DIGITAL MEMORY DIALOGUES

Dialogue I

Response IV: How Much Have We Learnt So Far About Holocaust History and Computer Games, and Why Do We Often Feel the Need to Legitimate Games About Holocaust History?

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***#LastSeen,* for which I was Project Director, could be described as a Holocaust game – or better: an innovative form of historical storytelling.**

Introduction

The provocation we are asked to consider is timely and at the same time somehow old-fashioned. Games and Holocaust history are not as easy to blend as Holocaust history and books. Using the *#LastSeen* game as an example – a project I directed as academic lead, this response explores the range of reactions we received, which were much broader than those often seen for Holocaust films or books. While some authors, like Axel Doßmann (2025), strongly advocate against games or gamification, others have embraced the medium. We can place this in a broader discourse about digital representations of Holocaust history, like Second Life or 'holographic' testimonies, which have often inspired debate about their appropriateness and ethical limitations. This is a recurring topic, just like the question of whether or not (and how) to present pictures depicting extreme violence or humiliation. Within this discourse, we can observe a range of reactions from clear disapproval, for example, Micha Brumlik (2015), who so strongly advocated against 'Dimensions in Testimony' and spoke about it turning survivors into ghosts. On the other side, we find those enthusiastically embracing new and innovative narrations (Jost 2023). And then there is the middle ground: those interested, cautious and often feeling a kind of discomfort. I want to explore this discomfort here.

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Rachel Baum (2022) once used the Freudian term *un-heimlich, the un-canny,* to explore Holocaust representations on Second Life and elsewhere. At the core of this argument was the quest to understand how we relate to historical and emotional content in digital settings. The term discomfort has in German also a Freudian connection, as he called his 1930 book *Das Unbehagen der Kultur* (English: *Civilization and its Discontents*). However, I am not interested in Freud's psychoanalysis of culture, here, but employ the term more etymologically, using its meaning of displeasure, restlessness, aversion, disapproval and trepidation. These terms include negative feelings, but not strong feelings, more like an underlying current.

Digital Discomfort

My focus on discomfort stems from observing reactions across nearly two decades of working on and discussing the representation of Holocaust history in digital media. Why is it necessary (or relevant) to discuss historical representations in computer games through the lens of discomfort? The short answer to this question is: the digital revolution and therefore the digital turn have not yet come to an end. The web and every other digital outlet are ongoing works in progress. We still see a fast and complex development and evolution of the digital realm and its interconnectedness to the non-digital, analogue realms of our life. Across the previous 30 years or so, private and professional lives around the globe have been transformed through the impact of digital media. Most of our routines and practices have changed: carrying our mobile phone close to our body, receiving text messages on our watch at our wrist, listening to podcasts through our in-ear headphones while doing the laundry. We are currently facing another transformation, as Artificial Intelligence (AI) has now become a serious opportunity, challenge, and risk to be considered**.** We are informed about the potential positive outcomes. Many have used ChatGPT for translations or help in writing grants, we are considering the usage in Holocaust remembrance projects, while colleagues have pointed out the massive risks (Walden and Marrison 2023). Only a few aspects of daily life remain untouched by the huge transformation we are witnessing and participating in. To be clear, this is the fastest-paced technical revolution we have yet encountered. When Guttenberg developed the book press, it took many more decades for written texts to be available to many people. The pandemic accelerated digitisation processes and broader digitalisation. Considering the fast-paced changes, it is understandable that digital literacies, even though they are now a key competence, take longer to develop.

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Specifically, within our field of Holocaust Studies, changes have been fast and many. When the Visual History Archive became digitally available at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2006, the first European university to have full access to it, one could not watch the testimonies outside of campus, because to stream such a massive amount of data through a 56k-Modem would not have worked, also virtual private networks were not yet available. This is mostly an anecdote, but it showcases the massive changes that have taken place (Bothe 2024). 15 years ago, Second Life was absolutely fascinating; now it is a case for a retro arcade. Historians, curators and educators of Holocaust history have been among the very first to embrace new media and to develop new forms of digital storytelling, like the first, early-stage online exhibitions the USC Shoah Foundation made available around 2007. When I wrote about them in my PhD thesis a few years later, they were already offline (Bothe 2019). At this point, we know of several hundreds digital Holocaust-related projects, as the Landecker Digital Memory Lab just started to map. This landscape consists of a heterogenous range of formats – including games. The discomfort many feel and articulate, sometimes based on ethical or religious writings, partly stems from the incredibly fast transformation I just sketched here. Life and history have ultimately changed. We need to adapt. So, I want to use the discomfort, the ambivalence of the digital as well as the discourse on ethical limitations for my exploration here.

But do we lose anything when we try to turn the hardest chapter of human history into games? It would be so easy to answer in both directions: yes and no. But as always, complex issues tend to be less black-and-white.

The Limits of Representation

I have been researching the digital transformation of Holocaust history for almost twenty years now, after coming across digital survivor testimonies. What sparked my curiosity was the question of transformation: what changes when the digital is introduced and what do these changes mean for Holocaust history? As a German national, my understanding of the Holocaust is very spatial; every street I walk along has been a crime scene. Holocaust history is around me in my everyday life, and my experience teaching Holocaust history has focused on combining spatiality with everydayness. I am not a gamer per se, I do enjoy a round of cards or board game, and even though *Pacman* and *Castle* were my first explorations of digital games back in 1989, I mostly just play the occasional *Wordle* or knowledge quiz. My understanding of digital games comes from theory and being the Project Director of *#LastSeen. Images of Nazi Deportations*, which includes also a digital game on deportation images. So, I have gone through the process of developing a game with (alongside other colleagues) the

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lead for education Dr. Christoph Kreutzmüller, who informed my understanding of games and Holocaust history in a new way.

Fittingly, Saul Friedländer (1992) has referred to the ethical appropriateness dilemma of Holocaust representation as the 'limits of representation'. These limits have often been tested within pop cultural, such as the graphic novel *Maus* (Art Spielgelman 1986-1991) or *Schindler's List* (Dir. Steven Spielberg 1993) or by digital representations. At the core of this provocation is, to me, the question about the limits of representation: Is the representation of Holocaust history in digital games ethically appropriate? I want to adapt this question in two ways:

1. Which representations of Holocaust history in digital games are within the 'limits of representation'?
2. Which ethically appropriate representations are still within the limits of being a game?

I do not want to judge other people's games here, but I want to discuss these questions regarding the *#LastSeen game* and then offer some speculative games ideas to interrogate where our feelings of discomfort with games might lie.

Playing the Holocaust and playing antisemitism have long histories. We find a certain form of 'playfulness', of satire and charade, of having and making fun in a number of antisemitic stickers, etc., already from before 1933. These were stickers in the street, like fake railway tickets to Palestine (Enzenbach 2017). It is one of the ways through which antisemitism became mainstream. When we discuss playing Holocaust history, let us go back to 1938 and the first board game of destruction called *'Juden raus!'*, which was sold more than 1 million times in Germany. So, to use games for telling Holocaust history is a double-edged sword.

Games, Mediascape and Holocaust History

To think about gaming and Holocaust history and memory is a complex undertaking, much more difficult and ambivalent than it looks at first. There are several hypotheses I would like to evoke at the beginning of this text:

1. Games can be complex cultural products, and we need to take them seriously.
2. The digital presents a unique mediascape and therefore needs its own considerations.
3. Telling Holocaust history should be innovative and at the same time ethically appropriate.

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To elaborate on how these three points will guide my explorations here:

1. We still encounter a lot of arguments that games are 'silly', 'dangerous' or simply 'time-consuming'. This might indeed be true for a number of games and sports we play and love. A round of *Moorhuhn, Pacman* or *Tetris* can offer nice, retro ways of passing time. Nevertheless, gaming can be much more complex than a *Wordle* in the subway; games can tell (hi)stories from multiple perspectives, leaving a linear framework for a non-linear, non-chronological story. One of the elements most of us connect with games is fun, and the other is winning. We can already feel the discomfort when connecting fun and winning with Holocaust-related issues. But playing is also a way of exploring thoughts and understanding the world around us. When we observe children playing, they often get entangled in a web of complex stories they spin, in which they encounter illness, injuries, death or ghosts and develop strategies for fear or mourning. Playing is not always a fun activity; it can be also a very serious encounter with hardship and difficulties.
2. Digital media involve complex network of digital devices, characterised by their interconnectedness. The digital realm has certain elements that are unique in their form and function. Time and space are transformed. I have described the digital elsewhere as a space-in-between, third space or interstitial moment, drawing from Hannah Arendt (2018) as well as Homi K. Bhabha (2004), who teaches us that it is 'the inter that carries the burden of meaning of culture' (Bothe 2019). We have to acknowledge the peculiar realm that has emerged through digital media. When we are talking about mixed reality, augmented or virtual reality, this becomes obvious. But also, the 'net' has brought about its own spatial qualities. Interactivity means that users actually interact with the medium, shaping it, working with it. Immersion is often used to describe how we delve into artworks, reaching a unique sphere. The digital has an immersive quality to it, as we are drawn into it through the screens or other devices. These characteristics lead to the media itself being hidden: 'virtual reality is immersive, which means that it is a medium whose purpose is to disappear' (Bolter and Grusin 1998). Time is transformed in the digital as well: we can repeat, stop, or move forward or backwards through nearly everything, every Zoom call connects nearly instantly, even between different time zones. Time becomes extremely condensed when connecting people thousands of miles apart. At the same time, we are immersed or outside the natural time frame, such as when we speak with a deceased person, like with survivor holograms. The digital has become part of our reality, but it also changes our reality. 96% of all Germans in 2025 have used the internet at least once in their lives (Destatis 2025). Getting used to these

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changes is an ongoing process, a transformation. The digital infrastructure behind the digital spaces, devices, platforms and social media, the algorithms as well as the server architecture is unknown to most users, who are only able to navigate the digital on a surface level, often, with a constant feeling of disorientation and inadequacy. There is also a power structure within the digital that is not part of discourse and understanding, different to how other social structures are governed. To understand the digital realm, we need to socially control it and establish democratic decision-making structures. Unlike books or films, the digital is not only a medium, or a series of media, but a complex spatial structure in which more or less everything from the economy to everyday life takes place. Books are often perceived as dangerous, as they can contain and spread thoughts. But they do not need to be governed. This is different for the digital realm. Netiquettes show this need for governing the digital on a practical level, but we need to talk about servers and algorithms. The digital transformation is intense and exhausting. In 2025 in a representative study nearly half of young Britons aged 16 to 22 said they would prefer to live without the internet (BSI 2025).

3. When speaking about the Holocaust, we speak about what Dan Diner (1988) once called the *'Zivilisationsbruch'* ('rupture of civilisation'). This guides our understanding of how to research and write this history. The history of the Holocaust has to be told; we need people to know it. However, writing this part of history comes with ethical implications and ultimately, severe consequences through which we can fail. The impetus to educate, to reach out and spread knowledge can be observed from the early days onwards, when secret archives were organised in the ghettos, when individual people wrote hidden diaries, when the commissions after liberation prepared leaflets, photo books, exhibitions, filmed and taped survivors still in the camps. With the need to document came the duty to tell in an effective way. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) and Spiegelman's *Maus* both come from that understanding: the duty to tell in a way to reach as many as possible through documentary and artistic rendering. Within the field of Holocaust studies, this duty or obligation early on led to experimenting with digital storytelling to find effective ways of fulfilling the duty to tell.

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#LastSeen: Ethically appropriate but a game?

The project *#LastSeen. Images of Nazi-Deportations* started in October 2021. In March 2023, we launched the *Image Atlas* as well as a discovery game through atlas.lastseen.org and game.lastseen.org. *#LastSeen* is devoted to searching, researching and digitally publishing deportation images. Currently, we are focused on the territory of the German Reich in the borders of 1937, but plan to expand to a pan-European level. At the beginning of our process, we had not decided to develop a game. Rather we wanted to create an interactive learning platform. The result of this process is hybrid, something we find with many historical games, as for example the game *Spuren auf Papier* (*Traces on Paper*, 2022) on 'Euthanasia' as well as *Erinnern. Die Kinder vom Bullenhuser Damm* (*Remember. The Children of Bullenhuser Damm,* 2024*)*, which present cross-genre elements, combining features of games and animated graphic novels. There are reasons for this hybridity that we need to understand and be transparent about.

#LastSeen is dedicated to searching and researching deportation images. In the first two stages, we only focus on the territory of the German Reich within the borders of 1937, as we have found many more images than we assumed to have survived. At the moment, we have more than doubled the number of places from which we know deportation images exist compared to our initial estimate. Given that many images might have been destroyed over time, we can assume that many more images were taken. Deportations were a crucial part of the Nazi persecution system. Without deportations, many would not have been brought to the place of their murder. To make it very clear: without deportations, there is no Auschwitz. Thousands of deportations took place, just from the Reich more than 200,000 people were deported. Deportations were mass occurrences, known by everyone and observed by many. Deportations have not been researched in depths, H.G. Adler's seminal work, *Der verwaltete Mensch,* is still an excellent overview (Adler 1975). Andrea Löw (2024) has recently contributed research about the experiences of the deportees. Deportations were not simply transports or passages, nor travels. Deportations were an elaborate process of excluding people from communities in the most brutal way: by social and actual death. Deportations link the places where people lived to the places of their murder.

What can we learn from researching deportation images? Researching images often leads to many questions about people, places and objects in these images. When looking at deportation images, we want to know about the individuals depicted, about the spectators, the direct perpetrators, about the situation, the power hierarchy, etc. Often, there are many questions we can't answer. As liberation happened only 80 years ago, it is hard to acknowledge that often we still do not know the persecuted, the

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perpetrators, and seldom ever the spectators. When closely reading the images, nonetheless, fragments of the story convey themselves, and one finds further hints for research.

When you play the *#LastSeen* game, you play historical research. Ethically, this is a safe choice. We considered the possible perspectives that we could have in the game: could we have a game where you play a bystander during a deportation? Or could you be a spectator from the future? The team decided against such a setting, that would have been much more bold. The storyline of the *#LastSeen* game is firmly contemporary: you are a photo blogger and you receive a text message from a friend, that they have found old black-and-white photos in an attic. Within seconds, the character realises these are images showing a deportation of Jews. You can then decide whether you want to research the images from Eisenach 1942 or Munich 1941 (Kreutzmüller 2023). Once you enter the attic, you participate in a search game: you look for clues in the attic, finding original documents and further context. It is, as Christoph Kreutzmüller pointedly states, a historian's dream: all the documents are neatly stacked together in one place. And you can also look directly at the sequence of deportation images and note down your observations. When these observations align with the observations of the historians, you receive points. After a certain number of clues and observations in the notebook, you can open the result page: a blog post (pre-written) that is made visible step-by-step. You can never reach 100% and see the whole post, as we do not know the 'whole story' as well. Holocaust history is very much about acknowledging the unknown, the lost parts of the book. When played by school classes, the intention is that, hopefully, every student achieves a slightly different result, mimicking historical research once again, to make the subjectivity of historical storytelling visible to untrained users. For Eisenach, the blog post contains static images and texts, for Munich, it contains videos that were produced together with high school students, who were involved in the project for more than a year. Students were involved in different stages of the game design process, with Dr. Christoph Kreutzmüller and Aya Zarfati organising workshops at our partner institution Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz. These workshops were instrumental in choosing the right images for the game. A third game level was prepared but never came into being. Based on four deportation images from Remscheid in March 1943, that level would make it possible for users to explore the images of those deported as Sinti and Roma. But the research team encountered a range of problems that made it too challenging in the short time frame of 18 months to develop this level fully, among them ethical considerations. One key issue was that we were not able to identify a person in these images, yet, we would have to consider whether we could publish a full name, as due to ongoing strong discrimination against Sinti and Roma, many members of the community prefer

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archives and researchers to use only abbreviations. The same situation arises for those persecuted and murdered under the so-called 'euthanasia' programme. Also, the amount of information was too little to have a strong enough case to turn it into a game level.

For the project, we asked colleagues for their professional peer review while we were conceptualising each product. These discussions were extremely fruitful, and I am grateful for the advice and considerations. They encouraged us to show the images in the format now online. What is unique about the *#LastSeen* game is its combination of new, innovative research on the images and the format of storytelling through the sources, mini-games and the blog post. To date, the project has received numerous awards, among them the DigAMus Award of the German Museum's Association, Honorée of the Webby Award 2024, four Lovie Awards, two Anthem Awards and the Award of the Art Director's Club.

#LastSeen is not utterly gamification, not entirely a game, but something in-between. We did not dare to be bolder, given the topic of our game, we did not dare to allow gamers too much agency within the game. More agency would have meant that users would actually be allowed to write the blog post and we did not have resources for an editorial management before publication. We decided for strict contemporariness, not allowing users to re-play historical research. The *#LastSeen* game contains ground-breaking, innovative historical research on the images that are included in the game. In my understanding, the product is neither entirely a game nor an exhibition, but the team found a new and highly meaningful way of historical storytelling in a non-linear mode. As for this user experience, no genre has yet been established; we relied on the term 'game', often using additional descriptors as learning game or discovery game. It is a 'research-yourself' narration, allowing users to explore history and historical research. In my understanding, this is the case with quite some Holocaust-related games in the field.

What Can We Play? Interrogating our Discomfort

'tsu fargevaltign daytshe shikses' ('to rape German girls'), these four words have been among those, Elie Wiesel omitted when he wrote *Night* (2006). In his first Yiddish Memoir *Un di velt hot geshvign ('And the world remained silent')*, they were part of his memory, which was directed to his fellow survivors of the She'rit Ha'pletah (Wiesel 1956) A group of boys or young men left the Buchenwald camp shortly after liberation to rape German girls (Seidman 1996). In the writings of Yehiel De-Nur, author's name *KaZetnik* we find many harsh, intense representations of the Holocaust, in vivid, yet

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dark colours (De-Nur 1995). Like this specific memory of Wiesel, which he did not include in his book Night, which was directed to a non-Jewish, non-Survivor audience, *KaZetniks* way of telling the Shoah in all its harshness, in the complexities of human behaviour, is hard to imagine as games. Ghosts and zombies are often featured in game narratives (Kabalek 2014), but the real ghosts that survivors talk about are not part of game stories. There are so many scenarios that we assume we can't turn into a game as the mass shootings of the Holocaust by bullets, scenes from the gas chambers, the brutality of hiding and surviving in the forests, or sexual violence, which are all of course, part of the Holocaust. We often fall into the trap of the perpetrators' narrative in assuming the mass murder has been an administrative act, smoothly executed, not shaped by violence and panic, and dirty death. Agnieszka Wiercholska (2022) writes in her book about Tarnow a telling sequence of a liquidation of the ghetto when the blood of the murdered literally ran down the streets of the Rynek. The Shoah was 'a world of choiceless choices', to echo Lawrence Langer (1982), such as parents in the Ghetto Litzmannstadt handing over their children to be deported and murdered or mothers suffocating their babies so that their cries would not lead the Germans to a bunker (Langer, *ibid*.).

Can we reconcile these violent realities of the Holocaust with the gaming format? Let me discuss a number of potential scenarios for games. The aim of this exercise is to consider where the discomfort starts, where the limits of representation seem to lay.

Scenario 1: Vilna Ghetto Resistance and Liquidation

What would happen if we turned the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto into a game? You could either play one of the members of the Jewish fighting organisation or of the SS, police or Wehrmacht? The timing of the story could start shortly before the final liquidation of the ghetto: the introduction could show us a small room with a bunch of young people huddled together on December 31st 1941. Among them is Abba Kovner, the poet warrior, as Daniel Kahn calls him, sitting to write a manifesto for the United Partisan Organisation, the Jewish Fighting Organisation. It includes the Yiddish lines: *'Lomir nisht gen vi shof tsu der shkrite, emes, mir zaynen shvokh un hobn keyn hilf nisht, ober der eyntsiger virdiger entfer dem soyne is viderstand. Zikh kegnshteln bisn letstn otem'* (*'Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter, the truth is, we are weak and have no support, but the only acceptable response towards the enemy is resistance: to oppose until the last breath'*). These lines are from the manifesto of Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye (FPO), the pillar of their fame. We see the young people courageous, fearless and hopeful despite all odds. Who does not want to be one of them? You can play Beila, a young woman, first a courier and after the failed uprising a weapon-holding

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partisan in the woods. Your tasks will be to smuggle weapons, to organise intel and to shoot at German SS. Each shot SS man is 100 points extra. Or you can play Bruno Kittel, head of the Gestapo for the Vilna Ghetto in 1943, and your role would be to run the ghetto, maximise profits, organise the liquidation and hunt down the partisans. Each hanged partisan means 50 points extra.

How does the scenario feel: playing Beila is an adventure game with a historical background, playing an active resistance fighter, nonetheless, a woman, not a victim. Death is present, even the Holocaust a bit, but it is bearable. As educators, we might say, students could get the wrong idea, that most people could have gone into the resistance or that the Jewish Fighting Organisation and the SS were kind of equal opponents. We do not feel the same level of comfort playing an SS man, organising a mass deportation and the brutal hunt for partisans. Do we want to see the graphic visualisation of the hanging of a partisan on the central place of the ghetto?

Playing either a fighting Jewish partisan or an SS member sounds like a feasible scenario for a game. Either the actively Jewish hero or maybe even heroine or the bad guy character from the SS, both personas sound intriguing. But history is complex. Let us add further characters to this game scenario: One new character is Jacob Gens, head of the *Judenrat*, an open adversary to the Fighting Organisation, trying to save as many people as possible through cooperation with the SS. A highly ambivalent figure in the ghetto, judged by his contemporaries - the few survivors - as well as by history and historians. Playing the Gens character, you would need to decide which information about the resistance to pass on to the SS, how to have higher productivity in the ghetto, and whom to hand over to the Germans. If you succeed with a given task, you can save some people for the next months, if you lose, they are killed. Most ghetto inhabitants are not known or remembered by name. A fourth character could be an unknown child, around the age of six, smuggling potatoes and sometimes bread through holes in the ghetto wall. The task is easy, either you can get back through the wall alive, or you are shot at and killed – round by round.

Now the scenario becomes slightly bewildering as we automatically ask ourselves how we can frame these stories in a game and if it is acceptable to do so.

Scenario 2: Game Sabotage

Let us have a look at a second scenario, called Sabotage, set somewhere in Europe, based loosely on historical events. A resistance unit blows up trains and railroad infrastructure transporting German soldiers to the Eastern or Western European frontlines in the months before liberation. Your task is to secure explosives, to place the

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bomb and try to detonate it at the right moment. The more objects destroyed, and soldiers killed, the more points you receive, helping you with the next mission that you will try to fulfil.

Simple as this scenario is, the comfort meter, which is not a very exact way of measuring the felt limits of representation within a game, goes into positive. But what happens when we enter a level in which we decide to blow up infrastructure, either stopping a deportation train to Auschwitz or using the detonation device to blow up a train going to the frontlines? A fully realistic aporia as resistance units had to make such choices. Or maybe placing a device under the wrong train, killing deportees instead of German soldiers?

Scenario 3: Game Babi Yar

Among the few images we know about the mass shooting in Babi Yar are those showing Germans searching and robbing the victims before shooting them. You could design this game for multiple players. Each player is a German policeman; the task is to search and rob Jews waiting in line. Who can search and rob the most people within 5 minutes?

This scenario is utterly awkward, but historically, absolutely correct. But why should one want to play such a game? Why would an organisation develop such an extreme game? The answer could be, to present how greed was a motivational factor in organising mass murder. Such a game both asks users to confront their own behaviour whilst playing it, whilst informing them about driving factors that enabled the Holocaust to happen.

Killing Nazis in a game does not feel as awkward as playing Nazi characters killing Jews. Crass scenarios in games could have more than the intended results as an outcome. Thinking in extremes shows us limits, but it also clarifies our intentions: do we want to design games, or do we want to educate via all means possible?

Why We Might Not Want to Play the Holocaust

These different scenarios showcase one thing: We have different levels of comfort with different historical scenarios. But we need to understand certain reasons behind these levels of comfort:

a) We often understand the Shoah as sacred, therefore aim for a respectful approach.

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b) Playing comes with immersing oneself into a scenario, a situation, or even a person's experience. Part of our educational tradition in Holocaust education is not to put ourselves in their shoes, not to take the position of a victim, whose choices we did not have to make and therefore cannot fully understand, because we are not situated in a world of choiceless choices. Overidentification with the victims is a threat from a German perspective, but is this not quite paternalistic and thus potentially patronising towards the users?
c) Even in historical research, we have difficulties with what makes us humans 'humans', fathoming their complexity and plain contradictoriness. Even mass murderers sometimes helped one individual. Nonetheless they victimised others. Few people helped just like that, most exchanged aid for favours or even assaulted those they helped.
d) A paternalistic lack of trust in those who play the games: Do they really understand what we want to convey? Can we entrust them with understanding the world of choiceless choices? Nonetheless, we need to consider the age of users and the content they engage with.
e) Being historians means we research and tell history, mostly in books. This is why games made by historians or with their intense input often resemble books or graphic novels. Already, this way of non-linear storytelling seems utterly bold to us. But on the other hand, we also do not try to produce Oscar-winning films on the Holocaust but leave this to filmmakers. It might be better to understand games as a form of art and leave Holocaust games to game designers. As historians and educators, we do not aim to write novels about the Holocaust or direct films about it – for good reason. We can help with the process, with our expertise. And if I take the digital realm as well as game design seriously as an art, I take a step back.
f) Our unwillingness to overwhelm players, a deep ethical, educational consideration that often seems slightly absurd, as the Holocaust in itself is just this: completely overwhelming.

Would it help users to understand the Holocaust better if they felt discomfort? What would happen if the games I have described were developed by game design artists, maybe nurtured with our historical expertise? What would happen if these games were played and discussed? Potentially nothing. Holocaust representation is an extremely broad field, and we have seen many missteps happening over the years that have not led to drastic changes.

Are we uncomfortable, as we seize the huge political shifts of our time? With the deep crisis of (liberal) democracy, do we want to assure ourselves by safeguarding Holocaust memory from one or a few poorly done Holocaust-related games? Or are

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we actually worried that games might have an inkling to do with the shift in discourse? In that case, we should immediately start to make crass Holocaust games to open up a more honest discussion.

Some Conclusions

Some of the questions and ideas I have raised here are making me quite uncomfortable. We have not moved much from the early discussions on the limits of representations regarding games, for the reasons I have outlined here. We have been asking the same questions for many years. The important question is, why do we ask these questions? What makes us so uncomfortable? Are they about ethical issues, the perceived public discourse, or about the trauma of the Holocaust and how it runs deeply from generation to generation? The discomfort I have been trying to describe and analyse has many different causes. One of them is interactivity and immersion, the intensity of a digital experience of Holocaust history. How much do we want to immerse ourselves? How much do we want others to be immersed (however patronising this might be, and as educators of Holocaust, we tend to and maybe we need to be patronising)?

To conclude: If you're contemplating creating a Holocaust game, either don't do it (especially not everyone trying it on a low budget) or do it right, but then what does it mean to 'do it right'? How should we consider the limits of representation? If we don't dare to make bolder games about the Holocaust, then we should stop altogether. Either we should use a medium to its fullest, or something is holding us back, therefore, we should perhaps abandon it. And if there are legitimate reasons (as for sure can be argued) not to play the Holocaust outside very safe settings, does it really make sense to pursue this? If we do, then perhaps let us call them remembrance games or digital educational approaches, rather than Holocaust games.

The questions I want to ask at this point are:

- How do we represent the Shoah digitally in a more complex and brutal manner, breaking with the perpetrator's narrative of a smooth killing operation?
- Why do we not trust those who are playing our games or visiting the platforms we have designed?
- How can we safeguard Holocaust history and memory in the digital era in an innovative, inviting way, so that more people feel inclined to carry the burden of memory?

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- How do we understand the digital mediascape that surrounds us and all our projects?
- How do we think about the Holocaust and emotions in digital settings?

GAME OVER. START AGAIN?

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