Selfies from Auschwitz: Rethinking the Relationship Between Spaces of Memory and Places of Commemoration in The Digital Age

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Abstract: This paper seeks to map theoretical and practical preoccupations in the contemporary relationship between places of commemoration and more abstract spaces of Holocaust memory. While the range of this topic is broad, I narrow the scope by interrogating specific ways in which the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum engages with Holocaust-related visual content on Instagram. The direction in which the memory of the Holocaust is moving and the ubiquity of social media posts, forces institutions like the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum to valorise, react, and engage with new media content. Therefore, the case study of 'selfies from Auschwitz' resonates in productive ways with questions of individual and institutional socio-historical agency in curatorship of 21st century Holocaust memory, as well as discussions on guardianship and claims to ownership of memory in the digital age. Contending that the Museum asserts itself as an increasingly visible actor in the transnational social media Holocaust discourse, I trace the history of the Museum's social media presence and engagement.

Keywords: visual social media, Instagram, visual communication, Holocaust memory, media memory, cultural memory, space and place, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland

In the months preceding the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, amid the multitudinous voices concerned with the future of the memory of the Holocaust in the world without survivors or witnesses, several of popular media outlets decried social media users for employing Holocaust-related visual content as affective devices of transgression and insensitivity. First, a June 2014 article in The New Yorker drew critical attention to a Facebook page *With My Besties in Auschwitz*, set up and curated by an anonymous

woman, that gleaned images of Israeli youth smiling and posing in front of crematoria and the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate during educational trips to former Nazi concentration and extermination camps. In an authorial gesture initially designed as a jest for her friends, the curator of *With My Besties in Auschwitz* captioned photos found on the internet in a caustic and sarcastic manner that publicly shamed what she came to view as a 'disturbing phenomenon' of taking selfies in places of Shoah remembrance (Margalit 2014). Three weeks later, numerous websites picked up a story first published by the New York Post about a high school graduate from Alabama, whose smiling selfie taken in front of barracks in Auschwitz captioned: 'Selfie in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp ☺' (Perez 2014). The post went viral on Twitter and became one of the trending topics on 20 July 2014. As a young woman defended her choice to take and publicly post her 'Auschwitz selfie' on Twitter as a way of commemorating the memory of her father who taught her about the Holocaust right before he died in 2013, thousands of people took to Twitter to attack what they perceived as a flagrant example of digital era narcissism.

Introduction: new landscapes of media memory

At the time of this writing[1], there is one more recent example of visual social media inviting us to think critically about material, social, and virtual spaces of Holocaust commemoration in the digital age: the controversial 2017 art project 'Yolocaust' (combination of a word 'Holocaust' with a popular internet acronym 'yolo' that means 'you only live once') by an Israeli-German artist Shahak Shapira that stigmatised contemporary digital media culture and the proliferation of selfies taken at Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. In a web-based artistic intervention, Shapira juxtaposed original images of the dead bodies of the victims of the Holocaust with contemporary selfies and other photographs taken at the Berlin memorial. Visitors to www.yolocaust.de hovered over recent images of selfie-takers (that were culled by Shapira from Twitter, Instagram, Tinder and Grindr) to witness the backgrounds instantly change from the Memorial to original imagery taken at Nazi German extermination camps. This form of communicating one's contempt for selfie-takers' actions, provoked a reaction of shock, anger and disgust with both authors of original social media posts, as well as with Shapira's methodology. In the aftermath of Shapira's project's short-lived online presence[2], a lot of people shamed by Shapira took 'Holocaust selfies' down from their social media profiles and wrote to Shapira apologising for their insensitivity. These comments are still available on Shapira's website. This conscious artistic treatment of the problem of selfie-taking in places of commemoration and sites of collective trauma is not only in dialogue with the other two examples mentioned above, but it also allows us to consider new theoretical perspectives on digital visual culture practices of Web 2.0 in the context of individual and communal online memory and trauma processing.

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[1] Fall 2017.
[2] The project was taken down after just one week.

Image 1. Screengrab of the New York Post article on the first highly publicised "Auschwitz selfie".

Smiling Auschwitz selfie sparks Twitter outrage

By Chris Perez   July 21, 2014 | 3:17pm

Source: www.nypost.com (accessed 10 October 2017).

Traditionally, audio-visual *lieux de memoir* (sites of memory) of the Holocaust have been limited to highly curated processes of memory production. That included the top-down process of writing Holocaust discourse via official, institutionalised and structured educational institutions and memory archives (like the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad-Vashem, among others), as well as through curated and externally funded cinematic and televisual representations of the Holocaust (the linkages between official political memory discourse, state funding and filmic representations of history are clearly more pronounced in Europe than in the United States). A few exceptions included experimental and avant-garde films, photo albums and gallery installations that underscored the limits of trauma representation by 'implicitly, and often explicitly' taking up 'the question that is at the centre of postmodern historiographic concerns: the recognition that there are historical events that by their nature defy representability but nevertheless play an important part in the ways we understand the present'[3] (Skoller 2005: xvi). These films[3], however, had a limited distribution and reach, and did not decisively shape national and transnational processes of Holocaust memory production.

Now, new media increasingly impact the way the memory of the Holocaust is represented, disseminated, and consumed by transnational audiences. Contemporary Shoah online discourse consists of various bodies of intersecting mediated texts: social media (Twitter, In-

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[3] Skoller discusses the following films: *Signal-Germany on the Air* (dir. Ernie Gehr, 1982-1985), *The March* (dir. Abraham Ravett, 1999), *Un vivant qui passe* (dir. Claude Lanzmann, 1999), as well as *Cooperation of Parts* (dir. Daniel Eisenberg, 1987) and *Persistence* (dir. Daniel Eisenberg, 1997).

stagram, and Facebook); websites[4], blogs, and online archives[5]; as well as video-sharing services that circulate user-generated content (e.g. YouTube). Simultaneously, interactive, augmented reality, or virtual reality technologies mediate the past in previously unimaginable ways. Here, USC Shoah Foundation's New Dimensions in Testimony[6] project comes to mind. It consists of interactive pre-recorded video images of Holocaust survivors that allow for a conversational interaction between users and 'digital survivors'[7]. Similarly, 2017 witnessed a premiere of the first immersive virtual reality film/testimony about the Holocaust. Gabo Arora and Ari Palitz's *The Last Goodbye* takes viewers on a walk through the Nazi concentration and extermination camp Majdanek. As survivors continue to shrink in number, the remembering of the Holocaust continues to be shaped by the tension between old and new ways of narrativising and animating history.

Additionally, as new media are not static, memory production in the digital age continues to evolve. While Web 2.0 from the beginning allowed for decentralised, democratised, and – often – text heavy mediation of Holocaust memory via websites and blogs, the more recent examples of online memory mediation present an increasingly image-centred content. These visual mediations simultaneously operate on different levels of scale: local and global, private and public, national and transnational, searchable and not searchable. Similarly, the role of authorial agency in its manifest relation to new technologies constantly oscillates between individual online engagements and institutionally curated projects. Eschewing the 'pre-digital institutional authority' vs. 'digital online freedom' rigid binary, I contend that changes in contemporary Holocaust memory mediation are a moment through which the rules of Holocaust education and memory curation can be re-theorised and historicised. As Joanne Garde-Hansen argues, 'there has always been tension between democracy and control when media were concerned' (Garde-Hansen 2011: 70). Indeed, the idea that technologies create new forms of sociality is not a new one. Now, however, 'new media technologies of digital and online media are thought to be key players in [the] process of freeing information and knowledge' (Garde-Hansen 2011: 70). By zooming in on the case study of selfies taken in Auschwitz-Birkenau, this paper begins to investigate the potentialities and limitations of a seemingly democratised Holocaust discourse in the digital age that operates at the nexus of individual and institutional entanglements between on- and offline memory practices.

Responding to contemporary new media landscape that has borne witness to a paradigm shift in the representation and curatorship of Holocaust memory, the case study of selfies from Auschwitz allows us to investigate the direction in which the Shoah discourse is currently moving and ask whether new mediated practices, which have been processing the memory of the Holocaust in private and public spheres since the rise of Web 2.0, enrich or increasingly flatten our understanding of the collective traumatic past. While the range of this topic is broad, I narrow the scope by anchoring this analysis in a specific relationship that the

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[4] 'The Holocaust Geographies Collaborative' is one of the examples of innovative Holocaust research native to Web 2.0. It is an interdisciplinary, multi-institutional collaborative research project that uses geography and GI-Science to re-examine places and spaces of the Holocaust. For more information, see: Holocaust Geographies Collaborative, accessed December 10, 2017, https://holocaustgeographies.geo.txstate.edu.

[5] For a detailed account of the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive, see: Michaelis, (2016), Schandler (2017), Shandler (2013), Shenker (2016).

[6] See: "New Dimensions in Testimony," accessed October 10, 2017, https://sfi.usc.edu/collections/holocaust/ndt

[7] For a discussion of USC Shoah Foundation's *New Dimensions in Testimony* project, see Zalewska.

Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum developed with social media users who post Holocaust-related visual content on their public Instagram profiles. The ubiquity of selfies taken, geotagged in Auschwitz-Birkenau, tagged with #Auschwitz, #AuschwitzBirkenau, #Birkenau and publicly posted online has encouraged the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum to establish informal yet comprehensive rules of online practices for the institution's social media presence. Therefore, this case study resonates in productive ways with questions of individual and institutional socio-historical agency in curatorship of 21st century Holocaust memory, as well as with discussions on guardianship and claims to ownership of memory in the national and transnational context.

As a result, this paper seeks to map theoretical and practical preoccupations in the contemporary relationship between places of commemoration (like the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum) and a more abstract digital space of Holocaust memory. I begin with a spatial orientation of contemporary Holocaust memory within the physical space of Eastern European *Kontaminierte Landschaften* (contaminated landscapes)[8]. I also investigate the specific ways in which Holocaust-related visual content is framed and articulated on Instagram. To demonstrate the relationship between places of commemoration (the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum) and more abstract spaces of Holocaust memory (social media Holocaust discourse), I investigate the history of the Museum's social media presence, its role in the process of Instagram curatorship and censorship, as well as its attitude towards 'selfies from Auschwitz' in the context of a broad epistemological, aesthetic and ethical shift in the way we approach taboos of Holocaust representation.

Greetings and smiles from Auschwitz

The 'spatial turn' of the late 20th century has encouraged scholars in the humanities and social sciences to regard space as a dense entity that is actively produced.[9] Spatial dimensions of colonialism, nationalism and imperialism have invited studies of space as a set of social and power practices. More recently, the rise of digital media and globalisation has shifted scholars' attention towards virtual and technologised spaces.[10] Considerations of the ways in which space informs culture (and its texts), politics and our reading of history can be summarised in one broad question: how does space function heuristically and what do we learn about ourselves based on our relationship to different spaces and places? By drawing from studies on place and space, we can unpack theoretical potentials of contemporary landscapes of Holocaust memory.

In his attempt to problematise the notion of spaces of memory, Thomas Lahusen invites us to consider the Janus-faced nature of the space-place dynamic by applying Pierre Nora's terminology of *lieux de memoire (*sites of memory) and *milieux de memoire* (environments of memory) to the study of collective memory (Lahusen 2006: 736). While the former designates material or non-material entities imbued with symbolic and/or historical significance by

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[8] Here, I am using the expression coined by Martin Pollack (2008).
[9] Some of the examples include Foucault (1986), Huyssen (2003), Lefebvre (1992), Massey (1991), and Soja (1989).
[10] Some of the examples include Baudrillard (1994), Friedberg (2009), Galloway (2013) and Garde-Hansen (2011).

a collective (e.g. the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate; the name 'Auschwitz-Birkenau'; Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*; or the Holocaust as an event), the latter describes the site of 'every-day habits, traditions, and social interactions'; it is an open-ended process of memory building (e.g. the way we behave at Holocaust memorial sites; the way we interact with the survivors; the way we teach cinematic representations of the Shoah; or the way we self-identify against the Holocaust: as Jews, gentiles, Germans, Israelis, etc.). This distinction allows us to differentiate between specific sites where memory settles and the overarching processes that carry, evolve and change the collective discourse on memory productions (on both national and transnational levels). These processes, in turn, become an *objective* articulation of an aggregate of *subjective* social relations or perspectives on distinct sites of memory. In other words, we can analyse an objective (often transnational) discourse of Holocaust memory at large by zooming in on particular representations of that memory that imbue it with value (like selfies taken at former concentration camps). These mediated representations of memory become aesthetically, ethically, epistemologically and ontologically charged 'mnemonic aids and remembering devices' (Garde-Hansen 2011: vii-viii).

The national framework of remembrance has been the dominant lens through which visual representations of the Holocaust have been analysed and interpreted. This paper emphasises the emerging relationship between social media users and Holocaust-related institutions, thus focusing on how contemporary new media organise the Holocaust discourse and operationalise the process of memory building on private, institutional and transnational levels of scale. For reasons that will be explored in the pages to follow, I define Auschwitz-Birkenau as a starting place of our investigation and a fixed literal and metaphorical centre of all Holocaust memory productions: it is the anchor point for this study of visual, physical, and digital spaces of memory.

Stepping back for a moment, we should address the problem of differentiation between geography and history. Building off of Edward Soja's polemic against the long-standing distinction between history and geography, I view his critical assertion of history as a temporal and spatialised discipline as a useful theoretical tool (Soja 1989). Soja's intervention forces us to examine how seemingly innocuous space consists of power relations. It also gestures towards an examination of how these power relations are further inscribed into specific sites of memory. This notion seems to respond to late 20th century scepticism towards historical meta-narratives described by Jean–François Lyotard and then articulated in the context of different forms of mediated historical 'writing' by Hayden White. However, in the digital age, sites of memory viewed as specific points where time and space intersect cease to be the exclusive domain of public authorities, institutions or other power groups; they become participants in the layered process of collective memory building. Nowhere is this shift more visible than in the process of building new types of decentralised archival regimes of memory that is currently happening online. Selfies from Auschwitz are one of the many examples in which contemporary public visual discourse counters the one previously established by Holocaust-related educational institutions.

The problem of marking one's presence in specific places of commemoration is not, however, a new and uniquely digitally-driven phenomenon. The 19th century witnessed the rise of an extensive industry of travel images: the travel genre was one of the most popular and developed genres in early film and postcards became a major form of travel imagery. The latter

marked the evidence of travel; they functioned not only as souvenirs, but as the journey's goal and purpose. Seemingly, therefore, it should come as no surprise that post World War II tourists traveling through Poland sent postcards upon visiting the small Polish town of Oświęcim and the remains of the Nazi extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau located within the town's limits. This phenomenon is well documented by a Polish anthropologist and visual artist, Paweł Szypulski, whose 2015 photo album *Greetings from Auschwitz* provides a comprehensive survey of analogue predecessors to Instagram selfies geotagged at Auschwitz-Birkenau.[11] Indeed, it could be argued that before the era of ubiquitous digital mobile photography, postcards as acts of marking one's presence at a specific location and sharing information about it via sent mail responded to the same documenting impulse that many have situated at the heart of modernity and photography, in general. Postcards appropriated the visited landscapes and places and marked them as owned. They provided images for people without cameras and, while they did not establish any indexical relationship between tourists and their surroundings, they allowed travellers to objectify the places they visited.

Almost all the postcards featured in Szypulski's collection had been sent and postmarked. Most of them feature friendly greetings addressed to the sender's family members, friends, or colleagues. A brief 'Greetings from Oświęcim! PS. Everything's great. The only things missing are you and the sun!'[12] accompanied by a grim panoramic photograph of Auschwitz concentration camp with the crematoria chimney, and the infamous 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate is one of the many examples of postcards curated by Szypulski for his artistic project. Another card features an image of the so-called 'Death Block' - brick barrack number eleven that became synonymous with cruel punishments, torture, and starvation that its prisoners were subjected to. This particular photo comes with a bizarrely worded inscription that could be seen as the sender's attempt at gallows humour: 'Sending you a transport of warm wishes from Oświęcim! With a soft noise of the wind in the background - sister Cześka'[13]. While the oldest postcard featured in Szypulski's album was issued and sent in 1946 shortly after the liberation, similar postcards featuring panoramas of the Memorial Site are still available for purchase. One could venture a guess that the rise of photography and consecutive proliferation of mobile cameras have impacted the sales of these forms of travel souvenirs. What has not changed is the impulse to produce and share visual content that celebrates one's mobility and ability to tag places and spaces.

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[11] It should be noted that there is more to Szypulski's artistic project that providing a collection of postcards sent from Auschwitz. In an attempt to extend the discussion on representability of trauma, he juxtaposes the collection of postcards from Auschwitz with one of the photos taken by members of the Sonderkommando analyzed by Georges Didi-Huberman (2008) in *Images In Spite of All*.
[12] 'Pozdrowienia z Oświęcimia" PS. "Wszystko jest w porządku, brak tylko Ciebie i słońca'.
[13] 'Transport gorących pozdrowień z Oświęcimia z szumem letniego wiatru zasyła siostra Cześka'.

Image 2. Postcards collected by Paweł Szypulski
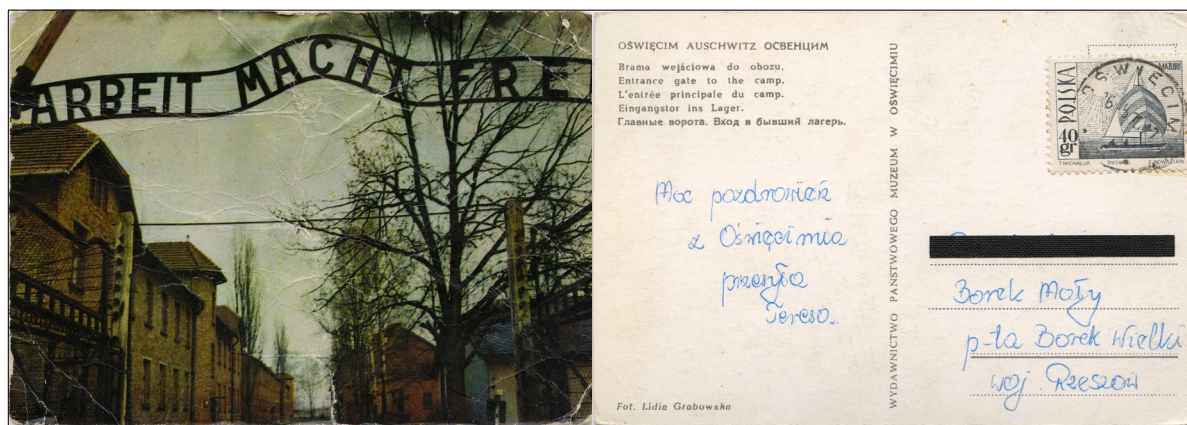
Source: Paweł Szypulski

As the analogue world unwound, photos and - most recently - selfies from Auschwitz re-placed postcards from Auschwitz. Situating this documentary impulse at the heart of moder-nity, Tom Gunning writes that 'in the modern era the very concept of travel becomes intri-cately bound up with the production of images. The image becomes our way of structuring a journey and even provides a substitute for it. Travel becomes a means of appropriating the world through images' (Gunning 2006: 27). Susan Sontag also calls upon travel photography as an opportunity to highlight a discussion of photographing as a way of consuming and ob-jectifying our surroundings. She remarks that as a 'way of certifying experience, taking pho-tographs is also a way of refusing it – by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. Travel becomes a strategy for accumulat-ing photographs. The very activity of taking pictures is soothing, and assuages general feel-ings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by travel. Most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter. Un-sure of other responses, they take a picture' (Sontag 1977: 10). However, selfies from Auschwitz mark a new stage in the way people process visits to sites of commemoration.

Many have linked the ubiquity of selfies in places of commemoration and remembrance to the rise of the genre of dark tourism that became prominent in 1990s, flourished in 2000s and gained more visibility with the rise of Instagram and other social media in recent years.[14] One of the online archives of dark tourism photos that researchers quote when analysing this phenomenon is a Tumblr account *Selfies at Serious Places* that consists of a repository of selfies taken at funeral homes, places of commemoration, cemeteries, etc. Some scholars present a case for technological determinism arguing that social media and new technologies have the power to alter people's behaviour[15] and that digital photography and social media have inspired people to fight for their followers' attention at the expense of breaking the rules of decorum.

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[14] See, for instance: Stone and Sharpley (2008) and Hodalska (2015).
[15] For a discussion of socio-technical agency, technological determinism, and social constructivism, see: Winner (1993) and Gillespie, Boczkowski and Foot (2014).

Image 3. Screengrab of *Selfies at Serious Places* Tumblr page.

Source: http://selfiesatseriousplaces.tumblr.com (accessed 20 September 2017)

Magdalena Hodalska finds linkages between the internet environment that activates narcissistic tendencies of social media users and the emotional detachment that further permits taking selfies at 'horror sites'. In a seemingly moralising gesture, she argues that 'tactless and goofy selfies […] are a signal of a meaningful shift and a proof of empathy decline, together with the growth of digital narcissism, which combined with other factors may lead to a significant cultural change' (Hodalska 2015).

Others, like Mark Nuns, argue that selfie taking, just like many other technologically-conditioned phenomena, are socially, economically and culturally situated. Nunes refuses to condemn the phenomenon and explores it as a new aspect of contemporary digital citizenship. These 'out-of-place selfies' constitute a negotiation between two overlapping frames: 'one embodied and physically situated, and the other circulating within an affective imagined community. This act of "self-witnessing" serves as a form of parasocial civic engagement that attempts to communicate one's own place within interpenetrating social spaces, no matter how gawking or disengaged they may appear at first analysis' (Nunes 2017: 109) The question that seems to be at the heart of most of the recent research on selfie taking in places of death is the one of sociotechnical agency. Similarly, the case study of selfies taken in Auschwitz-Birkenau resonates with questions of individual and institutional socio-historical agency in curatorship of 21st century Holocaust memory. The remaining part of this paper considers one of the ways cultural and historical trauma of the Holocaust is processed in the framework of a relationship between two actors: a collective of Instagram users and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. While considerations of epistemological, ontological, and aesthetic differences between selfies and earlier forms of imprinting oneself onto a visited land-

scape are vitally important to add to the body of scholarly work that explores how new media gives expression to 'the self', I will now investigate how social media posts, their various spatial and temporal entanglements, and the affects they can produce may influence the Holocaust discourse in the 21st century that until recently has been under a curatorship of institutions such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

#AuschwitzBirkenau

Within the context of post-World War II Eastern European history, few words carry as much weight as Auschwitz. After the war, it quickly became a symbol of the Holocaust and genocide in general. However, the memory of other places of the Shoah also existed in the collective memory of (especially) Eastern Europeans who inhabited, what Martin Pollack (2014) calls, contaminated landscapes. Bełżec, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Chełmno, Dachau, Majdanek, Mauthausen-Gusen, Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Sobibór, Stutthof, Theresienstadt, Treblinka and others are the words inscribed in the Eastern European collective memory by the generation that is now fading away into history. However, it is 'Auschwitz' that became a global symbol of the Shoah, as well as a fixed literal and metaphorical centre of all Holocaust memory productions. Similarly, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum established in 1947 is the most frequently visited former Nazi concentration camp in Europe.

Table 1. Data obtained on 14 October 2017.

Name of the Memorial	Visitors per year	Established in
Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum	2,000,000	1947
Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site	800,000	1965
Buchenwald	500,000	1958
Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum	300,000	1961
Bergen-Belsen Memorial	300,000	1952
Mauthausen Memorial	190,000	1949
Majdanek State Museum (first museum commemorating victims of WW II)	120,000	Nov. 1944
Treblinka Memorial and Museum	60,000	1964
Gross-Rosen Museum in Rogoźnica	40,000	1953
Bełżec Museum and Memorial Site (as a branch of the Majdanek State Museum)	30,000	2004
Sobibór, the Museum of the Former Death Camp	18,000	1965
Kulmhof/ Chełmno	15,000	1990

Source: Maria Zalewska

The new media revolution of the 21ˢᵗ century has created a friction between the well-established tradition of institutional curatorship of the Holocaust memory and the online Holocaust discourse. While the discussion of old media representations of the Holocaust remains beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that cinema and television had played a crucial role in the production and promulgation of Holocaust education in a form of narrative of documentary representations.[16] Until recently, it was precisely that productive cooperation and tension between centres of Holocaust education and old media that constituted the main axis of Holocaust memory discourse. Now, as the last witnesses are dying and the memory of the Holocaust increasingly depends on commemoration and re-telling of the story for new generations, Holocaust-related educational institutions search for innovative ways to bridge the past with the present.[17] While they continue to grapple with problems of trauma representation and securing remembrance, several new avenues of enquiry employing new communication technologies have come to the fore. As film persists in engaging with a plethora of Holocaust themes, ethical considerations[18], and modes of representation[19], the emergence of social media has increased the ubiquity of the Holocaust discourse in contemporary media.

Undeniably, new media have created new spaces for people to communicate, build identity, and discuss memory of the Holocaust across the globe. Yet, the seemingly open and democratised online discussion of the Holocaust does not necessarily reflect the complexity and nuances of Holocaust memory. By analysing the number of Instagram hashtags associated with three most often visited former Nazi concentration camps that accompany visual content posted on users' public profiles, we begin to see that Auschwitz-Birkenau holds the first place in this collective visual regime of digital memory. At the time of this writing, the

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[16] Between 1945 and 1989, Polish (and other Eastern European) cinematic productions as forms of national and state-subsidised artistic expression became intrinsically linked to Moscow's historical interpretation of WWII and the Holocaust. While some Polish filmmakers addressed the problem of Nazi terror and concentration camps, the relationship between the official Soviet discourse and the memory of Shoah remained problematic. For both geopolitical and ideological reasons, Soviet propaganda displayed forms of popular anti-Semitism in periodic swings throughout the Cold War. These characterisations trickled down into public discourses of Eastern European satellite states and added to their problematic attitude towards the Jews. The end of the Cold War gave voice to previously silenced topics in Eastern European countries, significantly enriching Holocaust discourse over the past twenty years. As both the Soviet Union and satellite states were engaged in falsification of memory and manipulation of cultural and cinematic production, the post-1989 period became a fertile ground for the celebration of counter-memory. Since 1989, such efforts have been significantly more pronounced in Eastern Europe than they have been in Russia. Moreover, the urgency of discussing the truth about Eastern Europeans and their pre-war Jewish neighbors became more pressing as the last witnesses of that time were dying. However, the most recent shift in the European political climate and the rise of nationalisms and anti-European sentiment may herald a reversal of this tendency to openly discuss the triangular relationship between victims-witnesses-perpetrators in Eastern Europe.

[17] By emphasising the relationship between personal and collective histories, the USC Shoah Foundation has championed new technologies and digital media literacy in all their commemoration projects. For more information, see Shandler (2017).

[18] From Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955), through Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), to Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1994) and Ferne Pearlstein's 2017 documentary on the limits of humor entitled *The Last Laugh.*

[19] From the most recent Auschwitz-focused films *Denial* (2016) and *Son of Saul* (2015) through *Aftermath* (2012) that tackles the problem of post-WWII Eastern European collective memory to, finally, Polish documentaries and avant-garde visual media installations that discuss - among others - the problem of previously silenced topics of Eastern European anti-Semitism.

total number of public tags[20] associated with Auschwitz-Birkenau and used since the launch of Instagram in October 2010 reached 368,317.

Table 2. Number of hashtags in public posts referencing the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial on *Instagram*. Data obtained on 14 October 2017.

Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial	
#auschwitz	247,455
#birkenau	60,271
#auschwitzbirkenau	35,360
#auschwitzi	333
#auschwitzmemorial	6,146
#auschwitz2	652
#auschwitz1	922
#birkenaucamp	1,747
#birkenauconcentrationcamp	892
#auschwitzbirkenaugermannaziconcentrationandexterminationcamp	23
#auschwitzcamp	635
#auschwitzstudygroup	1,533
#auschwitz70	2,537
#auschwitzmuseum	683
#auschwitzsurvivor	318
#auschwitztour	256
#auschwitzconcentrationcamp	5,352
#auschwitzmemorialmuseum	767
#auschwitzii	702
#auschwitziibirkenau	576
#auschwitzliberation	261
#auschwitz_birkenau	473
#auschwitz2016	102
#auschwitzbirkenauconcentrationcamp	52
#auschwitz2015	30
#auschwitz2017	30
#auschwitzgate	36
#auschwitz2014	43
#auschwitzguide	63
#auschwitzhands	27
#auschwitzpoland	27
#auschwitz2013	13
Total	368,317

Source: Maria Zalewska

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[20] It is hard to estimate the total number of private posts using these hashtags; similarly, there is no actual public data on the total number of private vs. public Instagram profiles; however, the 2016 study by Optical Cortex, a digital product agency, examined a sample of 21,239 Instagram users and learned that 28 percent of these users had their profiles set to private.

Table 3. Number of hashtags with spelling errors referencing the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial on Instagram. Data obtained on 14 October 2017.

Hashtags with spelling errors		
#auschwitzbikernau		22
#aushwitzbirkenau		2,369
#auschwitzberkinau		26
	Total	2,417

Source: Maria Zalewska

Table 4. Number of hashtags in public posts referencing the Buchenwald and Dachau memorials on *Instagram*. Data obtained on 14 October 2017.

Buchenwald Memorial		
#buchenwald		7,940
#buchenwaldconcentrationcamp		384
#buchenwaldmemorial		295
#buchenwaldkonzentrationlager		15
#buchenwaldmonument		2
#buchenwaldcamp		3
	Total	8,639
Dachau Memorial Site		
#dachau		65,875
#dachauconcentrationcampmemorial		133
#dachauconcentrationcampmemorialsite		579
#dachauconcentrationcamp		8,393
#dachaumemorial		582
#dachaucamp		169
#dachau_concentration_camp		16
#dachaukonzentrationslager		38
	Total	75,785

Source: Maria Zalewska

If we add misspelled hashtags (e.g. #Aushwitzbirkenau), the number goes up to 370,734 tags. This does not mean that 370,734 people posted public posts in which they discussed or condemned the Holocaust, but it does indicate that a significant number of Instagram users use this Holocaust-related tag more often than almost any other Holocaust-related keyword.

While these numbers seem trivial compared to the most popular hashtags on Instagram (#love: 1,169,407,552; #picoftheday: 345,894,512; #selfie: 320,054,390), they are impressive when juxtaposed with #holocaust that has been used in 463,746 Instagram public posts. I can

therefore argue that Instagram users who tag their visual content with Holocaust-related hashtags, treat Auschwitz as a proxy term for all the Shoah.

It is estimated that over 95 million photos and videos are shared on Instagram every day and over 40 billion photos and videos have been shared on the Instagram since its launch in 2010. A qualitative search of the Instagram hashtags mentioned above reveals an array of content ranging from serious photos that document the remains of the extermination camp and selfies taken in from of the barracks to Holocaust-themed memes with additional captions like #auschwitzmemes. Images that are specifically geotagged at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Memorial seem to be more thematically consistent. For the purpose of this study, I analysed 1000 Instagram images geotagged at 'Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz', as well as 897 images posted by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum during the period between December 2, 2012[21] and October 15, 2017.[22] In order to protect the privacy of Instagram users who post 'Instagram selfies' online, I refrain from showing original Instagram posts and images in this paper.[23] I will now briefly describe two types of the most frequently posted content.

First, there are photographs that document the place; the memorial, the museum. These are meant to capture the artefacts that testify to the place's authenticity: the infamous gate, Birkenau train tracks and the place of the former ramp, the vast grounds. They also archive the materiality of the place most susceptible and vulnerable to the passage of time: victims' shoes, hair, belongings, wooden barracks, ruins of gas chambers and crematoria. On the affective level, these documentations of material spaces are in relation to personal pasts of the victims, as well as shared emotions evoked by hashtags: #neverforget; #holocaust, #holocausteducation. Their content seems to be serving a dual -educational and testimonial - purpose. In both cases, authors of the photos seem to be attesting to their respectful discomfort with the scale and horror of the place. Drawing from Garde-Hansen's discussion on digital memory, I can call these images 'visual anchors that manifest [their] temporary attachment to a particular place' (Garde-Hansen 2011: 139). While they convey a sense of intimacy and one-to-one engagement, they inevitably get pushed down on one's Instagram feed and replaced by another visual anchor. What connects this first category with the next one is the fact that they are both geotagged at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Paraphrasing Garde-Hansen's thoughts on connections between memory and space: thanks to these registered images that get released into an online transnational space of remembering, their memory of being there

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[21] The date of Museum's first Instagram post.

[22] The topic of the relationship between institutions and individuals as rendered through social media is a relatively new research area. While digital spaces like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook enable scholars to test hypotheses empirically, the purpose of this paper is to develop a qualitative approach to motivate future quantitative work in the field.

[23] Writing about 'selfies from Auschwitz' forces me to consider complexities of internet research ethics. I refrain from using images culled from Instagram in my work. The notion of users' understanding of privacy terms and conditions is problematic. Similarly, it is not my intention to shame individual social media users who post 'selfies from Auschwitz'. Nor is it my goal to create an image-based archive pulled from social media without users' consent. That, in my opinion, would be unethical. For more on Instagram research and various methodological, conceptual, and ethical considerations, see: Highfield and Leaver (2015). For those interested in learning more about the phenomenon of 'selfies in Auschwitz', see Emma Szewczak-Harris's 2016 short film *Selfies at Auschwitz*.

'becomes something tangible, physical and positioned in space: they capture it, archive it, […], play with it' (Garde-Hansen 2011: 140).

The second category is less educational and more controversial: it is a collection of self-ies. These feature smiling people in front of the barracks, the gate, the barbwire, or the piles of suitcases. They also include staged pensive portraits, zoom-ins on people's faces or clothes they wear. In sum, they are images of people marking their presence as if the sur-roundings were irrelevant. Seemingly, these Instagram posts are taken by people whose be-haviour is inadequate to the seriousness demanded by the place. They violate the rules of decorum (the form does not correspond to the content) thus potentially offending aesthetic sensibilities. Refusing a moralising impulse, one must still acknowledge the fact that the rea-son why selfies from Auschwitz became an international news story lies in the fact that there seems to be a fundamental disagreement between selfie takers and selfie viewers about what visiting Auschwitz means; who we are while being in Auschwitz; what our relationship to that place is; what our relationship to people who were there before us means; and what our relationship to the victims of the Holocaust should be. Stepping back again to our discussion of travel photography, if we consider these selfies at their face value (ignoring captions that may alter our reading of authorial intentions), they seem to privilege 'the self' over the sur-roundings and context within which they are taken. For authors of these images, Auschwitz becomes one of the landscapes or backdrops for their self-portraits. It is their presence that fills and defines these images. Authors become their own subjects. The place of commemora-tion matters only as much as it provides a background for authors' perspective and subjective history. The space and memory become objectified.

Lastly, by geotagging this visual content at Auschwitz, authors of these images make a statement: 'I was in Auschwitz'. A claim that itself is an impossibility. One cannot utter this sentence because on a linguistic and semiotic level this sentence is reserved for Auschwitz survivors. Indeed, authors of these photos went to Auschwitz but they cannot say that they *were* in Auschwitz. Paradoxically, this sentence is both true and false. In the context of this free-flowing and un-curated *milieu de memoir,* physical place assumes a rather ambivalent spot. On the one hand, it functions as a geotagged marker of one's visit to Auschwitz; on the other, paraphrasing Anne Friedberg, this space ceases to be one's windows into the world but rather it becomes a window through which the world is asked to look at the individual and his/her Instagram photo gallery (Friedberg 2009). Another way to think about it is through Jean Baudrillard's formulation of the concept of simulacra: copies that no longer have an original. Baudrillard uses *On Exactitude of Science* by Borges to conceptualize of a whole world that is nothing but a simulacrum (a detailed map of the original world) (Baudrillard 1994). Would a loss of the original artefact (Auschwitz) matter to the on-line *milieu de mem-oir* of the Holocaust?

The importance of securing the preservation and conservation of the original physical re-mains of the Nazi extermination and concentration camp animates the bulk of the Museum's work. Additionally, the Museum does not rely on any kind of technological aids for its sys-tem of guided tours. Piotr M. A. Cywiński, Director of the Museum, emphasises the need for unmediated human-to-human interaction that allows for a balance of silence, stillness and conversation that addresses visitors' individual levels of knowledge, interests and emotional investments (author's interview with Piotr M. A. Cywiński, 2016). In other words, the Mu-

seum favours 'analogue' educational tools. However, an increasingly digital educational environment of global Holocaust discourse has encouraged the Museum to explore alternative avenues of engaging with its visitors and social media users alike. In October 2009, the Museum became the first Holocaust-related educational institution in the world to launch an official Facebook page. It quickly garnered a lot of media attention and is currently liked by 240,517 and followed by 229,740 Facebook users (at the time of this writing, the Facebook page of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is liked by 187,963 people and the one of Yad Vashem: World Holocaust Centre in Jerusalem is liked by 157,247 people).

The head of the Museum's Communications Department, Paweł Sawicki, recalls that the motivating question that has inspired the Museum to become an important actor in the social media Holocaust memory sphere was simple: is there anything on social media about Auschwitz-Birkenau that is educational, respectful, informative, curated? The original goal was to allow people to seek information from the source (author's interview with Paweł Sawicki, 2017). Additionally, the notion of visitors' increasingly digital media literacy played an important part in the initial stages of the launch. Situating the Museum's Facebook mission in dialogue with its overall didactic mission, Sawicki rhetorically asked: 'If our mission was to educate the younger generation to be responsible in the contemporary world, what better tool could we use to reach them than the tools they use themselves?' (Berg 2009). The Facebook page, therefore, became an addendum to the information already shared on the Museum's website; its specific focus is on historical education, sharing links to Holocaust-related articles, posting news and information about the Memorial, sharing links to the Museum's YouTube channel, etc. Additionally, Sawicki publishes photos from private collections that are sent to the Museum, as well as interviews with the Director of the Museum. To retain a high level of consistency and curatorial control, Mr. Sawicki is the only person with admin privileges who can post content. Yet, despite all these precautions, the launch of the Museum's Facebook page became a source of certain anxiety about navigating uncharted waters of social media without diminishing the seriousness of the Museum's mission. During a 2009 interview, Sawicki admitted that initially 'it was just an experiment' launched to see how the world reacts (Berg 2009). Despite its initial apprehension and caution, the Museum instantly engaged with its users in an open and frank online discussion about the merits of their decision. One of the questions back in late 2000s was: should a place of memory like Auschwitz-Birkenau have social media presence at all? When users ask direct questions, Sawicki uses the reply function to answer with the hopes of educating about the Memorial and its significance.

Taking advantage of social media affordances, the Museum's Facebook became a place for discussion and exchange of information that was not available to users on the official website. From the very beginning the Museum's Facebook page was a virtual extension of the Place of Memory and the rules set for the Facebook page were consistent with the rules of decorum of the Museum: social media page was not a place for a worldview debate but a place for learning more about the Memorial and Museum. Therefore, the notion of instant interactivity and letting go of control inspired the Museum to retain a form of curatorship over content posted on the Museum's profile: users were not allowed to write full posts on the Museum's page nor post images; they could only comment on the content carefully curated and shared by the Museum. Mr. Sawicki admits that the stakes for the Museum are very high

as far as online presence is considered. Every mistake or inaccuracy might be seen by thousands and potentially damage the reputation of the Museum. That is why the Museum considers its social media presence as one of the most important ways of communicating its mission to the world. Yet, the measure of its success does not come in the number of likes or followers but in a creation of a voluntary network of supporters and contributors. Initially, all posts were written in both English and Polish. As the page became increasingly popular, the Museum witnessed a development of an online community of volunteers who translate the Museum's posts into their native languages. To maintain and strengthen this spontaneous network of contributors, the Museum created a private Facebook group for people who want to help: they receive English posts from the Museum, translate them and send them back to Sawicki who then posts them on behalf of the Museum. The total numbers of volunteers constantly fluctuate; currently, the Museum has ten languages covered by this system of organic grassroots network of supporters.[24] This, and other Facebook initiatives, have created an atmosphere of mutual trust between the administrator of the page and its users; the page became "a place of communal and living memory" for those who visited Auschwitz-Birkenau and for those who cannot make a long journey to the Southern part of Poland.

Image 4. Screengrab of an Instagram profile for the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum
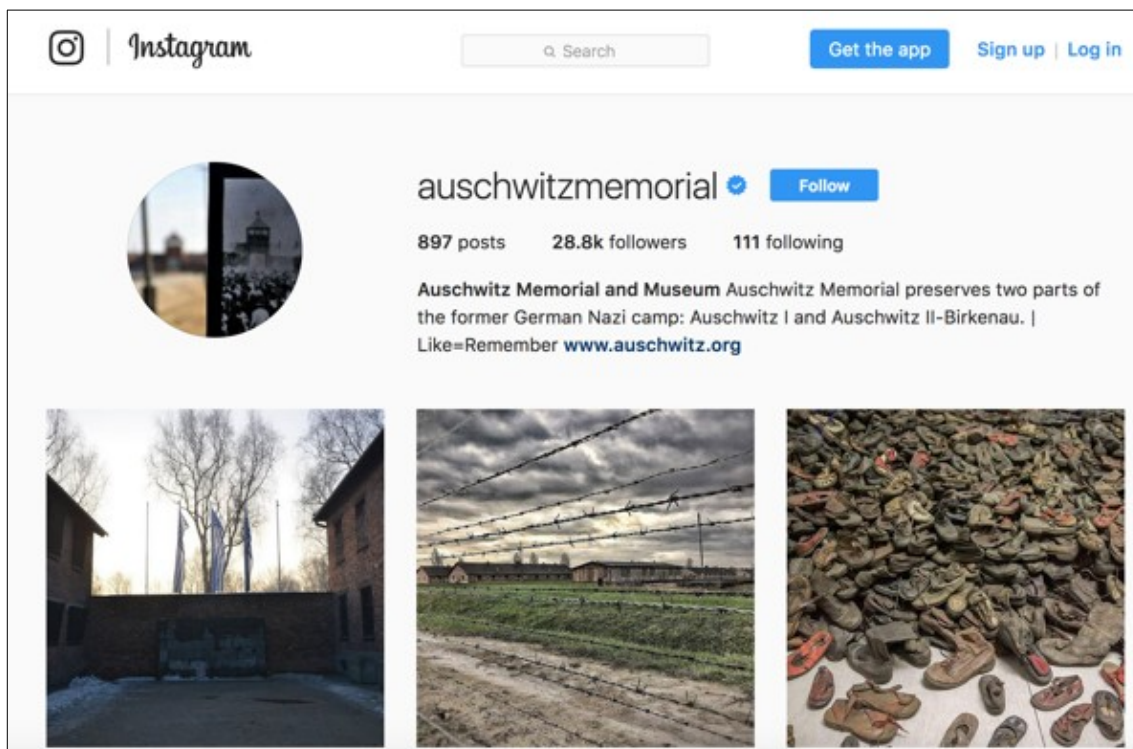
Source: https://www.instagram.com/auschwitzmemorial/ (accessed 14 October 2017).

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[24] These volunteers have been devoted to this translation task for years and two of these volunteers received the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum's award for their contribution.

In the past five years, the Museum became active on Twitter (approx. 53,000 followers), YouTube (approx. 1,200 subscribers), Instagram (approx. 28,800 followers), and Pinterest (1,923 followers). Thanks to social media, the institution reaches over 100,000 people from all over the world on daily basis. The strategies employed for the Museum's Instagram account are, however, different than the ones used for Facebook. Referencing controversies mentioned in the opening pages of this article, Sawicki admits that visual documentation of Auschwitz-Birkenau is more controversial than its written counterpart. The main focus on the Museum's Instagram has become a promotion of 'positive examples of commemorating Auschwitz-Birkenau through images'. Here, counterintuitively, the emphasis is not on the quality or aesthetics of published photos but rather on how 'wise' these images are. Sawicki appreciates images that reveal a new way of looking at the remains of the camp.

In an attempt to shy away from memory dogmatism, Sawicki argues that the rules of engagement with Instagram posts should not be seen in terms of moral binaries as most of the images he comes across 'fall somewhere within the grey zone'. In other words, what becomes of crucial importance to the Museum is the intention behind a photograph; that, according to Sawicki, includes taking a closer look at the impulse motivating taking and sharing 'selfies from Auschwitz' (author's interview with Paweł Sawicki, 2017). Here, however, a close qualitative study of images geotagged at Auschwitz-Birkenau or tagged with appropriate hashtags reveals that a formal visual analysis is not enough. To understand the context and motivation of the author, which is frequently revealed in a nuanced fashion, we must take a closer look at the captions and hashtags that accompany these images. Paradoxically, sole images are no longer the reflection of the subjectivity behind the lens (as Roland Barthes (2010) claimed). The purely visual content of Instagram posts must be analysed side by side with the accompanying text that becomes an additional and, perhaps, an inherent part of the image.

Often, it is the text that subverts the meaning of the image: a smiling selfie with a solemn caption 'Thinking about my family members that perished here in the Holocaust' becomes an act of self-witnessing. Similarly, a black and white photo of a woman posing in front of one of the barracks in Birkenau evokes associations with fashion photoshoots. These, however, are undercut by a thoughtful caption: '"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it". #auschwitz #auschwitzbirkenau #concentrationcamp #poland #peace #love […] #history.' Alternatively, a black and white artistic capture of the Arbeit Macht Frei gate that seems to offer a meditation on death and loss, can evoke an affective shock when accompanied by a caption denying the Holocaust or mocking its memory. One of the specific examples illustrating this phenomenon is a solemn selfie of a pensive Museum visitor taken by the Auschwitz barbwire with a caption 'A #flashbackfriday […] An experience I got to scratch off my bucket list! #fbf #onthemove #vacay'. Often, both the image and the caption strengthen each other's message. One of the examples analysed for this research reveals an image taken by an aspiring fashion blogger within the grounds of the Museum and Memorial; the staged photograph is tagged with a collection of unambiguous hashtags: #fashiondiaries, #fashionaddict, #fashionista, #instafashion, #fashiongram, #fashionblogger, #fashionblog, #styleblogger, #style, #winterfashion, #winteroutfit. Taking advantage of Instagram's affordances, the Museum also, albeit sparingly, uses hashtags to draw attention to its content. While most of the photos have zero to small amount of tags used in captions, the examples of

hashtags used by the Museum in 2017 include: #Auschwitz, #Birkenau, #German, #Nazi, #concentration, #camp, #extermination, #Germany, #Holocaust, #Shoah, #history, #ww2, #worldwar2, #memorial, #auschwitzmemorial, #memory, #remembrance, #unesco, #heritage, #worldheritagelist, #photo, #education, #humanrights, #remembrance, #instafollow, #follow, #architecture, #fence, #architecture, #barracks.

Even though the Museum has given Instagram users a green light to express themselves visually during or after their visits to the Museum (there are no 'no selfies' signs in the Museum), it does actively monitor the open-to-all, searchable, not curated and scalable Instagram archive of Auschwitz-related content. The process consists of Sawicki checking photos that are geotagged at 'Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz' and those tagged with some of the most popular Auschwitz hashtags (e.g. #Auschwitz). If Sawicki comes across a post that is offensive or insensitive, he engages in a didactic conversation with the author and encourages him/her to consider re-editing the original content. Alternatively, when he comes across a photo that could be used for educational purposes on the Museum's own Instagram page, Sawicki reposts it crediting the author. Sometimes the process of reposting includes the Museum leaving a long note under the original image on the author's Instagram page:

> 'Thank you for visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and sharing the image. We hope that your journey through the authentic site of the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp was not only a valuable history lesson, but also a significant personal experience. Share your story with others. See also our virtual visit: panorama.auschwitz.org. Auschwitz is an extremely important place where we learn what hatred, antisemitism and contempt for a fellow man and his rights resulted in decades ago. Auschwitz is a place where we can reflect on our individual and collective responsibility. We have a duty to remember not only to commemorate the victims. Memory can help us resist new gusts of populism, different slogans of propaganda, various ideologies and attitudes of insensitivity in the future. We all share the responsibility for a better world. You can also do something to make it better. Thank you for your remembrance.'

The images found and reposted by Sawicki are always measured and consistent with the educational tone promoted by the Museum on Facebook, Twitter, and the official website. Yet, in my analysis of 897 images posted by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum during the period between December 2, 2012[25] and October 15, 2017, I found at least three examples of the Museum expanding its discourse into new areas of online dialogue. On April 16, 2016, the Museum reposted an image of a visitor standing inside of 'Block 5' in Auschwitz I, next to the pile of shoes robbed from the victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The glass wall safeguarding the shoes reflects the flash of a camera and exposes the face of the author. As a result, the image becomes an accidental spectral selfie that features a blurry reflection of the visitor's figure dissolving into a pile of shoes. The next example of the Museum expanding its discourse, includes a meta conversation about Instagram Verified Badges. On June 17, 2017, the Museum posted a screenshot of its own Instagram page and directly addressed Instagram asking to receive a verified badge that would help users to more easily find the Museum's account on Instagram. The caption stated: 'Dear @instagram, Over 25,000 people al-

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[25] The date of Museum's first Instagram post.

ready follow the official account of the Auschwitz Memorial here on #instagram. We try to show that images can be a very powerful tool of remembering history. Perhaps it's time to verify this account. Thank you.' The account was indeed verified soon after this appeal appeared online. Similarly, on December 30, 2015, the Museum addressed its Instagram followers in a post that featured a collage of its most popular images from 2015. Emphasising its educational and didactic mission, the Museum wrote: 'Thank you all for remembering history with us and supporting the mission of the Auschwitz Memorial here on #Instagram. Thank you for all the tags, likes, and comments. Thanks to all of you who have joined us here in 2015. Images can be a powerful tool which helps us not to forget.' Through all the forms of engagement with Instagram users analysed in this study, the Museum asserts itself as an increasingly visible actor in the transnational social media Holocaust discourse.[26]

Conclusion

The ubiquity and the democratising impulse of visual content posted on social media changes the way we view the symbolic marking of one's presences within various geographic locations. Consequently, it forces institutions like the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial to navigate the digital environment suspended between physical places of commemoration and virtual spaces of memory. The case study of the Museum's attitude towards Auschwitz-related visual content shared on Instagram reveals tensions between individual and institutional agency in digital curatorship of Holocaust memory. It also brings attention to one of the paradoxes of contemporary curatorship of Holocaust memory: to retain a semblance of a human-to-human interaction with social media users, the Museum assumes a position of a social media user itself and engages in a form of online didactics. The direction in which the transnational memory of the Holocaust is moving and the ubiquity of social media posts, forces institutions like the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum to valorise, react and engage with social media content. While the Museum exerts less control over new channels of communication and representation, it places users and their responsibility for the content they choose to post at the centre of the debate on sociohistorical agency in the digital age. We are witnessing a unique phenomenon: as technology progresses, the institutional power over how the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial is represented (specifically) and how Holocaust memory (in general) is curated has eroded.

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[26] Pointedly, linguistic constraints of the Museum's employees, as well as demographic and language bias of social media, limit the reach and dialogue to mostly young and English and Polish speaking communities.

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