

Final abstract

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Finnish World War II photographs: shaping understanding in temporal context

In November 2006 some three hundred previously classified Finnish World War II photographs were made public. Among them are pictures of field court-martial, military executions, destroyed Finnish villages and evidences of cannibalism. In this paper I will focus on conversations about the photographs on the Internet forum of the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. Also a collage of ten photographs published on their webpage will be looked at.

What I am interested here is the relationship between photographs and memory, and at a broader sense, between visuality and understanding. Photographs as media of memory seem to have an ability to give an experience of certainty that something had existed. On the other hand though, photographs can be controversial and their relevance called into question. In my paper I will present some preliminary notions on the role of the photographs in constituting and shaping our understanding in temporal context. I will study the responses people had to viewing the photographs and consider the meanings that are given to the photographs in the Internet conversations. Questions of violence and representation come to play here. I am also interested in what sorts of implications or responsibilities photographs of the past might bring to present.