Infrastructures of Memory Exhibitions (Lodz, 16-18 Sep 26)

University of Lodz, Poland, Sep 16–18, 2026
Deadline: Apr 30, 2026

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Infrastructure of Memory Exhibitions: Difficult Part Through Art, Museum, and Curatorial Practices.

We cordially invite academic scholars and exhibition practitioners to the second conference organized within the framework of the 'Infrastructures of Memory' research project. Last year, at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, we examined the concept of the infrastructural turn in memory studies, focusing primarily on the analysis of historical exhibitions. This year, at an event organized by the University of Lodz, we are bringing art to the fore.

Artistic practices are playing an increasingly important role in developing new ways of addressing difficult pasts in contemporary exhibitions. Historical, ethnographic, and art museums, as well as other memory institutions, are creating new narratives and experiences by recontextualizing objects in their collections, disclosing the formerly suppressed aspects of the past, and presenting well-known events from different perspectives. Inviting artistic contributions and curatorial interventions fosters new directions in institutional practices and redefines how we approach and understand difficult pasts.

Scholars have extensively discussed artwork relating to memories of difficult pasts in terms of narratives and meanings. Much less attention has been given to the curatorial strategies behind exhibitions that address these subjects. What has been largely overlooked, however, are the mundane factors that condition exhibition-making, such as available resources, administrative frameworks, institutional conventions of practice, exhibition spaces, and technologies of display. In different ways, these factors shape exhibition narratives and experiences.

In order to explore the seemingly "banal" yet powerful aspects of exhibition- and memory-making, the conference organizers are turning to infrastructure studies. According to this perspective, infrastructures include all kinds of background factors that enable, support, and shape other things and practices. Similarly, artistic and curatorial attempts to challenge and redefine our visions of the past through exhibitions depend on more or less hidden infrastructural facets that co-determine their emergence and public reception.

Drawing on infrastructure studies and the recent research on art infrastructures, we would like to invite reflection on the various material and non-material factors that condition the production of exhibitions on difficult pasts and affect their narratives and experiences. These factors include,

but are not limited to, archival and museum collections, conservation requirements, exhibition space design, installation formats and display technologies, legal frameworks, management strategies and funding sources for cultural institutions, education practices, audience development, public relations, disability law and policy, security protocols and safety standards, collaborative networks, and biochemical processes and biotic ecofacts.
As the conference is funded by the Polish-German Foundation For Science, we are particularly interested in papers dealing with the difficult Polish-German past, namely the Second World War and the Holocaust. However, proposals related to exhibitions on other forms and histories of persecution, war, and violence from East- Central Europe and beyond are also welcome. We seek scholarly papers offering infrastructural exhibition histories as well as autoethnographic analyses of artistic, curatorial, and institutional practices.

We refer to the concept of exhibition in its broad artistic, historical, and ethnographic sense and therefore encourage contributions on various forms of displaying history through art. Considering exhibition-making a collective practice, we do not view artists and curators as “heroic actors.” We pay equal attention to the other professionals operating within and beyond exhibiting institutions. Those who should also be brought into the picture when exploring infrastructuring processes behind exhibitions include space and graphic designers, exhibition producers, educators, conservators, accessibility managers, administrative and technical staff, and promotion and marketing teams.

We encourage submissions on the following topics:
• infrastructural histories of memory exhibitions
• exhibition narratives and experiences as shaped by infrastructural actants
• difficult pasts in art museums vs. art as part of historical exhibitions in non-art institutions
• curating difficult pasts: practices, materialities, conditions, and collaborations
• legal, financial, and administrative frameworks of exhibition-making
• institutional modernization and new exhibition formats
• technological and environmental factors of exhibiting history
• local, national, and transnational infrastructures supporting exhibition-making
• institutional experiments with exhibition infrastructures
• infrastructural policies, biases, and exclusions — artists, curators, and other professionals as “infrastructural activists”
• modes of infrastructuring the public

The conference language is English. We are open to submissions from any discipline as well as to transdisciplinary contributions.

Practical information
The conference will take place at the University of Lodz, Poland on 16–18 September 2026. Conference participants are asked to submit an abstract and biography. Presentations should last no more than 20 minutes. The travel and accommodation expenses of the accepted speakers will be covered by the organizers. Selected papers will be considered for publication in an academic journal or collective monograph of international relevance.

Organizers: Tomasz Załuski and Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska (University of Lodz)

To apply: Please submit the title, abstract (ca. 250 words) and short biography (ca. 150 words) by e-mail to Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska (agnieszka.rejniak@uni.lodz.pl) by 30 April 2026. You will be notified about your participation by 31 May 2026.

Timeline: Submission deadline: 30 April 2026. Notification of acceptance: 31 May 2026. Conference: 16-18 September 2026.

Contact: agnieszka.rejniak@uni.lodz.pl

Reference:
CFP: Infrastructures of Memory Exhibitions (Lodz, 16-18 Sep 26). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 12, 2026 (accessed Nov 17, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51957>.