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Scope

The **Journal of Heritage, Memory and Conflict (HMC)** is an international, peer-reviewed, diamond open access Journal that critically analyses the tangible and intangible remnants, traces and spaces of the past in the present, as well as the remaking of pasts into heritage and memory, including processes of appropriations and restitutions, significations and musealization and mediatization. This interdisciplinary journal addresses the dynamics of memory and forgetting, as well as the politics of trauma, mourning and reconciliation, identity, nationalism and ethnicity, heritage preservation and restoration, material culture, conservation and management, conflict archaeology, dark tourism, diaspora and post-colonial memory, terrorscapes, migration, borders, and the mediated re-enactments of conflicted pasts.

Aim

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Sites of violence and their communities: critical memory studies in the post-human era

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Abstract

“Sites of Violence and their Communities” presents the results of a research project that brought together scholars and practitioners of memory work in an attempt to critically reinterpret the links between sites, their (human, and non-human) users, and memory. These interdisciplinary discussions focused on overlooked, repressed or ignored sites of violence that may benefit from new approaches to memory studies, approaches that go beyond the traditional focus on communication, symbolism, representation and communality. Clandestine or contested sites, in particular, pose challenging questions about memory practices and policies: about the status of unacknowledged victims and those who witnessed their deaths; about those who have inherited the position of “bystander”; about the ontology of human remains; and about the ontologies of the sites themselves, with the natural and communal environments implicated in their perdurance. Claude Lanzmann – one of the first to undertake rigorous research on abandoned, uncommemorated or clandestine sites of violence – responded to Pierre Nora’s seminal conception with his work and with the critical notion of “non-lieux de mémoire.” Methodologies emerging from more traditional as well as recently introduced perspectives (like forensic, ecological, and material ones) allowed team members to engage with such “non-sites of memory” from new angles. The goal was to consider the needs and interests of post-conflict societies; to identify and critically read unofficial transmissions of memory; and to re-locate memory in new contexts – in the grassroots of social, political and institutional processes where the human, post-human and natural merge with unanticipated mnemonic dynamics.

Key Words

Eastern Europe, forensic turn, Holocaust, lieux de mémoire, memory cultures, non-sites of memory, post-violence societies, sites of memory

Introduction

Central and Eastern Europe, the scene of brutal genocides in the past century, is dotted with sites of trauma. The IHRA Killing Sites initiative has documented that 2.2 million Jews were killed by bullets at dispersed killing sites – either in the Einsatzgruppen post-1941 executions or in the “third phase of the Holocaust” when occupants cooperated with locals finding and killing those trying to hide on the Aryan side (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance 2015; Engelking and Grabowski 2018). In *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* Timothy Snyder (2010) expands that number, adding other mass killings perpetrated by different totalitarian agents.

Today, only some of those potential sites of memory are marked with plaques, gravestones or memorials. What is the meaning or impact of sites that have been left behind, contested or forgotten and that still contain the victims’ bodies? The research presented in the following article was focused on the question of the societal and cultural impact generated by sites that have been excluded from social imaginaries. The initial hypothesis was that some “sites of history” that have not been transformed into “sites of memory” (Nora 1984–1992) nevertheless persist in a peculiar, negative way in the practices of the local community. Hence, sites expelled from the public discourse and ethical responses can still generate a significant impact on nearby communities. Since the problematic sites are kept

outside the social imaginary, the responses to them – one may suppose – are not part of the easily-readable symbolic system of the official culture. An alternative approach is therefore needed, a more sensitive tool required, to spot and assess possible interactions.

The key intention of the collaborative research in the project “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites and Their Impact on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland” (2016–2020) was to draw into conversation researchers, artists and professionals in order to construct an operative tool for memory studies – one that would make it possible to include more efficiently into shared awareness and research programs such post-violence sites that are today clandestine, contested, repressed, ousted from public discussions, omitted in symbolization processes, and overlooked in the management of collective and cultural memory. The texts presented in this issue give an account of this interdisciplinary dialogue.

From site to non-site of memory

‘Pits’, ‘holes’, ‘mounds’, ‘molehills’, ‘knolls’, ‘hollows’, ‘carcass dumps’ – these are the English equivalents of names mentioned by the interviewees during our research. Trying to identify the places where human remains were deposited after the war, the witnesses symptomatically omitted the word ‘grave’. This denotational effort reveals that in the case of clandestine post-violence sites we often deal with nameless objects. It also demonstrates the instability and un-rootedness (in discourse and in experience) of the uncommemorated post-terror sites that the research team was looking for.

This locally demonstrated terminological helplessness has an equivalent in the professional discursive circulation. Seeking a term for our research object, we traced the movement of theory around sites generating negative interactions: since the 1990s, there have emerged many concepts which could potentially aid our act of naming. It is worth recalling “sites in spite of all” (Didi-Huberman 1998), “bad places” (Hayden 1997), “Nicht-Ort” and “Un-Ort” [non-sites] (Saryusz-Wolska 2011), “voids” (Huyssen 1997; Liebeskind 2003) or “Geisterorte” [phantom-sites] (Assmann 1999). In the past decade, research on post-violence sites supplemented this vocabulary with notions related to the category of landscape: “campscapes” (van der Laarse,¹ Rapson 2015), “traumascapes” (Tumarkin 2015; see also: “trauma sites” in: Violi 2012), “terrorscape” (Laarse et al. 2014; see also: “terrorspace” in: Otto 2009), “forensic landscapes”, and, more broadly, “Holocaust landscapes” (Cole et al. 2014; Cole 2016; Małczyński 2018) and “landscapes of postmemory” (Kaplan 2010; Szczepan 2014).

However, a particularly useful (and also the earliest) term referring to abandoned post-violence sites in Poland was proposed outside academia – by Claude Lanzmann, the French documentary filmmaker who in the 1970s

visited with his crew uncommemorated post-camp and post-ghetto sites. His concept of “non-sites of memory” (*non-lieux de mémoire*; Lanzmann 1986, 1990, 2007) became the basic term in our research. Lanzmann’s idea naturally meant turning the edge of criticism against the very core of the category of “site of memory”, proposed by the French historian Pierre Nora and gaining immense popularity in the 1980s (LaCapra 1997). Consequently, choosing to apply Lanzmann’s concept in our research, we faced a new task. As Astrid Erll observed, “Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* have proven to be the most influential notion internationally” in the “context of what may be called ‘new cultural memory studies’” (Erll 2011a: 13); it was foundational for the second phase of memory studies, reborn in the 1980s and accompanying the phenomenon described as the “memory boom” (Erll 2011b: 4). In our empirical search for non-sites of memory in provincial Poland, at the same time, though at a different, theoretical level, we also engaged in a critical reinterpretation of the tradition of memory studies, joining the critics of one of its key concepts (François and Schulze 2001; Tai 2001; Anderson 2004; Schmidt 2004; Rothberg 2010).

While Lanzmann’s criticism does not broaden the list of accusations, it emphasizes the presence of objects which can be considered the obverse of what Nora wanted to describe. This inscribes his activity, in the spirit of the time, into the cognitive practices of deconstruction, in which a given category can be revised through revealing that which had to be omitted or muted in order for it to crystallize. In our project, we continued Lanzmann’s approach, trying to transform the cultural critic’s intuitive expression into an instrument of academic thinking in the area of memory studies. The French director’s critical proposition stemmed from years of extensive field research, interviews with surviving witnesses, and a search for locations akin to those that were our focus – in other words, it was built on an empirical foundation, one that is no longer available today. It is therefore worthwhile to revisit the data obtained in the 1970s and the phenomena manifest in them, approaching them as a hypothesis that needs verification. What is at stake is perhaps a deeper understanding of the local practices of memory, ungraspable by the interpretative practices developed in Western culture (Głowacka 2016).

We understand non-sites of memory as dispersed locations of various genocides, ethnic cleansings, and other similarly motivated acts of violence.

The basic indicator is a lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of reparations (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

¹ See: *Campscapes*: <https://www.campscapes.org/> (access 10.09.2020).



Figure 1. Uncommemorated site in Radechnica, in eastern Poland. Phot. Roma Sendyka.

some variety of physical blending of 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 forsaking of memorialization leading to ethnically problematic revitalization that draws criticism (Sendyka 2016a: 700).

In order to fully understand the specifics of these sites, it is necessary to employ theories distinguishing between “space” and “place” (Tuan), the categories of “belonging to home” and the “un-canny” (*heimlich-unheimlich* – Freud), “dwelling” (Ingold) and “placelessness” (Relph, Heidegger, Augé, Foucault), as well as venturing outside the anthropocentric paradigm.

The objects to which we devote this study are sites that witnessed war-time violence, “sites of history” that have not, however, been endowed with the status of symbolic objects anchoring the communal relation to the past.² On the contrary: the community actively keeps these places from coming out of the mnemonic shadow (Eisenhuth and Sabrow 2017). Thus, non-sites of memory are as

constitutive for group identity as ‘open’ sites of memory. In this regard, our argument is that we do not deal here with amnesia or forgetting, with a permanent and ultimate removal of a particular object, but rather with another kind of negative work of memory: “non-memory” (Hirszowicz and Neyman 2001, 2007; Kwiatkowski 2009; Nowak et al. 2018), which is transferred unofficially, in personal, close circulation, through deformed symbolic means (myths, legends, maxims, broken sentences, linguistic slips), and especially through non-symbolic ones (gestures, facial expressions, voice prosody and timbre, body language, special interactions with things and people, routes around particular surroundings, practices of using a given area) (Sendyka 2016b).

Methods: micromemory studies, close-range theory and theoretical objects

Topographical objects that seem to be unspecific and semantically unclear have been revealed in programs such as Yad Vashem’s “Untold Stories”, which collected testimonies on mass executions in the Eastern Front after 1941, “La Shoah par balles” by the French organization

² Nora’s premise not only concerned real but also imagined or created objects which secure the communality of the acts of relating to the past. In our project, the focus has been on sites in the literal sense of the word: topographically defined localities. While symbolic objects of another order do appear in our research, they are approached as auxiliary, secondary to the principal topographical field objects.

Yahad-In Unum, which since 2010 has archived statements from witnesses of the actions of *Einsatzgruppen*, German killing squads, in Eastern Europe, or in initiatives aimed at identifying sites of *Judenjagd* (the hunt for the Jews from the “third phase of the Holocaust”), by foundations (e.g. The Matzevah Foundation, Fundacja Zapomniane/Forgotten Foundation), religious organizations (The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland), state institutions as well as thanks to the efforts of many private individuals.³ The fact that these localities remain uncommemorated causes a cognitive dissonance in those who have adopted the standards of European memory culture (based on the “facing the past” framework and “duty to remember” politics of commemoration – see David 2017). This, in turn, opens the way to morally motivated criticism of the actions of local communities, seen as repressing or downplaying the significance of the Shoah. Countering this simplifying approach, research on the “banality of forgetting” by Jacek Nowak, Sławomir Kaprański and Dariusz Niedźwiedzki (2018) has shown a highly complicated knot of memory, which emerged after Eastern European countries regained their independence as a combination of factors such as the memory of World War II, post-war anomie and communist repressions, un-(der)recognized significance of the Shoah, official identity discourses of the communist times, the trauma of the 1989 transformation, resistance against what is perceived as the new ‘European’ colonization, and the rebirth of nationalistic identity. Thus understood, the mnemonic reality of the region appears as an intricate *noeud de mémoire*, which calls for more complex research tools – tools that, as Michael Rothberg once suggested, would enable studying remembrance without resorting to a priori limiting presumptions. Instead, they should rhizomatically capture the complexity of the structure under research, exceeding “attempts at territorialization [whether at the local or national level] and identitarian reduction” (Rothberg 2010: 7).

The research team of the “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites” project centered their exploration of the practices of remembering on sites characterized by the greatest dissonance between the cultural and religious imperative of

European culture, which demands commemoration of the fallen and the killed, and the fact that this rule is practically suspended in certain situations, and with regard to certain bodies. Our aim was to understand how “living with all the dead under our meadows and fields” (Pollack 2014: 91) became possible in Eastern Europe. Thus, we inquired about the processes of selecting sites worthy or unworthy of commemoration; we observed the ‘life’ of uncommemorated sites, we described social and cultural phenomena generated by ‘contested’ locations of violence, and, in the broadest sense possible, we made an attempt at cataloguing the functions of these places in local and supra-local memory cultures. Moreover, during our fieldwork and analytical research, we watched the gradual transformation of uncommemorated sites into sites of memory, inquiring about the necessary preconditions for the change of their memorial status.

Selecting our cases, we drew on guidelines from organizations engaged in field work aimed at identifying uncommemorated body disposal pits. We wanted our objects to constitute a diverse array of sites, related to the deaths of people from different social and ethnic groups. Out of the locations we learnt about, we focused on those which we considered paradigmatic, in sufficient numbers to create an exhaustive typology. Radechnica in the Roztocze region of eastern Poland drew our interest due to the findings of The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (RCC), which examined dispersed pits containing the bodies of the victims of the Shoah. At the same time, we observed the process of discovering the bodies of other victims and of establishing a different arrangement of symbols: a mausoleum is currently being created in this village to house the bodies of the “cursed soldiers”, members of the anti-communist underground, which have also been found in the region; the history of these soldiers is promoted by Polish right-wing authorities.⁴ Bielcza near Tarnów was the site of execution of the Roma people during World War II.⁵ The land around the town of Miechów became the object of exploration on a wider scale, not restricted to particular focal points (again, the aim was to examine the effects of the Shoah,

3 See sites describing individual projects:

Yad Vashem: <https://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/homepage.asp> (access 15.11.2019); Yahad-In Unum: <http://www.yahadinunum.org/>. Here one can inspect a map of identified sites: <https://yahadmap.org/#map/> (access 15.11.2019). The foundation is run by rev. Patrick Desbois, the author of a book that focused general attention on killing sites in the Eastern Europe (Desbois 2007). Zapomniane/Forgotten Foundation: <https://www.matzevah.org/> also: <https://zapomniane.org/#map> (access 15.11.2019). One should also mention the efforts to discover victims of the communist terror (from state-funded influential the Institute of National Remembrance in Poland to small scale foundations in post-soviet countries like the Soviet Past Research Laboratory in Gorgia).

4 Radechnica is a small village in Roztocze, a region in eastern Poland in Zamość County with approximately 920 inhabitants. In World War II, its small Jewish community was resettled in a ghetto in Szczepleszyn. A few Jews in hiding were denounced and executed. A strong underground movement was connected with the local Bernardine abbey where local partisans took often 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 Institute of National Remembrance are being moved here). The site was researched within a project by Maria Kobielska, Roma Sendyka, Aleksandra Szczepan with support of Aleksandra Janus, Jacek Małczyński, Karina Jarzyńska, Tomasz Majkowski and Katarzyna Suszkiewicz.

5 Bielcza is a village in the Brzeg powiat, in the Brzesko county, in Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodship, with approximately 1,600 inhabitants. From mid-19 century, Bielcza has been frequented by Roma groups. Until the II World War a few Roma families settled and lived there. In July 1942, at least 19 Roma were murdered by German gendarmerie and Polish collaborating forces, the so called blue police. Aleksandra Szczepan and Łukasz Posłuszny and Kinga Siewior worked on that case, with the support of Roma Sendyka and Jacek Małczyński.

but also the violence against Roma community and non-Jewish Poles)⁶. Sukowice (German name: Suckowitz) – the site of a mass grave of German army soldiers in the Opole region, and Dębrzyna forest near Przeworsk – the site of dispersed killings of the inhabitants at the hands of local gangs – have functioned in our research as control objects, in which uncommemorated sites were present despite the lack of cultural, ethnic, or religious difference between the community living in the area and the people buried in the pits.⁷ Particularly interesting cases were identified on the fringes of Nazi camps: although the areas of the – as we called it – ‘peri-camps’ were not included in the acts of musealisation, they were still connected with mass death or the burial of human remains. The acts of violence at the root of the sites selected for our research dated from the period of World War II and its immediate aftermath, i.e. “the great fear” (Zaremba 2012), during which the wartime anomie continued to shape social relations. Geographically, all the locations except the Kulmhof extermination camp area lie in southern Poland.

The unclear ontology of the field objects necessitated, on the one hand, flexible and interdisciplinary knowledge, taking into account many specialized expert knowledge and grassroots local knowledge, and, on the other hand, the development of specific research tools. The project team comprised representatives of cultural studies, memory studies, literary studies, history, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, and political science, also experienced in education and intercultural dialogue. We also benefited from the knowledge of experts, whom we thank below; they explained to us problems related to the existence of abandoned sites in terms of central and local administrative regulations, geography, humanistic geography, non-anthropocentric history, archaeology, forensic research, ethics, Holocaust studies, research on the annihilation of the Roma, as well as digital humanities, game studies, performance studies, and visual studies. We received support from research teams and institutions working on similar issues directly in the field (RCC, Yahad-In Unum, Forgotten Foundation, Matzevah Foundation). We obtained information from local activists and residents of the towns we visited. Last but not least, our team benefited from the vital input of our collaborating visual artists.

We approached the contested locations as “theoretical objects” (Bois et al. 1998; Bal 1999), which, according

to the guidelines left by the school of cultural analysis, themselves produce a “theoretical effect”; they call on the researcher to undertake a particular explanatory activity, at the same time providing her with appropriate instruments. Drawing on approaches from various research traditions, depending on the demands of particular sites selected as case studies, we combined data from field research and interviews, archive work, and art-based research. The hypothetical setting of this collective work was the “humanistic laboratory” (Kil et al. 2017), which offered a safe space for experimenting with selected ‘samples’, repeating research procedures, discussing the results, and, ultimately, for formulating a theoretical stance. If we were to indicate the most general framework of our activity, it would be defined by the post-anthropocentric, new materialist, and forensic turns (Forensic Architecture 2014; Dziuban 2017; Weizman 2017), as well as by environmental reorientations of historical and Holocaust studies (Małczyński et al. 2020) and new approaches to the ontology of the dead body (Anstett and Dreyfus 2017; Domańska 2017).

Results: dynamic and relational microtopography of a difficult past

Conducting research in particular locations, we adopted the practice of working in smaller teams and with various strategies. We collected all available data: from field research, interviews, extant sources (surviving documents, previous interviews, published and unpublished memoirs), local papers, loose prints, the works of vernacular researchers and artists, the activity of visiting artists and institutions, and finally from existing historical works about particular places. We strove for the greatest possible density of our field of knowledge. We were interested not only in the processes generated around the non-site of memory, but also in its interactions and interferences with its memorial environment. In Radecznica, the research was conducted in such a way as to maximize knowledge about a particular killing site, so the work model was ‘fixed’ and ‘focal’. In Bielcza, we adopted the practice of exploring a network of other places related to the local Roma killing site, and thus the research procedure consisted in moving from location to location, capturing their

6 The Miechów area was researched by Karina Jarzyńska and Jakub Muchowski with the support of Aleksandra Szczepan and Roma Sendyka. The town is located in Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodeship, has approximately 12,000 inhabitants. Its development started in 12. century, when Duke Jaks of the House of Griffins invited monks of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher. The abbey became a center of pilgrimage to the Chapel of the Tomb of Christ. Jewish settlement started here in the mid-19th. century and by World War II approximately 40% of the inhabitants were Jewish. During the war, the Jews were resettled in a ghetto, and murdered in death camps. In the area there is also a major killing site from 1942, i.e. Chodówki forest, with 600–700 victims buried in the field.

7 Sukowice/Suckowitz – a village in Kędzierzyn-Koźle County, Opole Voivodeship, with 374 inhabitants which was a part of Germany before 1945. Today its population is mixed, Polish and German. It was researched by Maria Kobielska and Kinga Siewior with the cooperation of Roma Sendyka; Dębrzyna – a wood between two small villages: Grzęska and Świętoniowa (approximately of 800 inhabitants each), near Przeworsk (Przeworsk County, Subcarpathian Voivodeship). Site of post-war 1945–46 attacks on travelers who used the nearby train line to Rzeszów, and the USSR border. Scattered stray graves dot the wood’s clearings. The case was researched by artist-ethnographer Magdalena Lubańska. Her experience, her film *Not to Judge* (2017, with Pawlina Carlucci Sforza) and materials gathered for this occasion became a resource for the researchers in the project on uncommemorated sites. Jacek Małczyński interviewed Lubańska, Małczyński and Sendyka visited the site.

dynamic relationship. In Miechów, we wanted to supplement the method of centripetal, 'vertical' probing with a 'horizontal' or 'centrifugal' analysis of a larger area: no longer a small 'town' but 'surroundings' – in order to see how a particular crime scene (a mass-killing site in Chodówki forest) functions in an extended memory plane, with which other repressed or accentuated places it enters into resonance and relations. It was important for us to take as multifaceted a view as possible, so that it would be possible to capture the relationships of a particular location with actors, objects, and memory processes. This intensive micro-memory topography revealed several common features of objects generating difficult memory.

1. The memory landscape of a particular town or village is filled with various gestures of remembrance: religious and secular, official and private. A given memorial object does not exist in a situation of exclusion, but rather in a networked relationship with other objects. It is a part of the process of proliferation, addition, supplementation of successive multivalent objects pointing to the past. It exists in relation to signs of the past which are still readable, as well as those which are already losing or have lost their meanings, and those whose meaning is undetermined or repressed. The historical and cultural contextualization of non-sites of memory reveals, as in the case of our research in the Miechów area, that they function in a dynamic network of sites and non-sites of memory.
2. A different kind of relationship is revealed when one notices that some places function as cenotaphs. A cenotaph is a symbolic object which combines and connects. It is a tomb that does not contain remains or, as in the case of tombs of an unknown soldier, it hides an unidentified body 'symbolizing' other dead people, who cannot have their own tombstones. For when a particular place is finally located and commemorated (as was the case in Radechnica thanks to the efforts of the RCC), it becomes a grave for the identified victims, but also a symbolic memorial: a substitute commemoration for other places, about which residual knowledge has survived, but, due to their small scale or difficult access/identification, no further exploratory work is undertaken in their case. Thus, non-sites of memory also remain in an internal relation to other objects of the same kind.
3. At times, there is a deep functional link between the accentuated objects and the contested ones. A special connection can be identified between non-sites of memory and nearby commemorations, which, through this 'unwanted neighborhood', acquire an additional function as screen objects to the places of difficult memory in the vicinity. Thus, tracing the fate of a given location and the transformations of its significance from the time of the war to the present reveals the dynamic character of these seemingly stable objects: they function in relation to other sites and non-sites of memory. Hierarchies and tensions emerge in this arrangement, and meanings are negotiated.
4. If we perceive the plane of the local work of memory in this complex way, the conglomeration of objects of memory and non-memory will not resemble a palimpsest that would promise the possibility of typological and historical separation and ordering of meanings. What we are dealing here is rather a case of accretion (Dwyer 2004; Sendyka 2014; Pirker and Rode 2019), the "fever of adding" monuments, plaques, signs of revealing or concealing. The multiplication and mutual permeation of memory data can also be observed on the narrative plane in the form of disturbances and interferences that appear in witness testimonies regarding the location and form of commemoration or the fate of the victims.
5. The fate of non-sites of memory, if one manages to historicize it, reveals particular instability: the places of execution are transformed by the perpetrators, by the local community, and by animals living in the area. Their physical shape is influenced by natural succession. Vernacular markings (cuts, litter, boulders, mounds) and simple symbols (e.g. crosses universally used after the war for all sites of martyrdom) appear and disappear. Thus, while we are dealing with symbolization, it is worth seeing it as a symbolic process rather than a one-off act.
6. In some locations, we saw monuments being moved: brought closer to more convenient car parks or pushed back into less frequented areas. At times, then, the commemorations, set into motion, veer away from the exact place where the bodies are buried, which can still remain undefined and unprotected. The order of the protection of human remains and the order of the martyrdom discourse are therefore not always aligned. Shifts and displacements usually concern short distances: the movement of objects around the execution site may take the form of small vibrations, saccades, forcing the observer to make an effort to stabilize the field of vision.
7. Very often in our research we encountered a situation where a non-site of memory was, in a sense, distinguished by being screened off. The burial sites of many Jewish victims are now clumps of bushes. Subjecting a place to the impact of vegetation is a surprisingly ambivalent gesture: the object is obscured, but, at the same time, distinguished from its immediate anthropomorphized surroundings with a kind of 'green breach' in the landscape.
8. A variant of surrounding a problematic location with a "mnemonic security" cordon (Mätksoo 2015; Nowak et al. 2018) is littering, reported by practically all research groups working on the project. In Radechnica, people used the burial pit to dispose of cut tree branches brought from nearby homesteads, creating a compost heap. In Krępiec near Lublin, hollows left in the ground after exhumation and the

activity of diggers in search of Jewish gold are used for illegal waste disposal. Waste desacralizes, but it also marks the area off as contaminated; hence, in a peculiar way, a given place is differentiated from the surrounding area of community activities through a paradoxical, insulting, apotropaic gesture.

9. While non-sites of memory are not graveyards, they do relate to cemetery functions and meanings; they take on features identified as topical memory of places, infused with agency. This entails the appearance of numerous proscriptions and taboos associated with a particular place (we often learned, for example, about refusal to pass through or to pick berries in a given spot). Another means of safeguarding against the power of non-sites of memory is telling stories of supernatural and potentially dangerous phenomena associated with them.
 10. The dynamic character of the field of memory, which our research has identified in various locations, was above all a derivative of the unfinished process of determining who is “worthy of grief” (Butler 2009). The memory cultures which we studied have changed due to social reconfigurations within and outside the community. New subjects would appear in the field of mnemonic sensibility (e.g. Jews after 1989; since the beginning of the 21st century, and especially after 2011, when a new remembrance day was established in Poland – the soldiers from the anti-communist post 1944 underground). We have also observed the diminishing importance of groups no longer included in communicative memory and no longer supported sufficiently by the local cultural memory (like the Orthodox in eastern Poland). The span of memorial attention is thus unstable, constantly reconfigured. One of the primary factors influencing the dynamic nature of the field is the unfinished process of negotiations on the question of the victims’ humanity. Dehumanization is necessary in order to minimize the significance of dead bodies that have not undergone funeral rituals, and therefore remain potentially dangerous. Acknowledging the humanity of victims is an essential precondition for commencing the work of commemoration.
 11. Exposing an uncommemorated site and introducing it into the field of attention can be triggered by a number of various stimuli. It may result from external intervention by an institutional or individual actor (e.g. Jonathan Webber’s successful ‘cultural diplomacy’ with regard to memory in Brzostek; Webber 2015). Another factor may be the influence of centrally designed education, memory politics, international diplomacy or religion. The identification of a non-site of memory and its transformation into a site of memory is faster and more effective if a representative of the local community is there to testify to the humanity of the victims. The agents of humanity are the survivors of shooting executions, crime witnesses, but also younger activists.
- This role is especially effective when assumed by a local authority figure: a teacher, librarian, or priest (Lubańska 2017).
12. A special communication culture functions around the contested object. Not talking about a particular place does not mean not knowing about it; there exists an alternative mode of communication about the subject. Alongside speech halting, imprecision, and vagueness, there are characteristic gestures, facial expressions, voice modulation, silences, and understated suggestions: an entire repertoire of Aesopian encryption (antonomasia, aposiopesis, metaphor, periphrasis, as well as prosody and body language) is harnessed to communicate a message about the past that escapes the attention of researchers of symbolic memory. Outdoor activity (e.g. mushroom picking, hiking, farming) is subject to minor corrections, which go unnoticed by an external observer, but remain readable to local participants of the memory culture. Drawing on the work of Polish sociologists, we define the total set of these communicatively effective yet non-symbolic measures as non-memory, a term already mentioned above (Hirszowicz and Neyman 2007; Sendyka 2016b; Nowak et al. 2018).
 13. A characteristic feature of this aphasic (Stoler 2011; Nowak et al. 2018: 14) information exchange is the deliberate omission of certain words. The terms clearly avoided by our respondents included: ‘Jews’, ‘dead bodies’, ‘grave’. With the need to use a particular word in an utterance comes symbolic panic, which, in turn, triggers elocutionary inventiveness, a frantic search for substitutes; often, whole cascades of euphemisms spill out as a result.
 14. The decelerated, damaged articulation of the past with regard to “difficult heritage” (Macdonald 2008) contrasts with the logorrhoea of animated and loquacious accounts, which we witnessed when asking about other pasts – especially those that could be placed in the context of a personal or family history, that allowed for a heroic and gratifying, affirmative story. We listened to many wartime stories stylized to resemble a picaresque or an adventure novel. This logorrhoea can hypothetically be interpreted as compensating for the dumbness with regard to another past, or as a ‘screen story’, which helps create a cordon of “mnemonical security” on the communication plane.
 15. A special feature of non-sites of memory is the intensity of their affective field. Due to the lack of a ready-made symbolic model for talking about such places, and the violence that had founded them in the past, these locations evoke intense emotions. Our respondents stated that when visiting them, they felt fear or anxiety; remembering such a place may cause anger or an emotional response. The accounts presently given by witnesses, who were children during the war, often seem to evoke emotions

from the recounted moment, revealing the continued presence of a child's emotionality, not fully controlled, caused by a traumatizing event (of killing) witnessed in the past.

Discussion: Non-sites of memory and their communities

In this volume, non-sites of memory are construed as the critical obverse of sites of memory. Thus, they challenge the consequences of the modern "acceleration" of history (Nora 1989: 6). As Pierre Nora argued, acceleration has led to the loss of temporal cohesion, of a sense of the teleological nature of time, and to the weakening of institutions that govern it (e.g. the abolition of the privileged status of historians). The thus emerged "age of commemoration" (Nora 1984–1992) is founded on a feeling of desperation: it is characterized by the society's obsession "with the archive that marks our age, attempting at once the complete conservation of the present as well as the total preservation of the past" (Nora 1989: 13). Contested places allow us to ask: does this "dangerous supplement" to official memories, lodged in, as Rothberg identified it, "gaps", "omissions" or "surprising absences" of Nora's project, derive from the modern experience just like *lieux de mémoire* (Rothberg 2010: 5–7)? Or, on the contrary, do non-sites of memory testify to a denial of the very paradigm of modern time, to a return to the time before modernity? In other words, do non-sites of memory belong to the practices of the modern society or pre-modern *millieux de mémoire*? (Bogumił and Głowacka-Grajper 2019)

Non-sites of memory indeed demonstrate the complex, non-binary nature of remembering. Consequently, they also oppose Nora's antinomic conceptualization at the meta-structural level. Since the concept of *millieux de mémoire* is merely hypothetical, nothing stands in the way of treating the phenomena observed around non-sites of memory as residual traces of how memory used to function prior to being sustained by mediatized records. Thus, these phenomena can also be studied in terms of the archaeology of social forms of relating to the past. Especially the acknowledgement of the role of extra-symbolic interaction may bring new data concerning the complexity of forms of remembering, which combine explicitly articulated and hidden elements.

Another potentially fruitful research path opens thanks to the development of post-anthropocentric approaches. Perhaps the question about the type of community implied by a particular contested place should go beyond traditional social research. When there was talk near Miechów about cereal grains that had gone black year after year, marking out in the field the burial place of victims of German executions, this suggested a non-human guardian of human history, an environmental 'marker/memorial, trans-species solidarity in giving a testimony of violence.

In our research, the communities around non-sites of memory are therefore analyzed beyond the opposition of modernity and post-modernity (Augé 1992) or modernity and pre-modernity (Nora 1984–1992). We emphasize complex strategies of remembering and ambiguous motivations and actions associated with it. As our findings suggest, more fitting are relational, dynamic, non-antinomic models, such as the concept of social implication, which, following Rothberg and Lehrer (Lehrer 2018; Rothberg 2019), we propose to apply (Sendyka 2018).

Conclusions: non-sites of memory as a diagnostic tool for memory studies

In the broadest sense, non-sites of memory, investigated within the range of their influence, but also as theoretical and critical objects, can become diagnostic objects with regard to strategies of relating to the past, especially in cases where violence has permanently affected social relations and the possibility of their articulation. We propose to understand non-sites of memory as objects which allow to diagnose problems through coordinating and effecting reconciliation of cultural memory, whether in the official or vernacular dimension. They are certainly not the only or exclusive phenomena offering insight into that which has been pushed out of the symbolic imaginarium, and is not manifested in the area of cultural memory, while remaining mnemonically active. Contemporary memory studies have developed primarily tools for researching cultural memory founded on the act of symbolization. In our project, we inquire about the possibilities and needs of expanding these research techniques in a way that would enable capturing memory when its expression is not based on a code that allows us to order the signifying and the signified, but rather on acts which are not yet or not fully encoded semiotically.

Below we present articles whose extended versions will be published in Polish in two edited volumes: *Nie-miejsca pamięci (1). Nekrotopografie* [Non-sites of memory (1) Necrotopographies (Sendyka, Kobielska, Muchowski, Szczepan 2020)] and *Nie-miejsca pamięci (2). Nekrotopologie* [Non-sites of memory (2) Necrotologies] (Sendyka, Janus, Jarzyńska, Siewior 2020). The participants of the "Uncommemorated Genocide Sites" project propose interpretations of social, communication, and cultural phenomena testifying to the present state of memory culture around uncommemorated sites of violence. Interpretations of mnemonic events generated by non-sites of memory constitute both pioneering attempts at understanding and explaining the collected data, and theoretical proposals for a terminology and research tools applicable to complex objects testifying to the operations of repressed memory. Potentially, therefore, the studies presented below may be used not only to explore other post-violence sites, but also, more broadly, objects

pushed out of the field of official collective and communicative memory.

The presentation opens with Aleksandra Szczepan and Kinga Siewior's discussion of the peculiar cartography of non-sites of memory. They can be found on unofficial maps drawn to support the narrative during depositions by witnesses to the crime (bystanders, interviewed after the war in relation to the war-time executions). On this basis, the authors develop a topological theory of non-sites of memory. Maria Kobielska and Aleksandra Szczepan propose their reading of the category of the witnesses, which has recently been debated with increasing intensity (Morina and Krijn 2018). They arranged a lexicon of productive sub-notions like "crown/summoned/volunteer/outcast" witness or witnessing "object/gesture/performance". The authors develop a dynamic interpretation of the witness in epistemological rather than ontological terms: as a variable and transitive disposition of "testimony". Jakub Muchowski comments on historians' practices of coming to terms with repressed crime scenes. While official historical discourses follow limited information, scattered in the archives, local historians have developed at least several strategies of working with this difficult topographical heritage. Aleksandra Janus investigates the manner and conditions of the emergence of remembering communities in non-sites of memory, the role played here by human and non-human agents. She also presents an interesting example of conciliatory forms of commemoration. Maria Kobielska proposes a close reading of the unveiling of a memorial to murdered Jews in one of the locations that have been the object of our research. She precisely identifies the difficulties with putting the past into safe language formulations and the defense or escape strategies that lead to avoidance of contested issues, to non-antagonizing, justifying, to whitewashing the difficult past. Katarzyna Grzybowska investigates a surprising practice associated with past attempts at mapping non-sites of memory, namely the 1965 action of involving young scouts in the search for uncommemorated sites. In this way, she reveals former strategies of responding to the *alert* of post-violence sites. Roma Sendyka and Aleksandra Janus discuss artists' present-day responses to the imploration of places difficult to grasp. Bystander art, always belated, is analyzed as a form of art-based research, of deepened exploration of non-sites of memory. Katarzyna Suszkiewicz and Tomasz Majkowski present a report on the experiment of building active memory and supportive attitudes among young people. A game jam organized in one of the towns has brought very interesting educational results. The volume is concluded with a transcript of conversations and discussions from the conference *Sites of Violence and Their Communities: Critical Memory Studies in the Post-Human Era*, held in Kraków on 23–25 September 2019 (organizers: Research Center for Memory Cultures, Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University; Polish Studies Program, Cambridge University; Yahad-In Unum). The texts published below were first presented as papers at that event.

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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, Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor 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.

2

SZKIC TERENOWY

MELDUNEK ZE ZWIADU

Drużyna Harcerska imienia B. Chrobrego
 przy szkole nr 1
 Miejscowość Szubin
 Powiat Szubin
 Województwo Bydgoszcz
 Podaje dokładną godzinę, o której po raz pierwszy
 przeczytano lub usłyszano o ALERCIE 22.04.1965 r.
 Nazwisko i funkcja, otwierającego kopertę:
Mieczysław M. - drużynowy
 Ilość harcerzy z drużyny, która stanęła na alarm-
 ową zbiórkę 13

DANE DOTYCZĄCE ZADANIA nr 2

Jaki, według Was, najważniejszy obiekt zbudowany
 na Waszym terenie w ciągu 20-lecia Polski Ludowej?

1. Dom Harcerza
2. Dom Kultury
3. Szkoła 1000 godzin i T. Ekonomiczne
4. Siedziba P.Z.P.R.
5. Pracownice Budowlane i Rolnicze
6. Powstały wtedy osiedla mieszkalne
7. Na ulicach zainstalowano
przecięte lampy oświetleniowe

3

1. Rodzaj obiektu Droga wzdłuż rzeki Łasawki.

2. Dane historyczne Pracę niestwierdz.

O miejscu tym dowiedziano się podczas
 wyjazdu z mieszkańcami Szubina.
 Bardzo łaconierne wiadomości na ten
 temat znajdują się w książce Jana
 Janikowskiego „Swastyka nad Szubinem”

Zródła informacji Mieszkańcy Szubina: p. Skutkowski,
Ficek, i p. W. Dobiecki. Według nich przy budowie
drogi i porzucaniu rzeki Łasawki pracowali Żydzi
z Szubina i okolicy około 150 osób prawnie wszystkich zamieszka-
li tam.

3. Dokładne określenie miejsca obiektu:

Miejscowość Szubin
 Ulica Droga wzdłuż Łasawki
 Gromada Szubin
 Powiat Szubin
 Województwo Bydgoszcz

4. Dojazd

stacja	numer stacji	odległość w km
kolejowa	<u>Szubin</u>	<u>M. Szubin</u>
autostradowa	<u>Szubin</u>	<u>i najbliższa</u>
		<u>szkoła</u>

5. W jakim stanie znajduje się miejsce

Obecnie alcy spacerować wyznaczono
 harcerzami – naszymi
 zaradkami twórczości Żydów.

6. Kto się nim opiekuje (sprawuje patronat)

Dotychczas niht. Od dn. 25-04-1965 r.
patronat objęli L.d. h. im. B. Chrobrego
w Szubinie.

7. Jeżeli obiekt jest zniszczony, co według Was po-
 winno się tam zrobić

Uprządkować drogę, wyznaczyć tablicę
informującą o trasach, które
wiezły się przez tam.

8. Czy można to wykonać we własnym zakresie,
 czy też potrzebna jest pomoc dorosłych

Tak. Potrzebna jest zgoda władz
miejskich na zrealizowanie zamiaru

UWAGI: Idziecia z przebiegu Alertu
przyjęli po opracowaniu

Uwaga! Kartę wypełniać czystym, oddzielnym dla każdego miejsca walki lub męczeństwa

„Praca”, tom. 20, nr 2, 1965, s. 1-4

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.

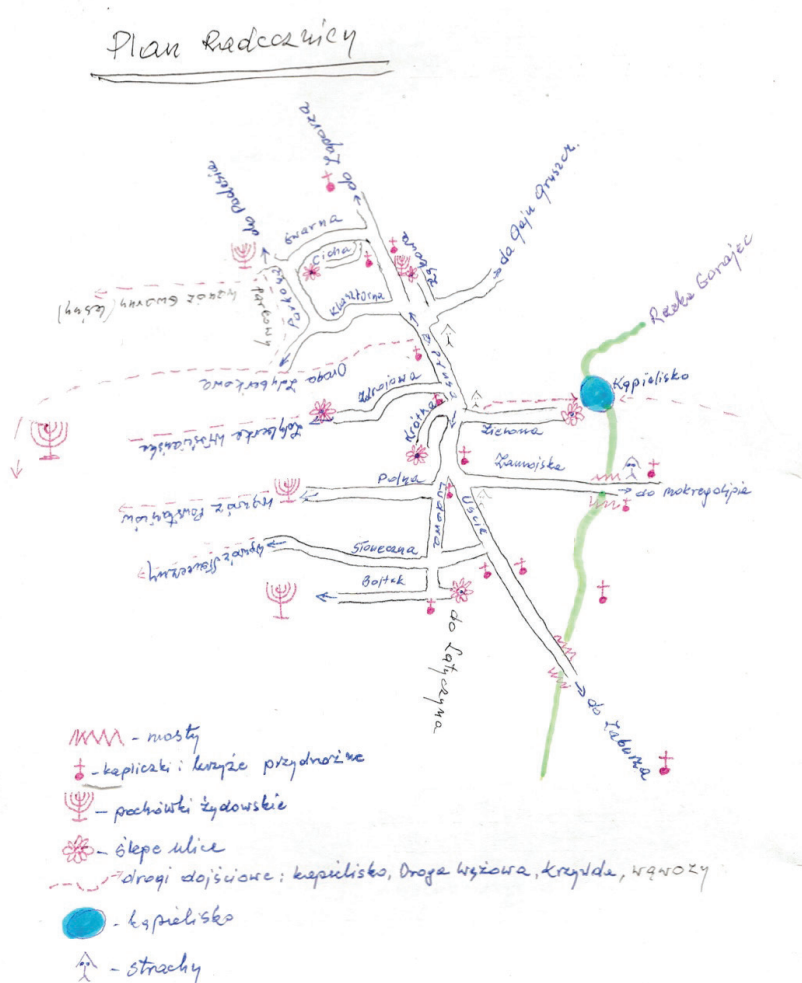


Figure 4. Map from the manuscript “Tak cię widzę, Radeczniczo” (This is how I see you, Radecznicza) by Stanisław Zybała.

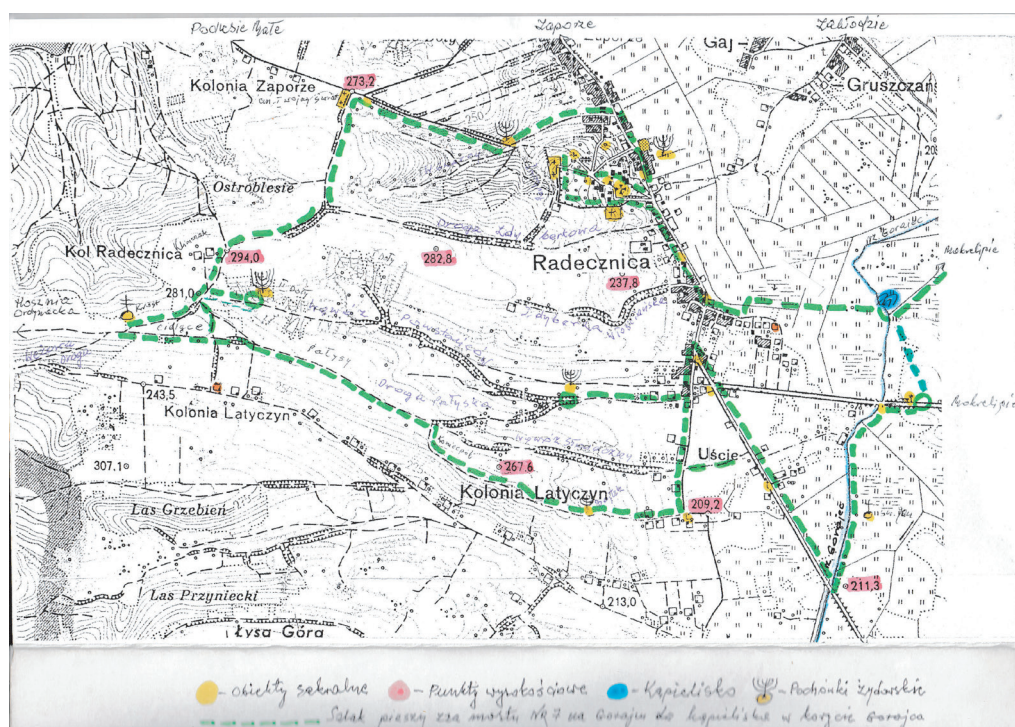


Figure 5. Map from the manuscript “Tak cię widzę, Radeczniczo” (This is how I see you, Radecznicza) by Stanisław Zybała.

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 Szczepieszyn. 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.

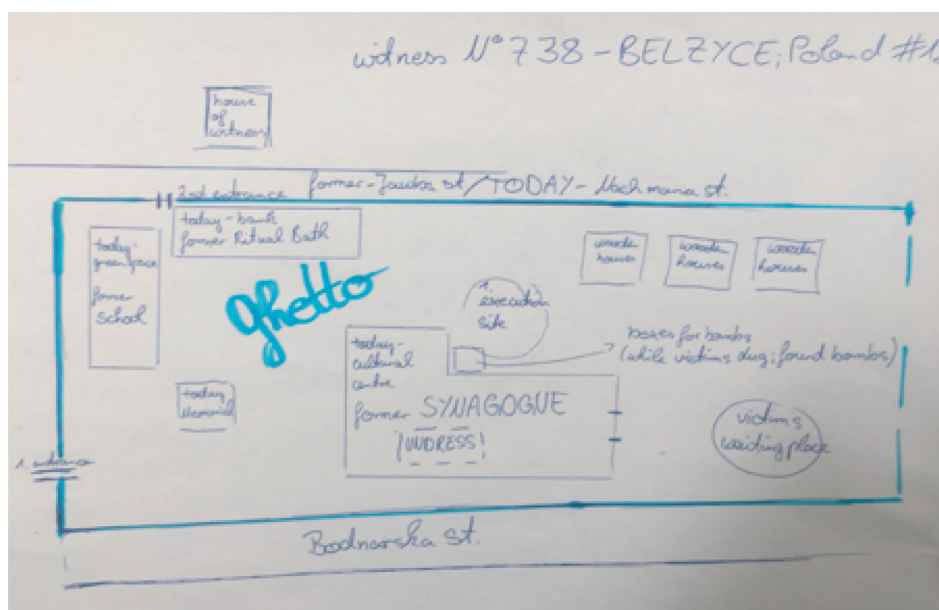


Figure 6. Map from Belzyce. Courtesy of Michał Chojak.

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.

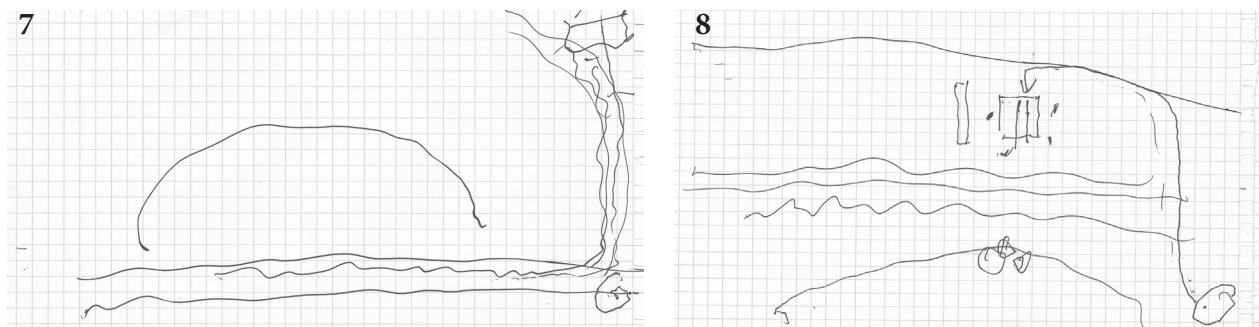
That is the case with the diagram from Belzyce (Fig. 6), a town in the Lublin region, made at the behest of a witness by a member of the YIU team (Yahad – In Unum 2017) and presenting the execution of 700 Jewish citizens in the spring of 1942. The document depicts three orders together: the topography 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.

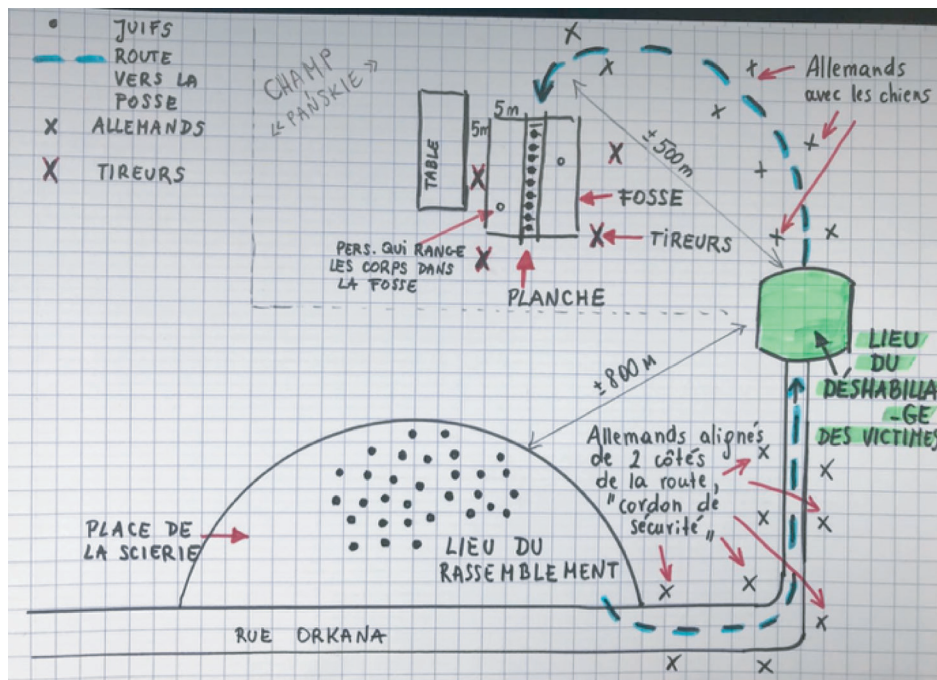


Figure 9. Drawing by the employee of Yahad – In Unum from Mszana Dolna. Courtesy of Renata Masna.

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.

transl. by Patrick Trompiz

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Testimoniality: A lexicon of witnesses of Holocaust non-sites of memory in Poland

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Abstract

The authors analyse grassroots modalities of the figure of witness in the communities living in the vicinity of uncommemorated sites of past violence. Testimoniality, understood as the disposition to bear witness, i.e. both the willingness to testify and the ability to provide important information, is discussed in relation to complex, heterogenic and dynamic assemblages that form around the sites in question, comprising both human (neighbours, wardens) and non-human actors (the landscape and biotope, material objects), diverse practices, performative gestures, and relations. The analysis is placed in the context of the debate on the complicated status of the “witness” as a category in the Polish post-war culture of memory, as well as of new relevant categories emerging in both Polish and international scholarship on the Holocaust. The authors conceptually systematise testimonial situations and propose a lexicon of testimonial positions, practices and objects that are grounded in the material gathered in fieldwork during the research project on unmemorialised sites of genocide in Poland. They distinguish: the crown witness, the trustee, the volunteer, the official and the contingent witness, and discuss categories of testimonial gesture, testimonial performance, testimonial object, and testimonial words.

Key Words

genocide, gesture, Holocaust, Polish memory culture, witness

Introduction

In Polish (like in German and unlike in English), the repertoire of terms for giving evidence, for the confirmation or reporting of events faithfully, enjoys a shared etymology: *świadek*, *świadectwo*, *świadczyć* (respectively in English: *witness*, *testimonial* [also an adjective in English]/*evidence/testimony/certificate*, *testify/bear witness*), standing for a subject, object and activity. Although contemporary Polish does not offer corresponding adjectival or adverbial cognates in common use, the latter nevertheless exist, at least in all major dictionaries. Samuel Bogumił Linde, regarded as first lexicographer of the Polish language, lists (1807–1814) the adjective *świadczeni* (lit. having the character of testimony) as in “bearing witness, serving testimony” but also “confirmed by testimonials”, as well as the adverb *świadczeni* (lit. “in a testimonial manner”, “in the presence of witnesses”). And it is precisely *testimoniality*, *świadczeni* – the disposition to

bear witness and to be a witness – that we would like to discuss in the context of unmemorialised sites of violence, so common in Polish and Eastern European landscape, related to the Holocaust, Romani genocide and ethnic conflicts during World War II. Roma Sendyka (2015, 2016) dubbed these abandoned post-violence localisations “non-sites of memory”, expanding the term used by Claude Lanzmann in the context of post-camp and post-ghetto sites. As Sendyka argues, the category of “non-site of memory” proves to be especially useful in case of localisations that witnessed dispersed violence in Eastern-Central Europe, such as “Holocaust by bullets” and third phase of the Holocaust. “Holocaust by bullets” (Desbois 2008) designates numerous killings by shooting in occupied Poland, the Soviet Union and Southeast Europe perpetrated by mobile squads (*Einsatzgruppen*), but also other German forces, including police battalions (Browning 1992). The third phase of the Holocaust, after ghettoisation and extermination in camps, called

by Germans *Judenjagd*, the hunt for the Jews, refers to fates of those Jewish refugees who managed to escape ghettos and went into hiding (Engelking 2011). During that time, their future depended mostly on the help or betrayal of non-Jewish populations: after the first weeks when German forces actively sought the escapees from the liquidated ghettos (with the help of – in the case of General Government – Polish “blue” police and the construction service Baudienst), later they mostly reacted to denunciations of local non-Jewish residents (Grabowski 2013). As historians estimate, out of 200–300 thousand Jews looking for help, only about ten percent survived (Engelking and Grabowski 2018). In both cases, the “Holocaust by bullets” and the third phase of the Holocaust, the killings were done by shooting, carried out in ravines, forests and fields outside the settlements or within towns and villages, often with the participation of Polish police and with the assistance of local residents, who usually dug graves and buried the bodies. These sites, omnipresent in Polish landscape, often lack any form of official commemoration or are abandoned and overgrown, have not been consecrated by religious rituals, very often still contain human remains, and, most importantly, generate a vast array of reactions of local communities: from devastation and littering, through processes of non-remembering and negligence, to vernacular, weak, unofficial forms of memorialisation. In this paper, we intend to analyse how localisations of such characteristics create testimonial situations, engaging agents and practices of various ontological status.

Thus, we would like to consider *testimony* in relation to complex, heterogenic and dynamic assemblages that form around non-sites of memory, comprising both human and non-human actors (the landscape and biotope, material objects), diverse practices, performative gestures, and relations. We assume that *testimony* is a *disposition to bear witness*: understood as both the willingness to testify and the ability to provide important information. We do not attribute to the agents, objects or practices that interest us the feature of testimony (or being a witness) “a priori”, as if it were an essential quality. Instead, we observe how testimony is generated through specific situations in a dispersed manner. This article is an attempt to conceptually systematise those situations.

By analysing various testimonial agents (or rather positionalities) and practices related to the uncommemorated sites of genocide, we also draw attention to the complicated status of the “witness” as a category in the Polish post-war culture of memory. In the discussions on the role of Poles in the events relating to the Holocaust, the term “witness” was challenged as inaccurate to express various form of implication and often the complicity of Polish citizens during the Holocaust. These discussions have been ongoing since the end of the 1980s and were incited by the film *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann (1985), who portrayed Poles mostly as – perhaps passive, but certainly cruel – observers of the death of Jews – a depiction that sparked

heated debate in Poland (Kwieciński 2012; Forecki 2013; Głowacka 2020). An important voice was then articulated by a Polish intellectual and literary scholar Jan Błoński in the essay *Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto* (1987 [1988]) who pointed out Polish indifference towards their Jewish compatriots during the war. More recently, the critical engagement with the notion goes hand in hand with criticism directed towards the term *bystander*, taken from Raul Hilberg’s (1992) categorisation of the roles in the Holocaust (victim – perpetrator – bystander). The use of the category of “Holocaust bystander” in relation to non-Jewish witnesses, usually neighbours and co-citizens of the victims, has been polemically scrutinised at least in two aspects. Firstly, the notion of a bystander as a passive, non-involved and disengaged observer of the events does not represent historical reality and overlooks the complexity of social relations of the communities as well as interchangeability of the roles assumed by non-Jewish individuals under the Nazi occupation. Especially the research on micro-historical perspective level (Bartov 2011; Wiercholska 2016) has proved inefficiency of such static categories: positionalities under long-lasting violence were dynamic, fluid and blurred. Secondly, it has been criticised as downplaying the complicity of the local communities in the events. Referring to the behaviour of ethnic Poles during the Nazi occupation, Jan T. Gross expressed it in the poignant phrase: “In the face of the Holocaust, ‘doing-nothing’ is also an action” (2014: 886). This context became especially urgent since the publication of Gross’s *Neighbors* (2000 [2001]) about the murder of Jews in Jedwabne committed by their Polish neighbours in 1941. In both Polish and international scholarship, new categories emerge, which emphasised various forms of implication, complicity and economic profit from the genocide shared by its seemingly not engaged observers. Therefore, notions such as “facilitator”, “beneficiary” (Fulbrook 2012, 2019), “participating observer” (Janicka 2015), “onlooker/viewer” (Sendyka 2019a, 2019b; Niziołek 2019), “implicated subject” (Rothberg 2020) have come to be used. The genealogy of the revision of the phrase “Polish witness to the Holocaust” can be found, partially, in the rooting of the discussion in a western paradigm of witness as a *survivor*, and, thus, someone in possession of particular “moral clarity”, as Carolyn J. Dean aptly puts it (2017: 631). Eichmann’s trial in 1961, when Holocaust survivors had their voices heard for the first time, “transformed the victim’s powerlessness into a newly discovered source of inner strength: of honour, of glory, and of wisdom” (Dean 2017: 631). The survivor turned to be the paradigmatic witness and an attribution of being a witness became imbued with morality, exceeding the meaning and authority of earlier, mostly legal, contexts. Lanzmann’s film records this process, representing the third of Hilberg’s triad, the “bystanders”, exclusively as (mere) eye-witnesses – those that watch and register what is happening, liable for the collective responsibility of the passive masses. Eyewitnesses to the Holocaust in this view cannot be real witnesses: Lanzmann made an axiom out of the distinction

between those who experienced the event and can therefore *bear witness* and those who observed and can only *give a testimony*.

Our attempt to investigate testimoniality as an element of the Polish culture of memory begins with the local specificity of the figure of the witness: its equivocal ethical, epistemological, political and societal status. Thus, the Holocaust, especially in the case of smaller towns and villages, unfolded in total visibility and became a strangely intimate (Bartov 2018) everyday occurrence, making everybody complicit in the events. Moreover, the long-term violence of German occupation and disruption of social relations caused by it permanently shaped the affective structure of Polish society that has not been dealt with on communal and individual level until today. While agreeing with findings of the aforementioned discussions on various forms of implication of Polish society in the Holocaust, we also would like to consider Polish eyewitnesses as form of “material witnesses” (Schuppli 2020): not only *witnesses to* but also *evidence of* complex historic experience as well as worldview, *Mitwelt*, economy of power performed by its various participants. Therefore, it seems crucial to recognise the ways the non-Jewish witnesses have related to the Holocaust in its aftermath, how they transmitted their knowledge and how the attitude towards the past positions individuals within a post-genocidal community. We aim at – in case of human actors – analysing forms of testimonial positions undertaken now, therefore limited in Polish context to those who were not victims of the Holocaust and their descendants. We recognise that the label of *witness* is applied in this essay almost exclusively to the members of the majority culture who bear witness to the experience of those who were violently deprived of the very chance to take up a position of witness. Aware of these ramifications for the dynamics of power that testimoniality may preserve, we primarily intend to observe and exercise broad potential uses of the categories witness-testimony-testimonial in the context of contemporary forms of remembrance related to the Holocaust and Romani genocide in Poland. Rendering testimoniality primarily as a *disposition to bear witness*, we ask: how do people in contemporary Poland position themselves as witnesses to genocide, but also how do they react to an external call to give a testimony? Or, in what ways may we consider them witnesses? How is it influenced by the dominant narratives of contemporary Polish collective memory culture and memory politics? Finally, although our goal is not to cast moral judgment and make testimoniality conditional on the questions of ethical position in the present or the past, we believe that the analysis of the contemporary forms of witnessing

may bring valuable insights about modes of complicity and involvement of Polish society in the Holocaust.

We propose therefore a lexicon of testimonial positions, practices, objects, and words that are grounded in the material gathered in fieldwork during the research project on unmemorialised sites of genocide in Poland.¹ We wish, therefore, above all, to consider the grassroots modalities of the figure of witness in the communities living in the vicinity of uncommemorated killing sites and to analyse the positionalities assumed in an effort to bear witness to the past, even by those who do not have an indexical link to that past, that is, did not participate in the historical events. Each analysed positionality might not exhaustively describe all the features of any individual witness’s actions and, in reality, several types of testimonial engagement we describe may overlap in any given situation. Consequently, the proposed typology is not intended as a standardised chart of fixed categories, but rather as a flexible network of partially interchangeable models, whose coordination may help recalibrate our thinking about witnessing, and particular acts of testimonial engagement. Some of the positionalities discussed seem particularly likely to overlap or coincide. As a result of the assumptions we have made, we have relaxed criteria usually used to distinguish between survivor-witnesses and “bystanders”, eyewitnesses from secondary witnesses etc.

The crown witness

When describing the relationships between the sites of former violence and the people who remember them, our interlocutor and guide to the killing sites in Radechnica (in the Lubelskie Voivodship),² Marianna Zybala, suddenly used a very particular formulation. Speaking about her husband, the by then late Stanisław Zybala, a historian and regionalist and indefatigable warden of Jewish memory in Radechnica, she called him the “crown witness” (using Polish phrase *świadek koronny* standing for “protected witness” in English, or the one who has “turned Queen’s evidence”).

Stanisław Zybala had spent the war in Radechnica as a boy and was an eyewitness to the Holocaust. The Germans entered Radechnica in mid-September 1939. The first cases of anti-Semitic violence, probably with the involvement of Polish villagers, happened there no later than in October 1939. The first public execution of Jewish inhabitants of the village took place in July 1942, while in September 1942, all Jews who remained alive up to this point were deported to the ghetto in nearby Szczebrzeszyn. Many of them managed to escape the transport and went into hiding, mostly in the forests that surrounded the village. From autumn 1942 well into

¹ *Uncommemorated Genocide Sites and Their Impact on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland* (2016–2020), see acknowledgements.

² Radechnica is a small village in Rostocze (a region in eastern Poland), in Zamość County, with approximately 920 inhabitants. The site was researched within the abovementioned project by Maria Kobielska, Roma Sendyka, Aleksandra Szczepan with the support of Aleksandra Janus, Jacek Małczyński, Karina Jarzyńska, Tomasz Majkowski and Katarzyna Suszkiewicz.

1943, they were continuously being caught and executed, often in public, by German Schutzpolizei; some of the executions were carried out by members of the Polish “blue” police. The victims’ bodies were buried at multiple sites (Skibińska 2018: 191–382). Furthermore, Radechnica witnessed many other forms of war violence directed towards its non-Jewish inhabitants, including deportations, arrests, attacks, bombings, and was a stage of partisan activity.³

Stanisław Zybała became a vernacular historian of these events, preoccupied predominantly by the village’s wartime past. He wrote the following about his own experience of an eyewitness: “That scene left in me a kind of photographic plate that remains inside me till today” (2001: 7).⁴ It is worth pausing a moment to consider the distinction between an eyewitness and a crown witness: as is clear from Zybała’s recollections, being an eyewitness, a kind of “photographic plate” recording the Holocaust, was not all that unique: the death of the Jewish inhabitants happened before the eyes of the entire village. Zybała’s regal status as the “crown witness” is to be found rather in the shift from mere minute taker to active guardian of the memory of these events, which are not anchored in any collective practices or memorials. He collected information about the unmarked execution and burial sites and managed to document and map at least eight of the latter, located as well in close proximity of the village’s buildings as in nearby forests and meadows. Almost all of them (except one site commemorated by the only Radechnica survivor, Rubin Weistuch) were left abandoned and routinely ignored by residents, who did not feel responsible for this heritage, placing Zybała in the position of the sole guardian of memory. At the same time, working as a librarian, he became the village’s history chronicler and archivist. As such, he won the respect of the local community, but simultaneously was perceived, with his unusual interests and strong opinions he voiced, as something of an eccentric. Thanks to this image, he could enjoy certain privileges to raise the topic of the local difficult past, understood here in terms of collective remembering. Firstly, “difficult past” relates to the past experiences that do not fit into the mainstream framework of national memory, organised by the principle of maintaining a positive self-portrait of the group via focusing mainly on Polish martyrdom and the history of fight and resistance. Secondly, it may be subjected to masking or erasing in order to reduce the risk for the community (be it national or local) to be held responsible for the past violence (or other harm) exerted by its members. As a result, in the absence of convenient cognitive schemes and of communal will to remember, this mnemonic content turns out difficult to narrate and acknowledge, let alone commemorate.

Let us consider the peculiar phrase used by Stanisław’s wife, Marianna Zybała in a broader context than her own intentions suggest. An adjective “crown”, in Polish especially, denotes the quality of being decisive or the most important, as well as “uncommon”, great, masterful (however, the dictionary examples in the latter cases are rather ironic, e.g. *koronny oszust, złodziej*, lit: “royal swindler, thief” – similar to the English “a right royal (e.g.) mess”). In combining the adjectival form of “crown” with witness, Marianna Zybała emphasises the gravity and directness of the evidence given. The existence of one such “crown witness” is the *sine qua non* for the preservation of a difficult past.

The crown witness is, therefore, the main witness, the most important, the “arch-witness”. Moreover, it is not the fact of being an eyewitness that makes someone the “crown witness”. The “crown witness” wants to bear witness and looks for ways to be as good a witness as possible. Their testimony can in this way be effective, invested with the power to reactivate difficult memory. The “royalty” of the witness is, however, ambiguous. According to the contemporary usage of the word, a “crown witness” – the accused who turns Queen’s evidence – is one who testifies against the interests of their own group, as group that is guilty, and at the same time, as exposed to a risk of revenge, needs protection. The characterisation implicit in the phrase may thus be applied to a non-Jewish Polish person who decided to speak out about Jewish suffering, taking into account the element of complicity of the Polish community in the fate of the deceased. Perhaps here lies the painful paradox of outcast witnesses in “bystander” communities: a betrayal of one’s own community and guilt are included from the outset.

The trustee

The situations we are considering show that – contrary to the classical concept of testimony based on the personal experience of the witness – testimony is a transferable disposition. Marianna Zybała, quoted above, has been for us a clear instance of this possibility. She moved to Radechnica in the 1950s and had no first-hand knowledge of the wartime history of the place. However, she went on to spend the rest of her life there, and she was her husband’s companion and co-participant in the testimonial actions he initiated as a “crown witness”. In 2013, representatives of The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland – a body established alongside the Jewish Community of Warsaw to supervise Jewish cemeteries in Poland and to identify unmarked grave sites of the Holocaust – came to Radechnica, alerted by a letter sent by Stanisław

3 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 has become 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 in the process of being moved here).

4 Zybała refers here to burying bodies of the victims of one of the executions; he saw himself also several acts of shooting.

Zybała, who intended to draw their attention to the local unmemorialised Holocaust burial sites. At that time, Stanisław's health no longer permitted him to show the representatives of the Commission around. It was Marianna Zybała who took them on the testimonial walk, undertaking and repeating the testimony she had adopted from her husband. This double act of witnessing: Stanisław Zybała's oral testimony performed at their house and Marianna Zybała's guided tour at the sites, was recorded by the Zapomniane [Forgotten] Foundation, collaborating with the Commission (Historie mówione. Radecznica 2014).

After Stanisław Zybała's death, his role in the local culture of memory was taken on by his wife: she continues the activity of bearing witness, she leads cultural initiatives, animates, and speaks up for the lost memory, takes responsibility, evaluates. The fact that she had not been an eyewitness to specific wartime events is, it seems today, of lesser significance. Her role is also acknowledged by her community, including recognition in official events: since the death of Stanisław Zybała, she has been perceived as the main expert on local history. It was her, for example, who recounted stories about victims in the course of a memorial event for one of the sites, in which we participated in September 2016, when a modest monument commemorating ten victims buried in a wooded gully was unveiled, due to the efforts of the representatives of the Rabbinical Commission. She was also our guide to the numerous non-sites of memory in Radecznica.

Adopting a testimonial disposition is not simply a matter of inheriting it. It demands a kind of decision and action, effort undertaken by a "substitute" witness. We propose to call the practice by which this transfer takes place a *trusteeship*. The witness-trustee is someone more than an heir or inheritor. The phrase has a few key connotations related to the situation of testimoniality: the trust which is invested in the trustee by the "crown witness"; the passing on of rare knowledge, care for non-sites of memory. Entrusted testimony does not become property that can be disposed of at will, but is rather a deposit that requires care. Effort-founded trusteeship does not require familial links; Regina Smoter-Grzeszkiewicz, Stanisław Zybała's pupil and co-worker, one generation younger, may be considered his trustee as well. Amateur poet, photographer and local historian herself, Smoter-Grzeszkiewicz co-authored many of Zybała's works on local history and constantly returns to his testimonial heritage in her own work, re-examining in particular regional war history, the Holocaust, its difficult legacy and non-memory. Her testimonial activity, inspired by collaboration with Zybała, can be reframed in terms of public history and regional identity.

The volunteer

Standing to an extent in contrast with trusteeship – with its strict and manifold obligations placed on successive trustees – we may define another manner of taking on the testimonial function where the "accession" seems more

accidental. This positionality is not connected by the person's own experience to the site, passed on and accepted by a trusteeship or by direct membership of the local community. What allows us to distinguish the *volunteer* testimonial positionality among numerous local memory activists in Poland (especially those who work in the field of preserving Jewish heritage and commemorating genocide victims) is the particular intensity of their engagement and its affective power. Testimonial actions may serve as founding principles of their self-images and self-definitions. Consequently, volunteers often take an uncompromising stand against non-memory, speaking on behalf of the victims and fiercely protesting mnemonic *status quo*. Again, this is not a first-hand experience of an eyewitness, but rather speaking against the dominant narrative when it masks a difficult past, doing justice to historical truth, acknowledging accountability, and renewing attempts at transforming the community's complacency into conscience – that lie at the core of testimonial activities.

The function of *volunteer* is often performed, it would seem, by people working at a trans-local level, occupying the role of "engaged experts" in the area of memory, attempting to reveal the past and present character of the non-sites of memory in the countrywide public sphere. Marcin Kącki, a reporter, and Mirosław Tryczyk, a researcher and author, both of whom wrote about the past of Podlasie region (Kącki 2015; Tryczyk 2020), stand as recent examples of such practices. Tryczyk's "testimonial zeal" is significant here; he discloses multiple cases of Polish complicity in the genocide and does not hesitate to confront the perpetrators or their descendants, urging them to confession or remorse. His activity is framed, as he reveals in his recent book (2020), by his family violent history, as he belatedly discovers that his late grandfather might have been involved in the murder of his Jewish neighbours or at least benefitted from it. Kącki, at times Tryczyk's collaborator, places himself and his work more in the context of professional journalism, but at the same time demonstrates his engagement and emotional commitment to uncovering the difficult past.

Yet there are also local cases fitting this definition: we can include here Lucjan Kołodziejcki from Borzęcin and Paweł Domański from Żabno (Lesser Poland Voivodship) – local historians. Each has devoted considerable effort into uncovering the fates of local Jewish and Romani minorities: Domański created a Hall of Memory, where he gathered photographs, documents and objects related to the local history, with a significant presence of the history of Żabno Jews, in 1939 constituting almost half of the town's population. He also participated in the restoration of the Jewish cemetery and erecting a memorial there, and authored a monograph dedicated to the Jews of Żabno *Israelici w Żabnie* [Israelites in Żabno] (Domański 2003), based on detailed archival research. Kołodziejcki, on the other hand, was an enthusiastic investigator of the history of the village of Borzęcin and its surroundings, and also made some gestures against the predominantly conciliatory local culture of memory: he catalogued

formerly Jewish houses and investigated the details of the burning of the synagogue, destroyed after the war by locals (Kołodziejski n.d.). In 2018, he initiated a monument comprising 22 plaques dedicated to all victims of 20th century conflicts from Borzęcin and neighbouring Bielcza,⁵ among them the names of 44 victims of the Holocaust and family names of almost 60 Romani victims of two executions in the villages. The volunteer's testimonial activity is often driven by a sense of a historical mission but also by pure vocation, a hobby of an explorer of the forgotten local history. He or she investigates both a glorious and difficult past and constantly negotiates what can and cannot be made visible with their community.

The outcast

A tension often mounts between practices commemorating sites of genocide, and those who undertake those practices, and the existing rules of the culture of memory. This is most evident when questions arise of the joint responsibility or the guilt of the contemporary local – and, more generally, Polish – population: for participating in the events or taking economic advantage of the destruction of part of the community by its ethnically Polish members.

In Szczurowa, a village in the Lesser Poland Voivodship, the massacre of 93 Romanies by the German gendarmerie in 1943 is commemorated each year by the Romani Caravan of Memory – a memorial initiative organised since 1996 by Romani and Polish organisations from the nearby city Tarnów (Bartosz 2015: 18–23). Before the war, Szczurowa also had a significant Jewish population that grew during the war to almost 400 people. In 1942, all of them were sent to the Brzesko ghetto, and they were taken there by the Polish inhabitants of the village, who were following German orders. Yet, Jewish citizens of Szczurowa have not been commemorated in any way until today. During fieldwork for the project, we met a witness in the village who spoke at length about the fate of the Romani community and yet was highly reserved when it came to questions about the Jews of Szczurowa. At one point, however, she herself took up the topic, saying, “There were some people who had Jewish property, that ... What they say now, that Polish people were on at the Jews, because there were various...” and after a moment she finished, “Various things happened, but I’m not saying anything” (Interview with A.B. 2017). The witness is on the side of her own community, she does not testify against it, yet in the form of the broken allusions she emphasises, in fact, the key issue: the memory of complicity

removes from official collective practice the commemoration of those whose death brought some or other benefit to the local community.

As a result, the witness undertaking this kind of action may ultimately be, and often is, considered an outcast member of the community – *Nestbeschmutzer*, literally “sullyng their own nest”, being harshly disciplined by their own compatriots up to the point of ostracism. The parameter of being “outcast” seems however to come in degrees: the practice of many witnesses is based in this context on a particular, multifaceted caution (even if they are unaware of it). They balance on the edge of whether the community is willing and able to accept a degree of “testimonial risk”. And this risk may be indeed significant, as the examples of Ireneusz Ślipek and Zbigniew Romaniuk, memory activists engaged in the commemoration of Jewish victims, respectively in Warta and Brańsk, show – they both exist on the margins of their communities. Or, it may bring even more severe outcomes, as in the case of Leon and Leszek Dziedzic from Jedwabne, father and son, an eyewitness and his “trustee”, who decided to move out from the village and move to the US due to the growing hostility and acts of aggression committed against them (Bikont 2016). Finally, the risk of being an outcast often influences the degree to which a witness would be willing to share his or her memories about the difficult past, and the general political climate, such as caused by passing the “Holocaust bill” by the Polish parliament in 2018, may significantly reinforce this tendency.

The official

The function of the witness can be undertaken in the form of a public task. A witness may be called on to perform this task by their own sense of obligation and competence or legitimised by various institutional networks. In our view, Adam Bartosz can be considered an official witness. He is the organiser of local initiative the Romani Caravan of Memory that commemorates sites of Romani genocide in Lesser Poland: every year, Romani and non-Romani participants travel from Tarnów to four locations of the killings: Żabno, Borzęcin, Bielcza and Szczurowa (Bartosz 2015). Bartosz is not only the creator and host of the Caravan, and the master of ceremony conducting the celebrations at each of the visited locations of the Romani genocide. Every year, he also tells the history of each site and creates communal structures on which he transfers a testimonial disposition: now all the participants know

5 Bielcza is a village in Brzesko county in the Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodship, with approximately 1,600 inhabitants. From the mid-19th century Bielcza has been frequented by Romani groups, with a few Romani families settling and living there before World War II. In July 1942, at least 28 Romanies were murdered by German gendarmerie and Polish collaborating forces, the so-called Polish “blue” police. Aleksandra Szczepan, Łukasz Posłuszny and Kinga Siewior worked on this case with the support of Roma Sendyka and Jacek Małczyński. Borzęcin is a village in Brzesko county in the Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodship, with approx. 3,700 inhabitants. A few Romani families settled and lived there prior to World War II, and 143 inhabitants lost their lives in the conflict, including 43 Jews. In July 1942 at least 29 Romanies were murdered in Borzęcin. Aleksandra Szczepan, Łukasz Posłuszny and Kinga Siewior worked on this case. Nearby Żabno today has 4,200 inhabitants.

what happened and where. “The place where we are now” (Tabor Pamięci 2012), “We have come here once again” (Recording of Romani Caravan of Memory 2017) – in these opening sentences, both the deictic roots of the act of witnessing (“here”) and the immediate invocation of the collective subject “we” are significant, *we* are about to become both the recipients and the participants of the testimony. Bartosz may be considered an official witness, summoned to perform his duties, because he efficiently navigates and negotiates between various milieus: Romani and non-Romani, local and regional, formal and informal, but also holds symbolic capital (he is also a museum curator and creator of the first Polish permanent exhibition dedicated to the Roma in the Tarnów Ethnographical Museum, as well as a pioneer of commemorating the Jewish community in Tarnów) that allows him to contextualise his actions and include them in local politics.

There is one more figure associated with the Caravan to whom can be attributed the function of an official witness, yet of an entirely different character. Krystyna Gil (1938–2021), one of the few survivors of the mass executions of Roma in Szczurowa, appeared every year during the celebrations as a “guarantor” of the past. The calling of Krystyna Gil was obviously of particular significance – she was a survivor not a bystander – and it was also important that she had become a witness-icon of the Romani genocide. The legitimization of her testimonial presence was grounded by both the indexical nature of her status as a survivor and the symbolic capital she represented, especially since her position had been formed within the discourse of Jewish Holocaust remembrance – her testimony, for instance, was recorded by the biggest Holocaust-related institutions.

The official witness participates in many symbolic orders and their position is guaranteed by recognition on supra-local level. Therefore, the engagement of such people as Jonathan Webber, a university professor who restored the Jewish cemetery in Brzostek (Subcarpathian Voivodship in south-eastern Poland) or the Olympic athlete Dariusz Popiela who dedicated himself to commemorating Jewish killing sites near Krościenko (Lesser Poland) proved to be successful: their position engages local communities and authorities and secures financial support.

The contingent

The previous functions are founded on a variety of structures of undertaking, adopting, usurping or forgoing the testimonial disposition. We may also invoke, however, the basic circumstance of something “calling for” testimony i.e. the situation of being a witness by the very fact of finding yourself in a place where something happens. This fact is accidental, contingent. The key aspect here is the peculiar passivity of the “recipients” of events, like those who act as – to use the phrase cited above – “photographic plates”, on which the event is imprinted. Eye- and earwitnesses come across an event which may – but need

not – become the subject of their testimonial activity. This process of unwitting registration captures the testimony of Zofia Kilian from Bielcza, who heard an execution in the forest near Borzęcin: in July 1942, German gendarmes, with the help of the Polish “blue” police, shot 29 Romani men, women and children there (Bartosz 2015: 16–17). The witness recalled: “I heard; shrieks, screams, crying, sobbing, ‘youyk’, literally that kind of wailing. I’m telling you; you couldn’t take it. I didn’t understand their words” (Kołodziejski 2008: 32). The imprint of the past is the material that is difficult to work through; it is incomprehensible, surviving in the form of images, sounds, affects, bodily memory; as a perceptual “deposit” – but one that does not lead to any action from its holder. It is precisely the testimonial situation of interpellation that confers a new positionality of a witness upon a contingent witness, a sensor witness, even though they do not perceive themselves as bearers of a testimony.

The testimonial gesture

The fundamental morpheme of testimonial gesticulation is indicating “It happened here.” Roman Jakobson (1971) called such demonstrative signs that have no meaning in themselves but only by referring to something else – “shifters”. Giorgio Agamben writes in a similar vein about a gesture: “The gesture is, in this sense, communication of a communicability. It has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality” (2008: 58). At the same time, the ontological status of the non-site of memory is precisely dependent on such non-signifying signs, the deictic/demonstrative gestures. How else – since the killing sites are usually bits of forest floor or bits of fields – could one be sure that it was precisely here that the past happened? The non-site of memory becomes a space of gestures of pointing or indicating: a point or measurable distance (for example when witnesses show the size of ditches where victims were buried by moving their arms), as well as a re-enactment of the past. The witnesses demonstrate how victims behaved – for example by kneeling down in an imaginary ditch – as well as show what the perpetrators did, by raising their hand in a gesture of shooting.

During the course of the aforementioned ceremony in one of the uncommemorated sites of Radechnica (2016), Marianna Zybała, the speaker-witness-trustee, was talking about a forest dugout in which victims hid to escape death. She tried to describe as carefully as possible the overcrowded hideout, using as a measure her husband’s and her own height and their bodies: “It was a kind of [*she makes a gesture sketching out the size*] dugout, more or less, because I was there and I know. [...] Even then we [...] ‘tried on’ the size in this way.” The Zybałas visited Radechnica killing sites regularly after the war, and not only performed standard gestures of commemoration, like lighting candles or praying, but also “tried on” the forest hideout of the mur-

dered Jewish people, as if it were a rehearsal, for a second taking their places in the act of momentary re-enactment (cf. Phelan 1993; Taylor 2004; Schneider 2011). These rehearsals, problematic as they are in their identification with the victims, reveal however both the Zybała's empathy and the irremovable difference between them and the victims: their testimonial gestures may only "try on" the past.

The testimonial performance

"We have come here once again to bow down to the souls of murdered Roma," said Adam Bartosz at the Szczurowa cemetery in 2017 (Recording of Romani Caravan of Memory 2017). "Bowing down" is a much more symbolic gesture than the indexical of pointing. In Bartosz's words is also expressed the iteration of testimonial gestures: sustaining the existence of non-sites of memory depends on repeated performative acts, which may take the form of a testimonial performance.

A set of testimonial gestures which become testimonial performances can be constituted, for example, by a walk – a frequent practice among the witnesses recorded by the Yahad – In Unum organisation, which dedicates itself to identifying the killing sites of the "Holocaust by bullets" in Eastern Europe, gathering testimonies and advocating commemoration of victims. Their testimonies are usually recorded *in situ* and may relate both to individual events (like shootings, transports to execution sites, beatings) and enduring structures of social life, such as life in a ghetto, hiding, and transports to the death camps. A walk as a form of testimony creates particular conditions to exhibit the effects of long-lasting violence and participation of ethnically Polish citizens in a gradual division of inhabited space – in a process of depriving Jewish neighbours of their social relations and rights.

Yet, a walk may also be a testimonial performance arising from an intimate imperative of memory, which is the case for Stanisław and Marianna Zybała. During their walks, they visited burial sites and performed commemorative rituals; they also wrote a guide to Radechnica Jewish graves that enables further witnesses-trustees to participate in the same testimonial practice (Zybała and Zybała 2013). Hence, in a testimonial performance, the body's involvement in the space, where history has taken place, assumes a centrality and the gestures are translated into the symbolic language of ritual. We can see it in the performance organised by Adam Bartosz at the cemetery in Szczurowa in 2012 (Tabor Pamięci 2012). Each person present had to take a piece of paper on which the name, surname and age of a particular victim was written. The participants, both Romani and non-Romani, had to read out this information into a microphone, and place the paper on the mass grave. Bartosz said, "Let us imagine that we all here are that condemned group." In this way, the participants could have gained a real bodily *sense* of what it means to be a member of a group of that same size as the one that had been shot – in the same place they were

standing – seventy years earlier. Although assuming the position of the victims makes this "vicarious re-enactment" (Perry 2019: 21) ethically problematic, especially in the case of non-Romani participants of the performance, the act of reading aloud the names of killed members of Romani community of Szczurowa had a strictly symbolic meaning: it summoned the victims to history, made them grievable (Butler 2010). For decades, the Romani genocide has been forgotten in both European and local Polish history (Kaprański 2012) and in the case of the Polish context, it is precisely the long-lasting presence of the Romani Caravan of Memory that helped it gain public recognition.

The testimonial object

As emphasised in the introductory remarks, the assemblage of testimonial relations created in and around a non-site of memory does not involve merely human actors. Avoiding the dichotomy of nature and culture, in our conceptualisation of testimoniality we consider elements of the landscape – such as soil, greenery, the shape of the terrain – but also objects created by humans as "testimonial objects" (cf. Hirsch and Spitzer 2006). A stone, a tree, an inscription or other material sign in space acquire testimoniality within networks of relations around a killing site, the latter always having a human-nonhuman nature. Necessarily relational, they seem permanently incomplete, but also open to reinterpretation. What distinguishes them from gestures is their materiality, and going beyond indexicality: testimonial objects do not solely point, but commemorate, what makes them closer to icons and symbols.



Figure 1. *Cemetery Symbol* by Stanisław Zybała. Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, INW-A-104. Courtesy of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

The most complex instance of this category that we came across is an object created by Stanisław Zybała in relation to the sites of the Holocaust in Radechnica (kept in the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, INW-A-104). *Cemetery Symbol* is a wooden bas-relief representing a condensed map of the area, on which the places of uncommemorated burials have been marked with matzevot. The frame of the work also has the shape of a matzevah and includes dates and symbols. If we treat this object as a map, then it is a special, testimonial map with the power to effect change: it reshapes the depicted space of Radechnica, a space covered with numerous killing sites, into a cemetery of its Jewish inhabitants – a paradigm of a site of memory, where the dead are ritually buried and properly commemorated.

The above description of Zybała's testimonial innovation as a bas-relief map is a considerable oversimplification: the work was made with the use of various techniques (cutting in wood, drawing, shading, the use of inlays), as well as using a series of semantic mechanisms: description in language (an integral part of which is text attached to the object), representation, metaphor and metonymy. The symbols located on the frame mobilise various orders which we can use to attempt to interpret Radechnica's painful past: the national (Polish symbol of white eagle), historical (the dates "1942–1943" given also in the Jewish calendar as "5702–5703"), religious (the matzevot and Tablets of Stone of the Decalogue). The tablets are depicted on the left-hand side in their entirety, on the right – the move from left to right is the passage of time, in which Radechnica was subjected to a wave of wartime violence – the tablets are broken, trodden on, depicted as if they were falling out of the wooden background. The head and talons of the eagle are visible at the top and bottom of the object, so the matzevah of the frame in a way substitutes the body of the bird. It is a disturbing combination of a moving expression of grief and somewhat odd, naïve form that produces its peculiar effect: a refusal of forgetting. It is an awkward object (cf. Lehrer and Sendyka 2019), requiring a proliferation of codes and clarifications, but precisely because of this awkwardness the whole communicates the overriding duty of testimony.

Testimonial words

Uncommemorated sites of violence are objects that, by means of their unclear status, resist transformation into widely understood symbolic scripts. There are no images emerging for them, no recognisable narratives, indeed no words which could ease the comprehension of their status. So, it is naturally interesting to look at vernacular ways of assimilating these locations into the language. For example, local inhabitants of Borzęcin call the execution site in the forest the "Gypsy Hills"; in Podleśna Wola (Lesser Poland), two of those taking care of the grave of murdered Roma say they are going "to the Gypsy"; the

inhabitants of Sobibór, when heading off to the area of the death camp, go "to the ghetto"; in Krośnica, the forest where Jews were shot is called by local Romani inhabitants "the Jewish forest". These vernacular descriptions could be called testimonial as they certify the status of sites as locations of events from the past, commemorating them – but in an incomplete, broken and somewhat inappropriate way. It requires further investigation to elucidate to what extent these words might recreate power relations and perpetuate the dynamics of violence from the past, and to what extent they constitute a vehicle for precarious memory about the victims. In everyday use, testimonial words potentially enhance perception of a given space, placing it in the past, mnemonic and affective context, transforming the usual "passing by" into a latent form of commemoration.

Conclusions: testimonial research

The witness is one of the most important and discussed categories (and buzzwords) of Holocaust studies. Who can be a witness, who can write about witnesses, who bears witness and who is merely capable of giving a testimony, who is a "real" witness "from inside" (Felman 1992: 231), contrary to a secondary or vicarious one, or – to use Gary Weissman's (2004) term – a nonwitness? All these typologies are grounded in, firstly, recognising unmediated experience as a sole source of witnessing; secondly, in a moral perception of witnessing; thirdly, in identifying witness in Holocaust research with a position of survivor, or victim from Hilberg's triad. However, as we have argued in the introduction, the testimonial situation needs to be investigated not so much through the reconstruction of the past, as through diagnosing present testimonial positions, transfers and dynamics. If that is the case, our position as researchers may also be interpreted in terms of testimoniality. We need to perceive our practice in the context of testimonial disposition: a disposition not only to acquire and produce knowledge about under-remembered past events, but also to undertake testimonial research, to attempt diagnoses – and self-diagnoses – of memory, care, and possible forms of bearing witness to the past in a post-genocidal society.

transl. by Patrick Trompiz

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Vernacular historical practices on Holocaust non-sites of memory in Poland

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Abstract

The approach employed by memory activists to sites of memory often involves historical practices. This paper presents the results of the examination of historical practices undertaken in locations of Holocaust violence during World War II and the disposal of victims' remains that were not memorialised properly according to local residents or other groups with an interest in the sites' past. The analysed practices were observed in the course of field research in various locations in Poland. The goal of the research was to describe these practices, discuss their critical potential, and indicate their distinct features as activities pertaining to contested sites of memory. A central tool for approaching this task is found in concepts of "non-site of memory" and "vernacular historian" as introduced to the debate by Claude Lanzmann and Lyle Dick. As a result, the article presents the cases of four vernacular historians whose practices are experimental combinations of the components of the work of professional historians and ways of working conditioned by local cultural environments, individual experience and commitment to communal life. Although vernacular history is sometimes considered of little value by academic historians, the research shows that the practices in question have the potential to produce new, socially relevant knowledge. Two distinct features of vernacular historical practices in non-sites of memory were observed: these unmarked sites of burial attract activists and prompt them to undertake historical practices; vernacular historians of these locations often undertake unconventional, sometimes experimental activities..

Key Words

contested sites of memory, historical practices, Holocaust, non-site of memory, Polish memory cultures, vernacular history

Introduction

Memory activists undertake historical practices at the sites of memory. In the article I present the results of the examination of historical practices committed in locations of Holocaust violence during WWII and the disposal of victims' remains that were not memorialised properly according to local residents or other groups with an interest in the sites' past. The team from the Research Centre for Memory Cultures (Jagiellonian University), which investigates the non-sites of memory, observed these practices in the course of field study in various locations in Poland: Radecznicza in the Lublin Voivodeship, the area of Miechów near Kraków, Bielcza and Borzęcin in Lesser Poland Voivodeship. Our methods include visits to non-sites of memory and sites of memory in the area, non-directive

interviews with local residents and memory activists, gathering data on the local memory discourse (literature, historical writing, memoirs, museum exhibitions, social archives, local press, vernacular art). The goal of my analysis is to describe these practices, discuss their critical potential, and indicate their distinct features as activities pertaining to contested sites of memory. I found a central instrument for approaching this task in concepts of "non-site of memory" and "vernacular historian" as introduced to the debate by Claude Lanzmann (and further elaborated by Roma Sendyka) (Lanzmann 1990; Sendyka 2016) and Lyle Dick (Dick 2010a, 2010b, 2013). The term 'non-site of memory' is a critical extension of Pierre Nora's sites of memory and refers to sites of violence whose forms of commemoration are questioned by local residents or other groups with an interest in the sites'

past¹. “Vernacular historian” is a notion that Lyle Dick uses to describe the practices of Canadian local historians who commit themselves to their communities and treat historical activities as a means to strengthen its identity and support the appreciation of its problems (Dick 2010a, 2010b, 2013; Devine 2016, 2017). As a result, I present the cases of four vernacular historians whose activities were entangled with sites of genocidal violence against Jewish Poles and Roma. Their practices are experimental combinations of the components of the research activities of professional historians and ways of approaching sites of memory conditioned by local cultural environments, individual experience and commitment to communal life. Although vernacular history is sometimes considered of little value by academic historians, the research shows that the practices in question have the potential to produce new, socially relevant knowledge. I identify two distinct features of vernacular historical practices in non-sites of memory: these unmarked sites of burial attract activists and prompt them to undertake historical practices; vernacular historians of these locations often undertake unconventional, sometimes experimental activities. The paper is one of the results of an interdisciplinary research project dedicated to the sites that witnessed violent events, which was conducted in the years 2016–2020 in Poland. A team of researchers analysed locations associated with violence perpetrated against Jews, Roma, and Ukrainians during and shortly after World War II (as a control case, the team also examined sites of violence against Germans and Poles).

Local historical practices

In 2010, Stanisław Rozwar Zybała (Szczepan et al. 2020) finished a typed manuscript of his book *The Children of Radechnica* (Dzieci Radechnicy). Zybała was a memory activist from Radechnica, a village in the Roztocze Hills in South East Poland, whose Jewish inhabitants were murdered in the Holocaust (Skibińska 2018).² In his book, Zybała reconstructs the fate of the young inhabitants of his village, his peers from the World War II period: their suffering brought about by the armed conflict and occu-

pation, the everyday struggles, the clandestine schooling, the death of Jewish children in the Holocaust, and the imitation of adults in forming a child’s resistance movement. Zybała wrote a dedication on the book’s closing pages:

Why did I write *The Children of Radechnica*? I did it because a lot had been written about the adults; there were even monuments erected [...] I scribbled down this *memoirial* for all the children of Radechnica – who went through the cruelties of war and experienced the joy of singing in the pastures, by the cabins and on camps – and for those who have been denied Kaddish. I will write down a funeral fragment from the prayer El Male Rachamin (S. Zybała 2010).

In this quote, the word “memoirial” catches the attention of the reader – the Polish word being “wspominnik”, a quasi-diminutive neologism, fusing the words for recollection (“wspomnienia”) and monument (“pomnik”). This linguistic invention might seem somewhat superfluous since the notion of “memorial” (pomnik) itself gathers several connotations referring to the preservation of personal or collective memory by means of various articulations. It emphasizes that the book is to be a recollection, a work about past events that the author was party to, as well as a memorial – a lasting commemoration in place of “stony signs”. In the last sentence, Zybała dedicated his work to the Jewish victims bereft of graves, and wrote the words of a Jewish prayer for the dead, recreating an element of the funeral ceremony and transforming the book into a gravestone for the victims of the Holocaust. Zybała presented his manuscript as a book on Radechnica’s children’s war sufferings in general (both Christian and Jewish); however in a number of passages he addressed the difference in the fate of Jews and non-Jews under Nazi rule.

And, indeed, the book is structured by Zybała’s recollections, complemented by accounts of other Radechnica residents, recorded by Zybała. The credibility of these testimonies – open to question after all, since there are few other sources that would allow for their corroboration – is strengthened by the presence of an “audiography” at the end of the book. The audiography, placed just before the bibliography, is a table of the oral records used by the author, including bios and photographs of the speakers (S.

1 Sendyka describes non-sites of memory in the following way: “The basic indicator is lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of reparations (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 has 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 blending of 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 forsaking of memorialization leading to ethnically problematic revitalization that draws criticism” (Sendyka 2016, 700).

2 Radechnica is a small village in Roztocze, a region in eastern Poland in Zamość County with approx. 920 inhabitants. In World War II, its small Jewish community was resettled in a 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 and where, after the war, a hospital for the mentally ill was built. In the last decade, the church in the abbey became a resting place for the exhumed bodies of the soldiers of the right-wing anticommunist underground formations. The site was researched in the project by Maria Kobielska, Roma Sendyka, Aleksandra Szczepan and Aleksandra Janus, Jacek Małczyński, Karina Jarzyńska, Tomasz Majkowski and Katarzyna Suszkiewicz.

Zybała 2010). An additional means meant to strengthen readers' trust in the veracity of the account is a rather surprising image positioned after the bibliography (Fig. 1).

Page 79 of the manuscript features a picture, a scan of a photograph of Zybała taken in semi-profile, with a frame and background typical for portrait photos in a style used in ID documents. The photograph itself is small and placed in the very centre of the image, the greater part being taken up by the print of the palm that is keeping the photo on the scanner's glass. In the top-left corner of the page there is the word "Autopsy". It would appear that the presence of the palm print has not resulted from the author's clumsiness but is intentional – other photos included in the book have been edited conventionally. Zybała signed his books with the name "Stanisław Rozwar Zybała", where the added word "Rozwar" means, as he explains, "being separated from a piece of himself." (Smoter-Grzeszkiewicz 2019) Immediately after the war, whilst he worked as a carpenter, Zybała lost a part of his thumb and index finger of his right hand, but was able later on to use the fingers nonetheless when writing by hand or on a typewriter (Zybała M 2019). He made his disability a feature of his identity and here, using the scanner, he has developed his disability into a signature. Zybała also added his own eye-witnessed "autopsy" to the table of sources, after the audiography and bibliography. He places somewhat excessive emphasis here by using two

indexical signs (the copy of the photograph and the palm print.) This addition, as with the audiography, seems an unusual, exaggerated and a simple imitative practice but it also makes a point, transforming the standard procedures of the professional historian along the way. Zybała's intention was to build up the impression of a reliable, credible book that would prolong and broaden the impact of local knowledge contained within it.

Following the classic rhetorical topos, Zybała's "The Children of Radecznicza" was meant to be a monument to the young Polish and Jewish residents of the village, a permanent record of their experiences, one that would be circulated around the local culture and the country as a whole. It might seem that Zybała sought to ensure the right effect by deploying the historian's toolbox of techniques, both in standard and innovative ways. Zybała's sometimes surprising, sometimes ham-fisted and, at times, original historical techniques may be his own way of trying to raise the act of commemoration to the rank and credibility of an academic discipline. In any case, they are a handy way of transforming information passed on in private conversations among neighbours into public knowledge to be accessed nationwide. The most basic purpose was for him to convey knowledge of the non-sites of memory – a knowledge that, as Zybała was convinced, needed both care and development into stable forms of commemoration.

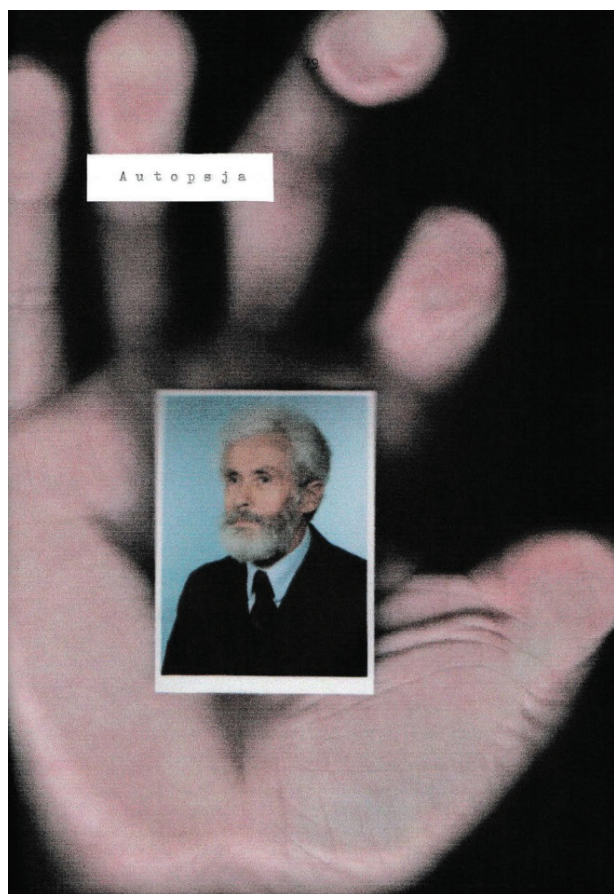


Figure 1. "Autopsy". S. Zybała, "Dzieci Radeczniczy", manuscript, p. 79.

Uncritical and ineffective?

In the course of research on non-sites of memory in Poland, our team met many people like Stanisław Zybała. He mentioned victims "who have been denied Kaddish", Jewish children whose remains are buried in unmarked locations. These kind of sites – locations of genocidal violence and disposal of victims' remains which were not memorialised properly according to local residents – were the main objectives of our research. Our research is based on the assumption that these sites are important components of local memory cultures: unburied bodies affect activities of people living in the area and trigger memory practices. We describe them as non-sites of memory following Claude Lanzmann's refiguration of Pierre Nora's term (Lanzmann 1990; Sendyka 2015, 2016, 2017a). The field work on non-sites of memory referring to genocidal violence in the 1930's and 40's was conducted in various locations in Poland in 2016-2018. We encounter local activists participating in historical practices pertaining to these locations who presented themselves as hysterics, as commune chroniclers, and as collectors (Jarzyńska and Muchowski 2017a; Szczepan, Pośluszyński 2020). We added the term explorer (Szczepan, Pośluszyński 2020) – and also "vernacular historian" which applied to all. In this article, I discuss these figures and the critical potential of the work undertaken by each of them, as well as indicating the distinctive features of vernacular historical practices pertaining to non-sites of memory. By "critical" I mean practices

which are self-reflexive, question the habitual patterns of action and produce a socially relevant knowledge.

The vernacular history is not usually a subject of debate among professional historians.. Professional and vernacular historians may share archives, very occasionally they may share methods, ideas and dictionaries but they do not share the stage at public debate, or review each other's papers. Two different kinds of knowledge have grown up in parallel – professional and local. This division is connected to the conviction of professional historians that local historians – like local artisans (Lehrer, Sendyka 2019) – are incompetent and their work of little value according to the yardsticks of professional discourse (Wiszewski 2008; Smasonowicz 1987). In a rare case of a professional historian even referring to vernacular historical writing, Bartłomiej Krupa read over a hundred books on the history of local Jewish communities in Poland and stated that this writing was subjected to unchanging rules since the 1980s, when it emerged as an articulation of - on the one hand - a surge of interest in the history of Polish-Jewish relations after the release of Claude Lanzmann's movie *Shoah*; on the other – the career of “small homelands” literature celebrating the imaginary multiculturalism of old Poland. He criticized this writing for its naïve acceptance of nostalgic myths of the uniqueness and charm of Jewish communities (Krupa 2012). This, he claimed, leads to an orientalisng perspective on Jewish inhabitants and an objectification of their suffering, the Holocaust being in these local writings merely a pretext for a sentimental narrative. The mythologizing image of picturesque shtetls collaborates with the disinclination – issuing from local power relations – to take on topics with a painful provenance, resulting in a censored narrative effectively veiling anti-Jewish violence (Krupa 2012).

One of the goals of this text is to reveal the perceptive and critically sharp vernacular practices as we have actually encountered them, allowing one to question the assumption that vernacular historians are clumsy, imperceptive, ineffective and unoriginal in comparison with professional historiographers.

The hysteric

Andrzej Pałka called himself a “hysteric”, playing off the homonymic quality of “hysteric” and “historian”. He is a retired railwayman, an enthusiast of the local history of Charsznica Commune in Miechów County, Lesser Poland, whose Jewish communities were liquidated in the Holocaust (Libionka 2018).³ As he himself explained, a hysteric differs from a historian in that the former exhibits *excessive* interest in the past, using time and resources that would be better spent elsewhere. Pałka emphasizes

that hysterics do not possess the erudition of the professional, yet they are more inclined to devote a lot of time to conversations with neighbours about the past and investigations of their cellars and attics – in the hunt for potential sources. And neighbours are more inclined to speak freely to trusted neighbours about their experiences, to pass on stories they have heard and to show them their mementoes. Whereas someone from the outside asking questions about the past, will anyway be directed to the local hysteric. “All roads lead to Andrzej,” the one who best knows the area and is also in close touch with the outside world in matters concerning history (Jarzyńska and Muchowski 2017a, 2017b).

In Pałka's opinion, the most important historical practices that he employs are collecting historical records and verifying the information obtained about the past by comparing different sources. According to the man, historical knowledge built on the basis of meticulous source comparisons is to question local myths, simplifications and stereotypes, especially those concerning the Jewish inhabitants of Miechów County. In our conversations, Pałka suggested that when he worked with the heritage of his community his loyalty had its limits. In contentious matters, he took the side of reliable historical knowledge or of another individual situated outside the community who needed his support. It seems that by calling himself a hysteric, Pałka also suggested that his practices differ from the social norm and his actions exposed him to the risk of being marginalized in his own community (Jarzyńska and Muchowski 2017b).

The commune's chronicler

We have already met Stanisław Zybała (died in 2014), the local librarian who played the role of unofficial “Commune Chronicler” for Radechnica. He himself used this term in his texts and the inhabitants of the area use it too. In his work, as befits his title, Zybała did not undertake the *explanation* of history. He noted down history chronologically, checking lists of participants, registering effects – but rarely commenting on them. In the classical distinction of Benedetto Croce a chronicle is a chronologically ordered set of historical facts, whereas history combines them into meaningful configurations – history explains them and provides them with meaning (Danto 1968; Topolski 1976).

A key element of his work as Chronicler was to produce, secure and pass on vernacular knowledge about non-sites, which for him were a key element of local memory (Szczepan et al. 2020). In his texts, Zybała took on the complicated task of naming the locations where human remains of Holocaust victims were hidden under

3 The Miechów area was researched by Karina Jarzyńska i Jakub Muchowski with cooperation of Aleksandra Szczepan and Roma Sendyka. The town is located in Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodship, has app. 12000 inhabitants. During the war, Jewish inhabitants were resettled to the ghetto, and murdered in death camps. In the area there is also a major killing site from 1942, i.e. Chodówki forest, with 600-700 victims buried in the forest. For the discussion of local non-sites of memory see Jarzyńska, Muchowski 2020.

the soil, which for various reasons did not satisfy the definition of *grave*. Substantial part of the Holocaust victims were killed in executions by Nazi Germans, their auxiliaries (including “Blue” Police and Christian neighbours) outside death camps. They were typically buried on the sites where they were killed: in woods, fields, roadsides and meadows. The burial was carried out by the perpetrators or residents of the area. These locations were not marked by a stone, a mound, a matzevah, a cross or a plaque and are an indistinguishable part of a landscape. Only local inhabitants are able to identify the sites where human remains were buried.

In describing these places, Zybala used the term: “burials-denied-Kaddish” (in Polish: *pochówki bezkaddiszowe*), “extra-cemetery burials” (*pozacmentarne pochówki*), “wild burial sites” (*dzikie miejsca pochówków*), “wild burials” (*grzebalnictwo dzikie*) (M. Zybala, S. Zybala 2004; S. Zybala 2001; Smoter-Grzeszkiewicz and S. Zybala 2015). The first two phrases use the portmanteau neologisms invented by Zybala (“burials-denied-Kaddish” or “non-Kaddish”, “extra-cemetery”). These phrases emphasize the absence of a funeral ritual at the burial of the remains in the ground and in the placing of the remains outside the grounds of the cemetery; the Jewishness of the victims and the absence of guardians of memory who might have said prayers for the deceased.

The word “dzikie” (rendered here as the English “wild”) may convey a sense of the transgressive character inscribed in this way of proceeding with victims’ remains. The notions invented by Zybala imply that bodies were not buried according to the rules of the cultural order, but were handled in a ‘barbaric’ or ‘primitive’ – but also careless and accidental – way. Moreover, Zybala suggests that the disposal of bodies was performed by actors not only outside of culture, but also far removed from human norms – “wild” also means bestial, animalistic. His colloquialism/neologism “grzebalnictwo” (“burial”) imitates an abstract noun formed in Polish from a verb; the group of verbs normally declined in this way includes verbs for professions and activities, so its use suggests collective, repetitive and deliberate action. The participle form “grzebanie” (literally “furrowing away” – in the ground or in a bag, for example) is strongly associated in Polish with funeral vocabulary and the dominating use of variations on the word “pogrzeb” (“funeral”). However, “grzebanie” is in the Polish *imperfective* form, emphasizing the incomplete status of the actions of digging over bodies. It also carries a pejorative connotation: furrowing, rummaging, doing something incompetently, unprofessionally, with difficulty. “Wild (“rummaging”) burials” in Polish suggests repeated movements, actions of digging over human remains (but not a proper burial, certainly not a funeral) in accidental places carried out in a negligent way, performatively expressing radical hatred

towards the victims by transgressing all cultural norms (Muchowski, Szczepan 2019).

The explorer and the collector

The figure of the explorer is played by Lucjan Kołodziejcki, a history teacher from Borzęcin, a village in the Brzesko County in Lesser Poland, and a place of genocide against Jewish and Roma Poles.⁴ His historical activities seem to be subordinated to the drive to extract previously unknown information about the past of Borzęcin. He has written about the execution of Romani in the nearby wood; the history of Jewish inhabitants of the village; the peasant revolt from the 1930s; the history of the Borzęcin parish and the Spanish flu epidemic. Kołodziejcki’s yearning for exploration includes everything that belongs to the past; he is constantly thirsty for new and undiscovered elements of past realities, with the one condition that it must concern Borzęcin. The desire to explore everything observed in Kołodziejcki’s practices is an obsession of the entire discipline of history, which – devoid of a clearly delineated subject of study – covers everything that changes over time (Le Goff 1992). However, the desire to discover new information about the past in this case takes a surprising form: after revealing a specific fragment of the past, Kołodziejcki does not undertake its full elaboration, but looks for another unknown data. An example of a collector, on the other hand, is Paweł Domański, a retired teacher from nearby Żabno. Domański is the creator and the curator of the Żabno historical museum and a chronicler of the town. He is the person behind more than 18 publications on the subject of Żabno. As Domański himself stresses, only a local historian could have set up this kind of museum, with all its exhibits being obtained from the town’s inhabitants who had, therefore, to trust their curator and neighbour.

The uncompromising nature of Kołodziejcki’s exploratory passion and Domański’s commitment to chronicling have key critical consequences. In their work they both speak openly about the post-war fates of Jewish property in Borzęcin and Żabno, although the subject of the acquisition of Jewish real estate and belongings by the Christian population still remains a taboo subject in the Polish public sphere (Grabowski and Libionka 2014; Matyjaszek 2019; Sendyka 2019). During the Holocaust the valuable part of Jewish moveable property was captured by Nazi Germans and their auxiliaries, while what remained – less valuable victim’s belongings, their workshops with tools, and houses – were taken over by local Christian residents. In extensive fragments of their own work, Kołodziejcki and Domański scrupulously map out the Jewish societies of their areas, on the basis of the reports of elderly inhabitants and local civil registries. With

4 Borzęcin is a village in the Brzesko county, in Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodship, with approx. 3,700 inhabitants. A few Roma families settled and lived there and 143 inhabitants lost their lives in World War II, including 43 Jews. In July 1943 at least 29 Romas were murdered in Borzęcin. Aleksandra Szczepan and Łukasz Posłuszny with Kinga Siewior worked on that case. Nearby Żabno today has 4,200 inhabitants.

these sources in hand, they have been able to describe the society of Jewish families with the surnames and forenames of their members, with the father's profession and real estate owned. A result of Domański's work is a list of Jewish shops, workshops, warehouses and the names of the Christian families who currently reside there (Domański 2003). Kołodziejski has prepared a catalogue of homes in today's Borzęcin: it is enough to have an address and under that entry one finds all the members of the Jewish family that lived there in the past (Kołodziejski).

These critical facts appear in the authors' texts without a word of commentary on the controversial nature of the knowledge conveyed. This situation can be read as the result of the passion of the explorer, or the collector-chronicler, or as the unwitting result of fidelity towards a particular type of data. Also at play may be the partial separation of local and public debate, as Kołodziejski and Domański work in a local environment that is less subordinated to the reigning norms than one might suppose. The development of critical knowledge that infringes existing taboos – something avoided by most professional researchers into 20th century Poland – comes easier to them.

Vernacular historians

In describing the people engaged in the above practices, I have used the term "vernacular historian". Ten years ago, Lyle Dick used this notion to discuss practices of local historians, who had been active in the Canadian prairies in the XIX and XX centuries (Dick 2010a, 2010b, 2013; Devine 2016, 2017). Lyle made three tentative observations about the practice of vernacular historians. Firstly, academic historians hold the rule of objectivity in high regard and therefore adopt a distanced attitude; vernacular historians are usually committed to and identify themselves with the subject of interest and the public interest. Vernacular historians also tend to treat historical activities as a means to achieving social and political ends: strengthening the identity of a local community and supporting the wider appreciation of its problems. Secondly, the term "traditional" does not really apply to vernacular writing as there is too much diversity there. We should avoid the false impression that vernacular history only draws on old, pre-modern cultural forms or only on local, unofficial and unprofessional knowledge. Vernacular practices remain under the influence of contemporary and modern as well as national, official and professional elements of cultural reality. What is more, despite its anchoring in local knowledge, vernacular history develops in a relationship with the main trends in historiography. It is not that knowledge spreads only by the diffusion of the dominant matrix into local parts or that the vernacular historian only relies on key local resources. Thirdly, it is fruitful to avoid a straight opposition of professional and vernacular: better

to acknowledge both kinds of history as extreme points on a continuum of historical practices. The position of the vernacular historian does not only result from local, racial or class identifications, but may be adopted out of a strong commitment to the vernacular community and its problems (Dick 2010a; Devine 2016, 2017).

Some remarks are required on the introduction of Dick's term to the description of actors from the Polish peripheries of cultures of memory anchored in non-sites of memory. His observations are generally correct in reference to the actions undertaken by those our team interacted with. Nevertheless, the vernacular historians of the Canadian prairie investigated the difficult past of colonialism, migration, race and English dominations – from the perspective of minority groups and out of support for them. In my research, on the other hand, I apply Dick's proposal to the description of representatives of the *majority* community who have decided to act on behalf of the minority victims of genocidal violence. Their actions have exposed them to the risk of being marginalized in their own community. Unburied human remains powerfully draw their attention, drive their commitment and provoke them to develop experimental and unconventional historical practices.

Vernacular historians take this risk when they write about the complicity of Christian Poles in the Holocaust, a topic discussed at length in the work *Dalej jest noc* by Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski. Andrzej Pałka, as he declared in conversations with us, acts on behalf of the Jewish victims of Polish violence in local memory activities; Stanisław Zybala, whose findings concerning the Holocaust in Biłgoraj district are used by the authors of the aforementioned work, writes about a pogrom in Radecznicza in October 1939 perpetrated by Christian Poles and murders of Jewish Poles hiding in the Radecznicza area in 1942-1943 carried out by the Navy-Blue Police and neighbours (Smoter-Grzeszkiewicz R, Zybala SR 2015); Kołodziejski and Domański write about Christian neighbours taking over Jewish property⁵.

Conclusion

The terms proposed by Dick – with the reservations mentioned above – provide a good characterization of vernacular historians and their activity as experimental combinations of the components of the work of the professional historian and ways of working conditioned by local cultural environments, individual experience and commitment to communal life. They have the potential to facilitate critical operations on local and perhaps regional or national cultures of memory co-created by non-sites of memory. The adaptation of historiographical authentication methods for the needs of local knowledge; linguistic creativity serving the recognition and

5 Kołodziejski also writes about the involvement of Blue Policemen and local residents in the July 1943 massacres of Roma in Borzęcin (Kołodziejski 2014).

naming of the material elements of non-sites; the desire for discovering history and the chronicler's willingness to infringe the taboos of public debate; excessive activism – all these features make up the productive historical practices we observed in the course of our research, practices that have led to the creation of new, socially relevant knowledge. Two of them – the recognition of the material anchoring of the culture of memory or the exposure of problems of Jewish property – coincide with the latest trends in Polish humanities.⁶ It is important that this work is bottom-up, grassroots activity that intervenes in the memory of a local community from the inside out. This enables these trends to be less confrontational and sometimes more effective than undertakings by actors working from the outside in.

I observed two distinct features of vernacular historical practices in non-sites of memory. Firstly, the lack of patterns of historical approach to this type of difficult localizations forces people involved in their protection to undertake unconventional, sometimes experimental activities. It should be noted, however, that the described researchers also used historical devices to neutralize the disturbing heritage. The use of the chronicle style, which sparingly, meticulously and aloofly reports facts, produced the effect of separating the present from the past, the matters that require commitment from the process of producing objective historical knowledge. Secondly, these unmarked sites of burial attract activists and push them to undertake historical practices. The status of uncommemorated scenes of crimes means that work on them does not mainly happen in professional historical circles. Most often it is vernacular historians that first scrupulously describe non-sites. The challenge facing practitioners of history is how to go beyond one's own society with one's own information, experience and interpretations – to present that same society to a regional or national audience (e.g. in the form of nationwide publications), to be able to fill in gaps in the historical debate and do historical justice to the victims.

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⁶ See the forensic turn in memory studies, e.g. Dziuban 2016; Sendyka 2017b; studies in the post-war history of Jewish property in Poland: e.g. Grabowski and Libionka 2014; Matyjaszek 2019, Sendyka 2019; environmental history of Holocaust: e.g. Małczyński 2018; or human remains studies: e.g. Domańska 2018.

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Vernacular memory and implicated communities

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Abstract

Abandoned sites of trauma in Poland appear to be forgotten, but their removal from social and cultural circles is only superficial. Frequently, these sites are inscribed into the local culture of memory and members of the local Polish communities can usually locate them and share stories about them. However, as they are not commemorated, there is an ambivalent aura around them. In 2017 two foundations (Zapomniane Foundation, The Matzevah Foundation) carried out an intervention into the landscape of Poland by marking thirty burial sites of Jewish victims of the Holocaust with simple wooden markers. The effects of that intervention shed light on the vernacular local memory of the Holocaust and the folk-traditional roots of the practices and behaviors related to these sites.

Key Words

heritage, Holocaust, memory, non-sites of memory

It is difficult to estimate how many unmarked sites of the deposition of the remains of Jewish Holocaust victims are located in Poland, especially in its southern and eastern parts, where the so-called “Holocaust by bullets” took place (Desbois 2009). In recent years, researchers have drawn attention to the fact that both the structure of this phenomenon and its remains in the landscape and local memory cultures differ from the image of the Holocaust as identified with ghettos, deportations and death camps.¹ The Holocaust by bullets often took place in plain view of bystanders or was, at least, not completely hidden from view, as it unfolded directly in people’s places of residence, or in their close vicinity; most often the remains were buried at the same location too, frequently by locals.

This article is an attempt to analyze a commemorative project carried out in 2017 by two organizations: the

Zapomniane (Forgotten) Foundation – a Jewish foundation established by members of the Rabbinic Commission for Jewish cemeteries in Poland (RCC) and The Matzevah Foundation – an American foundation devoted to the preservation of Jewish heritage in Poland. The aim of the project was to intervene in the landscape of Lublin region and Lesser Poland by placing symbolic wooden markers in the form of a matzevot in places of unmarked burial sites of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Although such sites appear to be abandoned and forgotten (they are not commemorated or marked, often neglected, littered, forsaken), it seems that their removal from social and cultural circles is only superficial. Although members of the local communities (homogeneously Polish) are not always able to locate them precisely, those sites are frequently inscribed into the local culture of memory, albeit

¹ The executions carried out by Germans often took place in towns or in the nearby forests; Jews were gathered and transported to the killing site, while locals would observe the entire event, sometimes helping or getting otherwise involved in it. This involvement took various forms, from the so-called “Blue Police” (in German-occupied Poland, it was the pre-war police force mobilized by the order of the General Governor Hans Frank to serve German authorities), to individual Polish citizens assisting the killers, to executions organized and carried out by the locals themselves. Apart from that, there were also individual murders and denunciations of Jews in hiding. See, inter alia, Engelking, Grabowski (eds) 2018, Grabowski 2011, Engelking 2011, Grabowski 2020, Tryczyk 2015.

not in an obvious manner. Within the research team of the project *Uncommemorated Genocide Sites*, we refer to them as *non-sites of memory* (Sendyka 2015, 16. 2016a). A non-site of memory can be seen as the reverse of a *lieu de mémoire* in the understanding proposed by Pierre Nora (1984). The term was coined by Claude Lanzmann and conceptualized by Roma Sendyka. According to her, non-sites of memory are defined as dispersed locations of various genocides, ethnic cleansings, and other similarly motivated acts of violence.

The basic indicator is lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of delimitation (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 has not been neutralized by funerary rites. These sites do not, meanwhile, share physical characteristics: they may be extensive or centered, urban or rural, though they are often characterized by some variety of physical blending of 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 forsaking of memorialization leading to ethnically problematic revitalization that draws criticism (Sendyka 2016, 14).

Their paradoxical status is important from the point of view of the subject of this article – these are places that are remembered, but not commemorated; conventional memory practices are not devoted to them, and yet often there are stories about them and related rules of behavior. Unmarked graves undoubtedly belong to this group of sites. At the same time, from the point of view of Jewish law, their status is different from places of violence or, for instance, from abandoned sites of worship. Because there are human remains deposited in them, they require special protection – like cemeteries. According to Jewish religious law it is forbidden to violate the burial site. As the Jerusalem Talmud states: “It is forbidden to move the dead and their bones from the place where they rest” (Jerusalem Talmud, Moed Katan 2:4). Locating and marking them is therefore important not only as a gesture of commemoration, but also as a way of informing people that there are human remains in this place and that it should not be disturbed. According to the guidelines of the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries, the remains should not be moved or tampered with, which excludes exhumation. As exhumation is only allowed in Judaism in exceptional cases (including the threat from natural fac-

tors, e.g. a flooding river, however, the key is to be able to carry out careful and thorough exhumation, which is impossible if the remains are not in the form of a complete skeleton, see: Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 363: 1), from the point of view of *halakha*, protection of remains from any possible interference is ever more important. Therefore, investigation of such sites using non-invasive archaeological methods is preferred, and great importance is attached to the most precise and accurate delimitation of grave boundaries (Sturdy-Colls 2015, Karczewski et al. 2016). In this sense, the marking of graves of the Jewish victims of extermination is not only an act of instantiation of the memory of Jewish communities and their tragic deaths, but it is also an attempt to protect their burial sites, doing justice to the provisions of Jewish law.

Case study: marking uncommemorated burial sites

The need for this kind of act was the starting point for the project that is analyzed in this article. In 2017, I accompanied the members of both foundations in their work in the course of the project, making observations and conducting interviews. Taking into account the estimates of the possible number of sites with this status in Poland – according to the RCC around a thousand – and being aware of the costs and amount of work potentially involved in the preparation of permanent commemoration, the Zapomniane Foundation and The Matzevah Foundation decided to look for a formula that would make it possible to mark such sites on a wider scale, an intermediate solution, not excluding or replacing commemoration, but rather facilitating it (Zapomniane 2017).

Looking for a form and shape of a marker to be located at the sites of thus far unmarked graves, the team tried to ensure that the interference it would cause in the landscape was modest. Marking was primarily intended to have an informative function – to provide information about a given place and legitimize it in the eyes of those who know its character – as most of the locals know *about* it even if they do not know *of* it. Jonathan Webber points out the precision and certainty with which representatives of local communities are able to indicate the location of a Jewish cemetery, although at present there is only an empty, overgrown area (Weber 2015). In this sense, the marker itself constitutes something *less than* a conventional monument. As the authors describe it, there are two main reasons behind the decision to choose such form of a marker, one of which can be described as pragmatic, the other – as social (Zapomniane 2017). If a marker is an indirect form that does not replace commemoration, and, at the same time, it serves to disseminate knowledge about such places, its form should allow for its relatively easy placement in space. Secondly, a marker placed overnight in a given place cannot, and should not, replace a process leading to a decision to establish some form of permanent

commemoration at that place. Its modesty was designed to avoid a strong visual interference with the landscape that could arouse resistance or opposition from the local community; I shall come back to the possible reasons for such opposition below. However, such a marker has the ability to play a facilitating role precisely as an act of modest interference – it can facilitate future commemoration of the site by “bringing out” local knowledge, focusing local initiatives and locally conducted research as well as encouraging commemoration practices. The thirty markers which were placed by the Matzevah and Zapomniane Foundations in autumn 2017 in thirty selected places in the Lublin and the Lesser Poland Voivodships, had a form referring to a wooden matzevot, found before the war in Jewish cemeteries in eastern Poland.² The markers were made of larch wood, most resistant to water and weather conditions from among the locally occurring trees. Because the addressees of this action were mainly today’s inhabitants of these places, the inscriptions were prepared in Polish. The same text has been placed on all the markers: “Here rest Jews of blessed memory murdered during the Holocaust”, with the Star of David and a *tantzava* (Hebrew letters TNCBN – an abbreviation from the sentence: “May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life”). The choice of material was dictated by the aforementioned assumption of modest interference in the landscape – a wooden marker made of a material most often found in marked places or in their close vicinity fits into, and sometimes even merges with, the landscape. The project was also thought of as a research experiment – the aim was not only to mark uncommemorated graves, but also to look at the consequences of this kind of gesture, both for the landscape, as well as for the local infrastructure and memory culture, and the life of the local community. In the following part of the article, I discuss my observations made less than a year after the markers had been placed.

Wooden markers in the form of matzevot were placed in places previously examined by the Zapomniane Foun-

dation in close cooperation with the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries (RCC). Since the traditional tools of archaeology are excluded due to the obligations of Jewish religious law (*halakha*) in such locations, the RCC and the Foundation used the tools and methods of non-invasive archaeology, including archival research, testimonies, analysis of satellite photography and archival aerial photos, topographical analysis with the use of LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and geophysical tools (like georadar) that facilitate the identification of anomalies located under the surface of the soil. In autumn 2017, thirty previously studied sites of the deposition of human remains of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were marked (until August 2020, both foundations had marked 50 sites in total). The sites were located in different surroundings, forests, fields and towns. Among them, there were 12 sites located in built-up/inhabited areas (of which 2 are on the grounds of former cemeteries, which today are rather undeveloped space), 5 are located on the grounds of marked or fenced Jewish cemeteries and 13 are located deep in the woods. While some markers became immediately visible to the residents of a place, others may not have been noticed. Some of them constituted an additional element of the existing memory infrastructure concerning the Holocaust (e.g. an existing monument located far from the burial site itself³, or an existing commemoration of another Jewish burial site in a given locality⁴, a marked Jewish cemetery like in the case of Łaskarzew, Piaski, Brzesko, Tarnów, Stopnica, Szydłów.). Others were the first signs of this kind in the local landscape. Moreover, three of the above sites were associated with the former death camp in Sobibór, and one with the labor camp in Bliżyn. Due to the specificity of these places, the placement of markers was accompanied by members of local community only in some cases. Only in the case of three out of the 30 marked sites, various representatives of the local community and local activists, non-Jewish Poles, preserving the memory of the Jewish community in the area or region were present

2 The Jewish cemetery is in a village called Lenin in today’s Belarus: <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/l/1428-lenin/104-teksty-kultury/138391-drewniane-macewy-z-lenina> (accessed: 20.08.2019).

3 In Miechów, the Chodówki Forest. The Miechów area was researched by Karina Jarzyńska and Jakub Muchowski with support from Aleksandra Szczepan and Roma Sendyka. The town is located in Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodship, and has approximately 12,000 inhabitants. Its development started in the 12th century, when Duke Jaksa of the House of Griffins invited monks of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher. The abbey became a center of pilgrimage to the Chapel of the Tomb of Christ. Jewish settlement started here in the mid-19th century and before World War II, approximately 40% of the inhabitants were Jewish. During the war, Jews were re-settled to the ghetto, and murdered in death camps. In the area there is also a major killing site from 1941, i.e. Chodówki forest, with 600-700 victims buried in the field.

4 In Radechnica. Radechnica is a small village in Roztocze, a region in eastern Poland in Zamość County with approximately 920 inhabitants. In World War II, its small Jewish community was resettled to the ghetto in Szczepieszyn, while 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. Over the last decade, the church in the abbey has become 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 gradually being moved here). The site was researched within the project by Maria Kobielska, Roma Sendyka, and Aleksandra Szczepan with the support of Aleksandra Janus, Jacek Małczyński, Karina Jarzyńska, Tomasz Majkowski and Katarzyna Suszkiewicz.

during placing of the marker (in Karmanowice, Rogalów and Brzesko).

During subsequent visits conducted in spring 2018 to the twelve selected sites, I noted that none of the markers in the sites had been removed. This is not surprising in places far from inhabited areas. Perhaps nobody, or only a few people, have had the opportunity to see/encounter them. However, among the more visible places, there were those where a wooden marker could be an obstruction (e.g. it was very close to the road), as well as those where there seemed to be consent to littering and acts of vandalism (alcohol is consumed at one of the unfenced, unmarked cemeteries, garbage is thrown away, etc.). When analyzing the effects of this intervention, the first question that came to my mind was: what caused the markers to remain in place after nearly a year? Currently, I have adopted two main working hypotheses concerning the permanence of markers in places where their removal or destruction was, in my opinion, most likely. The first refers to the taboo associated with a burial site, the second to the relationship of the marker with other, unambiguously Catholic, “domesticated” common gestures in the surrounding space.

Hypothesis 1: taboo associated with burial sites

Places which were marked with wooden *matzevot* most often functioned – in a particular manner, typical for non-sites of memory – in the consciousness of the local community as burial sites. The way they are treated is typical for the perception of space – in any case never homogenous – by religious and traditional communities. In folk cultures, space is divided into specific zones, which are reflected in the principles of proxemics and specific sets of behaviors (Tomiccy 1975, Bystróż 1947, Bystróż 1980, 221-222). Furthermore, sites of deposition of human remains pose a mediational character: they are treated as places of communication with the deceased. This treatment may also apply to *foreign* necropolises and graves, despite the fact that they do not fit into the category of *familiarity* (Józefów-Czerwińska 2012, 132). Although places connected with culturally, ethnically and religiously separate groups do not play (unlike one’s *own* necropolises) a community-forming role, in the experience of space – in a culture with folk roots saturated with magical semantics – they can be perceived as dangerous. Analyzing cultural taboos concerning burial sites in Polish folk culture, Bożena Józefów-Czerwińska writes that “[t]heir recognition [...] was, on the one hand, to prevent unacceptable contact with them and undesirable proximity to the sacred, and, on the other hand, to mark their territorial distinctiveness in the world” (2012, 133). Czerwińska emphasizes that “[c]emeteries and graves, in the eyes of the traditional population, appear to be inviolable places, permanently embedded in the cultural landscape”

(2012, 133-134). The non-sites of memory, usually deprived of any conventional memory practices, as locations for the deposition of human remains trigger specific types of behavior, even if in a negative mode. I see the sources of this type of behavior in the folk-traditional roots of those communities in which – in the absence of other discursive and symbolic frames into which sites left behind by the Holocaust from bullets could be interpreted – local “vernacular memory” developed (Sendyka 2016b). As Roma Sendyka suggests, the discourse on memory is multilayered and vernacular memory can be understood as a layer that is “closest to the ground”, most narrowly located and often unheard (2016b, 252). According to Sendyka, vernacular memory favors half-measures, silent knowledge, makeshift gestures, when trying to express what is unknown or partly known, what is blocked and for what there is no official language (2016b, 264). In my interpretation, in local communities, practices characteristic of vernacular memory draw from a reservoir of available resources – whether it be traditional religious practices or rules specific to the folk culture – in response to the need to cope with a place that cannot be easily tamed. Zuzanna Bogumił and Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper observed a similar mechanism of using traditional religious practices in coping with the memory of a difficult past (Bogumił, Głowacka-Grajper 2019). Non-sites of memory, as a problematic legacy, rarely openly recognized or discussed as part of local history, are rather the subject of the non-symbolic, non-discursive practices of vernacular memory. To this day, burial places are most often taboo spaces, which can be reinforced not only by the strangeness of those who rest there, but also – in the case of non-sites of memory containing Jewish remains – by the lack of a ritual closure that would make them a grave in the proper sense. As Polish anthropologist Ludwik Stomma writes, “where there is a taboo, look for mediation, where there is mediation, look for taboo” (2000:97). Mediation phenomena are inherently associated with prohibitions and practices that seek to neutralize them. The lack of a funeral in folk culture meant that the deceased was in a state of permanent mediation – and therefore suspended in a state recognized as particularly dangerous, requiring neutralization, and finally tabooed. Polish ethnographer Adam Fischer described the practices of dealing with the dead body in Polish folk culture in the early 20th century, including the gestures performed towards the bodies of those who experienced sudden, “non-their-own” death (especially the murdered), which were common in various parts of Poland, like throwing branches, hay, sticks or stones at the sites where the remains were buried. Searching for an explanation, Fischer refers to other researchers, interpreting those practices as a substitute for a form of worship or actions aimed at preventing the dead from leaving the grave and reversing the negative effects of contact with a dead body. The peculiar status of non-sites of memory – first of all, as deposits of remains of “others”, secondly, lacking the ritual closure – is sometimes expressed in the vernacular ways of referring to them, for

example, in the phrase “kaddish-less graves”, used by Stanisław Zybała from Radecznica. It is also reflected in the related practices of omitting them, littering, avoiding.

It should be noted that in many cases the cultural taboo did not protect either the Jewish graves themselves, or the tombstones that marked them. There are historically known cases of deliberate violation of burial sites and human remains/ashes deposits in post-war Poland described by researchers (inter alia: Gross and Grudzińska-Gross 2016; Zaremba 2012), along with the practice of digging through graves and the use of matzevot from cemeteries as building material (the practice was documented by Łukasz Baksik in a photographic project “Matzevot of Everyday Use”, Baksik 2013). While the pre-war cases of the violation of Jewish graves and remains observed in 19th century Poland were usually related to superstition and folk magic⁵, an economic motivation was behind many of the wartime and postwar violations of the sites where ashes and remnants of Jewish remains had been deposited. In the case of the former, violation of the tomb does not so much mean the lifting of the taboo but confirms it – it is the taboo that guarantees magical effectiveness. In the latter, the breaking of the taboo might have been rooted in – and in a sense, prepared by – the pre-war and wartime construction of otherness and dehumanization of Jews. Zuzanna Dziuban draws attention to how that later made possible a whole range of practices concerning Jews both during their life and after death, including desecration and digging up Jewish burial sites (2015). Anti-Semitism and the involvement of local communities in the acts of killing (often motivated by the prospect of profit: either being rewarded or appropriation of the property or money of the victims), also played a significant role.

In contemporary Poland, the protective aspect of the taboo seems to be restored to some extent, even while there is a sense of public denial about Polish involvement and complicity in the Holocaust (which can be observed as a reoccurring outcry accompanying publications of books that bring up the subject, e.g. Gross 2000) and while the practices of desecrating the remains are not unequivocally condemned by those who participated in it, and their descendants (Reszka 2019). I see the presence of this taboo in the ambivalent “aura” of the non-sites of memory and the neutralizing practices still connected to them: omitting, avoiding, littering, and marginalization. As such, they are not forgotten, but are rather subjects of non-symbolic, non-discursive practices - developed locally, without references to globalized or national discourses of memory, drawing from the local context and practices.

Hypothesis 2: wooden markers – affinity of gestures

The second hypothesis is related to the possible relationship between a wooden matzevah and the gesture, common in Poland, of placing wooden crosses not only at burial sites, but also at places of death – as, for example, in the case of marking the places of road accidents. Crosses at roads and crossroads – irrespective of whether they are a place of worship, a sign of burial site, site of death or a gesture of penance – are a common element of the Polish (and European) landscape. In addition to crucifixes as chapels and crucifixes on graves or as markers of the place of death, also penitential crucifixes were widespread in Europe (Grainger 2010). According to this hypothesis, the affinity of both gestures – marking the burial site with a wooden matzevah and marking the grave or the place of death with a wooden cross – may make the first gesture seem domesticated by reference to the latter. This has been proven recently by an observation made by members of the Rabbinical Commission for cemeteries in Adampol (a village close to Sobibór), where the locals refer to the marker using a term “the Jewish cross”.

- *Why do you call it a cross?*
- *And how are we supposed to call it?*
- *But there is no cross there.*
- *But for us it is a cross. Just as if it were a Polish cross (...). For me it is the same. I know it has a different name, but I don't know that name. Anyone will tell you that there is a cross there.*
- *In Jewish tradition a gravestone is called a matzevah (...).*
- *And we call it a cross. But not our cross, the Jewish cross.*

The relationship between the wooden marker and a “way-side” cross and the taboos related to burial sites might offer an explanation for the fact that none of the 18 markers visited by representatives of both foundations have been destroyed or removed. However, in at least three other locations the marker served as a starting point for commemorative processes. Within a year, two of the marked sites have been transformed into permanent commemorations and one has become the subject of local remembrance practices. In these cases, a key role was played by local networks of activists and the involvement of immediate neighbors of these sites (or property owners). In the case

5 Such practices were discussed in journals and newspapers, described as an outrageous „durability of superstition” and folk magic, however rarely explaining the essence of it, see: *Drobiazgi*, „Wisła. Czasopismo poświęcone krajoznawstwu i ludoznawstwu” 1916, v. 20, p. 81: <https://polona.pl/item/9030429/42/>; *Skutki zabobonu*, „Górnoślązak. Pismo codzienne poświęcone sprawom ludu polskiego na Śląsku”, No. 161, Katowice 19.07.1906: <https://polona.pl/item/50466604/3/>; „Kurjer Warszawski”, No. 117, 17.05.1876: <https://polona.pl/item/19219872/0/>; *Rosół z trupa*, „Dziennik Warszawski” 12.11.1865. I am grateful to Łukasz Kozak for drawing my attention to the above-mentioned cases, especially the use of Jewish corpses or their fragments by Polish peasants to protect animals from diseases or to protect people from plague and evil forces.

of Karmanowice and Rogalów, two towns near Nałęczów, the very placement of a matzevot sparked the interest of people involved in the study of local history – representatives of the local community were present on the spot, including a person who indicated the burial site; a two-part radio report on the subject was also created (aired on the Polish Radio Lublin). In Brzesko, thanks to the involvement of a local activist of memory, a plaque with the names and surnames of the victims – Cyla and MundeK Strauber – was placed on a wooden matzevot. The marker has also become an integral part of the Brzesko march of memory. In both cases, it was the local actors who gathered knowledge about the victims and the circumstances of their death. Thanks to a local activist, a school friend of one of the victims took part in the ceremony accompanying the unveiling of the monument in Karmanowice. Thanks to another one, the circumstances of death of Cyla and MundeK Strauber are known, remembered and reported by a schoolmate of Cyla. In the case of all three sites, the marker, in a sense, helped to “bring out” local knowledge. The temporary nature of the intervention may contribute to focusing local initiatives and act as a catalyst for locally conducted research, activities and commemoration practices. It is a gesture which, since it is not a proper commemoration, does not relieve the local community of other obligations, nor does it impose ready-made forms and discourses. At the same time, it opens up room for action, leaving space for one’s own agency and offering the opportunity to take responsibility for the commemoration process to the extent that is possible locally.

Conclusions

Following the suggestion of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2016, 102) and Roma Sendyka (2019), I refer to non-sites of memory as a “legacy” rather than “heritage”, to avoid the association with what is monumental, celebrated or at least recognized as important, even if problematic (as is the case with the difficult heritage of the site of the former NSDAP congresses in Nuremberg described by Macdonald 2009). As Konrad Matyjaszek (2013) also points out, the use of the term “heritage” with reference to what had been Jewish property in Poland draws our attention to the nature of the process of acquisition of these goods. However, this legacy shares some of the characteristics of “difficult heritage” described by MacDonald – the risk of opening up social divisions and challenging a positive self-identification of a group directly related to it. Non-sites of memory – unwanted and ambivalent heritage – function in the local community with a taboo associated with them. As Roma Sendyka writes, “they are a source of a certain discomfort among the communities nearest them, for whom commemorating them is a greater threat for their collective identity than is neglecting to commemorate them” (2015, 16-17). Their commemoration is threatening to expose both the former local presence of “others” and bring up the problematic status of

property they left behind, as well as the circumstances of their death. It seems that this prevents the local communities from making commemorative gestures and conducting commemorative practices, and results in deeming these places religiously and culturally alien, and therefore not subject to codes and systems of behavior belonging to the burial sites of members of one’s own community. Local memory activists who decide to make gestures aimed at commemoration on their own initiative are often confronted with the resistance of the rest of the community and fear of the consequences of violating the stability of the local memory culture.

Given the complex status of non-sites of memory, they appear to be something that is inherited in a sense of being left behind by those who were here before us, but for at least two reasons are not perceived as part of *us*. First of all, *they* (both victims and perpetrators) were members of *other* groups (the Jews, the Germans / the Nazis). This allows one to create a strong division between *our* and *their* legacy, including the legacy of violence. Secondly, even if perpetrators were members of our own community, the community uses various mechanisms to protect its own positive self-image, so in consequence, this is never fully acknowledged. A discourse of “a few bad apples” can serve as an example of such mechanism. Moreover, Andrzej Leder (2014) uses a term “sleepwalking through revolution” to describe the whole process that took place in Poland between 1939 and 1956 – namely the Holocaust wiping out the Jewish community and the fall of the higher classes. He calls it a revolution – referring to bourgeois revolution – but a particular one, as it was made by Others, which has problematic consequences, such as for instance the lack of the very possibility to equate actions with responsibility for what happened. Non-sites of memory are a problematic legacy rather than a difficult heritage – they are rarely openly recognized, talked about or referred to within the local community. Also, those who might want to claim their ownership over this kind of legacy cannot be easily interpreted as “heritage community”. The term, proposed in the UNESCO Faro convention, offers an interesting approach: contrary to the traditional definition of a community of (certain) heritage as formed by blood ties, ethnicity or place of residence, it introduces the understanding of such group as a community of will. However, Erica Lehrer points to the problematic use of the term proposed in the Faro Convention with regard to the legacy of the Holocaust. Recognizing the flexibility of the definition as its positive aspect, Lehrer (2020) also acknowledges the limits of the focus on “will” and “choice” as conditions for becoming part of heritage community. Instead, thinking about the intersections of Polish and Jewish history, Erica Lehrer proposes the term *community of implication*, more appropriate to describe those involved in a given history and entangled in it, regardless of their will and choice. Lehrer refers to Michael Rothberg (2019), who introduces a new concept of historical subjectivity – “implicated subjects” – to overcome the limits of Raul Hilberg’s triad (perpetrators, victims, bystanders).



Figure 1. Aleksander Schwarz, photograph of the commemorated site in Karmanowice (Poland), previously marked by a wooden marker, 2018. Available courtesy of the author.



Figure 2. Steven D. Reece, documentation of the project by The Zapomniane Foundation and the Matzevah Foundation, 2017. Available courtesy of the author.



Figure 3. Steven D. Reece, documentation of the project by The Zapomniane Foundation and the Matzevah Foundation, 2017. Available courtesy of the author.

Consequences of the intervention seem to prove that such gestures can become a tool to open up local knowledge, because the marker itself seems to belong to the same type of practices that vernacular memory favors: it is performative, it is temporary, it is modest, unspectacular. It also seems to fit into the complex memory cultures of communities of implication. Being *less* than a monument, they leave room for different actors to take action and create the discourse around them. Being vernacular, they facilitate the sharing of local vernacular knowledge. Being temporary, they create space for various stakeholders to negotiate the future of the site. At the same time, this symbolic gesture changes the status of the site, which seems to make it possible to change related practices. Practices of folk-traditional origin neutralizing the ambivalence of non-sites of memory can be replaced by a different system of behaviors, without imposing a national or international memory discourse, thereby letting the community of those who recognize themselves as actors take action.

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Ceremonial events at non-sites of memory: Seven framings of a difficult past

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Abstract

Abstract: The author discusses uncommemorated and under-remembered sites of past violence in terms of the conditions of their transformation into memory sites. Commemorative ceremonies, which may be staged at non-sites of memory, are presented as affective media of memory and identity, demonstrating social responses to the sites, as well as placing the local past in the context of supra-local memory forms. The argument is grounded in the material gathered from fieldwork during the research project on uncommemorated sites of genocide in Poland and, predominantly, in a detailed case study of a ceremony witnessed by the author in 2016 in Radechnica (Lublin Voivodship) at a burial site of victims of the “Holocaust by bullets”. In the article the discourse of speeches delivered during the ceremony is analyzed, on the assumption that they can reveal rules of national Polish memory culture dictating what may be commemorated and how cultural mechanisms have a power to hinder commemoration. As a result, seven distinctive framings of past events that kept returning in subsequent speeches were identified and interpreted as “memory devices” that enable and facilitate recollection, but also mark out the limits of what can be remembered and passed on.

Key Words

non-sites of memory, ceremonies, Polish memory culture, Holocaust, Radechnica, memory device

Introduction

East-Central European landscape encompasses multiple unmemorialized and under-remembered sites of past violence, related to the Holocaust, but also to ethnic conflicts during and right after World War II. Lacking full and/or official information, delimitation and commemoration, these sites often still contain human remains, although they have not typically been a stage of any religious or secular ritual to neutralize their presence. Roma Sendyka dubbed these localizations “non-sites of memory”, pointing out that “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”; as a result, non-sites can be problematically “transformed, manipulated, neglected, or contested” (2016b: 700). Despite manifest abandonment, however, non-sites of memory are not en-

tirely excluded from the society’s memorial activity, and occasionally can invite various forms of commemoration, even though these commemorative processes are never ultimately or successfully completed. Non-sites of memory are thus being delineated, traced, talked and written about, temporarily marked, and, sometimes, officially commemorated, usually with the use of some forms of monuments (which may also be challenged, subjected to changes, removed later on). The establishment of a monument or memorial is one of many possible ways of transforming a site into a *lieu de mémoire*, fortunately appealing to collective memory and historical consciousness (although there is no guarantee of that). It is also an occasion on which non-sites of memory may become the stage of ceremonial events. In the course of research of non-sites of memory, I had the opportunity to participate in an event of this kind. In this paper I interpret the ceremonial event in terms of memory forms that were performatively introduced within it.

According to literature, performative practices such as holiday celebrations, anniversaries, ceremonies, funerals, and religious services are considered affective media of memory (Erll and Rigney 2009, Kosiński 2010, Assmann 2011, Erll 2011) that produce identity and integration of a group (Olick 2007). Ceremonies reveal, repeat, and strengthen the dominants of a memory culture that frame past events' understanding. Speeches delivered at commemorative ceremonies express common values and shared ideologies of the "in-group", allow us to observe representation of the past in the context of present politics and its role in creating collective (and especially national) self-image and identity (Olick 2007, Reisigl 2008, Wodak 2010, Riehn 2019). A careful "reading" of commemoration forms reveals general remembrance trends, including official interpretations of the past, popular myths and common desires that the forms reflect, along with the use of commemoration to manipulate public memory (Carrier 1996). This perspective was usually applied to study "central" commemorative events organized on a national level, often in the context of established *lieux de mémoire*. An attempt to commemorate a non-site, in turn, represents a struggle for recognition of minority memory rather than a celebration of communal remembrance. The public inauguration of a monument in a non-site of memory demonstrates social responses to the site, ways of referring to and processing it, as well as placing the local past in the context of supra-local memory forms.

The ceremonial event which I discuss in this paper was organized at the site commonly called "Drugie Doły" ("Second Pits"), a wooded gully in the vicinity of Radechnica, a village in the Lublin Voivodship (south-eastern Poland). It was there that in December 1942 Germans shot and buried ten Jewish Poles from nearby areas, who had previously been hiding in a dugout in a forest. The site, recounted by a Polish bystander, was investigated, marked and commemorated with a modest memorial no sooner than in 2016, thanks to the work of the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland and the Zapomniane ("Forgotten") Foundation.¹ The event organized on that occasion, on September 2, 2016, is one of the first efforts directed towards the Radechnica community to commemorate the local history of the Holocaust in the village. In the course of the ceremony, several people gave speeches: Agnieszka Nieradko, representing the Rabbinical Commission and the Zapomniane Foundation; Edward Polak, the mayor of Radechnica; Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland; Mieczysław Cisło, the auxiliary bishop at the Lublin archdiocese, and until June 2016, the chair of the Council for Religious Dialogue of the Polish Episcopal Conference; and Marianna Zybała, a resident of Radechnica and the widow of Stanisław Zybała, a local guardian of memory, with whom she protected the memory of the wartime events.

The Zybałas ran the unofficial archive of the village, collecting documents and testimonies, co-authored multiple brochures on regional history, generously sharing their expertise with locals and travelling visitors. It is mostly thanks to their actions that the history of several unmarked Holocaust burial sites in Radechnica has recently been unveiled. The ceremony was attended by a significant group of pupils and teachers of the public school in Radechnica; however, there were hardly any other inhabitants of the village apart from Marianna Zybała and her relatives.

In the course of the article, I analyze the discourse of the speeches delivered at Second Pits, assuming that they can reveal cultural rules dictating what may be commemorated and how. This serves to uncover and look critically at the relations between dominants of the Polish memory culture and particular, local cases of potentially painful memory. The tension demonstrates that, despite tendencies prevalent in official commemoration, collective historical consciousness and politics of memory, Polish memory field is not a homogeneous one. Throughout the ceremony, non-dominant, minority perspectives within it can be observed as confronted with the master narrative. As Maria Janion put it in her authoritative work, the Polish positive self-image is grounded in a "narrative about our outstanding suffering and merits, our grandeur and superiority" (2006: 12), which served as a compensation during prolonged period of Polish non-independence, and resulted in activating defense mechanisms against questioning the narrative. The narrative produces self-concentrated, non-inclusive, and particularly sensitive remembrance structures, prone to defensive reactions to any challenge. Non-sites of memory, in fact, can provide illustrative examples of such challenges. They are not (properly) commemorated for multiple reasons, starting with ethnic difference between victims of past violence that happened at the site and its contemporary neighbors. (The minimum conditions of "proper commemoration" require fully acknowledging historical truth about the past, showing respect to the victims and observing usual traditional rules and/or rituals of cultural [religious, national, ethnic] group they belonged to. Memorial plaques avoiding direct identification of victims or perpetrators may serve as examples of "improper/insufficient commemoration".) Even though possible reasons for leaving a particular site unmarked can be complex, general lack of commemoration of sites of the "Holocaust by bullets" (Desbois 2008) is in line, at best, with the history of Polish disinterest in the fate of their Jewish fellow citizens and their indifference (if not hostility) towards them. Frequently, the history of non-sites of memory brings back indirect and direct Polish complicity in the murders of Jews, when their present abandonment can enhance the meticulously restrained sense of guilt. All this is hard to

1 The Commission was established to supervise Jewish cemeteries in Poland alongside the Jewish Community of Warsaw and to work on locating Holocaust unmarked grave sites. The Foundation was created in 2014 by the members of the Commission and works in close cooperation with the latter, supervised by the Chief Rabbi of Poland.

integrate into the aforementioned self-image of the group, within which it is Polish suffering that predominates.

Insufficient commemoration does not, of course, equate to absence of any form of (collective) memory. Our research on non-sites of memory has revealed that neighboring communities do not “forget” the difficult past, but maintain a certain relation to it and tacit knowledge about it, albeit underdeveloped and often non-verbal. As Roma Sendyka proposes in this context, “non-memory” can be understood as “inclusive term comprising these elements of remembering processes that resist symbolization” (2016a: 266) – not in stark contrast to memory, but to disclose how the two are inextricably intertwined. “Non-memory” marks a relation to the past which lacks official language to be articulated, and is neither assimilated nor absent. The speakers at the ceremony are thus supposed, putting it in general terms, to transform non-memory into a form of memory: to make it expressible and coordinate it with “official” remembrance. For this purpose, they have to propose, in accordance with their sensitivities, a form of commemorating the events of the Second Pits which would be appropriate, understandable, effective and acceptable for the entire community. This kind of reinterpretation of a non-site of memory requires placing it within the framework of familiar and understandable constructions of meaning, which take the form of general perceptive rules, narratives or images, recurring figures or even stereotypes. This familiar framework provides tools or “devices” enabling people to add challenging content to their existing universe of memory.

In conducting research into the Radechnica event, I identified seven contexts or sets of signs and meanings that keep recurring in the words of the speakers in their efforts to deal with the problem of non-sites of memory. Each of these ways of working on memory could be deemed a “memory device” (Kobielska 2017): a cultural apparatus (in Foucauldian sense – see Foucault 1980) that produces tendencies of remembering by encouraging, supporting and modifying mnemonic content for its users – helping them remember in some ways whilst discrediting others (Basu 2011). Apparatuses manage their subjects: who remembers with the use of a “memory device”, adopts a position of a “remembering subject” defined by what the device offers. By putting forward certain ways of framing the past, memory devices enable and facilitate recollection, but also mark out the limits of what *can be* remembered and passed on. To identify the devices, I apply the perspective of rhetorical analysis to the subsequent speeches with the aim to unpack the general structure of arguments as well as details of wording and style, while also paying attention to the speakers’ performance. Patterns of addressing the past are deduced from micro-analysis of utterances rather than from pre-existent knowledge of remembrance conventions present in literature. I assume that speakers may refer to and transform historically accrued conventions whether they are aware of the pattern or not.

1. “Fate wanted it so”: The course of history

The events in the Second Pits are sometimes described with phrases that refer to an impersonal course of history (“Fate wanted it so, the wheel of history turned here, through that very gully” [Nieradko]). They are euphemisms, allowing to avoid direct referring to history of brutal violence and death that does not make a literal appearance here; it is referred to delicately and cautiously, in general terms (such as “fate”) alleviating discomfort that more precise depiction might cause. It could be also described as “neutralization”: a difficult past comes across in this conception as a symptom of the general functioning of history and its natural caprice. No one is cast as accountable, the past is the product of chance or the decisions of superhuman forces. Memory of events framed in this way is meant to carefully avoid possible conflicts or controversies; the emotions prompted are rather those of sadness and compassion for the victims.

2. “They would have been your neighbors”:

About “normal” people

In many of the speeches a narrative appeared that emphasized a real or potential connection between victims (or more broadly: Jewish Poles) and the members of the Polish community of that time or of today – especially in its local form (“We know that they lived here [...], if it were not for the Holocaust, their progeny would probably live among us, would be your neighbors, schoolmates, colleagues from work, co-workers” [Nieradko], “they were our neighbors, our close friends” [Cisło]).

This kind of semiotic structure is clearly intended to bring contemporaries closer to the victims from the past, to develop empathy, uncover common features and common experiences, and in this way create a justification for the practices of memory the contemporary audience *should* implement. At the same time, these gestures of intimacy not only partially misrepresent history, removing cases of non-friendly, distant or hostile relations between Jews and Poles from the picture, but also may paradoxically emphasize difference, creating what Janicka and Żukowski (2016) call a philosemitic narrative, a seemingly paradoxical form of exclusion and violence. Stressing that members of both groups were (or might have been) friends suggests that there is something special about this kind of friendship – in contrast to analogous relations within each group that are perceived as self-evident, and paradoxically contributes to the process of *othering*. This paradox is clearly visible in the next sentence of Cisło’s speech: “The difference could not be seen, it was also a friend”. A Jewish girl (he refers here to the relation between Stanisław Zybała and his schoolmate) was not simply a friend of a non-Jewish Pole, but only could *also* be one; the friends could be close enough for the speaker to declare that the difference *could not be seen*, but not enough to say that there was *no* difference.

3. “Both societies got on very well”: On the Polish-Jewish brotherhood

Attempts at building a positive history figure prominently in the well-known story about the peaceful coexistence of Jewish and non-Jewish Polish people before the outbreak of World War II, replete with claims of the “brotherhood” between Jews and Catholics. This is a myth, not only oversimplifying real history, but often putting forward its inadequate image, contradicting frequent tensions, inequalities, and antisemitism among pre-war Polish society. Its traces are clearly visible in Edward Polak’s speech:

We should also remember, I think, that the history of the Jewish community in our area, in Radecznica, goes back to the 19th century. [...] Both societies [sic – społeczeństwa], Polish and Jewish, got on very well, lived very well together in peace, in accord;

as well as Mieczysław Cisło’s address to “dear Jews, also our brothers”, and repeating phrases about our “elder brothers in faith”, sanctioned by the authority of John Paul II.

From these words about harmonious coexistence, brotherhood and friendship, there steadily emerges the image of the “good Jew” anticipating and refuting the negative stereotype that may automatically appear in the minds of some listeners, according to which Jews, typical figures of ‘others’, are associated with deviousness and ingratitude (Cała 1995, 2012). The short statement given at the event by Michael Schudrich, who emphatically expressed his gratitude and belief in the power of harmonious cooperation, might have reverberated analogically around the participants, seeing in him the model of the “grateful Jew”.

Once again, the desire to bring Jews and Poles closer and to justify the remembrance by Polish people of Jewish victims sometimes seems to risk backfiring, and gestures of intimacy transform into “othering”. Or rather: undertaking the attempt to share compassionate memory on the basis of solidarity reveals, in a natural way, obstacles this attempt meets when confronted with Polish memory culture. A striking formula from Polak’s speech unintentionally illustrates the case: those who “got on very well” and “lived together in peace” were not compatriots, fellow citizens, or even members of different groups, but two separate “societies”.

4. “Only because they were Jews”: Fixed figures of the Holocaust memory

Among the contexts which provide a framework for the history of Second Pits is a certain typical way of speaking about the Holocaust – reiterated both at the national level and in the international memory of the Holocaust (“All

Jews met their death – only because, only because they were Jews” [Polak]; “the great tragedy of the Jewish nation”, whose “complete annihilation had been announced by Hitler”, mobilizing a “machine of death” [Cisło]).

The use of these phrases certainly does have an explanatory function, placing the case of Radecznica against the backdrop of widely known conceptual structures that organize the key events of the twentieth century, and so making it an important case in its own right. The direct reference to the Holocaust of Jews and its unprecedented scale often is yet offset by the next context.

5. “The great tragedy of our nation”: The context of Polish martyrdom

Elements of Polish historical memory about World War II, with particular reference to national martyrdom, turn out to be an essential context for speaking about the Holocaust (“Poland is studded with the graves of Jewish victims. Just as it is with the graves of Polish soldiers who fell in fighting the German occupier” [Cisło]). The whole ceremony refers above all to non-Polish suffering and death; as a result, the defense mechanisms, as mentioned above, are activated, to prevent destabilizing the time-honored hierarchy of Polish memory culture. The juxtaposition of “Polish and Jewish graves” seeks to neutralize this danger, disavowing obvious discrepancy in numbers of victims, circumstances of their death, and maintenance of burial sites. This logic of “neutralizing dangers”, typical in the field of Polish war memory, operates within the framework of competitive memory, as if collective remembering was a narrow space in which distinct and separate groups compete for limited resources (the logic acutely described – and criticized – by Michael Rothberg [2009]). On the other hand, taking into consideration historical consciousness of the listeners, there may be paradoxically an *increase* in the awareness and memory of the Holocaust in Radecznica. Showing it as parallel to Polish suffering does not (or rather: does not only) remove its status as unique but may also increase its significance. The juxtaposition, problematic as it is, suggests a memory pattern that is understandable and feasible for its future users, thus it can be interpreted as a step towards (partial) remembrance.

6. “Oh, I don’t know who betrayed them, who betrayed”: The question of Polish complicity

The circumstances of the executions in Second Pits are not entirely clear. The betrayal of those hiding in the dug-out by non-Jewish Poles seems highly probable but has not been backed up by hard proof thus far. This issue only appeared in two of the speeches: those of Marianna Zybala and Mieczysław Cisło. I will quote a relevant part of the testimonial speech of the former:

The one who was bringing food had the biggest problem, not to be nabbed by the Germans or some ... [Poles] who could tell on [them]... that something is going on. And that's how it was. A long time. Oh, I don't know who betrayed them, who betrayed, probably people from Lutycka Kolonia [village nearby] betrayed them [...]. After all, the Turobin Schupo [department of the Schutzpolizei from the nearby Turobin] didn't know there were ten Jewish people here.

The way Marianna Zybała makes her accusation throws down a challenge – both to the local community and to the broader models of the “correct” Polish memory, focusing, as shown above, on the maintenance of the positive self-image. Her statement also reveals the difficulties of voicing this accusation out at all – evident in the many ellipses she uses. She refers to the danger to the Jewish people represented by the part of the Polish community who could denounce them; but she uses a pseudonym, referring to them with a fragmentary phrase “some... who could tell on... that something...” Her moving, almost explosive repetition, “Oh, I don't know who betrayed them, who betrayed”, the most important statement in the present context, is formulated as the answer to a question, a question that actually no one asked: “Who betrayed them?” If someone *had* asked this question, the situation of Zybała would have been easier: the responsibility for opening this discussion would have lain with someone else. I understand this moment in her speech as an expression of feeling besieged, including by her own sense of duty to bear witness and that by fulfilling that duty she is breaking with the silent consensus of Radecznica and Poland's memory. The thrice repeated “betray” adds significant power, particularly in its proximity to the earlier verbs “to nab” and “tell on”. In a key moment, Zybała decided to use a verb that represents harm, a fundamental withdrawal from all principles or values and trust.

By contrast, the words of the bishop on the guilt of unidentified members of the Polish community were literally surrounded by remarks on Polish merit: “*Few [Jews] were saved. Those that were, were saved thanks to kind, brave people who helped them hide.* But as we have been hearing, there was no lack of treacherous people who denounced, reported. That was how those who were here died, not discovered by Germans – someone informed on them. *But in every nation there are wicked people, but there are also heroes. Just as our Mayor recalled, a local Polish family was also shot [...]*”. Betrayal becomes if not the exception among Poles, then at least a universal element that coexists with heroism; it is found everywhere and does not affect Polish group in particular. The “losses” to the Polish self-image (Żukowski 2018), evident when the “wicked people” are mentioned, need to be compensated for. Acknowledgment of “heroes” and “brave people” stands for the compensation. The short paragraph, rhetorically organized by the speaker, is enough to reveal the mechanism in all its power.

7. “I would like to emphasize at this point that Poland ...”: help for the Jews

The history of Second Pits does not speak about Jews being saved by Poles. From the perspective of “funerary” ceremony, devoted to the retrieval of the names of the dead and the restoration of their memory, it would seem there is no need to spend a significant part of the event recalling Polish acts of the help. But that would mean ignoring the prevailing rules governing the Polish memory culture.

These rules have already been precisely identified by researchers (Kowalska-Leder 2017, Molisak 2017, Żukowski 2018) and they point to the statement cited above: a condition of alluding to Polish guilt is to immediately recall Polish heroes and martyrs. Other speeches make the rule even stronger. Consideration of Polish noble acts is a condition for mere mentioning Jewish suffering and death:

[They died] just because they were Jews. That... I would like to emphasize at this point that Poland was an occupied country, and for sure the only country in the whole of Europe, in Europe under Nazi German occupation, where any help given to Jews was punished by death. [...] And even a good example is a case that is little known here: a family from our commune, from Gruszka Zaporska, was simply shot for hiding six Jews. [Polak]

The cited statement reveals the tension related to speaking about the Holocaust. And the remedy for that discomfort is a clear and arbitrary change of subject – a sudden return to safe, familiar space where obvious, internalized principles apply and one speaks about Polish dedication and heroism. As a result, during the “funerary” event in honor of the murdered Radecznica Jews, we found out about – and at great length – the risks taken by Polish heroes saving some Jewish people *entirely unconnected* to the story. Here was an answer to an unformulated question, an unexpressed accusation: Why were they not saved? The reservations put by the speaker – “I would like to emphasize at this point ...” – would be a logical line of defense to a hypothetical intervention that would upset the comfortable consensus of Polish memory. The reaction is clearly pre-emptive, actually – more allergic.

The Radecznica event provides confirmation that the memory of Polish Righteous Among the Nations – and more broadly, of Poles saving Jews (Molisak 2017) – has become an obligatory addition to memory of the Holocaust. It is telling that all the speakers fulfilled this “obligation”, albeit in different ways: while Marianna Zybała mentioned Poles supplying those hiding with food and water, other speakers unanimously paid their tribute to Solowski family from Gruszka Zaporska, brought up in Cisło's and Polak's speeches quoted above, and referred to saving Jews as to a standard for Polish wartime community.

Conclusion

A detailed analysis of the event that transformed a non-site of memory into a commemorated site has allowed me to identify the main factor “behind the scenes”. Though the need to commemorate the victims officially, the point of the event itself, is recognized and realized by all the speakers, this turns out to be, within the framework of Polish memory culture, a difficult, uncomfortable and questionable task. The speakers’ discomfort, apparent when analyzing the speeches, in turn, leads to the need to accustom themselves to the situation, to sanction the event, make the entire situation easier, more acceptable. To this end the devices I have listed are employed, needed although the event was planned and carried out in an atmosphere of conciliation. The consensus regarding Polish memory concerning World War II is essentially left untouched, but even the slightest shift of emphasis – perhaps the focus on previously uncommemorated Jewish victims was itself enough – brought about the mobilization of defense mechanisms.

To sum up, the seven devices are techniques for reconciling new elements with existing dispositions of the culture of memory; that is to say: for facilitating remembrance and recollection. They have a few features in common: to provide interpretation – to make the history of Second Pits understandable and meaningful; to relieve any possible discomfort, or other negative emotions; and, finally, to encourage memorial practices. The techniques realize these functions to a varying degree. In the first case, the history of Second Pits becomes understandable as a reflection of the changing course of fate – inspiring compassion but burdening no one’s conscience. The “neighborly” formula brings the victims closer to contemporary Poles. The narrative of Polish-Jewish brotherhood, working in a similar way, adds further elements. The idealized past becomes the precedent for good relations between groups, establishing an ideal to aspire to for contemporary Poles. These techniques would convince us that the murdered Jews “deserve” to be remembered: as imagined neighbors, as similar to the contemporary “us”, as friends – and yet they also serve the positive self-image of the Polish majority. Using the fourth device – the codes of memory about the Holocaust – provides a comprehensible context, a whole for the part that is local history, and provides not only meaning but validation. This, however, leads to the potential for anxiety in the majority’s memory which has a competitive nature. As a result, the techniques described perform a complicated balancing act: “disturbing” elements and “alleviating” elements intertwine and, to a certain extent, neutralize each other by means of their constant juxtaposition. The fifth of the devices, the context of Polish martyrdom, causes the Holocaust to be placed alongside Polish suffering and thereby to become less exceptional but more understandable – and perhaps closer. It is also a key element of a positive self-image. The sixth semiotic context – the problem of Polish complicity – is that which most of all cries out

for a soothing reaction, for reframing. The most powerful device for this purpose is the argument from help for the Jews, which again serves to save the Polish self-image.

Non-sites of memory seem to be a difficult area for memory cultures, but for this very reason they may become a litmus test: revealing the culture’s mechanisms, strength and limitations in action. The seven framings of the past identified in the course of analysis are grounded in the context of Polish official memory, collective memory and common identity; it is probable, however, that parallel mechanisms can be observed in different national and historical contexts. In the field of Polish culture of memory, the same (or analogous) framings may possibly be applied to cases of difficult past that are not necessarily embodied in particular non-sites of memory, under the conditions that (1) a minority perspective on the past is evoked and activates the discomfort and defense mechanisms while (2) a speaker nonetheless strives to acknowledge it.

The memory devices analyzed in this article provide a double function for the difficult memory of non-sites. First of all, they can open the way for a universe of shared remembering: opening that memory to familiar structures, explaining the past and bringing it closer to users of the memory culture. Here we enter into an (albeit limited) negotiation on the consensus about the past, filling out collective memory with elements that are currently missing from its accepted, common, and shared form. This process can be described as assimilating a difficult memory. However, this leads to another aspect mentioned already: assimilation (Janicka 2015) also means that difficult memory becomes easier, and its aspects that are the most troublesome for the community become alleviated. A condition of its acceptance is a reduction in its explosive potential.

transl. by Patrick Trompiz

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The “Alert”¹ for non-sites of memory: a 1965 scout action of discovering and describing Second World War sites in Poland

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Abstract

During the First Scouting Alert (Poland 1965), scouts were tasked with finding and describing sites related to the events of Second World War. Those were mostly monuments, places of conflict, graves and body disposal pits. The scouts were tasked with finding such sites in their neighbourhood according to information collected from local communities. The campaign resulted in 26,000 reports in form of the registration sheets containing self-made maps, short descriptions of the found sites and answers to several questions on how to commemorate them. The Alert can be seen as a nationwide response to non-sites of memory.

The article analyses the reports of the scouts, as well as considering the action as a process. It presents the political background of the action and diagnoses its influence on the results of the reconnaissance conducted - types of places to be found and registered or overlooked by scouts. In particular cases, the Alert generated opportunities during which non-sites of memory could be restored to the public awareness. The paper summarizes the campaign and focuses on two cases: Krępiecki Forest and Adampol, described to present the influence of the Alert on the memory cultures. In the neighbourhood of Krępiecki Forest, the Alert was an impulse to transform a person who saw the mass murder into a key witness. The case of archaeological investigations conducted in Adampol shows the potential of the Alert archive materials to evoke the state of unrest and to become forensic evidence

Key Words

Scouting Alert, body disposal pit, call to action, memory transfer, Nazi crimes, non-site of memory, oblivion, recon, scouts

“Non-sites of memory”² cannot be simply understood as “forgotten” – the notion pertains rather to places which, due to their contested or unsettling status require inter-

vention – a constant re-opening of processes of exploration, documentation and recollection. These processes have been ongoing ever since the end of the war in any

¹ In Polish Scouting terminology, an alert is a campaign or call to action which engages various troops in a particular endeavor. Given that there is no ideal English equivalent, the term has been retained here. See the section below for a further explanation of the term.

² The article was developed within a team research project “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites...” (2016-2020), where the researchers understood non-sites of memory in the following way: “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 2016a: 700). This term is developed further in the article “Sites of violence and their communities: critical memory studies in the post-human era” by Roma Sendyka in this volume.

given part of Poland, yet there are also episodes when those interventions are of especially high intensity. As an example of such an intervention, one can cite the First Scouting Alert – an event organised in 1965 by the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego: ZHP) in cooperation with the Council for the Protection of Monuments of Struggle and Martyrdom (Rada Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa: ROPWiM). During the action, Scout troops were tasked with finding and briefly describing places from their neighbourhoods related to the events of Second World War.

The organizations that prepared the campaign are worth characterizing. ZHP is a coeducational youth organization founded in 1918. It is part of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the World Organization of the Scout Movement. The organization has its own specificity – ZHP was shortly described by its founder Andrzej Małkowski as “scouting plus independence” (Mirowski 1997). ROPWiM, on the other hand, was established on the 2nd of July 1947 by the decision of the Polish legislative parliament as an institution responsible for the identification and documentation of national memorial sites regarded as “sites of struggle and martyrdom of the Polish nation”. By 1965 it had identified approximately 14,000 sites of memory. ROPWiM also had the task of engaging the public in the process of preparing monuments and taking care of the memorial sites (Bartelski 1977). The number of recognized sites increased significantly in the spring of 1965, as a direct result of the Scouting Alert.

Scouting “Alert”. A case of social unrest

The French term “alerte” [in English: “alert” or “warning”] is translated as “alert” in Polish, but the Polish word can also mean “alarm”, referring to a situation when an “alarm is raised” – it is a warning signal calling for readiness or a period of such readiness, signifying a moment of anxiety or agitation. The term also means a state of readiness in reference to an alarming natural phenomenon or a call given by a central authority towards the members of a given society/group (“central alert”, similar to the English “call” as in “call to arms”; this is a key aspect of the meaning associated with the ZHP “alert”). An “Alert” may thus be described as a call, the addressees of which enter a state of agitation and undertake specific actions of a collective or individual character. The phenomenon of “social unrest” includes the launching of social activities (e.g., starting a movement), initiating a discussion on a given topic (discussing particular issues, matters, problems) and a concomitant state of heightened emotions (unrest includes being unbalanced, excitement, a state diametrically opposed to indifference). The first major

dictionary of the Polish language published at the beginning of the 19th century (Linde 1807) quotes the following saying, “Evil. When it goes silent, let it rest”. It may be regarded as a social indication of how to treat topics too hazardous for local identity. In this context, the state of “unrest” can be considered a moment when a taboo is breached. Therefore, an “alert” can evoke a period of social change during which non-sites of memory can be restored to the public awareness.

Annual Scouting “Alerts”

The annual “Alerts” (from the Chief Scout - head of ZHP) were centrally prepared, nation-wide, 2-4 day long intensive scouting campaigns, as a part of which individual scout troops performed the tasks assigned to them by the headquarters of ZHP. The “Alerts” were intended to confirm the efficiency of the Association, to serve its advancement, to consolidate its social standing, and to achieve goals regarded by the leaders to be essential for the society: it organized meetings with combatants, promoted a healthy style of life among the youth, familiarized young people with self-defence techniques or with the fate of Polish children during Second World War and set up regional memorial rooms, mostly at schools, devoted to local history. The “Alert” staff were responsible for monitoring whether the tasks were carried out and for the organization of the campaign, with local staff assigned to each troop. Both the date of the “Alert” and the tasks related to it were kept secret and only announced at the launch (Fietkiewicz 1988).

“The Victory Alert”

The first scouting call to action, “The Victory Alert” also known as “The Scouting Sprint Recon”, was carried out between April 24 and 26 in 1965. The recon included two tasks. Firstly, the scouting troops had to find sites related to the struggle of the Polish nation against the Nazis in 1939–1945, both commemorated and forgotten, gather information about them by interviewing local people and representatives of appropriate organizations dealing with the Nazi occupation, structure (marking by different means: cleaning the place, plucking the grass, putting stones on the body disposal pit³ or fencing it) and commemorate the places and the occasion by paying respect (such as placing flowers or a guard of honour). The forgotten places were to be taken care of by the scouts also after the “Alert”. Secondly, the troops were to find buildings erected after 1945 in their surrounding – during the then 20-year existence of the Polish People’s Republic. This campaign, organized to honour the 20th anniversary

3 In the research project “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites...” we decided to use the term “body disposal pit” rather than “mass grave” as the places we researched were not transformed into graves in terms of funeral rite, marking, their status is unstable. On the designations used in the research by our interviewees see: “Sites of violence and their communities: critical memory studies in the post-human era” by Roma Sendyka in this volume.

of the socialist state, combined recognition of struggles for liberation with the formation of the Polish People's Republic and thereby made visible the development of the country as a result and continuation of the wartime heroism and martyrdom of the nation. The work done for the state's development was regarded in that context as a perpetuation of the wartime struggle for the country (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966; Syrokowski 1972). The first of the abovementioned tasks, as emphasized by the authors of reports on the "Alert", mainly the reports of ZHP, turned out to be much more interesting for the scouts than the other (Scouting Archive CI8; Syrokowski 1972).

The places sought by the scouting troops were located in their own neighbourhoods – in villages within an 8-kilometre radius and in cities nearby individual schools – and, thus, the troop members often knew the people they sourced information from, who were their family members or neighbours. The participants of the campaign were aware that their work had important social ramifications, the activities concerned their immediate surroundings and, in some sense, concerned them personally. Moreover, the recon was potentially attractive, having an appeal as a reconnaissance leading to discovery of a secret. The task performed during the "Victory Alert" was considered by the scout leaders to be successfully completed and unique in comparison to subsequent orders because it met the real needs of the ROPWiM which co-organized it: it would not have been possible to register so many mentioned in the "Alert" documents as "unknown" and "forgotten" sites spread across the country in a few days had there been not for the engagement of the youth organization. Scouting troops were present in almost every primary school (in some schools, more than one troop was active) as indicated by the report summarizing the actions of ZHP in the school year 1964–1965. The campaign involved more than 90 % of the troops. That is, 900 thousand members of ZHP (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966): it was on a massive scale, given that also parents, teachers, policemen and policewomen, soldiers and members of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy were asked to help the scouts. The engagement of society in support of the "Alert" participants was deemed by the leaders of ZHP and ROPWiM one of the event's greatest successes. Between April 21 and May 1, Polish Radio reported on the "Alert" with a total of 36 programmes and messages broadcast on the national radio channels providing announcements, instructions, reports and summaries. There was also television and nationwide and local coverage in the lead-up to the event featuring messages from ZHP and reportages and reports on the "Alert" itself (Scouting Archive CI8,1). As a result of the significant social support of the event and of its broad exposure, it was reported that in many instances the locals who witnessed the events had been waiting for the arrival of the scouting troops and sometimes they even looked for the scouts themselves in order to tell them about the events they saw (Scouting Archive CI8,1). It

can be assumed that this reflected their strong desire to share knowledge.

The event resembled a drill: scout troops were to meet at the appointed time at their places scattered around Poland to open an envelope received from the scout leaders. The contents of the envelope - orders from the Chief Scout, instructions, and a form to be completed – had previously been kept secret. The command explained the tasks of the recon and how they were to be executed. The first stage of the first task consisted of identifying places related to Second World War located nearby, and in choosing a destination of a recon, a place connected to Second World War (sometimes more than one). Then scouts had to do reconnaissance of the site (during this activity some scouts took photos or made drawings), they were asked to evaluate the condition of the site (whether it was marked or commemorated, whether anyone was taking care of it) and gather all available information about the site and associated historical events. This information usually came from the members of local populace, including bystanders who had witnessed the events or even their participants or – in the case of previously known sites – from members of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, ROPWiM and representatives of other institutions. The surveys conducted by scouts indicate that they were most impressed by the memories of partisans and direct witnesses of historical events. The troops had to honour the site for instance with a ceremonial roll-call and a minute of silence. They also had to consider what needed to be done at the site, if possible, by the group in question or with an assistance of some institution – each troop was asked to submit their declaration that it would take care of the neglected site. When the site had not been previously memorialized, the scouts were to suggest how to go about marking the uncommemorated place.

The majority of participants were members of junior troops, mainly pupils at primary school. From today's perspective, the participation of young people in the search for traces of war might be considered potentially traumatic due to the direct exposure to drastic reports given by people who witnessed the events, to the knowledge that mass killings took place in the direct neighbourhood of the scouts' living spaces and to the awareness that the ground they investigated still contained human bodies that were put into the ground without any burial ceremony. No such concern was expressed in the records of the time; they do not address potential remedies for the consequences of shocking children. The Centre for Psycho-Pedagogical Research at the headquarters of ZHP admittedly conducted a participatory observation investigation of the event – every tenth troop was accompanied by Association delegate who filled in the forms about the course of the activities. Furthermore, one scout from every monitored troop was asked to fill in an evaluation questionnaire after the completion of the Alert. Yet the questions in the surveys only concerned the integration of the scouting environment, social engagement in the help for young people, the promotional value and, in particu-

lar' the propaganda effect achieved. They did not address the emotional impact of the event on its participants.

The results

It is reported that the First Scouting Alert resulted in the discovery and description of 6,000 previously unknown or forgotten sites. From the perspective of research on non-sites of memory, this "Alert" is a performative formula created by society in response to non-sites of memory. It is interesting as a phenomenon in itself, as well as with regard to the documents prepared during the action.

The notion of "unknown sites" requires some clarification here: it refers to sites not registered at the time by the ROPWiM. The scouts found those sites thanks to instructions given to them by members of local communities. The individuals or groups who passed on their knowledge to young people engaged in the campaign and who, in turn, registered all information during the "Alert," became actors of memory transfer.

The archives of the reconnaissance available today form a record of a specific, nationwide event which had been initiated in a top-down manner. Sometimes these archives represent valuable evidence for forensic research, demonstrating the necro-performative impact of non-sites of memory. The impact of a dead body, often absent or lost, on the actions of present society is described by Dorota Sajewska (2016) as a search warrant issued by the missing corpse and this is clearly discernible in the context of non-sites of memory. The Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (RCC), an organization working with the Chief Rabbi of Poland, established in 2002, that oversees Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust mass graves, as well as The Forgotten Foundation – formed in RCC structure organization searching for and commemorating abandoned Jewish graves and seeking to create an inventory of them – quite often come across "Alert" reports during their research. The representatives of The Forgotten Foundation are given access to "Alert" reports concerning those places when doing archival research on the location and events associated with a specific site at the Polish Institute of National Remembrance.

The reports

The direct results of these actions – the registration sheets filled in by hand and accompanied by maps, map keys, short descriptions of the found sites and answers to several questions conveyed in the report forms – were sent to the headquarters of ZHP. 26,000 reports were sent/received, among them reports describing sites previously not registered. ZHP handed the reports over to ROPWiM, The National Academy of Sciences and to the Main Commis-

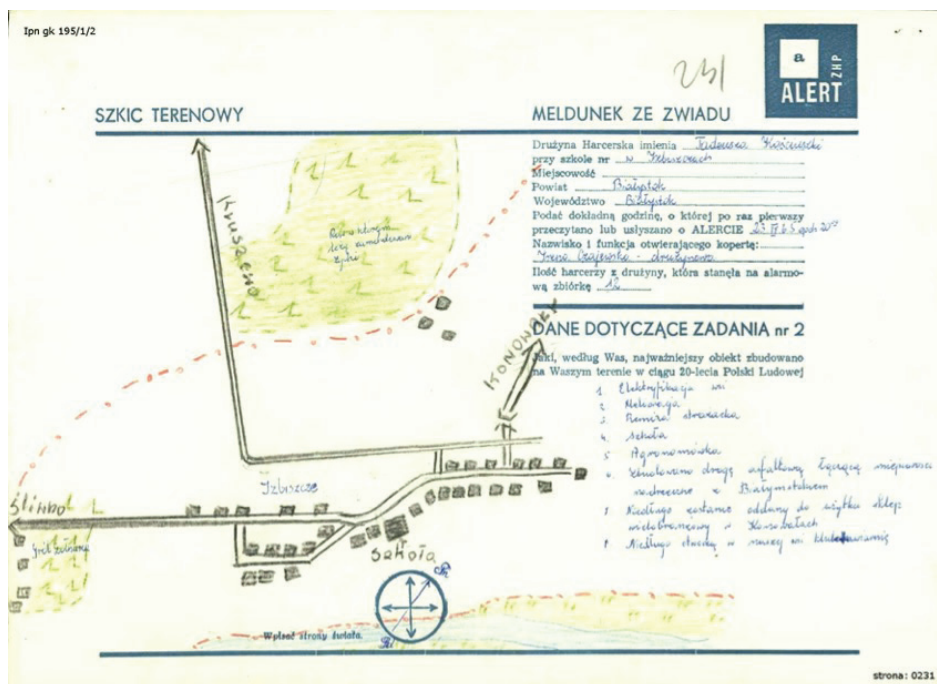
sion for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland – an organization established in 1945 to investigate Nazi crimes in Poland, collect and archive evidence, analyse materials and publish historical analyses. The Commission was established to provide evidence to the courts, the Supreme National Tribunal among others. Investigators from the Commission were tasked with verification of the veracity of scouts' reports. There seems to be no indication that this task was ever accomplished, although it could have progressed slowly as evidenced by the short, red pencil notes on some of the numerous scout reports: "m. up." [commemorated place] and "m. nup." [uncommemorated place]. Considering the numerous investigations of Nazi crimes commenced by the Chief Commission for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland and its local branches, the state of unrest evoked during the scout "Alert" of 1965 could be considered as a call (more precisely one of the calls, including exacerbation of the political situation and propaganda activities) to initiate them.

The scouting event is included in the collection of sources in the *Registers of Sites and Facts of Crimes Committed by the Nazi in the Territory of Poland in 1939–1945*, published by the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes (at present Chief Commission for Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation) in the 1980s. and '90s. The scouts' reports were included in investigation files composed by the Commission and surveys of town courts on the places and facts of Nazi crimes. However, there is a significant difference in scale between those collections of documents – especially the investigatory files compiled by the Commission are as a rule much more detailed than "Alert" reports as they were drafted by qualified investigators and created over an extended period of time. On the other hand, the specific value of the scouts' reports depends on its vernacular character, local knowledge (including local, folk names of the killing places) written down by the troops and, especially, maps. However, these materials have to be read taking into consideration not only the limited competences of the scout investigators, but also a possible tendency of their local informers to change reported events into a tabooed narration and pass over inconvenient facts.

"Memory Sieves"

The memory sieves⁴ are the mechanisms practiced by a given group that serve to distinguish what is considered worth remembering from what is not (Chwin 2016). Here they lead to being inattentive to the difference between sites of armed struggle and the murder of civilians, as well as a lack of ethnic distinctions between civilian victims. This causes some facts and events being omitted. The memory sieves launched during the "Alert" perpetuated the main propaganda lines of Władysław Gomułka's

4 The memory sieve is a metaphor coined by the Polish literary historian and writer Stefan Chwin. Memory sieves might have different origins, i.e. family, neighbourhood and generational, political, religious, gender (Chwin 2016).



Map 1. Map on the back of the Alert report from Izbiszcze (village in the east of Poland). Notes on the map: “Rów w którym leżą zamordowani Żydzi” [the ditch where the murdered Jews lie], “Grób żołnierza” [soldier’s grave], “Szkoła” [school], and villages names. Institute of National Remembrance, IPN GK 195/I/2, p. 241.

government (Żukowski 2014; Wołowicz 2014). Gomułka was the head of the ruling communist PZPR party [Polish United Workers’ Party] from 1956 until 1970. His government is known for the anti-Semitic campaign that took place in Poland in 1968. In 1965, the year of the “Alert”, the anti-Semitic attitudes of the rulers were not yet so perceptible, however, patriotic sentiments aimed at nationalism were increasingly present (Żukowski 2014; Wołowicz 2014). The matrix of subjective narrative emphasized the active and armed participation of the Polish nation in the struggle for independence. As Stefan Chwin (2016) writes, this matrix was built during the partitions of Poland, during the PRL period and after 1989. In the mid-1960s, it was strengthened by the state-building discourse of PRL a clear case of which was the second “Alert” task. The desired form of national solidarity, one built on the basis of “exalted bloodshed and common sacrifice on the front line and behind it” (Puerta and Żukowski 2014, 222), excludes the “passive” part of society to which Jewish victims were attributed. The cult of heroes overlaps with an anti-Semitic cliché that excludes the Jewish minority from history, the subject of which was exclusively the Polish nation.

The Victory Alert issued by the Chief Scout of ZHP, conveying the propaganda message associated with the 20th anniversary of the People’s Republic of Poland, centred on the importance of identifying sites related to the national struggle with the former occupants. One would expect, therefore, that the reports focus predominantly on

battle sites and graves of soldiers and partisans and there is little or no reference to the disposal pits with remains of civilians, including places related to the Holocaust. Yet, it is the notion not only of “sites of struggle”, but also “martyrdom” that is used as an official term in the “Alert” reports. To substantiate this statement, I will refer to how the “Alert” tasks were formulated by scout leaders (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966). The objective was

to honour sites of the nation’s martyrdom, to find sites of liberation struggles and gather information about them, to find sites of struggles with the Nazis, to find the lost places or monuments not taken care of, to find places of forgotten deaths, during the trip = recon to find places where the graves are located, to find places of execution from the Second World War.

Moreover, the publication summarizing the outcome of the recon published by Scouts Publishing house, *Na szlakach walki* [On the trails of conflict] (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966) too, records not only places of struggle but also the execution sites, sites of tortures and of body disposal pits of murdered civilians. Its authors argue that the Spring Call to Action and the resulting publication were an exercise in the didactic and identity-forming work of reading the landscape⁵ and the history inscribed in it, as in a book:

5 On modes of reading landscapes and cultural remembrances and on mapping as a research method see: Fyfe, J. (2020). *Unsettled Landscapes: The Narrative and Material Capacities of Landscape in the Post-War Croatian Hinterlands* (Doctoral thesis).

The earth is a book of experience. And the Polish land is a particularly rich book. The times of the Second World War are engraved in each of its locations: in every wood, on every field, on every street and in every house. Browsing through its tragic pages is the experience for youth.

This is why we stand to attention for the Alert...

As the event progressed, it was impossible not to come across some of the thousands of body disposal pits of the victims of the Holocaust, especially since it was the bystanders of the wartime event who suggested the direction of the searches and led scout troops to the places which they remembered the most. Therefore, as indicated in the reports, both the sites of struggle and those of suffering were investigated by the scouts. In the process of "reading the [book of] Polish land" that took place in mid-1960s, many body disposal pits containing remains of people of different nationalities were discovered. In the documentation and publications issuing from the event, materials concerning the body disposal pits of victims not engaged in the civilian struggle or of members of national minorities were yet not always differentiated from information about units and groups engaged in the struggle for national liberation. Descriptions of the maps drafted by the scouts admittedly include information on the victims' ethnic identity, yet the body disposal pits pictured on the maps are not usually distinguished in a visual way from places of struggle. The Jewish and Polish disposal pits are usually marked on the maps in the same way, using a square, circle, X sign, a cross or combination of those marks, and they do not seem to depend on the ethnicity or religion of the victims. However, the emphasis on the heroic history of Poland as the way that led to building the Polish People's Republic might be the reason for some of the disproportion between the number of reports between both groups of potential findings. This might also have led members of the scout troops to experience feelings of confusion and disappointment when the pit turned out to be occupied by German and not Polish or Soviet soldiers (National Archives in Kielce, 21/1101/153).

The publication *Na szlakach walki* (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1966) does not seem to differentiate war or uprising victims from murdered civilians. It places information on the victims of the September campaign (the invasion of Poland in 1939 which began the Second World War in Poland), on French Prisoners of War (POWs), on Polish and Soviet victims of the POW camps, prisoners from Szucha Alley (the infamous Gestapo headquarters and an investigative prison in Warsaw), or unknown soldiers, on an equal footing. The reports provide information on the bomb attack on Arbeitsamt (German Labour Office responsible for round-ups and deportations of Poles to the Third Reich) by the Polish Underground

Movement and sites of other partisan activities, on places of struggle from the period of the Warsaw Uprising and other clashes with the occupying forces. The publication also refers to murdered policemen and gives information on a group of people murdered during the Death March, children who froze to death during transport, and the Jewish victims of the Siedlce ghetto. It is only the last mentioned report which refers directly to Jewish victims. Although other information on the execution of civilians might have concerned Jewish people, the reader would assume they were ethnic Poles since there is no information about ethnicity or religion. Summarizing, among 74 "Alert" reports included in the album, only one addresses the murders of members of the Jewish community and explicitly established the victims as Jewish.

The political and dignity sieve of memory based on the matrix of the subjectivity and agency of the Polish nation and anti-Semitic tendencies was not the only factor leading to the sifting of sites registered by scouts and others not mentioned in their reports: connected with victims of different ethnicity that turned out not to suit well enough the patriotic narration of the time. Among other possible contexts, the educational sieve is worth mentioning. The questionnaire surveys carried out among scouts indicate a high repeatability of responses to the task concerning the history of Second World War: defining the Nazis and mentioning war heroes (people who "fought the Nazis"), including Mieczysław Moczar (the leader of the government section who in 1968 would lead to an outbreak of anti-Semitic sentiment). The scouts' answers seem very emotional but also, in the vast majority of cases, perfectly in line with state propaganda, also on the rhetorical level (National Archives in Kielce, 21/1101/153, 84-89).

Remembrance

The "Alert" order of the Chief Scout obliged scout troops to arrange and take care of the investigated sites that were not cared for before the recon.

A year after the Victory Alert, in 1966, at the request of ZHP, the Council for the Protection established the medal of Guardian of National Remembrance Sites awarded to teams and groups who "grant permanent patronage over a memorial site". This patronage meant the obligation of regularly cleaning up the site, organising a guard of honour during national holidays and anniversaries and drawing up a chronicle of the site. From a general perspective, the action of patronage turned out to be very successful (IPN GK 195/VIII/21, 19-27). Some scout troops addressed relevant institutions with the application for taking patronage over the place even before the medal was established, already during the "Alert". Such requests were granted.

The appeal to take care of "the sites of national memory" was repeated by the Chief Scout on various occasions connected with the establishment of The Polish People's Republic. The cooperation with the scouting institutions



Figure 1. Photo attached to the report from the reconnaissance in Zamość (Zmość-Zameczysko). Caption on the back of the photo: “Scouts of troop no. 5 from Zamość build up the grave of an unknown Jew murdered by the Nazi invaders”. Institute of National Remembrance, IPN GK 195/VIII/21, pp. 39-40.

undertaken by ROPWiM was aimed at educating young people in a patriotic spirit, therefore it can be assumed that the “Alert” participants, following their leaders, particularly appreciated sites connected with the defence and liberation struggles. Therefore, such places could be especially predestined for scout patronage. Despite the institutional work and numerous symbolic activities, the scouting patronage did not always survive the test of time. Places associated with Jews, which did not directly fit into the patriotic paradigm, could be at a greater risk of being abandoned and often returned to a state of oblivion. This can be supposed on the basis of the contemporary field research of the RCC. According to interviews conducted by The Forgotten Foundation at particular sites where the “Alert” took place, local residents indicate 1968 as the date when the scouts stopped looking after memorial sites related to the extermination of Jews. If so, this fact would be easily connected with the aforementioned anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. However, Agnieszka Nieradko from RCC highlights that this date may appear in the narrative of witnesses on the basis of associations as the year 1968 is a very powerful and symbolic date in Polish imaginary, i.e. the information may not be true (interview with Nieradko, Warsaw 15.07.2018). Still, the sites recorded in 1965 and examined nowadays by the RCC have again fallen into oblivion in the decades following the “Alert”, remembered in the performative form of oblivion: bypassing, abandonment or silencing the voice when talked about. The “Alert” resulted in many record cards which can still be used today. “Alert” documentation is included in the archival resource of the Institute of National Remembrance, some of the State Archives (The Archive of New Files, the State Archives in Poznań, in Kraśnik and in Katowice) and the ZHP Museum Archive.

The effective stirring of memory. A case of Krępiecki Forest

One of the “Alert” reports describing the killing site in Krępiecki Forest in the south-east of Poland, several kilometres from the Majdanek Concentration Camp, was accompanied by an 11-page-long account written down in 1953 by a direct witness of the killings of mostly Jewish victims. It was the testimony of Roman Podolski, a citizen of one of the villages neighbouring the forest. In the case of Podolski, as can be proved by a detailed analysis of archives collected in various locations, an impulse of “unrest” evoked by the scout “Alert” not only made him share his testimony, but also motivated him to conduct other activities connected with memory of the crime. On the 22nd of April 1942, while observing a mass killing, Podolski saw a Jew, named by him “The Brave One”, who escaped the execution and ran away. After the “Alert” Podolski decided to write a letter to Polish Radio, asking if they could find out whether the “Brave” Jew was still alive. In the letter, Podolski explains the history of Krępiecki Forest and his role as a witness. The letter was probably the first bottom-up act of communication by Podolski as a witness of the crime. Although there is no evidence that the Radio conducted any search for the potential survivor, it can be traced that it sent Podolski’s letters to the Regional Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Lublin. This information led to the decision to initiate an investigation that lasted in the years 1966-1977. Podolski was one of the witnesses questioned in this investigation (IPN Lu 284.410 t. 1., k. 3.).

The story of Podolski makes it possible to investigate how the “Alert” evoked a specific atmosphere, meaning that memory could have an influence on the non-site of memory. It seems that the state of unrest evoked by the

"Alert" was an impulse which transformed Podolski from a person who saw the murder into a key witness who undertakes the responsibility to remember, record and transmit his testimony.⁶

A case of Adampol

As noted earlier, the scouts' reports are included in the documentation obtained by institutions and researchers that ask in the Polish Institute of National Remembrance about archival materials pertaining to the sites of the Holocaust in Poland. The informative value of this "Alert" is primarily the fact that when it was carried out in 1965, many direct witnesses of the events were still alive. Secondly, the maps drawn by the scouts with a wind rose and reference points (the instructions for the creation of maps were simple: the scouts were advised to mark places related to Second World War, as well as locations of nearby bus stops or other sites related to mass communication), based on recollections of wartime inhabitants of the areas, still prove helpful in locating the sites. In the research conducted by the Forgotten Foundation and archaeological investigations leading to the discovery of disposal pits containing bodies, the reports made by scouts are used in combination with aerial photographs and non-invasive terrain tests.

In the town of Adampol in the east of Poland (<https://m.zapomniane.org/miejsce/adampol/>, accessed: 21.09.2019) the scouts found two "sites of struggle or martyrdom": a fenced in and ordered "place of murder of the Polish population" (as it was framed by the scout troop in the report) where the remains of seven partisans were said to have been found (the scout report does not mention who found the bodies or when it happened) and a neglected "place of murder of the Jewish population" where 300 Jewish people were believed to have been murdered. Both places were marked on an "Alert" map with rectangular figures and the difference in the victims' ethnic, national or religious identity can be established exclusively on the basis of a description accompanying the map provided in the report. The "Alert" sheet, containing information on both locations, speaks of a need to "extend care towards the place" and, indeed, the scouting troop declared the intention to take care of the location in the aftermath of the "Alert". Nevertheless, the sheet does not include any indication as to which of the two places was to be taken care of. Neither is a plural form used, the two marked places being located at a significant distance from each other. Since the Chief Guide's order called for the need to take care of forgotten places, one could assume that the scouts declared that they would look after the neglected site. And yet, contrary to these assumptions, it was at the site dedicated to the memory of the partisans that a boulder with a memory plaque was placed in 1966 (and is still there today) (IPN GK 175/78). The scout "Alert" could initiate this commemorative intervention. When the members of the RCC embarked on

an endeavour to find the location of the Jewish remains in 2013, they found neither a sign of commemoration nor any marking of body disposal pits. They were not able to locate the site as there were no witnesses who could point them in the direction of the site. On this basis one may assume that in a "place of murder of Jewish people" no commemoration was set up or, if it was, it was so insignificant or short-lived that it has been forgotten.

In 2015, the archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls, commissioned by the Pomeranc Group and the Office of the Chief Rabbi of Poland, conducted non-invasive archaeological research in Adampol. It was clear that in the town or in its surroundings, in the course of several mass executions, a large group of Jews were murdered who had previously been imprisoned in the labour camp. On the basis of available documents, in-field investigations and LIDAR survey data techniques the archaeologist marked ten places where the bodies of the victims may have been located. One of those places was located in the vicinity of the site marked during the scout "Alert". In this case, the "Alert" report was the only source indicating precisely its location and defining it as "the place of murder". It was checked by the archaeologists against the result of LIDAR examination and the aerial photo which allowed for a precise selection of the area to be studied. Today the site is a field. Reading the historical maps on Google Earth allowed Sturdy Colls to conclude that the chosen area, despite being part of a field, had been excluded from cultivation until at least 2011 – it had been left fallow. If the presence of remains at the site were confirmed, we could speak of a practice of "non-memory" described by Roma Sendyka (2016b) as "not revealing and yet maintaining relations to a certain event from the past". In this practice, which can be observed among others in Poland in the context of body disposal pits of the victims of non-Polish ethnicity, sites of memory are highlighted by not being transformed, thereby introducing an atmosphere of taboo around the semiotic memory transfer. The memory of the presence of dead bodies is not verbalized or marked by any monument or readable sign located in the area. In the case of "non-memory", it has a performative, silent way of transferring activities and omissions. However, field research conducted in Adampol with the use of ground radar yielded a negative result. The acquired image did not indicate the presence of human remains; shallow changes in the structure of the soil had arisen rather as a result of the removal of vegetation in this place (Sturdy Colls 2015). The final report prepared by the archaeologist does not exclude the possibility that murders might have taken place at the site located by the scouts and that some remains might have been buried there and exhumed a long time ago (perhaps during the occupation itself, in order to be burnt in the process of obliterating evidence of the crimes – authors note); no serious disturbances were discovered in the magnetic structure of the soil.

It seems significant that in their report the scouts do not call the area studied by Sturdy Colls a "cemetery", "body

6 See also Szczepan, Kobielska in this volume. Esp. the category of the crown witness.

disposal pit” or “grave”, but only a “place of murder”. Perhaps the bodies of the victims were never buried here.

Conclusion

When discussed in relation to non-sites of memory, the term “alert” can be understood as a transgression and an act of questioning of the existing reality performed by the “Alert” participants as well as their possible followers who, as in the case of Podolski, after the action found themselves in the state of unrest and mobilization. As a result of this mobilization, the status of non-sites of memory, their conceptualizations, local, state or wider dimensions, may be affected, though it does not happen in most of the cases of oblivion. The “Alert” would be read as an action aiming to supplement the registry of memory, extending it onto a site or sites that have yet to be recognized. It is an act whose objective is ultimately to neutralize the disturbing awareness of the existence of non-sites of memory, which is done through gathering, announcing, registering, or forwarding knowledge about events related to those places. The analysis of “Alert” as processual act of vehicular, bottom-up communication in which a local community informs the centre about the disturbing scandal of oblivion and lack of commemoration associated with the neighbourhood of human disposal pits, allows one to indicate its potential consequences. “Alerts” can evoke the transformation of a non-site of memory into a memorial site or the easing of potential movement and unrest. “Alert” reports have been deposited in the archive in order to be investigated by the Main Commission for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland. At present, rather unexpectedly for the report writers, they are and may be used as a call to action for future potential memory researchers. Thanks to the preserved documentation, the state of unrest, caused by the “Alert” in 1965 and probably suspended around 1968, and the direct entrustment resulting from it, may be triggered again. Reports produced by scouts have the potential to become forensic evidence and to awaken doubts, sometimes impossible to settle, about history and local memory and especially about their Holocaust parts.

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Depth of the field. Bystanders' art, forensic art practice and non-sites of memory

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Abstract

Abandoned sites of trauma often become objects of art-based research. The forensic turn offered artists the requisite tools to approach uncommemorated post-violence sites to interact with their human and non-human actors. The usage of artistic methods allows us to inspect nondiscursive archives and retrieve information otherwise unavailable. The new wave of “forensic art” joins the efforts of post-war artists to respond to sites of mass killings. In the post-war era, sites of trauma were presented as (implicated) *landscapes*, or unhospitable *terrains*. The tendency to narrow space to the site and to contract the perspective is continued today by visual artists entering difficult memory grounds, looking down, inspecting the ground with a “forensic gaze”. A set of examples of such artistic endeavors, following the research project *Uncommemorated Genocide Sites and Their Impact on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland* (2016–2020) is discussed as “bystanders’ art.”

Key Words

art-based research, bystanders, forensic art, Holocaust, non-sites of memory, genocide

Introduction

Uncommemorated post-violence sites, sites that witnessed the Holocaust or another type of mass violence but have not been marked with monuments of explanatory plaques, display paradoxical faculties. On the one hand, these are specific locations that contemporary researchers and activists are able to localize and describe with precise geographical coordinates, as if violence left a punctual trace. On the other hand, they are frequently discussed, recalled, explained and visualized as if they were topographically more extensive than they really are, as if they were swallowed by their surroundings. In his 2014 essay on sites of past trauma, Martin Pollack grasped and aptly described the cause of the “dilution”, the “spilling over” of the violence of the past out of its historical area into a larger space:

Some time ago, I came across a photograph in the internet of Karolina Bullowa’s stone house. In that house, all the Jews who had been hiding were killed,

together with the owner who had put them up. The photo was taken just after these things happened. In the foreground you could see a regular wooden fence and behind it a stone house, two holes where the windows used to be, no roof – that had gone up in flames. Some years back I went off to find this spot, and the house was gone. An old man there led me to a meadow where sheep were grazing. “Here it all happened,” he said, and showed me where by making a large arc with his hand. “Here those people were shot and buried immediately afterwards.” Around that place was empty space, nothing more, only the appearance of unspoiled nature. A beautiful mountain scene” (Pollack 2014: 31).

In this article, we test the usefulness of landscape as a key to opening up the enigmatic mnemotope of non-sites of memory. In the subsequent reflections, we follow the work of artists who have visualized abandoned and uncommemorated sites of violence. We consider their

representations as a way of engaged research procedures, formatted as a truth-finding actions performed at sites of mass crime, and a form of communicating the results of detailed analyses of non-sites of memory.¹

In the last decade the term “landscape” has become a conceptual basis for many, ever more specialist and precise terms in studies on memory. There is research into: campscapes,² traumascapes (Tumarkin 2005; Violi 2012), terrorscapes (Otto 2009; Laarse et al. 2014), the forensic landscapes and, more broadly, Holocaust (Cole 2014, 2016; Cole et al. 2014) and post-memory spaces (Kaplan 2013; Szczepan 2014). Landscape also appears as a key category in critical research into the so-called *environmental history of the Holocaust* (Małczyński 2017, 2018; Domańska 2017; Małczyński, et al. 2020) and *ecocriticism* (Rapson 2015, Ubertowska 2019). It is certainly still a very productive category in research on the topography of violence.

The category of landscape in the context of the Holocaust allows us to investigate highly contrastive perspectives – the human and the non-human. Victims' testimonies (Cole 2016), wartime historical and visual documents by perpetrators (Schama 1995; Małczyński 2018) and post-war documentations by victims and bystanders allow us to reconstruct Holocaust landscapes from a multitude of perspectives. In this article we will follow the point of view of post-war observers that strove to perceive abandoned and dispersed sites of violence, producing a particular kind of “bystanders' art”. We will be particularly interested in a shift from constructing a broad panorama typical for a landscape genre, to narrowing the scope of observation, lowering the eyesight, concentrating the attention on the narrow portion of land. This recent action of a visual “zoom into” the landscape might reveal a fundamental motivation of visitors trying to understand the past of the abandoned, uncommemorated sites that have suffered violence, the need to answer the urgent question: “What does it mean to stand in the place of death?” (Schuppli 2014). The effects of such inquiries we will call here “forensic art”.

From landscape to forensic art

Crime-scene as sight

Conceiving uncommemorated sites of the violence of World War II visually as landscapes – landscapes remaining in a relationship with memory – has a long history. We

can probably find its origins in the photographs taken in the course of local crime scene investigations carried out by Regional and Chief Commissions for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation and the Central Jewish Historical Commission – institutions founded in 1945 and 1944 in Poland and working – among other tasks – on documenting German crimes from the time of the Nazi occupation. These investigations were the beginnings of a photographic archive of sites that witnessed trauma. The basic poetics of visualizing a post-violence site was then established: the most frequently chosen composition is a wide shot whose center is taken up by material remains that are indexically linked to the reality of the time of conflict, and the scene is devoid of post-war people or objects.

This poetics has reached out to find its artistic expression: it was particularly popularized by the world-renowned documentary form 1955, *Night and Fog*, by Alain Resnais, in which colored shots of Birkenau taken in the 1950s were used alongside black and white archival footage received from different documenting institutions and victims' associations. A similar approach was used in Claude Lanzmann's 1985 documentary *Shoah*. Lanzmann's “extreme long shots of wide-open landscapes” (Prager 2015) became emblematic for the film, as well as filming in bright light, and including in shots the post-camp remains, surrounded by trees and plants. In both seminal cases the post-violence space was presented in the same convention: sites discovered as uncommemorated, solitary, abandoned (Kligerman 2008).

These films, however, represent a change in the poetics of the visualization of wartime landscapes in comparison to the one developed for the needs of courts and archives by investigating public institutions. Margaret Olin, commenting on the landscape strategy of *Shoah*, immediately calls the landscapes as presented “pastoral”; the nature is “beautiful” and the ultimate scene achieved is “mythological” (Olin 1997: 1). “Holocaust landscapes” à la Lanzmann should be understood in the context of the genre of landscape painting. The over-determination of the scene of nature causes a particular “visual trope” to be perpetuated, going on to become easily recognizable (Szczepan 2014). *Shoah* landscapes will become a fixed point of reference and the most inspiring representative tradition for attempts to look at post-violence sites that have been *absorbed* by their natural environment.

Accenting the aesthetic attributes of a landscape surrounding a non-site of violence sharpens the contrast be-

1 We understand non-sites of memory as dispersed locations of various genocides, ethnic cleansings, and other similarly motivated acts of violence. “The basic indicator is lack of information (altogether or of proper, founded information), of material forms of commemoration (plaques, monuments, museums), and of reparation (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 has 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 blending of 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 forsaking of memorialization leading to ethnically problematic revitalization that draws criticism” (Sendyka 2016: 700).

2 See the website and publications of the project *Campscapes*: <https://www.campscapes.org/> (accessed: 10.08.2016).



Figure 1. Terrain of KL Plaszów, 29 May 1946, IPN 16745, evidence from crime-scene investigations.

tween the associations evoked by what is *seen* and those evoked by what is *known*. Nature that is easy on the eye is presented in a mode of suspicion or even accusation. Lupine and pine trees grow on the ashes of the victims of Operation Reinhardt (Germans camouflaged the area of the liquidated death camps of Treblinka, Bełżec and Sobibór). Nature hides the crime in an act of cooperation with perpetrators and beneficiaries. The landscape can be read, therefore, as being implicated in the genocidal past, i.e. “entangled in historical and present-day injustices” with multiple “modes of implication” that can be “complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory, but are nonetheless essential to confront in pursuit of justice” (Rothberg 2019: 2).

The video-installation of Dominika Macocha (2016) is a good example that amplifies the reference to the Lanzmann tradition of visualizing post-Holocaust sites and that exemplifies the urge to “confront implication”. Her work is named after the geographical coordinates of three places to be discussed in the work (50°31'29.7"N, 22°46'39.1"E; 50°30'56.2"N, 22°46'01.0"E; 50°30'41.0"N, 22°45'49.5"E). A part of her work is a twenty-minute film presenting absolutely breath-taking, ostentatiously aesthetic “post-card” shots of the Solska Forest Landscape Park near Biłgoraj in the north-east part of Poland, filmed in the same manner as many of the cadres we saw in *Shoah*: in beautiful weather, in full light, fusing long shots or medium-long shots and aerial shots. Witness testimonies reveal a vague legend – about some previous buildings of a church that was flooded by water, and of an old tavern.



Figure 2. Dominika Macocha, a frame from video work 50°31'29.7"N, 22°46'39.1"E; 50°30'56.2"N, 22°46'01.0"E; 50°30'41.0"N, 22°45'49.5"E available courtesy of the artist.

It turns out it is a cover for the historically rather recent event of an attack on a bunker where Jews were hiding towards the end of the war (around twenty people were murdered). Macocha's work explicitly states something that is only implied in Lanzmann's *Shoah*: the forest – a natural environment that keeps mum, obscures, destroys evidence of crimes – it works in a similar way to the humans who would like to hush up the stories incriminating them in the Holocaust.

The *terrain* of crime

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, with a return of international artist-researchers to Poland, a new strategy began

to emerge. Ulrich Baer, in his *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (2005) points to a new poetics for the representation of landscapes of post-violence sites. Photographers like Dirk Reinartz (*Totenstill* 1994) or Mikael Levin (*War Story* 1997) abandon the “wide spectacle” of a landscape and draw our gaze to the peripheries of camps. They reduce the distance between the observer and the object, and do not look for the picturesque cadres. According to Baer’s diagnosis, “The landscape’s imagined depth – where experience, imagination, and memory may be contained – vanishes into utterly abstracted and inhospitable *terrain* [emphasis ours]” (Baer 2005: 41). The viewer becomes aware of the fact that they have lost distance and found themselves in an “inhospitable”, repulsive place. The visual turn from *scenery* that is remote from the observer to the *terrain* that surrounds them coincides, it is worth noting, with the shift in cognitive conceptions of the landscape offered by social scientists. In the early 1990s, the geographer Kenneth R. Olwig and the anthropologist Tim Ingold published articles recommending substantial, action-oriented and active conception of landscape as a real being and not a representation (Ingold 1993; Olwig 1996).

The convention described above, of presenting a landscape as a *terrain*, clearly dominates the strategies of artists commenting on the ontology of non-sites of memory. Limiting the shot, filling it with disconcerting elements, the reduction of distance, introducing the point of view into the observed scene, the cognitive disorientation arising from the overload of uncommunicating elements and a peculiar vertigo to the point of fainting (the consternation brought on by removing a stabile horizontal line) – all this leads to the paradoxical effect of including the observer in a post-violence site (which they cannot now escape from). An example of one of the first Polish works investigating *terrains* of non-sites of memory was the series *Kawalek ziemi* (*A Piece of Land*) by Andrzej Kramarz, from 2009. The video, with its almost motionless shot of a clearing in Ukraine (Kiryłówka) and a set of nine large-format photographs, presented the sites of German, Ukrainian and Polish war crimes.

Looking down – forensic analysis

The process of limiting one’s view and focusing on the *terrain*, drawing near to the uncommemorated site up to the point of entering into its sphere of influence and encroaching its borders, *looking down* at the *ground* with a bowed head and *looking out* for evidence introduces a new subject investigating the site of a mass crime. In the classical landscape, the observer is typically distanced, unmoved, rational, dominating and authoritative. Photo-



Figure 3. Andrzej Kramarz, *Kawalek ziemi* [*A Piece of Land*], 2009, Stefkowa. Available courtesy of the author.

graphs taken at non-sites of memory often reveal someone who is active, searching, who seeks the *truth* about the past. The artist/researcher is, in this case, more of an archaeologist and investigator than connoisseur or consumer (of a *landscape*), or a surprised and disoriented wanderer (entering a *terrain*), who has suddenly found themselves in an inhospitable place. This attentive researcher activates the “archaeological gaze,” penetrating seemingly empty spaces (“where there is nothing to see”) in comparative effort to look for what remains and what had been lost (Didi-Huberman 2017: 66). Turning one’s attention or lens towards the ground is a gesture opening up a third, today an increasingly common tendency in visualizing sites of uncommemorated violence – one whereby the landscape is neither a *view* nor a *terrain*, but the *scene of a crime* committed on victims of mass violence. And finding oneself in such a place means taking on a responsibility.

“What does it mean to stand in the place of death?” This question was posed in Izbica, Albania, a village where 120 Kosovan Albanians were killed in 1999. The question is asked by the narrator of the film *Material Witness* (2014), directed by Susan Schuppli, a British artist, a member of the group Forensic Architecture (Forensic Architecture 2014).³ At the site of the crime, at first sight, there is nothing to see – as the narrator admits. “No trace effects, no signs of struggle, no visible residue, to alert us to what transpired”. Yet, the one who has come here “knows that brutal things have taken place here”. So the film-maker looks for “the right way of looking”, a “recalibration” of the tools of recording, so as to be able to, finally, “decode the semiotics of landscapes, in which the processes of fertile growth dynamically reprogram the environments and remove history”.⁴ The investigative

³ For the research results of the project, see: *Forensis. The Architecture of Public Truth*, ed. Forensic Architecture, Sternberg Press and Forensic Architecture, Berlin 2014. The webpage of the project (grant ERC): <https://forensic-architecture.org/> (accessed: 10.08.2019).

⁴ Quoted from the soundtrack of the film at 1:00 minute into the film. See: <http://susanschuppli.com/exhibition/material-witness-2/> (accessed: 10.08.2019).

practice includes, for instance, looking for environmental signs (Sendyka 2017) – severed tree-tops, stained low-lying vegetation, the disfigured shape of the terrain and soil mixed with remains. In addition, technical images are also used: there are machines which “saw what happened on those slopes:” satellites, video-cameras, phones. In contrast to the previously mentioned projects, here non-human witnesses are summoned to bear witness – plants, earth, amateur recordings, electromagnetic wave recordings, images from laser meters. Technologies effectively oppose the power of a landscape to swallow up the past – a landscape which stands accused of colluding with perpetrators.

From a forensic, investigative or criminologist perspective, the environment can cooperate with the detective: the landscape is a source of evidence, crucial to the building of a case (Schuppli 2020). This perspective eludes traditional ways of approaching the landscape: the passive experience of landscape as a mere view and the active experience of a scene of action. This ties together the perspectives of human and non-human actors, emphasizing “informed materiality” (Isabelle Stengers term), i.e. the properties of things or of a technological record to recreate the details of genocide (Forensic Architecture 2014; Dziuban 2017; Weizman 2017). The landscape is here transformed into an image that acts cognitively, is capable of generating data.

The concept of “forensic landscape” emerged after 2000, stimulated by the experience of conflict archaeologists in their search for victims and evidence of genocide in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (Hanson 2004; Cox et al. 2008; Cyr 2014). A forensic landscape is “a physical parameter within which a sequence of events is discernible in noted topographical disturbances in and around a burial site” (Cyr 2014: 85). The forensic practice of reading a landscape is characteristic of all artistic projects working with a research team investigating non-sites of memory.

Forensic art and the non-sites of memory

During the course of the project,⁵ the team undertook co-operation with four artists: Karolina Grzywnowicz, Angela Henderson, Solomon Nagler and Anna Zagrodzka, as well as two researchers experienced with craftsmanship and various media: Wiesław Bartkowski and Aleksander Schwarz. In one case – Karolina Grzywnowicz – artistic work served as the point of departure for the research work of the team members – providing us with material, guidance and serving as a reference point. In all



Figure 4. Karolina Grzywnowicz, *Ground records* – visual note, documentation of a site, 2020. Available courtesy of the author.

cases, the artists produced their own artistic response to the sites investigated by researchers. In what follows, we will present their general approaches.

Ground records: microscopic examinations

Karolina Grzywnowicz developed a concept for an art installation titled *Ground Records* on the basis of the material gathered in the course of our research at the site of the former camp SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor – a Nazi extermination camp which operated from May 1942 until October 1943 and where around 200,000 Jews were killed in gas chambers (Kuwałek 2014). While the former camp is now in the process of being transformed into a monument and a museum, it has partly functioned as – and its margins still are – a non-site of memory. In her concept for the artwork, Grzywnowicz examines soil from non-sites of memory as a material witness of past violence (Schuppli 2020). In her definition of “material witness”, Schuppli refers to entities whose physical properties or technical configuration records evidence of past events to which it can bear witness. In the case of the soil from Sobibór the recording is strikingly precise: as the archeological research showed, the sandy ground has preserved imprints of the camp infrastructure in the form of dark marks against the bright yellow background. There are also traces of the human presence and movement in the area, like the “trodden” – a layer of compressed soil in the place where the prisoners had to stand for a long time, and were they moved between the ramp and the tunnel leading to the gas chambers.

Grzywnowicz focuses on the notion of landscape that keeps “archival records” in its soil and “evidence” of the

⁵ *Uncommemorated Genocide Sites and Their Impact on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland* (Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the National Programme for the Development of Humanities, 2016–2020, registration no 2aH 15 0121 83) developed in the Research Center for Memory Cultures, Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University. Principal investigator: Roma Sendyka, team members: Katarzyna Grzybowska, Aleksandra Janus, Karina Jarzyńska, Maria Kobielska, Jacek Małczyński, Jakub Muchowski, Łukasz Posłuszny, Kinga Siewior, Mikołaj Smykowski, Katarzyna Suszkiewicz, Aleksandra Szczepan. Site of the project: <http://niemiejscapamieci.uj.edu.pl/> (accessed 10.08.2020).

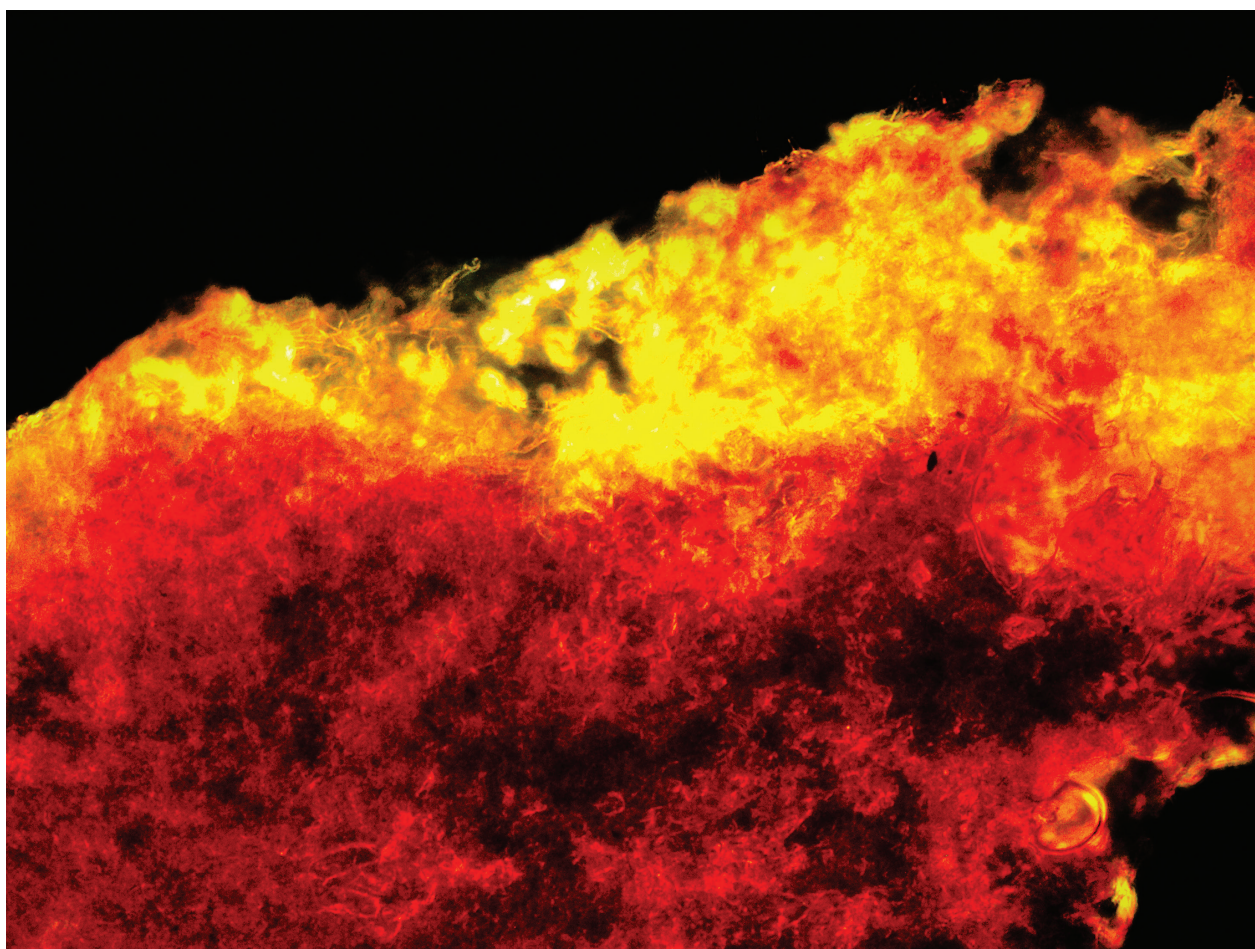


Figure 5. Anna Zagrodzka, *Epicoccum nigrum*, 2014. Available courtesy of the author.

murderous acts that have contaminated it (Pollack 2014). The aim of *Ground Records* is to invite the viewer to look at the ground through a forensic lens and explore it as a living archive – one constantly affected by complex interplays between natural forces and human endeavors.

Anna Zagrodzka is also concerned with the area formerly occupied by the camp in Sobibór, but she has taken a different approach. She has been documenting the post-camp terrain, focusing on the natural succession of living vegetation that takes place in these sites, especially when they are not protected by rigorous conservation procedures. As a biologist with laboratory training and experience, Zagrodzka visually documented the site of the former Nazi camp Konzentrationslager Stutthof in northern Poland which has been overgrown by nature, with the aid of photography and microscopic analysis as well as photographic documentation of the grounds. She has been also working for six years on the project *Alternaria alternata*, focused on the molds – from which the project's title comes from – that appear in the sites of former camps, especially in those parts where the infrastructure has been preserved (in Auschwitz-Birkenau or Stutthof).

In Sobibór, Anna Zagrodzka has concentrated on documenting the poorly visible yet still extant traces

of the camp in an area that looks empty, like a run-of-the-mill forest to the untrained eye. She has also traced them outside the grounds of the new museum project, in two locations in the strip of marsh surrounding the former camp from the north and the west, where human remains were identified by the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries (RCC) – an entity supervised by the office of the Chief Rabbi of Poland which is responsible for Jewish burial sites in Poland – and the Zapomniane (“Forgotten”) Foundation – an organization founded by members of RCC that deals with the burial sites of the Holocaust victims.⁶ In a similar way to her earlier work, Zagrodzka searched for details here, concentrating on how traces of human interference are exposed to the forces of nature and the passage of time. In these particular sites, the remains of the SS-Sonderkommando Sobibór were transported by prospectors for Jewish gold to a marsh in order to be sifted (Reszka 2019). What the artist is trying to bring to the surface is the presence of the residues of the past in what seems to be just another forest. By zooming in – sometimes using microscopic images, sometimes, like in Sobibór, just by focusing on details – she brings to light the persistence of material witnesses.

6 See: <https://zapomniane.org/en/> (accessed: 10.08.2016).



Figure 6. Aleksandra Janus, Solomon Nagler, Aleksander Schwarz, *First Person Cartography*, 2019. Available courtesy of the authors.

Speculative cartographies: forensic gaze

Both Grzywnowicz and Zagrodzka represent the strategy of narrowing the field of vision, limiting the view, turning toward the earth, to details. If the landscape is a “crime scene” – being approached as such by application of forensic methods – it requires a gaze that seeks for clues that can become evidence – the forensic gaze (Renshaw 2017; Weizman 2017). This attitude sees landscape as containing data that allow to detect violence that might be “at the threshold of detectability” (Weizman 2017: 13).⁷ When research is conducted in locations where the remains of Jewish victims of the Holocaust might be buried, the investigation may be limited by the Jewish religious law (halakha), which forbids any interference with the burial site.⁸ In such locations the traditional tools of archaeology are excluded and instead, non-invasive archaeology may be used, including such methods as analysis of satellite photography and archival aerial photos, topographical analysis with the use of LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and geophysical tools (like georadar) that facilitate the identification of anomalies located under the surface of the soil (Sturdy Colls 2015). This new approach has been an inspiration for two Canadian artists – Angela Henderson and Solomon Nagler who initiated the project called *Kartografie spekulatywne (Speculative Cartographies)*.⁹ In cooperation with Wiesław Bartkowski, a creative coder and media artist, Aleksander Schwarz of the RCC and Zapomniane Foundations, and Aleksandra Janus, the group focused on the search for possible forms for artistic practice in the landscape of non-sites of memory.

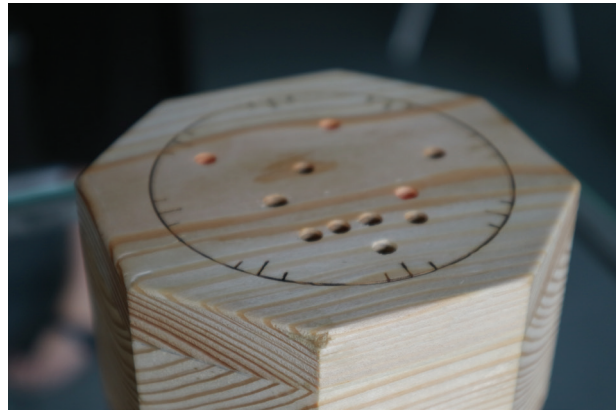


Figure 7. Wiesław Bartkowski, Angela Henderson, Aleksander Schwarz, *Compass*, 2019. Photo: Aleksander Schwarz. Available courtesy of the authors.

The *Speculative Cartographies* team worked in five locations in southern and eastern Poland. In Głódno, Pi-kule, Polichna, Radecznica and Franciszków Stary RCC and Zapomniane Foundation identified uncommemorated sites of the burial of Jewish Holocaust victims.¹⁰ When working in the field, the team sought new ways to speak about non-sites of memory, via alternative forms of mapping, recording the natural environment present there and communicating experiences related to those sites. One of those strategies was video material that was created by using an analogue camera and a 16 mm tape. The short video film made by the artists is a record of all the possible routes leading to each of the five places visited along with all the objects that were potential points of reference. The video also records the kinds of plants growing there and other topographical features that are not only visible as images but as a reflection of the way and the tempo of the person holding the camera. The film also conveys the sense that the reference points cannot be distinguished easily – one often gets lost looking for the right way, loses his/her track, confusing between forest paths.

This experience of confusion and uncertainty served as an inspiration for another object created as part of the *Speculative Cartographies* project. It was constructed with the use of a working compass and was designed to be played with by the audience in the exhibition space. The compass was deliberately programmed to respond to the smallest movements, so it enhanced the elusiveness of visitors’ experiences: in contrast to a real compass for navigation, this object is supposed to recreate the sense of being *lost* and that sense of uncertainty as to what it is actually supposed to be showing, evoking

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ As it is stated in the Jerusalem Talmud, *It is forbidden to move the dead and their bones from the place where they rest*, Jerusalem Talmud, Moed Katan 2:4.

⁹ The results of the project were first presented at the Warsaw Biennale in July 2019.

¹⁰ The Rabbinical Commission and the Foundation were represented by Aleksander Schwarz, who combined the roles of researcher, photographer, filmmaker and craftsman.



Figure 8. Angela Henderson, untitled, 2019. Photo: Aleksander Schwarz. Available courtesy of the authors.

the fundamental experience of those researching the sites in question.¹¹

Angela Henderson carried out the documentation of trees growing in the five sites visited by the *Speculative Cartographies* team. In each site, she identified trees which were old enough to have been present during the moment of killing (Małczyński 2010). A fragment of bark from each tree was documented with the technique of frottage. The arrangement of trees was mapped out using the simplest and oldest cartographical method – a long piece of string. The string was used to measure the diameters of trees, the distances between them and the distance to the burial site. In this way, alternative maps of these areas were created and brought to the gallery space in the form of sculptures and an analog data visualization, using the same pieces of string and preserving the real distances.

In each of the five places visited, the vegetation was different, depending on the positioning of plants, solar radiation, and types of soil. The team documented the vegetation in a specific way: plants were first soaked in bio-photographic fluid (an organic solution that was pre-



Figure 9. Angela Henderson, untitled, 2019. Photo: Aleksander Schwarz. Available courtesy of the authors.

pared on site), then laid out on film and subjected to the operation of the natural light present, leading to effects of varying intensity and spectra of colors. This process uses the chemical structure of the plants themselves, which “imprint” themselves at the surface of the film they touch under the influence of the bio-photographic fluid. The films were then prepared for a presentation in the form of transparent print-outs, accompanied by a description of the corresponding location.

Among the works from the *Speculative Cartographies* project there were also objects inspired by images made while carrying out non-invasive research and using the idea of navigation and technologies for locating objects in space. In the first case, the objects of interest were echograms – images generated by *ground-penetrating radar*, or GPR. The object prepared by the *Cartographies* team presented reworked images from four echograms obtained during the geophysical research in Franciszków Stary. Picture-echograms were graphically simplified and then replicated on perspex. Then these perspex cards were laid out in a way corresponding to the real-life layout (subsequent profiles in the field research were separated by around a meter). The object invites the viewer to follow the changes and irregularities of the subsequent transparent echograms, thereby adopting the research and forensic gaze.

Conclusions

The artists' attention to the ground, narrowing the field of vision, reaching down low, underfoot, following tracks – this can all be viewed as evidence of forensic sensitivity. Artists working in the field have a particular ability to spot what defies symbolization. By applying their own tools to understand these phenomena, artists help researchers

¹¹ Thanks to Wiesław Bartkowski, the co-author of the object, there was another important context for this object: an analysis of the influence of the spread of geolocational devices over the capability of people to find out where they are and move around autonomously.

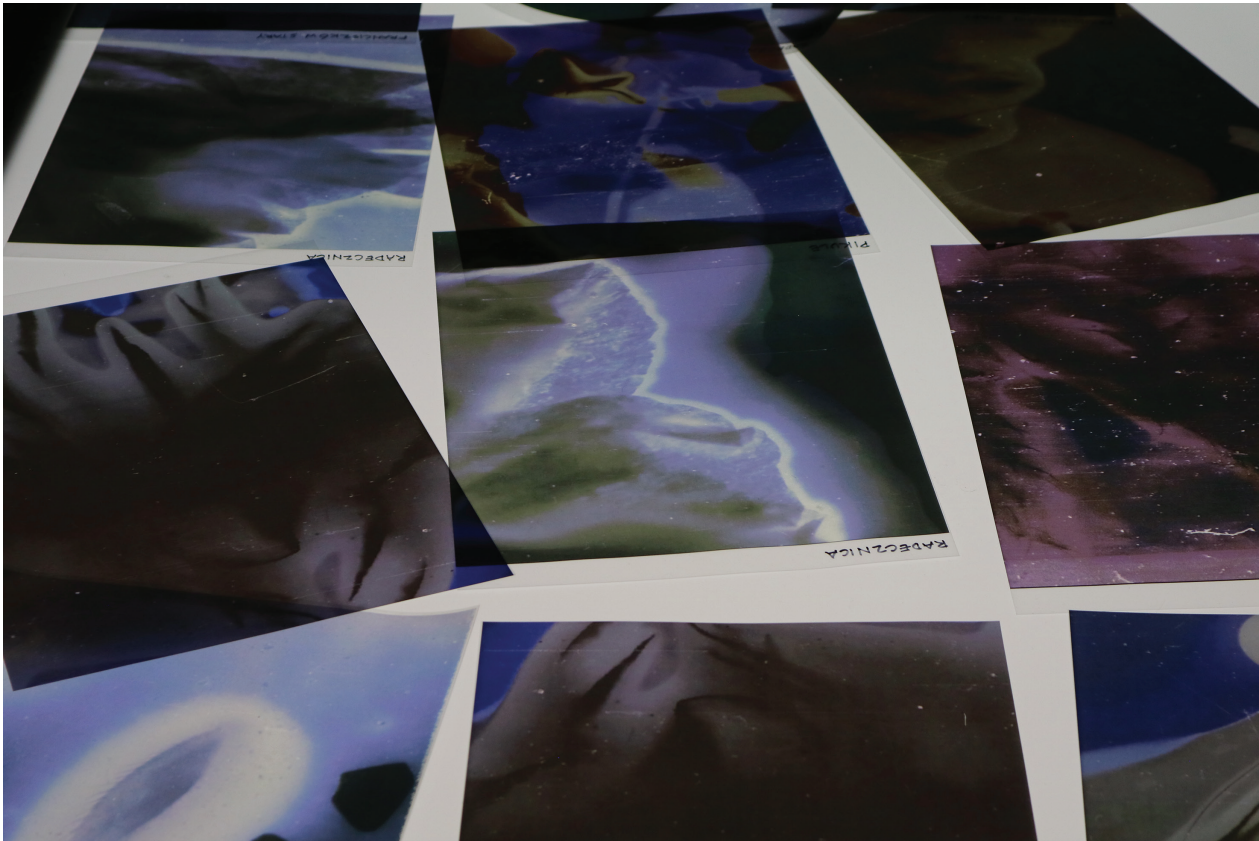


Figure 10. Solomon Nagler, untitled, 2019. Photo: Aleksander Schwarz. Available courtesy of the authors.

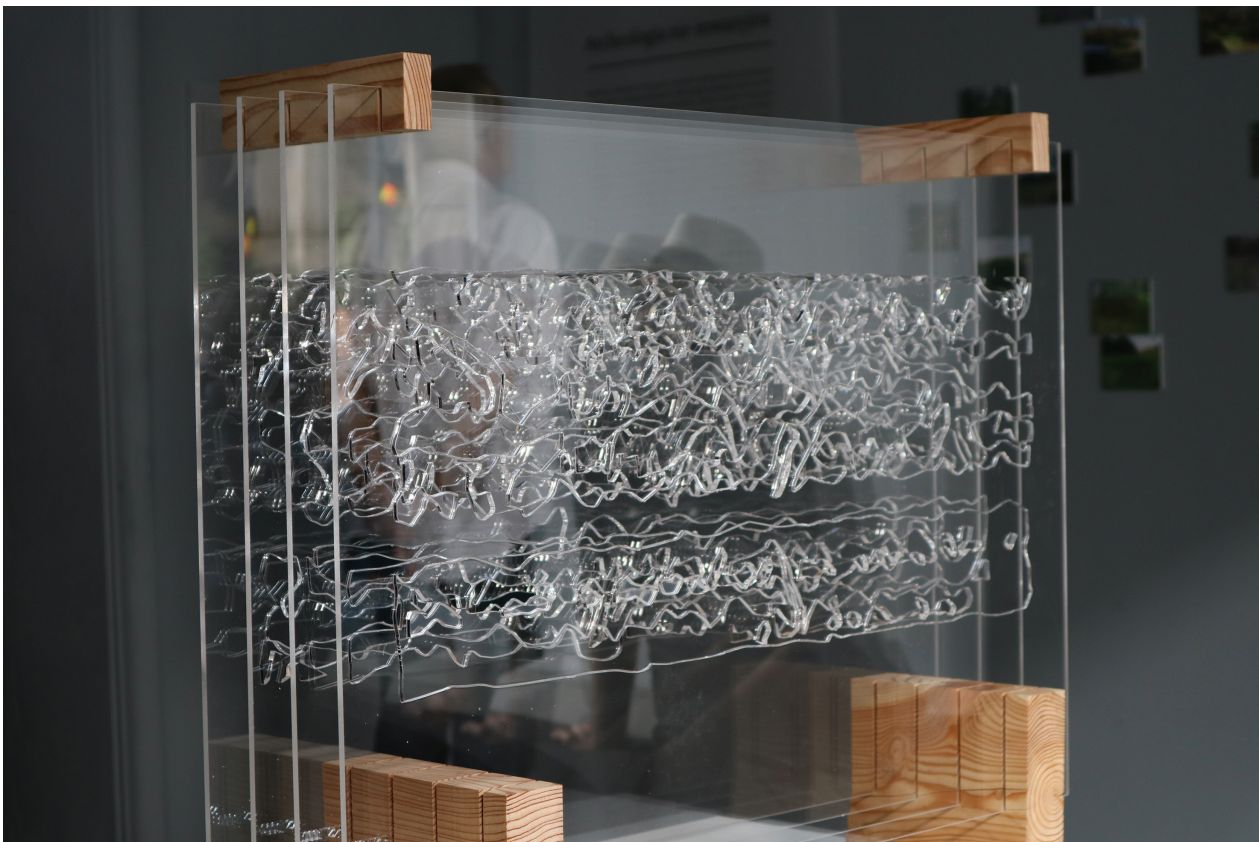


Figure 11. Wiesław Bartkowski, Aleksander Schwarz, untitled, 2019. Photo: Aleksander Schwarz. Available courtesy of the authors.

gain access to this unique, non-verbal, mediated and local knowledge. To perceive this is of the essence to understand processes of remembering which have happened and continue to happen in relation to non-sites of memory, in contrast to globalized discourses on memory.

The images of non-sites of memory, as presented above, develop our understanding of the position of the observer most of all, that third person on the scene – the bystander, or a belated post-bystander, who comes many decades later and needs to form an alliance with the technology and the environment to establish what happened in criminal events. Artist interventions contribute to the recent trend of the growing importance of the figure of the “bystander” (Morina and Thijn 2018). They join efforts to transgress the purely functional typology which distinguished between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders which was based on the forms of action taken by them. Putting “bystanders” at the center of attention, they help to repose and reinvigorate questions about current responsibilities and challenges related to uncommemorated sites.

In many ways, the contemporary work of intervention into the circumstances of abandoned and dispersed sites of violence is a particular kind of “bystander art”. We would like to understand it – based on the evidence presented above – as a variant of the “art of witness” (Lehrer and Sendyka 2019): characterized by a conscious motivation to testify about a past crime or act of violation of human rights and clearly communicating this through artistic means. In the same way, images – examples of which are discussed above – are a unique and rich testimonial resource. They facilitate understanding about the way of seeing the act of violence from a temporal distance – but without analogous geographical shifts. The analysis of these representations is one way of understanding the fundamental question: “What does it mean to stand in the place of death?”

Transl. by Patrick Trompiz

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Radecznica memory game. An educational workshop

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Abstract

The paper describes and discusses the educational workshop in the form of a board game jam held in Radecznica, a village in Eastern Poland. The event, organised by researchers from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, was a follow-up of the research project on uncommemorated Jewish mass graves in the area. The aim of the workshop was to facilitate individual reflection on local Holocaust killings amongst the participating adults, as well as to bolster the memory of mass graves in Radecznica. Combining Holocaust memories with the didactic properties of rapid board game design, it was also an attempt to employ game jams as a method in Holocaust-related education. The workshop's success leaves us optimistic regarding the method and its possible applications in the future.

Key Words

board games, case study, game jam, Holocaust education, Poland, young adults

Introduction

In this paper, we consider the practice of board game design as a tool in Holocaust education, serving as an effective means for bolstering personal connections to it and explaining the systemic conditions of the genocide to teenagers. As argued by Davide Spallazzo and Illaria Mariani (2018), curated game design can facilitate the implementation of prior knowledge and provide opportunities to discuss sensitive topics from a personal perspective, while retaining a safe emotional distance from the arguments and, thus, leading to a better understanding of the said topic. According to Stefano Gualeni (2015), since designing a game demands a deeper understanding of the processes upon which the game is based and encourages the adoption and implementation of a variety of perspectives, it can result in lasting changes in attitude towards the topic.

To test the idea, a Holocaust-related game design workshop was prepared and offered to junior high school students from the village of Radecznica in Eastern Poland, a site of uncommemorated mass graves of Holocaust victims, researched by scholars from Jagiellonian

University in Krakow. The workshop itself was an event concluding prolonged cooperation amongst members of the research team and the local school, an attempt to provide participating teenagers with a practical skill-set, while mobilising their knowledge of local Holocaust history to provide them with a better and more personal understanding of the genocide.

The event was a part of “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites and Their Influence on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland” research project conducted by the Research Center for Memory Cultures of Jagiellonian University in Krakow, with Roma Sendyka as the principal investigator. The project brought together scholars and practitioners of memory work in an attempt to critically re-interpret the links between sites, their (human and non-human) users and memory, 2016–2020. Interdisciplinary discussions focused on overlooked, repressed or ignored sites of violence that may benefit from new approaches to memory studies, approaches that go beyond the traditional focus on communication, symbolism, representation and communality. The key objects of analysis were clandestine and contested sites that witnessed

war-time violence. As the project introduced various academic and artistic tactics, the scope and character of the workshop, while unusual, was well within the varied and interdisciplinary character of the entire endeavour. For general information on the project and a description of the sites researched in the project, see Sendyka, in this issue.

The site of the workshop

The event took place in Radecznica, a small village in the Roztocze Hills, Eastern Poland, with approximately 920 inhabitants (Polska w liczbach 2011; Zybala and Zybala 2013; see also: Smoter-Grzeszkiewicz 2018). It was chosen as the subject of a case study for the project “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites and Their Influence on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland” due to the particular wartime history of the place, as the fates of Jewish, Catholic and Orthodox people, wartime refugees and asylum seekers were intertwined there. Indeed, this village is like a microcosm of Poland’s wartime experience outside of the major urban centres, with all the dominant motifs of the country-wide narratives being represented.

The village is known, above all, for the impressive Baroque church dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua and its Bernadine monastery. During World War II, a strong underground movement was connected with the abbey, where local partisans often took shelter. For this reason, over the last decade, the church in the abbey has become a mausoleum for the so-called cursed soldiers of the right-wing anticommunist underground formations (the exhumed bodies found in the area by archaeological missions of the National Remembrance Institute are gradually being moved here). Therefore, the main World War II narrative in Radecznica is focused on the heroic, Polish and Catholic resistance fighters, battling both Nazis and Soviets and refusing to bow to either regime.

However, Radecznica was also the site of the mass killings of the local Jewish population. In World War II, its small Jewish community was resettled to a ghetto in Szczepieszyn, while a few Jews in hiding were denounced, executed and buried in unmarked graves.

One such place, called the Second Pits (*Drugie Doły*) by the local population, was the woodland ravine where ten local Jews had been hiding. They were denounced to the local Schupo troops by a citizen from the village of Latyczyn, located next to Radecznica. According to the witness, Stanisław Zybała (nine years old at the time, later employer of the library and local historian) – all ten Jews were shot on the spot and buried in the forest in December 1942. One of the victims was Zybała’s childhood friend, a girl named Raźla. Zybała wrote about the murder in his letter to the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries in Poland in 2010 and personally recounted his testimony to the members of the research team.

The Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries was established in Poland in 2002 and was originally an advisory body for the Foundation for the Preservation of the Jewish Heritage. Now it operates in the framework of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland. The aim of the Commission is to take care of the Jewish cemeteries and keep them within their original boundaries, as well as preserving them. The Commission is also involved in detecting the killing sites and commemorating the Jewish victims.

On 2 September 2016, a commemoration ceremony took place in Radecznica, in the Second Pits. The ceremony was organised by the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries in Poland and Matzevah Foundation. Local authorities, school students, teachers and local leaders attended the commemoration. Amongst the events organised were a lecture for young people about the importance of remembrance, a march of memory and prayers at the site of the mass killing.

Towards the end of the project on uncommemorated sites, the research team of the Research Center for Memory Cultures decided to expand its research project into a previously unplanned area: to develop new memory practices in cooperation with local memory activists, adapted to the needs of the local community. Their aim was to sustain the memory on the Holocaust. In short, the question occupying researchers and activists alike was the issue of how to avoid a situation where the 2016 commemorations effectively led to the community being “exempted” from the “duty to remember,” leading to a new wave of indifference towards the history of the Jewish inhabitants of Radecznica (Fig.1).

The decision to undertake this additional task was made for a number of reasons. Frequent research visits in Radecznica by the Jagiellonian University team led to the development of a cordial and committed relationship with local activists and educators. The research team befriended Marianna Zybała, wife of Stanisław Zybała, who continues her husband’s legacy and protects the memory of the Jews in Radecznica. She became the first and most important guide in this research project. Subsequent visits allowed the team to gather unique archival material, as well as first-hand experience of the places described in Zybała’s memoirs and publications.

Marianna Zybała introduced members of the research team to other local actors, such as the school principal, local teachers and activists. The trust and mutual understanding developed during the project enabled a wider scope of research than available in other places scrutinised during the project.

There was also an additional, external impulse to develop new practices as part of the project. Nowadays, after the participatory turn, memory research practices are often co-developed with possibly many stakeholders, implicated in local difficult memory. Special attention is paid to ethical aspects and to the obtaining and usage of data. In addition to well-established standards, such



Figure 1. Radechnica students listening to the lecture on narrative game design (photo by Tomasz Z. Majkowski).

as ensuring the anonymity of informants and developing guidelines for working with vulnerable respondents, there is an emphasis on the mutual relations between researchers and stakeholders. To put it simply, it is important for the researcher to not only *take* data from the local community, but also *share* their knowledge, time and commitment with them (Babbie 1975; Brzezińska and Toeplitz Zuzanna 2007; Salzman and Rice 2011; see also: National Science Centre 2016).

Various actions were considered, as well as the participation of different groups of Radechnica stakeholders, including library users, students of the local junior high school, members of the “Stąd jesteśmy” (We’re from Here) association devoted to local culture preservation. The openness and support of the local middle-school principal allowed us to carry out the project in cooperation with the teachers and students. The research team of the “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites...” project invited them to co-develop a game-based educational workshop together with the Game Research Centre of the Faculty of Polish Studies at Jagiellonian University, led by Tomasz Z. Majkowski. Outdoor games, digital and board games were all considered. As a result, the outdoor games – well-suited and often-used for awareness-raising gaming – was rejected as too time- and resource demanding. Digital games, on the other hand, required all participants to have access to computers, which could not be guaranteed. For those reasons, the board game format was selected as the most promising medium for the workshop.

The exercise was supposed to emphasise the significance of the local commemoration of the places where Jewish inhabitants had hidden. According to Stanisław

Zybała, there were three major hideouts: 1) forest near the brickyard, where from October till March 1943, about 70 people were shot, 2) the already mentioned Second Pits and 3) a brickyard called “Bojtek”. Zybała also mentioned ten places where Jews in Radechnica were murdered (Zybała and Zybała 2013). The game-based workshop was therefore built around the theme of hiding (either oneself or someone else), with regard to wartime events other than the Holocaust in Radechnica.

Methodological considerations

Games – whether board games or digital games – are an important educational technique used effectively to shaping abilities and forming attitudes (Gee 2007; Bogost 2010; Connolly et al. 2012; Flanagan and Nissenbaum 2014). They are often employed in disseminating knowledge in an enjoyable way, especially in historical education (Kapell and Elliott 2013; Chapman 2019; Lünen et al. 2020) – indeed, digital games developed for historical education games appeared already in the 1970s, with history-themed educational board games dating back to the 19th century. Despite widespread game-based historical education, it is far less common to use the medium in education related to memory of the Holocaust, as it is often considered inappropriate to combine the Holocaust with play.

In 2000, the game and theatre scholar Gonzalo Frasca answered “No.” to the question whether “Is it barbaric to design video games after Auschwitz?”, claiming that such games would be possible if the deaths are treated

as a singular and pivotal event, not just an obstacle to overcome (Frasca 2000). Despite his seminal paper, Holocaust-related digital games only appear incidentally. It is more popular to use toys in Holocaust-themed art, to cause shock by confronting children's themes and motifs with the topic of the Shoah. The most famous examples of this kind are Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO* and exhibition piece with a concentration camp made out of LEGO bricks and Brenda Romero's *Train* – a playable board game tasking players with efficiently packing passengers in trains only to reveal they are heading to death camps mid-game (Fig. 2).

In digital games, it is more common to use allegories or fantasy tropes while dealing with the Holocaust. For example, death camps are set against alternative history of a Third Reich victory in the *Wolfenstein* series. The Polish digital game, *My Memory of Us*, uses a euphemism for the Holocaust: it is carried out by evil robots against people wearing red clothing. Finally, in many commercial games set in the realities of World War II, the Holocaust is either presented as a background event or completely omitted (On the matter of Shoah motifs in games, see: Chapman and Linderoth 2015; Michalik 2015; Kansteiner 2017; Seriff 2018; Pötzsch and Šisler 2019; Pfister 2020).

Digital games designed for educational purposes often mimic this strategy, referencing the Holocaust as a side-trope or background event, necessary to portrait World War II, but unrelated to the main plot. The most direct approach to the matter is offered by the award-winning game *Attendat 1942*, developed by a team of researchers from Charles University in Prague. Though the main plot-line is based around the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, at the margins of the main story is thorough information about the fate of Czech Romani and the Jews

of Central Europe, going as far as meeting an Auschwitz survivor during a game play. It is worth noting that the game was banned in Germany and removed from popular game distribution platforms (such as Google and Apple online stores) for displaying Nazi-related imagery. Even though those bans were recently lifted, the struggle to make educational games available on popular platforms clearly shows another obstacle for game-based Holocaust education: it is often confused as Nazi propaganda and actively censored.

The workshop which we organised in Radechnica was based on the idea of using games as a tool for shaping attitudes. The traditional approach to game-based education assumes that learning takes place in the course of playing, with the student acquiring desired abilities and absorbing knowledge while playing the game. In the same way, the game presents its ideological message, forcing the player to engage with the desired activities in order to succeed (Gee 2007; Bogost 2010).

In Radechnica, we took a slightly different approach, based on a model described by game scholars and designers Davide Spallazzo and Illaria Mariani (2018), as well as the game scholar, designer and philosopher Stefano Gualeni (2015). The approach assumes students themselves design the game, with the purpose of critically examining its central themes. To complete such a task, students need to reflect on the phenomenon the game is based upon, trying to identify its systematic properties which can then be used as the basis for the rules. Therefore, the goal is not to transfer knowledge, but to provoke independent reflection and the development of a personal relationship with the subject under analysis. This relationship then leads to the internalisation of the relevant content. Such a method was used by the aforementioned scholars to raise awareness of a variety of subjects, from



Figure 2. *Train* board game by Brenda Romero (source: designer's website, <http://brenda.games/train>).

dietary health hazards to sexually transmitted diseases and the systemic persecution of minorities.

The main didactic aim of the Radechnica workshop was to stimulate the participating students to reflect on the systemic aspects of the Holocaust, as opposed to the individual stories of death and survival. Their main task was to combine local Holocaust history, commonly perceived as a series of isolated events featuring individual actors, with their own understanding of recurring conditions that made the said events possible in the first place. In this way, we hoped to encourage discussion on the unprecedented scale and scope of the legacy of the Holocaust, as well as its ubiquitous nature. However, we also wanted to draw attention to more general contexts of refuge, hiding and threat to life. At the same time, our intention was neither to avoid trivialising our subject matter, overwhelm participants with the gravity of the issues nor bore them – something school classes often do. Finally, we had to steer away from enabling a particular kind of cynicism that can result from reducing historical tragedy to a pure rule set that has to be operational. We did not want the students to focus on finding a clever way to depict the Holocaust with witty and enjoyable mechanics or to design any winning conditions for such a game.

That was why we drew our inspiration from the artistic project *Train* by Brenda Romero that has the form of a board game and the location-based game designed by Ilarii Mariani's and Davide Spallazzo's students (presented by the authors during the seminar *Researching the Transgressive Aspects of Gaming and Play* at the University of Bologna, 22 May 2017). In both of these games, players perform a series of actions that are fairly typical for entertainment games, such as managing railroads in a board game or tagging unaware by-standers in a location-based game. Only at the end are participants informed that the

theme and mechanics were inspired by the story of the Holocaust. In the first of our two examples, this revelation happens mid-game, when players are informed that they were optimising the arrangement of places in train carriages heading to death camps. In the second case, after the game was concluded, it was revealed that the rules to identify and tag unaware bystanders was based on a set of instructions for the Italian Fascist Party allowing for the identification of citizens of Jewish origin on the basis of their physical features. By withholding this crucial information until the end, both games reveal the problem of the bureaucratic-normative aspects of the Holocaust, provoking consideration of the banality of evil.

Based on the examples described and the methodological assumptions stemming from them, the workshop creators prepared the following exercise: the students were to design a board game with a neutral theme, featuring rules for escape or hiding and then re-theme it, so the designed rules would be applied to the Holocaust narrative, in particular the killings in the Second Pits and the activity of Stanisław Żybała. In this way, we hoped to open up a space for reflection on systemic aspects of the Holocaust vis-à-vis local history (Fig. 3).

While preparing the workshop, the researchers were also concerned about ethical issues. How could we run the project so that the subject of the killings in Second Pits was not disrespected or made light of and, on the other hand, so that the participants will not be traumatised? The form of the workshops was consulted with both the school principal and the history teacher – who knew the students best. Before the workshop, there was an informational letter sent to the prospective participants and their parents informing them about the central subject of the project and written parental consent was required for participation. During the entire course of the



Figure 3. Students working with a professional game designer on early prototype (photo by Tomasz Z. Majkowski).

workshop sessions, Katarzyna Suszkiewicz was present, an educator from the AntySchematy2 Foundation (established in 2008 to support education endeavours opposing discrimination, racism and xenophobia) with experience in running workshops with young people, as well as the school principal and the history teacher. Project participants were given the opportunity to leave the workshop at any moment without giving any reason.

Contrary to the stated fears of the organisers, the students carried out their tasks with great commitment and respect for the subject matter, in all seriousness seeking means of expression for the Holocaust narrative with the aid of the game rules.

Board game design workshop

Fourteen students participated in the two-day workshop, together with seven organisers: five lecturers and mentors representing the Game Research Center and one professional Holocaust educator from the Research Center for Memory Cultures, introducing the central subject and supervising the ethical aspects of the workshop. Finally, there was one professional board game designer present. He was also experienced in organising “game jam” workshops: game design events, during which participants have to rapidly create their own games from scratch (Kultima 2015). In addition to the team mentioned above, the school principal and a history teacher observed the exercise.

As participating students had no prior experience of game design, certain preventative measures were taken to avoid any creative hitches. Prior to the workshop, five simple board game rule-sets were prepared by the professional game designer. We also secured professional components for making board games: empty boards, decks of blank cards ready to be described and illustrated, wooden and cardboard tokens etc. Said materials were divided into sets facilitating the development of certain rule types and mentors were instructed to steer student designer groups towards pre-created rule-sets if they were unable to create rules of their own. It should be stressed that those additional measures turned out to be utterly unnecessary, as all of the student teams were up to the task and were able to create simple, yet playable games of their own without any significant interference from their mentors.

The workshop was a two-day event, with the first day devoted to the basic game design, resulting with creation of functional prototype games. During the second day, students re-themed games that they had designed during the first day to tell a local Holocaust story.

The sessions began with a talk devoted to narrative and rhetorical aspects of board game rules and some training in the basics of game design. The students were then divided into four working groups, each with their own mentor from the Game Research Centre and a randomly assigned theme for the game to be designed, from well-established themes, common in commercially available board games (science fiction, fantasy, farming and

horror). There was an additional task to develop the rules for escaping, hiding or searching.

The rest of the first day's exercises was devoted to work with mentors, whose task was to give the students feedback on their ideas and introduce solutions in case any team got stuck. They approached their teams every 40 minutes or when called upon to minimise their influence over the design team dynamics and ways of working. As a result, four fully playable game prototypes which students could play from beginning to end were developed. All four groups got involved and, at the end of the day, were happy with the results. The only controversy stemmed from the fantasy theme, as occult-related aesthetics turned out to be controversial for the student group due to religious reasons. As a result, the game was re-themed as “fighting evil”. This was the only controversy to arise during the entire workshop: it is telling that a fictitious theme turned out to be more problematic for students than working with local Holocaust history, testament to the efficiency of the Holocaust education that students had already received under the auspices of the “Uncommemorated Genocide Sites...” research project (Fig. 4).

On the second day, the students were told the theme of their games was about to change and were given training on how to use the game rules developed as a tool to describe the Holocaust. To illustrate, one of the projects developed during the first day was used; on the second day, in any case, three people resigned (because of prior engagements) and the number of groups was reduced to three. After that, the groups discussed possible ways of applying their projects to the subject of the Holocaust and developed re-themed prototypes with their mentors.

In the end, three projects were presented.

The first, initially themed as escaping from a haunted house (horror genre), used the mechanism of a gradually shrinking board and resource management. The original goal was to help a person escape a collapsing house that was haunted by evil spirits. Both the mechanics and the theme turned out to be easily convertible to tell a Holocaust-related narrative. In the second version, the game focused on attempts to save a hiding Jewish person from death, with players collaborating to provide the persecuted individual with the necessary resources. The most important part of the re-theming discussion was devoted to the gradually shrinking board: it turned from a literal space (a collapsing house) into a metaphorical one, representing the “space for survival” as systematically shrinking.

The second group developed a highly polished prototype about escaping from a galactic prison (science-fiction genre), with all players controlling two pawns and moving through the board, with random events represented by cards. It was re-themed as a game about escaping from a threatened zone and the need to remain in constant movement, emphasising, with the help of the rules developed, the danger involved in a group of fugitives and the value of help granted by people who are not themselves in danger. In the design process, students discussed both internal and external limitations of hiding places, stress-



Figure 4. Students preparing a farming-themed game about cartoon pigs under mentor's supervision (photo by Roma Sendyka).

ing that the rule limiting the numbers of pawns that could occupy the same space needed to be realistic, as all hiding places in the area had only been able to accommodate a limited number of hiding Jews, due to physical space limitations. They made an attempt to tie the game board to the local topography, but discarded this idea after reaching the saddening conclusion they did not know enough households in the Radecznica area who had provided help and shelter for Jewish people to name all the safe spaces on the board after them.

The third project, initially a humorous game about pigs growing and selling crops, while searching for treasure (life on a farm genre), developed two re-themed versions. In this way, they had to deal with the double-theme of the original game (resource management and treasure-hunting), as the combination turned out to be unfit for a Holocaust narrative. Moreover, building a Holocaust-themed game about gathering the resources necessary to find something hidden had the potential to be deeply disturbing for a game about hunting for hidden Jews. To avoid this pitfall, students decided to re-connect the two main game mechanics and develop separate ideas.

In the first one, players were tasked with gathering resources to survive in conditions of the constant threat of denunciation. The main discussion students had was about the types of resources necessary for survival, in order to replace the three types of crops from the original game. After some debate, the group decided to name the three types of resources “food”, “medicine” and “hope”, considering those crucial to survive under extreme persecution.

In the second version, based on resource management rules, the participants were contemporary Polish people who slowly get to know a hidden truth about the local Holocaust murders. In this last case, the references to the killings in the Second Pits and the figure of Stanisław Zybala were the most direct, as the game was based on the student's own journey in getting to know local Holocaust history during the research project. It was also the least

developed concept, due to time constraints (the group was preparing two prototypes, after all).

The final presentations were taken very seriously and the participants not only thought intensively about the Holocaust, but also reacted emotionally as well. The group discussion was not only about how to relate the rules of the games designed to the set subject matter, but also about the language appropriate for speaking about games in this context. For example, all the groups highlighted the matter of victory and defeat, replacing the first term with “survival”. The participants were very able to connect their projects with the local context and avoid completely pop-cultural clichés about the Holocaust, such as images of ghettos or camps ingrained in our minds from cinema and television (as well as commercial games). Instead, all the groups by their own volition took up topics closely tied to the local, non-institutionalised history of the Holocaust. An example here would be the referencing by the participants of the specific names of hidden Radecznica citizens.

Conclusion

The immediate result of the workshop was undeniable and allowed all of the assumed goals to be fulfilled. All of the student groups mobilised and implemented their knowledge of local Holocaust history, not only shared by the entire group due to common education, but also stemming from individual family tradition and knowledge. They also discussed the systemic aspects of the genocide, helping them to separate what was incidental from the general conditions in order for the latter to be represented by the rules. In this way, they created their own critical framework to evaluate and debate both vernacular and official histories and reach a common conclusion which they were ready to share with the rest of the workshop participants. In this way, a more personal and emotional

link was established between students participating and the tragic memory of the Holocaust, hopefully resulting in a greater need to preserve local Holocaust history and commemorate murder sites in the future (Fig. 5).

To measure if there had been any lasting effects, participants were asked to fill out an anonymous evaluative questionnaire two weeks after the workshops. Most of the participants commented that the workshop enabled them to acquire new skills to better understand the mechanisms operating in the world. Those answering confirmed that they now know where the Second Pits were – which may also be explained by their participation in the memorial ceremonies of 2016. Similarly, the majority stated that they knew what happened in this place. On the other hand, in responding to the question about their plans to visit the commemorated place of hiding and death of Radechnica's Jews in the future, their answers were rather positive, but not univocally.

The key question for the educational project was: "Should we, in your opinion, remember about the "Second Pits"? "What ideas do you have to achieve that?" Three people replied "yes, we should" without further comment, two answered in a more personal way: "in my opinion we should remember it" and "Yes, I think it is worth remembering about places like that." One person referred to the question in a more generalising way: "Of course, we should remember about every historical place. We should talk about this at school." Others gave examples of how to remember: "I believe we should share information with a larger number of people, so the memory will not die; [...] by visiting and teaching about it; for example, in prayer, to visit the place; yes, visit the place." One respondent took up the issue of

frequency of mnemonic practices: "we should go and look in regularly."

Both the mentors and participants of the workshop emphasised the strong points: teamwork, the opportunity for creativity, the process of the creation of games itself and the freedom to discuss them at will. Participants also emphasised the open-minded approach of the project leaders, their readiness to help and the atmosphere of the workshop ("we had wonderful mentors, who helped us better understand the mechanisms of the world, there was a good atmosphere which helped our work; I most liked the nice atmosphere, the wonderful mentors and the interesting talks about games").

We should not forget that the initial conditions for this experiment were unusually favourable: the young people already knew the place which was the unifying point for the entire project and the school's representatives were supportive. Nevertheless, it also seems that the form of creative activity chosen – allowing for a large degree of freedom and creativity – led to a situation where the memory of the participants about local events was genuinely enlivened. Without a doubt, the form of experiment and the invitation for the young people to be creative and to place their games in a historical context, can be seen to be the most innovative aspect of this educational project. In contrast to many other educational projects, young people were not treated as the passive addressees of a previously-prepared message. On the contrary, participants had the task of creating these contents and not simply reacting to them. In our opinion, the young people from Radechnica managed with these challenges very well. Whether or not the impact of this memory game will be an enduring one, only time will tell.



Figure 5. Students presenting re-themed game during the workshop conclusion (photo by Karina Jarzyńska).

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Sites of violence and their communities: Critical memory studies in the post-human era (Kraków, 24–25 September 2019)

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Abstract

This discussion gathers voices of an international group of researchers and practitioners from various disciplines and institutions who focus on diverse aspects of sites of past violence in their work: archaeology, history, ethics, literature and art, curatorial practices, oral history, education and commemoration. The debate, which took place during the conference “Sites of Violence and Their Communities: Critical Memory Studies in the Post-Human Era” in Kraków in September 2019, itself centres on six main topics: the question of archives of uncommemorated killing sites; research methodology; the position of the researchers themselves; the problem of complicity during conflict and the right to be a witness to past crimes; the place of the Righteous Among the Nations within Polish collective memory and the international debate on the Holocaust; and, finally, new ways of commemoration and education about mass violence.

Participants: Katarzyna Bojarska, Michał Chojak, Ewa Domańska, Zuzanna Dziuban, Karolina Grzywnowicz, Aleksandra Janus, Karina Jarzyńska, Maria Kobielska, Rob van der Laarse, Bryce Lease, Erica Lehrer, Jacek Leociak, Tomasz Łysak, Tomasz Majkowski, Christina Morina, Matilda Mroz, Adam Musiał, Agnieszka Nieradko, Łukasz Posłuszny, Roma Sendyka, Caroline Sturdy Colls, Katarzyna Suszkiewicz, Aleksandra Szczepan, Krijn Thijs, Jonathan Webber, Anna Zagrodzka, Tomasz Żukowski

Key Words

genocide, Holocaust, archive, witness, bystander, complicity, Righteous Among the Nations, mass graves, ethics, commemoration, Holocaust by bullets, education

1. Spaces of mass killings as manifold archive

Roma Sendyka: During the unveiling of the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, one of the representatives of the founders in her note to the public said: “Es lebt sich jetzt leichter in diesem Land”: “It’s easier now to live in this country (after this monument was erected).” Holocaust-Mahnmal with its 2,711 concrete slabs symbolises all sites of the murder of the six million victims of Shoah – so it refers also to the sites of the dispersed Holocaust, so numerous in Eastern Europe. These being re-discovered today pose many questions for their stakeholders. Therefore, being from Eastern Europe, when confronted with Holocaust Mahnmal, I did not feel

the relief that the founders of the monument expected. It is not any easier now in Eastern Europe, where many still live “with all these dead under our meadows and fields”, as the writer, Martin Pollack once aptly put it. The symbolic gesture of the Mahnmal changes something in Germany, but it does change almost nothing for someone who lives on the verge of the Łęty, Jasenovac or Płaszów concentration camp site which was my first research object. In Poland and Eastern Europe, in general, there are many sites that refer to different types of past violence that escalated in the period of 1939–1945 and they could have potentially constituted *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, yet never were granted such a status. They have not been musealised or commemorated, yet they persistently impact local mnemotopographies. They might be vast or small, in the centre of a city or in the outskirts of a vil-

* Compiler

lage, overgrown with vegetation or empty, littered or left undisturbed. What is especially important in case of these places is the question of human remains: the reason why these sites do not fall into complete oblivion and are not swallowed by ecological and social reality is that the dead have not been properly buried. Therefore, there is some kind of residual life in these sites: their dead are not completely gone. They stimulate clandestine rituals, practices and “necroperformances” and impact social relations in nearby communities. Hence, the sites are only seemingly removed beyond the horizon of remembrance and symbolical orders that surround them; they do shape local memory cultures. In our project, we embarked on revealing contemporary meanings and functions of such sites and strived to understand their role. We called them non-sites of memory, inspired by Claude Lanzmann, who tried to distance himself from the influential term by Pierre Nora when he travelled in the 1970s through Eastern Europe, filming abandoned post-Holocaust sites. In his dissent, the initial “non” from “*les non-lieux de mémoire*” refers to both parts of the term: it suggests topographical and memorial deficiency that characterises these sites.

Local activists and artists were the first agents to react to these uncommemorated sites. Their works were a huge inspiration for us to construct analysis of these specific objects. So were thinkers pursuing advanced, interdisciplinary research on the environmental, the post-human, the dispersed Holocaust, genocide and human rights. In addition, this electrical field that is being produced between two poles: field/artistic research, based on empirical material on one side and advanced theory on the other, can be, I believe, a generative platform for our discussion on sites of violence and their communities today.

Ewa Domańska: Indeed, in thinking of post-genocidal spaces, inspirations drawn from soil and forensic sciences, as well as from land art, can be especially profitable. The discussion about the decomposition of human remains, how this process is happening and how it affects the soil, especially when we take into consideration environmental (and soil) ethics, might change our approach to how these spaces should be commemorated and preserved. We tend to think that we can preserve or commemorate something for a very long time. Yet, we can observe what is happening with the sites of World War I or events that happened in the 19th century: they stay alive for only as long as we remember them. Therefore, we should be aware that our ways of commemorating sites are temporary. Since our approach to the past, our possibilities, as well as technology in dealing with these spaces are changing, we should think about alternative ways of commemoration. Knowledge of the past in society is becoming severely depleted, so we must address the problem of commemoration from the point of symbolic sensitivity towards evil, violence, injustice and oppression, rather than of knowledge of concrete events. We might think about places marked by institutional cruelty, mass killings or state violence as potential works of art. A symbolic commemoration is more

telling for young people who might not have knowledge about specific historical events, than monuments with dates. In this context, instead of cutting down trees or using chemicals to discipline the plants that are living in these sites – thus using the technology of ecocide to preserve genocide spaces – we should take into consideration their ecological side, understand the importance of keeping alive material, botanic, organic witnesses, which are important not only from a metaphorical point of view. We can learn from forensic botanists how the roots of trees can show how long a body has been in the ground, while seeds can suggest whether or not the body has moved. The presence of particular species of fauna that are atypical for a given site can also help locate mass graves. So, trees and plants are not only metaphorical ecowitnesses, they are also survivors, pieces of forensic evidence and ecohistorical sources (camp arborglyphs). Therefore, we need strong cooperation between artists, humanities scholars and conservationists.

Jonathan Webber: From this perspective, what should the Polish government do then with the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau? Reconstruct the barracks or let them sink into the ground in the next hundred years?

Ewa Domańska: In the very long term, the barracks have more chances of remaining below the ground than above it. For a very long time already, I have advocated the idea that such sites should be kept in a state of controlled decomposition and ruination with limited access. Of course, museums, monuments, education etc. should sustain the memory of the events in the form of documentary movies, maps, photographs, 3D visualisations and other means of representation.

Jacek Leociak: I am thinking how to incorporate Ewa Domańska’s ideas about the significance of soil into studies on Holocaust history. If we think about the Ringelblum Archive, which was buried in the ground and then unearthed after World War II, we can understand it in terms of Greek philosophy. I think about the concept of Empedocles: the four elements – earth, water, air and fire – as elementary components of matter, forming the principles of being. In some sense, the documents from Ringelblum Archive survived the trial of earth, water, air and fire. They are marked by some kind of stigma, the materiality of these documents being wounded, in both a metaphorical and forensic sense. Abraham Sutzkever, one of the greatest poets in the Yiddish language, who was imprisoned in the Vilna ghetto, wrote, in that time, a poem in which he compared the burying of the library of Vilna in the ground to sowing the seeds in the soil. Seeds are hidden in the ground, but they are not dead, they are still alive and waiting for the time of growing.

Jonathan Webber: It is worth noting that Sutzkever’s idea is related to the classic Talmudic idea of the resurrection of the dead, in which the dead, buried in the earth, are simply waiting for the next stage.

Ewa Domańska: And, therefore, they should not be disturbed.

Krijn Thijs: I want to put another issue on the table from the Western European point of view. When we talk about non-sites of memory and the afterlife of localisations after the historical events, we talk about places where human remains are usually still in the soil, where people were buried or not. Yet, in the Netherlands, many places which we consider sites of genocide are not defined by human remains. These are sites used for hiding or deportations, but we need to remember that the killing during the Holocaust was happening in the so-called *bloodlands*. Would the approach of soil studies also work in cases of sites without human remnants, where the knowledge about the place is grounded in stories or other types of traces?

Aleksandra Szczepan: And yet, we need to remember that the very concept of *bloodlands* is not a neutral term, but renders othering and colonial bias: as in similar compounds, such as *bloodstain* or *bloodshed*, blood in this topographical category changes the ontological status of the terrains it refers to and expresses the Western othering gaze on the East.

Ewa Domańska: I am mostly interested in sites where there are human remains. However, if we think about these sites from the perspective of what is going on in the soil, we might take into consideration various material objects and we can think how, for example, rust may change the structure and the components of the soil. We should read soil (and forests) as a sort of natural archive with different layers.

Agnieszka Nieradko: When undertaking archival research, it is often astonishing to realise that the information we are looking for today, after 70 years, was available from the very beginning since the end of the war. It applies to the documents as well as oral history, or both. Yet now, our chances are very small and it is so frustrating to know that we are coming 10, 20 years too late.

Katarzyna Bojarska: If the information about these sites is “already there”, in the archive – what makes it forgotten? Or is it repressed? What prevents it from entering the canon? Perhaps we should think of non-sites of memory as consisting of two parallel and complementary archives, one of traditional documents and the other of what’s there in the ground. It is there and it just has to come up, be it a material object, a narrative or a ritual in the community. In this sense, researching on non-sites of memory might be a way of mediating between these two archives and trying to create a canon – to use Aleida Assmann’s distinction – to make this past sharable and to render it as a matter of collective memory and care.

Aleksandra Janus: The case of the site of the former Nazi death camp in Sobibór might be a good example. It

shows the potential of soil studies, especially when dealing with sites or parts of the terrain that do not contain Jewish human remains. Studying such parts during the archaeological works in Sobibór, revealed that soil is a living archive with a strikingly accurate imprint of the camp recorded in the sandy ground in the form of darker marks left by objects and infrastructure. There are also places where the ground is very different because of the number of people who walked through it – as in the case of the *Himmelstrasse* – a road going from the train to the gas chambers. When we stand in non-sites of memory, seemingly there is nothing there, yet the soil and forest might contain very powerful imprints of what happened.

Robert van der Laarse: Sobibór archaeological works create an interesting theoretical case when we think about the questions of what heritage is whose heritage. Some name plates of children killed there were found during the works and an inheritance conflict emerged between the survivors, relatives of the victims and the Polish government. The families wanted to have these name plates back, yet the Polish authorities did not agree to give them away since they consider them national heritage as being found in Polish soil. From a Dutch perspective, such as an approach turns heritage into a loaded concept in contrast to a dynamic notion of cultural heritage focusing on meaning and valuation. From such perspective, children’s Jewish family would have expected to have received the objects “back” as the righteous owner. Something also happened between the Netherlands and Israel, when the Leiden Jewish community requested the “return” of their Nazi looted Torah Cloak from the collection of the Israel Museum. The Museum had received it from the Allies after the War and refused such restitution while arguing that Jewish heritage could never be claimed back from the State of Israel as the only national representative of the vanished Jewish world. When we work on recovering campsites and their virtual reconstructions, we sometimes encounter comparable lack of comprehension for our actions. “It’s just a forest now, why are you forcing people to remember the long-vanished past”? Yet, for me, every object and every site is a very specific archive, a very multi-layered one. For instance, already in 1946, committees working on Jewish history, found a lot of information; we know, for example, all the names of 33,000 Jews from the Netherlands, where they lived, where they came from, how they ended up in all sorts of camps. However, the archive is also built up by archaeological work to unknown victims, which has been done in several waves: in the 1960s, 1980s and again today. We need to remember, however, that a lot of memory work has been executed within different frameworks. The paradigm shifts are enormous: perhaps the reason why we do not know much about such former archives is because we do not speak their language anymore. We come from a different culture. We look since 1989 from a post-Cold War gaze at these sites without acknowledging the former gaze on the camps in the East and the West. In the West, there

are a number of historical works about the Holocaust that date from the 1960s (including the first American monograph under that title), yet nobody reads them anymore. Therefore, part of our task is actually being a translator of our own past: how our own gaze and frames affect current memory work, how spatial, digital, forensic turns changed the ways we are doing our research in spaces, on materiality and even on human bodies, which past historians would never have dared to address.

2. Ways of researching sites of violence

Roma Sendyka: I wonder if we can think – in the context of soil and forensic studies – about violence as a generative force, as Max Bergholz puts it. How could we ethically combine this view of violence which can create new phenomena with the preventative standpoint of “never again”?

Ewa Domańska: René Girard, in his book *Violence and the Sacred*, claims that there is good violence and bad violence. This is certainly a very ambiguous idea and on a general level, it might lead to very dangerous generalisations that we want to avoid. Firstly, I always say: Go to the case study and examine the problem on the basis of a very concrete example. Secondly, we need to rethink the preventative potential of genocide/Holocaust studies. I like the idea of coming back to apotropaic symbols that have been used in many different cultures. How in our post-secular condition might we rethink the role of apotropaic symbols: textual, visual, material? If W.J.T. Mitchell is right with his idea that images “go before us” whenever a commemorative monument is designed, I would ask what future does it anticipate? Are we able, as scholars, to build a social imaginary that would protect us from bad violence or prevent possible bad violence from happening? How might our texts, poems, paintings or photos really prefigure a more positive future? Currently, public space is filled with catastrophic images, apocalyptic visions of what’s next. Can we focus on those aspects of our past that show that history might have happened otherwise and use this unfulfilled potential of various collaborations, cohabitations etc.? I’m thinking about the phenomenal project of the Israeli artist and scholar Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History*, in which she shows that history between Israel and Palestine could have been different. Therefore, I would ask: How might our projects that are related to post-genocidal spaces be transformative and preventative? What if we do not focus only on commemorating or stimulating discussion on how to commemorate a place, but investigate if there is anything preventative about them? Images of non-sites of memory might have a huge impact on the social (collective) consciousness that is undergoing a serious right-wing turn, not only in Poland. We are in a situation in which we cannot become bystanders. We must learn from our own research.

Let’s move out of humanities, just for inspiration, let’s revitalise our thinking by infusing humanities and social sciences with ideas and concepts coming from geography, soil science, dendrology or ethology. Let’s think about the ecosystem of a killing site right now and how this place might be turned into a valuable environmental site which, at the same time, is stigmatised by the events that happened in the past. Perhaps social archaeology combined with forensic archaeology might help? I wonder if Caroline Sturdy Colls sees this kind of movement in archaeology that would give us hope that there is really a necessity and possibility to merge the humanities with the natural sciences. Do you feel it yourself as a scholar contributing to this movement?

Caroline Sturdy Colls: Yes, I would like to think that. I am trained as an archaeologist with expertise in forensic archaeology so I have worked in a present context, with missing persons’ cases where the framework is to get a very black and white answer and there is a necessity to say: “This is exactly what happened.” However, that is a problematic concept in the forensic sphere, in general. There are ways in which archaeology and forensics go together: they are both about search and identification of the evidence, but there are also significant differences. Archaeology is obviously always about probabilities and I use the words “probable mass grave” a lot. My work has been very interdisciplinary and there are many different techniques that we can use which draw from different disciplines; in some sense, archaeology is about loaning techniques from other fields. I combine many different approaches: aerial photography, laser technology, LIDAR, remote sensing tools, geophysical methods. The non-invasive approach relies very much on the comparison of different types of datasets and, as technology evolves, we borrow tools and technologies from, for example, games design, computing and visualisations mechanisms and we can interrogate those data in different and interesting ways. However, the fact remains that excavation is the only way to get absolute proof. There are many misconceptions about these technologies because we are not in a position where we have an X-ray machine that will show us what is beneath the ground. In that sense, this work is also about managing expectations.

I think personally, particularly given Holocaust denial, it is more important to be honest about what you are doing than trying to make your findings fit a predefined hypothesis. Additionally, that is still often a very uncomfortable notion for many people who are working within the forensic arena. Certainly, in the context of the Holocaust, the emotional and ethically sensitive nature of the topic is of utmost importance and it cannot be completely removed from it. Therefore, I, for example, work with artists a lot – since art can communicate certain things that you cannot within other spheres. This has been for me one way to explore issues of forensic truth. By working closely with artists, we can explore what it means when you have an object and four possible interpreta-

tions of it or what it means ethically when your findings contradict what a survivor is adamant about.

Aleksandra Janus: Perhaps, following the artists' gaze as researchers, we can spot things that have escaped our attention and are located in the particular register of vernacular memory. In works of artists, such as Karolina Grzywnowicz and Anna Zagrodzka, who engage with sites of past violence, attention to the ground, narrowing the field of vision, reaching down low, underfoot, following tracks – this can all be viewed as evidence of forensic sensitivity. In addition, it is a key point that our gaze is often drawn to what has been insufficiently told or expressed. Perhaps it cannot be expressed fully or at all. Yet, this specific kind of sensitivity to reality, exemplified in artistic activity, may be of value as an epistemological tool. Contemporary artistic and academic research practice often puts into question the radical distinction between science and art as two different means of relating to the world and we see growing interest in all forms of art-based research. Artists with their tools and methods may significantly deepen our understanding of phenomena that are of interest to scientists.

Karolina Grzywnowicz: My practice is mainly research-based and I often work with specialists from different fields: botanists, soil scientists, hydrologists, but also local specialists and members of local communities. I am very interested in how humans mark the territory and how we can read the landscape as a liminal archive. According to the forensic approach, every gesture leaves a trace and I am searching for these kinds of traces. For me, everything started with the project *Weeds* in 2014, when I visited the south-east part of Poland where in the 1940s, after World War II, 620,000 people (Ukrainians, Boykos and Lemkos) were forced to leave their villages due to resettlements. Most of these villages were burned down, so there are no clearly visible traces that people used to live there, although it was a densely-populated area. I tried to find these villages and the only evidence that people used to live there were plants. I realised that, by knowing the plants, we can not only mark the places, but also restore the topography of these non-existing villages. I wanted to create a guide for people who want to go there and discover these places by themselves, so I made a website with a map and the plants' descriptions: for instance, if you find a periwinkle, it is very likely that a cemetery was located there, because it is an evergreen plant and people in this region used to plant it on graves. As I wanted to bring up this very marginalised topic of history and this quite marginalised region to the centre, therefore, I decided to present an exhibition in Warsaw at Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. I transported 20 m² of the meadow from these villages and, after the show, I re-installed it in a public space in Warsaw.

During my research, I realised that these villages function as taboo spaces: local people never go there and they really discouraged me to visit those sites. But of course, I

did. I tried to work with the community in places situated near a non-existing village, in Studenne. I decided to invite people for a walk to encourage them to go there. We went for a walk, during which we discovered remnants of former buildings and a cemetery. Many people who came for this walk visited this abandoned village for the first time, even if they lived only a five-minute walk away.

The last project I did, together with the choreographer Agata Siniarska, was an installation about Nazi violent practices towards nature. Agata's performance, inspired by Pola Nireńska's *Holocaust Tetralogy* and thinking about the body as the archive, was set in a garden that I designed. I researched how Nazis used plants to camouflage camps, gas chambers or mass graves, but also how they planted beautiful plants like roses or rhododendrons in the gardens in, for example, the Auschwitz Camp. Therefore, I used plates as in a botanical garden with descriptions and stories about these different violent practices.

Anna Zagrodzka: I am an engineer and photographer by profession. In my work, I examine the relationship between art and science and each of my projects is based on multidirectional research. I am interested in the visual reference of how nature transforms the traces of history in former extermination camps and how the biology of the environment invades the structure of the camp buildings with the organic matter. I use a microscope to take photos of the moulds that can be found at the camp sites and I try to present them in the most abstract way. I want to show something beautiful that can pose a serious threat to people. Another observation is the analysis of dependence of selected moulds and their interaction, the competition between species and their struggle. It is a denial of the romantic vision of nature. My work is based on microbiological research that shows that some moulds can be almost exclusively found in the death camps. I also try to show how the conservation philosophy towards camp sites has changed over the years and illustrate the micro-level of the conservation processes at the Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau. For instance, until the 1980s, decaying poplars at the camp site were being replaced. Later, the Museum's authorities started to conserve these trees. I'm interested in how the politics of nature transforms in places like this. Nature tends to confirm Oskar Hansen's vision of monument: it is a search for continuity. It starts with life, passes to death and then returns to another life.

Katarzyna Bojarska: Simon Schama wrote in *Landscape and Memory* that it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape. Yet, I think what both Karolina Grzywnowicz and Anna Zagrodzka are doing is redirecting this relationship: they look at raw matter and treat it not as something mute or voiceless, but rather as something meaningful. It is our inability to translate that renders "raw matter" speechless. Therefore, artists' work is an act of translation of something that

is undecipherable, seemingly meaningless. What I mean by translation here is not explaining the object, but rather relating ourselves, our bodies and imagination, to it. In this sense, artists exercise a particular “right to look”: the more skilled you are, the more literate in reading signs and traces of the past. As translators, armed with imagination and investigative skills, they are our guides in seeing more, wanting to see more and looking where we thought there was nothing see (or where we were not expected to look). There is also a question of power that is disarmed in those non-violent practices of caring: taking care of the sites of past violence, taking care of those plants, something that is associated with a very feminine gesture and belongs to a female tradition of land art, created also by such Polish artists as Teresa Murak, Elżbieta Janicka, Diana Lelonek or Joanna Rajkowska. Therefore, there are particular ethics of investigative care in these projects. Finally, both projects deconstruct the understanding of life on the sites of death. They show that there is a continuity of life, but in different forms: different forms of life and different forms of continuity, not necessarily anthropocentric.

Roma Sendyka: Artists are important trail-blazers as far as the actions they undertake in the post-violence areas: I mean not only artist visits, political walks, nature walks, testimonial walks and processions that direct attention and elevate the need to understand the site and its history. Some of these practices can even become radical: very often breaking through, trespass, secretly entering is exactly the way or the only way the artist can get closer and take us with her to the site. So, memory-inspired movement is key problem to discuss. Another is linked with materiality. When artists engage with post-genocidal *objets trouvés*, ethical questions arise. In the post-human era, we are seriously concerned not only with agency, but also with sovereignty of objects. We need, therefore, to consider – what was mentioned before by Ewa Domańska – the right to be left undisturbed, to moulder and decay. If we rescue an object from the earth, do we observe its rights or do we ignore them? Is that an act of care or human domination? We urgently need to answer an ethical question how to responsibly interact with spaces, plants and objects of uncommemorated sites we research.

Matilda Mroz: I would like to add to these different types of walks a walk that Claude Lanzmann is performing when he brings back Szymon Srebrnik to the site of the death camp. So, he is taking people to the site where there seems to be nothing to see. Yet, Karolina Grzywnowicz’s walk seems to be a completely different model from what Lanzmann is doing with landscape. Lanzmann shows us how we think about landscape and nature that seems to be indifferent to human presence, whereas there is something else too about our being indifferent to natural presence.

Katarzyna Bojarska: I am thinking about Dominick LaCapra’s distinction between loss and absence. According

to him, loss is always material, concrete and absence is abstract. Yet, in a post-genocidal context, absence is a fact, it is material: there were people, there were villages and there are no more. Whether this absence is transformed into loss for us who live here is because of artists, researchers and artists as researchers, who go to those sites and work very carefully to establish that affective relationship of loss. It can be seen as another version of what Ariella Azoulay called civil contract of photography: it is a civil contract of art, in a sense that those practices – post factum, long after the events – enable us to re-establish the bond of citizenship. We can form this affective space where the possibility of addressing our former co-citizens appears, we mark those sites in different ways and live in and with them in different ways. Researchers, activists and artists meet to address the absence and form an affective space for working out and living with loss, not taking it for granted.

Erica Lehrer: I would like to raise a critical issue related to such artistic interventions. There was an article by Maria Dembek in a recent issue of *Holocaust Studies* that points out that we tend to talk so much about the philosophy and ideology of our projects, which we develop as we are planning them, but rarely is there meaningful research carried out afterwards to assess what their actual effects were. This seems especially relevant when dealing with socially engaged projects that involve local communities. Dembek discusses a project combining arts and archaeology, called *The Cut*, that was done in Muranów, sponsored by the Polin Museum. Her argument is that the lack of a critical discourse framing this public performance of unearthing objects meant that it played into an un-worked-through process in Poland regarding the meaning of “digging for things.” It risked normalising and perpetuating for local viewers issues raised by Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross in *Golden Harvest*, rather than opening them to critical questioning. So, we need to ask ourselves what the actual effects are when we engage people to participate in the projects we make. What unintended effects might we unleash, which may work against our goals?

3. Positionality in the research on genocide

Caroline Sturdy Colls: As you know, a lot of my research is about finding ways not to dig and not encountering human remains in the context of the Holocaust. However, the issue of looting is still very prevalent, particularly in Ukraine where I have been working recently. Many of the projects, in which I have been engaged, feel more like rescue archaeology projects. Often, we visit a site with tools and technology only to find that the looters have already uncovered human remains. Looting the sites, taking metal – it is also about normalisation of objects like teeth. The same problems appear with memorials: founders know they will be destroyed, little pieces of metal and stone tak-

en, so it has to be decided what to build new memorials from. We are going to a site to undertake non-invasive research, but our job is often to rebury these remains, to find a way to protect them, to prevent those lootings from happening. Additionally, of course, for that we can count on local authorities, who assure us these actions should be prosecuted and whom we often witness trying to protect sites, but we have also encountered indifference to this. Therefore, the work we are doing becomes evidence in a public form. Therefore, my work will never just fit into the box of forensic archaeology because it is about public truth, it is about activism, it is about exploring some of these uncomfortable issues as well.

Ewa Domańska: The research on robbing mass graves requires a lot of sensitivity, also because it might go into the box of scandalous research. I find it shocking as a person living here and now, but it was probably not so unusual at that time, in the context of war. In addition, we must put it in the proper historical context.

Zuzanna Dziuban: In my research, I ask about the continuity between the “here and now” and the conditions in which the practice of grave looting could have become normalised. Contextualisation is important, but so too is the question around sensibilities which have survived the war and perpetuate deep into the post-war period. The durability of these sentiments can hardly be explained by the extreme conditions of war. In fact, I would argue that to think about these practices exclusively through the prism of the war serves to explain them away. That is why in my talk about the afterlives of objects looted from the dead, the central example came from an interview given to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2000 by Regina Prudnikova. In a startlingly emotionless manner, she admits to having implanted in her own mouth two gold teeth looted from Jewish victims of an execution. She bought the teeth after the war, fully aware of their disturbing provenance. Even in 2000, she does not seem particularly disconcerted about having profited from the death of members of the othered minority – she has it all rationalised. Thanks to historical research, we know that both grave robberies and the reuse of dental gold were quite widespread and normalised practices. I, in turn, look at contemporary contexts to see how, especially for the immediate participants of those events, this normalisation and the frames and sensibilities that enabled it are still being perpetuated today.

Robert van der Laarse: The question is also if this happened only to Jews or also to Poles or to Germans, since there were many dead bodies being found. That would be a very interesting question: what difference it made at the time.

Zuzanna Dziuban: We know from historical research that German war graves were also robbed. In this case, too, the grave robberies unfolded across ethnic lines.

However, I think that comparisons drawn between those cases are somewhat misleading and serve to analytically downplay the practice. We should bear in mind, for instance, the difference between the grave of a defeated enemy and the mass grave of brutally murdered fellow citizens. In the case of Jewish graves, it was othering, anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic myth of Jewish gold that played an important part. Grave robbery is a form of economic violence, but it also has a political dimension.

Therefore, in my writing I tried to intervene in the way in which this practice is framed as a treasure hunt or gold hunt because this framing reproduces, to a certain extent, the logic behind the practice. Grave robbery perpetrated at the burial sites of a defeated enemy or a member of othered minority constitutes a practice of alterity and dehumanisation and not merely a gain-orientated act. It is the politics of dead bodies. It took us a long time to reframe in these terms the practices of racially driven, colonial looting of indigenous and aboriginal graves, as a form of political violence. I think we should also open up our research on practices pertaining to the Holocaust to more critical approaches, not critical in terms of post-humanities, but also critical in terms of taking a step back and looking critically at our own practices of normalisation. I consider the urge, experienced also by researchers, to downplay or explain away the grave robberies as one such practice.

Łukasz Posłuszny: We have a problem with presentism in discussing these issues. I have a feeling that Regina Prudnikova was not unsettled at all giving this interview. It is upsetting much more to us than people in the historical context. We need to think about the prolonged existence of some structures: Holocaust mass graves or concentration camps had a longer history in terms of social tools or inventions. I wonder if it is possible to undertake an investigation in terms of the biography of an object, of going back and studying whether there were such practices of looting in Lithuania or Belarus earlier, also in the context of colonial, maybe very localised experience. Perhaps, it was happening earlier and there was nothing strange about it, maybe it was a general practice or knowledge that was already known?

Roma Sedyka: We need to engage cultural historical anthropology to fully understand this. It indeed might have been perceived as a normal practice known from the past. The whole gesture of casting is as old as the Bible which testifies the casting of a golden calf from personal gold of stateless Jews. Therefore, something that is made of retrieved gold, as well as casting, represent a very old symbolic moment with a long political and moral history. Research on everyday practices would shed some light on rules of recycling of objects belonging to the diseased, those of my kin and those considered being “the Other”. War-time looting as a social practice may also add needed information on such extreme acts. What is so unusual about the example researched by Zuzanna Dziuban is the

final bodily, somatic aspect of the re-appropriation. Ethical questions pile up and I believe anthropology may help us to understand (which will not mean: justify) at least some aspects of the practice. I feel that anthropology, supposed to study steady patterns of human behaviour, is too rarely summoned to aid Holocaust research, as if all of the events of the Shoah were unprecedented. As Hannah Arendt a long time ago and, recently, scholars working in Kraków on the “banality of forgetting” stated (Jacek Nowak, Sławomir Kapralski, Dariusz Niedźwiedzki): much of what happened during the “state of exception” was “banal” and “everyday”. It is important to see the “everyday practices” beyond what shocks us as a transgression, because what is at stake is not to raise “dark” excitement or express indignation or stigmatise, but to understand what, why and how something happened.

Katarzyna Bojarska: Where does our shock, our discomfort come from? Since you mentioned colonialism, that Holocaust logic is colonial logic, we need to think that there is another type of logic at play here: the capitalist logic. She bought the tooth and it was on the market. The production of the commodity was violent – and that is what capitalism is about.

Tomasz Łysak: There is a character in Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* who has all his teeth knocked out and then he replaces the ones he lost with gold. In the process, he changes his identity so the gold teeth mean a new identity. We might ask how popular gold teeth were before the war. Additionally, what did it actually mean when the teeth were transferred? It was also an economic transfer, yet not all people could afford gold teeth, so maybe there were also other materials from which teeth were made. Were they also transferred?

Zuzanna Dziuban: As far as I know, there is no existing anthropological study that presents an argument to suggest that this kind of engagement with corpses was culturally permissible. Grave robbery was a transgressive practice in the pre-war period. This transgressive act was suspended during the war and in its aftermath, conditioned by the transient circumstances of war, violence and impunity. However, grave robberies cut deep into the post-war period. There are places, as noted by Caroline Sturdy Calls, where it still unfolds. In Poland, the participation of local inhabitants in the process of extermination, because of the proximity of camps and killing sites, definitely contributed to the normalisation of grave looting. Yet, this activity was illegal both in pre-war and in the post-war period and was critically addressed by post-war authorities: in 1946, a new law was introduced, which strengthened penalties for grave robbery as compared to the pre-war period. This set legislation in place to cast grave robbery as a criminal practice. Thanks to research on colonial conquest, Armenian genocide, the Vietnam War and the Spanish Civil War, we know that the practice of scavenging from the bodies and graves of

the dead during and following periods of armed conflict and political violence is a universal phenomenon, present across cultures and geographies. Indeed, it is often a temporal distance from the events and taboo-breaching practices (and sensitivities behind them) that first enables research. Sometimes research is driven by the need to delegitimise those sensitivities. What I see in Poland, especially in response to the publication of Jan T. Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross’s book *Golden Harvest*, is a conceptual, epistemic process of knowledge production that keeps this practice normalised or domesticated and a critical intervention at bay.

Erica Lehrer: There was an exhibition in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in 2016 called *Bogactwo (Money to Burn)*. It was about the Polish post-war cultural imagination regarding wealth. I was immediately struck by the absence of Jewish themes amongst the works or in the curatorial text. Surely Jews must figure in here somewhere? Where was the *Żyd z pieniążkiem* (Jew with a coin), this incredibly popular, iconic image with such a long history? However, there was one piece, which I originally read as an absence, that I now recognise as perhaps rather a subtle artistic presence related to the theme of Jews and wealth. It was a piece by Ewa Axelrad: a huge photographic magnification of a gold tooth, entitled *Is It Safe* (2012). Still, the absence of any interpretive materials suggesting the Jewish theme made me wonder about cultural memory, about the ability or desire of Poles – even progressive Polish curators – to discuss that issue.

Tomasz Żukowski: I am interested in the social context of these practices. I remember, for example, an article by Ludwik Stomma in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1946 about installations for the gold miners in Oświęcim area and a remark that some of their houses were built thanks to the findings. So, the problem from where the money flows was apparently known to the whole community. Therefore, I am interested in the question “what was the reaction of how the miners were perceived by the community where they lived”? For example, in Henryk Grynberg’s *Dziedzictwo (Heritage)*, there is a passage where the local man says to Grynberg: “That house was built from the gold robbed from the dead.” There is no reaction in the community. For me, it is really a great problem how to investigate what happens in the communities.

Zuzanna Dziuban: There are testimonies from inhabitants of villages neighbouring with extermination camps that enable a deeper look into the social context of the practice. The memorial Museum at Bełżec has conducted dozens of interviews in which grave robbery is addressed, including by people who admit to participating in it, in the 1940s and in the 1950s, long after the end of the war. We know that this happened at all former camps in Poland and that the practice had a mass character. According to testimonies, “everybody participated” in the searches. During my research on Bełżec, Treblinka and Sobibór,

I learned that the areas of the former camps were divided amongst groups, sometimes families, competing for profit. It was not uncommon that, in order to avoid capture by the police, the looters would transfer human remains to the nearby woods, houses and barns, to examine them there. In some cases, armed gangs would protect the sites from the intervention of law enforcement agencies. Men, women and children would participate in the searches hand in hand. The looting continued deep into the post-war period, resulting in few arrests and boosting local economies, which is also evidenced by recent research. Even if the looting of the dead were not practised or accepted by all members of the local populace, it was a widespread and normalised social practice, in which the bodies of the dead and their graves were performatively and discursively dehumanised and acted upon as a mere source of monetary gain.

There is a fascinating example to evince this: in the aftermath of the War, a Jewish survivor, the head of the Jewish community of Tomaszów Lubelski, Szmul Pelc, visited Bełżec and, outraged by what he saw, alerted the authorities in Lublin. There was an exchange of letters between the authorities in Lublin, Tomaszów Lubelski and Bełżec, which offers a fascinating example of the work of cultural translation. While the documents exchanged between Lublin and Tomaszów Lubelski and sent by Tomaszów Lubelski to Bełżec unequivocally condemn the practice and cast it as desecration of human remains, as it was legally framed at that time, the public announcement issued by the Mayor of Bełżec requested that it be brought to an end because it constituted stealing from the state treasury. Locally, amongst its participants, the deeper transgressiveness of grave robbery was completely arrested and naturalised. I feel that our responsibility as researchers is to restore this elementary ambiguity, to critically re-read our conceptualisations of the practice and unpack the processes of closure and its consequences and continuities.

4. Witnesses? Bystanders? Participants? Dwellers of the non-sites of memory

Roma Sendyka: When we think about Hilberg's classic triangle of victims, perpetrators and bystanders, we consider subjects having different agencies. However, we forget that this categorisation comes as a matter of fact from the encounter with Claude Lanzmann's film which comes, in turn, from Raul Hilberg, who based his research on German administrative documents from the war-time era. So, in a sense, we are working with subjectivity constructions from the 1940s and fashioned – in fact – by the perpetrators. Perhaps, if we apply some newer approaches, such as Margaret Archer's relational sociology, we could proceed not with supposedly stable subjective positions (of a perpetrator, its victim and nearby onlooking bystander), but rather complicate and dynamise the social panorama focusing on relations between actants.

With this move, we could see the whole field blurred, precarious and situational: the social fabric around non-sites of memory could become less obvious when we observe the complex processes of implication, highlighted recently by Michael Rothberg. We could then grasp the system in motion: see how the classic attributions overlap and change or accumulate in one person, but only for a brief period of time, to become changed under new conditions evoked by ever-changing framework of violence. Perhaps, a change in epistemological approaches for our research on uncommemorated sites might help to grasp the problem in a more multiperspective, complex way?

Krijn Thijs: I am very eager to dwell on the categories used not only by the researchers, but also by the contemporaries to figure out the historical setting of what is happening during a crime. Michał Chojak lists in his typology of the witnesses interviewed by Yahad – In Unum, the curious ones; those who were forced to watch; the neighbours; the occasional witnesses; and the requisitioned. I am interested in the last category which comprises people who actually participated in the crime and epitomises the paradox we all work with in Holocaust studies, the problem of complicity. How do these witnesses see the way their testimonies are used in the research? Do they feel comfortable when they see that, in the eyes of the researchers, they were kind of essential to the process of killing? Is there any kind of discussion on this with the people whom the Yahad team interviews?

Michał Chojak: We are very transparent with the witnesses about how our work will be disseminated in academic and educational contexts. It needs to be stated that in Holocaust studies, we tend to use a modern, Western European filter to understand the event. However, for people who were requisitioned and whom we interview, there is no question of complicity. They do not think in these terms. To be requisitioned is a rural tradition which was common before the War, both in Poland and in the Soviet Union, where local administration used to ask villagers to do something for the good of the community: to clean streets from the snow or dig a silo ditch for crops. These kinds of practices were known for peasants and, when German troops arrived in these terrains, they used this existing system of requisitions in the framework of the killing. I never discussed complicity with a witness. For them, they did this because a representative of the local administration or the local police or the German himself, came to their house with an order: "Tomorrow at 8 o'clock, you will come to the town hall with your shovel." The killings involved not only people themselves, but also material tools and objects used by peasants during their everyday work. The genocide was deeply rooted in rural life.

Jacek Leociak: We face the problem of the witness here on many levels: on the level of methodology, the level of the Holocaust experience and the level of human experience, in general. I must disagree with Michał Chojak's

claim about Western categories that make us biased in the perception of the time and space of the Holocaust. I do not think so. We must try to elaborate, as precisely as possible, a typology of witnessing to the extreme experiences and this kind of typology must cover universal human possibilities of reaction to such events. We must abandon the triangle typology of bystanders, perpetrators and victims. It is time to elaborate a profound notion of what it means to be a witness and to discuss if it is possible to be a witness to such extreme experiences. The example of the requisitioned reminds us that we cannot apply such an old-fashioned category to people who participated in this killing machinery. There were many agents of this process: soldiers, gendarmes or policemen who just shot the victims. However, there were also various types of participants, not witnesses, just participants.

Zuzanna Dziuban: I also find the Yahad – In Unum’s typology of witnesses problematic. You mentioned requisitioned witnesses, but what about those voluntarily requisitioned? How do you locate this kind of person at the killing site? We know from the historical research that there were groups of people volunteering to bury the dead or to participate in the executions and they did so primarily in order to steal from the victims. If we keep conceptualising the positionality of those local populations in terms of witnessing, as they do themselves, we risk reproducing the framework in which they position themselves. In this way, instead of intervening critically, we might simply perpetuate the framework which has been in place since World War II. This is not about distorted memory of the participants of those events, but about a certain vision of reality, which should be addressed critically. When addressing colonisation, we certainly do not feel the urge to take on the perspective of the colonisers – we look at it critically. This approach is as much ethical as it is political and we should extend it to analyse how subjects – who contributed to the implementation of the Holocaust in various ways – naturalised, domesticated and interpreted their positionality not as complicit, but forced to participate in genocide.

Michał Chojak: The Yahad – In Unum’s classification of witnesses does not reflect our understanding of the category of witness, but rather refers to types of people one can meet today in the villages or towns of Eastern Europe. We consider the witnesses as witnesses in terms of criminology and define them through their motivation or simply the reasons that led them to become witnesses of the killing. Certainly, we should be critical towards these categories. I do not mention voluntary participants because it is difficult to find people who would accept to speak openly about their involvement and motives. The categories I use come from people who agreed to talk to us and who, in this way, explained to us the reason why they had been present at the crime scene. Our priority is gathering information about the events; therefore, we cannot openly discuss complicity because we would risk the

interview not happening. If we feel comfortable with the witness, if we see that the witness is answering questions without trouble, we may ask some more detailed or deeper questions about their perception of the issue of complicity. This is a task for researchers who analyse these materials to find answers to more complicated questions.

Roma Sendyka: Michał Chojak showed the conditions of being auxiliary to the killings and, as a keen fan of researching the middle grounds, I do not think that putting a clear alternative voluntary or requisitioned, will take us any further than we are now. Mary Fulbrook in her analysis of bystanders, proposes, in the first place, anthropological research on the violence field. Following this method, we should consider, for instance, the history of serfdom, this conditioning to answer the needs coming from above as an important factor. First, we should understand the realities, then draw conclusions if that was voluntary or not. We need to find a way and a language, perhaps specific for an area in question, that will not let us repeat far-fetched assumptions, often derivative of central and – we need to admit – elitists perspectives or from even more distant to the specific site global Holocaust studies. I advocate for more “situated” (as Donna Haraway put it) studies, that take time to research grass-roots, vernacular knowledges, not to uncritically normalise them, but to gain reference points to knowledge built centrally in our highly specialised educational institutions.

Katarzyna Bojarska: Perhaps the participants of the past scenarios can become the witnesses or informants of the present ones. We might want to try to make the participants of these past events our informants, our witnesses. This category needs to be critically reworked.

Robert van der Laarse: In the reconstruction of the notion of bystander, we also need to take into consideration historical differences. For instance, the point of ideology, nationalism and fascism is important to understand the position of bystander in Germany, while, on the other hand, in the occupied Netherlands, which lacked a strong authoritarian, anti-Semite tradition, the situation, as well as the experience and self-image of “bystanders” was distinct.

Christina Morina: Certainly, these ideological aspects are specific to each of those societies, but, at the same time, if the concept is to be successful, it has to be positioned on a meta-level so that it is broadly applicable. It is important to pay respect to that and take it into consideration, but, at the same time, it can also obscure the underlying anthropological and social dynamics that are at play regardless of the ideology. Dehumanising, exclusionary social practices and processes work according to similar logics and are, to a certain degree, fully independent from ideology and focusing on them enhances our ability conduct comparative research on other forms of systemic violence.

Zuzanna Dziuban: What I feel uneasy about is that when we develop our conceptualisations of bystanding, we all too often adopt the perspective of those who construct themselves as “bystanders” and witnesses and, as a result, this perspective is perpetuated without problematising the concept. We need to think about how the difference between testimonies of various actors is constituted and how the perspective on bystanding changes once we decide to look at it from the perspective of the persecuted. Maria Kobielska and Aleksandra Szczepan propose the term “testimony” to describe a contemporary disposition of Poles to bear witness or give a testimony and define it as a complex situation which is heterogeneous, dynamic, comprising both human and non-human actors. However, what is important here is the question of how power relations shape testimony. The power structures inherent to majority–minority relations affect not only testimony and the way in which the war experience is framed from the perspective of the so-called “bystanders”, but also how testimony is performed by witnesses who come to testify on behalf of those who perpetrated violence against them. We should bear in mind the continuity of power relations which are inscribed in the testimonial situation and played out in this field, especially if it is the so-called bystanders who are called upon to speak about what happened and construct the situation for contemporary audiences.

Krijn Thijs: Yet, in this conceptualisation of “testimony”, we obtain indeed some kind of new vocabulary to talk about witnessing; it does open a scope of different categories. From my perspective as an “old-fashioned” historian, I would be interested, however, in whether we can relate these various categories of witnesses to some kind of historical validity or source criticism. Various witnesses that we would like or not to call bystanders will always describe their position as most non-involved in the violence. Can we trust them? Can we trust one more than the other?

Maria Kobielska: Although the point of historical validity of the witnesses is, of course, of crucial importance, our focus was completely different. We did not want to investigate whether these people were telling the truth. We ask instead what they are doing now within the set of relations which we call memory culture or local memory culture. Our categories: crown, trustee, volunteer, outcast, contingent, summoned witnesses and testimonial gestures, performances, objects and words come from the present configurations of practices and subject positions of users of post-genocidal space.

Aleksandra Szczepan: We try to move the discussion about witnessing outside the discourse of morality because it has proven to be futile. Thus, instead of deciding who has the right to call themselves a witness, we rather ask: how do people in contemporary Poland position themselves as witnesses to the Shoah? Yet, we consider

ourselves implicated subjects, too: we are users of Polish memory culture and we have a vision of this culture and identity that we want to foster. This model entails speaking about the Shoah and Polish complicity and keeping the memory of the genocide. Therefore, our classification is in some way positive: we consider witnesses as people who are willing to tell the true story about the difficult past, even if in an incomplete and indirect way. In this sense, also our research might be considered “testimonial”: by researching sites of violence, we want to take upon the disposition of telling the story of the past.

Christina Morina: In a sense, this project is about unearthing things that you would not know about if you had not talked to these people: both in terms of the locations and of the things that happened. On the other hand, oral history interviews are not so much about what had happened, but rather document how people articulate their experiences and memories in the present. By the same token and bringing it back to historiography: the category of the bystander or rather *bystanding* – we should actually make the shift to a process-focused conceptualisation because the person-focused category has too many flaws – is not stable. Bystanding is a mode of social existence and thus an inherently unstable concept. Yet, it still allows us to grasp the complexity and changeability of the social experience of a person who can be acting as a perpetrator, suffering as a victim and behaving like a bystander in one and the same life. It is a category that constantly challenges perceptions about history and memory. For historians and memory activists, it remains tremendously challenging to find both, plausible explanations to what happened, as well as appropriate narratives, representations and platforms to disseminate their knowledge into society. So, our own work – including your interview work – has a profound impact on this complex interplay between history, historiography and memory.

5. How to get the Righteous right?

Roma Sendyka: The Righteous in Poland have always had bad luck – they have never been unconditionally accepted and valued and their actions from the past inevitably, for the last almost eight decades, cannot be read only within an ethical framework and beyond the political one. Even now, under democratic conditions and facing the time when all of them will perish, it seems like there is still no way to commemorate and thank these people in a non-political way. Used today as “screen object” in centralised discourse by populists, their biographies are utilised to boost Polish heroism/pride. On the other hand, anti-populists, trying not to join right-wing propaganda, opt for a quiet, calm almost self-effacing means of commemoration (like the unrealised monument of young wood near Polin Museum). Our research on clandestine abandoned sites confronted us with stories of the Righteous at least in two locations (Miechów and Radeckni-

ca). Locally, the enthusiasm to commemorate these heroes is visibly limited: evidently, they open up unresolved questions of participation in wartime violence, as well as remind about Jewish presence in the area. Is there a leftist and liberal way to openly and wholeheartedly commemorate the Righteous Among the Nations in Poland?

Katarzyna Bojarska: Tomasz Żukowski shows in his analysis that the motive of the Righteous is used to build a collective image of the entire Polish society. This happens by means of Polish culture. Yet, I would argue, there is no such thing as “Polish culture.” We talk about the so-called dominant discourse, but there is more to that and we should not exclude ourselves from it. Additionally, contrary to Tomasz Żukowski who says that he wishes for Polish culture to confront the actual experience of the Jewish people, I would claim that actually it does confront, let’s say, guilt, but the response is narcissistic and infantile. Yet, it is a response and an outcome of a confrontation. I am curious if the structure of using the Righteous in Polish culture to construct a self-image – by means of showing the Polish nation as a homogeneous group, marginalising violence against Jews and finally showing Jews as indebted to Polish people – is fixed throughout post-war until contemporary times. Or has it varied? If so, what would be the factors of change?

Tomasz Żukowski: I look at the culture from above and I am concerned about dominant groups; I try to show the social norm. This model is quite stable and repeats the same pattern. Moreover, if we start to try to tell this story in a different way, the model will overwhelm our narration and modify the meaning we would like to put into our message.

Roma Sendyka: What kind of majority are we talking about here? Is it a numerical majority? Or dominating culture because it dominates politically? Or dominating because of being in control of the symbolic order? The big surprise in research on non-sites of memory was observing how local populations, very open to right-wing and populist developments, are reluctant to accept the narrative about the Righteous that comes from Warsaw.

Tomasz Żukowski: I wanted to show how the discourse functioned. Perhaps it is my limitation that I am working in the library and I do not have the experience that you are talking about. I need to widen my field of observation.

Katarzyna Bojarska: And yet, can we have the right image of Polish and Jewish memory without any positive narrative about the Righteous?

Robert van der Laarse: We need to remember that the Righteous is not a neutral concept, but a very political one. In the light of current discussions on bystanding, it is remarkable that the two nations with the largest numbers of trees at Yad Vashem are Poland and the Netherlands. It would be interesting then to make a historical and cul-

tural comparison between the Dutch and Polish situation regarding the Righteous. In the Netherlands, today the whole notion is actually hardly known or probably “forgotten.” The Dutch discussion about the war is always about “why we did not help the Jews enough.” Instead of being proud of such a large number of people who helped Jews in hiding or escapes, there is a general shame of not having been able to save them from the Nazis. In addition, what I find fascinating is how different this category is perceived in Poland (or from another angle, in France, where the Righteous are also publicly honoured). So, there is, in my view, really a big difference in the way we treat the notion of Righteous, just like that of bystander and which is probably closely related to the way national identities and self-images are expressed in narratives of occupation and victimhood.

Zuzanna Dziuban: Thinking about Poland, I would argue that, before we start drawing from positive examples for wartime attitudes and deeds, we should face it critically, have our critical moment. From my point of view, this has not happened yet: in the last 75 years, every possibility to truly critically address Polish positionality during the war has been domesticated, covered over with the redemptory discourse of trauma, covered over with the positive narrative of the Righteous Among the Nations and the exceptional scale of altruism on the part of Polish helpers, often evoked to hide the scope of complicity of Poles in the genocidal violence against Jews. This pertains also to the level of discursive and epistemological constructions perpetuated by scholars. The ethnographic approach, going into the field, certainly has the ability to unsettle this dominant frame, but this is also limited if we listen exclusively to Polish testimonies and only one perspective on the events. I probably spent too much time in the archives to be optimistic. There is still a lot of critical work to be done, as well as on our analytical categories.

Erica Lehrer: Thinking about the problem of representing the Righteous from a curatorial point of view, I have seen quite a few exhibitions on this subject and I have thought about what it would take to make a good exhibition about righteousness, not only, but especially in Poland. There are a few issues: one is that we use “righteous” as a sort of shorthand; we assume that we know what we are talking about when we say this word. However, we do not really take time to unpack the concept at all. We need to understand the range of ideas and myths that people – audiences who come to see an exhibition – may already have in their heads about righteousness. Yad Vashem (Israel’s official Holocaust memorial institution) has a strict definition of what it takes for an individual to be formally recognised by the Israeli state as Righteous Among the Nations. However, their criteria are, I think, not well known to most people, who do not have any idea, for instance, that one cannot have received any compensation for the help that one provided to Jews. The historical reality, however, does not even support Yad Vashem’s

category as entirely plausible. Even very noble people who hid Jews at great risk still needed funds to feed these people and that must have, at times, come from the people themselves. How can we know that all the resources that a given Jew in hiding had to offer their rescuer went strictly for their own upkeep? In addition, of course, the way the term is used in the vernacular, for people who perhaps in any way at any time helped a Jewish person, well then it gets extremely complicated. Could we do an exhibition where we actually show the complexity through real, specific, lived stories? What was the experience of someone who hid or helped a Jew? Is this not as complicated a category as “bystander”? Could bystanders help someone and also sexually assault them? Could they help someone and extort all the money from them? Many things happened, there was a broad spectrum of behaviour and these are complex stories. Michał Bilewicz says that, in the case of the Righteous in Poland, we should emphasise their *rarity*. The way this phenomenon is curated in contemporary Poland makes it seem as if just about everybody was righteous. In addition, in allowing this kind of thinking to be perpetuated, we lose out on the real pedagogical potential of helping people understand just how brave these very *few* people were. Instead, the idea of the Righteous is being used in Poland as a tool for clearing the national conscience, to say “We were good.” It would be much more useful, instead, to say: “It was really incredibly difficult to be a hero in this kind of situation.” This would be a completely different story. However, I think it would be one worth telling, as well as determining how to tell this story well.

6. Commemoration and education

Christina Morina: I assume that the visits of Yahad – In Unum or Rabbinical Commission is quite an exceptional event for these small communities: when you go there and talk to people about stories that, in their majority, have long been hidden and not talked about, I am curious to know how you reflect in your team on the effects that your work has on the local cultural memory and the social landscape of the places you visit. Do you think that your work has the potential to shift people’s assumptions about complicity and, in a broader sense, change historical consciousness?

Michał Chojak: The main goal of our work is to establish facts. In Poland, we are lucky to have a lot of archival sources: depositions of survivors, German documents etc., but the further you go to the East, the fewer archives you will find. Therefore, our questions are about facts: where did it happen, how, who were the actors involved in the killing? We do not ask questions about the perceptions of the event because these questions might be complicated for some people to answer. They do not expect these kinds of questions, as, for many of them, it is the first time that they speak about those events and, especially in former Soviet territories, people are not used to

being asked what they think about a historical event and they are not really prepared to answer this kind of question. However, we deeply encourage researchers to study testimonies recorded by Yahad – In Unum because these answers are there: even if the question were not asked, one may find information about the witnesses’ perceptions of the event, of the place, of the impact it has had on their collective memory.

Agnieszka Nieradko: Our approach is similar. When visiting a place, we are mainly interested in finding the “hole in the ground”, meaning the grave. We do come back to those sites and people, we do not focus, however, on their condition of being a witness. What is striking for me is the fact that many witnesses, with whom we speak, are now elderly people, living either on their own or close to their families and their stories are often disregarded and ignored by the next generations. The descendants of the witnesses are surprised to see that somebody wants to talk to their grandmother or grandfather and that, in fact, what he or she says matters. The so-called local people all know about those sites; however this memory is marginalised.

Katarzyna Bojarska: How do you get in touch with the representatives of the community? Do you involve the community in any way? What, in your opinion, do you bring to the people who live there?

Agnieszka Nieradko: Whenever someone contacts us about a place, a grave she or he knows about – we react. We try to focus on people who contacted us with the information about the site, these being either witnesses themselves or their families or local historians or people interested in their local history who have been collecting stories for years and now they feel there is space and time to share. We engage local authorities only at the stage of establishing memorials or some more serious undertakings, not while just investigating and looking for witnesses. Those who open the door for us are just individual people and they are our guides. Additionally, we must realise that people we meet now were children at the time of the events, so not only have we to deal with the information they share with us, but also we have to face their childhood trauma, since very often, when talking about the events they witnessed, they focus on themselves. As children, they saw and heard things so powerful that probably, at some point, it influenced their entire life. Moreover, their memories are often general and imprecise, after 70 years everything at the site turns out to be different, greater from what they remembered. I am not sure what we give them; I do not think we give them much, because we just want to listen to the story and we leave. Quite often children or grandchildren call us after the visit to tell us it was too much for them.

Adam Musiał: Have the initiatives you have been undertaking at the grass-roots level had any effect in education. Have they had any effect in perpetuating the memory of

these places? Has anything changed in carrying on the memory of these places in order to turn these non-sites of memory into sites of memory? I think this needs grass-roots local initiatives, ideally of teachers, educators, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, where the dominant model of national identity is based on ethnicity, in order to turn these non-sites of memory into places of our common memory.

Agnieszka Nieradko: From my experience, a site of non-memory becomes a site of memory only after erecting a three-dimensional object. If there is nothing around which we can gather or where we can leave candles, flowers or a stone, this site does not exist in the local memory. It does exist only for individual people who decide to remember. In places where we have succeeded in commemorating mass graves, all sites are being taken care of by the local schools. Moreover, local inhabitants visit these sites on November 1, All Saints Day. Yet, these forms of organised memory happen only if there is some material sign of a site. This is why we came up with the idea of the wooden matzevot and have, so far, erected around fifty of them, mainly in eastern Poland. As it turned out, even a piece of wood stuck in the ground makes a difference for people. For example, in the tiny village of Adampol, near Sobibór, where a labour camp for Jews was located and where 800 victims perished, two years ago, we managed to put up a wooden matzeva in the forest where one of the mass graves is located. A year later, one of my colleagues visited Adampol again to collect some testimonies and he was approached by a local woman who told him that she would lead him to the Jewish cross in the forest – she meant our matzeva. Since a matzeva is made of wood, for the woman the connotation was clear. It is truly a matter of leaving a marker with an inscription – the matzevot have an inscription saying “Here rest Jews of blessed memory murdered during the Holocaust” – to add the site the gravity. So, if we want the memory to be transmitted to further generations, we need to think of something that would be understandable for the local people: where you can place a candle or say a prayer.

Christina Morina: I would encourage us all to think about the assumptions that we (often implicitly) share. I believe that cultivating and commemorating those sites will do something good – in the best case, it will prevent such social violence from happening again. We should, however, ask ourselves what kind of non-site memory activism we wish to pursue and inspire and how we can provide education through explanation and analyses rather than “merely” mourning and emotional engagement. We need to debate how these sites can serve as open spaces in which actual historical knowledge about what and why things happened is being provided so we can have some hope that people will think for themselves and thus learn or unlearn certain types of behaviour for their times. I think enlightenment should be our goal.

Jonathan Webber: Yet, it is a bit unfortunate that, as Agnieszka Nieradko mentioned, the idea of these memorials is that Poles, not Jews, are to remember Jewish losses. Jews chose not to remember their losses and did not make a very strong effort to memorialise mass graves in the years after 1945. I am thinking of the British who, after World War I, established what later became known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; it is a massive project, and to this day continues to maintain war graves at 23,000 locations in 150 countries, commemorating the dead in individual named graves or, if impractical, on a memorial. I cannot understand why, after World War II, the Jewish authorities did not establish a Holocaust graves commission and have not focused until today on memorialising all these places properly and correctly.

Zuzanna Dziuban: This is not necessarily the case. There was a special commission established as early as 1944 by the Jewish community, which was organising itself at the time and searches for graves and exhumations were undertaken. Additionally, the Red Cross carried out exhumations in the immediate post-war period. I think it is important to bear in mind that this took place in a specific political situation that, amongst others, led to the centralisation of exhumation policies and politics in the post-war period in Poland, which effectively prevented the Jewish community from carrying out those exhumations by themselves. However, there were many local and bottom-up initiatives aimed at collecting human remains from memorial sites, which were not transformed into memorial sites at the time, at burying ashes at Jewish cemeteries or bringing them for burial to Israel.

Robert van der Laarse: For a long time, in many countries, also in the Netherlands, orthodox Jewish communities did not even like to visit the sites of massacre. Thus, the Dutch chief rabbis stood by the position: “If you want to remember, do it within your own circles.” Nowadays, since the 1990s, in contrast, there are lots of involvement of Jewish communities and activists in “Holocaust” camp memorial sites. Yet, the main argument against the claim about Jewish negligence regarding memorialisation is the fact that, in the years 1945–1948, there was no State of Israel that could represent Jewish people. Moreover, there is the question if Israel does represent all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust comparable to how other countries, like Britain or France, are commemorating their war victims. Are we allowed to politicise them as Jewish victims, knowing that, as citizens of European countries, they were killed for being Jews according to Nazi laws. Thus, on the one hand, we need to be very careful in taking up such ethnic kinds of categorisations in memory work, while on the other, we certainly have the task to avoid making everyone the same kind of victim.

Agnieszka Nieradko: The Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, often says that the Polish-Jewish relationship, including the memory of the Holocaust, was in the

fridge for 50 years. So now we are taking this thing out of the fridge and we have to deal with it. It is astonishing and frustrating that it could have been done years ago. Hala-cha, meaning the Jewish law, forbids moving the dead. However, even if we could conduct invasive research of grave-sites, I do not think it would be of any help. In our team, we think that it is not only about religion – the dead who we are looking for right now should stay where they are. Just after the War, there was an idea about moving all the victims from the outside of the camps to create, in the four corners of Poland, four huge memorial sites. This idea and the one of moving bodies to Jewish cemeteries are not good from the memory point of view. Once again, Jews would turn out not to be Polish enough to stay in the places where they lived and where they died. They should stay where they are buried, for the sake of history and memory which is not in a very good condition anyway.

Zuzanna Dziuban: I am thinking about the performance *Akurat tędy szliśmy* (*We Walked Just This Way*) by Wojtek Ziemilski, produced by Bryce Lease. This was a performance without assigned roles; however, its participants were asked to drag miniature trucks with ashes, *Truposznica* – a toy which is a replica of a real wartime truck – across the bridge that connected Kraków’s Kazimierz with the ghetto during the war. What kind of subject position were they performing then? The question about positionalities, which we adopt or perform, cuts across a lot of contemporary memorial practices, performances and games. Moreover, we also assume specific subject positions in our research.

Bryce Lease: We talked about the truck as a vehicle of storytelling: stories that arise out of this object. It was also a reminder of the work of memory: walking, carrying, dragging behind – the idea that memory is something always behind our back, just behind us though separated by a kind of gap. I think you can theorise this gap along the lines of the copy itself. So, it was not about identifying our role in relationship to *Truposznica*, but rather about physicalising a certain kind of memory work.

Matilda Mroz: I am interested in the audience for your performance, since we have been discussing for whom we do this commemorative work. How were people relating to this procession? Did they join in or rather stop and stare at you? What were the responses from people watching?

Bryce Lease: Firstly, there were not enough trucks for all the participants in the end and some people felt upset about the fact that, even if they were walking with us, they were not pulling a truck so they were not fully participating. Secondly, we were hoping – since it was a Saturday afternoon – that people would be walking on the streets, coming into town, going shopping etc. Indeed, we did see quite a lot of people. The presence of the police stopping the traffic also made us visible in a completely

different way. However, what made us the most visible was the sound; the noise that was produced drew people onto the streets. A number of people asked if this was a protest. I think it was successful because Holocaust commemoration, especially in Kraków, tends to be overdetermined, so the fact that people did not know what we were doing and had to ask us – especially city residents who were accustomed to certain types of commemorative practices – that meant that we broke the predictable framework and actually engaged the public in a new way.

Katarzyna Bojarska: For a long time, we were thinking that the only thing that would work in the Holocaust pedagogy was telling people the truth about what had happened. We believed that the knowledge would transform their ethical and political stand. Now we know this strategy has failed or partially failed. So, we desperately need different forms of pedagogy, ones which would be open to ambivalence and ones which would include play. Additionally, the performance presented may be interpreted as both: a solemn walk across the bridge, but also a playful practice, in a very positive, productive sense.

Bryce Lease: At the beginning, I was very resistant to this idea and determined not to understand *Truposznica* as a toy. However, when I was confronted by a child who absolutely understood it as a toy, I realised that I could not exclude that form of identification as well.

Zuzanna Dziuban: In a sense, this logic was absent from the game experiment performed with school kids in Radecznica by Tomasz Majkowski and Katarzyna Suszkiewicz. I loved the fact that Tomasz and Katarzyna asked students to design a game and not to perform certain pre-assigned positionalities.

Bryce Lease: I wonder about this game: can you win it? In a standard Hollywood narrative structure about the Holocaust, we focus on survival rather than on death, so I am curious about whether the game reproduces the focus on survival as the act of commemoration in which the ones who win are the ones who live.

Tomasz Majkowski: Perhaps, the major problem with inexperienced board game designers is that they, of course, start thinking about a game in terms of winning and losing. Luckily, in all groups we had in Radecznica, students actually began to see problems in it. Especially in one game, they started to feel uneasy with the fact that there is a winner, so there is one survivor, but their gains are the costs of other people playing, since the major mechanics of the game was to push people out of hiding places to take their place. So, there was an opportunity for winning, but it was already problematised. It is easy to problematise it in a board game because you play it with living people. So, when you win, you actually see these people who lost. So, you start thinking that maybe you can come up with an alternative solution. There are also

board games that force you to cooperate, so everybody wins or everybody loses.

Katarzyna Suszkiewicz: It was the most important, but also the most challenging part of the project to create mechanics in which we would not give them simple answers or simple solutions, like winning meaning survival.

Krijn Thijs: Tomasz Majkowski said they framed the field for the participants of the game. Did it also include various positions people could have taken in the conflict? Or did young people in Radechnica themselves come up with the classical roles from the triangle of bystanders, victims and perpetrators? Was the question of with whom you identify important? For us, who are working with non-professionals (respondents, witnesses), it is important to know how far our impact extended on the people we work with. Do they deliver what we are expecting, to please us as Holocaust researchers? Do they get this kind of modus in memory work? Is there any evidence of not abiding by these rules or expectations in the context of the game in Radechnica? Maybe a different attitude prevails outside the room, amongst friends, with their family? The Holocaust is so interesting because it is sitting on a taboo, so it is impossible to make a “free” game of this and therefore illegal games are aiming at this taboo. Where are the borders of our discourse? Can we research on rejecting our frame of expectations?

Tomasz Majkowski: We decided to cut the workshop in half and reveal to the students that they have to reconnect already designed games to the topic of the Holocaust. First, we tried to push them in some other directions because we suspected that, if we had revealed our goal at the very beginning, that we expected from them to deal with the subject of the Shoah, they would have abandoned the local context completely and have gone with some mainstream imaginary of a death camp. This is why we decided to steer that topic away in the first part of the workshop and then see how and to what they can reconnect it afterwards.

Of course, they were unable to completely escape the framework of a board game, since this form has certain expectations and rules. They had only several hours to learn about the basics of board game designing which is not that easy at all. We actually designed sets of elements in a way that provoked them to go with a certain design direction just to facilitate it, so they would be able to produce something they believed they produced themselves. Our idea was to guide their work through elements and through mentorship by giving them as many tools as possible in such a short notice.

Katarzyna Suszkiewicz: Radechnica is a very peculiar example and people there know our team to some extent and know why we are there and that we are connected to the sites of the Holocaust. Before the workshop, we gave a description of it to the parents so they knew what the workshop would be about and they had to give their

consent. Therefore, it could have been easily sensed by students what the workshop would be about. This is why we set back to move them away from this topic. However, my presentation during the workshop was explicit about the aim of it. I said that we came there to strengthen their memory about the sites of the Holocaust. So, it was indeed very easy to please us in the survey afterwards, because they knew exactly what we expected from them. Another challenge for this project was the fact that there was no follow-up possible, as in many projects like this. Students are now in different high schools and it would be very difficult to track them. Yet, maybe by setting this scenario and guidelines for similar projects, it will be possible to do these follow-ups in different grades.

Karina Jarzyńska: As an observer, I noticed a sense of pride in students when they were told that their projects would become a part of the school library and could be used in the future. Additionally, the pride they gained from this experience might be something that would encourage them to pass on this engagement.

Roma Sendyka: I was observing this experiment from a very early stage and it was our goal to find a way to design a responsible collaborative project that would not be predictable. Hence, the idea of cooperating with the game studies department emerged. I joined the workshop in Radechnica only on the second day. The team made the students create the game, based on understanding of universal experiences of seeking something or fleeing from something; the game design forced the participant to take a meta-position, to observe processes, so the workshop put them in the situation of a sociologist who tries to understand certain practices, only in the last move being asked about what will happen to this practice if a framework of violence would encompass it. This is a proposition which is already detached from identification. Observing the experiment made me think that perhaps teaching about the Holocaust should not be about explaining *everything* (from Wannsee to Judenjagd) – but rather teaching *something*: finding the special moment that would “change gears”, trigger attention and engagement. Let me give you an example: one group of students designed a game, based on chasing and hiding. Basically, the scenario was based on moving pawns in different colours so they could go from one place to another. Then the players could raise the stakes: your task is to take all pawns in a certain colour to the final position. Taking one pawn was not that difficult, but taking two pawns was almost impossible. They designed the game in such a way on day one; on day two after a lecture, they had to think whether the Holocaust scenario could be placed in the reality they created. One of them said: “With family, it would be almost impossible to escape and save all.” Response of the rest of the group suggested this special educational condition of “understanding *something*” – that important, key “something” that changes your whole attitude to the issue.

Erica Lehrer: This is a really important intervention, because it ends the discussion of “who do you identify with?” In the game, you are forced to shift around and identify with everyone. Not only do you have to figure out how to win, but you also have to figure out how to frustrate others’ winning. It is not only about how to escape, but also how to stop people from escaping.

Katarzyna Suszkiewicz: It was a memorable moment when the students started connecting the ideas of hideouts with the topography of Radecznica, when they started actually mentioning places which were located on the map of the eyewitness from Radecznica, Stanisław Zybala.

Karina Jarzyńska: The workshop triggered students’ memory of stories that they knew from their grandparents about what happened during the War and provided an opportunity for sharing them with each other.

Roma Sendyka: At this moment, they realised that the Holocaust happened in that area. To understand that, they came with the knowledge from the area. That is what is at stake in such an experiment.

Conclusions

The uncommemorated sites of violence, the non-sites of memory, are objects of weak ontology. Should we stabilise them? Any essentialising in this context seems counterproductive and leads to less knowledge about the object in question. In our project, we strived to escape essentialisation, privileging work through relations and processes. We struggled with unstable ontologies and epistemologies, trying to explain uncommemorated sites of trauma beyond the division between semiotic (uncommunicable muted memory) and symbolic (cultural, communicative memory). The work demanded tools that would access what is not spoken of, what is communicated through movements, performances, actions, gestures, utterances. What is contained by different archives: those official, institutionalised, but also those grass-roots, private, unprofessional; those that can be attributed to nature, to materialities. We tended to think about non-sites of memory in terms of legacy rather than heritage, as Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett differentiates the concepts. Legacy suggests an inheritance not necessarily welcomed, something that befalls the successor. Yet, *legatus* – is the one who is sent to take an office, therefore it is a job – a job of facing the difficult past, to be taken on. However, if somebody is sent, there is a power centre or the privileged position; therefore, the power or even violence are inevitably inscribed in the notion of legacy. We might need a completely new vocabulary to describe what we are entering when we are

challenged by an uncommemorated site, a vocabulary that will abandon terms like “loss” or “absence” and highlight “presence”. It was the focus on what is still there, on “critical presence” that linked our debates on post-violence, post-Holocaust topographies.

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