

Affective Publics - Lecture Series

Dr. Steffi de Jong:

Witness Auschwitz?

How VR is changing Holocaust memory

AFFECTIVE SOCIETIES

Thursday, 15th April

06.00 pm

online

[Meeting Link](#)

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In my paper, I will scrutinize the uses of virtual reality (VR) for Holocaust education and memory. In particular, I will analyze the new conceptions of what it means to be a *witness* of the Holocaust that such VR experiences entail. I will, first, look at the simulations of conversations between survivors and secondary witnesses. Such simulations have first been developed in the context of the USC Shoah Foundation's project *New Dimensions in Testimony*. Secondly, I will look at digital reconstructions of historical spaces and events. Thus, the VR experience *Witness: Auschwitz* wants to allow users to enter into the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp during the Second World War.

I argue that such VR experiences herald a *digital corporeal and affective phase of Holocaust memory* in which, *immersive technologies* induce the users of the memorial medium to physically and emotionally feel *present* in a past reality by either being plunged into a digital reconstruction of a historical space or even by taking on the body of a historical person. As I will demonstrate, such uses tie in with a conception of VR as an "empathy machine" where empathy is understood as a mirroring of sensations and emotions that will lead to an improvement of the user's ethical thinking and acting.



Dr. Steffi de Jong is a research fellow at the Institute of History of the University of Cologne. Her research interest includes the history of re-enactment, the connection of new media and memory as well as the figure of the witness to history.
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