

Media Realities International Symposium, 2026, Jönköping

The Zone of Interest: Auschwitz and Cinematic Virtual Realities



Speakers:

John Lynch (Reader in Film), Karlstad University

Ross Abbinnett (Reader in Social and Political Theory), University of Birmingham, UK

Gary Hazeldine (Associate Professor of Sociology), Birmingham City University, UK

This year the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum announced the launch of a new digital replica of the concentration camp that would be available for filmmakers to use under license from the site's trustees (<https://film.auschwitz.org/>). The Auschwitz-Birkenau Virtual Film Location is the only certified 1:1 digital representation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau I Camp and is designed to support the telling of the story of the camp. The former concentration camp receives up to 2 million visitors per year whilst access is tightly controlled for filmmakers and is generally prohibited. According to the official website, 'Feature films are not and will not be permitted on the grounds of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial.'

In 2023, the British director Jonathan Glazer released his film *The Zone of Interest* to widespread critical acclaim. The film was produced in close collaboration with the museum and although they were prohibited from filming on site, the filmmakers were allowed to digitally-scan parts of the camp for reconstruction as a set, close by. In the film's final scenes, we switch from drama to documentary where, in a rare exception to the rule, Glazer was allowed to film scenes from the present-day museum.

Through a consideration of both the processes and motivations for the construction of the 1:1 Virtual Film Location and the production strategies deployed by Glazer, we want to consider some of the issues the digital rendering raises in terms of the ethical formulations of remembrance, authenticity and the digital. What are the implications of such detailed digital modelling for ideas of truth through realism? What is enabled but also arguably undermined by such strategies of representation? Are there risks to creating immersive digital spaces of such a location that marks the event of the Holocaust? What are the parameters of what the Director of the museum calls 'ethical storytelling' and how should creatives work with this in terms of their own vision?