

The Visual History Archive, Research Experience

Interdisciplinary *journée d'étude*

American University of Paris, October 26-27, 2017

Founded by the film director Steven Spielberg in 1994, the Visual History Archive (VHA) is a collection of testimonies recorded in order to preserve the words, faces, gestures and histories of genocide survivors. Holocaust survivors' testimonies, recorded around the world in 28 languages, represent the bulk of the collection (51 333 to this day). This core documentation is complemented by accounts from other victims of the Nazis (Sinti and Roma survivors, eugenic policies survivors, homosexuals), from witnesses of crimes perpetrated during World War II (liberators, war crimes trial participants) as well as from other genocides: The Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda (1994), the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923), the Nanjing Massacre (1937), the Guatemalan Genocide (1978-1996) and the Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979).

Since 2006, the VHA is administered by the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles and, since 2014, supported by the Center for Advanced Genocide Research of the USC Shoah Foundation. Digitized and indexed to the minute (with more than 62 000 keywords), the VHA is now reachable in full access in 66 universities and libraries in 14 countries. In France, it is fully accessible at the George and Irina Schaeffer Center for the Study of Genocide, Human Rights and Conflict Prevention of the American University of Paris and at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* in Lyon. In addition to these two sites, the French speaking testimonies are also available at the *Mémorial de la Shoah*.

Now more than ever, scholars can search the VHA for research on the Second World War or on the other crimes of mass violence which have been more recently appended to the collection. More than 54 000 video testimonies are now regularly used by researchers from many disciplines: historians, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, psychologists, literary critics and scholars of the law.

Although the VHA was initiated for memorial, educational and civic purposes, scholars gradually recognized the relevance of this source for academic work. However, this unique collection of testimonies has produced various reactions, from the recognition of its value to skepticism.

The aim of this *journée d'étude* is to gather scholars from different disciplines who have carried out research on or with the VHA. We welcome researchers who have analyzed the VHA as a collection or memorial event *per se* as well as those who have used it as a source, major or secondary, on violence and genocide or the social, political, cultural, psychological or legal implications of mass violence.

Participants will have the opportunity to share their research results and experiences. We are particularly interested in contributions which put the VHA in perspective with other testimonies (written, audio or video), reflect on the value of the archives in comparison to other types of sources, open a discussion on the methodological difficulties encountered by users or consider new uses of the collection. The discussion will bring insights on the scholarly contributions and limits of this collection of testimonies.

The *journée d'étude* will be introduced and concluded by keynotes from Stephen D. Smith, Executive Director of the USC Shoah Foundation, who will present the origins of the VHA and the innovative uses of the archive; Christopher Browning, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Jeffrey Shandler, Professor of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University, and Annette Wieviorka, Emeritus Research Director at the CNRS, will describe their own research with the VHA.

Although we expect the majority of papers to be given in French, a limited number of contributions in English will also be considered. Abstracts of 500 words maximum are to be sent along with a short CV to the organizers before May 9, 2017. Selection of results will be announced in early June.

Applications for grants for presenters from outside the Parisian region will be considered.

Place: American University of Paris (AUP)

Scientific Committee: Brian Schiff (AUP), Philip Golub (AUP), Susan Perry (AUP), Annette Wieviorka (CNRS-IRICE), Claire Zalc (CNRS-IHMC)

Organizing Committee: Emmanuel Debono (ENS), Constance Pâris de Bollardière (AUP)

Organization: George and Irina Schaeffer Center for the Study of Genocide, Human Rights and Conflict Prevention, American University of Paris; USC Shoah Foundation (France)

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