
photo: Sára Dobrovodská

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Holocaust Reminiscenses in Digital Media Culture and Cultural Institutions (Development of Critical Thinking and Media Literacy)

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ABSTRACT

The authors of the article analyse the problem of individual and collective memory through the prism of The Holocaust reminiscence. They are aware that we are living in a time when living memories of the grave crimes and catastrophes of the 20th century are fading away, as well as the complex political, social and cultural processes, taking place at present, are becoming intensified in the context of the War in Ukraine. These events and processes once again highlight the social importance of individual and collective memory and the need for its conscious formation through media and intercultural education. The aim of the authors' endeavour is to explore four forms of The Holocaust reminiscence, : 1/ reminiscence in the form of reconstruction (authentic representation of the past); 2/ reminiscence as (re)interpretation (remembrance that refers to the past but is interpreted in the context of current findings); 3/ reminiscence as prevention and civic engagement (education and educational programmes that promote tolerance and moral qualities); 4/ reminiscence as a tool for cultural identity formation (forming collective identities and promoting social inclusion). The study will include interpretations of selected works from the field of performing arts and case studies from media culture. Attention will also be focused on particular proposals for media-educational and cultural-pedagogical activities which can be used in cultural institutions and in media education in order to develop media literacy and critical thinking.

KEY WORDS

Collective Memory. Critical Thinking. Cultural Institution. Holocaust. Media Literacy. Reminiscence.

1 Introduction

The study of individual and collective memory relates to the problem of storing and transmitting memories, their interpretation and reinterpretation as well as the process of forgetting and re-reminiscence. However, a key function of memory is not only the collection of information, but also its selection and deletion. The French philosopher H. Bergson expressed the belief, that the task of the brain is not to collect memories, but to select among them the ones that are important.[1] In his understanding, the brain has become a tool of selection, which serves to recall useful memories on the one hand and at the same time to temporarily remove others. A similar position was presented by the English biologist and philosopher R. Sheldrake, who developed the theory of the morphogenetic field.[2] Memory is that which permeates the brain. The brain then acts as a "decoder" for the information contained in that the field. Sheldrake's perspective on memory and remembrance points toward the interconnectedness of the individual and group memory, as well as its interpretive meaning and the function of the socio-cultural context. We can talk about the important social and cultural functions that remembrance fulfils. Collective remembrance and the act of remembering is a necessary condition for the formation of a cultural continuity, social integration and the formation of individual and collective identities. It is important for any society that its members remember important events from their shared past and at the same time understand their own past (causally and contextually). These two phenomena create an important prerequisite so that critical past moments do not repeat themselves.

The memories of some events persist, others gradually fade away. The process of forgetting is explained using various concepts, for example: the theory of purposeful forgetting (unnecessary, inaccurate and erroneous information is removed); the theory of repression (traumatic experiences are repressed); by the extinction theory (if memory traces are not renewed and activated, they weaken, fade); by the theory of interference (different information stored in the memory can interact with each other in the process of memorization with a disturbing, negative effect) among others. Memory thus becomes the interaction of two polar opposites – "preserving" and "erasing" memories.[3] Interpretation thus becomes an important tool of remembrance, which determines the actual remembering, creating a social framework of values for it.

The process of forgetting is also explained by the French philosopher and sociologist M. Halbwachs via his theory of social frameworks. If the subject remembers what was reconstructed as the past in a certain frame, and therefore in a certain present, then they forget that which is not framed in this manner in this particular idea of a present. Forgetting is related to change, or the disappearance of the relevant framework.[4]

When examining reminiscences of the Holocaust in media culture, theatre art and cultural institutions, we base our research on the theory of the "culture of remembrance" developed by the German Egyptologist and religionist J. Assmann.[5] The term "culture of remembrance" (or culture of memories) is used together with the term of combination memory culture. The term has been in use since the 1980s and is associated with a growing interest in reflecting on historical events and exploring archives, as well as anything that had its own historical story or referred to such a story. Several authors connected (and currently connect) the culture of remembrance with the horrors and victims of Nazism.

1 BERGSON, H.: *Hmota a paměť: Esej o vztahu těla k duchu*. Prague : OIKOYMENH, 2003, p. 132.
2 See: SHELDRAKE, R.: Mind, Memory, and Archetype: Morphic and Collective Unconsicous. In *Psychological Perspectives*, 1987, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 9-25.
3 STERNBERG, R. J.: *Kognitivní psychologie*. Prague : Portal, 2002, p. 226-228.
4 See: HALBWACHS, M.: *Kolektivní paměť*. Prague : Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2009.
5 See: ASSMANN, J.: *Kultura a paměť: Písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*. Prague : Prostor, 2001.

The culture of remembrance refers to a group of people as well as to an entire community. It answers the question: what or what events we must not forget as a society (group, nation, etc.), because they form our collective memory and thus affect our present and future. The culture of remembrance is related to the memory, on which the society relies as a universal phenomenon forming the identity of every nation.[6]

1.1 Communicative, Cultural and Political Memory

Several authors (N. Maslowski, J. *Šubrt*, Š. Lehman, Z. Kubišová and others) divide collective memory into communicative memory, cultural memory and political memory. For all types of collective memory (and for individual memory as well) there is a common dynamic of remembering and forgetting.[7] The process of forgetting has both an active and a passive form. Active forgetting is the deliberate suppression and destruction of memories of the past. The tools of active forgetting are censorship, declaration of taboos as well as considering past events worthless. Conversely, passive forgetting does not take the form of active destruction. *"It is the indifferent neglect of things and phenomena that are deemed as uninteresting, unworthy of special interest/special attention."*[8] As a result of artefacts, information, memories, etc. not receiving enough attention, they gradually diminish, wither and disappear.

Each person simultaneously participates in different types of collective memory. Most of us participate in the communicative and cultural memory,[9] and, if we are part of a certain political community, we also participate in political memory. It is interesting that the same select phenomena, persons or events can be the elements of all types of collective memory at once. The collective memory is not an immutable and fixed entity – it includes assumptions that cause changes, innovations, transformations and reconfigurations.[10]

1.2 The Selected Cultural Representations of the Holocaust

A deep link exists between collective memory and education, as education resembles a tool and process of forming and maintaining collective memory. Our memory is socially-constructed[11] and must be "socially trained". Especially the memory of the members of the society who were not eye-witnesses to what later became socially commemorated. Commemoration plays an important role in forming individual and collective cultural identities.

Reflection of the Holocaust has become a part of formal and informal education in schools, museums, galleries, cultural centres, and organisations all over the world. It has a far-reaching and persisting legitimacy, reaching far beyond the historical conflicting parties, the victims and perpetrators, the righteous, and collaborators. It reaches out to the question of differentiating between good and evil, of respect for others and diversity, of human dignity, humanity and morality. It incorporates the most crucial ontological and axiological issues and concerns.

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6 See: ASSMANN, J.: *Kultura a paměť: Písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku*. Prague : Prostor, 2001, p. 32.

7 KUBIŠOVÁ, Z.: Kolektivní pamäť a národní identita. In MASLOWSKI, N., ŠUBRT, J. (eds.): *Kolektivní paměť: k teoretickým otázkám*. Prague : Univerzita Karlova, 2014, p. 83.

8 Ibidem, p. 84.

9 See more: BALLAY, M.: Kultúrna pamäť v súčasnom divadle. In MIŠOVIC, K. (eds.): *Témy na okraji záujmu? Zborník vedeckých príspevkov z teatrologického sympózia*. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2021, p. 10-13.

10 KUBIŠOVÁ, Z.: Kolektivní pamäť a národní identita. In MASLOWSKI, N., ŠUBRT, J. (eds.): *Kolektivní paměť: k teoretickým otázkám*. Prague : Univerzita Karlova, 2014, p. 85.

11 See: HALBWACHS, M.: *Kolektivní paměť*. Praha : Sociologické nakladatelství SLON, 2009.

D. Lustig explains that *"Holocaust survival is irreducible to an existential condition. From this vantage point, holocaust survivors do not merely live: they live to tell."*[12] R. Klüger, a Holocaust survivor and writer of *Still alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* posits the idea that *"the dead set us certain tasks"*.[13] The task having been set is that of telling and sharing the individual and collective stories. The other side of the coin is the task to listen, comprehend, commemorate and prevent. The reverse of that is the task for the listener (the rest of the world, the present and future generations). In this way, we come to understanding a great importance of reminiscence of the Holocaust. It aims not only to commemorate, but also to bring knowledge, form one's character and develop one's critical thinking. N. Noddings points to the importance of forming one's moral qualities within education.[14] Cultural infrastructure and cultural educational programmes play an irreplaceable role in this process. Cultural institutions meet numerous social and cultural functions and roles: educational, socialising, axiological, ideological, moral, identification and integrational. They are the centres of lifelong informal education, as well as places of democratisation[15] and social inclusion.[16]

There are numerous museums and cultural centres specialising in scientific documentation and education on the Holocaust.[17] The Holocaust documentation and representation must be addressed in a relevant and responsible way, taking into consideration both the respect for the perished and those who survived, and the moral lesson implied in such education. The Holocaust education within schools and cultural institutions takes on the forms of moral education, critical thinking and media literacy education and caring education. The phenomenon of the Holocaust is very complex and cannot be reduced to enumerating certain historical facts and events. We are living in a time where both historical and present facts (unfortunately, including facts dealing with the Holocaust) are being misinterpreted and manipulated. Therefore, there must be correct and adequate interpretation, contextualisation, and discussion over the matter. Students ought to be given the chance to understand deeper, to use critical thinking and develop their social and emotional skills.[18]

There are various forms of reminiscence of The Holocaust applied by cultural institutions. The most influential is reminiscence as reconstruction. This is often connected with museums, authentic Holocaust sites, research centres, cultural centres and civic organisations focused on documenting and reflecting the Holocaust. These institutions provide visitors with exhibitions, displaying original artifacts (newspaper extracts, photographs, personal property of the victims), detailed information on Nazi propaganda, Anti-Jewish laws and measures, concentration camps and death camps, individual and collective stories of the perished and those who survived. The institutions employ specialists, do their own research and publish scientific materials. They present their findings by means of public lectures. Other forms of reminiscence of the

[12] LUSTIG, D.: The Task of the Survivor in Ruth Klüger's «weiter leben» (1992) and «Still Alive» (2001). In *Studia Austriaca*, 2013, Vol. 21, p. 32.

[13] Ibidem, p. 32.

[14] NODDINGS, N.: *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education*. New York : Teachers College Press, 2002, p. 85.

[15] QUEMIN, A.: The Sociology of Art. In KORGEN, K. O. (ed.): *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 295. [online]. [2023-01-20]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316418369.031>.

[16] EARLE, W.: Cultural Education: Redefining the Role of Museums in the 21st Century. In *Sociology Compass*, 2013, Vol. 7, No. 7, p. 536.

[17] Authors' note: e.g. Yad Vashem (The World Holocaust Remembrance Center), Anne Frank House (The Netherlands), Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum (Poland), The Wiener Holocaust Library (The United Kingdom) etc.

[18] Authors' note: The need for critical thinking and media literacy is not crucial solely for understanding the present and future of our societies. It is equally important when looking to the past. First, the Holocaust appeared as a part of certain ideology, later transformed into massive propaganda which penetrated the minds and souls of the millions in Nazi Germany. The increase in far-right tendencies and parties in Europe over the last decades (including Slovakia) is a major red flag.

Holocaust within cultural infrastructure take on the form of reminiscence as prevention and civic engagement; and reminiscence as a tool for creating cultural identity. These two forms intertwine and imply an active approach. They are focused on the youth, as well as the general public. Cultural institutions prepare discussions, lectures, conferences and various media formats on the Holocaust. Some may also organise a public commemoration in the form of procession. The last form of reminiscence used in cultural institutions is reminiscence as (re)interpretations, represented by literary, visual, music, film, performative and other forms of (re)interpretation.

An example of all four types of reminiscence carried out within an institution can be found in The Museum of The Holocaust in Sereď, in the south-western part of Slovakia.[19] The museum is located in an authentic place – a former concentration camp with specific genius loci. The exhibition provides lots of data for visitors to grasp the topic within five authentic barracks and a cattle wagon used for transportation of the prisoners. Beside it, the museum offers educational programmes (mainly for schools) in the form of lectures with rich audio-visual materials. The educational programmes are based on interaction with the young visitors, discussions, developing critical thinking, media literacy, social and emotional skills. The researchers and educators map actual tendencies in Slovak society and reflect on them. They explain to pupils and students how the Holocaust is misinterpreted by groups of people inclining to the far-right political positions. It is explained to them how certain lies and hoaxes came to being during the pandemic of COVID-19 in relation to the Holocaust. They also make use of the method of oral history, cooperating with Holocaust survivors and with secondary materials based on interviews with them. According to S. Ledoux the methods of authentic historical sites and oral history are two key elements of collective memory education.[20]

These examples illustrate two other forms of reminiscence carried out in The Museum of the Holocaust in Sereď – the reminiscence as prevention and civic engagement; and reminiscence as a tool for creating cultural identity. Orientation towards prevention and civic engagement is realised with the focus on democracy, human and civic rights. Cultural identity formation is based on forming one's cultural values and social references. All three forms of reminiscence on the Holocaust accent and incorporate critical thinking and media literacy education as key cognitive and reflective instruments of a thinking subject. Recently, the museum has prepared an exhibition of children's works of art depicting and reflecting war, entitled *"We, todays' children, on war times"*, carried out in cooperation with the Ester association and The Israeli Embassy in Slovakia. The exhibition is located in the fifth barrack, where Slovak children and youngsters of different age groups present their understanding of war time and the Holocaust. It resembles reminiscence of the Holocaust as a (re)interpretation.[21]

After the turn of the millennium the Slovak theatrical environment began thematizing historical events, specifically the years of the Second World War and the period of the first Slovak Republic (Wartime Slovak State 1939 – 1945). The productions mostly depicted individual historical figures, but also ordinary people affected by the war. These were primarily productions of documentary plays and attempts at staging political drama (Anna Grusková – *The Rabbi*; Viliam Klimáček – *Dr. Gustáv Husák; Sláva Daubnerová: M.H.L.* and *Michal Ditte Terra Granus*, the core of which depicts the period after the Second World War and the repatriation of the population, etc.). This also includes the production Tiso (2005). A greater occurrence of productions with the theme of the Holocaust and the Second World War appeared on theatre stages in 2012, when Slovak society

[19] Authors' note: The Museum of The Holocaust in Sereď belongs to the museum of The Jewish Culture of The Slovak National Museum.

[20] LEDOUX, S.: *The Pedagogy of Collective Memory*. [online]. [2023-01-25]. Available at: <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/education-teaching-and-professional-training/pedagogy-and-pedagogist-in-europe-xixth-xxth/pedagogy-collective-memory-in-europe>.

[21] *My deti dneška o časoch vojny*. [online]. [2023-02-02] Available at: <https://www.snm.sk/muzea-snm/muzeum-zidovskej-kultury/muzeum-holokaustu-v-seredi/navstivte/vystavy?clanok=my-deti-dneska-o-casoch-vojny#menu>.

commemorated the seventieth anniversary of the transport of Jews from the Slovak Republic to extermination camps, and in 2014, the seventieth anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising.

The aim of the following text is to examine the manifestation of reminiscence as an interpretation and (re)interpretation via the prism of the production of the Pôtoň Theater and Horácky Theater in Jihlava titled *Swing Heil*. The reminiscence refers to the artistic depiction of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime, while the director – dramaturgist tandem works with authentic elements, such as: historical figures and their life stories, an excerpt from a chronicle, photographs, etc. At the same time, the educational dimension of the work is applied here in reference to the reminiscence as a way of prevention and civic engagement, or by reflecting on the topic and its artistic processing, the theatre positively demonstrates the civic position of the viewer, all the while supporting democracy and respect for human and civil rights. Slovak theatre and cultural expert Miroslav Ballay claims, that: *"Since theatre is, at the bare minimum, a means of communication, it always reflects the times in a certain way. As a rule, it is said that the creators present a specific reality, its colour, or depict individual historical and cultural contexts of a certain historical epoch."*[22]

Swing Heil represents and vividly reflects not only our history, but also the present and the most extreme forms it takes. The co-authors of the libretto, I. Ditte Jurčová and M. Ditte, worked with fragments of two authentic stories from the period of World War II, through which they pointed to the absurdity of the time.[23] The first is a reflection on the life of the dancer, costume designer and choreographer Nina Jirsíková, whose work acquired a significant social dimension during the occupation period. Her libretto *A Fairytale of Dance – About a Kingdom*, in which dancing was forbidden, anticipated the ban on dancing in Bohemia in 1941 and was the reason why Nina Jirsíková ended up in the Ravensbrük concentration camp.[24] The second authentic story retells the life of the Austrian resistance activist Anna Goldsteiner, who lived in the Austrian town of Pulkau. Anna did not sympathize with the idea of the incorporation of Austria under the auspices of Nazi Germany, which occurred in 1938. She was executed in the end.

At one point, the performer Tom Rychetský appears on stage, personifying the world of free movement, a reference to subtle creative power. Paradoxically, he meets a different man, a sympathizer of Nazism, portrayed by Filip Jekkel. As a dance teacher, Rychetský is not subject to prejudices against the young man. A situation in which a subtle creative energy (Rychetský) is opposed to a brute destructive force (Jekkel) shows signs of comedy for a certain moment, but they quickly disappear. The moment from which a clearly legible sign referring to Nazism originates when the figure of F. Jekkel does not repeat the same movement of the teacher, but demonstratively remains standing gesturing "Heil Hitler". Here, too, the purposeful directorial work of Ditte-Jurčová is evident, who does not create a cliché-like over-the-top theme of a kind of mandatory prevention of World War II themes, but subjects it to the comedy treatment when the dance teacher reacts to a "Nazi" gesture by exclaiming and clapping his hand "High-five".

The educational dimension can take shape precisely at the level of not identifying oneself with the figure of F. Jekkel, being a wholesale reference to Nazism. It is possible to observe a certain level contradiction in it, which can serve as a message to a person, a teenager perhaps, who is looking for the right values and anchoring in society.

An interesting moment in education is the scene in which the character of "Nazi" brings the character of the dancer Nina Jirsíková (Denisa Musilová) to the stage. Nina is locked in a cage like a wild animal with a dog's head. "Nazi" tries to train "that dog", but the "dog" does not listen to his words. The viewer can decode the scene taking place in the concentration

[22] BALLAY, M.: Divadelná inscenácia ako svedectvo doby (?). In MAŤAŠÍK, A. (ed.): *Divadlo ako dokument doby*. Banská Bystrica : Akadémia umení, 2014, p. 61-67. [online]. [2023-03-01]. Available at: <https://www.poton.sk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Divadlo-ako-dokument-doby-Konferencia-BB.pdf>.

[23] HUDECOVÁ, I.: Divadlo ako komunikačný kanál medzi spoločnosťou a kultúrou. In KNOPOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Divadlo a rozhrania*. Banská Bystrica : Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica, 2022, p. 394.

[24] Ibidem, p. 395.

camp. The character of "Nazi" lets the dancer Nina out of the cage for a supposed "freedom". A tired artist tries to dance, but her tired body seems to have forgotten the movement that used to be natural to her. The dancer with her unruly body is helped by the Teacher, who with gentle movements creates on the stage an intimate moment of absolute sensitivity of which the body is capable. This scene is complemented by cosmic, even intrinsically permeating music, creating associations with the earth, or something otherworldly.

Education can take place at the level of self-identification with the character, when the viewer can see either themself or a friend let's say, in the stories, which inspires them to think more deeply about problems. That theatrical education opens up avenues for own analyses, investigations that motivate the individual to increase self-development, creativity and subsequent success. At the end the audience hears a recording of the voice of the real N. Jirsíková. The production is enriched with educational materials dispersed around the stage. The viewer can enter it, interact intimately with the world of props, referencing national and global history. Specifically, they have the possibility to analyze the so-called "wall of meanings", on which authentic texts, photographs, poems by W. Whitman, or costumes such as flirtatious "cocktails" or pumps are on display. In this way, theatre develops a person's research skills, thanks to which they can gain and deepen knowledge or learn to think in context.

1.3 Representations of the Holocaust in Media and on Social Networks (the Holocaust in the Context of "Selfie" Culture and Dark Tourism)

Phenomena such as belittling the effects of the Holocaust, its deliberate misinterpretation or general human indifference, which we brought to light in the part of the study devoted to communicative, cultural and political memory, are all exemplified in an area, which is getting more attention recently, so-called dark tourism.[25] This type of tourism calls forth all manner of associations, from fascination through a will to participate, to fear, outrage and criticism. In addition to anesthetizing death, inducing shock or leeching onto human suffering, it is characterized by (in)voluntarily internalized resistance to the sensitive thematization of death and suffering, precisely via a crass pornographicization and commercialization, not only in the media.

Within intentions of critical reflection, it is a controversial phenomenon that is subject to the laws of the market economy, as it runs on profit, but at the expense of piety, morality and human dignity. Nowadays, even death and suffering have become objects of fun and commodification. In the professional discourse (but also in the public's consciousness) resonate mainly the extremely negative expressions and booming tourism associated with the events of the Holocaust, wherein visitors pose in concentration camps and subsequently publish the so-called "selfie" photos on social media, primarily for self-presentation, relentlessly seeking so-called "likes" and "followers". In such a context, the search for locations associated with the interests of dark tourism can relate to the principle of tourist self-realization in the sense of social prestige and legitimization of a person's social position. The Auschwitz Museum responded to the selfie (non)culture on *Twitter* by asking visitors to stop posing on the rails leading to the former extermination camp Auschwitz-Brezinok.[26]

[25] Authors' note: The term "dark tourism" is defined, in its broadest sense, as visiting places associated with death, suffering and macabre themes. In a narrower sense, it is the transformation of burial grounds, cemeteries, shrines and monuments, locations marked by tragedies, brutal crimes, natural disasters into tourist locations – attractions. British tourism management experts Malcolm Foley and John Lennon were the first to draw attention to the growth of dark tourism in 1996 and later with the publication of the book *Dark Tourism – The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. See more: LENNON, J., FOLEY, M.: *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. London : Continuum, 2000.

[26] @AuschwitzMuseum*: When you come to @AuschwitzMuseum remember you are the site where over 1 million people were killed. Respect their memory. There are better places to learn how to walk on a balance beam than the site which symbolizes deportation of hundreds of thousands to their deaths.* [Twitter post]. [online]. [2023-03-31]. Available at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108337507660451841>.

The (non)culture of selfies can also be seen in the project of the German-Israeli writer and satirist Shakah Spahira living in Berlin, with the apt name "Yolocaust" (founded in 2017). The author combined twelve selfie photos from social networks taken at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin with images from concentration camps and then published them on a website. After clicking on the selfie photo, the background did not show the backdrop of the memorial, but scenes from the concentration camps, where these young people were suddenly surrounded by emaciated bodies and corpses. The young lady leaning against the wall of the monument thus becomes a smiling woman posing in front of the piled up dead bodies of people, the kneeling artist with pink balls becomes a man juggling with starving people in the background. It is an example of realizing that a selfie taken in such a place is inappropriate, immoral and inadmissible. The author points this out by putting in them troubled, tortured people who found themselves in the given place by force. The selfie phenomenon cannot be ignored today, it has its place in our society, but in our opinion there is a difference between taking selfies in locations where we spent our free time, or how we spent our free time (group selfies, "drunk selfies", etc.) and taking selfies in hallowed places, places of cultural memory that bore witness to inhumanity and the slaughter of innocent people. We consider this inappropriate, inhumane, arrogant and inadequate, and such behaviour needs to be unequivocally rejected. Not just the young, but all people should realize that in this way they show disrespect to the millions of innocent Holocaust victims who experienced such atrocities and, for the most part, did not live to tell the tale.

The etymology of the name of the site and the project itself "Yolocaust" refers to the combination of the popular "Yolo – you only live once" hashtag (from the social media sphere) – and the Holocaust. The project ended after the people seen in the pictures made themselves known. The discussion regarding the controversial project continued even after that, however. The goal was – in the author's own words – *"to talk about whether it is right or wrong to behave in this way in this place".*[27] We can only surmise that this project has attracted enormous media attention on a global scale. The website *yolocaust.de* received more than 2.5 million visits within a few days of launch. The author found these photos on social networks (*Tinder*, *Instagram*, *Facebook*) and, after they were published, most of the authors went through self-reflection and re-evaluation of their attitudes: *"Probably the most interesting answer was sent to me by a young man who attached the description "Jumping on dead Jews @Holocaust Memorial" to his selfie. He was shocked by what his words and photo had evoked and begged me to pull the collage with his photo down. It was supposed to be just a joke for friends."*[28] On the other hand, there were voices critical of the project and the author himself, according to whom he bet on cheap effects and self-promotion. At the same time, there were arguments for the memorial in question to expressly be a place where everyone should find out for themselves how to deal with and internalize the topic of commemorating the Holocaust. The Yolocaust project received a broad spectrum of reactions, mostly positive, especially from historians and teachers who drew attention to the project in the teaching process. Critical, oppositional voices pointed out that the author used images of Holocaust victims for the collages and responded to the lack of piety with only a lack of piety. To this, S. Shapira responded by saying: *"no one from the media (pointing to the lack of piety, note by the authors) for example blurred the faces of the victims in the pictures. Many pixelated the faces of the tourists in their selfies, but not the faces of the victims. That's a bit hypocritical, isn't it? There are no tasteful photographs of the Holocaust. The Nazis told their captives that the world would never know what happened to them. Therefore, it is our duty to show these photos. In addition, all the photos used are publicly accessible".*[29]

[27] LAZAROVIC, S.: *Projekt "Yolocaust": "Chtěl jsem, aby se mluvilo* o *kultuře selfie."*. [online]. [2023-03-31]. Available at: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/cs/kul/mag/20946058.html>.
[28] Ibidem.
[29] ibidem

The Yolocaust project, drawing attention to inappropriate and unethical behaviour by tourists at Holocaust sites, once again raises the ethical and moral dilemma, what actually motivates visits to Holocaust-related sites among the "digital natives" generation? We believe that we are witnessing a lapidary example of anesthetization (desensitising) on all levels, from *"physical numbness to spiritual blindness".*[30]

The following part of the article is dedicated to evaluating reminiscences of the Holocaust via the lens of its re-interpretation and, especially, (dis)interpretation, which we exemplify by analyzing selected contributions into digital media culture. The primary aim of this text is to draw attention towards the importance of fostering media literacy and critical thinking in the context of rising anti-Semitism, denial or belittling of the Holocaust, racism, extremism, xenophobia and the general erosion of humanity, against the backdrop of life lived in an era, which has been dubbed with the epithet 'post-factual'. We can confidently state that information naivety and chaos have blossomed exponentially in this post-factual era, an era of information overload, where the individual is faced with a volume of messages that exceed the capabilities of their cognitive apparatus, and due to their fragmentary or context-free nature, are forced, so to speak, to permanently evaluate their relevance, objectivity, factual accuracy, or the usability of the acquired knowledge, claims the Slovak cultural scientist A. Olejárová.[31]

According to the United Nations, about 17% of Holocaust-related content on the popular *TikTok* social network falls either under the denial or misrepresentation category.[32] Unfortunately, such practices are not unusual in digital media culture, especially on social networks. Group polarization and the existence of information bubbles contribute to the unprecedented spread of hoaxes, misinformation and conspiracy theories, including on the subject of the Holocaust or Jewish world domination. This agenda fundamentally redefines and misinterprets the reminiscences and cultural memory associated with our research topic, the Holocaust. The consequence is the extremely negative impact on the target group which lacks in elementary media literacy and critical thinking. Potentially, this harmful agenda with a wide-ranging arsenal becomes an accelerator of irrational action with unpredictable consequences. At the turn of 2019-2020, an epidemic of the respiratory disease COVID-19 spiralled into a global-scale pandemic. From the Chinese city of Wuhan, this infectious disease spread very quickly to Europe. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global state of emergency, and most countries took extraordinary security measures. The health systems in most countries faced unprecedented pressure, while life in many other parts of society seemed to grind to a standstill. In addition, the threat of economic recession loomed in the air. The human sense of reality is naturally governed by the information available to the individual at any given moment. Naturally, events that deviate from the usual everyday stereotype attract the most attention. Thus, the formation of opinions and attitudes is conditioned to a non-negligible extent by the images that a person receives through the media, and as soon as something which radically deviates from the average appears, it immediately becomes the focus of attention. An event, such as the aforementioned global pandemic, is attractive for the media, a result of which was that it abundantly filled all news platforms, various websites, portals, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, discussions, etc. with such content.[33]

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[30] WELSCH, W.: *Estetické myslenie.* Bratislava : Archa, 1993, p. 10.

[31] OLEJÁROVÁ, A.: Informácie v digitálnom veku. Sondáž do vzťahu medzi participačnou kultúrou a nezávislosťou mediálnej produkcie v internetovom prostredí. In FUJAK, J. (ed.): *Charakter a vývoj nezávislej kultúry a umenia na Slovensku po roku 1989*. Nitra : Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2020, p. 298.

[32] *Svet si pripomenul obete holokaustu, pandémia zhoršila šírenie nenávistných prejavov na internete.* [online]. [2023-02-27]. Available at: <https://sita.sk/svet-si-pripomenul-obete-holokaustu-pandemia-zhorsila-sirenie-nenavistnych-prejavov-na-internete/>.

[33] Authors' note: The issue of epistemic and ethical risks of media reporting in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic is mapped in more detail by the authors Sabína Gáliková Tolnaiová and Slavomír Gálik. Compare: GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S., GÁLIK, S.: Epistemic and Ethical Risks of Media Reporting in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic, as Challanges for the Development of Journalistic Practice. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 76-94.

Not to mention the wide-range of disinformation, hoaxes and conspiracy theories that, combined with fearmongering, have become a powerful weapon in hybrid conflicts.[34] As a pars pro toto example, we present the exhibition *"The pandemic is not a Holocaust"*, by the *Edah* civic association, in which the authors react to the absolutely unacceptable and incomprehensible comparison of anti-pandemic measures with the Holocaust period: *"... a selected group of the population began to erroneously equate these measures with the Holocaust. There even exist various conspiracy theories attributing responsibility for the worldwide pandemic to the Jews. The goal of our exhibition is to put these inventions into perspective. We focus on the most common comparisons that appear on the Internet and social networks. We contrast these conspiracy theories, hoaxes and fake news with historical facts".*[35] Photos and comments began to appear on social media where the measures are described as a Holocaust. Various cynical statuses (untested, unvaccinated) and grossly abused symbols (Star of David) comparing themselves, the victims of anti-pandemic measures, to the victims of the Holocaust began appearing at an astonishing pace. Combining these two phenomena was described by Chairman of the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia R. Duda as *"a manifestation of gross cynicism or absolute clouding of the mind".*[36] Vaccines and testing, which had the goal of protecting the lives and health of the population, were equated by these individuals to acts and deeds committed against the Jews in concentration camps. The entire Jewish community in Slovakia, Holocaust survivors as well as the Holocaust Museum in Sereď strongly objected to this: *"A person is born a Jew, they have no choice. The very fact of being born during the Holocaust condemned them to death. It is incomparable to any anti-pandemic measures and regulations that are meant to save life."*[37]

By means of various deliberately altered photographs the manipulators try to convince people of the existence of alleged basic human and civil rights violations. Photo manipulation is as old as this medium of communication. *"There are many ways to manipulate. On the one hand, a situation can be created that does not correspond to reality and is artificially created already during the actual process of photography itself, on the other hand, changes can be done to the photo after it has been taken."*[38] Manipulation via photography brings with it a whole range of communication effects – from seemingly harmless ones to those that can influence public opinion. According to A. Feriancová and P. Mikuláš, manipulation in photography is based on four intentions, which often cross over and complement each other:

1. creation of ideals (beauty, heroism, etc.),
2. continuity, confirmation and consolidation of social ideologies,
3. sensational revelations,
4. creating a post-construct of the world.

In the case of the examined manipulative photos, we observe so-called "framing", in other words the shaping of a message applying the basic rule of manipulation - that "twisting" the truth is better than lying. Such manipulation is formed by making cunning use of language and "appropriate" linguistic means, using a large number of diacritics and punctuation marks,

[34] Authors' note: This issue is mapped in more detail by Peter Krajčovič in his article. See more: KRAJČOVIČ, P.: The Media in Times of the Pandemic – Comparing Viewing Figures and Interactions of Serious, Tabloid and Conspiracy Media on Facebook During the Covid-19 Pandemic. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2022, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 212-224.

[35] *Pandémia nie je Holocaust*. [online]. [2023-02-27]. Available at: <https://edah.sk/pandemia-nie-je-holokaust/>.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] Ibidem.

[38] FERIANCOVÁ, A., MIKULÁŠ, P.: Manipulácia v historických kontextoch – príklad fotografie. In FICHNOVÁ, K., MIKULÁŠ, P., WOJCIECHOWSKI, L. (eds.): *(Ko)médiá*. Nitra : Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2012, p. 195-196. [online]. [2023-01-17]. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/3483190/Manipul%C3%A1cia_v_historick%C3%BDch_kontextoch_pr%C3%ADklad_fotografie?auto=download>.

intentionally placing an ambiguous photo in media communications, etc. The symbol of vaccine and vaccination is often associated with photos from former Nazi concentration and extermination camps such as *"Arbeit macht frei"* (work shall set you free) for *"Vaccine macht frei"* or *"Pfizer macht frei"*.

We see the abuse of the Holocaust and its misleading comparison to anti-pandemic measures as one of the faces of the post-construct world, where truth and historical facts are subject to ideological distortions of reality, manipulative practices and propaganda. We perceive the creation of a post-construct of the world as one of the crudest forms of manipulation. In the subject of our research focusing on the Holocaust, we record a marked manipulation of cultural memory via deceptive and false information, hoaxes as well as conspiracy theories.

2 Methodology

The authors analyze and interpret primary texts focused on communicative, cultural and political memory (Assman, Assmanová, Kubišová, Sternberg, Šubrt, Maslowski, Sternberg and others) in the context of the problem of remembrance and forgetting. They primarily pay attention to the reminiscences of the Holocaust in the form of reconstruction of the past; the artistic interpretation of historical events and their (re)interpretation in the context of current times; the prevention and civic engagement as a tool for creating cultural identity.

They combine the method of textual analysis with the case study method. They make use of the method of content and relational analysis to draw conclusions regarding the application of select problems to the reconstruction of the past, the fostering of civic engagement and the formation of cultural identity. They rely on the principles of critical thinking and show how media literacy can be developed within the reminiscences of the Holocaust.

3 Discussion

Communicative memory incorporates all memories relating to the recent past that a person shares with their contemporaries. It comes into being at a certain time period and can disappear over time as its bearers die. A person acquires language and the ability to communicate during their life as a result of relating to other people. Consciousness and memory cannot be explained using individual physiology and psychology, a systemic explanation is needed that also covers interaction with other individuals. Its media are the "living memories", experiences and information from eyewitnesses obtained "by hearsay". Considering its bearers (eyewitnesses) as well as modes of communication ("living memories", "hearsay"), communicative memory refers to a time period of up to 80-100 years or a time horizon of three to four generations.[39]

Cultural memory is transmitted via libraries, museums, monuments, educational institutions, various ceremonies and official ceremonies. It is constructed to be long-term and last through the generations, more explicit and homogeneous compared to communicative memory, and it is created from the top down. The media of cultural memory are established symbolic codifications and productions, whether through words, images, writing, dance and the like, while cultural memory is objectified in buildings, in the landscape and places of memory. Cultural memory is available to experts (scientists, artists, historians, etc.) and in exceptional cases also to the public. They participate in cultural memory by reading, writing, learning, criticizing, appreciating its elements, etc.[40]

[39] KUBIŠOVÁ, Z.: Kolektivní pamäť a národní identita. In MASLOWSKI, N., ŠUBRT, J. (eds.): *Kolektivní paměť : k teoretickým otázkám*. Prague : Univerzita Karlova, 2014, p. 85-86.

[40] Ibidem, p. 89.

Political memory depends on specialized, mostly material carriers (books, pictures, etc.). It includes content which is deliberately, purposefully and long-term created and that is transmitted via institutions and organizations (libraries, museums, educational systems, galleries). Political memory is explicit, institutionalized and created and disseminated from the top. Political memory is linked to specific political organizations and institutions to the extent that it cannot exist without them. That, which is missing in political memory is like a passive memory contained within cultural memory. The basic framework of political memory (temporal structure) is the past of the state, party, movement, etc., which can be interpreted within the framework of a chosen political identity.[41]

Communicative, cultural, and political memory are reflected in various forms of commemoration of the Holocaust. For the purpose of this study we used the term reminiscence for individual and collective forms of social, cultural, scientific and political commemorating; interpreting and representing the phenomenon of the Holocaust in the sociocultural system. Based on the methods of observation, analysis and comparison, we have identified 5 main types of reminiscence of the Holocaust. 1/ reminiscence as reconstruction: reminiscence of the first type focuses on authentic reconstruction of the historical phenomenon of the Holocaust in all its possible contexts. 2/ is based on re-telling, interpreting and re-interpreting the events, usually in an artistic way; 3/ reminiscence as prevention and civic engagement: this type of reminiscence takes on a pro-active form of shaping one's character, attitudes and political insights into the topics of democracy, humanity, human and civic rights. It aims to promote active citizenship, tolerance of otherness, forming one's intercultural, critical-thinking and media literacy competences, as well as preventing social pathologies; 4/ reminiscence as a tool for creating cultural identity. The last type of reminiscence can be represented by any activity which facilitates the process of positive socio-cultural reference and cultural values formation, in this case towards the Holocaust.

Critical thinking primarily refers to the ability to think logically and the ability to accept, reject and argue for and against, formulate your own opinions, and be able to defend them, and evaluate the quality of the information we come into contact with. The concept of critical thinking can be applied to various areas of human life. Regarding reflections on the Holocaust, which are often linked to various conspiracy theories, this concept is absolutely vital. It is obvious that critical thinking can help distinguish between relevant information, misinformation, misinterpretations leading to denial, distortion or deformation (not only) of media images about this greatest tragedy in the history of the Jewish people. Conspiracy theories use emotions, false arguments and inferences to support their claims. At the same time, we can understand them as modern myths enabling a simple and clear understanding of complex problems. Their essence is that they are irrefutable. Combined with a subjective interpretation of the world (which may have nothing to do with the actual reality), irrational, emotional behaviour and decision-making, together with a fatal failure of cultural and communicative memory, we get a significant synergy of these influences, which in certain circumstances can have unpredictable consequences: starting with the increase in hatred and violence up to crimes against humanity and genocide.

We perceive the enormous occurrence of conspiracy theories, hoaxes and misinformation with their viral potential as a certain form of resistance of the media audience to the information produced in the digital media environment. One of the ways to resist such influence is the development of media literacy and critical thinking. Because a society that is stupid easily becomes docile. It is subject to propaganda and gives birth to radicals.

[41] KUBIŠOVÁ, Z.: Kolektivní pamäť a národní identita. In MASLOWSKI, N., ŠUBRT, J. (eds.): *Kolektivní paměť: k teoretickým otázkám*. Prague : Univerzita Karlova, 2014, p. 92-93.

4 Conclusion

The aim of the authors of this article was to interlink the understanding of communicative, cultural and political memory via the prism of various forms of reminiscences into a coherent whole. All the selected forms of reminiscence are united by one problem, one event – the Holocaust. Regardless of whether we examine it in terms of communicative, cultural or political memory, it continues to be a relevant issue which helps us to know our past, learn from it and prevent it from repeating itself. It is not in our power to prevent the recurrence of such negative events all over the world, but we can inform, educate and draw attention to its inhumanity within our community, our state, by remembering the Holocaust. At the same time we channel it to shape universal values such as tolerance, solidarity, empathy and cooperation and reject violence, lack of freedom and terror. By returning to this kind of memory, we return to our roots, as we instinctively know that just as a tree cannot survive without its roots, neither can a person live their present and plan for the future without knowing their past.

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