
Integrating a Massive Digital Video Archive into Humanities Teaching and Research

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Although the use of digital video in humanities teaching and research is growing, there are few studies that examine how it is used and what its impact is. One of the largest collections of digital video for use in education is the *Shoah Visual History Archive*, which was established by Steven Spielberg following the filming of *Schindler's List* to create a visual record of Holocaust survivors for use in education. The archive collects over 52,000 testimonies by survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust in 32 languages, yielding more than 110,000 hours of video. Over 38,000 of these testimonies have been digitized, and over 34,000 have been indexed using a set of more than 30,000 descriptive terms.

During the 2003-2004 academic years, Rice University, Yale University, and the University of Southern California jointly participated in a project funded by the Mellon Foundation to explore possible uses of the archive in research and teaching. Although the project has ended, all three universities continue their support of the archive. The team from Rice University (<http://shoah.rice.edu>) will report on applications of the archive in humanities teaching and research between 2003 and 2005 and cover three basic topics: how the archive was used in research projects in the humanities, how instructors adapted the archive for specific pedagogical purposes, and how the nature and content of the archive affected student engagement with their course material.

Humanities research

Because it collects so much data and captures the first-person accounts of Holocaust survivors in a dynamic form, the Visual History Archive is a rich resource for research. Students have used the archive for research projects in topics ranging from rhetoric to violence and trauma. For instance, three

graduate students in anthropology presented their observations on working with the archive as part of a panel at the American Anthropological Association conference in December, 2004. Research studies include "On forms of the Other and of the chronotope in memories of Rus Czerwona" (Potoczniak), "Cultural logics of memorialization reflected in the Survivors of the Shoah archive" (Baum), and "History and memory: Turkish and Jewish accounts of communal life before and after WWII on the island of Rhodes" (Erkan). In addition, a medical ethicist is using the archive to examine the role of doctors and nurses in resistance activities.

Despite the archive's potential for research, the process of identifying and viewing relevant testimonies proved difficult for some, since the keyword structure is elaborate, the number of testimonies potentially overwhelming, the technology occasionally unreliable, and the length of each testimony (anywhere from an hour to 18 hours, with 2.5 hours being the average) daunting. Student and faculty experiences with the archive, as well as a usability study undertaken by a graduate student in psychology, yielded significant recommendations for improvements to the web interface and point to ways that video archives can be better integrated into education.

Humanities pedagogy

No new courses were created in conjunction with the project. Rather, we set out to integrate the archive into existing courses and thereby assess its pedagogical implications in a broad context, investigating how humanities instructors would use a vast archive of digital video. Courses in religious studies, comparative literature, film studies, rhetoric, women and gender studies, and even classics employed the archive.

Participating faculty were interviewed to elicit their pedagogical vision. Most perceived that the archive offered an opportunity for students to work with primary sources and develop multimedia projects. But in each case, the instructors imagined specific reasons and practices for engaging with the archive. Our report includes several vignettes demonstrating divergent rationalities in humanities pedagogy, giving multiple meanings to a common digital resource. Among the assignments given to students were creating documentary videos based upon the Shoah materials, making presentations comparing pre- and post-War Jewish life as revealed in Shoah testimonies, and writing an essay analyzing two testimonies in relation to Samantha Power's recent book on genocide, *A Problem from Hell*.

Emotions and intellectual engagement

The faces and voices in the Shoah archive are captivating. The survivors speak for as long as they want on any experience they care to recount, and every aspect of their testimony is preserved. The stories are emotionally charged, and the possibility that any detail of the testimony could acquire a sudden significance leads most viewers to attend to the matter carefully.

Our project team developed a survey to assess the emotional impact of the testimony on students, finding that students who responded emotionally to the video also reported a higher level of intellectual engagement with the course material. An important secondary finding in our assessment of student engagement was that students also responded well to unexpected particularities, atypical experiences, and pre-/post-Holocaust contexts represented in the archive, justifying the archive's attempt at comprehensiveness and its storage in a digital format to enable essentially random access. For many students, video proved to be more compelling than written sources, since they could see the facial expressions of the survivors and hear the tone of their voices.

Bibliography

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