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An entangled memoryscape: Holocaust memory on social media

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Abstract

Within Holocaust studies, there has been an increasingly uncritical acceptance that by engaging with social media, Holocaust memory has shifted from the 'era of the witness' to the 'era of the user' (Hogervorst 2020). This paper starts by problematising this proposition. This claim to a paradigmatic shift implies that (1) the user somehow replaces the witness as an authority of memory, which neglects the wealth of digital recordings of witnesses now circulating in digital spaces and (2) agency online is solely human-centric, a position that ignores the complex negotiations between corporations, individuals, and computational logics that shape our digital experiences. This article proposes instead that we take a posthumanist approach to understanding Holocaust memory on, and with, social media. Adapting Barad's (2007) work on entanglement to memory studies, we analyse two case studies on TikTok: the #WeRemember campaign and the docuseries How To: Never Forget to demonstrate: (1) the usefulness of reading Holocaust memory on social media through the lens of entanglement which offers a methodology that accounts for the complex network of human and non-human actants involved in the production of this phenomenon which are simultaneously being shaped by it. (2) That professional memory institutions and organisations are increasingly acknowledging the use of social media for the sake of Holocaust memory. Nevertheless, we observe that in practice the significance of technical actancy is still undervalued in this context.

Keywords: Holocaust memory; TikTok; posthumanism; social media; entanglement; algorithms

Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been a proliferation of scholarly interest in the topic of Holocaust memory on social media. Yet, the literature to date fails to recognise this phenomenon as shaped by a sociotechnical ecology. On the one hand, some scholars emphasise what Hoskins (2014) referred to as the 'bifurcation of memory', recognising that in contradistinction to an increasing visibility of networked, public memory-from-below on social media platforms, Holocaust organisations have tended to retain traditional modes of address more akin to the broadcast age (Manca 2021; Pfanzelter 2015). Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann (2020) does challenge this position in his analysis of German concentration camp memorials on social media during the COVID-19 Pandemic lockdowns, describing a trichotomy of 'transferring, transitioning, and transforming' analogue forms of commemoration into digital experiences. However, this still implies a reluctance

by these institutions to fully embrace the specificities of social media platforms for the sake of memory practices (Makhortykh and Walden 2023). On the other hand, others uncritically recognise Web 2.0 as 'me-dia' (Merrin 2014), emphasising it as a space that empowers individuals to be 'produsers' – simultaneously producers and users (Bruns 2008) – in a participatory culture (Jenkins *et al.* 2006) that challenges traditional hierarchies of memory culture. This approach tends to highlight the significance of the self in new practices of Holocaust memory on social media through terms such as 'I-pistemology' (Łysak 2022), 'second-person witnessing' (Douglas 2020) 'I-witnessing' (Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Henig 2021), the 'witnessee' (Feldman and Musih 2022; Pinchevski 2019), 'self-representation' (Bareither 2021), and 'self-witnessing' (Henig and Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022), only sometimes highlighting that identity performed through social media is always a self-in-relation. This dichotomy between institution and user-generated content 'does not capture the complexity of social media entanglement' (van Dijck 2013, 17). Furthermore, both approaches ignore criticisms of the corporate dimensions of social media (e.g., Andrejevic 2016; Carter 1997; Dean 2003; Fuchs 2014; Zuboff 2019) and downplay the significance of their technicity, presenting them as platforms *through* which human-to-human communication happens. These platforms are more accurately *sociotechnical media* than simply *social media*.

In this article, we seek to address the over-emphasis of self and human sociability in current scholarship by exploring Holocaust memory on social media through the lens of entanglement. Firstly, we critique the established positions introduced above, placing these in dialogue with wider literature within media studies on algorithmic logics and culture. We then explain our methodology before analysing two case studies which both engage with TikTok. We focus on this platform specifically because it has drawn attention to the significance of algorithmic activity, even if this has long been an attribute of social media. Through these examples, we highlight how looking at social media engagement with Holocaust memory through the lens of entanglement underscores how organisations could engage with the specificities of digital connectivity for the sake of remembering this past.

Putting the technical back into sociotechnical media

The so-called digital turn in Holocaust studies is often framed by scholars as a shift from the 'era of the witness' (Wieviroka 2006) to the 'era of the user' (Hogervorst 2020). However, like many terms that become catchphrases in academia, the original meaning of Susan Hogervorst's claim has been diluted, standing now as a general descriptor for user-centric participatory culture online and a catch-all term for Web 2.0 engagement. Hogervorst introduces the term 'the era of the user' not in relation to social media, but rather, to suggest that digital testimony portals create a new dynamic in memory culture, which centralises the user over the witness in experiences with testimony. She argues the 'era of the user' distinguishes a shift regarding who was/is centralised in the experience of/with testimony. The witness is still a vital agent in this encounter, but it is the user, or as Amit Pinchevski puts it 'the witnessee' (2019), who drives the way the witness's story is experienced. This contrasts with testimony in its traditional oral history form, in which Hogervorst maintains, it is the survivor that controls the narrative structure. Although, of course in both instances, the form is heavily shaped by institutional and technological contexts (Shandler 2017; Shenker 2015).

This approach contrasts literature about self-witnessing on social media that positions itself in relation to this so-called new era of the user, in which the act of witnessing is an articulation of contemporary visitor's encounters with a memorial site which they present through digital media (Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Henig 2021). In such 'self-witnessing' experiences, the original witness to the Holocaust is totally absent. In contrast, following

Hogervorst's logic, the user and historical witness remain deeply connected. A recent empirical study illustrates that this is also true on social media, where posts by Holocaust organisations that foreground victims, survivors, or rescuers receive considerably more engagements by users than posts about memorial sites more generally, including advertisements of their events and behind-the-scenes content with curators (Makhortykh and Walden 2023). Further analysis has shown that users who share their own experiences of Holocaust sites online tend to adopt established aesthetics and decorum, therefore reiterating the approaches of institutional memory rather than offering a distinct alternative (Commane and Potton 2019; Dalziel 2016). Thus, rather than a bifurcation of memory practice, we see user and institutional approaches on social media as entangled.

Discourse about Holocaust selfies tends to emphasise the relationality between the personal, historical site, and the networked social (Bareither 2021; Douglas 2020; Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Henig 2021) but downplays the technical actants involved in the production of selfies. Whilst to some extent continuations of pre-digital practice (selfies are almost as old as photography), digital selfies distinguish themselves as 'assemblage[s] of non-human' and human agents (Hess 2015, 1629). Their relationality then is not solely human-to-human. There are two planes of immediate technical involvement: (1) the mobile device on which selfies are usually recording – these not only enable images to be taken on location and then quickly uploaded on-the-fly, but also perceive and process images computationally. To the mobile, the photograph is not an optic image, but data represented numerically on a sensor, processed by a microchip – mobile images are 'non-representational' (MacKenzie and Munster 2019). (2) The algorithmic interventions of the social media platforms on which the selfie is shared. Here, code determines the visibility of the image to other users. User, user account, content, and the wider network of users who engage with the post are all tagged in ways invisible to users. This tagging makes sense of each of these components as data nodes – with little computational distinction between 'human user', 'image', or 'text'. Platforms perceive in invisual, relational, non-representational, operative ways, and are continually generative (MacKenzie and Munster 2019). Other planes may also play a role later if the selfie gains significant traction online and circulates in spaces beyond the sites to which it was originally uploaded. Even when the technical aspects of *sociotechnical media* are recognised in writing about media memory, there is still a tendency to centralise the human with anthropomorphic language such as 'gestural image' (Frosh 2019) and neologisms like 'memobilia' (Reading 2009). Despite Hoskins's nuanced discussions of 'memory of the multitude' as sociotechnical, he describes the multitude as 'the defining digital organizational form of memory beyond but also incorporating the *self*' (2018, 85 [our emphasis]) and refers to its distinct assets as 'the *self's* new connections and entanglements' (2018, 85). Memory studies remains a little *self*-obsessed. This is not surprising, given most of the existing literature is situated within the Humanities – the study of human beings and their culture.

We have not simply moved from the witness to the self-witness, or from institutional to a produser-driven memory with social media; rather Holocaust memory is evolving into a posthuman phenomenon. Emerging technologies are increasingly playing a significant role in shaping memory of this past meaning we must take the *technical* aspects of this sociotechnical phenomenon seriously, rather than simply discussing it as social, collective, or cultural memory. It is worth noting that Holocaust memory has always been a sociotechnical phenomenon – books, television, and film – have all played a significant role in shaping what it means to remember this past (see Flanzbaum 1999; Fogu *et al.* 2016; Friedlander 1992; Magilow and Silverman 2019 [2015]).[1] Nevertheless, the rapid

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[1] The nuances of this long history are beyond the scope of this article, we encourage the reader to review Walden (forthcoming) for an archaeological exploration of media's relationships with the Holocaust.

development of connective computing possibilities and their introduction into both formal and informal memory practices has thrown this significance into sharp relief.

Challenging assumptions about the sociability of social media, José van Dijck redefines the social as 'the result of human input shaped by computed output and vice versa – a sociotechnical ensemble whose components can hardly be told apart' (2013, 14). Unlike many of the scholars critiqued above, Hoskins does recognise the autonomy of digital data beyond human visibility (2018, 94). Following Mauricio Delfin, he acknowledges the 'aggregative nature' of databases which reconstitute memory as relational data always open to potential connectivity with other data opposed to memory as coherent narratives about the past (2018, 94). What these two distinctions highlight is (1) the relationality of social media happens between humans and computers, as much as between humans and humans, and (2) that users and their data are 'understood' computationally in completely different ways to how they are presented at the interface. This line of argument is further supported by work on artificial intelligence (AI), which disputes the 'simulative model' in which AI is compared to human intelligence (Fazi 2019; Mackenzie 2015). Such literature emphasises that AI and machine learning more broadly work by generalising data (they work at collective big data levels rather than the personal) and use probability modelling and pattern recognition to make predictions, they are thus also generative not simply collecting data. Just as the self is constructed through the online and offline activity of humans in relation to social norms and practices, algorithms are also performativity. However, the latter do not attempt to produce coherent computational selves or support the illusion that we as human users can have coherent selves. Rather, they work to (re)arrange the sociotechnical – the relations between users and users, users and platforms, and platforms and other platforms. In doing so, they challenge attempts by users to construct their own sense of a coherent self (Butler 1990; Cover 2016), attributing a broad range of data tags to individual users which accumulate and change over time. These are based not only on any single user's behaviour, but predictions of their possible interests created through ongoing analysis of ever-growing generalised data sets. Thus, they produce social arrangements, affect and material realities (Bucher 2017; Fisher and Mehozay 2019; Mackenzie and Munster 2019). Social media function through the computational logics of numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding (Manovich 2001), but discrete digital data nodes constantly circulate in 'computational relationality' and these ensembles have 'generative force' on both platform and wider culture (MacKenzie and Munster 2019). We will now turn our attention to TikTok before moving onto analysis of two specific Holocaust-related case studies on the platform.

Algorithms and TikTok

Whilst algorithms are not new to the arrangement of data on social media, Douyin, and its global counterpart TikTok, have drawn particular attention to their significance as they have 'forefronted' the algorithm (Bharndari and Bimo 2022). Liang (2022) goes so far as to argue that 'social' media are being displaced by algorithmic counterparts as these newer platforms are designed to discourage sociality, instead 'prioritising algorithmically distributed content' (Liang 2022, 1111). (Although as we have seen, van Dijck (2013) has long critiqued the focus on sociability with Web 2.0 platforms.) Douyin and TikTok function through an emphasis on digital modularity in which every component is tagged separately, from songs and filters to users and their posts. Creators and users are then recommended particular components both at the production stage, where a limited number of songs and filters are offered, or via their 'For You' page, which algorithmically curates content for them. Mechanisms that allow users to follow, find their followers, and message users are

deprioritised for the sake of keeping users attending to algorithmically arranged content (Bharndari and Bimo 2022). Unless one purposefully resists this, content is divorced from context (Bharndari and Bimo 2022). This user engagement in turn produces further tagging for the algorithm. Liang argues that Douyin and TikTok produce a new attention model that is no longer structured around the human-centric influencer but is rather machine-centric. This new model presents 'precarious attention' for its users through 'flexible accumulation' – it is near-impossible to plan what type of content will be successful or not (Liang 2022, 1112). Thus, whilst the self and sociability might feel significant to users at the interface, they are practically meaningless in the new attention model. At the computational level, the self is constituted in terms of numerous discrete digital markers that can be adjusted on-the-fly (Fisher and Mehozay 2019; Lupton 2016). It is not a *self* we would easily identify with from a human perspective if it is indeed still a *self* at all.

With the global popularity of TikTok, however, users have developed an 'algorithmic imaginary' (Bucher 2017), in which they apply perceived logics and develop communities to discuss strategies to tame, train, or game the algorithm (Jones 2023; Liang 2022; Siles *et al.* 2022; Simpson *et al.* 2022). Liang identifies several techniques adopted by users: producing solely 'homogeneous 'vertical content'' (2022, 1121) in order to control the tags attributed to your account and posts; 'petting' (2022, 1126), in which users dedicate several days to solely viewing content they believe shares the tags they relate to their account; 'manual optimisation', which involves adopting a pattern-recognition approach as a user by trying to replicate the format and content of your most successful posts (2022, 1126–1127); and 'Matrix accounts' (2022, 1125), a technique adopted by brands upon noting that TikTok and Douyin deprioritise companies. Matrix accounts are an array of individual accounts which repeat content and appear on each other's posts functioning to disperse the brand. However, an examination of the techniques that users adopt to navigate the recommendation algorithms (which appear to focus heavily on the self), exposes a clear naivety about how they work. Creating a homogenously coherent self or developing a branded self-in-relation across multiple accounts are techniques that seem to rely on traditional ideas of narrativising the self. Yet, algorithms work on generalised and ongoing accumulation of big data. Recommendations recognise patterns across different users and are predictive, e.g., content is recommended to a user that they may not anticipate liking. They are not personalised in the way we might humanly conceive of personalisation. Furthermore, platforms are not separate from one another (Bharndari and Bimo 2022; van Dijck 2013). Just as users share their posts across multiple sites, data are also shared through third party apps and other arrangements, meaning that individuals do not have to be a user of a site for the company that owns the platform to have access to a vast amount of data about them (Elmer 2019). How can one account for this complex web of connectivity methodologically, then?

Entanglement of memory

One response to this question is to understand Holocaust memory across social media through the lens of entanglement. We take this term from the work of theoretical Quantum Physicist Karen Barad, who illustrates the similar interjections that need to be made in both the philosophy of physics and cultural studies if we are to better understand the 'agentic realism' of our lived world. Their approach is distinctly anti-representational and posthumanist, arguing that to understand our world, we need to recognise that both meaning and the actants involved in meaning-making are always in a state of becoming. Any phenomenon, for Barad, is shaped by intra-action between objects and measuring agencies, which themselves emerge through 'rather than precede the intra-action that produces them' (2007, 128). 'Phenomenon' is understood through the

lens of Bohrian philosophy to mean any instance of 'wholeness' (2007, 119). While Barad's description here is more fitting for a discussion of scientific investigation than digital memory culture, they nevertheless eloquently address the significance of this to cultural performativity too. In doing so, they highlight the over-dependency on representationalism in both the physical sciences (e.g., with visual instruments like the telescope) as well as culture (one example of this might be media representations). Just as Barad highlights the significance of the relationality between human and non-human actants in the production of meaning and existence, then, we argue for a similar case in relation to the production of memory culture.

Some scholars have adopted methodologies which try to account for the complex connectivity of social media (e.g., Bareither 2023; van Dijck 2013). Van Dijck, however, brings together actor network theory and political economy to look at social media at the macro scale. Whereas we are interested in zooming into the monads: specific accounts and campaigns, before zooming out to explore wider connectivities. Whilst Bareither's (2023) recent contribution proposes a 'content-as-practice' approach, it dismisses technological agency. To be clear, Barad's notion of entanglement recognises the dispersal of performativity across human and non-human actants as well as the generative potentiality of such arrangements to produce both phenomena and the subjectivities within their entanglement.

To take Holocaust memory on social media as a specific phenomenon (a 'whole'), we thus seek to demonstrate how understanding it as shaped by continual inter-actions between a variety of both human and non-human actants (1) helps us to acknowledge the complex levels of agency involved in its production, (2) recognise that the phenomenon comes to define the users, platforms, cultures, and practices involved in it as much as being defined by them, and (3) when recognised in the planning process can lead to the creation of social media campaigns that adopt the specific affordances of Web 2.0 platforms. We now move onto apply this analysis to two case studies: the #WeRemember campaign initiated by UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress and How To: Never Forget – a TikTok documentary series by influencer Montana Tucker.

TikTok entanglements

In the following analyses, we consider the different nodes of the phenomenon of Holocaust memory on social media, which we argue are: the various human actants from curators, advocates, historical figures, and witnesses, to users; the commercial and platform agents and the latter's computational logics; institutional actancy of Holocaust organisations; the actancy of discrete digital components and their relationality to other actants; the more implicit actancy that emerges from within content and themes, e.g., the places visited, their histories and the presentation of victims or others; and finally, the form of presentation. Rather than solely focus on any one of these specific elements, we emphasise how human and non-human actants work in-relation to one another in the production of Holocaust memory on social media, whilst these actants are in turn shaped by being involved in the production of this phenomenon. Furthermore, we illustrate the extent to which Holocaust organisations are acknowledging that they are but one actant within such entanglements, and thus are beginning to develop a more entangled strategy to social media. Crucially, we highlight, however, that more work is needed to fully account for the significance of non-human actants.

#WeRemember

The #WeRemember campaign in 2022 was part of a wider partnership between UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress, who had previously collaborated with Meta and in this

year extended to working with TikTok. It was the seventh year that the two transnational organisations had run the campaign and yet the year in which it seemed most visible. Manual user searches for #HolocaustMemorialDay on January 27th, 2022 on TikTok foregrounded several #WeRemember posts to the top of the results. There were few obvious posts by everyday users; however, those that were most visible were from formal institutions, members of royal families, politicians, and celebrities. For example, the three top posts related to Holocaust Memorial Day all presented an individual holding a white piece of paper blazoned with '#WeRemember'. These posts came from the accounts of actor Gabriel Macht, actress Mayim Bialik, and the German football club FCBayern. In a UN Civil Society Briefing in February 2022, Corey Weiss from the World Jewish Congress noted that it was not only important that people across society simply took part, but that the campaign was endorsed by opinion leaders, which included the Pope, football teams, influencers, a cosmonaut on the ISS, and celebrities. Each different type of endorser had the potential to widen the reach of the campaign and thus Holocaust memory to lesser reached groups. As such the campaign adopted a matrix-style approach. However, unlike the corporate matrices introduced earlier, #WeRemember involved numerous well-established and high-profile accounts sharing a repeated message. Rather than adopt a broadcast-esque approach of sharing commemorative messages to a supposed online mass, then, #WeRemember explicitly engaged in the networked, many-to-many logics of social media. Although it prioritised particular nodes in those networks focusing on cultural influencers – a strategy Liang (2022) argues is associated with classic 'social' media opposed to what they define as today's algorithmic mediascape. The choice of influencers (the Pope, television and film stars, and football teams opposed to social media influencers) also harks back to a tradition of the broadcast age of opinion leaders informing wider media choices, and fan culture as defined by homogenous followers rather than participatory creators – the latter being more common in Web 2.0 spaces (Jenkins *et al.* 2006). The metrics shared by the World Jewish Congress (Weiss 2022) demonstrate the impact of this with a reach of more than 1 billion people across 127 countries at that date (early February 2022).

In May 2023, searching for #WeRemember revealed 144.4 million views of the hashtag just on TikTok. Above the search results is, unusually, a message from the platform:

> TikTok is committed to keeping our community safe by fostering a kind and authentic environment for creative expression. While browsing this topic, we recommend you verify facts using trusted sources, such as the multilingual website (http://aboutholocaust.org) for essential information about the history of the Holocaust and its legacy. Please report any content which you think may violate our Community Guidelines.

This is not the only place where the About Holocaust website, created by UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress as part of this campaign, is visible. It is also embedded as a notification on every post to the platform that mentions the word Holocaust or any other of a list of 60 related terms they have identified, including those related to denial like 'Holohoax' (Weiss 2022). The partnership with platforms – Meta and Twitter, as well as TikTok – also extended to ad grants which helped to promote the content. Contrary to the algorithmic awareness or 'imaginary' (Bucher 2017) which many users express in trying to tame, train or game the app, partnering at the corporate level enabled a manipulation of the algorithm to ensure this commemorative content was made highly visible, for example by incorporation embedded links to the campaign-related 'About Holocaust' website on any post including a series of selected words related to the Holocaust, including those attributed to denial and distortion without the permission

of the user who created the post. Such an approach recognises an entanglement of institutional, corporate, and algorithmic actancy.

The simple gesture of holding up a sheet of paper with the words '#WeRemember' could be understood as a meme. The rules of engagement are explicitly outlined on both an accompanying campaign website (https://weremember.worldjewishcongress.org/) and in the WJC post on TikTok pinned to the top of search results. Yet, it is clear from the published posts how one can engage, and it is uncommon to have such detailed instructions to encourage participation in a challenge or action via social media. There is tension here between embracing the dispersed actancy and circulation characteristic of social media virality, and a need to retain authority over memory practice by the major organisations behind the campaign. Although it is meme-like, the campaign would be better understood in relation to the Dawkinsian notion of a meme rather than as an Internet meme. Whilst the former was defined as 'a unit of cultural transmission or a unit of imitation' and included things such as slogans; Internet memes are distinguished by the fact they are transformed and modified through the imitative process, engaging individuals within a participatory culture as creators not just copiers (Grundlingh 2018; Milner 2012; Shifman 2014). Each altered repetition expands the Internet meme's discursive power, adding something new to the discussion (Wiggins and Bowers 2015). Internet memes, then, speak to the computational logic of variability (Manovich 2001). One cannot be presumptuous enough to design a meme, rather an 'emergent meme' – a post with memetic potential only transforms into an actual meme, if it is adapted and circulated by amateur producers whose posts maintain a reference to the original, despite variation (Wiggins and Bowers 2015). Whilst a meme might have the appearance of a discrete computational component, they only become memetic through the complex circulatory entanglements of sociotechnical media: their communicative potential rests as much with algorithmic actancy as with that of users.

Rather than being *memetic*, the #WeRemember posts might be better understood as *mimetic*: 'the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power' (Taussig 2018, 2). Although like a simulacrum, the circulating copies of copies make it unclear what, if any, post is the original. Since 2023, the pinned WJC instruction post most clearly serves as this original reference. However, it can only be identified as such by users that purposefully search the hashtag, which is not the way the TikTok platform is primarily designed for user-engagement. Rather, users are directed to the algorithmically curated 'For You' page where any #WeRemember post could be sandwiched between an array of totally unrelated content. However, the campaign transposes mimesis into a traditional commemoration format. Whilst Walter Benjamin claimed that mimesis encourages a 'compulsion to become the Other' (1933 [1979]), here the actions of those contributing posts to the campaign enunciate a sharedness – a sameness. The repeated gesture of holding a '#WeRemember' sign has a similar resonance to activities that present the embodied intensity of coming-togetherness characteristic of commemoration events (Casey 2000 [1987]; Cossu 2010; Durkheim 2001[1912]), although dispersed temporally and spatially across the world. Sharing one's demonstration of participating in this action instantly establishes one's sense of belonging to a memory community. It is significant that these posts foreground the self, despite the long-standing criticisms of selfie culture and Holocaust memory. The self here is an active remembering body, which is emphasised by the present tense of the hashtag we *Remember*, not we have or will remember, yet appearing against blank or blurred backgrounds each individual is decontextualised. No longer then, is this a physically situated self (as with Holocaust selfies), presented in-relation with an environment from the lived world, rather they become part of a shared presentation of an emerging memory space as each post connects them all to a

space of remembrance in which the individual posters collectively become the *we* that is remembering together. This space is produced through the connective performativity of the #WeRemember meme, which resists the computational potentiality of variability for the sake of a collective remembering mass. In the mass, any sense of a particular performative self becomes irrelevant except for their value as opinion leaders with algorithmic potential to make the campaign visible to new audiences and thus to enhance the magnitude of the *we*. Nevertheless, whilst engaging with some computational logics (such as algorithmic manipulation at the corporate level) yet resisting others (the variability of the Internet meme), the space of remembrance is produced through the very entanglement of human and non-human actants defining this phenomenon – it did not exist before these actants met.

The content demonstrates the post-representational qualities of social media; the photographs, short clips, or video montages in posts do not express any specific meaning about the Holocaust, neither do they really distinguish differences in memory culture across the different peoples and places presented. As noted above, the background tends to be plain or blurred in most posts we discovered. It is the performative gesture rather than representation of the past that matters here; the sense of connecting with others through a shared action is what counts. Hoskins ([2018](#)) might critique such posts as 'sharing without sharing' as they lack substance (indeed, it's not even clear in many posts *what* we are supposedly remembering without linguistic or visual references to the Holocaust). Nevertheless, to some extent the ambiguity has the potential to capture users' curiosity whilst also avoiding reiterating canonical tropes of Holocaust representation. The fact that the images and videos are overlaid with the in-post notification encouraging users to visit the About Holocaust website suggesting a recognition for the need to signpost users to more empirical knowledge, whilst recognising that the short format of social media is not the best place for historical nuance. The automated addition of the notification depends on the user including one of the 60 terms identified by UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress to their post. If they simply demonstrate themselves holding a piece of paper declaring '#WeRemember', then this additional information is unlikely to appear. The addition of the in-post notifications both challenges and reinforces TikTok's logics. On the one hand, it makes visible algorithmic interference and yet, on the other hand, in doing so it provides a link which directs users' attention away from the platform connecting the campaign to multiple online spaces rather than retaining the user within the TikTok frame, and thus, the corporation relinquishes the potential for further data collection for the sake of encouraging well-informed Holocaust memory and education. The campaign then, affects TikTok's corporate model which, to remind the reader, operates using digital modularity designed to keep users on the platform for longer so it can collect data and manipulate user experience.

Montana Tucker goes to Poland

In contradistinction to the #WeRemember campaign's reliance on cultural influencers, the Claims Conference's partnership with Montana Tucker in 2022 was one of the first instances in which an organisation dedicated to Holocaust memory and education reached out to a content creator working specifically on these platforms to co-create a campaign. Such collaboration marks an important milestone as Holocaust memory organisations begin to recognise the value of social media influencers in the general mediascape and for their potential to reach new audiences (Walden [2022](#)).

Tucker's fame did not emerge with social media, the American singer and songwriter first appeared on US screens through music videos and advertisements when she was 8 years old. Now, arguably best known for dancing, she has more than 9.2 million followers

on TikTok amassing over 181.4 million likes on her choreographed dance videos in which she collaborates with other dancers, celebrities, and online personalities to produce in her words 'very light-hearted, fun dance videos' (Lebovic 2022). Tucker has more recently started to build a reputation for activism; of interest for this article is her TikTok documentary series *How To: Never Forget* produced by Israel Shachter and Rachel Kastner at SoulShop Studios, partially funded by the Claims Conference. The docuseries is divided into 10 parts consisting of approximately 2–3-min videos which follow Montana as she traces her family history by travelling to various sites of Nazi persecution across Poland accompanied by her professional guide, Zak Jeffay from the organisation JRoots. Prior to the docuseries, Tucker had posted three videos with her grandparents between 2021 and 2022 which introduced them as Holocaust survivors, however, the majority of her posts have been dedicated to dance – maintaining the algorithmic imaginary of consistent tagging to her profile (Liang 2022).

In the first instalment, Tucker films herself using the selfie aesthetic, a visual technique of self-presentation integral to 'witnessing modes' on social media (Henig and Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022) which communicate a first-person point of view. She apologies for crying as she shares details of her grandparent's survival as her motivation for creating the project. The editing positions the docuseries in stark contrast to her dance videos as Tucker self-reflexively acknowledges that such difficult subject matter does not fit with the remit of her usual content. Appealing to her community as though they are friends, she issues a call to action through an intimate style of communication which Abidin describes as 'perceived interconnectedness' (2015). Indeed, by imploring her followers to watch and share her journey, in spite of – and even because of its marked difference from her usual content – Tucker performs a transparent and vulnerable self which Banet-Weiser suggests constitutes 'the labor of authenticity' (2021, 143) which female influencers in particular, are expected to uphold (Arriagada and Bishop 2021). Yet, her call to share her story jars with the very logics of TikTok, as content cannot simply be shared on the platform as it can on Twitter or Facebook. Rather, it can only be shared through variability, e.g., duetting, whereby a user posts their video alongside another creator's video, appearing in a split screen and playing simultaneously or stitching, a tool which enables a user to combine part of another creator's video with their own. Crucially, then, Tucker's mode of address as a traditional 'social' influencer and her suggestion for user engagement are in tension with the platform's logics.

Tucker performs the illusionary 'authentic self' common to the social influencer aesthetic through 'calibrated amateurism' (Abidin 2015) manifested through shaky camerawork, loss of focus and shifting frame ratios (despite being accompanied by a professional production team) and also through her colloquial language and interactions with her tour guide. For instance, upon visiting the Bełżec Memorial, she asks 'how are they able to get this many people in here and then just *delete* it?' which enables her viewers to locate her *ordinariness* and familiarity within an extraordinary narrative. This is achieved not simply through the clunky sentence structure but through her (seemingly subconscious) choice of the word 'delete' coded as 'murder'. With its clear connotations to computational language, the word performs an ironic double function: communicating the truth of the Holocaust at its most dehumanising point, whilst simultaneously signalling back to Tucker as influencer, enabling her fan base to still recognise her in-relation.

The journey which unfolds over the subsequent episodes is typical of Holocaust pilgrimages, rooted in a rich history and tradition of familial return visitations to former sites of Nazi persecution (see Cole 2013; Jilvosky 2015; Kidron 2015). As Liat Steir-Livny's research into Third Generation documentary (2019) demonstrates, the recording of such experiences by the grandchildren of survivors is not a new phenomenon. In fact, on a

representational level, the series appropriates well-established Holocaust iconography and tropes such as the cattle truck and train tracks at Auschwitz-Birkenau. What is novel about this project (beyond the collaborative efforts mentioned above) is that more than 100 h of footage are edited into segments lasting no more than 3 min and uploaded onto her personal TikTok account as a docuseries, ever-present through the pinning function, located at the top of her profile (on a web browser) or archived in the play tab (on the app). Whilst Andreas Schellewald notes that documentary is one of six communicative forms that has emerged on TikTok, the genre is still usually 'marked by a comedic tonality' and documents 'everyday life' (2021, 1445). In contrast, Tucker's docuseries adopts a serious and solemn tone and focuses on the extraordinary. Furthermore, whilst Schellewald argues that on TikTok, the documentary form departs from a focus on the 'distinct content creator['s] personality' and emphasises more 'relatability' (2021, 1446), Tucker's videos are very much centred on the self, her specific genealogy and personal relationship to this past.

Crucially, then, we suggest that Tucker *betrays* her professional strategy to train the algorithm (Jones 2023; Siles *et al.* 2022; Simpson *et al.* 2022) following the logic of the 'the data attraction model' introduced above (Liang 2022) by adopting a broadcast-like rather than TikTok aesthetic and vernacular and changing the focus of her content. There are no duets or stiches, lip-synching, dancing, or use of bluescreen in the docuseries, strategies of 'playful activism' which have evolved through human-to-computational relationality on TikTok to navigate serious and political topics (Cervi and Divon 2023). Although she has shown mastery over such techniques in the past (for example, during her collaborations with dancers with disabilities). Furthermore, working against the grain of the algorithmic curation of TikTok, the docuseries had a staged release, akin to televisual or YouTube episodes published across the 10 days leading up to the commemoration of Kristallnacht (9th November). (It is notable that the docuseries was not solely released on TikTok but was a multi-platform campaign which might account for the lack of engagement with platform-specific functionalities.) Tucker also risks becoming less visible on the platform through fragmentation, that is by mixing content related to the Holocaust amidst her otherwise narrow focus on (what may be labelled by the system as) 'dance' and 'music' (including videos tackling other serious topics). Whilst the first video received 1.1 million total views (figures which correlate to her most watched dance videos), the next nine instalments of Tucker's experience in Poland did not exceed 318.6 thousand views per post. Whilst one might be tempted to take this as evidence that Holocaust content is not popular with Montana's fan base, recognition of the algorithmic arrangement of TikTok content suggests that this decline in viewing figures illustrates a shift in the way her posts have been tagged and then curated on users' 'For You' pages. Nevertheless, there clearly was dissatisfaction amongst her fanbase as Montana reportedly lost thousands of followers each time she published a post about the Holocaust (Lebovic 2022).

Notably, Tucker uses the hashtag #JewishTikTok, a hashtag used by creators to counter anti-Semitism and hate speech online (Divon and Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2022). These creators use the platform's unique vernacular, trends, and aesthetics 'to combat Holocaust denial while dancing and lip-synching in challenges, destigmatize Jewish culture using the respond-to-comment feature, immerse themselves in Jewish history with the green-screen effect, showcase Jewish customs, reveal behind-the-scenes of the match-making "industry" and even go "live" to broadcast antisemitic attacks in Israel and the United States in real time' (2022, 47–48). There is a tension between Tucker's use of this hashtag, yet explicit resistance of the vernacular and aesthetics that define it. This implies that the use of hashtags here are much more about making her content discoverable, then participating in and belonging to this particular subculture.

A similar logic applies to her engagement with the respond to comment function. The comments attached to Tucker's docuseries posts are more varied than those that accompany her dance videos. On the latter, we see far more examples of superficial comments like 'hiiiii' and 'first comment'. Such responses are illustrative of a tendency for users to use comments to communicate with the algorithm rather than the poster, signalling a desire for similar content to populate their 'For You' page (a 'petting' strategy). There are some examples of this in responses to her docuseries. However, these posts also prompt many users to add personal anecdotes about their Jewishness or their family histories. On the surface, this suggests a connective, social experience where users feel compelled to participate in dialogue over communicating with the algorithm. However, Tucker's replies shut down the possibility of further dialogue as she repetitively posts the clasped hands emoji (indicating prayer) alongside the love heart emoji gesturing thanks to the person without truly engaging with their message. Her, or her team's, motivation for replying in this way could be to appease her fan base by acknowledging them or it could be an attempt to boost the visibility of posts by adding further replies. Either way, she demonstrates a lack of interest in using the platform socially. Advancing Hoskins's (2018) aforementioned term 'sharing without sharing' to denote how social media becomes more of a compulsive activity (liking, sharing, swiping) than a connective experience, we propose 'commenting without commenting' as a conceptual aperture to describe the phenomenon of human to (imagined) machine communication which not only masquerades as a human-to-human connection but actively threatens sociability. To be clear, responses which close down dialogue with other users may still serve a communicative purpose on a *computational* level.

Tucker's experience, then, serves as a case study to demonstrate how Holocaust memory is entangled in a complex web of relations between technology, computational practices, social conventions, physical landscapes, and human bodies. In this case, entrenched in commemorative practices and traditions which are fostered through the collaboration with both Holocaust organisations and social media platforms, on- and offline. Indeed, reading this case study through the notion of entanglement enables us to account for the ways in which both the Holocaust heritage sector and Tucker herself continue to be shaped by such relations. Indeed, it is noteworthy that Tucker has recently been presented with the 'social media activist' award by the Auschwitz Jewish Centre Foundation, invited as a guest speaker to mark the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's 30th anniversary and was selected as an official emcee for the Israeli embassy in Washington to celebrate Israel's 75th anniversary. This recent flurry of accolades indicates a transition underway in how the sector engages with social media (and its influencers) and how, in turn, individual performances of self are entangled with computational practices and wider commemorative culture.

Conclusion

In this article, we have illustrated two key claims: (1) the usefulness of reading Holocaust memory on social media through the lens of entanglement which offers a methodology that accounts for the complex network of human and non-human actants involved in the production of this phenomenon which are simultaneously being shaped by it. (2) That Holocaust organisations and professional memory institutions are increasingly realising the affordances of digital connectivity for the future of Holocaust memory and education. However, we wish to underscore that such work is in its infancy and still emerging. Firstly, because the very nature of entanglements that shape such connectivity are always in a state of becoming (ergo, they are always *emerging*). Secondly, because there is still substantial evidence to suggest that historical practices remain dominant (Makhortykh and

Walden 2023). Thirdly, because connectivity is still primarily understood by Holocaust organisations as human-to-human or organisational partnerships with less attention given to technical connectivity. We are not suggesting that the examples presented here have created a radically new way to produce Holocaust memory online. Rather, we hope to have illustrated how they are acknowledging the existence of entanglements by working with platforms or influencers, whilst navigating the juxtaposition of traditional commemorative practices with computational, and particularly algorithmic, logics to differing levels of success. Whilst the #WeRemember campaign engages in algorithmic manipulation drawing users away from TikTok to empirical information about the Holocaust, TikTok sensation Montana Tucker's docuseries risks her social media visibility by going against the vernacular and algorithmic grain of the platform. Through these case studies, we hope to have highlighted that the phenomenon of Holocaust memory on social media is shaped by a complex entanglement of human and non-human actants, wrestling with the tensions between commemoration traditions and algorithmic culture. In both examples, however, it is not only Holocaust memory that is produced, #WeRemember alters the logics of TikTok and writes over user posts whilst the introduction of Holocaust content into Tucker's account rearranges the coherence of 'self' presented as this social media influencer's brand identity. In order to maintain and grow a significant visibility of Holocaust memory in these online spaces, Holocaust organisations and other creators need to give serious attention to how they work *with* platforms, algorithms, and expert creators recognising that actancy is dispersed across all. Nevertheless, this is not an easy task. Social media platforms are notoriously secret about the algorithmic design and regularly alter the computational logics that arrange content both on their sites and in relation with others.

To take an entangled approach to Holocaust memory on social media, then, requires two attitudes: (1) in academia, we need to attend to the significance of computational logics in our analyses and not over-emphasise the human agency of social media communication. (2) In practice, Holocaust institutions and other memory actors should approach social media activity through a design methodology that takes into consideration the possibilities of engaging with a wide range of actants from the corporate platforms and influencers, to historical authorities (including themselves) and wider users, through technical actants. If platforms continue to be opaque about their computational logics then collaborating with them, as UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress did, offers one way to approach algorithms from the inside without personally having access to their workings. More broadly, developing algorithmic literacies across the Holocaust heritage and academic sectors would at least support an understanding of the potentials of computational agency for Holocaust memory and could offer scope to develop digital initiatives that challenge the opacity of corporate platforms.

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