
The Malach Centre for Visual History – An Invaluable Facility of Knowledge

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“To overcome prejudice, intolerance, and bigotry – and the suffering they cause – through the educational use of the Institute’s visual history testimonies”. This is the mission statement of The Institute for Visual History and Education, an archive filled to the brim with stories of some from of the world’s biggest events.

Entering the Malach Centre for Visual History, located in the Computer Science building of the Charles University Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, with no previous knowledge of what is actually contained within the archives; I adopted an open minded approach. When I first heard the facility described as an “archive” I believe it was fair for me to presume the Malach Centre was a library of some sort.

I was wrong.

The sheer exclusivity of these archives (Charles University is one of only 17 European sites providing full local access to the *University of Southern California Shoah Foundation - Visual History Archive*) immediately invites visitors to appreciate their sheer importance. The archives hold an exceptionally large database compiled of various interviews, thanks to the help and cooperation of *Refugee Voices* (an association of Jewish refugees).

Together with various other facilities scattered across Europe, the Malach Centre in Prague boasts approximately 53,000 videotaped interviews with survivors of various mass genocides and other world events (with the Holocaust providing the background for a substantial portion of the interviews). Upon further dissection of the statistics, we learn that the centre contains over 112,000 hours’ worth of interviews. The videos, spanning across 63 countries, are available in a wide range of languages (fortunately for me, as an English speaker, the majority are available in my preferred language).

The archives have existed for a considerably long time. To assume that it took time and a substantial amount of effort to collect the video interviews would certainly be correct. Between 1994 and 1999, testimonies and interviews of Holocaust survivors were compiled, intended to be placed within the infamous archives. From 1999 to 2005 these testimonies were indexed and catalogued in order to make them more accessible to students, teachers and scholars. Finally, between 2008 and 2012 the video tapes were digitised. Since 2006, the archives have been available to use for educational purposes, most certainly proving to be an invaluable resource.

For users that are unfamiliar with how the archive system works, the website can undoubtedly feel overwhelming at first. With 53,000 videos to browse through, it may appear challenging to locate videos with content specific to your personal research. However, this is not the case at all. It takes only moments for one to familiarise oneself with the website, and before long it becomes exceptionally easy to navigate through the pages. This is greatly aided by the websites search engine, allowing users to search by keyword the names of areas mentioned in the interviews, for example, allowing for improved accurate findings.

What I personally found most interesting about the interviews was that each video is accompanied by the interviewee’s personal profile, providing that little bit of extra information.

I entered the Malach archives with little in-depth knowledge of the personal experiences of those involved in iconic world events from previous years. After my short experience with the database explained herein however, I can confidently say that these interviews are of immense importance. They are a resource that simply cannot be replaced. A visit to the centre is highly recommended to anyone studying cultural studies, political science, 20th century history or any related field of study.

Ashley Crowson is a student currently studying film studies and journalism at De Montfort University in Leicester, England. Interests include but are not limited to watching films, talking about films, and drinking tea.