

On Photographs Photography has now become such a part of our everyday

lives that it is not only a mode of archiving, sharing or presenting, but also a mode of being in places or with others. It is even a mode of being with oneself. More than two million people visit Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum every year. Sudeesh was one of them in 2018. Millions of pictures are taken there every year; Sudeesh's photographs are some of them. Sudeesh wrote a blog using those pictures. We did not want it to end there.

The Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp doesn't exist anymore; what now exists there is the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum. No one has the capacity to photograph or imagine the experience of the real camp from these preserved ruins, or empathise with the victims, or sympathise with the relatives from the details and exhibits presented in the Museum. Dr Isabel Wollaston, while discussing the limits of representation of the Holocaust in the context of the Warsaw POLIN Museum, suggested that "there is a point beyond which the visitor, however empathetic cannot and should not seek to go...we cannot follow the victims to the very end. We must part with them on the threshold of the gas chambers. The victims enter there alone and we remain outside".

We can only read the stories narrated there in the Memorial Museum, see the objects exhibited and photograph the Memorial and the Museum built within the ruins of Auschwitz, an enduring place to remember mankind's unremitting cruelty and unique capacity to annihilate itself. Why photograph this memorial and museum of death and mass murder and the largest graveyard on earth?

Visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum are varied and diverse in terms of the background, motivations and intentions of their visit, which influence the connection they establish with the site and its history through interactions with the Memorial Museum and the photographs they take. Dr Imogen Dalziel, a scholar of Holocaust tourism and digital representations of Holocaust memory, argues that visitors' photographs of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial have diverse motives connected to the different ways in which they relate to the place, its history and memory. Some people click to have their own copy of an iconic image - the gateway, railway tracks, freight wagon, barbed wire, the chimneys, the prosthetic limbs; others click aesthetically pleasing, 'good photographs' as a

method of establishing a gap between the place and oneself to be able to help them process and reflect. There are those who click to create an archive to educate and remind others about the limitless depth of human cruelty towards other humans, or there are those who click to commemorate the dead – like lighting a candle or praying at a cemetery. Still others click to attempt the sheer impossible task of extending sympathy and empathy to the victims and some to use it for reassurance about the message of hope and life's victory over death and the virtue of tolerance. And there are others, who click to preserve evidence of their own presence in the place, for whom clicking pictures is a way of being with themselves anywhere.

In the pictures that we have curated from Sudeesh's Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum portfolio there are iconic pictures that help to orient the viewer – the barbed wire, chimneys, gateways, the railway line, prosthetic limbs, the freight wagon. There are reflective pictures, from those that literally reflect the photographer and his flash to those that present a solemn, dead, melancholic silence - like the toilets, the washrooms, the portraits, the grass, the trees, the ash pits. There is terrifying documentation of the furnaces, the personal objects, photographs of photographs with which he wants to share his shock. There are attempts to empathise with this suffering, or join in the bereavement and grief - like the insides of a gas chamber in Auschwitz I, where hundreds of thousands of families died together in a tight embrace; the prison cells where humans were packed worse than the worst boundaries of our imagination; the outdoor gallows, in front of which prisoners stood in -25 degrees for hours on end, naked, before being hanged. There are pictures of the triumph of hope and justice, like the site of execution of Hoess - the commandant of Auschwitz - or the international memorial.

These are ordinary pictures from an archaeological site of extraordinary crimes against humanity by humanity, executed using immaculate reason and incomprehensible efficiency. Sudeesh did not only photograph them to share his curiosity of history, but also to express and share his grief, shock and fear due to the ominous tone of the parallels he perceives in his current world. It is precisely this that enabled him to briefly glimpse fragments of the site and its history through the Memorial and Museum, which otherwise is the site of the most incomprehensible and greatest industrial death factory ever known. It is imperative,

therefore, that as viewers we draw our attention from our present to gain an insight into Sudeesh's shock, grief and fear. It is imperative that we contemplate this time in that place and that time in this place.

"Or so I thought," is the moment of intersubjective interaction, when the tremors hit. Just a few of the millions of pictures of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum that are captured are printed in such large sizes and exhibited in a gallery with accompanying events and speeches. We have curated Sudeesh's work because we believe these are not just photographs from the Memorial and Museum, but are tremors from Auschwitz.

These pictures are Solemn. Melancholic. Cold. Monotonous. Quiet. Heavy.

Presenting

Yours Is Not To Reason Why

Murali Cheerth

Jayaraj Sundaesan