

TIER - AUTONOMIE

Jahrgang 10, Nr. 7

ISSN 2363-6513

Dezember 2024

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Translation of: Miriam Y. Arani, Die fotohistorische Forschung zur NS-Diktatur als interdisziplinäre Bildwissenschaft, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 5 (2008), S. 387-412, URL: <https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/3-2008/4393> ; with the friendly permission of > Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History via Jan-Holger Kirsch. Translated by Gita Marta Yegane Arani for Tierautonomie, Edition Farangis, Usingen, 2024.

Photo-historical research on the National Socialist dictatorship as an interdisciplinary visual science

Miriam Y. Arani

Archives have long included posters, photos and films in their collections because they consider them to be historically relevant. Under the Nazi regime, “new” mass media captivated the public: print media richly illustrated with photographs, radio, sound and color film. Only the medium of photography is dealt with here. It is often misunderstood as a “self-print of reality” - as if it were not also the artifact of people who procured a camera with film, selected the image section and pressed the shutter release at certain moments. The history of research into photography during the Nazi era is roughly outlined below as the subject of interdisciplinary studies.¹ An outline of the first photo-historical research during the Nazi regime itself and the more recent research paths since the 1980s is followed by a discussion of the special features of photographic sources, their archival indexing and digitization, as well as the possibilities of gaining knowledge in an interdisciplinary field of research.

1. Beginnings of photo-historical research

The beginnings of German-language research into the history of photography have been recognizable since the early 1930s.² Walter Benjamin first published his “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” in 1931 and the essay “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” in 1936. Two years later, he reviewed the photo-historical dissertation of his contemporary Gisèle (Gisela) Freund.³ Both had already fled Germany because of their Jewish

¹ The term “visual studies” is understood here as an analysis of images that are not considered artistic, based on art historical methods. Cf. most recently: Daniel Hornuff, *Aus dem Blick verloren. Wie sich die aktuelle Bildwissenschaft von ihrem Gegenstand entfernt*, in: *Merkur* 62 (2008), pp. 995-1003. On historical image research, see Gerhard Paul, Introduction, in: id. (ed.), *Visual History. Ein Studienbuch*, Göttingen 2006, pp. 7-36.

² Cf. generally Jens Jäger, *Fotografiegeschichte(n). Stand und Tendenzen der historischen Forschung*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 48 (2008), pp. 511-537.

³ Walter Benjamin, *Lehrstück in materialistischer Dialektik*, in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 7 (1938), on: Gisèle Freund, *La photographie en France en XIX siècle*, Paris 1936.

origins. Philological research on photography later favored Walter Benjamin's approach to the aesthetics and theory of reception,⁴ which, however, obscured what had connected him to Gisèle Freund before 1933: the scientific program of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, which became known as Critical Theory.

The social researchers' shared experiences at the time included the spread of new mass media and their use by totalitarian systems, but also by commercial actors and interests in democracies. It was in this context that the first research on the then “new” media was conducted.⁵

Gisèle Freund achieved greater recognition in art studies than in literary studies and sociology. Her book “Fotografie und Gesellschaft”, initially published in France in 1974, was first published in German in 1976. In this overview of social uses of photography since its invention in 1839, she also included examples from the time of the Nazi dictatorship.⁶ In her introduction, Freund wrote: “Photography plays a very important role in modern life. There is hardly any human activity that does not make use of it in one way or another. It has become indispensable to both science and industry. [...] Every day it is spread across thousands of newspapers and magazines. Photography has thus become an everyday phenomenon. It is so much a part of social life that we no longer notice it because we see it all the time. Its characteristic feature is that it is equally accepted by all levels of society.”⁷

Gisèle Freund did not see photography as art – she emphasized its mass appeal and its acceptance across all social classes. Inspired by Norbert Elias, she used the examination of photography as an opportunity to analyze society. Her sociological approach to the history of photography implied a new methodology of empirical social research, which was to be based on the collection and analysis of data with and about photographs.⁸ In contrast, as early as the 1930s,

⁴ See Jäger, *Fotografiegeschichte(n)* (note 2), p. 512, p. 515.

⁵ Michael Kausch, *Kulturindustrie und Populärkultur. Kritische Theorie der Massenmedien*, Frankfurt a.M. 1988, pp. 19-28.

⁶ Gisèle Freund, *Fotografie und Gesellschaft*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1989. This edition includes photographs by Heinrich Hoffmann showing Hitler practising his oratory poses (p. 141), a photomontage by John Heartfield (p. 170) and the best-known photograph of the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943 (p. 186f.).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸ In current photo-historical research, in contrast, there are signs of a divergence between empirical research and theory development; see Jäger, *Fotografiegeschichte(n)* (note 2), p. 516ff., p. 535. Critical theory itself did not produce a convincing sociological media analysis; see Dieter Prokop, *Medien-Macht und Massen-Wirkung. Ein geschichtlicher Überblick*, Freiburg 1995, pp. 160-169, esp. p. 163.

there was a national-historically oriented photographic historiography that was easily adopted by the Nazi state. In 1938, for example, Erich Stenger published his book “Die Photographie in Kultur und Technik” in Leipzig, in which he presented the history of photography as a national history of technical and cultural progress.

After the liberation of Germany in 1945, photographs played an important role in the Nazi trials, but they were mostly understood as objective depictions of reality, without their contexts of origin and their source value being problematized in the academic discussion of the time. The incipient historiographical research into the Nazi era concentrated predominantly on files and other written documents, while the social research based on photographic sources that Freund had suggested initially fell into oblivion.

2. Research into photography of the Nazi era since the 1980s

Since the early 1980s, a number of art scholars have repeatedly published articles on photography from the Nazi era, including in particular Detlef Hoffmann, Diethart Kerbs, Ulrich Keller and Rolf Sachsse.⁹ From the very beginning, research into the photographs taken under the Nazi regime raised the question of the connection between the surviving images, the ideology and the crimes. The aforementioned researchers pursued this question partly explicitly, partly implicitly; however, their answers could sometimes only be justified by the political conviction that the Nazi dictatorship had brought forth previously unimagined dimensions of crime and that the photos of that time should therefore be interpreted in this light.

⁹ See, among others, Rolf Sachsse, Probleme der Annäherung. Thesen zu einem diffusen Thema: NS-Fotografie, in: *Fotogeschichte* 5 (1982), pp. 59-65; Diethart Kerbs, Historische Pressefotos im Dienst der nationalsozialistischen Propaganda, in: *Fotogeschichte* 10 (1983), pp. 25-39; id./Walter Uka/ Brigitte Walz-Richter (Hg.), *Die Gleichschaltung der Bilder. Zur Geschichte der Pressefotografie 1930-1936*, Berlin 1983; Ulrich Keller (Hg.), *Fotografien aus dem Warschauer Ghetto*, Berlin 1987; Detlef Hoffmann, Fotografierte Lager. Überlegungen zu einer Fotogeschichte deutscher Konzentrationslager, in: *Fotogeschichte* 54 (1994), S. 3-30; ders., „Auch in der Nazizeit war zwölfmal Spargelzeit“. Die Vielfalt der Bilder und der Primat der Rassenpolitik, in: *Fotogeschichte* 63 (1997), S. 57-68; Rolf Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen. Fotografie im NS-Staat*, Dresden 2003; Ulrich Keller, Die umgedrehte Swastika. Propaganda und Widerspruch in Fotoreportagen der Machtergreifung, in: *Fotogeschichte* 107 (2008), S. 35-50. Even these brief references make it clear that the journal “Fotogeschichte”, founded in 1981, played a central role in such research.

Already since the 1980s, the American historian Sybil Milton had also been publishing on photographs of the Holocaust.¹⁰ The fact that only a few historians attempted to use source criticism to assess photos at this time is demonstrated by an article by Ulrich Herbert from 1983, which problematized the illustrated books on the Nazi dictatorship that were commercially typically published at the time. Referring to such an illustrated book on “everyday life” in the “Third Reich”, Herbert asked pointedly: Referring to such an illustrated book on “everyday life” in the “Third Reich”, Herbert asked pointedly: “Is this how the Germans lived?” He came to the conclusion that the photos published in it continued the self-stylization of the Nazi regime uninterrupted.¹¹ Sybil Milton, on the other hand, emphasized that, with adequate methodological reflection, photographs certainly enable a gain in knowledge that cannot be achieved on the basis of written sources alone.¹²

In the 1980s, art historians researching photography under the Nazi regime not only analyzed individual images, but also asked about the specific contexts in which they were created and used at the time. This more comprehensive approach to the object of investigation lost importance in the 1990s, at least within art studies. Photographs now increasingly attracted the research interest of philologists, political scientists and historians, who developed other questions from an angle of their own disciplines.¹³ Art historical research on photography during the Nazi dictatorship was increasingly limited to a person-centered analysis of the creation and significance of artistic photographs. This narrowing down to “work biographies” [Werkbiographien] of individual photographers with a legacy judged to be of higher aesthetic value can be understood as an adaptation to the form of presentation of artists' vitae. The biographical approach means that the criminal character of the Nazi regime usually becomes marginal if no person persecuted by the Nazi state is at the center of the investigation.¹⁴

¹⁰ For example, Sybil Milton, *Argument oder Illustration. Die Bedeutung von Fotodokumenten als Quelle*, in: *Fotogeschichte* 28 (1988), pp. 61-90; id. *Images of the Holocaust – Part I*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1 (1986), S. 27-61; id., *Images of the Holocaust – Part II*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1 (1986), S. 193-216.

¹¹ Ulrich Herbert, *Bilder vom Alltag im Dritten Reich. Lebten so die Deutschen?*, in: *Journal für Geschichte* Nr. 1/1983, pp. 8-15.

¹² Milton, *Argument* (note 10).

¹³ Cf. Jäger, *Fotografiegeschichte(n)* (note 2), p. 512, p. 517.

¹⁴ See, for example, Janos Frecot (ed.), *Erich Salomon. “Mit Frack und Linse durch Politik und Gesellschaft”. Photographien 1928-1938*, Munich 2004; Gabriele Lohmann, Elisabeth Hase. *Photographer for press and advertising. The 1930s to 50s*, phil. Diss. Bochum 2002, online at URL: <<http://www-brs.ub.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/netahtml/HSS/Diss/LohmannGabriele/>>; Irme Schaber, *Gerta Taro. Fotoreporterin im spanischen Bürgerkrieg. Eine Biografie*, Marburg 1994. In several cases, the

The fact that German professional photographers successfully cooperated with the NSDAP despite their reservations about it was rarely discussed.¹⁵

Although no clear caesura is discernible in art historical research on photography under the Nazi regime in 1989/90, the question of the source value of photographs from the eastern sites of the Second World War gained in importance in the 1990s due to the political changes in Eastern Europe. The murder of the Jews of Europe carried out there had long stood in the shadow of the war, which had been visually trivialized and stylized as a “clean” war in the visual media of the Nazi state as well as in those of German post-war society.¹⁶ In Germany, destroyed or chaotically privately handed down – also socially tabooed – image material from private “snappers” of violent acts committed by their own side in the war was purposefully collected in some archives of the “Eastern Bloc” in the post-war period in order to provide evidence of war and Nazi crimes - resulting in an almost complementary visual memory to that of the old Federal Republic.¹⁷ Since the 1990s, these internationally different collective visual memories have increasingly been confronted with each other, sometimes in conflict.

The historiographical research into photographic and filmic representations of Nazi crimes that began in Germany at the end of the 1990s primarily highlighted their de-realization in post-war West German visual publishing.¹⁸ The research was primarily limited to a history of the reception of images already published in Germany. The photographs of Nazi terror in occupied Europe that survived

photographers' statements about their own actions during the Nazi era were adopted without any comparison with relevant written and pictorial sources on the person in question. Cf. Daniel H. Magilow, *The Interpreter's Dilemma: Heinrich Jöst's Warsaw Ghetto Photographs*, in: David Bathrick/Brad Prager/Michael D. Richardson (eds.), *Visualizing the Holocaust. Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, New York 2008, pp. 38-61; and in contrast to this Barbara Stambolis/Volker Jakob (eds.), *Kriegskinder. Zwischen Hitlerjugend und Nachkriegsalltag. Fotografien von Walter Nies*, Münster 2006.

¹⁵ Cf. Jan Brüning, Dr. Paul Wolff. Ein Fotograf im Kraftfeld seiner Zeit, in: *Fotogeschichte* 61 (1996), pp. 31-46; Katja Protte, [“Bildberichterstatteerin” im “Dritten Reich”], “Photojournalist” in the “Third Reich”. Photographs from the years 1937-1944, in: *DHM-Magazin* 20 (1997), pp. 1-60.

¹⁶ Gerhard Paul, *Bilder des Krieges – Krieg der Bilder. Die Visualisierung des modernen Krieges*, Paderborn 2004, pp. 223-284.

¹⁷ Cf. on the photographic memory of the “Reichsgau Wartheland” after 1945: Miriam Y. Arani, *Fotografische Selbst- und Fremdbilder von Deutschen und Polen im Reichsgau Wartheland 1939-1945. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Region Wielkopolska*, Hamburg 2008, here Introduction and Chapter II.

¹⁸ See Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945*, Berlin 1998; id., „Auschwitz in der Paulskirche“. Erinnerungspolitik in Fotoausstellungen der sechziger Jahre, Marburg 2000; Habbo Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild. Fotografien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur*, Hamburg 2001.

outside Germany thus remained largely “invisible” to the German public. One important exception, however, is the work of Hanno Loewy, who since 1989 has published previously unknown photographic sources on Jews in German-occupied Poland.¹⁹ A few years ago, Janina Struk also presented general problems of determining the origin and transnational reception of photographs of the Holocaust.²⁰

In particular, the publication of photos of war and Nazi crimes in Eastern Europe was long opposed in the old Federal Republic of Germany with the claim that they were “falsified” by “the communists” in order to simultaneously deny the crimes as such. This defensive strategy reached both its climax and its conclusion in the German-language controversies surrounding the first “Wehrmacht Exhibition”. The political disputes surrounding the exhibition, which had been escalating since 1997, took on the form of an academic debate about allegedly “faked” photos in 1999.²¹ The most important methodological contribution during these controversies was formulated in 1999 by Wolf Buchmann, a senior archivist at the Federal Archives.²² He had to take a stand on the issue because, apart from the media public, photos of the Wehrmacht propaganda companies from the Federal Archives that were shown in the exhibition had also been attacked as “forgeries”. Alongside the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, the largest archive in the Federal Republic of Germany was confronted with the accusation of disseminating “forged”

¹⁹ Hanno Loewy/Gerhard Schoenberner (ed.), *„Unser einziger Weg ist Arbeit“. Das Getto in Lodz 1940-1944*, Vienna 1990; Hanno Loewy, “Nähmaschinen-Reparatur-Abteilung”. An album from the Lodz ghetto, in: *Fotogesichte* 34 (1989), pp. 11-30; he, P.W.O.K. Arieh Ben Menachem's Album, in: *Fotogesichte* 39 (1991), pp. 31-43; ss, “... ohne Masken”. Juden im Visier der “Deutschen Fotografie” 1933-1945, in: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ed.), *Deutsche Fotografie. Macht eines Mediums 1870-1970*, Cologne 1997, pp. 135-149; Kersten Brandt/Hanno Loewy/Krystyna Oleksy (eds.), *Vor der Auslöschung.... Fotografien gefunden in Auschwitz*, 2nd ed. Munich 2001.

²⁰ Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust. Interpretations of the Evidence*, London 2004.

²¹ None of the photos shown in this exhibition were “forged” in the sense of a deliberately induced change in the image statement. In very few individual cases, the captions of the images were incorrect, although the error rate did not exceed the number of errors in captions equally found in other historical exhibitions. See also Miriam Y. Arani, „Und an den Fotos entzündete sich die Kritik“. Die „Wehrmachtsausstellung“, deren Kritiker und die Neukonzeption. Ein Beitrag aus fotohistorisch-quellenkritischer Sicht, in: *Fotogesichte* 85/86 (2002), pp. 97-124, here pp. 105-112. For a rebuttal, see Ulrike Jureit, „Zeigen heißt verschweigen“. Die Ausstellungen über die Verbrechen der Wehrmacht, in: *Mittelweg* 36 13 (2004) H. 1, pp. 3-27, and my subsequent, more concrete description of the distinctiveness of the material forms of transmission of photographic sources contested by Jureit: Miriam Y. Arani, *Fotografien als Objekte - die objektimmanenten Spuren ihrer Produktions- und Gebrauchszusammenhänge*, in: Irene Ziehe/Ulrich Hägele (eds.), *Fotos - „schön und nützlich zugleich“. Das Objekt Fotografie*, Münster 2006, pp. 29-44. For more details on the methodological instruments I developed: Arani, *Selbst- und Fremdbilder* (Note 17), Chapter II.

²² Wolf Buchmann, „Woher kommt das Photo?“ Zur Authentizität und Interpretation von historischen Photoaufnahmen in Archiven, in: *Der Archivar* 52 (1999), pp. 296-306.

photographs. In 1999, the two institutions jointly organized a symposium on photographs from the Second World War period, which formulated a groundbreaking resolution on the handling of photographic sources.²³

The forgery allegations triggered a broader debate in German about the “correct” handling of photographs and led to a noticeable sensitization of historians and archives to this topic.²⁴ To date, there have been no systematic studies of photographs as sources on the Nazi era. There are also only isolated, scattered studies on the use of photography in the German-occupied countries during the war.²⁵ However, the source value of photographs of the propaganda companies is now distinctly questioned.²⁶ There were also an increasing number of articles on the private photography of Germans and their soldiers.²⁷ Around the turn of the millennium, there was a change in awareness in dealing with photographs of Nazi crimes in Germany and its neighboring countries. This can

²³ Cf. Sabine Hillebrecht, Bildquellen. Das Foto im Visier von Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaftlern, Historikern und Archivaren, in: *Fotogeschichte* 74 (1999), p. 68ff. The lecture by the representative of the Federal Archives was published in revised form (together with the resolution): Buchmann, “Woher kommt das Photo?” (note 22).

²⁴ Cf. Jäger, *Fotografiegeschichte(n)* (note 2), p. 528.

²⁵ For a general overview of the current state of research, see *ibid.* p. 531. For an overview of press photography under the Nazi regime, see Miriam Y. Arani, Deutsche Pressefotografie im Kontext der NS-Kriegspropaganda, in: Kurt Hochstuhl/Josef Wolf (ed.), *Brechungen. Willy Pragher. Rumänische Bildräume 1924-1944*, published by the Institut für donauschwäbische Geschichte und Landeskunde and the Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Ostfildern 2007, pp. 93-102. On press photography under the Vichy regime: Françoise Denoyelle, *La photographie d'actualité et de propagande sous le régime de Vichy*, Paris 2003.

²⁶ On the view before the controversies, see Heinz Boberach, Art. “Quellen zum Nationalsozialismus”, in: Wolfgang Benz/Hermann Graml/Hermann Weiß (eds.), *Enzyklopädie des Nationalsozialismus*, 3rd ed. Munich 1998, pp. 330-342, here p. 340. In contrast to this: Ahlrich Meyer, *Der Blick des Besatzers. Propagandaphotografie der Wehrmacht aus Marseille 1942-1945*, Bremen 1999; Bernd Boll, Die Propagandakompanien der Wehrmacht 1938-1945, in: Christian Stadelmann/Regina Wonisch (eds.), *Brutale Neugier. Walter Henisch. Kriegsfotograf und Bildreporter*, Vienna 2003, pp. 37-46; *id.*, Das Bild als Waffe. Quellenkritische Anmerkungen zum Foto- und Filmmaterial der deutschen Propagandatruppen 1938-1945, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 54 (2006), pp. 974-998; Oliver Sander, Deutsche Bildberichter in Polen, in: *Danuta Jackiewicz/Eugeniusz Cezary Król (eds.), W obiektywie wroga. Fotoreporterzy niemieccy w okupo- wanej Warszawie 1939-1945/Im Objektiv des Feindes. Deutsche Bildberichterstatte in Warschau 1939-1945*, Warsaw 2009, pp. 31-47; see also Claudia Zenker-Oertel, Die Verzeichnung von Fotobeständen am Beispiel des Bestandes M 660/319 im Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Transferarbeit im Rahmen der Ausbildung für den Höheren Archivdienst, Marburg 2005, p. 11, p. 19f.

²⁷ Cf. generally Jäger, *Fotografiegeschichte(n)* (note 2), p. 526; Timm Starl, *Knipser. Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1880 bis 1980*, Munich 1995; Alexander B. Rossino, Eastern Europe through German Eyes. Soldiers' Photographs 1939-1942, in: *History of Photography* 23 (1999), pp. 313-321; Peter Jahn/Ulrike Schmiegelt (eds.), *Foto-Feldpost. Geknipste Kriegserlebnisse 1939-1945*, Berlin 2000; Bernd Boll, Zur Überlieferung privater Fotografien aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, in: Anton Holzer (ed.), *Mit der Kamera bewaffnet. Krieg und Fotografie*, Marburg 2003, pp. 167-179; Petra Bopp, Fremde im Visier. Private Fotografien von Wehrmachtssoldaten, in: *ibid.*, pp. 97-117; Sandra Starke, Privates Fotografieren 1933- 1939 am Beispiel von Familienalben, unveröff. geschichtswiss. Magisterarbeit [unpublished master's thesis in history], Humboldt University of Berlin 2004.

be seen, for example, in a recent Austrian exhibition catalog on photographic sources relating to the Mauthausen concentration camp, which allows a source-critical perception of the images: groups of photos are differentiated according to their respective contexts of origin, which are explained in short introductory texts.²⁸

What relevance does the context in which photographs were taken have for their representation of reality? This question recently became the subject of controversy in France. In 2008, 270 de-contextualized Agfacolor colour slides by the photographer André Zucca, who had worked for “Signal”, the Wehrmacht's foreign magazine printed in colour, under German occupation, were exhibited in Paris. The French critics objected that Zucca's photographs concealed the repression of the German occupying forces and that the responsible curator had not sufficiently checked their production context.²⁹ As in many other cases, the aesthetic value judgment was given higher priority in this exhibition than the question of historical source value. Such a hierarchy of evaluation criteria proves to be particularly problematic in the case of those photographs from the Nazi era that were purposefully produced for press image propaganda at home and abroad. This type of photographic source is aesthetically very appealing and well crafted, but its overriding purpose – documented in numerous press releases and other written sources – was to visually disseminate Nazi ideology while at the same time concealing Nazi crimes. The historical source value of these press photographs taken under the conditions of a totalitarian system cannot be reliably determined without considering their original intention. This shows in particular the methodological limits of a conservative approach to art history, which does not ask about the source value of photographs. In 2001, another French exhibition made the first attempt to document the photographs from the Nazi concentration and extermination camps as comprehensively as possible.³⁰ The exhibits included

²⁸ Bundesministerium für Inneres [Federal Ministry of the Interior] (ed.), *Das sichtbare Unfassbare. Fotografien vom Konzentrationslager Mauthausen*, Vienna 2005. Cf. also the exemplary catalog texts on individual exhibits in: Philippe Arbaizar/Hermann Arnholt (eds.), *1945 - im Blick der Fotografie. Kriegsende und Neuanfang*, Münster 2005.

²⁹ Book accompanying the exhibition: Jean Baronnet, *Les Parisiens sous l'occupation*, Paris 2008. Zucca was employed by “Paris-Match” until 1940 and was the only foreigner to work for “Signal” (according to Rainer Rutz, *Signal. Eine deutsche Auslandsillustrierte als Propagandainstrument im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Essen 2007, p. 152). Cf. the review of the exhibition by Daniela Kneißl: <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id=99&type=rezausstellungen>>.

³⁰ Clément Chéroux (ed.), *Mémoires des camps. Photographies des camps de concentration et d'extermination nazis (1933-1999)*, Paris 2001; see also Ilsen About/Clément Chéroux, *Fotografie und Geschichte. Lecture at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst*, Leipzig 2004.

reproductions of the only surviving photographs of scenes before and after the murder of Jews in a gas chamber in Auschwitz-Birkenau.³¹ Two polemically arguing critics in France attacked Georges Didi-Huberman, author of an accompanying text to these photographs, and, referring to the filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, argued that the Holocaust was unimaginable and therefore could not be depicted. Didi-Huberman defended the presentation of the photos with extensive considerations of reception theory.³² The controversial pictures were taken by the Polish and Jewish resistance in the summer of 1944 at great risk in order to provide the world with credible evidence of the unbelievable events. A more precise distinction between film-theoretical discourses and unquestionable photographic acts of resistance is therefore useful. Photographs were taken in 1933-1945 under different conditions than film images; they can potentially convey events from the perspective of contemporary resistance organizations more frequently. Moreover, the figures of argument used by Lanzmann and others try to justify a kind of ban on images depicting the Holocaust appear all too apodictic and detached from any research. Recent photo-historical studies have shown how necessary and how fruitful a more precise examination of the images themselves and the contexts in which they were created and used is.

Looking back on around three decades of German-language and international research into photography during the Nazi era, it is astonishing how many specialist disciplines have opened up to this subject. In particular, the sources used, the methods applied and the area of applicability made on this basis remain in need of discussion. Since photographs are undeniably visual mass sources, methods of source analysis and interpretation should also be chosen that are adequate to this mass nature. The socio-philosophical approach of the Frankfurt School, for example, makes it possible to understand repeatedly reproduced photos as products of a “culture industry” or “mass culture” that occurs in totalitarian systems and in democracies. In both social contexts, photographs can become visual symbols of popular myths, as leading media [Leitmedien] of world perception that superficially guarantee factuality. Such

³¹ Cf. Judith Lerner Crawley, *Acts of Resistance* (2005), online at URL: <<http://www.sonderkommando-studien.de/artikel.php?c=fotografie/resistance>>, and Miriam Y. Arani, *Holocaust. Die Bilder des Sonderkommandos Auschwitz 1944*, in: Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder. Bildatlas Vol. I: 1900 to 1949*, Göttingen 2009, pp. 658-665.

³² Georges Didi-Huberman, *Bilder trotz allem*, Munich 2007. On the positions of the two critics (G rard Wajcman and Elisabeth Pagnoux), see also Ralph Buchenhorst, *Der Fotograf in der Gaskammer. Zu einer Debatte  ber die bildliche Darstellung der Shoah*, in: *Zeitschrift f r  sthetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 53 (2008), pp. 261-283.

processes of symbolic condensation (before and after 1945) are undoubtedly a fruitful subject of investigation at the intersection of history, cultural studies and social sciences. In order to determine the potential cognitive value of photographs for the research of the Nazi era, it makes however sense to also problematize the archival transmission situation and the possibilities of accessing the photo collections via the Internet.

3. Images in the (digital) archive

In view of the limited repertoire of repeatedly reproduced photographs of the Holocaust, Sybil Milton pleaded as early as 1988 for new image collections to be made accessible through source criticism.³³ As only a small proportion of the photos from the Nazi era have been researched in detail to date, the proposal has lost none of its topicality. There are no scientific aids for the millions of photographic sources that have come down to us from this period. The transmission is fragmentary, and they are also influenced by the media policy interventions of the Nazi regime. Even at the time the photographs were taken, Nazi press control in German photojournalism led to a quantitative over- and under-representation of certain topics and modes of representation. As a rule, Nazi-conformist perspectives on the event field are overrepresented.

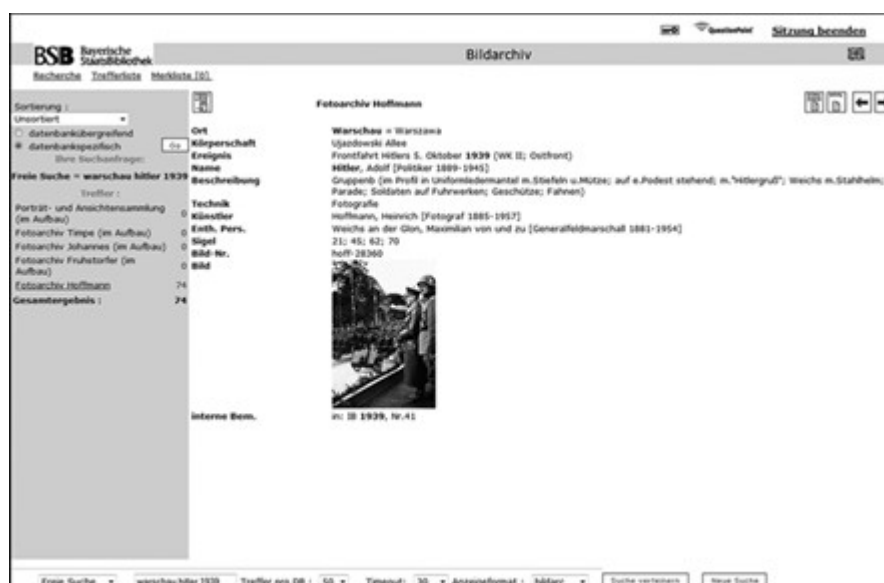
For example, it remains a challenge to critically reflect on the images glorifying Adolf Hitler.³⁴ Heinrich Hoffmann's political advertising photographs for Hitler and the NSDAP are available worldwide on the Internet. They were acquired by the Bavarian State Library with funding from the German Research Foundation, digitized and made publicly accessible a few years ago in the form of an image database. The introductory page briefly states that the Heinrich Hoffmann photo archive contains “materials about the NSDAP”; the context in which the photographs were taken and their original purpose is not explained.³⁵ Apparently

³³ Milton, Argument (note 10).

³⁴ In his dissertation on art history, Rudolf Herz comprehensively analyzed Heinrich Hoffmann's mass production of Hitler photographs for the first time, narrowed down the iconography and contemporary uses of these photographs more precisely and made it clear that the name Heinrich Hoffmann concealed a rapidly expanding company: Rudolf Herz, *Hoffmann & Hitler. Fotografie als Medium des Führer-Mythos*, Munich 1994. Cf. Horst-Pierre Bothien (ed.), *Adolf Hitler am “Deutschen Rhein”. NS-Prominenz aus der Sicht eines Hobbyfotografen*, Essen 2003, and Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen (ed.), *Das Auge des Dritten Reiches. Hitlers Kameramann und Fotograf Walter Frentz*, Berlin n.d. [2006].

³⁵ Heinrich Hoffmann photo archive in the Bavarian State Library, online at URL:

they arouse little scientific interest and are primarily used by picture editors of non-scientific print media and television channels.³⁶



Screenshot of the data record for a photograph of the Heinrich Hoffmann company in the image database of the Bavarian State Library. The photo shows Hitler at the victory parade in Warsaw in October 1939. The relatively extensive archive text accompanying the image, which also contains information about the fact that this photograph was published in the party magazine “Illustrierter Beobachter” at the time, does not provide any information about the format of the digitized paper print; it only provides information about the resolution of the digitized image. The image description is primarily concerned with the identification of people, uniform parts and war equipment. The occupying forces' repression of the Polish civilian population of Warsaw to ensure that the victory parade proceeds without disruption and to stage these official images of victory is not mentioned.

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The euphoria at the end of the 1990s about the seemingly unlimited possibilities of digitization has slowly given way to an awareness of its limits. Paradoxically, the increasing digitization of images does not solve the problems of evaluating and indexing photographic collections, but rather exacerbates them.³⁷ The image databases of German institutions made publicly available on the internet make

<<http://www.bsb-muenchen.de/Bilder.591.0.html>>. See also Sonja Meldau, Erschließung durch eine Bilddatenbank. Die Abteilung Karten und Bilder der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie* 13 (2006) H. 1, p. 15ff.

³⁶ Cf. Meldau, Erschließung (note 35), p. 17.

³⁷ Cf. Axel Metz, Nicht jedes Bild sagt mehr als tausend Worte - Ein Beitrag zur Bewertung von Fotobeständen, Transferarbeit im Rahmen der Ausbildung zum Höheren Archivdienst, Stuttgart 2007, p. 8.

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In addition to image databases, which break down large photo collections into a large number of individual images, closed provenances are also available on the Internet. A few years ago, the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance in Vienna recorded around 3,900 photos of Nazi victims from the Gestapo card index of the Vienna City and Provincial Archives in a database. The identification photographs [erkennungsdienstliche Fotografien] from this card index can be accessed individually on the Internet, supplemented by key biographical data on the persons depicted and information on their persecution by the Gestapo.⁴⁰ After several years of preparation, the Staatsarchiv Freiburg [Germany] are now presenting the entire image collection of the professional photographer Willy Prager (1908-1992) on the Internet and a selection of his pictures in a traveling exhibition with an accompanying publication.⁴¹ The Vienna Gestapo photographs and Prager's photographs are reproduced as completely as possible on the Internet, whereby users are left to make their own selection from the extensive collection – which is not necessarily made easier by the pre-structuring of the data records. The Buchenwald Memorial dealt more intensively with the question of how users can make a meaningful selection from a large number of available photos. After receiving financial support for the preparatory work from the German Research Foundation, it recently made the largest photo collection on a concentration camp accessible as a digital image archive on the Internet.⁴² The memorial provided an assessment of the relevance of the surviving photos with an exhibition entitled “Black on White”, which presents a selection of recontextualized photos from this microcosm of terror and has also been available as a “virtual exhibition” on the Internet since

⁴⁰ <<http://www.doew.at/php/gestapo>>.

⁴¹ Kurt Hochstuhl, Fotonachlässe im Staatsarchiv Freiburg i.Br. Überlegungen zu Erschließung und Vermarktung, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie* 12 (2005) H. 2, pp. 26-32; id./Wolf, *Brechungen* (note 25). The Internet presentation of the photo inventory of the Staatsarchiv Freiburg [Germany], Bestand W 134-137, Willy Prager Collection, can be found at <<https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/olb/struktur.php?stat=1&archiv=5&sprungld=20677&sprungStufe=B7&letztesLimit=suchen>>.

⁴² <<http://www.buchenwald.de/fotoarchiv>>. Cf. Silke Betscher, Das digitale Fotoarchiv der Gedenkstätte Buchenwald. Ein Beitrag zur Gedenkstättenarbeit im Internet, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie* 14 (2007) H. 3, pp. 14-17, who recommends using the sitemap to get an overview of the organization system of this photo archive; see <<http://www.buchenwald.de/fotoarchiv/sitemap.php?q=1&page=1&link=k>>.

September 2008.⁴³ The texts accompanying the pictures explain the contexts in which they were created.

The general problem of image archives on the Internet is not primarily a technical one, but above all insufficient linguistic information about the material form and origin of the respective photographs. The digital copies of photographic sources available on the Internet do not usually contain any information about specific features of the material form of the surviving material, although these features would allow relevant conclusions to be drawn about the origin and original context of use of the photographs. The information about the photographs that is “cut away” during digitization includes, for example, the format and material of the image source as well as inscriptions and notes on the back of the image carrier. (Foremostly positive prints on paper have survived from the Nazi era; negatives and color slides – which were handled in writing by their makers elsewhere – are rarer). The digital representation of the photographs is usually limited to a reproduction of the front of a photographic paper print that has been torn out of its context of transmission. This encourages a primarily illustrative use, as important parts of the image source are completely hidden from the users of the digitized version.

In addition, when image collections are digitized, archival classification systems usually remain in effect, transforming the media-specific information content of photographs. The findings of cultural scientist Karen Becker, who has identified three typical ways of using photographs, each of which produces different insights, have a high explanatory value in this respect:⁴⁴

- the use of the photo as a document, where it only serves as a substitute for something else that is important;
- the use of the photograph as an artifact, in which it is understood as a representational image medium [gegenständliches Bildmedium] that expresses and shapes certain cultural values;

⁴³ <<http://www.buchenwald.de/fotoausstellung>>. A book publication has also been announced: Volkhard Knigge/Rikola-Gunnar Lüttgenau (eds.), *Schwarz auf Weiß. Fotografien aus dem Konzentrationslager Buchenwald 1937–1945*, Göttingen (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Karen Becker, Das Bildarchiv und die Konstruktion von Kultur, in: *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 93 (1997), S. 235-253.

- the use of the photograph as a key to the documentation procedures of the institution in question, in which the image, including its caption, is understood as a representative of the respective institutionalized values and procedures.

The digital presentation of photos from the period of the Nazi dictatorship can thus also be seen as a source for an analysis of the institutionally established norms and values to which the image sources were subjected. The respective classification system creates a framework that defines whether and how certain photographs should be viewed and used; it produces new meanings of the images and influences subsequent research by constructing fields of research with specific research objectives, but also leaves gaps that stand in the way of answering new questions.⁴⁵ Yet the fixation of archival classification systems on photographs as documents of something else is the greatest obstacle to gaining further insights: Portrait photographs are often only listed as images of specific people, but not as a photographic genre. Interrelated photo collections are fragmented into chronologically, topographically or thematically sorted individual images, which makes it difficult to reconstruct their contexts of origin and use. Questions about specific photographers or specific uses of photography (press illustration, police photographs, etc.) are not answered by classification systems that refer to photographs as documents of something else.⁴⁶ They usually also disregard the fact that photographs reflect the perspective of those who took them.⁴⁷ Thus, the overrepresentation of Nazi-conformist photographic material is partly due to archival classification systems that do not capture either the context of production or the social perspectivity of the photographs.

In the meantime, efforts are being made in Germany to regulate and improve the archival cataloging of photographs.⁴⁸ In contrast to official documents, state archives do not have a monopoly on accepting photographs. Nevertheless, they are increasingly opening up to the question of how to assess the archival value of photographs.⁴⁹ Axel Metz has attempted to identify the special features of the archival evaluation of photographs in comparison to official written sources.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 249f.

⁴⁶ See Diethart Kerbs, Ehrenkodex für den Umgang mit Fotografen-Nachlässen und historischen Bildbeständen, in: *Fotogeschichte* 22 (1985), p. 2; Arani, *Selbst- und Fremdbilder* (Note 17), Chapter II.4.a.

⁴⁷ Becker, *Das Bildarchiv* (note 44), p. 241.

⁴⁸ Cf. the synopsis of guidelines for photo cataloging published in Germany to date in Zenker-Oertel, *Verzeichnung* (note 26), pp. 20-25.

⁴⁹ Metz, *Nicht jedes Bild* (note 37), p. 22, p. 2, p. 12, p. 33.

According to him, when assessing the archival value of photographs, the focus is on content-related criteria that depend on the collection mandate of the respective institution; archivists therefore usually focus their attention on the image content first.⁵⁰ Since the source value and the indexing of a photographic collection are closely related, a photographic collection that has not been indexed is worthless.⁵¹ Ideally, therefore, information on the creation and origin of the photographs should first be collected and documented.⁵² Such information has often not been secured to date.



Private snapshot from 1941 showing Soviet prisoners of war in the Crimea; from the estate of German soldier R.P.O. Schindler, who died on the Eastern Front. Schindler. Silver gelatine paper, 6.4 cm x 9.2 cm, front and back (privately owned). The fact that this is a privately

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 12ff.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 3; Zenker-Oertel, Verzeichnung (note 26), p. 20.

⁵² Metz, Nicht jedes Bild (Note 37), p. 25. If the photographs are closely related to certain written sources, the information they contain about them should also be recorded (ibid., p. 16).

produced photograph is confirmed by the shape of the source (including the inscription on the back indicating the location) and the history of its transmission. The photographer's intention in taking the photograph cannot be reconstructed beyond doubt due to the lack of written contextual information about the image.

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The archival value of private photos from the time of the Nazi dictatorship is particularly controversial. From the 1930s at the latest, larger groups of people were taking photographs than before; in addition to the pictures taken by professional photographers, many pictures were taken by private “snapshotters”, which as a rule do not have the same average design quality as professional photographs. However, due to the particular historical significance of the Second World War and the Holocaust, as much meaningful visual material as possible should be preserved.⁵³ There are few or no professional photographs of many important events and “everyday life” during this period. For this reason, it is also necessary to preserve photographs that are not of optimal quality if they capture events, conditions or changes specific to the Nazi dictatorship. In addition, private photographs document certain perceptions of the Nazi era that do not appear at all or only marginally in official photography.

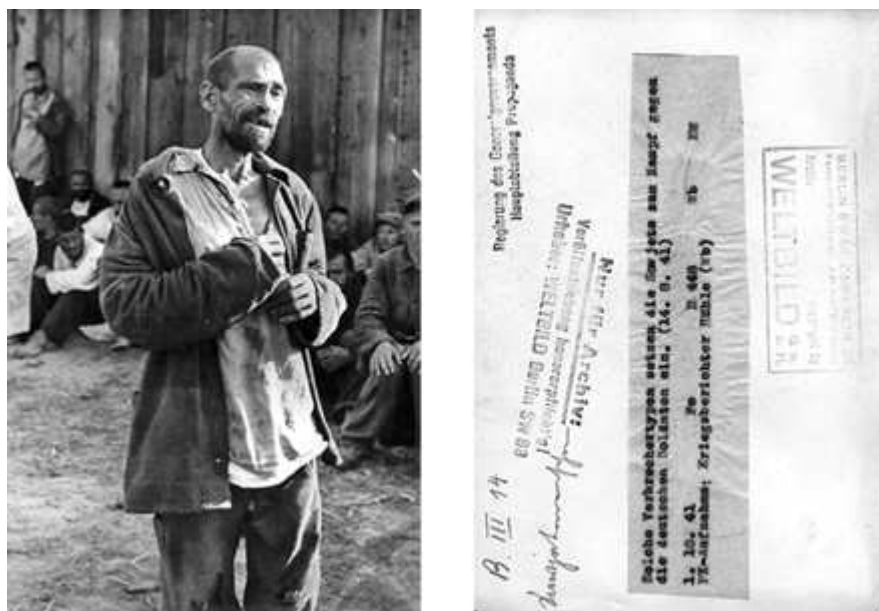
When assessing the archival value of photos, it is also important to avoid redundancy. Since professional photos of professional politicians are often highly redundant, it is usually sufficient to preserve a representative cross-section.⁵⁴ When digitizing the Heinrich Hoffmann photo archive, the Bavarian State Library was clearly not aiming to avoid redundancy: When digitizing the Heinrich Hoffmann photo archive, the Bavarian State Library was clearly not aiming to avoid redundancy: The digital image archive contains multiple copies of Hitler photos. There is no doubt that the National Socialists were among the early protagonists of an aestheticization and visual staging of the political, but multiple copies of the same “Führer images” do not gain any additional source value as a result. It is even more difficult to avoid a redundancy of photographic traditions in the relationship between different public institutions.⁵⁵ The limited exchange of information on this could be significantly improved by digital meta-

⁵³ One of the criteria mentioned by Axel Metz for the archival value of photographs is their origin from time periods for which, according to today's assessment, as much as possible should be preserved (ibid., p. 19ff.).

⁵⁴ Cf. ibid., pp. 12f., p. 19, pp. 25-32.

⁵⁵ Cf. ibid., p. 30, p. 33.

information on the existing photo collections. The “Fotoerbe” [“Photo Heritage”] project is a first attempt to create an overview of photo collections in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁵⁶



A variant of the visualization of the propagandistically constructed “deformed Soviet man” [“vertierten Sowjetmenschen”]: PK photographer Hähle, photograph distributed by Weltbild (Berlin), date of issue: 14.8.1941. Contemporary caption: “The Soviets used these types of criminals [‘Verbrechertypen’] to fight the German soldiers.” The fact that this is a professional German press photograph is confirmed by the shape of the source (including its inscription on the reverse) and its history of transmission.

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But what makes photographs so different from text documents? As an archivist, Axel Metz sees the decisive difference between official written sources and photographic collections in the fact that photographs are more heterogeneous in terms of content and more fragmented [kleinteiliger] than subject files.⁵⁷ In addition to one main aspect of content, they contain numerous secondary aspects that could be of interest for research. The central problem of their archival indexing lies in the indexing of such secondary aspects. Based on a processing time of around 15 minutes for one photo, the indexing of a photo stock measuring 33 shelf centimeters takes around seven full working days - the

⁵⁶ <<http://www.fotoerbe.de>>. Cf. Stefan Rohde-Enslin, Was ist wo und wer hat was? www.fotoerbe.de: Auf dem Weg zu einer deutschlandweiten Beständeübersicht, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie* 15 (2008) H. 1, pp. 18-21.

⁵⁷ Metz, Nicht jedes Bild (note 37), p. 21, p. 33.

indexing of official documents of the same volume, on the other hand, takes only three and a half hours.⁵⁸ Metz also introduces the “evidence values” of a photographic record as a new criterion in the archival science discussion. He uses this term to describe the informative value of the photographic primary sources about their producers and their method of organization [Organisationsweise]. Photo albums or photographers' estates can reveal, for example, how a photographer worked, what interests the clients or the people photographed pursued with the images, but also provide information on the question of how and why which photos were kept and by whom.⁵⁹ This refers to the photographic source as a material artifact with visible traces of its context of origin and use, as which it is not yet recorded by the archival classification systems.⁶⁰

Axel Metz also emphasizes a very important but rather vague criterion for the archival evaluation of photographic holdings: their potential usefulness for research.⁶¹ Since photos have long been used by historians hardly as objects of research, but primarily as illustrative tools, a prognosis of their future use cannot be based solely – as Metz suggests – on their previous use. With an expanded research practice and better access and publication conditions, use could also be more extensive. One of the biggest obstacles for students, doctoral candidates and researchers who are not civil servants is the fees charged by the archives for the use of images. Archives could increase the value of their photographic holdings for research simply by not charging academics researching photographic sources for the use of images.⁶² The search for free access to image collections for teaching and research purposes, which is being actively pursued by art scholars, can serve as an inspiration here: The Cologne-based organization Prometheus e.V. operates a distributed digital image archive for research and teaching. In 2008, Prometheus concluded a cooperation agreement with the Prussian Cultural Heritage Image Archive, which provides for simplified image rights management for pupils, students and researchers. As a

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 3, pp. 5-8; Zenker-Oertel, Verzeichnung (note 26), p. 13.

⁵⁹ Metz, Not every picture (note 37), p. 23f.

⁶⁰ Cf. Arani, Fotografien als Objekte (note 21).

⁶¹ Cf. Metz, Nicht jedes Bild (note 37), p. 12, p. 22.

⁶² Cf. Hanns-Peter Frentz, Leere Kassen – volle Archive. Erlöschancen kommerzieller Verwertung von Sammlungsbeständen öffentlich-rechtlicher Archive und Museen, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie* 12 (2005) H. 3, p. 20ff.; Holger Simon, Internetpublikationen - Zum Umgang mit Kulturgütern aus öffentlichen Sammlungen, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie* 13 (2006) H. 2, p. 23ff., Hanns-Peter Frentz, Wunschtraum und Wirklichkeit. Eine Replik auf den Beitrag von Holger Simon [a reply to the article by Holger Simon], in: *Rundbrief Fotografie* 13 (2006) H. 3, pp. 30-33.

result of this agreement, all digital images from the Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz can be used free of charge via the Prometheus Archive in schools, universities and scientific publications up to a circulation of 1,000 copies.⁶³

The new opportunities for research offered by digital information and communication technologies should be utilized and further expanded. However, the value of photographic collections for research cannot be increased by increased digitization and easier accessibility alone; improved classification systems (online and offline) are just as necessary, which capture the material form and social perspective of the image sources more broadly than before. Digitization enables and requires a new reflection on the structure [Ordnung] of the image knowledge stored in photographic sources as well as the introduction of documentation that is improved in terms of content.

4. Which questions about the Nazi dictatorship can be answered by photos - and which cannot?

Photographs can expand the scientific description and analysis of the past to include previously unnoticed aspects. Their particular value lies in the greatest possible temporal proximity to past events and in the multitude of simultaneously conveyed, detailed visual impressions that are difficult to capture by other means. The cultural and social scientific information content of photographs as data sources has already been discussed in detail in American “visual anthropology” and “visual sociology”.⁶⁴ Accordingly, a media-specific limit to their informative value lies in the fact that they only represent the visible. Since not all phenomena of the past were visible, they cannot be examined solely on the basis of photographic sources. Accordingly, a media-specific limit to their informative value lies in the fact that they only represent the visible. Since not all phenomena of the past were visible, they cannot be examined solely on the basis of photographic sources. It is also necessary to ask to what extent the largely invisible production conditions of a photograph limited the visibility of certain phenomena or helped to determine the way in which they were made visible. The aesthetic judgment of taste about a person's

⁶³ See Prometheus Newsletter 2008/01, online at URL:

<<http://www.prometheus-bildarchiv.de/index.php?id=384>>, as well as the terms of use at <http://www.prometheus-bildarchiv.de/uploads/media/Nutzungsbedingungen_de_01.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Jon Wagner (ed.), *Images of Information. Still Photography in the Social Sciences*, Beverly Hills 1979; cf. also Arani, *Selbst- und Fremdbilder* (note 17), chapter II.2.

appearance was closely linked to the political value judgment about this person and their right to life. The photographic images of the enemy, which illustrated supposedly “racially” inferior opponents in contrast to models ["Leitbildern"] of the “German national body”⁶⁵, have hardly been researched to date.⁶⁶ However, it can be assumed that this program of images contributed to the escalation of violence against “foreign nationals” ["Fremdvölkische"] and “foreign races”. It was not primarily certain individual images that had a destructive effect, but rather mass-produced images, as “Leitbilder” of the “German” and images of the “foreign” that were disseminated in countless variations.⁶⁷

The effectiveness of photographic images in the communication process cannot be derived from the images themselves, as the decisive prerequisite for their effectiveness is the human production and display of images - as well as the reception behaviour of the people who view these images. In this respect, the photographs disseminated and suppressed by the Nazi regime can be interpreted as a visual and at the same time material objectification of mass communication processes. An overview of the more recent German-language theories of human communication will reveal⁶⁸ that these – like the theories of signs [Zeichentheorien] – were mostly derived from linguistic theorems and offer no explanations for the particularities of visual communication. An important exception is the psychological communication theory of Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson, which was developed on a broad empirical basis based on regular communication disruptions [Kommunikationsstörungen] among

⁶⁵ *Berliner Blätter. Ethnographische und ethnologische Beiträge* 36 (2005): Menschenbild und Volksgesicht. Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus, ed. by Falk Blask and Thomas Friedrich; Ulrich Hägele, Die Visualisierung des “Volkskörpers“. Fotografie und Volkskunde in der NS-Zeit, in: *Fotogesichte* 82 (2001), pp. 5-20; id./Gudrun M. König (eds.), *Völkische Posen, volkskundliche Dokumente. Hans Retzlaffs Fotografien 1930 bis 1945*, Marburg 1999; Ulrich Domröse (ed.), *Leitbilder für Volk und Welt. Nationalsozialismus und Photographie*, Berlin 1995.

⁶⁶ Cf. Paul, *Bilder des Krieges* (Note 16), p. 236f.; Henrick Stahr, *Fotojournalismus zwischen Exotismus und Rassismus. Darstellungen von Schwarzen und Indianern in Foto-Text-Artikeln deutscher Wochenillustrierter 1919-1939*, Hamburg 2004. Zur völkisch-rassistischen Ikonographie im Nationalsozialismus: Arani, *Selbst- und Fremdbilder* (note 17), chapter III.3.

⁶⁷ For an edition of mass images, see Juliane Peters (ed.), *Spott und Hetze. Antisemitische Postkarten 1893–1945*, DVD, Berlin 2008.

⁶⁸ Cf. for example Carsten Winter/Andreas Hepp/Friedrich Krotz (eds.), *Theorien der Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft. Grundlegende Diskussionen, Forschungsfelder und Theorieentwicklungen*, Wiesbaden 2008. In the case of German-language research on visual communication, it is particularly important to ask to what extent it is internationally compatible, as photographic images, unlike national languages, do not require knowledge of the language in question for their reception. The oldest and most influential anti-democratic essay on the significance of images in mass communication is Gustave Le Bon's 'Psychology of the Masses', written at the end of the 19th century; the NSDAP built its image propaganda on this intellectual foundation. Another point of reference could be, for example, the theory of culture and symbols developed by Ernst Cassirer at the beginning of the 20th century.

people.⁶⁹ With the help of this theory, photographs can be understood as messages that appeal to a different human communication modality than language – a modality that is referred to as ‘analogue’ in the terminology of this theory.⁷⁰ Accordingly, analogue communication represents that what is meant through sensually perceptible imitation. It usually takes place unconsciously, but is relevant to action as it defines the relationship between the communication partners. Analogue messages are ambiguous and cannot express negations, causal connections or alternative relationships. However, socially tabooed phenomena that are *no longer* or *not yet* articulated linguistically can be communicated analogously.⁷¹ Of course, the complexity and multi-layered nature of visual messages increases if they are also part of an iconological tradition that goes back further in time and are also embedded in linguistic contexts (to be determined more precisely in each case).

Photographs can therefore communicate something that eludes language or transcends linguistic expression. The historian Sybil Milton had already referred to the gain in knowledge that photographic sources make possible in some cases for which there are no written sources. This possibility of an extended scientific description of the Nazi past is underpinned by recent discoveries of photographic images of anti-Jewish violence in villages and small towns.⁷² The German press photographs shown here from the last years of the Second World War contain visually formulated definitions of interpersonal relationships in the sense of the Nazi regime in several respects, which visually concretise and reinforce what is known from written sources: The man leads and fights, the woman fulfils purely reproductive tasks, all ‘Nordic’ types are good and beautiful, while the non-‘racially pure’ types appear untidy and unclean. The images illustrate National Socialist norms and visually demonise any deviation from them. The focus of the National Socialist image programme was on ‘northern racial’ ["nordrassische"] body types, ‘hard’ fighting men, the rustic

⁶⁹ Paul Watzlawick/Janet Beavin/Don Jackson, *Menschliche Kommunikation. Formen, Störungen, Paradoxien*, Bern 1982.

⁷⁰ Since the fundamental work of Gregory Bateson, Don Jackson and Paul Watzlawick in the 1960s, the term ‘analogue’ has been used in communication and media theory as the opposite of ‘digital’. While the verbal language referred to as ‘digital’ is based on an arbitrary connection of the meaning with abstract signs, the non-verbal communication modality referred to as ‘analogue’ is based on a relationship of similarity between the messages to that what is meant. For the history of the term, see Alexander Roesler/Bernd Stiegler (eds.), *Grundbegriffe der Medientheorie*, Paderborn 2005, pp. 9-16.

⁷¹ Watzlawick/Beavin/Jackson, *Menschliche Kommunikation* (note 69), p. 61ff., p. 98ff., p. 101f.

⁷² Cf. Klaus Hesse/Philipp Springer, *Vor aller Augen. Fotodokumente des nationalsozialistischen Terrors in der Provinz*, Essen 2002; Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft als Selbstermächtigung. Gewalt gegen Juden in der deutschen Provinz 1919 bis 1939*, Hamburg 2007.

and folksy and as many blonde children as possible. With iconographic reference to the Nazi racial ideology, the ‘enemy’ was often visualised as a ‘racial mixture’ ["Rassenmischung"] - in deliberate contrast to the ‘racial unity’ ["Rassereinheit"] of the Germans sought by the Nazi regime.



Left: A variant of the visualisation of the national gender role model ‘German man’: PK photographer Fröhlich, photograph distributed via Atlantic (Berlin), date of issue 7.6.1944. Contemporary caption: ‘The combat helmsman ["der Gefechtsrudergänger"] – has a very important function to perform on the ship. He cannot and must not leave his position during an attack.

If he carries out the commander's orders calmly, safely and quickly, the ship can escape many a bomb and torpedo.’ Archival print, silver gelatine paper, 18 cm x 13 cm, front (privately owned).

right: A variant of the visualisation of the national gender role model ‘German woman’: Unknown photographer on behalf of the National Socialist People's Welfare (NSV) [Nationalsozialistischen Volkswohlfahrt], photo distributed by Weltbild (Berlin), date of issue 18.12.1943. Contemporary caption: [‘Mutterglück – Fränkische Bäuerin mit ihren Zwillingen.]. Mother's happiness - Franconian farmer's wife with her twins. The face of the peasant woman - do we not know it immortalised in wooden portraits and paintings from past centuries and does it not seem to us to prove that this type of Franconian woman will be preserved for all time.’ Archival print, silver gelatine paper, 18 cm x 13 cm, front (privately owned).

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In terms of social and contemporary history, it is significant here that the National Socialist visual programme generated an apparent visual evidence of

the racial doctrine, which, in contrast to the linguistically tangible ideologems and the visual propaganda offences sanctioned by the courts after the end of Nazi rule (use of swastikas, etc.), was still passed on relatively uninterrupted in the visual mass media of the Federal Republic.⁷³ The peculiarity of mass-distributed visual messages and their iconological traditions lies in the fact that they seem to be effective primarily through their omnipresence – while texts primarily affect those who receive them more or less specifically.



American prisoners of war are visualised as a contrast to the National Socialist ideal of 'racial unity' ["Rassereinheit"]: PK photographer Seeger, photograph distributed via Weltbild (Berlin), date of issue 6 March 1944. contemporary caption: 'As prisoners in Rome! Chicago and New York types ["Chikagoer und New Yorker Typen"] in Rome as prisoners of German paratroopers and grenadiers.' Archival print, silver gelatine paper, 13 cm x 18 cm, front (privately owned).

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The fact that the government-controlled press photographs under the Nazi regime only captured the events of the time very selectively is evident, for example, from comparisons with photographs taken independently. It therefore makes sense to use research concepts that look at a large number of photographs by different authors on the same topic or field of events in parallel - for example,

⁷³ It must of course be taken into account that this took place in a democratic state, which allows a far greater pluralism of world views disseminated in word and image than the Nazi dictatorship.

photographs by authors of different nationalities.⁷⁴ The term ‘visual studies’ introduced at the beginning marks a detachment from the aesthetic value judgement that has long guided art history in the selection of its research objects and still does so to a large degree (see chapter 2 above). This detachment is a necessary prerequisite for the academic examination of German press photographs from the period of the Nazi dictatorship in order to gain distance from the aestheticisation of the National Socialist world view in the government-controlled image programme of the Nazi dictatorship. All photographs – not just the artistic ones – are a legitimate object of research. Not all photographic sources from the period of the Nazi dictatorship were controlled and directed by the propaganda apparatus. The statement by archivist Axel Metz that they depict phenomena that are not reflected in the official written sources certainly applies to all the surviving photographs.⁷⁵ Photographs show in detail the concrete socio-cultural living conditions of people; they record material manifestations of the social and cultural order in a particular space and also enable a generalised examination of a social order, as this is partially manifested visibly.⁷⁶ Photographs can be used to analyse the body language messages of individual people (kinetics) as well as the relationships between people and things within a space and the cultural significance of their spatial positioning (proxemics).⁷⁷ In this respect, photographs open up various possibilities for gaining social and cultural-historical knowledge. The examination of photographic sources from the period of the Nazi dictatorship also opens up the opportunity to triangulate the knowledge gained from the written tradition in a sociological sense, i.e. to specify the scope of these statements in comparison to knowledge from other data sources – including photographs.⁷⁸ While files describe a human population primarily from the perspective of its administration, photographs of different originator groups [Urhebergruppen] on the same subject allow multi-perspectival insights into socio-cultural microcosms under the Nazi regime. However, this diversity of

⁷⁴ Margot Blank (ed.), *Beutestücke. Kriegsgefangene in der deutschen und sowjetischen Fotografie 1941-1945*, Berlin 2003; Andrzej Rybicki (ed.), *Przełamywać bariery - budować mosty. Wojna na fotografiach polskiego i niemieckiego żołnierza [Breaking barriers - building bridges. The war in photographs of Polish and German soldiers]*, Krakow 2004; Arbaizar/Arnhold, *1945 - im Blick der Fotografie* (note 28).

⁷⁵ Metz, *Nicht jedes Bild* (note 37), p. 21.

⁷⁶ The visible expressions of a social order include, for example, the furnishings and condition of individual people's clothing and living space, meeting places, public leisure facilities, trading centres, workshops and industrial plants.

⁷⁷ Cf. Wagner, *Images of Information* (note 64); Ernö Kunt, *Fotografie und Kulturforschung*, in: *Fotogeschichte* 21 (1986), pp. 13-31.

⁷⁸ Cf. Wagner, *Images of Information* (note 64), p. 150; Arani, *Selbst- und Fremdbilder* (note 17), pp. 106f.

perspectives on the field of events can only be opened up if the currently digitally underrepresented, non-professional and oppositional image production is included to a greater extent.

Since images – according to the view expressed here – appeal to a different communication modality than language, this should be taken into account theoretically and methodologically when researching them. It is also important to determine the similarities and differences between photographs and other visual sources more precisely. This field of research can only be tackled on an interdisciplinary basis, as the individual disciplines cannot provide viable answers to the many questions that arise with regard to photographs from the Nazi era. In the context of interdisciplinary visual studies, a new formulation of epistemological interests could be undertaken that would do greater justice to the changed conditions of visual communication of entire societies since industrialisation than the previous approaches of art history and art studies. When examining photographic sources from the Nazi era, it makes sense to understand the case studies on photographs and photographers that are now increasingly appearing in art history and history studies from a more comprehensive sociological conceptual perspective, the starting points of which could of course only be roughly outlined here. At the same time, the art-scientific standards of object description and iconographic-iconological interpretation methods are undeniably useful for other disciplines that do not have a tried and tested set of tools for reconstructing the contexts of origin and meaning of images. Finally, a closer connection between research-related and archival-practical competences would also be desirable, as more complex research is largely dependent on adequate forms of indexing in the archives.

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About the author

Miriam Yegane Arani did her doctorate at the UDK in Berlin under the supervision of the photo historian Prof. Diethart Kerbs. Her work focuses on the survey and analysis of photo-historical materials from the NS period. Her dissertation dealt with the Reichsgau Wartheland, where the Nazis implemented “exemplary” oppressive measures against the native Polish population. Similar methods were soon to be used in the old Reich territories in an increased dimension against the antagonized parts of the German, especially the German Jewish population. In the “Reichsgau Wartheland”, a German administrative unit newly formed from previously Polish territories after the military occupation, the Nazi regime realized its population and settlement policy plans for Eastern Europe in an exemplary manner.

Tierautonomie

Publisher: www.simorgh.de – ‘Society, conflict and the anthropogenic dilemma’. Revised 12/2024. This reader is published in context with the memorial fund dedicated to Miriam’s work by the Edition Farangis.

Citation

Y. Arani, Miriam (2024): Photo-historical research on the National Socialist dictatorship as an interdisciplinary visual science. *TIERAUTONOMIE*, 9 (2), http://simorgh.de/tierautonomie/JG10_2024_7.pdf.

TIERAUTONOMIE (ISSN 2363-6513)

Impressum

Edition Farangis
Untergasse 7 / Marstallweg 8
61250 Usingen / Taunus
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www.farangis.de

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Erscheinungsdatum: Dezember 2024
Kontakt Daten: www.farangis.de
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