, well, they gave them some work, or if there was some food left, they gave it to them."

Although the notion of help conveyed in the interview is largely problematic, given the fact that the entire community of Roma from the town was subjected to forced resettlement as well as internment in labour camps, it nevertheless presents a broader picture of the wartime experience. Despite the wartime being for the Roma community largely marked by restrictions, persecution, and hunger, there was still a space for aid and negotiation with their neighbours.

All inhabitants of the small town shared the experience of hardships, which was especially the case during the passage of armies towards the end of the war. For most of the town's inhabitants, the Red Army left behind memories of looting and violence, not depending on their mother tongue (Sadílková,

[16] Interview with Juraj T. (*195x), recorded by the author on September 27, 2022, in Medzev, in Slovak (author's personal archive).

[17] According to a 1943 decree of the Ministry of the Interior, "Gypsy dwellings should be removed from busy roads," and on this basis local authorities evicted Roma from outside the villages. See Jurová, *Vývoj rómskej problematiky,* 16.

2020, p. 143). The arrival of the Red Army to the town and the postwar reshuffling of power created a new setting, where again, the notion of belonging to the town became largely contested.

Searching for a Home after the Second World War

During the winter of 1944–1945, Nižný Medzev faced several waves of passing armies and forced migrations of the local population. Many inhabitants left the town before the arrival of the Red Army, many of them were dragged by the Soviet soldiers to the labour camps in the USSR.[18] However, after the end of the armed conflict, many of those who considered Nižný Medzev their home tried to return.

One of them was Mária S., who was born in a Roma family in Nižný Medzev in 1929. Although Juraj T. mentioned that the Roma from Nižný Medzev avoided mass deportation to concentration camps, the story of Mária S., shows a different experience. Before the outbreak of the war, she had moved with her grandmother to Košice, a regional centre that had fallen to Hungary in 1938. During the Second World War, she, together with her grandmother, were deported to concentration camps. In an interview, she mentioned the frequent transports between the camps and described in detail the most difficult times of suffering she went through together with her grandmother, who perished during the war. However, Mária survived the war and returned to her father, who continued to live in Nižný Medzev.

[18] For the general context of the deportations, see Martin Pekár et al., *Cena víťazstva: odvlečenie obyvateľov z územia Československa, Maďarska a Poľska do Sovietskeho zväzu v rokoch 1944–1945* (Šamorín, Košice : Fórum Inštitút pre výskum menšín, Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika, 2017).

The "homecoming" of Mária did not last long, as she recalled: "My father didn't want me, so my [partner] and I went to Moravia."[19] The interview, in which Mária reflected on her wartime and postwar experiences, mirrored the difficulties of postwar return shared by those affected by wartime displacement and violence (Králová & Kubátová, 2017). Mária touched on the mourning for loved ones who died during the war, but also on the struggle to return to torn communities. In the case of Nižný Medzev, this was true not only for the Roma community but also for the German-speaking population, who were forcibly evacuated at the end of the war and, upon their return, often found their homes confiscated and occupied by their former neighbors. In the period of escalated postwar nationalism, the Germans were to be expelled from their hometown as well as from the entire state (Gabzdilová-Olejníková & Olejník, 2004). Therefore, after the end of the Second World War, the question who would be allowed to return to their "homes" in Nižný Medzev, was largely contested. Local Roma faced the postwar legislation that confirmed and continued the ghettoization of the Roma population from the wartime era, claiming that Roma "are to be removed and placed separately from the village, in a remote place designated by the village."[20] Similarly, the German speakers were forced to leave by the state authorities. The ambiguous postwar situation of the German speakers and the Roma in the small town had been also addressed by Juraj T.:

[19] Maria S. Holocaust testimony (HVT-3363). Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

[20] Štátny archív Košice (ŠA KE), Fond (f.) Okresný národný výbor (ONV) Moldava nad Bodvou 1945–1960, škatula (š.) 1, Úprava niektorých pomerov cigánov, 24 May 1945.

> "Then, when the war ended, the German minority was deprived of citizenship and everything. So they had no rights and no right to these food stamps that they got. Again, the Roma had a lot of children, they got them, but they didn't have the money, so they shared—they gave them the cards, they gave them the money. So they had this, and they had that, so that's how they helped each other."[21]

The notion of sharing the struggle of the postwar shortage of food across the communities appeared repeatedly in the interviews with the locals. Mária G. (*193x) whose mother tongue was the local German dialect recalled:

> "There was no sugar, [...] after the war they gave it on ration cards. The Gypsies, or the weaker people, they didn't have so much - they got these blocks. [...] Then my mother would buy these blocks from the Gypsies and then she would buy sugar and things like that in the store. [...] Then mom would give flour to the weaker people, and that's how she helped them."[22]

As apparent from the interviews, the unequal distribution of rations caused resentment among the local population but, in some cases, also fostered cooperation and negotiations between various groups of inhabitants. These memories may be distorted by an idealized image of aid, but they still provide valuable insight into relations between local Roma and non-Roma populations, which are often overshadowed in official sources by the narrative of exclusion and contempt. As far as the postwar

[21] Interview with Juraj T. (*195x), recorded by the author on September 27, 2022, in Medzev, in Slovak (author's personal archive).
[22] Interview with Mária G. (*193x), recorded by the author on September 12, 2017, in Medzev, in Slovak (author's personal archive).

minutes of the local authorities are concerned, they do not mention any matters related to the local Roma, which shows how little attention was paid to them. Only scraps of information appear in the situation reports; these are mentions focused on security and hygiene, where the narrative focuses mainly on the fact that Roma do not pose a "security risk" to the locality. Alternatively, the "usefulness" of the Roma and the ability of local authorities to employ them in work in postwar reconstruction, as one of the situation reports points out: "Gypsies were engaged in all useful work, such as on roads and in various jobs in the municipalities."[23] In several instances, however, local Roma were again contextualized with the poor of other mother tongues, such as a situation report: "There is a great need for the supply of vitamin D substances, as children, especially among the socially weak working class and Gypsies, suffer from malnutrition."[24] Although this report highlighted the precarious situation of the local Roma and poor, the local authorities were generally not very concerned about their social situation. The lack of interest on the part of the authorities was partly due to the fact that the main focus of the local governments was on the "cleansing" of Germans, Hungarians, and other population groups that were considered "nationally and

[23] ŠA KE, f. ONV Moldava nad Bodvou 1945–1960, š. 1, Obvodný úrad MSK Nižný Medzev: Podávanie periodických situačných zpráv MNV, 6 August 1945.
[24] ŠA KE, f. ONV Moldava nad Bodvou 1945–1960, š. 9, Situacná (sic!) zpráva o pomeroch v moldavskom okrese hlásenie za dobu od oslobodenia okresu CA (sic!), strana (s.) 6, 30 May 1945.

politically unreliable," i.e., not among the desired members of postwar society.[25]

By the late 1940s, therefore, the question of for whom the small town would remain a "home" became largely unclear. The bleak situation—inadequate housing, lack of food, the spread of disease and poverty—was the main reason why many Roma decided to leave Nižný Medzev after the war. Such as Mária S. and her partner departed after few weeks in what used to be her home town, many other tried to secure a better life for their families. As a situation report on the "security situation" in Nižný Medzev put it: "The behaviour of the civilian population is good. Most of the male Gypsies have gone to work in Bohemia."[26] In the same period, the local German-speaking population was threatened by the restrictive measures and organized expulsion from the state. Thus, during the postwar reshuffles, the notion of who "deserved" to belong to the town remained a matter of negotiation across linguistic boundaries.

Conclusion

This paper problematized the question of belonging in a multilingual small town on the periphery of Czechoslovakia, particularly through the lens of the Roma experience. The perception of who belonged to the community of the small town of Nižný Medzev, largely inhabited by German, Hungarian,

[25] On the notion of "cleansing" in the context of postwar Czechoslovakie, see, for example, Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[26] ŠA KE, f. ONV Moldava nad Bodvou 1945–1960, š. 9, Obvodný úrad NV Nižný Medzev: Periodická situačná zpráva – predloženie, 28 February 1946.

Slovak, and Romani speakers, was largely contested in the first half of the 20th century. The multilingual town became a field where many actors tried to define who was an insider and who was an outsider. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the local Roma were portrayed by the regional press as unwanted outsiders, but they were placed in the same category of "lesser people" as the town's poor, German-speaking workers. Although the narrative conveyed by the interwar press was largely exclusionary, biographical accounts of both Roma and non-Roma point to the interconnectedness of these groups that were largely deemed separate.

Even during the Second World War, when local Roma were physically rendered outsiders by being forcibly relocated to the outskirts of the town, they remained "locals," sharing wartime experiences, hardships, and mutual aid with those who remained in the town. The notion of who was the "wanted" inhabitant of the town in the multilingual periphery became even more problematic after the end of the Second World War. As the majority German-speaking population of the town was affected by the repressive policies of the state, the local Roma and German-speakers negotiated over who deserved to receive the food supplies, but also the right to remain in the town as their "home." By drawing on the experiences of local Roma and the German-speaking population, this paper highlighted the fluid and contested nature of the negotiations over who belonged to the town. It underscored how local Roma negotiated their place within the community, which was far from homogeneous, and thus sought to refine the image of Roma as "eternal outsiders."

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Towards Semantic Tagging of Segmented Holocaust Narratives

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Introduction

In the last decades, great efforts have been made to collect the memories of people who survived the war, in particular those who were directly affected by the Holocaust. One such example is the Visual History Archive (VHA) by the USC Shoah Foundation that comprises more than 55,000 video interviews indexed with ∼68,000 terms, about 12,000

(20%) of which are hierarchically ordered subjects. A different source is the EHRI Online Editions, a growing collection of more than 500 digitized documents in at least 12 different languages. These texts are annotated with named entities and document-level subjects but lack segmentation and thus indexing on a segment level.

In fact, the segmentation of such spoken narratives is not trivial: In contrast with structured articles (Koshorek et al., 2018) or scripted video essays (Retkowski & Waibel, 2024), there are no hard boundaries between topics. Instead, they are characterized by smooth transitions between possibly overlapping topics. While this narrative segmentation is a separate challenge not further addressed in this work, it is important to outline that a

lack of proper segmentation and topically discriminate text segments negatively affects how well a language model can link these segments to an ontology (Wagner et al., 2022).

The aforementioned VHA is pre-segmented into segments of uniform length rather than by topics, and many of these segments lack annotations. In the following, we ignore this issue and use a small subset of the VHA as training data to evaluate a simple text classification model without re-segmenting the video transcripts. This serves as a first baseline for a future goal: A segmentation and semantic tagging pipeline for domain experts trained on large amounts of Holocaust testimonies.

Related Work

While information extraction from historical documents has recently gained traction, most research is focused on Named Entity Recognition (NER). The HIPE-2022 shared task on identifying historical people, places, and other entities (Ehrmann et al., 2022) produced Historical Multilingual BERT (Schweter et al., 2022), a Transformer model pre-trained on 19th century newspapers which has been shown to outperform traditional word embed- dings on multiple NER benchmark datasets in the general historical domain. Dermentzi and Scheithauer (2024) fine-tuned XLM Roberta (Conneau et al., 2019) on the EHRI Online Editions and published the first Holocaust-specific NER model for 9 languages which also predicts CAMP and GHETTO labels in addition to standard labels.

Outside NER, the text-to-text Transformer T5 (Raffel et al., 2020) has been fine-tuned on synthetic question-answering dataset for conversational speech and applied to machine-generated

transcripts of VHA videos (Lehečka et al., 2023; Švec et al., 2024). An online demo is available.

Recent advances in the unsupervised segmentation of manual transcripts of VHA videos are also concerned with the topical classification of the resulting segments. However, they reduce the set of ∼10,000 hierarchical subject terms to 29 flat topics and solve a multi-class rather than a multi-label classification problem, i.e., they only assign one topic to each segment (Wagner et al., 2022).

Rather than ignoring this hierarchical structure, multi-label classification models can use it explicitly and enforce logical constraints on the predictions (Giunchiglia & Lukasiewicz, 2020). Recent such state-of-the-art models specific to text classification encode the hierarchy in graph convolutional networks (Zhou et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2021) or coding trees (Zhu et al., 2023) that use text encoding as inputs or use a constrained sequence-to-sequence model to predict series of labels along the hierarchy tree (Torba et al., 2024).

Dataset

At the time of writing, the full Visual History Archive (VHA) counts 57,058 video testimonies related to the Holocaust and 1,899 more interviews related to other historical events such as the Armenian Genocide. While approximately 10% of these videos are accurately segmented and indexed using a rich hierarchical domain-specific ontology, the majority are segmented uniformly into 1-minute long segments, and only one third of these uniform segments are annotated. The VHA

ontology consists of 67,709 hierarchically ordered keywords, about 20% of which are subject terms and the rest being geographical entities.

We are mainly interested in four languages: English, German, Dutch, and Czech. These comprise 31,012 testimonies, i.e., little more than half of all the Holocaust-related testimonies of the VHA. The composition of this subset is described in Table 1. Out of the full ontology of 67,709 unique keywords, these four languages use 34,348 (50.73%). Approximately half of these are subject terms, indicating that most unused keywords are geographical locations while abstract subjects are used more consistently across all languages. On average, the testimonies are 163.38 minutes in length, i.e., they comprise 164 segments, about 55 of which are annotated with 84.69 ± 39.00 different keywords.

Language	Testimonies	Fraction
English	28,457	91.76%
Dutch	1,077	3.47%
German	917	2.96%
Czech	561	1.81%
Total	31,012	100.00%

Table 1. The composition of the Holocaust-related subset of the Visual History Archive in four languages.

Although the ontology has a maximum depth of 8, the majority of used keywords (57.42%) are located on the fifth level of the hierarchy while keywords are rare if they are too general or too specific. This results in a significantly skewed distribution with an immense variance: Individual keywords are used between 1 and 81,472 times across all available testimonies, and the

arithmetic mean is 118.39 ± 1070.20, and the median count is only 4. This excludes higher-level keywords that are never explicitly used. On average, the annotated segments are indexed with 2.56 ± 1.91 keywords, although there are some outliers with up to 31 annotations. The most common keywords and their rapidly decreasing counts are summarized in Table 2. It is not surprising that these are centred on family while more specific keywords related to individual experiences will follow later in the ranking.

Keyword	Count
extended family menbers	81,742
interviewee photographs (stills)	63,061
family life	43,757
loved ones' fates	33,568
working life	31,304

Table 2. The five most used keywords and their counts across all the Holocaust-related testimonies in English, Dutch, German, and Czech via the VHA.

This is a lot of data: 27 TB of MP4 video i interviews, reduced to 4.6 GB of plain text using domain-specific automatic speech recognition models (Lehečka et al., 2023), 2.1 GB of annotations, and 56 MB for the keyword hierarchy with definitions and synonyms.

However, while this will be extensively used for a domain-specific semantic tagging model, most of it was not yet available at the time of the experiments described in Section 4. These experiments use a tiny set of manual transcriptions that were used as training data for the mentioned ASR model. This set is

monolingual and covers merely 0.78% of all English data. In total, it contains only 2,115 annotated 1-minute segments indexed with 1,063 different subject terms which is little training data for this amount of labels.

Experiments

Four different Transformer models are first trained and evaluated on annotated segments of the small English VHA subset described in Section 3. The models are trained on a multi-label classification task using the flattened subject hierarchy as labels, i.e., they do not make use of any structural information and do not predict geographical entities which are, in conjunction with people's names, better handled by named entity recognition models.

To mitigate the segmentation problem, the input text is a window encompassing one previous and one subsequent text segment in addition to the tar-get segment. In case of a topical overlap, i.e., at least one of the additional segments is annotated, the sets of labels are merged. The training splits are randomized using 20% of the data as the test set and 20% of the remaining data as the development set. The candidate models are the following:

1. BERT (Devlin et al., 2018)
2. Since the training dataset is English only, the uncased version of BERT is used as an English-focused baseline.
3. Multilingual BERT (mBERT)
4. Since four languages are targeted, the cased version of mBERT is evaluated to compare the performance of a

multilingual variant on English data with monolingual BERT.

5. Historical Multilingual BERT (hmBERT) (Schweter et al., 2022)
6. hmBERT has been pre-trained on 19th century Europeana newspapers (German, French, Finnish, Swedish) and British Library[5] books published between 1510 and 1900.
7. LaBSE (Feng et al., 2022)

Language-agnostic BERT Sentence Embed- ding is a multilingual sentence Transformer (Reimers & Gurevych, 2019) and thus better suited to encode the meanings of sentences.

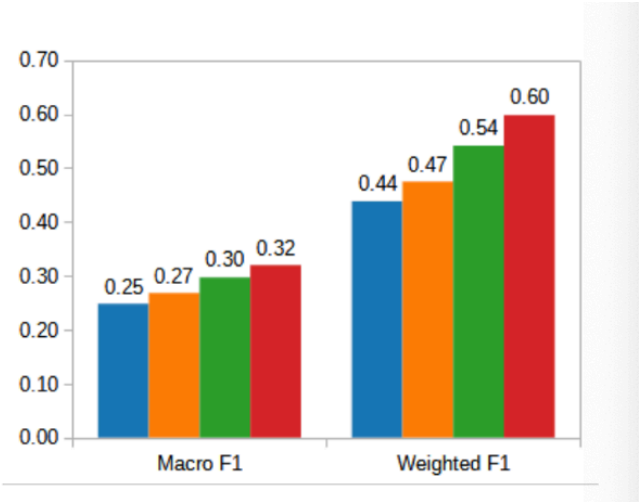

Figure 1. Macro and weighted classification scores of four different Transformer models. From left to right: BERT, mBERT, hmBERT, LaBSE.

All of these models are fine-tuned for 100 epochs using a linearly decreasing initial learning rate of 2e-5 and then rolled back to the checkpoint with the best F_1 score which is usually at around 98 epochs. The model weights are optimized using Adam without

weight decay and binary cross-entropy loss for multi-label classification, which can be interpreted as training independent binary classifiers for all 1,063 present subject terms on top of the language model weights. These labels are binarized, i.e., each annotation is represented by a sparse 1,063-dimensional binary vector where a 1 signifies that the input text is annotated with the corresponding indexed keyword from the VHA ontology.

Results are shown in Figure 1. The macro-average F_1 scores do not take the number of subject term occurrences into account and are rather low, which was expected considering the little training data (2,115 segments) compared with the number of predicted labels (1,063). However, the weighted averages being approximately twice as high as the macro averages indicates that frequent subjects are handled more reasonably well and we expect improvements when adding more training data with more occurrences of all subject terms.

Surprisingly, mBERT outperforms English BERT on the English-only data. This is possibly due to a significant number of non-English entities, such as people and locations, that are present in historical texts. This is further emphasized by hmBERT, even though the period of its training data predates the period of interest. Finally, LaBSE achieves the best results despite being domain-agnostic, likely due to it being focused on encoding whole sentences which can help identify more abstract subjects. This model is available on Hugging Face but requires the VHA ontology to disambiguate the labels as it only predicts keyword IDs.

1	ghetto living conditions
2	ghetto-related aid giving
3	sustenance provision
4	ghetto forced labor
5	camp forced labor
6	ghetto housing conditions
7	anti-Jewish roundups
8	beatings
9	Poland 1941 (June 21) - 1945 (May 7)
10	loved ones' fates
11	Poland 1941 (June 21) - 1944 (July 21)
12	ghettoization
13	deportation awareness
14	German soldiers
15	ghetto selections

Table 3. The top 15 keywords predicted by LaBSE for an English testimony excerpt published by DEGOB.

Finally, the fine-tuned model is manually evaluated on a testimony published by the Hungar- ian National Committee for Attending Deportees (DEGOB) in English and Hungarian[8], the latter one being the original text in a language not present in our training data. Since the model can only process input texts no longer than 512 tokens, only the first 26 sentences are used. In this excerpt, a Jewish survivor from Munkács, Hungary (today Mukachevo, Ukraine) describes their ghetto experiences in May 1944 before being deported by train to Auschwitz, including beatings by German soldiers, forced labour for men, and the existence of a soup kitchen in the ghetto. The top 15 predicted keywords ranked by their likelihoods as predicted by the model and limited to exhibit diversity, are listed in Table 3 and Table 4 for the English and Hungarian texts, respectively.

Clearly, only a few of the keywords extracted from the English translation are wrong: There is no mention of aid giving, the forced labour does not happen in a camp, the fate of the parents is not mentioned, and Poland (more specifically: Auschwitz) is only mentioned after the excerpt. The biggest problem is not shown in the table: In practice, the model would classify none of the keywords as true.

1	ghetto-related aid giving
2	sustenance provision
3	ghetto forced labor
4	loved ones' fates
5	beatings
6	ghetto living conditions
7	anti-Jewish measures
8	Poland 1939 (Sept 1) - 1945 (May 7)
9	anti-Jewish roundups
10	Hungary 1944
11	German soldiers
12	deportation awareness
13	ghettoization
14	shootings
15	Romania 1944

Table 4. The top 15 keywords predicted by LaBSE for a Hungarian testimony excerpt published by DEGOB.

Their prediction scores range from 0.2 to 0.4, and thus all lie below a standard threshold of 0.5. Evidently, even a simple Transformer is able to learn and identify these abstract concepts but requires more training data to do so reliably.

Interestingly, even though only English data was available during the fine-tuning, using a multilingual pre-trained Transformer as its basis appears to be sufficient to give the model multilingual capabilities. While the order of the keywords

extracted from the Hungarian testimony is slightly different and Romania 1944 has been incorrectly added to the list, the keywords are generally similar, and Hungary 1944 and shootings have been additionally identified as correct subject terms. This is likely due to LaBSE having been trained on pairs of equivalent sentences in different languages and cannot be generally assumed for the other three models that achieved lower scores on the test data. Furthermore, most of the ghetto-related keywords which have the same parent "ghetto experiences" which already describes the testimony well and would have probably been predicted as a true label by the model had this annotation been used instead of the less frequent and more fine-grained labels. This also raises the question of what granularity is actually desired, and the answer to this question depends on the user. In the end, a likely erroneous prediction can often be resolved to a correct more general one: In the given hierarchy, there is always a path from the best general keyword to the best granular one. In addition to using more training data, this concept can be used to devise more complex model architectures and hopefully achieve better performance on data with a much greater set of labels, as described in Section 3.

Conclusion

We presented one of the largest available annotated Holocaust-related datasets, the Visual History Archive, and showed that even a simple multi-label classification model trained on little data can produce promising results despite achieving rather low F_1 score due to the rarity of many fine-grained labels. There are different ways to address this issue:

- Using substantially more data
- Re-segmenting the data to align the segments with the annotations semantically instead of using uniform-length segments
- Using a more complex model that incorporates the hierarchical structure of the label ontology in its predictions.

We will explore these options in the near future and believe that we are on the right track to providing an efficient semantic tagging tool for domain experts. While we cannot publish the whole described dataset due to licensing issues, we further plan to prepare a representative subset for open research and advance computational approaches in Holocaust research and similar domains related to the digital humanities and digital cultural heritage.

Limitations

This study describes preliminary research results based on a small amount of data and focuses on future prospects. The summarized dataset cannot be published in its entirety which means that the exact results cannot be reproduced. However, the presented semantic tagging model is openly available and representative datasets can be published in the future to ensure as much reliability and reproducibility as possible.

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Irma Grese: "The Beautiful Beast"

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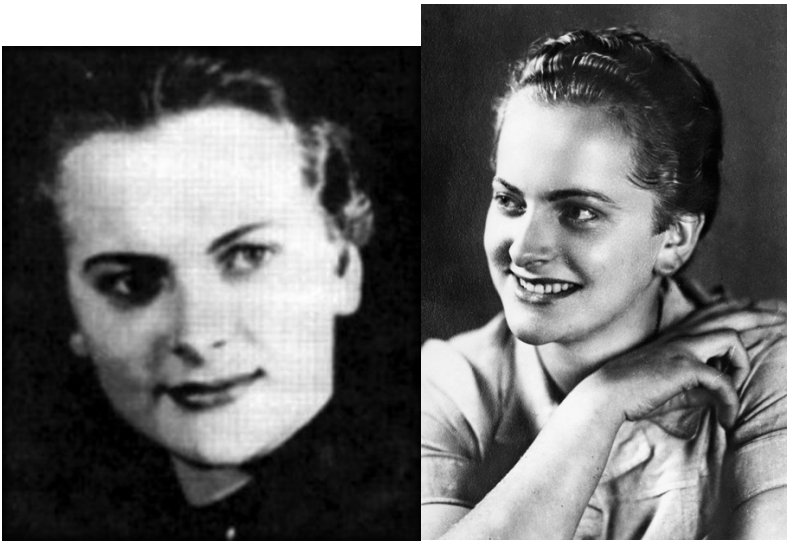
> "No one who did not see her during her cruel acts could not believe that such a beautiful creature is capable of torturing others with such sadism and hate." Erich Schön, 1945
>
> "She was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen." Gisella Perl
>
> "She was an incredibly beautiful woman. I have never seen any woman like that in my life. But she was cruel in the same way." Magdalenah K´aufman

Irma Grese is one of the most well-known female guards who worked in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II. She had served in three notorious camps: Ravensbrück, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Bergen-Belsen and she held the distinction of being one of the youngest women to work on behalf of the SS. Because of her startling beauty, her youth, and enraged cruelty against concentration camp victims, Irma Grese became the centre of attention at her postwar trial. There had been so much publicity about her in newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals around the world that she became better known than many of Hitler's notorious henchmen. Many simply could not believe that such a pretty, young blonde girl with an innocent face could be capable of committing the crimes that she had been indicted for by the British. Grese is remembered by many

survivors of the Holocaust, who were able to somehow endure under her watch, just how calloused and brutal a human being could be. Even after many years, the memory of Grese would still conjure up horrendous flashbacks of her sadistic acts against defenseless people. There is no way one can count how many deaths she was responsible for, but it had to have been thousands, especially during the May 1944 mass selections of the Hungarians Jews who flooded into Auschwitz-Birkenau.



Figures 1 and 2. Photos of Irma Grese. Available https://historiek.net/irma-grese-blonde-engel-des-doods/60834/ and https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/irma-grese-the-blonde-beast-of-birkenau-and-belsen/.

The childhood and early life of Irma Grese is well documented in several published accounts; as a result, my study will only examine the basic facts of her childhood years and place more emphasis on her time in the camps.

Irma Grese was born on October 7, 1923, in a small German village of Wrechen, approximately forty kilometers from Neustrelitz. Her parents were worked as managers of an estate and Irma was one of five children - she had two brothers and two sisters. Irma Grese's mother committed suicide by ingesting a cleaning agent that contained hydrogen chloride in January 1936. Grese was only twelve at that time and it must have had an effect on her because she discovered her mother as she began to die from this horrific method of killing herself (Brown, 2004, p. 11, 13-14).

The people from Wrechen never spoke about her much after the war because the small village is mainly known for the birthplace of the most notorious female guard and the residents were, of course, not proud of it. Also, Wrechen was located in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), or "East Germany" and one had to shed any connection to Nazism for self- preservation.

As many young German children, Irma Grese was fascinated with Nazi ideology, its symbolism, and exuberance. With her sister, she joined the organization *Bund Deutscher Mädel* ("League of German Girls"), which was the female version of the male *Hitlerjugend* ("Hitler Youth") Nazi organization. Their father did not want them to join the group, but the two sisters joined it even with their father´s opposition.

Irma Grese attended primary school for eight years and, in 1938, at the age of fourteen, she left school. Some sources say that she was bullied and did not see a reason for going to school anymore (Prima ZOOM, 2020). She worked at the Fürstenberg dairy factory and then as a sales assistant in a small shop in nearby Lychen, Germany. From 1939 until 1941, she served as an

assistant nurse at the SS sanatorium in Hohenlychen. She worked under the head of the hospital, Karl Gebhardt, who later performed horrific experiments on women in the female concentration camp Ravensbrück. Grese tried to become a nurse, but it did not work out. Failing at that, she applied for the women´s SS service and volunteered to train for a position as an *Aufseherin* ("supervisor") in Ravensbrück (Brown, 2004, p. 17, 19, 23-27 and *Exhibition*, 2004).

Ravensbrück 1942-1943

Irma Grese's application was accepted by the Nazi authorities and she enrolled in the female guards' training program at Ravensbrück in July 1942. She completed the course and became *Aufseherin.* Because she was one of the youngest female guards, her pay salary was 54 *Reichsmarks* a month, which was much less than the salary of her colleagues received. (Brown, 2004, p. 38 and 40-41).

Apart from being the biggest concentration camp for women, Ravensbrück was also a training center for the new female guards. Between 1939 and 1945 more than 1000 male SS guards and over 3 000 female guards served in the camp and its subcamps. The first commandant was *SS Hauptsturmführer* Max Koegel. He was succeeded in the summer of 1942 by *SS Hauptsturmführer* Fritz Suhren. The replacement of the commandant was the time when Grese began serving in Ravensbrück (Beßmann & Eschebach, 2013, p. 167, 173-174). In July 1942, the chief guard (*Oberaufseherin*) was Maria Mandl. Because the chief female guard was also responsible for the training program of the new female guards, it is possible that

Mandl herself was in charge of Grese´s training. Grese with other *Aufseherinnen* learned their regulations and were taught how to oversee the prisoners as well as how to punish and beat them. It was then when Grese was instructed in the finer points of cruelty and callousness toward her prisoners. Indeed, it was well known that these young women changed dramatically after completing their training program (Hájková, 1963, p. 32, 288).

Grese finished her training after about three weeks and then was assigned to oversee several work details. She oversaw prisoners the laundry detail as well as the Opitz Nursery and Gardening operation. During her leave, Irma Grese returned to visit her family in Wrechen for the last time. She came home wearing her uniform to impress her family with her position in the female guard unit. It was during this visit that a fight between her and her father ensued and Grese never returned home again (Brown, 2004, p. 37-40).

Auschwitz-Birkenau 1943-1945

In March 1943, Irma Grese was transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau. At first, according to her trial testimony, she worked as a telephone operator in the office of a *Blockführer* (Brown, 2004, p. 43). This function however was not occupied by female SS guards (Aufseherinnen).

Women who were known as "SS helpers" (SS *Helferinnen)* were put in charge of telephone duties. It is most likely that Grese was lying about this camp duty (Auschwitz archives, 2023). It is certain, however, that she supervised various female working details for about a year. As former prisoner of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Erich Kulka noted in his book, "She was in Birkenau

for a long time and had lots of different duties." (Kraus & Kulka, 1964, p. 242).

Firstly, Grese supervised a women's detail which was building roads. Then she was assigned to guard women´s punishment detail where prisoners worked in the worst conditions and where the death rate was the greatest in the whole camp. Following this, Grese was given a gardening detail in Rajsko, one of the subcamps of Birkenau (Setkiewicz et al., 2017, p. 77). She also oversaw a detail which picked herbs for the camp hospital. This particular detail was set up with the agreement of SS Dr. Werner Rhode. After nearly three months of existence, this working detail was cancelled (*Zeszyty Oświecimskie* 24, 2006, p. 65).

Irma Grese developed a reputation for excessive cruelty while overseeing all of these different work details. She would often release her dog on the defenseless prisoners under her command, especially on those details that took place outside the camp complex (Brown, 2004, p. 52). Her cruelty was soon known throughout Auschwitz-Birkenau. During 1943, Grese served as the female block leader (*Blockführerin)* of various barracks of the women´s camp in Birkenau. For a time, she oversaw the packages section where female prisoners sorted parcels that had been sent by the prisoners' friends and relatives. Like other female guards, Grese also stole the prisoner´s packages and delighted in making inmates wait for their packages during freezing weather. In December 1943, she worked in the postal department where she censored the prisoner´s letters (Posmysz & Wójcik, 2017, p. 395; Brown, 2004, p. 44; and Setkiewicz et al., 2017, p. 77).

Grese: "The Terror of Camp C" (Birkenau 1944)

The most important time for Grese came in May 1944 when Auschwitz-Birkenau was awaiting mass transports from Hungary. At this time, she began participating in the camp selections of the Hungarian Jews, which was the biggest killing action in the history of Auschwitz. She was chosen to be in charge of the new camp, BIIc, also known as *C Lager* (Camp C), which contained approximately 30 000 Hungarian female Jews. However, it must be pointed out that Grese had not become the chief guard of the whole Women´s Birkenau camp, but only of the "C" component. By the summer of 1944, this camp section had about 20 000 young women mainly from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland (Expressen, 1945 and Smoleń, 1972, p. 106).

Due to the Soviet advance, the prisoners were awaiting transports to other camps in the West. By this time, there was a shortage of the already meager rations and the hygienic conditions had deteriorated (Smoleń, 1972, p. 105-106). Grese was responsible for the inhuman conditions in her area of Camp C and the poor inmates under her charge had to bear the consequences of her calloused behavior. Due to her elevated position within the women's camp, Irma Grese would become known as one of the most ruthless and brutal of all the camp guards.

In the eyes of the female prisoners, Grese was one of the most important female SS guard in Compound C. As Survivor Isabella Leitner wrote in her account: *"She was seemingly more in charge of*

our daily existence than anyone else." (Leitner& Leitner, 1994, p. 176).

Former prisoner functionary of Camp C, Magda Hellinger, has also noted the important role in which Grese was now: "Grese was the only SS guard who resided permanently in Camp C. She had an office in a small guard house at the entrance gate to the camp." (U4čitelka, 2022)

The Daily Dreaded Roll Calls (Appelles)

Most of the prisoners got to know firsthand about Irma Grese's cruelty during the daily counting roll calls. She would usually arrive at the roll calls by bicycle and she would gleefully whistle while the nearly 20 000-30 000 inmates had already been standing a couple of hours on their feet, in formation, in front of their blocks, waiting for the counting process, regardless of what it was like outside (Expressen, 1945). The prisoners who saw her for the very first time could not believe that *"such a beautiful blonde woman with blue eyes could be cruel."* (Lengyelová, 2018, p. 87). They had no idea what they were about to experience.

> "I will never forget the moment I first laid eyes on her. An angel descending from heaven couldn´t have looked more beautiful." Anna Molnár Hegedüs (Hegedüs, 2014, p. 50)

As the group of SS guards arrived at the roll call to commence the prisoner count, Grese stood out: she would generally wear well-tailored greenish grey culottes, usually with a white blouse or a light blue shirt, her blonde hair pulled up into a bun, her SS hat curtly placed atop her hair, and she had on black high boots that were highly polished (Hegedüs, 2014, p. 50-51; Expressen, 1945; and Lengyelová, 2018, p. 263). She also carried a silver

pistol in her holster (Moskovits, 1993, p. 172). During the roll call, Grese would whip individual prisoners for the smallest movement with her infamous whip that was fashioned from brown-red leather. Grese always carried her whip inside one of her boots (Schön & Kraus, 1945, p. 87 and Lengyelová, 2018, p. 263). Grese hit the prisoners with such powerful blows that they would fall to the ground instantaneously. She was also capable of kicking or beating inmates to death if they fell out due to weakness or if they were not able to stand up straight. Often her beatings were given without any reason at all. She never hit the inmates without her hands in gloves (Expressen, 1945).

> "When she marched in her high boots and with the whip and a big dog, we would just freeze- just to look at her." Judith Rubinstein (USC Shoah Archive)

> "You had to stay without a movement when Grese would come in (the roll call) because she would pick you out and you never see the light. And we stayed like marble." Violet (nee Friedman) Weiss, (USC Shoah Archive)

Grese would very often make the prisoners stand for hours at a time. Sometimes she ordered the prisoners to stand in place completely naked. The prisoners were not allowed to leave the formation until she gave the order to disperse (Expressen, 1945). Because of these conditions, some prisoners fainted then Grese trampled on them and/or set her big German shepherd even the whole camp with long hours of kneeling and sometimes the prisoners were forced to hold bricks above their heads (Setkiewicz et al., 2017, p. 77 and Expressen, 1945).

Selections

During the roll calls, Grese and some other guards selected individual prisoners for direct transport to the gas chambers. Many prisoners mentioned that they witnessed Irma Grese and Dr. Josef Mengele conducting these selections more than others. There were terrible scenes that occurred during the selection process. Grese would join other male SS guards and Dr. Mengele. She would then conduct a "parade" a procedure in which prisoners would pass in front of her. She picked whoever she liked. Once she picked the most emaciated women, next time, she would pick those who had skin rash (Expressen, 1945). She shot at prisoners who tried to escape their selection to be transported to the gas chambers (Brown, 2004, p. 80). She would even whip the prisoners chosen. During the selections she would not show any mercy and calmly send thousands of women to their deaths (Lengyelová, 2018, p. 170, 264). She purposefully tore relatives apart who attempted to go together on a transport to other working places/camps (Brown, 2004, p. 53).

She Was Seen as The Most Beautiful Woman

Due to her striking physical features, immaculate dress, flawless complexion, and relentless brutality, her image was etched in the memory of those who survived. Many prisoners saw Grese as a beautiful woman, often as one of the most beautiful woman they have ever seen. Multiple prisoners thought that she was an actress type beauty.

> "One could not imagine that there could be so much cruelty in such a beautiful woman. We kept asking why."

> Seeing her, one would think that an angel from heaven is coming." Valéria Forbátová (USC Shoah Archive)
>
> "It may seem strange to repeat it so often, but she was exceptionally beautiful. Her beauty was so impressive that, although her daily visits meant roll call and selection to the gas chambers, the internees were completely captivated as they looked at her and muttered: How beautiful she is!" Olga Lengyel (Lengyelová, 2018, p. 262)
>
> "It was said in the camp that she used to be a former actress. She was so beautiful that no words can describe it." Miriam Berko (USC Shoah Archive)

Acts of Kindness

Grese was unpredictable in her behavior and although she was known for her brutal acts, it must be noted that there were occasions in which she behaved much differently; indeed, she even acted with kindness. During some selections, she would save some of the prisoners. For example, this happened when she saved a woman on sixteen separate occasions from a selection overseen by Dr. Mengele (Camurati, 2017). Grese was able also to help the prisoners who worked for her and she arranged their meeting with their relatives in the camp (Schnurmacher, 2019, p. 152). She picked the prisoners whom she wanted for personal assistance. An excellent seamstress from Munkács, Hungary, personally sewed uniforms for her while a different seamstress from Budapest attended to other clothing Grese wanted to add to her wardrobe (Hegedüs, 2014, p. 51 and Lengyelová, 2018, p. 263, 269).

Former prisoner of Camp C, Ms. Lilly Salamon (formerly Lilly Rappaport) wrote to me about an incident where Grese saved her from a beating by a brutal Jewish Kapo who assisted her during roll calls (e-mail message from Ms. Salamon, August 24, 2021).

When Grese was serving in Bergen-Belsen, she once caught young girls picking up potatoes which they found and let them go without any punishment or beating (Verolme, 2016, p. 217-218). She took a liking to some prisoners too. This happened to a Polish prisoner named Nina Kaleska. Grese made her work for her and she gave her extra rations from her private food supply (Miller, 2000, p. 36).

She had a friendly relationship with *Lagerälteste* (Head prisoner of Compound BIIc), Magda (nee Hellinger) Blau. However, as Blau later said, "She could talk to me like a friend; and the next minute she was a devil." (Miller, 2000, p. 139).

The Daily Hunt for Victims

Apart from roll calls and selections, Irma Grese had authority over the administration of her camp. She seemingly could appear anywhere, at any time, and she took great satisfaction when she saw prisoners quickly evading her. She spied on the starving prisoners who were trying to get some food by the camp kitchen and then she would take delight in brutally punishing them on the spot or she would shoot them outright (Perl & Preston, 2017, p. 140 and Schnurmacher, 2019, p. 152). She was active in the camp during curfew lockdown when prisoners were supposed to be in their blocks. If she located someone not in her designated place, Grese would give the offender a thrashing (Expressen, 1945).

Survivor of Camp C, Isabella Leitner wrote in her account: *"You´d rather go to the crematorium than get into her hands"* (Leitner& Leitner, 1994, p. 228). However, Grese was not alone in her enjoyment of inflicting pain on violators. Other female wardens took part in the daily brutal acts, making the prisoners' lives miserable. These notorious female overseers included the *Rapportführerin* Margot Drechsel, Luise Brunner and Elisabeth Hasse who were on duty in the female sections of Birkenau, including Camp C (Hegedüs, 2014, p. 50).

> "From the roots of her hair to the nails on her toes, Grese was saturated with deeds so evil and so abhorrent that the likes of her could not ever have been part of the human family." Isabella Leitner (Leitner& Leitner, 1994, p. 176)
>
> "She ruined so many lives. She tortured and mutilated many victims and drove (some of them) insane or crippled them for the rest of their lives." Gisella Perl (Perlová, 2019, p. 55)

Grese was also known for her perverse inclinations (Schön & Kraus, 1945, p. 87). She specifically picked out and sexually abused attractive and/or well-endowed young Jewish girls. Grese was relentless in hunting down those who did not want to have anything with her or were seen purposefully evading her (Kraus & Kulka, 1964, p. 126).

She would usually dispatch the female prisoners she had raped to the crematorium. (Lengyelová, 2018, p. 314). On one occasion, Irma Grese made another prisoner stand as a guard in front of a barracks where she was making love to the other Jewish girls (Miller, 2000, p. 36). She focused on the pretty women in other ways than sexually. At times, she would walk around the camp

and beat them on their breasts with her whip (Langbein, 2004, p. 400). She would take pretty girls, throw them on the ground, beat them until they were bleeding and then send them to the crematorium (USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive, Interview with Relly Geller).

Grese was widely considered as a Sadist by the camp inmates.

> "There was no reason at all and she would just beat and beat. Whoever would walk pass her would be beaten up by her." Alice Klein Olsson, (USC Shoah Archive)

Grese was also responsible for killing several babies by hitting their heads against the wall. She also killed them by shooting (Eva Israel, USC Shoah Archive).

She was personally responsible for killing women prisoners by putting her belt around their neck and drag them until they were dead (Valéria Forbátová, USC Shoah Archive).

Grese sent a large number of prisoners to their deaths completely on her own decision. Thanks to her beauty, Grese had numerous lovers in the Birkenau camp. There were rumors that at one time she was the girlfriend of Dr. Josef Mengele, because she joined him very often. But the most important affair she had was with an enlisted SS guard named Franz Wolfgang Hatzinger, who later died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen camp (Lengyelová, 2018, p. 263; Brown, 2004, p. 64).

Liquidation of Lager C and Her Promotion to *Rapportführerin*

Grese and Dr. Mengele led the final selection in Compound BIIc (Perl with Preston, 2017, p. 178-187). In December 1944, after the liquidation, the remaining strong prisoners were sent on

transports to other camps as slave laborers and the sick prisoners were dispatched to the gas chambers, Grese was promoted to *Rapportführerin* in the main women´s camp of Birkenau (Setkiewicz et al., 2017, p. 77). The rank of *Rapportführerin* was the second highest rank for a female guard and it entailed Grese being responsible for the daily roll call parades, disciplinary investigation, and oversight of punishments (Ian Baxter, personal communication, December 11, 2020).

When the evacuation of Auschwitz began, Grese guarded one of the last transports sent from the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex to Ravensbrück. She was there only for a couple of weeks before being sent to Bergen-Belsen camp in March 1945 (Exhibition, 2004).

Bergen-Belsen

Grese arrived in Bergen-Belsen with a huge prisoner transport in March 1945 and this time she was appointed as *Arbeitsdienstführerin* (the work service leader, who was responsible for assigning prisoners to their work details as well as overseeing the prisoners' labor). She also was given the duty of being a *Rapportführein*. Irma Grese was only at Bergen-Belsen for three and a half weeks and, even as the war was rapidly coming to a close, she continued her brutal treatment of the prisoners (Brown, 2004, p. 63, 65). Indeed, Grese did not relinquish her favorite activity-beating women on the face until they fell to the ground. The prisoners who knew Grese at Auschwitz could see that there had been some physical changes taking place with her physical appearance. For one thing, she seemed to be pale (Expressen, 1945).

Grese did not attempt to improve the terrible conditions which existed in the camp and she seemed content to let thousands of prisoners to die of hunger (RFU, 2019). As the camp *Arbeitsdienstführerin*, it was her job to monitor the daily prisoners march to work and their return to the camp compound. She also supervised new transports that came into the camp (Ian Baxter, personal communication, December 11, 2020). She had an office near the women´s camp gate (Verolme, 2016, p. 217-218). Since there were many children brought to Belsen with their mothers, Grese often visited them and tormented the young inmates psychologically. Survivor Barry Spanjaard, who was a young boy when he was imprisoned in Belsen, described in his memoir how Grese often purposely stood in front of the starving inmates while eating cheese or a sandwich (Spanjaard, 1982, p. 147-148). I was lucky enough to get in contact with few survivors from Bergen-Belsen who saw Grese there. One of them Mr. Maurice Blik from the New Netherlands had a similar experience like Spanjaard and told me about one visit of Grese into their barrack with her dog while enjoying eating an apple in front of the prisoners. He noted that all the while she had a smile on her face (Maurice Blik, personal communication, February 29, 2020). Mr. Thomas Reichental from Slovakia told me about Grese´s visit to the children´s barrack with her whip. He also told me that there were rumors that when Grese caught inmates trying to communicate through separate sections of Belsen camp, she beat them (Reichental, personal communication, December 16, 2018; January 9, 2019). Mr. Ivan Lefkovits from Slovakia was one of the children of Belsen and he remembered seeing Grese with her whip in the camp street. His mother warned him not to make eye

contact with her because they learned from other inmates that even an eye contact could make her use her whip (Lefkovits, personal communication, February 5, 2019).

While watching the prisoner marches, Grese inspected them as they returned from work. She once attacked a Czech prisoner whom she found a knife hiding in her socks. The prisoner was Zdenka Fantl who shared her testimony with me. Fantl described that Grese was wearing a working uniform, a jacket and a cap with peak. She continued by saying that Grese *"gave orders not only to the prisoners but also other female guards and had huge power over everybody in the Belsen camp"* (Zdenka Fantl, personal communication, December 7-8, 2018). As in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Irma Grese continued the practice of making the prisoners endure standing for lengthy period of time during roll calls. She and other guards sometime enjoyed throwing water over the female prisoners standing in freezing temperatures (Ian Baxter, personal communication, September 30, 2020).

Trial

Grese was arrested on April 17, 1945, shortly after British units liberated Bergen-Belsen. The liberators were profoundly affected by what they saw in the camp, as appeared to be "hell on earth." In fact, even years after the event, many still found it difficult to articulate what they witnessed.

Irma Grese was put on trial with other guards on November 17, 1945 in Lüneburg. She and the camp commandant, Josef Kramer, became the immediate focus for the press covering the proceedings (*Mahn-und Gedenkstatte, Ravensbrück,* 2004). Even at the trial, Irma Grese made sure that she looked perfectly. She also

transformed her hairstyle as she now flaunted "... a coiffured look accenting her blonde ringlets" (Brown, 2004, 77). Journalists who observed the trial described how beautiful she was. However, most of the time her demeanor was cold, distant, and contemptuous. On some occasions the 21-year-old would laugh, but these incidents were usually the result of some false and absurd concern for the plight of the prisoners that a defense witness made. Once in a while she would also provide court photographers with a demure smile. She admitted that she continued to carry a whip towards the prisoners even when the camp commandant prohibited using them (Langbein, 2004, p. 400).

Witnesses described Grese´s extraordinary brutality and testified that she had taken part in selections for the gas chambers, shot at women prisoners, had beaten and kicked them, and forced them to kneel for hours at roll calls while holding heavy stones above their heads (Setkiewicz et al., 2017, p. 77).

The court sentenced her to death by hanging and the sentence was carried out on December 13, 1945. On the eve of their executions, Grese is said to have sung Nazi songs in her cell with the two other condemned female guards (Langbein, 2004, p. 401). She was the youngest woman ever executed under the auspices of British legal practices (RFU, 2019).

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