

Necrocartography: Topographies and topologies of non-sites of memory

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Abstract

Based on the experience of spatial confusion and inadequacy common during visits to uncommemorated sites of violence, the authors propose expanding the topological reflection in the research on the spatialities of the Holocaust, as well as to introduce topology into the analysis of the everyday experiences of users of the postgenocidal space of Central and Eastern Europe. The research material is composed of hand-drawn maps by Holocaust eyewitnesses – documents created both in the 1960s and in recent years. The authors begin by summarizing the significance of topology for cultural studies, and provides a state-of-the-art reflection on cartography in the context of the Holocaust. They then proceed to interpret several of the maps as particular topological testimonies. The authors conclude by proposing a multi-faceted method of researching these maps, “necrocartography”, oriented by their testimonial, topological and performative aspects.

Key Words

cartography, cultural geography, Holocaust, map, testimony, topography, topology

Introduction

Our point of departure is an autoethnographic experience: the experience of spatial inadequacy at the uncommemorated sites of genocide, so ubiquitous in post-Holocaust Eastern Europe. This inadequacy takes the form of a sense of being lost without a reason and an irrational sense of the ineffectiveness of tools available to help us find these locations. Roma Sendyka (2015, 2016), dubbes such places *non-sites of memory*: they are dispersed locations of various genocides, ethnic cleansings, and other similarly motivated acts

of violence. They constitute entities that undermine the binary divisions between life and death, human and unhuman, culture and nature, past and present, organic and non-organic, and evoke *affective resonance*.¹ In this article, we focus on the particular experience of space which these sites evoke, as well as on the spatial practices which involve them as objects and correlate with them, and consider non-sites of memory through the conceptual prism of *topology*.

Our framework is drawn from a modern branch of mathematics – topology. This perspective allows us to conceptualise the post-catastrophic site as a set of spa-

¹ “The basic indicator is lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of reparations (and of any official designation of the scope of the territory in question). Non-sites of memory also have in common the past or continued presence of human remains (bodies of deceased persons) that have not been neutralized by funerary rites. These sites do not, meanwhile, share physical characteristics: they may be extensive or minute, urban or rural, though they are often characterized by some variety of physical disturbance to the organic order (human remains, plants, animals) and to the inorganic order (ruins, new construction). The victims who should be commemorated on such sites typically have a collective identity (usually ethnic) distinct from the society currently living in the area, whose self-conception is threatened by the occurrence of the non-site of memory. Such localities are transformed, manipulated, neglected, or contested in some other way (often devastated or littered), the resultant discouragement of memorialization leading to ethnically problematic revitalization that draws criticism” (Sendyka 2016, 700).

tiotemporal knots which can be interpreted in terms of relations, a continuous transformation and multiscale historical processes drawn together in one place (Shields 2012). At the same time, we are concerned with the complexity of the everyday experience of the “users” of the post-genocidal space of Central and Eastern Europe, namely the communities whose collective identity was deeply shaped by World War II and witnessing the Holocaust, as well as *our* position as researchers and participants of this assemblage. We intend to demonstrate that the specific character of non-sites of memory can only be properly understood by “going in circles”: moving away from classical tools for thinking about space and investigating such places in terms of intensity rather than extension (see: DeLanda 2002), while being aware of various kinds of “topological interruptions” (O’Doherty 2013). The representations, correlates and indexes of these topological entities are for us, paradoxically, those objects which at first glance seem most topographical themselves: maps.

Topology and topography

Topography and topology – the concepts we use here to grasp the spatial specificity of non-sites of memory – have shared etymological roots and scopes of interest: surfaces, fields and points in space. They are, however, divided by the discursive traditions that have led to their modern definitions and research procedures. *Topography* is closely tied to cartography and Euclidean geometry, and represents a science that is auxiliary to geography, one whose aim is to describe diverse forms that shape a terrain, and to create linguistic and visual representations of the earth’s surface in terms of scale and distance. As Jonathan Murdoch observed, topography is defined by its well-ordered structures – compact and spatially finite and compressible into the surface of a map. On the other hand, *topology*, one of the youngest and most abstract branches of mathematics, is strictly connected to non-Euclidean geometry (Murdoch 2006: 12). It deals with objects that *do not* undergo a change under the impact of the constant and radical deformation of their shape and surface (bending, stretching, tumbling, twisting, but no tearing). To investigate these geometric properties, we need more than the concepts of size and distance (i.e. the concepts of compactness, openness or separability); what allows us to describe topological objects are the relations which are sustained – both to itself and to its environment. In topology, two objects are the same or *homeomorphic* when they can be converted into one another by means of continuous changes (e.g. a coffee mug morphing into a torus/donut). Topology reveals the surprising order and connections in apparently chaotic and amorphous phenomena, where closed sets or two-dimensional models of representation would be an inadequate conceptual apparatus.

Topology offers a language, tools and an intellectual sensitivity to be able to describe a continuum of transfor-

mations, i.e. objects and phenomena which preserve a core of identity despite dynamic change. These concepts were quickly adapted for the needs of the humanities, stimulating fruitful research in the last decade (Lorimer 2005; Lury et al. 2012; Martin and Secor 2014; Thrift 2007; Manning 2009; Whatmore 2002). A significant fact in the new context is that cultural topology does not so much base itself on the axioms of contemporary mathematics but instead treats them in an autonomous, creatively interpretative manner. Another equally important source of inspiration for the expansion of “topological sensitivity”, is postmodern philosophy, especially that of Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, and Giorgio Agamben. Guattari and Deleuze, the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*, develop the concept of a manifold that is fundamental for their philosophy (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). A manifold – popularly understood as a general topological space – is a non-standard geometrical figure which is defined not by specific coordinates but by relations with its neighbourhood. This means that though every point in space has its own nearby local neighbourhood, one which can be represented in the three-dimensional framework of Euclidean geometry, the neighbourhood is also a part of broader structures which can be heterogeneous or fuzzy, and can also exhibit a considerable degree of plasticity and connectivity to other, sometimes distant, neighbourhoods (DeLanda 2005; Murdoch 2006; Martin and Secor 2014).

Whereas Agamben refers to topological concepts when considering the spatial dimensions of the (bio)politics of Nazi Germany (Agamben 1998). Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (2016) take his notion of *selva* and interpret it as both “forest” and “state of nature”, a phantasmatic space in Eastern Europe. *Selva* is not merely a topographical zone – a measurable, mappable product of the “calculative rationalities” of Hitler’s state (*Lebensraum, Generalplan Ost*). It is also a topological space representing everything that defies instrumental reason – such as the less technocratic and less ordered killing in the East: carried out by special Nazi units (*Einsatzgruppen*) outside of concentration camps after the launch of Operation Barbarossa (1941-1944). Both death camps and the East as *selva* are a space in which topographical and topological qualities coexist in constant tension, in “inclusive exclusion” (Agamben 1998: 21) and the separable nature of pairs of key categories cannot be sustained, be they norm and exception, open/closed, inner/outer, friend/enemy, human/animal or border/interior (Giaccaria and Minca 2016).

Cultural topology, to summarise, is a method for the analysis of this kind of spatial multiplicity of meaning characteristic for the state of exception. As Rob Shields rightly points out, cultural topology is also useful for reflections on the multidimensional experiences of the everyday which determine the “plushness” of the real (Shields 2012: 50). Hence, in this conception, cultural topology helps research into the intertwined experiences of time and space – the temporal dimensions of space and the spatial dimensions of time. It offers insight into the intersection of these categories, completely trans-

forming the traditional metaphors of depth and surface. Finally, it affords an understanding of space in temporal and network terms by viewing individual elements in a relational manner as an environment or neighbourhood. Therefore, the domain of cultural topology is the simultaneity and complexity of a variety of scales of experience and perception, norms and social practices which are often encountered as the “strangeness of everyday life” (Shields 2012: 55).

Cartographies of the Holocaust

Martin Gilbert’s *Atlas of the Holocaust* (1982) opens with a map of Europe marked with arrows (Fig.1). The centre of gravity is much to the east of where we have come to expect, as per our modern imaginings about Europe: all rails here lead to “Auschwitz”, the word being written in a larger font than the names of Berlin, Vienna or Paris. This map constitutes a symbolic introduction to the following three hundred and fifteen other maps, which present the huge scale of the tragedy of the Jewish people of Europe, represented by cartographical portraits on various scales: country, region, city, town and village, camps and ghettos, individual communities and families. The first drawing, used as a visual abbreviation for the visual story to follow, in a surprising manner realises the original idea of the atlas as a cartographic genre, allowing its users to undertake countless journeys in the privacy of their libraries: as one’s finger traces a line along all the train tracks of Europe, however, the only destination is a black crater marked with a swastika (Fig. 1).

Gilbert’s map provides a good summary of two basic problems which should be brought up in the context of the cartography of the Holocaust. Firstly, the map represents a conceptualisation that is typical for the cartographical paradigm in the age of great geographical discoveries – the dream of a map that can attain a full and objective representation of the terrain in question (Kitchin et al. 2009; Rybicka 2013). Cartography as a modern scientific discipline is an expression of faith in the panoptic utopia, a totalising, bodiless and distant view “from everywhere”. By creating the illusion of this impersonal gaze – this “god trick of seeing everywhere from nowhere”, as Donna Haraway puts it (1992: 189) – the map was able to serve effectively the brothers in arms of modernity: militarism, colonialism and male domination – all kindred spirits for Nazi politics. Secondly, the fact that Auschwitz is the only death camp on this map and an almost entirely white space stretches out to the east of this point is of great significance. “Auschwitz as symbol of the Holocaust excludes those who were at the centre of the historical event,” writes Timothy Snyder (2009), arguing that both research into the Holocaust and the collective consciousness have focussed on the fates of *western-European* Jews, omitting the fates of those who were in fact the majority of the six million: Eastern European

Jews. They died in Treblinka, Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór and in the forests and fields of eastern Poland, Ukraine and Belarus.

These two premises – the map as a tool for instrumental reason and Eastern Europe as an unmappable *terra incognita* – represent the framework for traditional discourse on the spatiality of the Holocaust and their critical deconstruction is the only way to introduce topological categories. This restrictive framework may be loosened if we introduce critical and post-representational cartography to the spatial research on the Holocaust. Critical cartography reinterprets its own oppressive genealogy as a domain of knowledge that claims the right to objective and genuine representation of reality; it reveals the map as a privileged and political tool of authority and knowledge, treating some terrains as empty space and literally pushing some people “off the map” (Kitchin et al. 2009: 9). The striking absence of Eastern Europe on the maps of the Holocaust may be read as an instantiation of these tendencies.

Even though initiatives such as *Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945* (2009–2012) prepared by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum progressed significantly in filling the gaps in Holocaust topography, the cartography of the Holocaust in the East is still a pressing matter. Such mapping endeavours as the virtual map of the “Holocaust by bullets” (Desbois 2008) in Eastern Europe created by the French organisation Yahad – In Unum or the “Archive of Jewish Wartime Graves” in Poland by the Zapomniane (“Forgotten”) Foundation and the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish



Figure 1. Map from *Atlas of the Holocaust* by Martin Gilbert. Martin Gilbert, *The Dent Atlas of the Holocaust: The Complete History* (London: Taylor & Francis e- Library, 2005), p. II; <https://www.martingilbert.com/>

Cemeteries² may be considered an effort to reimagine the Holocaust topography in the East as “counter-mappings” to the aforementioned mainstream paradigm. As an antecedent in this respect, we may consider the map “Nazi crimes in Polish territories in 1939-1945”, published in 1968 at the initiative of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites (Rada Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa).

Post-representational cartography, in turn, focuses on the ontological status of maps, rejecting the model by which the map *reveals* the truth about a territory. Instead, it demonstrates ways maps are used in specific historical circumstances; it rejects the large-scale perspective that brings to mind the instrumentalising and distancing of the perpetrator’s “hegemonic gaze” which, whatever the intention, reduces the individual experiences of victims to countable and measurable points on a map; and treats maps as processes, practices rooted in action and affective structures, as permanently “becoming” mappings (Ingold 2000: 219–242; Della Dora 2009; Harley 1989; Corner 1999; Wood 1992; Wood and Fels 2008). In the context of the cartography of the Holocaust, we can interpret the maps used and created by the survivors or eyewitnesses to the events as this sort of a processual, performative and topological mapping – as *cartographical testimonies*. Although the geography of the Holocaust usually assumes the separation of cartographer and witness and created maps based on written and oral testimonies of the survivors (Knowles et al. 2015; Cole 2003; Cole and Giordano 2018; Westerveld and Knowles 2019), the map can also play a key role in the hands of the participants in the events. This phenomenon, although common, is rarely analysed.

In the subsequent parts of this text, we will concentrate on three examples of this kind of “vernacular” practice of mapping – graphs made “on site”, indexically connected to the crime scene. We will be interested in the handwritten maps created by eyewitnesses of events and their descendants who spent their lives in the neighbourhood of non-sites of memory.

Szubin

The first map (Fig. 2) came about in the context of the “Alert of Victory by the Scouting Spring Reconnaissance” (Alert Zwycięstwa Harcerskiego Zwiadu Wiosennego, 1965)³ – a special initiative organised by the Polish Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the end of World War II, two million scouts, who took part in the action, sought and catalogued 6,000

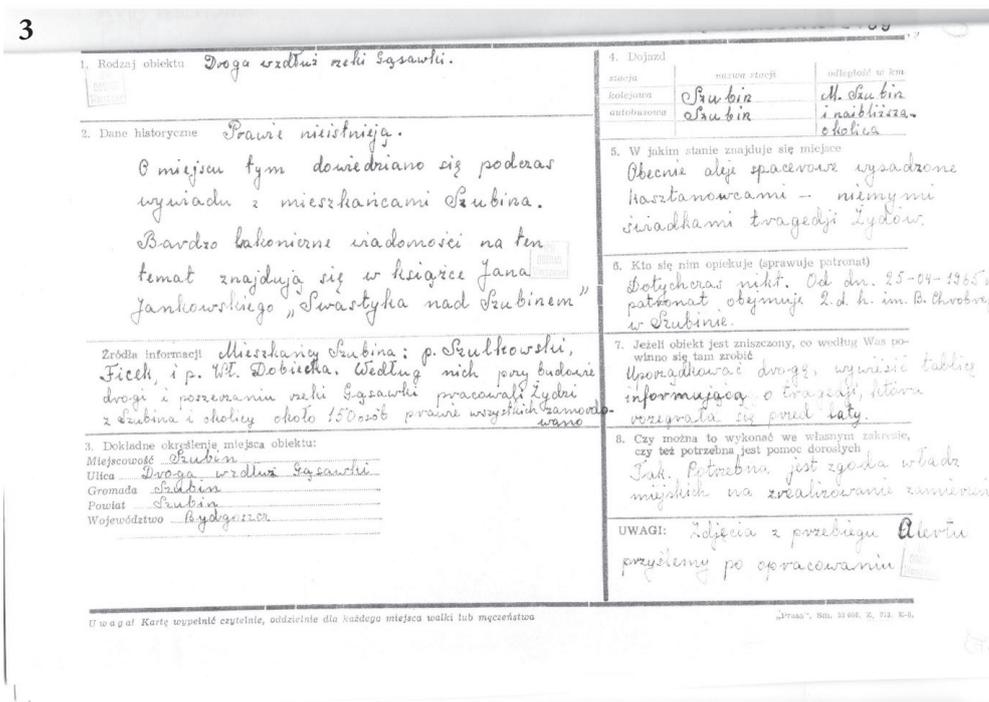
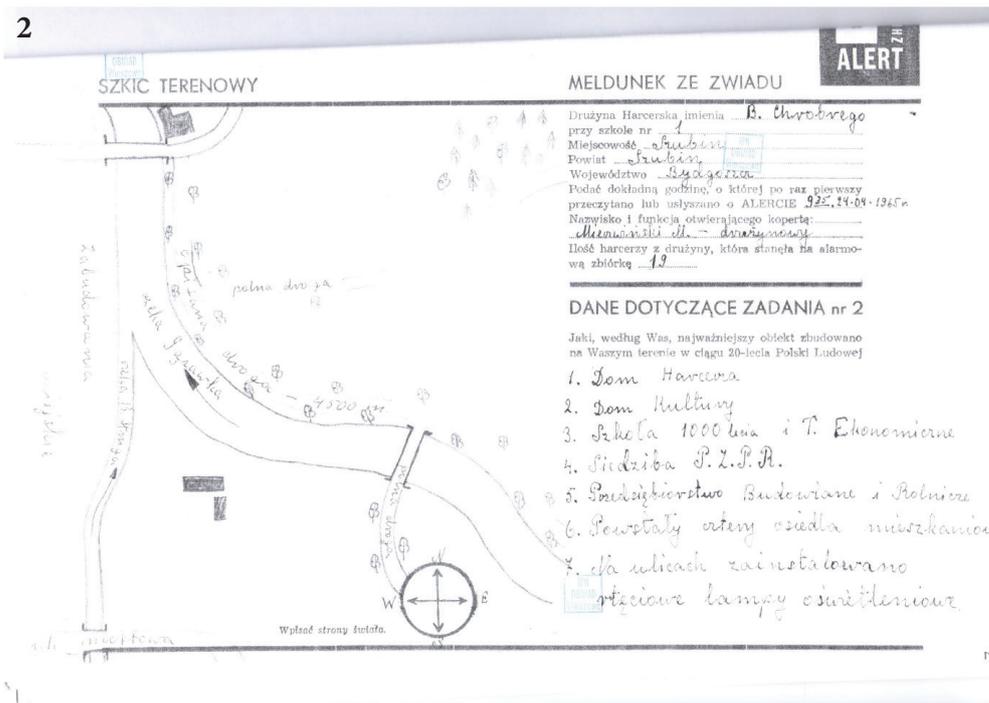
“unknown or forgotten sites of struggle or martyrdom” (Bartelski 1977: 226). Each report included the following elements: a short questionnaire on the history of the place, sources of knowledge on the location, the identified caretaker of a site and possible ways of commemorating it, finally, maps of the terrain with burial sites marked.

The report from Szubin, displayed below, concerns the road along the Gaśawka river, where around 150 Jews from Szubin died during its construction. A sketch of the river and the road that follows its course presents in a cartographical abbreviated form the extensive space of persistent violence – the penal labour for the road’s construction which led to the death of the workers. This road is a non-site of memory made up of many points, but the diagram, though dedicated to this place, does not mention the past. The effect of “diluting” the map of wartime events is increased by the official list of the most important sites built in the area in the post-war years (the Dom Kultury [Community Centre], Dom Harcerza [Scouts’ Centre] or the residential estates, for example.) The drawing from Szubin denotes the present, its relationship with history can only be established in a complicated move of reference: the line on the map along the river is the “road mentioned” in the questionnaire (Fig. 3); several small symbols of trees are marked alongside the road, because now this place is “an avenue lined with chestnut trees – the silent witnesses of the tragedy of the Jews” (Meldunek ze zwiadu. Szubin 1965). Besides the trees, there is no other mention about the past on this sketch of the terrain: the burial sites are not marked in any way; any relations and connections with Jewish people from Szubin are excluded from the picture – where they lived before the war, from where they were coming to the labour sites, what routes they took, where exactly particular neighbours died. The Szubin alert can be viewed as a particular record, topological in its structure, in which we can see how the traces of the past give way to the order of the present. The document both recreates and produces a situation whereby a small-scale event of the Holocaust, although still alive in the memory of neighbours (indeed, all the information obtained was from local inhabitants), is delegated by an administrative act into a larger-scale order – whether regional or national – and is shifted beyond the horizon of everyday experience.

The Alert of 1965 was not the only initiative that mapped out wartime graves. Subsequent alerts led to the setting up of hundreds of local Halls of Memory, killing sites received patrons, the latter being honoured with the medal of “Safeguard of Sites of National Remembrance” (Odznaka Opiekuna Miejsc Pamięci Narodowej); tourist

2 *The Map of Holocaust by Bullets*, <https://yahadmap.org/#map/> (accessed: 01.09.2020); *Archive of Jewish Wartime Graves*, <https://zapomniane.org/en/#map> (accessed: 1.09.2020). The mission of both organisations is to locate unmarked graves of the Holocaust victims in Central and Eastern Europe and enable their future commemoration.

3 We thank Agnieszka Nieradko for help in finding the map in question.



Figures 2, 3. The report from Szubin. Source: Institute of National Remembrance, sign. GK 195/II/17.

initiatives were also organised, such as the hikes “Along the Paths of the Fight against Fascism” (Traba 2000: 55–57). This increase in topographical activity took place in a significant period, whose culmination was the years 1968–1969, a period which saw an anti-Semitic campaign and the emigration of thousands of Polish survivors of the Holocaust. This period was characterised by a tendency to whitewash Jewish wartime experience

(for example by omitting any mention of the ethnicity of victims on the numerous memorials and monuments erected at that time.) The paradoxical “double” status of the alert from Szubin consists in the fact that it introduces Jewish deaths into the visual space yet at that very same moment excludes them. The local, particular experience of space is drawn into a bigger picture of the countrywide politics of memory.

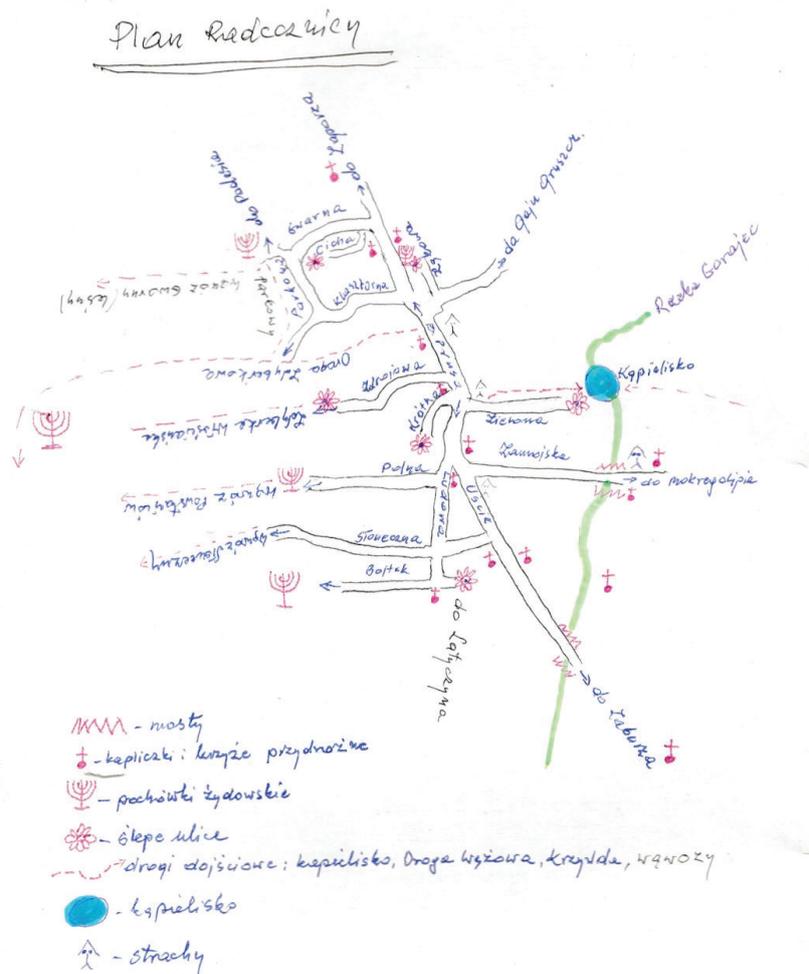


Figure 4. Map from the manuscript “Tak cię widzę, Radeczniczo” (This is how I see you, Radecznicza) by Stanisław Zybała.

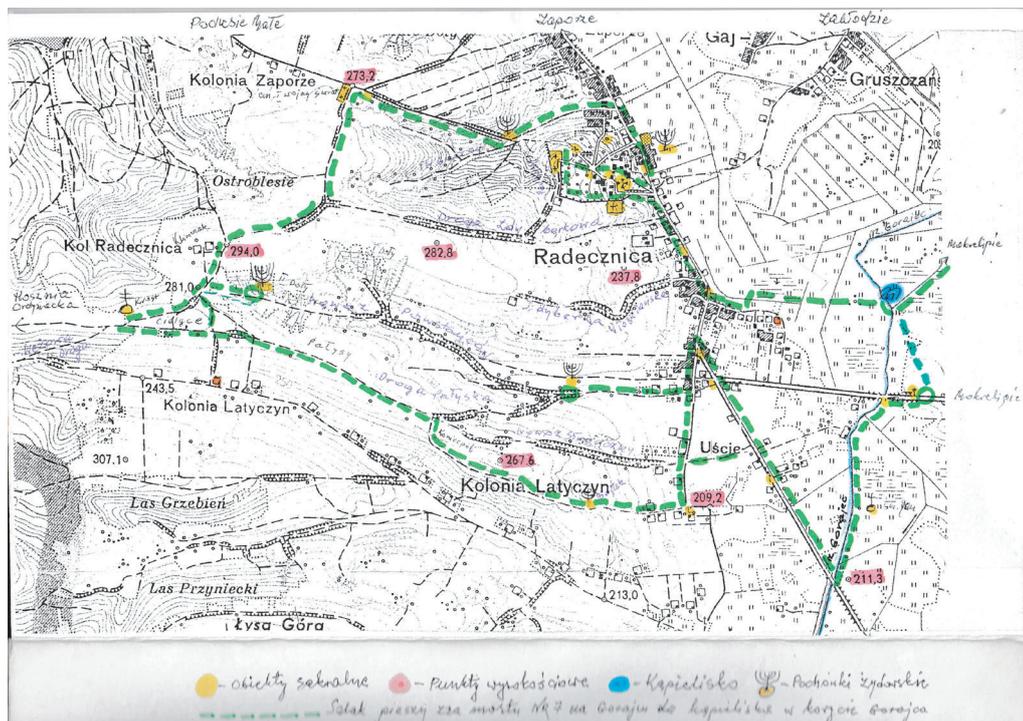


Figure 5. Map from the manuscript “Tak cię widzę, Radeczniczo” (This is how I see you, Radecznicza) by Stanisław Zybała.

Radecznica

Another example comes from the work of Stanisław Zybała (1930–2014), a librarian from Radecznica, a small village in the Lublin region in eastern Poland, and an eyewitness to the Holocaust in his village.⁴ Zybała drew maps several times, but among the fifteen or so documents that have been preserved, the most interesting seem to be the two maps that were attached to the type-written manuscript “Tak cię widzę, Radecznico” (That’s how I see you, Radecznica) – a guide to the area around the village, written together with his wife, Marianna (Zybała and Zybała 2004). These two maps are a handwritten one, on which uncommemorated sites of the extermination of Jews are marked (Fig. 4); and a cadastral map of the village with an added hand-marked “pedestrian path” (Fig. 5). They represent a completion of the text which is itself an invitation to take a walk around Radecznica. In view of the fact that the printed version ultimately did not include either of the maps, it falls to the written narrative of the guide to be the tool generating the necrotopography of the village.

The route passes a variety of locations: haunted places, scenic points, noteworthy local buildings. Yet the most important elements – although added almost incidentally – remain points to which it is hard to accord any particular physiological features: the sites of the extermination of the Jewish inhabitants of Radecznica who died in a mass execution carried out by German units in autumn 1942 and in several individual shootings carried out by both German gendarmes and the Polish “blue” police. The authors of the guide try to give their readers a sense of orientation with the aid of easily identifiable landmarks and buildings. However, they adopt a specific attitude when the route approaches the killing sites. They precisely describe the historical circumstances of the events and suggest specific modes of behaviour for those places: they cite Jewish prayers which the imagined walker can say in the intention of the victims and they invite the reader to take a piece of biotope (root of a tree) as a memento. Behind this attempt to render visible dispersed sites of crime there stands the extreme biographical proximity of Zybała to the thus projected space: as a boy, he was a witness to killings in several of these locations and he knew many of the victims. To invoke the categories of Giuliana Bruno (2002): a mere *voyeur* looking at the map is to be transformed through Zybała’s guide into a *voyageuse*, travelling across the “tender geography” of the village. The brochure and maps suggest a scripted walk

that is to be a re-enactment, mourning and act of testimony at the same time – everyone who follows its trail will bear witness to what happened in Radecznica during the war. “Tak cię widzę, Radecznico” is intended to represent a repeatable practice for performing the memory maps created by Zybała.

The route for the walk indicated on the map combines various orders and scales of historical experience, referring not only to the Holocaust, but also to the history of the village and post-war transformations in its topography. We do not find out, however, where exactly we are to look: Zybała’s maps are not so much a guarantee of ontological security in their representation of reality, but a reflection of embodied knowledge of a given place and its history. So, though these sketches look like run-of-the-mill maps and are even superimposed on real maps, they do possess a particular performative character. They are unique acts of counter-mapping: they shape the space of Radecznica with their scripts concerning the un-remembered, thereby involving subsequent viewers in the preservation of those scripts and the awareness they bring.

Bełżyce and Mszana Dolna

The final examples are drawn from the archive of Yahad – In Unum – the French organisation gathering interviews with witnesses of the “Holocaust by bullets”.⁵ In this case, the maps of witnesses are used as a forensic tool to facilitate the identification of the location and circumstances of the crime scene, as well as an aid for the memory of witnesses. Interviews are usually recorded in the home of the witness, then the YIU team goes to the scene of the crime to conduct an on-site inspection. Maps appear in these testimonies in various contexts: at the initiative of a witness who is trying to explain something to newcomers; at the request of the team, if the spatial layout of the situation is unclear or the position of the witness is hard to understand or if the witness is unable to recall the details of the crime scene. This was the situation in the case of the testimony of Dvariukai in Lithuania (Yahad – In Unum 2013): until the witness sketched out the crime scene, the YIU team was unable to understand why she had not seen the execution that took place nearby and yet was able to hear it perfectly well. It turned out there was a wood between her and the killing site.

Finally, though testimonies seem to refer us to specific acts of looking, to individual points in history, their temporality is much more complicated than that. They

4 Radecznica is a village in Roztocze, a region in eastern Poland in Zamość County. It has approximately 920 inhabitants. In World War II, its small Jewish community was resettled to the ghetto in Szczebrzeszyn. A few Jews in hiding were denounced and executed. A strong underground movement was connected with the local Bernardine abbey where local partisans often took shelter. After the war, a mental hospital was opened in the buildings constructed next to the abbey. In the last decade the church in the abbey became a mausoleum for the so-called cursed soldiers of the right-wing anticommunist underground formations (the exhumed bodies found in the area by archeological missions of the National Remembrance Institute are currently being moved here). The site was researched within the project by Maria Kobielska, Roma Sendyka, Aleksandra Szczepan with support of Aleksandra Janus, Jacek Małczyński, Karina Jarzyńska, Tomasz Majkowski and Katarzyna Suszkiewicz.

5 We thank Michał Chojak and Renata Masna for help in finding the maps in question and understanding the circumstances of their creation.

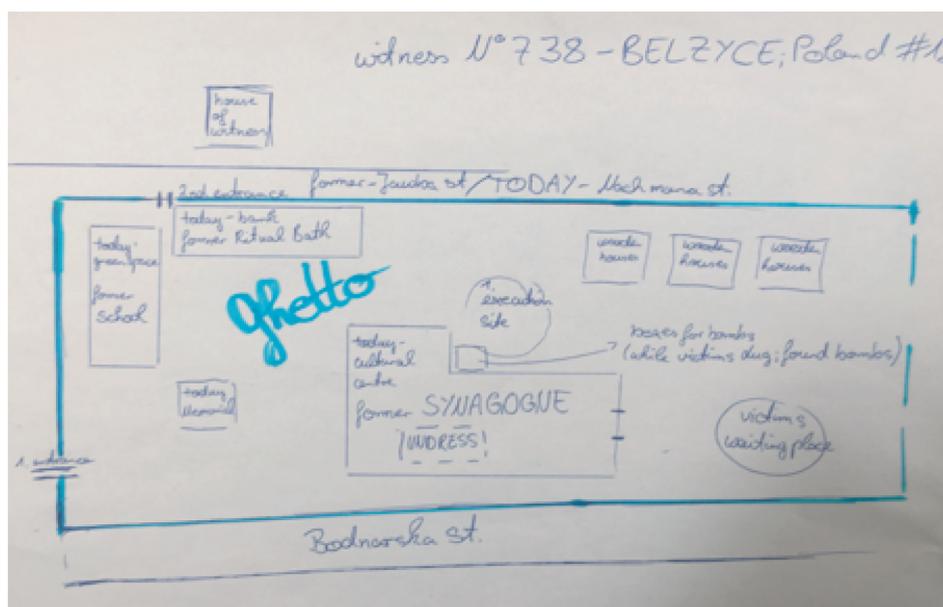


Figure 6. Map from Belzyce. Courtesy of Michał Chojak.

gather up experiences of life in a multi-ethnic community before the war including acquaintanceships, knowledge about Jewish homes, shops, schools and synagogues. Testimonies often include memories of persisting violence towards Jewish people: dispossession, persecution, ghettoisation. Even if the testimony only concerns a single event, we should remember that knowledge on the matter is the effect of affective development and it has been the subject of extended negotiation. The map and the act of drawing the map direct our attention to their complex temporality, also because they represent space with multiple levels of attribution.

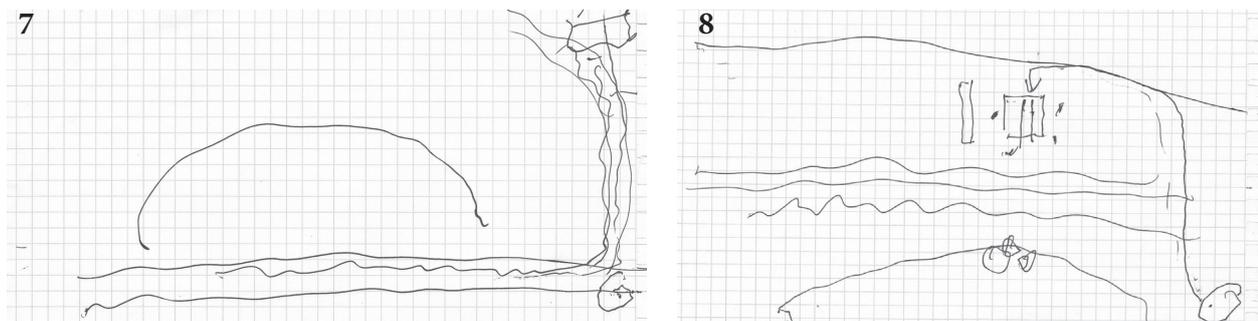
That is the case with the diagram from Belzyce (Fig. 6), a town in the Lublin region, made at the behest of a witness by a member of the YIU team (Yahad – In Unum 2017) and presenting the execution of 700 Jewish citizens in the spring of 1942. The document depicts three orders together: the topography of the ghetto, today's layout of buildings and subsequent stages of the executions. The schematic buildings have a double reference: the synagogue where the Jewish people undressed is now a cultural centre; the bathhouse has become a bank; the square is still in the ghetto as marked on the map. Furthermore, particular locations in space are related to particular *actions*: to undressing, to waiting for execution, to death. The witness is absent from the diagram, yet his house is on the map. The compressed temporalities of spatial representation convey in this case the topological structure of the very act of witnessing.

The disturbance caused by a foreign visitation asking about the details of events from the past induces changes in established structures. The witness becomes a guide to familiar, everyday space as far as he or she is concerned: in some recordings, we can observe slow walks to the crime scene in which the body of an elderly person walking sets the rhythm of the whole excursion. The map –

contrary to the tradition of modern Europe – is not here a tool for colonisation from without but serves to share secrets from within.

Witnesses draw at home and then the map is used as an aid at the site, or the map is created in the field. In the latter case, the team-member's hand becomes a tool for the witness's story: it transfers communicated information onto paper or a screen. The testimony is transposed from the order of a story and wayfinding to the order of seeing and cartography. This process is preserved by the drawings from Mszana Dolna (Figs 7–9), a town in Lesser Poland. Hence, a witness, giving a detailed reconstruction of the course of events leading up to the execution of 880 Jewish inhabitants of the Mszana ghetto in August 1942, realises that the places that he narrates about are unclear for his interlocutors (Yahad – In Unum 2018). So, as he tells the story, he sketches two maps, carelessly drawn layouts: wiggly lines, senseless arches, circles and half-circles, squares and rectangles. In the context of the testimony these lines are a support for witness's act of storytelling. But abstracted from that context, without their author's voice, they seem impossible to decode – they come across as self-referential testimony, the gesture of pointing. If we treat the witness's drawings as an attempt at presenting the execution space, they are completely useless. If, however, we recognise them as a part of the process of mapping – the practices aimed at acquiring an orientation in space and the ability to retrospectively recreate a particular route, then they become the perfect vindication of Tim Ingold's thesis that “the products of mapping (graphic inscriptions) [...] are fundamentally un-maplike” and they “are not so much representations of space as condensed histories” (2000: 220).

The key to solving the puzzle of the lines on the map here is in the video material recorded at the same time as the act of sketching, recounting the story as well as the



Figures 7, 8. Drawings by the witness from Mszana Dolna. Courtesy of Renata Masna.

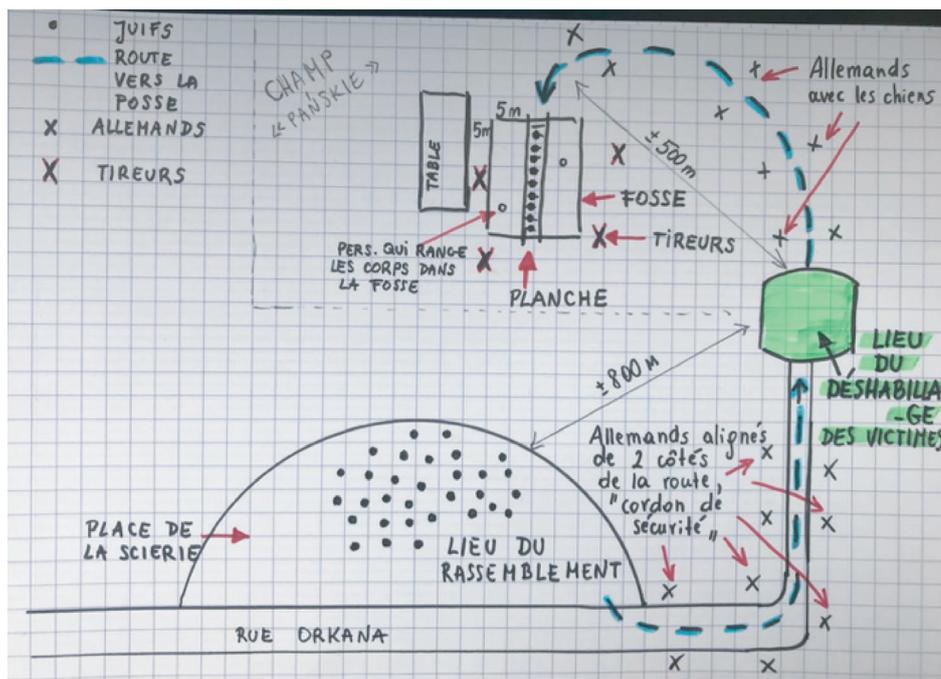


Figure 9. Drawing by the employee of Yahad – In Unum from Mszana Dolna. Courtesy of Renata Masna.

decidedly more professional map prepared by a member of the YIU team – drawn with a sure hand and supplied with graphical notation and signatures. In the drawing of the YIU member, the waves and twists disappear – elements that express the nonverbal meaning of the testimony as given. The final image, though still somewhat makeshift, was made with the use of simple cartographical tools (ruler and protractor), as well as the tools for structuring images (map keys and shades of colour).

The set of maps from Mszana Dolna allow us, in this way, to grasp the process of the creation of cartographic illusion *in statu nascendi*. The map of the YIU employee, still a rough copy of the sketch of a witness, conveys knowledge about the topographical layout of the crime scene, but also preserves the topological properties of its original. So, in the case of the testimony from Mszana Dolna, all the visual documents reveal the site of the killings as a multiplicity of various temporal and spatial orders. In the sketches, the rhythm of the day-long executions is clearly expressed: the early morning, when the

witness was stopped by the gendarmerie and could observe the Jewish inhabitants gathered at the square; the middle of the day when he witnessed groups of victims heading for the execution site; and, finally, the afternoon hours when he saw the executions and the burial of the bodies. The “timetable” of the past blends into the time of the noting during the interview – the time when the witness relates the scene of the mass murder to the map of contemporary Mszana. In the spatial scheme, the sketches take account of several dispersed points in the town (subsequent stages of the execution) and places from which the witness, at the time a boy, observed the train of events (street and a hill). All these dimensions combine to form a record of the topology of experience, in a diagram merging present and past events. What is especially worthy of attention in the process of correcting the witness’s drawings in the map made by the YIU employee is the subtle objectification of his story: removal of the situated witness-observer, marked by him with a circle. The exclusion of his perspective from the “final” version

of the document deprives the visual narrative of one of the dimensions that gives it depth, revealing the push to a more flattened topography in the process of establishing an objective sequence of events.

Conclusion

We would like to summarise the above considerations in the form of a list of conclusions about the practices of the local, “vernacular” mapping of the non-sites of memory, but also what maps tell us about the status of the non-site of memory itself and the nature of research practices that we call “necrocartography”.

The map is both testimony and a tool for memory. It is both evidence in the matter of the history of a site, as well as an intimate record of the observer’s experience. It may bring back memories of the past (Bełżyce, Mszana), it may sustain memory (Radczyca) or provide a framework in response to specific ideological needs (Szubin). Despite these differences in the role played by local maps, their common features are the abandonment of the “large scale” that recalls the instrumentalisation and distance of the gaze of perpetrators, the effort of conceding the absolute dispersion of violence in this terrain, and the treatment of these lands not as a post-genocidal vacuum, but as a space that has been persistently inhabited, needing to be experienced in the most bodily of ways.

The act of drawing a map is always an act of translation in which the topological qualities of the non-site of memory and the circumstances of testimony are translated into topographical qualities. It consists in the transmission of intensity into categories of extension: seen, heard and experienced elements of the crime scene are expressed as measurable spatial distances seen from above. The topographical impulse does not, in this case, completely remove the *topological* aspects of the act of witnessing to beyond the framework of the image. Vernacular maps permit one to capture those features of being in space which do not depend on measured distance: a variety of relations of contiguity and connection, social and spatial relations including those of proximity and distance. Furthermore, this kind of mapping refers us to complex temporality and represents a space of multiple attribution. Drawn maps bring together various temporal orders of spatial experience: being present at the place of events, producing knowledge about an event and preserving the status of a site (visiting the crime scene after the killings, discussing events among neighbours), processes of the forgetting and neutralising of memories, the contemporary experience of space.

A non-site of memory is a topological interruption. It is characterised by its topographical absence of significance. It is “a pure contingency”, “sustained by no abstraction” (Barthes 1992: 36) – it is much more factual and tactile than symbolic or visual. When marked on a map or put in a register, the non-site of memory will always

require pointing out. The guarantee of the localisation and existence of a non-site of memory is only the gesture of “it’s here”. This disturbance can be experienced while visiting a non-site of memory, which is why a walk is the best way to witness and investigate a non-site of memory. When walking with a witness, the researcher is imbued with knowledge about the ways needed to find the way as well as the story about the past – during a walk the disposition to be witness is transmitted. With research by walking (Ingold and Vergunst 2008), we can come to understand the specific nature of post-genocidal space, in which the extreme and the everyday formed the coordinates of reality.

A non-site of memory is a topological knot of a variety of biological, ethical, affective, political, social and ethnic orders. As a field of multiplicity it accumulates and intensifies meaning that cannot be accommodated within conventional or routine ways of orientation. It is situated in a network of public and private affects. To the same extent, it depends on the intensity of relations with central and local politics of memory, as on the frequency of inflows and outflows of individual dispositions to care and bear witness.

The non-site of memory undergoes constant transformation, and at the same time is a homeomorphic structure. It suffers encroachment, the natural shifting of terrain and processes of soil formation; it is built on or concealed from view; the uses of its immediate surroundings change. It can shrink or expand in connection with land and mortgage registers or the transformations of local structures of property. Its visibility grows or disappears depending on historical circumstances, politics of memory, grassroots campaigns or external institutions. However, in spite of all these kinds of change of character, the non-site of memory forever remains a dangerous supplement, a strange addition in the biological and social fabric of space. Its unstable status, both precarious and explosive, determines its political and ethical potential: it compels the communities living in its vicinity to confront own implication (Rothberg 2019) from the past.

Necrocartography – research into non-sites of memory – resembles mapping in its structure. It requires one to become oriented in the multiplicity of orders that can be encountered in the non-site of memory. It is an interdisciplinary countermovement, a constant leaning out and straying from the beaten tracks of thinking and methods of interpretation. The techniques of researching into non-sites of memory combine the topographical gesture of mapping with a topological sensitivity. Necrocartography – in the form we present it here – is a narrative about the non-site of memory whose demand is to transgress one’s own borders: it aims to be generative research thought and praxis to a sufficient degree to change the rules of its own field and the reality it describes.

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