

## Reader's query

**Date :** August 17, 2008

*[Ed: This question just in from Barbara Kirschenblatt Gimblett, NYU, all input greatly appreciated]*

I am interested in exploring issues around the mediation and remediation of photographs in historical exhibitions, especially those dealing with the Holocaust.

There is of course a big literature on the subject of photography and the Holocaust: James Young, Barbie Zelizer, Marianne Hirsch, Diana Taylor, Laura Levitt, Shelley Hornstein, Sybil Milton, Janina Struk, Ulrich Baer, Paul Williams, Omer Bartov, Atina Grossmann, Molly Nolan, Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, Cornelia Brink, Habo Koch, Caroline Wiedmer, Jeffrey Shandler, Oren Stier, Carol Zemel, Brett Kaplan, Harold Kaplan, Andrea Liss, and others. However, discussion of issues specific to exhibition (design and installation) from the perspective of practitioners is somewhat elusive because practitioners tend to do rather than write about what they do. I would be grateful if readers could point me to where in their own work or the work of others such issues are addressed. While my primary concern is with Holocaust exhibits, the issues bear on any history exhibit. What are the protocols that practicing curators and designers develop (or do not develop) with respect to cropping, enlarging, use of details, and graphic treatment of historical photographs when designing the installation for a history exhibit? How do these protocols (or lack of them) affect decisions regarding enlargement, cropping, medium on which the photograph is printed, whether paper or glass, graphic or filmic treatment, digital projection, use in interactive display, and even 3-dimensional treatment. In other words, I am interested in the thinking behind all decisions that affect the presence of photographs in the exhibition. This question is especially important when the "originals" (prints made close to the time of the negative) are not shown, let alone the strip of negatives, contact sheets, and uncropped photographs (even when they exist).

I am trying to determine if Holocaust exhibition practice has developed its own protocols, raised the threshold for what can and cannot be done, or provided the model in other ways. How do issues that have been debated at length with respect to the Holocaust play out in the exhibition of other genocides and in reflections on those exhibitions. What are some of the cultural differences and sensitivities that would make a protocol acceptable in Poland but not in the USA or Israel, in Argentina or Vietnam or Rwanda, but not in Ireland, acceptable for other genocides, but not for the Holocaust.

Atrocity photographs and traumatic images are the limit case and have been discussed at length. I am also interested in the protocols (if there are any) for presenting any photographs taken in Poland during the Holocaust, whether they show civilians looking up at falling bombs or a flowerseller on the street on a sunny summer day. Again, my concern is with curatorial and design practice and with the protocols, stated or unstated, that guide what can and cannot be done with these photographs in an exhibition .