



“VWI invites Anton Holzer”

Wednesday, 2 December 2020, 3.00 pm

Please use this link to join the event (online only):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81524562409?pwd=SW44QzVERXp6Ri9HM1ZybVJmMTg2QT09>

Lukas MEISSEL

THE PERPETRATORS’ GAZE

SS PHOTOGRAPHY AT CONCENTRATION CAMPS



This lecture presents new research on photographic practices in Nazi concentration camps, specifically photographs taken by SS men from the *Erkennungsdienste* (identification departments) from their foundation in 1936 through to 1945. The term *Erkennungsdienste* refers to police institutions that had existed since the nineteenth century. In the concentration camps, these departments were responsible for the production of photographs for the camp administrations, higher SS institutions, and SS members. The images produced there include portraits of deportees, photos of prisoners conducting forced labour,

construction sites and buildings in the camps, corpses of murdered inmates, events such as ceremonies or visits by delegations and Nazi officials, as well as private photographs of SS personnel.

The aim of the presentation is to investigate not only what these pictures show, but to interpret them as visual perpetrator narratives of the concentration camps. The photographs highlight how the camps were supposed to work according to the SS, therefore they represent an idealised reality that never actually existed. Accordingly, they should not be interpreted as authentic visualisations of the camps, but as an expression of the ideological and practical aspirations of the perpetrators which are seldom preserved in other types of sources beyond images. A central argument of the presentation is that the photos played a decisive role in legitimising the camps within the SS and at certain points beyond the inner circle of perpetrators.

Commented by Anton Holzer

Lukas Meissel is a Junior Fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies and a PhD candidate in Holocaust Studies at the University of Haifa. His doctoral project analyses photographs taken by SS men at concentration camps. Prior to his studies in Israel, he worked as a historian for the Jewish community of Vienna and served as deputy chairperson for GEDENKDIENST, a Vienna-based NGO dealing with Holocaust education. He has also worked on projects on behalf of Yad Vashem and since 2008 has guided numerous study trips. Meissel has received fellowships in Israel, the USA, Germany, and Austria and has published on visual history, Holocaust studies/education, and antisemitism.

Anton Holzer is a photo historian, curator, and journalist. Since 2001, he is the editor of the journal *Fotogeschichte. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie*. He studied history, political sciences, and philosophy in Innsbruck, Bologna, and Vienna, receiving his PhD from Vienna University. He has conducted research projects and published on the history of war photography, photojournalism, exile, and photography. For an overview, see: <http://www.anton-holzer.at/>

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