

Proximities & Gaze

27th Workshop on the History and
Memory of National Socialist
Camps and Killing Sites

Utrecht, The
Netherlands

October 28 - November 3, 2024

Deadline for applications: 25 January 2024

Call for Papers and Participants

28 October to 3 November 2024, Utrecht, the Netherlands
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We cordially invite you to apply to the 27th Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Killing Sites in partnership with the Department of Political History at Utrecht University – to be held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, from the 28th of October to the 3rd of November 2024. The workshop will explore “proximities” and “gaze” as analytical categories for the study of the Holocaust, NS concentration camps, and killing sites.

The Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Killing Sites has been held annually since 1994. This international workshop, organized by and for emerging scholars and Holocaust educators, provides an interdisciplinary and non-hierarchical forum dedicated to research on National Socialist camps and killing sites. In particular, the topics of persecution, isolation, forced labor, mass murder, and the Holocaust, as well as their representation in various memorial cultures, are discussed. The goal is to promote a collective, cooperative, and supportive atmosphere to share and discuss ideas, knowledge, and methodologies in innovative, comparative, and transdisciplinary ways based on a variety of sources. To guarantee low hierarchies during the workshop, the program exclusively invites applicants who do not hold a PhD when they apply (i.e. Ph.D. candidates, MA students, and Holocaust educators). To maintain the workshop’s continuity and sustainability, every candidate is allowed to attend three times: as speaker, participant, and organizer.



Still from film “Westerbork 1944” by Rudolf Breslauer

Who do we see portrayed in the image above? Who leers out of the image to gaze back upon us and, perhaps most enigmatically, who is absent from our gaze as viewers? What, in short, is the relationship between the one captured within the image, its creator, and the viewer? The image shows a ten-year-old girl in the Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands whilst boarding a train destined for Auschwitz-Birkenau. Strikingly, and in contrast to similar pictures, the image was not produced by a German perpetrator but, rather, by a German Jew named Werner 'Rudolf' Breslauer who, by orders of the commandant of Westerbork, was charged with filming everyday life in the camp for internal propaganda purposes. It is May 19th 1944 and we are gazing upon a process of deportation, leading to murder.

When this still from Breslauer's film became known after the war, many assumed that the person depicted in it was a Jewish girl. Decades later, however, the girl was identified as Anna Maria Steinbach – better known as Settela – a Sinti victim of the Holocaust. Since this discovery, the image of Settela's face, peering out from the slit of a cattle car as if to implicate the viewer, has become a symbol of the Roma and Sinti genocide. Settela's startling gaze provokes uncanny feelings in those who, contemplating her arresting eyes, are fully aware of the events which are about to befall this ten-year-old. The dynamic created by Settela's look is, in short, a thought-provoking one and introduces the themes of this year's workshop: *Proximities & Gaze*.

During this workshop, we aim to explore all aspects of seeing, visual witnessing, spectating, observing, and gawking in/or out of proximity to camps and killing sites during the Holocaust. Our goals are to highlight innovative research and projects, visit Holocaust related sites (e.g. the Amsterdam Jewish Quarters, Westerbork, Amersfoort) in the Netherlands, and share methodologies and tools used in the study of NS camps, ghettos, and killing sites (including Holocaust geographies and visual studies).

Application

The 27th workshop will bring together emerging scholars and educators whose research connects to the workshop themes of "*Proximities and Gaze*" before, during, and after the Holocaust. We welcome papers that explore the history and memory of concentration and death camps, ghettos, and killing sites. We will focus on questions such as:

- How did being in proximity to the non-Jewish/non-Sinti and Roma population and/or "Aryan side" during WWII impact survival attempts (escape, hiding, rescue/aid, collaboration)? How did the process of alienation and segregation of targeted victims from the surrounding population and world facilitate mass murder during the genocide?
- Was there a Jewish gaze or Jewish eye during or after the Holocaust (photography/film, hiding, documenting)? What does the perspective of the victims add to our understanding of the events?
- How did distance and proximity shape the experience of the victims, perpetrators, and bystanders of the genocide? Specifically, what does it mean to stand "by" or live in proximity to a site of violence and/or a killing site?
- How did acts of watching/observing victims from targeted populations enable the implementation of the Holocaust (policing, surveilling, and denouncing, by collaborators, perpetrators, and neighbours)?
- How did secrecy, euphemisms, and the concealment of crimes during the deportation of victims to camps and killing sites in the East (being hidden from gaze and out of proximity to the Western world) aid the perpetrators in carrying out the genocidal process? What does it mean to see the absence of neighbours in this process?

- How can one analyse the faculty of seeing (onlookers, spectators, observers, gawkers) in relation to violence and killing? How to use visual turn methodologies in researching genocide and its memory?
- What affective response does proximity to traumatic events evoke? What does it mean to be empathic towards the victims?
- What role did gender, libidinal pleasure, and sexuality play in the act of gazing at violence, killings and dehumanisation (male/female gaze, etc.)?
- What are the proximities and differences between Holocaust and Postcolonial Studies? How to conceptualise the "colonial gaze" in both contexts (backwardness; civilised and uncivilised; race and racism; class/national superiority)? In what ways did colonial crimes affect the Holocaust and post-war memory/history of the Holocaust?
- How are different forms of gazing used in visual arts, literature, and in the spaces of memorials and museums?
- How to research visual materials from/about ghettos, camps, and killing sites? How to avoid following or featuring the perpetrators' gaze in approaching Nazi propaganda materials, such as films and photos?
- How does the study of the Holocaust and, by extension, WWII, utilise geography, topography and mapping to portray closeness to genocidal events?

The workshop is not exclusively dedicated to the themes listed above and remains open to a wide array of interests related to the study of the Holocaust, including those which place the history of concentration camps, killing sites, and ghettos at the heart of their study. Above all, participation is not restricted to doctoral students only and we strongly encourage early career archivists, Holocaust educators, curators, and museum professionals to apply. We particularly welcome applicants from underrepresented communities, as well as those from the Global South, Ukraine, and other Eastern European countries.

- Individuals who wish to apply to present their research as **speakers** are requested to submit a one-two page CV, a bio (max 150 words), and an abstract of their proposed paper (300-500 words).
- Those applying as **participants** should submit a one-two page CV, a bio (max 150 words), and a motivation letter (300-500 words) indicating the workshop's relevance to their research or professional activities and their interest in participating.

All submissions to the workshop should be in a single PDF and emailed directly to workshopscamps2024@gmail.com by the 25th of January 2024.

The presentations and discussions will be held in English and should not exceed 20 minutes. We appreciate more open and innovative formats of presentation. After the presentations, there will be extensive time for discussion. We are currently applying for funding to cover the costs of the workshop, as well as accommodations and travel costs. It is our goal and intention to cover the full cost of attendance for all invited speakers and participants; however, funding will be prioritised for applicants who demonstrate **financial need** in an **optional personal statement** submitted with their application (if applicable). We are willing to accommodate special needs (e.g., childcare or dietary restrictions) according to our funding possibilities. All confirmed speakers and participants must attend the entire workshop. Following the conference, we intend to publish a selection of the papers/projects presented.

For further information on the workshop, please consult our website: workshopscamps.com. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact the Organising Team at: workshopscamps2024@gmail.com.

Organising Team:

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Organised in cooperation with the Department of Political History at Utrecht University and the Stanley Burton Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Leicester



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