

Conference Presentation Abstract  
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*The man with many names: image making as a placeholder for a more heterogenous approach to remembrance practices*

This paper explores the significance of contemporary lens based media practices which involve personal re-imagined narratives as placeholders of resistance to established memorial contexts. Critically, it aims to highlight how creative image making approaches may help to generate a more heterogeneous understanding of dominant collective remembrance frameworks in response to historic narratives shaped by conflict and power systems. The presentation will situate my current practice-based research '*The men with many names,*' which uses photography and film as placeholder to personal and familial remembrance in order to question the German official remembrance culture or 'Erinnerungskultur' and identify an alternative, possible future of the past. The latter aims situate the role of individual and familial experiences, to engage in more diverse terms with an established history and its remembrance. In recent years, visual culture scholars such as Dora Osborne (2022) have pointed to the 'insufficiencies' of the official cultural memory as it fails to address how individual narratives challenge and disrupt it.

Contemporary approaches to the notion of cultural memory, especially since the turn of the millennium, have critically explored the impact of media (and new media) on the development of different forms of relating to history. Museums, archives as well as multiple forms of visual and online media play a particular role in shaping new 'dynamics' of remembering. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009: 3) suggest that the processes of 'remediation'<sup>1</sup> of previously existing media (e.g photography, film, printed media) is particularly significant to the contemporary context. It provides not only another 'access to the past and occasions for remembrance' (2009:4) but also, more importantly, shapes how we interpret 'past experiences' and how we will relate to them in the future (ibid, 3). The relation between the individual and official cultural memory draws on this transformation, and visual practices can act as placeholders to other, missing insights.

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<sup>1</sup> Term coined originally by David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999).

My presentation will situate this intersection between personal narratives with contemporary remembrance processes, through the example of my own practice in conversation with the work of other visual artists that shape it. One significant theoretical context to my practice, and work with subjective placeholders of memory such as sites that will be explored in more details, is the creative engagement with archival depositories. The works of image makers that engage in alternative forms with the impact of a dominant historic narrative, such as the Palestinian-American artist Emily Jacir and her ongoing work 'Material for a film, ' the visual family memoirs 'Heimat' by Nora Krug and the moving and Regina Schilling's work with archival material and photographs will allow to analyse and situate my visual approach to making the past tangible and meaningful for the present and future.

This will be followed by a deeper exploration of the proposition that a memory culture which is centred on the experiences of a single community indeed risks to overshadow other memorial contexts. One relevant theoretical framework that I will explore to this end is Michael Rothberg's notion of "multidirectional memory," which posits necessity to explore the 'intersections' between histories, rather than considering them as separate from one another. Generating a 'productive and dialogic interaction of mnemonic materials' becomes, according to Rothberg a means to generate a more dynamic approach as active placeholders remembrance. He considers that visual media play a particularly important role towards this 'active and effective recognition of the ongoing claims of multiple pasts'(2024:299).

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