

Project meeting and exhibition at the Westerbork Memorial Center
15-17 October 2017

Participants in the three day workshop: University of Amsterdam (prof. dr. Rob van der Laarse, dr. Zuzanna Dziuban, dr. Andriana Bencic, Phd candidate Dana Dolghin, phd candidate), Norwegian Institute of Technology (prof. dr. Marek Jasinski, dr. Gunnar Hatlehof), Staffordshire University (Assoc. prof. Dr. Caroline Sturdy Colls, arh. Kevin Colls, Phd candidate. Will Mitchell, PhD candidate Czelsie Weston, PhD candidate Janos Kerti, Phd candidate Esme Hookway), University of West Bohemia (prof.dr. Pavel Vareka, Dr. Zdeňka Vařeková) Freie Universität Berlin (dr. Cord Pagenstecher, dr. Verena Buser) Universitat Pompeu Fabra (prof.dr. Paul Verschure, mr. Sytse Wierenga), Memorial Kamp Westerbork (Bas Korholt), Gedenkstätte Bergen Belsen (Stephanie Billib), Marie (Memory of Nations)

In October 2017, the ICACCESS team met in Westerbork for the second time on the premises of the Camp Westerbork Memorial in Drenthe, for research updates and site visits. Since the first meeting in 2016, the memorial site itself has introduced some new elements to the visit and to the interaction it proposes to its visitor which have met the purposes of the ICACCESS. The tour now includes a weekly presentation of the Moluccan history of the camp and also includes several previously not public accessible areas of the camp which allow the visitor to understand more of the regime of detention and the hierarchy of the camp (guarding system, the OD in the camp), the diverse political associations within the community of inmates (part of the organized resistance, which also facilitated some cases of escapes from the camp, some on the contrary tried their chances inside the camp, by being part of its organization). Also given the purpose of ICACCESS, the Memorial took the opportunity to interpret these traces in the context of the memorial dynamics of the camp, and convey some of the changing framings of its history since the liberation of the camp. A new brochure on this new materiality in the camp, which traces these changes from refugee camp, to concentration and transfer camp, to accommodation facility and memorial grounds in the 1970s) was edited by the memorial. The publication was meant to bring to the public several aspect



s concerning the spatiality of the camp, both as historical resource and framing of memorial narratives.

In line with this perspective, the ICACCESS consortium decided in early 2016 to have a public event in Westerbork where it could engage with the public and make research findings and memorial perspectives available for the larger public. Several members of the team and staff of the Westerbork memorial contributed to a VR rendition of the 1944 perimeter of the camp, meant as a spatial and narrative approach to memorialization. Based on the developments of the UPF SPECS research group, which has grounded its approach in fundamental research in psychology, neuroscience in augmented and virtual reality, the installation continued the approach the group has developed and deployed in the conservation and presentation of the history of the Holocaust and Nazi crimes. The Active Learning in Digitally Enhanced Spaces (ALDES) combines digital visualisations of spatial reconstructions with historical sources. By augmenting the virtually reconstructed space with historical information, source material is put back in its historical, and mobilizes the dynamics of memory.

For this particular event, SPECS has adapted the meticulous digital reconstruction developed by Jaap Kooistra for the memorial center between 2013-2015, which has been now presented to the public for the first time. As the exhibition also marked the commemoration of the last transport of inmates from Westerbork to Bergen Belsen, the installation unfolded as a parallel of the two virtual environments, between which the public could navigate freely. Although the presentations were conceptualized differently (Westerbork through a

model aiming for an experiential iteration of the camp, Bergen Belsen visually conveying the historical debates concerning the uncertainty of the precise structure of the camp following its dismantling in the immediate aftermath of liberation) their integration represented a new way of looking at the intersection between personal memory and collective framings of memory. The visual approach is in itself a testament to a wider debate concerning the appropriate way of conveying “difficult heritage” and the turn towards experience based display in the gradual absence of direct witnesses. There is a noticeable difference between these two approaches: the gradual lack of direct witnesses of these camps increasingly change the ethics and expectations placed on memorial sites and museums, which have been built in the last 50 years to suggest a memory centered on the very absence of these victims. At the same time, the choice to center the narrative on the victim rather than historical context, which has been long scrutinized by scholarship, is increasingly asking for changes in approaches on the site and the installation has been a trial intervention which the project proposed.

The addition to the previous ways of storytelling has been the narrative perspective, where the UvA team has pointed to several themes regarding memory dynamics (child icons, (in)visibility of perpetratorship etc.) that transverse the perspectives on the two sites. The aim of the approach was to show not only the similarities in processes of memory, but also the dependence of these frames of representation of memory to the social and political dynamics which have followed the end of the war (Cold War, post-war reconstruction, the fall of the Berlin wall).

The workshop has further explored these questions on site, in relation to the specific history of Westerbork and the Dutch processes of memorialization after the war. The fact that by 1951 the fact has become a temporary accommodation for the Moluccan community, who r. places the site at the intersection of the (post)colonial perspective of the Dutch state, worldwide discourses on anti-fascism and the gradual emergence of the Holocaust paradigm in memory politics. The context of the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949) and the intervention of the Netherlands marked a particularly sensitive political action in the immediate post-war international context, and also polarized the context in the metropolis, given the different perspectives on the colonial state coming from the left spectrum of political life and the more conservative representatives of the imperial architecture. The arrival of the former local members of KNIL (the community from the Islands of the Moluccas has been a constant and loyal contingent to the Dutch during the events) in Westerbork prompted not only an occasion to leave the past behind on the site but also triggered ripples in the Dutch context as a whole, in particularly concerning the status and politics of immigration. Accepting the groups from outside the Netherlands occurred while much of the Dutch population was encouraged to emigrate due to post-war shortages and stifling economy. The enduring status of foreigner was coupled with the Moluccan’s community own expectations to the Dutch government of supporting the project of an independent republic in the islands, which slowly unraveled in the 1960s and the 1970s. By the 1970s, the rift was so large that the train hijacking planned by Moluccan youth to signal

their own discontent became a central piece of a traumatic perspective on the integration narrative. These dynamics were also disputed on the Westerbork site, which by 1971, when it became a national monument and memorial for the Jewish victims, did in fact dislodge the Moluccan history of the site. The internal politics on the Moluccan context was in fact mirrored by the site, as the memorial came to be central to the story of the Jewish community in the Netherlands, at a time when the memory of the Second World War was being reconsidered through the transnational Holocaust discourse in memory.

Similarly to the approach of this exhibition have been the attempts to use materiality and archaeology in order to open the memorial perspectives at Westerbork. Heidelager, a nearby outpost around Westerbork, has been used by the camp police, part of its members of the Dutch Marechaussee. The normal police collaborated and contributed to the isolation of the camp from the rest of the perimeter. The guards in the camp, the Jewish OD, were also joined by the marechaussee (Dutch police), from 35 people in 1942 to 60 in 1944. At first they were brought in Westerbork itself, moved later to Heidelager. The premises of this space might have also been used for labour battalions that built much of the infrastructure during the 1930s, as part of the labour programs coordinated to fight unemployment. A further exploration and presentation of Heidelager is a focus for both the memorial and the project, as it embodies the main focus of the project in Westerbork, the visibility of perpetratorship and heritage that is associated to perpetrators, rather than victims.

This perspective is crucial in the context of Westerbork, where its most iconic material remnant is the house used by the commanders of the camp (Erich Deppner, Albert Konrad Gemmeker), also used as central building for the refugee camp and after the war used for the Moluccan community.

To this end, the project has also taken the first steps for a visualization of the central “iconic” element of the camp, the Commander’s house, to overlap and represent the different layers of usage and changing meanings of perpetratorship over time. Point cloud data was generated by Scanlab, to use as an entry point to the visualization of memory dynamics for the platform and for future displays in the Memorial itself.

For more information:

<http://www.futurememoryfoundation.org>; email: info@futurememoryfoundation.org

<http://www.belsen-project.specs-lab.com/the-tablet-application/>

<http://www.campscapes.org>

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